2010s: Against The Post-Internet
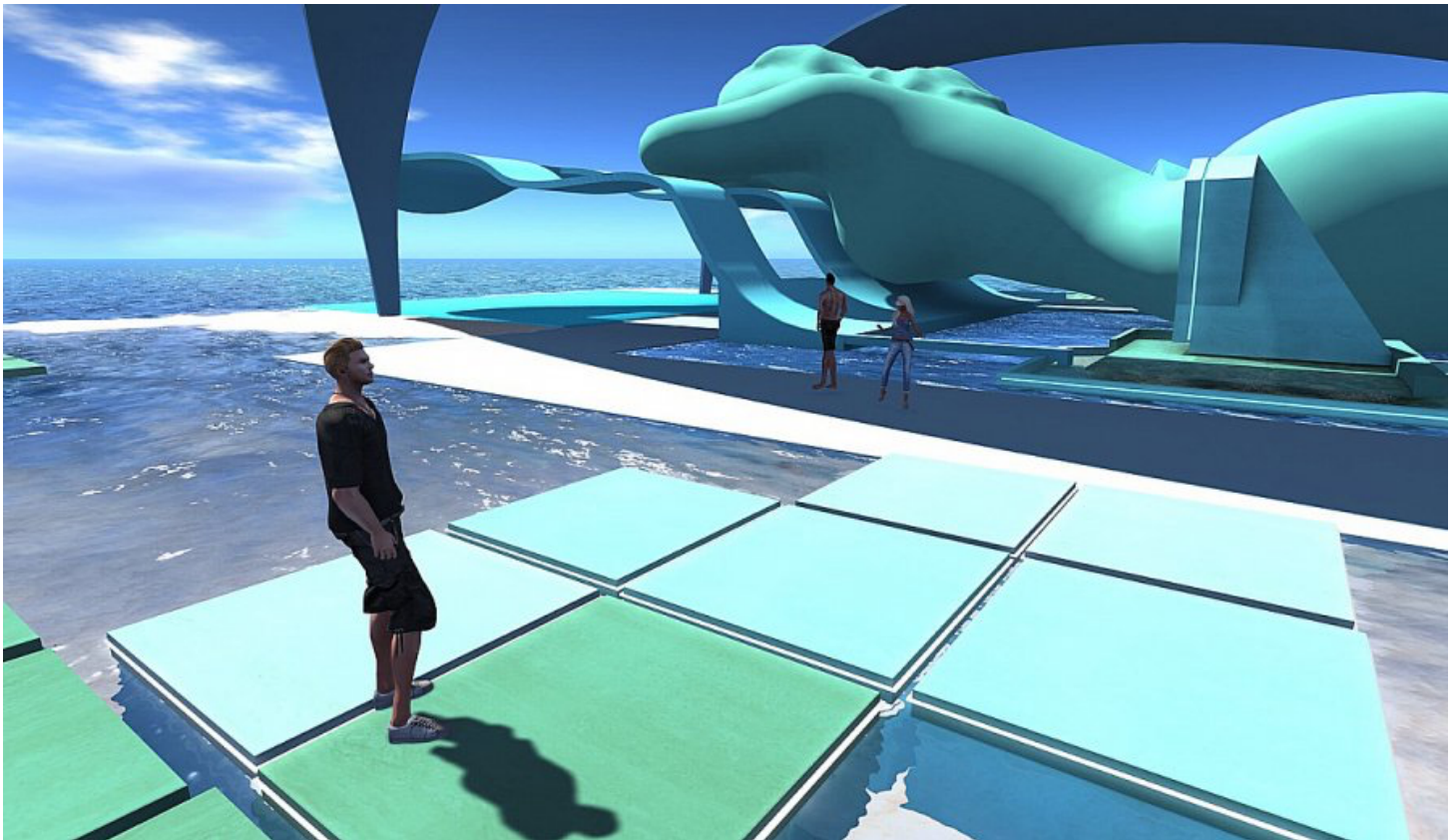
How we mistook the map for the territory and failed to register the present

ARTICLE

by **RAFAEL LUBNER** · November 19, 2019

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"Club H2O" by Stavaros Gracemount

We are celebrating the end of the decade through lists, essays, and mixes. Join us as we explore the music that helped define the decade for us. **MORE FROM THIS SERIES**

"Of course, the decision to use 'post-' as a discursive frame is ultimately a political act. From that perspective, 'post-' communicates a haziness or murkiness — a blanket generalization that is an empty descriptor. 'Post-' announces that challenging instances of passage and transformation can only be articulated through what they proceed. But is

this enough?"
– Zach Blas, "Contra-Internet Aesthetics," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*

This we know: the world, in its current form, is ending. In the last 10 years, two phenomena that will shape the remainder of the 21st century have become inescapable: the beginnings of the climate crisis, with its proliferation of floods, fires, and famines; and the ongoing enmeshment of the internet into our daily lives. We are now, as James Ferraro said in 2011, "wearing the Internet, eating it, hearing it, talking about it all the time." Things are moving, and we are running out of time.

As believers in culture, in the abilities of people to form the world, it's vital to recognize the ways in which we think and make art about these epochal shifts. Beyond providing succor and community in dark times, art can be revealing: bringing us to terms with the terms of our world. It can show us how our world might be made different, how it could be freer, more equitable, held in common.

But art can also obscure, adding opacity to an already obfuscated world.

"

As a descriptor, the post-internet not only fails to capture the texture and scale of the internet, but also registers a more general failure to adequately historicize our contemporary moment.

Enter the post-internet, a term initially developed in contemporary art circles and latterly applied to a certain strain of experimental music, of the type that TMT has spent the last decade covering. This essay seeks to critique this term, as well as the various ways it has been employed, in order to argue that as a descriptor, it not only fails to capture the texture and scale of the internet, but also registers a more general failure to adequately historicize our contemporary moment. Both as a concept and as a discourse, the post-internet reduces the complex set of economic, political, social, and technological changes that make up the present to a simple binary. Within this framework, the internet is an event whose singularity causes a total rupture of history,

splitting it in two. Both past and present are reformed in its image, with the past now existing solely as the period before the internet's emergence and the present being defined wholly by its effects. The future is in turn transformed, persisting only as a vague shadow of the present.

