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Sezgin Boynik

Noise Against Culture

Introduction to the Second Issue of Rab-Rab

Class Struggle Reverberations

In the second issue of Rab-Rab we will deal with the issue of noise. Departing from our programme based on the understanding of art practice as a confrontation between formal and political inquiries, our aim in this issue is to use noise as the name for this difficult, disturbing, loud and coercive exploration. In many cases the formal and political aspects of noise are two separate things: the former is seen as an issue of information or perception, whereas the latter is usually reduced to a metaphor of spontaneity. But if we change these parameters of discussing the noise from measurable coefficients of failed communication, or from elusive metaphors of contingencies, towards the conceptual references related to ideology and class struggles, then what is understood as noise turns into something else. It can become a valid concept of inquiry, refusing to be pinpointed to conventional academic banalities or to silly phenomenological artistic fantasies immersed in experience.

We have to start from somewhere. The book by Tony Bennett *Formalism and Marxism* (1979) that otherwise would be similar to Rab-Rab's position, as it also deals with the politics of form, ideological contradictions, heurism of art, structures of reproduction, regimes of representations, critique of aesthetics and other burning questions, ends with a very strange argument on class struggle and noise through the theory of Louis Althusser.

Bennett argues that, “ultimately, Althusser’s work echoes not to the *sound* of class struggle but to the reverberating *noise* of empty epistemological categories clashing with one another.”¹ This reaction against noise comes after his observation that Althusser discusses ‘ideology’, ‘literature’ or ‘science’ in an abstract fashion, which does not permit that “men and women themselves actually take up and develop” the real determinations. Instead he claims that Althusser’s concepts reproduce the emptiness of theoretical thought. Obliquely his dilemma departs from issues regarding formal representation of political contradictions, namely, whether class struggles in Marxist theoretical form are part of echoing sounds, or noisy reverberations? To translate it to more familiar expression, we can reformulate the question as this: are class struggles heard as noises or as sounds? These demanding questions imply yet another more complicated inquiry on whether the ‘noise versus sound’ dichotomy presupposes different relations of antagonisms toward ideology and consequently, as these are usually related, toward culture? Here, the plan is to address these questions by opening uneasy discussions regarding the form of conceptualisation of class struggles of noise.

Before looking at the political and theoretical reasons of Bennett’s insistence on the echo of sound over reverberations of noise, it is important to look more carefully at the ‘noises’ of Althusser. It is widely known that Althusser was deliberately introducing contradictions, distortions, complexities, force, violence, and other coercive elements in his theoretical work; he was at some points even referring to noise with explicit terms, as when he described coercion between various Ideological State Apparatuses and the direct Repressive State Apparatuses:

“In fact, it is the latter which largely secure the reproduction specifically of the relations of production, behind a ‘shield’ provided by the repressive State apparatus. It is here that the role of the ruling ideology is heavily concentrated, the ideology of the ruling class, which holds State power. It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes *teeth-gritting*) ‘harmony’ between the repressive State apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different State Ideological Apparatuses.”²

1 Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, Routledge, London, Methuen, 1979, p. 149

2 Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation’, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, NLB, London, 1971, p. 143. There are both political and theoretical reasons for this ‘teeth-gritting’, noise-form of Ideological operation. The relation of class struggles to ideology cannot be explained functionally: class struggles behave strange in relation to Law and State. They are in the exceptional border of both the State and the Law, thus their effect is to produce excess in these structures that cannot be otherwise represented within existing apparatuses. The political issue of this ‘noise’ and ‘excess’ is about the legitimacy of organized class struggles within the system of bourgeoisie Ideological State Apparatuses, a question concerning very much Althusser himself: how to describe class struggle in capitalist legal structures. The answer is: “by dint of their struggle in the history of social formation, imposing this recognition and this inscription: hence by force.” (Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 2014, p. 95.) There is also a theoretical effect of this excess: “the class struggle unfolds in the forms of the Ideological State Apparatuses, although it goes far beyond those forms” (Althusser, *On the Reproduction*, p. 157)

Researchers, such as Dick Hebdige who has had an interest for noisier productions (i.e. Punk) realized the theoretical possibility of this coercive proposal at a very early stage of the formation of the infamous discipline of Cultural Studies. This is why, Hebdige's book on punk still holds strong, it grasps the tension between the politics and form of punk beyond cultural conventions; references in his case study are put in concrete confrontations. Hebdige has admitted to the author of these lines ten years ago in Kassel that the strength of his formalism was largely to do with his own class contradictions: at the time he was writing a book on Punk, his mother was working as cleaner in the part of London where Malcolm McLaren was living!

“Throughout this book, I have interpreted subculture as a *form* of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style. Specifically I have used the term ‘noise’ to describe the challenge to symbolic order that such styles are seen to constitute. Perhaps it would be more accurate and more telling to think of this *noise* as the flip-side to Althusser's ‘teeth-gritting harmony.’”³

One shouldn't be far-sighted to understand that the reason of Hebdige's hold on the epistemological values of noise is to do with the very ‘form’ of the punk, which is more indebted to negation than affirmation of the culture. Of course, punk as a form is hardly a guarantee for the conceptualization of the class struggles as a noise; but I claim that involvement with the violence and force of punk is a step further than seeking Shklovskian devices of formal *ostranenie* (estrangement) of the ideology of slavery, as Bennett does, in the pages of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Bennett is claiming that Mark Twain is estranging social conventions by introducing (linguistic) imperatives of individualism to the mouth of a ‘Negro’, which trespasses the limits set by imperatives of slavery institution. Already here we are facing with one obvious ‘political’ symptom of this supposed *sounds* of class struggles; in reality, they are far more disturbing than what Bennett is prepared to acknowledge in his liberal fantasy based on narrative of Mr. Twain. In no way has an ideological apparatus of the institution of slavery set the limit to the jargon of individualism: contrary, it has reproduced this ideology by both claiming and refuting the imperatives of individual freedom. This is what Domenico Losurdo described as the form of liberalism tangled in contradictions.⁴ One does not arrive at the dialectics of this form of entanglement by understanding class struggles and politics as abstract relations of the cultural field. On the contrary, the condition for political understanding of ideological struggle is to conceptualize its imperatives as emancipated from culture.⁵

3 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, London, 1979, p. 133.

4 “I refer to the tangle of emancipation and dis-emancipation that distinguishes the individual stages in the process of overcoming the exclusion clauses characteristic of the liberal tradition” (Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, Verso, London, 2014, p. 342)

5 Losurdo citing arch-liberal-conservative Edmund Burke who defended community as “a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born in the great primaevial contract of eternal society”, comes closest to the thick description of imperialist properties of culture. (Losurdo, *Liberalism*, p. 198).

This formal observation is true for artistic subjectivity as well: it is not only politics that has to break from culture, the condition for genuine artistic practice and theory depends as well on struggle against culture. In conceptual art this discussion has a rich history. Carl Andre in 1967 wrote that 'Art is what we do, culture is what is done to us', pointing at this radical separation from culture as a condition for art practice. The group, Art & Language corrected this slogan in 1973 by adding the ideological twist to it: 'Art is what we do; culture is what we do to other artists'. In both cases the intervention is against the reactionary formalism of Clement Greenberg epitomized in his *Art and Culture* and against nationalist and provincialist constraints, although these two provincialisms, intellectual and ideological, do not exclude each other.

The working name of this emancipation/break is 'noise'. Noise against culture.

Althusser's noise and Formalist's zaum

Often there are some particular ideological reasons of channelling the disturbance of noise towards the harmonious realm of echoing sounds. Bennett's reason, as it becomes clear by the end of his book, is that the noise of class struggles happening within the ideological state apparatuses (for example between education and art) cannot be used for "producing a new position within the field of *cultural* relations" (Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, p. 166). This is why noise has to have direction, or tendency, before it gets lost in the empty reverberations. The name of this in Bennett's ideological system is 'cultural policy': precisely it is a name of giving orientation to the contingency of unpredictability. The culture of this policy, in general terms, is relying on sort of activism targeting anything that would have enable formation of novelty based on unpredictability. It is activism of a strange sort, aiming deterministically to clarify things by peeling off the abstraction and noise from the assumed direction: "Indeed, its *raison d'être*, it might be argued, is that it should work upon literary texts, wrenching them from the forms in which they are customarily perceived or interpreted, so as to mobilize them politically in *stated directions*" (Bennett, p.152-153).

The cultural action with the strong hand, which strategically aims to determinate what ought to be is obfuscation of main principle of the political novelty – the possibility to incorporate (i.e. formalize and conceptualize) the interruption.⁶

"These views naturally culminate in the reduction of ideology [politics] to culture, or, more exactly, in a theory of the non-existence of ideology (except as a 'cement' for groups of men, with no mention of classes) and the exaltation of the theoretical value of a notion that is altogether vacuous, the notion of 'culture.'... Anyone can imagine the consequences, political consequences included, which can flow from replacing the notion of ideology with that of culture: the intellectuals of the Italian Party are living

6 This is how Bennett explains the fate of the Bolshevik party after the October Revolution: "The result, in the absence of an authoritative theoretical voice at the political centre, was a complex concatenation of divergent voices competing with one another for Party approval." (Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, p. 31)

proof of them. For if ideology rather quickly comes to mean ideological struggle, hence an inevitable, necessary form of class struggle, the notion of culture leads straight to the ecumenism of the notion that an elite (in the Party as well as in bourgeois society) is the guardian of culture's own values of 'production' ('creators') and consumption ('connoisseurs', 'art-lovers', and so on). I shall not labour the point; it would be too easy."⁷

Apart from political revisionism in the name of giving orientation to confused reverberations of noise, Bennett is applying this same principle of "giving orientation and tendency" also to the works of the artistic avant-garde that was crucial for the theoretical formation of Russian Formalism. When referring to the Formalist's engagement with zaum-poetry, Bennett associates it with Viktor Shklovsky's position, which he derogatorily describes as related to "Kant's doctrine of art for art's sake" (*Formalism and Marxism*, p.26). This in the lingo of "authoritative theoretical voice", which Bennett is calling for, means "unmotivated" art experimentation that should be put in use by strong "political centre". Authoritarianism disguised as social-democracy!⁸

Roman Jakobson's early text on Khlebnikov, the noise-maker of Russian Futurism, discusses zaum experimentations as having strong epistemological motivation targeting the structures of linguistics conventions. It is this epistemological (heuristic) element of zaum which reinvigorates the possible politicization of the avant-garde. By ignoring zaum, Bennett negates the main currency of Formalism: the noise of language made audible by artistic experiments. Without *dyr bul shchyl* of Kruchonykh, *bob eh o bee, manch! manch!, chi breo zo* of Klhebnikov, or *tivo orene alizh* of Malevich; neither Jurij Tynjanov, Boris Eikhenbaum and Viktor Shkovsky could make sense of the 'de-canonized language' of Lenin, nor the grotesque of Gogol, nor the montage of Eisentein; even the theses on poetic language of Jakobson would never have reached such scientific precision.

We are thus insisting both on the 'noise' of Althusser and the 'zaum' of Formalism. It is no wonder that the name of Viktor Shklovsky appears dozens of times in the pages of this issue.⁹

Noise against Noise

To define noise, as we claim, as a generative name for a concept of being politically and formally against culture is very strong, but at the same time very ambiguous proposition. If culture, as a ubiquitous sphere (or 'semiosphere', as Jurij Lotman describes it) absorbs everything, then we must have some strong reason to present noise as something capable of escaping it. In reality, meaning in

7 Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, Verso, 2006, p. 149

8 For a critique of social-democratic misuse of zaum-poetry look at Sezgin Boynik: *Still Stealing Steel: Historical-Materialist Study of Zaum*, Rab-Rab Press, Tbilisi, 2014.

9 'The language of poetry strives to reach, as a final limit, the phonetic, or rather, a trans-sense speech'. Roman Jakobson, 'The Newest Russian Poetry, Velimir Xlebnikov', *My Futurist Years*, Marsillo Publishers, New York, 1992, p. 207.

practice, there is no such reason; but as most of the texts in this issue claim, the ‘noise’ as concept is, if nothing else, at least a consideration that such contradictions exist. So our reason is this: in order to discuss noise as a concept we have to be able to formalize it. Without this operation we cannot talk about politics, subjectivity and epistemology of the noise.

Following Ad Reinhardt who in one of his interviews said that “first word of artist is against another artist”, we are also claiming for the strict lines of demarcation.¹⁰

We will not seek to find the most appropriate ways of how to justify these schisms and demarcations; neither should we find any excuse for our hostilities. But in any case we want to be rigorous in our rudeness.

Noise can easily be part of music, and being part of music can comfortably find its place within the culture. For example we can read sentences like these: “noise in Japanese culture”, or “let us therefore leave this noisy sphere”, they are all, whether by David Novak or Karl Marx, referring to noise as an indicator of certain disturbing aspects of ‘society and culture’. These are more or less casual and descriptive uses of noises. But, if we look at more operative uses of noise, as in some approaches of theories of sounds, such as in the highly acclaimed book called *Audio Culture*, we can detect no less cultural indications.¹¹ A brief scan of these different indications should be sufficient to demonstrate how different noises have found their place in different cultural manifestations.

Jacques Attali writes that “theorists of totalitarianism have all explained, indistinctly, that it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences or marginality” (*Audio Culture*, p. 8); Morton Feldman continues that “noise is something else”, and that “it is psychical, very exciting, and when organized it can have the impact and grandeur of Beethoven” (*AC*, p. 15). Edgar Varese before claiming that “subjectively, *noise* is any sound one doesn’t like”, states that “to stubbornly conditioned ears, anything new in music has always been called noise.” (*AC*, p. 20) Henry Cowell, who insists on the ubiquity of noise, sees it as a “resonance” residing in the heart of every sound and tone. This is why Cowell compares noise to sex: “the noise-element has been to music as sex to humanity, essential to its existence, but impolite to mention”; consequently the “noise-germ” has to be unleashed, it has to “provide previously hidden delights to the listener”. As a result, as Cowell hopes, that will build a “non-Beethovenian harmony” (*AC*, p. 23). This is similar to Masami Akita who claims that “Noise (with capital N) is the most erotic form of sound” (*AC*, p. 60), but unlike Cowell he is interested in possibilities of “a fascist way of using sound” (*AC*, p. 61). Or Mark Slouka, ranting on the cacophony of

10 Bruce Glaser, ‘An Interview with Ad Reinhardt’, *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, University of California Press, 1975, p. 16.

11 “We must be careful to distinguish the relative and casual sense of noise from its absolute, productive sense. In its relative sense, noise is just another signal, albeit a confused one: too many contradictions which cancel each other, a babbling of many sounds at once. ... However, in its absolute sense, noise cannot be heard, it is the imperceptible, the uncontracted ...” Aden Eevens, *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 16.

commodities and capitalism that he can't make up his mind about, starts with complaining how the silence of his summer cottage is buzzing with all kinds of sounds: "the rainy hush of wind in the oaks, the scrabble of a hickory not rolling down the roof, the slurp of the dog in the next room, interminably licking himself ..." (AC, p. 42). It is as if the resonances of Cowell penetrating into a remote summer cottage do not spare even a naïve middle-class desire for tranquillity. But this noise/sound breaking the silence has political meanings as well: it is hope, for Slouka, to give voice to seventeen men and women killed by Stalin's secret police. Slouka has cropped the faces of these victims from the article in *The New York Times* and glued it to his wall, thus "they are not forgotten, they have a voice" (AC, p. 43), providing with this act the perfect example of liberal noise against totalitarian silence.

Mary Russo and Daniel Warner's contribution is the most 'sociological' among the essays meandering around noise. "Noise is cruel. ... Noise is pain", with these words Russo and Warner conclude their essay, also referring to anthropology vis-a-vis Claude Levi-Strauss who has mediated on noise "as a dangerous negotiation of structural polarities" (AC, p. 53). It is this subversive element of noise that can bring together the sounds of Luigi Russolo, Cornelius Cardew and Einstuzende Neubauten, because they all are, through their work of stretching the limits of what is acceptable as sound, questioning the condition of what we describe as culture. "To a large extent, a culture's musical conventions are a set of aural negotiations between signal and noise" (AC, p. 49).¹²

If we treat noise in relation to signal/information as an arbitrary relation based on relativity, then the negotiation of when is what ('innate features') will never have clear contours. Consequently we can propose two theses which are not mutually exclusive: *a.* noise is present in every signal, and *b.* noise is a signal we don't want to hear. It is then a role of culture which is mediating the ambiguity of noise: either as things that we cannot make sense of, or as senseless things that are part of our life conventions. It is as if there is an invisible mechanism which can accommodate noise both as something part of ideology and as outside of it. The question here should be about the fields of this confrontation: when does noise stop and sounds starts, or vice versa? If culture is what negotiates the noise, then how are we supposed to conceptualize this culture which is beyond this negotiation. It seems that the real problem is somewhere else. Following this formalization we have to suppose that there is a neutral conception of culture, which defines things as sound or noise depending on something else than the processes of its inner dynamics. To dramatize the situation, we have to define the question in more explicit terms: what is that which determines the relativity of culture in regard to noise and signal? And, is noise conditioned by culture through some invisible forms; if so, are these profound forms (structures), something that we have to consider in our inquiry? The complexity of these meanderings and wanderings are, if anything, proof of the theoretical and political dead-end in thinking through culture. We have to emancipate ourselves from this

12 *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, Continuum, New York, 2004. Jacques Attali, 'Noise and Politics'; Morton Feldman, 'Sound, Noise, Varese, Boulez'; Edgard Varese, 'The Liberation of Sounds'; Henry Cowell, 'The Joys of Noise'; Mark Slouka, 'Listening for Silence: Notes on the Aural Life'; Mary Ruso and Daniel Warner, 'Rough Music, Futurism, and Postpunk Industrial Noise Bands'; 'The Beauty of Noise: An Interview with Masami Akita of Merzbow'.

reasoning. To do this, the first step should be to look at the consequences of the culturalization of the noise-element. We can achieve this by naming the common ideological discourse of various noise descriptions that was indexed a little before. The thing which unites this variety is some assumed position against totalitarianism, whether it is totalitarianism in the form of political and social agency, or as a philosophical and artistic tendency. In all these cases the noise is something that is beyond Manichean repressive system of so-called grand narratives. I bet there are dozens of noise theoreticians who are ready to subscribe to such a vague description of the function of noise.

Jacques Attali, adviser to two previous French presidents, set the tone: theorists of totalitarianism are indistinctly against noise. He then predictably goes on with the usual narrative, presuming that both communism (in the opinion of Zhdanov) and fascism (in the opinion of Stege) are against noise because *first*, it can tell truths from conflicting perspectives, i.e. it can tell conflicting truths; and *second*, the truth of noise is the truth of the future, i.e. it talks about shapes yet to come, resisting the prevailing conventions. It is undoubtedly true that the epistemological elements of noise are more complex than a simple signal-message; but it is hard to understand how the complexity of noise is opposed to totalitarianism. Usually totality as a concept is bound to strict ideological and metaphorical (even religious) usages. Further, as Domenico Losurdo has argumentatively shown, totalitarianism is an empty concept used in the policies of the Cold War to employ some sort of “performative contradiction” to obfuscate the collective political emancipations.¹³ To discuss noise within the frame of theorists of totalitarianism is nothing but to divert its political and subjective element to a field determined by tautologies, and cultural paranoia. The extra political effect is the obfuscation of class struggle from the communism/capitalism confrontation towards ‘communism = fascism’ nightmare. In this case it is only liberal culture that can profit from the libertarian form of noise; because it is this culture which knows, in the best way, how to exploit the concept of liberty and at the same time profit from slavery. It is not surprising that Attali’s book is enjoying such success; there is something ‘shitty’ about his concept of ‘economy’ regarding to noise.¹⁴ After introducing a form of capitalism as a repetitive structure, he sees noise as genuine political and economic agency against homogenization and totalitarian oppression. “The only possible challenge to repetitive power takes the route of a breach in social repetition and the *control of noisemaking*. In more day-to-day political terms, it takes the route of the permanent affirmation of the *right to be different*, an obstinate refusal of the stockpiling of use-time and exchange-time; it is the conquest of *the right to make noise*, in other words, to *create one’s own code and work*, without advertising its goal in advance; it is the conquest of *the right to make the free and revocable choice* to interlink with another’s code – that is, the *right to compose one’s life*.”¹⁵

The politically reactionary program of Attali’s liberalism becomes evident when he looks at history of free jazz in North America. He acknowledges that free jazz is “the first attempt to express in

13 Domenico Losurdo, ‘Towards a Critique of the Category of Totalitarianism’, *Historical Materialism* 12:2, 2004

14 “In five weeks I will be through with the whole economic shit”, Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, January, 1851. Cf. David McLellan, *Marx’s Grundrisse*, Paladin, London, 1973, p. 16.

15 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 132, emphasis added.

economic terms the refusal of the cultural alienation inherent in repetition” (Attali, *Noise*, p. 138), but adds that after attempts at collective organization of this counter-position, such as Bill Dixon and Archie Shepp’s *Jazz Composer’s Guild*, the *Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians* (AACM), and the *Jazz Composers’ Orchestra Association*, it has lost its initial political and cultural impetus: “since that time, the sound of free jazz, like the violent wing of the black movement, has failed in its attempt to break with repetition” (Attali, *Noise*, p. 140). In other words, the refusal of repetition of noise of free jazz has to remain where it started from, in the realm of individual and personal freedom of choice.

Necessity and Choice in Forms

More simple would be to state what is obvious: if culture, as convention, is conditioning what noise is, then the noise of irregularity of any historical moment or social context should mirror the ideology of assumed universality of culture.

Chris Cutler has understood this implication in the best way in his text dealing with the “necessity and choice in musical forms”, where he sets to discuss the political and social condition of the emergence of the new in musical expressions. The dynamic which he attributes to musical transformations are not necessarily new in the domain of Marxist analysis of history of forms. It has an echo of Raymond Williams’ insistence on residual elements and revolutionary potential (as in ‘folk’ for example) and also some of Trotsky’s influence that art could unleash the coagulated potential of human emancipation.¹⁶ Cutler is not discussing the noise; nevertheless the topic of his inquiry which is about the emergence of new-expression as something against conventions – or notations which he describes as ‘bourgeois-commodification’ – permits us to make use of his theory. Anyway, it is not a noise-element that he is after, but the counter-theory to cultural oppression of the new artistic forms. Consciously Marxist, Cutler is showing that the novelty of artistic forms do not appear smoothly as in some evolution of gradual technical inventions; but they emerge as result of the constant and dialectical struggle between inherently ‘necessary’, or innate, form and external social and political contingencies. His elaboration of the two conflicting classes (and indeed he names them as ‘class conflicts’) are between ‘expressive potential’ and ‘commercial commodity’. Precisely, any new genuine expression, such as improvisation or other non-notational music forms, will confront the structures of reception set by the ideology of bourgeois commodification. In this “battleground of class forces” the new cannot emerge without having an explicit confrontation with culture. The collective nature of new expressions are thus oppressed from the very start by ideology,

16 “The human species, the coagulated *Homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psycho-physical training.” Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1960, p. 254-255.

forcing it to address the issue of the new with “forms and values which are not their own.”¹⁷ The strongest point of Cutler’s argument is about the reasons for this defeat, or as he says the reason for ‘distortion’ of the new. It is “culture that has become, effectively, an instrument of class oppression” distorting the submission of the proletariat to bourgeois ideology. Simply, culture conceals from the proletariat its oppression and presents it as a neutral and natural condition.¹⁸ What culture successfully does is to generate “certain ideological fictions in order to preserve the relative well-being represented by the status quo” (Cutler, ‘Technology, politics’. p. 291).

“This condition is met in the industrial West and is a direct product of its imperialistic relationship with the underdeveloped nations. The prosperity of the first world is based on misery and exploitation of the third world, effectively permitting a division of some part of the ‘spoils’ amongst the broad masses at the centre. In this way the proletariat of the imperialist nations is ‘subsidied’ by the peoples of the third world through the agency of the Western bourgeoisie”

17 Chris Cutler, ‘Technology, politics and contemporary music: necessity and choice in musical forms’, *Popular Music 4: Performers and Audiences*, eds. R. Middleton and D. Horn, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 291. From this perspective the history of noise could be a very interesting project. Hillel Schwartz’s book *Making Noise* is an attempt of this, of a cultural history of noise. Schwartz “ascribes independent agency to noise” (p. 28) and sets to demonstrate “the ubiquity of noise” (p. 230) by pointing at certain episodes of its transformations. These changes constitute the history of noise. One has a strange feeling in reading this ‘evolution’ of noise, almost as if reading Norbert Elias ‘civilizing process’; but since noise is ideologically understood as opposite to civilization it is uncanny to read a book reversing the evolution of culture to noise. Since, as we are claiming, ‘noise is against culture’ it is difficult to picture this history. This is a reason why Schwartz’s book is not dialectical in a materialistic sense, but it is dialectical in an idealist and vulgar sense. It is lumping historical facts in order to expose certain assumed determinations of noise. Here is the background for Karl Marx: after setting historical abstraction that “[noise] in the later 1800s came to be experienced as ubiquitous and interminable, it came to be understood not only as inescapable but intrinsic. . . . noise slipped out of the range of the simply sonic and won the privileges of metaphor” (p. 250), Schwartz continues by pointing at interminable ‘fatigue’ as an image of this metaphor. Referring to one Ernest Hart, editor of *Sanitary Records* and *British Medical Journal*, who has written that “[factory] workers who must shout to be heard over the machines yet swear that they are unaware of the noise: after years of laboring to assert their own rhythm against the heavy blows of steam hammers or drop forges, they suffer extreme fatigue and its moral consequences” (p. 343), Schwartz rights that “Marx had construed this fatigue in the context of the political economy of capitalism”(p. 343). It is then this noise that is at the root of the *camera obscura* of ideology, of distortion of manipulation and reason of “all errors, all superstition” having the consequence of defective affection. Following this William James, John Dewey and Ivan Pavlov are explained with this ‘fatigue’; all in three pages of thousand page book! Here is the Lenin of ‘noise history’: “Skirted by an expanding industrial sector and rows of barracks of laborers, the center of Munich was overrun by beggars and whores, and its workdays were often interrupted by labor protests and strikes. Lenin had been in Munich since 1900, pacing in his room and *whispering* aloud each sentence of What is To Be Done? Before composing his detailed plan “in which everyone would find a place for himself, become a cog in the revolutionary machine, while his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya washed the dishes as *quietly* as possible . . . The Lenins returned to Russia in late 1905 just as Arnold Sommerfeld was arriving at the University of Munich to set up the first institute for theoretical quantum physics” (p. 475). Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang & Beyond*, Zone Books, New York, 2011.

18 ‘[The] ideology is not impartial; it is the expression of the outlook of a particular class’ (Cutler, ‘Technology, politics’, p. 289).

(*ibid.*). More concretely, “through the agency of the Western bourgeoisie culture”, underlining that complicity with (bourgeoisie) culture is not a simple matter of fact of tastes and likes, as some sociologists want us to believe.

It is this political lesson which Henry Cow and other Rock-in-Opposition avant-garde music groups *learnt* in their practice of music making in seventies. If we are set to discuss progressive elements of noise as being against the culture then I think this ‘pleasure to learn’ (to draw demarcation lines with culture) could be one starting point. One is here naturally remembering Cornelius Cardew. He was well aware, more than any other experimental avant-garde musician, that John Cage’s silences are noises of culture: they help us to discern the procedures of how culture as background operates with all its institutions, laws and constraints. Simply, the audience participating to a performance of the three movements of *4’33* will see three stages of culture-form. Either as coughing, grinning, hushing, or the presence of others, the class division of particular institution, the unconscious associations; all happenings, and movements will indicate nothing but to background of culture. Following the success of the avant-garde, gradually this background of Cage’s silence became the property of bourgeoisie class, affirming their own world in their self-tutoring culture. Thus, Cardew is right when he writes that “ten years ago Cage concerts were often disrupted by angry music lovers and argumentative critics. It was the most bourgeois elements in the audience that protested against it. But they soon learned to take their medicine. Nowadays a Cage concert can be quite a society event. The audience has grown and its class character has become clearer in proportion. ... Cage circus becomes titillation of a cultured audience.”¹⁹

Accordingly, the noise of silence is nothing more than the background of culture. This is an interesting thesis, but it presupposes some kind of insidious noise-element within the culture that can spontaneously generate irrational emancipations. Additionally this is the noise of David Lynch movies; the noise bringing together New Age philosophy and Slavoj Žižek. Lynch, does not see the contradiction between the violence and terror of his films with his personal “devotion to ocean of pure consciousness” of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; Žižek on the other hand, sees in the sublimity of Lynch’s films the proof for his theory of pervasiveness of perversity in the foundation of the real, in every corner of the world, even among the insects.²⁰

Insidious Germ of Culture

The concept of noise in relation to *background* was crucial for information theories aiming to understand not only the relativity and arbitrariness of the nature of noise, but also the formal properties of how to demarcate noise from un-noise (signal, or message). The formal conceptualization of the arbitrariness of noise in relation to (artistic) message is thoroughly

19 Cornelius Cardew, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, p. 35-36

20 “The fundamental noise in Lynch’s films is not simply caused by objects that are part of reality; rather, it forms the ontological horizon or frame of reality itself, i.e., the texture that holds reality together.” Slavoj Žižek on David Lynch, http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?page_id=1955

discussed by Abraham Moles, whose writings dated to the early fifties are still actual. According to Moles, in order to talk about form, or *Gestalt* as he likes to call it, we have to define it according to the criterion of autocorrelation, or “of an internal, intrinsic coherence.”²¹ The form, following this, is the conceptual possibility for talking about meaningful, reiterating, graspable, and concrete messages, a signal. Anything that is beyond that regularity is background, or noise. Simply: anything opposing form is background. But, since there is no such thing as *pure noise*, which could be as absolute/total outside, we don’t have any available conceptual apparatus that could establish criteria that enables us to draw the line between form and background, between message and noise. As we have already seen, every signal contains noise, and in each noise there is an inherent signal. “In short, there is no absolute structural difference between noise and signal. They are of the same nature” (Moles, *Information Theory*, p. 78). Moles’ answer to this is an act of choice. The concept of *intent* is the only available tool for separating noise from the message, regularity and form: “a noise is a signal that the sender does not want to transmit” (Moles, *Information Theory*, p. 79). The voluntarist demarcation of noise has one particular difficulty: it substitutes it deliberately to everything which is irregular, and beyond our reach; as such it is representing noise as a simple accident, or disturbance. The current art theories based on haptic, visceral or tactile versions of ‘aesthetic perception’ are more or less relying on a similar concept of noise: as a formlessness that is not possible to grasp with the available tools of intellectual faculty. The predominant reactionary use of noise in speculative realism and new materialism is largely based on this ideological understanding.

The phenomenology of Moles is mostly visible in his attempt to establish a formula (and in fact he does propose one auto-correlative mathematical formula on noise) that could detect “the emergence of form in noise” (Moles, *Information Theory*, p. 82). This, again, is only possible through intention: “Thus the receptor can perceive an organized phenomenon *hidden inside* an amorphous phenomenon” (Moles, *Information Theory*, p. 82-83). Noise in this case is a future anterior of ideology; the shape of things yet to come. The one who has the ability to scrutinize this irregularity by attentively looking at the nature of the amorphous background can get into the heart of the form of noise. It can delineate the form of what is inside of apparent manifestation. In this phenomenology, one can easily detect traces of Russian Formalist theorizing on irregularity as a method for arriving at hidden and latent forms of the processes of artistic production (i.e. artistic devices). This question, the relation between information and noise in regard to artistic work, has been discussed in more precise terms by Jurij Lotman. Following Jakobson and other Formalist’s, Lotman came to a similar conclusion with Moles, that “art is capable of transforming noise into information.”²² According to Lotman there is not the structural totality which guarantees the success of this transformation; only culture can complete the noise: “the question of whether ‘noise’ is transformed into artistic communication always presupposes a description of the *type of culture* which we take as observer.” (*ibid*). Lotman’s unfortunate example for the description of this cultural uptake of noise is “Venus de Milo’s broken arms”. He claims that whatever we see in the broken arms of Venus de Milo, whether it is the “antiquity”, “genuineness” or “the unspoken”, it depends

21 Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Aesthetic Perception*, University of Illinois Press, 1967, p. 77.

22 Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, University of Michigan, 1977, p. 75

from our cultural position. As a result we arrive at the philosophical conclusion that what we see through culture is nothing but culture. The properties (antiquity, genuineness, etc.) that Lotman describes have nothing to do with art; indistinctly this interrogation of the transformation of noise to art ends where it has started from: in the realm of self-affirming culture.

Basically, the science of semiotics is obsessed both with noise and with culture. It is no any exaggeration to claim that semiotics as an academic discipline became a practice of euphemism for all sorts of cultural nationalisms and reactionary ideas. In the safe haven of empty analytical propositions, semiotics created such a bland and unimaginative atmosphere of nationalism that it became almost impossible not to read descriptions such as ‘culture as explosion’, as disguised cultural imperialism. In Finland, Eero Tarasti is best representative of this. The author of books on musical semiology, dealing among others with Schoenberg, in his later retrospective analysis of history of this discipline he claims for “positive” semiology, which will not “break myths, but instead, support the efforts of a given community to maintain its particular universe of sign.”²³ Finnish culture from his perspective is a successful case, because it ‘has been able to transform the external impacts into Finnish (i.e. was able to “semiotize” them)’ (Tarasti, ‘Finland’, p. 204). If we follow this example, we can say that Sibelius has managed to semiotize both contemporary trends and national-socialism to Finnish culture vis-à-vis musical forms and the state support. “But”, as Tarasti is reminding, “texts which are *wholly* messages from ‘elsewhere’, whose codes are too far removed from Finnish semiosphere, are neglected and have no influence” (Tarasti, ‘Finland’, p. 213). These disturbances, parasites, externalities, or noises create particular obstacles in the ‘positive’ imagination of national-semiotism. This is the reason why semiotics is obsessed with noise; it is the germ that disturbs the very essence of cultural containment.²⁴

23 Eero Tarasti, ‘Finland in the Eyes of a Semiotician’, *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies* 1991, 87: 3-4, p. 203.

24 A few years later in the pages of the same journal appeared a text by Antero Honkasalo ‘indexing’ noise in Finland. His contribution to semiosphere includes economy-politics as well: “Usually wealthy people themselves make less noise. It is not only a question of education and good manners, big fish like deep and quiet waters. ... [though] people do make lot of noise in stock exchange. Noise is, however, only made by workers there: the dealers.” Antero Honkasalo, ‘Environmental Noise as a Sign’, *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, 1996, 109: 1-2, p. 35.

Philosophical Malaprops

Noise as an indispensable feature of culture is obvious thing. Nevertheless there are theories and art practices which are not delegating this necessity to some organicist understandings.²⁵

The group Art & Language in their most explicit 'political' writing *Draft for an Anti-Textbook* made clear that the starting point of their artistic practice is pandemonium: "One of our problems ... it may turn out to be an advantage ... is that we can't separate the 'knowledge' from the 'noise' ... the knowledge industry tries to exclude noise, but I'm interested in the noise, it's just about all I've got." (*Art-Language*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1974, p. 3). But they warn immediately in what follows that 'you've got to watch making too much of a "knowledge/noise' dichotomy and we're not ..." (*ibid*). Because this noise, or pandemonium, which becomes manifest in relation to the others and in relation with Art & Language itself, as a collective, is not the abstract noise; the very relation, or interference, is happening through these noises. And here is exactly the point: the noise is not an absolute definition of some element which fully guarantees the break from existing knowledge and the system. Noises are everywhere, and they are in a multiplicity. This slight difference in definition is what makes the difference in conceptualisation; Art & Language does not discuss noise as currency or a metaphor of multiplicity, because the noise itself is also subject to multiplicity, to the interference. "What I'm dealing with is something like my noise, your noise, his noise, which relates respectively to points of reference ... it's the difference between noises, not the difference between message and noise." (*ibid*). Thus, 'in the broadest sense of contexts, noise relates (somehow) to culture and society' (*Art-Language*, p. 3).

To my knowledge this is most operative use of noises in conceptual art practice. Philosophically speaking to make sense of noises inherent in culture versus art is to come up with a 'system' that could incorporate pandemonium without having to represent the form as a compact and regular feature of artistic expressions. The work of Niklas Luhmann is especially close to this. His system acts strange, as Art & Language reviewing his book *Art as Social System* wrote: "art as he conceives it is an autopoietic system that knows a bit about the world which it must treat as its background" (i.e. as noise).²⁶ But this autopoietic system is not knowledge or phenomenon against noise, it is itself constituted with asymmetrical and unequal stratifications, functional differentiations, double contingencies and closures, and unmarked spaces; it is the very "paradox of form" which

25 William R. Paulson, author of *The Noise of Culture*, trying to understand the complexity of artistic messages from the point of view of the "theory of self-organization from noise", claims for the augmentation of information. Noise, in this case is what can offer excess to society, the polyvalence, the multiplicity, the richness. "Under the right circumstances, noise – from whatever source – can create complexity, can *augment* the total information of a system." William R. Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Text in a World of Information*, Cornell University Press, 1988, p.73. It is thus logical to claim that "[artistic] communication rather than attempting to reduce noise to a minimum, will assume its noise as a constitutive factor of itself" (p. 83).

26 Art & Language, 'Roma Reason: Luhmann's *Art as a Social System*', *Radical Philosophy* 109, September/October, 2001, p. 14.

contributes to the strangeness of the art 'system'. According to this philosophy, the culture in any case is feeling uneasy with art. This is why, Art & Language who understood this in the best way, further politicized this 'noise in art' as something that cannot be delegated to administrative inspection of the culture: "The upshot of all this is that artistic practice can resist meltdown into hopeless spectacle and manipulative barbarism in so far as it works hard on its own indeterminacy, its endless project of self-description. This is art without purification or police. It is art borne of the practice of bad citizenship in the state controlled by the academy of Cultural Studies."²⁷

The name of this in the theory and practice of Art & Language is malapropism.²⁸ Conceptualism of Art & Language is attracted to malapropism, as Michael Corris notes, especially because of political reasons; "it is displacing power with respect to representation of class', and also they can 'index some hiatuses in that social process."²⁹

Rejoice in Noise

There are those who rejoice in noise. For them noise is usually a metaphor of some unprecedented flow of social movement, or of some positive expression of violence, force, and in many occasions of politics. We can hear this noise in Antonio Gramsci's discussion of elements of rawness in the immediate political culture of the urban proletariat. He does not hesitate, in spite of Fascism to see the rawness of Italian Futurism as an appropriate tool for the expression of proletariat's anger.³⁰

27 Art & Language, 'Roma Reason', p. 15.

28 A malapropism is the use of an incorrect word in place of a word with a similar sound resulting in a nonsensical, often humorous utterance. Malapropism is also name for socio-linguistic theory contributing to racism: 'An important factor contributing to the color of Negro dialect speech is the malaprop quality of the mispronunciation in the Negro's lexicon. The Negro frequently resort to twisted and garbled version of sesquipedalian words, an addition that has made for much of the supposed humor in the Negro dialect' (L. H. Herman, *Manuel of American Dialects*, Chicago, 1952, *op. cit.* Reijo Kettunen, *'Black English': a Language or an Idiom? Study Based on Three Modern Black Novelists*, Pro Gradu Paper of Department of English Philology at the University of Helsinki, 1974, 78

29 Michael Corris, "We have Submerged Victoriously!", in *Art & Language in Practice, Vol.2: Critical Symposium*, ed. by Charles Harrison, Fondacio Antoni Tapies, Barcelona, 1999, p. 267.

30 In 1913: "Futurists are artists, not rustic entertainers ... their art is direct reaction against the general state of degradation." In 1912, while in prison: "Not to be afraid of monsters, not to believe that the world will collapse if a worker makes grammatical mistakes, if a poem limps, if a picture resembles a hoarding or if young men sneer at academic and feeble-minded senility. The Futurists have carried out this task in the field of bourgeois culture." In 1922, still in prison, in a letter to Trotsky: "Marinetti accepted the invitation willingly, and after visiting the exhibition together with the workers he has satisfied to have been convinced that the workers understood Futurist are better than the bourgeoisie." Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 46-54.

The history of the labour movement is rich with accounts directly addressing the political effect of noise. English leftist historian, author of *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson has discussed this as ‘rough music’, as collective transgression of existing social conventions, through loud chanting, rumbling, banging, and screaming. Even if his interest is triggered by social context and oppositional value of ‘rough music’, he is well aware of the metaphorical nature of this distortion (“it is not *just* the noise, however”), and as such the transgressive element in rough music cannot be fixed to one particular social function. “Domestic rough music was socially conservative, in the sense that it defended custom and male-dominative tradition that the elite saw little threat in it and were casual to put the practices down.”³¹ It seems that the ruling class was familiar with the ‘noise-form’ of the rough music “as a *displacement* of violence”, which actually through this form of expression draw the boundaries of transgression, or precisely, “circumscribed just how far the participants (to ritual) should go” (Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, p. 486). But noise was also used in organized labour class struggles, “rough music was commonly adapted to industrial conflict” (Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, p. 519). And when it happened the “translation of the ritual from the private to the public domain was viewed by the authorities with anxiety” (Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, p. 521).³²

Thompson is careful with the difficulties of politicizing noise; it is hardly a guarantee for emancipation. But at least noise is, in the best of all ways, the sound of anti-bureaucracy: “[noise] is property of a society in which justice is not wholly delegated or bureaucriticised, but is enacted by and within the community” (Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, p. 530). The uneasiness with the political ambiguity of noise is not resolved even in this simple anti-bureaucratic usage: “In Bavaria the last manifestation of *haberfeldtreiben* (the German version of rough music) were linked to mafia-like blackmail, anti-Semitism and, in the final stage, to ascendant Nazism” (Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, p. 531). Probably he has felt this uneasiness so strongly that the essay on anti-bureaucratic ‘rough music’ concludes with a reminder, alluding to the Nazi’s exploitation of noise, that for some of its [noise’s] victims, “the coming of a distanced Law and bureaucratized police must have been felt as a liberation from the tyranny of one’s ‘own’” (*ibid.*).

A common metaphor to this form of noise is the agency of spontaneity. Either as anti-bureaucracy, or as anti-totalitarianism, this spontaneous noise is detectable in T. J. Clark’s

31 E. P. Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, The New Press, New York, 1993, p. 524

32 Thompson gives a very interesting example from a document dated in the year 1839: “The right which is thus arrogated of judging ... another man’s domestic conduct, is certainly characteristic of a rude state of society; when the same measures are applied to ... thwarting the operation of the laws of the land, they become of much more serious import. The principle is perfectly Irish, and ... contains the germ of resistance to legal order.” *First Report of the Constabulary Commissioners* (1839) (Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, p. 521).

description of not-yet commodified society in Paris, or in Kristin Ross' poetic reading of the Paris Commune through Arthur Rimbaud.³³

Noise as spontaneous agency of social unrest, is grounded on one specific modernist contradiction. As in this, and other cases, the noise is seen as an effect generated by modernism, which at the same time opposes, transgresses, and subverts its own conditions.³⁴

Juan A. Suarez puts this pattern in a nutshell when he describes "modernism as a way of doing things with noise, of making noise with things."³⁵ Looking at different, mostly North American pop, literature, cinema and other cultural artefacts, he tries to relocate these contradictions of noise in some form that resists conventional norms of representation. "It's surrealism is the result of taking documentary factualism as its word, or, differently put, it is the result of exploring popular practice (children at play) and everyday life (ordinary street interaction and city spaces) by means of automatic recording device that does not discriminate between sense and nonsense, information and noise" (Suarez, *Pop Modernism*, p. 241). As such, the popularity of noise is not anymore in the realm of class struggles (as in 'folk' of Chris Cutler, or 'rawness' of Antonio Gramsci), but in the irresistible and unpredictable drive of "mass produced popular culture"; in other words the force of noise is driven by the unavoidable avalanche of commodities. But, the linearity of 'mass-production' is given life, or transformed to 'positive consumption' by "spontaneous, untutored cultural production" (Suarez, *Pop Modernism*, p. 249). It is needless to say that most of these transformations happen in New York City, and that the carriers of this real combustion of the spontaneous agencies are "blacks, Hispanics, immigrants, the poor and children." (Suarez, *Pop Modernism*, p. 241). The infantilism combined with cultural racism in the wings of capitalist democracy is at stake here. In many examples of enthusiastic takes on noise, whether in theory, art or in music, and there are plenty of them, we can see similar kinds of ideology of commodity-capitalism disguised as spontaneity. This is the noise of confusion, it can mean everything, but since

33 "When the streets had been healthy, the guidebooks agreed, they had been full of people doing business on the sidewalk. Flower girls and faggot sellers; water carriers, errand boys, old-clothes dealers, organ grinders, pedlars, bailiffs, acrobats, wrestlers, rag-and-bone men, bill stickers, lamplighters, porters for the market and the shops, porters for hire by the hour; coachmen, window cleaners, dog washers and dog trimmers, knife grinders, booksellers, coal merchants, carters, prostitutes, odd-job men, glaziers, itinerant plumbers, menders of crockery or shoes; sellers of licorice water and lemon juice, of herbs, of baskets, umbrellas, shoelaces, chickweed, and whips; puppet shows, street singers, somnambulists, dogs that played dominoes, Scottish jugglers, baton twirlers, savages with stones round their necks, India-rubber men, and human skeletons." "Sellers of ink, fish, potatoes by the bushel, peat, birdseed; chimneysweeps, saltimbanques, charlatans, stone breakers, open-air jewellers, sixpenny stall holders; all of them shouting, singing, modulating their apostrophes and descanting their sonorous invitations on the scale that most sets one's teeth on edge." T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1984, p. 50-51.

34 Mladen Dolar, in his afterword to translation of Attali's *Noise* book to Slovenian described this ambiguity, referring to concept of 'aura' of Benjamin as: "To our horror, there is no aura anymore, and thanks god there is still aura". Mladen Dolar, 'Hrup in Glasba', in Jacques Attali, *Hrup*, Maska, Ljubljana, 2012, p. 159.

35 Juan A. Suarez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday*, University of Illinois Press, 2007, p. 10.

it is defined as spontaneous mass culture, often it ends up by reproducing predictable reactionary and ideological forms, as one recent commentator on noise summarized: speaking of noise can include things from ‘murderous loudness’ to ‘the crackle of silk’.³⁶

Long ago, Gramsci criticizing the ideas on the defence of Western culture by one conservative liberal Henri Massis, has detected the racist aspect of the culturalization of noise and spontaneity.

“What makes me laugh is the fact that this eminent Massis, who is dreadfully afraid that Tagore’s and Gandhi’s Asiatic ideology might destroy French Catholic rationalism, does not realise that Paris has already become a semicolony of Senegalese intellectualism and that in France the number of half-breeds is increasing by leaps and bounds. One might, just for a laugh, maintain that, if Germany is the extreme outcrop of ideological Asianism, France is the beginning of darkest Africa and the jazz band is the first molecule of a new Euro-African civilization!”³⁷

Ideological Reverberations

The aim of Suarez is to conceptualize noise as an ice-breaker of ossified “bureaucratic and totalitarian development that had lost its connection with spontaneous artistry” (Suarez, *Pop Modernism*, p. 4). The right words for this artistry he has found in the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari by naming his program as an: “attempt to pick up the pervasive vibration” (Suarez, *Pop Modernism*, p.10).

The thesis that there is a pervasive, but hidden noise-form deep inside things that we have to immerse into, be seduced by it, or pick it up through their ‘natural’ features is common to most of the intellectual noise-industry. This understanding of noise is based on three assumptions:

first, noise in service of culture as spontaneous agency,

second, noise as a metaphor of phenomenological experience of intrinsic complexity,

third, noise as indispensable being of eternal contradictions.

36 James A. Seintrager, ‘Speaking of Noise: From Murderous Loudness to the Crackle of Silk’, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 22: 2-3, 2011. Seintrager, recognisably, defines noise as non-casuality, and as emancipation from determinism. As such this noise, this “loud crackle”, allows one for total liberty, more than what “political liberalism” of Attali has permitted. It is a guarantee for the laissez-faire of aesthetic pleasure, or as author puts: “[it is] to vouchsafe a freedom to produce and listen differently” (p. 267).

37 Gramsci, *Letters from Prison* (1927). Cf. Paulo Capuzzo and Sandro Mezzadra, ‘Provincializing the Italian Reading of Gramsci’, *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, Routledge, London, 2012, p. 49.

Against this assumptions we introduce:

the form against spontaneous agency,

the concepts against metaphorical experience, and

the politics and *the history* against eternal contradictions.

Living happily with contradictions is a political program of the noise-philosophy seeing in immersion a stoic position of life's richness. The book *Reverberations: the philosophy, aesthetics and politics of noise* can serve as a good example for this immersion, of this idea of 'picking up the pervasive vibrations'. From Michel Serres' account of 'noise as parasite' to Bataille's 'accursed share', noise has many forms and manifestations; because "we are in the noises of the world, we cannot close our door to their reception."^{38, 39} But as we know, the real questions in philosophy do not deal with the objective conditions of 'the world' (of brute facts of positivist-empiricism), but with procedures of how questions regarding 'the world' are conceptualized. Thus keeping our door open to outside noise is not a sufficient philosophical question; we have to ask what kinds of doors are kept open to this noise. These doors are, according to references listed in *Reverberations*, either general sources such as Bergson, Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari, or specific ones like Gilbert Simondon, H.P. Lovecraft and like-minded writers. It is easy to pinpoint some of the commons of this noise-philosophy: the creative life of animic spirit ... against fixedness ... in a kind of ecstatic repulsion ... of process of 'othering'⁴⁰.

In their sister book to *Reverberation*, the editors of *Resonances* have further specified this philosophical quest with references to music, as purposeful disorganisation/ indeterminacy and

38 Michel Serres, as quoted in 'Introduction' to *Reverberations: the philosophy, aesthetics and politics of noise*, edited by M. Goddard, B. Halligan and P. Hegarty,, Continuum, London, 2012, p. 3.

39 "The agitation is everywhere to be heard, beside the signals, beside the silence. The silent sea is misnamed. Perhaps white noise is at the heart of being itself. Perhaps being is not at rest, perhaps it is not in motion, perhaps it is agitated. White noise never stops, it is limitless, continuous, perpetual, unchangeable. ... As soon as there is a phenomenon, it leaves noise, as soon as an appearance arises, it does so by masking the noise." Michel Serres, 'Noise', *SubStance*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Issue 40, 1983, p. 50.

40 As it seems the philosophy is attributing same confusion to 'voice' as well. For Mladen Dolar, the politics of voice is the formal possibility to go beyond interpellation, or beyond ideological hook-up. His book, *A Voice and Nothing More*, is actually about everything; the elusiveness of voice, its materiality based on vibrations and pulsations is always something in-between. It is in-between nature and culture, it is in-between body and language, and it is in-between logos and phone or bios and zoe. Voice keeps these dichotomies together by separating them. It is irresolvable mystery. "[The] two entities overlap in an element which does not belong to either of them, yet holds them together. This location – the intersection, the void – turns the voice into something precarious and elusive, an entity which cannot be met in the full sonority of an ambiguous presence, but is not simply a lack either" (Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, 2006, p. 121). In this mystery, "the distance between the two voices opens the space of the political" (p. 123), beyond interpellation.

spontaneous noise.⁴¹ This disorganisation of noise suspends ‘natural’ conventions of ‘bourgeoisie, as in the movie of Pasolini, *Theorema*, where instinctual drives (the sex = the noise) shatter the existing structures. The name of this deadlock, which Pasolini pictures as madness, is ‘the very irrationality that conveys the absence of the answer’ (*Resonances*, p. 5). The “noise” of this philosophy is the name of anti-philosophy, of not being able to make sense of concepts of the world. To have it nastier, we can say that the ideological reverberation of noise in philosophy is another name for fabricating mysteries and enjoyment in confusion.

Questioning Noise/Questioning Culture: contributions

In this issue we have five interviews. The interview with Dror Feiler was made in January of 2012 in Fittja, a suburb of Stockholm. The political background of the interview was the riots that happened there in 2010 (with a harsher reprise in 2013), and subsequent conservative restoration of this mass movement by researchers and artists working at the area. The aims of many of these avant-garde reactionaries were to delegate these intense class struggles to issues of misrecognition of identity and ethnic values. The topics discussed with Feiler such as violence, force, distortion, racism, state structures, and representation should be understood from this perspective of references. Dror Feiler, since the seventies, is an internationally active musician; he has played in a few free jazz, improvisation and noise bands such as *Lokomotiv Konkret*, and *Too Much Too Soon Orchestra*, and in duets with Lasse Marhaug and Stig Larsson, among others. He has also composed contemporary and electro-acoustic music for symphonic and chamber orchestras. Feiler is the spokesman for Ship to Gaza, and he is chairman of European Jews for a Just Peace. His installation-work, co-authored with Gunilla Sköl Feiler, *Snow White and the Madness of Truth* was vandalized by the Israeli ambassador to Sweden in 2004. The interview and subsequent texts by Feiler deals with the concrete political and ideological conditions of experimental music making. But it also deals with the contradictions of experimental music making and the state apparatuses; the issue of representation, of nationalism and related topics. The interview has both formal and political concerns to do with the theoretical concepts of noise and with the political and ideological conditions of involvement with noise. Dror Feiler is also active in the Swedish Left Party.

The second long interview, with Darko Suvin, was conducted in May 2014 in Lucca, Italy. Suvin has recently published a book on Yugoslavia (subtitled as *X-ray of Yugoslavia*), where he is originally from and where he was active in the avant-garde and political platforms in the fifties and sixties. His texts and books on science-fiction, Brecht, utopia and Formalism have been translated in various languages in dozen of journals and books. Starting with questions regarding the relations between formalism and politics in socialist Yugoslavia and beyond, we have made long detours via the critique of historicism, the problem of transformations of artistic forms, Lenin, the concept of *novum* and utopia, the politics of representation, the theory of slogans, nihilistic estrangements, and other issues which are ‘burning’ questions for Rab-Rab. To make a few remarks regarding

41 *Resonances: noise and contemporary music*, edited by M. Goddard, B. Halligan and N. Spelman, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2013.

the title of the interview: in a couple of places Suvin compares his methodology, or to be more precise the diversity of his dialectics, to Surrealists ‘communicating vessels’, bringing together Lenin and Dadaists, Marx and Freud, Engels and Bloch, politics and form, and much more. *Communicating Vessels* is book by Andre Breton published in 1932. It is a very strange philosophical book, trying to communicate mutually exclusive forces and elements. It is Breton’s most political book. Part of the book was translated to Serbo-Croatian, the same year as the original publication in the third issue of *Nadrealizam Danas i Ovde* (Surrealism: Today and Here, 1932) in Belgrade. It is, as Mary Ann Caws, who translated book in 1990 to English, wrote, a work where ‘Breton formulates the theory of the link.’ It is impossible, a contradictory link, one must add; the link which brings together Di Chirico, Nosferatu the Vampire, Huysmans, Hervey, Marx, Feuerbach, Freud, Lenin and Engels. The idea is how to think of contradictions without suspending their antagonism to typical reactionary chronological causality. “Is chronology obligatory? No! (Lenin).”⁴² As Breton understands very well, the “completely uneven character” of revolutionary thought has its own philosophy based on ‘cracks’: “that in front of it, life is being robustly constructed and organized, whereas behind it, the revolutionary effort is applied to the necessary destruction and disorganization of the existing state of things” (Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, p. 124). It is the novelty of the October Revolution and the philosophy of dialectical-materialism which is at stake in this Surrealist dream of destruction.⁴³ We are pleased to publish this interview, together with Suvin’s text dealing with epistemological meditations on science, poetry and politics. I am grateful to Slobodan Karamanić who arranged this interview with Suvin.

The third interview, with Peter Gidal, is a result of collective learning and enthusiasm. Before conducting the interview in Helsinki in January of 2015, a group of artists including Diego Bruno, Giovanna Esposito-Yussif, David Muoz, Kari Yli-Annala and myself have systematically studied Gidal’s texts and films. Some of us have a long history of engagement with Gidal’s work. It is not easy to present Gidal; he has directed dozens of very influential experimental films (*Room Film 1973*, *Clouds*, *Volcano*), written two books on the films of Andy Warhol, a book on Samuel Beckett, and a book on experimental film called *Materialist Film*. He also edited *Structuralist Film Anthology*. These writings, especially his rigorous critique of phenomenological formalism

42 Andre Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, p. 48.

43 “Andre Breton was shocked that I [Meyer Schapiro] did not believe that dialectical materialism was an adequate philosophy on which to ground theoretical and practical issues. ... So, when we had an argument about dialectical materialism, I proposed that he would choose people to defend it and I would select two or three for my side. I chose the logician and philosopher Ernest Nagel, a very dear friend of mine. He was at Columbia, a great teacher as well as logician. And A. J. Ayer who was in New York, working for the British Government in their information bureau. Breton choose Jean van Heijenoort, who was the last secretary of Trotsky, a man who had a philosophical and mathematical education and who wrote on logic that excellent book which is a collection of the most important essays on modern symbolic logic - and he also chose a Greek poet named Nicolas Calas, a man who adored Breton and followed him everywhere. We met in Breton’s apartment, with Breton positioned like King Solomon in a higher chair. We sat around, disposed below. Breton was a very mild person, but he not only sat higher, he also talked with an air of authority, with that great leonine head. He said he would hear both sides; he wasn’t going to say anything until it was all over. No one else was there.” James Thompson and Susan Raines, ‘A Vermont Visit with Meyer Schapiro’, *Oxford Art Journal* 17:1, 1994, p. 11.

in certain avant-garde and abstract art tendencies, and his insistence of the ‘oppressive character of narrative’, uncompromising criticism of ideological reproductions in representational film and art, his radical dismissal of identity is a theoretical and practical position which should be the starting point for today’s art’s politicization. Unfortunately it is not. In the prevailing banality of engineering the artistic activism as un-digested spontaneous outbursts of common creativity, Gidal’s position is obsolete. It is especially in this front, against prevailing reactionary ideas, that we want to engage with his writings and films. The amazing thing with Gidal’s films is that they are not, unlike Godard, representational even on the theoretical level. Precisely, his films are not about theory offering the clauses of how to escape narrative and ideological reproduction; they do not call for identification and experiential recognition. The theoretical, and with it, the political side of his work (his writings) is around the context they confront, the ideological reception of contemporary art as part of the cultural field. This is the reason why Gidal often criticizes the ambitions of experimental film-makers trying to be at the centre of their culture. As we are *for* the materialist-formalist-experimentation, we are at the same time *against* all attempts of cleaning Gidal from Althusser, from Lenin, from historical-materialism and from the asymmetry of class struggles. This is the main reason why the conversation with Gidal is dominated largely with political and theoretical issues. It is this discussion that we want to pursue in the following issues by strengthening this position of political and formal inquiries against identity based culturalizations of politics and art.⁴⁴ We are grateful to Sami van Ingen who is responsible for this interview. He is himself an experimental film-maker, and has organized screenings of Gidal’s films and his visit to Helsinki.

