

Noise, Sound and Objecthood:
The Politics of Representation in the Musical Avant-Garde

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ABSTRACT

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This essay offers both a historical analysis of twentieth century avant-garde practices relating to representation in music, and a prescriptive model for contemporary methods of composition. I address the taxonomy problem in classical music, clarifying the ontological divide identified by German musicologist Michael Rebhahn *Contemporary Classical music and New Music*.

I demonstrate how neoliberalism has developed a Global Style (Foster 2012) of "Light Modernity," evident in both contemporary architecture and music alike. The central problem facing composition today is the fetishization of materials, ultimately derived from music's refusal to allow the question of representation to be addressed.

I argue that composers have largely sought to define noise as sound-in-itself, eliminating the possibilities of representation in the process. Proposing instead that composers should strive to tackle representation head-on in the 21st century, I show how Jacques Rancière provides a model in which noise and sound—representation and abstraction—function in a conjoined, yet non-homogenized aesthetic regime. Governed by what he calls the "pensiveness of the image," it allows for a renewed art form that rejects repetition and neoliberalism, re-connecting to the spirit of the avant-garde without slavishly echoing either its outmoded aesthetics or dogmatic philosophies.

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<https://soundcloud.com/alec-hall-1/zoopoetics>

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I. Introduction

Over the past seven years, I have pursued a musical aesthetic that collides the composition of new works with their surrounding social and political reality, prompting a radical critique of their historical antecedents. These efforts have originated primarily through an investigation of noise and field recordings which, through a careful weaving into the musical fabric, can be used to confront the listener with a composition that demands to be read as a text, rather than as a mostly phenomenological account of a sound stream. My work situates itself in what Rosalind Krauss famously called the “expanded field,” when she spoke of advances in conceptual sculpture in 1979 (Krauss 1985). The compositions move away from the lexical and discursive tendencies of classical music and are re-positioned into “a cultural situation” (Krauss 1985, 289). By treating sound as a text, with codes that can be read intentionally in a social context, the possibility arises for music to acquire the qualities of what Jacques Rancière calls “the pensiveness of the image.”

Such a framework can engender emancipatory conditions for listeners that might exemplify Joseph Beuys’ grand vision for the renovation of art, whose true purpose is “dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline” (Kuoni 1993). This dissertation will demonstrate that the use of noise as a discursive category is the best resource currently available to composers and sound artists wishing to create works in the conceptual and ideological traditions of both Krauss and Beuys. Composing in such a fashion also takes into account Jacques Attali’s criticism of the historical avant-garde tradition, and in particular his definition of “repetition.”

II. Definitions

Before moving on, it is important to define some basic terms relating to the existing reality of contemporary musical creation. There is a somewhat serious problem of identification in composition today. Although the formerly rigid ideological divides between composers of divergent aesthetic camps have for the most part dissipated (e.g. Uptown/Downtown, Serialist/Minimalist, etc.) and the deployment of a well defined musical style as an identity marker has ostensibly disappeared completely, the classificatory term employed to replace these outdated and disparate (sub-)movements is as generalizing as it is misleading. Signaling apparently any type of music that is written by a living composer, “New Music” is a term that ascribes almost no meaning to what it seeks to define. As Julian Johnson writes, "the word *new* has sounded tired for decades. It survives because all the other terms—modern, contemporary, recent, twentieth century, even avant-garde—have become chronological terms" (Hoeckner 2006, 72).¹

Perhaps then, a definition of New Music could be used to signal any type of contemporary music creation that is destined for a public audience, yet either intentionally or inadvertently eschews the mainstream commercial market. This definition is even more troublesome than the last, however, as established “New Music” groups like Bang on a Can (BOAC) have achieved notable commercial success within the music industry. David Lang, for example, a founding member of BOAC, was nominated for Best Song at the 2016 Academy Awards. Carolyn Shaw, who won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in music, was recently featured on *Say You Will*, a new track by Kanye West.

¹ That major commercial record labels founded the annual "New Music Seminar" in 1980 as a means to bring those in the industry together to foster business innovation demonstrates just how vague the term "new" really is.