This essay is then ultimately about the relationship between present and future: about what futures we can and can't imagine from the vantage of the present, and about how a certain aesthetic of "futurity" has taken hold of contemporary music. This aesthetic's universalizing claims, its positioning of itself as having a unique grasp of our current moment, should be challenged. At the decade's end, a singular phenomenon shouldn't be taken to stand in for a whole host of epochal changes: a map shouldn't be mistaken for a territory.

ORIGINS
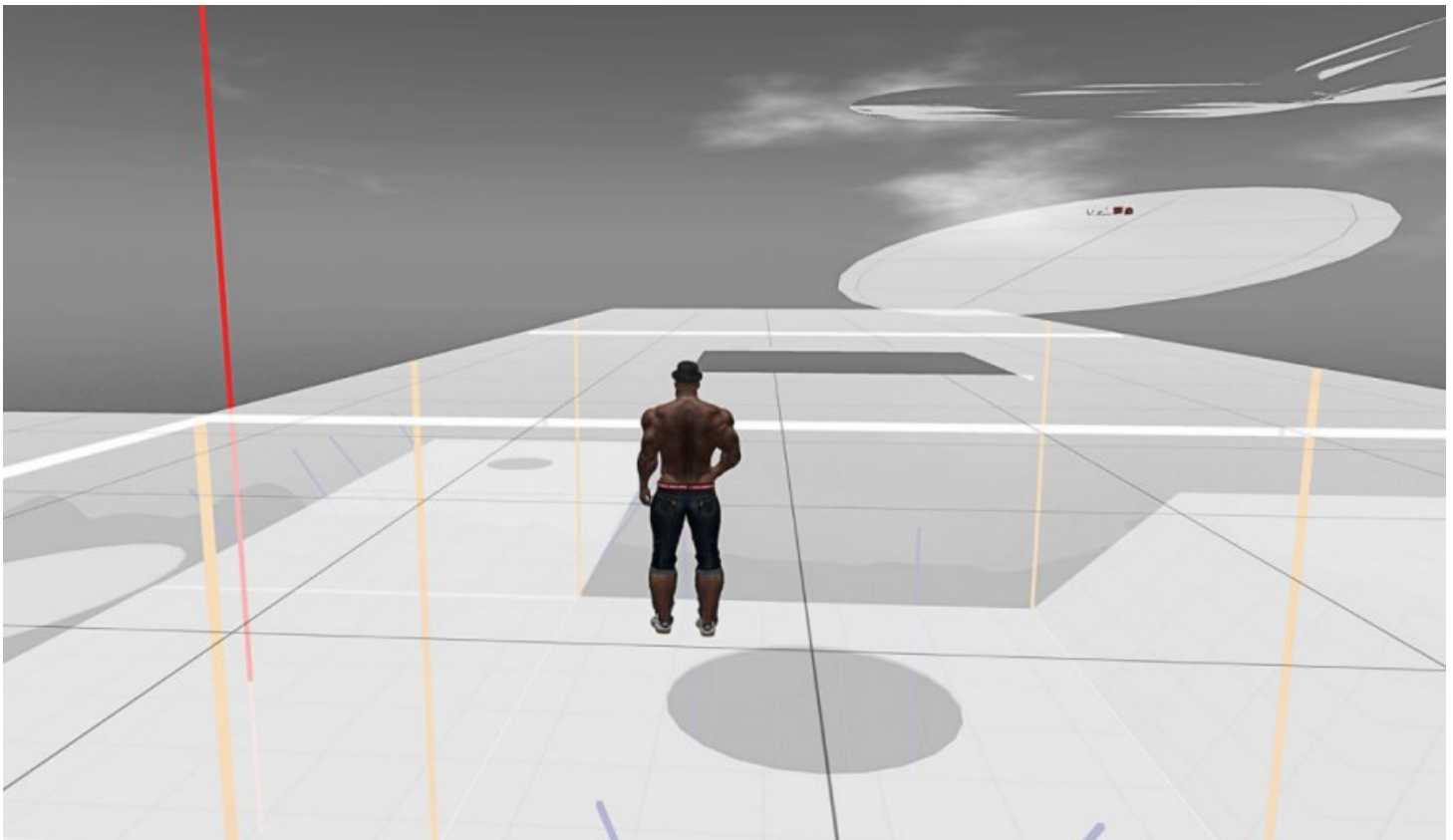
"spazio - tempo" by Pelos

"Is 'post-' not more of a stylistic convenience that evinces a blind spot, an inability to account for the present in its specificity and singularity? Is it not an easy shorthand for what could be called an impasse to think the contemporary?"
– Zach Blas, "Contra-Internet Aesthetics"

Let's start at the beginning. The term "post-internet" was first placed into wider circulation by artist-writer-curator Marisa Olson between 2006 and 2008. In an essay reflecting on her initial intervention, Olson argues that it was important to emphasize how art *about* the internet was taking place both online and offline, rather than existing solely online, as was assumed to be the case at the time. Olson found that, in her own practice, she had been drawn to making work that was "*after the internet* in the sense that "after" can mean both "in the style of" and "following." She was not alone in noticing these shifts and cites various other practitioners and critics, who had also begun to use this terminology to describe their art, which was "created with a consciousness of the networks within which it exists, from conception and production to dissemination and reception." So far, so simple: the post-internet refers to the becoming-quotidian of the internet, and the artistic and critical engagements that emerge in response.

Problems arise when Olson attempts to historicize the term, a task she accomplishes by substituting awareness of a phenomenon for historical consciousness more generally. For her, a "historically-aware, continuum-synthesizing definition of the *postinternet* is itself exemplary of *postinternet* thought, insofar as it reflects this awareness."

