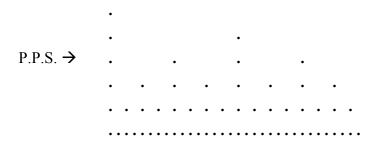
## Web Feature 3.1

## Perceiving levels of meter in Autechre's "Crystel" [1992]

Like much recent electronica, the metric structure in "Crystel" is very dense at the lowest level. The primary pulse stream, which clocks in at 120 beats per minute, is ultimately subdivided into eight units at the lowest level (the equivalent of constant thirty-second notes in  $_4^4$ )—you can hear this in the high-hat-like pattern that enters at about [0:15], on the fourth beat of the primary pulse stream. The "whole note" level of metric structure, corresponding to the upper-most level of the metric structure, can be heard in the slow-changing bass notes that enter at about [0:39] into the song.

Since the bass line consists of four notes—C2, Bb1, F1, and G1—we are able to easily hear "Crystel" as consisting of four-measure (and sometimes eight-measure) segments or phrases, a feature ubiquitous in electronic dance music. Changes in phrases (and preparations for new segments) are signaled by changes in texture, especially the addition or subtraction of various percussive sounds—sometimes omitting the drums entirely.



Beginning at [3:26], however, something unusual happens. The tempo gradually decelerates until, by [3:48], it is exactly one-half of the original (in other words, the primary pulse stream is now 60 beats per minute). At this slow speed, you may have already started to subdivide, assigning the P.P.S. status to the next highest level of the metric structure. At [3:48] the original "chirpy" synthesizer enters also at half speed, an octave below its original pitch. At [4:20] the original drum tracks enter over this, restoring—if only briefly—the song to its original tempo before the close. At the point where the tempo has slowed down to half its original speed, then, two measures of the original tempo can fit like a glove.

Incidentally, a similar tempo deceleration (with concomitant increase in lower-level density) occurs in some Javanese gamelan pieces. The term for these different tempos is *irama*. At a single from the drummer, the ensemble will seemingly "shift gears" to a more relaxed *irama*, a central section during which some of the instruments will shift to playing a more elaborate version of the *balungan* in a 2:1 or 4:1 rhythmic ratio. Another signal from the drummer instigates a gradual acceleration of the ensemble to the original tempo, and the players who were playing the more elaborate layers shift back to doubling the *balungan* with the rest of the ensemble.