

The Edit

All about the wonderful world of editing and cutting up of sounds. Ergo and Vicki talk about their favourite editors of life, and demonstrate how one can mess up sound so easily and to such good effect. Features the work of William Burroughs, Negativland, Language Removal Services and cut ups of BBC Radio.

To make a Dadaist poem:

Take a newspaper.

Take a pair of scissors.

Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.

Shake it gently.

Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.

Copy conscientiously.

The poem will be like you.

And here are you a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar. --Tristan Tzara

Editing is the central component of sound-collage, and for that matter any kind of collage, whether that be film, photomontage, or text collage. This episode of "Codpaste" looks at diverse approaches to editing throughout history, and different concepts of the connotations of cutting things up and putting them back together in new combinations.

In a world where we are completely used to the idea and indeed the practice of editing, it may come as some surprise to learn that, as recently as the 1950s, the renowned American novelist and artist William S. Burroughs believed that editing could be used, in theory, to change the political system, or indeed the world, simply by editing the speeches of corrupt public figures to reveal the underlying truths beneath the political sophistry.

The closest modern parallels with this can be found in the work of media satirists like Chris Morris and Victor Lewis-Smith. However the key difference is usually that this work is presented in the context of satire, rather than attempting to present an alternate truth, as such.

Where Burroughs was quite fundamentally correct, however, was the possibilities of total transformation of materials through their rearrangement. Particularly in the modern "non-destructive" editing of the digital environment (compared to the world of analogue tape editing, See where an edit required the physical cutting of sound with a knife and subsequent sticking back together), it is far more deeply possible to use editing to fundamentally transform sounds or a series of sounds.