"

By treating the internet as a monumental event that has shaped the entirety of the present, the post-internet, as both a discourse and a concept, gains its particular "currency."

In this tautological formulation, being able to determine that a series of art works and discourses are "post-internet" is evidence that, as a concept, the post-internet has

historical purchase. Covertly, this grounding in the historical requires the self-consciousness of the individual to operate, as it is the individual who, understanding themselves to be a subject of the internet, is able to make art "after the internet," thereby capturing it in history. Individual experience here becomes the primary conduit through which the deep structures that underlie society — economy, politics, ecology, technology, culture — express themselves. What is troubling about Olson's individual-centric approach to history — one that emerges from New York, the epicenter of the Global North's cultural hegemony — is that it allows her to make a claim that

> *postinternet* artistic practices […] have not only a special kind of relevance or currency, but that they are also part and parcel of an as-yet unspoken, totalizing, near-universal set of conditions that applies to all art as much as it implicates all art in transporting the network conditions under which we live.

We have moved seamlessly from a minor situation of artists and critics discussing a trend in new media art in the Global North to a reading of this art as possessing "a special kind of relevance or currency" in diagnosing global, universalizing shifts. There's a slippage at play here, whereby post-internet art is tacitly positioned as having a special purchase on the totalizing set of shifts characteristic of the internet, which will imminently apply to *all* art. For Olson, "post-internet" art succeeds because it is alert to this near-future: it can capture its effects and singularize them into the individual artwork, providing advance warning of a condition that is becoming generalized. In so doing, Olson creates a conceptual framework within which a singular embodiment of a phenomenon can come to stand in for the phenomenon more generally. This emphasis on the singular reappears in various forms whenever the post-internet is invoked, to deleterious ends.

For example, we can notice how the turn to the singular engenders — and in fact requires — a limited engagement with the historical. By treating the internet as a monumental event that has shaped the entirety of the present, the post-internet, as both a discourse and a concept, gains its particular "currency." History must be stripped of complexity, ossified and binarized, for the post-internet to function. This denuded sense of the historical is reflected in Olson's understanding of the post-internet era, which for her "may be ahistorical insofar as it has no degree-zero." This assertion's appeal to generality, its belief in the total subsumption of the contemporary

by the internet, refuses to countenance historical complexity, instead allowing for a subsequent assertion that "*We are now in a postinternet era. Everything is always-already postinternet.*" In these terms, history is rendered as a thing that happens, *that has already happened*, not something that can be shaped, that emerges out of economic, social, political, or cultural forces. The internet's emergence can then be posited as a rupture, something that, by clearing away the vestiges of the past, announces a new future. In the face of this epochal shift, art exists simply to register these changes and to self-consciously comment on them from within.

No politics, no struggle, only content.

POST-INTERNET MUSIC

Arca (photo: Drew Gurian via Facebook)

Turning now to contemporary music, we can trace how this uncritical discourse has been imported (uncritically) into recent scholarly and popular work.

In the most sustained academic theorization of what the author terms "Post-Internet music," Michael Waugh's "'My Laptop Is an Extension of My Memory and Self': Post-Internet Identity, Virtual Intimacy and Digital Queering in Online Popular Music," we see a familiar rehearsing of the same limited approach to history that we encountered in Olson. On the article's first page, Waugh commutes the historical content of the internet down to a singular effect, "[emphasizing] the wider significance of the term 'Post-Internet' for the identity politics of the post-millennial generation." Through this reverse telescopy, the vast history of the internet's emergence becomes binaric, reduced to two distinct generations of internet users: a post-internet generation and its predecessor. The latter generation (which is not even given a name of its own) makes a distinction between online and offline, while the "Post-Internet generation" "[has] little experience of a world without constant connectivity or social media," seeing the internet as a "natural element of daily existence."

Again, history is rendered mute here, overwritten by a model in which the complexity of the internet's emergence is reduced to a narrative of one generation succeeding another. Waugh's main argument is that "Post-Internet" musicians like SOPHIE, Arca, and Holly Herndon make music that reflects an awareness that everyday life has been saturated by the internet, which is plausible enough, while also engaging in an extremely limited way with both posthumanism and queer theory, making no significant attempt to think through the relation between technology, race, sexual identity, and nation.

