


Nasty Noises: 'Error' as a Compositional Element
in Contemporary Electroacoustic Music

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed: 
Date: 24 February, 2006

ABSTRACT

The use of error by composers as a means of adding colour to a musical text has a long history, but the device is ultimately ineffective. Material whose significance is its incongruity is incorporated by recontextualization, and in time, becomes familiar and unremarkable. 'Glitch' is a stylistic mannerism within electroacoustic composition that emerged in the late 1990s. Glitch, or 'microsound', as it is known in an academic context, observes the conventions of *music concrète*, drawing on material sampled from the real world, and fashioning this into sonic narratives. Its signature is the 'sound of failure', sonorities characteristic of electronic devices malfunctioning or mis-used: clicks, crackles, distortions, fractured digital files. Glitch/microsound has already diminished from a movement to a mannerism, but its legacy is a refreshment of our palette of sonorities, and an interrogation of the very act of listening. This essay is short examination of the use (and nature) of noise a musical ingredient and the significance of glitch/microsound for electroacoustic composers. It concludes that this 'style' is little more than a nuance, and that its advent and advocacy were less to do with a new musical movement, than with a new generation of electronic composers attempting to distinguish itself.

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