

## *FNORD ( FABULOUS NOISES )*

*2011 // ELECTRONIC TAPE PIECE // '25 MIN*

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In this article, Damian Marhulets presents his piece «FNORD (fabulous noises)» and the creation process that led to it. This work has been inspired by several fields of popular and underground culture having in common an interest for what is often considered as irrelevant information or disinformation, summarized by the word «fnord». The author presents the 22 substances or phenomena coming from fictions, false or obsolete scientific theories, and popular beliefs (Kryptonite, Miasma, Coronium, etc.) that are linked to each of the 22 parts of the piece. He explains how the Genesis software has been used to create most of the chaotic sonic material of the piece, thanks to a systematic exploration of simple yet unpredictable physical models.

### **1. What is Fnord?**

The mysterious word fnord is the typographic representation of irrelevant information or disinformation. It was coined as a nonsensical term in the discordiantext “Principia Discordia” - a discordian<sup>1</sup> religious text written by Greg Hill and Kerry Thornley and first published in 1965 - and then popularized by “The Illuminatus Trilogy” (1975), satirical conspiracy fiction novels by Robert Shea and Robert Anton.

Fnord is an intersection between satire, radical absurdity and popular culture. In the novels by Shea and Anton fnord has a hypnotic power over the unenlightened. Whereas to see the fnords means to read between the lines. In the computer circles fnord has been used to indicate a random or surreal sentence. The term is also often

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(1) Discordianism is a parody religion which is based on the worship of Eris (also known as Discordia), the Greco-Roman goddess of strife. Discordians use subversive humor to spread its philosophy and to prevent their beliefs from becoming dogmatic. Discordianism has been likened to Zen because of its absurdity. It's been also inspired by Taoism, although the conception of Tao has been replaced by a “Sacred Chao”.

used by hackers and programmers as a metasyntactic variable or a placeholder name. Moreover, fnord appears in the Sub-Genius<sup>2</sup> film “Arise!” and has been in use in other contexts related to the Church of the Sub-Genius.

In relation to the classical theory of information, fnord can be understood as a noise inside a communication channel, which can block or interfere with the meanings of a message, but is still considered to be information.

## 2. FNORD - fabulous noises

“FNORD - fabulous noises” is an electronic tape-piece composed of 22 small parts, which exposes in its own way certain popular aesthetic of connecting electronic music with science. Although, instead of being based on particular modern scientific theories, “FNORD - fabulous noises” is being gratefully inspired by pathological science<sup>3</sup>, discredited substances<sup>4</sup> and fictional elements. Each of the 22 parts, the piece consists of, is linked to one chosen phenomena or element. Therefore, the piece can be understood as an index of fictional elements – some of them used to be a part of our physical reality, some are building blocks of well known pop-cultural constructs.

## 3. Sound-sources

“FNORD - fabulous noises” has been composed mainly with sounds samples, which were created with Genesis software. Both the idea of extreme simplicity of models and fascination for working on the boarder areas of the software, has played an important role while working with Genesis. Being mostly interested in chaotic, unstable models with unpredictable sound results, I started with one very simple limitation of using only one vibrating particle for producing the sound. After