Most importantly, however, and as in Olson's work, Waugh's argument positions "Post-Internet" art as a form that is ultimately reducible to the experiences of the individual, whose only relation to the contemporary is one of reflection, acknowledging historical shifts without hoping to influence them. "To be truly Post-Internet," Waugh argues, "is to be incapable of separating the virtual from the organic, and this is due in part to the constant uploading (and shaping) of information about one's self to digital media." There is no room for historicization or action here, only a myopic focus on information and the self.
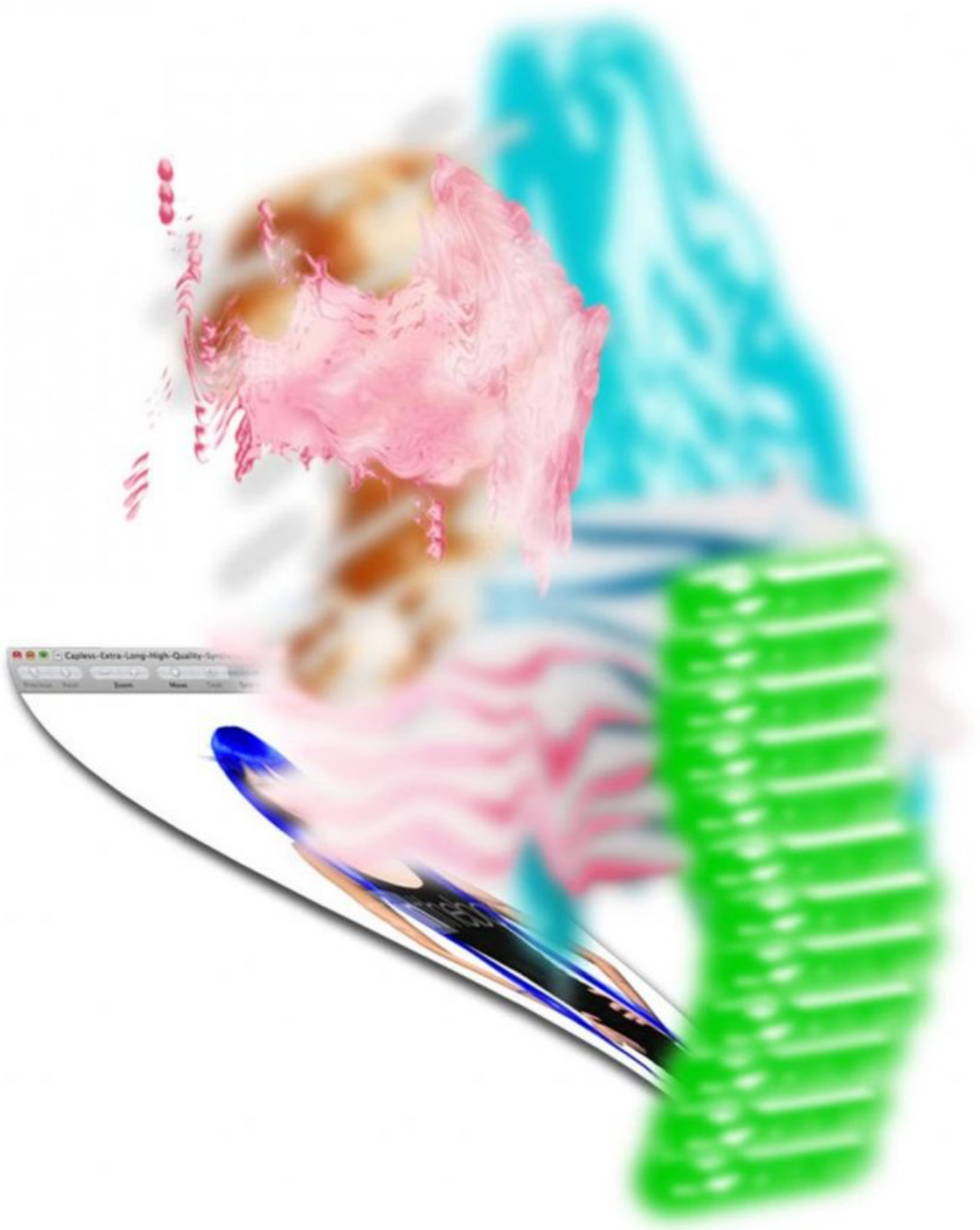
Artwork for EasyFun's self-titled EP on PC Music

For popular analyses of the post-internet, we can look to Adam Harper, one of the decade's most influential writers on experimental music, and notice a similar reliance on singularity and universality when the subject of post-internet music arises. In a 2018 article for Red Bull, "Charting the evolution of post-internet music," Harper traces the emergence of a recognizably "post-internet" aesthetic in underground music. For
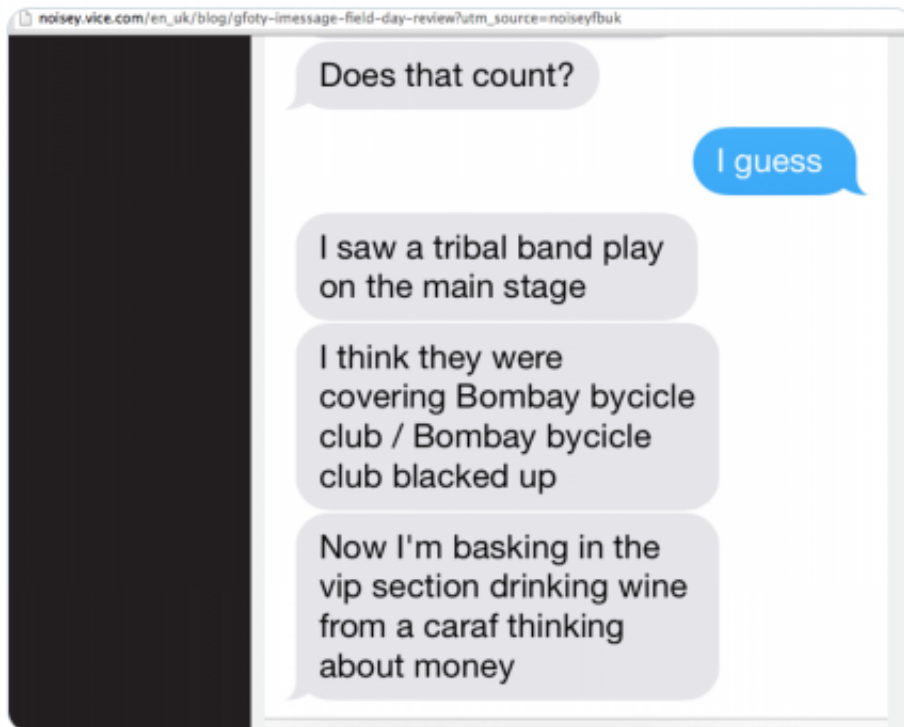
Harper, collectives like PC Music and Activia Benz, as well as club nights like JACK댄스 / Non Stop Pop, attest to an orientation toward the internet as subject matter, with a fondness for sounds that figure the internet as a source of retro-kitsch, gleaming surfaces and complex architectures. At the same time, a parallel strand of club-focused material, beginning with Jam City's *Classical Curves*, similarly renders the effects of the quotidian internet through high-definition sound design and the collaging and collapsing of various regional club styles.

Harper then turns to a critique that began to be levelled at PC Music *et al.* as their popularity increased: that this music is "[c]onceptual music […] music about ideas or postures rather than emotions; its makers are veiled pretenders rather than authentic, expressive artists." This critique gathered momentum in 2015 when GFOTY, in a feature for Vice, was accused of making racist comments about the Malian two-piece Toumani & Sidiki Diabaté. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a scene that, in PC Music's case, struck an ambiguous balance between critiquing and celebrating consumption from within the overcapitalized Global North, attempts to joke about the cultural cachet of whiteness and the purported backwardness of musicians from the Global South fell flat.