Gidal’s references, too, are not representational. They work against the tide, with dialectics. Against Straub-Huillet, Mike Dunford; against Berwick Street Film Colective, Lis Rhodes; against Julia Kristeva he introduces Christine Delphy, which was for some of us the turning point in encountering with writings having highly political and materialist approach against overtly-banalized issues such as commonality, or ‘domestic revolutions’. We are pleased to re-print Delphy’s text, ‘Continuities and discontinuities in marriage and divorce’, claiming that divorce constitutes a continuation of marriage in a different form. We are grateful both to Christine Delphy’s enthusiasm and support and as well as Verso books’ permission to reprint this invaluable text.

We have two ‘borrowed’ interviews as well. One is by Ivana Momčilović with François Nicolas, and another is by Milica Tomić with Jan Eugster. I met Momčilović in Belgrade in January 2015, during Alain Badiou’s visit which she had organized. It was no less eventful then the meeting with Feiler, Suvín and Gidal. Momčilović runs a samizdat called *Edicija Jugoslavije* (Edition Yugoslavia) between Brussels and Belgrade; hopefully this contribution will be the start of a collaboration that

44 “The endless reproduction of dominant forms of ‘unproblematic’ voyeurism is what dominant representation is all about, that is its narrative. All I can add is that irony does not change a damn thing and if I hear the word desire one more time I’m going to throw up” Peter Gidal’s statement in discussion organized by *The Undercut* in 1986 on ‘Cultural Identities’. Reece Augustie, Martina Aatile, Peter Gidal, Issac Julien, Mandy Merck ‘Aesthetics and Politics: Working on Two Fronts’, *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artist’s Film and Video*, eds. Nina Danino and Michael Maziere, Wallflower Press, London, 2003, p. 157.

will expand in the future issues. The interview with Nicolas, published earlier in Serbo-Croatian, includes the Manifesto of Edicija Jugoslavije dealing with the radical political break of socialist Yugoslavia and its repercussions in philosophy and art. The interview is also accompanied with text by Nicolas, which was a paper delivered at a Conference on Musicology in April 2014 in Belgrade. François Nicolas is a contemporary composer, philosopher, and teaches music and thought at L'École normale supérieure. He previously played in free jazz groups, has written extensively on the form of music, the relation between thought, mathematics and music, Badiou's philosophy and combines composition with theoretical reflections. In his text he deals with formal and theoretical issues of continuity and discontinuity in experimental music.

The second borrowed interview by M. Tomić is part of an art-work. She has interviewed Jan Eugster, "specialized in consulting artists in techniques and materials, and finding customized solutions for their three dimensional art projects." Tomić's interview with Eugster is part of her larger installation 'Re-Assemblage' where she questions the suppression of labour processes in contemporary art practice. Her special focus is the artist Rudolf Stingel whose 'relational aesthetic' works are supposed to underline process instead of the object in art practice. Tomić by interviewing Eugster who realizes and produces Stingel's supposed process based works, magnifies the neo-liberal and commodity based logic behind these practices; i.e. she makes audible the suppressed 'noises' of relational aesthetics. As Tomić herself makes clear in the interview, the attempt is to 'disconnect' the fabricated relations. I have kept interview in its raw vernacular form, which follows one digression after another. These unlimited associations of contemporary art work is very similar to singularity of capitalism, similar to what Peter Hallward has described as "the singularity of any one commodity qua commodity implies the singularity of the market mechanism that commodifies it."⁴⁵ The abundance of digressions and associations in interview, regarding production of one art work, clearly implies that often the singularity, or so-called 'aura', of an art work is nothing but the singular fetish of commodity capitalism.

The contributions to the two volumes of the second issue of Rab-Rab are roughly separated as 'noise' and as 'form' volumes. This should not imply that we propose some kind of separation between 'noise' and 'form'; to the contrary, we insist that the supposed formlessness of noise is a trap for all kinds of reactionary and banal ideas discussing contradictions, interruptions and breaks from the point of noise. It is because of this sole reason that there cannot be a separation between noise and form; noise as a concept is yet to be formalized in art and in theory. As philosopher Georges Canguilhem has wrote: 'To work a *concept* is to vary its extension and comprehension to generalise it through the incorporation of exceptional traits, to export it beyond its region of origin to take it as model or on the contrary to seek a model for it – to work a concept, in short, is progressively to confer upon it, through regulated transformations, the function of a *form*.'⁴⁶

45 Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific*, Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 8.

46 Canguilhem (1963), op. cit. , Peter Hallward, 'Introduction: Theoretical Training', *Concept ad Form Volume One: Key Texts from the Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, eds. P. Hallward and K. peden, Verso, London, 2012, p. 13.

Thus the red thread between the two parts is a slogan we want to put forward: noise against culture.

A companion to the interview with Dror Feiler and his texts, are two drawings by Mazen Kerbaj related to his song 'Starry Night', followed with a text by Ozren Pupovac dealing with this wild, thrilling, yet brilliant experiment. Mazen Kerbaj is an experimental musician and artists based in Beirut. In June 2006, while Israel was bombing Beirut, he improvised with his prepared trumpet on his balcony to the unpredictable rhythm of bombs sent by the Israeli Defence Forces. The result is an enchanting piece, lasting six minutes, on the deconstruction of the mathematics of violence. The following text by Pupovac deals with the formal construction of this violence. Departing from Alain Badiou's theses on indexing and subjectivity, Pupovac understands the violence (destruction) as the conceptual core of Kerbaj's successful attempt to decipher the representational regimes of state structures. Similar, in theoretical line, is the text by Bruno Besana on void, nothingness and force; concepts usually associated with noise. Besana departs from the idea that destruction is an attempt to break from ideological reproduction and representational modes, by bringing about novelty in positive terms. He argues that the deadlock, generally induced by the annihilatory effect of destruction is abstracted in art-works in a specific way, by calling to both destruction and construction, force and voidance. Pupovac and Besana are involved in *Versus Laboratory*, a theoretical laboratory set to explore, and experiment upon the problem of the polemical genesis of thought in contemporary philosophy, and currently they are putting together a book on the concept of multiplicity in the theories of Alain Badiou.

Ben Watson is involved with the London based Association of Musical Marxists (AMM) and Unkant, the association's publishing activity. He has published books on Adorno, Frank Zappa and a brilliant historical-materialist study of Derek Bailey's improvisations. In this issue we will be publishing two texts by Watson. We are re-printing 'Music, Violence and Truth' in its original version, initially published as a pamphlet by Unkant in 2011. We want to disseminate and give off to a wider public this brilliant analysis against political and theoretical hypocrisy of pop-experimentalism which the magazine *The Wire* is successfully imposing on a global scale. Against this postmodern confusion, Watson is re-drawing lines with examples of political engagement and radical musical experimentations. Instead of kitsch industry, Watson, as someone engaged with the 'politics' of avant-garde, shows simply that without confronting the violence we cannot discuss thought or novelty in music. It is not The Noise, as another form of commodity, he is after, but a thought of making clear that in the comfort of capitalism there is no room for noise, as he writes: "noise organised for the extraction of surplus value isn't noise, but silence at high volume."

Similar to this, is a text by Michel Chevalier, already familiar to readers of Rab-Rab from the first issue, dealing with commodity based ideological pop-theories on music and art frantically supported by Diedrich Diederichsen. With a careful theoretical and historical analysis of the formation of pop theory of Diederichsen, Chevalier is precisely showing how so-called art theory and criticism is nothing but an attempt to mime the success of the mainstream art-commodification form. Diederichsen's cultural capital (reverse-duplicate of *Kulturkritik*, as Francis Mulhern would say) is his presumed music knowledge which is nothing but the dream of successful ideological

reproduction. This is the case not only with music writing, but with art theory and criticism as well: most often curator's, whose intellectual capacity is not beyond the reach of facebook, hottest European 'author films' or some well-packaged pop-disco music, can do nothing but to write about contemporary art as it is also part of the same culture of mainstream. It always ends up with disappointment, regarding glamour, success, money, and sex available to contemporary art comparing to the mainstream. Chevalier shows that the nihilism of Diederichsen is not far from this disappointment. The version we are publishing is slightly revised from original version which is initially published in 2004 in samizdat *Autonopop* from Hamburg put together by Chevalier. He is for this project grateful to Tobias Still and Len Pappe.

Chevalier for this issue translated a very interesting text by conceptual artist Jean-Claude Moineau, 'Music Wars' from French and Rahel Puffert's text on the avant-garde art of the twenties from German. Reading Moineau's text is jumping, not immersing, into noise. His text, too, deals with the combat nature of noise, but without delegating it to the irrational drives of the human condition. Thus he criticizes the theses of Luigi Russolo and does not suspend the communicative (positive) aspect of noise. It is through these forms that noise communicates (in Moineau's words conditions 'uptakes') in a non-ideological, thus political field.

A departing point of Taneli Viitahuhta's text is also a critique of Luigi Russolo's theses on noise. Apart from criticizing some main concepts of Russolo and showing their profound relation to Fascism (primarily through occultism), Viitahuhta's text also analyses the limits of his music-form. According to Viitahuhta, Russolo has brought nothing substantially new into avant-garde musical concepts. Mirroring Rosa Luxemburg theses on imperialism and capitalism, Viitahuhta shows the real reactionary form of Russolo's avant-garde project. Viitahuhta plays in a dozen of improvisation and free jazz bands in Helsinki, such as *Mobel*, *Boris Morgana*, *Horst Quartet* and *Hetero Skeleton*, all having a great dose of anger and fire.

Henrik Heinonen's text is part of his ongoing art-project; mapping noise as an element of war and control. But he is also concerned with the structural definition of noise; what is the threshold between noise and sound, how we can enter to that.

Gregoire Rousseau's brilliant, cool text is a vivisection of the principle of uncertainty. He abstracts this 'uncertainty' from the micro level set by Heisenberg and Schrödinger, to the programmatic plan of understanding 'noise' in electricity.

In the second volume regarding 'form' we start with Darko Suvin, which follows with Anthony Iles' text on Shklovsky and with a bloc of texts that Iles, Mattin and Grupa za Konceptualnu Politiku (Group for Conceptual Politics) has written in communication. Iles and Mattin are editors of *Noise and Capitalism*, a book published in 2009. It is an amazing collection of texts dealing with the politics and history of noise and improvisation. Remarkably, Ben Watson targets the mass of experimental-underground music lovers cultivating themselves with the beauty of noise, wrote in his contribution to *Noise and Capitalism* that the real threat of noise should be towards

culture, because: “culture is a form of capital that it becomes *a sow which devours her own piglets*, an infanticidal cannibal, its own nemesis, a porcine slough of violence and despond.”⁴⁷

Iles' longer text on 'studying unfreedom' and Mattin and Grupa za Konceptualnu Politku deals with Viktor Shklovsky, particularly with his *Third Factory* book. Shklovsky is a disturbing figure, full of contradictory and oppositional tropes. He writes with uneasiness of being part of culture; the obsession with mechanics and his noisy form is a symptom of this anxious fight. Not flight. He, as well, could have used a citation from *Tristram Shandy*: 'Though, in one sense, our family was certainly a simple machine ... it had all the honour and advantages of a complex one.'⁴⁸

I am really grateful to Anthony Iles, who not only has re-worked his earlier paper attempting a very difficult materialist and political reading of some Shklovsky's concepts; but also engaged in bringing together three short texts involved with different aspects of the Shklovskian formal devices. One is his own text 'Relations of Reproductions' pointing at ambiguities and contradictions of the political use of formalist theories and methodologies.

Following this is Mattin's 'Noise as Device'; strong critique of escapist-phenomenological noise in the style of Vomir. The main currency of today's noise music is either in activism by mimicking the 'power' of industry or warfare; or it is seen as a personal affair forcing the boundaries of psychological endurance. In both cases noise is a metaphor of formlessness. By introducing form, through Shklovskian theories of device, Mattin shows the real strength of noise: in its ability to draw the lines of demarcations. Grupa za Konceptualnu Politiku (GKP) in order to politicize the Russian Formalist concepts, they propose to change *ostarenienie* (estrangement) to *onenačinjenje* (destruction).

Jyrki Siukonen, himself musician as is Mattin, has played in two great Finnish post-punk bands (*Kollaa Kestää*, *Vaaralliset Lelut*); his rigour and formalism cannot be explained with scholarly training; there is a twist of strangeness in his texts. His text on Shklovsky is actually dealing with the noise-element of Formalist writing, with the uneasiness of Shklovsky's theoretical device. He is showing how Shklovsky's contemporary, one Kaverin, is missing the point from the very start by misguiding contradictions (i.e. errors) in Shklovsky's form, or his Sternian "shifts and displacements and retreats", towards conventional narrative of representation. Siukonen is for elaborating this disturbing feature in Shklovsky's writings.

Rachel Puffert's text translated from German by Michel Chevalier is about the inherent political form of the crisis of representation, the avant-garde claim of autonomy as a site for struggle, the formalism as a new language of mediated experience of historical changes, about all things which are a rationale for our interest in speaking about politics of arts through forms.

47 Ben Watson, 'Noise as Permanent Revolution or, Why Culture is a Sow Which Devours its Own Farrow', *Noise and Capitalism*, edited by Anthony Iles and Mattin, Arteleku Audiolab, Donostia-S. Sebastián, 2009, p. 117.

48 *Tristram Shandy*, cf. Peter Gidal, 'Technology and Ideology in/through/and Avant-Garde Film: An Instance', *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. T. de Lauretis and S. Heath, Macmillan: London, 1980, p. 151

Martin Krenn and Jaakko Karhunen are artists, and both contributions are part of larger videos installations. Krenn is based in Vienna, in his art works he engages with the anti-fascist struggle and is a committed activist against historical obfuscation of these struggles. Here he writes about Sergei Tretiakov, a Russian avant-garde theoretician of Factography and also a Kolhoz activist. Trying to combine the two, and showing further repercussions to theory itself (through Walter Benjamin's 'Author as Producer'), Krenn wants to magnify the contradictions of Tretiakov's artistic and political context through, what he calls, "blind spots". Both Benjamin's notorious text and Tretiakov's work, despite their call for participatory, dialogical and collectivist features makes sense only when we approach them through the intelligibility of forms. The ideology and the concept of collective is dissected both in Krenn and in Karhunen. In the former it is 'blind spot' and the noise, or 'plague of locust'; whereas in the latter it is the clamour of collective identification. Karhunen examines his own Marxism mercilessly by trying to find out the class struggles in relation between collective 'we' or unionized proletariat and dispersed 'we' of lumpen-proletariat strikebreakers. It is a hard and disturbing road that he wants to take in order to display the contradictions in labour struggles, but one worth of taking, especially if we aim to make audible the noises of ideological liberalism. Karhunen is an artist based in London, his works refer to the philosophy of Louis Althusser, amongst others.

With the following bloc of Ben Watson, Max Rynnanen and Gert Raeithel texts we take this difficult and impure Marxism one step further. Watson's second text in this issue deals with Bishop William Montgomery Brown's book *Communism and Christianity*, self-published in Galion, Ohio from 1920 to the Bishop's death in 1937, with the subtitle: *Analysed and Contrasted from the Marxian and Darwinian Points of View* and with a slogan saying: 'Banish Gods from Skies ... and Capitalist from Earth.' Rynnanen who has written a book on the history of Venice, is an artist and pedagogue based in Helsinki. His vituperations induced by psychedelic and Marxist revolutions are not the result of desperation or depression; they are the effect of an angry, or as he says 'noisy', way of thinking against "today's Finland media which has the guts to publicly call even hardcore Nazis and racists just as 'critics of immigration'". In the company of Rynnanen one is always learning and hearing about unusual things; one such thing he told was *Maledicta: The International Journal of Verbal Aggression*, published from 1977 until 2005, of which he was subscriber. In the fourth issue in 1980 they published a text by Gert Raeithel called 'Karl Marx, Maledictor.' Here we re-print this amazing collection of Marx's vituperation's, thanks to permission given by Reinhold Aman, publisher and editor of *Maledicta*.

Aeron Bergman and Alejandra Salinas are an artist couple based in Seattle. We met them in Helsinki. Apart from installations, publishing activities, education projects they also make music albums. They have used all kinds of means to expose racist, capitalist, white anglo-american 'motherfuckers' aggression toward the 'people'. Here they are exposing the 'factographies' related to class struggles in art in Detroit, and make concise cas against using gentrification instead of more precise "colonialism".

Not only because Bergman & Salinas' work *Abstract Your Shit Is*, mentions the *League of Revolutionary Black Workers* active in Detroit in the late sixties, that I want to conclude with Amiri

Baraka; but because Baraka's 'noise' is something which is unfortunately missing in this issue of Rab-Rab. Our aim in the next issue is to take steps further in this direction.

'Spooky

niggers scared of everything. "Ghosts!" A Honk. A mean low scream like rich people dying in front of their offices with nigger janitors grinning and susycueing into jeeps with mounted bazookas. Weird march music for weird marches. We rose from our paralyzed stuttering and ran to meet them -

"Albert!

Mong!" We called

"here's ...? (And before we got it out

John Coltrane

came down thru the roof blowing *Impressions* faster than

light

(or was it Chico, Ricky, Tyrone, David, Arthur, Julius, Hamiett, Oliver, Joseph ...)

& the dismal pinkerton niggers sued for peace. Which meant they cd only produce their albums with a disclaimer that said, "This music will turn you into rich people's underwear"

& they went out in the snow of

their own

creation

humming the fanon, efranklin frazier

black anglo-saxon unblues

& what did we do

we did what we needed

to do

we blew

& blew

& blew blue

blue blue blue blue

& even reached you ...

& even reached you

& even reached you

& even reached you

& even reached you

reached you

reached you

you

you ⁴⁹

49 Amiri Baraka, 'Class Struggles in Music', from *New Music-New Poetry* LP by Amiri Baraka with David Murray and Steve McCall, India Navigation, 1981.

Too Much Too Soon
Interview with Dror Feiler

by Sezgin Boynik

SB: *Can you briefly tell about your involvement with music; and especially how music and politics are related in your work?*

DF: I started with music when I left Israel, when I came to Sweden. In Israel I was politically very active, and in any case in Israel politics is very dominant, it is in every facet of your life. In Israel for me there was no space for music. When I came to Sweden there was an empty space for music; at the beginning I was not involved much with politics here, I didn't know much about it, I didn't even know the language. So music was here a new opening for me, which was almost an urge at that time. Then I start to listen to musicians, I was curious to hear what was going on. It was a totally auto-didactic process, I never studied saxophone, academically. Very soon then I moved to experimental music, because I found it very boring to play like somebody else, or to imitate others. I tried to find my own way.

SB: *But have you studied music here?*

FD: Yes, my first two years were in Fylkingen, where they had special education on new music and media. It was 1975/76, I also studied one year of musicology in university and then five years of composition in Academy. So, that is my academic schooling, electronic music studio, composition, all that stuff.

SB: *How was the experimental music scene back then in Sweden. For example how was your relation with bands such as Iskra?*

DF: I know them personally of course. It is important to know, in Sweden, in seventies, there was a very strong movement of so-called progressive music. It consisted of people who described themselves as politically left, and

they tried to make music that they thought of as being progressive as well. Meaning they were writing progressive texts and putting them in rock or blues or whatever available music styles. Both *Iskra* and the group I played with *Lokomotiv Konkret* (we started in 75/76), were not accepted by this movement. Because they said there is no text in it, they couldn't understand anything other than lyrics as being progressive. I argued with them saying they are wrong, that it is they who are conservative. Maybe their texts are not, but their music was definitely conservative. For us the power of music is at least as important and innovative as the text, and this thesis of mine is proven now ... have a look at how people relate themselves to *Livet Är En Fest* (Life is a Party), the song written by the progressive band *Oktober*. Even if it is meant to be critical, and leftist, people are usually partying and drinking with that kind of song, without having a moment of thought as to what that celebration might be about. This happens because this song, which was meant to be a revolutionary song, lacks any revolutionary elements. Maybe in its text, but nobody listens to it that anyway. So, in Sweden, in seventies, there was a very strong classical modernist tradition, a progressive movement, and a very conservative jazz scene, playing, in best cases, like Charlie Parker or John Coltrane. Then we came! We said that we want all of it. We want skills, architectonic and form of thought in modernist composition; the wilderness and spontaneity of free improvisation and free jazz; and we want the brutality and ritualistic feeling of rock concerts, of the electric guitar. Apart from some titles of compositions, the political twist of our work was not in the texts. For us the idea was that if you create a new form, somehow you can also make people listen in a new way, and then hopefully they will feel in new way too,

and accordingly think and act in that new way too. I usually quote d'Alembert, editor of the first *Encyclopedia*, who wrote a little book called *On the Freedom of Music*. There he says that all freedoms are bound together. Freedom of music leads to the freedom of thought which in turn leads to the freedom to act. The freedom to act is, as you know, enemy number one of the state. So, if you want to keep the monarchy don't change the form of opera. This could, of course, be perceived as very childish, and sure, things are not as deterministic as I present them here. But still I think that there is a seed of truth in this. Because when you realize that things don't have to be like they are, in music, or with food, or with your family, or in collective communication, then the next step is to think how much of the rest should change. So, we started to create our own music and our own *Association of Free Improvised Music*, in order to promote this form and to claim that this music has high qualities as other music. We belonged nowhere, because when compared to compositional-modern music we were not seen as refined, and on the other hand we were not as popular as the rock-blues-pop stuff. So, for us to insist on the qualities and importance of what we do was also a political and organisational quest.

SB: *I understand that the progressive scene didn't like your approach, but what about other kinds of experimental music movements, for example what was your relation to Fylkingen?*

DF: I think that in Fylkingen we succeed in creating our own group between 1978 and 1990, in those years we were very strong. If you look at the index of the book on Fylkingen you will see how many times I have made concerts and organized things there. But, retrospectively I think, that in spite of being very strong in Fylkingen, many

people didn't think highly about our musical combination and they were not happy to accept it in the first place, they didn't like the noise, the brutality, and they especially didn't like that on top of this we also manifest this as a political act. They wanted Fylkingen to be part of this society, part of this culture and musical environment.

Gunilla Sköld Feiler: I think that in a country like Sweden, pretending to have such high ambition on quality, the change is not immediately accepted. I think that you were then very much aware of the situation, and your practice was somehow a reaction to this. I think it was very logical that you decided to take other kinds of steps, and to create a new group; even the name of your group reflected this very well, *The Too Much Too Soon Orchestra*. Anyway this was your concept, not to recognize accepted patterns and to reach for too much too soon, almost immediately.

DF: True and one of our LPs was called *The sky is a Limit*. You know, people commented to me many times things such as: "but Sweden is different, it is not like this, you have to understand" etc...I always, and still, reply to this with: "Yes Sweden was like this, Now I am here and Sweden has been changed." I was insisting that I am here and I will "save" Sweden from its cultural decay. Of course everybody was provoked by this, they thought that I came just four years ago and that I should not talk like this, and that I should know my place, etc.

Q: *Do you mean that this attitude about your work was because you came from Israel, was there such a stigma on you ...*

A: No, no. Not stigma, but if you come to a new country and you say that they have to

change because I am here, that is a strong attitude that people usually don't know how to deal with regardless from where you were coming from.

GSF: But he didn't understand from the beginning Swedish words like 'lagom'.

DF: Which means not too much, not too little; it means medium. It means more than medium actually, it is something like mainstream. I don't like this word at all. Most of the time, the issues related to integration have this component. People who have lived in Sweden for forty years and are well integrated into the cultural life are often also saying that they don't feel like they are part of this society; that they don't feel Swedish. But I always say that you are Swedish if you live and work here. Being Swedish shouldn't mean that only you have to change, it means that society has to change as well; this is dialectical.

SB: *I want to go back to our discussion on the politics of free improvisation; there are some other indicators of this politics, apart from the form of music that you were talking about. First of all the very name of the band, and second, for example, in the cover of an Iskra album you can see the image of Lenin. So, communism is overtly emphasized there. Did you think of the issue of representation in regard to your involvement with politics?*

DF: In the cover of our second LP is a photo of Arseny Avraamov conducting the Russian fleet on the Caspian Sea with flags. This was the dream of combination; the music, the sound of the city, the political power, and the political environment. The titles of many of the pieces on our albums have these kinds of aspirations. But for us, the music itself was the expression of not accepting the order of

things. Because I am a musician, I have to start with music. I was also, as a matter of fact, chairman of *Musik Centrum*, it was a free union for musicians. I always tried to make music and politics work in parallel. I was always trying to encourage musicians as cultural workers to be involved in the processes of society that were other than their own. I remember there was in the eighties an initiative to introduce money to the loans in libraries. There was a big protest in response. I tried to get the musicians union to get involved; I said to them you have children, and you are using these libraries as well. Also, if we don't help the people who need our solidarity, why should they help us when we need them? They have to see that we are part of society; otherwise they would think that we are protesting only when things are wrong with the music business, or with issues that are only related to our own interest. It is about solidarity. So, my engagement with politics through music was based on a complex structure.

SB: *In that time, in the height of Social Democracy, you could, even as an experimental musician, be involved somehow in cultural policy. How were you supporting your experimental music, was it through state grants?*

DF: Yes. We got money from State Kulturrådet (Swedish Arts Council) to support *Lokomotiv Konkret*. It supported our tours, both in Sweden and abroad. I myself didn't get so much support in seventies because I was still studying. But I got a state working grant from the years 1983 to 2003, continuously. Twenty years, every year, big grants, as a composer.

SB: *In seventies you say that you were struggling as a cultural workers ... what did you achieve, if I can ask you in this way, from your struggles?*

DF: Well, we had Fylkingen, and we were doing our struggles there. I was vice-chairman of the board, and was very much involved in their program. Then, there was *Musik Centrum*, they were organizing concerts, but also they were functioning as a working agent. You could put your name there, and then they would look for a job for you. We had an idea that musicians themselves would control their work flow. We didn't need an impresario, or some agent who would get a percentage from our work. That could be one example of our achievement; it was active, and very active, until the end of the nineties. Apart from this organizational work we also wrote texts for journals, promoted new music, and fought against the people who tried to instrumentalize the culture; saying that culture is good because it makes people happy. We were always insisting that music has its own value, of course music is used for many things, and it is unstoppable. But the reason that you make music can only be that you want to make music. The primer of making music should be to want to make music; then after that you can do whatever you like with that. And this is the value of it; and we were fighting for that value. When cultural state institutions were saying things like: "culture is very important, because ..." then they go, "this and that". In the end all that reasoning is about money. The next year they can go and say, look it was not fulfilling what you were saying. We had big discussions about these issues. There was for example a woman researcher who made research on jazz clubs, and she found out that the jazz club was earning more money *for* the state than what the state was giving them. The state said we'll give you every year half a million, and you see how much taxes they pay, and how much VAT goes to beers, then she came up with the conclusion that state is earning money with culture; so the conclusion was: let's invest in

culture. Of course, it sounds very good. But all these things based on calculations can get dangerous. Because if she calculates like that, then someone else can calculate completely differently, and will come to the conclusion to not finance culture, as it is happening today.

SB: *It is very interesting to hear about these concrete examples of contradictions regarding the cultural policy of experimental music ...*

DF: There was *Svenska Institut*, which had special programs for culture. A big part of their budget was spent for Swedish musicians and artists to go perform abroad. If you look at the statistics showing which countries got money for culture, you will see a pattern there. When Sweden tries to sell, the airplane model JAS 39-grippen to South Africa, there was lot of cultural grants given to artists or musicians to go there; when Sweden tried to sell airplanes to Hungary, I got money with Fylkingen to go to Hungary to play. Because they know that culture and arts create good will, and suddenly you become, even without noticing it, a promoter of the Swedish national capitalist system and arms industry. This we can't avoid. You are always part of it; you can never be totally out of system.

SB: *It seems that these contradictions are more complex than they appear at first hand.*

DF: You see, the state is very clever by supporting everyone and by corrupting everyone. This is characteristic of a successful state, being repressively tolerant. This was the strength of Swedish social-democracy. Because of this they succeed to avoid very big social conflicts and class struggles. It was the cornerstone. But it depends, of course, on the other side; the side which gets the money. You either lose the compass or lose what is the fire in them, or manage to work through

these contradictions. To have spaces like we had is important, especially because of this issue; it helped us collectively come to terms with the contradictions. Otherwise, these contradictions are not manageable in privacy and in isolation. That's why we insisted on the collective character of working on cultural policy. If you don't keep the discussions alive then you will be victim of the system.

SB: *Why then has the state stopped being so clever after the nineties?*

DF: I think the change already started to happen in the eighties. Already during the time of social-democracy. When the Eastern bloc showed the signs of collapse, then the pressure for social-democrats to be progressive, to give more and more reforms, and to respond to the needs of the lower classes started to vanish. If you look at the reform tendencies in Swedish society from the twenties, to the eighties, you can see that after the Russian revolution, they had to find a way to change the working day, to give the workers this and that, because otherwise revolution would come here as well. Even the capitalists, they had to accept the idea to have this middle road in Saljöbadsanda. Satsjöbaden is a very rich suburb of Stockholm, with lots of villas. There is a very beautiful hotel, and there they had a meeting between social-democrats, trade-unions, and the capitalists; and there they came to the conclusion that all problems could be solved by talking: we don't need strikes, demonstrations, and revolutions. When the threat of social revolt had disappeared, there was no need any more to have direct confrontation. This is one part, the other process is, that the so-called left have lost the battle in the cultural field, because of the ideas that were aggressively pumped into us, year after year, by the mainstream films of Hollywood, by fashion, all of this,

which after a while achieved a critical mass, and had to change the whole field of cultural policy. In Sweden all the unions, unions of tenants, cultural unions, all these suddenly fell apart, and everyone had to take care of themselves. This started in the eighties. This of course has parallels with post-modernism; claiming that both the right and the left are the same, etc. All these processes together led us here. I also think the self-esteem of the left movement has vanished. There was already in the end of the seventies a suggestion by a man called Rudolf Meidner, who was a social-democrat economist, who proposed something like a fund for the workers. It meant that the state would put a special tax on the salary of working people and with this tax they would buy stock until they would get control of private companies. It was the social-democratic way to nationalize.

SB: *This sounds too socialist for social-democracy ...*

DF: Of course, and there was a big discussion going on about this. Stupid radical people were also against it. If they would have adopted this plan, then the ownership relations in Sweden could be different. Anyway, there was a huge demonstration of the non-socialist parties of Sweden against this, and some people see it as a kind of start to the change that brought us here.

SB: *But radical Marxist's were very clear with the separation of socialism from social-democracy. Today, because of neo-liberalism people refer to social-democracy as some kind of socialist practice; but you are saying that social-democracy was from the beginning, at least in Sweden, on the side of profit and capitalism, except in the case of these kinds of failed proposals ...*

DF: Yes, but they were different streams.

SB: *But I guess that radicals were aware that these kinds of reforms might make social-democracy even wiser in concealing its capitalist affinities ...*

DF: I think they were thinking non-Marxistic. Because as Marx said, “the ownership relationship is what will change society”; it is not the idealistic things, it is not what you think; it’s how money, ownership, and the economic system forms your mind. So, if these kinds of proposals become reality, if for example, workers became 58% owners of the factories that would change the whole structure of the society of capitalism based on ownership relations.

SB: *Actually you are right, because then the concept of the struggle would also change form; it would turn into a struggle between the workers who own and the workers who don't own.*

DF: But the plan was that they would all own. It was a collective thing. It was exactly this thing that was so threatening. Collective ownership, and collective solutions are the biggest headache for bourgeoisie society. Even constitutional laws have been changed during the eighties so that everything would fit into this scheme; the biggest importance was given to private property. This was one of the most fundamental blows to the left.

SB: *How has experimental art and music culture been influenced by these changes?*

DF: Well, artists are always individualists, from the start. It is very difficult to organize artists. It is very difficult to tell them you cannot play a concert for 1.000 Crowns, because it is too cheap. But they say if I don't play there, there is someone else who would play for that money. And then comes a third one who plays for 800 Crowns; so it is very

difficult to create solidarity among artists. Of course most of the time it has to do with the character of the work; because in composing or creating other forms of art you do work alone. Although there were many experiments to have collective theatres without directors, orchestras without conductors, and anyway experimental music has an inherently a democratic form. Then, the state decided if collective solutions do not work for art, and if everything is based on individual work and interests, then the problem should be not solved with cultural policy, but things must be left to their own course. The idea of neo-liberalism fits perfectly to this: if you like the music then you need to pay for the ticket, and everyone individually should decide about their preferences. This leads in a strange way to the redundancy of cultural policy, which fits very well with current neo-liberal transformations.

SB: *Could you say that this privatisation of culture fits with the nature of art, which cannot organize collectively?*

DF: Artists will never have the chance to change this privatisation of culture if they don't get support from the population. Let's say that composers would go to strike, or painters would not go to the studio; nobody would care about it. I had an idea in the eighties and nineties to unite all the unions of cultural workers, theatre, music, radio, TV, bars, all of them; if you strike with all of them together, and if there is no radio, no TV, no music, no theatre, then something could happen. But if only musicians strike, nothing will be felt.

SB: *How do you connect the fight against instrumentalisation and the search for collective organisation?*

DF: This is more complex. For example, look at how we relate to food; you never only eat what is necessary for your body, but you also eat out of the pleasure of eating. Otherwise we would be like animals. It is exactly the same with culture. If you treat culture as an instrument you become like an animal, because it should give some certain expected result, as food for the soul. Another thing, which inherently resists instrumentalization is that there is always the element of unpredictability in art.

SB: *Especially in improvised music ...*

DF: Even Beethoven symphonies ... they are never the same. The problem is that we have the mechanism of listening. We listen through records, which is freezing the music.

SB: *To move on, I would like to ask about your opinions and involvement with the anti-imperialist struggles in Sweden, which it seems like in the seventies most of the Third World Struggles were supported here, such as the Palestinian struggle ...*

DF: That's true; Sweden was a very strong supporter of the Third World struggle against imperialism. But they were not involved with Palestine at all. They were following the myth that Jews, who were oppressed and killed in Europe, which is true, went to Palestine, which was a desert and they made it bloom, which is not true. This is a Zionist myth that was spread all over the world. Because this myth was spread by the social-democrat party of Israel, and it was the brother and sister of the party ruling in Sweden, they readily took this as a historical fact. But in the eighties things changed. Support of the ANC by Sweden was incredibly big; they even bought guns and gun powder in East Germany, and gave it as a present, secretly to the ANC. Of course,

I remember in 1975 when Saigon fell, there was 100.000 people demonstrating, and in the front was the Prime Minister, Olaf Palme leading the march. I don't think that Sweden was interested in anti-imperialist struggles because they were genuinely supporting the movements of emancipation, but Sweden was thinking geo-strategically, that these newly de-colonized countries were coming to power, and they were very careful to be on the right side. Third World countries were seen as a market. But of course this engagement was more complex; in the social-democrat party there were some very radical people, who were trying to change schools, ... For example, Palme gave a speech in 1972 in Copenhagen, comparing Auschwitz, Agadur, Guernica to Hanoi... then he was not invited to United States during rest of his life.

GSF: I have to tell that some people from the progressive music movement, which was very strong in Sweden, later on took important jobs in the newspapers, and started to write about art and culture a lot. They were very hostile to improvised music. In that time in Sweden there were very few people who knew how to respond to this new music, how to write about it; simply, in the seventies people didn't know how to deal with improvised music.

DF: Improvised music also had different styles; *Iskra* for example, was in a way, more accepted then *Lokomotiv Konkret*. We were considered too brutal and wild. *Iskra* introduced folk elements, even some progressive styles into their music. We were never interested in folk sentiments. Even though we made one album (*Voice Still Heard*) that is built up on research I made about Jewish praying traditions. Then, when I started to work with computers they thought I was crazy; even improvised musicians were provoked by it. After that

when I started to work with noise music, and made *Celestial Fire*, that caused an uproar. For me, there was always an urge to find new ways, new things. I thought I would become more and more soft when I get older, but it turned out quite the opposite; I am more harsh and brutal now. I always had noise in my music, but now the noise is noisier.

GSF: I feel that many times when you talk about music you emphasize this freedom, this idea of music as music. But when it comes to art, you are not as open, and you don't support so much the idea of art as art.

DF: Because I think that in many cases the idea behind art as art is not to disturb, but to behave comfortably and beautifully, and co-exist with the system. That's why. I think that many artists are instrumentalizing the idea of art not being instrumental. But, of course in principle I think that art is for art as well.

GSF: But still I think you are using different rhetoric on music then on visual arts; you never say, for example, that art has its own language ...

DF: I will consider this criticism; but as I said I am for art as art.

SB: *This Adornian position of negation of any kind of instrumentalisation, most of the time goes in conflict with organized politics. But you are trying to struggle on both fronts, both against instrumentalization and also against repressive cultural policies ...*

DF: But, if you are against instrumentalisation and at the same time you are not organized in this struggle, then you are finished, you are no one.

SB: *But most of the artists are doing exactly that ...*

DF: They are finished as artists. I think one of the reasons of this disorganized struggle against instrumentalisation is the historical obfuscation going on now. Many artists, curators, musicians, cultural and artistic workers, don't know what happened in seventies; they don't know for example about the struggle between the form of progressive music and improvised music, the political effects of that struggle, etc; very few people know about these things.

SB: *I would like to know of course more about these histories; but I am more interested to know how, in a social-democracy, these kinds of contradictions regarding profit interests, state support and the autonomy of artistic productions were in conflict. For example how were you writing your regular grant applications for Fylkingen ...*

DF: For example I had a series of concerts in the nineties, the first Monday of every month, called Thrash Music. I tried to work in as many different combinations as possible; for example four drummers and a guitarist, eight guitars and one flute; to try to make as many strange combinations as possible. Because I was working with the possibility to make music that would kill the entire notion of how the group-composing and improvisation would work, all the established conventions regarding group-work in music. Many of these concerts were not paid; we didn't get money. I could put it like this: the biggest sponsors and supporters of culture in all states, even in the Swedish state where the situation is considerably better, are the artists. They themselves support, either by not being paid at all, or by being paid very badly. Their families are paying the price. If

you look at the salaries in the best jazz clubs, the minimum salary is same as it was twenty years ago. When I first came to Stockholm, my first job was washing dishes, I got 10 Krona's an hour, our first apartment with Gunilla costs 212 Krona's a month, that means in twenty-one hours I earned my monthly rent. That meant half a week. Now, in half a week, you cannot pay the rent. This is in numbers how the development of costs and income has changed.

Regarding grants, Fylkingen was writing grants applications directly to the state, and to the Stockholm municipality. The deal was always like this; the municipality would say that they would give the same amount of what the state would give us. So we knew that if we succeed to get 200.000 Krona's from the state, then the Municipality would pay the same amount. In the beginning we had a place in Östergöttagatan 33. It wasn't such a good place, but had affordable rent. So a lot of the support money would go to production. Then we moved to a bigger place, a nice place, where it is now, and there the rent is very high, something like 20 or 50 thousand a month. It came to a point where even if we applied and got very good grants we almost didn't have enough money to pay the rent. Almost no money was left for production. All the money for production you got either from door money, from tickets, or musicians were sponsoring with their cheap or free labour. If you look at the history of Fylkingen you will see that there is lot of programmes there, but how many of them were being properly paid? If I go somewhere to give a lecture I will get from 4 to 8 thousand Krona's, in a school or at a university. But if I play concert, maybe I get 999 Krona's, only. Why, because in that case they don't pay the tax, it is you who are responsible for the taxes. After 1.000 krona's you have to pay the tax.

[Minna Henriksson is laughing because this reminded her that Sezgin had been invited to give a talk in the Multicultural Centre at Fittja, a suburb of Stockholm, and as a fee he got 999 Krona's.]

DF: But you know what is even more obscure, is that this 999 Krona's have been in use for thirty years. It meant something thirty years ago, but now it is nothing. And you have to know, Fylkingen is an association; and if I work and do a program for the association I don't demand a proper fee, I often play for free there. But I will never play for free for the municipality, or any other state institutions. They have money; if they can pay for cleaning the streets, they have to pay for musicians too. They don't ask the street cleaner to do their work for free, why should I do it for free. So I think you should go back to the Multicultural Center and say that there is a tariff for speakers, and it is protected by the state.

SB: *In your text, Point Blank, you say that capitalism is absorbing everything. And you claim that to fight against this 'hegemony of absorption' with means such as protest, is not the proper answer for the ubiquity of capitalism.*

DF: Protest is necessary, but you have to realize that if you think that protest will change the system then you are down and out. If you understand that protest is a legitimate way to express some kind of un-satisfaction, you must also understand that it is also a part of the game, then you have a chance to do other things. Then you can change the system. Because protest is part of the system; so that you can have your protest catharsis and go home; such as Occupy Wall Street for example. I think it is good that they protest, I even like their slogan, but I don't think they are right (I think they are in fact the 1 %, not

the 99 %), but that is another thing. It is good that they put on their agenda that capitalism is, more than ever, a criminal system. But when they got their catharsis they go home; they don't need much more.

SB: *But is there something that is not absorbable, or recuperable to the system. You mention Žižek, for example ...*

DF: I will answer your question with a film, as Žižek usually does. In the Monty Python film, *The Meaning of Life*, there is an episode where a fat man orders more and more food in a restaurant, and in the end after all this gorging, when he can hardly even move, the guy who serves him, quite a thin guy, says but have only one more small after-dinner mint. He takes that and afterwards he explodes. This is my answer. Capitalism will absorb everything until it will explode. Marxist theory is all about this as well.

SB: *Then there is a question of waiting for this explosion of capitalism to take place ...*

DF: No, we cannot wait.

SB: *Then what is to be done?*

DF: Then you have to continue to sharpen and find the real contradictions of system; and of course, to organize. As we just mentioned, protest is usually not about organization. I can quote Lenin, who said that the proletariat without organization is nothing, with organization is everything. Of course what we understand as proletariat and organization is not the same as Lenin understood them, but still, I believe that if we don't organize (and I don't mean as party organization, but primarily organizing of our thinking --- way we relate to art, to politics, the way we relate ourselves to friends ... all

of this) ... and the most important thing is to re-invent our ability to dream up other possibilities of how to be and to act.. The ideological totalitarian system, the system where we are living in, has deprived us of the possibility to dream of another world. [“Of this kind of dreaming there is unfortunately too little in our movement. And the people most responsible for this are those who boast of their sober views, their “closeness” to the “concrete”, the representatives of legal criticism and of illegal ‘tail-ism’.” V.I Lenin, *What is to be Done*, 1903]. We can have nightmares that there will be a meteor that will kill everything on the planet, this we can have fantasies of, but the fantasy of another world based on another economic system is not even possible to dream of.

GSF: But it is natural; because it is easier to paint hell than heaven.

DF: To paint yes, but we are talking about dreams here.

SB: *I understand that this sharpening of contradictions is not a protest, is not a peaceful co-existence, but something more radical. Somehow I understand it as related to noise ... which for me is associated with revolutions and to riots.*

DF: Well, that would be the proper answer to your question on intensifying the contradictions. But the question is, what is the real revolution, and the question is to know when the revolution has started. These things are difficult to represent. We had riots in London, last May, and they didn't lead anywhere. Riots themselves are not enough; the same with the noise that you mention. If you go to Niagara falls, that is noise. But it is not noise as we mean it. Because it is not organized. It is natural noise; we are not

talking about that when we talk about the politics of noise. Same with the riots; riots themselves will lead nowhere. It will only show that something is wrong, that it can be a catalyst of something else. But if you don't organize riots, it will not go anywhere. If you look at Egypt, there were huge riots, immense. Nothing happened until they started to organize. In the beginning there was only fighting, then they built tents; and suddenly this big noise became an alternative way of thinking and acting. It is not something which flared and disappeared.

SB: *In your text, Music, Sound, Garbage, Noise and Politics you claim that going from disorder to greater disorder interests you even more ... How can you explain this with your thesis on organization ...*

DF: It is very easy to explain. If you go from disorder to greater disorder you must analyse what is disorder; this order is an organization, a catalogization, an index, and then from this you go further. This is all a process kind of thinking. If you arrive at something that you don't know exactly what it means, then you try to understand what it is, then you have to map it so that you can go further. Without this mapping you cannot get further. If you don't know what is disorder you cannot go toward greater disorder. Of course, always when you map it, you lose something, because mapping is never like terrain, but it is a more advanced form.

SB: *So there is some intellectual, heuristic work involved here.*

DF: Yes, but I think it is also emotional and practical work. For example if I make a noise piece, that's to say that I prepare a computer program which will manipulate sound in a specific way, and I put some rules in this; then

I always try to have some fault in the system. That there will be some feedback, that the system will collapse: I want to feed the system with too much information, sometimes I have generated so much information that the computer was nearly destroyed, the processor cannot handle that much; and then on top of it I do things with the saxophone or whatever, then I have this result, which is called 'noise'. Then I go home and listen to it and try to find what happened, what was right what was wrong, and to find how I could proceed with things to even greater disorder, expression or whatever. There is lot of different layers within organisation.

SB: *As I understood without indexing of the disorder, you cannot go toward bigger disorder.*

DF: But also it is with order.

SB: *Yes, I understood that in noise there is certain order-of-things, certain forms ...*

DF: Which you go on to destroy. But if you look at music history you can see this very clearly. There were some intervals, they said it is ok. Then they introduced some more intervals. Because there was an order, the order said that these intervals are ok. If you introduce one more, it is disorder. For the next generation that possible disorder was an order. It went along like this. Look at Bach's work in *Matthew's Passion*; he took the interval terza, and put all the terza in each other, and you get the cluster, actually the first cluster in music history. But he didn't know that it was a cluster; though he recognized it as an order. Generations later they pick it up and analyse it. This is more or less the story of the development.

SB: *Yesterdays noise is today's music.*

DF: Yes, for example, today electronic music is based on Stockhausen. Kraftwerk would not be possible without Stockhausen. I was playing in Gotland in Visby, I played this very noisy piece just two days ago. Then a girl came after the concert saying that she liked it very much, my noisy piece. Apparently she had a dysfunctional issue with her brain, and while listening to my noise she felt very calm and peaceful. So she got a sense of relaxation from the extreme harsh noise. Maybe then noise will be not only be the music of the future, but also a future treatment for psychological disorders.

SB: *I would like to discuss a bit with you about the issue of violence and force in regard to noise. In the same text you say very clearly, that in your music you always want to deal with the grim problems in life; such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, revenge of the poor, revolution, the filtering process of the unwanted, etc. What role does force and violence play in your philosophy and in your music?*

DF: I made a piece in 1980, my first orchestra piece, 18 people, not big, it's called *Maavak*. It's for 4 contrabass, six percussionists, and eight wind instrument. *Maavak* means struggle in Hebrew. They asked me if it is a description of struggle. I said no, it is struggle itself. I mean I tried to compose the music as if the production of the sound of the music is the struggle in itself. It doesn't want to describe some other struggle; it is the same with violence in noise music. I don't want to picture the violence in Palestine or other places. I try to create the violence in the sound itself. It is same with my work *Halat Hisar* (The Siege); I don't want to describe the siege in Beirut or in Ramallah or wherever. I try to somehow make the music, the sound itself to be in a siege against some other tones. It is very difficult to put words to these kind

of things related to violence. I have used the laws of density of gases to create structures for compositions. If you say that two clouds of gases would collide; what would happen, mathematically. Would it be same as what would happen to sounds— that is my starting point in this formalisation. It's not the same, but the same kind of thought. It is the sounds which are crushing. Using violence as a physical phenomena, is an attempt to describe violence as a process, not something related to emotion or other things, it has nothing to do with right or wrong. I try to notate the fire; to listen and to understand how it is structured and built. This is used for example in my piece *Ember*; it is when the fire is low, and only a little red is left in the end. I tried to create that slow fire sound with the orchestra. To put it in a nutshell; I can say that I like physical contact with music; because I think that music, first of all, is a physical phenomena, it is a hit: it hits your body, your ear, whatever. Then, physical contact with sound makes you to think, or feel whatever. So, personally, when I play saxophone or electronics I want speakers behind me to have the full blast, I like to feel them behind me, not only to hear them. Gunilla knows, when I come down from my studio, I also am transformed. So, I like the physical power of music. I think that has something to do with violence, with violent effort.

SB: *Is there anything in this violent effort that you might think as non-absorbable to capitalism?*

DF: The most dangerous for all systems is when people start to think that there is something greater than their own lives; that they are ready to sacrifice themselves for that. If you think for example that on 9/11, 3.000 people. It is a big number, but it is not only that. 3000 people and more are being killed

all the time. In the Tsunami it was hundred thousand; in the Storm Katrina even more, in Vietnam even more. That people are ready to die for something that is bigger than themselves is non-absorbable to any system; that is what I think.

SB: *I remember once listening a panel discussion in 2008 Subversive Film festival at Zagreb, where Slavoj Žižek was insisting, rather harshly, that capitalism can absorb and recuperate everything. Karl Heinz-Dellwo (member of Red Army Fraction) who was one of the participants to this panel said to Žižek that he is not right, that since they had guns, they were not recuperable; that's why the state had to kill or destroy them.*

DF: This is exactly what I mean. Though it doesn't mean violence can change the system; but it means exactly what you were asking,

Fittja, Sweden, January 2012.

With participation of Gunila Sköld Feiler and Minna Henriksson

that the system cannot absorb you in that case – it has to kill and destroy you. Then you, of course, can go as far as to define the act of killing by the state as act of absorption. I think that the thought that people can do these kinds of things is not absorbable; this is what the state and the system cannot accept. It is more dangerous than the deed itself. Because it is generating new dreams, new people. If you decide to take up a gun, then you are controllable if you don't have enough necessary guns. If you take Columbia as an example, and look at FARC that is struggling in jungle for more than fifty years; you can see that the system cannot absorb them, and cannot destroy them as well. That is a real contradiction, this tension. Mother Theresa is absorbable for example, if you want one example in the opposite direction. [*all laughing*].

Dror Feiler

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Music, Sounds, Garbage, Noise & Politics

About music, art & the anti-fascist existence

Music is more than the reproduction of tones, it is a process of creating and producing sounds and forces. The tone is first of all just a noise that is being filtered and is bound in a canon of rules - and only becomes a tone in these circumstances. The music of the whole Occident builds a system and creates the models that filter the noise, the “garbage”, the “rauschen” [a German word for rustle (leaves, silk, radio), rush (flowing water, wind), roar (storm, waves); rausch - intoxication, drunkenness; rauschend - rustling etc., orgiastic (party) swelling (music)]. Here the word is used to describe the electrical noise and allude to the other meanings of the words and the currents of sound. The computer, the sampler and the synthesizer are machines that through the varied possibilities of sound synthesis and calculations not only make new sounds audible and new structure possible but also restructures the process of music production itself. It is the musical work with structures and sound material itself that allows new energies and intensities to be captured.

We are becoming deaf and musically numb when we hear nearly nothing but “perfect” harmony, perfect structures, repetition and its refrain; it becomes just a simple academism. Perfect melodies and “perfect” chords in popular music, “perfect” structure, instrumentation and electro-acoustic sounds in the new music scene; just a circulation of clean and sound currents, cleaned of the noises, “garbage” and sounds that could disturb “prosperity”, that’s what music offers us today. This use of chords, melodies, voices, structures and electro-acoustic sounds that claim to be the music itself, create an aesthetic of boredom, a self sufficient repetition and artistic conformity. The tracks are overwhelmed by signature tunes, the concert halls by “classical”

compositions and “new music” academism. This is the potential fascism in music. People are being manipulated into passivity and conformity by the computer sound, the synthesizer, the “new” pop tune and the “new music” academism. So the structure, the harmony, the chord, the sound even the tone itself must explode; one must open the door to noise itself, make the channel to the sound currents quake.

I work with methods, instruments and tools that can directly inspire the process of producing sound structures, which will molecularise (break down) the forms of music and at the same time expand them. The new music-machines (computers, music software, algorithms) can be used to reject technologically or musically defined precision ideals, and to continuously produce unpredictable results, complications and implications. All this by multiplying noise, sounds, politics, notes and creating interfaces for the new.

About my music & noise

In classical music, and in the new academic modern music, the emphasis is on the relationship between various pitches and durations of a note, which are the reasons for melody and harmony. In my music I place importance on other elements, for example the relationship between synchrony and asynchrony, or precision of sounds versus imprecision. Going from disorder to order in music interests me. Going from disorder into a greater disorder interest me even more. The most immediately audible characteristic of my music is its noisiness. Abrasive, loud, fast. The textures are never sweet or satisfying in the conventional sense; one has only to hear the primal screams of ‘Pig Iron’ (*The Celestial Fire* CD/ANKARSTRÖM-Ö10 (Dror Feiler Solo)) for tenor saxophone & live electronics, the punk-free improvised thrash of ‘Tio Stupor’ (Saxophone con forza PSCD 81 (Jörgen Petterson)) for alto saxophone & live electronics or *Point Blank* for chamber ensemble & live electronics (commissioned by Donaueschingen festival and performed by Klangforum Wien at Donaueschingen festival 2003 (*Point Blank* PSCD 155) to realize that neither a pathetic classical prettiness nor a pretentious romantic resolution has any place in those work of music, except as an antagonism. Nor do these works admit the conventions of modern and contemporary chamber music.

Noise, in the widest possible sense, is one of the central elements in my music as for its more popular “musical cousin” the Noise music. The abrasive raucousness in the music is an attempt to alter how people hear. Noise, as sound out of its familiar context, is confrontational, affective and transformative. It has shock value, and defamiliarizes the listener who expects from music an easy fluency, a secure familiarity, or any sort of mollification. Noise, that is, politicizes the aural environment.

My music uses ”noise” that is ”noise in itself; but noise, in this connotation, is not simply haphazard or natural sound, the audible “background” that encroaches on a work such as Cage’s 4’33”, as the audience is forced by the tacit piano to listen to its own shuffling, or to the urban soundscapes that emerge through an open window. It is a noise that is always impure, tainted,

derivative and strangely, in the romantic sense of the term, beautiful as in in *OpFor & DiaMat* by the Too Much Too Soon Orchestra (*What is the point of Paris?* CD/FYCD 1007).

My music is difficult in the sense that Adorno finds Schoenberg's music difficult - not because it is pretentious or obscure, but because it demands active participation from the listener (as well as from the players, who are themselves listeners). As organized sound, this music demands from the very beginning active and concentrated listening, the most acute attention to simultaneous multiplicity, the renunciation of the customary crutches of a listening and the intensive perception of the unique and the specific. The more it gives to listeners, the less it offers them. It requires the listener spontaneously to compose its inner movement and demands of him not mere contemplation but praxis.

About music, Che Guevara & the revolution

Che Guevara made the choice to dedicate and then sacrifice his own life to a revolution. A last inaccessible event that mostly leaves the survivors only with traces of desperation and loneliness. And yet it is this last absolutely unique choice that allowed him to become his own and from one moment to another, left us only with the power that is found in his work. Perhaps it was not the kind of suicide which Foucault spoke of as an act which should be thought about, that illuminates life, but more as the radical refusal to give up the realistic dream of the revolution ... Che himself thought of life, the energies that life releases within itself and the act of forcing the struggle, as a great experiment to overcome the possibilities of existence and the forms of life which one is a prisoner of. Life is beyond the biological force; in every moment it should create new constructions by opening the lines of resistance. Just as life is the discovery of the new and setting itself free of the self to be able to think of the new, so must music draw vanishing lines, withdraw from the mechanisms of closure, avoid the permanent control and hyper-information.

As part of the modern capitalist society music is in danger of perishing in random samples, data, markets, instrumentation patterns, institutions and computer nets, or of suffocating in the gigantic tautological machinery of the media industry, that continuously sends back the opinions of the masses, that they, as media, formulated.

We need music that is the differential, that neither compromises or thinks of surrender, but carries on even in the shadow and disguise like the guerrilla fighters and draws active disappearing lines in the fields of society.

We need music that is a labyrinth, a rich ensemble of relations; diversity, heterogeneity, breaks, unexpected links and long monotonies. It is the vision of a life that opens the ways and allows the horizon of resistance to light up.

In my music I want always to deal with the grim problems in life: *Shrapnel* (war) ; *Beat the White the Red Wedge* (Revolution) ; *Schlafbrand* (Second World War) ; *Let the Millionaires*

go *Naked* (Revenge of the poor); *Halat Hisar* (Israeli-Palestinian conflict); *Müll* (the filtering process of the unwanted).

Aesthetics *per se* does not interest me. More than that, it is dangerous. When I compose or play, I do not look for beauty, but for truth. I often depict, fortissimo and at great length; a violent struggle is heard but as in *Halat Hisar* (Under Siege) the composition does not describe the siege it is the siege itself.

Whenever I dedicate a composition or write *In Memoriam*, i.e. Che Guevara in *Ember*, the Palestinian peoples struggle in *Intifada* and the foreign workers in Europe in *Gola*, it is not so much a question of an inspirational motif or a nostalgic memory, but on the contrary, of a becoming through confronting its own danger, even taking a fall in order to rise again: a becoming as the content and form of the music itself, and it continues to the point of end... Becoming, so that the music goes beyond itself.

Noise as Form

Life is never consistent with the way that thought would have it. When philosophy turns away from palpable social chaos toward another world, it glosses over that difficulty. Fundamental ontology withdraws toward the depths of existence, and positivism relies on logic to reconstruct a well-ordered façade that can be dealt with by papers and seminars.

The world is too diverse to be conceived by thought. More provocatively, we might say “that which is whole is untrue.” But such an assertion is not postmodern by any means, although we can thereby conclude that every truth is local and that we each proceed from our own perspective — differences, diversity and synchronicity are all that exist. That attitude embodies a kind of ingenuous optimism, regardless of whether the topic is postmodernism, post-colonialism, queer theory, gender theory or cultural studies. Often neglected when it comes to these areas is that not even the humblest approach to thought can reduce the world’s diversity. No matter how locally defensive our claims may be, thought remains an illegitimate generalisation beyond the local sphere that was our goal. In other words, the problem is not the world, but thought — which is inherently the worst enemy of diversity.

