us to reconsider what our organisation of sound impressions can bring of awareness and reflection.

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Paul Miller, aka DJ Spooky, that Subliminal Kid, *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Media and Culture*, **MIT Press. ISBN – 2007032443**

Sooner or later a friend will tell you Laurie Anderson 'loves this book!' David Byrne agrees, 'It's a lovely eclectic collection that is a nice antidote to the usual way music and the history of music is often categorized into high/low, pop/classical, or black/white.' The pieces are generally brief, but the sheer breadth of topics is boggling (Dave Valencia, *Library Journal*, 15 April 2008). Amazon book reviewer Jeffrey Newelt thinks this book shows off DJ Spooky's two biggest strengths, the mashup and the teamup, while fellow Amazon reviewer Julian D. Santa-Rita thinks this compilation is essentially a book of post-graduate papers on music and its evolving relationship with the world. Branford Marsalis goes even further, writing, 'Paul Miller has grabbed disparate philosophies and references from the past five hundred years and tied them into a neat and interesting narrative on music, sound, and current thought in our time.'

Yet some are of the opinion that DJ Spooky is a farce. His writing lacks content, and is more concerned with flashy language and textual sleight of hand (Zach G. Maldof, Amazon book reviewer). The sheer breadth of topics is boggling, perhaps to a fault. The foreword, introduction and Miller's opening piece do little to shed light on the unifying idea behind the collection (Dave Valencia, *Library Journal*, 15 April 2008). Spooky emphasizes how the present bleeds into the future, yet the book is deeply rooted in the past (Mark Weidenbaum).

A graduate student told me that while on tour, 'DJ Spooky talked about his trip to Antarctica where he SAMPLED sounds there. The undergrads were very skeptical – like,

> how was this music?
> And …?
> But some thought 'this is a-maz-ing!'
> Meh.

Oh, and afterward he gave me a copy of this book to hold and somehow I thought that Marcel Duchamp wrote something that was in it or something like that.'

'Inviting a group of authors, performers and intellectuals to participate in an anthology on music and popular culture in the era of electronic sampling is the literary equivalent of playing Russian roulette: spin the chamber and pull the trigger, and a thoughtful collection of essays may burst forth – or you may get a barrage of academic one-upmanship and John Cage references that makes you want to put a loaded weapon to your temple' (Dave Itzkoff, *New York Times*, 22 June 2008). Jessica Livi was convinced by DJ Spooky that 'both in the past and today, now more than ever, art [and reviews are] naturally derivative; stemming from one source after another.'

> If you want situational awareness about the world of sound, music, performance, computers, and ideas, read this book. (Lev Manovich)

'Spooky is clearly applying his DJ skills to editing … layer[ing] seemingly incongruous material … letting the sympathetic overtones register with the reader. As a bricoleur, he is a little light on the mortar that binds the book: aside from a brief introductory essay, few connections are drawn between the chapters' (Mark Weidenbaum). 'Some of the very best stuff [in the book is] in the back [and] has hardly anything to do with sampling at all, including Naeem Mohaiemen's searing treatise on the interrelationship between hip-hop and Islam' (Dave Itzkoff, *New York Times*, 22 June 2008).

Marc Weidenbaum is an editor and writer living in San Francisco, California who writes about ambient and electronic music and sound art at www.disquiet. com. He was a little disappointed by absence of biographies for the contributors. It would have helped his understanding of the book to learn that Daphne Keller – contributor of what he felt was 'perhaps the most clearly articulated essay in the book, describing the US legal system's adjustment (or lack of it) to the digitization of culture – is a product lawyer at Google.' 'Still, this is a provocative and intriguing text, of interest to anyone working in or studying contemporary experimental music' (Dave Valencia, *Library Journal*, 15 April 2008).

P o l y g l o t i c i s m s a n d h i g h c u l t u r e s l a n g
You'll like it on sight, buy it on sound! 'The 45-track CD that accompanies *Sound Unbound* illustrates and parallels the book's central argument, locating a historical foundation for today's innovations' (Marc Weidenbaum). 'Contrary to the back cover's summation of the accompanying cd [sic] the musical work is far from groundbreaking' (Zach G. Maldof).