The Quietus ✓
@theQuietus

As the racist iMessages by @GFOTY have now been er, blacked out, here's a screengrab of them

noisey.vice.com/en_uk/blog/gfoty-imessage-field-day-review?utm_source=noiseyfbuk

Does that count?

I guess

I saw a tribal band play on the main stage

I think they were covering Bombay bycicle club / Bombay bycicle club blacked up

Now I'm basking in the vip section drinking wine from a caraf thinking about money

GFOTY @GFOTY · Jun 8, 2015
I was actually trying to make a joke about appropriation, but I fucked up and it wasn't funny. I'm sorry.

○ 11   ⭦ 15   ♡ 73   ⬆   ▽

GFOTY
@GFOTY

I know I push buttons, but I've gone too far this time. I was being really naive, and for that I take full responsibility.

6:23 PM · Jun 8, 2015 · Twitter Web Client

The GFOTY incident is useful here because it illustrates one of the limitations of the concepts proposed by Olson *et al*. Following Harper, we might think of PC Music and its affiliates as the "first wave" of post-internet musicians, inasmuch as their music expresses the kind of self-conscious awareness of constant connection that Olson was initially interested in. What GFOTY's ironically racist comments reveal, then, is that this self-consciousness is often tied up with an understanding of oneself as a subject unmarked by race. While GFOTY's embodiment of the affects and drives of the

extremely online provides a useful framework for understanding the psychological and sociological impacts of digital capitalism on its subjects, it has less to say about the foundational role played by race and coloniality in this capitalism's formation. That GFOTY's critique of digitality ran aground when confronted with histories that precede and shape it exposes a limit-point for a thinking that doesn't account for the internet's emergence by and through the colonial configuration of the earth and its reproduction through these selfsame extractive modes (e.g. coltan production).

> **The post-internet's initial formulation as a concept seems to inevitably result in this mistaking of the singular for the universal.**

Beyond the partiality of this critique, however, what is at issue here is the lionizing of an ultimately singular mode of expression as definitive of "the future" of music making. This partiality has a geographic dimension too, as many of the producers and artists from this first wave reside in the cultural capitals of the Global North, locations that provide them with particular entry points into the socialities engendered by the internet, in a manner that's not necessarily global (see: Jace Clayton, *Uproot*). In many ways, this joining of geographic specificity and global significance is mirrored in the post-internet art scene, which as Zach Blas argues "would seem to account for a widely and wildly divergent grouping of people and practices, but […] is rather taken up by a considerably moderate collection of hip, young, 'digital native' artists and art institutions mostly in the West, a reality that contradicts its temporally totalizing implications." What is important to keep in mind here is how the post-internet's initial formulation as a concept seems to inevitably result in this mistaking of the singular for the universal.

Indeed, one way we might understand this synecdochic movement within the post-internet is as an expression of the totalizing impulse of whiteness as an epistemological frame. Even Harper's rehearsing of the distinction between conceptual music and more "authentic," "emotive" music neatly reproduces what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls the "analytics of raciality," wherein subaltern subjects are

understood as "affectable" (they are acted on by the world), while dominant (i.e., white) subjects act on the world (see: de Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*). It follows that the totalization and historical blindnesses characteristic of the post-internet as a concept is the result of a short-sighted focus on novelty, singularity, and futurity. This is a tendency that forecloses a conception of the internet that could account for the histories of coloniality and racial capitalism that underwrite it. In so doing, it moves us away from understanding how we arrived at the present moment, and instead engages in a thinking that is always stepping over the past, impatiently striving to reach the future.

AUTHENTICITY AND EMOTION

Photo: Lotic

Returning to Harper's article, we can see a further way in which post-internet thinking reduces itself to a limited set of investments, this time in its relationship to "authenticity" and its substrate, the "emotive." At the time of her comments, GFOTY was strongly criticized by Lotic, a response that Harper takes to "clearly signal a shift of focus in underground musical aesthetics away from conceptuality and toward a new form of authenticity rooted in the personal expression, experience and solidarities of people who experience structural oppression."

"i told you" isn't even the right response to this. like, i understand that white people don't feel like they have 'tribal' music or any 'real culture' in general, but to me this is more a result of press/club culture over-intellectualizing music and being too curious about 'mysterious' producers, congratulating mediocrity and creating false heroes because we're so desperate to save our clubs. and i get it.

but. you can congratulate pc music et al. for their mystery and 'clever' use of 'irony' or you can just investigate and realize that it's merely a vapid art project by a handful of rich kids (mostly male, with female avatars btw) that's diluting the club pool and that your making excuses for their boring music is part of the problem. you actually don't have to pretend that anything that's even vaguely non-conforming is good or cool?

there is so much music being made by incredibly talented queers and people of color that it's almost always comical to read headlines about straight white musicians. i personally never click on them, and i would actually bet money (of which i have little) that no other queer/poc gave a shit about pc music or ten walls until, like, today. and that's because, for some people, music is still a medium reserved for genuine expressions of emotion or feeling (the last one?), as opposed to a way to explore a concept.

this, and the ten walls incident, is upsetting, but there is absolutely nothing surprising about either incident to anyone that has a real investment in protecting these spaces, to anyone who NEEDS these spaces in order to survive. not monetarily, but NEED in terms of staying

sane, in terms of exploring themselves, in terms of being free and escaping the world and the status quo, even if just for a night.

and i want to be clear that i'm not vehemently against conceptual music. i think it's important and has its place. concepts help us keep our bigger projects on track. everyone loves a new perspective! but 'conceptual' and 'mysterious' usually turn out to be an abdication of responsibility (there's nothing brave about not showing your face and nothing exciting about having nothing real to say). and we can't be afraid of emotional or confrontational music. since when has music not been political? since when have we not turned to music when we need uplifting or comfort?