Artistic experience provides the only opportunity for escape from the ontology of that false condition. Art and music can bridge the gap between subject and object, identical and non-identical, that is the foundation of the original sin of thought. The dialectical *modus operandi* of art is mimesis, i.e., pre-conceptual representation. Art possesses a naiveté, vulnerability and intimacy that thought lacks. Thus, art (music in this case) is inevitably affected by the reality that thought conceives. As a result, art becomes a wordless commentary on the dialectic of thought, an opportunity for instantaneous illumination of unredeemed reality. At the same time, art is

rational — a domain of thought entangled in itself. Art and philosophy are equally rational discourses — only their tools distinguish them from each other. The tension between rationality and mimesis allows art to succeed where thought falls short. But the vulnerability of thought is accompanied by powerlessness — without the thought that philosophy contributes, art is disenfranchised and only a distraction for the privileged. If art bears a truth that philosophy lacks, philosophy can liberate the truth that art is incapable of expressing. Art and philosophy depend on each other. The unredeemed world in which we live has a particular need of that encounter. The redemption that reality withholds can emerge only there. Freedom and utopia survive by grace in the realm of art.

Are these ideas still valid as they once were (among Schoenberg, Xenakis, Kafka, Beckett, etc.), or has art left them behind? Can they be applied to video art, rap music, electronic music, dogma films and the like?

Such questions cannot be evaded. We must ask ourselves whether artistic expression of the 21st century leaves room for freedom, utopia or the promise of reconciliation. Or has art stopped being art?

Most of my music is constructed according to a unitary principle of form. It is a kind of tapestry woven from contradictory, calculated clouds of sound in which each individual expression reflects the absent whole. The music is never unequivocally defined, but fluctuates constantly among the various levels of the composition. As a result, the listener floats in a billowy sea of sound without a compass. My music draws strength from its own imperfections, its inevitable approximateness, opaqueness and contradictions. Instead of a futile attempt to pin down a kind of clarity with precise structures and composition, the music relies on its own aesthetic nature to pin down its essence.

My intention is for chaotic, incomplete form to serve as a counterpoint to positivistic, well-groomed and complete form. The goal is not to advocate a kind of formlessness, but to accept the inevitable consequences of the aporetic situation in which composition finds itself. The problem is how to strike a balance between the futility and necessity of striving after clarity and solidity in composition. The result is noise as a form that is free of preconceived notions about either itself or its antithesis.

Point-Blank

“There is something inherently ‘terroristic’ in every authentic act, in its gesture as thoroughly redefining the rules of the game”. (Žižek)

We live in a free society. We enjoy democratic rights. We have a high standard of living. We belong to an easy-going culture that tolerates difference. So what’s the problem ? Why and from what standpoint can the Left hope to make a critique of the existing order, of capitalism in its current form ?

“It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.”
(*The Communist Manifesto*; 1848)

Hegel’s conception of substance as subject suggests one answer to this question. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel argues that substance — reality, has the same structure as the subject — consciousness, which is what makes possible their ultimate reconciliation in Spirit. In both cases this structure is incomplete, and its negation — what lies outside — is part of its very being, so that consciousness and reality are defined by constant movement, incessant change

as they strive to close up this hole at the centre of their being. Spirit, in fact, is this movement which they share. Consciousness seeks to know what the reality is not, to make it its own, but it can never close the gap, while at the same time reality does contain consciousness; consciousness is real enough.

One of the most nefarious attributes of late capitalism is its ability to absorb all resistance in the name of acceptance. The concept itself can be seen as incredibly brilliant and extremely dangerous: domination by acceptance. This is exactly what a philosopher like Žižek is referring to when he writes that the “incessant activity of fluid, shifting identities, of building multiple ad hoc coalitions... (in our so called “post” capitalistic society) has something inauthentic about it”. By appearing to be working toward equality in terms of acceptance, any possibility of the real political or cultural concerns of these “others” being addressed is handily swept under the protective rug of the so called multiculturalism.

Without this striving to become something other than itself, there would be neither consciousness nor reality, for this is what they are. If consciousness were ever to merge with reality it would no longer be consciousness of reality, and reality would no longer be reality, the object of consciousness.

“Only such gestures which disturb this phantasmic core are authentic acts”. (Žižek)

Society, the social substance, consists of the same structure, there is a hole in its very centre, and this hole contains just that which society excludes [negates], what it can not include or else it would self-destruct. And it is at this point of exclusion that a critique of society can begin. One particularly well-constructed example of this kind of “hegemony of absorption” is: the protest. The modern protest rally, march or cultural radicalism has been made into just another “accepted” event. Instead of attempting to stifle protests and radical culture and treating them as serious security, political and/or moral threats, the strategy has become to surround, or contain the protest. In this manner, the protest, the gesture is allowed to play itself out in the contained setting, effectively rendering the protesters and the artists impotent, eliminating any possibility for systematic change, and furthermore preserving the status quo.

How can we discover that which is excluded from our society, given that it is outside and not to be found anywhere around us? For me or as Lacan said, it is in the “traumatic encounter with the Real” that the truth of our society, of what has been excluded from it in order for it to exist at all, is to be discovered.

Finally then we have come to the question of how any change is affected within a system based upon the “hegemony of absorption.” The answer is: it isn't. In order to affect any real change, the system must be breached. The only properly authentic act, the only act that has the chance to confront the dominant system on more equal footing, is the act that causes the system to lose its own footing. Or as Žižek writes, “this means that there is something inherently ‘terroristic’ in every authentic act, in its gesture as thoroughly redefining the rules of the game.”

September 11th, in spite of its nefarious and infamous character was just such an encounter. The system was breached when it was the innocent in New York who died instead of the innocent from the Third World as it usually was and still is. The trauma of Sept 11th lay not only in the horror of the collapse of the Twin Towers, after all, destruction of this order makes up the staple of mainstream TV and cinema viewing. As both Žižek and Jean Baudrillard have pointed out, it is precisely because this kind of catastrophic event is so much a part of our culture that the terrorists' target was in a sense chosen for them by us, suggested to them in countless Hollywood movies and even spelt out in detail by Tom Clancy in his bestselling novel about aircraft crashing into the White House.

So this is where we are left, in the uncomfortable position that mandates radical departure. Yet it seems that this is where we must be if we wish to move beyond the seemingly ubiquitous frontier of late capitalism and its culture. Working comfortably within the system will prove nothing less than an exercise in futility.

Instead the trauma lies in just that aspect of the event that the postmodern Western mind finds most impossible to come to terms with — the reality that there are people out there (Palestine, Colombia, Afghanistan, Mexico) who are willing to give up their lives for a cause they believe in. It is this very idea that is simply unthinkable from the perspective of everyday New York, Berlin, Paris, Stockholm or London life.

Music, poetry & art that doesn't function like the matador's red rag upsets me.

It's about the seconds before this very moment.

The here and now. For me it is sufficient to say that the image of the red rag – la muleta - is one of the central templates for my own aesthetic. It is the red rag which is the stunt – for the matador as well as the illusionist or musician. It's about focus, direction, irritation excitation and enticement. About swiftness, experience, practice and control. But also about versatility, dialogue, improvisation and presence. Most of all it's about this very moment. Quite frustrating, the red rag is always "seconds before the now" (for the practitioner) and an elsewhere "seconds before the now" (for the listener), and somewhere in between floats the music, provocative and full of promise – with nothing more than air behind it! (How did this happen? Why like this? How did it become itself?)

The Stunt. The stab, the contact the insight, they always come from the "wrong direction", from the side, from the only place that one knew was empty. (What I mean is that if one could ahead of time point out all the "where", "when" and "in which way" in music, then the deadly blow of the matador, the unforeseen introspection or the instinct's dizzy new perspective could not come about). So, who's seeing through who? Both the musician and the listener live in the faith that the other stands ready directly behind the red rag, and both forget – and must forget – that it is, of course, the music (or the red rag) that is the stunt.

Red(ness). The colour red is universal. It maintains its own boundary and its own substance. There are warnings, stop signals, the heart and the sore. Socialism's red banner as well as the bull's eye, nipple, blood and love. Hate, suffering, lust and provocation. But there's also a materiality

without the symbols. That cadmium red colour distinguishes itself through its substance: it neither “expands” or “shrinks” but rather indicates and establish itself.

Irritation. Those composers and musicians who I listen to (Xenakis, Brötzmann, Scelsi, Merzbow, Nono, Braxton, Lachenmann, Bailey) all have in common a musical language that accommodates and embraces a number of inimitable eccentricities – stylistic characteristics which have now and then infuriated me – but without these “impurities” the music would be appreciably worse. The stunt wouldn’t work, and the listener would, after a short-lived triumph as the (avslöjande agent), experience a feeling of emptiness, alone in the arena holding nothing more than a meaningless red rag. Without having made any new observations.

Movement. The most difficult. To keep the red rag moving. It’s a matter of finding strategies, so that the written “seconds before the present moment” result in a music of countless “Now-Now-Now...- positions; which the listener experiences as sudden, “seconds-after-the-now”. It appears to be almost impossible to fairly describe such strategies without landing in nonsense-like paradoxes (absent presence, the wisdom to not know, uncontrolled certainty). But one must set up some kind of goal for one’s compositions praxis, even if the direction – if it’s going to be good – ends up following a different direction. Flexibility (mobility), I believe, is something that must exist in both the composer/musician’s head and the music to come. The billowing red rag – la muleta - a hell of a provocation and full of promise.

Exile as Noise - Noise as Exile

To be in exile, to be displaced from one's country of origin and upbringing, to be an immigrant - the experience of over 185 million people in the world, on a conservative estimate - is a wrench perhaps comparable in impact to that of war, long-term hunger or imprisonment.

For me to be in exile, to be an immigrant is like being 'noise' in musical context.

Instead of a person creatively carrying over meanings, across accepted borders of sense, a person is here bodily pushed over borders by forces beyond his or her control.

In 'noise music' performances aural elements are sprinting toward each other from opposite far ends of the aural space and are colliding in a direct, violent impact. This sound of crashing aural elements is 'noise music'. While sound connotes nothing more than the sense-data of hearing, 'noise music', from the Latin *nausea*, suggests an unpleasant disturbance, confusion, or interference baldly lacking any musical quality and that in sociological terms for me is 'exile'.

Creating this sense of feeling alien and out of place, a widespread unease sometimes deepening into despair, is built-in the experience of modernity. Marx, found the root of alienation in the labour process. The acute critic of the first modern mass democracy, Thoreau, postulated that most people live lives of quiet desperation, but the sentiment is most often articulated by and about intellectuals, from Nietzsche to Sartre to Said.

'Noise music' generates straightaway auditory disturbance, panic and fear, we hear something like the squeal of a dentist's suction straw, the collision of helicopters, or the thermonuclear roar

of the sun's core. It sounds as if the machines of music have begun to digest the earth, and we listen to the garbage disposal run as nature is ground in technology's gizzard. And this fear is similar to the usual reaction to the 'other', to the immigrant

“The metaphor, ‘all modern thinkers are exiles’, might tend rather to conceal the brute fact of bodies not only psychically but physically in exile, and the new ways of feeling, thinking, and living that this brings; to elide the experience of working and downtrodden people. The metaphor is of Jewish/Christian origin, evoking the expulsion from Eden; but ‘what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings’. (Edward Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, *Granta* 13, 1984, p. 160; reprinted in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, 2000.)

One cannot listen to an entire composition without suffering effects: muscles twitch, nerves fray, the heart races, and cognition hits a wall. Unlike artists who pride themselves on rupturing ear drums with low frequencies at high volumes, or who induce fear and disgust through extended samples of a rape beneath viscous hardcore ‘noise music’ is not attacking our physical or moral limits. Instead, it presents the simple horror of extreme complexity. Here music is sacrificed to the art of aural agitation.

“Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that--to borrow a phrase from music--is contrapuntal. For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environment are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. ... There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension.” (Edward Said, “The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile,” *Harper's Magazine*, September, 1984, 269: pp. 49-55, p. 35.)

How can we make sense of this situation? Why must music now risk its own identity in order to strike a critical chord with its culture? What social and aesthetic forces are at work behind the back of this seemingly anti-social and anti-aesthetic phenomenon? Does the ‘unlistenability’ of ‘noise music’ mark a kinship with the now distant and inaudible shock of the avant-garde music? Is dissonance even possible in our age, and what does dissonance, in its achievement or failure, press us to confront? Just as the music of Jimi Hendrix and the Sex Pistols that once resembled alternative forms of life now find homes in soft-drink and car commercials, will these unbearable ‘noise music’ also take root in the status quo? Have they already?

“The pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives... Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one in your new home or situation.” (Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1994, p. 39.)

'Noise music' could only become meaningful and articulate at a time when thought and language have become somehow inarticulate. As T.W. Adorno's stipulates, that we live in an abstract and instrumental world, where each object we encounter holds meaning only as 1) a representative of the class to which it belongs and 2) a tool for our use. Much of the veracity of Adorno's theory of art lies in its ability to explain the cultural tension played out in the conflicting responses to 'noise music'.

"The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience". (Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 170.)

As soon as we encounter 'noise music', we are engaged in a struggle to make some sense of what we hear. Unable to categorize the stimulus within any known musical genre, incapable of interpreting or recognizing sounds, and generally bereft of aesthetic orientation, the work commands our full attention. With our ear tuned and focused to hunt out some structure and reason in the work, micrologics emerge, and like Schoenberg and Berg's rigid expressionistic compositions under the twelve tone system, the work's elaborate and exact structure is not readily apparent. Sometimes 'noise music' breaks for a few seconds, as if the blinds to the horror were closed for a moment, to reveal the tinkling of wind chimes. Like the vertical zips in Barnett Newman's otherwise monochrome paintings that mark the very origins of the universe, such a quiet landmark amidst this otherwise undifferentiated sonic topography becomes a potential site for infinite meaning. We're intrigued: if there's some form, there must be more. Reconciliation, it would seem, must follow somewhere in the wake of structure.

The metaphor of intellectual as exile remains highly ambiguous. On the one hand, the chosen identity of outsider suggests a welcome break with conformity: 'to stand away from "home" in order to look at it with the exile's detachment' is a particular instance of what Brecht calls the 'estrangement effect', of seeing all as strange unless sanctioned by reasoned values. This involves seeing things not simply as they are, but 'as they have come to be that way: contingent, not inevitable... the result of a series of historical choices made by human beings'. And indeed Said's insistence that by a creative use of displaced personhood the intellectual can become a well-informed critic in the borderlands between the poorer and richer sections of the world, on 'both sides of the imperial divide', seems to me rather Brechtian and right. In that case, forced displacement becomes 'a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea-saying, settling in'. (Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 170; 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals', *Grand Street* 12.3, 1993, pp. 122; *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1993, p. xxvii.)

The most disturbing aspect of 'noise music' must be its technical perfection. Despite the prima facie appearance of chaos, 'noise music' abides by the strictest ordering principles. When a 'noise music' fragment takes hold of musical form or trope, they are compulsively consistent. With the amplifiers whole power and register a 'noise music' pieces fit together like a massive

mechanical contraption that does not accomplish anything.” We have an exactly calculated and efficient piece serving no end, and thus we see the image of modern life: the increasing efficiency of instrumental rationality without a meaningful end in sight. Thus ‘noise music’ exemplify Thoreau’s description of the industrial revolution as “an improved means to an unimproved ends.” (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

Exile, far from being the fate of nearly forgotten unfortunates . . . becomes something closer to a norm, an experience of crossing boundaries and charting new territories in defiance of the classical canonic enclosures, however much its loss and sadness should be acknowledged and registered. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 317.)

Our attention funnels into the work’s singular moments, and once we realize the ‘noise music’ is not here to fulfil a macro-structural objective, it becomes something that ends in itself. Instead of singular ‘noise’ existing for the abstract achievements of the whole, the whole is composed to throw us back onto the horns of the ‘noise’. Now very much unlike Beethoven, whose dissonance always serves a higher abstract order, here the very material of composition steals the show. The singular, particular, and visceral ‘noise’ fully consume us. Every ‘noise’ in the music takes on a specifically meaning, and no clear hierarchy exists between them. Each ‘noise’ in the music, just as Adorno described each sentence of *Aesthetic Theory*, is equally close to the center. Yet equality does not slip into interchangeability, for each ‘noise’ in the music remains painfully particular. Thus we find a possible exemption to Adorno’s claim that the “history of music at least since Haydn is the history of fungibility: that nothing is in-itself and that everything is only in relation to the whole.”

Liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation is today the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and the artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 332-3)

The “critical power of art” (in this case ‘noise music’) is a somatic experience that “hits you in the gut” and “resists predatory reason, precisely because it can’t be stomached, gobbled up by the mind.” “If experience leaves a non-digestible residue that won’t go away,” “that is food for critical cognition.” (Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics After the End of Art: Interview with Grant Kester,” *Art Journal* 56, 1997, p. 38.)

“Those who find their homeland sweet are still tender beginners; those to whom every soil is as their native one are already strong; but those who are perfect are the ones to whom the entire world is as a foreign land.” Hugo of St. Victor (1097-1141)

“Philosophy says what art cannot say, although it is art alone which is able to say it; by not saying it.” (Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, London: Routledge, 1984, p. 107).

Mazen Kerbaj

Starry Night (two drawings)



Beirut
16 JULY 06
2.10 AM

*How can i show
sound in a drawing?*



MAR 06

Ozren Pupovac

The Violence of Form

Starry Night by Mazen Kerbaj¹ is a work of art that stages an impossible encounter. A sound piece recorded on the nights of 15 and 16 July 2006, during the first days of the armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that was subsequently named the 'July War', *Starry Night* documents the exchange between the explosions of bombs ravaging the city of Beirut and the improvised sounds of a 'prepared' trumpet. It documents a musical encounter which borders upon the absurd: a duet between the trumpet and the bombs.

Two 'performers' meet in *Starry Night*: an improvising musician, utilizing a trumpet modified with a number of different extensions and objects,² and the Israeli Air Force, whose presence is registered *in situ* by the thunderous sounds of destruction caused by the bomb explosions. Standing on his balcony as the Israeli air strike over Beirut takes place, Kerbaj opposes the noises of the airplanes and the detonations of bombs over Beirut with the sounds of his trumpet. He unleashes a flurry of improvised tones and noises into the soundscape, entering into a tension with the dramatic political situation that he faces and transforming these immediate circumstances into another place: a musical universe, a universe of sounds clashing against each other.

At the beginning of the piece, we hear muffled, distant sounds of explosions coming out of the night, into which the trumpet blends with long droning and gurgling tones. As the air strike commences in the immediate vicinity, loud explosions cut and punctuate the soundscape. Their appearance is rhythmical, and it severs the acoustic landscape with its intensity. In the immediate aftermath of the explosions, a tension builds up around silence, only to be interrupted by security alarms and barking dogs. The trumpet engages in an acoustic exchange with the sounds of the explosions, providing contrapuntal movements to the brutal shifts of the dynamics from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo* that the bombs dictate: the trumpet crescendos and distorts its sound in anticipation of the bombs, it bursts into noise experiments in their aftermath, it cuts against the noise of descending jet planes with a humming drone, but also mimics this noise and blends into it. To the rhythmical pattern of the explosions, the trumpet counterposes its own erratic movement of heterogeneous sounds: hissing noises, airstream hums, high-pitched tones, zings,

1 Mazen Kerbaj was born in Beirut in 1975. His work spans the fields of improvised music, painting, drawings and comics. He is one of the founders of the Lebanese festival of improvised music IRTIJAL, and one of the pioneers of improvised music in Lebanon. He has performed in solo and group settings in Lebanon, Syria, France, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, UK, and the USA. His visual work, collected in a number of publications, includes satirical commentaries on the political situation in the Middle East. Kerbaj runs a blog which displays some of his works at: www.kerbaj.com. The recording of *Starry Night* can be accessed online at <http://muniak.com/mazenkerbaj.html>.

2 The sounds that Kerbaj produces on the trumpet are made by using extended instrumental techniques and by the technical alterations of the instrument itself: air sounds, fluttering noises, growling sounds, microtones, drone sounds, choking sounds. Kerbaj modifies the trumpet with different tubings which lengthen its shank, and he uses a saxophone mouthpiece, which allows for the production of a wide, *legato* (smooth) sound, coming closer to woodwind than brass instruments. Furthermore, he alters the instrument by inserting different objects into its bore, by which the resonance of the air column extends to the body of the instrument, resulting in a muted and choked sound.

clangs, murmurs, and drones. Finally, it sinks into the silence of the night, creating suspense between the explosions.

By making music in an extreme context – the situation of violence and destruction emerging at that point where politics extends into war – and moreover by making the extremity of this situation itself an element of a musical piece, Kerbaj has created a work which is dramatic and shocking, but also remarkably subtle and complex. *Starry Night*, it seems obvious, is a political work of art. And yet its political nature does not reside in what might seem most obvious, in the dramatic impact of its gesture and its sensible contents. The themes of violence, destruction and politics are certainly the most direct themes that *Starry Night* works on, and yet these themes do not simply unfold in an immediate manner here. Rather, they come about by a detour, in abstraction.

The analysis presented here is an attempt to follow this detour. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the true nature of Kerbaj's aesthetic strategy is revealed only when we take distance from what might seem immediate in it – the distance from its immediate, 'sensible' representation of a 'reality'. Kerbaj's aesthetic exploration is, in fact, anything but mimetic; it consists in a remarkable procedure of distancing and abstraction – an abstraction which not only disconnects the question of violence from what would appear as its immediate truth – obtained by a shock effect – but which forcefully involves us in an entirely formal investigation of the relationship between order and indeterminacy, between contingency and destruction with regard to musical forms. By following Kerbaj's detour, we furthermore discover that the 'impossible' duet staged here is far from a simple political provocation obtained by aesthetic means. Kerbaj's aesthetic gesture touches upon something essential in politics, as it probes nothing less than the unfolding of the revolutionary dialectic, framed as an interruption of the violent logic of social order and hierarchy.

Let us begin by exposing the falsity of the obvious. Undoubtedly, what strikes one first about Kerbaj's work is the scene of violence that it evokes. The intensity of the explosions of bombs that are recorded *in situ* makes a dramatic mark on our listening and apprehension of the piece. And yet we should refrain from interpreting this work only from this sensible intensity, from the dramatic force of representation that it evokes, just as we should refrain from reducing the work to the intensity of the artistic performance which rises against extreme circumstances of violence. The bare sound of the bombs and the immediate image of horror that it brings to the fore is not all that *Starry Night* conveys to us. Reducing *Starry Night* to a simple representation of political violence – of its *brutality* – in the acoustic register seems to me as an indicator of a grave misunderstanding. Moreover, such a misunderstanding appears even greater if one tries to read this excessive sensible presence of the bombs – together with the terrifying image of destruction that they evoke – as an immediate moral meditation on violence. This is the first thing to dispel: interpreting Kerbaj through the Kantian sublime.

It is indeed tempting to claim that what we have here is a work of art engaged in a direct conversation with Kant. The title of *Starry Night* alone seems as an evocation of that famous

phrase from one of the *Critiques*: ‘The starry heavens above me and the moral law within me’.³ And its contents, in their sensible intensity, seem to cry out in an immediate manner for that specific meditation on morality that Kant develops in his aesthetic of the sublime. The recording of the bare sound of destruction can easily strike the listener with the power of what Kant had thought of as the ‘pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure’.⁴ Confronted with something that seems ungraspable or immeasurable, with something that overwhelms us with its magnitude and its might, we feel the utter inadequacy of our capacities for action and resistance. At the same time, in and through this feeling of limitation, we also take pleasure in sensing the unboundedness of our cognitive and moral self. The aesthetic sentiment that Kant in his *Kritik der Urteilkraft* had termed the ‘dynamical sublime’ involves an attraction by terrifying phenomena, an attraction by the sight of an overpowering force, in which we find pleasure as we discover an aspect of ourselves that cannot be dominated: the force of our reason and our moral person. By measuring ourselves against an immeasurable exterior force, while imagining a situation of sheer heteronomy, we find the irreducibility of our thinking mind as well as the irreducibility and autonomy of our moral freedom.

If one allows for this interpretation, the bombs in the Kerbaj piece, their shattering sound of violence and destruction – precisely because they evoke an image of an all-powerful force against which our mundane strategies seem futile – would come to represent a vehicle for the reassertion of the unlimitedness of our moral freedom. The representation of extreme circumstances of violence would become a eulogy of the independence of the subject, of the infinite freedom of our moral self, which does not succumb.

One needs to note a connection between such a moralism of the sublime and the procedure predominant in the public opinion today, by which violence – political violence especially – is overexposed, shown in its immediacy and in its full graphic nature, so that we can condemn its brutality, so that we can become aware of the enormity of the suffering of the human subject. If sublime violence functions as a vehicle for the self-assertion of our morality, the strength of its graphic exposure lies in its capacity to provoke psychological empathy with human pain and suffering. The dramatic recording of the bombs could, in this sense, also be read as a form of protest against the mindlessness of violence and war, as a humanistic affirmation of life over death, of creativity and humanity over destruction and brutality.

The important thing to note is that this ideological construction of the human victim, erected on the grounds of a naïve pacifism, shares with the Kantian aesthetic of the sublime a very precise effect: it shifts attention to the moral capacity of the subject and renders the force of the object uncognizable. Both forms of aestheticization seek to make the violence confronting the human subject a matter of cognitive indifference, for what is important is solely the subjective effect of moral superiority – whether in the feeling of freedom, or in that of empathy. In other words, it is not imperative to analyse objectively what is happening to us, but only to draw a

3 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 133.

4 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 143.

subjective lesson from it. Such a displacement from the object to the subject, in fact, thrives on an obscuration of the question of the origin of violence itself. Violence is severed from its origins in human actions, and transubstantiated into an element of nature. If we can find Kant seeking the sources for his aesthetic of the sublime in natural phenomena and primarily in natural disasters (volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.), the humanistic depiction of political violence and war in contemporary media divorces these consequences of human actions from concrete political and subjective decisions, and makes them into nature's contingencies, as if they represented pure external catastrophes.

Even if it is highly probable that what inspired Kerbaj to make music in the extremity of this situation was a resolve to stage a protest of human freedom, will and creativity against the overwhelming power of violence, what he produced in this incredible examination of tension in the medium of sound was something else. What Kerbaj stages in *Starry Night* is not simply a sublime rendition of the violence of the bombs. He does not push the bombs into the region of the ungraspable in order to provoke a feeling of awe and moral self-confidence or a feeling of pity. Rather, he transforms this sensible material and weaves it into a particular aesthetic investigation, an investigation which enters into a tension with the political situation that defines it, whilst producing a specific strategy of its thinkability.

In the first place, Kerbaj is not simply recording and exposing bare violence. He is playing over it, with it, against it; he is inscribing violence as an element into an improvised musical piece. The trumpet responds to the bombs. It submits them to a musical investigation. It counters the movement of the bombs with its own set of subtle and erratic movements, with its own fury of heterogeneous sounds. The sounds of the bombs and their movements are transposed into the structuring elements of a musical work. This transposition is crucial, as the explosion sounds now become something other than what they stand for in their representational immediacy: they become formal elements in the organisation of a musical piece. When entering into the composition of a work of improvised music, violence – the violence of exploding bombs – is abstracted from its sensible intensity, from the terrifying image that it provokes, in order to become an element in the abstract universe of relationships among sounds.

The whole strength of Kerbaj's work, therefore, is that it does not simply take as given the sensible material that it works with; it abstracts from the givenness of this material in order to construct something else; it displaces the immediate encounter with its circumstances by creating a formal distance towards them. This is the first dimension of the intricate aesthetic strategy present in *Starry Night*: *abstraction-transposition*. The sensible intensity of the bombs is abstracted from its existential immediacy and is woven into formal relations between sounds. The sounds of destruction are severed from their direct signification and are reconfigured within the immanence of the medium of sound. What matters is not to experience the sublime violence of the bombs, but to 'read' the sounds of the bombs from within the relations that they entertain with other sounds. These relations, furthermore, are abstract in themselves, as they are composed out of the pure contingency of noises, out of chance sound occurrences that are abstracted from any sense of nature and any legislation by conventions of musical taste.

Starry Night therefore produces a formalistic treatment of violence. The point is not to amplify the dramatic political events around which the work is organized; rather, what matters is to transpose and reorganize these elements into another register, where a new investigation of their meanings can be made. Examining violence means examining the structure of sounds, examining the way in which sounds can be organized, and how a musical order is born out of a contingent encounter between heterogeneous elements.

Abstraction, Destruction, Form

Once we abstract from the immediacy of its representational nature, we find *Starry Night* to be a piece organized around a set of abstract acoustic tensions, around movements of intensity, suspense and anticipation in the element of live recorded sound and musical improvisation. The bombs have disappeared in their immediate presence, they have disappeared as a horrifying representation that haunts us; but at the same time, they reappear as sound elements which enter into a relation with other sounds and organize a musical universe. The universe of *Starry Night* is indeed an abstract universe: a universe made up of minimal acoustic elements, of rudimentary sonorities organized entirely around tensions of texture and timbre. A universe that is abstract because it is devoid of all the classical parameters by which we recognize and constitute musical motifs: melody, harmony, rhythm, tonality, measure, etc. By anchoring his work in the modernist, avantgardist aesthetic strategies of free improvisation and post-serialism in contemporary music, Kerbaj explores the possibilities of non-conventional sonorities, appropriating aesthetically the acoustic horizon which would not usually be experienced as musical: noises, murmurs, silences, environmental and technological sounds, sounds defined by chance. In order to counter the movement of the bombs, Kerbaj does not play what would classically be recognized as notes; he unleashes noise, he experiments with sounds to the utmost, mimicking the environment, but also mimicking the sounds of the explosions in their loud, excessive, displeasing nature. He produces a set of contingent sounds: a wall of noise composed of heterogeneous elements clashing with each other.

The emphasis here is – as with the artistic avant-gardes of the 20th century – on contingent encounters, on ‘found objects’, objects from the situational, everyday environment that are not by their own nature recognizable as art objects. Every aleatory sensible occurrence can potentially produce an effect of art. There are no predetermined norms or forms that the subject is due to follow. Rather, the subject is forced into an improvised reaction by the encounter with the very situation that he or she is thrown into. There isn’t any pre-given reservoir of aesthetic choices, no given set of rules for the ordering of musical elements that the artist might draw upon. The repertoire of sound is entirely contingent, experimental, improvised. Being drawn from the extension of the expression that the instrument and the artist are capable of producing, from experiments which push sound beyond the traditional confines of instrument design and usage. And more generally, being predicated upon an attitude of openness towards each singular acoustic occurrence, towards the potential appropriation of the totality of sounds, of all those

tones, noises, frequencies, textures which are not limited by the confines of ‘natural’ melodic structures.⁵

This formula of abstraction and openness is, in reverse, also the formula of destruction. The avantgardist strategy assumes that form, in this case musical form, is not something which is normatively given, or which can be normatively prescribed (following rules of harmony, beauty or pleasure). Form is precisely the radical questioning of such normativity. A form that is rooted in an encounter and born out of a precarious treatment of contingent situations presupposes the negation of received or established conventions. It presupposes the annulment of the existing consensus which would legislate the boundaries between art and non-art, which would provide a normative measure for the production and judgment of aesthetic objects. The recognisability and the judgment of musical sounds, the very boundary between sound and noise, between music and non-music, is precisely what is constantly called into question, what is incessantly subverted and breached. This is also what improvised music inherits from the avant-gardes: an aggressive stance towards each aesthetic convention, an ethics of novelty and invention which incessantly questions the givens of the present and the past, proclaiming the necessity to destroy all previous schemas and their mechanisms of evaluation, to put an end, in every form, to the repetition of form.⁶ Walter Benjamin would name such a stance the ‘destructive character’: ‘The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred.’⁷

Already at this point we can see how Kerbaj approaches questions of violence and destruction in a manner irreducible to simple *mimesis*. Being transposed into the abstract medium of sound, the bombs make a different destructive gesture from the one that they perform in reality: they function as destroyers of musical conventions, as those chance sound elements that, once appropriated as music, shatter the conventions that legislate the boundaries between art and non-art. What they also shatter is any sense of the naturalness of sounds. Kerbaj’s musical medium is noise in its purity, and what he enacts in *Starry Night* is a dialogue in and through noise, a dialogue between environmental and situational noises and the acoustic experiments of

5 As Cornelius Cardew once put it: ‘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’. Quoted from: Cornelius Cardew, *Treatise Handbook* (London: Edition Peters, 1971), p. xvii.

6 In the realm of improvised jazz, the Rimbaudian maxim ‘*Il faut être absolument moderne*’ was perhaps most prominently embodied in Ornette Coleman’s manifesto-works like *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, or the *Change of the Century* from the early 1960s. The European tradition of free jazz would go even further in the militancy of the avantgardist ethics, pronouncing openly in 1968, the militancy of the avantgardist ethics of destruction in works such as *Machine Gun* by the Peter Brötzman group, an all-out attack on aesthetic conventions of music.

7 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Destructive Character’, in *One Way Street and Other Writings* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 157.

the trumpet – a dialogue that expands and explodes the sonic vocabulary, and transforms it into a medium of disturbance and provocation.

Despite this, the sonic experiments of *Starry Night* cannot simply be reduced to a breach of aesthetic traditions and a plea for a boundless search for sounds. There is a further element introduced here. Because what Kerbaj stages in his abstract treatment of the sounds of violence – and I believe this is where the extraordinary nature of *Starry Night* resides – is the very question of the *genesis of the musical form*: the question of how, starting from a specific coordination of contingent sound elements, a musical order can be said to emerge. By transposing bombs into abstract sound elements, *Starry Night* poses in a radical way the question of how a musical situation is constructed, how its order can be seen to arise in and out of chance encounters.

The important thing to perceive is that the configuration of sounds and noises that *Starry Night* brings forth is not random, the result of an essential situational disorder that could only be put together by the improvisational strategy of the artist who appropriates chance sounds. What *Starry Night* portrays is the existence of a specific order immanent to chance relations between sounds. The sounds that Kerbaj works with – whether by recording them or producing them – are *forced sounds*, and they are forced to the utmost degree as they are measured against the shattering sonic domination of the bomb explosions. There is, in other words, an essential asymmetry involved in the field of sonic contingency, as the improvising subject finds itself thrown into a situation which already crushes it by its forceful presence. It is the bombs that set the dominant sonic movements of the piece, and it is to their acoustic domination over the soundscape that we should look for the genesis of the organization of musical elements.

This is, in fact, the point where *Starry Night* introduces an incredible reversal. Structurally speaking, the bombs are not simply a force of destruction and violence. As sonic elements appearing in an abstract shape, they pass into their opposite: they are constructive. They do not simply destroy space; they constitute space, because they provide an ordering principle between the elements, the mediation for their arrangement. When entering into the composition of a musical work, the bombs come to represent the logic of its organisation and ordering, they come to stand for the principles in which a piece of music organizes and positions its elements. The explosions of bombs unfold the ‘space’ of the musical piece precisely as an abstract system of relations.

In the first place, the bombs provide markers for a rudimentary physical orientation: while the presence of the trumpet is ethereal and immobile, coming from nowhere and everywhere, the bombs move in space, they establish the feeling of distance and they create a sense of location: far, near, at the very centre. In other words, we have a minimal physical sense of space. But the bombs also construct space *in abstracto* in Kerbaj’s work: they impose a system of locations and positions of its contingent elements, a system of relations between sounds. As the only recognisably repeating sounds, the bombs impose a sense of rhythm and repetitive movement. The explosions appear in irregular but repetitive instances, they create a set of punctual moments. In this sense they provide a specific rhythmic measure to which other sounds can be related, against which other elements can be sized and evaluated, precisely as variations or intensities of

the rhythmic movement. The explosions of bombs also structure dynamics and dynamical shifts: they dictate the unfolding and the organisation of the shifts from fortissimo to pianissimo, as well as other, more subtle dynamic textures that characterize *Starry Night*; they enforce indexes of dynamical value which arrange other acoustic elements, ordering them according to a specific scale. In other words, the bombs do not only constitute a sense of physical space, but literally unfold the abstract space of the musical work: the form in which the work organizes its elements. In the absence of any conventional use of musical forms – such as the classical space of tonality or rhythm – the bombs provide a contingent form of musical organisation. By following the rhythmical movement of the explosions and the shifts in the dynamics of sounds that they dictate, we obtain a sense of order being imposed on the contingency of environmental and improvised sounds – order *qua* an imprint of a hierarchy between different sound elements, order *qua* a fragile movement of sound relations. This also applies to the specific temporal arrangement of the piece: the bombs also structure the time of Kerbaj's work, establishing provisional time signatures. Appearing almost 'vertically' as loud and excessive interruptions, they encircle the piece and outline what can be taken as its parts.

This is, in short, the essence of the incredible reversal that Kerbaj installs: instead of appearing as forces of destruction and disorder, the bombs represent the force of order; they impose a set of coordinates around which all the heterogeneous and contingent acoustic elements can be measured, put in place and arranged.

Schematizing things, we can in fact say that *Starry Night* exposes three main formal moments: 1) musical order or form is contingent, 2) form is a violent imposition, 3) order functions by assigning points, by making a spatial arrangement.

1) Musical form proceeds from a contingent encounter. Sounds take place in a situation, and the rules of their connection are defined by the contingency of the situation itself. The very syntax of the recognition and judgment of sounds, together with the way in which we order and structure them into music, is something that arises out of the field of chance. It is not the general horizon of tonality, rhythm, or harmony which organizes musical discourse. It is the very gesture of the appropriation of a set of contingent sounds that prescribes what is musical and what is not. And in this, the determinant element is precisely the encounter with a specific situation, an encounter with a set of relational coordinates that we discover in the situation as it unfolds.

2) The emergence of order or form in and out of contingency is violent. It is violent because it is destructive towards all previous forms and schemas. But it is also violent because it is forced upon the subject by the encounter with the situation. There is an asymmetry involved in a duet in which the trumpet confronts the live sound of the bombs; the explosions, in their intensity, are like the pillars of a structure which violently imposes itself out of contingency, they are those points at which chance passes into necessity, and where the improvising subject cannot simply follow the formula of openness and wandering but is forced to react to a situation which enforces its own logic.

3) Order is a spatial arrangement: it organizes and fixes points, it places things in their places. The bombs function as relational and organizational markers: they assign specific indexations to other acoustic elements, they provide a measure against which the entirety of the sonic material can be organized. It is through the bombs that the fluttering improvisational noises of the trumpet, the environmental sounds, and the silences acquire a sense of unity and hierarchy, a structure of oneness.

Violence and the State

These formal explorations that we discover in Kerbaj's work draw an immediate echo between the aesthetic and the political registers. Jacques Attali once wrote: 'With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion.'⁸ Kerbaj is here providing a corrective to Attali: noise, destruction and order are intimately intertwined, in the same manner in which the organisation of political situations is irreplaceably infused with violence.

In *Starry Night* the sky over Beirut has been transformed into another place: an abstract world reduced to minimal elements, to tensions between sounds, to relationships of sound textures, which are essentially organized around themes of order and indeterminacy, contingency and violence. And yet this shift from an excessive political situation to an abstract acoustic register also involves a specific movement of return. The minimum of formal relations obtained via an aesthetic abstraction allows one to trace a new path through the political situation, rendering its complexities thinkable. From the first abstraction, the abstraction of sounds, we leap to a second one, a parallel abstraction in the political register, as the elements constituting the immediacy of the political situation in Beirut are reassembled and reassessed. Most importantly, it is the theme of political violence that appears in a new light here. Once a formal distance is taken from its crushing sensible presence, violence becomes thinkable, and it becomes thinkable precisely as a question tightly linked to the problem of order and its genesis, as a question of the relationship between order and contingency. Kerbaj's second movement of abstraction, running in parallel to the first one, abstracts from the particular predicates of the political situation in which his performance is enacted,⁹ in order to frame the problem of political violence in a new way – order, indeterminacy and violence now becoming the minimal yet essential markers of the structuring of a political situation.

From a philosophical standpoint, we can observe that Kerbaj is entering into a dialogue with Marx at this point: the formal structure of the musical piece, its own examination of form, its investigation of the relationship between order and indeterminacy, stretching between aesthetics and politics, structurally evokes the problem of the State and its treatment in the Marxist

8 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 6.

9 In his visual works, Kerbaj readily abstracts from the complexities of the political situation in the Middle East, satirizing the absurdity of ethno-religious predicates as markers of politics.

tradition. All of the three moments around which Kerbaj articulates the problem of the genesis of musical form – the aleatory emergence of order, the violence that resides at its base, and the spatializing function of order – reflect in a profound way the approach to the problem of the State in Marxist thought.

For Marx, as we know, the State as a historical form was in no way a natural or necessary phenomenon in human history. It is a contingent occurrence, something that arises in concrete historical circumstances, and therefore something that might perish in the future. ‘The State has not always existed’ as Lenin once asserted.¹⁰

There is a historical contingency to the birth of the State as the medium of the regulation and ordering of social relations. Order, the statist order, is not something which is natural and necessary, something which can be deduced from divine laws or the laws of human nature; rather, it is something which emerges in particular historical conditions, something which is born out of concrete tensions and contradictions permeating the socio-historical realm. It is necessary to reject any anthropological ontology of politics, to reject any depiction of the absoluteness or the historical invariance of the State itself. The historical form of the State emerges out of precise conditions: from the necessity to regulate and pacify the gap between wealth and poverty. This is what Engels wrote in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*: ‘[The] state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes.’¹¹

At the same time, the emergence of the State is not simply to be equated with the universality and the abstraction of the juridico-political order, with its formal power of regulation. The ‘origin’ of the State rests on violence. The State is not a product of a ‘social contract’ between the warring sides which would put an end to violence. It does not arise out of the sovereign will of the people, the will that gives itself laws in order to ‘civilise’ itself. Rather, it is a product of violence, a forced and parasitic imposition on the will of the social body, which is able to realize, by imposing a universal structure of regulation, the perpetuation of the violence of domination of one part of society over others. The criticism that Marx launched towards the bourgeois myth of industry, labour, thrift and generosity as the origin of capitalist economy applies to the ‘origin’ of the State as well. Just as the ‘primitive accumulation of capital’ is not a scene of individual economic enthusiasm, charity and mutuality, but a scene of pillage, theft, exaction and violent dispossession, so too is the ‘primitive political accumulation’ a scene not of the freedom of the individual and his subjective rights, but of conquest, domination, slavery and oppression.¹²

10 Cf. V. I. Lenin, *The State, A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University*, July 11, 1919 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970).

11 Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in: Karl Marx and Friedrich, Engels, *Selected Works* (London and Moscow: Progress Publishers and Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 577.

12 The problem of ‘primitive accumulation’ is developed in Part VII of Volume One of *Das Kapital*. See also Althusser’s remarks on Machiavelli in ‘Machiavelli’s Solitude’: Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London: Verso, 2000).

The State is not a solution to violence as Hobbes and the theorists of Natural Law thought; it is violence in itself, an instrument for the perpetuation of violence. It is a profound lesson of Marxism to have revealed the necessary dialectic between Law and violence in history, the complementarity between legality and violence in historical situations. Violence is not opposed to the Law, but accompanies the Law as both its precondition and necessary supplement. Every politico-juridical order bases itself not on the universality of its principles or norms, but on force, on the asymmetry of the conjunction of forces that it expresses. This is why Lenin insists that the State is necessarily 'a power standing above the Law': an absolute power, unlimited by any law, because it institutes and forces laws, because it transforms the excess of force and violence existing in the social terrain into legal norms and institutions, all the while sanctioning and legitimizing the social inequalities from which it is born. In addition to the monopoly of violence, which the Law retains in order to exercise functions of public government, administration and regulation, there is an excess of unregulated, unrestrained violence inscribed in the Law, an excess indifferent to the question of legitimacy, because it proceeds directly from historical relations of exploitation and oppression which it sanctions. As Balibar would argue:

*The State rests on a relation of forces between classes, and not on public interest and the general will. This relation is itself indeed violent in the sense that it is in effect unlimited by any law, since it is only on the basis of the relation of social forces, and in the course of its evolution, that laws and a system of legislation can come to exist – a form of legality which, far from calling this violent relation into question, only legitimates it.*¹³

This repressive essence of the statist order, the essential link between violence and universal legal norms, is also complemented by something else: a productive dimension of the State, expressed precisely in the spatializing operation that Kerbaj evokes in his piece – the assignment and reproduction of fixed points. The State is not simply a mechanism of repressive execution, operating by violence and coercion. There is another dimension, inscribed in the State's function of regulation and administration – it is that dimension which assigns places and roles, which divides society into parts and administers and manages these parts according to specific rules. The function of the juridico-political order is not only to legitimate the violence of class conflict by transposing it to a 'neutral' terrain of juridical relations and the putative freedom which they provide. Its function is also to reproduce these relations: to impose the myth of their normality and naturalness, to establish fixed points and clearly identifiable categories according to which societies are divided and according to which different parts of the social situation should relate to one another. The statist order is in the last instance a spatializing order: it provides fixed points and places in social space and it imposes the normality of such a division – the normality of the 'social division of labour', the normality of socio-economic inequalities, the normality of submission to the rules of the established order. It is this dimension of the State that Althusser attempted to theorize – coming in this sense also close to Foucault – under the rubric of *reproduction*. The maintenance of the capitalist relations of production necessitates not only

13 Étienne Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 71.

the maintenance of the conditions of production, but the reproduction of the very relations of production, the relations between exploiters and the exploited, between oppressors and the oppressed. In short, the State order makes sure that everybody is kept in his or her 'place':

Each mass ejected *en route* is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society: the role of the exploited (with a 'highly-developed' 'professional', 'ethical', 'civic', 'national' and a-political consciousness); the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to give the workers orders and speak to them: 'human relations'), of the agent of repression (ability to give orders and enforce obedience 'without discussion', or ability to manipulate the demagogy of a political leader's rhetoric), or of the professional ideologist (ability to treat consciousnesses with the respect, i.e. with the contempt, blackmail, and demagogy they deserve, adapted to the accents of Morality, of Virtue, of 'Transcendence', of the Nation [...]).¹⁴

Returning to Kerbaj's work let us recapitulate the second, political abstraction that one can see being produced in its formal explorations. By constructing a musical universe out of the extreme political situation of the bombing of Beirut, and moreover by reducing this universe to a set of minimal elements which revolve around themes of order, contingency and violence, Kerbaj translates the situational immediacy of his performance into a more abstract register: what is outlined in *Starry Night* is not simply the logic of pure violence and destruction unfolding in a situation of war; rather, what is outlined here is the silent 'war' immanent to the very constitution of the political order: the violent role of the State in its construction and reproduction of an abstract set of social roles and positions. This is how the formal aesthetic procedures of *Starry Night* resonate with the Marxist theory of the State and its treatment of the problem of violence as something inseparable from the very notion of order. But this is also how we can see Kerbaj employing aesthetical means in order to bring out the problem of political reorientation: in a situation of extreme violence, where political possibilities and paths seem to be radically absent, it seems imperative in the first place to assume distance: to abstract from the immediacy of the situation in order to examine the fault lines of its own constitution. To invert the problem of the bombs from one of destruction into one of construction.

The Dialectic of Order and Indeterminacy

Starry Night, however, poses another problem as corollary to the problem of the relationship between the State order and violence. The exchange between the trumpet and the bombs also presents us with the following question: what is a political relation? Or better, *what is politics* as a relation which is irreducible to the statist logic of administration of the conduct of men and

14 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1971), p. 147.

things, and which can only be thought as a radical gesture, as a gesture that introduces a singular novelty into a situation?

This is palpable from the very nature of the duet that Kerbaj enacts: from the tension embodied in the exchange between the trumpet and the bombs. What we have here is not a tension that can be reconciled on a horizontal terrain, where the two 'performers' appear as equals. The two 'performers', instead, stand in a relation of tension that implies what we have is the construction of a qualitative difference between the two 'performers', an absence of common ground..

The drone and the fluttering sounds of the trumpet, at times indistinguishable from the noise of explosions, introduce a new quality. They introduce a disjunction into the ordered, rhythmical structure imposed by the bombs. The trumpet releases a flurry of heterogeneous sounds – a set of acoustic contingencies – against the violent rhythmical patterns of the bombs. These sounds are also violent, for they seem to dissolve the consistency of the acoustic horizon dominated by the bombs: they cut into it, interrupt it, subvert it. The trumpet does not simply respond to the bomb explosions, it struggles against them: it subverts their repetition. It introduces an aleatory set of sounds, forcing a singular excess into the spatial order being imposed.

From a conceptual perspective, and in another echo of Marxism, it seems to me that Kerbaj here touches upon the problem of the dialectic itself, framed as a relation between repetition and the emergence of the unrepeatable, as a relation between the State and its revolutionary dissolution. In the contrasts and heterogeneous movements of the trumpet and the bombs, we find a reverberation of the problem of the *asymmetry of the contradiction*.

Contradiction is asymmetrical: this is what Marx adds to Hegel against Hegel. When thinking about the contours of the politics of emancipation, of the political struggle against oppression and exploitation, we cannot simply think in terms of symmetry, in terms of two forces confronting each other on an equal terrain. There is always an essential asymmetry involved, an asymmetry both in terms of the contours and qualities of each of the terms and with regard to their specific relations. A symmetrical contradiction would imply the contradiction between two terms which confront each other on an equal basis, two subjects staging a fight in a horizontal space. An asymmetrical contradiction, by contrast, presupposes an essential structural inequality between the terms. There is no common space, there is no common measure of force, as the very terrain upon which the contradiction unfolds is already slanted in one direction. In the words of Althusser:

[C]ontradiction, as you find it in *Capital*, presents the surprising characteristic of being *uneven*, of bringing contrary terms into operation which you cannot obtain by giving the second a sign obtained by negating that of the first. This is because they are caught up in a *relation of unevenness* which continuously reproduces its conditions of existence just on account of this contradiction.¹⁵

15 Louis Althusser, 'Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy', in *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: Verso, 1976), p. 185.

Alain Badiou has formalised the problem of asymmetry with great rigour in his *Theory of the Subject*. For Badiou, contradiction is not a binary opposition between two discrete terms, A and B, which would be given in advance and where each would be a direct negation of the other. In fact, according to Badiou's conception, in contradiction there is never an A and a B properly speaking; there are never two clearly distinct things. Rather, contradiction has to be thought starting from the relation between A as such, and this same A repeated by being assigned a specific place. So we have A and this same A at another place than itself, A plus a differential, spatial index. In the words of Badiou:

A, we said, (and A, this is the thing) is at the same time A and A_p , where A_p is the generic term for any placement of A. Indeed, this can be A_{p_1} , A_{p_2} , A_{p_3} ... with all the $p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n, \dots$ belonging, for example, to P. This is what we will see later on: there is an infinity of places. A_p is A in the general-singular of placement. Now, it is always in this way that A presents itself (it is always placed) and is refused (because, as placed, it is not only itself, A, but also its place, A_p).¹⁶

Badiou's reconceptualization of the notion of contradiction infuses the latter with the idea of tension. What we have as constituting elements of contradiction are not two simple poles, or two simple elements, discrete and identifiable in themselves prior to their relation. Contradiction is built upon an irreducible tension immanent to the relation between the two terms; or better, it is built on a tension immanent to the process of the (self-)differentiation of an element, inasmuch as the latter becomes engulfed by – and refuses – the logic which provides it with a place, or a differential index. This is why Badiou would insist that when speaking of contradiction we have to speak of an opposition between a pure being, A, and the infinite combination of its different indexed iterations: its placements. The set of placements, or the set of all the combinations and repetitions of A – all its possible differentiations and redoublings into A_{p_1} , A_{p_2} , A_{p_3} , etc. – is what, according to Badiou, can be thought of as a space, the space of placements, P, as the ground for all possible differentiations and redoublings of A into A_{p_1} , A_{p_2} , A_{p_3} , etc. Of course, what P represents is not to be taken as a pure concept of physical space. In fact, P does not need to be a spatial idea at all, it can also be a temporal space, a movement of time ordered in a homogeneous and repetitive way. What is essential for Badiou's concept is the logic of spatiality taken abstractly, the logic of organisation or positioning of elements, which arranges them the latter in such a way so as to impose points and recognizable coordinates. P is, in short, that which places things in their places according to specific rules and norms, and in this sense engenders their ceaseless differentiation. . With the proviso that the differences produced here are not alterations but repetitions. In its redoubling through P, A is never transformed proper, but always returns to itself in a specific manner. Instead of the production of real qualitative difference – as in a temporal rupture – we have iteration, an automatic compulsion to repeat.

What is a contradiction, then? A contradiction is a relation between a pure element and a repetitive structure which orders, organizes and places elements: it is a movement of tension

16 Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* [Théorie du sujet] (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 6.

between a term and its indexation: '[The] true initial contradictory term of something, A, is not something else, not even the same A placed, A_p . No, the true camouflaged contradictory term of A is the space of placement P, it is that which *delegates the index*.'¹⁷

It is clear that the determining characteristic of contradiction conceived in this sense is its *asymmetry*: there is no symmetry between the two poles A and P, because one of the poles determines the very terrain on which the contradiction unfolds. One pole holds the other in a relationship of inclusion, subjects it to itself. It is P, the space of placements, or, according to Badiou's neologism *esplace* (or *splace* in English) which is the dominant element in the contradiction, because it is P which always provides an index, a measure to A and not the reverse:

Any contradiction is fundamentally asymmetrical, in that one of the terms sustains a relation of inclusion to the other. The including term, which is to say the place, the space of placement, is named (particularly by Mao) the dominant term, or the principal aspect of the contradiction. The one that is included, for its part, is the subject of the contradiction. It is subjected to the other, and it is what receives the mark, the stamp, the index. It is A that is indexed into A_p according to P.¹⁸

Now, the entire question of politics, and of the revolutionary unfolding of the dialectic, is a question of the passage from structural asymmetry – from the logic of spatial indexation and repetition – to its revolutionary upturning, to what Badiou names *reversible asymmetry*. If the essence of contradiction is an asymmetry in which one of the terms is always the including and organizing principle, whilst the other is the 'passive', included, and dominated element, is it possible to put a stop to such a logic, to reverse it? Is it possible to subvert and overturn the system of places? Or better: how can we think of an element that would free itself from this system and annul the logic of indexation and inclusion which keeps it in check?

Badiou schematizes two possible paths through which such an unfolding might proceed: A *quantitative* path of change implies the reversal of places, a combinatorial logic of displacement, reshuffling, and permutation. What was subordinated becomes dominant, what was dominant becomes subordinated. The terms of the contradiction reverse their places, they exchange quantities of force which are accorded to them by their structural locations in a situation. And yet this logic remains a purely 'reformist' logic, or a spatial logic according to Badiou's lexicon: what changes is the position of the elements, whilst the places and the functions remain the same. We have formal mutations and variations, but the essential contents, the very structure of asymmetrical places, remains unaltered. In the end, such a logic of quantitative inversion changes nothing essential: it imposes variations on the same structure, variations on the place, whilst reproducing the asymmetry of the structure itself, whilst reproducing the contours of order which divides the terms unequally. The occupation of P by an element A simply reproduces P, the logic of spatial indexation, and its unequal distribution of terms.

17 Ibid., p. 7.

18 Ibid., p. 15.

By contrast, a *qualitative* path implies the transformation of the very system of places in which contradiction is entangled. What is introduced is a new quality, wherein the old place is subverted and overturned. The reversal of asymmetry here involves a breach in the oppressive logic which hierarchizes and structures the terms. Change is, in other words, conceived as the construction of an emancipatory novelty, and not as a simple change of hands or a change of places. Change is that point at which the system of places which divides and differentiates the elements is replaced with something else, a radically different configuration of terms in which the violent logic of placement is annulled.

A political example that Badiou draws from the syntax of class struggle can help clarify this. The proletarian struggle against capitalism is not a struggle against the capitalist class as a subject, nor is it simply a struggle for the occupation of the place that the capitalist class as a dominant class maintains. It is a struggle against a type of a relation, a structured totality, which is hierarchically and unequally divided into classes; it is a struggle against the system of places which makes a class society, a struggle for a situation in which the socio-economic divides between classes have been abolished. As Badiou writes:

The true contrary of the proletariat is not the bourgeoisie. It is the bourgeois world, imperialist society, of which the proletariat, let this be noted, is a notorious element, as the principal productive force and as the antagonistic political pole [...] The project of the proletariat, its internal being, is not to contradict the bourgeoisie, or to cut its feet from under it. This project is communism, and nothing else. That is, the abolition of any place in which something like a proletariat can be installed. The political project of the proletariat is the disappearance of the space of the placement of classes. It is the loss, for the historical something, of every index of class.¹⁹

According to the *Theory of the Subject*, such a global process of qualitative transformation already starts with the production of a minimal fissure, a punctual destructive gesture. In outlining the logic of this fissure, Badiou would coin another neologism, that of *horlieu*, the *outplace*. In order to grasp the cessation of indexation, we first need to start with something which escapes its sway, with something that frees itself from the determination by a structured system of places. Outplace is quite literally something which is out-of-place, something subtracted from the very logic of placement, a radical heterogeneity that does not allow itself to be indexed in any way. It is an element which is not placed, a heterogeneity that cannot be placed, measured, included in the repetitive sequence. This radically heterogeneous term is never an original potentiality for Badiou – there is never a pure identity of A existing as a virtuality beneath every structuration, or being alienated and lost in every placement. Rather, the outplace is an element which only exists in and through the dialectical process of subversion and destruction, through the movement of the cessation of the place. The outplace is the fragile emergence of an excess at that point at which the subject emerges by freeing itself from the resort of inert repetitive habits that were previously

19 Ibid., p. 7.

assigned to it. The subject produces an outplace (and produces itself) by applying force to the logic of placement that keeps it in check, when it forces into place a radically heterogeneous quality, an element whose only consistency is radical indeterminacy as such. In Badiou's words:

A subject is such that, subservient to the rule that determines a place, it nevertheless punctuates the latter with the interruption of its effect. Its subjectivizing essence lies in this very interruption, by which the place, where the rule is deregulated, consists in destruction.²⁰

What this means is that politics is always a matter of the concentration of the movement of interruption. A global upturning begins with the insertion of a cut into repetition, by the displacement of the automatism of the place and by the production of something unassignable, a qualitative heterogeneity to the logic of placements; and it expands further by the steadfast drawing of consequences of this heterogeneity, by an affirmation of a novelty that forces its way through the system of places and overturns its structure. A dialectical contradiction, schematised in terms of the confrontation of the logics of the *esplace* and the *borlieu*, is always torn between the movement of repetition and indexing, on the one hand, and, on the other, the interruption and cessation of indexing, on the other induced, by the emergence and the forcing of an unrepeatable term. Politics, revolutionary politics, is consubstantial with the question of novelty. It exists whenever we have the creation of a new point upsetting the rules of the old world, whenever we have something whose inclusion in the world necessitates the dissolution of this world.