Written about glowingly in major media outlets, most recently in the New York Times Magazine as part of a "one-time spectacular" interactive feature on the future of music,² Ms. Shaw's co-operation with Kanye has done little to damage her standing within the New Music community.³ On the contrary, her vocal compositions for West seem to have galvanized the spirit of New Music practitioners, as summarized by Alex Ross, at least,⁴ hoping that one day the commercial music industry will finally realize that it is in fact their *own* creativity which has been missing in popular music after all these years of enormous industry profits.

What would seem to unite almost all of the composers under the banner of New Music is neither an ambition for commercial success, nor the composer's instrumentarium or stylistic direction. Rather, nearly every single one of these composers has been extensively trained in either a conservatory or an academic department of music. New Music is classical music. It lives and breathes its traditions. To become a specialist of New Music, one almost inevitably has to pass through a long and complex series of institutional gatekeeping functions, undergoing long years of training in the techniques, histories, and aesthetics of classical music. To be a composer of New Music is—in the 21st century—little more than asserting that one has gone to school(s) and studied classical music, and continues to produce something that resembles it. New Music as a term tells us nothing about the style, aesthetics or political content of the music itself. What it does signal however, is that almost without exception, the New Music composer

² "25 songs that tell us where music is going," March 10, 2016, *The New York Times Magazine*: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/03/10/magazine/25-songs-that-tell-us-where-music-is-going.html>, accessed March 13, 2016.

³ For a further discussion of established composers' fear of widespread audience appreciation, see McClary 1989.

⁴ <http://www.thereistisnoise.com/2015/10/kanye-west-obama-caroline-shaw.html>, accessed March 15, 2016.

is one with at least some level of academic pedigree. As musicologist Jann Pasler proclaims, "Composers in universities have been an undeniable force in the world of American contemporary music" (Pasler 2008, 328).

In a presentation given at the New Perspectives for New Music conference at Harvard University in April 2013, the German journalist/musicologist Michael Rebhahn delivered a piercing lecture on the state of music today in which, among other important points, he proposed a taxonomical distinction to be applied to active living composers of classical music. Underneath the wide umbrella of new musical composition, Rebhahn suggests that the already existing classification, largely employed by the music industry itself, should be re-appropriated in order to clarify and concretize the significant ideological and aesthetic divisions that still shape the western compositional community.

Especially in anglophone countries there is this paradoxical term of Contemporary Classical Music... A really ghastly term at first glance. But is it that wrong? Or isn't it rather a term that defines, in a sort of almost cynical accuracy, a not inconsiderable portion of New Music? A style of combinations and adaptations, of allusions and quotations. A gallant mixture of serialism, complexism, spectralism, micropolyphony and of course *musique concrète instrumentale*. Now and then a little tonal sprinkle may also be quite nice, and the sonoristic icing is done by some electronics. Isn't that pretty much what a not so small amount of New Music is like? (Rebhahn 2013)

Here Rebhahn is being overly generous in his stylistic assessment of "anglophone" countries. In the United States and Canada, his stylistic amalgam is found only in academic music departments that have a more distinctly European outlook, whether that means European composers on faculty, as is the case at Columbia, Harvard, UCSD or Stanford, for example, or else Americans who have trained in Europe, of which there are quite a few.

In her still very relevant study of the place of composition within American universities, Jann Pasler observed two fundamental principles of musical composition in

the United States. Firstly, that the university is not merely a hospitable environment for a composer, but that "Academic institutions have come to rival the old cultural capitals as centers of musical production and consumption in America and as power brokers" (Pasler 2008, 321). Secondly, that these academic music departments are defined above all by their plurality of style (359-61). Pasler recounts that the more serious American composers would have traveled to Europe for their studies, up until about the 1930s. (341) Starting in the 1920s, however, and lasting through the 1960s, the composer and professor Howard Hanson, "worked aggressively at Eastman to build their program and to develop a specifically American music" (341). The school granted more degrees than any other accredited music institution in America between 1934 and 1944, and the graduates became known as the "Eastman Group," known for their tonal style of diatonic melodies based on traditional forms (341). Pasler argues that in the succeeding years,

Eastman spread its power and influence by helping its students get jobs in music departments across the country, especially in state universities. Eventually these Eastman graduates became chairmen of their departments. They controlled hiring and promoting, and in the late 1940s and 1950s (according to [Will] Ogdon) made it very difficult for anyone not from the Eastman-Northwestern University-University of Michigan bloc to get a university job. Over the years, Eastman also built an important alliance with Juilliard (342).

