the interesting part, it's an interesting challenge for our exchange. Now we are saying that you would do the design when maybe you think that we should do the design. And this question of the exchange and the bartering is also still there.
M: No no no please.
E: Maybe on the inside there could be the design from S, and on the outside a less designed cover, but both taking the same strategy. Or using the idea of the self-reflexiveness, and inspired by your typography project, but our attempts at design and your design, almost mirroring each other.
M: And would we really copy and paste the design by S, or?
E: Yes, but without S telling us how.
M: Trying to be designers?
E: Yes, like the game where you copy another persons drawing, where S starts and I do a version, and I pass it to M, and then that becomes the cover.
M: Yes it sounds interesting and exciting. I find this conversation exciting, from the question of who is the we, to the changing and shifting of roles. Perhaps at the beginning I was projecting too much of a classic notion, like you were saying, but I'm really happy about what you just suggested, yes, I'm open.
E: It's funny because the screen has just gone black and we can't see you, I feel like I have to have the graphics of you.
M: Have you been thinking about the assignment, or what bartering means, or implies, or have you not thought about it yet so much? Maybe we can all say what we think bartering is?
E: I was just thinking - what we've been talking about, I mean I've talked about it with you and with M, about the projection of you as the expert and, just in the first part where M says that the inside should be relatively neutral and the idea that for you, I would assume, or from what I know of other people who work with typography, the idea of design being neutral is a fiction.
M: Yes, yes.
E: But also there is an aim in design that it should be in some cases as undistracting as possible. So the idea is that something should be very easy to read and not distracting to the eye. I think it is an interesting challenge to think within the boundaries of the assignment that you have. The last time I spoke to you S, you were saying that you weren't sure if this would work in relation to the assignment you've been given, because of the time, and the amount of time that you thought you needed, and the time that this would take.
M: Just one note, on neutrality, it's because of ignorance, I mean the whole thing is about experimental music so if you want to experiment with the format in any far out ways, total freedom, and excuse my ignorance.
E: I just think it's interesting that when we think about our own practice we would scrutinize the form and the means of production, but when we project to another person, engaged in another kind of practice, like design, we don't bring the same amount of critical thinking. But that's

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Noise & Capitalism

Is it possible to try to make something, to capture something in design that transmits the relations produced in making this cover? I am struggling with this process of transfer and translation, but I can also see that simply writing down the questions is not so interesting, it isn't an encounter of the sort that I think we have been feeling. M asked me if I would be interested to write something for this book in the summer, but at the time I didn't think I could, I had a feeling of not being qualified or not aligned to the project in a way that was strong enough for me to embark on writing a text. Part of the reason as I understood M's asking was around a question of gender, and how for him there was not so much representation of bodies other than male identified bodies writing in the book. I had been involved in an exhibition called 'Her Noise' at the South London Gallery in 2005, which in some way sought to approach some of the relations of Noise and Experimental music and gender. I am curious about how displacements of subject positions occur, and what an invitation implies spatially and over time. I had actually forgotten about the earlier invitation.

Now M and I are both together in New York, in this new situation. We are finding a way to work together and share this time in what I think is a very interesting way. M asked me if I would like to make the cover for this book, I have been procrastinating. I received an email from S about an assignment she was given at school, she is studying Graphic Design. S sent me the work that she and Brit Pavelson made, it is a book that tells in both the text and layout, what are the conventions of book design and layout. I thought it was connected to M's proposal, so I showed him and we both really got a lot of enjoyment from this.
I spoke to S about working on the cover design for this book, and S was interested.

I am interested in how to work together with friends, and how this working together can sometimes be problematic, and other times really important since it decompartmentalises the things you talk about with some and not with others. I prefer to assume that someone will be interested in talking about ideas, although I haven't always done this, quite often I have compartmentalised my work and friendships because I feel self-conscious or ungenerous perhaps.

I started to project that S would be able to make the design since this is the thing she is studying. S and I have talked about this as a problematic relationship for her. In her school there is an emphasis on a professional career and this is not so important to her. She has moved away from close friends in Sweden to be at this school in Amsterdam, and often feels unsure if she made the 'right' decision, although she doesn't really believe that there is a 'right' decision. We didn't talk about it for a while, and then we did. Then S was set an assignment at school as follows: Work for Work, Graphic Design 2nd semes

Noise & Capitalism

Anthony Iles
Mattin
Csaba Toth
Edwin Prévost
Ray Brassier
Bruce Russell
Nina Power
Ben Watson
Matthew Hyland
Matthieu Saladin
Howard Slater

KRITIKA

Introduction

Anthony Iles

The Foundry isn't an old East End pub, but it has occupied a privileged seat from which to view the radical transformation of East London over the last 15 years. A cipher for the transformation of sign-value – the reorientation of economic strength from industrial production under enlightenment values to the postmodern turn to the leisure (pleasure) industries, the now world famous area the Foundry is situated in, Shoreditch, has travelled from being an ex-light industrial zone, the headquarters and organising frontline of the National Front – to a hotspot for clubs, DJs and bands. The Foundry, itself a former industrial space, represents just about every underground musical genre, hosting micro-gigs, festivals, sound systems, open mic nights, including the regular noise and improvisation night – Oligarch Shit Transfusion. Yet, as Shoreditch has made this transition, its turnover of residents has accelerated, initially squatters and artists living in dilapidated warehouse spaces, followed by architects, fashion and graphic designers. Now, its remaining inhabitants are a super-elite of city workers and the art star residue of those few who made good from the rapid up-turn in property values. It turns out the developers buying up the area had studied the gentrification of Chelsea and deployed artists as placeholders on short leases until the area had become sufficiently 'cool' and property values began to skyrocket. No longer needed, artists' short term contracts were terminated and both they and any locals who hadn't purchased their properties were priced out of the area. For the 'creatives' who had lent the area its cultural cachet and populated the network of bars and cafés which soon became the destination for the city's pleasure seekers and cool hunters it seemed they had been given a raw deal – as if something had been subtracted from them in exchange for nowt. If Shoreditch became a metaphor for the ways in which capitalism puts creativity to work, the Foundry would appear to be the remainder of how things might have been otherwise. Yet this grubby politicised venue coexists with the areas' smooth transformation into a playpen for the upwardly mobile citizens of a world city.

Above the Foundry bar in Great Eastern Street London an enormous banner bearing a sonogram wraps the entirety of its three storey, formerly squatted, frontage: 'Decibels Now' [noiseawareness.co.uk]. The banner is neither a promo for a noise gig nor some sell out outfit preying on noise chic for their new record, but rather part of an 'ambient' marketing campaign by AEG networking five metropolitan cool spots in London, Berlin, Brussels, Barcelona, Milan, Madrid. The advert bears the legend 'In a noisy world, appliances that aren't'. AEG's silent laundry products don't have a lot of credibility, they are not exactly cool yet they glom onto the buzz of the streets and are drawn into an association. The banner and its associated website connects the capital cities of Europe's music, fashion, art and subcultural scenes – each is linked and articulated in one fell swoop. This 'ambient' advertising encloses and trades off its location, feeding off the involuntary activity of those who crowd the streets and basements below.

Howard Slater proposes that capital has transformed relations of production to embed our very senses in its architecture of valorisation – the production of value having shifted away from the factory and into the supply lines of the 'factory without walls'.[1] Slater speaks of

> *the way our bodies, their sensory membranes, have become not only the over-stimulated site of media industry messages and subliminal seduction, but crucial terrains in the ongoing maintenance of ourselves as 'points of circulation'.*
>
> *[Slater p.153]*

If Slater is right, somewhere like the Foundry can be considered a key site of struggle – the very threshold where artists and musicians' experiments in the articulation of a thwarted condition collides with the media and so-called 'creative' industries attempts to trap, fix, shape and automate our very powers of 'perception and affectability'.

[1] See Brian Ashton, *The Factory Without Walls*, Mute, http://www.metamute.org/en/Logistics-Factory-Without-Walls

For Slater, capital's reorientation towards the senses and its solicitation of emotion and self-expression makes it possible to detect an anti-capitalist politics in the legacy of avant-garde practices' 'struggle towards changes in perception'. As the senses become central to the advancement of contemporary capitalism, so also do experiments with the re-organisation of the senses as a potential 'redistribution of the sensible' comes to the fore.

Noise encompasses that which locates itself self-reflexively at the limit of what can be accepted as music or as musical performance. Here, as Ray Brassier argues, genre is obsolete:

> *'Noise' not only designates the no-man's-land between electro-acoustic investigation, free improvisation, avant-garde experiment, and sound art; more interestingly, it refers to anomalous zones of interference between genres: between post-punk and free jazz; between musique concrète and folk; between stochastic composition and art brut.*
>
> *[Brassier, p.62]*

If there is currently some work underway in academic and journalistic circles to classify and historicise noise as a genre, most of the contributions in this volume militate against this easy definition. Bruce Russell [p.72] maps an understanding of actual social reality in which 'the social totality is always open to potential contestation' and his practice of 'improvised sound work' is very much a part of that contestation.Few of these writers are interested in defining noise or improvisation as genre, conversely, there are instead attempts to describe the exercise of these terms as practices – zones of play experiment and ritual that intersect with performance art, political theatre and non-western musics. If it is possible to write musicians working with free improvisation and noise into a tradition of experimental music then there are also important qualifications and disambiguations to be made over improvisation and noise's relationship to

the avant-garde. Ben Watson [p.104] makes distinctions between the dead-hand of serialism and the experimentation fuelled by the engagement of Romanian composers Iancu Dumitrescu and Ana-Maria Avram with popular musics and noise. Nina Power [p.96] frames the development of noise alongside the development of a specifically gendered, female, relationship to technology. Eddie Prévost [p.38] distances the historical development of a scene of musicians experimenting with improvised musical form from two key threads of avant-garde music – that of the Darmstadt School and the group of New York composers around John Cage.

In both free improvisation and noise the question of mediation, by the score or by market relations is key. Cornelius Cardew's break with Stockhausen and critical stance towards notation being a case in point here. Prévost states, in free improvisation,

> *the relations between musicians are directly dialogical: i.e. their music is not mediated through any external mechanism e.g. a score.*[2]

For a network of musicians active in the 1960s drawing both on free jazz and avant-garde experiments it became crucial to carve out a musical space that was free from the tradition of bandmasters, composers and notation as well as the emerging spectacular culture through which popular music was beginning to circulate. Though improvisation is the term that has continued to characterise this music, along the way this term has been contested by some key players involved in the development of 'free' musical form:

> *'Free playing' was a term preferred by Coleman and other jazz musicians who rejected the use of the term 'improvisation' on the grounds it was often applied to black music by white audiences to emphasise some innate intuitive musicality that denied the heritage of skills and formal traditions that the black musician drew upon.*[3]

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[2] A 'score' being (among other things) a document in which ownership of the music can be enshrined and legally protected. Subsequently it becomes the means by which value can be extracted from musical performances by way of royalties.

[3] Simon Yuill *All Problems of Notation Will Be Solved by the Masses*, http://www.metamute.org/en/All-Problems-of-Notation-Will-be-Solved-by-the-Masses and *GOTO10 Floss-Art* book forthcoming.

Whilst Prévost employs the term and goes to lengths to explain its development he is also keen to dispel some illusions about the 'spontaneity' and 'freedom' of free improvisation. Rather than 'practising' improvising musicians train, developing their musical capacities through a process of 'de-skilling' and 're-skilling'. What these musicians are developing is often not some 'virtuoso' skill, but rather, the ability and attention necessary to be able to respond to their co-players, to a situation and to an evolving musical space. And this musical space relates to another musical time, freed both from the score and freed from repetition, by neither having a set time nor tempo allotted, improvised music breaks with linear cumulative time and narrative historicisation. In this sense improvisation and noise musics animate the tensions between synchronic (ritual) and diachronic (play) time – posing a space for unlimited play in now-time without disposing of the potential for human history.[4]

Csaba Toth frames the advent of noise – specifically computer noise – in a technological dialectic that questions the very outcome of western science and technology. By donning a lab coat to play free improvised jazz with The Art Ensemble of Chicago Lester Bowie asserted his music as a form of experimental research. If improvisation can be considered a form of research then noise, as the other side of music and everything outside the discipline, literally encompasses what hasn't been discovered as music yet. That noise can challenge hierarchies of disciplines and pre-existing ideas of competency is also reflected in the struggles over its theorisation. Musical scenes are often accompanied by self-publishing initiatives and noise is a particularly good example of this. Many practitioners play noise, distribute others' music, organise gigs and write about it. As with the move away from notation, this auto-theorisation interrupts mediation, but is the opposite of anti-intellectualism. It is about taking control over the production of sound – its distribution and reception being very much a part of

[4] See Giorgio Agamben, *Critique of the Instant and the Continuum* and *Reflections on History and Play* in Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History, Verso, 2007.

that production. There runs through the interests of the writers of this book an attempt to make the mediation framing music more tightly bound to the production of music – to create a feedback loop between music and practice and theory and music and so on.

The essentially open brackets (open musical space) that improvised music creates is here (and elsewhere) filled with ideas, concepts and practices. There are common reference points for some; minimalism, the Scratch Orchestra, music concréte, the Situationists' subjectivist science of constructed situations, Theodor Adorno's championing of negative critique, Toni Negri's concept of 'self-valorisation' to Chiapello and Boltanski's critique of flexible managerialism. There is strong field of attraction to the cultural space of noise for the politicised musician – a music that does not have a set code or form nor an expected mode of behaviour. Those packing a liberatory politics with their music often turn up here.

Rather than overcoming mediation, free improvisation and noise are in tension with it – something to which these many attempts to theorise music and its relations to politics attest. The stance of anti-mediation binds the practitioners of these musical interests to a modernist aesthetics in which successive institutional and formal frameworks for making and presenting music and art are transgressed and transcended. Yet there is also an important split – in the modernist academy this could be interpreted as refining a critique internal to the work, while improvisation and noise arguably turn outwards to the field of social relations. A good example of this is when the home-made electronics and improvisation outfit Morphogenesis used to bring the outside of a gig into it by means of amplifying and filtering a microphone slung out the window of the venue they were playing in. Through these means they would bring the outside in and the sound of social relations and the location of the venue itself into play. Here,

however, is a key contradiction for our times. Turning the usual question on its head, Mathieu Saladin asks: what does improvisation have in common with capitalism? Finding the values celebrated in writing and statements about free improvisation to be one and the same with the values celebrated in the new capitalism that developed during the 1970s and 1980s. If this turn towards social relations has been for some time a weapon of insurgent and outcast music, the harnessing of these relations is now a key strategy in capitalism's current push to reproduce itself anew.

> *Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organisation are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possiblilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things.*[5]

By going further into the details we can move away from the *idee recu* that improvisation is political music, a liberatory musical praxis [see Prévost p.42]. It is urgent to closely examine its conditions, to challenge improvised music's implicit freedom as a given – as Eddie Prévost insists:

> *Certain material conditions have to be met before any music can be made.*
>
> *[Prévost, p.41]*

Music can neither escape commodification, nor can noise musicians escape the immediate material demands that capital makes of them (to sell their labour power). Existing conditions structure what music can be made and by whom, yet also music is one of a number of cultural forms by which people react against existing conditions and try to overcome them. As Matthew Hyland puts it,

[5] Jacques Attali, *Noise, Theory and History of Literature, Vol 16*, Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

improvisation (as Derek Bailey intends it) resists commodification almost successfully. 'Almost' remains an upper limit as long as capital goes on being strengthened by what hasn't killed it yet.

[Hyland p.130]

Like any other form of music, improvised and noise music, nonetheless exists in capitalism. Since we cannot accept that noise or improvisation is by default anti-capitalist music, then we need to look more closely at those resistances and tensions this music carries within itself – where it provides potential tools for capitalism and where it supplies means for getting out of it.

Going Fragile

Mattin

Of course it is not easy to get out of your own material, and it can be painful; there is an insecurity aspect to it. This actually is probably the most experimental level. When do you think real innovation and experimentation are happening? Probably when people are insecure, probably when people are in a situation very new to them and when they are a bit uncertain and afraid. That is where people have to push themselves. People are innovative when they are outside of their warm shit, outside of the familiar and comfortable... I don't know exactly what I want, but I do know exactly what I do not want.

– Conversation with Radu Malfatti

Improvised music forces situations into play where musicians push each other into bringing different perspectives to their playing. Improvised music is not progressive in itself, but it invites constant experimentation. When players feel too secure about their approaches, the experimentation risks turning into Mannerism. What I would like to explore here are the moments in which players leave behind a safe zone and expose themselves in the face of the internalised structures of judgment that govern our appreciation of music. These I would call fragile moments.

During the summer of 2003 I had the opportunity to spend time in Vienna researching the political connotations of improvised music. Not that I found a direct relationship, but through conversations, going to concerts and playing with other musicians, I became aware of some of the potentials and limitations that improvisation has in terms of political agency within the space of music production. For this text, I draw from the conversations I had with the trombonist Radu Malfatti as part of my research. While Malfatti's roots are in the chaotic-sounding improvised free jazz of the 1970s, he is currently more focused on ultra quiet and sparse playing. His approach to performance runs against the stagnation that might occur in sustained improvisation. In his quest to avoid stagnation, Malfatti looks for those insecure situations that I mention above – situations that can call into question the dominant structures of music appreciation.

How could you anticipate what you might achieve if you do not know what you will find on the way? To be open, receptive and exposed to the dangers of making improvised music, means exposing yourself to unwanted situations that could break the foundations of your own security. As a player you will bring yourself into situations that ask for total demand. No vision of what could happen is able to bring light to that precise moment. Once you are out, there is no way back; you cannot regret what you

have done. You must engage in questioning your security, see it as a constriction. You are aware and scared, as if you were in a dark corridor. Now you are starting to realise that what you thought of as walls existed only in your imagination.

While your senses alert you to danger, you are also going to use them to deal with it. Keep going forward toward what you do not know, to what is questioning your knowledge and your use of it. Keep pushing yourself, knowing that the other players will be pushing you, replacing traces of comfort. This is an unreliable moment, to which no stable definition can be applied. It is subject to all the particularities brought to this moment. The more sensitive you are to them, the more you can work with (or against) them. You are breaking away from previous restrictions that you have become attached to, creating a unique social space, a space that cannot be transported elsewhere. Now you are building different forms of collaboration, scrapping previous modes of generating relations.

Something is happening here, but what is it? It is hard to say, but certainly there is intensity to it. These moments are almost impossible to articulate; they refuse pigeonholing, and evade easy representation.

We are forced to question the material and social conditions that constitute the improvised moment – structures that usually validate improvisation as an established musical genre. Otherwise we risk fetishising 'the moment' and avoid its implications.

When we talk about stagnation and progression there is just one instrument to help us explain what we mean, and this is time, history.

– Radu Malfatti

When Radu Malfatti talks about the breaks that some musicians have made from musical orthodoxy, he looks at the ways that they have dealt with these breaks. Some seek to consolidate or re-metabolise the fragile moments they have encountered; others simply return to the safety of their previous practices. Only very few manage to keep searching for fragility; it requires musicians to make multiple breaks from their own traditions. It's easier to develop coherence within one's practice: There is a fine line between being persistent in pursuing a particular line of research, and getting comfortable within one's methods.

> *When something new happens, people do not like it. It's as simple as that... There is nothing I can do about it.*
>
> *– Radu Malfatti*

When something different and hard to place appears within the dichotomy of the new and the old of mainstream values, attention cannot easily be drawn to it.

While nobody might recognise the importance of what you have done, you need to keep your confidence. It is difficult to be alone in working toward something and yet not know where it will take you; something which threatens to destroy your artistic trajectory, which you have worked so hard to build up. Of course when one uses music, not as a tool for achieving something else (recognition, status...) but in a more aggressively creative way, it is going to produce alienation. But what do you want to do as an improvised musician? Work toward the lowest common denominator, making music which more people can relate to?

Improvised music has the potential to disrupt previous modes of musical production, but it is up to the players to tear them apart in order to find a way in. Opening new fields of permissibility means to go fragile until we destroy the fears that hold us back.

We are not talking here about changing the labour conditions of a majority of people, but, being aware that culture, creativity and communication are becoming the tools of the 'factory without walls', we need to be suspicious of ways in which cultural practices can be exploited by capital. Because of this we must constantly question our motives, our *modus operandi* and its relation to the conditions that we are embedded in, to avoid recuperation by a system that is going to produce ideological walls for us. To be antagonistic to these conditions means danger and insecurity. To go through them will mean commitment and some of what Benjamin described as the 'Destructive Character':

> *The destructive character has the consciousness of historical man, whose deepest emotion is an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognize that everything can go wrong. Therefore the destructive character is reliability itself. The destructive character sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there, too, he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force; sometimes by the most refined. No moment can know what the next will bring.*
>
> *– Walter Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character', 1931.*

Mattin, July 2005 London, Anti-Copyright

Noise Theory

Csaba Toth

In the mid-1980's, Noise music seemed to be everywhere crossing oceans and circulating in continents from Europe to North America to Asia (especially Japan) and Australia. Musicians of diverse background were generating their own variants of Noise performance. Groups such as Einstürzende Neubauten, SPK, and Throbbing Gristle drew larger and larger audiences to their live shows in old factories, and Psychic TV's industrial messages were shared by fifteen thousand or so youths who joined their global 'television network.'

Some twenty years later, the bombed-out factories of Providence, Rhode Island, the shift of New York's 'downtown scene' to Brooklyn, appalling inequalities of the Detroit area, and growing social cleavages in Osaka and Tokyo, brought Noise back to the center of attention. Just the past week – it is early May, 2007 – the author of this essay saw four Noise shows in quick succession – the Locust on a Monday, Pittsburgh's Macronympha and Fuck Telecorps (a re-formed version of Edgar Buchholtz's Telecorps of 1992-93) on a Wednesday night; one day later, Providence pallbearers of Noise punk White Mice and Lightning Bolt who shared the same ticket, and then White Mice again.

The idea that there is a coherent genre of music called 'Noise' was fashioned in the early 1990's. My sense is that it became standard parlance because it is a vague enough category to encompass the often very different sonic strategies followed by a large body of musicians across the globe. I would argue that certain ways of composing, performing, recording, disseminating, and consuming sound can be considered to be forms of Noise music. The Noise sub-themes behind Christian Marclay and DJ Olive's turntablism, DJ Spooky's illbient 'electroneiric otherspace,' Masonna's body-based performance, Philip Samartzis' live mix of specially prepared CDs combined with real time synthesis and abstraction, Wolf Eyes' 'wailing, tortured dungeon sound'

(Ben Sisario in SPIN), Scot Jenerik's fire-fuelled display of noisy destruction, Oren Ambarchi's guitar experimentations, and the classics in the genre's history, Throbbing Gristle, SPK, Z'ev, and the Haters clearly illustrate this point. I wish to state that it is the entire socio-cultural and historical matrix within which Noise is chosen, combined, and listened to that defines the genre.

NOISE IN THE SOCIETY OF SILENCE AND SPECTACLE

According to French cultural theorist Guy Debord's powerful analysis, life in late capitalism presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles.[1] Everything that was once directly lived has moved into representation. The society of the spectacle eliminates dialogue; the organization of the monologue by political and economic organizations isolates and prevents direct, localized, non-repeatable communication. The society of the spectacle, Jacques Attali claims in his pioneering book Noise, is also the society of silence.[2] These considerations enable us to theorize the rise of Noise music as a form of cultural disturbance in the silent and silenced deindustrialized space of late capitalism. Therefore, I will construct the beginnings of Noise performance as an aesthetic production that challenged social and cultural institutions, collapsed genre boundaries, and had broader socio-political implications.

Noise music in its most uncompromising form is different from other forms of resistance musics such as punk, New Wave, hardcore, or dark metal. In these musics, the voice, the logos as truth, has constituted the ideal point of a politicised voice by claiming to speak the truth of its audience's situation. Noise has no such claims; it is a radical deconstruction of the status of artist, audience, and music.[3] It is 'the grain of the voice',[4] a refusal of representation, a refusal of identity. Noise, at the very least,

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[1] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

[2] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). See also Csaba Toth, 'The Work of Noise' in Amitava Kumar (ed.), *Poetics/Politics: Radical Aesthetics for the Classroom* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 201-218 and 'Sonic Rim: Performing Noise around the Pacific,' in Kathleen Ford and Philip Samartzis (eds.), *Variable Resistance: Australian Sound Art*, with compact disc, (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 14-23.

[3] For an exploration of these questions in theory, see especially Chapter Three in Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

[4] Roland, Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice, ' in *Image – Music – Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179-189.

disrupts both the performer and listener's normal relations to the symbolic order by refusing to route musical pleasure through the symbolic order (symbolic relations are defined here as an aggregate of guilt, the law, achievement, authority figures). We can call this musical pleasure anti-teleological jouissance, achieved by self-negation, by a return to the imaginary or the pre-subjective (the stage that precedes ego differentiation) – which, in our context, is a sonorous space. As for its 'musical' parameters, Noise is conceived to be anti-teleological in the sense that it digresses from the reified desire for the telos-driven formula of tension and release that characterizes most western musics, and particularly tangible in rock and pop performance. Instead, Noise speaks to and through our imaginary register of auditory, visual, haptic perceptions, and fantasy creating a chaos of sensations and feelings.

I also wish to stress the performativity of Noise. It is enough to allude here to Francisco Lopez's blindfolding his listeners, Christof Migone's 'corporeal glitches' (Will Montgomery in The Wire), Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock's releasing an amplified turkey laden with contact microphones during a live show, the humorous head-dives by the Incapacitants' 'big man,' Fumio Kousakai, and the fanciful masks, headgears, and 'choreographed' movements of Lightning Bolt, the Locust, and White Mice. Why performance? What is the value of performance to Noise practitioners? I construct performance as an aesthetic production that challenges cultural institutions and genres, and has broader social implications. As queer performance theorist Ann Cvetkovich suggests, performance inhabits different locations – both discursive and material: the nation, the stage, the body.[5] What version of late capitalism is contested in the rise of Noise-based musics? Noise performance, in our view, exercises a culturally coded and politically specific critique of late capitalism, and offers tools for

[5] Ann Cvetkovich, 'Comments,' at the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association, Nashville, TN, November 1994. In author's possession.

undoing its seemingly incontestable hegemony. To be sure, Noise performance operates in the shadow of recontainment by the very commodity structures it intends to challenge. But resistance to such commodification continues to occur, and what cultural critic Russel A. Potter says about hip-hop appears to be true also for Noise music: 'the recognition that everything is or will soon be commodified has ... served as a spur, an incitement to productivity.'[6] Let it be enough to mention here the hundreds of recordings by Merzbow, Francisco Lopez, Muslimgauze, and, most recently, the endless stream of cassettes and CD-Rs released by Wolf Eyes.

It is worth noting that Noise has become a transnational global cultural form capable of mobilizing diverse constituencies. I wish to give a measure of historical specificity to Noise music by claiming that the rise of Noise was coeval with deindustrialization in the USA, Western Europe, and parts of the Asia-Pacific region.

NOISE AND HISTORY

The birth of Noise culture can only be understood in the context of the collapse of the industrial city. Noise is a profoundly metropolitan genre (even in its ecological form) that first registered its presence amidst the ravaged urban-industrial landscape and reactionary cultural climate of the Thatcher and Reagan years, and, perhaps to a lesser degree, the Yasuhiro Nakasone period. Concomitant with deindustrialization in the West and Japan was a development that went hand in hand with a globalizing process: the emergence of a global information network and immense transnational corporations. Saturation with consumer goods and informational simultaneity wove a web far finer and smaller scale than anything imaginable in the classical industrial era.

[6] Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 1995), 8.

Deindustrialization continued to hit the Fordist economies of late capitalist societies between the late 1960's and mid-1990s. Although the roots of industrial collapse are complex, the demise came with the changes global restructuring wrought. Cities such as Manchester, Leeds, (parts of) London, the Rust Belt in the United States (Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland), major heavy industry centers in Australia such as Whyalla and Elizabeth in South Australia, Newcastle and Wollongong in New South Wales, had been particularly adversely affected by retrenchment and capital flight, becoming ghost towns of late capitalism.

With the collapse of traditional industries, venture capitalists heavily invested in the new wave of 'cyber work,' producing North Carolina's Research Triangle, Silicon Valley in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the 'model' city of the 1990's, Seattle. We have witnessed the increasing concentration of the functions of 'information capitalism' in central Tokyo. Australia began 'to confront the realities of world markets' (Paul Keating, Labor Prime Minister) by simultaneously deregulating its industries and advocating the mantra of cyber-work under the sugar-coated slogan of 'Clever Country.' In reality, the selling points with which these cities tried to lure back capital sounded like whimpers coming from a desperate 'underdeveloped' country: promises of lower wages, lower rents, tax abatement or tax breaks, and corporation-friendly local office holders.

The economic 'upswing' cycle since the mid-1990's has been, statistically, characterized by a dramatic rise in employment. What these statistics hide though is that most new jobs represent flexi-work, that is, partial employment with no benefits. While this economic 'boom' has produced harder times for the middle sectors, it solidified the stagnation or further submergence of the labour pool hit by earlier processes of

deindustrialization. Also, perhaps crucially, it reinforced racial/ethnic bifurcation (Berlin, Budapest, Pittsburgh) and a multi-dimensional fissure of space, race, and class (Chicago, London, Paris, Sydney) in the post-Fordist city.[7]

A new regime of representation set out to celebrate the 'visible and audible rehabilitation' of the city, and, in the process, shifted attention away from the arid row houses, impoverished ghettos, bleak projects, and the neubauten that had loomed so large in the 1980's, early 1990's. And while, as music scholar Adam Krims states, representationally, a new music-poetics marked the 're-conquest' of the city,[8] forces of law and order imposed materially a brutal silence on the city's subaltern subjects from New York to Paris as sky-rocketing rates of incarceration for petty crimes, anti-immigrant hysteria, and paramilitary presence in certain neighborhoods have shown.

I will argue that Noise music, although not always unproblematically, intervened into this silenced space, and functioned as a resistant cultural form. Performers produced, found, and invented new Noise instruments, and applied guerilla tactics of street theater (Einstürzende Neubauten's disassembling a part of the Autobahn, for instance). Their work was collective; what was played was not the work of a single creator – audiences initially barely knew the names of those behind most of these groups. Recordings were made on 'production sites' set up by industrial performers (see Throbbing Gristle's Industrial Records; Manny Theiner's SSS label in Pittsburgh; Load Records in Providence; etc.). Groups stayed together for a short time, and dissolved only to regroup for another intervention. To be a Noise performer meant a day-to-day and subversive activity, a guerilla tactic, a constant war of position.

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[7] Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 357.

[8] Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (Routledge: New York, 2007), 123.

NOISE MUSIC AS GENRE

Noise music, in its many alterations, ruptures conventional generic boundaries: it is often not music at all, but noise, or sound, combined with visual material (video, DVD, public-access cable television, radio, the internet). Due to its polymorphism, it escapes the closure of the (theatrical) stage. It is often performed and disseminated outside the commercial nexus (in fact, Noise music probably would not exist without the self-activity of its fans). When staged, the relation between performer and everyday person is blurred, and participation by audience members in Noise events is, in specific instances, a distinctive phenomenon.

At its inception, Noise music was informed by a diverse set of assumptions, cultural and political, in its approach to postindustrial society. In musical terms, Noise performers' formative experience entailed a confrontation with what they perceived as the destruction of rock music by a culture industry reflective of mass production and what Attali calls repetition. Industrial standardization in the record industry in particular translated to them as the emergence of a single totalitarian code. The initial impetus behind Noise rested on the assumption that since industrial production sets the terms for repetition inside mass-produced music, any cultural form of repetition inside the commodity market would be subsumed by the overarching logic of industrialization. Therefore Noise musicians generated non-repeatable music outside of the commercial nexus.

NOISE AS ENJOYMENT?

Noise is pre-linguistic and pre-subjective. The noise of heavy machinery and the powerful sonic onslaught of a Macintosh PowerBook are acts that actively foreground

their materiality and disrupt meaning: 'what does this Noise mean?' Harsh textures of sonic forces break down our identities rather than reinforce them. In the language of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, we would say that Noise creates jouissance. Jouissance means 'enjoyment'[9]; in French it is used to mean 'orgasm.'