Coda

In its framing of the 'impossible' duet between the trumpet and the bombs, *Starry Night* can be read as an aesthetic rendition of the opposing movements of contradiction that the philosopher formalizes in the concept. As the night sky over Beirut becomes transposed into a war of sounds, the exchanges between the improvising musician and the war machinery exhibit a series of tensions between repetition and interruption, between placing and displacement, between homogenization and the heterogeneous. The vertical and rhythmical movements of the bombs, which seek to draw the entirety of the sonic material into their ordering apparatus, is countered by the errancy of the trumpet sounds, sounds which have been drawn out of their place – unassignable sounds, arhythmical sounds, disordered sounds, coming from nowhere and everywhere, and being in the end indistinguishable from noise: and as such, sounds which are precisely bent on upsetting and destroying the consistency of the spatial order imposed – destroying its consistency by including themselves, as heterogeneous elements, within it.

But this incredible duet that Kerbaj stages remains, nevertheless, an impossible duet. The aesthetic strategy does not seek to impose itself as a substitute for politics and for concrete

20 Ibid., p. 259.

political strategies. It does not seek to represent politics, or to serve as its immediate instrument. Rather what it does is to create a specific tension with politics, a tension which opens a gap in reality and places politics at a distance from itself. This is why the precise nature of Kerbaj's work is difficult to define: stranded between aesthetics and politics, *Starry Night* is at once a formal work, an abstract exploration in the medium of sound, and a performance, enacted in the concrete situation and organized around immediate events and elements that compose this situation. Through an aesthetic inscription of real political events that surround it, but also through their formal transposition, *Starry Night* takes something from politics in order to construct a fictive realm upon it: it abstracts from the immediate reality in order to propose a new world; it displaces things from the given situation and reorganizes them in another sense, in an abstract universe. But through this formal exploration, it also provides politics with a subjective paradigm. Staging the dialectic of order and indeterminacy, a dialectic of the place and its cessation, the constructed, abstract universe of *Starry Night*, paradoxically, appears more real than immediate reality as such. In the sheer impossibility of the political context into which he is thrown, Kerbaj uses aesthetic means in order to construct a path. A fictive path, a fragile path composed in and through abstraction, but still a path, a thinkable way, where the subject can learn how to find new means of orientation *vis-à-vis* the situation, and trace steps out of it.

Endnote

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Ben Watson

Music, Violence, Truth

After the devastation in Manhattan on 11 September 2001, what can radical music mean? Einstürzende Neubauten - whose name translates, prophetically, Collapsing New Buildings - earned their avantgarde stripes in Britain by applying pneumatic drills to a stress-bearing beam at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. After 11 September, such transgressions surely pale into insignificance. Indeed, any comparison might seem offensive. At No Future, an academic conference on Punk held in Wolverhampton in late September 2001, an American delegate announced that after 9/11 the relationship of music to violence and shock needed to be rethought. The whole Punk and Noise “transgressive” aesthetic, one he’d subscribed to throughout his youth, needed revision. Like watching the late Linda Lovelace, born-again and demure, denouncing porn and sex-before-marriage on a TV chat show, such reversals in ideology cannot be taken at face value. These rifts and contradictions indicate a clash of tectonic plates at a more fundamental level, something violently mismatched in the relationship of music to truth and conscience.

Musically, America responded to the pain and loss of 9/11 with a fund-raising telethon which drew on the sombre substratum of hymn-singing which underlies corporate pop, and which unites country, soul and reggae. Music written for church performance - unmediated, involving, communal and local - inevitably became kitsch and false when delivered by top-selling super-stars for international broadcast. These songs are made for internal reflection, not personal adulation. The economics were hypocritical too: the artists may have waived their fees, but as with Live Aid, it’s obvious that the global exposure they’re achieving is worth more than any fee. However, in such a context of harmonic maturity and low-key sentiment, the concept of “audio terrorism” does appear silly and adolescent. Should the noisy end of the avantgarde shut up, and confess its misdemeanours were all a ruse?

The avantgarde registered its own peculiar response to the disaster. Rushing in where angels fear to tread, Karlheinz Stockhausen voiced what some may have felt in the instant, but none dared say. For him, the crashing planes and collapsing towers felt like art: “What happened there is: now you must re-adjust your brain. The greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos. Minds achieving in a single act what we in music can only dream of, people rehearsing like mad for ten years, preparing fanatically for a concert, and then dying. You have people who are that focused on a performance and then 5,000 people who are dispatched to the afterlife, in a single moment. I couldn’t match it. Against that, we - as composers - are nothing.” Surely the guy is crazy? In Stockhausen’s defence, he did go on to admit the attack was a crime, because part of the “audience” were “not consenting”. This demur didn’t soften Gyorgy Ligeti’s retort: “Stockhausen should be locked up in a psychiatric hospital”.

A comment by one TV reporter - that the image of the planes crashing into the towers “repeated in the memory like a nightmare loop” - was distinctly strange. You didn’t need to repeat the images in your head, TV did nothing else for days on end. As usual, the mass media materially create the psychic conditions which they then proceed to moralise. But what should artists do when reality outdoes them? Stay quiet? Admit anti-art destructivism was just a tease? Confess that these tumultuous, apocalyptic events we call “radical” were really just conjury with lutes and viols, a luxury product ornamented with frissons of phony danger?

Such evasions smack of the brittle repression of married couples who banish their teenage metal and pop albums to the attic, and call their yen for music a “passing phase”. For us, giving up on extreme music can’t be the answer. Quite the opposite: it’s by paying closer attention to the internal structure of radical music - “violence” and all - that its historical and social meaning might be decoded. Stockhausen’s equation of art and terror - “this leap from security, from what’s ordinary, from life” - may be poor consolation for inhabitants of Manhattan who have lost loved ones, or now feel desperately insecure. However, his weird outburst did touch on something deep. Why is it that, since the modernist revolts of the early twentieth century, composers and improvisors have continually shouted noise, crisis and violence?

The crucial point is that art is an attempt to tell the truth about the world, the whole world, not simply to provide baubles for those in the comfort-zone of privilege. The economic pressures and national conflicts that create world wars and mass starvation and genocide are still in operation. The operations of global capitalism, and its political face-savers, those blue-suited bastards Bush and Blair and Berlusconi, mean that the inhabitants of Burundi, Beirut, Belfast and Baghdad (I use alliteration simply to limit the list) have long suffered the terror and chaos which the suicide hijackers brought to Manhattan. Edgard Varèse brought the noise of sirens and bombs into music in the 1920s, a response to the terrors of World War I. After that, the instruments of Mozart seemed antiquated. His “Hyperprism” predicted the Nazi strategy of the Blitz, when civilian populations first became long-distant targets of military hardware. Unlike his “objectivist” follower Iannis Xenakis, Varèse bent the shapes he heard into organic ovaloids which speak for the suffering ear. This is why, of all the pre-war orchestral composers, only Varèse has a non-salon, yet humanist ruggedness: a realism that moves the blood and shakes the entrails. Sonically, Varèse can stand comparison to Coltrane and Hendrix, who provided lasting testimonials to a different noise: a struggle against racial oppression in America and genocidal war in Vietnam.

These moments of musical truth weren’t easy to achieve, nor were they facile, attention-seeking stabs at ugliness or excess. They were not the sound of George Antheil seeking to be a “bad boy” of the avantgarde by slamming his fists on the pianoforte keyboard, or of the Japanese Noise artist Merzbau producing fashionably catatonia-inducing, all-enveloping drones (to steal a name from Kurt Schwitters and then recycle the shocks of a degraded surrealism deserves some kind of critique). According to his wife Naima (talking to C.O. Simpkins, his best biographer), John Coltrane systematically studied scales from all over the world, and tried to pack every musical system into his music. **If the results sound ugly, that is because you are too wedded to your partial musical identity, to your comfort-blanket of familiar harmony: heavenly universality sounds like hell to closed-in ears.** For his part, Hendrix was intensely loyal to classmates who had been drafted and to 101st Airborne, the regiment he’d served in. Eric Burdon was amazed at his rightwing stance on the Vietnamese war when he reached England in 1967. Music-journalist Karl Dallas challenged him in print. Reaching an anti-US position was painful and slow, yet by “Machine Gun”, it happened. Hendrix’s rainbows of audio-feedback revelled in spaces which brought pain to the repressed and rigid: in the ears of GIs, they were incitements to immediate pleasure, to disrespect for authority, and to outright mutiny (“fragging”).

Coltrane and Hendrix did not invent this dialectic between musical shock and political liberation. It had been the major theme for Beethoven and his followers. Romantic music was a call to revolution that now languishes under the idiot term “classical”. The exhilarating *allegri* of the symphony - the hoofbeats, the jangling bridles, the crack of loading muskets - are not about hunting, as the rightwing British music critic Roger Scruton fondly imagines. They are about bourgeois revolution - “to arms, citizens!” - discovering common aims, seizing the castle keep, liberating the prisoners, letting in the light of reason, sweeping away the cobwebs of feudal reaction. After 1848, when the bourgeois class made its historic pact with state power and landed interests, the excitement turned sour. In March 1871, the French state slaughtered the Communards in tens of thousands, and drove the voice of universal truth and reason underground. In Wagner, massive chromatic transitions invoke myth and fate: surrender to the madness of the stock market as to a natural force. By Mahler, the revolutionary *allegri* are hollowed-out, febrile, a nostalgic memory that relates to erotics rather than history. But this radical subjectivity had consequences.

By rationalising the brain-bending chromaticism of Wagner and Mahler, Schoenberg and Webern forged a music whose freedom of note combination rejected the respectable, bourgeois world of repression and exchange. Their negation of tonality in Twelve Tone, born through logic, is painful; its parallel in the Blues, itself born through pain, is alluring. These twin attacks on the tempered key system stalked each other through the twentieth-century, fighting, aiding and abetting, fusing and swapping places (see Muhal Abrams, Frank Zappa, James Blood Ulmer, Derek Bailey). The struggle for authentic music resembled political resistance to war and inequality and mass starvation. Its history is likewise fugitive and unofficial: stark glimpses of a different order in a black night of violence and lies. When Mark Sinker, writing in *The Wire* (no 211, September 2001), worried that the offensive volume of rock can be mobilised to confirm conservatism, he needed to pay more attention to the music’s economic base. Noise organised for extraction of surplus value isn’t noise, but silence at high volume: rock as spectacle blocks its liberating essence, its democratic release and insurrectionary energy (hence the necessity of Punk etc). As usual in bourgeois thought, idealism links to positivism: Sinker’s decibel-counting cannot handle the fact that “noise” in music is an aesthetic fact concerning collective human experience and individual response, not a quantitative measure. Noise is not volume.

Take the example of Cecil Taylor. In carrying out zappologist Marco Maurizi’s dictum that the dialectic of Modern Art is “mediation criticised by immediacy”, Taylor explodes the meaning of the piano - that prime embodiment of bourgeois tonality - from within, seemingly bending notes which the machine was designed to deliver straight and even, transforming pianistic mastery into a battlefield of physical tensions and clashes. Taylor has reduced pianism to lightning rhythmic nuance and bounding sonic volume. Encyclopedic harmonic knowledge is balanced like an inverted pyramid on the nose-tip of the moment, causing a frictive density and horrid power which make lovers of civilised tinkling flee the room. Why this cataclysm at the heart of musical creativity? Because the reputation of the classical “masterpiece”, this civilisation, is the accumulation of the sweated labour of legions of composers, musicians, concert organisers and concert-hall builders, all those who have worked to make these moments possible. Taylor’s intent is to inject the spontaneity of the instant - his actual presence at this moment in front of

you now in this particular hall - into the frozen monolith, to explode the tempered key system into a million scintillating fragments, to make the process of playing the point of us gathering, and not the congealed kudos of the past. Taylor is the most refined and gentlest of people - to underline the point, he even recites poetry and wears pink fluffy slippers at recitals - yet ears trained by radio and film musics, *i.e.* used to music which fails to address the listener directly, shout “VIOLENCE! VIOLENCE!! VIOLENCE!!!” every time they hear it.

A recent performance at the Barbican (13 May 2002) is a case in point. Invited to write a concert piece for performance by Bang On A Can All-Stars (“a fiercely aggressive group, combining the power and punch of a rock band with the precision and clarity of a chamber ensemble” according to the *New York Times*, who appear to have swapped music criticism for promotional falafel), Cecil Taylor questioned the fetish of the written masterpiece by appearing in person with the group. His “score” was an A4 photocopy of some derisory doodles containing randomly scattered letters and musical signs. His “rehearsal” consisted of a thirty-minute *séance* at which the musicians were instructed to make “no sound” while Taylor explored the limits of the auditorium by slowly moving up the aisle (the pianist tinkles some notes and is admonished, leading to a backstage war in which she is finally banished from the performance). Then the musicians were themselves sent into the auditorium to test the space, exhale air and pronounce a word. When they turn this into a clever improvised event, cooing and chirping at each other (as they do “downtown”), Taylor upbraids them and tells them to slow the tempo to near silence. Worse even than gagging the All-Stars, he imports drummer Tony Oxley, insisting Oxley is “the best drummer on the planet” (thus bouleversing decades of careful negotiation between Black Nationalism and American patriotic hard sell to make “jazz” a global cultural hegemon).

In their performance that night, Taylor and Oxley upset any notion of received harmony or rhythm, forcing the three members of Bang On A Can who dared show up to improvise what they are rather than what they know. The improvisation tore spaces in the fabric of “community”, and created a genuinely new and unheralded musical construction with the materials to hand. Like a John Cage piece performed in the midst of a set of new minimalist hackworks, Taylor and Oxley proved that all the careful notations by Tan Dun, Hermeto Pascoal and Don Byron (pieces which had occupied the first half) were so much tepid filmscore twaddle, trivial evasions of what playing music in front of people really is.

The rhythmic relationship of Taylor and Oxley brought in something vocal and authentic that was completely lacking in Bang On A Can’s finicky reproduction of strategies from Henry Cow, Curlew and the Mike Post Coalition. The fusion of “rock power” and “chamber clarity” promised by the *New York Times* proved to be ersatz class-reconciliation, a postmodernist sales pitch indicating a consummation devoutly to be wished by harrassed arts promoters (ie “bums-on-seats” plus “high-class tone”), but nothing at all in terms of musical micro-substance in the hearing. Bang On A Can’s clumsy attempts at rock and samba were exceedingly ugly, notes as illustrations of the idea rather than the thing-for-itself, cluttered and awkward. Their performance revealed the absolutely empty character of academic musical values: all the music said was “we can play these dots”, there was no motive force, no message to the bowels, no **meaning**.

For musicians to deliver “the word with its theme intact, the word permeated with confident and categorical social value judgment,” they must also provide the next term in V.N. Voloshinov’s argument: “the word that really means and takes responsibility for what it says” (these are the closing words of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 1929). This means developing a personal voice on your instrument which sheds the chameleon-like pseudo-universality of the competent orchestral interpreter - the musical equivalent of the polite dinner-party chatter which pretends to talk freely of anything, but remains scared witless by economic or sexual reality - and risks genuine expression: what Leroi Jones called the “stance” which defines the authentic jazz saxophonist. Taylor and Oxley provided “stance” in such abundance that their presence felt like a volcanic eruption of directness and immediacy, sending the Bang On A Can musicians into gibbering recall of adolescent Halenesque electric-guitar (the artificiality and fragility of the sexual equality induced by classical training was revealed when the two female members of Bang On A Can failed to show up; this was a punch-up any female free improviser would have loved, and shone in ... fans of trombonist Gail Brand’s amazing performance at the V&A MERZ NITE riot were reduced to imagining what she could have done in this context).

However, just because musical truth sounds violent and unacceptable to the *status quo*, it doesn’t follow that literal devastation and violence are art. Stockhausen’s enthusiasm for the Trade Center attack could just as well be the futurist Filippo-Tommaso Marinetti praising war (“the world’s only hygiene”). Stockhausen combines Baader-Meinhof’s elitist concept of spectacular political action with neo-Wagnerian megalomania: he doesn’t realise that art and revolution are not a physical force, a firestorm (despite the images used by halfwits to promote “Ecstatic Jazz” or “Fire Music” or whatever sales tag they will dream up next), but powers mediated via human intellect and will. In other words, the “power” of great music is its **truth content**, its proposed relation to the totality of society and the cosmos, not brute force. Music is not real violence, but a discourse of affective states, one that creates opportunities for judgment about feelings. The split between intellect and emotion is transcended. This can’t be done with a bludgeon, any more than revolutionary seizure of the state by the proletarian class can be achieved by individual acts of anarchist violence (Trotsky’s critique of Narodnik terrorism still stands).

Varèse and his handful of authentic orchestral inheritors - namely Simon H. Fell, Iancu Dumitrescu and Ana-Maria Avram - make music which short-circuits merely intellectual appreciation (the tight clean shape of a Haydn Quartet or a pop song), and at moments speaks directly to the body. **It maps out the flow of blood, the rustle of nervous synapses, the creak of bone.** Yet these musics don’t neglect the intellectual thrill of graphing such biological realities, nor twinges of anxiety and guilt. This emotional science steels the brainpan, giving us the resolve to regard the world in its true colours. The political corollary is not aesthetic awe before the actions of suicidal hijackers, but comprehension of the motives that drive global conflict. Not Deleuze & Guattari’s facile and rhetorical “surrender to the primordial Other”, but Enlightenment: Freud’s “Where Id was, Ego shall be”.

9/11 was not radical music, but an atrocity inflicted by conspirators trained by the CIA for destabilisation projects in foreign countries. They applied what the CIA had taught them in pursuit of their leader’s power struggle with the Bush dynasty concerning the price of oil

(Cecil Taylor cites the fact that San Francisco's mayor was warned not to fly on 11 September, maintaining that Bush organised the attack to consolidate a lost-in-fact election: you can hear Taylor's tough, Burroughs-like disassociation from newspaper commonsense in every note he plays). Even if they inevitably gain the applause of arab populations suffering under US-backed repression, Al-Qaeda have no plan beyond revenge, using the civil populations of the enemy state as targets (they're like the USSR backed with a "people's bomb" that will wipe out the workers of the world they should be uniting with). Al-Qaeda's actions do not help to create an independent working-class politics which could overthrow capitalism, but instead invoke the logic that led to the bombing of retreating Iraqi troops on the road to Basrah, and deaths in tens of thousands. Al-Qaeda are no more to be supported than Cecil Taylor's alternative "axis of evil" (George Bush, Wynton Marsalis and Philip Glass, as if you couldn't guess).

Political violence conceived as conflict between national or religious blocks is a species of psychic repression, akin to conceiving sex in terms of individual gratification, or music in terms of a quantitative measure ("genius", "outreach", "sales"). It fails to find any agency for saving the human race (isn't it funny how the well-heeled are so prone to political despair?). It reduces history and culture to a spectacle that is no longer carried out by people capable of reason: for example, the myth that the Arab/Israeli conflict is the fruit of thousands of years of difference (one peddled in a recent headline by the supposedly progressive french newspaper, *Libération*), rather than a US strategy to put pressure on arab states and keep down the price of oil. Religious and national pseudo-explanations obscure the rational dynamic of capital and its reproduction (*mangetouts* from Kenya, silicon chips from South Korea and the multi-coloured metropolis are all highly explicable phenomena), naturalising anglo wealth and afghan poverty. Alice Coltrane's millionaire mysticism retains the worst part of John Coltrane's legacy: its living part is its global integration of musical codes, its refusal of religious and national divisions. **Free music is the song of the New International.**

By facing the horrors of an unbalanced world, by making us experience its terror and violence and sorrow, radical music offers the satisfaction of truth rather than the blandishments of comfort. It arms the psyche for reality. This will become increasingly necessary as the weaponry and trade-deals sold by the First and ex-Communist Worlds to the Third send us their refugees, their anger and their despair. The grief-stricken of Manhattan should be allowed to bury their dead in whatever manner they wish, but sombre hymns and TV-studio candles are not the final word: only a courageous assessment of global realities - musical and political - will allow us to shape a future worth hearing.

[This piece was originally offered to Rob Young at *The Wire* in the aftermath of the Twin Towers suicide attack on 11 September 2001. It was deemed "not to fit" with other contributions (for which see *The Wire*, no 213, November 2001). After Young voiced the opinion that US bombing had created "a happier Afghanistan ... music and song are returning to that devastated land" (editorial, *The Wire*, no 214, December 2001), it seemed unlikely that the anti-imperialist sentiments voiced above would find favour, so it was placed on Esther Leslie and Ben Watson's website <www.militantesthetix.co.uk>. Andy Wilson and Ian Land, prominent dissidents from the Socialist Workers Party, issued it as a pamphlet given out for free at London music venues,

and it was expanded for that purpose in May 2002 (hence the inclusion of a Taylor/Oxley/Bang-On-A-Can concert review). This alliance eventually led to the formation of the Association of Musical Marxists. Since then the essay has been widely anthologised; Watson is grateful for its inclusion in *Rab-Rab*, as he is always looking for those who agree that an avantgarde without anti-imperialist politics, such as proposed to us by John Zorn and the Downtown musicians, is both vacuous and insulting.]

Michel Chevalier

**Class War:
Gallery Art Against
the Music Underground**

This essay¹ is written from the perspective of someone who has been involved in the independent music scene since the mid-80s and who, for better or for worse, has also been following developments on the other side of the fence, in the art field, for the last dozen years or so.

Tales from the gallery art/music underground front

* Jérôme Sans is interviewed about the Paris exhibition of “new activist art” he has curated and reflects:

“If you have a good look at the exhibition, artists today, unlike the militants of the ‘60s, have a position of great ambiguity, not in the stakes, but in the questioning they provoke: is it ironic, is it sarcastic, is it critical, is it praising its object? We don’t know very well. In any event, it asks questions while avoiding frontality.”²

The name given to this show which “avoids frontality” while deploying “great ambiguity” is *hardcore*.

Beyond the marked inversion here of all that could have possibly defined the aesthetic of hardcore stands another point: 17 of the 18 featured artists exhibit work with commercial galleries. If an exhibition is going to name itself after a music scene, it can only expect that further, perhaps non-aesthetic, analogies, or homologies, be drawn between the two cultural fields. If we look at hardcore’s production strategy, in the early ‘80s, we see that it was grounded in a clear break, by choice and necessity, with all established music-labels, magazines, and networks. Hardcore bands like Minor Threat and the Necros, following in the tracks of the ‘78-80 punk bands, started their own labels, made their own recordings, organized their own tours, and contributed in no small way to the ‘80s ‘zine explosion. On the other hand, if there is any equivalent to the major labels in the art scene, it’s the commercial galleries (with the public institutions most pliant to their taste acting like the art equivalent of Top-40 radio). Neither Nicholas Bourriaud nor Jérôme Sans, the Palais de Tokyo/Centre de Création Contemporaine directors, has ever to my knowledge written about any artist who hadn’t *already* exhibited in

1 This is a slightly modified version of a text originally published in »*target:autonopop*« *Zeitschrift* (Hamburg, 2004)

2 Jérôme Sans interviewed by Orphélie Lerouge, 3/7/03. www.fluctuat.net/article.php?id_article=403
He may *consider* the positions of his featured artists to be new. Alfred H. Barr’s 1958 catalogue introduction to the famous “The New American Painting” exhibition provides a case in point that Sans’ discourse, at least, has already been around the blocks a few times: “They defiantly reject the conventional values of the society which surrounds them, but they are not political engagés even though their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude.” See Eva Cockroft, *Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War*, in Francis Frascina, ed. *Pollock and after: the Critical Debate*, Second Edition (London, Routledge, 2000) p 153.

a commercial gallery. The qualification of this exhibition of commercial gallery artists in their space as “hardcore” is a syntactical wonder whose conditions I have set out to examine here.

* A German gallery-financed free art monthly covers an exhibit it describes as a “sociological” and “real life” look at a “Zeitgeist of the past.” The curator, it sees fit to mention, is a former employee of Zürich’s Hauser and Wirth Gallery. Here’s a look at their picture and headline (fig.1), which leave no doubt as to which of the two possible readings—restarting the museum with a punk OS, or restarting punk with an institutional-art OS—is intended.³

Since Dan Graham’s early-80s videos *Minor Threat* and *Rock my Religion*, the reception in the institutional art context of the indie/punk music scene’s history and ongoing developments has decidedly taken some unexpected turns.⁴ I will examine how one actor in the field of art-practice (John Miller) and one who has made his way from music journalism to art theory and curation (Diedrich Diederichsen) both survey music-based scenes, or subcultures, from the ‘70s until now. They both consider their approaches to be “critical,” yet ultimately discredit and declare invalid the term “underground.” In so doing, they argue that unobtrusiveness, albeit symbolically *subversive*, and not oppositionality, is what should characterize any cultural production that aspires to be adapted to our times. A major point to be developed is that these representatives of the socially-legitimated art sphere (whose central historical concepts are *autonomy, independence, freedom*) selectively lock horns with actors or tendencies in the (less legitimated) music scene which also claim these concepts, to just as full an extent, for themselves (but with different meanings).

“Alles ist Pop”

Diedrich Diederichsen has been writing for the German art magazine *Texte zur Kunst* since its launch in 1990, has occasionally written for catalogues and for the magazine *Artforum*, and is even featured in the latest edition of the *Art in Theory 1900-2000* anthology. In Germany, at least, he is better known for his prolific output as record reviewer and music journalist, starting out in 1979 with the zine-turned music mag *Sounds*, and later moving on to *Spex*, which he also edited. He is one of the few music reviewers around to have published his complete output in one volume, and he has published several collections of essays. The mini-bio on page 3 of his book *Politische Korrekturen* (1996) puts it this way: “Diedrich Diederichsen has, for over fifteen years, written about pop- and countercultures, art, politics, and (especially Afro-American)

3 Marion Leske, *Neustart mit Punk in Kunstzeitung* Nr. 71, July 2002, p 7. To avoid any misunderstandings—when I write about galleries in this article, I am referring not the outlets for such artists as Andrew Wyeth and Leroy Nieman but to those “high” art galleries whose products are often labeled “contemporary art.” See Natalie Heinrich, *Le Triple Jeu de L’Art Contemporain* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1998) pp. 10-11.

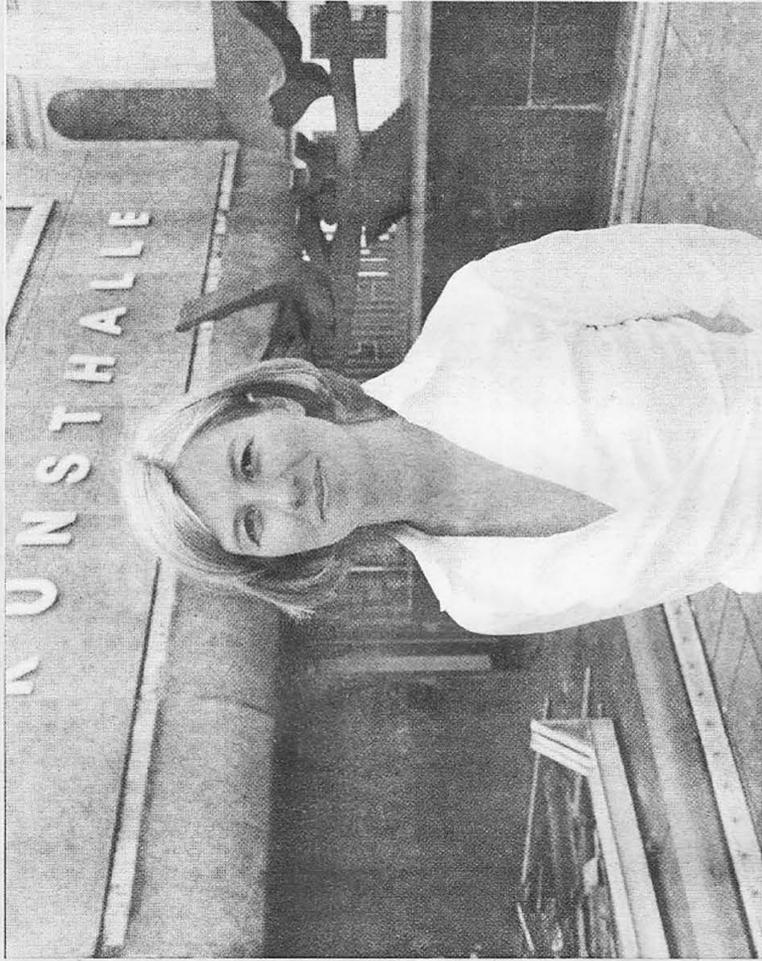
4 Still more examples: the aseptic display-cases in the Centre de Création Contemporaine’s gift shop which feature limited-edition multiples based on Ramones and Clash LPs (fig.2), or the discourse produced by and surrounding the artist Steven Parrino.

Die Pisces Collection

Das angebliche Sternzeichen des Sammlers und ein Werk von Damien Hirst galben der Pisces Collection ihren Namen: „Alone yet together“, eine hübsche Formaldehyd-Installation des englischen Künstlers mit unzähligen hellen Fischchen. Sie schwimmen wie in einem Schwarzwald von links nach rechts, jeder im eigenen Plexiglas-Gehäuse. Auf Regalbrettern stehen die Kästen in Reih und Glied. Endstation Donaueschingen. In dem saniersten Museum am Karlsplatz, wo bislang die Alten Meister der Fürstenberg-Sammlungen hingen, wird künftig aktuelle Kunst gezeigt. Die Fürsten wollten den Karlsbau vom Odium des angestaubten Provinzmuseums befreien. Im November 2001 waren die Cranachs und Holbeins ausgelagert worden. Ihre Zukunft ist noch immer ungewiss. Die Meisterwerke sicherte sich Stuttgarts Staatsgalerie-Chef Christian von Holst zunächst als Leihgabe für sein Haus.

Eine Leihgabe, vorerst für zwei Jahre, ist auch die Pisces Collection, die nun in Donaueschingen zu sehen ist. Ihr Besitzer will anonym bleiben. Er soll in Meisterkonzentrierte. In seinem Auftrag hat der Auktionator Simon de Pury in den vergangenen vier Jahren die Pisces Collection aufgebaut. Mittlerweile umfasst sie 200 Werke: Plastik, Malerei und Fotografie seit 1980. Simon de Pury zählt zu den Hauptfiguren im internationalen Kunstbetrieb. Bis 1986 war er Kurator der Sammlung Thyssen-Bornemisza in Lugano. 1995 versteigerte er als damaliger Star-Auktionator von Sotheby's die Besitztümer des Hauses Baden. Mittlerweile führt er das Auktionshaus Phillips de Pury & Luxembourg.

Beim Aufbau der Pisces Collection



Ulrike Groos

Foto: Burkhard Maus

Neustart mit Punk

Düsseldorf: Die Kunsthalle zeigt wieder Flagge

Den Leuten war es damals schlicht langweilig. Heute, im Rückblick, darf man das mit wissenschaftlichem Unterton „Kultivierung der Ödnis“ nennen. Dazwischen liegen immerhin 25 Jahre. Und die Kids, Jürgen Teipels 2001 veröffentlichtes Buch „Verschwende deine Jugend“, ein Zusammenschritt von Interviews mit den Protagonisten (KUNSTZEITUNG, Nr. 70, Seite 16). Doch Groos forscht weiter – denn seit der Ehrenhofkomplex aufmöbelt wurde und die Kunst des 21. Jahrhunderts ein neues Domizil hat, spielt die Musik nicht länger nur am Grabplatz. Maa die Neu-Düsseldorferin Groos, zuvor

Gaßners Wechsel

Der Wechsel von München nach Essen fällt Hubertus Gaßner sichtlich nicht schwer. Er sei froh, nach neun Jahren Tätigkeit in der saturierten bayerischen Landeshauptstadt in ein „sozial dynamischeres Feld“ zu wechseln, gesteht der Ausstellungsleiter des Hauses der Kunst freimütig im Gespräch. Am Folkwang Museum, dem er vom 1. Oktober an als Direktor vorsteht, erwarte ihn eine „vorzügliche Sammlung“, die es zwar neu, in zeitgemäßer Form als bisher zu präsentieren gelte, die aber einen reich ausgestatteten Fundus biete: „Man hat seine Kinder ständig um sich.“ Ähnlich wie Jean-Christophe Ammann es im Frankfurter Museum für Moderne Kunst mit seinen „Szenenwechseln“ praktiziert hat, will Gaßner künftig auch in Essen immer wieder Ausstellungen aus der Sammlung selbst heraus entwickeln. Dabei hilft ihm ein kleines, aber hoch motiviertes Team. Kuratoren wie Ute Eskildsen und Mario-Andreas von Lütichau haben einen guten Ruf in der Szene, und so will ihnen der neue Direktor künftig freie Hand bei ihren Projekten lassen.

Hubertus Gaßner übernimmt die Leitung des Hauses in Essen im Moment einer fast schon historisch zu nennenden Zäsur. Am 16. September dieses Jahres feiert die ursprünglich 1902 in Hagen gegründete und 1922 an den heutigen Standort übersiedelte Folkwang Sammlung ihren 100. Geburtstag. Wenn auch das Renommee unter Gaßners Vorgänger Georg W. Koltzsch, nicht zuletzt wegen der Präsentation gefälschter Jawlensky-Aquarelle im Jahr 1998, deutlich gelitten hat, bleiben die Ideale des einstigen Gründers Karl Ernst Osthaus aktuell. Denn Gaßner will nun eine neue Sammlung von Gegenwarts-

music.” His headline for an article in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* two years later offers the prospect of narrowing his range of interests somewhat: *Everything is Pop*.

Bearing some semblance to a manifesto, the text principally articulates a break between the pop of the ‘60s through ‘80s (called Pop I), and that of the ‘90s (Pop II). Diederichsen first points out a few symptoms of pop’s ubiquity and seeming amorphousness, then traces his version of a short history of pop, takes a few swipes at Adorno and “culture pessimism,” and ponderously concludes: “The production of meaning has never been so important, as raw material for the market and as ferment of the social, and thereby in principle also open to a new politicization. Never has it simultaneously been so unimportant, so replaceable, so evanescent, so devoid of resonance.”⁵ The real conclusion, however, is buried in what immediately precedes: “Is it justified, then, to call everything pop, was that actually the big news? True, Pop as Pop II has penetrated all forms of communication, but up to now only as a tendency, never as a new totality. The task is now to confront this tendency and its relation to Pop I and the old public sphere and, at this level, to study and to strengthen oppositional effects. In any case, that’s hardly possible from outside. What’s left is really just only the cooperation with Pop II [...]”

Once more: opposition (inauspiciously wedded to the term “effect”), in his version of the public sphere, must first undergo a sort of feasibility study, before being “strengthened.” It is unclear who exercises this opposition, or whether its content is open to humans or merely limited to an already-scripted opposition of Pop I to Pop II on the structural level. What is ruled out as highly unlikely is any opposition from *outside* of Pop. This text gives us a good opportunity to see how discourse can morph over time, taking on metatheory scaffolding. Here is basically the same riff, eight years earlier, without the aestheticizing of political terms: “We have realized that, for the present, there is nothing outside the system, at least as far as the visual and plastic arts are concerned, that can possibly hope to exercise any influence whatsoever.”⁶ What *Everything is Pop* does accomplish rhetorically, much better than the earlier formulation, is to coyly assert a condition in which resistance and conformity cannot and should not be distinguished. It neutralizes conflicts through an eclectic language that derealizes them. The present article seeks to do the exact reverse. To his free-associative theorization I will oppose a contextual historicization.

Pop before Rock

On first reading, the passage about pop history made me raise my eyebrows. The explanation for this, which wasn’t clear to me at the time, is that Diederichsen has, as we’ll see, several more Pops

5 Diederich Diederichsen, *Alles ist Pop*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8/8/98 (all Diederichsen translations from German are mine unless otherwise noted).

6 Diederich Diederichsen, *Which side are you on, Cultural worker?* (translated by Nicholas Walker) in C. Harrison and P. Wood, ed. *Art in Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) p 1162. You can almost hear Negativland chiming-in with their refrain from *A Big 10-8- Place*: “...no other possibility.”

standing in the wings. He proceeds decade by decade, starting in the sixties during which “pop stood for a rebuilding of the world according to the ideals of the youth- and counter-cultures,” (I’ll get to this crazy statement later) “especially the parts that the ruling economic order could come to terms with [...]” —note how the “especially”-qualification evokes harmony between two agents which are definitionally (*counter-*) at odds! The seventies offered somewhat of a contrast: pop “stood for the marketability of counter-cultural goals. Whoever believed in these with commitment wanted to disengage from pop’s commodity aspect, via other labels.” This game will start be-coming familiar to the reader: according to Diederichsen, committed opposition to the sales culture *reproduces* the sales culture, and nothing gets beyond the symbolic level of the label. The fact of the matter is intended to be so obvious that it only warrants a short aside. Luckily for Diederichsen, the early ‘80s set everything straight: “several people coming from the fields of politics, theory, or art and disappointed from their own artistic or political strategies were again ready to recognize the attributes commonly attributed to pop (speed, commodification, transitoriness...) as signs of social progress.” Then come the ‘90s, and the society with the impossible overview.

In his chronicle the ‘60s and the ‘80s get about eleven lines of text each, the then-ongoing ‘90s get nine lines, and the ugly-duckling (punk) ‘70s only four lines. But then again there’s the decade that got no lines, the one he left out: the ‘50s. Funny, since in another text, written a few months earlier, Diederichsen writes “Pop-music was born at the moment helpless, physically weak, thin voices communicated loud and clearly over electronic amplification... the voices of Charlie Patton, Son House, and Bukka White,” which would put us in 1929/30... Elsewhere, he does mention the “protopolitical mixture, in the ‘50s and ‘60s, of artistic nonconformity and questioning of the patriarchal order.”⁷ Lawrence Alloway is credited with having coined the term “pop culture” in 1954;⁸ let’s see about this decade that falls by the wayside in Diederichsen’s Everything-text.

Pop, as a musical genre, existed before rock ‘n’ roll. In the early ‘50s record companies, like RCA, had pop departments alongside their classical, country, or children’s departments. Artists were signed to pop contracts. In 1954, Carl Belz writes, the popular music market was divided into three segments: pop, rhythm and blues, and country, adding that among them “the Pop field was the largest in terms of its audience, the number of artists it included, and the size of the record companies which issued its music.”⁹ These record companies, called the *majors*, owned manufacturing plants and controlled distribution outlets for their products. These were complicated industrial structures, and the pop branch of the music business was conservative in its output and in its view of market changes. During the early ‘50s, the songs which made it to the top of the charts (best-selling records) usually stayed there for over twenty weeks. Pop artists like Perry Como and Kay Starr extended the show music and ballad traditions of the

7 Diederich Diederichsen, *2000 Schallplatten 1979-1999*, (Köln: Hannibal Verlag, 2000) p X.

8 George Melly, *Revolt into Style*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979/1989) p 14.

9 Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) p 17.

'40s, and worked closely with their record company's A&R (artist and repertoire) chief. As the name suggests, this executive was responsible for the total output of the record company. Pop artists almost always recorded songs that were written by professional songwriters. These songs were selected by the A&R man and purchased from the publishing company owning the rights. The A&R man then matched the songs with the artists on his roster, had arrangements written, picked sidemen, and oversaw the studio sessions. The majors withdrew from the rhythm and blues market during WWII, and when first R&B, and then rock 'n' roll artists started to break into the pop charts, the development was perceived very negatively by pop-specialized A&R men like Mitch Miller of Columbia Records.¹⁰ These new artists, the success of the new labels that recorded them, and their use of self-sufficient musical units were a threat to industry stability (and to return on investments).¹¹

How can we describe pop? "Middle-of-the-road" and "pop" have been used interchangeably by the industry at various times. Simon Frith's definition, from 2001, seems to cover the key attributes that the music has had from its pre-rock days until now, and deserves to be quoted at length:

"Pop is not driven by any significant ambition except profit and commercial reward. It's history is a history of serial or standardized production and, in musical terms, it is essentially conservative. Pop is about giving people what they already know they want rather than pushing up against technological constraints or aesthetic conventions [...] Pop is music provided from up high (by record companies, radio programmers and concert promoters) rather than being made from below. Pop is not a do-it-yourself music but is professionally produced and packaged [...] Pop is not an art but a craft. It is not about realizing individual visions or making us see the world in new ways but about providing popular tunes and clichés in which to express commonplace feelings [...]"¹²

Youth drops pop, pop takes on rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll

What follows is essentially a synthesis of the studies undertaken by Carl Belz (1969) and Steve Chapple with Reebee Garofalo (1972). These books are unfortunately out of print and since cultural theorists and historians have, over the last two decades, really steered clear of the questions they address they are all the more indispensable to any consideration of what the

10 Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1972) p18.

11 *The Story of Rock*, p18, *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay*, p 46.

12 Simon Frith, *Pop Music* in Simon Frith, Will Straw, and James Street, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Pop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p 96. Simon Frith's cutting down of pop is in no way based on friendliness towards rock or jazz.

terms “mainstream” and “alternative” can mean. In 1952, many young whites in Los Angeles had had enough of clichés and commonplaces. The Dolphin rhythm and blues record store, previously patronized by blacks alone, saw whites accounting for 40% of their sales in May of that year. Artists crossing over big to the white market were Fats Domino and Joe Turner. Locals such as Johnny Otis and T-Bone Walker were transplanting bop-influenced horn sections onto the Chicago electric blues band-format, developing a new style. R&B radio stations (often black operated, if not owned) played a part in this new music’s success and thanks to them, Chapple and Garofalo stress, “for the increasing number of white teenagers dissatisfied with a diet of Rosemary Clooney or Frankie Lane, a different world was available with a turn of the dial. It was impossible to segregate the airwaves.”¹³ Many big-city white radio stations started featuring their own R&B shows that same year. Border-radios based in Mexico, with their huge transmitters, were beyond reach of FCC regulation and censorship, and spread the music thousands of miles into the U.S. heartland.

The pop departments at the majors reacted by covering the R&B hits with their own versions. The majors didn’t have to pay anything to the original artists, because copyright law only protected songs which were *published*, and they could take advantage of their superior distribution and promotion, sometimes beating the R&B originals to the stores in certain markets. According to Belz, the first rock record isn’t Bill Haley but the original version of “Sh-Boom” by the Chords, the first R&B tune to break into the pop top-ten, in 1954. It was soon covered by three pop groups (and one country and western artist).¹⁴ Within two years, however, mass audiences wanted the real thing, and RCA at least had Elvis Presley under contract before the *whole* thing could get out of control. Soon thereafter Columbia signed Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash. The R&B market remained elusive, however; independents kept the upper hand. In spite of the major signings, both RCA and Columbia tried, in 1957, to launch a calypso craze. They hoped that The Tarriers and Harry Belafonte would take the wind out of rock ‘n’ roll and R&B’s sails, to no avail. Then they tried clean folk music... On another front, other pop-music interests were going after the upstarts, in court. The American Society of Composers and Authors (ASCAP), a lobby which licensed “good music” (pop and classical) to commercial radio, in coordination with the music publishers, consistently tried to get rock and rhythm and blues songs banned (for alleged sexual content) from airplay. Although rarely successful, they created a steady stream of bad publicity (at one appearance before Congress, Frank Sinatra waxed eloquent: rock ‘n’ roll was the “most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression”).¹⁵ What finally saved pop, and it’s still true today, was TV. The knight in shining armor was Dick Clark and his “pepsodent pop” American Bandstand dance show, which hit the airwaves in 1957 and was soon broadcasting live *every* afternoon to millions of cathode ray-narcotized teenagers, who soon simply stopped buying records (record sales had risen up to 36% each year between 1955 and 1959. In 1960, they

13 *Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Pay*, p 30.

14 *The Story of Rock*, p 28. See his stylistic comparison of the Chords original and the cover by the (pop) Crew Cuts. The term rock ‘n’ roll was not coined by white DJ Alan Freed in 1952 as is sometimes claimed; it had been used in several R&B songs before then.

15 *Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Pay*, pp. 46-47.

went down).¹⁶ Artists like Charlie Feathers and Muddy Waters struggled on in an increasingly hostile business environment, with the majors buying up more and more independents, and the newly-invented Top 40 radio format hoarding advertising money and crowding R&B from the airwaves. James Brown, bucking all trends with an up-front rhythmic and rawly emotional approach, could only build up his reputation by foregoing mass-media considerably, choosing instead, like the punk bands in the '70s and '80s, to focus on touring with a high-energy show guaranteed to generate word of mouth. This escalation of means on the live front, requiring a line-up stability, talent-scouting, and practice-schedule reminiscent of the previous decades' big-bands, characterized the approach of James Brown's Famous Flames, but also of the Muddy Waters Band (and, going back to jazz, Sun Ra's nascent Arkestra). This band-identity was later key to the success of the British Invasion and, as Joe Carducci notes, "the *lack* of band ideology among the fifties artists is what allowed the music to dissolve seemingly overnight. Elvis led the way down Tin Pan Alley. Buddy Holly was doing the same"¹⁷ (emphasis mine).

"Counter-cultural goals" and Diederichsen's pop

We have seen how pop, in the decisive decade of the '50s which Diederichsen elides from his narrative, defines itself against everything that threatens its market control and the routines of its production process. This threat is the suddenly "aberrant" buying behavior of its target group (white youth), and the culprits are bottom-up musical trends and radio that subvert the social-control mechanisms (segregation, censorship) that play a role in pop's success.

A brief tally:

pop

actors: limited roster of stars, publishers, major labels, ASCAP lobby

stylistic: musical conservatism, "middle of the road," studio arrangements

media: Top 40 radio, TV

image from opponents' perspective: boring

rock 'n' roll / R&B

actors: innumerable bands and record labels

stylistic: "tear-it-up" break with conventions, innovation on stylistic and instrumentation fronts derived from live-performance experiments

media: rhythm and blues radio, speciality shows, border radios

image from opponents' perspective: "brutal ugliness"

16 *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay*, p 69.

17 Joe Carducci, *Rock and the Pop Narcotic* (Chicago, Redoubt Press, 1991) p 173.

Let's now get back to Diederichsen's statement about the '60s: "pop stood for a rebuilding of the world according to the ideals of the youth- and counter-cultures, especially the parts that the ruling economic order could stomach [...]." As far as the '50s go, his sentence only seems to stand if we truncate it along the lines of "pop stood for... the ruling economic order."

Did the '60s magically shuffle up the cards? We know that the adult-owned mass media channels and promoter/business types hyped up pop, just as before—what of the manifestations of the "ideals of the youth- and counter-cultures"? Here's a counter-culture (but hardly underground) sample from 1967: "For the past six months (progressive FM radio) KMPX in San Francisco has been conducting a highly successful experiment in a new kind of contemporary music programming... embracing the best of today's rock and roll, folk, traditional and city blues, raga, electronic music, and some jazz and classical selections."¹⁸ Funny how pop doesn't show up on the radar. I went through some Mothers of Invention LP liner notes and tried my luck at a pop-search: I found Euclid James Sherwood described as a pop star, but the closest thing to pop as a musical category was "trivial poop" to describe the song "Motherly Love." I looked through the ESP catalogue and came up dry. Even the Beatles, in all their song and album titles (and even lyrics as far as I know), found no use in the pop moniker. I could go on doing this sort of research, and I'm sure that Diederichsen wouldn't care. Considering the period from a musical perspective, it's impossible to see why pop should be identified with '60s "youth- and counter-culture" any more than surf, psychedelia, garage, reggae, Staxx-label soul, funk, folk, neofolk, new thing, free jazz, or ska should. Contrary to appearances, the pop appellation has nothing to do with a descriptive project. It is part of a project that is *ideological*, taking Marx's definition of the term: to give as a universal, as disinterested, that which serves one's particular interests. Elsewhere, referring to his pals in the house band Whirlpool, he revealingly says "one knows that Hans and Justus, more than in Eric's case, have invested in hipness and popism."¹⁹

Diederichsen's "standing for," like his pop chronology, needs some fleshing out. Read instead as "standing-in for," a willful substitution of what youth and counter-cultures *actually identified with* by what they were *supposed to identify with*, this statement is perfectly consistent with Belz's and Garofalo and Chapple's accounts. Many taboos against targeting youth had slipped after the war and the majors, among others, wanted youth to identify with pop, and by extension pliant, predictable consumption patterns.²⁰ This corporate agenda is still with us today.

Music, thankfully, is not just the majors, but pop becomes so ubiquitous in Diederichsen's music-cultural landscape because he interweaves its denotation of a musical style—"to keep

18 Tom Donahue quoted in *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay*, p 109.

19 Diederich Diederichsen, *Wassermusik (aus Schaum geboren)!*, Spex 4/95, p 36.

20 In an article that Diederichsen cites in *Everything is Pop*, his Spex colleagues Mark Terkissidis and Tom Holert come closer to the facts of the matter (while still adhering to the no-alternative doxa); "Whether they liked it or not, youth and their music were to become the social avant-garde of the establishment of new consumerist values."

a balance between the Monkees and the Residents was decidedly pop (so, anti-rock)²¹ — with its infinitely broader use as a synonym for popular, non-elite, culture. This muddling of pop music and pop (mass) culture is played up in order to inflate the scope of his arguments, encompassing, as we have seen, a kind of cultural, economic, and political Zeitgeist. While doing this, however, he implicitly rules out, via his blues-pop genealogy, that this pop he means is simply mass-produced industrial diversion (Frith's definition above). Pop (music?), thanks to this semantic shift, comes to denote all competing musical fields: blues, R&B, rock, and even jazz, which as musical forms essentially based on live performance may have things in common among themselves but certainly very little with pop music.²² More importantly, Diederichsen has pop then reap the credit for historical accomplishments that came about *in opposition to it*. This operation allows Diederichsen to mix oil and water, referring to the “complex whole of pop-/counter-culture.” or “pop-dissidence in the 80s.” The third point in this pop-amalgamation is to boil it all down to one essence which occults its whole production process and then deifies its supposed effects on the consumer: “[...] one cannot in any way communicate about what is the domain of pop: feelings.”²³

Critical trajectory

In a 1991 issue of *Spex*, Diederichsen ironically takes a fellow reviewer to task for his prediction, seven years earlier, that the Violent Femmes were the future of rock 'n' roll. In the interest of better understanding the theory we have seen above (both textually and contextually), let's see what kind of music-critical calls Diederichsen himself has made. His published works gives us the opportunity to start in 1979. After sorting through all his reviews and various other articles he's written, it's possible to break his trajectory down into various phases (although Diederichsen describes his musical taste as “changing sides” every four years, my reading is only congruent with his critical self-depiction on a few points²⁴).

*1979-1980: erratic wannabe cutting-edge phase, in which he's not sure if he should let the NY or the London writers call the shots for him. Already some early signs of free-floating discursive one-upmanship: a decontextualized adaptation of Lester Bangs' swipe against current jazz (in which other genres get their due, and which culminates with the statement “almost all current music is worthless”) yields the Diederichsen formula “jazz is dead” (Which doesn't stop him from name-dropping Lester Bowie in his *Contortions* reviews).

21 Diederich Diederichsen, *2000 Schallplatten* (Cologne: Hannibal Verlag, 2000) p 91.

22 Of course there is pop-blues, pop-jazz, and pop-rock (AOR), which are embalmed versions of their namesakes. For a thorough definition, history, and analysis of rock music in the period that pop bases its claim to fame on, see Carducci.

23 Diederich Diederichsen, *Freiheit Macht Arm* (Cologne, Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1993) p 277.

24 See *2000 Schallplatten*, p 423.

*1980-1986: “dancing politics” ultra-commercial pop phase, enamored with major label product like Haircut 100 and ABC. He thereby ignores or downplays all important developments in the underground (bands such as the Birthday Party and Mission of Burma; labels such as United Dairies, SST, Touch and Go, and RRR records; genres such as noise/ industrial and hip hop).

*1987-1994: backpedal and conciliatory brown-nosing to the alternative music scene, then burnout. This process is initiated when the unavoidable Sonic Youth signs to previously-ignored SST at about the time that SST founder Greg Ginn’s brother Raymond Pettibon breaks into Diederichsen’s art scene. He tries to play catch-up, gets bogged down becoming a connoisseur of SST’s worst phase, and misses other boats.

*1995-2000: second backtrack, rock is Neanderthal and/or elitist, the (house or hip-hop) groove reigns. An oldies (Byrne, Bowie, Reed) stable merits continuing interest, while congenial but passing surprise is expressed whenever anything new seems to be (still) going on. A return to big-label commercial pop.

Diederichsen himself writes “Now, we all know that the point of pop music is not the music, but the references of this music (...)”²⁵ and unsurprisingly, his trajectory, so determined by whatever (openly acknowledged) secondary material was at hand (*Village Voice*, *NME*, *i-D*, *Forced Exposure*, *the Source*), resembles more the behavior of someone placing bets at the racetrack on hopes of a big payoff than that of a fan who cumulatively develops what could be called an aesthetic (never mind a theory), and who’s ready to weather out his or her convictions. How to explain the astounding flip-flops (Diederichsen on hip-hop in 1985: “very strongly on the way to the oblivion,” as opposed to 1991: “HipHop has become the dominant music of the underground.”²⁶) or the tendency to blame others where he stands first in line (a 1991 Meat Puppets review includes the condescending aside “for all those who missed a great band up to now”—he missed their first five LPs!) and the typical cluelessness (*and* indifference to references),

25 Diederich Diederichsen, *Cecil Taylor, Music for Two Continents* in *Spex* 11/84, p 38

26 Diederich Diederichsen, *Das ABC des Jahres 1984* in *Spex* 1/85, p 34, for the hip-hop dismissal, which reads as follows in the original German: “Durchfaller [...] Hip-Hop: Ganz stark auf dem absteigenden Ast. Lang genug haben wir uns eingeredet, daß auch hier Übung den Meister macht. Was wir selbst aber trotz allen blauen Flecken nicht lernen kann, kann die Mühe nicht wert sein. In Weltstädten findet man *Break-Crews* deshalb fast gar nicht mehr. Allein auf deutschen Kleinstadtangern machen sie sich noch wichtig.” The hip-hop proselytism (his current position, as far as I know) is from *Texte zur Kunst*, #2, (1991) p 86.

as when he tries to rope the Minutemen into his “anti-authentic” agenda by misrepresenting the intentions behind their titling a song “Do You Want New Wave (Or Do You Want the Truth)?”²⁷

By the mid-’90s what seems to get Diederichsen’s goat about what he calls the “abstract ‘n’ rollers” is that, by not seemingly to conform to his idea of the *Zeitgeist*, they block (or sabotage) his Hegelian-logic demand for transitions that lead from one (easily discernible) musical phase to another²⁸, and that bridge his music and his lifestyle concerns, which are rooted in mass-media and consumption, and even, as we’ll see, partake in and reinforce a *connectionist* mindset.

The ‘80s pop hype of magazines like *the Face* promised a way out of the ‘50s to ‘70s (existentialism to punk) quagmire of intellectualism implying asceticism and the rejection of money. For reasons broadly related to capitalism’s re-launch under Thatcher/Reagan, there was nothing easier to do for cultural gatekeepers than to misread, draw the wrong conclusions from, and ultimately disregard ‘70s punk (as well as dematerialist art strategies). Pop, color, style, dance, and fun were invisibly drawn ahead by forces best elided from “journalism.”

This statement by *Spex* magazine (and *Texte zur Kunst*) writers Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis shows how self-fulfilling discourse about pop (and *within* the pop context) may deactivate cultural critique, clearing the way for self-justification without a bad conscience: “it’s no wonder that the term pop is the subject of tugs-of-war from all sides. A mainstream-media machine must once and for all seize hold of a term that is indispensable for social representation. Pop, that always sounds progressive, colorful, interesting and multifaceted.”²⁹ How can we not see—after the underground, hip-hop, and house misfires—the metatheory pop project as less the descriptive one it claims to be than an act of strategic authorial positioning (functioning like brand positioning: via a combination of capital—Isabelle Graw’s deep pockets—and symbol)?

27 See *2000 Schallplatten*, p 287 and p VI, where he writes “so you want new wave or the truth?’ [*sic*] asked the Minutemen, who thoroughly considered themselves a new wave band.” —a strange conclusion to draw considering the lyrics to this song were printed on the sleeve of their 1984 SST records release *Double Nickels on the Dime*, and include the passage “I stand for language I speak for truth I shout for history.” Stranger still, anyone who purports to be an expert on American music must know full well that the appellation “new wave” carried a very negative connotation in the underground scene the Minutemen were active in. Claude Bessy, singer for the LA band Catholic Discipline and writer for the magazine *Slash*, had this to say on the topic ca. 1980: “There was never any such thing as new wave; it was the polite thing to say when you were trying to explain that you were not into the boring old rock ‘n’ roll but you didn’t dare to say punk because you were afraid to get kicked out of the fuckin’ party and they wouldn’t give you coke anymore. There’s new music, there’s new underground sound, there’s noise, there’s punk, there’s power-pop, there’s ska, there’s rockabilly, but new wave doesn’t mean shit.” (interview in the Penelope Spheeris film *the Decline of Western Civilization*, 1981).

28 See his Hegel-with-a-tight-deadline critique of No Wave: “In the sense of this theoretical period, it was wrong, in the sense of the building up of what was to come, it was right.” *2000 Schallplatten*, p 203.

29 Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis, *Einführung* in Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis ed. *Mainstream der Minderheiten* (Cologne: Edition ID-Archiv, 1996) p 17.

And as a face-saving maneuver for someone who, to use his terms, has “invested in popism,”³⁰ putting all his eggs into the pop basket in the ‘80s, believing that his payoff would be translated into the art field to boot, but who is now trying to negotiate the ensuing disaster whereby the music industry collapses, country after country, in the wake of the industry hyping of boy-groups³¹ practicing what he so adamantly preached.³²

Once Diederichsen had identified pop as the cultural production mode producing the most “relevance,” it was also necessary for him to elaborate or find some consistent account of how pop fits into social space, how social agents themselves move within it, and what criteria are relevant describing *their* behavior in this process.

“Mainstream of minorities”

Diederichsen’s inquiries usually involve, fairly enough, a critique of what he considers widely held assumptions, such as here: “I’ve said years ago that the underground/mainstream distinction should be abandoned in favor of a E/U distinction [A German commonplace: Ernste (serious)/Unterhaltung (entertainment)], but in which E stands in for whatever demands more commitment (be it social, musical etc.).”³³

Alas, this comes not at the outset of an inquiry involving a consideration of the reasons for the emergence of this mainstream/underground opposition, but only in the guise of a conclusion which begs these questions: where does “demanding” end and “engrossing” start?—what about teenybop, which “demands” nothing of someone who doesn’t care for it, but quite a lot in the way of devotion and energy from a fan? Diederichsen, in ostensibly sweeping away tired clichés, implies quasi-anthropological insight (perhaps a future mission for pop referees like himself) into what’s easy to “get into,” or “swept up by,” and what isn’t.

