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# Assemblage Theory: Recording the Archaeological Record: Second Response

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# ASSEMBLAGE THEORY: RECORDING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD: SECOND RESPONSE

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This piece is a response to Reinhard's <u>Assemblage Theory: Recording the Archaeological Record</u>.

Responding to Andrew Reinhard's *Assemblage Theory* is difficult on a number of levels. The greatest challenge, for me, is recognizing in Reinhard's work a response to the recent attention to the assemblage in archaeological thinking (<u>Hamilakis and Jones 2017</u>; <u>Harrison</u>

2011; Martin 2013; Fowler 2013; Haggis 2018). This work is remarkably diverse and theoretically informed. Much of it taps into the vital current of thought concerning the limits of material agency both in the past and in our own work as researchers. At its most exciting, critical engagements with the concept of assemblages, relational ontologies, and scientific practices (especially in the hands of thinkers like Karen Barad (2007)) offer new ways for understanding the "social life of things" (Appadurai 1988), "stuff" (Miller 2009), and "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010). Bruno Latour has explored how in its broadest definition, the concept of the assemblage can inform how we think about our world in the fits of the Anthropocene (Latour 2017). This is heady and important stuff.

At the same time, I was drawn to Reinhard's album and article because of my interest in music. In the past, I've thought about how music can inform archaeological thinking (Caraher 2019; Caraher, Kourelis, and Reinhard 2014). I also just really like music. In fact, as I write these words I'm listening to Ornette Coleman's "Monk and the Nun" which was originally recorded in 1959 during the same session as his iconic *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. "Monk and the Nun" did not appear on that album, and resurfaced only on some compilations released in the 1970s. This afternoon, however, I was listening to it on Ornette Coleman's box set of recordings from his year on the Atlantic label (1959-1961) called *Beauty is a Rare Thing* and released in 1993. The tracks on this box set are arranged in the order that they were recorded rather than in the order that the tracks would appear on any of Coleman's Atlantic albums. This means that they loosely follow the organization of the albums and do not follow the order of the tracks as they were originally released. Coleman's well-known track "Lonely Woman" is track 5 on the first disc of *Beauty is a Rare Thing* and comes immediately before "Monk and the Nun." It originally appeared as the string first track on his *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. To my mind, this is important: the bass line, then drums, and finally, those magically awkward, melancholic, and deeply engaging lines from Coleman and his long-time collaborator Don Cherry introduce their new approach to jazz featured on this album and definitive for Coleman's long career.

The box set offers an exhaustive survey of Coleman's work during his most exciting and productive period. It is markedly different from the assemblage offered by the six albums released over this same period (*The Shape of Jazz to Come* (1959), *Change of the Century* (1960), *This Is Our Music* (1961), *Free Jazz* (1961), *Ornette!* (1962), and *Ornette on Tenor* (1962)). The different order of the tracks alone give the 1993 box set a different vibe and the faithfulness to the order of recording provides new opportunities for insights into the development of the songs and albums that would make Coleman famous. Reading Reinhard's work reminded me to think about albums as assemblages, and to think (and eventually write) about music.

Reinhard's *Assemblage Theory* is a remarkable experiment in thinking and performing an assemblage. Sculpted from found sounds on the internet, Reinhard's album — and the article that introduced it on *Epoiesen* — makes visible the work of a musician, archaeologist, and individual in bringing order to the fragmented realities that surround us. The seamlessness of Reinhard's beats does not intend to represent or reproduce the cacophonic and discordant character of the original group of samples. Instead, he seeks to resolve their differences through the cutting away and the careful arrangement of the sounds into recognizable songs. Reinhard makes one group of his found sounds available for us to understand his process, and this is a generous way to make clear the methods that Reinhard used, in general, to produce order from the chaos of even his opportunistic assemblages. Reinhard's work reinforces a point made by Rodney Harrison (2011): assemblages are "assembled" rather than discovered and while the act of finding sounds on the internet playfully mimics the modern serendipity of excavation, it does nothing to detract from the obvious work of assembly that is crucial to Reinhard's piece. We can safely assume that he discarded and rejected sounds that were not suitable for his project making the act of finding even less about revealing something that existed and more about creating something that was necessary.

The goal of my response is to explore the nuances of Reinhard's *Assemblage Theory* as he created it and as I have encountered it and to trace the limits of his assemblage beyond the bounds of the album into the sinews of our culture. In this way, I want to emphasize an *Assemblage Theory* as a point of entry into a wider meditation on the ways in which assemblages provide a medium for the critical engagement of our contemporary world. In this way, Reinhard's project reflects his (and my own) longstanding interest in the use of archaeological methods and metaphors as a way of excavating and constructing critical perspectives on the contemporary world.