But jouissance may also refer to a state of crisis that occurs when the grip of the symbolic is weakened or broken. This is how Lacan talks about law and jouissance in Seminar XX, '[T]he essence of law [is]-to divide up, distribute, and "retribute" everything that counts as jouissance. What is jouissance? It is reduced here to being nothing but a negative instance. Jouissance is that which serves no purpose.'[10] This is a powerful phrasing of the non-teleological nature of Noise. However, I sense a slight contradiction between the claim that Noise music is non-teleological and that it is 'oppositional' at the same time. Would Noise be then a form of resistant sound by accident?

The blunt edge of applying Lacanian jouissance to Noise as which 'serves no purpose' has been complicated by musicologist Robert Fink, who, instead of an antiteleology, speaks, by way of gender theorist Judith Butler, of a performative teleology.[11] Such a performative teleology if applied to Noise performance may signify a teleology that sets the libido free by infinitely mutating it like, I would claim, a Boredoms performance.[12]

Other theorists such as Barthes and Julia Kristeva give jouissance a somewhat different meaning. Recapturing the pre-linguistic experience, the child's relation to his mother, an unmediated materiality is an orgasmic experience: it is the moment in which signification interrupts meaning, that is, it disrupts the symbolic, the social. I believe that the kind of Noise that, for instance, Japanese sound artists such as Merzbow,

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[9] For example, Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 1994).

[10] Quoted in Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1995) 191 note 29.

[11] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 43.

[12] Ibid., 42.

Masonna, Hijo Kaidan, Boris, and others generate, amply illustrate these two intersecting, yet differing interpretations of jouissance. In Merzbow's laptop work, for instance, we have extreme sonic effects and high-frequencies often interspersed with samplings from Black Sabbath's songs. The pain of harsh digital textures mixes with heavy metal's brutal intensity.

But Noise is not only pre-linguistic and pre-subjective, it is not simply a 'return' to something in our past. The kind of jouissance Noise generates has the effect of displacement and lets the subject open up to the possibility of change.

MUSIC, TECHNOLOGY, IDEOLOGY

In the early 1980s, formations such as Einstürzende Neubauten, Throbbing Gristle, and early SPK rejected repetitive modes of technology, considered themselves sub-electronic, and deployed environmental, 'found' sound as well as the body as their chief source of Noise. In musicological terms, for Noise musicians, repetition was equated with industrial standardization and mass production and represented a move toward a single totalitarian code. The body appeared to be the perfect vehicle to achieve non-repeatability. Late capital's silent space was exposed as laden with a neo-fascist potentiality. Telecorps, NON, Psychic TV, Merzbow, and Laibach, often in controversial fashion, perceived this space as one dominated by a totalitarian code, where only the state is beyond the code, and manipulates all codes. Unlike the noisy rallies of historical fascism, this neofascism builds on the silence of the 'users' of its space – episodic resistance is met with overwhelming state violence.

From the late 1980's on, the use of sonic forces informed by mass reproduction technology (synthesizer, computer, video, etc.) had been more widely embraced.

Noise musicians increasingly went beyond the model, according to which objects are simply use values that extend the body or enable its disembodiment – a model that premised its utopian assumption on a re-establishment of the organic interrelation between subject and object and that looked to direct exchange to facilitate those relations. They proposed ways in which technology can provide destabilizing strategies, shattering some of the notions of those artists who overtly identify technology with capitalist progress and social control.

Was then Noise, because of this new course, subsumed by the larger logic of the repetitive economy of capital? In her book on rap, Black Noise, Tricia Rose convincingly argues about rap's alternative uses of and relationships to repetition. She stresses the multiple histories and approaches to sound organization inside commodified culture. Rose claims that, in black culture, repetition means circulation and equilibrium; and is not tied to accumulation and growth as in the dominant culture.[13] Her conceptualization of rap appears to be applicable Noise music as it has developed.

At the transition to a new millennium (1999-2000) an influential group of digital Noise performers – Mego, Sensorband, Hrvatzki, Greg Davis, Nobukazu Takemura, and others – targeted postindustrial consumer society more directly. If creating (consumer) desire in perpetuity is the dominant characteristic of post-World War II capital, why not confront it with the sheer excess of processed sounds? Shaking off allegiances to technologies favoring organic components (body, fire, trash can) and perceived 'outdated' technologies (analogue box), the digital wave of Noise performers have been using western electronic hard and software technologies with immense creativity. There is a new sense of agency at work with technology-intensive musics: sound technologies are used to create new meanings for strategic aesthetic and political ends. 'Wired'

[13] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 71-72.

Noise also fits the current international moment: music happens along global channels of rapid communication. The acceleration of sound communication opens new avenues for instantaneous intervention – that is, somewhat paradoxically, resistance to global capital is channeled through global cultural circuits.[14]

How does digital Noise performance mesh with information-based businesses, spurred by developing cyber-technology, military research, or computer-driven control operations geographically separated from production? The question is legitimate since music as a cultural form is imbricated in economic production. How does this imbrication in the late capitalist mode of production impact digital performance and the structures of feelings Noise creates in the listener? That there is a certain unease about the digitization of Noise among its performers has been reflected in the revival of analogue composition. Vintage synthesizers are used both live and in recordings. The Locust features one member on an 'old-fashioned' Moog, White Mice's Anonymouse uses knobs and wires, Stereolab rely on a mixture of electronics, Astro (Hiroshi Hasegawa) generates ambient analogisms, DJ Jeff Mills 'spins' minimal techno, Vibracathedral Orchestra record their live shows directly to two-track tape with guitars, violins, cello, banjo, recorders, and Casio toy organs, and Masonna kindles a 'warm' psychedelic sound with his Space Machine project. Others like Yasunao Tone subvert the 'intentions' designed into digital devices by using a Scotch tape to confuse the laser reading a CD, thereby creating a wide array of glitches.[15]

Is the 'return' of analogue a form of nostalgia, ask the authors of Analog Days, Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco?[16] Their answer is: not necessarily. They cite Brian Eno who appears, in principle at least, to valorize the unpredictability of analogue production: the sounds 'between the knobs'[17] challenge the flawless efficiency and

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[14] See Chapter One in Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (eds.), *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

[15] See on this Nicolas Collins, *Handmade Electronic Music: The Art of Hardware Hacking* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 229.

[16] Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco, *Digital Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 318.

[17] Ibid., 319. See also Timothy D. Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 110-111.

'discipline' of digital technology. Would then the recourse to an analogue approach be the relevant response to the tyranny of silence, anonymity, programmed and depersonalized workplace that multinational corporations have imposed on the urban-postindustrial space? In defense of digital Noise I argue that their approach provides a possibility for new experiences of desire and new experiments in musical forms. Taking a cue from Lacan via Robert Fink I claim that digital Noise is not 'the negation of desire, but a powerful and totalizing metastasis [of desire].'[18] With Lacan though, it must be stressed that it is a desire for an unsatisfied desire.[19] Digital Noise, like Lacanian desire, does not seek satisfaction–it pursues its own continuation and furtherance, resulting in the aforementioned productive complication of the teleological/non-teleological binary. It is only in a reconfigured listener (subject) that desire will no longer hinder the subject's pursuit of gratification. To achieve this, Noise must make the listener not only acknowledge that something is 'wrong' with his or her desire but expose, that even in refusal, he or she desires in accordance to the Law (authority figures, guilt, ambition) and that even 'our' desires are not our own but belong to the Other.

Can digital Noise performance achieve this? In quasi-programming environments made possible by certain software (MAX, Super Collider, etc.) the musician can create a storehouse of pre-defined connections and control them using patterns and sequences and free-form patch control that is unique to one's computer. And if one 'intrudes' into the program itself as Ikue Mori does, one can get totally inside the electronics behind the sound and thereby overcome routinisation (hollowing out) of her intervention and continually shatter the listener's expectations by not sounding one expects her to sound.[20] This Noise makes us want to know something, figure out what our unconscious is saying, and discover what the performer can capture from our dreams and fantasies. It is only then that the true task of 'working through' between Noise performer and audience can start in order to get us listeners to say the 'unspeakable' without guilt and without fear. The social and political outcome of saying the 'unspeakable,' just as that of a Noise performance, is unpredictable.

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[18] Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 9.

[19] Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 51.

[20] Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music*. Second Edition. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 236.

Free Improsivation in Music and Capitalism: Resisting Authority and the Cults of Scientism and Celebrity*

Edwin Prévost

*I use the term 'scientism' to describe an area of discourse which uses the language and nuances (and to some extent the authority) of science without necessarily being scientific.

There is a strong argument for not aligning the two topics contained in the title. Music is one thing and capitalism is another. Except, of course, they intercept each other. A discussion about capitalism is inevitably political. It is a critique of how human society works. All of us, in some way, are involved with the cash nexus. Free improvisation in music is also a site for human activity in which there is also the potential for exchange.[1]

Listening to music is mediated mostly through the capitalist market. The listener has in some way to purchase the opportunity to hear the music through attending concerts or purchasing recordings. The major exceptions to this appear to be religious music and what is left of unmodified folk musics. Although listeners to these musics have to pay with something other than money.[2]

The motivation for making and listening to music need have nothing to do with whether it is a commodity or not. However, it is extremely difficult to escape the cash nexus. In a capitalist society everything, even our leisure, is measured by the dominant social and economic criterion – the monetary equivalent.[3] In most cases we purchase musical instruments (or the materials and tools if we make them ourselves). We are likely to purchase tuition. Even if we organize a free concert then it is likely that the space for the performance will have to be rented or some arrangement made so that the owner of the premises can make some return on the transaction (i.e. by selling beer and food to listening customers). Of course, the capitalist system is the normal socio-economic environment. Most people will see nothing unusual or wrong with the idea of music being made to be purchased. And whether the music is successful in the market place often becomes the measure of its value. In other words many consumers believe that if music is worth paying money for then it must be good. Conversely, if the music is given away freely then it must, by definition, be worthless. This is ideology at work.[4]

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[1] Here I am suggesting that a dialogical process is as much an 'exchange' – a reciprocal act of giving and receiving – as is the more usual notion of money exchanging hands for goods and services.

[2] 'World Music' is the development of a new genre in which folk forms are combined with mostly western forms of pop music. Although jazz and even western classically orientated music have also embraced this fusion.

[3] It could be argued that the concept of 'leisure' is predicated upon its opposite i.e. 'waged labour'.

[4] Downloading from the internet for free might seem to counter this suggestion. However, there is a difference between something which is freely available and something which can be freely obtained. Downloading for free makes the recipient feel as if they have got something for nothing (i.e. something that they might otherwise have to pay for). In a capitalist ideology it is this characteristic (i.e. 'theft') that makes it feel that something of worth has been obtained without payment.

It is within the conditions outlined above that a form of music like free improvisation has to contend. Its practitioners are not immune from the basic requirements of existence (within capitalism) which enables them to continue living. Certain material conditions have to be met before any music can be made. Given that the social and economic background is so uncongenial for musics that fall into the broad category of free improvisation or experimentalism, it is somewhat surprising that this music exists at all. In some sense, however, we could posit that it exists precisely because of the socio-economic strictures of a capitalist culture. That is, it is a form of music which (I suggest) counters the ethos which characterises capitalism; with its emphasis upon market relations, and all the social forms and attendant attitudes that follow in its wake. In this respect free improvisation follows an artistic and a cultural trajectory that is familiar to the history of jazz. Wherein, despite the close kinship that early jazz had with vaudeville and its continuing links to show business, there have existed radical pockets of resistance to mainstream white dominated U.S. culture and an assertion of an alternative set of cultural values and mores. Very little of this cultural self-assertion was consciously anti-capitalist. It was mostly the intuitive response of a community under pressure from some of capitalism's uglier henchmen – its racists. Jazz became a part of secular cultural self-definition for a beleaguered community in which some white dissidents also felt at home.[5]

There are examples of musics being part of a counteraction to the strictures of capitalism but it would be an exaggeration to claim, for example, that jazz was intrinsically political and therefore anti-capitalist or anti-anything in particular. Some jazz musicians were more overtly political than others e.g. Max Roach. In a similar way I think that we can argue that free improvisation in music is an alternative cultural form. However, perhaps this mirrors the growing disaffection of some people (the white

[5] Black resistance to racism has rarely let itself turn into a counter-example of the affliction it was defying. Although some black communities have rightly been wary of white liberal affiliations.

populations in particular) in the so-called advanced industrial capitalist societies in Europe, in which there are very few models of positive cultural responses (other than those contained in religion and other superstitious systems) and no adequate models of resistance to the prevailing individualistic culture. Although many free improvising musicians may be apolitical, there is something in the manner of their working, and their general relations within the form, that suggests an alternative to the kind of context that capitalism thrives upon – namely market relations.[6]

At this point we need to outline what is it in free improvised music that distinguishes it from other ways of making music. Hopefully, this will enable us to categorize its structural moments that make it, in my view, both potentially and inherently, a vehicle for cultural renewal. In *No Sound is Innocent* I began to flesh out the twin-analytical propositions of heurism and dialogue which seem to me to be at the heart of collective improvisation.[7] In brief I suggested:

a) that in a so-called normal piece of formal music e.g. a Beethoven string quartet or even a pop song, most of the technical problems of preparing for a performance are solved and refined before the intended presentation.
b) that the relationships between the musicians are mediated through the manuscript which normally represents the score.

The contrast of these analytical propositions with those of improvisation are:

a) that improvising musicians are searching for sounds and their context within the moments of performance.

[6] Sadly, for this writer, there have been too few black exponents in this field. There are of course notable exceptions: e.g. Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton and George Lewis who have straddled the cultural divide, and have thereby very effectively proposed a wider sense of community that is outside the discourse of race.

[7] Edwin Prévost, *No Sound is Innocent*, London: Copula, 1995.

b) the relations between musicians are directly dialogical: i.e. their music is not mediated through any external mechanism e.g. a score.[8]

What we are talking about here is the process of discovery in music making. In relation to the AMM improvising experience Cornelius Cardew wrote:

> *We are searching for sounds and for the responses that attach to them, rather than thinking them up, preparing them and producing them. The search is conducted in the medium of sound and the musician himself is at the heart of the experiment.*[9]

The point to be emphasised here is that it is during the activity of sound-making, even during a performance, that the materials used are investigated constantly for their potential. Concert-making as an act of experimentalism. The results of which need to be evaluated, initially on the spot, for their social and musical resonances.

It is this activity which leads to what I have referred to as self-invention. This is how and where enquiring musicians find and develop a unique voice to represent their individuality and their general aspirations. Together with this is the implicit collectivism of the activity – the dialogical: '... we are searching for the sounds'. It is people working closely with others in a mutual process of making music – a creative and a continual social invention.

The questions to be posed in this situation include: does the sound work in itself? (i.e. have I worked thoroughly enough to discover some of its potential?). Does it work within the context of the performance? Does it work in the context of whatever social milieu is being addressed and embraced? These questions propose a new range of

[8] A 'score' being (among other things) a document in which ownership of the music can be enshrined and legally protected. Subsequently it becomes the means by which value can be extracted from musical performances by way of royalties.

[9] Cornelius Cardew, 'Towards an Ethic of Improvisation', *Treatise Handbook*, Edition Peters, 1971, reprinted in *Cornelius Cardew: A Reader*, London:Copula, 2006.

criteria for success within performance. And, maybe will lead us to see how new senses of 'the aesthetic' are formed. The new view will not be through a prism of previous experiences but derived and moulded through the practice of self and social invention.

Of course, it is unlikely (although not impossible) that anyone decides to listen, or play, freely improvised music on the basis of some already formed political judgement of the value of the music in question. And, it has been a continuing regret that many people that I know, who consider themselves to be politically intelligent, still cannot identify with the radicalism that clearly resides within the process of free improvisation. For many left wing radicals this kind of music remains incomprehensible – mostly, it would seem, because free improvisers create a music without conventional tonality and familiar rhythms and have a conscious disregard for any populist market-oriented appeal. While, for many listeners, some ersatz folk-cum-rock music, or even 'world music' – as long as it has an appropriately radical lyric or some historical political allusion – seems to fit the bill. And it continues to work for them even though they are quite aware of the compromises that most popular musics have to make with capitalism in order to continue to exist. It does not seem to occur to many left wing ideologues that changes in social relations will have to be reflected in all manner of human activities – including music. Meanwhile, many practitioners of musics which owe their genesis to free improvisation are now finding that certain facets of this creative approach are amenable to exploitation within a burgeoning sector of the leisure market called 'art'. All this should be very discouraging for those who think that freely improvised music can in some way be a vehicle, or a model, for the kind of society – other than a rampant free-for-all capitalism – in which they would prefer to live.

However, before we turn away disillusioned, let us examine what is happening in this, albeit minor, capitalist appropriation of free improvisation. For years I have thought that some of the exceptionally discordant sounds and general dislocation of expectation would have resisted marketing. Whereas for myself and numerous others it is this otherness in the sonic world that we find attractive, I am familiar with responses to experimental and the freely improvised musics where listeners do not comprehend these things as music at all! What seems to have happened is that in certain contexts, and for a section of the audience, discord and dislocation have become tolerable experiences. Maybe this is what Cardew was referring to when during the 1960s and 70s he observed the bejeweled bourgeois clientele at, for example, the Venice Bienalle or those who attended Merce Cunningham Dance Company performances.[10] They listened attentively and politely applauded the music of John Cage et al. 'The bourgeoisie have learnt to take their medicine' he said.[11] What does the avant-garde have to do to shock now? Well, nothing. As Chris Cutler suggests with convincing illumination – the avant-garde is dead.[12] Many audiences have learned to applaud politely at almost any occasion, just as long as they have been persuaded that their acquiescence serves some fashionable cause and there is always the after concert drink and dinner to look forward to.

I have always supposed that the avant-garde was where new cultural horizons could be explored. That the avant-garde was the site for an implicit rejection of the status quo. Such activity consists of alienation strategies: e.g. atonality, chance procedures, using new technologies to make sounds, making new sounds with old instruments. These actions are intended to disturb the perceptive, cultural and sometimes the social equilibrium.[13]

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[10] During the 1970s the Cunningham Dance company had begun to become fashionable especially in France. Occasionally Cardew had been employed as one of the accompanying musicians.

[11] Conversation between John Tilbury and Cornelius Cardew.

[12] Chris Culter,*Thoughts on Music and the Avant Garde* in Hanns-Werner Heister, Wolfgang Martin Stroh, Peter Wicke (eds.), *Musik-Avantgarde. Zur Dialketik von Vorhut und Nachhut*, (BIS-Verlag) Oldenburg 2006, pp.52-73.

[13] Here I am referring to many of the extreme 'performance' pieces. E.g. LaMonte Young's *Feeding the Piano Hay*, which works the first time around (to surprise or disorientated an audience?) but, in my opinion, barely deserves to be repeated except as a bit of harmless fun.

However, many of these procedures are reactive. The intention is to negate what is already perceived as a negative situation. There is, as I hope to show, another role for some of these apparently disruptive procedures.

During the early 1970s some hair-shirted Maoists of my acquaintance (some of whom had been avant-gardist musicians) were not alone in perceiving the antics of much of the avant-garde as the tiresome excesses of bourgeois individualism. But by confusing positive and creative features of individuality with individualism they threw the baby out with the bath water. In their desperate and forlorn haste to usher in the era of the 'dictatorship of the prolelariat' they sought to denigrate and rob others of a conduit for dialogue and creative understanding. For them, from thence on, only the party leadership could decide on which cultural manifestations mattered. We need not shed too many tears here; for their fundamentalist confidence in Mao was soon to be shattered. Although not before much damage was done to creative initiatives, cultural relations and even friendships.

The idea of 'the avant-garde' is, of course, dead the moment it becomes classified. And, given that so much of what is now accepted as art has become so relativised: 'everything can become art' or 'all sound is music', then it follows that it matters little – except as a leisurely diversion – if we pay any attention to what goes on in the name of art. The Maoists of my acquaintance found it easy to convince themselves that modern art was merely a bourgeois indulgence, because presumably that is what they had been indulging themselves with whilst they were avant-gardists. However, there has always been another strand in creative life that was attached to cultivating and enhancing a sense of personal and social being. For example, the avant-garde in black jazz of the 1960s in the USA was self-consciously social. It often prided itself

on its technical excellence and its community spirit. The idea of 'anything goes' in a casual pose of 'it is art if I say it is art' attitude would not do. A sense of black pride went with a determination to be as good, and preferably better, than any representative of the oppressing culture. It must be said that jazz no longer maintains such a social and political, or even artistic, profile in the black community of present day USA.[14] However, I suggest that similar motivations can continue to exist within the practice of free improvisation.

By the 1950s, as the world emerged from the privations of the Second World War and moved into the ideological climate of the Cold War, a sense of a 'new world' was offered to western culture through the experiments of the New York school of composers that we associate with John Cage and the ruminations of the total serialists of Darmstadt.[15] These activities were concurrent with the emerging musical initiatives, largely inspired by jazz, which lead to the development of a new musical aesthetic which we can now broadly refer to as free improvisation. They all, in some way, impacted upon each other. In comparison to that which the Darmstadt group or Cage acquired, free improvisation drew very little following and support, official or otherwise. Nevertheless, free improvisation was contentious enough for Cage, Boulez, Stockhausen and many of the major new music protagonists to comment upon it.[16] There were also some significant overlaps: e.g. the composer and young associate of John Cage, Christian Wolff improvised with AMM in the late 1960s, Boulez and Berio wrote articles discussing free improvisation. Anthony Braxton admired Karlheinz Stockhausen etc. And one might even say that Boulez and Stockhausen actually flirted or dabbled with improvisation. But the procedures they adopted and the results have little in common with the general aspirations and artistic objectives that continue to sustain an 'improvisational' musical life as we know now.

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[14] 'Free-jazz' began the task of apparently 'deskilling' (or 'reskilling'?) jazz from the technocratic leanings of be-bop (which became more and more formalised and subsequently used in formal music training). It also put intuition back on the creative agenda and reasserted collectivism.

[15] Following on from the work of Webern and Schoenberg who had developed a music system in which note rows in a chromatic scale were strictly adhered to i.e. no note was repeated until the other note had been used. The Darmstadt school extended the idea of the serial to the other parameters of music e.g. time and timbre.

[16] Pierre Boulez 'Constructing and Improvisation', *Orientations - collected writings*, edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, translated by Martin Cooper, London:Faber and Faber, 1986. Luciano Berio, *Two Interviews with Rossiana Dalmonte and Balint Andras Varga*, New York, London:Marion Boyars, 1985. pp.155-173.

Although Cage and the Darmstadt school were thought of in some ways as competitive, they had, in my view, significant things in common that separated them fundamentally from their free improvising counterparts. The quasi-mathematical calculations, required in e.g. John Cage's *Variations 1* (1958), in which transparent overlays are used to create random relationships between dots and lines from which sounds/music are constructed, mirrors (perhaps in a comical way) a much more rigorous attitude instructive of 'total serialism'. Whether Cage was intending to be ironic or not is beyond my reading. Cage, however, was famously against improvisation. This chimes with his general philosophy about the use of chance within his compositions which puts great emphasis upon letting sounds be themselves somehow allowing sounds to have a life outside of, or beyond, human intention. His inspiration for these methods of creating objective or neutral sounds, and configurations of sounds, was the *Book of Changes* or *I Ching*, the first book of the Confucian Classics. A perhaps more famous user of the *I Ching* in western culture is the analytical psychologist C.G. Jung. The *I Ching*'s attraction for Jung seems to me to be precisely opposite to the claims that John Cage made for its procedures. Jung was impressed by how the ritualistic and random falling of the yarrow stalks (or the three coins in the short form of the divinatory method) allowed questioners to get into their unconscious. Cage, as I understand it, was only interested in getting beyond consciousness. Jung, I am sure, would have questioned the possibility of escaping the persona and would have claimed that using the yarrow stalks actually brought the individual closer to the totality of their being by integrating, or tapping into, their unconscious motivations and insights. However, and interestingly, both Cage and Jung were enthralled by the *I Ching* because the manipulations proceeded mechanically and 'left no room for interference by the will.'[17]

[17] C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe, London: Collins and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963. p.342.

Cage may well have been looking for a system of randomization. In which case, given the perceived modernity of the project, why did he choose a method that had so many historical, exotically foreign cultural and mystical overtones? There are important issues here. For example, is it possible to arrive at a state of complete psychological neutrality? And, is such a state desirable? Cornelius Cardew, who had initially been Cage's great advocate in Europe, subsequently noted, for example, that when John Cage and David Tudor themselves performed *Variations 1* that:

> *Their performances were full of crashes, bangs, radio music and speech etc. No opportunity for including emotive material was lost. And musically they were right. Without the emotive sounds the long silences that are a feature of the piece in its latter stages would have been deprived of their drama and the piece disintegrated into the driest dust...*[18]

At best John Cage, with his 'silent' piece and chance methods of construction, posed a series of challenging questions about the nature of music.[19] He gave us all a fresh insight into the possible meaning and beauty of sounds that were previously considered to be outside of the territory of music. He encouraged a certain kind of freedom of thought. However, as David Tudor remarked in an interview in *Music and Musicians* conducted during the late 1960s:

> *I had to learn how to cancel my consciousness of any previous moment in order to produce the next one, bringing about the freedom to do anything.*[20]

This is a comment from John Cage's right hand man, so to speak. It is clear from many accounts (including my own) of preparing for Cage pieces using the prescribed chance

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[18] Cornelius Cardew, 'John Cage: Ghost or Monster,' *Stockhausen serves Imperialism*, London:Latimer, 1974. Reprinted in *Cornelius Cardew A Reader*, London:Copula, 2006. p.1520.

[19] John Cage, 4'33".

[20] *Music and Musicians 20* (1972) pp.24-26.

mechanisms, that any so-called 'freedom' is totally dislocated from any human objective - except the perverse satisfaction of carrying out an irrelevant instruction. Perhaps Tudor, in the above quotation, was explaining some of his own strategies for trying to escape 'the anticipated' in performance. But there is something self-deceiving in the idea of trying: 'to cancel one's consciousness of any previous moment'. This practice is nigh impossible as well as being perhaps of no particular consequence.

Cage's music had assumed the sobriquet of the 'experimental.' This was in contrast to the term 'avant-garde' which those who gathered at Darmstadt during the immediate post-Second World War period adopted. The Darmstadt enterprise seems to have had much more 'intellectual' intensity. There was a serious sense of rigor applied to the new music arising from a development in serialism following on from Schoenberg and Webern et al. Pierre Boulez, perhaps together with Karlheinz Stockhausen, was considered a prominent figure in this 'total serialist' movement. Boulez seems to have been searching for and developing what he called an 'active analytical method' which for him was 'indispensable':

> *... it must begin with the most minute and exact observation possible of the musical facts confronting us; it is then a question of finding a plan, a law of internal organization which takes account of these facts with the maximum coherence; finally comes the interpretation of the compositional laws deduced from this special application.*[21]

There is none of the playful and often poetic mischief one can detect in John Cage's music. Nor is there any apparent freedom for the musician. And although performing in this arena of music is totally outside of my own experience - as they say - I know a man who has. John Tilbury, in one of his more robust descriptions of the demands that 'total

[21] Pierre Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. by Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett, London:Faber and Faber, 1971. p.18.

serialist' music made upon musicians, described it as being 'a very complicated way of laying the dinner table, except that there was never a meal at the end of it.' This highly technocratic formula for making music clearly places the musicians in a subordinate and functionary role as far as the creative outcome of the music is concerned.

The hey-day of serialism and indeterminacy may be considered by many to have passed. Newer musics have moved away from any affiliation or attachment to either school. Certainly the subsequent formulations appear to be more eclectic and disparate: Minimalism, New Complexity and the various micro-tonal forms have vied with numerous other postmodern expressions. And even some forms of free improvisation can be said to have engaged with Cagean aesthetics and embraced micro-tonality. However, we live in a era that is more at ease with apolitical and ahistorical discourse. The capitalists have been gloating that the ideological battle has been won. Although there is currently some back-tracking going on about the notion of 'the end of history', music seems to be lingering in a twilight world in which it exists for its own and the market's sake. Yet, I would contend that positions proposed by the serialists and the indeterminists, who emerged in a time where polemics were an anticipated part of any cultural proposal, regarding the relations of musicians to sound, musicians to fellow musicians and musicians to the wider cultural landscape, remain essentially intact and in play. I would argue therefore that a review of what was proposed and subsequently developed from serialism and indeterminacy is still worth pursuing for it will shed light on the lingering tendencies which persist in their wake.

What was on offer appeared to be the purported objectivity of total serialism and the neutrality of random products of indeterminism. On the one hand, there was the unalterable order of the tone row and its extension into other parameters of music. This

was perceived as a metaphor for some kind of scientific democracy. On the other hand, we were offered the alleged anonymity of sounds selected by chance procedures as a metaphor for some kind of liberal freedom. Cage's obsession with removing the will from the music-making equation, by virtue of mechanisms for random choices for sound selection and the strict mathematical discipline of 'total serialism', led to very similar ends. The 'interpreting' musician could make very little difference to the artistic outcome. Cornelius Cardew, who had been an assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen in the early 1960s, had become increasingly uneasy with the rigidities of the new music. Cage and company initially seemed to offer something of a liberating respite. However, through the deception of randomization, the real message behind the new procedures of making music was not freedom but its opposite: authority. Cardew's initial response to this, as seen in his own indeterminate works arising out of, but going beyond, these influences, began to display 'people processes'.[22] This culminated in Cardew's decision to cease with composition for a while, instead becoming a member of improvising ensemble AMM in which the musical practice had moved beyond simply the production of sounds. The sounds had to be understood, nurtured, enjoyed and even personalised – and placed within a human (i.e. socialized) context.

Modernism in general has been equated with a new form of scientific culture. Stockhausen recounts the move, traceable to Varése, of music towards scientific enquiry and more specifically towards collaborations with companies at the forefront of new technologies e.g. Bell Telephone Laboratories. Boulez took this a step further with the founding of a research institute in Paris (IRCAM) in which composers joined with engineers and scientists for what was described as 'a disciplined joint program for the advancement of musical and acoustical science.'[23] Meanwhile, John Cage offered a scenario in which anything and everything could be music. Between them, and much

[22] Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd Edition, New York and Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1999.p.6.

[23] Robin Maconue (ed.), *Stockhausen on Music: lectures and interviews*, London:Marion Boyars, 2000.

of that which has since followed, they offer us anaemic musics squeezed dry of the life-giving blood cells of meaningful participation. In such a climate what replaces the possibility of social involvement is the projection of celebrity. Whoever makes the most outrageous claims for their music, and appeals to the exclusive market in 'high' modern art (mostly through publicity mechanisms which favour notoriety and scandal), becomes the most celebrated. Not, of course, that the less intellectually revered musics were ever immune from such self-regarding and inflated views. Jerry Roll Morton had apparently claimed that he was the inventor of jazz. Whilst more recently others have had artistic originality thrust upon them like some kind of virgin birth. Ornette Coleman has been acclaimed as the creator of free jazz and Derek Bailey as the inventor of free improvisation. All of which is palpable nonsense and has nothing much to do with the musicians concerned, but it makes good media copy and propagates the myth of celebrity.

Many of the musics referred to above are marginal and completely outside of the experience of the majority of the population. Yet they are the sites of cultural debate and in some cases the recipients of huge state funding. For where capitalism has not found the arts to be a source of financial profit and doctrinal comfort, it is quite prepared to mobilise the use of public resources for ideological purposes.[24]

Certainly Stockhausen serves capitalist culture – even if we cannot go so far as to follow Cardew's provocative assertion that Stockhausen serves imperialism. Why else would Stockhausen have been lauded so much? Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that capitalism serves Stockhausen. But this still begs the question: Why the cult of genius and celebrity when he was but one of many making innovatory moves in music?

[24] In Britain currently we see the diverting of 'the peoples' money' for the benefit and leisure of the rich through the use of Lottery Funding to the arts. The system is different in structure in the USA. Large 'private' endowments (often representing hundreds of thousands of dollars per recipient) are available to musicians many of whom would be regarded as avant-gardists and be considered outside of the mainstream of arts e.g. Anthony Braxton, Steve Lacy, George Lewis, John Zorn – to name but a few.