really sorry to get so dramatically romantic and i usually just channel my frustrations into my own music but i'm actually just *not having it* in general right now and neither should you and i'm upset that we all just kind of allowed these people to 'blow up' based on hardly anything. it's a fucking distraction.

also, who doesn't know who toumani diabaté is?! and anal is amazing?!?

anyway *opens ableton*

What is interesting here is how Harper transposes Olson's and Waugh's binaric thinking of and in the internet to a new locale. Just as Waugh neatly divides the history of the internet into two eras, the pre- and the post-, Harper too sees the conceptual as meeting its opposition in the guises of the authentic and the emotive. This is a curious binary, which despite its best intentions manages to again place the racialized subject of the internet into a position of reaction and affectability. Artists like Lotic are positioned by Harper as "more sincere, emotive and more politically direct (you might even say honest)" than their ironic, conceptual predecessors. Positioned as having a uniquely clear connection to the world around them, Harper renders these artists as speaking "truthfully" to their context, in contrast to the "playful" (read: insincere) speech of PC Music.

We are moving here from one kind of subject-supposed-to-know to another. The first tells us about the recombinant nature of the internet, its multimodal capacities and its

flattening of culture and geography. The second speaks to a world in which the internet forms part of racial capitalism's strategies for surveillance, containment, and extraction. Again, there is no attempt to grasp how these two positions may not in fact be separable but are instead intertwined, and that the internet is not simply an either/or proposition — either a place of postmodern play or one of structural oppression. We instead remain trapped in a discourse of authenticity and emotion, founded on a singular subject who is understood solely to speak transparently about their position: Lotic's music is an "honest" expression of their struggles, rather than a complex invocation of black queer life. Authenticity is then wedded to a simplistic differentiation from the inauthentic that, when placed under further scrutiny, can be seen to recapitulate an understanding of the internet's emergence as a rupture rather than as a part of any historical continuity.

Musicians like Lotic are judged by Harper to be authentic because they give voice to "real" conditions of existence (of dispossession and subjugation), while the musicians who cluster around the PC Music axis are coded as "inauthentic" because they are removed from these same conditions and can consequently use them as fodder for jokes. As Harper has it, "[r]ather than ironic music for the internet age, some of today's most vital producers make a passionate music for the age of Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and queer struggle."

The dichotomy that opposes the rational from the emotional, and the real from the ironic, fails to acknowledge that these conditions may in fact be conjoined. Instead, authenticity becomes a route away from post-internet music — like GFOTY — whose reliance on ironic detachment is degraded in light of its dearth of "passion," which then serves as evidence for its dismissal. But, as Erika Balsom argues in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, within an era characterized by the almost total subsumption of everyday life by capitalism, authenticity is no refuge, as it too is reconfigured, "[deriving] its force from posing as an alternative to, rather than an engagement with, the status quo." Against the "immateriality" of contemporary capitalism and the internet, authenticity "seeks to remedy a supposed lack," marking it as "a fundamentally conservative withdrawal from the present." This is not to say that Lotic's music does not provide us with a lens with which we can view the contemporary; it clearly does. But what is frustrating about post-internet discourse is that, as a result of its limited historical framework of binaric opposition and rupture, it depends on tired dichotomies and concepts in order to create positive content of its own.

> ## What is frustrating about post-internet discourse is that, as a result of its limited historical framework of binaric opposition and rupture, it depends on tired dichotomies and concepts in order to create positive content of its own.

We can observe another instance of this oppositional tendency in Harper's view that artists like Lotic represent a new vanguard of post-internet music. In his words, "Arca, Pan Daijing, Yves Tumor, Klein, Toxe, Rui Ho, Visionist and many others" communicate emotion (as against concepts), making "a music not (or not yet) of any particular genre, not from History or Culture as previously constituted (by the hitherto powerful, of course), but from bodies and the resonances between bodies." Capitalized History and Culture recede, subsumed into the body and the movements between bodies. In order to produce a statement about the difference of post-internet music, it must emerge through a singular form — in this case, the body.

But this body's absorption of history, culture, genre, and geography, as well as its subsumption of these objects into the movement of its relations, removes the present — as a site of history — from view yet again. Art is delinked from the worlds from which it springs, and the post-internet recedes from the terrain of the present. In Harper's refusal to admit forms of music production that do not speak univocally in favor of music that speaks from a place of authenticity or transparency, we see an understanding of culture that is always reducible to its producer, never to the histories that might have spurred its production. From Olson onward, the post-internet has been premised on an understanding of the internet as an unprecedented rupture of our world, one that in its desire to "crush the past" in order to make way for something new limits itself to the privileging of singularity and novelty. Within such a framework, music is defanged, always making sense, speaking from a place of truth — what in this schema is more truthful and less contestable than a body's experience? — and never signifying otherwise.

CRISIS AND HISTORY

Photo: Grimes

"I'll start by making two claims, which I won't return to since they speak for themselves and because they are — as far as I'm concerned — incontrovertible. With the first, I'm paraphrasing Nicholas Mirzoeff in saying that 'post-' should not be understood as 'the successor to' but as 'the crisis of'. Having established this, let's get one thing straight: every artist working today is a postinternet artist. Let's move on."
– Jesse Darling, 'Post-Whatever #usermilitia' in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*

If, to come at it from another angle, the invocation of the post-internet is an acknowledgment of crisis, what might the crisis of the internet be? Let's turn to Grimes and Mat Dryhurst.

