

NOT YOUR AVERAGE CUT'N'PASTE.

Demux publishing's digital syn-
aesthesia.

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Image courtesy of Peter Newman
<http://www.demux.org/>

Demuxing / demultiplexing basically means, when speaking of video formats, splitting the file that contains both audio and video data (and possible other data streams as well, like subtitles), into separate files, each containing one element of the original file. Demuxing file doesn't weaken the video nor audio quality, it doesn't do anything for these data streams, it just simply saves them into separate files. Opposite of demux is muxing, which basically joins the datastreams back together. (<http://afterdawn.com>)

New label Demux has assembled an impressive team of fellow demuxers in its mission to promote and distribute synaesthetic artworks of experimental sound and moving image [check out the website for releases and events]. Together with co-founders Pete Newman and Wade Marynovsky, Sam Bruce Andrew Gadow and Cameron Foster add a digital twist to synaesthetic productions, not in the banal sense of using digital technologies to cut and paste images to the beat, on the model of Disney's Fantasia for a vj-ing generation, or in the mode of Michael Gondry's seminal Star Guitar, each snare stab visually corresponding to an element of the visual milieu.

Descriptors like cut and paste, remix, or even parallel streaming only allude to combinatory acts, which while they can be dazzling in their extreme sonic and auditory revisionings (Beastie Boys' Mixmaster Mike), don't come anywhere near describing the kind of semi-automated and post human processes at work in the synaesthetic productions of Pete Newman or Sam Bruce et al.

In respect of cut and paste technologies the computer updates and speeds up analogue tasks, in Manovich's argument synthesising the functions of so many other machines (tape players, video players, editors of various kinds). Newman and Bruce draw a very different inspiration from the depths of the machine, from the semi-automations and micro processes which open the subtle unpredictability of post human worlds: particulate worlds of micro matter and micro behaviours.

"Set the controls for the heart of the sun." So goes a line from an early Pink Floyd song. Set the controls within a range of parameters and voyage inwards with the post human eye of machinist vision. Newman opens the blistering and white-hot intense micro worlds of his "Rosebud" from expanding into the flames of the final frames of Welles' Citizen Kane. You can't simply call it sampling; rather micromanipulation which opens world within worlds down through the layers of sound and image streams.

By contrast none of the dense lavish lushness of Newman carries over into the Keaton-esque gags of Sam Bruce's line monsters let loose to draw themselves in and out of the accidents of their semi-programmed events. Like Robin Fox's synaesthetic works in which the shapes of his sine wave sounds are simultaneously self-imaging in the patterns on the oscilloscope screen, Bruce sets up a synergy of patterning between sound and image. Yet, there's greater degree of unpredictability and the ridiculous as the lines stumble, freak out, fall and hopelessly tangle from a loose skein of thread, to a tune with the cheesiness of Mike Flower's big sound. Suppose the antics of Buster Keaton and the early animators of cartoons can be put down to the hallucinatory pairings of jazz and drugs, in the computer weird distortions, odd amplifications and strange blips can emerge in the less than complete symbiosis of man and machines.

In Heideggerian terms there's a relationship of letting be, of a certain yielding of the machine to do its thing, with the artist in the role of releaser of tendencies already inherent in a thing. It's never a question of being in complete control, a virtuoso, but rather a way of tweaking possibilities, a being-alongside. Andrew Gadow, with his test pattern glitchworks, is like a director coaxing a performance from a star. Sure, Gadow shapes and displaces, alters pitch and tone, and vertical hold, but a semi-tuned TV, once turned on, would continue to play itself, albeit much less interestingly, if he walked away. The element of semi-autonomy favoured by Demux's artists is highlighted in Wade Marynovsky's Autonomous Improvisation installation, in which a programme randomly mixes tunes from a genuine old-fashioned pianola (an early autonomous machine) with video clips of various performers (including a nude John Wa painted red slapping his arse; George Tillianakis as gold-caped, masked and mini-skirted Pizzo; numerous clowns; and serious musicians like Amanda Stewart [voice], Peter Blamey [mixer] and Lucas Abela [playing a slab of glass with his face]).

Demux launch with DVD giveaway sampler, 2 March, The Performance Space @ The Carriage Works, Sydney.

Wade Marynovsky, Autonomous Improvisation vol 1, April-May, Artspace, Sydney.

Forthcoming: Liquid Architecture 8, 28-30 June, Performance Space, Sydney.