The scientism perhaps reached a new level with Stockhausen's piece for string quartet and helicopters.[25] For the first performance in Amsterdam, the four musicians of the Arditti String Quartet were positioned individually in helicopters that flew around in the air space near to the venue. Their playing parts were radioed down to the concert hall, where the composer sat at a mixing desk controlling the sounds, moderating the mixture of sounds from musicians and helicopters that were eventually heard by the audience. I leave it to the reader to ponder upon the potential cultural value of such a piece. However, from a practical and financial point of view I wonder why there is any need for helicopters and string quartets if the sounds that these elements produce are going to be controlled and electronically modified. On the other hand, of course, it was a huge publicity coup.

There has to be a reason why these examples, even those not so extreme as the above, are not just tolerated but encouraged. All at great financial cost. And with no observable benefits for the advancement of mankind except as some kind of great pantomime – something akin to firework displays on New Year's Eve. These works are propagated and given exposure as the better and more representative examples of positive modernism or as worthwhile experiments. The truth is that some of Stockhausen's works owe their genesis to other works by other composers and is it not always thus? *Mikrophonie 1* (for tam-tam and six players) surely owes a debt to LaMonte Young and maybe others.[26] Reading Karlheinz Stockhausen talking about the development of this 'composition' it becomes very clear that his own explorations with the tam-tam proved to be difficult to notate or even to repeat with any hope of accuracy.[27] The question one has to ask is, why not let the musicians themselves make theses sonic enquiries? Why do Stockhausen's supporters maintain the idea that unpredictable

[25] A twenty minute piece that was part of Stockhausen's opera cycle *Mittwoch aus Licht*.

[26] LaMonte Young, *Studies in The Bowed Disc*, 1963.

[27] 'Microphony' in Robin Maconie (ed), *Stockhausen on Music — lectures and interviews*, London:Marion Boyars, 2000.

sounds emerging this way, i.e. by the performers, constitute his 'composition'? As a long-standing tam-tam player myself, I know and rejoice in the uncertainties of the instrument. I am always amazed that different people using the same kind of instrument seem to manage to produce such a diversity of sounds.[28] All this, to me, seems to be a signifier and a celebration of humanity and not at all scientific, even though a playful sense of enquiry is at the heart of the exercise. The interface between materials and the person has a special individual imprint. Such a free and spontaneous approach, which is the general *modus vivendi* of an improviser, is an unmediated and an unfettered response to the world. It is not, thankfully, subject to some scientific calculation. It is not repeatable. And there is no good reason why it should be repeated: except to capture and exclusively enslave the sounds – and maybe exploit them financially.

So, why is this notion of the composer/controller genius maintained? Much better, to my mind, for musicians to be directly involved in discovering sounds for themselves rather than being directed to try this or that procedure. And, there are other works of Stockhausen which are perhaps collaborations to which compositional contributions have never adequately been acknowledged.[29] Whilst his mystical formulations of 'Intuitive Music' hijack a whole range of practices, sentiments and aspirations that were commonplace, yet valuable, to schools of improvising musicians elsewhere in Europe and north America prior to the time of his own outpourings. At best, Stockhausen was participating in a world-wide enquiry. Yet so much of this material is perpetrated as the work of a single genius. Capitalism cannot, of course, give any credibility to the potent mix of 'self-assertion and collectivity' that free improvisation thrives upon and consequently encourages. Where would it all lead?[30]

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[28] Prévost's most recent solo CD featured a tam-tam. *Entelchy*, Matchless Recordings, MRCD67, 2006.

[29] See Cardew's account of his work with Stockhausen on Carré. *The Musical Times October and November 1961*. Reprinted in *Cornelius Cardew A Reader*, London:Copula, 2006.

[30] Arguably capitalism's effect on jazz was to develop the careers of but a few e.g. tenor saxophonists. Each label had one or two stars. Yet when I first went to the USA in late 1960s it seemed as though there were brilliant saxophonists around every corner. The market apparently could not tolerate the existence more than a few 'stars'.

Of course the current myth of celebrity has to some extent superseded the somewhat over-inflated myth of genius itself. This is because most celebrities cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be afforded the sobriquet of genius. And most do not want it. Celebrity is now held to be far more important than any recognition of work done. Given the currency of ambiguity and ambivalence, in so many features of US culture and society, particularly since the 1960s and 1970s, one wonders at the precise significance of Andy Warhol's alleged memorable response when asked about what had been his greatest achievement: 'keeping a straight face.'

Music is promiscuous. I have already sounded a number of warning notes about how easy it is for a singular cultural objective to be undermined or subverted. A musician may be working towards the production of a collaborative piece of work only to find that the collaborators are using the material for their own (and other) ends. Even reviewers, consciously or otherwise, often misrepresent things according to the prevailing capitalist ideology. I recall the release of AMM's first album. There was nothing to suggest, in the music or the accompanying sleeve notes, that the music or the ensemble was anything but a collective. There were two prominent reviews: one (*Musical Times*) called AMM 'The Cornelius Cardew Ensemble' and the other (*Jazz Journal*) referred to AMM as 'The Cornelius Cardew Quintet'.[31] Apart from nicely revealing the specific cultural baggage of the journals in question, they raised the spectre of capitalism's anti-communitarian programme. Cultural perception as a maker of historical fact!

My general critique has often been portrayed as anti-technological. This is because most of the negative examples I have noted – for what I see as abuses

[31] *AMMMUSIC 1966*, Elektra. Later re-released as a CD by ReR Megacorp.

occurring in music (e.g. the oppressive use of electronically induced volume and the indiscriminate, often careless and uninspired usurpation of material by means of sampling) – happen to occur through the medium of electronic machines and computers. I have been cast in a Luddite mould. But, as I think is clear from a more careful reading of my earlier texts, it is not the machines I blame but some of the machine-minders.[32] We do well to remember Marcuse's caution about man's subjection to his production apparatus.[33] Science and technology, even in music, have been viewed as progressive features in our culture. Little or no account is taken of the ideological dynamic in human activity which attaches itself to the machine and to science or scientism.

> *Technology can create images which are themselves exciting, and it can also suggest new ways of generating images which, because they are self-sufficient and unanswerable to traditional ideas of taste, lead to exciting and revealing results.*[34]

If Maconie's words reflect the general ideology of his subject and his followers, as it seems reasonable to suppose, then we have to ask whose, and which, definition of 'exciting' is being applied here? There is something very deterministic going on which ironically has much in common with Cage's own liberal anarchistic brand of excitement. Whether through the 'self-sufficient' and worryingly 'unanswerable' use of technology or through the use of 'chance methods' to find and fix futures; the audience, and the rest of the world are held hostage.

> *The genius of capitalism is not simply that it gives consumers what they want, but that it makes them want what it has to give.*[35]

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[32] Edwin Prévost, *Minute Particulars*, London:Copula, (Matching Tye), 2006.

[33] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, New York:Routledge,1991.

[34] 'Afterword' *Stockhausen on Music: Lectures and Interviews*. Op.cit. pp.176-177.

[35] Timothy Garton-Ash,'Global capitalism now has no serious rivals. But it could destroy itself.' *The Guardian*, 22.02.2007.

Much the same can be said of what passes as art music in Cage, Boulez and beyond. If we – as musicians and listeners – have any choice when confronting the morality of capitalism, then it must be to do rather than to be done to. We must decide who we are rather than be given an identity. In our freely improvised music there is the opportunity to apply a continual stream of examination. We search for sounds. We look for the meanings that become attached to sounds. And we have to decide – on the basis of observable responses – on the musical, cultural and social values that reside in whatever configurations emerge. The search is surely for self-invention and social-invention. This is an opportunity to make our world. If we do not act to make our world then somebody else will invent a world for us.

Genre is Obsolete*

Ray Brassier

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'Noise' has become the expedient moniker for a motley array of sonic practices – academic, artistic, counter-cultural – with little in common besides their perceived recalcitrance with respect to the conventions governing classical and popular musics. 'Noise' not only designates the no-man's-land between electro-acoustic investigation, free improvisation, avant-garde experiment, and sound art; more interestingly, it refers to anomalous zones of interference between genres: between post-punk and free jazz; between musique concrète and folk; between stochastic composition and art brut. Yet in being used to categorise all forms of sonic experimentation that ostensibly defy musicological classification – be they para-musical, anti-musical, or post-musical – 'noise' has become a generic label for anything deemed to subvert established genre. It is at once a specific sub-genre of musical vanguardism and a name for what refuses to be subsumed by genre. As a result, the functioning of the term 'noise' oscillates between that of a proper name and that of a concept; it equivocates between nominal anomaly and conceptual interference. Far from being stymied by such paradox, the more adventurous practitioners of this pseudo-genre have harnessed and transformed this indeterminacy into an enabling condition for work which effectively realises 'noise's' subversive pretensions by ruthlessly identifying and pulverising those generic tropes and gestures through which confrontation so quickly atrophies into convention. Two groups are exemplary in this regard: To Live and Shave in L.A., led by assiduous American iconoclast Tom Smith, whose dictum 'genre is obsolete' provides the modus operandi for a body of work characterised by its fastidious dementia; and Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock, headed by the enigmatic Swiss deviant and 'evil Kung-Fu troll'[1] Rudolf Eb.er, whose hallucinatory audiovisual concoctions amplify the long dimmed psychotic potencies of actionism. Significantly, both men disavow the label 'noise' as a description of their work – explicitly in Smith's case, implicitly in Eb.er's.[2] This is not coincidental; each recognises the debilitating stereotypy engendered by the failure to recognise the paradoxes attendant upon the existence of a genre predicated upon the negation of genre.

[1] See the interview with Smith online at http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/bio.htm

[2] Smith's own description of Eb.er in an interview available at http://prague industrial.org/interviews/ohne. Eb.er is a qualified martial arts instructor.

Like the 'industrial' subculture of the late 1970s which spawned it, the emergence of 'noise' as a recognisable genre during the 1980s entailed a rapid accumulation of stock gestures, slackening the criteria for discriminating between innovation and cliché to the point where experiment threatened to become indistinguishable from platitude.[3] Fastening onto this intellectual slackness, avant-garde aesthetes who advertised their disdain for the perceived vulgarity of the industrial genre voiced a similar aversion toward the formulaic tendencies of its noisy progeny. But in flaunting its artistic credentials, experimental aestheticism ends up resorting to the self-conscious strategies of reflexive distancing which have long since become automatisms of conceptual art practice – the knee-jerk reflexivity which academic commentary has consecrated as the privileged guarantor of sophistication. This is the art that 'raises questions' and 'interrogates' while reinforcing the norms of critical consumption. In this regard, noise's lucid anti-aestheticism and its affinity with rock's knowing unselfconsciousness are among its most invigorating aspects. Embracing the analeptic fury of noise's post-punk roots but refusing its coalescence into a catalogue of stock mannerisms, Smith and Eb.er have produced work that marries conceptual stringency and anti-aestheticist bile while rejecting sub-academic cliché as vehemently as hackneyed expressions of alienation. Each implicates delirious lucidity within libidinal derangement – 'intellect and libido simultaneously tweaked' – allowing analysis and indulgence to interpenetrate.[4]

The sound conjured by To Live and Shave in L.A. is unprecedented: where noise orthodoxy too often identifies sonic extremity with an uninterrupted continuum of distorted screeching, Shave fashion what are ostensibly discrete 'songs' into explosive twisters of writhing sound. On a song like '5 Seconds Off Your Ass', the bracing opener from 1995's demented *Vedder, Vedder, Bedwetter*[5] (whose 'oafish bluster' Smith has since partly disavowed), the music seethes forth in a relentless cacophonous blare that

[3] For an overview of industrial culture see the *Industrial Culture Handbook*, Re# 6/7, edited by V. Vale and A. Juno, San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1983. The best insight into the nascent noise scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s is provided by the magazine *Bananafish*, edited by Seymour Glass, which has only recently ceased publication with issue 18 (2006). An anthology of issues 1-4 was published by Tedium House Publication, San Francisco, in 1994.

[4] *Vedder, Vedder, Bedwetter*, Fifth Column Records, 1995

[5] http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/bio.htm

seems to mimic the Gestus of noise. Yet barely discernible just beneath its smeared surfaces and saturated textures lies an intricately layered structure coupling scrambled speech, keening oscillator, and disfigured bass shards, intermittently punctuated by mangled pop hooks, absurdly disembodied metallic arpeggios and sporadic electronic roars, over which Smith spews out reams of splenetic invective. Where orthodox noise compresses information, obliterating detail in a torrential deluge, Shave construct songs around an overwhelming plethora of sonic data, counterweighing noise's form-destroying entropy through a negentropic overload that destroys noise-as-genre and challenges the listener to engage with a surfeit of information. There is always too much rather than too little to hear at once; an excess which invites repeated listens. The aural fascination exerted by the songs is accentuated by Smith's remarkable libretti, featuring verbal conundrums whose allusiveness baffles and delights in equal measure. Typically cross-splicing scenarios from obscure 1970s pornography with Augustan rhetoric, Smith's ravings resist decipherment through a surplus rather than deficit of sense.[6] And just as Shave's sound usurps formlessness by incorporating an unformalizable surplus of sonic material, Smith's words embody a semantic hypertrophy which can only be transmitted by a vocal that mimes the senseless eructations of glossolalia. Refusing to yield to interpretation, his declamation cannot be separated from the sound within which it is nested. Yet it would be a mistake to confuse Shave's refusal to signify and their methodical subtractions from genre for a concession to postmodern polysemia and eclecticism. Far from the agreeable pastiche of a John Barth or an Alfred Schnittke, the proper analogue would be the total materialization of linguistic form exemplified in the 'written matter' of Pierre Guyotat or Iannis Xenakis' stochastic syntheses of musical structure and substance. Indeed, the only banner which Smith is willing to affix to Shave's work is that of what he calls the 'PRE' aesthetic. PRE is 'a negation of the errant supposition that spiffed-up or newly hatched movements supplant others fit for

[6] Smith: 'My libretti are not random, owe nothing to stochastic or aleatory operations, and in their specificity are rigidly fixed to character. My approach is strictly cinematic.' http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/bio.htm

retirement [...] PRE? As in: all possibilities extant, even the disastrous ones.'[7] PRE could be understood as Smith's response to a quandary concerning musical innovation. The imperative to innovate engenders an antinomy for any given genre. Either one keeps repeating the form of innovation; in which case it becomes formulaic and retroactively negates its own novelty. Or one seeks constantly new types of innovation; in which case the challenge consists in identifying novel forms which will not merely reiterate the old. But one must assume an infinite, hence unactualisable set of forms in order not to repeat, and the limits of finite imagination invariably determine the exhaustion of possibility. It is never enough to keep multiplying forms of invention; one must also produce new genres within which to generate new forms. Noise becomes generic as the form of invention which is obliged to substitute the abstract negation of genre for the production of hitherto unknown genres.[8] Generic noise is condemned to reiterate its abstract negation of genre ad infinitum. The results are not necessarily uninteresting. But 'PRE' intimates an alternative paradigm. Since the totality of possibility is a synonym for God, whom we must renounce, the only available (uncompromisingly secular) totality is that of incompossibles. If all possibilities are extant, this can only be a totality of incompossibles, which harbours as yet unactualised and incommensurable genres. The imperative to actualise incompossibles leads not to eclecticism but to an ascesis of perpetual invention which strives to ward off pastiche by forging previously unimaginable links between currently inexistent genres. It is the injunction to produce the conditions for the actualisation of incompossibles that staves off regression into generic repetition. In *The Wigmaker in 18th Century Williamsburg* (Menlo Park, 2001), this imperative to actualisation results in a music of unparalleled structural complexity, where each song indexes a sound-world whose density defies abbreviation. Here at last dub, glam-rock, musique concrète and electro-acoustic composition are conjoined in a monstrous but exhilarating hybrid.

[7] http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/bio.htm

[8] Interestingly enough, recent years have seen the emergence of sub-categories within the 'noise' genre: 'harsh'; 'quiet'; 'free'; 'ambient', etc. Noise seems to be in the process of subdividing much as metal did in the 1980s and 1990s ('thrash'; 'speed'; 'black'; 'glam', 'power'; 'doom', etc). Nevertheless, the proliferation of qualifying adjectives within an existing genre is not quite the same as the actualisation of previously inexistent genres. Whether these sub-categories will yield anything truly startling remains to be seen.

Eb.er squarely situates Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock under the aegis of actionism. Their performances are not concerts but rather 'psycho-physical tests and training', where both the testing and the training are directed toward the performer as much as the audience. The rationale is not shock and confrontation but rather discipline and concentration, yoked to an unswerving will to perplex. Eb.er and accomplice Dave Phillips slam their faces at accelerating pace into contact-miked plates of spaghetti. Eb.er pounds and gurgles at a piano pausing only to discharge a shotgun which the audience is relieved to learn is loaded with blanks. A woman with a tube inserted into her anus screams in misery as Eb.er blows into it to the strains of an elegiac string accompaniment. Eb.er struggles arduously to extract sounds from contact-miked fish lying dead upon a table. Three Japanese women are filmed imbibing colour-coded liquids which they then vomit into bowls in orchestrated sequence. Or less ostentatiously, but more perplexing still, Eb.er perches upon a stool sporting a woman's wig and chewing anxiously on an electric cable while a latex-masked Joke Lanz stands guard menacingly beside him, balancing what seems to be an antique wireless on his shoulder while the sound of buzzing flies issues around them. These experiments in contrived absurdity, of brief duration but invariably poised at the tipping point between comedic entertainment and intolerable provocation, have earned Eb.er the opprobrium of 'serious' experimental musicians, who are wont to dismiss them as sensation-mongering stunts. But the extraordinary lengths to which Eb.er is prepared to go in conceiving and executing these 'stunts', not to mention the inordinate difficulties he often generates for himself in doing so, immediately contradict the accusation of facileness. What is being ridiculed here is the facile mysticism of those who would sanctify musical experience – more specifically, the experience of listening to 'experimental music', whether composed or improvised – as a pure end in itself: this is the specious mystique of aesthetic experience as ethico-political edification. Far from being a mere pretext, the

auditory component of these actions is as important as their visual aspect and provides the raw material for R&G recordings. These are meticulously edited exercises in discontinuous variation which are constantly re-cycled for further performances. As with Shave, R&G's music is characterized by intricately structured sequences of discrete sonic events strung together in diverging series: sighs, gasps, burps, groans, retchings, barks, growls; dogs, roosters, accordions, yodels, strings, pianos, brass; shouts, roars, thuds, shrieks, and sawings; each series punctuated by precisely defined intervals of silence, which are in turn periodically shattered by crescendos of processed wails that morph into choruses of mournful ululation. The sound of gagging is followed by the sound of bludgeoned flesh and cracking bone; gentle acoustic rustlings are cross-stitched with violent blasts of synthesised blare. The perpetual oscillation between cartoon mischief and psychotic malevolence is at once comic and uncanny. Eb.er describes his editing procedure thus:

> *In Switzerland I used open reels and scalpels, almost surgical. Cutting, cutting, cutting, sewing back. I dig a hole and stay in there with all those blades, tapes, and scissors. I didn't want to mix things up, but to put the knife into the sound of what I did and recorded, inside and outside. What you hear on R&G is real. The action and its body. I just cut the body parts, sew them wrong and cut again – in that timing, 15 years of R&G sounds get divided and divided, grow and grow. I grow my sounds 'biologically', like dividing cells. Cut and let grow.*[9]

This surgical metastasis finds an echo in Eb.er's paintings: oneiric depictions of psychic abjection in which organic and inorganic forms are subjected to cancerous metamorphoses. A transsexual Mickey Mouse sporting disfigured genitalia sprawls in pornographic abandon. A Japanese schoolgirl with a fissured head and single prominent nipple gapes blankly while a diseased landscape yawns through the hole in her face. Some of these an-organic anomalies are redolent of the sexual dysmorphias

[9] From an interview with Drew Daniel, 'Aktion Time Vision', published in *The Wire* 227, January 2003, pp.21-25.

drawn by Hans Bellmer, but Eb.er's paintings are executed with a technical proficiency worthy of artists like Nigel Cooke. Are these contrived and consequently inauthentic tokens of derangement? Or genuinely psychotic but therefore stereotypical symptoms? Over-familiarity has rendered the iconography of Viennese actionism banal: blood, gore, and sexual transgression are now tawdry staples of entertainment. Ironically, even *art brut* looks formulaic to us now. But Eb.er's judicious leavening of the freakish with the cartoonish and his disquieting transpositions of psychic distress into infantile slapstick betray a suspicion of stereotype and a lucidity about the ineliminable complicity between wilfulness and compulsion, perversity and pathology. The embrace of such ambiguity is the voluntary risk undertaken by a man acutely aware of the paradoxes attendant upon his own *mot d'ordre*: 'art not crime'. In this regard, Eb.er's approach is the symptom of a tactical rather than psychiatric dilemma: How to produce art that confronts without sham; art that is unequivocal in its refusal to placate or appease? 'We do not care about any behaviours, standards or civilisation. I don't want new ones. Just none. Bye bye.'[10] Such an exemplary refusal is as likely to be chastised for its irresponsibility as to be patronized for its aberrant, pathological character. It abjures moral condemnations of social psychosis as well as pathetic revendications of victimhood. But perhaps a psychotic who is lucid about the degree to which his estrangement is socially manufactured is a more dangerous political animal than any engaged artist or authentic lunatic?

Debates about noise's subversive or 'critical' potency unfold in a cultural domain whose relationship to the capitalist economy is at once transparent and opaque. Socio-economic factors are obviously relevant here; but their role is easier to invoke than to understand precisely and in the absence of detailed socio-economic analyses,

[10] From an interview with Drew Daniel, 'Aktion Time Vision', published in *The Wire* 227, January 2003, pp.21-25.

the stakes of such debates continue to be largely played out in cultural terms. In this regard, the 'noise' genre is undoubtedly a cultural commodity, albeit of a particularly rarefied sort. But so is its theorization. And the familiar gestures that vitiate the radicality of the former are paralleled by the reactionary tropes which sap the critical potency of the latter. Much contemporary critical theory of a vaguely *marxisant* bent is compromised by conceptual anachronisms whose untruth in the current social context is every bit as politically debilitating as that of the reactionary cultural forms it purports to unmask. Just as 'noise' is neither more nor less inherently subversive than any other commodifiable musical genre, so the categories invoked in order to decipher its political potency cannot be construed as inherently 'critical' while they remain fatally freighted with neo-romantic clichés about the transformative power of aesthetic experience. The invocation of somatic and psychological factors in accounts of the (supposedly) viscerally liberating properties of 'noise' reiterates the privileging of subjective (or inter-subjective) experience in attempts to justify the edificatory virtues of making and listening to experimental music. But neither playing nor listening can continue to be privileged in this way as loci of political subjectivation. The myth of 'experience', whether subjectively or inter-subjectively construed, whether individual or collective, was consecrated by the culture of early bourgeois modernity and continues to loom large in cultural theory.[11] Yet its elevation by idealist philosophers who uphold the primacy of human subjectivity, understood in terms of the interdependency between individual and social consciousness, impedes our understanding of the ways in which the very nature of consciousness is currently being transformed by a culture in which technological operators function as intrinsically determining factors of social being. Technology is now an invasive component of agency. Neurotechnologies, including cognitive enhancers such as modafinil, brain fingerprinting, neural lie-detectors, and nascent brain-computer interfaces, are giving rise to phenotechnologies which will

[11] See for instance Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

eventually usher in the literal manufacturing of consciousness in a way that promises to redraw existing boundaries between personal and collective experience and recast not only extant categories of personal and collective identity, but also those of personal and collective agency. The commodification of experience is not a metaphor played out at the level of ideology and combatable with ideological means, but a concrete neurophysiological reality which can only be confronted with neurobiological resources.[12] Although still ensconced at the cultural rather than neurobiological level, the dissolution of genre prefigures the dissolution of the forms and structure of social existence. If the substantialization of 'experience' is an anachronistic gesture with as little contemporary critical salience as its 'aesthetic' complement, why not jettison it along with the latter and find other ways of articulating whatever critical and political potency music might retain? In this regard, the negation of generic categories exemplified by Shave and Runzelstirn bears a cognitive import which invites us to embrace the eradication of experience as an opportunity to re-fashion the relationship between the social, psychological, and neurobiological factors in the determination of culture. Since experience is a myth, what do we have to lose? To eradicate experience would be to begin to intervene in the sociological determination of neurobiology as well as in the neurobiological determination of culture. Here, the cognitive and cultural import of art cannot be separated from its formal and structural resources: the radicality of the latter must be concomitant with the radicality of the former. Shave and Runzelstirn not only mean something different than other experimental musics; they *mean* differently. Where noise orthodoxy substantialises its putative negation of genre into an easily digestible sonic stereotype, which simply furnishes a novel experience – the hapless but nevertheless entertaining roar of feedback – Shave and Runzelstirn construct the sound of generic anomaly – a hiatus in what is recognizable *as* experience – by fusing hitherto incommensurable sonic categories in a way that draws attention to the synthetic

[12] For a discussion of the scientific and philosophical ramification of these developments, see Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (New York: Basic Books, forthcoming 2009). For a vivid fictional dramatization of this predicament, see *Scott Bakker's Neuropath* (Orion Books, 2008).

character of all experience: dub cut-up, free-glam, and electro-acoustic punk for Shave; cartoon *musique concrète* and slapstick art brut for Runzelstirn. Both groups deploy an analytical delirium which steadfastly refuses the inane clichés of subcultural 'transgression' on one hand, while obviating the stilted mannerisms of academic conceptualism on the other. Neither sounds like 'noise'; yet it is their refusal to substantialise the negation of musical genre that has led them to produce music which sounds like nothing else before it. The abstract negation of genre issues in the sterile orthodoxies of 'noise' as pseudonym for experimental vanguardism, and the result is either the stifling preciousness of officially sanctioned art music or (worse) the dreary machinations of a 'sound art' which merely accentuates and hypostatizes 'listening experience'. But by forcefully short-circuiting incommensurable genres, Shave and Runzelstirn engender the noise of generic anomaly. It is the noise that is not 'noise', the noise of the *sui generis*, that actualises the disorientating potencies long claimed for 'noise'.[13]

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[13] Further information about both groups can be found on their respective websites: http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/ and http://www.artnotcrime.net/r+g/

Towards a Social Ontology of Improvised Sound Work

Bruce Russell

INTRODUCTION

Improvised sound work is one of the key areas of inter-generic hybridity in contemporary music. Any attempt to identify a social role and agree on a cultural meaning for such improvisational practice must grapple first with issues of definition. These issues are especially acute for emerging hybrid practices because their practical development outstrips the ability of the available critical/ideological structures to provide useful and generally agreed definitions for them.

Situationist theory remains a uniquely powerful tool for the criticism of culture under the rule of the commodity. As such, an analysis of the revolutionary critical praxis of the Situationist International (SI) has much to contribute to an understanding of all forms of culture – and improvised sound work in particular.

The central Situationist terms of 'spectacle', 'psychogeography' and the 'constructed situation' are of great help in defining the ontology of improvised sound work: what it *is*; and also its teleology: what it is *for*. Central to this is the understanding of the Situationist project as an attempt to build a new form of subjectivity, of social consciousness.

Strong analogies exist between this 'critical praxis' as practiced by the SI, and the modes of engagement characteristic of improvised sound work. Building on these analogies it is possible to start constructing a social ontology. This framework of theory may then be able to be used to collate and interpret empirical data for an ethnography. This will reveal what the 'practice community' understands this work to be, and may be used as the basis for hypotheses about its wider usefulness for 'human practice and [...] the comprehension of this practice'.[1]

[1] Eighth thesis on Feuerbach. D. McLellan (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: OUP. 1977. p.157

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this discussion I propose to use the term '*improvised sound work*' to describe an activity in which I am engaged. I regard it as art because it is part of an attempt to understand human reality without either describing or analysing it. Art, in my definition, is neither a description nor an analysis. It is rather an analogue of human reality - an attempt to map the process of integration of the subject and object in history.[2]

This activity is *improvised* because it seeks to make this contribution to the map of human reality spontaneously, without premeditation, and without consideration for later accurate replication by any means other than real-time recording. It is *sound* because the audible realisation of the artwork is made without regard for the rules, conventions and agreed methods of creation and presentation which would allow society as a whole to define it as music. It does however encompass the methods of music, without limiting itself in any way. It is work because it is a product of praxis, which is the constitution of human reality through the process of integration of the subject and object in history.[3]

I regard these issues of definition as central to any real understanding of this activity. When casual acquaintances ask me: 'What kind of music do you do?' – I find it almost impossible to offer any answer at all, much less a meaningful one. This is because we share no common terminology with which to conduct the discussion – hence their unconscious abortion of their questions at birth by their use of the term 'music' to describe my work. It is like asking a breeder of llamas what kind of sheep they raise.

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[2] F. Beiser. Hegel. *New York: Routledge*. 2005. p.285. see also G.H.R. Parkinson. Georg Lukacs. London: Routledge. 1977. p.133

[3] This is what materialists like Feuerbach, according to Marx, do not understand as 'practical-critical' activity. D. McLellan. Op. cit. p.156

When I explain that they wouldn't really think of it as music, my interlocutors think I am being modest. It is important to me to be understood clearly, and when I speak about my work I tend not to be modest. On the contrary, I usually make claims for my work so global they can easily be misinterpreted as megalomania, because the actual development of this sphere of activity outstrips the ability of the available critical/ ideological structures to contain it.

Central to any attempt to understand a category of art practice is the identification of an agreed social role and cultural meaning. These issues are especially acute because improvised sound work is an emerging hybrid form, combining concepts, methods and tactics from a number of other more established forms of practice. These include genres of music (such as - improvisation, rock, electro-acoustic, and jazz), as well as of art (such as - sound, time-based media, kinetic sculpture, and performance).

As a developing practice, and because of its improvisational method, this sound work is inherently self-critical. It is this which ensures its sharpness as a tool for exposing reification in other forms of culture.[4]

The establishment of a coherent theoretical understanding will enhance our capacity to undertake this form of praxis. The attempt to define such a theoretical understanding of the 'cultural meaning' of an art practice is what I mean by a 'social ontology'. I use the term in a sense inspired by Georg Lukacs' posthumous work *The Ontology of Social Existence*. In an early attempt to summarise the significance of this work, Parkinson[5] described how Lukacs used the term 'social existence' to emphasise the study of 'what is objectively *there*, existing independently of the mind that studies it'.[6] His use of 'ontology' in this connection did not imply any causal priority

[4] 'The only valid experimental attitude is one based on the uncompromising critique of existing conditions and their conscious supercession... Creation is not the arrangement of objects and forms, but the invention of new laws for such an arrangement.' G. Debord. 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organisation and Action of the International Situationist Tendency'. In T. McDonough (ed.). *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Books. 2002. p.43

[5] G.H.R. Parkinson. Op. cit. p.145

[6] Ibid.

was being given to the 'theory of existence'. Rather it was used to describe the derivation of categories from the study of reality.

This 'social ontology' is therefore the uncovering of the general categories relating to the existence of a sphere of art praxis from an analysis of actual social reality. The question is, how will the categories be derived? We can begin from external reality as it appears to the naïve observer, consisting of a jumble of unmediated facticity - or from a deeper understanding of that reality, based on a genuinely critical perspective.

The latter is clearly the more profitable path, matching that described by Marx in his methodological discussion in the well-known 'General Introduction' to the *Grundrisse*. There Marx illustrates the danger of the 'rationalisation of the world' which Lukacs argued is characteristic of reified bourgeois thought.[7] Reified systems of thought, viewed as separate sets of partial systems, appear both as internally consistent and as unchallengeable as natural laws.

However reified thought disregards the concrete nature of reality viewed as a 'totality' of interconnected parts, understood from the standpoint of the whole. From this standpoint the social totality is always open to potential contestation. Marx therefore cautions against starting with apparently 'concrete' particulars such as 'population' (or, he might as well offer: 'music').

> *The concrete is concrete because it is a combination of many determinations, i.e. a unity of diverse elements. In our thought therefore it appears as a process of synthesis, as a result, not as a starting point... although it is the starting point of observation...*[8]

[7] G. Lukacs. *History and Class-consciousness*. London: Merlin Press. 1971. p.101

[8] K. Marx. 'General Introduction', in D. McLellan. *Marx's Grundrisse*. St. Albans: Paladin. 1973. p.45

Marx makes plain that if we start our analysis at the level of a concrete thing-in-itself considered just as it 'appears', then the complete conception passes into a merely abstract definition. But if we proceed correctly, starting from abstract definitions of simple ideas (what he refers to as 'simple determinations'), then they will build up in the course of reasoning - considered in their concrete relations to each other as they really appear - into a picture of the concrete subject considered in relation to the totality.