Through extensive analysis of NEA grant awarding from 1969-1985, Pasler observes how exactly these forms of inter-university alliances were maintained through financial and institutional support. She also noted how the university functioned to provide composers with credentials of prestige, as well as generating private, membership-based support networks—that is to say, for graduates of elite programs—through both grant making and the awarding of prizes, e.g., Rome Prize, Guggenheim, Koussevitsky, etc.

Beginning in the 1940s however, the mass European immigration to the United States prompted by World War II brought with it a wave of modernist composers with no

prior connections to American music.

Two fundamentally opposed aesthetics, associated with the nationalists or the followers of European émigré composers, came into conflict within the academic environment in the 1940s and 1950s. They struggled for preeminence but ultimately became coexisting alternatives, along with other aesthetic positions (360).

This academic pluralism, of which Pasler writes here, is perhaps best described by Kyle Gann in his geographical division of Manhattan into Uptown and Downtown, each with a compositional ethos that he views through an Adornian lens. The Uptown composers, centered around Columbia, followed the modernist path, relating their works to the figures of the European avant-garde that was developing at the time, e.g., Boulez, Stockhausen, Nono, etc. (Gann 2006, 2). In contrast, according to Gann, the Downtown composers were defined primarily by their "deliberate rejection of Uptown elitism" (4). Downtown music became synonymous with American experimentalism and early minimalism, with such prominent figures as Pauline Oliveros, LaMonte Young, Terry Reilly, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, among many other now very famous composers. Gann reserves his scorn for what he has in more recent years begun calling the Midtown crowd. These composers are, as Gann describes

those especially associated with the Juilliard school and the orchestral circuit, can be said to "play deaf and soldier on as if music were still music" : that is, they continue to write symphonies and concertos, wear tuxedos and formal attires to concerts... who write orchestra and chamber music in intuitive, nonsystematic idioms comparable in form and feeling, if not always in musical materials or style, to European works of the 19th century (2).⁵

The so-called Midtown composers exemplify Rebhahn's Contemporary Classical Music in the North American context. As Alex Ross writes, this is a music that has "regained

⁵ Gann's quote is from Theodor Adorno, "On The Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music," in Leppert 2002, 135.

the confidence of mainstream classical listeners, who never quite got around to accepting Schoenberg, never mind Milton Babbitt" (Ross 2007, 737). This style of composition was always present in university music departments throughout America, however. As illustrated by Pasler, she described it as peacefully co-existing alongside the academic advancement of post-war modernism, led in the United States by composers like Milton Babbitt, Elliot Carter, Donald Martino, Mario Davidovsky and others.

This détente, as it were, would endure roughly until the mid-1980s, finally breaking apart on account of "the defection of many younger composers from any allegiance to 12-tone technique..." (3) Indeed, the rejection and eventual death of serial methods was the cause of much celebration by American composers and audiences alike, but it also created a vacuum in the academic music departments that would come to be filled by the both the initial progenitors of the Downtown set, as well as its next generation of composers.

Downtown and midtown composers are alike in rejecting the prophet-in-the-wilderness, who-cares-if-you-listen mentality that prevailed after the Second World War. They often speak in terms of an atonal nightmare ending, of a melodic morning dawning. By now, members of these formerly suspect camps have achieved positions of eminence in American academia, and young composers no longer fear intellectual ostracism if they dabble in tonality (Ross 2007, 737).

Downtown music was a poly-centric, vanguard form of American experimentalism, defined by Gann as a movement that "wanted to create an ever-renewing music that would not fall into the categories defined by the commercial music industry" (Gann 2006, 7). Noting, however, that "the early 1980s saw minimalism turn establishment" (Gann 12), Alex Ross provides valuable insight into the next generation of Downtown composers.