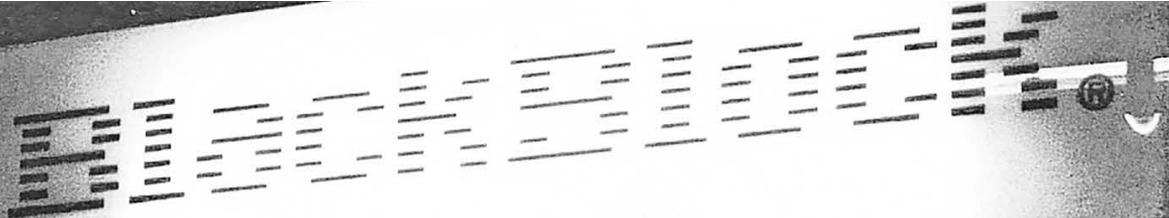
Like the “E/U” categories he re-wires, the substitutes he offers are invariably more conservative than their disputed objects. Received ideas are hardly debunked at all: they are disingenuously rehabilitated and invested with a critical function. Because it provides a good example of behavior-clichés and historical elision, I want to examine this example of Diederichsen’s *Spex* and *Texte zur Kunst* colleague Tom Holert applying the underground/serious conflation we have just seen, as he examines two great musical development of the postwar period: “[...] bebop,

30 Diederich Diederichsen, *Wassermusik (aus Schaum geboren)!*, *Spex* 4/95, p 36.

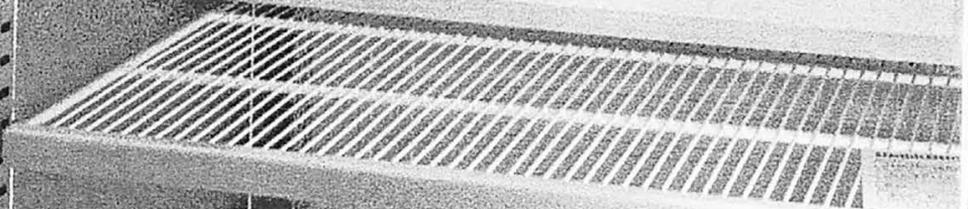
31 A BMG executive pointed out this pattern at the 2001 Popcom in Cologne, adding that the marketing hype of the boygroups ostensibly led consumers to lose all respect for the industry, and thereby removed all remaining inhibitions against CD-burning, napster-use, and other forms of “piracy.”

32 Diederich Diederichsen, *Fantastisch!—Haircut 100* in *Sounds*, 6/82 pp 40-42.

33 Diederich Diederichsen, *Freiheit macht arm, Das Leben nach Rock ‘n’ Roll 1990-1993* (Cologne, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1993), p273. This book mentions another “unbearably terroristic binary” to be done away with: the political distinction between left and right (p 99).



FRIGIDAIR



and later to an even greater extent free-jazz, were not aimed at mass-acceptance, but rather at a small, academic specialist-public.”³⁴ In his book *Sozialgeschichte des Jazz in den USA*, Ekkehard Jost paints another picture with regard to Holert’s first point: “Chet Baker, who shortly joined Charlie Parker’s band in L.A. in the late ‘40s, confirms that Afro-American audiences did indeed dance to bebop: “They danced at the Five Four Ballroom... to Bird’s music! And they had a good time! And they didn’t need a strong backbeat, you understand?” ”³⁵

As to the second point, the notion of free-jazz, Ayler/Sun Ra/Sharrock/etc. being gestures aimed at approval in “academic-specialist” circles has got to be one of the most ridiculous slanders you could possibly make against its protagonists!

Holert and Diederichsen’s matrix, which groups entertainment-body-mainstream-popular on the one side, and “demands”-underground-non-body-elite on the other owes much (in its caricatural way) to subcultural theory.³⁶ So does their concept of consumption, and its flipside—production, especially as it relates to symbolic power (the focus of this entire article). I hope the reader will now bear with me as I go on my second and last tangent, after the overview of the ‘50s music scene I now want to outline some points related to subcultural theory. Associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies, subcultural theory developed in the ‘60s, and can be said to have merged two trends: studies of social-deviance in classical sociology, and a critical reevaluation of the teen-culture hype of the time. Two classic texts in the field are Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture, the Meaning of Style* (1979) and *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) edited by Tony Jefferson and Stuart Hall. Both of these works focus on youth groups who belong to scenes such as the *mods*, the *teds*, or the *skinheads*. They are among the first books of any kind devoted to such scenes, and certainly the first that present them all side by side, with analytical, comparative, and evolutionary studies of their dress, music, and daily routines. It’s easy to understand how these books drew a lot of attention from people outside the social sciences, for instance fashion designers or record reviewers, who were involved, daily, with the commodities which these youth groups identified with.

And this brings us to the point on which the above works, in what could be called an adaptation of the theory of internal contradiction, considerably revised Marxist theory: consumption. Their

34 Tom Holert, *Bad Brains in Mainstream der Minderheiten*, p 176.

35 Ekkehard Jost, *Sozialgeschichte des Jazz in den USA* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982) p 100.

36 Another influence, which Diederichsen acknowledges in an essay entitled *Subversion-Cold Strategy and Hot Differences*, is Tony Negri. Timothy Brennan’s excellent review of the Tony Negri/Michael Hardt-authored tract *Empire* analyzes “why the claims to intellectual opposition sound equally hollow these days” and much of his critique can indeed be carried over to what’s been getting printed in exhibition catalogues lately. T. Brennan, *The Empire’s New Clothes* in *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 2003. This essay is indebted to Brennan on many points, notably the Birmingham School lead.

authors argue that, far from being a source of alienation to working class youths, it provides them with an opportunity to resist their subordinate-class experience.³⁷

Diederichsen may praise Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis for their “pathbreaking” 1996 book (to which he is himself a contributor) because it shows that “we have to do with an abundance of pop-cultures existing next to each other... each so structured... a semantic is established around purchasable culture-objects, which declares the group as binding.”³⁸ These ideas, key tenets of Diederichsen and his colleagues’ *resistance via consumption* (and more broadly, pop-culture) thesis were in fact elaborated by the Birmingham school twenty years earlier. Diederichsen’s uncredited and rosy adaptation also stands in marked contrast to an entire tradition of political art-theory which stresses, precisely, that consumption is a singularly *unredeemed* moment, and that it is a democratization of making, of creative production (proto DIY-style) which is synonymous with social progress. Walter Benjamin: “A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody. The crucial point, therefore, is that a writer’s production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production and, secondly, it must place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be the better, the more consumers it brings into contact with the production process — in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators.”³⁹ The *expressive form* which interests subculture theory is not so specifically material or individual, but rather the far less tangible “patterns of life” which social groups develop. *Material* forms of production are, from the outset, considered beyond the reach of subordinated groups like the working class.⁴⁰ Here, the “do” part of DIY only gets as far as bricolage, a term borrowed from structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, and as oppositional as it may be according to this theory,⁴¹ it is limited to the customizing or recontextualization of what are in the end consumer items which have been duly purchased from mass-market retailers.

37 Tony Jefferson, Stuart Hall, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Subcultures, Cultures and Class*, in Tony Jefferson and Stuart Hall, ed. *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976) pp 47-48. This text features no illusions about the outcome of this resistance, however: “There is no ‘subcultural solution’ to working-class youth unemployment, educational disadvantage, compulsory miseducation, dead-end jobs [...] They [the subcultures] ‘solve’, but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unsolved.” Later texts, such as Frank Mort’s *Politics of Consumption* elect to drop the grim realities. Stuart Hall later sees it fit to paste a smiley face on the intentions of multinationals: “Have we become bewitched by who, in the short run, reaps the profit from these transactions (there are vast amounts of it being made), and missed the democratization of culture which is *also* potentially part of their hidden agenda?” *New Times: the Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, ed. S. Hall and M. Jacques, (New York: Verso, 1990).

38 *Alles ist Pop*.

39 Walter Benjamin, *The Author as Producer* (1934, reprinted in C. Harrison and P.Wood, ed. *Art in Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Forerunners to Benjamin are to be found in the Russian Productivist movement, which included Osip Brik and Alexander Rodchenko.

40 *Subcultures, Cultures and Class*, pp. 10-11.

41 John Clarke, *Style*, in *Resistance through Rituals*, p 176.

Richard Middleton attributes some of the weak points in Hebdige's theory to punk's "dominating influence" at the time, especially considering its "ambiguous class base."⁴² It's too bad that it took so long for class-ambiguous youth trends to develop in the British Isles, and one wonders what shape subcultural theory would have taken against the backdrop of the '60s garage rock or free jazz scenes as they emerged in the U.S. Another point that needs to be examined, because it underpins the *Alles ist Pop* theory, is to be found in the previously quoted *Subcultures, Cultures and Class* essay from *Resistance Through Rituals*. A fundamental distinction is drawn between *subculture* and *counterculture*, whereby the former is identified as invariably working-class and the latter as middle-class. The rigor of the authors' methods slips somewhat in that their "U.S. counter culture: a chronology" table (p.59) seems entirely derived from *mass-media* coverage: cardinal points between '65 and '72 are Easy Rider, Warhol, and Leary; no mention of the MC5, border radios, or experimental cinema. Even more regrettable: Hall, Clarke, Jefferson, and Roberts rush to overturn the "spectacular ideology of affluence" (according to which postwar affluence eliminates social inequalities), but in so doing they rigidly divide social space along boundaries, seemingly fixed once and for all.⁴³ Their categorizations are supposedly adequate and applicable, in equal measure, to cultural behavior in provinces or big cities, regardless of the income- or spending-differences which make certain "working-class" families more prosperous than their "middle class" neighbors, and taking no consideration of the variations between traditional trade and factory worker families, or how ethnicity or religion can temper putative social "respectability." The authors of *Subcultures, Cultures and Class* go on by asserting that while working class subcultural values retain their marginality, the middle class counterculture is "incorporable" by the dominant order, and even performs "an important task on behalf of the system."⁴⁴ The subtext is a familiar one: a contrast between, on the one hand, the working class youth's Sisyphean enterprise of ever-symbolic opposition to decidedly material problems and, on the other, middle class youth as unwitting collaborators of the ruling class, performing R&D, outsourced and free of charge to boot, for their enemies (not just "parent culture" but also their young Tory contemporaries). The heroically doomed on one side, and the conceitedly stupid on the other. It also fulfills other needs, more related to the social-legitimation of the art field: its need to maintain, as we'll see, a monopoly on what is called "critical practice."

Relating to music, Richard Middleton has brought up a further critique of subcultural theory: "(it)—like many branches of folkloristics and cultural anthropology—has relatively little to say about music as music. Often its significance is taken to operate at the level of a general symbol [...] on the rare occasions when a subculture has *started* from music, coalescing round it rather than integrating an existing style into an already formed or forming ensemble—as was the case with punk—subcultural theory again has problems, since now the connections with the wider

42 *Studying Popular Music*, p 164.

43 *Subcultures, Cultures and Class*, p35-56. Their acknowledgment of 'different class strata' seems to only hold *within* a hermetically sealed working class.

44 *Resistance through Rituals*, p 66.

music discourse (in this case, rock history) and the music industry become crucial, and the theory is not equipped to tackle these.”⁴⁵

This double emphasis on symbolic interpretation and music-as-commodity would certainly explain the difference between Diederichsen’s approach, decidedly more desk-research oriented, and the fieldwork take one of his early role models, Lester Bangs, resorted to. Diederichsen approvingly reviews the band Bastro, saying he likes the LP way more than their live sets: everything A-O.K.⁴⁶ Bangs, far more skeptical of, among other things, recording technology (or to put it another way, his own vulnerability in being suckered by it), would probably not have let them off the hook so fast. His reviews, when possible, set the live and recording dimensions of a band against each other dialectically, and usually crammed in much media (and scene) critique where the reader expected it least as his Stooges, Jethro Tull, and Kraftwerk reviews amply demonstrate.⁴⁷

Referring to his own experiences in the ‘80s music scene, underground-label veteran Joe Carducci observes: “They [the rock press] are tired of the involvement that rock music, an essentially live, performance based musical art requires of them. They may be pushing forty or fifty and don’t go out as much as they used to... they’ve latched on to the less strenuous (but nearly as interesting) pop world as if it were a life saver.”⁴⁸ The transfusion of subcultural theory into music journalism unfortunately played its role as well, only reinforcing the trend Carducci diagnosed.

A few supplementary words about Diederichsen’s concept of the critic, and his practice, are in order here. In the footnotes of his edition of collected reviews he provides us with the formula: “the activity of the critic on the front of civilization: demanding ever more of the artists (James White withstood this badly).”⁴⁹ I am astounded because, as I read this, I wonder what

45 Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), p 166. See also David Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

46 *2000 Schallplatten*, p 254.

47 Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

48 Joe Carducci, *Rock and the Pop Narcotic* (Chicago, Redoubt Press, 1991), p 25. This noteworthy passage continues: “It is, in fact, a career saver. Because what publication is going to pay them a living wage to cover all those no name 1980s rock bands? Pop criticism requires little more than a radio and records and if you get your records free by mail from the labels you need never leave your apartment (other than to check that new restaurant that everyone says is so hot). With a little sleight of mind, this pop circus gets presented as if it were the rock world and soon enough, once hooked on the pop narcotic, the rock press is dead to rock music. It makes them nauseous.” Diederichsen, citing the “inflation of pop phenomena” says how there are ten times as many concerts in clubs per week and music on TV than in 1980. His problem is that he fails to distinguish music which is it’s own and not the middle-of-the road’s from the “music” which owes its existence to below-the-line marketing campaigns (one field which *has* exploded since 1980).

49 *2000 Schallplatten*, p 88.

artists or what forum he is referring to. Perhaps he was making private phone calls to all those '80s iconoclasts urging them to go out on an aesthetic limb, long-distance from Germany... the attitude displayed in his *published* material is illustrated by this typically jaded and gutless example: a 1980 Human League review reads "Throbbing Gristle, just to name an example, is more interesting and more exciting [than the Human League], but without the least hope of being heard by many people [...] The Human League have a great future ahead of them." Another example fleshes out his relation to his critical field: Diederichsen seizes what he sees as an opportunity to trump popstar-killer ("this floating crap game of technically impeccable hacks") Lester Bangs when the Contortions (band of aforementioned expectation-victim James Chance/White) release a great LP shortly after, so Diederichsen believes, Bangs bemoaned the state of the underground. Diederichsen's chronology is all wrong, and he admits it in the closing of his review, in light of what he calls "new unconfirmed rumors" but he lets his positioning of himself as more radical, and "clear-sighted," than Bangs stand.⁵⁰

Diederichsen's art-critical writing is more subdued (he currently earns his livelihood at a private art academy in Stuttgart while serving as an official in the "German National Culture Foundation," a.k.a. *Bundeskulturstiftung*), and is characterized by a banal formalism, the equivalent of his secondary-source approach to music writing. What sets him apart in this field more than anything else is his profile as former *Spex*-editor, allowing him to adopt culture-guru postures and referencings (mention Tina Turner in that Deleuze review!)⁵¹ that, I suppose, spice up the unremittingly boring art he has been asked to write about, and thereby keeps his friends and patrons happy.

To sum up Diederichsen: throughout his terminologically eclectic (although, inappropriately calling Deleuze to his aid, he distances himself from "eclecticism") overview of diverse musical trends, at the issue of which he always sides with pop-consumption, it is (without crediting it) from subcultural theory that he derives the claim to political correctness, since consumption is the choice of the working class. Inclusiveness is the *mot d'ordre* according to which he ceaselessly goes head to head with Adornian "culture pessimism" and, in *Alles ist Pop* and more recent articles, rock 'n' roll and punk.⁵² Finally, the beauty of pop in his cultural ontology is that it allows him to co-opt all postwar positions that were developed in opposition to it.

50 2000 *Schallplatten*, p 28, p 25.

51 Diedrich Diederichsen, *Aus dem Zusammenhang reißen/in den Zusammenhang schmeißen*, in *Texte zur Kunst*, December 1992, p104. Actually, Diederichsen's writing has a lot less in common with Deleuze than with *Tel Quel* founder and Maoist-turned-Balladur-supporter Philippe Sollers. For a trenchant study of an intellectual career based on little more than the principle of being-where-it's-at, see Louis Pinto's *Tel Quel: au sujet des intellectuels de parodie* in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* no. 69, September 1991, pp. 66-77.

52 Diedrich Diederichsen, *Scritti Politici's "Jacques Derrida," Artforum*, March 2003, p 112.

“Burying the underground”

John Miller, following Dan Graham’s example, has written extensively about mass culture. Although identified and labeled “conceptual” in his artistic approach, his work has mostly stayed in the realm of mainstream gallery fare (painting, sculpture, photographs) and in this respect his conceptualism bears little in common with that of Stanley Brouwn, Michael Asher, or Maria Eichhorn. Miller’s *Burying the Underground*, first published as a German translation in 1995, shares the following with Diederichsen’s pop text: the determination to leave cultural opposition, as implied by the term underground, behind us; and the identification of pop with inclusiveness. Interestingly, the repositioning which we saw in several texts by Diederichsen is present in Miller’s case within this one. Despite assurances to me that his English version was an expansion of the German one, with “more information in there, rather than less,”⁵³ there are many changes which are revealing in what they tone down and what they render more polemic.

I want to begin with such a passage, namely the conclusion of the original German text, deleted in the English one:

“People still do what they always did: have sex in different forms, listen to music, take drugs, be politically active—but it doesn’t seem to make sense to call it ‘underground’, today it seems more like a question of lifestyle and the politics of the everyday.”⁵⁴

John Miller unintentionally gives us a late twentieth century program for bourgeois individualism: a little sex, a little music, a little drugs, and a little politics. Given the leisure time, all these pastimes are available to us without hassle—and in open view because, as he says a few lines above, “while the term underground seems too romantic or historically outdated, its most extreme form of expression, terrorism, has been taken up by the extreme right [...] all this—and the actual success of the different liberation movements—has undoubtedly contributed to the weakening of the concept of buried and uncovered truth.”

As with Diederichsen, the *Zeitgeist* is invoked and the author, having his grip on the *Zeitgeist*, allows himself to make normative personal judgements (“makes sense”) in lieu of argument because they express the enlightened *Zeitgeist* which seizes itself. Miller would object that he is being historical, but as in Diederichsen’s case the gaps in his ‘60s through ‘90s chronicle are very telling: his choice of political struggles to be recounted seems calculated according to the demonstrated interest the art field—*his* audience, but not necessarily the readers of the article—

53 Telephone conversation with John Miller, 8/20/02.

54 John Miller, *Den Untergrund Begraben*, in Marius Babias, ed. *Im Zentrum der Peripherie Kunstvermittlung und Vermittlungskunst in den 90er Jahren* (Dresden/Basel: Verlag der Kunst, 1995) p 147 (my translation). The original German text reads: “Menschen tun immer noch, was sie früher auch taten: Sex in unterschiedlichen Formen, Musik hören, Drogen nehmen, politisch aktiv sein — aber es scheint nicht länger sinnvoll, das ‘Untergrund’ zu nennen, es ist heute eher eine Frage des Lebensstils und der Politik des Alltagslebens.”

has shown in this area. We have sympathetic portrayals of the women's rights, the gay rights, the civil rights and the Black Panthers, but to the exclusion of Native Americans, labor unions (in the struggles of women or Hispanics) and the prison rights movements.

Perhaps this is artistic license, focusing on what transfers well enough into pop imagery for him, and which hasn't been associated with too much of a social-realism aesthetic. It comes as little surprise that from such a perspective Miller can speak of the "success of the different liberation movements" while the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in history is under way.

Beyond the fashion logic, Miller's text from the very start makes two argumentative mistakes, conveniently summed up here: "Rosalind Williams, for one, maintains that excavation has served as the twentieth century's most dominant metaphor of truth-seeking, shaping its major intellectual movements [...] Accordingly, to characterize an esthetic or political tendency as underground is to invest it with the capacity for revelation."⁵⁵

What Rosalind Williams writes in her book *Notes on the Underground* in no way allows Miller to draw such a conclusion because her interest in the underground has nothing to do with cultural or political paradigms. Her study deals with "the underground as vision of the technological future" and as a model of technological environments.⁵⁶ Williams' project is, as she clearly says, a contribution fully inscribed within the history of technology. Miller quotes her out of context in order to extrapolate her findings to the cultural sphere and to attribute an ideological function to the term 'underground'. That done, he imagines, via a process of inverted logic, that those who describe themselves as underground are actually trying to benefit from a certain implicit messianic capital. This notion may be expressed in writings by other authors, but Miller doesn't quote them, he only misquotes Williams. If Miller had wanted to, he could have found quite a lot on the underground as a metaphor in a *cultural* context, starting with Mikhail Bakhtin's monumental study *Rabelais and his World*; only this work lends itself in no way to a fusion of underground and ideology.

Instead, Miller imagines musicians and artists cheerfully experiencing their marginalization (and/or trivialization) by most media channels as the best of all possible worlds. Glenn Branca played in the late '70s New York no wave bands the Static and Theoretical Girls, and has composed orchestral works for electric guitars, involving legions of experimental and noise-scene musicians since then. As such, he's well placed to offer us a perspective on non-mainstream production, and to test Miller's cheery view of underground-as-choice. Here is an excerpt from a 1990 interview:

"FE: Do you have anything else you'd like to get off your chest?"

55 *Burying the Underground*, English PDF version available from John Miller, p. 1.

56 Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground: an Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1990) p1 and p 4.

Glenn: Well, what about what happened to the hardcore punk scene? Am I the only one who sees this? I read the Voice, I don't hear a thing about this. It's like it never happened. It's like the hardcore movement was some sorta underground scene that went on, and then it became speedmetal and... that wasn't the case. Didn't you see it as well as I did? Why were none of those bands signed? [...] it seems clear to me that there had to be some kind of conscious measures taken to keep the scene away from the media and away from the major distribution network. I'm sure these bands were selling more records than a lot of major bands in the '60s [...] In the mid-'80s something was fucking happening; no one was saying anything about it, and it died and it went away. But it did happen and it was much bigger than the hippie movement."⁵⁷

Miller, who's art is described in a catalogue of his as "provocative," "abrasive," "acerbic," "crass," "subversive," "lewd,"⁵⁸ and who has said that the "the most vital aspects of popular culture originate with the working class,"⁵⁹ shows just which side he's on when he plays Branca's accusations to part in the first line of his article: "Since the late '70s there has practically been no underground."

In *Burying the Underground* he, as an artist, declares outdated a term which had all too few ramifications in art *to begin with*. This doesn't stop him from trying to position himself, and his brand of art, as the successors of underground music and politics and to, historically, reinscribe underground production as actually derivative of gallery-art, as here: "punk came about as a reaction to the failed utopianism of the counter culture. In this regard it was an echo of Andy

57 Glenn Branca interviewed by Howard Wulfing, *Forced Exposure #16* (1990) p 24.

58 Nancy Spector, *More Shitty Art* in *Rock sucks Disco Sucks* (Berlin: DAAD Künstlerprogramm, 1992) pp. 13-15.

59 Bourdieu, *High and Popular Culture: A Debate between John Miller and Students of Cultural Studies*, in Beatrice von Bismarck ed. *Games Fights Collaborations Das Spiel von Grenze und Überschreitung* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1996). p 167.

Warhol's pose."⁶⁰ Beyond simple co-optation, we may ask if there is a motive which specifically emanates from the logic of the art field, and which helps explain Miller and Diederichsen's driving attempts to discredit underground oppositionality.

The art market, network capitalism, and the underground

Miller and Diederichsen both subscribe to the maxim that pop culture, beyond the mainstream, has come to subsume what can be called the "culture at large,"⁶¹ and that if there is an underground separate from pop, which maintains its distance to pop via cultural resistance, it is condemned to historical irrelevance. This line of thought finds its theoretical support in what is, under the guise of a critique of authenticity, effectively a neutralization of the critique of inauthenticity.

Thus we find an adaptation of Warhol in Miller, and a general postmodernism cheerleading in Diederichsen. Although, or perhaps precisely because, this supposed authenticity critique can be seen as an evolution of the *l'art pour l'art* privileging of distance, form, and impersonal neutrality,

60 *Den Untergrund Begraben*, p 140 (my translation). The original German text reads as follows: "Punk entstand als Reaktion auf die fehlgeschlagene Utopie der Gegenkultur. In dieser Hinsicht war er ein Echo der Pose Andy Warhols." The English text deletes the second sentence.

Besides the well-documented enmity which existed between the Warhol entourage and bands such as the New York Dolls or the Stooges, there is an historical artifact which sheds light on the much vaunted influence that Andy Warhol supposedly had on punk: A 1976 T-shirt designed by Malcolm McLaren and McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, which was sold at her "Sex" boutique, features a list of "loves" on one side and "hates" on the other. The former include the Sex Pistols, Lenny Bruce, Olympia Press, John Coltrane, and Valerie Solanis. The latter include the Liberal Party, Brian Ferry, Securicor, the Top of the Pops, and Andy Warhol.

McLaren's involvement in punk was itself quite commercialist (see his forays in NYC 1973-75), but one has to give him credit for quickly being able to sniff out trends and keenly evaluate the mood in the underground at the time. Consequently, the Warhol-pan and Solanis-praise on the "Sex" shirt deserve to be seen less as an expression of McLaren/Westwood's personal feelings toward Warhol than as an accurate reflection of the consensus among the (much younger) music-fans who were their potential clients.

Warhol and his entourage were regulars at the Mudd Club, which some art commentators falsely described as "punk." In a recent interview Mark Cunningham even mentions the scene of which this club was typical as a contributing factor to the 1978 breakup of his legendary band, Mars:

"Weasel Walter: What were the circumstances surrounding the disbanding of Mars?"

Mark Cunningham: Another long story of which I could probably give at least three different versions, all of which would be true. The least personal is that our end coincided with the end of the underground scene that existed around CBGB's and Max's... A whole new scene was forming around the Mudd Club which was the beginning of the underground dance scene. It seemed like nobody gave a fuck suddenly about any bands that didn't fit in with this new aesthetic" (see www.nowave.pair.com/nycnowave). The English language version of Miller's text, not so coincidentally, opens with a Warhol quote: "It looks like construction on the 'Underground' discotheque is almost finished. (*laughs*) The Underground, I'm not kidding, that's what they're calling it."

Miller doesn't seem to realize the joke isn't the use of the term underground in 1980, but its use by the disco-entrepreneurs who are actively doing their part to destroy what the term means.

61 *Bourdieu, High and Popular Culture*, p 166 for Miller's formulation.

and because it has proven useful for defending the works of art-market stars as various as Martin Kippenberger, Cindy Sherman, and Guillaume Bijl, as well as the countless “reality-hackers” of today, it is never in itself an object of consideration for them. It *is*, after all, a commonplace of contemporary market-conformist art criticism and production. *Texte Zur Kunst* editor and publisher Isabelle Graw, for whom both Diederichsen and Miller write regularly, has said as much: “since Warhol or now with Koons as well, it’s the artificial, the non-authentic which is celebrated.”⁶² This credo is adhered to even when it comes to the design of a gallery, as the architect Roger Bundschuh makes clear discussing a 2002 project: “The design of Christian Nagel’s new gallery is a little exercise in nihilism: it proposes an authentic image of an identity defined by its very lack of authenticity.”⁶³ Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have shown that this neutralization of the critique of inauthenticity has become nothing less than a cornerstone of what they call “the new spirit of capitalism.”⁶⁴ They argue that the ‘60s demand for authenticity (manifest, for example, in Guy Debord’s critique of the commodity) was counterbalanced by an ideological apparatus stemming from post-structuralism. This later counter-critique has spread very much in the last years because it is compatible with what they call the new capitalist world of the network, which demands constant short-term associations and connections. This new spirit of capitalism demands of all those expecting success to submit to its new values, that they become “connectionist” beings. They must communicate, adjust to new situations, show enthusiasm, be flexible, in short: be malleable and fit in everywhere. Under these new game rules permanency, attachment to values, being “true to oneself,” as forms of resistance, are to be criticized as incongruously rigid, even pathological.

Their arguments are perfectly consistent with the way that, for example, Diederichsen has from 1982 until now (adapting subculture theory-influenced Frith and several other early ‘80s British writers) pilloried “rock” (standing in for rock ‘n’ roll, stadium metal, AOR, punk, all experimental variants) for going hand in hand with what is called an *ideology of authenticity* (or,

62 Isabelle Graw interview with Pierre Bourdieu, first published in *The Thing* magazine, 1996, available under: www.homme-moderne.org/societe/bourdieu/entrevue7quesui.html

63 www.bundschuh.net/galerie/nagel.htm. John Miller has exhibited in Nagel’s Köln gallery.

64 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) pp. 544-552.

“authenticism”⁶⁵). Nowhere does he consider the historical background of rock in the hostile pop field (ca. 1954, see above), and that far from an ideology of authenticity, what can be noted in the discourse of rock ‘n’ roll (and of folk, Afro-American big band jazz, rhythm & blues, bebop, hard-bop etc.) is a critique of the inauthentic which demystifies the marketing, packaging, and distributional sheen of pop theft. Similarly, the alternative music field is granted no right of self-defense, on the discursive level, against commercialist incursions and appropriations —any refusal or even resistance is a symptom of “elitism.” May I add that its antithesis, “pop-music, a *binding and unambiguous* language,”⁶⁶ sounds like the dream of every marketing executive?

What are the political implications of this pop vs. “authenticism” schema? In one passage he rails against “authenticism from the left.”⁶⁷ Perhaps political orientation is itself an illusion, or that he considers carelessness *binding*, because he also writes that “no one on the left, but only people on the right still believe in person, author, family, responsibility, authenticity [...]”⁶⁸ Diederichsen, despite all the Deleuze and Différance references, never takes the trouble to mention what his critique of “rockist authenticity” owes to the post-structuralist authenticity-deconstructions. What we read is a by-default argumentation, always “personal” and therefore normative, which stresses the same objections to the critique of the inauthentic that the capitalistic connectionist ideology does: truth to oneself is a source of rigidity, resistance to others, refusal to connect: “The resort to a heroic sub- or parallel history of rock music as avant-garde culture stands for the defensive position of rocknroll seeing itself as art, it’s possible, but it gives up decisive other dimensions.”⁶⁹ Miller’s attack on underground cultural resistance is, as we have seen, equally

65 *Wassermusik (aus Schaum geboren)!*, p 35 and *2000 Schallplatten*, p VIII. Another example of connectionist values in “art & pop & crossover” discourse is provided by Paolo Bianchi’s concept of *self-subversion*, which I’d like to contrast to Richard Hell’s famous early-’70s “Please Kill Me” T-shirt. The latter confronts the urban passerby with a mix of the everyday (“could you please tell me how to get to....?”) and the morally transgressive, in an ultimate form of anti-communication (or communication-to-end-all-communication). It turns the happy face of social norms (of which “please” is an emblem) inside out, leaving us to think about how the genteel (and their historical successors) have used them to dominate other social groups. Once internalized, these norms do very well in hamstringing these groups into what amounts to political suicide (or at least maiming). Twenty years later, Paolo Bianchi does his best to sound cool when he gives us this very different formulation: “[...] subversive thinking *and negotiation* is only serious when it goes through the self (durch das Selbst hindurch geht). The fusion of self and subversion into **self-subversion** is the ideal” (editorial of *Kunstforum International* Vol. 134, *Art & Pop & Crossover, vol II: Cool Club Cultures*, 1996, p 64). His formulation takes Hell’s rhetorical operation and literally flattens it into an injunction which deploys the normative values (here moral-aesthetic: “ideal”) Hell ransacks. An explosively extroverted joke thus makes way, in the “cool” *Kunstforum*, for an injunction to self-paralyzing narcissism.

66 *2000 Schallplatten 1979-1999*, p 13.

67 Diederich Diederichsen, *Politische Korrekturen*, (Köln, Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1996) p 154.

68 *Freiheit Macht Arm*, p 277.

69 *2000 Schallplatten*, p VIII.

gratuitous, as when he says “using the term (underground) without the requisite degree of irony is, as Warhol implied, embarrassing at best.”⁷⁰

I will now examine why this offensive on the music (and music-derived) underground, undertaken by actors of the gallery-art field, has taken place. Miller and Diederichsen are, after all, two early examples of a template that has by now become widespread. Their social- and market-conformist stances are strikingly similar to those of Kunstforum’s Paolo Bianchi in 1996, the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg’s *German Open* curators Andreas Brodbeck and Veit Görner in 2000, the French art magazine *Zérodeux* in 2003, the aforementioned Jérôme Sans, and countless others.⁷¹ This confrontation is to be seen, I am inclined to believe, as a confirmation that the music underground and its cultural oppositionality creates three *problems* for the contemporary art market as such, and many of its artists and theorists in particular.

1. A current legitimacy problem. Music is perceived as a threat, needing to be addressed, because its alternative practices aim at being truly social (not cliqueish) in scope, both open and anonymous, and truly alternative in their economic structure.

The first point is long to address in depth, but can be sketched by looking at the institutional art field and its enduring lip service to internationalism. In 2004, the mechanisms of commercial art production and promotion operate parochially, with the up-and-coming having to prove themselves to local and national gatekeepers over a period of years before they can hope to break through abroad. The galleries prize personal contacts and social networks. They unabashedly present their new artists as “former assistants/students of so-and-so” unaware of the academic connotations of such referencing.⁷² The low-cost and far more alternative video/media-art circuit has long been more international than all but the biggest-budget art institutional events. The alternative music scene went just as far, despite the higher travel costs for entire bands, starting in the late ‘70s with its touring circuit and international ‘zine coverage.

70 *Bury the Underground*, p 1.

71 Some examples:

“The subversion of self-determination no longer means the liberation of art (or music, literature, etc.) but rather stands for the consciousness of the most elemental potential of the self as foundation for subversive normality.”

Paolo Bianchi, *Art & Pop & Crossover*, in *Kunstforum International*, vol. 134, 1996 (my translation) p 54.

“Above all, pop still means destroying ideologies and hierarchies in the Warhol mode. First of all, pop offers space for individualism. The fact that group phenomena subject to specific codes can develop from this, and thus a certain uniformity, is a matter of course. But this is a uniformity that people have chosen for themselves and have not been ordered to accept; hence freedom of action for the individual is preserved.” Andreas Brodbeck and Veit Görner, *Now’s the Time*, in cat. *German Open* (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000).

“Hardcool... between overassertive commitment and the limits of seductive or spectacular forms, contemporary artists have found the answer, a coolly radical esthetic.” Judicael Lavrador, *Hardcool*, leading editorial in *Zérodeux* #24, January 2003 (my translation).

72 For an example, see the video *Zum Besuch bei Nagel* (Rahel Puffert and Michel Chevalier, 2003)

Regarding the second point, alternative economic structures, Will Straw writes, “well-known subcultures of the 1970’s, such as punk [...] were also redefining consumption within new networks of small-scale capitalism and artisanal labor. In so doing, they helped create micro-economies of a sort, social and entrepreneurial worlds in which the divisions between producers and consumers, or artists and audiences were weakened.”⁷³ As David James has noted, materialist aesthetics has, since Benjamin, dropped the ball when it comes to examining resistance not just in light of modes of consumption, but also of production.⁷⁴ An overwhelming number of institutional art practitioners and chroniclers have turned a blind eye in the last twenty years to art’s critical heritage with regard to questions of audience *and* economics, or have even written apologies for “relational art practices [...] that limit themselves to galleries and art centers.”⁷⁵ As I mentioned earlier, the adaptation of subcultural theory opens the window for gallery-art theory, under the aegis of progressive refocusing, to play fast and loose with the theme of consumption in general, and the art-object as exclusive commodity, what James calls “the blue-chip functions, the mix of real estate and glamour, that floats the art world,” in particular.⁷⁶ If the commercial (high) art field is to distance itself from the politically-charged notion of the avant-garde, it must, to ground itself as a radical production (something other than handicrafts, or academism), find cover in the category of autonomy.⁷⁷ Yet such a theoretical grounding flies in the face of carrerartists’ dependency on an immediate demand for their production, as it does of galleries’

73 Will Straw, *Consumption*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop*, p68.

74 David James, *Power Misses — Essays Across (Un)Popular Culture*, (London: Verso, 1996) p14.

75 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Vers une Politique des Formes*, in *Esthétique Relationnelle* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998) p 86 (my translation). One notable exception, which treats this question at length and has received relatively wide acknowledgment, is Martha Rosler’s excellent *Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience* in Brian Wallis, ed. *Art After Modernism* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

76 David James, *Allegories of Cinema, American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p 273.

77 Here is a recent treatment of the avant-garde (and related social-critical approaches) which deserves to be quoted at length because of its stupidity. Harald Falckenberg, businessman, art-collector, chairman of the board of the Hamburger Kunstverein, founder of the Phoenix Art Center, *Texte zur Kunst* contributor, and Christian Democratic Party member: “For many decades, almost for one century, we had the avant-garde. They thought they could create something, that they could break through, but mostly they broke down. And then, we had this social relevant art, how do they call it, ‘Art in critical practice’? It’s about the social practice of the artist, how he works, but who’s interested in the practice of such an artist, huh? That was always the big question. And then we got done with the second program, too. And the young artists say: ‘we don’t want to have anything to do with this stuff anymore’. And now, we are in a phase that I would, once again, call ‘free art’, where you’re neither worried about avant-garde ideas nor about socially relevant implications, but we instead do just what we want to.” Speech at Galerie Jürgen Becker, Hamburg, 18 February, 2003 (my translation).

For the avant-garde and autonomous art as two distinct poles in the nineteenth century break with bourgeois academism, with the first rooted in “social art” and the second in formalist *l’art pour l’art*, see *The Rules of Art*, p. 91 (the roots of avant-garde practice) and pp.77- 76 (the emergence of *l’art pour l’art*). Baudelaire is the only figure who manages to straddle both positions in this early phase.

subordination to wealthy buyers, their tastes, and the mechanisms of social legitimation.⁷⁸ For this business-as-usual to maintain a semblance of autonomy, it is necessary to institute what Bourdieu calls a “tabou de l’explicitation,” which renders “unforgivable” all art-strategies which openly break with (and thereby expose) the conditions which allow autonomy-claims to actually “function” in an environment which owes its existence to autonomy’s factual curtailment.⁷⁹

A related problem for the art market, relative to its ability to symbolically ‘compete’ with the radicalism that alternative scenes can afford, is that the ‘80s have brought on a structural change in their target group, the wealthy and their families, with no end in sight. As Boltanski and Chiapello point out, a characteristic of neo-management is its penetration into employees’ persons, with the distinction between private and public vanishing. Far from being a fad, this development is, they stress, historically rooted in strategies undertaken by large corporations and their lobby groups, whose general effect has been to reframe the industrial-era distinction between spheres governed by interest and those governed by disinterest, between those things which may be merchandized and those which may not.⁸⁰ Even many upper-managers are now subject to (in the feudal sense) the sales-culture instrumentalism, the profit dynamic (as Boltanski and Chiapello put it), that previously only affected the lower rungs; and increasingly in the blunt form of in-the-office brainwashing.⁸¹ This, it may be expected, translates into the personal tastes and cultural outlook of these elites and, furthering the cycle, the culture-at-large they play a major role in shaping. Many are certainly less willing to step back and deal with works that demand that they completely recalibrate the value-systems that they earn money and/or maintain their lifestyles with. The bubble of privilege, of which collection of autonomous artworks is a symbol, is shrinking in the era of globalization.

2. A commercial audience problem: The institutional art scene (with the galleries exercising a dominant influence), trying to put a few hard years behind it, is now attempting to reposition itself. Paolo Bianchi, introducing the thesis that “perhaps, art and pop are twins,” adds: “with the stagnation of the art market in the nineties, the interest in theories and position-determinates have grown once more.”⁸² This consequence may apply to himself, but the phenomenon he is riding on as a critic is this: like many other luxury-product areas, the commercial galleries are

78 Pierre Bourdieu: “art and art consumption are predisposed, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating class differences.” *Distinction*, p 7— my modified translation.

79 For the concept of “tabou de l’explicitation,” see Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques, sur la theorie de l’action* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994) p 203. For “unforgivable” transgressions in the art field, see *The Rules of Art*, p170.

80 *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*, pp. 563-568.

81 On this point, see Stéphane Haefliger’s *La tentation du “Loft Management”* in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2004, p 32. A fine example of state-of-the-art corporate brainwashing is the 6th edition of the *Successful Manager’s Handbook* by Susan H. Gebelein, Lisa A. Stevens, Carol J. Skube, David G. Lee, Brian L. Davis, and Lowell W. Hellervik (Minneapolis: Personnel Decisions International, 2000), especially their infantilizing “Valuable Tips” and “Get Ready to Learn” sections, pp. 603-605.

82 *Art & Pop & Crossover*, *ibid.*

finding it indispensable to revamp themselves with a youthful and dynamic image/audience (without losing on the glamour front). From this strategy arises the need to dislodge the music scene and to usurp many of the roles it occupies within other fields, such as academic discourse (where music is a privileged subject of cultural theory) or media-coverage (where music has long been an indicator of social trends).⁸³ These “position-determinate” exercises are then expected to pass as an entertaining update of critical practice.

3. A historical legitimacy problem. There is a real danger of art being reinscribed, as Dick Higgins or Allan Kaprow would have wanted it, into a tradition which would leave post-'78 gallery production by the wayside. This project emerges from a general dissatisfaction with directions in market-art, of which the following is a 1985 example: “more and more, art is directed by a cyclical mechanism akin to that which governs fashion, and the result is an ever-stylish neo-pop whose dimension is the popular past. An *arrière-avant garde*, such art functions in terms of returns and references rather than the utopian and anarchic transgressions of the *avant garde*.”⁸⁴

The logic of such reinscriptions is neither new nor so hard to grasp—for examples, see Stella Rollig's or Howard Slater's takes on it.⁸⁵ Generally, we can say that such reinscriptions involve a historical reading of how art and symbolic production have entertained different relations with their audiences, and the public-at-large, picking up and extending the strategies of, among others, the Russian productivists, Antonin Artaud, John Cage, the artists of Tokyo's Yomiuri Independent scene, the Lettristes, '60s fluxus, environments and happenings, intermedia, expanded cinema, body and performance-art, the alternative-space, video, and media-art scenes, as well as those cultural resistance approaches which are in theory parallel to art, but in fact overlap it (and one another) more and more: the underground music/'zine scene, the alternative website and hacker scenes, the culture-jamming and agit-prop scenes, and the “alternate world” movement.

It's hard for me not to see the *Hardcore* catalogue text as a maneuver to foreclose any such reinscription: we read, on the first page of Roberto Pinto's (short) essay titled *A History of Radicalism in Art*, about dada and futurism, but the Russian constructivists are left out. The imploding thrust of body art radicalism is relevant (but only in so far as it self-directs the artists' social critique and “pushes the limits of experience”) as are the flights into politics and the “real world” that leave the art system untouched; operations affecting the field at its most vulnerable, at the point where the artistic gaze can with only great difficulty stand outside of itself—the point

83 Dan Graham: “music has a certain power, and I believe that the art scene is aware of this power.” Ukrike Gross/ Markus Müller, *Interview mit Dan Graham* in *Make it Funky: Crossover zwischen Musik, Pop, Avantgarde und Kunst* (Cologne: Oktagon, 1998).

84 Hal Foster, *Against Pluralism*, in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985) p 23.

85 Stella Rollig, *Zwischen Agitation und Animation: Aktivismus und Partizipation in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* in Eva Sturm and Stella Rollig, ed. *Dürfen die das? Kunst als sozialer Raum* (Vienna: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2002) pp.128-139, and Howard Slater, *Some notes on Political Conceptual Art*, Draft 1, 2000. www.infopool.org.uk/hs.htm

of the art-audience's constitution, or the point of the artwork's sleight-of-hand transformation into purchase-object (leaving the content untouched)—these are not to be articulated, and only very speciously alluded to.

By titling this work class war, I use this problem(atic) term in the sense that it is widely understood: a war between social groups, initiated by those who suffer from the status quo (on economic and other levels) against those who benefit from it (and are often its orchestrators). It is in this sense that the term, usually used for mudslinging in mainstream channels (e.g. the 2000 Bush/Cheney campaign), or positively in anti-mainstream channels (the Dills' *Class War* single, 1978) describes what I have observed in art discourse, but operating in an inverted direction: those on top against those below. The term is usefully descriptive in fact, but rests on theoretical grounds that have become shaky over the last century and a half. Because awareness of one's place and life expectations is so determined by conventions and reigning ideology, the line separating self-perceived winners and self-perceived losers is very fluid, and this front is itself the stake of ongoing symbolic conflict. An example is how unions and other coalitions in the 1890's U.S. tried to mobilize diverse groups united by a common lot, in order to demonstrate and exercise strength in numbers. Newspapers, schools, and businesses, in an effort to fragment those same numbers, preached individual salvation for those with 'talent'.⁸⁶ Class wars are inevitably struggles over *classificatory* schemes that bring together distinct social groups together into larger camps, social movements, classes. Rarely are these effects anything more than fleeting; the struggle over the schemes within social space is ongoing, and its successive outcomes ultimately determine, in a non-totalitarian context, the distribution of material wealth from one era to the next.

Taking art off its pedestal is a project is long overdue, as the last twenty-five years have shown. Not only to resist an artistic conformism (the ever-stylish neo-pop Hal Foster diagnoses) whose practitioners and patrons in various cultural fields strive, in a grotesque riff on *rationalization*, to subordinate all artistic and social expression to their principles. Under pressure from the institutions and the market, art must somehow be prevented from becoming a counter-counterculture. To briefly take one institutional example: art schools. My personal experiences in the '90s, as a student and friend of students at schools in Chicago, Dijon, Paris, and Hamburg (none of which were especially old-fashioned in their curriculum at the time) has left me with a suspicion that art education, instead of opening up students' horizons as it may have in the late '70s, now imbues them with the values of, shall we say, enlightened conservatism (and need I add that both Miller and Diederichsen teach at such venues?).

What was regrettably a class-legitimation function in art is now becoming what can only be called a class war function, with "success." One can never be certain of the future, but if there is to be a new chapter in non-academic art any time soon, it would seem to require that the momentum this process is gaining be broken. Turning the process against itself will probably lead, paradoxically, to many forms of cultural censure, not least the accusations that poor-against-

86 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p 262.

rich (as opposed to rich-against-poor) class war is a destruction of aesthetics: the Palais de Tokyo *Hardcore* catalogue gives us a taste of what may lie ahead as it praises its artists for virulently “unmasking and castigating political and social messages that smack of demagoguery,”⁸⁷ this last term being, clearly, selected for its universally negative connotation and its etymological roots to “people” (in the plebian sense). “New activist” artists as witting or unwitting ideological bodyguards for their patrons...

Approaches to creative production, if they are to remain artistic in the historical sense, are well advised to incorporate what is defined as unattractive by the commercially driven and commerce-legitimizing institutions and their agents: this means focusing on this drift towards an eclectic consensus culture which rules out oppositionality. It also means that, far from delusively trying to create new publics from scratch, they should hold fast to the challenge of situating themselves historically and should, above all, look to mobilize already-existing scenes⁸⁸(in every way the opposite of what we have seen above: strategic expropriation of symbolic capital from groups which are weaker from a legitimacy perspective; de-historization). Taken together and employed resourcefully, these measures can, if history may be taken as a guide, break the momentum of these commercialist and socially regressive trends and, why not, wage class war in the opposite direction.

87 Jérôme Sans, *Hardcore/ Towards a New Activism* in cat.*Hardcore/ Towards a New Activism* (Paris: Editions Cercle D'Art, 2003) p 7.

88 Be they counter-cultural, politically, or community-directed.

Jean-Claude Moineau

When Music is for Waging the War

Whatever is to be made of the brash return of an art that is representative, when not even “celebrative”¹ (of the powers that be), recent art has no less pursued the project of a non-representative art. It has thereby not so much opposed representation – as in the recent past – with abstraction, with a presence solely sensual, or with the representation of an irrepresentable, but rather with Austinian performativity.² An art which, in Austinian terms, is more of a perlocutionary character than merely locutionary or illocutionary. An “utterance” which may be of a performative nature and, contrary to Austin’s view, “succeed” pragmatically even in the absence of any legitimacy on the part of its “speaker” (and of the utterance itself).

Nonetheless (music having been traditionally an art that had little representative content all the while having been regarded since antiquity as having a strongly illocutionary potential: *ethos* of modes and tonalities whereby, quite unlike what Charles Le Brun³ held for the visual arts, the point was more to rouse passions than to represent them) as the many cases of music used as tools of war or torture instruments listed by Juliette Volcler⁴ and Suzanne Cusick⁵ show (and this should not need stressing) performativity – in art and elsewhere – is not necessarily directed against the powers-that-be, but can just as well (all the more when, consistent with Austin’s thesis, the “speaker” is *recognized* as legitimate) serve the powers-that-be themselves. At the service, notes Georges-Henri Brice des Vallons,⁶ of what Michel Foucault⁷ had called biopower, at the service of “a ‘bio political’ transformation of military operations” from the moment that “‘the imperative to conquer territory’ is supplanted by the ‘imperative to control environments’”: a distinction between conquest and control, on the one hand, and between (natural) environment and (cultural) territory, on the other. A thesis taken up by Volcler: “Via the development of these non-lethal weapons, we are witnesses to a mutation of war, which now seeks to be ‘clean’ and total: the point no longer being to eliminate, but to neutralize [whatever negativity this notion may still have], and to control.” Even if, in fact, well before the advent of what Gilles Deleuze⁸ called the society of control (a surveillance society in Foucault’s terms,⁹ already distinguished by him from the previous disciplinary society) the different powers that succeeded each other had used music as a weapon.

1 Drothea von Hantelmann, “Célébrer, un déplacement de la critique” in: Pierre HUYGHE, *Celebration Park*, Paris, Paris-Musées, 2006.

2 See John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962

3 Charles Le Brun, “Conférence tenue en l’académie royale de peinture et de sculpture sur l’expression générale et particulière,” 1668, in *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* n° 21, Paris, Gallimard, Spring 1980.

4 Juliette Volcler, *Le Son comme arme, Les Usages policiers et militaires du son*, Paris, La Découverte, 2011.

5 Suzanne Cusick, “Music as Torture/Music as Weapon” in: *Trans, Revista transcultural de musica* n°10, 2006.

6 Georges-Henri Brice Des Vallons, “L’Arme non létale dans la stratégie militaire des Etats-Unis : imaginaire stratégique et genèse de l’armement” in: *Cultures & Conflits* n°67, Fall 2007.

7 Michel Foucault, “*Il faut défendre la société*” in: Cours au Collège de France, 1976, Paris, Gallimard/Seuil, 1997.

8 Gilles Deleuze, “Contrôle et devenir,” and “Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle” in: *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, Paris, Minuit, 1990.

9 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir, Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975.

Not only as an echo of battlefields, the “battle rumble” that Martin Kaltenecker¹⁰ ascribes to European music at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the wake of Napoleonic wars, with the works of Haydn, Beethoven and others: echoes and even quotations from military music (quotes that even confront each other as in Antonio Salieri’s cantata *Der Tyroler Landsturm* composed in 1799 in honor of the populations of the Tyrol mountains who fought the French, and in which one hears the *Marseillaise* clashing with the hymn *Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser*), works celebrating combat and victory, a vast increase of instrumental means within a heroic style, compositions which even renew with the pictorial genre of the battle scene (then making its return) towards representative ends (as it will later be the case – with an aim no longer celebratory, but denunciative – of Jimi Hendrix interpreting at Woodstock the American national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, at the height of the Vietnam War... with a guitar solo full of distortion that calls to mind the release of American bombs over Vietnam and the screams of the victims)...

Yet, just as the geographer Yves Lacoste¹¹ has maintained that “geography is firstly for waging war,” and that according to Rosalind Krauss,¹² at least in the case of Timothy O’Sullivan, photography is for waging war (even if, in this case, we are dealing more with a document, a performative document, than with art),

Photography itself having, according to Abigail Solomon-Godeau,¹³ later sought, within the New Vision movement in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, to establish itself not as an art but as a weapon. A weapon directed against the “old world” and adopting a “radical formalism.” A formalism that, according to Solomon-Godeau, was at its origin anything but depoliticized – Georges Didi-Huberman¹⁴ echoes her thought, himself adopting the term “combat-image.” Even if, Solomon-Godeau presumes, in its passage to the United States, and its passage from avant-garde to modernism, that photography lapsed into formalism in the usual (but incorrect) sense of the term. The formalism of Alfred Stieglitz, acting here as a relay... photography morphing into a style: an aestheticization of politics of exactly the kind criticized by Walter Benjamin¹⁵ (who himself, consistent with avant-garde principles, privileged

10 Martin Kaltenecker, *La Rumeur des batailles, La Musique au tournant des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles*, Paris, Fayard, 2000.

11 Yves Lacoste, *La Géographie, ça sert, d’abord, à faire la guerre*, Paris, Maspero, 1976.

12 Rosalind Krauss, “Les Espaces discursifs de la photographie”, 1982, in (French translation): *Le Photographique, Pour une théorie des écarts*, Paris, Macula, 1990.

13 See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style,” 1983, in : *Photography at the Dock, Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

14 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps, Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images*, Paris, Minuit, 2000.

15 Walter Benjamin, “L’Œuvre d’art à l’ère de sa reproductibilité technique”, first version, 1935 and final version, 1939, (French translation), *Œuvres III*, Paris, Gallimard, 2000.

the document over art¹⁶). Not an inversion of the direction in which the weapon is pointing, but a transformation of the weapon into art – even if, according to Benjamin, this aestheticization of politics culminated in the war itself (with a hijacking not only of technical progress but of the masses that war drags into its fold). “Imperialist War” celebrated on an artistico-aesthetic level (with Kant,¹⁷ previously, having pronounced that war could have something sublime about it) by the avant-garde itself, in the entity of the Italian futurism of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Luigi Russolo (conjunction of the art of noises and the art of war, Russolo himself awaiting that war – the “spectacle” of war – would provide him “the artistic satisfaction of a sensory perception modified by technical means”) ...

Even though, according to Paul Virilio,¹⁸ from the outset weapons “are not just tools of destruction but also of perception.” And indeed, all it took is for Jules Janssen to be inspired by the fixed-barrel colt patented in 1832 for him to then develop the “photographic revolver” (transition from the repeating weapon to repeating photography) in order to photograph – thereby overcoming the limits of human sight – the passage of Venus before the sun on December 8, 1874. This alignment, according to Edmond Halley’s 1716 research, occurring only twice every 113 years and, when precisely timed, potentially yielding data allowing to calculate the distance between the earth and the sun. And, in 1882, “[o]n the basis of this idea, Etienne-Jules Marey then perfected his chronophotographic rifle, which allowed its user to aim at and photograph an object moving through space.” ... Whereas from now on, with the advent of electronic warfare “projectiles have awakened and opened their many eyes: heat-seeking missiles, infra-red or laser guidance systems, warheads fitted with video cameras that can relay what they see to pilots and to ground-controllers sitting at their consoles. The fusion is complete, the confusion perfect: nothing now distinguishes the functions of the weapon and the eye; the projectile’s image and the image’s projectile form a single composite. In its tasks of detection and acquisition, pursuit and destruction, the projectile is an image or ‘signature’ on a screen, and the television picture is an ultrasonic projectile propagated at the speed of light.”

And the German media-theorist Friedrich Kittler¹⁹ has for his part revealed the military origins of many a technique used in art and the entertainment industry that maintain traces of their first use (without thereby succumbing to technical determinism): in addition to Marey’s chronophotographic gun he notes: the vocoder (voice coder), the first vocal synthesizer used by the US military for effective transmission of the human voice over telephone lines, which notably allowed Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill to communicate over the ocean during WWII (and subsequently, in the hands of Kraftwerk, was turned into an instrument in its own right); HI-FI, developed by Decca by commission of the Royal Air Force then seeking a

16 See Walter Benjamin, “Treize thèses contre les snobs,” in: *Sens unique*, 1928, French Translation, Paris, Nadeau, 1978.

17 Emmanuel Kant, *Critique de la faculté de juger*, 1790, French translation, Paris, Gallimard, 1985.

18 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema, the Logistics of Perception*, 1984, English translation, London, Verso, 1989.

19 Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter*, Berlin, Brinkman & Bose, 1986, English translation., Stanford, University Press, 1999.

technique to detect sounds emitted by German submarines; the computer, itself a spin-off of the Enigma typewriter which allowed both encryption and decryption of messages, and was adopted in 1937 by the German military and used by the Nazis during WWII; the Internet...

... music is also used for waging war. For war and for torture.

Yet, if music can be also used for warfare and torture, this is principally by sedulously making the most of the heady, obsessive, even obsessional character which already is already that of much music or many melodies of which we have forgotten the origins. A feature already noted by Theodor Reik²⁰ in connection with his hearing the *a cappella* singing of a Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock poem set to a melody excerpted from the final movement of Gustav Mahler's *Résurrection* (although Reik settles into an explanation which is both too literary and too biographical, neglecting musical dimensions). An obsessive melody, or as Peter Szendy²¹ puts it, returning "like a ghost that would come to haunt us." Involuntary memory, which is veritable memory according to Benjamin.²² Or one may, together with Jacques Derrida²³ and Simon Reynolds,²⁴ speak of hantology. Unlike ontology, itself bearing traditionally on the opposition between being and non-being, hantology has to do with what has both being and non-being, presence and absence, of the presence of the past in the present. Szendy observes that this is also a characteristic of "hit" songs that follow you wherever you go, in department stores, airports, the Internet... Something that one wasn't listening to at first, paying no attention to, hearing in spite of oneself, as it becomes more insistent bit by bit, in the expectation that it come to an end, one increasingly keeps one's ears open, one starts to listen, always despite oneself, until one can do nothing else but to listen in order to "see" if "it" continues, if it becomes less frequent, if it returns...

A type of listening not taken into account by Theodor Adorno²⁵ in his typology of different modes of listening (which, as Szendy²⁶ notes, is solely limited to the listening of musical works), but one that leads Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari²⁷ to go so far as to refer to "the potential

20 Theodor Reik, *Variations psychanalytiques sur un thème de Gustav Mahler*, 1953, French translation Ferdinand Alquié, Paris, Gallimard, 1985

21 Peter Szendy, *Tubes, La Philosophie dans le juke-box*, Paris, Minuit, 2008.

22 Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 1939, in (English translation) *Illuminations, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968*.