As we have seen, this approach is not ontology understood as the deduction of reality from logical categories: it is *the deduction of those categories from reality*. As Marx put it:

> *The method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete is but the way of thinking by which the concrete is grasped and is reproduced in our mind... It is by no means, however, the process which itself generates the concrete.*[9]

Our path therefore leads from the abstract to the concrete. We will move through an engagement with truly critical theory, towards an element of ethnography, the study of what Phill Niblock calls 'the motion of people working'. It will be an examination of what Lukacs termed a mediation of totality, an analysis of a part of social reality leading to an understanding of its relation to the whole.[10]

This analysis will give rise to an understanding of both what improvised sound work is, ontologically: and also what it is for, teleologically. This is because to understand a thing in its relation to totality is to know what Hegel termed its 'concept' (*Begriff*) – its essence and its purpose: in Aristotelian terms, its formal-final cause.[11]

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[9] K. Marx. 'General Introduction', in D. McLellan. *Marx's Grundrisse*. St. Albans: Paladin. 1973. p.45

[10] L. Kolakowski. *Main Currents of Marxism*. Oxford: OUP. 1978. v.3, p.265

[11] F. Beiser. Op. cit. p.81

My hope is that an understanding of the concept of improvised sound work in relation to the totality of early 21st century society will eventually provide a full answer to the question: '*What kind of music do you do?*' It will also deal with the almost inevitable corollary: '*Why would you do THAT?*'

TOOLS

This raises the question of exactly how we might undertake a theoretical analysis of a mediated part of the early-21st century social totality? Clearly we need some tools to enable us to build up an accurate picture of 'concrete things' - such as mediated social realities. Marx has bequeathed us a philospophical basis – practical materialism; and a method - his material dialectic.[12] Unfortunately world-political exigencies of the last century have tended to detract from, rather than enhance, our understanding of how to apply this to concrete social reality.

Some theoretical advances were however made in the 20th century, notably by Lukacs and some of his de-Stalinised French heirs such as Lefebvre, and by some of those who have followed the 'philosophy of praxis' approach first signalled by Gramsci.[13] Despite this, there is only one thinker who has really been able to synthesize these tentative advances in theoretical understanding, and fully apply them to both theory and practice in a way that marks a genuine advance over all other efforts. That person is Guy Debord, the author of what some regard as 'the *only* political writing of our time'[14], and a man who did not assume as many did, that the failure of capitalism to materially pauperise the great mass of those under its sway signalled the death-knell of Marx's 'outdated' imaginings.

[12] Preface to G. Lukacs. Op. cit. p.xlii

[13] For example A. Sanchez Vazquez. *The Philosophy of Praxis*. London: Merlin Press. 1977

[14] *Foreword to A. Jappe*. Guy Debord. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1999. p.vii

Despite the efforts of many to limit understanding of the Situationist project, helmed by Debord from 1957 to 1971, to a mere *avant garde* in art, the truth is that it *was* that, and much more. It is the 'much more' that makes Debord's writings able, I argue, to be used for the kind of 'big picture' theorising I am outlining here. Situationist theory is a uniquely powerful tool for the criticism of culture under the rule of the commodity - because of its understanding both of culture, and of its relationship to the perverted totality on which it depends. Despite the still-poorly understood tensions between social revolution and cultural subversion in the revolutionary praxis of the SI, it has much to contribute to an understanding of all forms of culture.The central Situationist terms which will be of help in defining the ontology of improvised sound work are 'constructed situation', 'spectacle' and 'unitary urbanism'. In order to elucidate the significance of these some background is required.

The work of the SI began in the early 1950s, under the rubric of the Letterist International, and prior to about 1961 most of the group's activity could be seen as a continuation of the work characteristic of earlier artistic *avant garde* groups, primarily Dada and Surrealism. A number of talismanic individuals defined a certain aesthetic of life which cast light on many of the group's preoccupations – these included Isidore Ducasse (le comte de Lautréamont), Arthur Cravan, Saint-Just, Machiavelli, Francois Villon, Thomas de Quincey, Cardinal de Retz and Guido Cavalcanti – as well as groups such as the Cathars, the Durruti Column, the Frondeurs, the Communards and the Enragés. One of the key themes uniting these diverse inspirations was the tendency towards total negation, destruction and opposition to established social formations.

Along with a certain hooligan perspective, and an impulse towards derangement of the senses, went a thorough-going concern for theoretical rigour. One of the central

and ongoing activities of these groups was the publication of journals and the pursuit of theoretical debate in an attempt to understand how society was sick, and where the pressure points for change might be. Central to this was Debord's conviction that the key concept in Marx's critique of capitalism was reification, defined in the 1859 *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* as 'the product of universal alienation'.[15] The concept of reification, brought to prominence by Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*, represents the other side of the duality implicit in the concept of alienation, as outlined by Marx in his earlier works. The primarily anthropological concept of alienation implies the loss of aspects of human autonomy to structural forces within the prevailing mode of production. Reification explains how these aspects of autonomy become associated with economic products, which take up apparently independent social power over humanity as commodities.

Debord's genius lay in understanding that as reification became more and more universal in late capitalism, it made a dialectical transformation of quantity into quality. The exchange value relation (having), which had abstracted from the use value relation prevalent in pre-capitalist formations (being), became further abstracted into an even more purely 'hypostatised abstraction', the rule of images (appearing).[16] This inexorable drive towards pure quantification and abstraction, Debord termed the spectacle. The mass-media is merely the most superficial, obvious and banal manifestation of this internal drive of capitalist social relations.

Lukacs expressed the form in which this 'spectacularisation' arose from the capitalist mode of production in the following terms:

> *As labour is progressively rationalised and mechanised [the worker's] lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more*

[15] K.Marx. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.* Moscow: Progress Publishers. 1970. p.47

[16] A. Jappe. Op. cit. p.12-14

contemplative... towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man's consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system...[17]

Corresponding to this increasing abstraction, for Debord, was the tendency for commodities to become entirely identical and interchangeable as carriers of value. The ultimate form of the commodity, when all concrete content and possible use value has been leached from it, is time itself. In the society ruled by the 'spectacle-commodity' the only real commodity is time, understood as the most abstract form of exchange value. Realising this, the Situationists aligned their attacks upon the spectacle to concentrate all their force on the absolute negation of the commodification of time, through the deployment of their ultimate weapon: the 'constructed situation'.

Central to this is the understanding of the Situationist project as an attempt to build a new form of subjectivity, a new form of social consciousness. This was their project - to break outside the 'perfectly closed system' of the spectacle, and re-enter *real lived experience*.

An understanding of how new forms of consciousness can arise in advance of fundamental changes to the relations of production is one of the central – but least well understood - questions of practical materialism. The work of the SI in building on the insights of Lukacs' so-called 'Messianic phase' illuminates these questions across the whole sphere of cultural production.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND ART

The 'vulgar Marxist' understanding of consciousness as a social product holds that consciousness is fully determined by the economic base of society. In this rigidly

[17] G. Lukacs. Op. cit. p.89. Reference partially cited in G. Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books. 1995. p.25

deterministic model the problem arises of how the consciousness which will give rise to change can possibly appear. How can the proletariat, as revolutionary subject, develop a future-oriented revolutionary consciousness while subject to the rule of capital?

Lukacs was one of first of Marx's successors, building on the revolutionary praxis demonstrated so effectively by Lenin, to ask how this could be possible. His conclusion was that a much more finely-nuanced understanding of ideology was needed. Lukacs admitted, as Marx himself did in all but his most polemical writings, that the determination of the 'superstructure' by the 'base' must include a feedback loop of secondary determination:

> *One of the elementary rules of class warfare was to advance beyond what was immediately given... For because of its situation this contradiction is introduced directly into the consciousness of the proletariat....* [18]

This addresses one of the perennial problems of revolutionary praxis, how can reified thought be replaced 'overnight' by a form of consciousness suitable to the building of a new form of human society? Building on the advances in sociological understanding characteristic of the mid-twentieth century *gauchiste* precursors, notably Henri Lefebvre, the focus of criticism was brought to bear on 'everyday life', and the way to 'advance beyond what was immediately given' was found in practical experimentation with how life is lived, with the subjective effects of the objective activities of real people.

Debord himself was quite certain that the reason he was later so *persona non grata* with the French state was nothing to do with the events of May 1968, but rather depended on the way that he had lived in 1952, while initially developing the practices of dérive and détournement. It was his 'imagining that one could rebel'[19] that was crucial to the later revolutionary programme with which his name remains associated.

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[18] G. Lukacs. Op. cit. p. 72 (emphasis added)

[19] G. Debord. *Panegyric: volumes 1 and 2*. London: Verso. 2004. p.23

As the SI evolved out of the LI, their ideas evolved out of a set of connected practices: dérive, détournement and psychogeography. These in turn gave rise to a set of theoretical concepts: spectacle, constructed situation and unitary urbanism.

The SI defined culture as 'a compound of aesthetics, feelings, and manners, that is... a period's reaction to everyday life'.[20] It is, furthermore: 'the ensemble of means through which a society thinks of itself and shows itself to itself'.[21] It was regarded as being in an advanced stage of 'decomposition' under the control of the ruling ideology. This control 'recuperates' all oppositional tendencies, ensuring: 'the trivialisation of subversive discoveries', and their wide circulation only 'after sterilisation'.[22]

For the Situationists, as for Lukacs, culture was not seen as merely determined. It is not only: 'the reflection, but also the foreshadowing, of possibilities for life's planning'.[23] This 'foreshadowing' offered the opportunity within existing society for Lukacs': '*advance beyond what was immediately given*'.

The opportunities for 'revolutionary action within culture'[24] seemed timely in the stultifying atmosphere of the 1950s, especially given the degeneration of the pre-War *avant garde* movements. One of the prime requirements for such work to be 'revolutionary' was the radical rejection of exchange value, the cornerstone of all reification and spectacularisation. As a consequence of this the LI and later the SI valorised the concept of the 'potlatch': the profligate and intentionally wasteful gift-giving practices characteristic of many indigenous Pacific peoples. In potlatch gifts were given in a competitive and escalating sequence directed to socially-connective ends diametrically opposed to any concept of equivalence or exchange. This form of praxis appealed to the Situationists because it 'annihilated' the basis of reification in society.

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[20] G. Debord. *Report on the Construction of Situations...* In T. McDonough (ed.). Op. cit. p.30

[21] G. Debord and P. Canjuers. 'Preliminaries Toward Defining a Unitary Revolutionary Program'. In K. Knabb (ed.) *Situationist International Anthology.* Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets. 1981. p.305

[22] G. Debord. *Report on the Construction of Situations...* In T. McDonough (ed.). Op. cit. p.31

[23] G. Debord. Op. cit. p.29

[24] G. Debord. Op. cit. p.42

Any cultural praxis directed towards commerce of any sort fell under the interdiction of the collective as 'careerist', ultimately accounting for numerous individual exclusions.

The SI pursued the policy of 'revolutionary action within culture' actively until about 1962, turning at that point in favour of direct political action, as Debord determined presciently that the opportunity had arisen in Europe for such activity.

While it is, as has been pointed out, a distortion to over-emphasise the aesthetic aspects of Debord's theories,[25] it is correspondingly inappropriate to deny their trenchancy and ongoing worth. The 'revolution of everyday life' must, after all be thorough-going, or nothing at all. There was an ambivalence in Debord's attitude to artistic praxis. Having announced in 1959 that modern art had 'superceded itself' and that 'the world of artistic expression... has already lapsed'[26], Debord himself certainly returned his earlier critical praxis in the cinema with redoubled enthusiasm following May 1968. On balance the judgement on the supercession of art might correspond to Chou en Lai's famous caveat on the outcome of the French Revolution: 'it's too early to tell'.

The 'constructed situation' was, as already stated, the ultimate weapon which Debord grasped first in 1952. This was defined as 'a moment of time concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambiance and a game of events'.[27] It represented a negation of the 'totality' of the spectacle. Where the ruling relations of production and their ideas are to be challenged, their seamless envelopment of all of subjective reality cannot be criticised by 'partial' or (to use Debord's term), 'sterilised' means. The solution is the re-invention of life outside the rules unilaterally laid down by the spectacle.

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[25] A. Jappe. Op. cit. p.179

[26] Editorial Notes to *Internationale Situationiste #3: The Meaning of Decay in Art*. In T. McDonough (ed.). Op. cit. p.90

[27] *Definitions*. In K. Knabb (ed.) Op.cit. p.45

The 'constructed situation' involves a rupture, an abrupt seizure of collective control of both time and space, and it is within this 'integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behaviour' that a new consciousness has a chance to develop.[28] 'Unitary urbanism first becomes clear in the use of the whole of arts and techniques as means cooperating in an integral composition of the environment... [it] must control, for example, the acoustic environment.'[29] This is the SI's understanding of what 'unitary urbanism' could achieve.

The evaluation of unitary urbanism put into action through the praxis of the dérive was referred to as psychogeography: 'the study of the specific effects of the... environment, consciously organised or not, on... individuals'.[30] In the classic praxis of the LI and the SI unitary urbanism was implemented across all of everyday life through the dérive, and specifically within the field of art through détournement. This latter was a specific approach to plagiarism on the 'Lautréamontian/Ducassian' model, implying both the hijacking of cultural elements and their re-presentation in new aesthetic contexts to promote an oppositional understanding of the decomposed culture of the prevailing mode of production.

One of the foundational texts of this perspective on revolutionary action in culture is Chtcheglov's *Formulary for a New Urbanism* (1953) which contains the celebrated exhortation: 'No longer setting out for the hacienda...Now that's finished. You'll never see the hacienda. It doesn't exist. *The hacienda must be built*.'[31] Obscure and evocative as these words are, they come into sharp relief when seen as a détournement in their own right; in this case of Lukacs' formulation of the relationship of the vanguard Party to the development of class-consciousness in the proletariat: 'The Party does not exist: it comes into being'.[32]

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[28] Definition of 'unitary urbanism'. Ibid.

[29] G. Debord. *Report on the Construction of Situations...* In T. McDonough (ed.). Op. cit. p.44

[30] Definition of 'psychogeography'. Ibid.

[31] I. Chtcheglov. *Formulary for a New Urbanism*. In K. Knabb (ed.) Op.cit. p. 1

[32] G. Lukacs. 'Lenin'. Cited in *G.H.R. Parkinson*. Op. cit. p. 54

This parallelism shows how the praxis of unitary urbanism was directed at the remodelling of collective consciousness into a 'foreshadowing' of revolutionary forms. This is directly analogous to, but more radical and more 'practical' than, the role of the merely political Party or cadre. Rather than building a political consciousness and will in a social fraction, the project of the SI was the creation of an entirely new species of humanity through praxis: *homo ludens*.[33]

SOCIAL ONTOLOGY

From this brief overview of the 'critical praxis' of the SI, we can indicate clear parallels and analogies with the modes of engagement characteristic of improvised sound work. These include explorations of structure, sound, duration, and subjective perception as well as the practices of the 'collaborative potlatch', experimentation with alternative performance-experiences, and the radical rejection of the cult of the composer, the 'rules' of music and the hierarchical models of composition, score-reading and conduction.

Using the taxonomic concepts derived from this analysis of Situationist theory and practice we can outline a 'social ontology' which could subsequently be delineated in more detail by means of ethnographic research. At this point it is not necessary to exhaustively cite historically documented examples of the concepts under consideration in actual use. No doubt interested readers can provide many of these from their own experience, as all these phenomena are considered here only by virtue of their being widespread and ubiquitous.

The first concept to consider is the stance of the SI with regards to existing social conditions under the rule of the commodity-spectacle: 'criticism'.

[33] A. Hussey. *The Game of War: the Life and Death of Guy Debord*. London: Jonathan Cape. 2001. p.74

In 1963 Debord stated categorically that:

Critical art can be produced as of now using the existing means of cultural expression, that is, everything from the cinema to paintings... Critical in its content, such art must also be critical of itself in its very form.[34]

Improvised sound work fulfils this requirement by continually critiquing its own existence through the method of its own creation – and by serving at the same time as a critique of its doppelganger: music.

As an improviser I can take up, prolong, or abandon any piece of work at any time during, before or after a performance. No duration, no form and no means of production are given in advance, the work is provisional in every regard. What is more, if there is more than one artist working together, they too all have the freedom to take up or abandon the work individually, reliant on no other consideration than: 'does this work meet my criteria of validity at this moment?'

Furthermore, sound work implicitly and insistently serves as a criticism of 'music', which is generally understood to have 'meaning'. Improvised sound work - considered as noise - draws attention to the sham nature of communication under the sign of the spectacle in a rude and incontrovertible fashion:

By means of the spectacle the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise... if the administration of society and all contact between people now depends on the intervention of such 'instant' communication, it is because this communication is essentially one-way... Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle.[35]

[34] G. Debord. *The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art.* In T. McDonough (ed.). Op. cit. p.164

[35] G. Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle.* p.19-20

The most efficient way to respond to this monologue is by returning the gift in a howl of screeching hate-filled noise. 'One never really contests an organisation of existence without contesting all of that organisation's forms of language.'[36]

Improvisation is also at the heart of the concept of the dérive, an apparently aimless meandering concealing a hidden agenda of negation. The strongest analogies exist on the continuum of time, as in both cases the activity often consists of taking as little conscious care as possible as to direction and goal, while focusing entirely on the experience of the lived moment. Improvisation proceeds by listening as each moment passes as a basis for entering the next moment, often in a fashion surprising to all those involved. The principal idea being to create an experience which is unparalleled and informed not by conscious thought, which can be too easily 'sterilised' by the alienated totality. For their part, the proponents of the dérive: 'said that oblivion was their ruling passion. They wanted to reinvent everything each day...'[37]

As far as the spatial considerations of the dérive are concerned, improvised sound work is often presented in 'non-standard performance spaces', guerrilla venues, squats, lofts, living room or basement clubs. Being outside of the so-called 'music industry' which purveys alienated entertainment products that 'joyously express their slave sentiments',[38] sound work can create, for brief periods of time 'constructed situations' where 'unitary ambiences' of sound, *mise en scène*, and selected audiences of initiated *enfants perdus* can briefly combine to 'foreshadow' 'a few aspects of a provisional microsociety'.[39] Recently the mid-western United States has been flecked with clandestine outbreaks of precisely this kind.[40]

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[36] G.Debord. *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Period of Time* (screenplay). In K. Knabb (ed.) Op.cit. p.30

[37] G. Debord. Op. cit. p.2

[38] G. Debord. Op. cit. p.33

[39] G. Debord. Op. cit. p.29

[40] See the comments by members of Wolf Eyes on the performance situation in Michigan around 2002 in A. Licht. 'Call of the Wild'. In *The Wire* #249, Nov 2004. p. 43

These provisional 'unitary ambiences' are also the best venues for experimentation with long-duration works, which blur the boundaries between performance and installation, though galleries, 'art spaces' and rehearsal studios are also used. Immersion in an experiential environment which mimics aspects of the psychedelic experience without explicit undertaking as to termination is a characteristic of many artists' work across the globe. This is a way of taking control of the subjective perception of time, which the spectacle destroys by creating an eternal present of 'unified irreversible time', that is: 'the time of economic production – time cut up into equal abstract fragments'.[41] This aspect of performance represents the return of the perception of historical time, in which progression and change are both real and under human control.

While Debord employed the tactic of détournement principally in the spheres of literature and, pre-eminently, the cinema, it is an equally useful model for sound work employing previously recorded segments of audio. While the models for this work come from classical electro-acoustics and *musique concrète*, and Jamaican dub culture, the 're-cycling' of pirated sections of other recordings – viewed within a prism of critical-revolutionary praxis - fulfils very specific functions.

In terms of Debord's theories, as Giorgio Agamben has shown, the twin handmaidens of repetition and stoppage: 'carry out the messianic task of cinema...This task essentially involves creation. But it is not new creation after the first... [it] is an act of de-creation'.[42] This engagement with history in the Marxist sense is always messianic and eschatological – end-oriented, and headed for judgement. The dialectically-entwined poles - repetition and stoppage - are modelling in analogic form the devoutly sought-after human intervention in the progress of history - which the spectacle, on the contrary, is meanwhile perpetually telling us is *already over*.

[41] G. Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. p.107

[42] G. Agamben. *Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's Films*. In T. McDonough (ed.). Op. cit. p.318

In improvised sound work this engagement with the perception of history through détournement is another example of the 'constructed situation' operating on reformation of consciousness. Now, in the era of digital sound, it is ubiquitous. Even the commonly-used nomenclature 'electro-acoustic improvisation' [EAI] presumes it.

Far from 'proving' the end of history, this ubiquity merely proves the truth of William Burroughs' 'curse go back' magico-symbolic cut-up disruptions of 'control' in rue Git-le-Coeur.[43] Burroughs, like Hegel, has 'inverted the dialectic', and the work he imagined to be operating on the level of magic, in fact stands firmly on its own two feet, working on the transformation of the consciousness of real people in 'unreal' spectacular time. It is in its essence critical and revolutionary: 'the fluid language of anti-ideology'.[44]

International common practice in the improvised sound underground also valorises the Debordian concept of the 'potlatch'. The gift occurs most characteristically in the realm of collaboration in artistic creation. Large, often excessive and unlistenable, parcels of recordings are given to initiate collaborative work. As in the Pacific origins of the concept, the giving often has an element of competition, and direct equivalency of exchange is never an appropriate consideration.

More important is the subsequent aesthetic exchange of the act of creation. Recordings are submitted to a process of often serial alteration, each laminal layer of accretion and treatment erasing much of what went before, until what is left is a pure melding of personal *mana*, the attribution of the artists' names, associated together with a piece of work in effect *is* the content of the artwork, in which each has given their own soul to create a new unity of personal essence. The odour of *voudoun* or of cargo cult is almost palpable.

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[43] B.Gysin. *Here to Go: Planet R101*. San Francisco: Re/Search Publications. 1982. p.194-198

[44] G. Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. p.146

The same is true of collaboration in performance, which can be both at once competitive and mutually validatory for participants. The gift of *mana*, or reputation, in an area of practice where actual financial returns are often negligible, makes the potlatch of collaboration a way to symbolically liquidate the most valuable of commodities: time.

Improvised sound work is, however, most radically marked in its rejection of the previously unquestioned hierarchies of composition. Improvisation abolishes the division of the musical sphere of culture into what Debord termed 'the generalised... and stable division between directors and executants... the separation between "understanding" and "doing"'.[45] This 'separation' is one of the fundamental aspects of the spectacle, as is the separation between image and reality, the spectacle and its audience. 'The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation... superior to the world.'[46]

This rejection of 'direction' either by composers, bandleaders or even by scores, is one of the things hardest to accept for those who are not accustomed to turning the weapons of criticism against the prevailing order. Their instinctive reactions are the negative and unassailable conclusions: 'you can't do that' and (my personal favourite) 'that's not music'.

The roots of this improvisatory approach in modern music began within the African-American diaspora, building on indigenous African traditions. However, a key eruption of completely free improvisation - unshackled from any established idiomatic musical vocabulary - burst into coherently-programmatic group practice at the root of the Ur-Minimalist enterprise in New York in 1963. As Tony Conrad has put it: 'the music was not to be a "conceptual" activity... it would instead be structured around

[45] G. Debord and P. Canjuers. *Preliminaries...* In K. Knabb (ed.) Op. cit. p.305

[46] G. Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. p.22

pragmatic activity, around direct gratification in the realisation of the moment... '[47] As well as the Theatre of Eternal Music, the early 1960s also saw groups as diverse as AMM, Joseph Holbrooke and MEV bring improvisation to the fore as a thorough-going and radical strategy. From this has grown the entire tradition of improvisation in sound.

By the same token, this rejection of separation is the most important thing about improvisation in sound – it is the core of its radical criticism both of its own form and its content. It is moreover a product of the unity between its mode of inquiry and its mode of presentation. In the case of this form of praxis they are one and the same thing, and the greatest merit of this work is that it models a form of activity not predicated on separation, either in space or time. It depends rather on its unity.

> *The critique of culture manifests itself as unified: ...in that it is no longer separable from the critique of the social totality. It is this unified theoretical critique that goes alone to its rendezvous with a unified social practice.*[48]

CONCLUSIONS

These ontological categories may now be built on by means of historical and contemporary ethnographic research. It will then be possible to start constructing a social epistemology of improvised sound work, building up towards an understanding of the concrete social totality. This will be a more or less coherent picture of what the 'practice community' understands this work to be, built on theoretical categories supported by empirical evidence. On this basis an aesthetic of improvised sound may be, if it is found to be desirable, finally deducible.

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[47] T. Conrad. 'Liner notes to Four Violins' (1964). *LP: Table of the Elements*. 1996

[48] G. Debord. Op. cit. p.147

The match between the critical praxis of the SI and this provisional social ontology of improvised sound work is, as I have shown, highly suggestive. This impression is strengthened by even a cursory consideration of the structural and methodological aspects Guy Debord's cinematographic works, but that will have to be the subject of another essay.

In addition we may, as we have seen, use the matrix of this critical praxis to reveal the wider purpose which this work may fulfil for culture and society as a whole. Whether or not many, if any, of the practitioners consciously acknowledge the implications of this critical praxis is immaterial:

> *This... constitutes an analysis far removed from the naïve description of what men in fact thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history... The relation with concrete totality and the dialectical determinants arising from it transcend pure description and yield the category of objective possibility... That is to say it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation.*[49]

> *To say that class consciousness has no psychological reality does not imply that it is a mere fiction... Of course this uncertainty and lack of clarity are themselves the symptoms of the crisis in bourgeois society.*[50]

For me this analysis provides a clear guide to where the answer might be found to both those vexing questions: '*What kind of music do you do?*' and '*Why would you do THAT?*'

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[49] G. Lukacs. *History and Class-consciousness*. p.51

[50] G. Lukacs. Op. cit. p.75-76

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Woman Machines: the Future of Female Noise

Nina Power

The future masters of technology will have to be light-hearted and intelligent. The machine easily masters the grim and the dumb.

– Marshall McLuhan

Factory workers in the previous centuries have indirectly been the most sustained and brutal players of Noise. Recognition of our past should always be present.

– Mattin,"Theses on Noise, IX"

In February 1966, a group of Belgian women working in arms manufacture demand equal pay for equal work. Calling themselves 'women machines, they go on strike', disrupting work for twelve weeks, behaving in the same way, they claimed, 'as one carries out a war'...

– History book

Women have always been desired by the machine. It needs them for their deftness, their smaller hands, their capacity to work quickly and, initially at least, to demand less for doing so. The proliferation of typewriters and telephones in 1870s and 1880s, and the concomitant mechanisation of information, allowed women to compete for jobs they could easily do better than men. In other words, 'a large number of higher-salaried men with pens who added columns of four-digit numbers rapidly in their heads were replaced by lower-salaried office workers, many of them women, with machines' (Lisa Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper*).

Rarely, of course, have women ever been on the side of construction (though Waterloo Bridge, the longest bridge in London, rebuilt by women during World War II, magnificently undermines the idea that women's work is 'small-scale'). For women, as Sartre famously noted, *the machine dreams through them*, inculcating just the right level of distraction for maximising performance – the erotic dreams of machine attendants a curious by-product of the repetition of labour.

If women have historically operated as conduits for the dreams of machines, then noise too has a peculiarly female quality, from typing pools to sewing factories to switchboard operators. In a sense, we have always been secretly aware of the privileged relationship between women, technology and noise: that most fantastically energetic and machinic of data, conversation, has always been regarded, for better or worse, as the preserve of women; indeed, women's speech is often dismissed as 'noise' – Immanuel Kant in the *Anthropology* peevishly banishes 'the girls' to the other room for frivolous chatter, while the men slowly and soberly discuss the important issues of the day.

When silver screen actress Hedy Lamarr co-invented a secret communication system in order to help the allies defeat the Germans in World War II, MGM kept this aspect of her life under wraps as incompatible with her 'star' image (even though she had already done her best to deflate the illusion, even at the very beginning of film idolatry: 'any girl can be glamorous. All she has to do is stand still and look stupid').

From mangles to washing machines, dictation to cryptography, espionage and wartime code-breaking, manipulating and mechanising the feedback of machine, information and transmission has usually needed women a lot more than it has needed men.

> *Machinery does not lose its use value as soon as it ceases to be capital. … It does not at all follow that subsumption under the social relation of capital is the most appropriate and ultimate social relation of production for the application of machinery.*
>
> *– Karl Marx, 'Grundrisse'*

Capital was and is increasingly feminised via its machines; high-rise gyno-capitalism literally *making nothing*, better and faster, as the circuits babble ceaselessly among themselves. A million data-entry workers sigh as the tips of fingernails clatter interminably; call-centres trilling with the trained tones of treble-tone perfection; fembot recordings at stations instructing harried commuters where to be and when. Far from possessing a deep-seated aversion to the unnatural, the contrived, the processed, women have forever shown their speedy capacity to adapt to and out-automate the machine, even as it uses and abuses them in turn. Any appeal to the supposed 'naturalness' of women, or some sort of privileged relation to nature is as historically inaccurate as it is banal: Women make the best robots, as *Metropolis* shows us.

What happens, however, if we go beyond this? When communication becomes less idle chatter than the production of pure noise? When the machine, instead of dreaming through women, is created, maintained and, indeed, exploited by them?

There's a scene in Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *Man with a Movie Camera* which combines footage of women doing a variety of different activities: sewing, cutting film (with Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's wife and the film's actual editor), counting on an abacus, joyfully making boxes, plugging connections into a telephone switchboard, packing cigarettes, typing, playing the piano, answering the phone, tapping out code, ringing a bell, applying lipstick. The cut-up footage speeds up to such a frenzy that at one point it becomes impossible to tell which activity is done for pleasure, and which for work. This is a vision, long before desktops, mobiles, call-centres and the invention of temp agencies, of the optimistic compatibility, perhaps even straightforward identification, of women with the boundless manifestations of technology and artifice...

Sometimes I do feel this psychic connection with machines.

– Jessica Rylan

Jump forward almost a century and we encounter Jessica Rylan, a woman who makes her own machines, and performs with them so that the overlap between her voice and her creations loses all sense of separation. This is certainly 'noise' of a sort, but of an altogether novel kind. Live, Rylan performs a combination of discomforting personal exposure (in the form of a *capella* songs played with unstinting directness towards the audience) and machinic communing with self-made analogue synthesisers

feeding back to eternity and fusing with ethereal, unholy vocals that haunt like cut-up fairy tales told by a sadistic aunt. Whilst occasional shouts for 'more noise, more pain!' might be bellowed at her from the floor at Noise nights, what this desire for noise at any cost doesn't get is how much more effective Rylan's performance is at revealing the true power of the machine.

Jessica Rylan is the future of noise, in the way that men are the past of machines. Tall, slender, politely dressed, bespectacled... across a crowded clerks' office, Kafka's heart starts to pound. While the sirens of unpleasantness continue to seduce the male noise imaginary, Ms Rylan and her home-made synth-machines pose a delectable alternative: what if, instead of abject surrender to the hydraulic-pain of metal-tech, we forced the machine to speak...*eloquently*. But let's not be coy here: there's nothing *nice* about her noise – no concessions to the cute, the lo-fi, the cuddly or the pretty.

Rylan has written before of the idea of 'personal noise', which she opposes to the juddering-by-numbers idea that noise should be as harsh and relentless as possible. This is entirely in keeping with the idea that there should be a certain style to noise, a certain attention paid to the specificities of sound and that, in fact, the only way to even approach the artificiality of the natural is to outstrip and outdo its simulation, which Rylan does by plugging and unplugging her voice and body into the auto-circuits of an oneiric eroticism that weaves beguilingly amidst a series of disconcerting incongruities: 'Although it is characteristic of noise to recall us brutally to real life, the art of noise must not limit itself to imitative reproduction' Luigi Russolo.