In the 1980s, three composers from the Yale School of Music, Michael Gordon,

Julia Wolfe, and David Lang, banded together under the name Bang on a Can. They summed up their thinking thus: “We had the simplicity, energy and drive of pop music in our ears—we’d heard it from the cradle. But we also had the idea from our classical music training that composing was exalted (Ross 2007, 738).

Both in terms of style and attitude, Gann defines the transformation of this once rebellious community into the present-day commercial juggernaut known today as postminimalism. As Ross points out above, Gann also describes this musical movement as one "whose reference points are overwhelmingly from popular musics" (Gann 2006, 14). It is problematic to deny the legitimacy of a musical style in the 21st century, but the academic placement of composers who situate commercial music at the center of their musical inspiration, as the Bang on a Can members describe succinctly above, is even more so. As Gann writes, "To make loads of money from old and familiar music without nurturing new artists and cultural expressions is like cutting down forests wholesale without planting any new trees" (11).

Indeed, as a quick glance at the most prestigious academic music departments in the United States will show, the faculty are by-and-large representative of both the Midtown and establishment Downtown musical-economic communities. At Yale, Curtis, Juilliard, Princeton, USC, Oberlin, University of Michigan, Cornell, Eastman, Peabody and now Oberlin, with the recent administration-led restructuring of the composition faculty, all of these highly regarded schools have composers on faculty that write in the aforementioned style. Pasler (2008) notes that while students are not required to flatter their teachers through imitation, the philosophical direction of music departments varies dramatically based on the specific faculty (361) and students are often either drawn to a school because of particular faculty, or alter their musical directions once enrolled. Beyond stylistic orientation, Pasler's case study on the awarding of NEA grants to individual

composers is striking, noting that in non-blind jury evaluations, composers with degrees from certain schools dominated the awardees.

Half the winners graduated from one of eight institutions on the East Coast—Columbia, Yale, Juilliard, Princeton, Eastman, the University of Pennsylvania, Brandeis University and Harvard—34 percent from one of the first four, and 20 percent from one of the first two, which is even more than all those who graduated in the western states (353).

The NEA no longer awards individual grants to composers, but when examining the list of winners of the Rome Prize from 2011 to 2015, it is important to note that every composer has a doctoral degree, with three winners from Columbia, two from Cornell, two from Yale, and one each from Princeton, NYU and UT Austin.⁶ This is only a tiny sample and more research ought to be conducted on contemporary data, but the main conclusions of Pasler's study, now more than thirty years old, still seem relevant.

Returning then to Rebhahn, when evaluating the scope of his categories within the context of the "anglosphere," it is critical to include elements of postminimalism, and American neo-romanticism (Midtown) in particular, as part of the foundation for his "Contemporary Classical Music," at least when referring to the United States. Here we can finally begin to separate out the genres into something resembling an ontology.

So, wouldn't it be helpful to establish a separation of the genres: Contemporary Classical Music on the one hand and New Music on the other hand? The first as an eldorado for those composers who make do with the traditional repertoire of materials, for those who do not see any difficulties in the three-step-archetype production–delivery–realization, for those who are not really interested in contributing to an aesthetic discourse. In contrast the latter would be the field of activity for artistically ambitious composers, who are fed up with skillfully executed variations of material and are totally interested in contributing to an aesthetic discourse.

It is difficult to find fault with Rebhahn's divisions, particularly when confronting the challenges that arise when these entirely separate musical discourses attempt to share the

⁶ <http://www.aarome.org/people/current/rome-prize-fellows>, accessed March 15, 2016.

same financial, media and human resources, as well as mechanisms of institutional validation.⁷ I mark the distinction between the two terms, Contemporary Classical Music and New Music, as discursive categories, not simply differing musical genres, which is something that Rebhahn quietly does throughout as well. He mentions twice in one paragraph the notion of “contributing to an aesthetic discourse,” which he asserts only composers of New Music are actually capable of accomplishing.