(I'm now listening to The Comet is Coming's *Complete Studio Recordins 2015CE-2017CE*. The tracks on this album, through some accident of markup lost their metadata and even their original order, when I uploaded this album to my Roon music software library.)

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Reinhard is an archaeologist and like so much archaeology, the smoothness of his final production serves as much to obfuscate the original character of his assemblage of samples as the methods and practices that brought them into seemingly meaningful relationships. His description of this process evoked for me Elizabeth Freeman's interpretation of Frankenstein in her book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010). In a short digression, Freeman considers Mary Shelley's Frankenstein as a model for understanding the role that time played in the processes used to create verisimilitude in media. She argues that in creating his creature, Victor Frankenstein

aspired to assemble a being whose seamlessness manifests the experience of reality in the present. His creature, however, was characterized by its seams and sutures that combined the assemblage of scavenged parts necessary to bring it to life. The visible seams demonstrated that it was impossible to eliminate the abrupt and affective character of its pastness that is intrinsic to awkward and profoundly human assemblages. In effect, the seams made Frankenstein's creature authentic and, ironically, alive. Our modern efforts to create a smooth and seamlessness experience from found things, at best, mimics our experiences of the present, but more likely anticipates a perfectible utopian future that disregards our own encounter with the past. The discipline of archaeology with its debt to modernity (Thomas 2006) consistently attempts to create seamlessness from the disparate fragments assembled from past experiences. This echos the modern promise of seamless integration in the internet of things, of augmented and virtual reality, and in various transhuman fantasies of technologically enhanced humans.

Reinhard's selective remixing of his samples to produce a smoothly contoured present ensured|created a juxtaposition that both located the samples in the past but also created their pastness. The dissonant, discontinuous, and found character of the samples defined them as something other than the contemporary experience. This distancing made the act of re-assembly possible and, indeed, necessary even through we realize that the digital samples at the core of Reinhard's songs are from an archaeological strata that could also be contemporary with the songs themselves. As Smith has noted in her response to this album (2019), Reinhard's effort to assert and demonstrate the disparate parts of these songs while simultaneously obscuring how these parts fit together to create a sonically consistent whole is a key role in locating Reinhard's creative power in the present. The tension between an asserted pastness and recognizable present is a common feature of our diverse, digital, post-industrial and modern world in that we often seek to eliminate the jarring disjunctions between parts of the assemblage that remind us of the past's messy abruptness. The tragic and all-too-human character of Victor Frankenstein's monster made it the deeply sympathetic victim of modernity's distain for the incongruity and flawed character of the past and the false hope for a seamless and perfected future.

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To his credit, Reinhard, like Victor Frankenstein, is honest about how he created his assemblage. He arranged his found sounds according to the structure of traditional pop songs and accentuated the sounds that evoked contemporary guitar rock, beats drawn from trap, house, and EDM, as well as other sonic conventions. These various structures are part of this assemblage as well, and it is probably safe to assume that these structures allowed Reinhard to prefigure his album in the sounds on the internet. Hayden White (1973), for example, famously argued that a series of tropes and forms of employment shaped the way that historians produced narratives, explained causality, and produced

assemblages of evidence. Neville Morley's (2019) response to Reinhard's piece reminded us that pop sensibilities are only one potential way to emplot this assemblage. As long as pop music has existed, there have been those who have sought to challenge the self-evident character of its structure.

(I just put on the Minutemen's *Double Nickels on the Dime* which was famously recorded and mixed for $1100 (Azzerad 2001, 82). Despite the effort to make this into a concept album, it still retains the band's anti-commercial, rambling style of the band which was the very antithesis of pop music.)

Despite Morley's critique, which Reinhard invited by making his original assemblage available for examination, Reinhard's arrangement still models our own approach to archaeological knowledge making. Narratives of all sorts prefigure the assemblages that we encounter in archaeology. These narratives and processes constitute parts of these assemblages the same way that a traditional pop melody or familiar sound on the web prefigured the songs possible at Reinhard's deft hands. Different hands introduce different elements to the assemblage and Reinhard's generosity with his samples has resulted in at least one new encounter with some of the same basic elements.

There are other elements present in Reinhard's assemblage that offer more insights into the process that produced the final album. Two struck me as immediately visible.