This 'imitative reproduction', this lack of imagination that characterises much noise music is reflected in the introspection of much of the noise scene, as if the best response to a hostile world is to turn away from it and howl into a corner. There's no interest in nature in the noise scene, Rylan says. 'This whole world, we've all gone indoors, we look on the internet, watch TV, read books, watch movies, take drugs, whatever. It's all very interior, we don't spend any time in the world.'

I know how to deal with my own equipment.

– Jessica Rylan

It is this relationship between the natural and the artificial – and the artificiality of nature – that perhaps best expresses the effect of Rylan's performances, and points towards a future for a noise that would be both female and machinic. There's something deeply unusual, for example, about the way the analogue gets processed by her synths. Usually prized for its warmth, its authenticity, its richness, Rylan turns this fetishism of the vintage machine into anti-warmth, a series of self-styled machines that cut up and disconnect time from itself in the present. Using analogue to out-mimic the effects of digital, Rylan has hit upon a technique that causes maximum possible disturbance to her audience, and she doesn't even need to shout.

Rylan has commented before on her desire not to use any effects that mess with time (reverb, delay), but instead the machine messes with her and with itself, so you can no longer tell where the sound is coming from. In a way it no longer matters. What you see and hear is a series of deftly manipulated switches, wires and sockets attached

to their creator, who circles the mechanical morass and herself emits sounds that feed back, away from and into the machine. The relation to the audience is deliberately ambiguous and highly structured – rather than the crowd-baiting outright aggression (however ironic) of most power electronics.

Her shows, while on the brief side now, used to be even shorter, seven minutes or so, anti-indulgence personified. 'I did everything at once', she says of her previous performances. In many ways, this has always been *the* temptation of noise, to embrace the speed and brutality of the car, the machine, the 'love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness' of Marinetti's 1909 *Futurist Manifesto*, to live up to Russolo's demand to combine an infinite variety of noises using a thousand different machines. Increasingly, however, a certain calm has crept in to her shows, the careful thought involved in every aspect of her work: music, the show, the performance, the equipment. No slap-dash, jumbled-together mix of a misplaced genius-complex and self-absorption that characterises much of the Noise scene.

If the subterranean history of the relation between women, machines and noise has finally emerged overground as a new Art of Noise that seeks to destroy the opposition of the natural and the artificial, what performers like Rylan represent is an expansionist take-over of the territory. No longer will the machines dream through women, but will instead be built by them. They will be used not to mimic the impotent howl of aggression in a hostile world, but to reconfigure the very matrix of noise itself.

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Noise as Permanent Revolution

or, Why Culture is a Sow Which Devours its Own Farrow

Ben Watson

Noise annoys
– The Buzzcocks (1978)

I wasn't listening to any rock, and then I read an article about the Dead Kennedys and Black Flag. It was by Robert Christgau, and of course he was completely wrong about everything. He said these were Nazi groups playing Nazi music – I don't know if I'm quoting him exactly, but that was the basic drift of it. I was intrigued. Why should any bands be playing Nazi music? It seemed such an insane thing to do. Then I checked it out and realised it was anti-Nazi music. Reading descriptions – it had no melody, it was a bunch of noise – I thought, well finally they're getting back to playing something decent. I got interested. Around the same time I was playing with Zorn. I remember setting up a show, I decided that this rock crowd seems to be into really noisy music, so maybe they'll like it. I played a gig at CBGB's with Arto Lindsay and DNA – it didn't go down too well. Eventually, with Shockabilly, that crowd got into it. It needed to be presented like a rock band – some guy playing solos, guitars ... but I was starting to play Country & Western, and that was a horrible mistake in New York in the early 80s. There was this crowd in New York that would sit through any weird improvised music and they were always talking about incidents where, 'Well this guy came in and he freaked out listening to this stuff, he ran out with his hands over his ears, ha-ha-ha'. But they themselves reacted that way to country music! If you played a Hank Williams song, they acted like you were doing something disgusting. That was really interesting – why are they so freaked at this kind of music?

– Eugene Chadbourne to the author, on the train from York to Hebden Bridge, 15 June 1993

Wire contributor Sam Davies was still publishing his own fanzine when he went to see shock-rock band Ascension at the Louisiana pub in Bristol in 1994. He hated them, and said so in his organ: 'wilfully offensive music of absolutely zero merit'. Thirteen years later, in a special issue of *The Wire* dedicated to 'seismic performances' (February 2007), Davies wrote again about the gig. This time, after seeing Ascension (guitarist Stefan Jaworzyn and drummer Tony Irving) with bassist Simon Fell and saxophonist Charles Wharf as Descension – including the infamous mini-riot they provoked supporting Sonic Youth at the Kentish Town Forum in 1996 – Davies had changed his mind. The Bristol gig was now a memory he 'enjoyed'.

Davies wasn't so disgusted he couldn't register what the music was doing. His description – 'an unflinching barrage of the most jarring music I'd ever heard, with fragments of guitar smashing through each other, like the sound of glass being broken by glass – or possibly by drumsticks' – is utterly recognisable. Even though Irving has now been replaced by Paul Hession, that's how Ascension sound today. Yet such readjustments of critical judgement question all standards. They can plunge people into whirlpools of scepticism and relativism, where it's declared that music is simply a matter of personal taste; that there is no objective analysis of the musical object; all is Maya. Davies himself explains the Bristol experience as a 'slow release toxin' which got beneath his skin. Rather than killing him, it made him an addict. Or is this in fact the same thing? Is Noise like smoking cigarettes or suicide, irrational and harmful practices which are nevertheless *cool*? Davies' image is telling, but also complicit with neoliberal ideology: a free market in dangerous substances; the 'right' of the consumer to follow their desires; a nihilist attitude towards meaning beyond deference to a social

reference group (at the Forum 'I was on the side of the provocateurs': we're not told *why*). Of course, challenging neoliberalism in a 400-word squib is not easy, especially in the pages of an established music magazine. Noise may be a new niche market, but in the pages of *The Wire* 'noise' concerning critical opinion remains anathema.

So, if we are not content with Davies' cyberpunk image of Noise as a decadent anti-social fix, what explains the allure of these horrible sounds? To my ears (an opinion formed as soon as I first heard Jaworzyn, in a creche in Walthamstow in March 1995), Ascension provide THE answer to dilemmas facing anyone discontent with the musical ready-meals dished up by commercial interests, i.e. THE technical solution to historical dichotomies (jazz/rock; prog/punk; hardcore/improv) which have defeated such celebrated bandleaders as Miles Davis, Robert Fripp and John Zorn. But is this simply because I too have this noisome toxin running in my veins? An addiction which might make me a cool commentator – someone who could endorse any number of pretenders queuing up for their place under a dark sun – but doesn't help *explain* anything. No: this isn't some personal aberration, it's a *reasoned* response to an *unreasonable* situation.

Even in the no-holds-barred, access-all-areas, everything-is-permitted Temporary Cacophonous Zone that is Noise, explanation requires *history and philosophy* (or facts and ideas, if you prefer). In common with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (and practically every undergraduate studying the Humanities today), the noise writer's first port of call is invariably Gilles Deleuze. Not much history here, it's true; but plenty of phrases about schizophrenia, machines, desire, desiring machines, and the failure

of discursive reason to transcend a stark dualism between fascist and revolutionary urges. For the Marxist, this dualism has a simple social explanation: it reproduces at the level of aesthetics the vacillation of those whose training is in capitalist modes of money-making, who sense that something is wrong, but don't understand that in so far as they pursue objectives within the commodity system, they will do things that their reason and conscience baulk at. Deleuze converts the problem of Noise – an overriding desire for something which appears monstrous and anti-social – into a high-toned theoretical hysteria, but fails to explain *why* we are in this predicament.

The courage of youth enables it to look directly in the face of things. Its folly is to imagine that no-one else has ever done so. The advantage of the style-handle Noise is that it foregrounds an aspect of music which has been bothering straight society since at least Beethoven. Namely, music's refusal to play the subservient role of ornament or *divertissement*: authentic music's relationship to truth, its antagonism to a merely pleasant night out. The 'unflinching barrage' experienced by Sam Davies has more in common with Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* (1825) than it has with Ascension's obvious reference points (John Coltrane, the Velvet Underground, Whitehouse, Hession/Wilkinson/Fell). Of course, to experts in marketing, for whom *confirmation of social identity* is the daily bread of thoughts about music, such a statement is sheer lunacy. Beethoven belongs to a mature and well-heeled demographic which is seriously into expensive perfumes, glossy magazines, investment opportunities and real estate – he's a timeless classic. Ascension and Keiji Haino, on the other hand, are the latest soundtrack for a few goateed web designers in Hoxton, probably accompanied by some designer toxin or other ...

Beethoven's music is presently caught in a machinery of musical reproduction called variously 'serious music' or 'classical music'. A situation for which he must share the blame. Aware of himself as a supplier of goods to the marketplace, Beethoven carefully presented his recipes for musical events as 'texts' for consumption by interpreters (different from, say, William Shakespeare, for whom a play's *performance* was indeed 'the thing'). Before the Shellac 78rpm grammophone record, the score was the most readily commodified aspect of music making (the legacy of this is that pop musicians make most of their money from 'the publishing', a contractual payment for a notional 'score' which is often non-existent). Hence, it was not 'culture' or *Zeitgeist* or inspiration but commodity fetishism which transformed score-writers ('composers') into the celebrated 'geniuses' of plaster-bust fame, eclipsing impressarios, bandleaders, singers and musicians. Commodity fetishism was Marx's term for capitalism's inverted perspective, where the whole society dances to the tune of commodity values which appear to have a life of their own and change abruptly of their own accord. People who talk about the problems of modern music without talking about capitalism and commodity fetishism are themselves one of modern music's problems.

Heavily involved in developing both the score and the piano (the most complete interpreter of a score in a private domestic space) for the market – in other words, heavily involved himself with commodity fetishism – Beethoven introduced into music a strong historical dynamic: an impatience with tradition and a craving for the never-before-heard. Even in his lifetime, this quest exceeded the requirements of his listeners: the *Grosse Fuge* sounded like 'noise' to them (his publishers persuaded him to remove it from its original setting as the last movement of a string quartet, and publish it separately,

replacing it with a sparkling Allegro). Beethoven's followers stoked this antagonism towards audiences, until by the early years of the twentieth century innovative composers were completely out of sync with their audiences. The present day vicissitudes of Noise are but a branch of this fundamental schism. The techno-fetishists who tell you Noise came about through 'amplification' have the historical *nous* of a gnat.

If, due to the corruption of listening by commodity fetishism (the repetition, stockpiling and standardisation of music attributed to mass production by Jacques Attali), authentic composition sounds like noise, then it's tempting to conclude the reverse: noise must be authentic composition. Eugene Chadbourne's quote at the head of this essay shows someone using this reversed syllogism to navigate the treacherous waters of modern music and locate something of value. For him, it worked. The Dead Kennedys and Black Flag, latter day punks out to destroy the complacency of Robert Christgau and *Rolling Stone*, introduced a dishevelment into rock which suited Chadbourne fine. As a Free Improvisor, he needed open-ended form, harmonic transgression and interruptions to the beat. However, though reversing the terms of a syllogism helped here, it is also a notorious way of arriving at an untruth (all magpies are black and white birds; it doesn't follow from this that black and white birds are all magpies). Some Noise may not be authentic music at all, but simply *noise*, devoid of merit or interest. Indeed, it may in fact be sonic wallpaper: music reduced to an eventless and convenient texture. (In fact this would characterise whole swathes of Noise today). Or Noise may simply be publicity-seeking transgression, of no musical import whatsoever (name your favourite!). Naturally, given the misunderstandings which abound in modern music (witness Sam Davies' change of heart), critics are loath to dismiss anyone waving the Noise flag. They might miss the boat and end up looking conservative and foolish. This 'Fear of Avant' leads to the style

of reviewing which pervades *The Wire*, where music is described like some exotic landscape the writer has witnessed from train or plane – they played high frazzles, then low drones, chucked in some steam engine samples, then did some drumming – with value judgements suspended. Chuck in some words like visceral and ambient and fractal and the job's done.

Unfortunately, because a magazine must be selective about what it covers, any description, however poor, is in fact commendation, *entrée* to the cool coterie. But, as Joe Carducci might put it, no-one dares put their balls on the line (or, increasingly, their ovaries up for sale).[1] This leads to a decadent situation where decisions about what product to feature are made by editors *in camera*, and no-one seeks to explain *why* we should be interested. Behind the scenes, labels which advertise in the pages of the magazine exert their muscle. In *The Wire*, Avant celebrity becomes a *fait accompli*, untainted by rational argument (occasionally you get a clue as to how some new crew of hopeless hairy Stateside noisemaker muffins have been selected: 'Thurston says they're okay ...'). This muting of personal opinion on the part of writers travesties the dynamics of the music's actual reception. In a commodity economy (and given the parlous financial position of most of music obsessives), decisions about forking out cash for gigs or CDs are fraught with anxiety. There ought to be space to register the anger and indignation of the disappointed punter (punk was only possible because of the anti-corporate fury built up by *New Musical Express* contributors in the early 70s). In the pages of *The Wire*, the radicalism of Noise is neutralised by the fashion for descriptive objectivity. Judgement – a personal stake – is the pivot of any real description (as Theodor Adorno put it, 'we can no more understand without judging than we can judge without understanding').[2]

[1] Joe Carducci, *Rock and the Pop Narcotic*, Los Angeles: 2.13.61, 1994 remains the most pertinent aesthetic theory for Noise, even (or especially) when bands think they have completely transcended rock categories.

[2] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 1966; translated E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p.64.

In *The Wire*'s Noise coverage, what should be an explosion of critical negativity – denouncing other musics for irrelevance, denouncing much Noise as phony – becomes window dressing for another sexy item to stick besides those of Brian Eno and Björk. The editorial wisdom at *The Wire* is that the acts covered are so worthy, alternative and dis-corporate, they all deserve support. However, as Friedrich Nietzsche observed, charity has a bad relationship to aesthetics, and is usually a mask for duplicity. Under this kind of regime, it's the honest citizen reporting the truth who gets ostracised.

If commercialism spoils any real discussion of Noise, where to run? At the moment, post-Deleuzian philosophy is under siege from those who would reintroduce consideration of morals and ethics (Levinas, Agamben, Badiou). Might they help? Predicated on the pre-capitalist antithesis of Good and Evil, morals are peculiarly ill-equipped to deal with the contradictions of commodity production. Was Beethoven, for example, 'good' or 'evil'? By putting musical innovation to market, he made change and musical progress ('noise') exciting and relevant. Yet this historical dynamic, by distracting attention from the musical experience (the public ritual of the concert) to a commodity (the private ownership of a score), alienated the truly musical. The furious arguments Beethoven had with audiences and publishers were harbingers of the later schism between artists and bourgeois society. During the revolutionary crises of the 1920s and 1960s, many progressive artists, despite their previous dependence on the wealthy, made common cause with workers seeking workplace democracy (soviets or workers' councils) and an end to commodity production (Béla Bartók, for example, took part in Béla Kun's short-lived revolutionary government in Hungary in 1919).

Musical relief from Beethoven's Noise logic came from a surprising quarter. Just as Arnold Schoenberg was undermining the harmonic basis of Western music by subverting the key palette of the tempered system (Twelve Tone), news arrived of an eerie new music being played by ex-slaves in the American South: the Blues. Arriving one hundred years later, its relationship to class, capital and commodity was different to that of Beethoven and his followers. Blues and jazz related immediately to the new technology of recording and record distribution – commodification of a particular performance rather than of the written recipe. Although there were important songwriters and composers in this field, now a singer's or musician's *individual sound* could become a retail commodity, inventing whole genres along the way. Nominalist materialism had entered the lists to do battle with the abstract idealism of classical music.

Stripped of their individual tribal musics by slavery (slave-owners deliberately mixed members of different tribes together, thus making rebellions less likely), black American musicians improvised a music of chthonic power, referencing fundamentals which had global appeal, cutting across all national and cultural divisions. This is not to deny that blues roots may be traced to West Africa, but it's immediately apparent that the Blues has a driving, directional logic lacking in the intricate, circular patterns of African musics. Blues is only imaginable sung in English: it is *a retort in the language of the master*, not merely an echo of ancient glories. As many exponents of Noise have discovered, if you pick up guitars and drums and jam something heavy on them, you will find yourself stumbling on the riffs, reverberations and transitions which make Blues so powerful. The *Gross Fuge* asked where rational modulation ends and mimetic thunder begins;

the Blues is based on such a dialogue between differentiated chords and sonorous timbre. It injected a physical realism and body knowledge into pop which the musically-minded have been finding and re-finding ever since. This explains why, despite its record of *indifference* to past music, *non-deference* to tradition and *irreverence* towards rock's rich tapestry, Noise keeps refuelling itself from the rock tank (itself a refinement of sludge and tar tapped from the underground dead dinosaur lake of the blues).

Commodity production entails competition between different capitals, resulting in ceaseless technical innovation. *Cultural obsolescence* is the spiritual correlate of this war of all against all. Oedipal revolt is led into the narrow bounds of stylistic markers, so that young people find an 'identity' in consuming something different from their parents. As usual with commodity logic, it's hard for morals to assess this process. Is it good or bad? Who knows! It's *contradictory*, it's happening, it's inescapable: we live in this mess, and what shall we do about it?

Marco Maurizi, guitarist in Lendormin (Rome's answer to Ascension, another guitar and drums duo pummelling rock instruments into an 'unflinching barrage'), believes in Noise as necessary disorder. As necessary as breathing, as necessary as dissing Berlusconi, as necessary as overthrowing capitalism. Using Hegelian language, Maurizi describes the role of modern art as 'immediacy versus mediation'[3]: in the midst of all the mediations we're subject to (albums, magazines, blogs, musicianship, historical knowledge, essays named 'Noise as Permanent Revolution'), modern art is an eruption of immediacy, the moment where the lunch is naked and we stare at what's on the end of the spoon. That's why its most extreme and effective

[3] See Lendormin, *Night Dawn Day: Music for George Romero* (2006), available from <amnesiavivace@tiscali.it>; Marco Maurizi, *I Was a Teenage Critical Theorist: Zappa*, Nagai, Romero (2007); available from <www.lulu.com>.

moments involve rubbishing all previous cultural standards, achievements, techniques and skills: Asger Jorn's childish scribbles, Derek Bailey's 'can't play' guitar, J.H. Prynne's 'incomprehensible' poetry. Extrinsic formal structure (whether song or composition or training) prevents us seeing what's right under our noses: instruments, fingers, people, ears, amplifiers, attention, inattention. Both Ascension and Lendormin achieve discernible structures, but improvised on the spot, a kind of processual spotlit agony. This is not structure as in GarageBand software's 'snap to parameters', a preconceived schema filled in as we watch (painting by numbers), but structure as in skid marks or magma or star swill or words shouted in anger: what Cecil Taylor and Tony Oxley discover each time they do battle. We train ourselves to be prodigious in historical knowledge and playing technique, and then throw it all away for the buzz of the instant. We don't produce certified values, we improvise unique structures.

To the religious mind, 'unique structures' – or wilful disorder or desired turbulence – are sin, nominalist rejection of holy archetypes. Likewise, to Saussurian structuralism – and all its deaf (non)listening-posts – 'unique structures' is an oxymoron, since all communication depends on obedience to the fixed rules of the system. Following Marx and Engels, Theodor Adorno turned all that on its head.[4] He translated revolutionary political theory into a musical aesthetic and came up with the only philosophy to understand Hendrix, Coltrane and Noise. Adorno claims that music only speaks when it *breaks rules* and formulates *the unexpected*. Far from being the inexpressible, primordial tragedy of the Neo-Kantians (from Heidegger to Lacan to Deleuze they all chorus the same: beware the *Ding-an-sich*), such system-breakdowns are *experience*, the concept-busting crisis which allows ideas to change and new concepts and production to flourish.

[4] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 1966; translated E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973.

To conclude this essay, I'd like to recall another Italian, someone whose work has been almost completely suppressed in the postmodern academy, but whose philosophy provided the immanent cell-logic of *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce's eruption of psychic immediacy onto the plane of language (and whose relevance to the Noise aesthetic cannot be overstated, as Bob Cobbing understood). This is the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, whose *Scienza Nuova* (1725) proposed a new science of history to challenge René Descartes' assertion that the only reliable knowledge was number based. Instead of simply rejecting the modes of thinking of early humanity – animism, poetry, myths, religion – Vico suggested they be understood as proto-concepts, images of reality which provide the natural basis of language and reason. Without honouring these primary responses to the world, thinking becomes arid and cold and lifeless. Indeed, students trained solely in maths and logic were being lobotomised, and, lacking sympathy with humanity's desires and aversions, were useless at estimating how humans will behave, and so had no grasp of the business and politics of real life. Vico's first work, written when he was 25, was *Feelings of One in Despair*, an extravagant poetic tirade, the result of his involvement with free thinkers known as libertines. He became a devout Catholic, but his philosophy was revolutionary without knowing it (Marx gave him an appreciative footnote in *Capital*).

In *Scienza Nuova*, Vico discerned a cyclical pattern in history: a *divine*, barbaric age when all thinking is poetic; a *heroic* age, when some actors seem larger than life; then a *human* age under a constitutional monarch, when people cease to be dazzled by the images we invent to hide what we do not know. But this democratic age contained its own seeds of destruction. Lacking the juice of subjectivity and belief, discourse

becomes dry, barren and banal. People become disenchanted and sceptical, and a new barbarism arises, but one suffused with the techniques and discoveries of the previous ages. Vico was the first historian to see that the Dark Ages were not simply a regression from Roman civilisation, but an essential development. He called this transitional age a *ricorso*. Maurizi's 'mediation criticised by immediacy' is a call for another *ricorso*, a revolutionary assault on perceived cultural values, a trashing in favour of a new realism, a new spontaneity and connectedness.

Unlike the moralists, Marxists discern in the controversies and clashes of culture, not a metaphysical clash between good and evil, but a battle between labour and capital. It's because culture is a form of capital – something Getty Images can purchase – that it becomes *a sow which devours her own piglets*, an infanticidal cannibal, its own nemesis, a porcine slough of violence and despond. Culture becomes its opposite. For example, the Nazis championed realism versus modern art, which they branded as 'degenerate': in Esther Leslie's words: 'Having located the spoils of nineteenth century realism, they wanted to rid the world of the revolutionaries and bohemians and critics who had produced it.'[5] It is this *alienation of the product from the labour of those who produce it* which Marx diagnosed as the central crime and problem of capitalism. Capitalism-as-usual may not exhibit the genocidal frenzy of Nazism (inhabitants of impoverished or bombed third world countries may disagree), but commodification nevertheless wrenches artistic products from the milieu which produced them. This is why all pertinent discussion of rock hinges on the problem of 'selling-out' (ask Kurt Cobain). Under capitalism, the glamour of achieving art status or mass sales – victory in the commodity stakes – is confused with providing real artistic experience. That is why, to those who cultivate their

[5] Esther Leslie, 'Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset', *The Philistine Controversy*, edited Dave Beech and John Roberts, London: Verso, 2002, p.223.

beautiful souls in emulation of capitalist accumulation, authentic expression will sound like 'wilfully offensive music of absolutely zero merit'. The real thing explodes chin stroking self-regard into events whose excitement is obvious to all. Rock'n'roll, baby! 'Noise' is a useful way of foregrounding this aspect of music.

Of course, any term accepted in the marketplace can quickly become a cover for inept simulacra and calculated fraudulence. Chadbourne's observation about the devastating effect of Country Music in Noise circles serves as a warning against anyone who believes that a radical music experience – a *bouleversement* of social identity in favour of *objective experience* – can be subsumed under a commercial category. A generic label should be the *starting point* for critical debate, not a replacement for it. When Tony Herrington at *The Wire* told me to 'think niche' in writing for the magazine, he showed how well he had internalised the lessons of capitalist culture: 'Shhh, don't mention the Universal, it might dent our sales'. However, the burning intent and beating heart of every 'genre' is proselytising and avid, believing it can burst into universality and reach all ears. That's what Coltrane did to jazz; and what Ascension and Lenormin do to rock. To deny this ambition is to smother music's life breath at birth.

MANIFESTO TIME!

What we need is not the dull thunder of guitar bands abandoning song structure because Avant is vogue, but pursuit of the jarring beat into the microstitial crevice of rhythmic disturbance whose dark matter blossoms forth in ceaseless strange new patterns no-one has ever heard before. Drummer Tony Oxley, extrapolating from Elvin Jones'

work in the John Coltrane Quartet, showed the way. Ascension and Lendormin apply Oxley's improv methodology to the base elements of rock, unleashing a shocking and exhilarating force worthy of the name of Noise, and making each listener question every value under the sun.[6] This is where Noise's radicalism and protest make sense. If, in a decadent period of recycling and niche marketing, audiences flee and labels turn their backs and magazines don't want to know, it's because the *music matters*.

ROMANIAN FOOTNOTE

Confirmation of the objective necessity of what Ascension and Lendormin do comes from an unexpected source: the spectral music of Iancu Dumitrescu and Ana-Maria Avram, two Romanian composers who also record, produce and release their own music.[7] Now that academia has recuperated the best hopes of Free Jazz and Post-War Darmstadt Modernism, straining their 60s absoluteness into decorative mosaics of high-tone variegation *which matter not a piffle*, Dumitrescu and Avram restore the defiance to generic categorisation at the wellspring of music. Working with ensembles which include both readers and *non-pareil* improvisors like Fernado Grillo and Tim Hodgkinson, players who have invented their own languages on their instruments, Dumitresci and Avram destroy any distinction you might make between a Hendrix guitar solo, computer serialism and a Company Week blow-out. They prove that what we thought was an outburst of creativity in British composition – the New Complexity – was hopelessly compromised by its fear of rock and jazz, its adherence to the repressed and depersonalised anonymity of conservatory musicianship and procedures. The term 'spectral' used by Dumitrescu and Avram to describe their music

[6] Ascension are contactable by mail at Shock, 56 Beresford Road, Chingford, London, E4 6EF, United Kingdon; Lendormin via <amnesiavivace@tiscali.net>.

[7] Contact: <idamahyp@spacenet.ro>.

is woefully inadequate. What they do bursts right out of the prettified post-Boulezism of Tristan Mirail and Gérard Grisey into new universes of sound. The best description of the impacted tension of their music comes, not from musicology, but from astrophysics: 'Space becomes lumpy and actually froths with tiny bubbles that dart in and out of the vacuum. Even empty space, at the tiniest distances, is constantly boiling with tiny bubbles of space-time, which are actually tiny wormholes and baby universes.'[8]

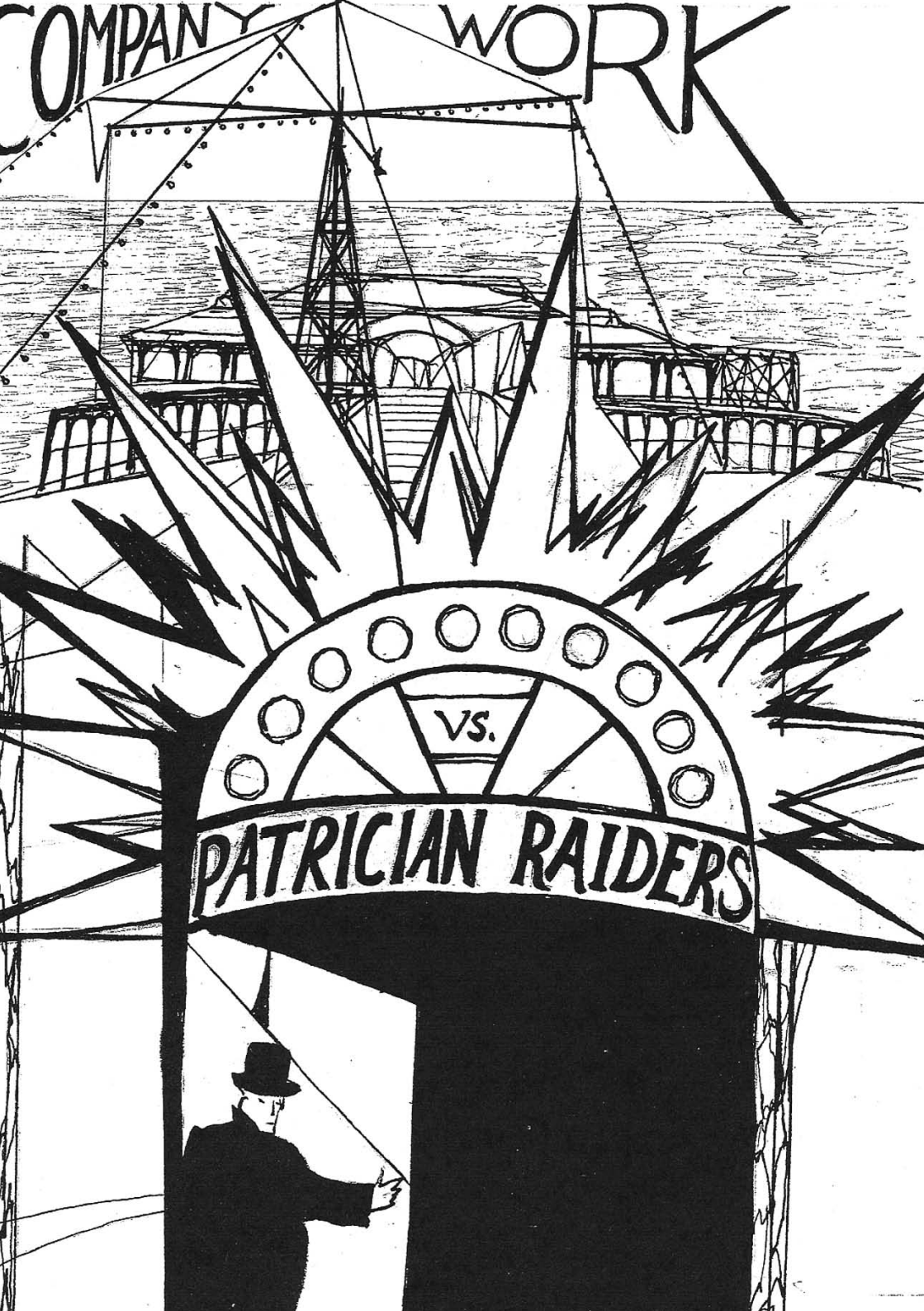
Accessing sonic realms other contemporary composers avoid as vulgar, a multi-coloured peacock-cum-firework display like Jackson Pollock golden-showering on Existential Paris, Dumitrescu and Avram provide a parallel *ricorso* to that of Ascension and Lendormin. Cataclysmic barbarism which lists every sonic mediation which has been bugging the hell out of you lately, and smashes each one on an anvil of bodily intensity. The pseudo-objectivism of Iannis Xenakis saved from neoclasssical formalism (that Brahmsian bluster) and galvanised into slithering, hatch-as-hatch-can *life*. The universalism of Great Music aimed like a flame-thrower at the gabbling hydra-heads of postmodern pluralism, scepticism and niche-marketing! An end to separation!! If Noise as a genre embraced Dumitrescu and Avram, then it might become more than a flash in an editor's brainpan. It might even set the world alight.

Ben Watson
www.militantesthetix.co.uk

[8] Michio Kaku, *Parallel Worlds*, London: Penguin, 2005, p.135.

Company Work vs. Patrician Raiders

Matthew Hyland


COMPANY WORK
VS.
PATRICIAN RAIDERS

The late Derek Bailey's musical 'career' was founded on years of wage labour as a guitarist in dancehalls and nightclubs. An idea which aspirants to today's fully professional-entrepreneurial cultural sector would find barely comprehensible, suggests Matthew Hyland. For what other than individual elevation above wage-worker status defines the 'creative' life that these subvention-seekers clamour for so shrilly?[1]

> *Anyone who has experienced the music business from the musician's point of view is bound to be cynical about music, and often, in fact, about everything.*
>
> *– Derek Bailey, obituary for Motoharu Yoshizawa*

Among its other achievements, Ben Watson's recent biography of Derek Bailey proves that anyone who calls a lifelong intransigent in the face of market common sense an *idealist*, as though declining to second-guess the fancy of imaginary customers meant being 'out of touch with the real world', 'spouts craven fund-me drivel'.[2] People who talk this way may take their own brittle go-getting bravado for 'cynicism', but the story of Bailey's working life testifies that he meant something quite different by the word.