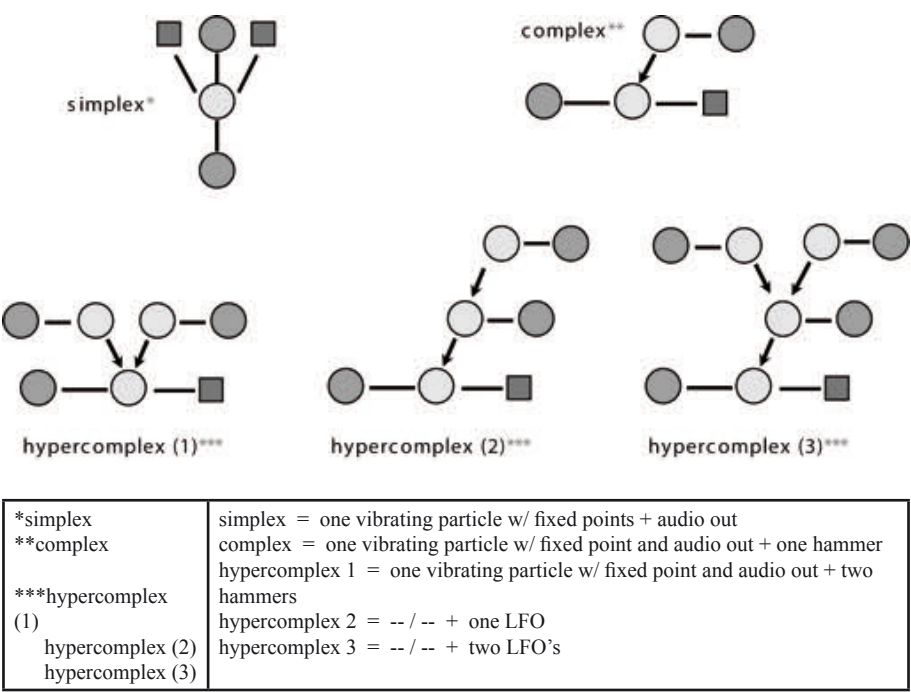
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(2) The Church of the Sub-Genius is a parody religion that satirizes religion, conspiracy theories, UFO's and various pop-cultural artifacts. According to its “mythological” origins, the Church of the Sub-Genius has been founded in the 1950's by J.R. “Bob” Dobbs, who is depicted as a cartoon man smoking a pipe filled with a mysterious substance known as Habafropzipulops.

(3) Pathological science is an area of research that simply will not “go away” – long after it was given up on as “false” by the majority of scientists in the field. (examples: polywater, x-rays, UFO)

(4) Substances, which were once commonly accepted, but are no longer considered as real by a mainstream scientific consensus (examples: miasma, phlogiston, elixir of life, philosopher's stone).

running first tests I came up with pretty interesting sounding results. Thus, I've chosen three possible variations of such initial structure:



The next step was about exploration the sonic possibilities of every structure by playing with all the possible parameters. In doing so, a vast number of variations has been created. Regarding the properties of sound produced by every structure, audio samples has been sorted into four classes: class 1 - static sounds; class 2 - oscillating sounds and simple rhythmic patterns; class 3 - unstable patterns; class 4 - chaotic sounds and patterns with unpredictable changes.

Although, samples created with Genesis were used as a main sound material for the piece, rarely they are combined both with sounds designed with NI Reaktor and some weird field recordings. NI Reaktor as well as Ableton Live were used for further sound-processing as well as mixing and postproduction. The sound spatialization has been done with Zirkonium controlled via OSC messages coming from MaxMSP (Max4Live).

## 4. Index (22 parts)

### 01. "Habafropzipulops" ( from: "Bob's" Pipe, Church of the Sub-Genius )

Mysterious substance which fills the "Bob's" pipe. May contain either mystical, hallucinogenic, or divine powers. "Bob" is a figurehead of the Sub-Genius Church - a parody religion organization, that satirizes religion, conspiracy theories and popular culture.

### 02. "Mindprobes" ( from: "The last book on the universe" )

Mindprobes are the preferred method of entertainment after The Big Shake, preferred to books and television. The Mindprobe allows the user to become a character in a story. Side effects include addiction, memory loss, and secreting a thick, clear fluid at the injection site (the top of the head). They come in a variety, such as adventure, and sexbos (porn).

### 03. "Electromatter" ( from: "Futurama" )

Described by Hubert J. Farnsworth as "Matter's Badass Grandma". A pink substance that mainly exists in the dimension on the other side of the anomaly; can only be broken by more electromatter. A sheet of electromatter can easily cut metal objects, such as robots.

### 04. "Jumbonium" ( from: "Futurama" )

Each atom of this element is large enough to be easily visible to the naked eye, with marble-sized nucleons and electrons. It is very rare and valuable. The Jumbonium was in 3001 used for the Miss Universe competition, where it would hover above the prized tiara.