First, the album has the unmistakable character of contemporary music making in its unfailing and precise rhythmic structure. Generally, a "click track" imparts this structure on a song. The click track is a tool that allows a musician to precisely synchronize sounds in various recordings. The click track is eliminated during the production process, but the regularity of the beat that it imparts persists. Damon Krukowski (2019), the former Galaxie 500 drummer, has recently observed that the "click track" regularizes the interplay between musicians in recordings. Prior to the use of click tracks and in live performances, musicians would listen to one another and adjust their tempos in minute ways that would allow a song to hold together. Musicians also would be influenced by live audiences to accelerate or slow their tempo in response to the crowd, the moment, and the shared experience of the performance. Thus the audience and performers responded to one another and the listener's response to a performer would follow the performers responses to one another in the process of music making.

I'm now listening to Cannonball Adderley's album *Something Else* (1958) and as I bob my head in time to their version of the jazz standard "Autumn Leaves" waiting for the entry of Miles Davis's muted trumpet, I'm literally moving in sync with the musicians as they listened to each other. I'm locked into the interplay between Art Blakey's drums, Sam

Jones's bass line, and Hank Jones's sparse piano. These are real musicians whose subtle cues and gestures I attempt to imagine as I listen deeply into this classic album. Reinhard's album is a different affair, but it would be an odd effort to seek human interaction in the mechanical regularity of the click. Krukowski has suggested that lack of intimacy in contemporary recorded pop music comes from the standard use of the click track which has eliminated the subtle variations that may be undetectable on a conscious level, but nevertheless draw us into the experience of music as a human art. Whether one agrees with the argument of a former dummer is less significant than the more obvious observation that when we move our body in time with Reinhard's thumping beats, we are not sharing in the generative interplay of the musicians who recorded the song, but falling in sync with precise beats of a machine.

The other artifact of Reinhard's assemblage that captured my attention was the driving beat of trap music. Over the last decade, the rhythms of trap have become essentially synonymous with hiphop. Trap is usually associated with the beats that emerged in the South, and particularly Atlanta, in the 1990s and by the early 21st century these beats became increasingly common in the EDM. Essential to the style of trap is the sound of the Roland TR-808 drum machine which became so closely associated with this style of music that hiphop duo Outkast recognized it by name in their 2003 hit "The Way You Move" which connects the 808s distinctive cymbal and bass that is characteristic of trap.

> So click-it or ticket, let's see your seat belt fastened
> Trunk rattlin', like two midgets in the back seat wrestlin'
> Speaker box vibrate the tag
> Make it sound like aluminum cans in a bag
> But I know y'all wanted that 808
> Can you feel that be-A-S-S, bass

Outkast here is making fun of the 808-produced trap so typical in early-21st-century Atlanta hiphop by describing how it sounds played through a car stereo with its powerful subwoofer rattling the license plate and the poorly attached plastic trim. The reference to it sounding like "aluminum cans in a bag" is not simply an innocent simile but a playful suggestion that the sound of thumping base evokes the image of the urban scavenger with his assemblage of recyclable cans in plastic trash bag. In the hands of Outkast, the ubiquitous sound of trap and the Roland TR-808 slyly evokes the lower class near-suburbs of Atlanta and the "dirty" neighborhoods which made this sound famous. This superficial reading of trap does not do the complexities of this genre justice (see for example, McCarthy (2018)), but since Reinhard's album is not so much trap as trap-inspired

EDM, the relationship between his beats and the assemblage of trap driven hiphop is probably distant enough for us to abandon it at this point in my response.

The more proximate context for trap inspired EDM is, of course, the club. As I have already noted in my discussion of the "click track" in contemporary electronic music, the use of trap beats in the club creates a bodily response not just to the beats, but to the automated processes which order the beats into a systematic tempo. The club is also a place of consumption and display where music is not only consumed, but individuals produce distinctive assemblages to manufacture both group and individual identities. EDM is social music designed to be played in public places and a constituent part of the assemblages that define club culture identity (classically explored by D. Hebdige (1979); more recently Jackson (2004); Wilson (2006)).