Bailey learned his technique on the job, as a big band guitarist in the provincial dancehalls of the 1950s. (Not 'touring' like rock product, but serially resident 'in every major town in Britain'.) The bands played on revolving stages, supplying an uninterrupted swinging background to packed houses of sexually-hyped, illicitly pissed proletarian youth. Sometimes the musicians were kept in a cage, lest they become collateral damage in the general melée.

In the book Bailey recalls the dancehall world, (and 'the provinces' in general) with love. The musicians lived among and played to people of their own class, yet they

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[1] This essay constitutes a digression on one theme arising in *Ben Watson's Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation* (Verso, 2004). All page references are too this book unless otherwise stated.

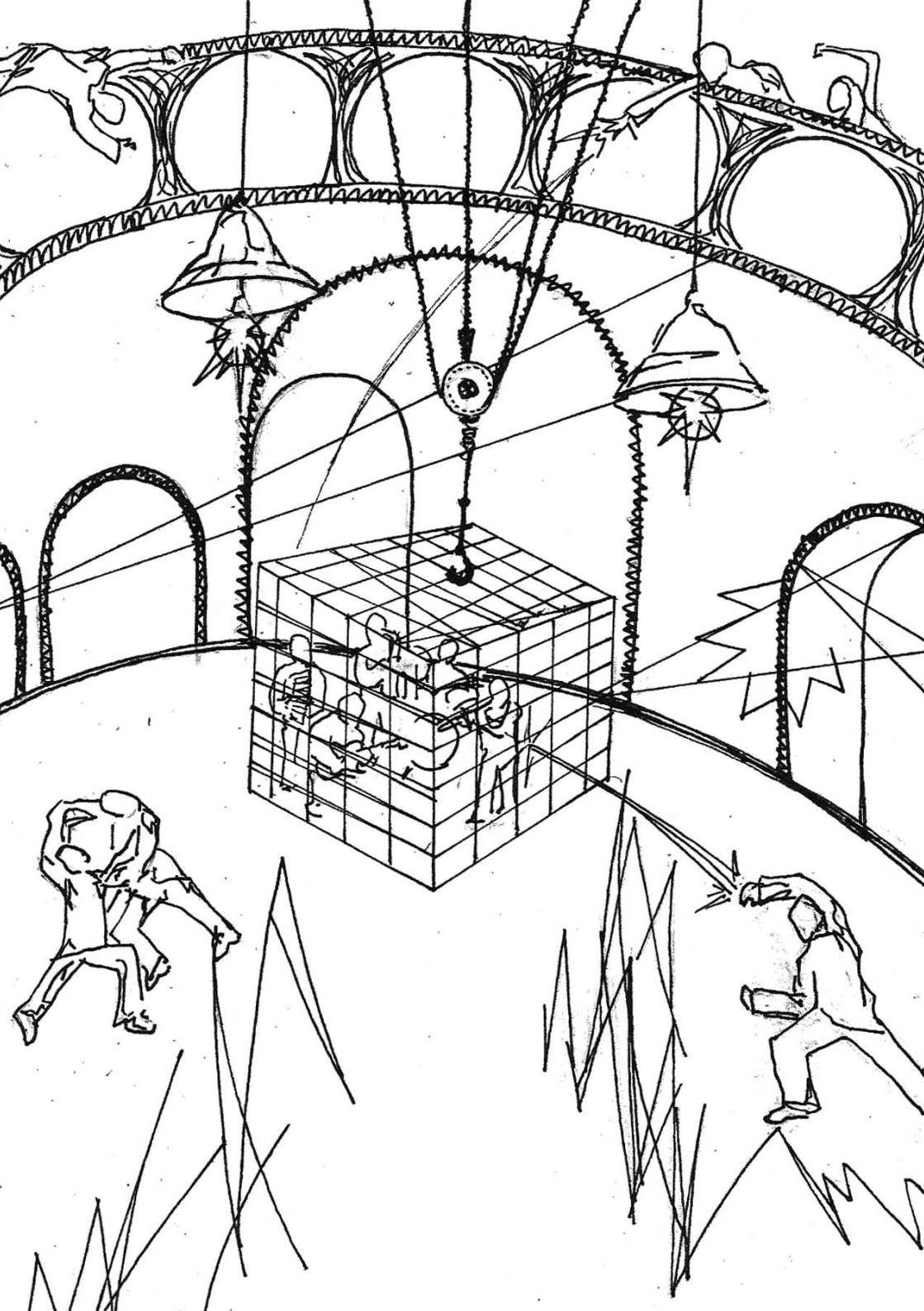
[2] The author uses this phrase with reference to 'supporters of Free Improvisation who believe that "pure" music replaces the need for politics'. The analytical category is extended here to include an allied group.

existed as 'almost a kind of secret society... a completely integrated alternative' (p.45), with absolutely no interest in 'the audience' either as consumers to be obeyed or 'fans' to be humiliated. Both they and the dancehall crowds were there for other reasons.

In fact the musicians' indifference to the secrets of audience desire was not only reciprocated, it was something musical labourers *held in common* with the brawlers on the balconies, inasmuch as the latter also lived by selling their labour to owners of capital, and had no say and no interest in the final consumer's encounter with the product. *Worrying about competing in the marketplace for consumer attention is the capitalist's problem*. Like any other skilled employee, Bailey was concerned with earning a wage under acceptable conditions, which as far as he was concerned meant being far away from factory punishment. The other requirement was that while working he had to be learning from the other players, or as he put it, 'getting rid of some of my musical ignorance'(!). Watson notes that Bailey regarded 'most British "jazz" [as] a patrician raid on a form that had initially been arrived at through involvement in regular work' (p.110).

If any of this seems surprising now, perhaps it's because in the decades since Bailey took his leave of the dying dancehall scene (killed by the obligation to sound like The Record), musicians have come to behave as culture professionals, self-brokering mini-brands awaiting market breakthrough, even as they languish in perpetual shamefaced internship.

When someone says they'd rather work in a factory than play music they don't like, observed Bailey, it means they've never worked in a factory. The critique of class-privileged idealism is (literally) on the money here, but the comment also points to a significant difference between the mid-20th century and the present. When Bailey



played in dancehalls and nightclubs, it just about made sense to think of factory labour and full-time waged music as alternative futures for (a minority of) working-class kids. The comparison was between two kinds of wage labour: one that's physically punishing and brutally coerced and another where the wage-earners' bodies were left unbroken and they even maintained a relative degree of freedom.[3] Today's aspirational artists, on the other hand, imagine music (and culture in general) as a meritocratic alternative to wage-labour *per se*: the individual body's ticket out of proletarian drudgery, to be earned by submitting the spirit to special humiliation.

When a youthful Bailey decided he had to play music full-time or not at all, he couldn't have imagined that full-time music, as distinct from unlimited-hours' investment in presentation skills-coaching and micro-entrepreneurial networking, would be all but extinct within his lifetime. His post-dancehall trajectory from jazz clubs to unsubsidised international free improvisation is not unique, but it remains a scandalous exception, an isolated anti-career describing a never-(yet)-realized social potential. In the process he frequented other exceptional cases, and thus had little reason to question the extent to which *working playing music* in the sense he meant it was still possible, or for whom.[4]

As the world of waged music disintegrated, Bailey contrived a way to leave behind its downsides (e.g.'the unrelieved gruesome sentimentality of the stuff we were playing'(p.46)) without taking up what has become the full-time work of high-culture artists and pop-culture stars, i.e. developing and promoting a reproduction-ready identity, for recognition either by commercial creditors or public funding bodies. Thus, for decades after its disappearance from the wider social horizon, he held onto the aspect of waged playing that constituted its original attraction: an income from 'totally absorbed' full-time work on the material of music itself, without regard for the idea of an

[3] It should be remembered, contrary to facile accounts of 'post-fordism', that industrial manufacturing labour is more prevalent worldwide today than at any time in history.

[4] It's important to note Bailey's insistence that his own need to be 'full-time' was a personal response to concrete circumstances, not a prescription for anyone else. Also he worked with countless players whose anti-professionalism keeps them permanently 'part-time'.

audience and its imaginary needs. The stakes in this gamble for dialectical disengagement from market command were raised to the point that Bailey of all people, recorded music's severest ontological opponent, ended up a record label owner. The existence of Incus can be seen as a sort of pre-emptive lunge at the business, allowing Bailey and other musicians to record while avoiding beholdenness to blackmailing market mediators.[5]

Watson argues forcefully that free improvization – at least as Bailey played and theorized it – is resistant to commodification. This is true in the sense that speculators in culture and their hired experts are put off (especially given the legion of eager easier alternatives) by wilfully unrepeatable gestures and simultaneous offences against the codes of romantic rock star glamour and serious artist *gravitas*. The investors take this for a lack of quality control, pointless noise corrupting the customer satisfaction signal, and their aversion gives the practice the 'distinct advantage' of 'less capital and fewer careers riding on it' (p.262).

But free improvising that isn't supported financially by work the musicians do (or someone else does) elsewhere still has to 'pay for itself' by being sold. Once the music is 'inside' the commodity form (whether as a recorded product or a 'service' like a gig makes no difference) there's nothing about its aesthetic content that makes it any less formally exchangeable than a Frank Zappa ring tone or the lease on a Dalston jazz club. Hence Watson's polemic against uncritical improv-boosters who spiritualize the music, pretending its purity transcends the conditions of its manufacture and sale. Bearing this in mind, it might be useful to modify an insurance executive's slogan about poetry and intelligence[6]: free improvisation (as Derek Bailey intends it) resists commodification *almost successfully*. 'Almost' remains an upper limit as long as capital goes on being strengthened by what hasn't killed it yet.

[5] The chief blackmail, of course, being the alternative between conforming and simply being silenced, whether under contract restrictions on outside work, or, when the commercial sector's grip on the means of production is as tight as it was in the early 1970s, by not being 'signed' in the first place. Incus co-founder Tony Oxley points out in the book (p.71) that they started the company at a time when 'many musicians were not being recorded at all'.

[6] Wallace Stevens, *Man Carrying Thing*, Collected Poems, Faber & Faber, 1984, p.350.

A crucial premise of the argument about commodification, stated explicitly towards the end of the book, is that the problem with commodities isn't a *moral* one, it's material, or, as Watson says of artistic commodities, *aesthetic*. Human freedom to determine *what* is produced and *how* is distorted by dead labour's claim on the living, resulting in more and more atrophied use values along the chain of productive consumption.[7] It follows that it isn't moralizing to proclaim the *aesthetic reasons* for repudiating professional music, even – in fact especially – when little or nothing is left either of the proletarian music jobs Bailey remembered from his twenties or the exceptional working circumstances he bloody-mindedly secured later. To put it bluntly, a recording contract holder or a serial applicant for funding and residencies will probably spend LESS time working on music itself – or learning about it, as Bailey would insist – than a totally absorbed 'part-timer' who pays for the time through a 'normal', rigorously uncreative day (or night) job.[8] The part-timer's art is certainly more likely to be informed by an experience of alienated labour that isn't hopelessly skewed by belief in individual personality as an essential productive force. It's not a matter of standing aloof: rather, struggling in 'dead-end' employment breeds worldliness (or 'cynicism') about the commodified world, and hence intolerance of smug self-employed willingness to *compete* in it. Artists who expect to succeed within their field, by contrast, are specially 'motivated' to kid themselves that capitalism rewards creativity and hard work.

Thanks to Ben Watson and the late Derek Bailey for producing (amongst other crucial things) the book digressed from here. BUY IT! at: http://www.amazon.co.uk/Derek-Bailey-Story-Free-Improvisation/dp/1844670031

Thanks also to Paul Helliwell for conversation and writing some of the questions raised way past the scope of the digression. See http://www.metamute.org/en/First-cut-is-the-deepest and http://www.metamute.org/en/Zombie-Nation.

[7] 'Productive consumption' is meant, of course, in the strict Marxist sense, i.e. the consumption of one commodity in the production of another. Certainly no reference is intended to the recent academic fantasy according to which all human activity, private consumption included, is somehow equally 'productive'.

[8] The attempt to claim and maintain state benefits certainly falls into this category, although the degree of creativity required to succeed rivals that which paid artists attribute to themselves.

Points of Resistance and Criticism in Free Improvisation: Remarks on a Musical Practice and Some Economic Transformations

Matthieu Saladin

The detached observer is as much entangled as the active participant; the only advantage of the former is insight into his entanglement, and the infinitesimal freedom that lies in knowledge as such. His own distance from business at large is a luxury which only that business confers.

– Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia. § 6.

It [AMM] continues to want to play and in playing fails; appears at times to be succeeding then fails and fails. The paradox is that continual failure on one plane is the root of success on another [...] We certainly must not look for failure any more than for success.

– Cornelius Cardew and Eddie Prévost, 'AMM Music', The Crypt, [liner notes].

When approaching a discussion of free improvisation, it is not unusual to arrive at the consideration that one of its most outstanding features resides in its prodigious openness. For instance, this feature would be found at work in the musical space immanent to its enunciation, as well as in the staging of collective performances. Furthermore, no rules – besides the necessity to improvise, obviously – constrains performance, nor is any one particular direction privileged. As Derek Bailey put it, free improvisation 'has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it'[1]. Thus, it would seem that free improvisation, from its very beginning, is characterised by the field of possibility which it introduces.

However, we must clarify immediately that such a practice is often shaped by criticism of that which it rejects. If free improvisation expresses itself in affirmation, it is also formulated in reaction to a reality considered unsatisfactory. For the musicians who became involved in it in the middle of the 1960s, it was a matter of experimenting with another relation to music by refusing to adopt musical standards and the transcendental values they tended to generate; refusal of a certain mode of creation and the order it gives rise to; or refusal of a certain kind of society and the way it reduces music to a commodity. In general, they stood against the relations of domination and alienation that this society engendered and maintained.

Refusal is never easy and has to be distrustful of compromises. The practice of free improvisation can appear as an act of resistance, but not resistance that preserves past values, rather, a form of resistance to the established order that generates a concrete alternative. This current of resistance and its critical dimension evidently did not appear only in the emergence of free improvisation in Europe.[2] This current extends

[1] Derek Bailey. *Improvisation: its nature and practice in music*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1993, p.83.

[2] However this article will be limited to it. Among other subjects it will neither deal with the contemporary, indeed earlier, emergence of free improvisation in Japan, nor its formulation in USA.

beyond free improvisation and was present in an underlying way in several tendencies questioning a whole range of artistic fields in the 1960s. More generally, this spirit of questioning updated criticisms for which the first symptoms can be found in the 19th century when industrialisation and bourgeois society were beginning to impose themselves. Then, it was already a matter of denouncing 'the dangers of the domination of life by productivity and utilitarian thinking, modern industry and technology.'[3]

However, it is not the interest of this study to relate the complex history of artistic practice, critique and resistance since the 19th century in order to consider the singularity of the alternative formulated by free improvisation and the implicit heritage updated by its advent. Conversely, we will consider the musical revolution of these improvisers as a point of departure in order to question assumptions about critique and resistance in the contemporary improvised scene, and, prior to that, examine the profound transformations in that which the alternatives had set out to assert themselves against. First, we will try to remind ourselves of what exactly the criticisms and alternatives at work in free improvisation consisted (and, to a certain extent, continue to consist). These can be noticed in the mechanisms of play experimented with by musicians, their shifting relationship with music, as well as the discourses, retrospective or otherwise, which surrounded these practices, i.e. the set of gestures with which these earlier improvisers 'problematised their behaviour.'[4] We will then study the important mutations wrought by capitalism after the period of free improvisation's emergence in Europe in order to confront this renewal with the proper musical alternative put forward by these musicians in response to a prior phase of capitalist development. Thus, we will examine the critical aspects of free improvisation which remain current and those which seem to have been recuperated by the economic system of the society allowing them. Lastly, we will touch on the political dimension embedded in the practice of free improvisation.

[3] Eve Chiapello. *Artistes versus managers*. Paris: Métaillé, 1998, p.14-15.

[4] Cf. Michel Foucault. 'A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique: un aperçu du travail en cours'. *Dits et écrits II*. Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001, p.1431.

THE AMBITION OF A DIFFERENT PRACTICE

The critical dimension of free improvisation can first be noted less in properly political discourse expressed by musicians than in the feeling of dissatisfaction with the musical practices of the time. What emerges most often from commentaries by early improvisers about their adoption of such a practice is the necessity of developing a personal music in reaction to existing musical standards considered sterile and oppressive. Thus, the liberation expected was about music, rather than to be manifested in society as a whole. Derek Bailey expresses this in the following words:

> *[...] much of the impetus toward free improvisation came from the questioning of musical language. Or, more correctly, the questioning of the 'rules' governing musical language. Firstly from the effect this had in jazz, which was the most widely practised improvised music at the time of the rise of free improvisation, and secondly from the results of the much earlier developments in musical language in European straight music, whose conventions had, until this time, exerted a quite remarkable influence over many types of music, including most forms of improvisation to be found in the West.*[5]

Moreover, we can remind ourselves that the transition to free improvisation, for a number of musicians, did not happen suddenly as an irreversible leap. The musical revolution was not the consequence of careful consideration. It was more of a progressive transformation, drawing on some lines of flight within experimentation.

Other musicians insist on explicitly linking the pursuit of a personal music to motivations that stretch beyond the musical field. The questioning of musical rules and norms was in this way echoed by the questioning of the standards also stratifying everyday life. For example, Eddie Prévost describes a broader field of perceived constraints:

[5] Derek Bailey. op. cit., p. 84. Cf. also what Tony Oxley says, p.89.

[…] I think a lot of improvisation was a kind of response to that dehumanising aspect of life. And that's the link I would put into it, and I think it's just one of the recurring moments, if you like, that you can see if you look at the whole history of jazz; you can say it gets sharper where there are things to react against of that kind. And I sense that in the 60s there was a general reaction against those kinds of forms which were quite alienating, and one obviously picked up with the Americans and saw them as kindred spirits who were likewise responding.[6]

According to Prévost, the emergence of free improvisation cannot be really understood outside of its socio-historical context :

[…] contemporary improvised music is essentially a phenomenon of a modern industrialising society. The common experience it portrays is that of alienation arising from the economic, social, and cultural deprivation caused by a modern, market-oriented political system. The structural aspect common to these musical manifestations, which differs widely in style and performance emphasis, is that which expresses individual aspirations, and that which is the least susceptible to a commodity ethos, namely the improvisation.[7]

From a similar point of view, Frederic Rzewski, member of Musica Elettronica Viva, insisted retrospectively on the semantic plurality of the term 'freedom' associated with the practice of improvisation:

In the 1960s, in radical circles of the 'free music' movement, freedom was an ethical and political, as well as an aesthetic, concept. Free music was not merely a fashion of the times, and not merely a form of entertainment. It was also felt to be connected with the many political movements that at that time set out to change the world – in this case, to free the world from the tyranny of outdated traditional forms.[8]

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[6] Eddie Prévost. [interview, AMM: Eddie Prévost, Keith Rowe], in Barney Childs & Christopher Hobbs. 'Forum: improvisation'. *Perspectives of New Music, vol. 21*, n° 1 & 2. Fall-Winter 1982, Spring-Summer 1983, p.42.

[7] Eddie Prévost. 'The Aesthetic Priority of Improvisation: a Lecture'. *Contact, #25*, Autumn 1982, p. 37. Such considerations can also emerge from specific mediations of kinds of practice. Ben Watson notes of the first edition of *Company Week*: 'Company Week 1977 was a major event, and established Free Improvisation as a rhetorical stance. It became a point from which to criticise the way the music industry – both pop and classical – had immersed past and present music in commodity fetishism, a market of competing "geniuses" rather than an arena of collectivity, co-operation and construction – of active music-making.' Ben Watson. *Derek Bailey and the story of free improvisation*. London: Verso, 2004, p.222.

[8] Frederic Rzewski. 'Little Bangs: A Nihilist Theory of Improvisation'. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (ed). *Audio Culture, Readings in modern music*. New York: Continuum, 2004, p.268.

These statements concerning the sense of alienation, as much musical as societal, can be read – setting aside all liberatory perspectives, possible or otherwise – as an echo of the 'instrumentalised reason' diagnosed and described by the philosophers of Frankfurt School, in particular Horkheimer and Adorno.[9] In the domain of human activities, their theory accounts for the close supervision of bodies, a form of organization which follows the rhythm of machines with strict planning and which considers individual fulfilment only in accordance with its reproduction as labour. In the field of music, the theory describes the dominance of the culture industry, the generalized reification and standardization induced in its products as well as in its consumers. For both authors, the direct consequences of this standardization are suppression of any possible subjectivation and the deletion, or at least confinement in a ghetto, of a logic of art consisting in the enunciation of difference.[10]

However, for Prévost, musicians did not remain in a disenchanted reaction, but opened concrete alternatives towards experimental musical practices:

> *Obviously, what we all had in common was a rejection of the predominating modes. However, I would repudiate the superficial assumption that we shared a camaraderie based upon a destructive dislike of an unsatisfactory form. No intense long-term creative relationship is likely to be sustained upon a negative basis.*[11]

The rejection appears, consequently, only as the inverted mark from which musicians do not only experiment with a new relationship to sound, but also more generally create new possibilities of existence: create the possible by the event. Deleuze and Guattari express it like this:

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[9] Cf. Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

[10] Cf. among others Theodor W. Adorno. *Théorie esthétique*. Trans. Marc Jimenez. Paris: Klincksieck, 1995, p.312.

[11] Eddie Prévost. *Improvisation*. in Cornelius Cardew. A Reader. Essex: Copula, 2006, p.294.

The possible does not pre-exist, it is created by the event. It is a matter of life. The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity (new relations with the body, with time, sexuality, the immediate surroundings, with culture, work).[12]

However, to consider the experimentation at work in free improvisation as an event does not mean to remember only the positive dimension of practices. The latter appears much more indissociable from the spirit of refusal which motivates it. This refusal interferes at the very heart of the sounds which, according to the context, alter or reinforce its presence. In a certain sense, it is only the negation that allows the effectiveness of its opposite to remain active, i.e. current. In the same way, we can say that, if an isolation of the negative dimension is not enough to understand what improvisers do, playing it down or overlooking it tends put to work an ideological dimension in this alternative.[13] Furthermore, we must underline that a different practice cannot be purely heterogeneous. Across the criticisms and the concrete alternatives which they create, the musicians shape within their play both precarious and transitory knots that will create dissensus – knots that Foucault names *points of resistance*.[14]

AESTHETIC FEATURES

It is now necessary to look more precisely at the elements of this 'positive response.' For this purpose, we have to somewhat leave the field of musicians' statements in order to focus more closely on musical practices. If, according to Derek Bailey, free improvisation is characterized by its amazing diversity, the fact remains that, from an aesthetic point of view, a few similarities can be brought out of its practice – setting aside all factions or periods isolated by a retrospective approach.

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[12] Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. 'Mai 1968 n'a pas eu lieu'. in *Deleuze. Deux régimes de fous, textes et entretiens 1975-1995*. Paris: Minuit, 2003, p.216.

[13] Theodor W. Adorno. *Philosophie de la nouvelle musique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1962, pp.138-142.

[14] 'These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. Resistances do not derive from a few heterogeneous principles; but neither are they a lure or a promise that is of necessity betrayed. They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite.' Michel Foucault. *La volonté de savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976, pp.126-127. (*The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. trans. by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, pp.95-96.)

Among these similarities, we can mention the following: the horizontality between the different musicians in the performance, and thus the denial of all hierarchical organization between them; the place indexation[15] of the performance and the consecrated ephemera; the specificity of the relationship with audience, its implication; the indefinitely renewed game of encounters which facilitates the improvisation; the flexibility required; the openness to accidents and unpredictability that supposes.

For example, in the gathered improvisations of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble's *Face to Face* record (1973), which is a duet between John Stevens and Trevor Watts, particular attention is focused on the placing of bodies in the performance space. The adopted configuration aims to wholly allow an interpersonal relationship in the creation's process. The title is intended to be explicit: two people are brought together, opposite to each other, in order to favour the process of *dialogism* in the improvisation. Each one is a constituent of the other. The musicians cannot be placed on separated planes, which, in spite of being only a couple, would reintroduce a hierarchical logic. Only the horizontality of players placement seems to render operational the relationship between sounds, not simply in their resonance, but also and first of all in their emergence. In the liner notes, John Stevens explains the project:

> *Face to Face means exactly that. When Trevor and I perform it, we are seated to enable the drums and the saxophone to be approximately on the same level. We face each other and play at each other, allowing the music to take place somewhere in the middle. This is very much an outward process. We are trying to be a total ear to the other player, allowing our own playing to be of secondary importance, apart from something that enables the other player to follow the same process – the main priority being to hear the other player totally. Both players are working at this simultaneously.*[16]

[15] Cf. Michel Gauthier. *Les contraintes de l'endroit*. Bruxelles: Les impressions nouvelles, 1987.

[16] John Stevens. *Face to Face – a piece for two people*, [liner notes]. SME. *Face to face*. 1973, Emanem CD 4003, 1995. According to a similar perspective, we can notice that John Stevens had made subtractions and substitutions into his drum kit a few years before in order to reduce the sound and space 'bulk' which separated him from others musicians. 'Summer 67' documents the earlier improvisation where Stevens uses this reduced kit. The other involved musicians are Peter Kowald and Evan Parker. Martin Davidson explains the issue: 'The emphasis was for each musician to listen to the contributions of the others rather than concentrate on their own playing – the antithesis of most of the then (and now) prevailing trends in music. This required Stevens to move from a conventional drum kit to a quieter collection of small drums and cymbals and other percussion – allowing other instruments to be able to converse on the same level.' Martin Davidson, 'Additional Comments' [liner notes]. *SME. Summer 1967*. Emanem CD 4005, 1995.

The favour bestowed upon Bakhtinian dialogism in SME finds an echo in one of the main features distinguishing, according to Prévost, improvisation from composition.[17] Moreover, we can emphasize that this dimension is shaped differently depending on the collective improvisation groups in whom it appears. For example, in AMM the musical space seems to combine differently. There, it is not really a matter of opening a closed relationship between musicians, but rather moving towards a disidentification of sound individualities through the entanglement of sounds. Then, the 'face to face' relation is substituted by a generalized abstraction, like that which propagated throughout the improvisations performed at the Crypt, on June 12, 1968.[18] Though the terms and the music differ, we can detect nevertheless a similar restraint of the individual in favour of the situation. About his experience with AMM, Cornelius Cardew noted:

> *as individuals we were absorbed into a composite activity in which solo-playing and any kind of virtuosity were relatively insignificant.*[19]

One of the other specificities of improvisation put forward by Prévost concerns 'the application of "problem-solving" techniques "within" performance.' This draws attention to the absence of planning in improvisation. Rather than premeditated action which is only performed to estimate its exactitude, the practice adopted by these musicians favours the investigation of circumstances. The musicians do not attempt to follow some pre-established directives, which could only suppress their initiative and give to them a status of auxiliary executants. Conversely they are only focused on the 'here and now' of playing. In the same way, Cardew insists on distinguishing, in the practice of improvisation, the attitude of rehearsal – by which improvisation would disappear – from the behaviour which consists in training.[20] The latter, contrary to the rehearsal, leads the musician to remain open to what will happen in the situation,

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[17] Cf. Eddie Prévost. *No Sound is Innocent*. Essex: Copula, 1995, p.172.

[18] AMM. *The Crypt*. 1968. Matchless Recordings, 1992. MRCD05. For a discussion of this disidentification stemmed from a mutual sound absorption, see the remarks by Christian Wolff about his taking part in AMM in 1968. Christian Wolff. '... let the listeners be just as free as the players' Fragments to make up an interview'. *Cue: Writings & Conversations*. Köln: Edition Musik-Texte, 1998, pp.80-82.

[19] Cornelius Cardew. *Towards an Ethic of Improvisation*. Treatise Handbook. London: Peters, 1971, p. xviii.

[20] Ibid., p.xvii.

accepting it for itself, or in other words to stay alert and flexible. The emphasis is put on process and not on product.

This behaviour, which stands at a remove from what is too predictable, is also the kind adopted by Derek Bailey in his approach to improvisation. In Bailey's music, it is exemplified by an asserted predilection for the ephemeral encounters between different singularities, in order to avoid all sedimentation in the playing and to encourage, according to Bailey's expression, a 'slight musical friction' which allows improvisation. The system of stable ensembles is thus replaced by one of *ad hoc* groups – which finds its paradigm in *Company Weeks*. These always temporary bands take as their foundation the principle of functioning by *project*. Indeed, the project is not characterized by a perpetuation of musical relationships, but conversely, consists of a momentary regrouping of individuals for the purpose of carrying out a precise activity, improvising for one evening. By this same bias these encounters tend to favour a weaving of networks. This way of working finds its motivation, in Bailey, in a refusal of idiomatic inscription which, as such, tends towards the identification of the playing and thus authorises 'identical' reproduction of it, a standardization which introduces itself into the most subtle nuances,[21] which gives rise to the emergence of style as Musil could understand it in his essay on swimming:

The style is a substitute, but in itself not at all arbitrary, for standardization.[22]

Nevertheless, non-idiomatic improvisation has not to be understood in Bailey as a pure absence of idiom, but rather as the expression of a negative aesthetics, in the way Adorno meant, i.e. that which, by its refusal of universality, consists in introducing, or at least preserving, some *difference*. The idiom is less denied than renewed, by the process of improvisation, in a becoming which contradicts it.

[21] Cf. Walter Benjamin. *Hachisch à Marseille. Oeuvres II*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000, pp.55-56.

[22] Robert Musil. *Art et morale du crawl. Proses éparses*. Paris: Seuil, 1989, p.102.

THE PROBLEM OF CRITICAL EFFECTIVENESS AGAINST THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF CAPITALISM

If the emergence of free improvisation in Europe has been accompanied by a calling into question of an establishment considered as oppressive, and thus tried to formulate itself as an alternative opening up of the field of the possibilities, it would seem, according to some analysis in social sciences, that the very basis for those criticisms (beyond free improvisation alone, of course) has been a 'breeding ground for capitalism.'[23] Whereas these criticisms could appear, according to its actors, particularly relevant in the 1960s and 1970s, their object was not (and still is not) timeless, changing in part according to the extent of the demands that it came up against. Indeed, it was in order to overcome the difficulties that it met at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s, and of which these criticisms were one of the symptoms, that capitalism was forced to carry out a displacement, to evolve its ideology in order to carry on, beginning this change inspired by these demands.

As Musil said, we shall not promote the belief that 'each end of school year represents the advent of a new era',[24] and thus the understanding that the capitalism of yesterday will be but a thing of the past. Rather, it is important to grasp its moving order to understand what, to a certain extent, put the aforementioned criticisms in a difficult position. These transformations of capitalism have been widely discussed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in their book, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.[25] The two researchers distinguish in their study two kinds of criticisms which accompany the history of capitalism. One, they name 'social criticism,' is characterized by a concern for equality, it denounces exploitation and individualism. The other, they name 'artist criticism,' pertains to oppression and domination through standardization and commodification.

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[23] Pierre-Michel Menger. *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur, Métamorphoses du capitalisme*. Paris: Seuil, 2002, p.9.

[24] Robert Musil. *L'Europe désemparée ou petit voyage du coq à l'âne*. Essais. Paris: Seuil, 1984, p.148.

[25] Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello. *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. We have to note that their study is about France, but the authors assert that 'relatively similar processes have marked the development of ideologies that have accompanied capitalism's redeployment in other industrialized countries [...]'. Boltanski & Chiapello. *Paper presented to the Conference of Europeanists*, March, 14-16, 2002, Chicago. p. 2.
Available at www.sociologiadip.unimib.it/mastersqs/rivi/boltan.pdf

It enhances conversely individual autonomy and freedom, singularity and genuineness.[26] These two criticisms are found on the whole in two different social groups, and can only with difficulty be inscribed together coherently, but nevertheless neither are they mutually exclusive of each other.[27] The period surrounding the year 1968 is notably distinguished by the rareness and the strength of their interaction.