23 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx, L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Paris, Galilée, 1993.

24 Simon Reynolds, "Ghosts in the Machine, Sampling, hantologie et *mash-up*," 2006, in: *Rétromania, Comment la culture pop recycle son passé pour s'inventer un futur*, French translation, Marseille, Le Mot et le reste, 2012.

25 Theodor Adorno, *Introduction à la sociologie de la musique*, 1962, French translation, Orgemont, Contrechamps, 1994.

26 Peter Szendy, *Écoute, Une histoire de nos oreilles*, Paris, Minuit, 2001.

27 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A thousand Plateaus*, 1980, English translation, London, Bloomsbury, 2013.

fascism of music”: “colors do not move a people. Flags can do nothing without trumpets. Lasers are modulated on sound. The refrain is sonorous par excellence [Deleuze and Guattari adhering here, in all Adornism, to a specificity of the musical medium, whereas elsewhere they write: “It seems that when sound deterritorializes, it becomes more and more refined; it becomes specialized and autonomous. Color clings more, not necessarily to the object, but to territoriality.”], but it can as easily develop its force into a sickly sweet ditty as into the purest motif, or Vinteuil’s little phrase. And sometimes the two combine: Beethoven used as a ‘signature tune’.” “Sound invades us, impels us, drags us, transpierces us [...] Since its force of deterritorialization is the strongest, it also effects the most massive of reterritorializations.” As Jean-François Augoyard²⁸ writes concurringly: “sound is a something that overflows and dispossesses one [...] the sonic is that which overflows us the most.”

Our ears – quite unlike our eyes – not being endowed with “lids,” we find ourselves unable to close our ears (at most we may use our hands in an oh-so-imperfect attempt to stop up our ears), on the sonic level, whether want to or not (John Cage), we are unable to close ourselves off completely from the world which surrounds us. Which means that music, much like noise (as Augoyard has noted in diverging both from, on the one hand, the physiological theory of Hermann von Helmholtz²⁹ which is founded on the hypothesis of an atemporality of musical sounds and distinguishes these from noises while understanding them as rigorously periodic phenomena – Helmholtz neglecting the moments of attack of musical sounds that are necessarily “noisy –, and from, on the other hand, the “political economy” of music and noise of Jacques Attali³⁰ for whom the distinction between music and noise is that between coded and uncoded sounds... “in a familiar environment, it is often someone else’s music which becomes a noise”, a “noise experienced as a disturbance,” with the distinction between disturbing noise and musical sound (which has been taking the place, within the tonal system itself, of the distinction between consonance and dissonance) being according to Augoyard an obstacle, what Gaston Bachelard³¹ calls an “epistemological obstacle,” which blocks us from that living of sound that anteceded mental categories. As had already been observed by Sophocles, “to him who is in fear, everything rustles.”³²)... has the tendency to keep us awake, to prevent us from sleeping (we even seem to hear better with our eyes closed)... which means that we are especially vulnerable to music and to noise. On top of which sound and noises (what we perceive as a sound and what we perceive as a noise) are not only perceived by the ears but by the entire body, resonating as they do with the entire body. Sounds, but also infrasounds and ultrasounds which are inaudible to human

28 Jean-François Augoyard, “Une pensée de la modalité,” *ethnographiques.org* n°19, December 2009.

29 Hermann Helmholtz, *Théorie physiologique de la musique fondée sur l'étude des sensations auditives*, French translation Paris, Masson, 1868.

30 Jacques Attali, *Bruits, Essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*, Paris, PUF, 1977.

31 Gaston Bachelard, *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique, Contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective*, Paris, Vrin, 1938.

32 A phrase taken up by Pierre-Albert Castanet for the title of his book *Tout est bruit pour qui a peur, Pour une histoire sociale du son sale*, Paris, Michel de Maule, 1999.

ears but endowed with unbearable characteristics that are theirs alone, generating as they do respiratory difficulties, disorders of vision itself, anxiety and, even, in the case of church organs, religious sentiment. Not everyone is sensitive to the same extent; age plays a strong factor. Take the case of the “mosquito device” (marketed in France under the name... Beethoven, the deaf musician!), which broadcasts very high frequency sounds similar to the buzzing of a mosquito, and very unpleasant for those who can hear them, in this case adolescents, the only group for whom they are audible. And so for this reason the mosquito is used as an anti-youth weapon, dispersing groups of adolescents who may be a little too rowdy. Although, as pointed out by Volcler,³³ silence – and, more generally, sensory deprivation – can itself be deployed as a weapon: anechoic chambers, sound-proof helmets...

There is talk both of non-lethal weapons, causing neither casualties nor ruins, requiring no clean-up or reconstruction operations after use, and of *no-touch torture*, a sort of torture without any physical contact, not even leaving any trace on the bodies of its victims. Disjunction from other senses, even from hearing itself. Just as Solomon-Godeau has observed³⁴ that at Abu Ghraib, photography did not solely document torture as it had at S-21, or as in the long stretch dating back to antiquity, document different methods of torture as illustrations as celebrative as they have been spectacular – spectacular here not in the sense of Guy Debord, but of Foucault,³⁵ a tradition which according to Stephen F. Eisenman³⁶ embraces the entire history of art itself, an archive of torture... at Abu Ghraib photography had become an integral element of torture procedure, the torturers exploiting Islam’s dictate of modesty and decency while these are less and less respected in the West. The dictate of modesty and the proscription of defilement. Defilement which, for both Solomon-Godeau and Mary Douglas,³⁷ is principally symbolic in dimension as it is “less an act of violence inflicted on the body as upon identity, one’s self-esteem.”

More precisely, Boris Groys³⁸ has observed that whereas contemporary Western society, while maintaining that it is preoccupied with ethics and distinguishing itself from all other civilizations (past or present) on the basis of its respect and protection of human dignity, has nonetheless seen a surge (be it fraternity hazing, reality shows, or body art) of manifold practices in which any and all are ready to abandon their dignity publicly, or give away their dignity in exchange for a certain recognition, to receive as a counter-gift an even greater dignity... such a symbolic exchange proves to be impossible with people from civilizations in which an individual, not having her/his dignity at her/his disposal, cannot initiate the process of losing it, sacrificing

33 Juliette Volcler, *Le Son comme arme*

34 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Torture à Abou Ghraib, Les Médias et leur dehor,” French translation, *Multitudes* n° 28, Winter-Spring, 2007.

35 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*

36 Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, London, Reaktion, 2007.

37 Mary Douglas, *De la souillure, Essais sur les notions de pollution et de tabou*, 1967, French translation Paris, Maspero, 1971.

38 Boris Groys, “Les Corps d’Abou Ghraib,” French translation, *L’Herne* n° 84, Baudrillard, Paris, 2004.

it, or using it to take part in a potlatch. Unless, of course, these people are subject to violence and have a foreign culture imposed upon them, as in the case of the Abu Ghraib prisoners. In this case we have both a *becoming-weapon* of photography and a *becoming-art* not so much of the photographs (as in the case of the S-21 photographs hung in a museum), which remain “amateur” photographs, but of the photographed subjects transfigured, in the sense of Arthur Danto,³⁹ into art by photography.

The use of music as a means of torture can even “play” on cultural differences between torturer and victim, the torturer seeking to crush through her/his own cultural identity the cultural identity of the victim. Christian Grüny⁴⁰ has taken note of the fact that the openly sexual dimension of pop music means that forcing Muslim prisoners to listen to certain pop songs is consistent with the approach of draping women’s underwear over the heads of male prisoners at Abu Graib prison, or of forcing them to masturbate in front of female US army staff. In Cusick’s own words⁴¹ – she also refers to “sexual/cultural humiliation” in the case of Abu Graib – “What better medium than music to bring into being (as a felicitous performative) the experience of the West’s (the infidel’s) ubiquitous, irresistible Power?”... Cultural difference or, at least, a difference of taste, as Antoine Hennion⁴² formulates it. A difference that does not allow itself to be reduced to mere cultural or social difference (that social distinction as analyzed by Pierre Bourdieu⁴³; although here one should also be on guard against falling back into the flattest kind of methodical individualism): heavy metal can prove to be a real form of torture for the classical music aficionado.

As a matter of fact, a difference of taste is not even a requirement for there to be musical torture. Any kind of music, the music one likes the most (all the more if the volume is amplified) can be slowly turned into a real torture instrument if it is repeated ad nauseam. Inversion of the ready-made: not transfiguration of non-art into art, but of art into non-art.

Additionally, according to Szendy,⁴⁴ this is an inversion of the (illocutionary) power to console that is traditionally attributed to music (alongside its properly aesthetic qualities). An inversion of its power to console and of its power to divert. Martin Moschel⁴⁵ echoes this thought with the observation that the forms of consolation and diversion, of entertainment, are both contrary and complementary.

39 Arthur Danto; *La Transfiguration du banal, Une philosophie de l'art*, 1981, French translation, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

40 Christian Grüny, “The Language of Feeling Made in a Weapon: Music as an Instrument of Torture,” in: Julie A. Carlson & Elisabeth Weber, eds. *Speaking about Torture*, New York, Fordham University, 2012.

41 Suzanne Cusick, “Music as Torture/Music as Weapon”

42 Antoine Hennion, *La Passion musicale, Une sociologie de la médiation*, Paris, Métailié, 1993.

43 Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction, Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, Minuit, 1979.

44 Peter Szendy, “Musique et torture 1, Les Stigmates du son”, *Poésie* n° 134, Paris, Belin, 2010.

45 Martin Moschel, *Divertissement et consolation, Essai sur la société des spectateurs*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2010.

... But is music itself always made to be heard and listened to? Thus, contemporary music⁴⁶ yields us the example of ambient music which, quite unlike the nagging character of veritable airport music, lends itself to a distracted perception as theorized by Benjamin⁴⁷ with regard to photography (a theory quite apt today, more than ever, with the profusion of photos taken on the go with portable phones that one never has the time to look at.) ... Glenn Branca concerts where guests receive ear-plugs at the entrance. The tracks and LPs full of silence. The anti-records⁴⁸... Just as Paul Veyne⁴⁹ has noted the fact that, since antiquity, certain scenes in paintings or sculptures of the greatest minutia were positioned in public buildings in a way to be out of view. According to James H. Johnson⁵⁰ the music in concert halls, operas, and *salons* was neither listened to nor were its performers watched, those assisting (which we therefore cannot really call an audience in this case) holding the music to be a simple ornament of the spectacle of their persons which they offered one another.

Or at the most, according to Kaltenecker,⁵¹ a listening that is not “aesthetic” but “esthetic,” with attention paid not to music but to sound in itself, and even only to individual sounds to the detriment of the form (and Kaltenecker holds that however “concentrated” the usual “aesthetic listening” may be, the concentration is not on the sound but is rather an intention to make music take part in aesthetics, and presumably is accompanied by the production of mental images), a type of listening that makes a strong reappearance in the contemporary era with what Kaltenecker calls “artists’ listening” (as required by Cage for his own pieces).

... Even if, later, with the dimming of lights in concert spaces (although the trend has been of music being listened to, or at least heard, more and more outside of concert spaces) there was an evolution which was opposite of what Benjamin described relative to the visual arts: not a movement from contemplation (of a nature less artistic than religious) to distraction, but from a distracted perception of form to more attentive forms of listening.

And, quite before the advent of conceptual art, there have been cases in which not only the supra-perceptible was valued, but also the non-perceptible as such, across all senses. A valuation

46 See Jean-Claude Moineau, “La Musique s’écoute-t-elle encore ?” in: *Musiques d’aujourd’hui, Actualité en 26 propos*, Conseil général de la Creuse, 1993.

47 Walter Benjamin, “L’Œuvre d’art à l’ère de sa reproductibilité technique”

48 Although I, for my part, have tried to offer a listen to *anti-records* on the station Radio Libertaire, as others have no doubt done.

49 Paul Veyne, “Lisibilité des images, propagande et appareil monarchique dans l’Empire romain” in: *Revue historique* n°621, Paris, PUF, 2002.

50 James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris, A Cultural History*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California, 1995.

51 Martin Kaltenecker, *L’Oreille divisée, Les Discours sur l’écoute musicale aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles*, Paris, MF, 2010.

which, according to Susan Buck-Morss,⁵² led Kant⁵³ in the era that aesthetics constitutes itself – in reaction against the homoerotic sensuality of Johann Joachim Winckelmann – to value... the art of war itself, with the Kantian transcendental subject purging itself of those senses which implicate empirical man in the world and render him passive, non-active, “effeminate” (*verweiblicht*): “Our sense tells us that, faced with nature’s might, ‘our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle.’ But, says Kant, there is a different, more “sensible” (!) standard, which we acquire when viewing those awesome forces from a ‘safe’ place” [...] “the irresistibility of nature’s might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature,” independent of the perceptible, of esthesia. And here, Szendy⁵⁴ stresses, “aesthetic judgment turns into a judgment *about us*.” Whereas, according to Kant, Buck-Morss posits, if the the artist is usually too dependent on the senses, independence, on the other hand, is never more manifest than in case of the “warrior, impervious to all his sense-giving information of danger.” At most, Kant hesitates between the statesman and the general, who he both holds in high esteem on the basis that “both, in shaping [performatively] reality rather than its representations, are mimicking the autogenic prototype, the nature- and self-producing Judeo-Christian God” only dependent on himself.

And it is Nietzsche himself, Buck-Morss adds, who values the warrior (in contrast to the priest celebrated by Judeo-Christian morality, which inverts the hierarchy of values) the warrior who once again is “self-contained, taking the highest pleasure in its own biophysical emanations,” the warrior “who is by nature ‘master’, he who is violent in act and bearing.”⁵⁵ “One does not reckon with such natures [...] Their work is an instinctive creation and imposition of forms; they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are [...] they exemplify that terrible artists’ egoism that has the look of bronze and knows itself justified to all eternity in its ‘work’, like a mother in her child.” Where, according to Martin Heidegger,⁵⁶ Nietzsche insurges against an effeminate aesthetic based on the receptivity to sensations coming from outside (“Our aesthetics” Nietzsche writes, “heretofore has been a woman’s aesthetics”) demanding for his part “a virile aesthetic,” but “nonetheless an aesthetic” Heidegger notes with regret, instead of breaking completely with aesthetics. A virilist aesthetic Buck-Morss finds to be based on the “combination of autoerotic sexuality and wielding power over others.” One that, she observes, perpetuates a “solipsistic fantasy.”

52 Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered” in: *October* 62, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1992

53 Emmanuel Kant, *Critique de la faculté de juger*

54 Peter Szendy, *Kant chez les extraterrestres, Philosophictions cosmopolitiques*, Paris, Minuit, 2011.

55 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 1887, English translation, New York, Vintage, 1969

56 Martin Heidegger, “La Volonté de puissance en tant qu’art” in: *Nietzsche*, 1961, French translation, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.

Whereas “[t]he nervous system is not contained within the body’s limits [...] as a source of stimuli and the arena for motor response, the external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit” and that “sensory deprivation causes the system’s internal components to degenerate.” This “aesthetic system of sense-consciousness, decentered from the classical subject, wherein external sense-perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation” that Buck-Morss proposes to call the “synaesthetic system.” The “center” of this system being not at the level of the brain, but at the surface of the body. And for this very reason, she posits that Freud located consciousness at the surface of the body, decentered from the brain, Freud himself writing in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*⁵⁷ : “Since consciousness essentially yields perceptions of excitations coming from without and feelings (Empfindungen) of pleasure and pain which can only be derived from within the psychic apparatus, we may allot the system W-Bw.(perceptual consciousness) a position in space. It must lie on the boundary between outer and inner [...]” A system which, according to Freud, is peculiar in that “the excitation process [becomes conscious in that location and] does not leave in it, as it does in all other psychic systems, a permanent alteration of its elements, but is as it were [also] discharged in the phenomenon of becoming conscious and vanishes. And this is the reason that *“consciousness arises in the place of the memory-trace.”*”

In addition to which Freud, in this text which seeks to report on trauma afflicting WWI veterans due to the terrible violence they have been subjected to, himself maintains that if the living organism were to be set into the exterior world charged with energies of the greatest intensity, “it would be destroyed by the operation of the stimuli proceeding from this world if it were not furnished with a protection against stimulation (Reizschutz). [...] For the living organism protection against stimuli is almost a more important task than reception of stimuli” whereas excitations triggering “extensive rupture of the barrier against stimuli” are traumatic in nature. Which, for Freud, means that “the old naïve doctrine of shock would come into its own again.” Although he maintains that “the psycho-analytic conception of the traumatic neurosis is far from being identical with the crudest form of the shock theory. While the latter takes the essential nature of the shock as residing in the direct injury to the molecular structure [...] we seek to understand the effect of the shock by considering the breaking through of the barrier with which the psychic organ is provided against stimuli.”

An idea taken up by Benjamin⁵⁸ himself – but with this difference, according to Buck-Morss: what had been war traumas for Freud have for Benjamin become the norm (the paradigm) of modern life, the exception having become the norm (just as, after WWII, Giorgio Agamben⁵⁹ would come to view the concentration camp as the “biopolitical paradigm of the modern”). “In industrial production no less than modern warfare, in street crowds and erotic encounters, in amusement parks and gambling casinos, shock is the very essence of modern experience.

57 Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 1920, English translation, London and Vienna, International Psycho-Analytical, 1922.

58 Walter Benjamin, “On Certain Motifs in Baudelaire”

59 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo saquer I, Le Pouvoir souverain et la vie nue*, 1995, French translation Paris, Seuil, 1997.

The technologically altered environment exposes the human sensorium to physical shocks that have their correspondence in psychic shock”... and with the notable difference that Benjamin is principally discussing the crumbling and death of experience (and Baudelairean correspondences) or, at the very most, of substitutes for experience. As Buck-Morss says herself: “the synaesthetic system is marshaled to parry technological stimuli in order to protect both the body from trauma of accident and the psyche from the trauma of perceptual shock. As a result, the system reverses its role. Its goal is to *numb* the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory: the cognitive system of synaesthetics has become, rather, one of *anaesthetics*. [...] the simultaneity of overstimulation and numbness,” of aesthetic hyperstimulation and anesthetic numbness, has become the rule, not the exception.

Just as, no doubt, it may also be the case with many kinds of music, be they “scholarly” or not, equally deployed as weapons, or not. Cusick⁶⁰ mentions “resonances between the aesthetics implied by theorists of ‘no-touch torture’ and the aesthetics shared by a wide range of music cultures since the 1960s.” “Musical cultures” and no-touch torture which – in both cases, she writes – additionally tend to erase the distinction not only between sound and noise but between sound and music. But then, what of music as a weapon, or, as Judith Volcler⁶¹ has titled a book, of sound as a weapon? She writes that “sound appears to be immaterial but it is everything that is most physical.” Cusick also decides conclusively in favor of the term ‘sound’, sonic power and continuous propagation (sonic continuum) taking rank for her (as for Stéphane Roth⁶²) above properly musical qualities: pitches, melodies, rhythm (assuming that rhythm be a quality which is properly musical) ... even above properly cultural categories (assuming that properly cultural categories of an identitarian nature even exist) Which, Roth presumes, implies a mutation of listening itself (assuming one may still speak of listening today).

Thus, for Cusick herself, torturers would share with current-day musicians the idea that listening, by polarizing itself on relations between sounds (or on sounds as such, as in esthetic listening according to Kaltenecker) would tend to dissolve (not only melody but also) the actual subjectivity of the “listener” (Roth even goes so far as to speak of desubjectivation, although in these cases there is also subjugation, and so, to follow Foucault⁶³, always subjectivation) all the while affecting bodily functions. Listening submitting the “listener” to a paradoxical condition, both strongly incorporated and quasi-disincorporated, bringing this listener to thereby forget important swaths of her/his supposed identity.

Translated by Michel Chevalier

60 Suzanne Cusick, “Music as Torture/Music as Weapon”

61 Juliette Volcler, *Le Son comme arme*,

62 Stéphane Roth, “Écoute impossible, Les Déserts de Vareuse et l’acoustique tortionnaire d’Abou Ghraib” in: , Jean-Marc Lachaux & Olivier Neveux, eds. *Une esthétique de l’outrage ?*, Paris, Harmattan, 2012.

63 Michel Foucault, “Le Sujet et le pouvoir”, 1982, in: *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, Volume IV, 1980-1988, Paris, Gallimard, 1994.

Taneli Viitahuhta

Three Theses on Russolo

Luigi Russolo's manifesto *Art of Noises*, published in 1913, connects the terms "noise" and "music" in a decisive way, thus presenting important model for later conceptions. Over time it has acquired signification as aesthetic urtext of the 20th century avant-garde and experimental music.¹ In the following theses my interest is to look at this text from perspectives that disentangle the aesthetic thread from its double, the political.

1. Art of Noises is a musical emblem of conservative revolution

Immanuel Kant singles out music in the §53 of *Critique of Judgement* when he compares the aesthetic values of beautiful arts with each other and sets music as the lowest of them. Apparently these art charts were close to a hobby for Kant and he did not uniformly place music at the bottom. But here we find music considered from a social perspective and Kant does not rate it highly. Music, says Kant, "extends its influence further (into the neighbourhood) than is required, and so as it were imposes itself, thus interfering with the freedom of others, outside of the musical circle, which the arts that speak to the eyes do not do, since one need only turn one's eyes away if one would not admit their impression."² Kant recognizes the extraordinary power that music has by means of its immateriality, being sound that spreads in the air, forcing itself to be heard. But his recognition is doubled by blame, because on these grounds Kant reproaches music of being disturbing. Music is unruly, it does not keep to its place. Kant goes on to compare music to the habit, "gone out of fashion", of pulling a perfumed handkerchief out of one's pocket and forcing everyone "if they are to breathe", to enjoy the scent.³ Maybe Kant is thinking of aristocratic mores here, but clearly for him perfumed handkerchiefs and loud music are the kinds of things that an orderly citizen is not especially in need of. In footnote he blames those who recommend the singing of spiritual songs at family prayers for not taking into account "a great hardship upon the public by such *noisy* (and therefore in general pharisaical) devotions". Music, Kant surmises, is in "want of urbanity", it isn't as fit for the city as other arts are, because through music noise always imposes itself. Here lies the hypocrisy (pharisaical devotion): to whomever is making music, there is no way to tell if the sounds she makes will be heard as music or as noise, as art or as disturbance. For Kant this is a critical flaw. As an aside it may be added that Kant had firsthand experience of the hazards of music as noise since at one

1 Russolo's translator Barclay Brown singles out Pierre Schaeffer (*musique concrète*) and John Cage (minimalism) from post-war experimental music as composers who saw special value in Russolo's work, Tristan Tzara of competing Dada movement and Maurice Ravel as immediate utilizers of his techniques, and *machine music* of the 1920s as well as Kurt Schwitters' sound poetry as closest in spirit to his project. (Brown 1986, 1; 20–21 and passim). Gary Lachman detects influence of his ideas in the music of Cage, Edgard Varèse, Harry Partch, Karlheinz Stockhausen and summarizes that "the forms of noise in current electronica, HipHop, avant rock and pop testifies to its entrenchment in modern culture". (Lachman 2003, 32).

2 Kant 1792/2000, 5:330.

3 Ibid.

period he was constantly disturbed by the devotional exercises of the prisoners in the adjoining jail.⁴ So it is Kant, we might say, who puts *urban* in *disturbance*.

In Kant we see the first modern theoretician of the conceptual triangle *urban life–noise–music*, noise emerging as an intermediary term. On the one hand noise is here something of a chance container of residues of life and has in fact a damaging effect on the aesthetic life; on the other hand noise always foreshadows the status of music among the arts because of the unruliness of sound, the remnants of life in it. Kant's theory posits a demand that people living in close proximity, jail or otherwise, have their physical and aural space protected in order for them to appreciate fine arts in the first place. It is the city dweller who needs his Sunday walk in the green, as the sights of nature get his tired eyes toned for the art works. This division of life and art is thus the starting point for Kantian aesthetics, for it guarantees the free interplay of cognition and senses without collapsing their difference. Music's inability to conform to this division is its point of weakness for him.

For Luigi Russolo, writing some 120 years after Kant, nature has ceased to be a reference point and arts have become vapid. Assault on culture is the sine qua non of Futurist project, made famous by F.T. Marinetti's manifesto on the front page of *Le Figaro* in 1909. Russolo focuses this attack on modern music. *Art of Noises* opens with a sketch of a musical history that is illuminating in comparison to Kant for in it the power of sound is given a pride of place:

“In this scarcity of *noises*, the first *sounds* that men were able to draw from a pierced reed or a taut string were stupefying, something new and wonderful. Among primitive peoples, sound was attributed to the gods. It was considered sacred and reserved for priests, who used it to enrich their rites with mystery. Thus was born the idea of sound as something in itself, as different from and independent of life. And from it resulted music, a fantastic world superimposed on the real one, an inviolable and sacred world.”⁵

Starting with music, Russolo forcefully negates the Kantian parallel of beauty in nature and in arts. For him “nature is silent”, and sound, though prominently natural, has always to be man-made if it is to be revered by man.⁶ For Russolo the distance, or quality of being cut off, is at the core of music: it constitutes another, sacred world. Re-tracing his steps we must be very precise in order not to misunderstand this notion. On first glance it looks like Russolo is embarking on a Marxist critique of reification in music. Thus it is easy to see in his essay a concise history of concrete labour (sound embedded in life) turning into possession (sacred music) and being cut off from the socially productive forces (collective intelligence of society, the so-called “General Intellect” (Marx)). Historically this point is valid. For example the eminent 20th century musicologist Curt Sachs has pointed out that the “growth of musical forms that we observe in Europe from the seventeenth century on seems to be connected with the growing

4 Wallace 1882/2002, 42.

5 Russolo 1916/1986, 23. Hereafter: AoN.

6 AoN, 23.

separation of music from social life and extra-musical claims.”⁷ Russolo goes on to affirm this reading, but his critique of reification is cut halfway. The problem in seeing in Russolo a Marxist critic of reification is the other side of his argument, which basically has no truck with the logic of separation. The reason behind this is that Russolo does not in any way examine the concepts of expansion or progress. Quite the opposite, he affirms them. For if he would have examined them, this would have shown him that it is indeed a very special and limited history that he takes to be universal, that of western music’s emancipation from use and into autonomous art form. Because of this, of not investigating these key concepts, his ruling principles stay conservative even if they might seem Marxist on the surface.⁸

For Russolo the historical narrative of music is that of expansion, and this leads him to explore the use of dissonance in latest composition: “As it grows ever more complicated today, musical art seeks out combinations more dissonant, stranger, and harsher for the ear.”⁹ At this point the modern orchestra can no longer satisfy the ear, he claims: “We cannot see the enormous apparatus of forces that the modern orchestra represents without feeling the most profound disillusionment before its paltry acoustic results.”¹⁰

At the time that Russolo is writing, the inability of Wagnerian chromaticism to secure harmonic structure in Western music was becoming evident. *Art of Noises* was published in March 1913, some five months after Arnold Schönberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* premiered in Berlin and less than three months before the scandalous premiere of Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* in Paris. So Russolo is feeling the pulse of *Zeitgeist* when at this precise moment he takes steps to historicize hearing itself. He claims that what is heard and taken pleasure in is a question of surroundings, so that his contemporaries have a need for dissonant sounds and augmented orchestras that would have horrified their ancestors.¹¹ In this framework the truly original step is the setting of noise as the solvent term, overcoming the dichotomy of music and life. But it is set to work in tandem with the key concepts of musical expansion, specialisation and historical progress. Like Kant, Russolo maintains that noise is mainly a by-product of the city life, but he emphasizes its historical role in industrialization: “In the 19th Century, with the invention of machines, Noise

7 Sachs 1962, 124.

8 Again comparison with Sachs’ anthropologically informed (decolonizing) take on musicology is illuminating. Thus Sachs: “there cannot be a steady, straight evolution from childish beginnings to an ever more perfect art, as evolutionists once dreamed. There is rather a bewildering sequence of sudden changes by leaps and bounds, indeed, a constant reversal to older, new, and foreign ideals. [...] Unless one confuses history and evolution, history, the Greater Memory of mankind and our only account of lapsing time and of change, is an eternal function of the mind, whether it appears in nebulous sagas of yore or in the modern search for provable facts and convincing interpretation.” Sachs 1962, 214; 216.

9 AoN, 24.

10 AoN, 25.

11 AoN, 25.

was born. Today, Noise is triumphant and reigns sovereign over the sensibility of men.”¹² For although he maintains that the coming Futurist orchestra should be capable of producing the whole range of sounds that human ear registers, also those of nature, the thrust of Russolo’s writing comes from his claim to hear the urban surroundings in orchestral way:

“Let us cross a large modern capital with our ears more sensitive than our eyes. We will delight in distinguishing the eddying of water, of air or gas in metal pipes, the muttering of motors that breathe and pulse with an indisputable animality. The throbbing of valves, the bustle of piston, the shrieks of mechanical saws, the starting of trams on the tracks, the cracking of whips, the flapping of awnings and flags. We will amuse ourselves by orchestrating together in our imagination the din of rolling shop shutters, the varied hubbub of train stations, iron works, thread mills, printing presses, electrical plants, and subways.”¹³

Russolo’s intuition for solving the crisis of modern music is thus to expand the musical meaning and this starts with listening to the city as a soundscape, in this case the working class quarters of early century Milan, that he turns into his musical raw materials. This, he concludes, will deliver the noises needed for the coming Futuristic orchestra.

Aesthetically Russolo sees his task as bringing noises into music but also extending the spectrum of musical sounds technically. For him these aims go hand in hand. He believes that noise can be refined to be used similarly to traditional musical: “*We want to give pitches to these diverse noises, regulating them harmonically and rhythmically.*”¹⁴ In addition the manifesto boasts of “acoustical enjoyment itself, which the inspiration of the artist will know how to draw from the combining of noises.”¹⁵ The text ends with a sort of entrepreneurial bombast that can be explained with Russolo’s dedication, veering on self-congratulatory, before the task of bringing into world the new noise instruments.¹⁶

In the very last lines of the manifesto the latent contradictions inherent in it, between the attentive-critical and the separatist-expansionist aspect of his project, become manifest. It is in connection with his conviction that every mechanical noise can be refined into essential sound (thus making noise musical *in nuce*) that he writes: “Thus, the motors and machines of our industrial cities can one day be given pitches, so that every workshop will become an intoxicating orchestra of noises.”¹⁷ First we should see the implications of the extension of musical form to cover noises: what we hear as noise is not to Russolo relevant as such, but only

12 AoN, 23.

13 AoN, 26.

14 AoN, 27. Original italics.

15 AoN, 28.

16 “The practical difficulties involved in the construction of these instruments are not serious.” AoN, 29.

17 AoN, 29

as raw materials for musical-technical refinement (giving pitches). But when the hyperbola of this assertion (“every workshop” etc.) is set aside, it is clear for two reasons that bringing noises *as music* back to living work cannot be part of Russolo’s program. Firstly, other than in this comment, there is curiously no mention whatsoever of the transformation of life or work in the manifesto. Secondly, Futurist orchestra, Russolo’s project in view, is in the manifesto presented as a rough-and-ready organisational replacement for traditional orchestra and this places it strictly in traditional musical setting. Politically speaking we have here an exact metaphor of conservative revolution: replacing the old instruments (of power) with new ones, keeping the structures intact and getting to the actual business of ruling (transfixing the audiences).

All this should direct our attention back at Russolo’s program of *listening* → *refining* → *and making musical* of noises. The exact direction that these arrows indicate is the taking of noises away from the context of communal life and instead finding a place for them in the “intoxicating orchestra”, that is, inside the holy sphere of music separated from life. The concert hall needs not to lose anything of its sacred origins and the music that will intoxicate the listeners still following the commanding hand of the conductor (a highly trained musician, not an employee on bus, we might add). This becomes obvious if we follow Russolo’s choice of words. They infallibly land on the enjoyment of the passive audience in front of a musical spectacle made out of noises: these include abovementioned “intoxicating orchestra”, but also “greatest emotional power in acoustical enjoyment itself”¹⁸ and “noises that produce pleasing sensations”¹⁹.

The idea of bringing noises back into the environment they are gathered from has no place in Russolo’s manifesto. Here we see the peculiar element of Russolo’s noise aesthetics. His aim is to take noises of city life into the music and thus expand music and produce new enharmonic instruments to replace the traditional ones, but not to question the framework of music in any other way. Thus he leaves the fundamental musical relations of *composer–musician*, *orchestra–audience* and *work–performance* intact, as well as the *spatial speciality* of musical venue. Most importantly the category of musical composition is left untouched. Thus the nouns *opus* and *opera*, words that in Latin link musical composition with labour, continue for Russolo to show only one side of their meaning, denoting a hierarchy that sets accomplished, dead work as its crown and downplays living work, improvisation and unpremeditated noise.

In Russolo’s conceptual triangle *life–noise–music* we should see the concept of sacred, otherworldly music commanding other terms. Music lifts noise up from its entanglement in life, but this has no serious effect on life outside the very special construction that is the situation of musical performance. If noise is to be likened to a revolution – and why not? – it too should be differentiated by the various political uses it can be put in. Noise in *Art of Noises* has its structural equivalent in the revolution of conservative political movement.

18 AoN, 28.

19 AoN, 25.

2. Russolo's aesthetics and politics have a common ground in mythical concept of authority

If Peter Osborne is right in claiming that Italian Futurism has long been recognized as an example of politically reactionary artistic modernism,²⁰ then this cannot really be said to have touched on the reception of Russolo's work. On the contrary, the modernist critics of Russolo have tendentially presented him as a politically progressive materialist because of his emphasis on technique and the age of machine. It is Luciano Chessa's formidable accomplishment to have shown in his book *Luigi Russolo, Futurist* (2012) the very concrete links that pertain between Russolo's spiritual or occult worldview, his aesthetics and politics.²¹ Russolo's own writings show clear enough signs of his anti-materialism, especially his book *Al di là della materia: Alla ricerca del vero, Alla ricerca del bello, Alla ricerca del bene*²² (1938). Already the title gives a taste of its severe critique of materialism, caused in Russolo's view by a lack of spirituality in society.²³ The fact that in reception of Russolo's work, these and other obvious traits have been omitted shows alarming unwillingness of critics to deal with contents that have disturbing effects on representation. For example, Chessa traces an undocumented and counterfactual claim of Russolo's purported antifascism that is echoed in research literature since first uttered in 1975. This claim runs through Russolo scholarship up to these days with nothing to back it up. On the contrary, there is clear evidence presented by Chessa that Russolo participated in il Duce-endorsed Futurist exhibits in 1927 and 1929 and that after his return from Paris to Italy in 1933 he first accepted and then allied to the fascist regime.²⁴ Thus, Osborne's claim should be extended: if Futurism has been recognized as politically reactionary art movement, then musical Futurist program makes no exception. The connections between Russolo's art, politics and *Weltanschauung* have scarcely been seriously studied before Chessa's writings on the topic.

Yet we must be careful not to mirror the procedure of those critics whose toil it is to clinically separate the layers of aesthetical and political so as to analyse only artworks, as if they were produced in vacuum. Critical blind eye that has been turned to Russolo's political alignment with Italian Fascism would make it easy now to smudge him by combining facts in a suggestive fashion. But this again would rely on the questionable method that we just criticized as spurious

20 Osborne 1995, 166.

21 Chessa argues that behind the lack of critical interest in Russolo's occult work are ideological reasons: "Interest in the occult has been ignored by scholars whose modernist approach to musicology accepts and rewards only contributions that can be considered progressive according to a narrow, selective, and fundamentally ideological idea of progress in art. Most likely this judgment is also based on a fear of the supposed connection between irrational occult theories and fascism." Chessa 2012, 20.

22 "Beyond matter: In search of Truth, in search of Beauty, in search of Good"

23 Chessa 2012, 184.

24 Chessa 2012, 21.

separation of aesthetics and politics. In fact there is no point in dismissing Russolo's art because of his political stand, for this would subject the needed close scrutiny of his proceedings to assumed common political opinion. Guilt by association short-circuits the analysis, because it starts with what should be the results, while in fact these two are connected by a silent third term, that of ideology. To avoid this, in the following the amalgam of aesthetics and politics is disentangled by focusing on Russolo's art practice alone: how it brings up his rationale of power and authority.

It needs to be said that among the arts music is special in that it seems to invite spiritual description. For sound is invisible, it moves through the air and hearing is based on feeling vibrations. Thus it is no wonder that musicians have been prone to describe their art in spiritual terms throughout the ages. Also, the Italian Futurists, while rooting their project in the Cosmic, were not alone in their reliance on the mystical. Around 1910s their various interests in Blavatsky's theosophy, Neo-Platonism, Eastern philosophies, Rose+Croix, black and red magic, spiritualism, Nietzsche and Bergson, latest scientific discoveries (Röntgen's X-rays, Einstein's theory of relativity) and fields of parapsychology and parascience (telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis etc.) would have certainly seemed daring to their contemporaries, but by our time the dichotomy of scientific/unscientific thought has become so rigid that it is hard for us not to view their project in anachronistic terms as wildly eclectic, bordering on crazy. But as Chessa notes, "from the middle of the nineteenth century on, interest in the occult was increasingly shared by scientists and occultists alike".²⁵ The Futurists were swimming with the tide, so to speak, in linking scientific and supernatural. And even more to the point, Russolo's concept of musical revolution that is the topic of my theses, was an amalgam of these ideas.

Nonetheless even given the intellectual surroundings around 1910 and Russolo's involvement with Futurist movement, first as painter and after 1913 as musician-theoretician, his commitment to metaphysics is striking. Actualizing spiritual reality by hermetic knowledge of correspondences seems to encapsulate the alchemical task that Russolo always set to his art.²⁶ How he has inquired to do this in music is somewhat better known, while the personal motivation behind is normally left in the dark. In fact it seems that the non-willingness of the public opinion to understand his procedure surprised Russolo himself, because he complains that after the publication of his manifesto not one of his critics had understood its intuitive principle or its practical realization.²⁷

Apparatuses that Russolo designed and built after his manifesto *Art of Noises*, are called *intonarumori* in Italian or noise intoners in English, and first generation of them were presented for the public in 1914 concert in Milan. After this they were heard over the years either by themselves or in various combinations with traditional instruments in the concert halls of Rome, Paris, London and Prague. Although almost nothing survives of Russolo's noise orchestra

25 Chessa 2012, 31.

26 Chessa 2012, 182–199.

27 AoN, 31.

in the form of records,²⁸ his initial idea seems to have been as radical as laid out by Brown: “entire symphonies composed of the sounds of everyday urban life.”²⁹ His best known work to use only noise intoners, *Risveglio di una città*, doesn’t unfortunately show much interplay between different *intonarumori*, but is more of showcase of their special abilities.³⁰ Later he made concessions to traditional composition and instruments, but it seems more of a marketing plan than aesthetically motivated move from him.³¹ After 1921 Russolo concentrated his energies on “noise harmonium”, *rumorarmonio*, a one-man operated organ of sorts with more than two noise intoners combined. With this instrument he accompanied silent movies in 1920s Paris, but as talking pictures were just about to supplant them, work got scarce and he retired from music business without having had his break.³²

Public reception for art of noises mixed acclaim, disbelief and ridicule. For Russolo however it was beyond criticism, for it extended his artistic contact with the otherworldly that he had started as a painter several years earlier. Russolo believed in alchemic quality of *intonarumori*. For him there was no truth in the criticism often hurled at his project that it replaced meaningful music with mere sounds of imitation, because for him this music aimed for creation of spiritual life, not imitation of material world. He opposed aesthetics of representation with aesthetics of creation, and drawing inspiration from the writings of Aristotle, Leonardo da Vinci and Bergson channelled his philosophy of musical creation through occult and theosophical theories.³³ For Russolo the *intonarumori* were special instruments in conjuring up spirits, because they were not limited by the diatonic scale but instead produced “enharmonic sounds”. This means that they used glissando and could not produce intervals between pitches by leap. Russolo called this feature “dynamic continuity” and saw in it key to every harmonic formation: “Here are every form of scale, natural, diatonic, Pythagorean, tempered, chromatic, and enharmonic, the most infinite variety of timbres, all forms of chords and associations of triads, dissonances, and enharmonicisms.”³⁴

28 The instruments were presumably destroyed in the Second World War, but with the supervision of Chessa, contemporary composer and Russolo researcher, many of them were built anew for *Performa09* festival in New York, 2009. Below is a link for a video documentary of an evening-length concert program, that presented to audience *16 Futurist Sound Intoners*. With the *intonarumori* orchestra, that Chessa is leading, guest performers, such as John Butcher and Joan La Barbara, perform on their habitual instruments: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lqej96ZVoo8

29 Brown 1986, 1.

30 Listen to it here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC3KMBskYNI.

31 The classic wax cylinder recording from 1921, *Corale/Serenata*, has traditional orchestra performing with some *intonarumori*. *Serenata* can be heard here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmHXKCaRYeM.

32 See Brown, Introduction.

33 Chessa 2012, 158.

34 AoN, 66.

For what we know of *intonarumori* by the way documentation, they seem rather crude in terms of exact control of pitch. But for Russolo this seems to have been of minor importance. For him the *intonarumori* was not so much a musical as a alchemical-metaphysical instrument, endowed with cosmogonic ability to re-create the structure of the world.³⁵ Thus Chessa:

“For Russolo, the *intonarumori* was an alchemical experiment in the creation of life, which futurists believed was the only process capable of producing an art that could truly be called ‘spiritual’. In Russolo’s experiment, raw matter (in the form of pure noise) is transformed by means of a mechanical instrument (the *intonarumori*) functioning as an alchemical crucible or *vas*, through a cunning process with a mechanical side (enharmonic transformation) and a spiritual one (infusion of energy).
[...]

This process is articulated at three levels. In the first level, noise becomes spiritual as a result of the *intonarumori* being tuned and endowed with enharmonic (i.e., microtonal) possibilities. In the second level, an orchestra of *intonarumori* produces a spiral of noises that re-creates the world first as a simultaneous chaos and then as a unity. In the third level, the artist-creator-medium who spearheaded the process can communicate with the spirits, who, against the soundtrack of spiritual music, are now able to materialize.”³⁶

It now becomes possible to separate the musical breakthrough that Russolo has achieved from the authoritative usage that he has put it in. Although the *intonarumori* seem technically limited, this does not mean that they would not be capable of releasing great charge of noise *en masse* and in effect emancipating players and audiences alike from dependence on narrow musical ideas concerning harmony, scales, purity of sound and the like. But these possibilities are brought to standstill by Russolo’s authoritative leadership that rests on mythical ground of metaphysical wisdom. Striking in his own description of performing with noise orchestra is that it essentially depicts a heroic battle of a solitary subject against the terrifying forces of matter in a demiurgic task of creating the world from chaos. Its political ramifications show the worst influence of Romantic ideas put to work for authoritarian ends and the vertical power structure that Western musical practice so forcefully puts forward. Disappointingly they are not challenged by Russolo in any way. On the contrary, it is strengthened as he reaches into the primordial past. As the “artist-creator-medium”, is communicating with the spirits of the dead that he conjures up, he is at the same time battling against base materiality of the noises produced by *intonarumori* and trying to elevate them. The intoxicated or synaesthetic state for the listener that is Russolo’s aim would be attained by spiral-like change in the musical atmosphere and dynamic fusion of noises, leading from chaos to order.³⁷ Russolo describes his struggle with noises: they must be “dominated, enslaved, mastered completely, conquered, and constrained to become elements

35 Chessa 2012, 159.

36 Chessa, 151.

37 Chessa 2012, 160.

of art. (This is the continual battle of the artist against matter.)”³⁸ As the musical machines and other technical gear the conductor is equipped with also happen to be made by him, so in all seriousness Russolo’s fantasy can be said to be that of giving birth to another, non-material world in a state devoid of original sin.

In concrete musical situation this gives total license for the artist-creator-medium and it is worth asking if the matter that Russolo sees to be in need of complete mastery, is limited to the sounds or if it includes the musicians and the totality of situation. Since we encounter here the double idea of the conductor as possessed – thus outside the sphere of converse and social interaction – and yet in total control, it is safe to assume that questioning the leader or even maintaining one’s individual voice must have been very hard inside this framework. The complete authority this description gives to the conductor, no matter how efficient or “intoxicating” the effect might be, is ages away from ideas of egalitarian social setting. If anything, the esoteric backdrop of Russolo’s art of noises begs the question why to call on musicians and composers to follow, as he does in manifesto. It seems fair to suspect that few musicians would be persuaded if they knew the God-like position this program gives to the leader and the opaque background for his elevation above the status of mere mortal that the musician must be content with. This analysis of mythic authority in *Art of Noises* in no way needs to hamper our appreciation of it. In contrast, making the social parameters of musical practice transparent could lead to more emancipatory musical situations also within the existent avant-garde and experimental music scenes.

3. Russolo serves musical imperialism

Etienne Balibar has argued that the capitalist division of labour leads to the polarization of social formations and creates antagonistic classes whose interests are decreasingly common ones. We can thus see the history of social formations, the binding force behind collective action and the relations inherent to them, “non-economic” by capitalist standards, as a history of attack and de-structuring caused by the expansion of capitalist value form.³⁹ Read through the conceptual triangle of *life – noise – music* Balibar’s statement can be hypothetically translated into musical terms. Following this, my hypothesis is that in the recent history of western music expansion of the dominating *musical* form is to be understood as annexing *sound relations* to itself that are formerly thought of as noise, and at the same time de-structuring or making loose these relations in their “non-economic” milieu, that is, in social formations. In the following *Art of Noises* will be read through this initial hypothesis with help of Rosa Luxemburg’s seminal work, *Accumulation of Capital* (1913).

38 Quoted in Chessa, 152.

39 Balibar 1991, 8.

Western music and capitalist mode of production have one common feature above all: both are driven to expansion by a structural need. There is no need for a grand theory of economic determinism or explanations deriving from base and superstructure model. We need to only note this conjuncture: harmonic development and increase in orchestral size as well as music's separation from the context of communal life are contemporaneous events to expansion of capitalist mode of production in Europe. While the parallels is vague, it becomes meaningful when we consider the history of western music in the light of Russolo's manifesto.

After the final military defeat of Ottomans and the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718, Ottoman ambassadors were regularly sent to establish political relations to European capitols and Polish and Russian monarchs also ordered Turkish janissary (military) bands for their courts. The second half of the 18th century saw European imitations of these bands becoming commonplace and the *alla turca* style, based on janissary music, infiltrated into European art music. Mary Hunter's analyses shows how Gluck, Mozart and late Beethoven incorporated impressions of this music in their works and that, although janissary bands were thought of being noisy, savage, and beyond technical refinements of European orchestra, their sound could nonetheless not be duplicated by western instruments.⁴⁰ This period, labeled "classical", is in fact largely indebted to non-European music, especially Turkish, and this exposure also gave shape to the orchestral overhaul of the times.

These two broad ideas – that Western music has a history of annexing foreign sonic materials into it and that this simultaneously shows the shortcomings of the tradition in close-up – are curiously expressed in Russolo's compact history of Western music that opens up his manifesto. What is curious, is Russolo's silence on exotic music's importance to classical period of Western music, though he comes close to conceptualising this.⁴¹ But since Futurist assault on culture does not give weight to class analysis (for if it would, it would have had totally different position towards imperial warfare, national culture and political regime), Russolo has no conceptual tools to analyse musical history in light of imperialism and to recognize that Ottoman Empire, the one "exotic" culture that Western European population of the 18th century could have had some limited experience of⁴², has its counterpoint in the early 20th century bourgeoisie culture. This counterpoint is of course the proletariat. Similar fears and fantasies of vile barbarity and lawlessness are projected onto them and very similarly they both come to embody the noise and unruliness of music that Kant finds so disturbing. The manual workers and paupers are the actual Turks of 1913, no longer on the gates but inside the city, and even more threatening for this reason. But since he is oblivious to class relations Russolo has no conceptual tools to analyse this substitution nor can he account for the importance of ethnicity in Western music.

In this connection Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of imperialism in her seminal book *The Accumulation of Capital* is interesting for it directly deals with the blind spot in Russolo's

40 Hunter 1997, 43; 48.

41 AoN, 24.

42 Hunter 1997, 43.

schema. Luxemburg states that what sets capitalism apart from all other modes of production is its continuous need for expansion. The very peculiar nature of capitalism is that it needs other production modes to sustain itself. The other productions provide it with not only raw materials but also with labour power and lastly, but historically most importantly, with new consumers. In its full maturity capitalism “depends in all respects on non-capitalist strata and social organisations existing side by side with it”.⁴³ Slave and peasant economies as well as other “primitive” organisations of production are the lifeblood of capitalist expansion because on a national market there exists a balance between surplus value extraction from working class and their functioning as consumers.

So if expansion is the law of capital and it needs production only so far as to secure the exploitation of surplus value, then production needs to conquer new ground. Similarly, the production system needs new labour force, new people becoming workers and consumers. These new capitalist people are then positioned on the lowest level of the global capitalist ladder where the system presents itself through long days, small wages, hazardous work, and no access to trade unions. Thus if there is a “civilizing aspect” of capital, as Marx puts it in *Grundrisse*, it “drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces.”⁴⁴

Luxemburg’s analysis shows the theoretical parallel Russolo’s project has with imperialist economics. Plainly put the proletariat is in cultural terms in the same situation as primitive people with their “non-economic” social system vis-a-vis capitalist production. The proletariat enjoy their music outside the specialization and social coreography of concert halls: theirs is the *opera*, not the *opus*. This is the “traditional, confined” musical production that starts to interest the bourgeoisie because of the civil proximity they share with it and the growing mechanical powers of noise to penetrate their lives. As the boring concerts that Russolo depicts show that the musical form of production has saturated (the Schönbergian and Stravinskian crisis just announcing themselves), there is hardly no more surplus value to squeeze out while keeping the consumption going. And without audience, or only with one that grows old and dies without succeeding in the reproduction of capitalism by transferring their cultural values to their offspring, the production starts to stoop and the expansion of capitalism by way of higher surplus value is not guaranteed.

So what better way to get proletariat into serious music than by incorporating into music the noise contents they are already familiar with? Thus their vital musical energies would fuel the coughing apparatus linking the non-capitalist productions to the existing capitalist system.

43 Luxemburg 1913/2003, 335.

44 Marx 1858/2015, 402–412 (Notebook IV: Devaluation of capital itself owing to increase of productive force).

Accordingly this would bring new cultured masses to the concert halls as it would incorporate new labour force and bring about new consumers with purchasing power.

Russolo's and other Futurists' enthusiasm about World War I is a telltale sign of the imperialist mode of thinking both in their aesthetics and in similarities to the economic imperialism analysed by Luxemburg. Thus Russolo:

“Marvelous and tragic symphony of the noises of war! The strangest and the most powerful noises are gathered together there! A man who comes from a noisy modern city, who knows all the noises of the street, of the railway stations, and of the vastly different factories will still find something up there at the front to amaze him. He will still find noises in which he can feel a new and unexpected emotion.”⁴⁵

Luxemburg notices that one of the errors of Marxist economics thus far has been the rejection of the idea that state can become consumer and thus help out the capitalist class in making profit when the private consumers won't. Her thesis is that war economy essentially makes this move by boosting the production while at the same time solving the problem of demand because all the products are purchased by the state (or the army).⁴⁶ Here we have the last parallel between the *Art of Noises* and imperialism as it is analysed in *The Accumulation of Capital*. Although Russolo got wounded, he came back from the war not muted as Walter Benjamin wrote of the veterans of the World War I, but dedicated to continue his work with the *intonarumori*. If he made music of his *Kriegserlebnis* we cannot tell. But that he heard in the sounds of war new sonic productions and advertised them as stirring up new unexpected emotions is a sign of continuation of imperialist train of thought in the midst of a great revolutionary turmoil.

45 AoN, 50.

46 Luxemburg 1913/2003, 435.

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Henrik Heinonen

**Description of a Sound
in Seven Parts
Script for a Lecture-performance**

Here is a sound.

You might not be able to hear it, but it is there. You may not hear it, you may not see it, you may not smell it, but it is there. You feel it. A strange uneasiness, annoyance, and nausea linger in your nervous system when you are inside the perimeter of its effective distance. You may want to remove yourself from this space.

Then it stops. Disappears from the room, without a trace as if it never was. Like a ghost, or an undesired memory. The space that it occupied, although our sensory system finds difficulties to attest its presence, is now empty.

Here is a sound.

A fighter jet flies over an apartment building on low altitude. Then a boom, a crash, windows shatter, a nosebleed. Splitting headache. Feeling of terror, anxiety, distress. The jet broke the speed of sound. Like being inside an explosion, one of the victims of such an attack describes it. He lives in Gaza, terrorised by the Israeli Air Forces non-lethal tactics of sonic bombs, utilised since the last Israeli settlers were removed from Gaza Strip in 2005. It has been reported to have caused an extensive spike in the amount of miscarriages amongst the Palestinian women. Like bombs that kill before the enemy is even born.

Here is a sound.

You hear a voice. Female, middle-aged. An American accent. She's preaching. About the Love of God and strength in Faith, how it brought down the walls of Jericho by the combined voices of the believers. Her name is Aimee McPherson. She is an evangelical preacher, one of the first female preachers in United States. It's 1920's America, radio is gaining more and more popularity, and she is the first one to grasp the possibilities of mass media in full. She is the second woman ever to gain a broadcasting license and she uses the donation money to her church to found a radio station of her own. She combines the fundamentalist reading of the Bible with popular culture and the new media technology. She becomes the most popular preacher of the new religious rising of the United States of America. Perhaps the most popular ever, for her sermons go across the continent and sometimes, on good weather, can be heard even across the Pacific Ocean in Australia. She becomes a celebrity, a superstar, the first one, more popular than any politician or film star of her time. Her end will be tragic, and today she is forgotten. But the voice still lingers on.

Here is a sound.

It is a sound of a heavy staccato beat of a machine gun spitting bullets. A stocky build man in a beard and dark clothes is called Abu Musab al-Sarqawi. Now he is speaking. "God willing we will defeat the Americans with their own weapons. Allahu Akbar." He does not know how to

clear the stoppage of the US Army issue M249 machine gun and walks away in white basketball trainers. And now he is dead.

The young recruits of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Leviathan, or simply Islamic State, the military terrorist organisation he founded, heed his words. Global computerized information networks, originally developed for the United States Department of Defense, become a propaganda tool for extreme fundamentalism, terrorism, and military recruitment. Pictures of kittens with machine guns and Qurans mix with videos of beheadings of infidels and suicide bombings. There's also those heavily photoshopped images of mujahideen soldiers, standing in the desert, staring at a sunset in the distance, leaning to a machine gun on top of a mountain, smiling. So very similar to the recruitment advertisement used by the western military. So very similar to the historic European oil paintings between High Renaissance and the early modernism. The sky, the colours, the composition are from Poussin or Lorrain or Velasquez, whereas the images of beheadings and torture are like those of Caravaggio or Goya. Old European Master palette mixes with American corporate techno-algorithms and modern fundamentalist interpretation of Arabic religious texts. In invasion warfare, guns are the weapons least effective.

Al-Sarqawi is dead now. But the voice still lingers on.

Here is a sound.

It is a voice, a speech. But garbled, nonsensical gutter talk mangled out of recognition. It is Winston Churchill, British prime minister during the Second World War, giving a speech. Next to the phonograph stands Alan Turing.

Turing was a mathematician who broke the German secret code during the Second World War and who invented what is known as the Turing Machine - the basis of every computer built today. The machine creating the distorted sound is called Vocoder. Invented by Bell Laboratories in United States, he has perfected it to disguise and deceive, mask human voice to become impenetrable for eaves dropping and spying. This machine, ubiquitous in today's popular music - Kraftwerk, Cher, Daft Punk - turns the bark of the British Bulldog into hiss and screech, white noise over the Atlantic Ocean.

After the war Turing kills himself. The circumstances are tragic, he has been perpetrated because of his homosexuality, convicted, publicly humiliated, and chemically castrated. But the voice still lingers on.

Here is a sound.

It's dark. Across the river a division of tanks is preparing for an attack. There's a bridge being built, shouts, banging of wood, heavy tools, motors revving, movement, preparation into formations, pioneering of bridges and roads - the cavalry of modern warfare. What cannot be

seen can be heard, the coming attack, the tension, almost like a promise - an engagement. The bridge is ready now. Men become silent, and the engines follow. A wait before an action.

But there is no action. There never was any bridge, nor tanks, nor men – except for a group of artists. They are called Ghost Army, a tactical deception unit stationed in Europe during the Second World War. Utilising brand new stereophonic amplification equipment, mounted on top of so-called sonic cars they use a soundtrack mix of meticulously recorded sounds of heavy armour movement, drawn from a vast vinyl archive of high quality sound samples, to create a soundscape of a battlefield. Like a group of Military DJ's and beatmakers, they deceive the enemy to think that what is not there, is there, and what is there, is not there. Warfare becomes a theatre of sound, an aural image of the battlefield, a phantasma of noise - and then disappears.

And here is a sound.

Noise, by a technical definition, is random fluctuation or interference in an electronic signal that is not part of the signal and either disturbs it or obscures it completely.

In 1950's United States Central Intelligence Agency funded a project called MKUltra. Based on research by a Canadian medical doctor Ewen Cameron, it researched ways to control and manipulate human mind and memory by reconstructing the human brain as an intricate computer, a complex electric circuit. And just like a computer, the brain could be connected to, wiped clean of the existing memory and reprogrammed. This was done by cutting off the skin from the backside of the head, removing the back of the skull while the heavily sedated patient was still awake, and directing low-current electrical signal into this vast and complex circuit of memories, emotions, anxieties and neuroses. The hypothesis was that by delicate manipulation of human neuro-psychological complex by electrical current, its memory paths and data storage could be decoded, recoded and reorganised without the subject even remembering what had happened. So in effect, by directly introducing a form of noise into the human mind it could be controlled and manipulated into an amnesiac agent, with new memories and a new identity.

The project was a disaster and never produced anything but patients with a complete loss of memory. The idea, systematic technological mind-control by secretive state organisation corroding the very fundamentals of civil liberties, lingers on in various forms in the vast culture of conspiracy theories, science fiction, popular cinema and so on. The story, that of double agents and mind control has somehow grasped our imagination throughout the 20th Century and with the new technological advancements of the 21st, has become even more pertinent. Perhaps it is a modern fable, a story told in various forms and types of narrative, but having always somewhat the same basic structure, and the same message. Perhaps it is a way for us to remind ourselves to stay wary of those who control us. Stay wary, and be afraid - of power.