### 05. "Collapsed Matter" or: "Neutronium" ( from: "Terro-human future history", scientific theory )

Collapsed matter (i.e., no longer possessing separate electron shells) plated in extremely thin layer onto more conventional metals and used as shielding for spacecraft and reactors. Refers to Degenerate Matter or Neutronium. Degenerate matter is a bizarre form of exotic matter created in the cores of massive stars, where

atoms or even subatomic particles are packed so closely that the primary source of pressure is no longer thermal but quantum.

#### **06. "Miasma" ( Obsolete scientific theory )**

Miasma was considered to be a poisonous vapor or mist filled with particles from decomposed matter that caused illnesses. Miasmatic infection was not passed between individuals but would affect individuals who resided within the particular location, that gave rise to such vapors. It was identifiable by its foul smell.

#### **07. "Minovsky Particle" ( from: "Gundam universal Century" )**

The two positive and negative Minovsky particles were found in the Universal Century. It can block electro-magnetic waves. Scattered in open space or in the air, the repulsive forces between charged Minovsky particles cause them to spontaneously align into a regular cubic lattice structure called an I-Field. Because of the way Minovsky particles react with other types of radiation, radar systems and wireless communication systems become useless, visible light is fogged. This became known as the Minovsky Effect.

#### **08. "Boing!" ( from: "Judge Dredd", DC universe )**

A miracle plastic of extremely high elasticity invented in 2101. It's stored as a liquid in an aerosol can, and is sprayed onto the user, where it solidifies and expands into a bubble surrounding the user. The solid form of Boing! Is extremely bouncy.

#### **09. "Nintendium" ( from: Urban dic., internet meme )**

"The hardest, most durable material known to mankind, discovered by Nintendo for usage in their NES console." Its manufacturing process was perfected sometime before the creation of the Gameboy. Nintendium is also at least 10 times harder than diamonds.

#### **10. "Phlogiston" ( Obsolete scientific theory, "World of Warcraft" )**

The theory holds that all combustible resources contain phlogiston, a substance without color, taste or mass, that is liberated in burning. Once burned, the dephlogisticated substance was held to be in its «true» form, the calx. Phlogisticated

substances are those that contain phlogiston and are dephlogisticated when burned.

In “World of Warcraft” Phlogiston is a source of Energy that powers the creations of “Engineers”.

### 11. “Tachyon” ( scientific theory )

Hypothetical subatomic particle that always moves faster than light.

### 12. “Bombastium” ( from: “Uncle Scrooge”, “Duck Tales” )

Extremely rare element each atom of which, when dropped in a barrel of water, is capable of generating a barrel containing a different flavor of ice cream. Bombastium can be also used to power a time machine. Bombastium is characterized by its fractal taste, looks like colored ice, and might be used for nuclear fission. When licked, it produces a totally different flavor with each lick.

### 13. “2, 4, 5 Trioxin” ( from: “Return of the Living Dead” series )

Gas that brings the dead back to life as zombies. Zombies created by exposure to trioxin retain all of their former intelligence and abilities. Human behaviors and emotions fade as the brain shuts down leaving only the base instincts to feed. They also crave human brains; one zombie explains that brains are required to stave off the pain of decomposition. The only known ways to destroy zombies created by trioxin are by incineration or electrocution.

### 14. “Bolonium” ( from: “Futurama”, “Simpsons”, “Star Track” )

Fictional element used to describe something as impossible or nonsensical. The atomic weight of bolonium is delicious and snacktacular. (Simpsons). The “Star Trek: The Motion Picture” official blueprints published in 1980 specifically identify the Klingon K’t’inga-class Battle-Cruiser as possessing bolonium engine shields.

### 15. “Chemical X” ( from: “The Powerpuff Girls” )

When Professor Utonium was creating the Powerpuff Girls, he accidentally added this chemical to the mixture of sugar, spice and “everything nice”. It’s responsible for granting the girls their super-human powers. A mysterious substance called Antidote X is a chemical opposite and neutralizer of Chemical X. Chemical X can

also be found in prison toilets and when mixed with snips, snails and one talking dog tail, created The Rowdyruff Boys.