However, if these two critical main axes met a large-scale movement at the end of 1960s and during 1970s and gave rise to different negotiations, the profound mutations carried out by capitalism from the second half of the 1970s (which allowed its redeployment in the following decade) seem to have mainly been brought about by employers' organizations taking into consideration the demands that stemmed from artistic criticism.[28] This interpretation, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, gave rise to a new spirit of capitalism, a new ideology of its justification:

> *Turning its back on the social demands which had dominated the first half of the 1970s, the new spirit opens itself to criticisms which at that time denounced the mechanization of the world, the destruction of ways of life favourable to the fulfilment of proper human potentialities, and, particularly, of creativity, and underlined the intolerable character of modes of oppression which, without necessarily deriving directly from historical capitalism, had been put to use by the capitalist mechanisms of work organization.*[29]

The artistic criticism demanded more freedom and individual autonomy, and refused control by hierarchy and the planning of tasks; the new spirit of capitalism answered it by giving up Fordism and rearranging the organization of work according to an adaptation of these demands. The new organization was, in turn, accompanied by a new form of precariousness. Sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger sums it up in these words:

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[26] Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello. op. cit., pp.81-86.

[27] Free improvisation, as for it, lends itself bad, as we have seen, to a such dichotomy, being shared, not without ambiguity, between these both main lines.

[28] Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello. op. cit., pp.255-280.

[29] Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello. op. cit., pp.288-299.

Thus the irony is that the arts, which have cultivated a fierce opposition against the domination of the market, appear as forerunners in the experimentation with flexibility, indeed hyper-flexibility.[30]

The transformations carried out by this new spirit brought about the formation of a new city[31], that Boltanski and Chiapello call the *cité par projets* (projective city).[32] They model it by cross-checking new ideas emerging from the management literature of the 1990s. The projective city establishes a new order of norms of judgement, where the improved self-esteem proper to the new spirit is mainly centred on the ability to adapt easily, the distance from repetition, the skill to generate trust and to activate temporary connections in a world henceforth understood as a network, and in this way encourages mobility and flexibility. It is perhaps interesting here, in comparison with the aesthetic statements quoted previously, to evoke certain terms from these management handbooks. Thus, as Eve Chiapello explains:

Planning and rationality are not any more, according to the management teachers and consultants, the only ways to make a success. Conversely, it must be 'run by chaos,' continuously innovate, be flexible, intuitive, have a strong 'emotional quotient.' Companies are too bureaucratic, too hierarchical, they alienate the workforce; they have to 'learn how to dance'...[33]

Companies where these imperatives manifest themselves, notably take the form of organic structures,[34] which, as such, allow room for interpersonal relations by horizontalising them. They are inscribed in a process logic, and seek to create an increasing involvement of each of their actors. Singularities can interact more easily and from here the expected profit is found in the creativity favoured by such encounters of differences. These transformations at work thus tend to establish a connection between

[30] Pierre-Michel Menger. op. cit., p.68.

[31] Luc Boltanski & Laurent Thevenot. *De la justification*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991.

[32] Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello. op. cit., pp.154-192.

[33] Eve Chiapello. 'Art, innovation et management: quand le travail artistique interroge le contrôle'. Lionel Collins (dir.). *Questions de contrôle*. Paris: PUF, 1999, p.194.

[34] Eve Chiapello. *Artistes versus Managers*. op. cit., p.160.

the economic world and what could constitute the specificity of the artistic field. They contribute to make their opposition less obvious:

> *The separation between these two worlds is not a sure thing any more; the boundaries are vaguer making possible some transfers of logic, of people, some reciprocal hybridization.*[35]

However, it is necessary here not to confound these criticisms with their object. The principle of recuperation at work in capitalism is nothing new, and we must equally point out how some of these criticisms stay relevant, while others are reformulated.[36] In this way, it is not a matter of overturning the profound meaning of experimented revolutions and assumed commitments, but merely of trying to apprehend the socio-historical context of a practice, free improvisation, in order to consider its possible critical significance. As Bourdieu said:

> *It's when reason discovers its historicity that it becomes able to escape from history.*[37]

Still, these shifts can lead today to a misunderstanding of the musicians' reasons for initiating their practices of improvisation in Europe at that time. It is maybe in this sense that we have to understand the surprise of a musician like Eddie Prévost when a younger musician tells him that he wants, like him, 'to make a career' in improvisation:

> *Do you realize that many people come to this music to make a career? Who the fuck would think of making a career through this music? Well, they make it, they notice that some people like you [Derek Bailey] or me work regularly in several places and they say: I want to do like them.*[38]

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[35] Ibid., p.220.

[36] Such critical displacements could concern, for example, liberation's requirement which covers the history of capitalism or the nature of interpersonal relationships in its new spirit. Cf. Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello. op. cit., p.528, pp.568-576, p.762 n. 4. Cf. also Eve Chiapello. op. cit., p. 229, pp.239-241.

[37] Pierre Bourdieu. *Choses dites*. Paris: Minuit, 1987, p.36.

[38] Comments of Eddie Prévost quoted by Derek Bailey. 'Derek Bailey'. [interview by Gérard Rouy, retranslated from French]. *Improjazz*, n° 103. March 2004, p.8. Eddie Prévost evokes similar considerations, according to these earlier improvisers, between the situation at that time and the current context, in the beginning of his paper: Eddie Prévost. 'The Arrival of a New Musical Aesthetic: Extracts from a Half-Buried Diary'. *Leonardo Music Journal*. Vol. 11, 2001, pp.25-28. About the relations to career in free improvisation, we will can also see the comments of Jack Wright in his paper, *An Avant-Garde Reborn – Free Improvisation and the Marketplace*, http://www.springgardenmusic.com/essays.html#avantgardereborn

POLITICAL DIMENSION OF IMPROVISATION

Whereas the advent of free improvisation in Europe was accompanied by both musical and extra-musical criticism, it would seem that such an aspect is less obvious today. The context differs and the musicians, according to their generation, probably do not improvise exactly for the same reasons. As Derek Bailey has remarked, the very atmosphere of concerts seems to have changed:

> *[...] we do not see people run out and scream, they do not behave like that. Sometimes they sit down and they talk to each other, as they would behave in a restaurant...*[39]

As Bailey's observation seems to admit, it is not unusual to acknowledge that in the end one improvises with 'tact' in the current scene. From a similar point of view, the guitarist Noël Akchoté asserts that

> *If the Free liberated without doubt and in a poetic way in the 1960s, today it is only liberal.*[40]

Nevertheless, we have to observe that these remarks about the contemporary scene do not give a fair account of its diversity, and that some new points of resistance, shaping becomings-minor[41], can appear here and there, their uncontrollable bifurcations tending to foil, at least in their advent, the attempts at recuperation. However, studying their aesthetic singularities would be outside the framework of this essay. So, to conclude, we will try to evoke more generally – i.e. in a way not period-specific – how free improvisation has not ceased to contain, in germ form, a political dimension, and so, how it remains critical. This political dimension, as well as its critical dimension,

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[39] Derek Bailey. art. cit., p.8.

[40] Noël Akchoté. '100 ans de Jazz'. *Improjazz*, n° 100. November-December 2003, p.5.

[41] Cf. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. *Mille Plateaux, Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2*. Paris: Minuit, 1980, pp. 356-380. Cf. also Anne Sauvagnargues. *Art mineur – Art majeur : Gilles Deleuze*. EspacesTemps les Cahiers. *Esthétique et espace public*. 78/79, 2002, pp.120-132.

neither resides in the political commitment of improvisers, nor in their declarations of intent, but it is revealed through the aesthetics that their practice confers.[42]

At least one aspect of free improvisation seems to express its political dimension: its *lack of identity*. The idea that the free improvisation distinguishes itself by this lack of identity was already what Derek Bailey expressed when he noted that its intrinsic diversity makes it difficult to name, leaving it in suspense. This constituting lack is not a gap which should be bridged within free improvisation; on the contrary, this lack is the empty space which allows it to exist. This empty space manifests itself both in the absence of rules which would come to outline its contours and in the absence of a right required to practice it. If the former is habitually admitted, though remains ambiguous, it seems much more rare that the latter is evoked. On this subject, Bailey noted:

> *Its accessibility to the performer is, in fact, something which appears to offend both its supporters and detractors. Free improvisation, in addition to being a highly skilled musical craft, is open to use by almost anyone – beginners, children and non-musicians. The skill and intellect required is whatever is available.*[43]

What Bailey affirms here is not that free improvisation could be some paradigm of an 'Art for all,' but rather that it only becomes present through the always inaugural gesture enacted by those who are practising it, i.e. those who are making it effective by playing to another ear. Free improvisation does not pre-exist, but is only a practice. So it cannot take count of the people coming into it, or to say this more explicitly in the terms of Jacques Rancière, it cannot mark out a clear and definitive boundary between those who can take part in it and those who cannot.[44] This does not mean that it can be some sort of pure openness, but rather, that its empty space supposes an indefinite plurality.

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[42] Cf. Jacques Rancière. *Malaise dans l'esthétique*. Paris: Galilée, 2004, pp.36-37. About what follows, see Jacques Rancière. Le partage du sensible, esthétique et politique. Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 2000. And more widely from the same author. *Aux bords du politique*. Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 1998.

[43] Derek Bailey. op. cit., p.83.

[44] Note I am referring to free improvisation as a practice, and not as a 'scene' (if we can separate them) where the terms appears in a different way of course. About the phenomena being inherent to the forming of a scene, see notably Emmanuel Carquille. 'Lieux communs'. *Revue & Corrigée*. n° 54, December 2002, pp.17-25. In the same way, what is evoked here does not consist to block out any implicit mechanisms of reproduction of social hierarchies into this scene. More generally see Charlotte Nordmann. *Bourdieu/Rancière: la politique entre sociologie et philosophie*. Paris: Amsterdam, 2006, pp.122-128.

The latter, coming to inhabit the irreducible empty space of free improvisation, is then accompanied by *dissensus*, in the sense Rancière describes. It is first of all polemical by the very assertion of its presence, but also, following this, in the type of relations that it can allow to take place. If free improvisation can undoubtedly give way to some consensus in its practice, it does not necessarily aim to being practised in a spirit of consensus. In the same way, dissensus does not mean that the music has to be played necessarily in contradiction (although it can be), but it characterizes the specific encounter of differences, in a creation which does not seek reconciliation or the profit of any a priori success.[45] This kind of encounter is the one Bailey has continuously experimented with in his unlikely itinerary, but it is also – without any infinite quest of the other – the one we can find in the stratified lineaments of a group as long-lived as AMM. Therefore, talking about free improvisation in terms of dissensus does not consist in reducing it to conflicts of interests which could reach a compromise, but instead designates the unpredictable encounter of differences contributing to the questioning of established aesthetic partitions. Beyond any expected volume levels this is nothing other than its noise.

[45] This encountering of differences is consequently very different from the one praised in the contemporary management handbooks.

Prisoners of the Earth Come Out!

Notes Towards 'War at the Membrane'

Howard Slater

Everything about us, everything we see without looking at it, everything we brush past without knowing it, everything we touch without feeling it, everything we meet without noticing it, has swift, surprising and inexplicable effects upon us, on our senses and through them on our ideas, on our very hearts.
– Guy de Maupassant, The Horla

The real subsumption of labour under capitalism, variously called bio-production, endocolonisation, expanded reproduction etc., has lead to a situation in which the processes of valorisation has become autonomised. By this it is meant that the 'valorisation of the value advanced' is not solely dependent on the labour process. The creation of surplus value becomes just as much a matter of 'productive circulation' as 'production proper':- values-in-flow aim to cut the circulation time of value, formerly a non-productive time, to a minimum; an instantaneous moment of valorisation that makes the circulation of values, their change in form, productive in itself. Theorist Jacques Camatte suggests that for this to have occurred Capital has 'anthropomorphised' and formed a 'material community'. This, then, could be what is meant by real subsumption: namely that the antagonistic barrier to continual valorisation, formerly the working class as living labour and variable capital, has been subsumed enabling capital to take on a human form and thereby overcome its limits.

The initial pessimism of this rendition only marks a defeatist acceptance and silent compliance if the tenets of orthodox Marxism are held to. If we look for antagonism in the old places, solely at the point of a dispersed and de-massified 'production proper', then we come across a (non) conscious compliance; a subject produced through the labour-process as the subject of a capital that is imbibing a bios. This production of the subject takes place under the auspices of a 'work plan' that, moving out from the 'production schedules' and 'product specifications' of the plant, takes the form of 'abstract operative rules'; society-wide dispositifs that mobilise constrained freedoms that determine the possibilities of life. If this production of the subject seems to foreclose antagonism it is just that we are being incongruently situated by increasingly outmoded discursive apparatus in that such a production for capital, by imbibing a bios, instaurates antagonism at a site of 'interiority' (an

ambiguous place as we shall see). By using the term 'labour power', Marx leaves an opening for us to conjecture through. Such a 'power', and its vicinity to Marx's 'vital force', involves all elements of a bios: from physical energy to psychical processes, from sensorimotor actions to language aptitudes, from powers of perception to involuntary affectivity. The whole body is involved and valorisation passes through us all as 'independent points of circulation'.

Real subsumption, then, creates a situation in which all activity becomes productive in some measure (even unemployment). There is no unproductive labour and most human activities are subject to being articulated as 'labour'. Just as artists speak of 'my work' etc. our consumption activities produce a surplus value somewhere in the circuit whilst producing a 'sign value' for ourselves. (Capital has long since learned to turn 'revenues' into productive capital). In mobilising each of us as 'valorisation agents', as switch points in the circuits of circulation and metamorphosis, Capital's real subsumption has developed in parallel to a communications media it has itself heavily invested in (c.f. Marx on railways). From smoke signals to the *cursus publicus* through to the spectacle, a 'sensory physiology' of communication has gradually come into being as a vehicle for abstract operative rules, for micro-interpellations and ready-made roles. This is hardly news, but what it suggests is that our very affective-propensities have been made productive. The concept of 'affective labour', keen to keep within the labour process and hence draw its genealogies from the workers movement, has not taken cognizance of the way our bodies, their sensory membranes, have become not only the over-stimulated site of media industry messages and subliminal seduction, but crucial terrains in the ongoing maintenance of ourselves as 'points of circulation'. As Jonathan Beller puts it: 'Trade is not just the movement of money and objects; it is the movement of capital through sensoriums'. Our senses labour.

This, then, is the war of the membrane; a war over the control of intensities, that has long been raging undeclared, but that allows us to recognise that, under real subsumption, 'labour power' has extended outside the factory and been harnessed through the faculties of perception and affectability. These faculties, deemed as aspects of freedom by liberal aesthetics, are themselves subject to automation, to habituation. This may explain the common thread running through much of avant-garde practice as being the struggle towards changes in perception; a struggle of the 'affective classes' who attempted and attempt, by practices aimed at 'deautomating perception', to re-format the 'instincts'.

This rendition of 'endocolonisation' as taking place at the 'interior' level of instinct formation, may seem far fetched, but it is our powers of affectability (our receptive surfaces) that have a direct input in the formation of instincts. Rather than the model of 'internal stimulus' and early life experiences being that which determines our 'interiority' it could perhaps be a matter that the sensory membrane, acting as a moebius strip between 'inner' and 'outer', is, following Deleuze, 'a receptive apparatus capable of bringing about successive superimpositions of surface planes' (hence our qualifying of 'interiority' as ambiguous). It could be argued that such 'superimpositions' of perception at the membrane are what create instincts in the form of a drive (*trieb*). If they are having such an impact then they can be said to be creative of our very 'will', they are direct inputs in the bio-production of our subjectivity. Furthermore, if a repetitive act (say, at a conveyor belt) can create a body map, then a repeated message aimed at our sensual perception by means of the 'sensory physiology' of communications media (i.e. audio-visual-language), can create an affect-map conditioning and habituating the way we feel. Such a rendition of 'real subsumption' necessitates that we recognise the

membrane as a site of antagonism and take a cue from Nietzsche who, under the auspices of a 'combat against culture', stated 'all sense perceptions are permeated with value judgements'.

Nietzsche is saying here, I think, that the supposedly liberational senses are as subject to conditioning as supposedly 'cognitive' thought processes. But, more importantly maybe, that, not only is there is no differentiation possible in the symbiosis of perception and intelligence (a riposte to 'pure thought' and 'pure feeling'), it is the case that sense perceptions cannot be autonomous from the values of the society in which they are embedded. This latter is the legend of the ivory tower artist of liberal aesthetics, but also the myth of the non-compromised revolutionary. What is at stake here, maybe, is that, beyond the autosuggestive power of the spectacle, there is inculcated, with the repeated sensory superimpositions, a drive, a desire, a desire for habitual perception produced as the recursive raw material of the production of subjectivity. If the subject can be constructed then its desire can be bio-productive. The senses and the energies attached to them, as a facet of the 'labour power' required by 'real subsumption', do not have to be forcibly harnessed, but learn to be pleasured by an abstract compulsion that appeases instinct. There is, then, an autosuggested will to valorisation that must continue to perceive in the same way or risk devalorising itself. Nervous breakdown. Peer opprobrium. The homogenised culture of the spectacle, itself subjected by gridworks of 'abstract operative rules' such as narrative and representational norms, insures against this devalorisation and so the membrane is simultaneously autosuggested and self-policed: the (in) voluntary servitude of sensual labour (c.f. Beller and his 'labour theory of attention'). The resultant subject displays the inviolable cool, the auto-affirmation, of the self-interested. Freud's 'stimulus shield' is no longer necessary when perception can be

automated. As media historian Friedrich Kittler puts it: 'Sense and the senses have turned into eye wash. Their media produced glamour will survive for an interim period as a by-product of strategic programmes'.

It may seem that we are no nearer to breaking through capital's material community, that the pessimism has deepened. It is possible to say, then, that what we are dealing with is a real subsumption that, in extending to the bios, has created a society of generalised alienation. This would only compound pessimism if it were taken that such an alienation removes us from the essence of what it is to be human, rather than it be, under real subsumption, a matter of this being-human being profiled as something to aim for and surpass in a process of becoming. There therefore comes a need to embrace alienation as an 'anticipatory form of becoming' (Matthew Fuller), to work from an 'alienated ground'. As Nietzsche states: 'It is in man himself that we must liberate life, since man himself is a form of imprisonment for man'. In some ways, then, the notion of an authentic subject and an authentic culture, are - with a rounded and deep-rooted assessment of technology (from hand-tools to laptops) as a constant mediating factor in our lives - non-starters from the beginning. An embracing and re-articulation of those very mediations becomes necessary. Mediations, such as machines and dispositifs, that are seen as factors of alienation and which, when they become perceived as bio-productive materials, ultimately point to the way subjects are constructed and produced by the 'movement of capital through sensoriums'. In some ways, this is the same as saying that the production of subjectivity needs to become perceptible, that, in the war at the membrane, the sense perceptions need to come into antagonism with their valorisation. This struggle over the production of subjectivity not only undermines any notion of a human essence, but it infers that alienation needs to be embraced, sensually re-appropriated, considered, rather than repressed for the

repression is tantamount to the reinvigoration of 'automated perception' in that the energy spent 'repressing' could be nothing other than cultural sublimation: our trying to make ourselves whole and live-up to a mythic 'essence' is a defensive, imprisoning measure. *Prisoners Of The Earth Come Out!*

It is here, in the realm of alienation made conscionable, that avant-garde music practices provide tools to combat the endocolonial move of capital's material community. In some ways these musical practices are involved in sensually re-appropriating alienation. Like other avant-garde practices they are involved in a process of de-automating perception and alerting us to the antagonisms that surround it. For those used to conventional definitions of music (harmony, chord progression etc) this accounts for the often encountered response that avant-garde musics are estranging and 'unmusical'. Often these very responses are conditioned by what is expected from conventional music; an emotional comfort is expected, a sense of unity, a familiarity that provokes familiar self-affirming emotions that could themselves be facets of an automated perception that figures as a defence-mechanism, a defence of our own value. Within avant-garde music the deliberate push towards estrangement, towards treating the listener as if he/she were an object (pliable produced matter, a reduced being) or as a subject formed from 'unnatural' perceptual abilities (a developing species-being), could be best exampled by noise music. A use of sound that is just one means of bringing a willed antagonism to the enforced yet unrecognised war at the membrane.

Noise music has a long history and is subject to variations. From the incursion of extraneous sounds (such as Varèse's use of sirens in *Ionisation*) to guitar feedback and industrial machinery, from the 'noise' of amplified micro-sounds to the out-and-out ear

splitting conglomerations of overloaded circuitry, noise commits violence on automated perception, it violates expectations and tempers unity. At one level its violence is almost paranoiac; it refuses communication and seems to nihilistically reject meaning. However, the multiple particles of sound that make up 'noise', noise as composed compounds, noise as a wall of sound, as a block to a block, can be said, in confronting our habituated notions of communication, to be participating in their deconstruction. Seamless communication can be the modus operandi through which dispositifs operate; the production of subjectivity proceeds by means of well-mapped narrative expectations, by means of recognisable significations and symbolisations. With noise there is a disruption of such repressing representations and an embracing of what Guattari has called 'a-signification'. In some ways, then, the violence of noise, its 'affect torrent', can often be of the sort that confronts its human auditors with the inhuman.

Listening to noise, then, alerts us to the way that the 'sensory physiology' of the membrane is ever-present; a fact that habitual modes of perception cover over for us in the way that common responses are elicited as part of the ongoing production of subjectivity. Noise, then, its physical impact upon us is creative of apperception - the perception of perception, an intensification of perceptions that brings into focus, by means of an alienating distance, the means by which our subjectivities are produced as much by sensory percepts as rational concepts. This physical impact summons up an idea of the sensory membrane as what Freud fleetingly referred to as the 'body-ego': 'a mental projection of the surface of the body'.

This seemingly heretical phrase, offering as it does the imbrication of a mode of agency of the psyche (ego) with the notion of the skin (surface of the body), has, when we take into account the endocolonial seductions of affectivity, the ramification that

there is no boundary between the instinctual and the cultural (c.f. Jean Laplanche). The raw composed barbarism of some noise, its technologically harnessed primitivism, its metaphorisation of 'vital force', seems like an apt analogue to this alienating yet alarmingly real revelation of the 'dynamic functioning of irrationality' in our culture (c.f. Otto Rank). This weakened boundary is the site of a constant struggle in which the 'affective classes' become alienated from habit.

Similarly, the rejection of meaning by means of noise is another way that alienation is embraced. Whereas we are often expected to make meaning of our perceptions, to thereby be interpolated by directed processes, with noise we are drawn to the irrationality of the posited possibility of any, all and no meaning. This, to some degree, also acts critically on the idea of a human essence in that such an essence, an identity, is constructed by means of selective perception and vouchsafed meanings. The abandonment of meaning by means of noise has the repercussion of an abandonment of the priority given to consciousness, knowledge and the mediations of language. This has the effect of not only opening out the 'deconstruction of communication' by means of an unconscious communication (c.f. subliminals etc), a communication at the level of 'vitality affects' (Daniel Stern), a 'semiotic of the impulses', but of a concomitant deconstruction of the subject and its recourse to the refractive defence-mechanisms of language. Under the onslaught of noise the human essence dissolves into an (alienating) diffusion of potential becomings whereby identity can be revealed as a fabrication, as the foreclosing product of endocolonisation. The sensualised activation of a 'body-ego' by means of our perception of the membrane similarly reveals a polymorphous sexuality, a libidinal skin, that, at the extreme, can undermine the 'genital organisation' of the body. It is this onslaught that is often attributed as an aggression of the noise-maker upon the auditor whereas, as an operator of noise, as a

non-subject agent or meta-musician, the aggression is being wrought upon the shared notion of a generalised sense of 'self' that is becoming traumatically awakened to a polymorphous, diffuse becoming that effects the very organisation of the body.

The abreaction of unconscious material, often felt as a kind of aggression wrought upon the produced sense of a unified and ideal 'self', can be traumatic. Avant-garde musics have long had this divesting, para-analytic effect upon listeners. It is such abreaction that is crucial in combating endocolonisation for it can reveal levels of our being produced and overdetermined as 'selves' that undermines the sense of 'freedom' normally attributed to the subject. In some ways the music of Throbbing Gristle deals with just this both at the level of an often freeform, chaotic and unstructured improvisation, which utilised uncommon noises, and at the level of a verbal abreaction; a kind of continuous self-disclosure and becoming-others from Genesis P-Orridge (c.f. Persuasion). The effect, especially in live recordings, is one of a collective of non-subject agents from whom it is difficult to isolate who does what: several singularities cohere into a temporarily unified group. In some ways, as with improvising ensembles such as AMM, Musica Elettronica Viva and Morphogenesis, what occurs in the music making is a sense not only of the 'real subsumption of labour' into processes that are beyond human control (abstract operative rules), but the foregrounding, in such collective improvised musics, of the quality of relation between the meta-musicians; a kind of public abreaction shared between group and audience members.

It is this focus on social relations that becomes acutely profiled under real subsumption. When we speak of capitalist social relations we are also saying capital is a social relation. In this light the capitalist form of value could be tracked back to its role in homogenising and equalising the variability of different forms of labour

by bringing them into relation, making them formally equitable in terms of measure. Capital as a social relation, then, is a reduction of all relations to cynical usurious relations, an 'objectified social mediation' (Moishe Postone). Interestingly, a facet of capitalist social relations, with the accent placed upon independence and individual contractual conformities, is their occlusion, their not being manifested. An anonymously authored pamphlet entitled 'Call' says interestingly: 'We do not perceive humans as isolated from each other... we see them as bound by multiple attachments that they [have] learned to deny'. This denial of attachments, a repression of dependencies, an indifference to others, is, in some ways, what is expressly sought to be overcome in group improvisations, group abreactions, such as those of AMM et al. More than this, the relations established need to be qualitative, congruent ones, as, bearing in mind the unfamiliar syntax of the music, its use of the vagaries of noise, it is a music that sensually re-appropriates our 'alienation-from' each other by, crucially, profiling, by means of musical practice, the making public of formerly private intensities. Abreaction as means to overcome indifference and, to cite Laplanche again, as a means to reveal the lack of boundaries between instinct and inter-subjectivity.

For such abreaction to proceed 'the affective circulation through which... multiple attachments are experienced' needs to be unblocked ('Call'). This is the war of the membrane taken to the more general level of the extra-individual, of the affectivities conducted, circulated, between-us in the wider social world which is itself a series of membranes and means of intensity that are policed in order to be dis-empassioned. So, if an ensemble like AMM can be criticised for their incorporations of the 'idiomatic' (jazziness, improvisatory techniques) then this is just as much about their refusal to block those 'multiple attachments' that, in more purist (and individualistic) renditions are seen as the presence of 'alienating material'. In group improvisation such material

cannot be avoided. From the radio snippets used by Keith Rowe to the whole field of the 'social ear' of music concrete and the lambasting detritus of the id that emanates towards us as noise, it is the material of endocolonisation, those 'introjected aspects of self-structure', that need to be abreacted. For this to take place, without adopting the mien of the confessional or inquisitional, the import needs to be placed on the quality of the relation: the sensual re-appropriation of alienation is our having to stake a claim upon the 'worst of ourselves' in a mutually supportive environment; one which allows for emotional intensities to be experienced in common. In the case of group-ensembles and the non-subject agents of noise it could be said to be a matter of partially unwilled responses taking place in a permissive atmosphere. The 'worst of ourselves' in the case of AMM, or other avant-garde musics, is this 'idiomatic' of the pre-set, the reincorporation of material that cannot be deemed pure, and our examination of the relations, the social embededness, such material represents for us and the relations, the abreactions *en masse*, that could be the cause of transfigurations, devalorisations, becomings.

In the assault against the 'mythic essence' that abreaction brings to light we are on the terrain of forms of cultural activity that verge on the embarrassing, that tread the line of the acceptable in an experimental testing of the quality of relation, a 'going fragile'. In avant-garde music practice this is seen in what is loosely called 'abject music' in which 'musical' props or idioms lend support to a kind of public 'self-differentiation' or direct play of an affect-ridden and pre-articulatory persona that, in demonstrating a lack of unity in the performer, challenge the auditor to similarly become contradicted by an openness to affect and similarly overcome the embarrassment of abreaction. Such abreaction is embarrassing in that it reveals and/or embraces a sense of alienatedness, it reveals us as just as much imprisoned as 'free cultural agents'. Sound poetry often has this abject effect whereby the sound poet

seems to be overcome by an 'affect torrent' that is enabling a deconstruction of communication, reducing language to guttural materials that no longer mediate the affects by a use of words, but create new affects and compounded emotions, a 'changingness', for which there is no language. Indeed, with sound poetry, language is often being consciously de-cathected; an alienating move in itself when it is considered that our use of language, our cathecting of words in order to express ourselves, is, we are led to believe, the main means of communicating 'accurately' and 'authentically'.

Like 'abject music' and sound poetry the incursion of silence into music, almost a conceptual conceit, is another mode of resistance against our endocolonisation. From the overlong intervals of a Morton Feldman piano piece through to the descent into almost inaudible passages in some of the works of AMM and the 'constituting pauses' of Radu Malfatti, silence functions, unlike quietude, to undemonstrably demonstrate that the participants have created an environment between themselves whereby trustingness, non-judgemental attitudes and empathic listening are almost taking the form of musical instruments to replace trumpets, keyboards, tapes. With silence comes anticipation, but, in the common run of things, with silence there comes an embarrassment that must be overcome. We can fear silence as if it were the most ear-splitting noise; a psychical feedback of inculcated paranoia and self-doubt inculcated in the slipstream of the 'mental-reaction-average' of capital values as they circulate through the sensorium. So, when silence makes us uncomfortable it speaks to us of the projections and introjections that have taken place at the membrane, it makes us attempt to articulate something inexplicable, something produced of us without our knowing. Silence almost forces us to stop and reflect, to pause before broken objects, to doubt the consummations and consumptions, self-satisfactions, that are expected to be pleasurable. The practice of silence in music, silence shared between many,

seems to suggest that one day there will be no music, just possibilities. Our willingness to abreact *en masse*, to decathect the 'bad objects' of capital and sift through affect, in order to take control of our own becomings as we counter the use of ourselves and our desires as bio-productive materials of an anthropomorphised capital, is the most pleasureable music there is. Here, there is no embarrassment or denial that an 'internal communication' is proceeding, that, it can sound imperceptibly. Here, after Carl Rogers, the organism, as it reappropriates its sensual labour for itself in the ongoing war at the membrane, is becoming 'an instrument of sensitive living'.

Howard Slater 2007

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Anti-Copyright: Why Improvisation and Noise Run Against the Idea of Intellectual Property

Mattin

Property is theft.
– Proudhon

Intellectual property is shit.
– Billy Bao

No other type of music-making contradicts itself through its recording like improvisation does. In this essay I intend to explain certain aspects inherent within the practice of improvisation and noise that counter the idea of intellectual property practically and conceptually. While many musicians would probably argue in favour of getting rid of any notion of authorship, and sharing their recordings, there is often a lack of discussion about this aspect of musical practice. Almost all the people that I know are downloading music, but people rarely talk of the consequences. Some people tell me it is very utopian or naïve to think that one can get rid of copyright and intellectual property, but to a certain extent it is already happening in practice. Most of the music that is heard in the world is likely to be from downloads using different peer to peer (P2P) networks such as Soulseek, Amule or Bittorrent, or one-click hosting pay websites such as Rapidshare. Because of its rigid and bureaucratic structure, the law is always left behind by the questions posed by new technologies. But, apparently, it is only a matter of time before the law catches up. Right now repressive measures aided by technologies of surveillance and control are already being developed without our consent by the most powerful governments under the pressure of corporations (ACTA being a good example).[1] Should we allow them to do this or should we start to develop our own platforms outside of the ideological framework that lets them behave this way? I will argue that the practice of improvisation in itself questions the foundations upon which intellectual property is based, such as: authorship, rights, restrictions, property, and the division between production and consumption. Improvisation and noise distribution, with their hardcore do it yourself (DIY) aesthetics, indicate alternatives to the mainstream means of production and distribution of music. Both practices are intertwined and share many things in common, but I am taking their obvious characteristics as a way of showing that within these types of music-making, there is already an existing critical attitude towards copyright that should be deepened and developed consciously.