But something goes missing with this crude sketch of fumbling agents and useless pseudo-scientific experiments. A low electrical current, introduced to the subjects nervous system. Tiny, inaudible, dull, inconspicuous, discreet. Disrupting, deranging, influencing, obscuring, distorting... Today it is a constant part of our lives. One of the first writers to see the

problems the fast technological advancement could create to the civil society, Aldous Huxley, wrote in 1945:

The Twentieth Century is, among other things, the Age of Noise. Physical noise, mental noise and noise of desire—we hold history's record for all of them. And no wonder; for all the resources of our almost miraculous technology have been thrown into the current assault against silence. [...]

And this din goes far deeper, of course, than the ear-drums. It penetrates the mind, filling it with a babel of distractions—news items, mutually irrelevant bits of information, blasts of corybantic or sentimental music, continually repeated doses of drama that bring no catharsis, but merely create a craving for daily or even hourly emotional enemas. [...] the noise is carried from the ears, through the realms of phantasy, knowledge and feeling to the ego's central core of wish and desire.¹

With the global network of internet, instant news 24 hours a day and constant connectivity with mobile technology, Huxley's proclamation holds true more than ever before. But perhaps the din doesn't so much project into us, penetrate our ears or the cerebral cortex of our brains, but immerses us into a vibrational affect of all surrounding noise - a sonic ecology. Human body is 60 percent of water, so perhaps the sonic din the of "babel of distractions" does not simply interact with our auditory perception system, but resonates through us, in us - like a stone thrown into water, an allegory for physical properties of sound used by Stoic philosopher Chrysippus already 2,200 years ago. Sound can penetrate, but noise you drown into.

A global political ecosystem of interlinking crises' and networked technology. Machine guns made in US, trainers made in China. Soldiers die in wars without armies, facts escape narratives created by weapon systems of hearsay and lies. Ecology of sounds, an onslaught of voices that "make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and [...] give an appearance of solidity to pure wind"². Drown into the epicentre of an explosion. Pheme, Fama, or Ossa, the daughter of Gaia:

...The swiftest traveller of all the ills on earth,
Thriving on movement, gathering strength as it goes; at the start
A small and cowardly thing, it soon puffs itself up,
And walking upon the ground, buries its head in the cloudbase.
The legend is that, enraged with the gods, Mother Earth produced
This creature, her last child, as a sister to Enceladus
And Coeus—a swift-footed creature, a winged angel of ruin,
A terrible, grotesque monster, each feather upon whose body—
Incredible though it sounds—has a sleepless eye beneath it,
And for every eye she has also a tongue, a voice and a pricked ear.
At night she flits midway between earth and sky, through the gloom
Screeching, and never closes her eyelids in sweet slumber:
By day she is perched like a look-out either upon a roof-top

Or some high turret; so she terrorises whole cities
Loud-speaker of truth, hoarder of mischievous falsehood, equally.³

She fights the cold war of frozen words. Wilderness of mirrors. You see everything, but in fact you see nothing. Every voice and word reaches its listening ears.

Some sounds go unheard. Some sounds are too big to be heard.

So here

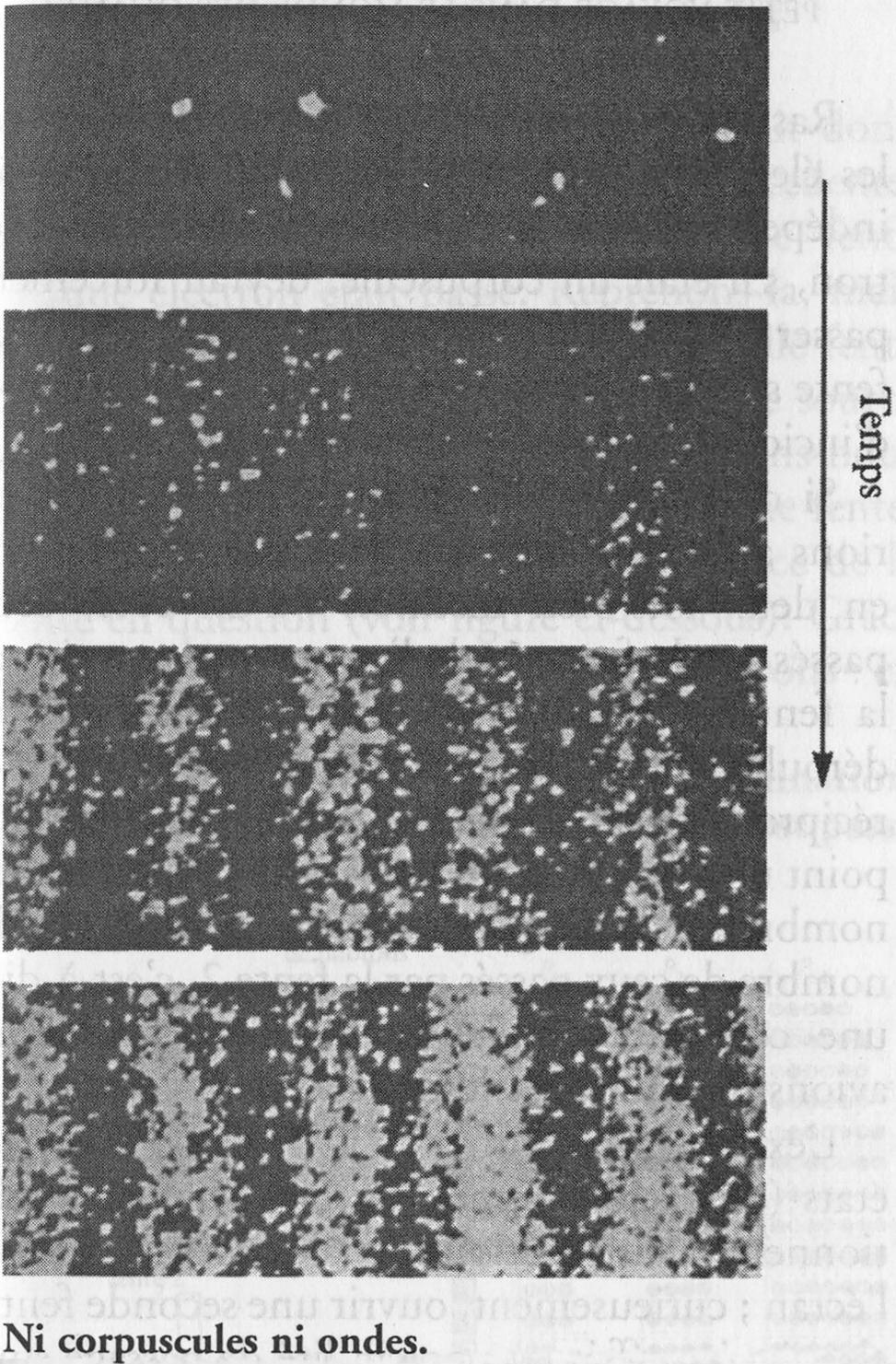
is a sound.

Endnotes

- 1 Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1946. 249-250.
- 2 Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." In *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 127-140. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- 3 Virgil. *The Aeneid* (book 4, lines 174-188), trans. C. Day Lewis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. 96-97.

Grégoire Rousseau

**Origin and Process
of Modern Machine**



Ni corpuscules ni ondes.

Double slit experiment: visual evidence of duality wave-particle for quantum object. Electrons are fired toward a double slit and proved to behave both as wave and particle, when not observed.

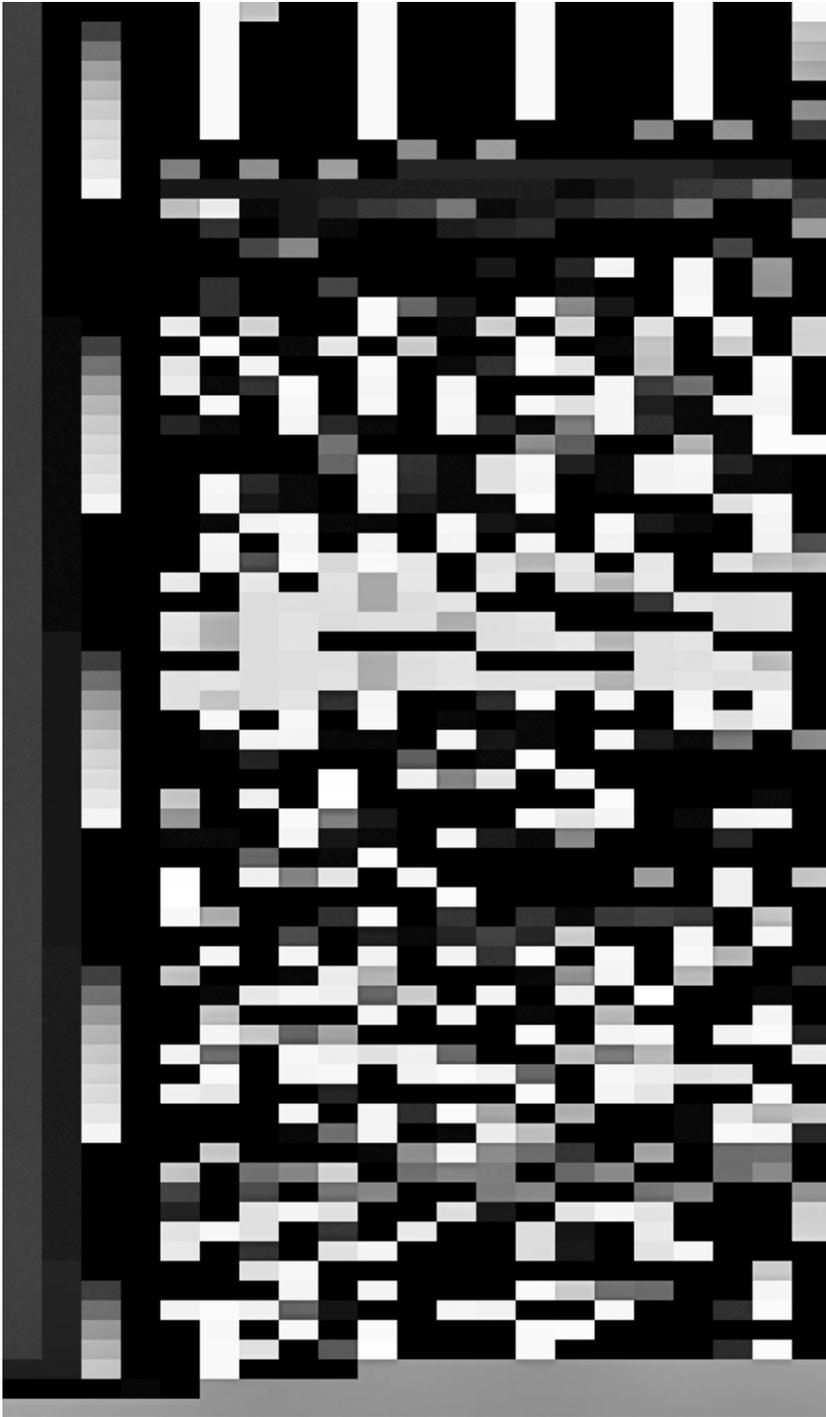
The modern machine consists of complex binary ensembles. Its form consists of a body of coordinated systems requiring enormous energy, and its organisation rules a state of control leading inexorably toward an unnecessary unity. The method of any binary system operates only on true/false processes. This simple statement does not imply that inputs or outputs of a given binary system are to be dual; closed possibilities of only two modes. Mathematics has already defined what is binary logic.

Binary logic originates from DeBoole and DeMorgan; mathematicians from the 18th century. They first conceptualized an algebra operating on base “two”; numbers are expressed as series of “0” and “1”. The modus operandi to manipulate variables happens to be very efficient, as only three basic operators suffice to define any binary systems. These three core operators are NOT, AND and OR.

Nevertheless, our senses, relation to physicality and market require the machine to adapt to us. It has to consider our analogue world as an always-limited scale of degrees. Value does not belong to a continuous space but exists as discrete parts of a whole. A difficulty of interpretation appears, simultaneous to the belief that accuracy can solve the precise questions of understanding on limits, and infinity, becomes a necessity. This contradiction can operate on both the temporal and material levels. Systems must be quicker and larger. My phone is more sophisticated than devices that went to Space in the 1960s. This achievement does not imply better knowledge on how machines can actually understand the language of society, or even on how to actually communicate. The increasing flow of information produces a soft representation of physicality within the machine. These sequences of true/false transform into an image of the material condition. The software, as a non-physical instance, processes this image to transform it into a possible representation for society.

Information, byte by byte, is transmitted by signals. Electricity can store, carry and process big digital data. Digital data, at the material level, can take only two states; “true” or “false”; become “0” or “1”. From computers, phone and communication, train rail systems to social security numbers, bus and plane ticket databases, digital technology applies binary logic to everyday life; the abstraction of mathematics turned into a system of interpretations and analysis. New categories proceed from a change in paradigm. Revolution in science elaborates new discourses; the new apparatus of modern machines originate from the new theoretical disciplines. The same morning the Quantum science revolution arose, modern machines were assembled in the late evening.

Max Planck first faced quantum physics in 1900. The unexplained behaviour of black bodies led him to fabricate a new method to rationalise its weird encounter. He quickly realised it was impossible to match his method with the old theories. Old instruments are used essentially to solve old problems. During his experiment, Planck met a case of a not-yet-indexed circumstance that would invalidate the predictions of the currently used theory. The necessity to find a new and adequate model induced the foundation for a totally new approach to physics as a whole. In quantum physics, the quantum refers to the least possible leap between steps in a given field. For instance the Planck length constant defines $1.62 \times 10^{-36} \text{m}$ as the smallest distance



Visual representation of software blink.ino. This code produces a square wave of Frequency of 1Hz. This code is compiled on Arduino, then Processing converts the hexadecimal value of the binary file into corresponding grey colour codes.

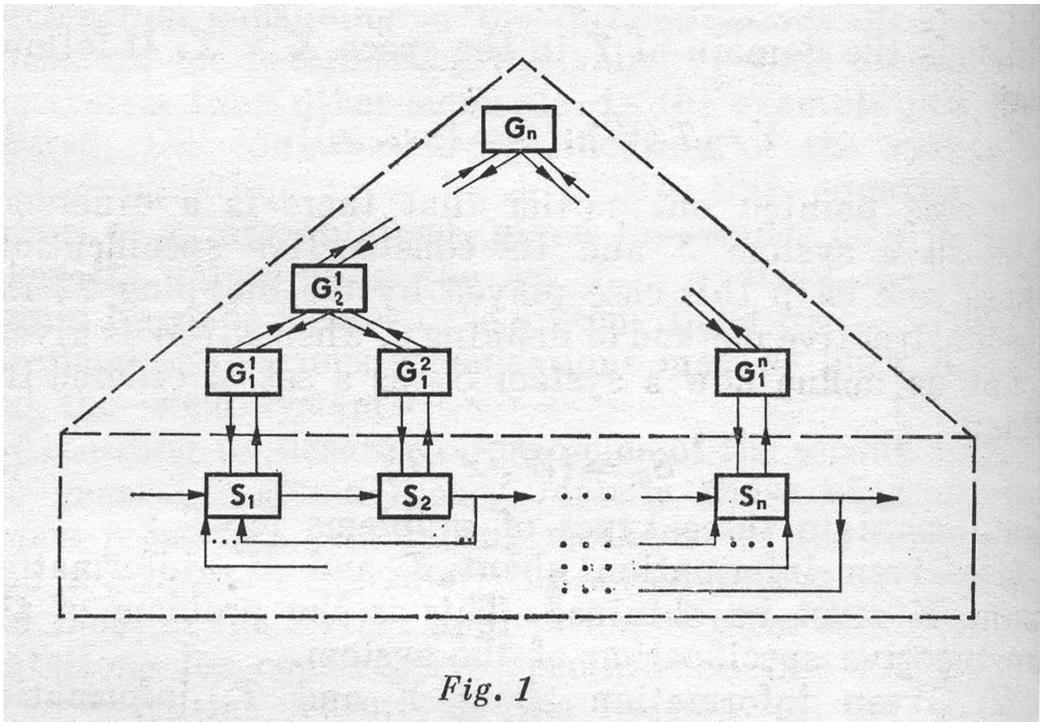


Fig. 1

Abstract representation of a large multi-level multi-goal system.

between two instances. Quantum physics understands reality as a superposition of variety on possible states. The reduction of this superposition to a single state defines the outcome of a given experiment. Quantum physics operates on probability, and uncertainty. Once applied, it manifests its stability and its practicality is not questioned. However, the debate is not closed on specific concepts.

Quantum physics happens to be famous for its paradoxes; simple anecdotes for a very deep topic. However, they reflect a certain truth; the ball going through the net, the fish in the bond-Poisson soluble-, Schrödinger's cat or the experiment on wave/ particle duality.

Quantum objects have strange behaviours that any everyday approach is not able to produce. In order to understand them, it is necessary to break, beforehand, clearly with our usual conceptions, to renounce as well any visual representation of physical objects. We must get rid of the requisite for the necessity of image as a condition of knowledge.

The most common quantum object is a transistor, combining "transfer" and "resistor". Transistors conduct electricity in a specific manner due to the semi-conductivity property of materials. Arrangements of transistors construct binary systems. A solid architecture designed to process digital data. A single average computer chip integrates up to 5.5 billion transistors; 5.5 billions of false/true operations processed at the frequency of 3 billion times per second.

This processing power allows modern machines to appear as real time operators and to be even more precise than what society would need. Real time operation and the idea of measure, as a trace/memory of the position, are two essential traits of the analogue world which digital systems cannot implement. An analogue system has no delay or processing time between the input and related output signals. The relation between input and output, or transfer function, takes form in a mathematic formula, originating from the physical properties of the system's components; while in a digital system, processes will be clocked at a fix tempo. If the amount of data to be processed by software happens to be larger than supported, then the system will slow down and simulation of real time becomes sensible. The specificity of analogue regarding an assessment of position stands as follows: "In analogue, it is impossible to find the same position twice", nothing can actually be repeated. As powerful as a digital system can be, its process can only operate on discrete parts. Hence, its correctness in position assessment cannot work in the field of the senses. The modern machine can only perfectly repeat work instruction, or tasks. A field where speculation on position has no eventuality.

Bruno Besana

**Doing Nothing:
Voidance and Intensification**

What follows is not a proper scholarly philosophical paper - although it integrates lines of inquiry from previous scholarly works, and although it aims at a further conceptual production. It is rather an interruption of philosophical writing: a fracture or moment of suspension, an aphasia affecting a well-ordered conceptual language, the aim of which is to insert a disturbance in the apparent unity of a given chain of concepts. The aim of such operation is to produce a better conceptual understanding of a major dialectical problem, and to do so by inserting a fracture and a disturbance in the given, customary way in which philosophy articulates it. A fracture obtained by inquiring on some aspects of the ideas of void and disturbance, or noise, in art, and namely by investigating examples that appear to produce an inconsistency in some concepts, thus forcing to find for them a different articulation.

More precisely the attempt is to see how a series of moments in the arts that *have nothing in common* between them, by certain modes of articulation of such a *nothing* allow for a different understanding of what *change*, thought as radical transformation, *is*. The question of such a 'being' of change classically is: how can a radical transformation not only appear, but have a consistent existence, i.e. be able to continue and to produce further effects? It is via a detour out of philosophy that it will be possible to overcome an apparent deadlock to which the analytics of this question apparently always leads. In general terms, this paper attempts at seeing how a certain appearance of nothing might shed some light on the following, classical question: how it is possible to account for change in such a way that the latter is not reduced to the simple permutation, to a change of position of elements into a structure that distributes and hierarchizes their positions? How is it possible, in other terms, to understand a qualitative change? By temporarily stepping out of philosophy it is possible to examine a set of cases in which the existence of such a change is related to the appearance of an empty supplement: *a term that is not*, a term the appearance of which cannot be accounted for by the logic naming and distributing places for the elements of a situation.

The idea that a change other than the simple structural permutation might be coupled with a certain appearance of nothing is, of course, to be found in the idea of proletarians who, as the French translation of the International Anthem says "are nothing and become all". But it is also to be found in the case of insignificant peasants who are not supposed to be represented in art outside the 'tableau de genre' and that all at once strike a hieratic pose in a six by four meters 'majestic' painting (i.e. in a format usually reserved for kings or for mythological scenes), as in Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans*.

In order for change to appear, something of the order of a nothing, of something that has no recognizable characters within a field (a subject that has nothing to do with painting codes, a clumsy mumbling that is not recognizable as language, a subject deemed to be too ignorant to articulate a political speech) has to appear. And it has to appear not as an element of the artistic, political, narrative situation, but as a pure interruption, as a void fracturing the consistency of a situation. In the case of Courbet's painting, such a nothing appears as an inconsistency, and a big one, between the codes of a genre and a subject-matter: properly, the subject of the painting is this non-sense, this void of relation between form and portrayed object, appearing in all its force, in all its assertive material presence. The subject of the painting is thus not simply

the subject portrayed in it, but the very lack of relation between the latter and the codes of the genre of the painting in which it appears. Here the subject is a pure nothing, an absence of relation; and when nothing does that which it is not supposed to do (i.e. not to be there) *it does not appear as something, but it appears as a fracture, as a radical change (or at least as a promise of a radical overturn)*. The no-one, the nothing, portrayed in this painting will no longer be the same, after its simultaneous appearance in the streets of Paris (1848) and in this painting (1849). Again, the real subject is not “the people”, but the presence of an impossible, nonsensical (for the organization of the artistic or political field of the time) connection: common people making political statements in the streets, the plebe conquering the centre of a majestic portrait, appearing with the calm, dignified, almost hieratic staticity usually applied to the portraits of the noblesse.

What is to be stressed, is that the appearance of such an equation between nothing and change, which has been central in the last philosophical century, happens to find out of philosophy (and namely, in art) some of the most precise resources for a more precise understanding of its internal dialectics. Nonetheless, the point is not here to do some sort of ‘philosophy of art’, ‘reflecting’ upon some artworks, or asking what the artistic century is¹, but rather to use a set of singular examples, of singular moments of fracture into the arts, that show how the appearance of such a relation of change and nothing is inseparable from two elements: destruction, and pure positivity.

On a broader, more abstract perspective, one can notice that the idea of a certain presence, of a certain effectivity and materiality of that which is not, appears to be exactly that via which the attempt is posed to overcome the limits of the logic of the negative - of the negative as determinate, and determining, moment articulating and confirming the very logic upon which a situation is constructed and ordered. The idea is that when nothing appears, it doesn't appear as a negative moment: i.e., it does not appear as that which negates an aspect or part of a given situation - that which ultimately would confirm the very validity of the common ground within which the negation is posed. Rather, it appears as an unrelated inconsistency. As such, it appears to be at once destructive and positive. Destructive because, appearing with no relation to the situation in which it appears, it threatens the representational stability of the latter. In fact, a nothing that appears (while, as nothing, it is supposed not to appear) threatens to drag into nothingness everything: *nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout* - which of course means the promise of a new order to come, but also, quite literally, means ‘nothing can become everything’ (all should be destroyed). In more serious terms: the stability of a totalizing logic of representation that attributes a place and name to each element of a situation is threatened of annihilation by the very appearance of whatever, in the perspective of that same logic, is nothing. The question

1 Gilles Deleuze has clearly shown the limits of philosophy meant as an activity of contemplation of universal ideas, as an activity of reflection upon other fields, or as a communicational tool. Namely, he has insisted on how, by claiming its capacity to reflect upon every field, one might seem to give all power to philosophy, while ultimately reducing it to an activity lacking any proper creative capacity. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, New York, Verso, 1994, Introduction and Chapter 1.

of a radical, destructive appearance of nothing echoes the polemics, roaring in XXth century philosophy, but also for instance in Italy's 60's and 70's political debate², around the limits of determinate negation, around the limits of thinking negation as that which ultimately affirms that which it is supposed to negate. The polemics, in other words, against the negative as that which produces further determinations, allowing for a better and more precise operational capacity of the structures in which it takes place. For instance: left opposition as negative of governmental right, finally affirming the very common ground of parliamentary turnover while at once strengthening the government's capacity to face critiques.

Contrary to this, when nothing appears, it overcomes twice such logic of the negative. First, as seen in the Courbet's painting or in the quote from the International Anthem, 'nothing' appears as an inexistence producing a non-sense that immediately saturates the situation with its paradoxical presence, a presence with which the former logic of the situation cannot come to terms. By acting independently from the determining logic of the negative, it undermines the consistency of the structure declaring its inexistence. Secondly and most important, as we will see, such nothing appears not as a negative moment, in the sense that, although appearing by explosive, destructive means, it is not *the pars destruens*, to which a new constructive moment (literally, a restoration) will follow. *Novelty is not the restoration of a space of sense coming after a destructive moment. When novelty is, it is absolutely positive*, it is a nothing that becomes *directly* constructive, it is *constructive within its destructiveness*. The two senses of 'nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout' ("we shall be the new world" and "nothing becomes all, all shall be annihilated") are actually logically and chronologically the same. One sense, splitting into two.

Of course the idea of an overcoming of determinate negation has been largely investigated within contemporary philosophy. Still it is interesting to see that its further dialectic articulation - i.e. the idea of a nothing that suddenly appears by overcoming the limits of determinate negation, being *directly constructive in its destructiveness* - is an idea that appears to be largely posed in the second half of the century outside of philosophy, and namely in fine arts. Silence in Cage's music, destruction in Matta-Clark architecture, or voidance of image in Malevich's paintings did not appear as negative moments via which the logic underlying harmonic structures can be extended to further domains, via which the solidity of architecture can find more subtle expressive means, or via which the pictorial narrative based on the adequation between style and object of representation can be taken to a further level of complicacy. All these moments appeared as fatal inconsistencies in the art grammar of their time; even more, they all meant to introduce a new idea of art as the articulation of a conflictual space in which that which is not - that which is not supposed to exist into art - appears in it as a nothing which reduces to

2 A good overview on this is offered by Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (ed.), *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, Melbourne, Re:Press, 2009.

nothing the very mode of organization and perception of what the space of art is.³ Furthermore, they all meant to introduce the idea that art is inseparable from the creative capacity of its own destruction. A radical destruction that is not meant as the storm after which the construction of a new language will be possible, but on the contrary as a *destructive act of voiding which is in itself a constructive and articulated reality*.

Amongst several examples of the introduction of an 'inexistent' which at once produces an effect of destruction and posits a radical novelty, it can be of interest to focus on some aspects of the use of void and silence in Cage's work. It's known how Cage dignified silence by bringing it to the role of musical object; but it can be interesting here to remark a few qualifications that in his essays he uses for silence, and that allow us to see how silence is introduced not because it would be a certain flatness, a sheer absence of sound, but because it is an *articulated presence* which rather flattens the customary structures and organisational relevances upon which is constituted the musical space in which it appears.

Cage first and foremost remarks that silence, far from being inert or unarticulated, expresses, within written music, that which does not find place into it, yet being there. In written music, Cage explains, "those (sounds) which are not notated appear as silences".⁴ Silence, the void of music, is thus the specific mode of appearance of those sounds that are not recognized as music. Cage's point is the following: what any musical grammar fundamentally does, is to constantly select sounds, categorizing between musical and non musical ones, thus fundamentally *silencing* the second ones, which appear in the page as the white blank separating notes or other musical graphemes. Reversing this logic, one can think of silence as the possible *performance of those sounds*. Namely – Cage continues – in live performance silence is that latency where random environmental sounds can appear: when performed on stage - either as the piece itself (4'33") or as a fundamental aspect of it - silence not only works as the destruction of music, as its effective erasure, but it's also equated to (it allows for the appearance of) the sound of a chair squeaking, a cough from the audience, the heavy or soft breathing of the performer, or even the screams of protest of a bored audience and, as in a well know case, the political slogans and the songs of an audience singing against Cage, but also with Cage, and claiming the need of getting rid of those bourgeois avant-garde artists.⁵ By making silence a musical object, Cage manages to saturate the musical field with an overwhelming mass of allegedly non-musical elements.

3 On the idea of an essential contradiction between works of art and a given field of art see Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 1-15, and Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, New York, Continuum, 2008, pp. 23-25. One can also refer to the concept of "art contrarié" in Rancière's *Film Fables* Introduction, "A Twisted Fable". see Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, Oxford - New York, Berg, 2006, pp. 1-20.

4 John Cage, "Experimental Music", in John Cage, *Silence*, London, Marion Boyars, 1980 (1968), p. 8.

5 If of course 4'33" is the seminal example of this, one can think of the live recording of *Empty Words, Part III*, Milan, Teatro Lirico, 1977, Cramps Records, 1990). Footage available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_NBQ3e8PGE.

The point in creating an empty space allowing for silenced sonic phenomena to be exposed is not simply to remove artificial structures in order to show some allegedly deeper truth of music and sounds, but it is to *give room to those elements which, in a precise historical sequence, by entering the musical space, have de facto the capacity to produce a fracture within the habit by which the composer, the musician or the listener tend to organize sound*. Silence has not any longer anything to do with the “negative of music”: as Cage explains, silence is no longer meant as “the time lapse between sounds, useful towards a variety of senses, among them that of tasteful arrangement, where by separating two sounds or two groups of sounds their differences or relationship might receive emphasis”⁶. Quite the contrary, in Cage’s use of silence the aim is to offer a space of latency or absence in which the emergence of something inconsistent with that which is perceived as music is able to produce further fractures. The whole point of silence is that the attempt to produce it introduces noisy disturbances in the musical scene - it introduces a hyper-saturated field of sonic phenomena which not only immediately self-organize in new musical forms, but which also organize new actions of aggression against taste, genre, sense, and other form of organized divisions of sonic phenomena.

Silence is thus a nothing that actively empties itself of its only own quality, i.e., to be silent. *And immediately one can see that silence brings forth two fundamental aspects of any contemporary grasp of the nothing as functional concept: to have a certain materiality* (silence is immediately its opposite, i.e. an hyper-saturated sonic field) and to have a certain *efficacy* (this noisy silence immediately produces disturbances, dissonances, but also reactions and battles, hence constructing new narratives within its destructive capacity, within its capacity to silence music).

Silence – i.e. the proper nothing of music – loses thus its negative functions, it is no longer simply that space of absence of sound that allows for the distinction of sounds, and for their rhythmic, tonal and timbric distinction. So conceived, silence *makes a difference* within music, and creates new musical phenomena, by actively producing a flattening, an *indifferentiation* of the musical field. In this sense, silence appears as a performance: as the performance of a destructive and erasive fracture within music, allowing for the manifestation of that which, *present* in it, receives in it no *representation*. A performance that structures itself in the material dialectics of voidance and saturation, and that equates destruction with the constructive narration of this destruction. The void, as soon as it appears as a hyper-saturated field, becomes destructive. Taking place in a space where it is supposed to be an inert nothing, such void appears in it against the logics of the latter - and it appears in it by articulating itself and its inner resources in new combinations and possibilities: hence, by the simple act of constructing its own narrative,

6 John Cage, “Composition as Process”, in John Cage, *Silence*, cit., p. 22.

it destroys the apparent universal validity of the rules organizing the place 'at the place of which' it appears.⁷

As an example of this construction of a narrative of destruction, one could notice for instance how Cage is extremely attentive in exploring a plurality of techniques and modes of articulation of silence as a hyper-saturated sonic field. Namely, Cage introduces a criterion of selection between the random appearance of sounds brought up by silence: "at the parting of the ways, where it is realized that sounds occur whether intended or not, one has to turn in the direction of those he does not intend".⁸ performance needs to select those acts or sounds, or those specific moments of intervention of silence, which are able to drag with them further unintentional elements, further disturbance and chance. Amongst all Cage's systems of randomization (from the use of I-Ching to prepared pianos), one can quote a strategy that is created directly at the level of writing, as an active form of creation of musical narrative produced at the point where the power of the composer is held hostage, is hijacked. As he explains, the idea is to set a system in which "notes are determined by imperfection in the paper upon which the music is written".⁹ In other terms (and in analogy with silence), *paper is no longer here the negative, the white nothing upon which the sonic graphemes can be determined in their mutual relation; it is rather a disturbing 'nothing of sense' provided with a specific materiality, actively disturbing the act of writing, actively disturbing the dialectics that distributes different signs through the mediation of their negative, i.e. the blank page. The blank page is chosen as a material means able to bring forward a nothing (a randomness, a nothing of sense - namely here the imperfections of the paper) that disrupts the distribution of those sounds that are music and those that are not. It is actively chosen as an enhancer of noise (noise meant as that, the presence of that which exceeds the classical distribution of musical signs in specific parts of the page), operating mainly by bringing forth randomness and chance, i.e. the very void of necessity upon which the distinction of music and non-music ultimately relies.*

7 If silence is to be understood as a means to produce difference by erasure or indifferenciation of a given field, then an interesting parallelism to this is Sly Stone's mixing technique for *There's a riot going on* (1971) and *Fresh* (1973). Fundamentally, Sly Stone 'equalizes' all different instruments, jeopardizing the possibility of a harmonious perception of a foreground voice and solo instruments, a mid-level presence of accompanying instruments (piano, organ, rhythm guitars), and a background level of the rhythm session. All parts appear to be flattened out, that which immediately allows for a less track-format oriented perception of the music, a perception more oriented to catch micro-structures and clusters of notes, reiterations, subtle variations, timbric dissonances and assonances. This also tends to produce a decreased perception of the division of the track in verse, bridge and refrain (the distinction of which is by the way undermined by the repetitive structure of the tracks, organized in a manner that reminds of course the expanded drony structures of Clinton's Parliament/Funkadelic's music). Paradoxically, the dramatic increase in importance of the rhythm section in post '70s music is one of the main, but not necessarily most interesting, effects of the perceptive possibilities opened by such a flattening: one could in this sense argue that the results of such musical difference produced by flattening have been later exploited in order to re-create a new format, namely the one of '80s disco music.

8 John Cage, "Experimental Music", in John Cage, *Silence, cit.*, p. 8.

9 John Cage, "Composition as Process", in John Cage, *Silence, cit.*, p. 26.

What is to be noticed, is that the creation of such a space of voidance, of irrelationality with the present definition of a field (here, the field of music) is *at once* destructive and constructive. Dialectically unrelated to music, actively erasing all music (not only by silencing it, but also by diminishing the authorial capacity of the composer and of the performer), it allows to force into music that which not only is not music, but that specific non-music that, in a given historical sequence, torments and reshapes the very line of discrimination of that which is music, and that which is not. As anticipated in the introduction, the idea is that, by overcoming the dialectics of the negative, the destructive capacity of nothing is no longer a moment to be overcome: it is not the *pars destruens* to which a *pars construens* will follow. There is no restoration of the musical field after its destruction, because the destruction of the musical field is equivalent here to its construction. This construction is here witnessed by the use of the blank page, which unfolds and gives a further twist to the logic of the material and effective use of silence. Namely, in the same way in which silence brought forward its equivalence with the hyper-saturated field of noise, the imperfections of the blank page (blank page which Cage noticed to be the equivalent of silence in traditional music) are here used to perform a further investigation in this dialectics of the absent and of the present, of the active and of the passive. The materiality of the blank page brings forward a blockage of the activity of the author (who will choose a certain type of paper as an active form to hijack her own activity), and this produces at the same time a series of paradoxical musical notations, which are literally the sound of the blank, the sound of silence: these sounds produced by the materiality of the blank page integrate within the act of playing an instrument the noise that in other compositions Cage revealed via the performance of silence.

Although this example shows a possible internal constructive logic of destruction, still a further investigation is needed in the dialectics of these explosive, revolutionary moments into art - these moments where that which is not supposed to exist comes to the forefront, producing the destruction of the organizational logics of the field in which it appears. Boris Groys, in a brilliant article on Kazimir Malevich, has correctly highlighted the kernel of the possible deadlock or impasse of such emphasis on destruction. The problem he highlights is the one of the continuation of a revolutionary moment identified by its non-dialectical, destructive capacity: by stressing a parallelism between the revolutionary sequence and Malevich's revolutionary gesture into painting he writes: "the continuation of the revolution could be understood as its permanent radicalization, as its repetition - as permanent revolution. But repetition of the revolution under the conditions of the post-revolutionary state could at the same time be easily understood as counter-revolution - as an act of weakening and destabilizing revolutionary achievement. On the other hand, the stabilization of the post-revolutionary situation unavoidably revives the pre-revolutionary norms of stability and order".¹⁰ Groys' remark synthesizes a well-known political problem: how to continue a revolution, what to do *after* the destruction of the old? By continuing with destruction, one ends into annihilation and chaos, thus hijacking the revolution itself; on the other hand, by constructing something after the destructive moment, one risks

10 Boris Groys, "Becoming Revolutionary, On Kazimir Malevich", *E-Flux* #47, 9/2013, New York. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/becoming-revolutionary-on-kazimir-malevich/>. Connected to this article are also Boris Groys, "On the new", in Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2013, pp. 23-42.

to reproduce the very schemas that the revolution was set to overcome, i.e. either to produce mediations with the reactionary forces, or to develop from the inside a new form of reactionary power. This double (or triple) bind is clearly understandable in political terms: this could be for instance the case, after the Russian revolution, of the risk of an anarchist drive, or on the contrary, of mediation with the bourgeoisie, or finally of constituting a bureaucratic privileged caste within the new state-form.¹¹ In music, this could be either the temptation, after Cage, to stop performing and only talk or write about music; or, on the contrary, to create a mediation by introducing cagean solutions within chromatically-organized music;¹² or, finally, setting an established repertoire of sounds for performing Cage's pieces (thus standardizing pieces that initially demanded the intervention of aleatory operations or extremely free choices).

Boris Groys reads Malevich 'destructive' antifigurativism - as namely exemplified by 1915 'Black Square' - within the frame of this predicament, i.e. as a revolutionary attempt to get rid of the old, but an attempt that fails to overcome the deadlock of the question 'how to continue'. Still, it seems that Groys misses here the essential point, i.e. Malevich's attempt at unfolding a productive capacity of destruction, in which the destructive moment is no longer the *denstruens* posited between old forms to be destroyed, and a new formalism to come, but is in itself identical to the construction of the new. On the one hand, 'Black square' does not posit itself as a determinate and determining negation of that which it attempts to negate: it does not interact with or mend figurativism, but it simply considers the latter as inexistent. On the other hand, as a destruction of all possible figurative grammatic, Black square is neither equal to sheer destruction nor is meant to be followed by a constructive moment that, being a restoration of forms, would finally be a factual negation of the destructive moment. Malevich in other terms, against the grain of Groys reading, is indicating the possibility of a positive constructivity of destruction itself.¹³ How is this possible?

11 The same problem has been brilliantly highlighted for instance by Pier Paolo Pasolini's screenplay on Saint Paul. In it the founder of the Church is presented as thorn between the revolutionary impact of the universalistic, egalitarian message of Christianity and the necessity to organize in a quasi-military way a hierarchic apparatus set to defend the new community of equals. See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saint Paul - a Screenplay*, New York, Verso, 2014. Also, in more abstract terms, Alain Badiou has highlighted how a subject faithful to an event within an artistic, political or scientific situation is on the one hand bound to the announcement of such an event wiping away all given modes of organization of that field and of hierarchized representation of its elements, and on the other is bound to organize a rigid, hierarchized structure in order to ensure the embodiment of the consequences of the event in the situation in which she operates. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003.

12 One can think in this sense of a certain irreflected use of prepared piano in Aphex Twin's albums.

13 A similar idea is developed in other terms by the works of Sylvain Lazarus and Alain Badiou: the claim is that novelty should proceed directly from a positive articulation of that which is unaccounted for within a situation, the simple self-organization of which being a factor of loss of grasp and power of the structure producing its invisibility. Novelty is thus constructed without relation, "at distance", from the representational and power structures of a situation. Novelty proceeds from that which, in the situation, counts as 'nothing'. See in particular Sylvain Lazarus, « Sur une nouvelle politique contemporaine et sur la philosophie de la politique de Louis Althusser lecteur de Lénine », in *Socio-anthropologie*, 23-24, 2009, pp. 211-236.

Malevich doubled the voidance of all figurativism performed by his 'black square', with a more radical form of iconoclasm.¹⁴ Facing the risk of artworks in Russian musea to be burned or destroyed, in the aftermath of the revolution, by groups of activists, he wrote the following: when there is a "striving to destroy, one must not interfere, since by hindering we are blocking the path to (novelty)." And, more interesting, he adds: 'In burning a corpse we obtain one gram of powder: accordingly, thousands of graveyards could be accommodated on a single chemist's shelf.'¹⁵ Pot of ashes by pot of ashes, shelf by shelf, one can imagine to build up a whole 'pharmacy' made of the burnt corpses of the ancient paintings (the reduced space they take also providing at the same time for, quite literally, more room for the new). "The aim [of this pharmacy] will be the following: if people will examine the powder from Rubens and all his art – a mass of ideas will arise in people, and will be often more alive than actual representation (and take up less room)".¹⁶ One can stop herself of course at the level of seeing here a *pars destruens*, (i.e. the physical elimination of the old representative art, of that art that has been for a long time the material support of the mental representation of class differences); and a *pars construens* (the pharmacy, i.e. art as the cure capable to heal humanity from stupidity and injustice). But what is rather interesting is to see *that what is at stake here is the existence of a creative capacity of destruction - of the same destructive aspect present in suprematist antifigurativism*. If one reads together such declarations and the gesture of 'Black Square', she can see that the proper artwork is not per se 'Black Square', nor is it the following coming back of a certain figurativism that takes place in Malevich work, after 'Black square'. Black square is neither the "minimal" form of the artwork, once and for all achieved, nor a destructive moment after which one should start painting again with new codes. What is to be read as the proper consistency of Malevich's artwork is a sequence of gestures unfolding, proliferating *from within* the destructive moment of voidance: 1) from the black square proceeds the idea of de-painting, of taking painting up to the minimal sensible trace of its own arrest or blockage; 2) from the painting as materialized idea of de-painting, of *doing* nothing, proceeds the idea of undoing figurative painting on a larger scale, namely by letting paintings burn; 3) this expansion of de-figuration is not obtained by active means of an author who would become a performer (a sort of action painter, who for instance would actively burn galleries as an extreme mode of performance-art)¹⁷; on the contrary, it is

14 Of course the question of a return of figurativism is indeed factually present in Malevich's work. Without entering in an analysis of this problem, the aim is here simply to trace a possible line of development of antifigurativism - line of development of which some fundamental elements can be found by putting together some aspects of the work of Malevich between 1915 and 1922.

15 Malevich, *On the Museum*, 1919. The following translation has been consulted: Kasimir Malevich, « Scritti » (Andrei B. Nakov, ed.), Milano, Feltrinelli, 1977. Text out of print, found at <http://milanoartexpo.com/category/kazimir-severinovic-malevic/>. Groy's in his article (see *supra*, note 10) reconstructs the background of Malevich article, namely the fact that "the new Soviet government feared that the old Russian museums and art collections would be destroyed by civil war", and that Malevich's text should be read as an invitation "not to intervene".

16 *Ibid.*

17 The most famous case in this direction is probably Ulay's theft of Spitzweg's "Der arme Poet", witnessed by the video *Action in 14 Predetermined Sequences, There is A Criminal Touch To Art*, 1976. Nonetheless, this performance has far more nuances, which cannot be analyzed here.

obtained by inscribing a certain passivity into the core of the definition of new art: sMalevich's request is *to let* artworks be destroyed ; 4) a new sense appears here in the traditional idea of a certain equivalence of the active and the passive in the artist's figure: the coincidence of the passive and of the active is no longer, as in romantic art, an internal struggle ultimately defining the activity of the artist, but it is rather a suspension of her powers and of her individuality (what here counts is the destructive capacity of the masses, active in the point where the artist stops working);¹⁸ 5) finally, this produces a certain 'pharmacy' which is not to be read as simply the capacity to heal the stupidity of the masses by a supposed medical role of the artist-thaumaturg. What is here at stake is rather the capacity of the masses themselves to combine the different powders that are to be found in the shelves of destruction.¹⁹ All this chain of consequences is what constitutes the constructivity of destruction, is what constitutes the capacity to "construct creation by erasing the path behind us":²⁰ *here we witness the capacity of an artwork, equivalent to*

18 The idea of the connection between the construction of the new and a radical form of passivity (or rather action of erasure of activity) is in particular witnessed by 1921's writing on "Inactivity", in which Malevich points out how novelty can only be produced within a complete blockage of activity, a widespread 'laziness'. The latter should even not be understood in the terms of the *otium* to which one could have access once the *negotium* is suspended. Quite the contrary, Malevich poses here the necessity to perform a pure space of latency where both productive and intellectual activities are suspended (pp. 23-27). Once reached that state, then a more radical novelty can emerge, in which the figure itself of humanity would be overcome by something new ("in the future, the machine will overcome its exploitation and will have another being producing at its place, getting thus free from the burden that the socialist society has cast upon the machine in order for humanity to conquer the right to inactivity" (p. 22). True activity is thus the destructive work set to create this goal of inactivity ("each truth has work as a mean to reach inactivity", p. 37). Quotes from Kasimir Malevich, *L'inattività*, Trieste, Asterios Editore, 2012. Similar points are also implied in the search for objectivity in art production as unfolded in Kasimir Malevich, *The Question of Imitative Art*, in Kazimir Malevich, *Essays on Art 1915-1928*, New York: Wittenborn and company, 1968, *passim*.

19 It would be interesting to analyze this aspect from a Rancièrian point of view. In particular, it appears here that such a chain of acts and statements goes beyond any possible didactic paradigm, rejecting the idea that the work of art would be that via which an artist transmits a liberating, political content to the masses. This absence of a didactic paradigm at the core of a highly politicized art sequence allows for a different linking of art and politics, where the latter is no longer the subject-matter transmitted by the forms of art, with the mediation of the artist. Politics is rather here to be found at the level of the choice of materials themselves (here, ashes), at the level of the determination of which hands manipulate this material (here, any hand), and at the level of the question of which mode of production is rejected (here, the artist posing herself as exemplum for the masses). For this perspective, read in particular, Jacques Rancièrè, *The Emancipated Spectator*, New York Verso, 2011, *passim*.

20 Kasimir Malevich, *On the museum. cit.*. One might notice here that the aim is not to construct new forms, but to construct creation, that which is equivalent to the unfolding of destruction. Construction is constructed by erasing the path, erasing the very possibility to localize the construction of the new. The construction of the new is equivalent to the construction of what one can call its own 'irrelativity'.

annihilation (even equivalent to its own annihilation),²¹ to produce a chain of consequences. And it is this chain of consequences that should be properly called 'artwork'.

As a conclusion, it can be relevant to notice how such a capacity of destruction by voidance to become a creative process is provided with an internal dialectics. More precisely, not only is destruction immediately creative when attaining a capacity to accumulate consequences out of a state of suspension, interruption or voidance: the capacity for destruction to create a set of consequences is obtained by a series of modes, in a dialectic field placed between voidance and saturation. In fact, one can observe how a creative capacity of destruction can be obtained when the saturation of a field proceeds out of an act of voidance, or when a collapse is produced by means of accumulation: namely, such a positive capacity of destruction to construct novelty relying on its own sole resources is obtained when the void so obtained appears to be densely populated by 'noisy' elements (elements inconsistent with the 'grammar' of the situation), and each time that the accumulation of disturbances voids a situation from the evidences upon which it is currently organized. There is, in other words, a complex structural field of destruction, within which novelty is produced, and this is what overcomes the limits of Groys remark.

The idea for instance that a radical fracture can be obtained by means of accumulation of individually coherent signals, finds one of its seminal examples is Steve Reich's spoken word piece 'Come out', from 1966.²² By using an over-recording technique that in the same years Alvin Lucier was experimenting with 'I am in sitting in a room',²³ Reich takes one voice sample, i.e. one discrete signal understandable under different analytic angles, and progressively overlays it to itself - but he does so by introducing a constantly increasing interval between the samples. As the over-recordings increase in number, and as the void fracture between the samples increases in duration, on the one hand the signal, by cumulating to itself, degrades into noise; but, on the other, a series of new musical phenomena emerge from this degradation: one can hear spoken word acquiring echo up to the point of creating musically notated sound,

21 For Malevich not only the new is constructed by destruction, but is inseparable from its own constant erasure (that which anticipates an aspect that will be here later analyzed in relation to Beuys' and Roth's work). In this sense in the same article on the museum he adds that new art will compose a "Contemporary Museum" the peculiarity of which is that new forms will only be "temporarily preserved" for as long as they can continue their creative/destructive function.

22 Steve Reich, *Come out*, 1966, first recording available on Steve Reich, *Early Works*, New York, Nonesuch, 1987.

23 In, *I am sitting in a room*, by recording the reading of a text performed in a given room, playing it back in the room, and progressively recording and playing again each playback, Alvin Lucier erases the original signal by overlaying it to itself, with the addition of nothing else that the echoic quality of the 'void' of the room in which it is played. This very act of erasure by accumulation is what produces the progressive construction of the musical architecture of the piece. Differently than in Reich's case, the void added to the piece is here always contingent, specifically determined by the performance, of which it is the trace. The piece can actually be read as the progressive gaining of presence of the silence of the room against the original performance (the first performance of the text). The performance is simultaneously both silenced and created by the integration of silence within the performance itself. Also, the textual dimension refers here directly to the effect produced by the piece, which thus realizes the text by silencing it.

one can hear pulses and then rhythmic structures appearing and sinking, canons forming and dissolving, clarity increasing and finally producing a white noise, the apparent flatness of which is in fact remarkably articulated in a real “grammar of noise”. Spoken word becomes musical element becomes musical note becomes pulse becomes rhythmic structure becomes canon becomes grammar of noise: again, the same generative sequence created around a fracture that we have seen in Malevich (there, doing art out of passivity, out of destruction, out of the positing of a space emptied of figures and of activity; here, using a non-musical element, and a non musical strategy, to create a new musical field and structure), but this time the fracture is introduced together with a cumulative strategy of hyper-saturation of signals. Destruction is created by accumulation, accumulation is obtained by interpolation of nothing but silence, and a new musical architecture is created by the very process of destruction of the original message, mediated by the addition of a nothing in the hyper-saturated version of which the piece itself finally ends, as a sort of epitomizing of the Cagean equivalence of noise and silence.²⁴ A double nothing acts here: on the one hand, the simple sound ‘come out’ is separated from itself by a variable quantity of void, the function of which is not to punctuate, but to create noise in the reception of the discrete, understandable signal. On the other hand, the architectural structure of the new (the piece itself with its complicated construction) proceeds in its progressive construction in parallel with the degradation of signal and the augmentation of noise. Noise and silence, the two ‘nothings’ of music, appear here as one element - one element that, in the moment in which it starts splitting in two, becomes both a program for the destruction of a sonic field (the piece performs the narrative *of a degradation of signal*), and a generative matrix of novelty (the piece *performs the narrative of a degradation of signal*). In more general terms, such an imposition into music of nothing/silence and of noise (which are the two sides of the same act of introduction of an inexistent, and yet destructive element) works both by actively erasing signal via intensification of disturbance, and by creating new sonic phenomena via the reduction to silence of acquired musical structures. What is thus produced is the very possibility of the complex, articulated (non)field of noise music, the changing grammatic of which largely relies

24 A visual, architectural equivalent exists of such an idea of a work produced by a destruction brought forward not by a direct exposition of a void, but by an accumulation of elements. This is the project of Archizoom’s No-Stop City, a one mile long functionalist building in which the simple mechanics of capitalist production and of human workers’ rest and reproduction would become directly visible in the architecture, without any decoration. The aim of the city’s project is its own destruction, brought forward by the inevitable revolt that the inhabitants of such a city would perform, once all decoration is removed from their daily existence. This idea of destruction, of voidance by saturation also includes a certain aspect of exhibition of the void (or of that which is left invisible): the very starting point of the project is the manifestation, through architecture, of all those structural modes of exploitation of capitalism that normally do not directly appear on the social scene. See Andrea Branzi, *No-stop City*, Orleans, Editions HXX, 2006, and Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy*, Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 2008, pp. 69-79.

on removals, impediments, limitations, silencings²⁵ as well as on overlays, loops, feedbacks, and other techniques of saturation.²⁶

Another mode of dialectic articulation of voidance, collapse and accumulation is to be found in Joseph Beuys' work: as is known, the latter is often accused of undermining his allegedly antiauthoritarian position by putting himself in the place of the master of ceremony, of the shaman, of the healer or of the preacher.²⁷ But the argument can be reversed. Certainly Beuys tends to condensate together on himself, or rather in his acting self, a series of symbolic postures that link his work on the one hand to a preromantic (symbolic) form of representation, and on the other to a position of authority. Still, the beautiful architecture of symbols that he displays is always exposed to a double point of failure: first, the different symbols are condensed together in such an overlaid way that they end up becoming inconsistent; second, the nice structural circulation of symbols is supplemented by a series of material impediments, of malfunctioning, of risks of failure or rotting.

This becomes particular evident in *I Like America and America likes me*. Putting himself in the position of the sick white European man, Beuys, upon arrival at New York's airport, is transported by ambulance to a gallery where he will be caged with a coyote for a few days. Beuys not only displays here the very problematic metaphor of the white man healing from his own sins (namely here the extermination of native Americans) by entering in contact with the forces of nature (the coyote); also, he integrates this metaphor in a wider metaphoric circuit, where he puts himself in the role of shepherd (of the artist as guide tofor a stupid humanity reduced to the role of herd), of shaman, symbolism carried by the appearance of the living sculpture in which he himself transforms, the sculpture being a further symbol of power to be added to the list of symbols. He then adds a further symbolic layer, by letting the coyote pee on a pile of copies of the Wall-Street journal, the textuality of which is corroded by the vital fluids of the animal. One can thus see here a very problematic metaphoric circuit where the artist-healer-shepherd finally reproduces the same forms of exploitation and dominance that he is supposed to reveal and undermine.

25 The so-called expanded techniques of playing instrument being the other side of the fact of not playing - or of being put in the condition of not being able to play - certain features of the instrument.

26 Being 'noise music' by definition a field unified solely by its active, creative means of destruction of codes, styles and genres, it is very problematic to give cogent, 'central' examples of such a mode of performance. I would like here to mention, for what concerns the use of expanded techniques/limitations in instrument playing, Okkyung Lee's *Ghil*, on Ideological Organ/Mego (2013) and the seminal Helmut Lachenmann *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelholzen* (1987); Christian Marclay and Vinyl Terror and Horror performances, for the way in which they combine an accumulation of debris and acts of destruction with the constitution of an expanding sonic universe. Extremely important is also the tradition coming from popular music, such as hard rock and disco, that one can see in Sunn O)))'s work or in Joke Lanz's performances.

27 On this topic one can for instance read Jan Verwoert, "The Boss: On the Unresolved Question of Authority in Joseph Beuys' Oeuvre and Public Image", in *E-Flux #1*, 12/2008, New York, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-boss-on-the-unresolved-question-of-authority-in-joseph-beuys%E2%80%99-oeuvre-and-public-image/>

But, at a closer look, we can see how the performance works exactly at the point in which this system of references and symbolism fails. First of all, there is a sort of hermeneutical constipation produced by the excessive architecture of symbols.²⁸ And, second and most important, the one element that was supposed to allow for a fluid circulation of these symbols, namely the coyote, is on the contrary blocking it, and even blocking it twice.

This, not only because the coyote introduces chance and randomness, by exposing Beuys to the risk of a total absence of interaction, i.e. by exposing him to the risk that the performance of the encounter of the shaman/healer and of the coyote/medium will not take place. But also because, in the moment in which the encounter effectively takes place, it works directly against the symbolic articulation of the performance: by shredding the dearest of all Beuys' material (the felt being itself already overcharged with problematic symbolisms) the coyote exposes that Beuys, the shaman, healer and shepherd, is ultimately nothing but an impostor, *a stupid man holding together in a precarious situation a collapsing monument of symbols*.

Beuys' performance thus works in the moment in which it hijacks itself, in the moment in which a void or inconsistency is created starting from an entanglement of symbols (finally ending in a sort of cacophonous noise). Such an approach where the different elements composing a symbolic monument hold together, 'make one', when they are supplemented by their collapsing - the monument-form being ultimately provided by its own destruction - is also to be found in a scattered tradition of anti-monumental works: one can here think of the anarchitectural tradition going from Gordon Matta-Clark's *Conical Intersect* to Rachel Whiteread's *House* - the first work being a void carved in a building destined to destruction, ironically adjacent to the then rising building of the Centre Pompidou, the new pride of France, thought of as the very shelter for the monumental museification of contemporaneity; the second one being the extremely fragile stabilisation of the process of destruction of a previous building, echoing the urban and social transformations of its surroundings. But one can also think of the work of Diether Roth, a mechanical, monumental ode to human relations with nature, in which the nice post-romantic tale of the final union of technology, nature and (art)market only comes to make sense by making visible its inevitable process of rotting.

What these examples show, is the possibility of a generative process based on the sole resources of an act of destruction, at the fundament of which lies a self-dividing equivalence of increasing noise produced by saturation, and an absolute, unrelated void, posited by an act of fracture. What one needs to look for, is this very generative mechanics of destruction, overcoming not only any form of determined negativity, but also overcoming any alternation between a *pars destruens* and a *pars construens* - thus finding a positive mode of solving what we have identified as the 'post-revolutionary doublebind'. What it was meant to be stressed here is how, starting from the analysis of the internal resources of the acts of voidance and silencing, one can construct

28 The gallery being not located on street level, and using this same mode of transport on his way back, Beuys famously will have never touched the American soil during the trip: such a performance of levitation of a sick man somehow interrupts the very contact with the land that his allegedly healing activity should have required.

an immanent expressive field based on the sole resources of the destructive moment, on the sole performative capacity of what one can call (it feels like something is missing here, maybe just “create from”... etc..) the materiality of nothing. Procedure by saturation and procedure by failure only indicate here two extremes of a field, or rather of an operatory mode, the resources of which are largely yet to be explored. And it is in an analytic of these resources that one is to engage, if she is to seriously reply to the question “what is to be done”.

Talking About Music and Politics
without Practicing Them!
Conversation with François Nicolas

By Ivana Momčilović

Ten questions

1. You've started in your "Qui vive? Le communism" ("Long live who? The communism!") a series called "Doing justice by what used to be called 'Yugoslavia?'" How could you describe the moment that got you interested in that name that has become almost taboo today?

2. Your impressions in a few words on the exposition «Penser la Yougoslavie vingt ans après», ("Thinking Yugoslavia twenty years after") seen at the L'Université Libre de Bruxelles....