#### **16. "Erototoxins" ( pseudo scientific theory )**

Judith A. Reisman (an american cultural conservative writer) has postulated a physical mechanism to account for the dangers she ascribes to pornography: when viewed, an addictive mixture of chemicals which she has dubbed erototoxins, floods the brain, causing harmful influences to it.

#### **17. "Kryptonite" ( "Superman" DC universe, real element )**

created during the destruction of Superman's home planet Krypton. Kryptonite has been found in the real world (according to its chemical composition) and has none of the properties or color variations of fictional kryptonite.

#### **18. "E-Z Doze It Sleeping Pills" ( "Looney Tunes" cartoon )**

The pills are so strong that the character who takes is so out of it that he or she might sleep through an invading tornado.

#### **19. "Cavorite" ( H.G. Wells' novels, Sci-Fi )**

Gravity-blocking substance. Cavorite is impervious to gravity and can shield other materials from its effects. It was named after its discoverer, Dr. Cavor, who used it to travel to the Moon ("The First Man in the Moon"). Also used in "The War of the Worlds", "The League of Extraordinary Gentleman", Robert Buettner's "Orphan" series ...

#### **20. "Coronium" ( Obsolete scientific theory )**

Suggested chemical element, hypothesized in the 19th century. It was named after the solar corona. During the total solar eclipse of 7 August 1869, a green emission line was observed in the coronal spectrum. Since this line did not correspond to that of any known material, it was proposed that it was due to an unknown element, provisionally named coronium.

## **21. "Solarbonite" ( "Plan 9 from Outer Space" )**

A high-energy substance found on Earth and possibly other planets. It is capable of exploding the particles that make up sunlight itself. If contained in a weapon, it can set off a chain reaction that explodes sunlight, along with anything the exploding sunlight touches, that will eventually destroy the universe, possibly at the speed of light itself.

## **22. "Narrativium" ( "Science of The Discworld", Discworld )**

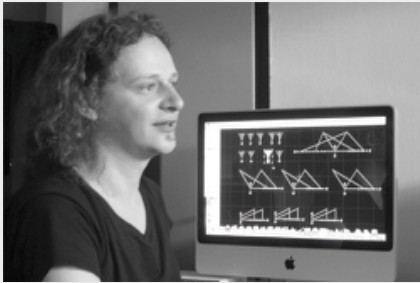
An element unique to the Discworld; proto-substance from which all things spring forth. It is the fundamental element of Story, and is how things know what they're meant to be. "Plenty of creatures are intelligent but only one tells stories" (Discworld).



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## About the author



Damian Marhulets, composer, media artist, and sound fetishist, was born in Minsk in 1980. His musical education has been developing throughout playing oboe and piano towards composition and electroacoustic music, that he studied in Hannover and Cologne.

Damian Marhulets is a founder and participant of many musical projects, such as dak~ [dak.tilde] live electronic trio and -+ [without additives] trio, spanning contemporary classical music to live-electronic improvisation, glamorous noise and perverse pop.

His major interest lies in anti-logocentric territories of sound and anarchitecture of music data.

### Selected Works:

„*The Descent*“ (2005, théâtre musical, basé sur l’œuvre de C.G.Jung).

„*Cypher*“ (2006, solo pour orgue),

„*Blue Notebook Nr. 10*“ (2007, théâtre musical, basé sur l’œuvre de Daniil Charms).

„*Space/Place/Object*“ (2007, 94 objets sonores, pour 8 Instruments),

„*Coke Spoon: 14 Tracks for a Discontinued Object*“ (2008, pour ensemble).

„*/temp\_*“ (2008, pour „Ableton Live“ Software).

„*Miniatouren*“ (2009, pour Electronic-Live, en collaboration avec David Borges).

„*Strange Beauty of Second Use*“ (2009, pour voix, platine disque, synthétiseur et guitare électrique. Card-Set).

„*Playful Things*“ (Canal d’installation vidéo, à partir de Porn-Movies Vintage).

„*Displaced Meanings: 81/2 Bits*“ (2009, A/V Performance pour platine disque & Live-Electronique).

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