Grimes is in some senses an avatar for post-internet music's aesthetic and ideological

development in the 2010s. In interviews immediately preceding her breakout *Visions*, she describes her sound as post-internet, in that it's informed by the increased availability of music and the subsequent destruction of generic boundaries engendered by the internet. In this way, Grimes is one of the first musicians to self-consciously take on the mantle of the "post-internet" and to engage with its sonic affordances, and has subsequently charted a thrilling and controversial path through the 2010s. As of the time of this writing, she is poised to release an album that — ironically? — celebrates the coming climate crisis. In this latest incarnation, as a Silicon Valley adjacent defender of union busting and in her — ironic? — embrace of the monumentality of Anthropocenic destruction, she represents one endpoint of the dehistoricized, depoliticized thinking that orbits the post-internet, conceiving of the planet's destruction as monumental and unstoppable: the sudden wrath of an angry god. Yet again, we are trapped within the world of the individual, as the complexities of climate change are embodied in the "character" of an "anthropomorphic Goddess of climate Change." Unsurprisingly, within this version of the present, there is little scope for a different world. Instead, when the destruction that "we" have wrought on other people and on our planet is revealed, all that is left to do is to stare in silent awe, frozen in the face of forces beyond "our" control.

Who the "we" and "our" are here is crucial, as they are reproduced in Mat Dryhurst's rendering of the current juncture in the history of the internet. Dryhurst, Holly Herndon's partner/collaborator and a critic in his own right, posted this (since-deleted) tweet in August of this year:

Mat Dryhurst
@matdryhurst

The stakes, I believe, are quite high. The narrative fallacy of collective action through freedom of information has failed. Accessibility, one of the sacred tenets of the information age, is a two-way street. The poorer have access to more information, however the richer also have more access to the poor through their labor and data. Everyone is now free to contribute their thoughts and labor online, and witness others' in turn, however only a minority are tooled to analyze and harness that information towards productive and profitable ends. The original conception of the internet as a utopian commons has manifested into a series of gamified social feeder networks, designed for a monarchic class, who can divine signal from the noise of our poorly structured contributions. This cycle will be difficult to break without updating the stories we tell ourselves. The poorest amongst us now get to luxuriate in a simulation of what wealth felt like pre-internet, with access to affordable goods and travel, more time, and an open platform for expression, while those with the skills to harness those platforms enjoy the kind of wealth and insight only previously enjoyed by royalty.

10:50 AM · Aug 21, 2019 · Twitter Web App

9 Retweets   **42** Likes

Julia Kaganskiy @juliaxgulia · 3m
Replying to @matdryhurst
The poorest among us are much, much poorer than this piece of writing imagines. The poorest among us, depending on where "we" are located, are killing themselves with prescription opioids, starving and killing each other due to lack of food, dying in proxy wars, etc.

Dryhurst rehearses a similar trajectory to Grimes, from a post-everything optimism to a pragmatic realism in which the dream of the internet reveals itself to be a nightmare in which we stand by and watch our own destruction. But as Julia Kaganskiy notes in her reply, the "we" and the "us" are assumed here, indicating that what Dryhurst is doing is of a familiar type: mistaking a singular experience for a universal one. As with Olson, Waugh, and Harper, Dryhurst founds his conception of the internet as a utopian commons on a dehistoricized model of rupture, in which an idealized pre-history is differentiated from a dystopic present. Without this idealized pre-history, however, Dryhust would not be able to make these claims about the contemporary, as his periodization would have to admit continuities between our present era and the world in which the internet emerged — a post-WWII U.S. obsessed with decentralizing its infrastructure to minimize the damage from nuclear attack and a world structured around colonial extraction. The internet was never a utopian project for all.

So, if this is one type of crisis — of a thinking that wraps itself up in the internet only to find its limits in the latter's indivisibility from the colonial and racial capitalist structures that birthed it — then might we be able to find some other, more generative crises? Because, as the members of the communist/communizing journal *Endnotes* reminds us, crisis is what makes the world of the capital-relation go round. The task then might be to find forms of crises, which with *Endnotes* again afford the possibility of *non-reproduction*.

Where are the crises of the singular? How do we ensure the non-reproduction of its thinking, reliant as it is on the individual or the body, on a history that admits no continuity, only rupture? What are the aesthetics with which this crisis could be brought to bear?

LAUGHTER, STUTTER, BREAK, AND BLUR

Elysia Crampton (photo: Boychild)

"*My problem with getting lumped into these worldings — particularly with online/consumer groups — is that even the ones taken as the most futuristic, and therefore thought of — by default — as optimistic, feel mired in colonial ideas of execution and seem to blindly carry out the functions of a system that privileges this mode of educated whiteness that takes its own prejudices as an unspoken given. The stuff with the sharpest, newest production value, often signaling an easy-to-read deconstructed ethos, gets taken as the most progressive work, even when this is clearly not the case. We forget to ask ourselves the simplest questions sometimes, but more frequently, we forget to ask questions at all.*

– Elysia Crampton, interview with Tiny Mix Tapes

Elysia Crampton's work this decade offers us a possible escape from the post-internet. Across her edits, mixtapes, albums, and performances, Crampton has charted a course away from music-as-linear history and the telos of the individual. Take *Demon City*, the album she made by "being-with" her friends and collaborators. As part of the process of co-writing the album, she drifted away from the self-possession common

to the individual and toward a possession by and with others. In her words, "[h]ow does my friends' — [who are] from all different backgrounds — support of me inform my own autonomy, my own agency?"