The intersection of style, music, and the movements of bodies in the club locates Reinhard's album amid a larger assemblage of manufactured experiences that define identities within consumer culture. A particularly intriguing aspect of our experience with *Assemblage Theory* is the loudness of the album. Loudness in this context does not refer to the volume of the tracks which the user can control, but the relationship between the quietest and loudest passages on any track. The compressed dynamic range of the tracks on *Assemblage Theory* is a sonic artifact of the late-20th and early-21st century. Reinhard's album has a dynamic range of around 6 db, which is consistent with the 6 db of range present on Migos platinum-certified album *CULTURE* and slightly less dynamic than Daft Punk's 10 db range on *Random Access Memories*. To put this in perspective Orbital's highly regarded second album (often called "The Brown Album") released in 1993 had a dynamic range of 13 db. A Tribe Called Quest's iconic *Low End Theory* from 1991 had a range of over 12 db. The recent increase in loudness has its roots both in the desire of record labels to have songs that stand out on the radio, but it also ensures that tracks sound hyperreal when played through highly amplified sound systems at dance clubs. The flattening of dynamic range ensures that all frequencies and passages are equally audible above the throbbing bodies of a dance club. On home systems, particularly low efficiency speakers and headphones, this loudness creates an impression of fidelity that has little in common with the sound of live instruments. In many ways, the loudness of EDM contributes to hyperreality of the genre (and increasingly of all pop music) that has no or few referents in performed music. Our encounter, then, with loudness, the regimented experience of the click track, and the seamless integration of the found sounds in the assemblage offers an experience of the real with only the barest of relationships with our lived experiences. To use Baudrillard's language, the structuring of this assemblage offers a simulacrum that lacks a clear point of reference (Baudrillard 1994).

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Reinhard is aware that his assemblage is hyperreal and makes the samples of a track available for us to play along with him and to create our own music from a common pool of sonic artifacts. It is worth noting that in archaeology, this kind of generosity remains relatively rare. Historically, archaeologists were loath to release key elements of archaeological assemblages often preserved in excavation notebooks which often remain the personal property of the scholar. More recently, archaeologists have acknowledged that their deep experience in the landscape, with particular methods, and across the social relationships that shape fieldwork formed as vital a part of the archaeological assemblage as the carefully documented ceramic sherds and stratigraphic relationships. These limits, of course, shape Reinhard's willingness to share as well. He is not only adept at manipulating the tracks in Audacity, but also has a workflow, a distinct set of gear, and experience as a musician to guide his encounter with these songs. Recognizing this, I was at first, inclined to critique Reinhard for only releasing the artifacts from one song and to note that it neatly paralleled the tendency among archaeologists to feint toward transparency and openness in analysis while holding back certain key elements of the interpretative process. This was uncharitable, though, because by offering one song from *Assemblage Theory,* he pushes us from thinking about the artifacts present in the songs and toward thinking about the broader assemblage of artifacts that served to mediate our encounter with his music. Our own efforts to manipulate the provided tracks primarily demonstrate the impossibility of recreating Reinhard's songs.

Even the more passive encounter of just listening to Reinhard's album is fraught with a certain element of uncertainty. When I first read Reinhard's piece, I clicked through to Spotify and dutifully clicked on the first track. The website played the first 30 seconds of the song and then went to the next song on the album. I didn't think much of it because I wasn't really that concerned with the length of the songs. After two or three tracks, however, I discovered that because I don't have a Spotify account, I could only hear the first 30 second of each song. That was a bummer, and apparently this also influenced the first responder to this article's listening to the tracks (Smith 2018).

I then emailed Reinhard and he let me know that the album was also available on Tidal. I then played it on my MacBook Pro and thought it sounded interesting enough to cue it up on the stereo that lives in my main room. Through my much larger and more sophisticated stereo the sound seemed a bit muddled: the big bass in a few songs (like "Trappist") seemed to smear across the other sounds on the track, and the lack of dynamic range made the entire album just feel too loud and heavy. To be clear, the system that I was using to play the album was not optimized for loud music. I was streaming the album over an Auralic Mini music streamer that outputs to a Schiit Bifrost DAC from which it then runs through a pair of Audioquest RCA cables into a 60 watt vacuum-tube Audio Research Corporation amplifier that drives a pair of Zu Omen Defs speakers. The Omen Defs are

paper-cone, full-range-driver speakers that I've paired with two super quick, 400 watt Zu Undertone subwoofers. This system loves dynamic music: small ensemble jazz, carefully recorded rock music, and acoustic stuff. When I play loud, boomy music especially through the streamer, the bass makes the entire scene a bit sloppy for some reason.

The next day, I also played it over my little office system which consists of two powered Yamaha studio monitors and a thumpy little subwoofer that sits under my desk. It sounded tighter and every bit as loud as on my home system, but not as big and more precisely rendered. This little system encouraged me to look deeply into the mix as one might expect from studio monitors.

