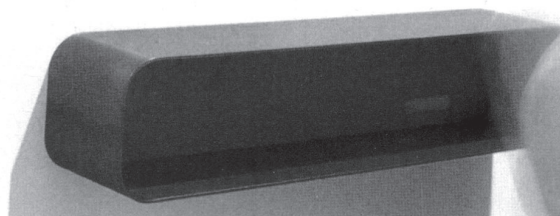


REMOVAL COMPANY

By Marcus Boon

12k



Minimal compacts: 12k label founder Taylor Deupree

"Minimalism Keeps Getting Starker", announce the sleeve notes to *Chronologi*, a compilation of recordings from the first four years of New York based Taylor Deupree's ultraminimal label 12k. So stark that Deupree recently started a separate side label, L-NE, with Washington DC sound artist Richard Chartier to explore mostly beatless realms of virtual silence. Chartier's recently issued *Of Surfaces* must rank alongside the German master of inaudibility Bernhard Günter's work as one of the quietest CDs ever made.

Interviewed the day before his first L-NE CD *Series*, is to be 'exhibited' at NYC's Whitney Biennial – America's most prestigious fine art show – Chartier recalls, "As a child I was always mimicking appliances, like the refrigerator. I loved listening to its low frequency hum. I like the subtleties of low or really high frequencies. We live in a culture that's dominated by information, and information is noise, whether it's visual or audio. People don't listen to small things because usually they're drowned out. I got email from someone in New York saying, 'I can't listen to your music because my environment's too loud, there's too much going on.' Most people don't grow up in a situation where they're required to listen, so anything small, or subtle or barely there is lost because they've tuned it out."

Chartier and Deupree's collaboration on L-NE, as well as their recent 12k CD *After*, whose main track was recorded live with Kim Cascone at MUTEK, the annual Montréal sound art festival, says a lot about the current state of digital sound culture. While Chartier comes from a strong visual arts background, Deupree first surfaced as a member of Prototype 909, an early 90s Techno act famous for their 'machine-Improv' rave shows. Deupree's gradual disenchantment with rave's beats 'n' drugs culture and his growing interest in stripped down sound is revealed on *Chronologi*, which shows 12k's development from early 1997 Ambient, FSOL-like projects such as Human Mesh Dance's *Thesecretnumbertwelve* with its 808 rhythms, to the drifting spaces of Kim Cascone's "Bufferdrift" and the beautiful Ambient shapes of Dan Abrams's Shuttle358 project.

Deupree says he now prefers to perform in gallery spaces. "People have this connotation when they go see you in a club that they're gonna talk or dance, and I've had disastrous club shows where the wrong audience shows up, expecting something else. When you play at a gallery, people are going in with a different idea, they're not expecting a dance show. But you say 'club' and 'electronic music' and people think Techno."

Both Chartier and Deupree are fascinated by the CD as an object that straddles the visual and audio cultural worlds. Deupree, who designs all the 12k releases, with their elegantly minimal slimline jewel cases, notes that "when I began listening to electronic music in the early 80s, I used to buy records based on their covers, before I was aware of 'graphic design', just because they looked cool. I became familiar with designers like Peter Saville and Neville Brody, labels like 4AD and Factory Records. When someone compared 12k to Factory, it was the biggest compliment of my entire life."

Poised between the music and art worlds, 12k and L-NE's 'sound art' blurs the boundaries between the two – it's sold as a CD in record stores, even though the CDs don't necessarily contain 'music'. "We create this work on a CD," says Chartier, "which has the ability to be purchased and consumed by the public. It blurs the line between fine art, something unaffordable that you have to go to a gallery to see or hear, and something that you can take into your home or put on your MP3 player. But if you remove the sound work from the package and the medium of the compact disc, it becomes something totally different." 12k's Website-only MP3 label term. (the period is, of course, obligatory), focuses on the ephemeral quality of digital sound, not to mention its tendency to proliferate into infinite versions and collaborations. Deupree says that term., which has so far released work by Sogar and Goem side-project Freiband, "is the representation of pure data and imageless sound information. The antithesis of physical form... all downloads will be available for a finite period of time only."

A good introduction to Deupree's aesthetic can be found on the 1999 Caipirinha compilation *Microscopic Sound*, which Deupree assembled, featuring stripped down but funky tracks by the likes of Ryoji Ikeda, Thomas Brinkmann and Raster-Noton's Frank Bretschneider. At their best, these tracks sound like blueprints for a manual on Zen and the Art of the Drum Machine: it feels like you are hearing an 808 for the first time. Much of Deupree's work, including *Balance*, his recently issued collaboration with Bretschneider on *Mille Plateaux*, maintains a strongly rhythmic pulse, but one that can be focused on as sound rather than a groove to dance to: "I'm really interested in repetition, so to me an interesting sound is often one that can be heard over and over again. When you hear a sound repeating, a small loop, you often start to hear other things within the sound. The more you concentrate, the more you hear some little fluctuation in the sound that starts to become really apparent."

Chartier, whose own work is almost devoid of rhythm (not to mention sound), believes that the computer offers the possibility for new types of minimalist sound: "If you think of the work of people like Steve Reich or Philip Glass, who've been designated minimalists, it's minimalist in a musical sense, but not in a physical sense. To me their work is very busy, active. The advent of digital audio has greatly increased what composers can do in terms of using the aspect of silence as a compositional element; where it really is silent, not an analogue silence that has that hiss. With digital silence, there's nothing. An absolute zero – no code. My work is really a process of removal. Sometimes a piece will be based on one [looped] sound with things layered over it, and then eventually I will take the original linking element out. So it's this ghost element that's not really there. That's what I like about working with sound as opposed to paint and canvas: especially working on a computer, you can take away sound until there's really nothing left." □ *The Chronologi compilation is out now on Instinct. Richard Chartier's Of Surfaces is out on L-NE; Bretschneider & Deupree's Balance is on Mille Plateaux. Website: www.12k.com*