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

Stephen Gard

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Music (Composition),
Sydney Conservatorium of Music,
University of Sydney, 2004.
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: [Signature]

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.

Fpercussive
CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ...... Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.0 Nasty Noises ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.1 Glitch Music ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.2 The Tradition of Shock and Confrontation in Art ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.3 Duchamp and the ‘readymade’ ........................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.4 Scope of this Essay ....................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 2: SEARCHING THE LITERATURE Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.0 Search Terms .............................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.1 Material in the Dissertation Abstracts Database ............ Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.2 Other Voices ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.3 On the Topic of ‘Wrongness’ in Music .............................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion of Noise as Musical Material Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.5 On the Nature of ‘Glitch’ Music ........................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.6 On the Topic of Recontextualizing Sound ......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.7 On the Blurring of Boundaries between Art and Pop Music Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.8 Conclusion ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 3: DEFINITIONS AND DERIVATIONS Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.0 Defining and Exampling Some Terms ............................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.1 ‘Nasty’ Noises ............................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2 Glitch Music ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3 Microsound ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4 Noise Music ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.5 lowercase music ............................................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.6 Techno ......................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.7 Sampling ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 4: GLITCH AND GLITCHING

4.0 Why Is Glitch Music? ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.1 The Never Ending Story .......................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2 Do It Yourself .......................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3 Error = Individuality ............................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.4 Refracted Meanings ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.5 On Deconstruction ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.6 The Decay of Composition ....................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.7 Blitz ......................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.8 Glitz ......................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.9 Sitz ......................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.10 Intertextuality, and the Anxiety of Influence ......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.11 Glitchers on Glitching ............................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.12 My Glitch .............................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.13 Spirit Trace ............................................................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.14 Study 1.0 (FM) ....................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.15 Village Football ...................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.16 BAG ....................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.17 Talking the Talk: Modex ........................................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.18 Walking the Walk: Plex ........................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ART OF GLITCH ....................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

5.0 Grabbing Glitch ....................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.1 The Limits of Glitch ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.2 Neuter Noises ......................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

APPENDIX I: SOUND EXAMPLES .............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

APPENDIX II: ‘CARRIERS’, ESSAY IN RADIOSONIC GLITCH .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
REFERENCES ....................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to my colleague Amanda Cole,

for drawing my attention to the glitch in my music.