The unelaborated concept at play here is the historical understanding and practice of music as a quasi-phenomenological aesthetics, which neither rely on, nor contain referentiality beyond the means of its own physical production. As Seth Kim-Cohen observes in his important 2009 book, *In the Blink of an Ear*, music is “obsessed with its media specificity” (Kim-Cohen 2009, 39). Of all the art forms, he claims, music is the only one which has “a term for the foreign matter threatening always to infect it: the ‘extramusical’” (Kim-Cohen 2009, 39). Contemporary Classical Music is the instantiation of the present-day form of musical creation that most clearly embodies Kim-Cohen’s historical reading of classical music. As Rebhahn states so effectively, Contemporary Classical Music’s “combinations and adaptations, of allusions and quotations,” amount to a closed symbolic system that keeps at bay any subversive sonic tactics that would threaten to undermine the carefully constructed identity formation of the historically bourgeois listener (Attali, 66-67, 110). Of western music in general, writes Kim-Cohen, “as a language [it] seeks to retain its absolute proximity to itself... Music vainly resists semantic interaction with “outside” influences. This is music’s impossible dream. Batoned sentries stand down the barbarians at the gates.” (Kim-Cohen

⁷ Amy Beal also uses the term "American Contemporary Classical Music" when contrasting conservative US music against what she calls its more "radical cousins." See Chapter 5 in Beal 2012.

2009, 99).

The category of “New Music” that Rebhahn seeks to define as “innovative,” which would contribute qualities of vitality and importance to an “aesthetic discourse,” is clearly the historical descendent of twentieth century Avant-Garde art movements. Rebhahn seems to desire fresh contributions to New Music that provoke what Kim-Cohen (113) calls a “discursive transformation, an intervention into the *textuality* of art and art history” (or in this case, music and musical history). While Kim-Cohen is speaking here about the initial power of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades, his prose could be similarly used to define a successful work of New Music, in which aesthetic value is “derived, not from the visual [sonic] or material qualities of the nominated object as it relates to the tradition of art [music] objects, but from the artistic act as it relates to the tradition of artistic acts” (113). This style of musical meta-commentary is rare in most present-day compositional settings, kept at bay by the social and economic instantiations of Kim-Cohen’s batoned sentries standing guard. As disheartening as it may be to acknowledge, it is both the philosophy and the aesthetics of Contemporary Classical Music that dominate the intellectual and performance landscape of 21st century musical production. As Alex Ross poetically puts it, “much contemporary music in Austria and Germany seems constricted in emotional range—trapped behind the modernist plate-glass window of Adorno’s “Grand Hotel Abyss.” The great German tradition, with all its grandeurs and sorrows, is cordoned off, like a crime scene under investigation” (Ross 2007, 752).

The following sections will explore the conflation of these two distinct artistic categories into the overarching definition of “New Music,” with a view toward teasing

out their differences in order to create a critical framework for music composition in the 21st century. A point of clarification, however, before moving ahead: when speaking of the endeavor of creating new musical works in general I sometimes refer this field as "contemporary composition," or "contemporary music." This is meant to indicate newly composed music in the broadest possible sense, without regard to a specific category as described above. References to New Music in contrast with Contemporary Classical are capitalized, and by extension, when referenced with "contemporary composition," the term "new music" is used.

III. Repeating

Jacques Attali's groundbreaking 1977 text, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, divides the evolution of western music into three distinct stages: Sacrifice, Representation, and Repetition (as well as a possible post-Repetition stage he calls Composition). For Attali, music, which he defines as "the organization of noise," is more than just an "object of study," but something far more powerful: "a way of perceiving the world... a tool of understanding. [Music] constitutes the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society" (Attali 1977, 4). These three stages of musical evolution also represent Attali's global interpretation of the history of Western society in the second millennium, not just in regard to the organization of noise. One of the most important chapters in the book concerns what Attali calls the era of Repetition, which in his formulation began with the invention of the first audio recording devices. Viewed in broader historical terms, Attali's Repetition can be understood by what Neil Brenner (2004) defines as the period of Fordist regimes of accumulation within Keynesian

national welfare states. *Noise* was written during the early onset of neoliberal economic theories and the global transition to what Brenner calls post-Keynesian regulatory experimentation (Brenner 2004, 2). While the political economy of music has changed quite dramatically since Attali wrote *Noise*, ultimately those changes have had more to do with the accelerating implementation of neoliberalism than an authentic turn toward a post-Repetition society. Attali describes Composition—the era of putative triumph over Repetition—as a radical, utopian form of political organization "that calls into question the distinction between worker and consumer," creating a new form of social communication that "can only emerge from the destruction of the preceding codes" (Attali 1977, 135-6).