Crampton is presenting us here with a form of self-determination that is not hinged to the individual, but instead arises through collectivity. It is an attachment to others and their circumstances built on solidarity, on an appreciation for what is held in common. Autonomy is not the end-goal of the artistic process, but a part of it, one that must be brought into dialogue with the various backgrounds — historical, cultural, geographical — of her collaborators. Music-making becomes a collective process, in which producers engage with the various fabrics of which they are part, "[acknowledging their] involvement in the world's happiness or the world's functioning."
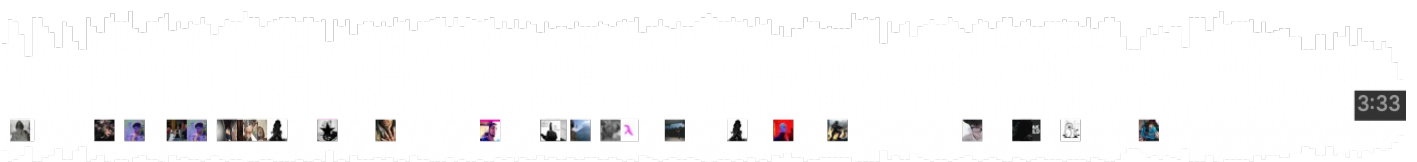
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▶ **Break World Records**
Why Be, Elysia Crampton, Chino Amobi - Dummy Track

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This vexed relation to the individual comes into view on "Dummy Track," which is co-written with WHY BE and Chino Amobi. Here, a riotous clattering of drums floats into the ominous rumble of monstrous laughter. As the drums resolve themselves into a steady beat, a second laugh becomes tangled up in the percussion's momentum. The syncopated laugh comes to function as a multivocal sonic object, both an element of the drum track and a melody in and of itself. This sonic confusion — between laughter and music, music and laughter — creates an arena within which the singular is made untenable and unsound. Instead of a singular body that laughs, the listener is given only the laugh's carnivalesque echo, its fluid movement between subject and object in what we might call, echoing a line from her previous album, *American Drift*, a mode of "slip infinity." Indeed, Crampton herself refuses to pin down which part of her musical heritage that the laugh — one of her sonic signatures — comes from, instead saying that:

> it's always there, and what I like is that no one can locate a real owner, there's no master or originator there, so it's just part of this legacy that finds its way into my work and I just carry it on.

Against the individual, Crampton is instead enfolded in a trans-generational play of influence that resolves itself into a sonic mantle that she takes on and continues. Ownership of this sound is less important than its persistence, ensuring that its legacies are respected, its attachments attended to. *This* is a mode of music-making for the present, one that neither shies away from history nor lets itself be overcome by it. It is a music-making that understands that history is made "under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." The past does not recede into obscurity here, crushed by the momentousness of the internet. Instead, it is reworked, returned to the present in a new form, giving the lie to a historical consciousness constructed according to a series of pre-s and post-s. Through her employment of laughter, Crampton is participating in what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten see as the necessary rejoinder to the individual's "enclosure and settlement of the earth":

> The play […] is to desediment, to exfoliate, to renew the earthly and inseparable assembly, the habitual jam, by way of and in the differentiation of what will be neither regulated nor understood. All we got is us in this continual giving away of all.

> **The past does not recede into obscurity here, crushed by the momentousness of the internet. Instead, it is reworked, returned to the present in a new form, giving the lie to a historical consciousness constructed according to a series of pre-'s and post-'s.**

If Crampton provides us with a sociality for contemporary music-making, the fractured, looping nature of her music provides us with an aesthetics. Indeed, Crampton joins a number of other musicians whose response to our present predicament is to proliferate styles that, in their generic and sonic experimentation, wedded to an orientation toward the dancefloor, strive to create a situation of "inseparable assembly" by and through a production of sound that moves beyond regulation and understanding.

It's worth signaling my commitment to provisionality here. Against the totalizing, universalizing theorizations of the post-internet, I want to offer an avenue into forms of music-making that do not talk with one voice or signify in one way; music that speaks but in words that might not be understandable *yet*. What seems important to me about this music is its commitment to unfolding, to an aesthetic mode that dwells in the zone of the unresolved, a fact reflected sonically in this music's multiplicity, in its assembling of textures, genres, and affects that are themselves in a state of process. It is also notably a music that gains from being in transmission, from being resolutely of and for dancefloors, taking on new forms as it reaches new audiences and signaling a need for working out what it can do *in common*.

We could then look, for example, at the stuttering aesthetics of Príncipe, whose producers — DJ Marfox, Nidia, DJ Nigga Fox, DJ Lycox, DJ Firmeza, Normal Nada, *et al.* — make music that drags and scrapes, shaping affective spaces structured by fragmentation and mutation. The present here is figured as one of vertiginous drops,

queasy silences, and sudden accelerations, qualities shared amongst the skewed beats of Equiknoxx, the pummeling weight of Slikback's collaborations with SVBKVLT, and in Kelman Duran's alternatingly leaden and buoyant edits. This is a music that runs circuitous laps around the listener's synapses, refusing to settle or be settled. It is a music that warps: as in the trans-fusions of Mexican DJ collective and record label N.A.A.F.I, whose admixtures of regional club styles rumble ominously and whose pop-hybrids fizzle with joy. And it is a music that flutters, as in the microsonic excesses of Siete Catorce & AMAZONDOTCOM and Oli XL.

What the music of these producers share is a sense of contingency and possibility: an aesthetics made to the measure of our crisis-ridden era. Always in the process of shifting, this music takes us into spaces not yet known, whose boundaries are not yet concretized. Against the post-internet's obsession with the future, with a ruptural break from the past, this music returns us to a different, roiling present.

With this music, we tumble, stutter, break, and blur, a series of movements that require an accounting of the past and a staying-with the affordances of the present: How did we get here? Where can we go?

With this music, we elide the smooth ahistoricity of the post-internet's version of the current moment, its interest in the individual, and in the subsumption of the local by the global. In its stead, we have collectivity, uncertainty, and a particular kind of rootedness.

This music could not come from just anywhere; it is grounded in the histories of its transmission, in colonization and decolonization, in abandonment and hope, construction, and destruction. It requires an internet connection, but is not defined by it. Landing with odd cadences, stabs of melody, and non-reproductive rhythms, this music sounds itself both in and as the here and now, the afterlives of coloniality and racial capitalism — our impending climate catastrophe and a world that could be (and has been) different. It is a rendering of and a response to these unequally distributed crises, opportunities and worlds that are, I would argue, the posture required for our moment, one that is contingent and unfinished, danceable, despairing, and joyful. It is not the sound of the future, of futurity or of the futuristic, of the pre- or post-internet. It is a sound for the present. Against the blank map of the post-internet, the sound of a (possible) territory.

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