Finally, I returned home and played the version of the album that Reinhard sent to me as .wav files through my Sony music player (a HAP-Z1ES) and from there into my ARC amplifier and into my big speakers. For some reason this cleared up most of the boomy-ness. It was still loud, but it felt a bit more carefully wrought and exact. This version of the album preserved more of the digital character of the music despite it running through vacuum-tube amplifier and paper cone speakers. At the same time, it communicated a sense of scale. 800 watts of subwoofer and four paper-cone woofers ensured that I felt the music.

All of this is to point out that this sculpted assemblage of samples also consists of a complex series of technologies, services, and environments that mediate our encounter with all parts of the assemblage from their transmission to the relationship between the various component parts. The more that I listened to his album (and right now, I'm listening to it on my MacBook Pro, through an Audioquest Dragonfly Red DAC, a ALO Rx MC3-B+ headphone amplifier and a pair of Audeze LCD-2C headphones), the more I wondered how close what I was hearing was to what Reinhard created. My various listening environments created plenty of room to quibble about how the assemblage actually works.

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What remains clear in all of my encounters with Reinhard's assemblage, however, is how companies have succeeded at monetizing various elements in this assemblage. Sometimes this is overt, such as when we have to sign up to listen to a particular music service which then records our listening habits, compensates (barely) musicians, and serves up advertising. At present, we only have access to this music through a series of music services that monetize Reinhard's efforts and whose future is far from certain. The formats through which this music is distributed—whether in the uncompressed format of a .wav file or through such compressed formats as FLAC, ALAC, or MP3—may prove as ephemeral as 8-track tapes, DATs, or mini discs, or as persistent as LPs. Archiving these

tracks so that both Reinhard's and this article makes sense in the future is not as simple as saving the music files to a repository, but must also extend to preserving the various subsidiary formats and even devices through which these songs could be heard. As Raiford Guin's (2014) work has shown with video games, digital artifacts are more than just the source code, but involves the experience of the arcade or the home gaming system, the haptics of the controllers, the look of the CRT monitor or television, and even the art on the game cartridge or cabinet.

(I'm now listening to Paul Westerbergs ill-fated 2008 album *49:00*. The album is a brilliant piece which blurs the distinction between a medley, montage, and album, but since it included covers of songs by the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Alice Cooper, Steppenwolf, Bob Dylan, and others, and these covers were not cleared, the album was pulled from various online stores within days. You can now hear it on Soundcloud.)

Reinhard is aware of the commercial concerns associated with the dissemination, use, and reuse of audio and their place within the longer history of music making. The samples that Reinhard used in his songs were all free and open access, apparently, and this, presumably, was an economic and political decision, but also an artistic one. Thirty years ago, however, the landscape of sampling and the assemblages available to recombine look much different. Hanif Abdurraqib, in his recent meditation on the oeuvre of A Tribe Called Quest, *Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to A Tribe Called Quest*, (2019) reflected on the change in hiphop in the mid-1990s when record labels discovered they could require permission and payment for samples used in songs. By 2001, the use of expensive samples becomes a point of pride for some rappers and embarrassment for others. Jay-Z, famously attacked Nas by claiming that he did not even own the right to his own songs so when Jay-Z sampled them, Nas did not make any money (this point was later disputed by Nas and his representatives):

> *So yeah, I sampled your voice, you was usin' it wrong*
> *You made it a hot line, I made it a hot song*
> *And you ain't get a coin, nigga, you was gettin' fucked then*
> *I know who I paid, God "Serchlite publishin'"*

In this context, Reinhard's use of free samples explicitly detached himself from one of the commercial aspects of the music making process. At the same time, he did not release his entire assemblage of samples explicitly and, curiously, there is no equivalent of the ceramic catalogue, or concordance where he credited the original sources of his samples. Moreover, he distributed his music via commercial services that even at the free tier require registration as a way to monetize plays and listeners, and his tracks are not

available for free download. We can imagine, then, that maybe Reinhard is getting "coin," but his sources are, in Jay-Z's words, "gettin' fucked." In the 21st-century, moreover, it is clear that as listeners, we are, like his samples, also a resource to be monetized.