The outlook is altogether gloomier, however, as the codes of Repetition have indeed been altered nearly to the breaking point, but in distinct opposition to the emancipatory social and economic organization that Attali had imagined. The distinction between worker and consumer has very much been called into question, not in the terms of Marcusean emancipation, but rather through the creation of an economy based on precarious labor. The neoliberal "sharing economy" economy has blurred the lines between worker and consumer so much that subjects (whether as citizens or undocumented migrants) of the western state apparatus now occupy both of these roles simultaneously, with the legal protections once guaranteed to each category now afforded to neither.⁸ Social reality today is defined by a kind of hyper-Repeating; an advanced

⁸ "...Nike for example, which uses an iPod to log runners' performances, has recorded – and fed back to Nike – 150 million individual jogging sessions since the launch of the product in 2006. Like all businesses, Nike is in the process of becoming, effectively, 'information plus things'. This is what the cognitive capital theorists mean by the 'socialized factory.' We are no longer a world of clearly delineated production and consumption, but one in which ideas, behaviors and customer interactions with the brand are critical to generating profit; production and consumption are blurred" (Mason 2016, 28).

technocratic, post-ideological society. The core of this economy produces only the disingenuous aesthetic of a modernity that is focused on creating, as Hal Foster writes, the "image of a present that wishes to appear advanced" (Foster 2011, 49).

In his 2011 book, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, Foster claims that if Modernist architecture was the International Style, then today's architecture now represents the "Global Style," whose aesthetics are defined what he calls a type of "light modernity." In many ways Foster's thesis of the Global Style parallels Rebhahn's definition of Contemporary Classical Music, as an un-theorized amalgam of recent modernisms. Through the fusion of disparate musical styles, situated at a safe distance of time from their origin and therefore now stripped of their ideological content, Contemporary Classical has engendered a fundamentally different mode of reception, with critics evaluating quality based on the "quantity of technically competent details" (Rebhahn 2012, 2) The result is disastrous, as Rebhahn argues that "a consensus ensues that composition is nothing more than the ability to 'carry out' acquired techniques according to established standards of fabrication" (2). Resembling Norman Foster's appearance of advanced modernity (by representing stale concepts in the most advanced materials possible), musical composition in the 21st century has largely become a cyclical discourse on the materials themselves used to create 21st century music.

Rebhahn makes a provocative argument that New Music has become essentially a craft-based endeavor that has forfeited its right to the status of an art form— fixated on the presentation and arrangement of materials in a quasi-fetishistic form:

a substantial number of contemporary compositions do not go beyond craftsmanship – beyond the demonstration of how they are made. The focus is on the effort to demonstrate a 'state of the art', conveyed in the varyingly skilled application of a material currently considered 'progressive'. Often enough, one

finds no more than a manifestation of this ability: as long as the product maintains an intactness of the external appearance, as long as it has an overlap of at least 75% with the culture-historical topos of New Music, the composer has achieved their class goal (Rebhahn 2012).

Just as in contemporary music, the neo-modernity of the Global Style is a "sublimated architecture, one that is perfectly fitting for art museums and the like" (Foster, 62). It is clear how the same conceptual apparatus simultaneously drives the ideology and the aesthetics of both new music and the contemporary architecture of Light Modernism. It can also conceivably be argued that new music today no longer obeys any historical conditions of geography or national consciousness, but that its uniform, material-driven style has achieved a degree of globality as well. As Neil Brenner writes in *New State Spaces*, within the framework of the post-1970s experimental deregulations,

it is no longer capital that is to be molded into the (territorially integrated) geography of state space, but state space that is to be molded into the (territorially differentiated) geography of capital (Brenner 2004, 16).