'If there's one thing *Sound Unbound* is about, it's the remix – it's a sampling machine where any sound can be you, and all text is only a tenuous claim to the idea of individual creativity. It's a plagiarist's club for the famished souls of a geography of now-here' (Paul Miller, *Sound Unbound*, p. 5). Robert Wilson believes 'a good staging of an opera uses what you see on stage to make you hear better. Similarly, these reflections make it easier to tune in to the sometimes

confusing soundscape of our dislocated, interrelated, networked times.' While Jeff Chang thinks the *splendor* of *Sound Unbound* is that it calls upon us to 'reimagine freedom and reclaim our creativity.' *We are freed at last from the heat and distortion of tubes and output transformers.*

   This book is recommended for music libraries. (Dave Valencia)

How did the preceding text make you feel? Do you now know what I really think of *Sound Unbound*? Do you perhaps think that I copped out of writing a real review by using the reviews of others? Was I just a little too clever by going meta and sampling reviews for a critique of a book about remix? Was the quality of the prose uneven? Do you think the first paragraph was a strange mash-up between dropping widely recognised names while referencing public Amazon reviews? Did this high/low pairing please you? Did I justify that mash-up later or did the review continue to feel piecemeal? Did my disappointment with the small number of female authors come through at all? Did you wish for me to draw connections between the materials presented instead of simply regurgitating them? Did some parts of my review not even seem to fit?[1] Did some of the typography seem a bit twee and overly precious? Did it feel I forced you to jump from topic to topic without time for reflection? Do you think that I even authored a review? Do you feel obliged to like this review because it draws on the Cagean tradition?? Did you feel that the meaning of quotes changed depending on the length of my sample? Should I even be given credit for this review? Do you think I'm a little too smart for my own good and can get away with being a bit lazy? Did some of the quotes seem extremely amateurish? Did you feel I sacrificed content for conceit? Did you catch the spelling error in one of the sampled reviewers' names? Do you think my review lacked a certain focus? Do you think some of the quotes were so vague as to be useless? Do you have a better understanding of *Sound Unbound* after reading this review?

   So much for the cloak. Now for the dagger. I have an intense appreciation for the way Paul Miller's mind works, but I truly wished for more of his voice shaping the material he collected. The book starts with a forward by Cory Doctorow discussing networks and music as a bridge that brings us together because we are apart. He does not discuss sampling, but does write about digital music. This introduction is followed by an introductory essay by Steve Reich in which he writes about his own experience with sampling before the term was even in vogue. The article is a good overview of Reich's own musical history, but doesn't really set the tone for the span of the book either. The second article is Paul Miller's own, a thirteen-page missive which moves from manifesto, to anecdote, to descriptions of historical events, through multiple discussions of art projects, to a discussion of density and memory, media philosophy and knowledge invoking Adorno and Cage, multiple threads involving the world wide web and semantics, and which concludes with the totality of information as a product of our desires. Miller tosses us tidbits of thought, each of which could be the genesis for a doctoral thesis. The entire book reads like an extension of these wide-ranging ruminations – interesting, but ultimately unfulfilling. As a multi-media artist I respect the desire to approach a topic such as sampling from many angles, disciplines and perspectives, but unfortunately without a strong director things quickly get out of hand. *Sound Unbound* has an incredibly wide scope: from the title already there is sound, sampling, digital media, and culture, while in the introduction Miller says the book is an anthology on multimedia, sampling and memory. Like a sprawling multimedia improvisation, the book does not hold together. There is some lovely material in here – Lethem's *Ecstasy of Influence* is a standout and follows very logically from Miller's essay (though I had already read it in *Harper's Bazaar*). But the next article, 'Roots and Wires – Remix: Polyrhythmic Tricks and the Black Electronic', doesn't seem to fit with the preceding texts. The article itself is well written and informative, and it does fit under the rubric of sound, sampling and digital media. I would have liked some connective tissue between the articles, teasing out the tenuous connections between the ideas. It is no longer groundbreaking to sample and juxtapose/collage styles. The challenge lies in the cracks. Miller is more than capable of building bridges between diverse topics and I wish he had taken more responsibility for helping readers understand the fullness of this text. Instead of feeling satisfied after getting to the end of this book, I felt cheated and confused. Perhaps this book is better read by sampling the essays one at a time out of order, rather than reading it from cover to cover. In that case what is the role of the editor? Does an editor have responsibility beyond collection?

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[1]In the 1950s there was an ad campaign for Harmon Kardon featuring the phrase 'sound unbound'.