

21M.380 · MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY
RECORDING TECHNIQUES & AUDIO PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION ANALYSIS 2 (PA2)
PRODUCTION BLOOPERS

DUE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016, 9:30AM
SUBMIT TO: MIT LEARNING MODULES ▶ ASSIGNMENTS
5% OF TOTAL GRADE

1 Instructions

Identify artefacts (often referred to as ‘bloopers’, ‘goofs’, or ‘blunders’) in different commercially available audio productions. For each artifact that you find, create a short sound example and describe it in an accompanying write-up.

2 Guidelines

Listen for things that were not meant to be heard (such as click track leakage through the singer’s headphones) rather than means of artistic expression (such as a deliberately pumping compressor that emphasizes a musical beat). It is likely that the errors that you find were the result of an unavoidable compromise in the production process, which were hidden in the mix in the hope that they would not be noticed by the large majority of listeners.

2.1 Examples of things to listen for¹

- Obvious cuts, splices, or crossfades
- Inconsistent reverberation
- Stereo center shift
- Unstable phantom source localization
- Wow/flutter (variations in tape speed) or tape phasing/flanging
- Opposite phase polarity between left and right channel
- Dropouts, clicks, or clipping
- Pumping or breathing compressors
- Comb filters

¹ See Katz (2007, p. 51) for inspiration.

2.2 Online resources

Of course there are plenty of blooper collections online, such as:

- <http://www.hometracked.com/2007/08/23/10-recording-bloopers-that-made-the-album/>
- <http://www.gibson.com/News-Lifestyle/Features/en-us/bloopers-1012.aspx>

You may use these as a starting point to get an idea of what you could be listening for, but you are expected to find other examples than those listed on the above (or other) websites. *Try your personal music collection!* Listen to ten songs on headphones in detail and you will probably find plenty of material. This is primarily a listening, not a research assignment.

3 Assessment criteria

- How many examples can you provide? I think three examples can be considered a reasonable average.
- How outrageous are the errors that you have discovered? For example, an audible tape splice wins over a slight stereo centre shift. Actual errors hidden in a mix win over matters of subjective aesthetic interpretation.
- Quality (good examples) wins over quantity (many examples). Variety (examples from different productions) wins over homogeneity (all examples from same production).
- How well can you verbally communicate the nature of the artefact, such that another listener can reliably identify them in the examples that you provide? Make sure you clearly communicate what you want the reader to listen to in which moment of each example, and apply the professional music technology vocabulary that you have acquired over the course of the semester. This might be harder than you think – test the results on your friends prior to submission, to check whether they can relate to your descriptions of the artefacts.
- How reasonable is your explanation as to what might have been the cause of that artefact? You can do research to verify your suspicions, but I want you to try and draw your own conclusions first. Imaginative reasoning wins over accuracy.

4 Submission format

Please do *not* pack your submission into a .zip or other archive format at this occasion. Instead, upload your write-up and sound examples as individual files, which should be named as follows.

```

| writeup.pdf
|
| example_1.[wav|aif(f)|flac|mp3|m4a|...]
|
| example_2.[wav|aif(f)|flac|mp3|m4a|...]
|
| ...
|
| example_n.[wav|aif(f)|flac|mp3|m4a|...]

```

- `example_i.[wav|aif(f)|flac|mp3|m4a|...]`: Provide a separate audio file for each example, which should be as long as necessary to communicate the nature of the artefact, but not longer.² Do not submit entire songs! Rather, extract the relevant section in your DAW and apply a fade-in and a fade-out. Pay attention to creating expressive examples. If possible, preserve the original audio file format. If you have to decode from a lossy compressed format for editing purposes, do not re-encode the result to a lossy compressed format (which might obscure your argument).
- `writeup.pdf`: Your write-up, too, should be as concise as possible.³ Specify artist and song title, the name of the accompanying example sound file, and the precise time (e.g., 0'04") at which the artefact you are describing appears within that file, along with a clear description of its nature and possible cause. You may include images of waveforms, signal spectra, etc. to illustrate your point.

² 5–10 seconds per example will be sufficient in most cases.

³ One paragraph per example should be sufficient.

References & useful resources

Katz, Bob (2007). "An earientation session." In: *Mastering Audio. The Art and the Science*. 2nd ed. Focal Press. Chap. 3, pp. 45–52. MIT LIBRARY: 002015727. Available at: MIT Learning Modules ▶ Materials.

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