3. Your comments on the twelve theses...

4. In what way is the name Yugoslavia important today in your opinion?

5. Do you recognize behind this name an idea that transcends the concept of a concrete nation state?

6. Which are the main points of your own research on Yugoslavia?

7. At the time of declaring a rupture with the Stalinist control and with its theses of "socialism in one country", Yugoslavia was for a while very isolated and alone. The surrealist Marko Ristić who became the first ambassador in France of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945, writes about the brutal rupture with the French communist party (among others), but also of close friends (Paul Eluard is mentioned) who overnight refuse to have any relation whatsoever with their Yugoslav surrealist friends, in the name of a concept of humanity "betrayed by the Yugoslavs". Ristić dedicates some of the most eloquent pages of his *Journal posterieur* ("A late journal") to this paradox. What do you think

of Sartre's thesis - a thesis he put forward in a forgotten text that we found while preparing the exposition - that the Yugoslavian rupture in the Titoist framework can be important to France?

8. In a well-argued letter you oppose the ex-Yugoslav, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek about his idea of "an egalitarian communism in the musical domain", his concept of "musical communism" and finally his saying that the German hard rock group *Rammstein* "is today the best weapon to defend this communist culture". Could you explain your differences in a few words?

9. Your differences included also the founding role of a "ritual in communism". We accept it is for the Yugoslavian communists to analyze the role of a ritual in the Yugoslav type communism and so we'd like to ask your thesis on the subject.

10. You are preparing a musical tetralogy on May 68 for ... May 2018. Could you tell us something about this project?

Twelve thesis on the project Yugoslavia

Do we have sufficient reasons to raise the question today about the importance of the Yugoslavian project? It does seem that the destiny of the entity named “Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” was indeed sealed some time before its dismantling with the creation of a specific syntagma in “ex-Yugoslavian” political philosophy: “Yugoslavia as an unfinished state”. It is from this perspective that all the current evaluations of the “weakness”, “fragility”, “non-functionality”, the “unrealistic character” of Yugoslavia spring forth: “Something vital was missing in the Yugoslavian project so it was doomed to fail”. This conclusion has to be rejected because its foundation is false and deformed. First of all, it is only a simple reflection of the orthodoxy in modern capitalism – the “self-evidence” of the liberal nation state with all its devices of sovereignty. In the same time this conclusion doesn’t leave room to register and to think about the political foundations of the Yugoslavian project. This political foundation escapes the thesis of “Yugoslavia

as an unfinished state” and actually enters in explicit contradiction with this theses. It is indeed paradoxical that the pertinence of this contradiction is the most visible in the very reality of the Yugoslav succession wars, wars that had for objective the destruction of the Yugoslav project as such. Because, let us remember, that what the reality of these wars truly express is not the process of dismantling of the State, but quite in the contrary, the violent logic of its constitution based on the principle of the normality of the sovereign nation state - the attempt “to perfect, to finish a state”.¹

Facing this restorative vision, we must formulate here a few thesis on the mode of existence of Yugoslavia.

1 The thesis of “Yugoslavia as an unfinished state” has been elaborated in the book of the same name by Zoran Djindjić, a political and indeed a tragic figure of one of the post-Yugoslav constructions, the union of Serbia and Montenegro. It is very interesting to note the degree to which this student of Habermas had marked even the “leftist” philosophers who have written on the Yugoslav problem. So for example Slavoj Žižek, in spite of his auto-proclaimed political radicalism and his numerous references to concepts that once belonged solely in the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, doesn’t go past the political and ideological point of view defined by Djindjić, but observes the Yugoslav project through liberal concepts. Žižek

is entirely faithful to the thesis of the “unfinished state” in his analysis on the conflicts following the dismantling of Yugoslavia, as he claims that the Titoist order actually represented “a federal system of sovereign (nation) states” that was based on “a fragile equilibrium”. With his arguments Žižek never leaves the logic of the “modern” or “bourgeois” nation state, and the concept of “sovereignty” which is at its core and which proves to be so very explosive in the post-Yugoslav wars. His revisionist notes are all about an attempt to impose on the Yugoslav project a political form that is completely foreign to it and which the project largely exceeds.

1. Yugoslavia, created during the Second World War, is a revolutionary gain. It runs from the claim that expresses the revolutionary subjectivity, an “impossible” claim in the sight of the destruction of the existing state.

2. The collective that the Yugoslav project reposes on emerges from the image of Two, the image of political antagonism. It is established in the framework of the foundation of the antifascist movement that unites people in their resistance against the fascist occupation and also against the capitulation and collaboration of the state apparatus of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with local nazi forces. The name of the collective is “Peoples Liberation Front of Yugoslavia”.

3. The Yugoslav project is a radical break with all politics that would be deduced from a predestined substance. The construction presented by the declaration of 1943 by Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, known more commonly by its Yugoslav abbreviation AVNOJ, is not founded on the tradition of a Yugoslav idea, the idea of ethnic kinship or on the concept of “national unity” that served as a foundation in the construction of a political order in the Balkans after World War II. It is not founded on the idea of the identity of the “nation” that would precede its political uniting, instead *it runs from the politics itself*, from the political act of resistance to fascism and from the radical claim to equality.

4. The fight that the Slovenian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian and Croatian partisans started together, is not only a fight to oppose the fascist forces, but also a fight against imperialism and all the forms of exploitation and domination, so that in this sense it is founded on the idea of

class struggle. Since the very beginning of the movement the several hundreds of volunteers from the Spanish Civil War, both workers and intellectuals, put forward the Leninist thesis: “To transform the imperialist war into a proletarian civil war against the bourgeoisie.”

5. The Yugoslav partisans’ politics takes up the main motif of bourgeois revolutions, the motif of “national liberation”. However, this theme is imported in a quite paradoxical manner, while injecting it with an explicit contradiction. The Yugoslav project does in no way represent a “patriotic” act of defending an order - whether an already established order or one that would be established in the future - or of defending a symbolic and institutional structure. The Yugoslav project is founded on the practice of a new collectivity, a collectivity that is fundamentally opposed to the state apparatus of the place, the monarchical apparatus. So the People’s Liberation Front of Yugoslavia raises the question of national liberation *in the plural*. This means that the liberation of a nation, a “Yugoslav” “nation” implies the liberation and equality of everybody, which applies as well to those who are already “represented” in the apparatus of the monarchical state as those who are not. Indeed the contradiction can be seen most clearly in the opposition of the Leninist statement of “people’s right to self-determination” to the very construction of a monarchist order. This “right” does not mean in this situation a legitimation of a juridical-political form, the legitimation of *a principle* stating that in every state the structure of the state must be a reflection of a “national community”. Instead this right represents *the minimal common denominator* by which the collectivity which unites the “nations” in the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist fight, a fight for the radicalisation of the egalitarian maxime, will construct itself.

6. It is also important to stress the fact that the People's Liberation Front had articulated simultaneously two different concepts: the struggle for the national liberation of all the nations included in the monarcho-fascist regime which favored three nations by according them the status of a subject in the state representation, notably the Slovenians, the Croats and the Serbs while excluding all other nations and even committing unprecedented massacres on some of these nations (50,000 Albanians were killed during the military campaign of the Royal Yugoslavian Army between 1919-1920). Here the concept of a people's fight does not signify the fight of a nation, but of a political articulation of *the innumerable multiplicity* that was excluded by the terror of monarchist dictatorship in 1929-1939 and of the Axis occupation and collaborator regimes' terror in 1941-1945. The People's Liberation Front is an invention of *the innumerable multiplicity*: peasants, workers, intellectuals, women, communists...

7. The radical character of the Yugoslav project is also found in its political form. The form of the political organisation it is founded on is actually an example of the process of *presentation*. It is here that the essence of the break with the logic of the bourgeois "nation state" becomes obvious. The collectivity introduced by the Yugoslav People's Liberation Front does not pronounce itself as "sovereign" reflecting itself in the machinery of a specific state. The collectivity doesn't reclaim the sovereignty of neither the monarch nor of the previous regimes "autonomy". Quite to the contrary, the Yugoslav collective ensues mainly from massive forms of direct democracy that were created during the Yugoslav People's Liberation Front, of the "Proletarian Brigades", the "committees of national liberation" and

the "provincial anti-fascist councils". These forms of political organisation that find their inspiration in revolutionary situations, in the workers councils during the Paris Commune and the soviets of the October Revolution, place themselves not only outside the state apparatus but in direct opposition to it, their aim being its "abolition".

8. The existence of the revolutionary subjectivity that founds the Yugoslav project can be found in the very nature of the entity called *Yugoslavia*. We must think of Yugoslavia as a reality necessarily contradictory. What more, it represented an *indissolubly contradictory unity* which by this character implies a tendency to its own revolutionizing, an urge towards a creative division and invention. Only from this perspective that in the Marxist-Leninist tradition is known by the concept of the "weakening of the state", can we fully understand the developments of contradictions and the contradictions of development of the Yugoslav project. In other words, a *series of irreducible images that comes together in the construction of the Yugoslav state*. Thus *Yugoslavia represented what Lenin calls "a state that is at the same time already a non-state"*.

9. What does it mean then, from this perspective, to be Yugoslav? It is not a simple category of membership, of belonging. The Yugoslav collectivity involves all the people who opposed the politics that was fiercely attached to attributes - be it the attributes of the state, the nation, the religion, the race, ownership or sex. It is thus a category of immanent practice of separation. The Yugoslavs are those people for whom "us" expresses a passion for egalitarianism and of the subjectivity of emancipation. *The Yugoslav collectivity is a collectivity not identical with*

itself, but a collectivity capable of its own transformation.

10. The Yugoslav project's paradigm is thus *experimental*. "People's Liberation Front" in its extreme aspect has to be seen as a political form capable of constant evolution, capable of transforming itself according to its own trends. Practicing politics that take their measure from innovation has to be a lesson in partisan politics.

11. Today, after the wars surrounding Yugoslav succession, the post-Yugoslav situation is characterized by the same "ethnic" chaos than before World War II. The only difference is very subtle: the new monarch, the new tyrant, is the democrat.²

12. We have to be very clear about the reasons that make it necessary *to invoke a continuity of the Yugoslavian project*. To think and to practice the politics of impossible, the politics of exceeding the existing state, in a situation where, as it was the case for the Yugoslav partisans, the adversary is incomparably stronger and more numerous, represents the direct continuity with the Yugoslav emancipatory project. *The Yugoslav partisans' gesture must be an inspiration for us* so that in our situation - which is not only a situation of new structure for the relations of capital and of juridical-political-militaristic formations,

but also a post-Yugoslav, "post-socialist" situation, we had to think and practice it's impossibility, the possibility of emancipation *for all*.

Collectif Belgrade – Ljubljana – Zagreb – Bruxelles - Londres (22nd March 2002)

2 Indeed, it is in the "normality" of the idea of the liberal democratic state, in other words, in the "legitimacy" of the principle of its sovereignty that we'll find the causes for the post-Yugoslav conflicts and wars. Also, it is parliamentary democracy that is imposing today a series of particular "possibilities", a series of limitations for political thought and practice which speaks to us about the unrealistic character and general impossibility of revolutionary and emancipatory projects.

Answers

I will organise my answer by grouping together the questions concerning ex-Yugoslavia (1-7) and those that deal with the relation between communism and music (8-9: relation of communism to music; 10: relation of music to communism).

« Yugoslavia » (questions 1-7)

Why am I interested in your problematic on ex-Yugoslavia?

First, because of your questions. So my interest is originally partly due to a chance encounter.

This chance though, was coupled with a form of necessity that explains better the lasting nature of my interest: if there is question today of rethinking the question of communism, the Yugoslav experience should be seen and revisited as a singularity.

From political and militant point of view (and there can only be militant politics), I come from a tradition which calls itself “Marxist-Leninist” and which rests on Maoism to surmount Stalinism from inside the revolutionary movement, and to engage in a new stage of the long political road towards communism. In France this took the form of a project for a “new kind of party”, notably the French Marxist-Leninist Union of Communists (*L'Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste, UCF-ml*) with which I was working with many others from 1969 to 1985.

Reevaluating this piece of political history seems necessary today. The world is undeniably not the same that motivated the succession of “red years” between 1965-1975.

If we want to take up the communist hypothesis it is tempting to compare our time with the reactionary period in Europe from 1815-1848. I would prefer though to examine this development from the point of view of the 1970's when the communist political fervor got stuck and then froze to end up disappearing all together.

Indeed, if we are to “continue” there is no other serious method than to pick up the questions in the state they were left in and to sketch a new start. It's within the framework of this vast perspective that your questions on the ex-Yugoslavia seemed to me to be actuality.

My own political relation to Yugoslavia has been, during all these years mentioned earlier, marked by my political orientation. That is to say it has been critical in essence, in part structured by the opposition between an anti-revisionist Albania and a proto-revisionist Yugoslavia (or revisionist before all others)³. In reality, I didn't study the Yugoslav question at the time. It was not a question of being lazy: at the time we spent our time studying and the smallest of African, Asian or Latin American countries was able to mobilize our intellect and our strength. It was more the result of an equation “Yugoslavia=Titoism” at a time when the differences between Maoism and Titoism was at its greatest. We were then too occupied by the figure of a internal revival of communism to pay attention to communist experiences that were seemingly negative.

3 I'll remind you that we then called “revisionists” the communists who were pro-USSR and who supported, since the 25 point letter (in 1963) “the pacific way towards socialism” and the giving up of “the dictatorship of the proletariat”...

While keeping it in proportion (and to make a partial introduction to my later meanings on music), Mao was for us the knight Parsifal of political communism: one who came from a very different horizon from the European Marxism-Leninism, a horizon not burdened by the triple foundation of Marxism (English political economy, German philosophy and French socialism). He had revived communist politics stranded on a Chinese Communist Party that had become the castle of Monsalvat, incapable of answering the seduction of the sham Khrushchev-Klingsor.

To reexamine today the figure of ex-Yugoslavia in order to create a new idea of communism implies in my opinion that we have to dismantle the aforementioned equation “Yugoslavia=Titoism”. This means reexamining not the political figure of Titoism but rather of Yugoslavia. Which leads to my own working hypothesis: what can eventually be found in the political experience (diverse, multiple, periodical) known under the name *Yugoslavia*, which cannot be included in the political figure of the political doctrine called Titoism and which therefore merits to be reexamined?

Thus the hypothesis to not to reduce this Yugoslav experience to Titoism (as, moreover, we would not reduce the Soviet experience between 1923 and 1953 to Stalinism) and to take into account its whole complexity.

From the case *Tito* to the singularity *Yugoslavia*

Let us put it in other words: my present hypothesis would be to consider the possibility that ex-Yugoslavia constituted a

singularity and so the particularities of its political experience should be reinterpreted in a totally different light. It should be seen as a singularity and not anymore as an experience escaping the general laws of Marxism which only makes it an exception to generalities (hence the thematic of the “case”: “the Yugoslav case”).

A singularity is an eminently local situation where two contradictory tendencies are “momentarily” rendered imperceptibles, mixed up (by being crushed say the mathematicians). A singularity is a specific point (immediately “phenomenologically” repairable as it constitutes a “bump”) where universality of a contradiction is condensed (and it is exactly this condensation that gives it the nature of a “bump”, of something sticking out). Thus a singularity, far from constituting an absurd point which we could ignore or plane down for to better capture the general law without losing time in the study of these pathological situations, is on the contrary the very thing that creates the universal law by making it visible as something that sticks out. All the difficulty lies in the fact that this universal law appears as an exception (the universally dynamic contradiction having been crushed within it) and that the contents of the universally dynamic contradiction, when pointed at by the very existing of the singularity, isn’t explained by it. To bring out the universality which is indirectly revealed by the singularity we have to - like the mathematicians put it - to break it up or to open it up so that the dynamic contradiction it precedes can appear.

Let us resume: my hypothesis is that the Yugoslav specificity could spill out of the “Marxist-Leninist” figure of the case (even more of the Tito case than the Yugoslav case)

in the contemporary figure of a singularity: the singularity Yugoslavia⁴ (and not Tito).

Hence the following questions: hasn't the experience of ex-Yugoslavia condensed (and "crushed" at a certain point) major contradictions of the communist fervor as it was manifested in a number of countries from the 1930's onwards? Yugoslavia would then become simply a name for the not so simple reality, imperceptibly contradictory, where Titoism (as a political doctrine) and the original experience⁵ (orthogonal to Titoism) would be presented as locally mixed.

Hence the idea to try to see something else besides simple Titoism behind the Yugoslav discourse: to see behind the slogans for joint worker-management control and non-alignment (which have recapitulated in the face of "the hard imperatives of the world") something contradictory to this resignation: an attempt at freeing the communist thought of the subordination to the question of the state.

Needless to say, all this has been brought to me by your own work, which has put this old name of Yugoslavia on the table again only to reveal it's... singularity! Because of this, the name Yugoslavia really has more food for thought to offer today than that of Albania!

Which singularity?

To what kind of universal contradiction does the name Yugoslavia refer?

4 See thesis no. 8 "Yugoslavia is an indissolubly contradictory unity".

5 See thesis no. 10: "The Yugoslav project's paradigm is experimental".

It is this question that my political study raises. It is with this question in mind that I watch Yugoslav films, that I read the texts reporting the Serbian / Yugoslav surrealist experience...

Hence the idea to study this subject while paying attention to what reveals itself as a symptom: not the regularity but what sticks out, the specificity, all that can be a pointer towards the content of the Yugoslav singularity.

Hence my interpretation of certain films revealing the mixing up (which is in the essence of film) of on the one hand a Titoist regularity (joint worker-management practiced as a bureaucratized competition, the communist morals separated from all truly political momentum...) and on the other hand the singularity of a female character (*Azra*), an indifferent relation to the religions (*Azra*), the face of a man at the same time dignified and struck by unworthiness (*Combatants, dismissed!*) etc.

What exactly was hidden behind the conventional Titoist discourse (which to me doesn't seem to be calling for "rehabilitation") that would indicate a question crucial today for the future of communism?

A plurality of pluralities...

On this point your thesis seems to me to be putting weight on the ex-Yugoslav invention of the exceeding of the nation state. This point I discovered when visiting the exhibition in Brussels, is very stimulating.

The following canonical formulation (by Tito, but can it be called purely Titoist? That would have to be studied...) retained my attention:

“Yugoslavia has six republics, five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets, and one party!”

Thus Yugoslavia is a plurality, more exactly still a plurality of pluralities (6-5-4-3-2-1: there is the plural of the republics, the plural of the nations, of the languages), let us say *a bundle of pluralities*.

Just like you, I think the word “plural” is more adequate here than the word “multiple”: multiplicity is multiple of multiples whereas plurality is the plural of units (here the unit is alternately a language, a religion, a nation...). The multiple is without units⁶, the plural is the sum of units.

When we take into account that in the preceding enumeration state as such does not appear - the formulation mentions one party but not one (federal) state - if the state is not mentioned it is because state is here seen as a statement: in a way it is the federal state (plural!) that poses Yugoslavia as a product of six republics, five nations etc., that is, as the product of a sum...

Without developing this point further, I’m here coupling together the notions of “product” and “sum” which seem to me to carry some importance for the reflection on communism if we are willing to shed light on them from the point of view of their use in mathematical theory of categories. See *Qui-vive* n°16 (25th December 2011) entirely devoted to *sketching a communist formulation between equality and liberty*.

You take up this point in your thesis n° 5 when you talk about a “common minimal denominator” (which is quite exactly a possible form of such a *product*). What seems to me to be more problematic in this same thesis n° 5 is the exact characterization of this *greatest common denominator*⁷ : it seems to me that this can only be the result of a principle. Yet you don’t at this point pronounce your own principle but instead seem to invalidate the Leninist principle evoked. It is true that you have previously aligned two very different questions: that of a right and that of a principle. To discuss all this would lead us very far, so in three words it seems to me

1. that only a principle can initiate a “common denominator”, that is to say can produce an equal liberty for those who are deployed under this principle;
2. that such a principle is not the product of law but of political declaration
3. that inversely no law is the product of this kind of principle, in the same way as equality exists disconnected from all supposed “right to equality”.

Finally, the singularity of *Yugoslavia* comes back to the question: what is a state constituted of the enumeration of heterogeneous pluralities? Would this kind of state be constituted being at the same time open to its own destruction (which constitutes your implicit hypothesis⁸)? In a way, could this kind of state (which is constituted of the enumeration of plural pluralities) be a possible paradigm of a socialist state (meaning

6 What you call in your thesis no. 6 “the innumerable multiplicity”...

7 Please note that I passed from “minimal” to “maximal”. This shift is not without importance...

8 See your thesis no. 8

a transitional state towards communism)? To put it bluntly, could this kind of paradigm of a socialist state be that of a federal state (where “federal” points not only to one plurality but to the many⁹)?

What remains problematic in this orientation are the fact that politics would still remain a measure of the projection of state, which is measures of the form of state it would be capable of creating.

In your thesis n° 3 you raise the question of the constituting character of politics (rather than being constituted from a previous identity): the construction of a new kind of Yugoslav unity “runs from the politics itself”. This point is very interesting. The difficulty - your difficulty - to me lies in that your next thesis (n° 4) seems to prove that this constituting politics has been in turn constituted in the fight against fascism which was the means to unite Slovenians, Serbs, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Croats. The problem of Yugoslavia has been: what does such politics that were self-constituted against fascism become in times of peace. It seemed to me that a number of the films presented at your exposition and that I’ve had the pleasure of relaying to the readers of *Qui-vive* address exactly this point, in particular by posing the question: how come courageous partisans, people who have proved themselves be honest and devoted to the common cause in time of war, how can they in time of prolonged peace become people utterly lost (losing their points of reference and losing the responsibilities that were trusted to them)?

Hence one way of retrying to understand the singularity of Yugoslavia: Yugoslavia is the name of a place where at a given point in time a conformation of the socialist state to the prescription communist (wasting away...) and a conformation of communism to the prescription of state (power of the state managed by the party) was imperceptible.

In a way, I’m only putting in other words what you propose in your thesis n° 8 : “*a series of irreducible images that come together in the construction of the Yugoslav state. Thus Yugoslavia represented what Lenin calls ‘a state that is at the same time already a non-state.’*”

I would like to draw your attention in passing to the fact that the federal nature of the state in the case of Yugoslavia rubs off on the more decentralized nature of the communist party which is even called “League of Communists” (when the expression “Communist Party” indicates that the organization breeds the communists, the expression “League of Communists” suggests quite the opposite: that the communists make up the organization...)

I won’t dwell on these questions, which are very hard ones and would require meticulous work for which I don’t have the time nor the means.

I will simply point out that I approach these questions from a different point of view than you do. If I have understood right, your work aims to revive a purely Yugoslav idea (that which previously I have tried to define as the singularity of Yugoslavia) if possible on the soil of ex-Yugoslavia. You place yourselves

9 Which is what makes the difference between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Federal Republic of Germany...

inside this history, with specific objectives¹⁰. My own aim is to form thoughts outside of this singularity, less for its specifically Yugoslav future than its eventual power of clarification on the communist question in its universality.

Question 7 (Sartre)

I will answer your seventh question some other time, as it deals with Jean-Paul Sartre's relation to this affair, at least as I've interpreted it from his article « Faux savants ou faux lièvres » from 1950¹¹. The questions the hypothesis of a *Yugoslavian* singularity raises are already difficult enough without the additional difficulty of addressing this whole other question of Sartre's relation to politics in general and to this Yugoslav singularity in particular.

It will be enough to point out that my own relation to politics has never been the same as Sartre's to suggest that the question indeed is a completely separate one.

Question 8 (Žižek)

I will have to clarify a few points about my discussion of an idea of "musical communism" put forth by Žižek:

First of all, I am rejoicing in the existence today of someone like Žižek, because his discourse is in a very welcome way upsetting the capitalist-parliamentarist discourse and opening gaps in it in favor of the communist

hypothesis, encouraging people to think for themselves and collectively. If I am addressing his ideas, it is "among friends" and not as an adversary, and even less as an enemy.

This said, I can't identify with the way Žižek is perpetually taking the role of clown in order to bring forth some subversive idea. My way of working, of being, of acting is indeed the opposite of his, which explains the irritation I sometimes experience while listening or reading him.

This was the case with a publication which in my eyes was particularly important because it enclosed also an international discussion on the idea of communism. Hence my irritation when I saw that music was playing only a minor part and a bad one at that. You could say that I found the "cast" was poorly chosen. [Note: referring to Žižek's book *Living in the End Times*, Verso, 2010]

I don't need to recount the text here: it is freely available on the web. I will just point out that my irritation, in the capacity of musician as well as militant was due to the following points:

- the choice of musical examples is simply disastrous, mixing up creative subtraction and pure and simple musical nihilism (Satie, Cage...), aligning the culture of the musical pieces (the rock!) with the artistic side of a piece of music (like we had mixed in politics the questions of communism and that of the amount of state subsidies to a certain party or the quota of female senators): why should we call for a serious approach of poetry and then when there's question of music to elevate complete nonsense on an equal bar with decisive propositions?

10 Your thesis no. 12 is thus orientated to invoke a "continuity of the Yugoslavian project" so that "the Yugoslav partisans' gesture be an inspiration for us"

11 See *Situations VI (Problèmes du marxisme, 1)*

- a way of depoliticizing the question of communism by “culturalising” it, and worse still, by summoning music on this particular point: as an emblem of a cultural concept of communism. I therefore wanted to keep music at a distance from this type of operation by affirming that music as art and as a form of thought had better to do than become (anew) purely functional music!

- the question of communism is political, it is not musical; and the question of music, even for a militant musician is not: how to best serve communism? But what music should one compose so that it would answer the musical exigencies that music itself can formulate?

- between music and communist politics there can be at the most some alliances

- but those would be alliances between autonomous entities - and at that point the notion of culture (which of course signs a non-autonomy of the concerned processes) has no place. From the point of view of a given art, culture occupies the same role than technology can occupy from the point of view of a given science (or that the social can occupy in the communist politics, or sex in love...). Between music and politics, there is no transition.

- all in all, the notion of “musical communism” is flimsy.

It is true that the question of relations between music and politics is a complicated one and that I have already written quite a lot on the subject. So for now I'd rather say no more.

Question 9 (« ritual »)

You bring up the question of an eventual ritual in the ceremonies that communism might promote.

This question is for me still partly in the dark at the moment. I will only say the following.

- One should not put the cart before the horse: we will have to reinvent almost everything in communism (politically speaking) - the questions of victory, organization, of lasting politics, of the relations between militants and the masses, the relations to the state, the relations of communism to a socialist state, its relations to the revolutionary theme, how to radically change the world if we are not going to throw it over in one coup, what should communist politics be regarding factories if the working class is not exactly the material bases of a political class called the proletariat, etc., etc. I have trouble thinking that the question of ceremony would be in the head of this list. I'd rather think: let us advance a little way politically; we will see then what will become of the question of representation.

- If we mean by “ceremony” an auto-(re)-presentation of some generic humanity, do we have place for rituals? Is every ceremony necessarily a source of rituals? Couldn't there be question of inventing new types of ceremonies that don't hold rituals at their center?

- Does a new kind of ceremony have to be called a ceremony? Shouldn't it think of itself (and thus call itself) as something else and underline the thing it

is a ceremony for (rather than just being a ceremony, rather than its ceremonial form)?

Hence my answer to your last question.

Question 10 (tetralogy)

It is true that my project on the tetralogy on 1968 (*Égalité* '68, Equality '68) can be seen as a ceremony for May 68 and it is for that reason that I have fixed as a deadline the 50th anniversary of the events.

For me the point is that calling it *ceremony* doesn't take into account its internal reasons. Still more to the point, thinking of this tetralogy as a ceremony doesn't tell anything about the work I will be doing inventing, composing, imagining, writing and creating relations. The word ceremony is neither motivating nor orientating. The reason for this has been already evoked: it is difficult to know what exactly in May '68 would be the reason for a ceremony.

It couldn't be a ceremony for veterans, a memorial or any kind of "back to the" (back to the good old times, back to the old world before the changes brought by Deng Xiaoping / Reagan / Thatcher / Mitterrand). It is not about memory. It is about reactivation. It is not about Gurnemanz (the old guardian of memory, the one to remind where and by whom the cause was abandoned, the one who witnesses that the reigning impotence goes back to a subjective defection, a resignation, pertains to "internal causes" and not to the evil Klingsor whose power is only due to the powerlessness of the militants). Instead, this is about Parsifal: a young naïf adopting against all appearances the abandoned cause and taking up the arms of criticism and the criticism of arms.

In other words there is question of transmitting to the youth something of the task of musical as well as political thinking, above all something of the exaltation and enthusiasm that such tasks alone can provide. Many a militant of my generation have understood what liberty means only when they became militants, and organized militants at that, disciplined, militants who are ready to get up in the night to be ready at the factory gates by dawn to get to talk to one or two workers (because the union apparatus polices factory gates much more efficiently than any employers malice).

My project of a tetralogy was born of the parallel existence of the double claim for the musician and militant that I incarnate:

- for the musician, to continue to compose an art of today, the music has to be in contact with other things than music, with the heterogeneous as Adorno called it. It has to welcome in its own temporal flux other existences than just music, so that it recharges itself by wedding other flux - in a way what Wagner himself had to reinvent after the revolutions of 1848... There is no question of music becoming again purely functional in order to do this, or of being in the service of something else than itself (politics, poetry or something else). Quite to the contrary, music has to consolidate its autonomy, precisely in contact with other autonomies for an alliance to make any sense. I have chosen for my part to concentrate on the alliance between music and languages, especially foreign languages (not French) and more specifically still, Arabic (the great language of literary Arabic). Hence the project of "entering Arabic into contemporary music", and of course,

if it is about creating an alliance with languages, it is important to respect these languages and more particularly still to let them express themselves to truly say something, not just make them “talk without saying anything” (which is often the case in contemporary glossolalias when they play with the phonemes without any true conceptual thought). Introducing languages means introducing a vocality equipped with an autonomous acoustic consistency, but it means also introducing into the heart of the music a torrent of significance that we can't erase. Hence the question: what should be said that deserves to summon music in this way?

- from the point of view of politics, if everything has to be rebuilt, it is also necessary to equip oneself with sufficiently enthusiastic conditions to be able to do this, to fight the harmful nostalgia for the past when politics presented itself as requisition. How to get successfully through the black night for the thought that seems to be emerging? How to pass on the communist tasks when the lives of millions of people have been implacably destroyed and no one can count one by one these existences that have been erased? My own political determination was formed around these years of the 1960's (more exactly for me in the two years preceding '68: in the autumn 1966 with the battle cry “NLF will conquer!”). Hence the project of reactivating what about '68 is universally meaningful for political emancipation.

May 68

What interests me about May '68 is its singularity, its uniqueness and thus its

universal influence. I detect this singularity in the imperceptible mixing together of equality and a liberty. The libertarian destiny of '68 has been only too much magnified. It is now time to reactivate its image of equality.

To raise again the '68-singularity, and to do it in a way that is not nostalgic, it means showing the effectiveness today of those political questions of equality such as they were then approached. It means laying down an improbable equation, all the more political that it is improbable, of the type:

- Bastille Square (Paris), 1st May 1968
= Tahrir Square (Cairo), spring 2011
- manifestation of 21st February 1968 (Paris) = Tunisian manifestation in 2011
= offensive manifestations of a thousand eras
- occupied factories and universities in May 1968 = factories and universities in the whole world
- a militant meeting in June 1968 = a militant meeting today in Africa, in Columbia...

Hence a booklet (yet to be written) which will tell nothing but will expose the great political questions of our time in concrete situations (the first part will be consecrated to a violent insurrectional manifestation; the second part to a great mass gathering; the third part will put on stage the different human collectives attached to their usual working places: universities, factories; the fourth one will be devoted to a militant meeting making a lasting and organized assessment of these different political initiatives). It will mean proving how all these political questions are

very much alive, and if not active, then at least that it is possible to reactivate them.

This means that these questions will be said and carried in six different languages: Arabic, Russian, German, English, Latin and French. The whole will integrally and exclusively take place on the side of the emancipatory politics: no adversaries, no enemies.

A singularity *Égalité '68* (Equality '68)

The whole point of all this is in the entwining of this speech and of a music which is in no way an accompaniment of the speech but which will quite to the contrary claim its whole and entire autonomy.

The whole tetralogy should ultimately be led by the music, not by the booklet. Such is the paradox.

Let us hope that this paradox will then itself take the form of a singularity: the singularity of *Égalité '68* where musical and politico-ideological enthusiasms, naturally orthogonal to each other, will for one moment in time, in one place in space, be made indiscernible!

Translated by Emilia Lehtinen

François Nicolas

**A “contemporary” Music
Does Not Think Alone!**

Our musical between-times raises two questions:

- How do we come out of musical modernity with a unilaterally subtractive orientation (a-tonal, a-thematic, a-metric) proceeding from the top-down (in an affirmative manner), not from the bottom-up (by sinking into the nihilistic “modernism” of systematic deconstruction)?
- How do we put this musical modernity to the test of a non-musical heterogeneity if it is true that music as thought, and so as art (not as cultural function) implies, particularly today, its renewed confrontation with the non-musical?

To examine this first question, we will set out from the manner in which the poet Mallarmé, in his *Coup de dés*, orients his specific between-times (between the alexandrine and free verse) towards a new type of global Metre and we will sketch a musical problematic intertwining anew fresh harmonies, rhythms and *Gestalts* (gesture-figures).

For the second, we will set out from the manner in which the mathematician Dedekind revolutionised number theory by *extending* the field of the rationals by the *adjunction* of “cuts” and we will sketch the manner in which music can extend its space of thought by adjoining to itself other types of discourse, in particular of a linguistic nature.

To send “contemporary music” to the schools of poetry and mathematics in this way leads us to examine the manner in which our two questions - the one endogenous, the other exogenous - respond to each other and intertwine, while sketching the path of a modernity fighting simultaneously on two fronts (against nihilistic “modernism” and against academic “traditionalism”) to better affirm a contemporary musical art thinking with others according to the heterophony of composite musical works.

Musical practices – Continuities and transitions

(The Twelfth International Conference of the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade)

Belgrade, 25 April 2014

My position in your topic “Continuities and transitions” will be very specific: I will try to present you a way of thinking that combines continuation and “revolution”. My question will be: how is it possible to continue a way by a jump but without transition?

A friend of mine, the french Philosopher Alain Badiou, has written: “*The rupture has for essence, not interruption, but adjunction.*”

So, I want to present you how an extension by adjunction makes possible a continuation by a jump without transition.

I have modified the title of my paper to better reflect my subject. It is now: “Towards a *terza pratica* extending the *Music*-world by the adjunction of heterophonies”

« *Barefoot, you wander from word to word.* » Branko Miljković

Music, in particular the music that we call, in France, “contemporary”, does not think alone.

How can it think with others?

I would like to examine this problem with you by posing a more delimited question: how can we conceive today of a *terza pratica*?

As a quick outline of my intentions, I would like to

- First, show the musical pertinence and urgency of a *terza pratica* - I will explain, of course, what I mean by that.
- Secondly, show that such a *terza pratica* could find its musical principle in a heterophonic logic extending ancient polyphonic logic.
- Thirdly, indicate by which concrete compositional processes we could envisage such a musical extension.
- Fourthly, determine how to think this *terza pratica* *with* other types of thought: on the one hand with a mathematical thinking of adjunction and of extension, on the other with a philosophico-political thinking of *justice*.

Why a *terza pratica*?

I will employ this term in direct reference to what Monteverdi called *secunda pratica*. The associated musical practice is that which consists in *setting words to music*.

I will distance myself, in doing this, from the sense that my musicological friend, Célestin Deliège, gave the term in the nineties of the twentieth century¹ (Célestin Deliège was, I believe, a regular visitor of your musicological meetings and it is for me a joy to recall his memory here). He was inspired then by Hegel - his three stages of the work of art - rather than by the question Monteverdi posed to the *vocal* musical work.

To recall Monteverdi's operation:

1 Célestin Deliège : *Le duel de l'image et du concept. Essai sur la modernité musicale* (1994) in *Invention musicale et idéologies 2* (Mardaga, 2007 ; pp. 219-254)

Monteverdi tried to give music new expressive powers by putting it to the service of the words that it welcomes and it accompanies. It is in serving the words that music masters the new expressivity that authorises the new tonal system.

The previous practice - *prima pratica* - was founded on modal counterpoint. This counterpoint ordered the musical composition of the voices according to a step-by-step construction, point by point (*punctus contra punctum*).

This element-by-element, note-by-note algebraic construction was the law of composition on which the words were arranged - *ought* to be arranged: at that time (the Middle Ages), music commanded the words, and the words served the music.

Monteverdi wants to reverse this rapport: he revives the ancient hierarchy of Gregorian monody where the Latin prosody commanded the expressivity of the musical neumes.

In following this attitude, Monteverdi will reinvent melody in the new harmonic context that authorises tonality: this melody can no longer arise, like the voices of counterpoint, from a note-by-note algebraic construction - we know elsewhere the difficulties there will be in conceiving of treatises of melody as though they were treatises of counterpoint, of orchestration or even of composition. A melody is a musical topology subtly and globally espousing an autonomous prosody.

This resurrection of melody, subtly weaving itself around a prosody of an *lingual* order, comes to modify the musical category of the *voice*.

In the *prima pratica*, a musical voice had for its partner another musical voice - such is the very principal of counterpoint. Polyphony then resulted from weaving the voices between themselves, stitch by stitch, and constituted in this way a homogenous plurality. Certainly, the possible Cantus Firmus singularly served as a matrix, but it was itself algebraically framed without being melodically ornamented. In this way, the Cantus Firmus reinforced the *skeletal* logic of the voices of counterpoint, of polyphonic counterpoint. In total, it fixed the common law for a collectivity of voices that one can declare to be of a *fraternal* type.

This notion of voice, with its principle of modal and contrapuntal polyphony, will be found relativised in the *secunda pratica*.

Understand well: Monteverdi does not try to disqualify *prima pratica*, he does not try to delete the polyphony of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, he does not try to reject contrapuntal logic; he tries to extend the notion of the voice by adding a new expectation of expressivity to music.

In *secunda pratica*, the voice once more becomes *melody* (as it was in Gregorian monody), but this time it is a new type of melody, because it is a *tonal* melody. In so doing, the melodic voice will have for partner no longer another voice, as in contrapuntal polyphony, but the functional harmony that the tonal system has just invented - think, for example, of the compositional practice that Monteverdi will draw from the simple tonic-dominant relationship at the beginning of his madrigal² *Hor ch'el Ciel e la Terra*. A new system of melody (already harmonised and

2 *Madrigali guerrieri e amorosi* (1638)

harmonically accompanied) begins here, and we are familiar with the eminently fecund destiny of it in the centuries that follow until today.

On this point, a new musical power is inaugurated that comes to split the notion of the musical voice into two types:

- the new melodic type;
- the old contrapuntal type, which will internally weave functional harmony (one knows the choral destiny of the four voices harmonically superimposed).

It is worth noting in passing that this process liberates the melodic voice from properly thematic functions - those that appeared in contrapuntal polyphony starting with Guillaume Dufay and which agreed with the algebra of notes (pitches and durations).

As such, in this new polyphonic system,

- the melodic voice is not a thematic voice (as the voice of the Cantus Firmus could be);
- the thematic voice is not one of the four voices of harmony;
- the four voices - implicit or explicit - of tonal harmony, those that put into movement tonal harmonic functions, are not melodic.

We grasp the considerable polyphonic possibilities that this *secunda pratica* offers. Polyphony is organised from then on around a sort of musical division of labour:

- on the one side, the *melodic* expressivity that exhausts the sung text and its prosody;
- on the other side, the dynamic of tonal harmony, materialised by a completely new combinatory of voices obeying the old contrapuntal rules;
- on a last side, some more properly thematic functions brought to bear by such or such *local* configuration of this system.

The polyphony that proceeds from this intrinsic diversity of voices no longer has *fraternity* as a paradigm. On the one side, the melody is a voice that demands its *individuality*; on the other, the theme affirms a musical *consciousness* of self. The harmonic plurality finally materialises a *body* in movement. All this turns around a voice that preserves its irreducible specificity: by speaking at the same time that it sings. In sum, a sister voice rather than a brother, and a paradigm that recalls love between two sexes rather than the asexual fraternity of counterpoint - we are familiar with the manner in which this harmonised melody will be able to celebrate the nuptials of love.

These new resources, patiently composed around an initial adjunction - the adjunction of a melody in service of a prosody - will give music a new *discursive* power: it is in fact here that baroque music, as a musical *discourse* of an entirely new type, is born.

This new discursivity of music will authorise it to enter into closer relationships with the discursivity of the language that it sings: music will hierarchise and segment its discursive flux according to properly musical - and no longer lingual - laws. It will in this way be endowed with a sort of power of nomination over the words that it sings: musical discourse phrases its discourse, articulates the phrases produced into different segments, detailing these segments as smaller entities so that it can *double* the linguistic syntax of the words with an ersatz musical syntax. This *doubling* will give music the impression that it comments on language.

As such, music is endowed with a *para-signifying* capacity: not a signifying capacity like that of a language - music does not signify, music is not a language - but a capacity to declare that it,

music, knows well what language signifies, that it knows well that the words put to music are, for their part, signifiers.

Music is endowed in this way with a sort of *signifying aura*, with a *significance* that is not a signification, and it is endowed with it precisely by serving a linguistic signification that remains fundamentally heterogeneous and inaccessible to it.

We will formalise this process engaged by the *secunda practica* by passing over the mathematical models of adjunction and of extension.

I will not detail these models here. They are of three types:

- the “cuts” of Dedekind, then of Conway, that enable the construction of the real numbers from the rational numbers, then the surreal numbers from the real numbers;
- the algebraic extensions of fields that enable the construction of the field of algebraic numbers from that of the rational numbers, then the field of complex (numbers) from that of the real numbers;
- the generic extensions by forcing of Paul Cohen.

It is worth noting that, in the two first cases, the analogy with our three *pratiche* [comme pratiqué]:

- the cuts first of all pass from a numerical *prima practica* - that of the rationals - to a *secunda practica* - that of the reals - then from this *secunda* to a *terza* - that of the surreals;
- the extensions of fields first of all pass from a *prima practica* - the field of rational numbers - to a *secunda* - the field of algebraic numbers - then from this *secunda* to a *terza* - the field of the complex (numbers).

Take from this the following principal idea: one can pass from a *secunda practica* to a *terza practica* in the same way as one has already passed from a *prima practica* to a *secunda practica*!

For each of these three mathematical models (take my word for it!), the process properly called *adjunction* consists of three successive and cumulative stages:

1. first of all the construction of words, or specific objects composing a lexicon;
2. then the transformation of these words into *names* (apt to designate and signify) by bestowing the previously constructed words with a properly signifying face;
3. finally the construction of *statements* from these names in order to control, from the inside of the original situation, the expected results in the future extended situation.

Once this adjunction is effectuated (with *words* becoming *names* incorporated into *statements*), the process of extension consists in making the new adjunct object interact with the original situation. The point is not only to graph, to stick, or to add together, but to engender a recomposition of the entire original situation. The idea is to generate a new extended situation in which the original situation remains a single delimited region, a particular case of what is from then on generalised. One will say that, in this phase of extension, one passes from a simple cut-and-paste to the production of an ensemble, that one transforms a sum into a *product*, the product of a global interaction.

Remember that to add is to construct a system with *words* becoming *names* able to produce *statements* and that to extend is to mobilise these statements to control (from the very interior of the original situation - this is the genius of the operation) the global interaction able to generate a situation of a completely different species: an *extended* situation.

We will see how *secunda pratica* answers to these formal characteristics of an adjunction and an extension before coming to our *terza pratica*.

- First of all, the hierarchised segmentation of the tonal phrase forms the fundamental entities which will take the place of *words* in the new musical discursivity: a musical word is here an elementary melodic-harmonic motif, perceptible and identifiable by ear.
- Then, these musical “words” see themselves correlated to ordinary words (those that are pronounced by the text set to music) in order to musically “name” the words said by the voice: the musical motifs become in this way musical *names*, able to name the joy or sadness, love or hate, anger or tenderness evoked by the sung text (think about the leitmotifs of Wagner but also, more generally, baroque rhetoric...).
- Finally, these musical names will interact to compose musical *phrases* constituting a more global musical discourse, a discourse which will espouse and musically “express” the affects and actions designated by prosodised language.

In this way, musical *words*, *names* and *statements* come to add to music a new type of melody (in comparison to “contrapuntal” melody). This melody is endowed with the para-signifying capacity of which I have spoken.

The extension (to which this adjunction leads) holds to the musical generalisation of these new expressive capacities proven around harmonised melody. *Secunda pratica* is not only an old instrumental music to which could be added a new type of melodic voice: it is a complete revision that systematically shattered what *voice*, *polyphony*, *monody*, *melody*, *harmony* and *choir* meant until then.

In total, this *secunda pratica* revolutionises *prima pratica* not just by destroying it, not by undermining its foundations to better delete or dissolve it; it revolutionises it from the top down: by enlarging the space of thought and relativising *prima pratica*, which appears like a particular case, like a circumscribed region of the new extended situation.

If you have followed me up until now, I ask you then: can one engage the twenty-first musical century with a *terza pratica* which could be to the *secunda pratica* what the latter was to *prima pratica*?

Such is the hypothesis at work in my compositional labour, that which guided the choral study entitled *Dido and Aeneas*.

We will examine more closely this hypothesis of a *terza pratica*.

There is, first of all, the idea that we intend to extend the properly artistic power of music by banking anew on a musically delimited *pratica*: that which sets words to music.

As Adorno suggested,³ music has need of the heterogeneous to remain an art, an autonomous form of thought, in order not to fade into the exercise of simple cultural and religious functions (to amuse, to accompany dance, to accompany images, to illustrate films, to contribute to the sociological identifications of the youth, to participate in the sportive cults of vast stadiums, etc.).

The heterogeneity - which I propose to privilege for my music - will remain that of language.

It will consist then - and this will be my first axiom - in re-examining anew what “set words to music” can mean today.

In terms of words set to music, we shall determine two principal essential points:

1. These words must say something about this time, this time precisely in which music wants to be contemporary; the words set to music cannot just be vocalises, mumbling, glossolalia, scat and other language games; they cannot be limited moreover to quotidian babble, to the commerce of opinion; the words set to music ought to signify a contemporary “who goes there?” of thought; they ought to engage with the emancipatory aspects of this time (against the general dumbing-down extolled by globalised capitalism – a lateral thesis could be that globalisation is only the supreme - financial and imperialist - stage of capitalism, and there is nothing insurmountable there!)

Our first principle will then be: *Terza pratica* should carefully choose the words that it wants to set to music.

2. The second principle, the corollary of the preceding one: the setting to music of these words, carefully chosen, should not efface what they say! The words set to music should remain *globally* comprehensible to the ear. To set to music should not mean to undo linguistic prosody, to take the syntagms apart, to deconstruct the words to reduce the linguistic discourse to a pure acoustic game of unsignifying phonemes.

Our second principle will then be: *terza pratica* should globally respect the phrasing and the prosody of the language mobilised so that the words set to music remain comprehensible - the heterogeneity to which music has recourse should remain heterogeneous and not be musically dissolved, assimilated or denatured: when a host invites a stranger to his home, he does not force him to dress and speak like the natives!

There is then the following principal idea: *terza pratica* should enable the extension of different types of musical polyphony to true heterophonies.

I repeat: the goal of all this is to *extend* music. The goal is not to musically welcome the heterogeneous, as though the point was for music to make propaganda for this heterogeneity (by

3 “*Kunst bedarf eines ihr Heterogenen, um es zu werden*“. (1966).

mobilising the existing repertoire of conventional musical effects): to welcome the heterogeneous, to set a contemporary discourse to music, this should be for music the occasion to invent new properly musical alterities *for itself*: in order for the global heterophony between the two types of discourse - musical and lingual - to be a true heterophony, not a simple superimposition or a pure collage, it is in fact necessary that this bringing together also mobilises a heterophony intrinsic to each discourse.

As one doubts, this extension (of polyphony towards heterophony) will correspond to a profound modification of the notion of *voice*: it will not be completely the same “voice” that can make music heterophonic; one will not play with alterity as one played with alliances (counterpoint) or (melodico-harmonic) complementation.

The voice susceptible to compose a heterophony will not be a voice susceptible to be repeated and varied as in contrapuntal polyphony - we will say: this will not be the singular of a plural. It will not be moreover an indivisible and unrepeatable entity as is the melody of *secunda pratica* - this will not be an individual voice. The voice of heterophony will be itself *composite*, that is to say interiorly marked with intrinsic alterity: this is the endogenous condition that allows this voice to participate, in a non-accidental manner, in a more global heterogeneity - this will be an *dividual* voice (that is to say interiorly multiple, without prerequisite or guaranteed unity).

With this condition, heterophony will be something other than the new disparate and arbitrary assemblage of ancient polyphonic voices.

Our first compositional principle will then be: a heterophony will incorporate intrinsically composite, dividual musical voices (but this, certainly, does not prohibit some secondary incorporation of such or such voice of a more classical type).

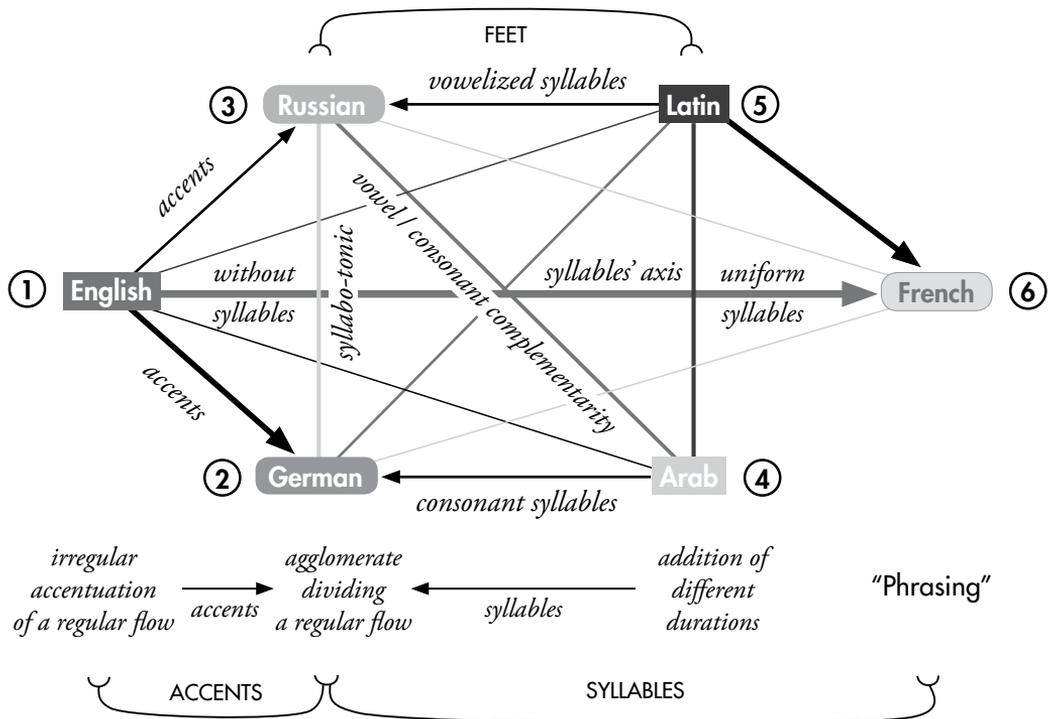
Our second compositional principle will be: in the setting to music of words remaining words, in the disjunctive duality between music and language, we need a third element. This third element will not come to synthesise disjunction from the top down; it will not moreover mediate it from the bottom up; it will rather create the conditions of a *participation* between disjunct orders (think of the manner in which Plato speaks about a participation between intelligible and sensible). The third element will favour the constitution of a resonance between musical and lingual voices.

This third term will be a *chorus*. I suggest then - the second principle will guide me here - that we need a heterophony of two distinct choruses, susceptible however to share the common characteristic of being a choir. We need then an instrumental and a vocal choir.

The addition of this term, chorus, involves already a nominal displacement: one passes from the primitive duality of the *musical* and of the *lingual* (that of our *pratica* consisting of setting words to music) to the choral duality of the *instrumental* and of the *vocal*. We have in this way begun to make immanent an exogenous contradiction in the music. Certainly, one is not yet finished with the level of lexicon and of names, but we will return to the importance of these instances in the process of adjunction.

So then, two choirs.

1. We will have, on the one hand, an instrumental choir: we must then treat the orchestra (or any other more restricted instrumental formation) like a choir made of composite voices. One senses that this will imply diagonalising the traditional instrumental families (woodwinds and brass; bowed, plucked or struck strings; skins with or without defined pitches; etc.). One will orient oneself instead towards an extended formula of chamber music (think of *Farben*) where each instrument configures by itself its own little chamber music, interiorises a specific form of heterogeneity. In such an instrumental choir, with a heterophonic vocation, it will then be difficult to tell exactly the number of voices!
2. On the other hand, that of the vocal, we will have what I propose to call a *Babelian choir*, that is to say a choir simultaneously speaking different languages. They will not say the same thing under different simultaneous translations, but synchronically state different ideas. The difficulty will be in ensuring that this heterophony does not degenerate into cacophony (we could say into *chaos-phony / chaophony*). The stake of the vocal composition will rest on this point: how do we simultaneously set different properties of different languages to music? To do this, the idea will be to play with proto-musical properties of each language: what is the rhythm of its syllables (long/short, accentuated/non-accentuated, agglomerated or equally distributed?), what is the prosody of its accents (syntactic/semantic, word for word or by syntagm?)? The idea will be that a Babelian chorus, musically prestructured according to these different types, will be able to more spontaneously interact with an instrumental choir.



In my own music, I expect to work with six languages (French, Latin, Arabic, German, Russian and English) regrouped into four categories according to which the prosody is syllabic or not, according to the pre-eminence or not of a lexical mode of accentuation - see the following diagram. My *Dido and Aeneas* began with only three of them.

Remark

Does such a Babelian chorus sustain *a* discourse? No, without doubt.

Take the example of spontaneous political gatherings that constitute themselves as the principal sites of affirmative, emancipatory politics. Such were the recent gatherings in Kasbah (Tunis), Tahrir (Cairo), and Puerta del Sol Squares (Madrid), in Zuccotti Park (New York), Taksim Square (Istanbul) until - why not - Maïdan Square (Kiev). Each gathering declares without exactly discoursing. They declare for example “Down with Ben Ali/Mubarak!” or “We are the 99%” but the sum of the discourses effectively held on each square at the same instant could not constitute by itself a discourse (in this way, the gathering distinguishes itself from the protest that, even spontaneously, is unified around some common words that tend to add up diachronically to a continuous discourse).

One will pose then – provisionally - that heterophony declares without exactly forming a discourse.

But we will return to our musical focus.

In total, the system envisaged will place in global, heterophonic resonance on the one hand an instrumental choir made of composite voices, on the other a vocal choir of a Babelian type.

I will not detail here a point that merits a more detailed exposé: the most pertinent mode of composition for such a global heterophony arises perhaps from the category of *montage*⁴.

The stake could then be to constitute a specifically musical version of this category, which could distinguish it from its native cinematographic usage: how to compose a properly *musical* montage?

Such could be a possible horizon for the *terza pratica* that I have in mind.

The difficulty is that we are speaking of a horizon, that of an extended musical world: it remains to be seen through which type of adjunction, here and now, it will be possible for us to prefigure it.

To return to the proposed formalisation, with which new types of properly musical *words*, *names* and *statements* will we be able to construct, patiently, step by step, the adjunction able to extend our *Music*-world?⁵

This point opens other compositional problems that concern not so much the intended heterophonic expressivity than the musical system susceptible to produce the new objects that will serve us for words, names and statements.

4 *film editing*

5 François Nicolas: *Le monde-Musique* (Aedam musicæ; Paris; 2014).

To recap: *secunda pratica* enlarged *prima pratica* through its new conception of voices, but it was able to do this because it subsumed the old modality in the new tonality. In its turn, a *terza pratica* can enlarge the *secunda pratica* only by associating its new heterophonic orientation with a new type of musical system, extending the old musical systems (modal and tonal, serial and spectral).

To detail this new group of compositional tasks could be the sole object of an entirely different lecture. I will content myself to indicate here the manner in which, for my part, I envisage these more technical tasks.

It is first of all clear that it could not be done by the simple enlargement of serialism: the serial path was necessary and fecund; it is today saturated as is the tonal and, *a fortiori*, modal paths. Spectralism, even more so, could not show the way.

For me, I try to implement a system that articulates the following dimensions.

- In the first place, it tries to reconfigure a functional harmony around vast structures of pitches that I call *rainbow* chords.
- In the second place, I try to globally frame each work around a vast polyrhythmic Metre, and it is around this point that the experience of Mallarmé in his *Coup de dés* (such as has been recently laid bare by Quentin Meillassoux) interests me.⁶
- In third place, I start from there to frame the development of the work through a global Matrix (obtained by blending the rainbow harmonies and rhythmic grids that follow from the two preceding points).
- Finally, I animate this vast matrix from the inside through a network of gestural figures - of local *Gestalts* - which come to enlarge the older leitmotivic system.

In total, I try then to exceed the triple subtraction at the foundation of the twentieth century - “no tone, no metre, no theme!” - without, for all that, returning, full of remorse, with my head hung low and with a downcast gaze, to the old system of tonality, metre and thematism.

What we understand well - and this will be my last point - is that the passage to a *terza pratica* can be today only a fight on two fronts (and no longer on just one, as at the time of *secunda pratica*): against a certain modernism (which advocates fleeing before an indefinitely renewed electro-acoustic technology) and against a certain traditionalism (which advocates a pure and simple return to the naturalist identities of the good old recipes: those of the acoustic tone, of the dancing metre and of the psychologically identifiable theme). So we have, on the one hand, an active nihilism (“*we want perpetually-updated technique at the fault of wanting new ideas!*”) and, on the other hand, passive nihilism (“*all desire entails risks; so we should content ourselves with managing the long-proven natural!*”).

6 Quentin Meillassoux: *Le Nombre et la Sirène* (Fayard)

Against these two figures of the same nihilism, the music that wants to continue to be a contemporary form of thought can prolong its old *pratica* under the form of a *terza pratica* that seeks the creation of choral heterophonies by assuring the musical composition of its new voices with new harmonic, rhythmic and gestaltic systems.

If *prima pratica* promised contrapuntal fraternity, if *secunda pratica* magnified the figure of love between dissimilar individualities, *terza pratica* could contribute to implementing, at the heart of the new century and within its unique world, a *justice* here and now. Music could then be the carrier not of hope in the future, but of the hope that justice is already here, in such a withdrawn and circumscribed place, and that it counts then already, universally, for all!

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