This is not meant to be a criticism of Reinhard's place in the media ecosystem or his right as an artist to benefit however modestly from his work, but to demonstrate how the flow of objects through various media create relationships and value. Recent attention to media in the production of archaeological knowledge (Garstki 2018; Morgan and Wright 2018) and in its presentation and reception (Perry 2018; 2019) has revealed the complexity of the relational systems that shape how sites, artifacts, and encounters create opportunities for ethical actions and shared knowledge. The easy fluidity of digital space perhaps emphasizes or even exaggerates the instability of the kinds of 21st-century assemblages accessed through *Assemblage Theory*. The interplay of the physical and virtual continuously destabilize how our experiences of digital worlds produce meaning. In this way, *Assemblage Theory* is a valuable companion to Reinhard's longterm project of archaeogaming (Reinhard 2017). It also reminds us that the relationships that constitute knowledge—even in the dusty corridors of Ivory Tower archaeology—are always being monetized through access, citation, reading, and remembering.

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Reinhard starts his discussion of assemblages with Manuel Delanda's *Assemblage Theory*. By the time I had finished listening to *Assemblage Theory* for the third or fourth time, I was more drawn to considering his work in light of Delanda's earlier text, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (2003). In this book, Delanda expanded and developed the notion of machinic phylum (DeLanda 1997) from Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Deleuze and Guattari emphasizes that assemblages form not merely through conscious decisions or even discursive rules (like narratives or the pop song), but also through affordances of the objects themselves. These scholars were particular intrigued by the notion of flow and the ways in which the movement of material, manufactured objects, and individuals mediated by their materiality produced value within the capitalist system in ways that appeared to be nearly autonomous. Michael Roller has adapted this notion of archaeological assemblage as evidence for the emergence of mechinic consumerism in the 20th century (Roller 2019). This is a kind of consumerism that is as much a product of producers and production as the manufactured objects. Roller reminds us that the assemblages that reproduce the experiences of 20th- and 21st-century consumer culture are fraught with contradictions and map onto our experiences as both producers and consumers. The tolerance for these contradictions both within assemblage and within our lived experience reflects the growing willingness to accept "the intervention of corporations in their lives" (18) and an opportunity (if not obligation) for archaeologists to untangle the complexities of 21st-century assemblages and unpacks "the *plurality of*

*forces* that produce the present world" (19). It is worth noting that despite Roller's radical and activist rhetoric, his article appears in the journal *Historical Archaeology* which is published by the commercial publishing conglomerate Springer Nature who monetized access to his radical arguments.

An archaeological investigation of Reinhard's *Assemblage Theory* goes beyond the playful parataxis of distinct samples and sounds and reveals traces left behind by the technological, political, economic, intellectual, and social flows that establish value and define culture in our contemporary world. Haggis has argued that the assemblages of ceramic objects and sculpture excavated from a Hellenistic pit at Vergina or a Late Archaic well in Athens (Haggis 2018) constitute a context for considering archaeological questions that arise at the intersection of methods and the functional, chronological, and typological relationship between objects, space, and place. Isolating these objects from their archaeological context through their display in a museum or appearance in a catalogue, for example, transforms (and some would argue even impoverishes) the potential value of these objects to speak to the widest range of questions about past practices that form the basis for larger statements on past culture. By locating Reinhard's *Assemblage Theory* in a series of different contexts, we open it up to speak most broadly to questions of pressing concern in contemporary society.

I hope my response has shown how our encounter with this album traces a number of elements of 21st century economic and social life. First and foremost, the album celebrates the potential of art gleaned from the surplus sounds scattered about the internet. The growing fascination with modern spolia (Meier 2012), the surplus of material and meaning that surrounds contemporary life (Akasegawa 2009), and the economic and creative activity of scavengers (Ferrell 2006) speaks to a society increasingly defined by the reciprocal acts of production and consumption.

Reinhard's trap-inspired EDM relentlessly encourages us to connect our movements to his music through a tempo encoded in an invisible "click track" and to embody the precise pulses of our digitally mediated world. In some, indistinct ways, this prepares us for the hyperreal loudness of *Assemblage Theory*. The vividness and immediacy of the album seems to anticipate its seamless distribution through commodified, ubiquitous, and increasingly invasive services. The same connections that both allowed Reinhard to harvest found sounds and us to enjoy his creative work creates value for capitalistic concerns who profit from the flow of data throughout our connected world. At my house, *Assemblage Theory* was further mediated through an arcane and expensive set of stereo equipment. In my most optimistic moments, I pretend that the carefully arrangement of components in my stereo system creates a unique sound through which I can assert some individuality. In reality, I am probably the same as a club kid whose body sways to a hidden

click track while pretending that the latest styles make me distinct enough to stand out and recognizable enough to be part of a crowd.

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*Masthead Image* Reinhard, Assemblage Theory, Figure 1.

response | music | archaeological theory | assemblage | listening