[1] The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) is a proposed plurilateral trade agreement that would impose strict enforcement of intellectual property rights related to Internet activity and trade in information-based goods. See http://jamie.com/2008/05/23/we-must-act-now-against-acta/

RECORDING THE MOMENT

In improvisation one always tries to understand and play with the specific characteristics of this situation. The relationship between the instrument, the other players, the space and audience (if there is one) becomes intensified through a mutual understanding that everything is at stake at every moment. Power structures can be changed at any point because the future of this practice is unwritten. The social relations being produced are questioned as the music develops. If successful, improvisation runs against its own dogmatism. This is done through developing agency and responsibility towards the present among the people involved by questioning established norms of behaviour. In this sense we could say that improvisation is the ultimate site-specific form of performance. There is no outside to improvisation, no end, it is akin to what Walter Benjamin calls pure mediality or pure violence which is human action that neither founds nor conserves the law. Pure means as revolutionary violence. How can we translate this kind of activity into the making of a record, an object? How can a performance that is so specific then be put forward into something that could be heard, read or seen at any time by anybody in the future ? How can this activity in time be brought to an end? Made into something that can be consumed again and again?

> *The relations between musicians are directly dialogical: i.e. Their music is not mediated through any external mechanism e.g. A score.*[2]

Often in improvisation one finds an attitude towards recording as one of merely documenting the creative process at an specific moment (as for example is often the case with the record label Emanem). Placing a stereo microphone in the room, the players play, the sounds get recorded and then released, with as little intervention in the

[2] Eddie Prévost, *Free Improvisation in Music and Capitalism: resisting authority and the cults of scientism and celebrity* in this book and (forthcoming) ed. James Saunders, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009.

process as possible. I find this approach problematic. It is a fallacy that one can capture the moment through audio recording – that the recording can really represent that 'creative process'. We all know that the moment is gone forever, that the recording can never reproduce all the specifics of the situation, the room, the feeling of the players, their history and backgrounds, the conditions, reasons and interests for producing such a recording. Peggy Phelan, an important feminist scholar in the field of performance studies, has discussed the problematics of documenting performance through writing. Her view might help us with our concerns here of documenting improvisation through recording. In the last chapter of her book *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, she says:

> *Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation or representations of representations. Once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance enters the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.*[3]

Phelan argues that the writing about performance should be performative. By writing about performance one is transforming the work discursively giving a new perspective which breaks with its previous one. It is important to understand that you can never capture a moment, and therefore must never attempt to make a universal truth that represents the moment. It's only through understanding this disappearance that one can bring to life different qualities that might feel similar but nonetheless raise new perspectives. One should have an active and creative attitude towards documentation; understanding documentation not as merely subordinate to the action of improvisation but instead as a collaborator, applying the same kind of exploratory

[3] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The politics of performance*, London: Routledge, 1993. p.146.

approach that ones uses in improvisation to all the processes of production (recording, distributing, different ways of networking...). Never taking anything for granted, we should question the laws that try to define notions of authorship, freedoms and the values of what we produce. One brings his or her subjectivity into the material, recreating it and redefining it for one's needs. The division between making and listening to music would disappear if the notion of authorship was not there. But because the author must protect her cultural production, a need arises to make clear cut boundaries between production and consumption. If improvisation is an exploration of freedom and the limitations of that freedom then it should always problematise clear cut notions of producer and consumer, of making and consuming. This would be a situation in which the notion of authorship is constantly put into question as it is these 'authors' who categorise our freedom. The framework of improvisation is wider than just the moment in which the musicians are playing with each other. As the specific conditions of where they are playing such as the room, the type of audience and their expectations, and the way they make money, all effect the amount of time that they practice, obviously all this and more affects their playing. Therefore if we change the conditions of our production we would also change the way we play.

> *Warning – Copyright subsists in all Matchless Recordings. All rights of the producer and the owner of the recorded work reserved. Unauthorised copying, public performance, broadcasting, hiring or rental of this recording prohibited. In the UK apply for public performance licences to: PPL.1 Upper James Street, London W1R H3G.*[4]

Matchless recordings is the label of Eddie Prévost, member of the radical and innovative improvisation group AMM which started in 1965. All the records of AMM released on Matchless recordings have this or a similar copyright warning. There is a

[4] Copyright Warning, printed on the back of most Matchless Recordings releases this is taken from Eddie Prévost solo entelechy.

huge contradiction in finding this copyright note on an improvised record, a music that questions so deeply the notion of authorship. When I asked Eddie about his use of copyright, he told me that it was because of practical reasons. PRS/MCPS Alliance (the home of the world's best songwriters, composers and music publishers!)[5] has a deal with the BBC, so the BBC will always pay a certain amount for copyright. If the BBC would play some uncopyrighted AMM recordings on the radio, then it would be allocated to an unattributable copyright section which will then be shared by percentage with the members of PRS/MCPS. So, the already rich, 'best songwriters and composers', would basically get richer. While this is an understandable and strategic use of copyright from Eddie's side, there is not doubt that this use also implies the same conservative attitude inherent in copyright which the music itself supersedes. By being part of the copyright system, one reinforces the whole structure that underpins the star/celebrity system.[6] How can it be possible for recordings in the so-called 'free' improvisation genre to restrict the possibilities of what you can do with this material? What are the limitations of that word 'free' for the person who is listening to the record? You are free to pay for the record, you are free to listen to it, to enjoy it, but no to be creative with it, to use it to, give it to your friends, to make music out of it, to download it, to copy it, to make money out of something for which you had to pay? I perceive the sounds on records as an extension of the sounds that you put into space, in the concert. The improvisation among the musicians does not happen at that precise place or moment where the record is played, but people can apprehend it as material for thinking or working with. The music is not a pure representation of the individual playing of which the only possessor is the musician. Think of the people that you are playing with, of all your influences and all the comments made by friends. By thinking the situation through in this way we can open up the framework of an improvised concert in both time and space.

[5] Statement found on their website: http://www.mcps-prs-alliance.co.uk

[6] See Eddie Prévost's essay in this book *Free Improvisation in Music and Capitalism: resisting authority and the cults of scientism and celebrity.*

NOISE DISTRIBUTION

While in improvisation there is a sense of craft within one's own instrument and in being able to interact with other musicians, in noise this disappears to the extent of anti-virtuosity becoming a virtue. A nihilist approach to improvisation in which the interaction is not based upon developing common denominators for some communication to happen among the players, but rather a matter of developing the freedom of individual expression. In this sense I find the noise scene even less academic than the improvisation scene. The noise scene is founded upon people organising concerts in all kinds of places, releasing music in any kind of medium and finding, along the way, different means of distribution. This allows for many collaborations to occur. In this scene the DIY ethos is part of the survival. If nobody gives a fuck, at least you do. People have been self-organising themselves by organising concerts wherever possible and more. This self-organisation, which constantly makes people change roles; from player to organiser, from critic, to distributor, helps people understand each others roles. An example of this is Daniel Löwenbrück, who for the last 15 years has run the label and mail order outfit Tochnit Aleph. He has just opened the record shop Rumpsti Pumsti (Kreuzberg, Berlin), he performs under the name Raionbashi and he has organised concerts for some of the most radical artists in Berlin. Both in the improvised and noise scene the question of authorship is completely interrelated to that of the producer.

MEANS OF PRODUCTION

The best political tendency is wrong if it does not demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed.[7]

[7] Walter Benjamin, The Author as Producer in *Reflections* .trans. Edmund Jephcott, New York: SchockenBooks, 2007. p.223.

Walter Benjamin, in his 1934 text 'The Author as Producer', discusses how the political tendency of the work of art, cannot be justified solely by being just 'politically correct'. Instead, its politics should be demonstrated in its relationship to technique and of equal importance is the matter of how the writer positions himself/herself within the means of production. While the practices of improvisation and noise are often very progressive regarding their content, technique and relationship to the means of production – generating alternative, self-organised, and open structures for music making, presentation and distribution – these days there is little discussion of their politics. People might want to distance themselves from the political discussions characteristic of the '60 and '70s, in which the politics might be seen today as oppressive and all too clear cut, propagandistic and carrying an overly defined message (see Eddie Prévost text in this volume). What are the elements that constitute the means of production in the specific case of CDs? Authorship, market, distribution... . I remember having a conversation about copyright with the experimental electronic musician Dimitris Kariofilis (artist name Ilios, who also runs the label Antifrost focussing on experimental electronic works). Dion Workman and myself released a duo CD on his label in 2004, and we attached an Anti-Copyright statement. When asking me about the reasons behind the copyright note, Dimitris suggested that by not putting any note he himself was more radical than we were, because not even caring about it at all was more of a 'Fuck Off' to the system. But if you do not care, somebody is going to care for you especially if there is some profit involved. By default, thanks to the Berne Convention, whatever you do is copyright, so you will still be under the legal framework.[8] By including an Anti-Copyright statement as part of the release we were purposely not adopting the language of the law (as the Creative Commons licences do) but making obvious the fact that one is, in practice, totally free to use the recording in any way one wants to. This rhetorical gesture – which makes it obvious that we do not support the ideology

[8] From Wikipedia.org: 'Under the Convention, copyrights for creative works are automatically in force upon their creation without being asserted or declared. An author need not "register" or "apply for" a copyright in countries adhering to the Convention. As soon as a work is "fixed", that is, written or recorded on some physical medium, its author is automatically entitled to all copyrights in the work and to any derivative works, unless and until the author explicitly disclaims them or until the copyright expires. Foreign authors are given the same rights and privileges to copyrighted material as domestic authors in any country that signed the Convention.'

behind copyright – has a long history, from the Situationist International to Woody Guthrie and many punk and anarchist publications. Taking control over what you have to hand, we and other people are free to do whatever one might imagine with this material.

> *An author who has carefully thought about the conditions of production today [...] will never be concerned with the products alone, but always, at the same time, with the means of production. In other words, his [/her] products must possess an organising function besides and before their character as finished works.*[9]

More and more we have the possibility to do our distribution without the need of big record companies. A good (or bad example) of this could be MySpace. One can produce a song and upload it to the internet straight away, without the need of a label, then send the information about it to a great number of people. There is no doubt that the original idea is good and it helps to create many new connections and contacts. But at what cost? First giving publicity to the company itself. Many contemporary artists use the MySpace website as their prime website, even before your name there is already a brand with a very clear ideology behind it. Whatever progressive music you make you will have tattooed upon your forehead the name of a company which has very close alliances with conservative ideology (Rupert Murdoch the owner of MySpace and News Corp., which also contains Fox, and through all his media empire supported the 2003 war in Iraq). In terms of use, at least partly due to the interface of the website, there is rarely anything more than simple self-promotion and a great lack of discussion. The MySpace system also uses proprietary software (as opposed to free software, I will explain later on). MySpace websites are often very heavy for the computer, and they usually use very poor compression of the audio tracks they host. It has some similarities

[9] Walter Benjamin, *The Author as Producer* in trans. Anna Bostock, Understanding Brecht, London: Verso, 1983; written as a lecture for the Institute for the Study of Fascism, in Paris, April 1934. p.98. This quote is taken from the website: http://www.kurator.org/wiki/main/read/Introduction

with a big record label but with the difference that the big company is in the end without any need to bother listening to see whether what you are doing is good or bad, it just takes advantage of your need for promotion: your creativity is their publicity with the added possibility of being exposed to their censorship:

> *MySpace.com reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject, refuse to post or remove any posting (including private messages) by you, or to restrict, suspend, or terminate your access to all or any part of the MySpace Services at any time, for any or no reason, with or without prior notice, and without liability.*

This statement makes very clear the amount of control that you have in using MySpace. You might own the rights of the music that you put on MySpace (this was not the case until 2006), but you do not have any control over the future of the infrastructure that you are promoting yourself on. The statement makes a clear differentiation and division, at the end of the day, the future of your music distribution might be decided by a corporation which behaves according to their interests and not yours. You surrender control over your future and the future of your music.

> *What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers- that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.*[10]

Breaking clear cut divisions between producers and consumers, in order not to reproduce the hierarchical structures that puts limitations on our creativity. The underground noise tape circuit in the 80's is a good example of how people were sharing their music. You would send some tapes to some of the people interested in the same music in other

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[10] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' in *Reflections*. p. 233. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Published by Schocken Books, New York. 2007

parts of the world, and people would rework the material, and it would be considered more of an honour than a matter to get angry about. What could be a more creative attitude towards somebody's work than making a work out it? MySpace does not encourage this type of activity, because the latters' collaborative character disturbs the foundations of their ideology which is aligned with simple proprietorship and exploitation.

AUTHORSHIP

How has the idea of authorship developed through history?

The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author.[11]

It is very important to understand that the idea of the author was not always there – think of stories, folk tales, epics and tragedies that were passing through people without the need of pointing out a person responsible as the originator. The idea of authorship has been constructed throughout history, depending among other things, on philosophical discussions such as the freedom of the individual and the development of new technologies. The invention of the printer was crucial for the developing the idea of the author. Once people could reproduce books, leaflets, images and were able to distribute these in very different places, the connection with the printed commodity's locality was lost. It is at this point that the notion of the author as some sort of genius, who had some transcendental qualities that went

[11] Sabine Nuss, *Digital Property*, http://osdir.com/ml/culture.internet.rekombinant/2005-08/msg00012.html

beyond the reproducible object that you had in your hands and gave value beyond the reproducibility of the book at hand. This conferred a special value upon the individual as creator, even if culture has been always about reappropriating somebody else ideas and using them in different and playful ways.

In the 60's with the arrival of post-structuralism, thinkers like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault began to criticise the notion of the author and its authoritative power. For Foucault, the idea of the author developed as a way of controlling the press through censorship and it was a way of finding out who did what in order to then punish them. As one cannot punish ideas or texts, the (often nominal) author became responsible for his/her ideas and text, by which in this process they became his/her property. By establishing legal structures like Copyright, the classification of transgressive work and its authors was made easier, the works themselves became part of the canon of our culture. Through its institutionalisation the transgression was no longer in need of being prohibited but instead became accepted.

> *But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature. It is as if the author, at the moment he was accepted into the social order of property which governs our culture, was compensating for his new status by reviving the older bipolar field of discourse in a systematic practice of transgression and by restoring the danger of writing which, on another side, had been conferred the benefits of property.*[12]

Could we see this as an act of progress or of recuperation? The law is always behind with peoples' activities, and what once might have been seen dangerous

[12] Michel Foucault, *What is an Author*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900 – 2000 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, London: Blackwell, 2007.

for society later on becomes perceived as an enrichment of the general culture. The transgressive character of a work gets assigned to an 'author' then classified, categorised & marketed.

> *Writing is not the vehicle for the author's expression of his/her emotions or ideas, since writing isn't meant to communicate from author to reader, but rather writing is the circulation of language itself, regardless of the individual existence of author or reader: 'it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears'.*[13]

Opening up new ideas and works, is the issue here, not self-promotion and egoistic acceptance by a passive audience. Once you put work out there, it is no longer yours, it should be considered to be in the public domain and people should do with it whatever their imagination drives them to. And that is not some bullshit piracy discourse, this is the way people have behaved throughout history. Once written, the author stops having control over the text. The text has its own discourse and power and we should not limit it to an authoritarian voice. Language itself has is own potential and to make it solely the property of the author might dilute its power. While many people have argued that responsibility is a very important question with regard to what somebody does, and how he or she must have responsibility to that which what she or he says, that responsibility should be extend to the distribution of what they do.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

In order to trace the notion intellectual property historically we have to look at the idea of property propagated by the English philosopher John Locke, a key contributor to liberal theory (a defender of individual freedom, his ideas became very important

[13] Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author.* Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900 – 2000 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, London: Blackwell, 2007. p.139.

for the American Constitution). Locke can be identified as the creator or main theorist of the idea of property. He suggests that an individual, by the application of his/her labour, produces private property for their exclusive use. As Sabine Nuss puts it, 'he who plucks the apple shall keep it'. Locke's premise was that everybody has property in himself or herself, that everything in the state of nature is still held in common and was given by god in order to be propertised. If you add your own labour to something that is in the commons then you make it your property, since otherwise if it remains in the commons it will be neglected, it will be left to rot. Marx criticised Locke's notion that one could have exclusive control over the goods originated through his/her labour as part of bourgeois ideology. Marx maintains that the social relations of production are what produces the goods. It seems that Locke had in mind rival goods when he developed his theory (if one consumes it, others can't). What happens to non-rival goods like ideas? George Bernard Shaw famously said that if you and I have an apple and we exchange apples, you would only have one apple but if you and I have an idea and we exchanged them, we will have two ideas. So, how is it possible to treat ideas as if they were apples i.e. to make them into commodities? It is only through copyright that it is possible to produce scarcity out of ideas and this of course can produce serious benefits for some but not all:

> *The core copyright industries are serious business: the top three exports of the US for instance are movies music and software. In 2001 the value of the Copyright industries stood at $535 billion and exports form the same accounted for $88-97 billion, while that of chemicals were $74.6 and automobiles were $56.52. It is only within this context of the global political economy of the media industry that we can even begin to understand the ramifications of licensing in copyright law.*[14]

[14] Lawrence Liang, *Copyright, Cultural Production and Open Content Licensing*, http://pzwart.wdka.hro.nl/mdr/pubsfolder/liangessay/view

ALTERNATIVES

Again technology is posing interesting questions regarding intellectual property. Today with the help of the internet, audio-visual material can be reproduced at no cost except for that of a internet connection and hard drive space. There are licences that try adapt copyright or at least play with it in order to make legal the new possibilities for reproduction. Many of these licences come out of the Copyleft movement. The concept of Copyleft comes from a play of words of Richard Stallman as a way of opening up the notion of Free Software and his GPL licence (General Public Licence) to a broader cultural spectrum. Richard Stallman started the Free Software Movement and created the GPL licence as a way of countering proprietary software. While proprietary softwares were about restricting your use, the GPL licences gives you four freedoms:

0. Users should be allowed to run the software for any purpose.
1. Users should be able to closely examine and study the software and should be able to freely modify and improve it to fill their needs better.
2. Users should be able to give copies of the software to other people to whom the software will be useful.
3. Users should be able to improve the software and freely distribute their improvements to the broader public so that they, as a whole, benefit.

In the GPL licence you always need to reproduce the GPL, so one cannot close the code. Thanks to this licence Linux, was developed. Many people tend to confuse 'Free Software' with 'Open Source' but they each contain different ideological positions. Open source was a term developed by Bruce Perens and Eric Raymond in a Netscape

navigator conference in 1998 as a strategic term to appear more attractive to the market – the word Free, unless as in 'free market', is not such a cool thing for the development of capitalism. The word free contains two meanings: 'free as in speech' and 'free as in beer'. Richard Stallman only refers free software to 'free as in speech'. So a politically correct term to gather the whole movement has become FLOSS (Free, Libre, Open, Source, Software-Libre in Spanish meaning only 'free as in speech'). One of the main alternative licence systems to follow up the Copyleft movement, developed by the lawyer Lawrence Lessig, are the Creative Commons licences (CC). These licences give you the opportunity to decide what kind of licence you want to apply to your work. The diversity of CC licences is very wide, from the very restrictive (close to copyright) to the public domain (not owned or controlled by anybody, public property for anybody to use). While Copyleft functions more like a concept, backed by a whole movement, CC are trying to take advantage of that movement in order to get users to use their licences. Lawrence Liang founder of the Alternative Law Forum in Bangalore suggests that the CC are the gentrification of copyright, making it look nice and trendy but operating according to the same principals (in fact Lawrence Lessig is a great defender of Copyright, and also of the free market, so the notion of freedom gets a bit confused here). As with gentrification what the CC has done is to appropriate a movement that was posing interesting and cutting edge questions reforming its content until no rough elements remain. Looking back it seems rather like a trend where many people got interested and put so many CC logos on their work and media output, but now one questions the ideology behind those logos. This might be one of the reasons why the discussion around Copyleft has decreased (three yeas ago in Spain and Italy it briefly became very popular to have alternative symposiums about copyleft and this brief moment even produced certain celebrities).

As copyleft does not allow the extraction of rent for the right to copy, and what owners of property want is not something that will challenge the property regime, but rather to create more categories and subcategories so that practices like filesharing and remixing can exist with the property regime. In other words, copyjustright. A more flexible version of copyright that can adapt to modern uses but still ultimately embody and protect the logic of control. The most prominent example of this is the so-called Creative Commons and it's myriad of 'just right' licenses. 'Some rights reserved', the motto of the site says it all.[15]

Dmytri Kleiner, in his text 'Copyfarleft and Copyjustright', suggests a new method for distribution which would help artists to make a living from their work. His argument is based on making a distinction between those who own the means of production, make profit out of the use and distribution of the material and on the other hand those who are not making any profit out of the use and distribution of their own material. Those who make profit should pay for using this material. The rest should be able to use it for free. To defend his argument he cites David Ricardo's 'The Iron Law of Wages', which states that the workers can only earn from their wages enough money to survive and reproduce themselves 'to perpetuate their race'. Just enough to live but not enough to acquire the means of production. As we have seen before, in the improvised and noise scene, people create means of production within minimum possibilities. Exceeding the just subsistence, making a living in any way we can – creative survival.

The purpose of property is to ensure a propertyless class exists to produce the wealth enjoyed by a propertied class. Property is no friend of labour. This is not to say that individual workers cannot become property owners, but rather that to do so means to escape their class. Individual success stories do not change the general case. As Gerald Cohen quipped, 'I want to rise with my class, not above my class!'.[16]

[15] Dmytri Kleiner, *Copyfarleft and Copyjustright* available at: http://www.metamute.org/en/Copyfarleft-and-Copyjustright

[16] Dmytri Kleiner, *Copyfarleft and Copyjustright* available at: http://www.metamute.org/en/Copyfarleft-and-Copyjustright

Do people in experimental scene these days identify themselves within this class division? With precarious jobs in different kinds of conditions one constantly has to negotiate one's relationship to capitalism and having enough time to express oneself. This does not mean that class division has disappeared by any means, but I would think that most of the musicians are in situations where the class division is blurry and problematic, probably earning money somewhere else and then making their music in their free time. People might also be dubious about class identification, as previous generations have suffered from clear cut and crude class categorisation (again see Eddie Prévost text in this volume). A question arises? Should we see what we do as work? I would suggest that the making of improvised music has more to do with situationist notions of play (ludic desire and instability) than work (more fixed in its productivity). In conversations with Keith Rowe (ex-AMM) and Philip Best (ex-Whitehouse, Consumer Electronics), two of the most innovative bands to come out of England, they agree that one should not make a living out of making this kind of music because the music is compromised. Another question would be how they and other musicians earn their living.

Kleiner's argument does not work for the the kind of music that we are talking about it. This music has only very small repercussions in the mainstream media and few companies or corporations are making any profit out of it. And even if they do, would it be better to be protected by a legal system or some bureaucratic organisation that divides people according to class relation? How would this division take place?

Would this not mean to fix people according to their own situation which in many cases might already be precarious? The distribution of this kind of music is not based in getting profit out it. Whilst there might be few people making some money out it, I would say that most of the musicians, labels and concert organisers interest behind

what they do is to get the work across in small, self-organised and informal networks. Two important aspects that can characterise the practice of noise and improvisation are its anti-academism and its DIY aesthetics (if you do not care about what you do nobody else will). Improvisation and noise usually try to question the parameters in which one can act, using instruments in unconventional ways, finding venues for playing in strange and difficult spaces adapting to these particularities and finding different methods of distribution. We could say that this is an enclosed way of working, without much relevance outside its context. One could criticise its lack of mobilisation towards something bigger, but on the other hand it creates exactly the kind of network that Kleiner's critique does not apply to, it is just too small.

Improvisation and noise are informal in their operation, they are practices that adapt, play against or at least take into account the specific conditions of their own production. The question remains, how to earn a living doing what one wants to do? This problem actually opens up many questions, such as why this music does not produce enough value for me to make a living? Should it? But we should be careful not to fall into a similar situation to the one that produces Prévost's argument for using copyright, namely a pragmatic attitude towards an economic and legal system which could easily compromise questions posed by music production itself. This would cut the potential effect of the discursive radicality of the music, which would mean to see this type of music-making in formal terms rather than as a progressive and experimental mode of production that could be extended to different areas (distribution, recording, social relations...). Please do not get me wrong, I do not want to appear as a liberal communist. Even if Olivier Malnuits' first of the 10 commandments for liberal communists is 'to give everything away for free (free access, no copyright...) just charge for the additional services, which will make you rich', the liberal communists still believe that it's possible to make a more just

world out of capitalism, which frankly I do not believe. The acceptance of the capitalist basis (our creativity as work) and the legal framework means the perpetuation of our constant desire to find a nice niche in this fucked up world. We should be working to enable (which to a certain extent is already happening through the filesharing and free software movement) the foundations of the capitalist system to be questioned and at some points bypassed. This does not mean that capitalism is going to be easily abolished, but it shows different alternatives and different ways of thinking that could quickly be recuperated by capitalism if we do not develop a sense of our own agency.

BEYOND THE LAW: PURE MEDIALITY

> *We are above all obligated to note that a totally non-violent resolution of conflicts can never lead to a legal contract. For the latter, however peacefully it may have been entered into by the parties, leads finally to possible violence. It confers on both parties the right to take recourse to violence in some form against the other, should he break the agreement. Not only that; like the outcome, the origin of every contract also points towards violence. It need not be directly present in it as law-making violence, but is represented in it insofar as the power that guarantees a legal contract is in turn of violent origin even if violence is not introduced into the contract itself. When the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay. In our time, parliaments provide an example of this. They offer the familiar, woeful spectacle because they have not remained conscious of the revolutionary forces to which they owe their existence.*[17]

Walter Benjamin, in his famous essay 'Critique of Violence', talks of a revolutionary violence that does not have an outside to itself. Divine or pure violence is revolutionary because it cannot be fixed into definitions or categorisations that fall into the

[17] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence' in *Reflections*. Tran. Edmund Jephcott. Published by Schocken Books, New York. 2007. p.287-288

bureaucratic apparatus of the law and this is precisely because it does not produce an end. Benjamin explains at length how in order to perpetuate itself the law needs violence. If violence is not constantly performed, law would cease to exist. In this sense the law produces what Benjamin calls mythical violence, which is law and power making – a violence that strengthens the state. I find very interesting the last line on the Benjamin's quote above in which he mentions how parliaments had degraded into a 'woeful spectacle'. The intentions behind forming them might have been revolutionary, but the establishment of bureaucratic functions over time lets them and the people using them 'fall into decay'. Relying purely on parliamentary structures to base their arguments, the politicians stop developing a sense for responsibility and urgency, instead reducing any revolutionary power through the constant creation of boundaries and limits to popular power.

> *If mythical violence is law-making, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythical violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood.*[18]

The clear separation of ideas as property cannot but only develop this type of mythical violence, in which one is always protective about the fictitious boundaries established by the law, of what is one's idea and what is not. This type of thinking benefits only capitalists and people in power. If you protest using their tools, such as their legal system, they know what you want and it becomes easy for them to give it to you and to shut you up. A quick and superficial fix that momentarily makes happy the people underneath. But fundamentally nothing has really changed and of course this system will continue to produce misery and frustration. Pure means, another term by

[18] Ibid. p.297.

which Benjamin names revolutionary violence, is about pure mediality, in the sense that we are responsible for what we are doing without having a structure outside of what we do (such as the law) that defines whether what we are doing is right or wrong.

It is possible to connect Benjamin's notion of pure means and Guy Debord's unitary revolutionary praxis, a theory and practice which attempted to abolish all separations (between art and politics, leisure and work, producers and consumers...), in the sense that is not a matter of consolidating structures (then it would produce an end), but instead a total intensification of life where everything is at stake at this revolutionary moment without the desire to look anywhere else or to achieve something concrete. There is no doubt that liberation hurts, it cannot be a smooth process, breaking stereotypes is difficult and disturbing especially if you are alone, and you might have the feeling that what you are doing is ridiculous – or even senseless? But there is no deviancy in the use of other peoples' material, ideas are not people, you cannot hurt ideas and knowledge, you can only discuss and work with them. People are scared, they are so protective about their individual work, but this is only because they have internalised the logic of authorship. Now we take it as natural the idea that whatever we could possess already has a value, and we do not want to diminish this value or question the foundations on which this value is based. I recently heard a story about the contemporary artist Paul Chan giving a lecture to MA art students at Columbia University. When one student asked him about a case in which Chan was accused of plagiarising a student of his, he admitted that when he was under pressure for a deadline and he did not have ideas, he just took the idea of one of his students. Later, some of the students refused to have a one-to-one tutorials with him because of his plagiarism. For me, the problem is not his pragmatic and uncritical use of somebody else's idea, but the way these MA artists thinks about themselves, the distribution

of their ideas, what they think art production is, and how they are so market-oriented. I use the anti-copyright term when I make records as rhetorical statement that does not refer to the language of copyright to let people know that to copy is not only fine, but encouraged. But what we really need to do is to use our creativity in order to find different ways of distribution. We have to change the signification of copying, or as Stewart Hall might put it, a class struggle of signification over the term 'copy' – copying not as piracy or stealing, but as sharing with good intentions and distribution of knowledge. Records stored in private houses are not doing much for the rest of the world apart from giving the person who owns them a good feeling. Instead, a file on the internet can be listened to and/or downloaded by different people at the same time in many parts of the world. Isn't the process of misusing also a creative process which poses new questions that were not there before? In improvisation we constantly make errors, we use them and in fact we learn from them. The radical character of the work itself which might be difficult, its recuperation, or its content might exceed the limitations of the dexcontextualisation. Ready to destroy whatever parameters that comes in its way in a similar vein to the intensity in which it was produced. No half licences which try to help people not to make profit, we are aware that we are in capitalism, but we do not want to make it more nice and soft, we want to abolish it. That this might be difficult, or we might not actually be able to do it, does not mean we do not want a better life under this system.

> *Is any non-violent resolution of conflict possible? Without doubt. The relationships of private persons are full of examples of this. Non-violent agreement is possible wherever a civilized outlook allows the use of unalloyed means of agreement. Legal and illegal means of every kind that are all the same violent may be confronted with non-violent ones as unalloyed means. Courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, trust, and whatever else might here be mentioned are their subjective preconditions.*[19]

[19] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence' in *Reflections*. Tran. Edmund Jephcott. Published by Schocken Books, New York. 2007. p.289

As Richard Prelinger (from the Prelinger Archives and archive.org) said to me in conversation: artist, writers, film-makers, musicians, academics and the type of people who are producing stuff have not sat down to think all together what kind of conditions we want for our work. Surely discussions would arise. I get the impression that the discussion on intellectual property is based on a certain philosophy and abstract notions about the individual and its relation to cultural production. Thanks to the law these notions become solidified as universal truths (at least for the time being especially if profit can be produced out of it). But how will people look at this type of production in the future? Of course, we do not know. However, what we can do is to develop platforms for discussion. If we do not, somebody is going to take advantage of us. In a conference in Berlin, held as part of the project 'Oil of the 21st Century', Lawrence Liang gave an interesting example regarding intellectual property. Imagine you have three things: my pen, my poem, my friend. While Copyright makes you think of your poem as if it was your pen (something you use and then throw away), Liang suggested that we should instead think of the poem as a friend, to whom you have responsibility and you care about it. This is a lovely metaphor that takes on intellectual property in an affective way rather than as a cold legal system. But we should not forget that to make a poem one needs passion and must struggle with language to come up with something special. There is violence in the making of a poem, a creative violence that tries to break away from stereotypes and dead forms, which wants to open up a different way of understanding language, a torturing of language that cuts both ways, you try to torture it while in turn it tortures you. Let's think through Benjamin's notion of 'The Author as Producer': if we can extend this creative violence to change the conditions of production and issues of intellectual property in ways which neither founds nor preserves the law, then we would be talking about what Benjamin calls pure means or revolutionary violence. Notions of intellectual property are going to be the issue of the

future, and if we do not find ways of challenging the structures that are being developed we are going to be pretty fucked. I don't think that to put the anti-copyright mark in whatever you produce is by any means enough. As I have tried to explain; the radical and exploratory character of improvisation should be directed not only to the making of music but in changing the conditions in which the music is produced. Today these conditions are at least partially set by the discourses of intellectual property, copyright and authorship. These notions should be challenged and perverted the same way improvisers pervert their instruments to create new sounds, so we can create new conditions that suit our necessities, interests and desires.

I do not want to compromise nor police what is no longer 'my' music.
- Billy Bao

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