Not only are the public institutions whose role it is to nurture and support new music creation weakening through massive austerity-driven reductions in their budgets⁹, but also that according to Brenner,

The goal of national, regional, and local state spatial policies is no longer to alleviate uneven geographical development, but actively to intensify it through the deployment of urban locational policies designed to strengthen the place-specific socioeconomic assets of strategic, globally linked city-regions (Brenner

⁹ From 1992 to 1996, the Federal government slashed the NEA budget from its all time peak of nearly \$175 million to \$99.45 million a 56.5% cut in total expenditures (see <https://www.arts.gov/open-government/national-endowment-arts-appropriations-history>). Indeed, the slow destruction of the NEA closely follows the trajectory of neoliberal power consolidation, including the fact that the public has consistently been opposed to such cuts and is strongly in favor of federal public subsidies to the arts. As sociologists Paul DiMaggio and Becky Pettit maintain, "Federal government arts programs appear to deviate from the rule that legislative behavior closely follows public preferences. Since the early 1970s, public opinion surveys have found stable if modest majorities supporting federal aid to the arts. Yet during that period the National Endowment for the Arts, the agency responsible for federal arts support, has faced volatile legislative treatment: great favor until 1978, budgetary stagnation through the Carter and Reagan administrations, and congressional disfavor, culminating in sharp budget cuts and agency reorganization, after 1989" (DiMaggio and Pettit 1999, 2).

2004, 16).

The result for new music, which Adorno described in 1955 as "Music Festival Music" (Hoeckner 2006, 72) is that the distribution of resources to fund and support the arts become centralized in either capital cities or else in the largest existing music festivals not held in a major urban region, for example, the annual Donaueschinger Musiktage. While Adorno's early critique of new music as a type of Festival Music is devastatingly insightful with respect to the relative isolation of the avant-garde from everyday life, the channeling of capital resources today away from institutions like public broadcasters (which used to disseminate the so-called Festival Music to a larger public) and the shuttering of cultural institutions deemed "peripheral"¹⁰ have only deepened the isolation of the compositional community in the world, as well as cementing the global, post-nationalistic tendencies of musical production.¹¹

Beyond the legislative political dimension, the swift and massive outbreak of corporate mergers among communications companies after the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act has led to extreme integration in all aspects of mass media production. (Hoeckner 152) In his 2006 piece, "Music, Corporate Power, and the Age of Unending War," Martin Scherzinger writes that

media cross-ownership and joint ventures tend to reduce competition, lower risk

¹⁰ The CBC Radio Orchestra in Vancouver was the last radio orchestra in North America still operating until it was disbanded in 2008 due to funding cuts caused by the Harper Conservatives (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/cbc-radio-orchestra-to-disband-after-70-years-1.761897>, accessed March 15, 2016). The orchestra had an active program of commissioning, recording and performing new works by Canadian composers (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/cbc-scraps-radio-orchestra/article25578849/>, accessed March 15, 2016).

¹¹ A multi-year battle raged more recently against the cuts that caused the forced merger of the SWR Symphony—an orchestra founded in 1946 with a strong focus on promoting new orchestral compositions—with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony (<http://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2013/nov/26/cuts-merger-swr-symphony-stuttgart-radio-orchestras>, accessed March 15, 2016).

and increase profits. This, in turn, has forced musical production to succumb to the advertising, marketing, styling and engineering techniques of increasingly uniform and narrow profit-driven criteria (Scherzinger 2006, 152).

Stylistic trends will continue to change as they always have, but commercial music is no longer constrained by cultural regionalisms or national boundaries. The climate of funding in new music, whether public or private, similarly appears to mirror this corporate process of globalization as de-regionalized homogenization.

IV. Permanent Crisis, or, the State of Exception

Within so-called New Music there are perennial grumblings about the state of crisis in which the field finds itself. In 1953 the crisis was, for Adorno in his essay, "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music," a rather serious one in which he struggled to come to terms with the very notion of music's "right to exist" (Adorno 1953, 146). Adorno was of the opinion that tonality was so powerful as an aesthetic force that it had become so engrained in the social fabric as to become second nature. Tonality's strength, he argued, came from a function that it performed for centuries, which was to effectively mediate a degree of resolution between the universal and the particular.

Tonality afforded certain general formulae, and within the systems of musical architecture it buttressed, it was "flexible enough to offer... space for the particular" (Leppert 2002, 666). The particular, in this instance, is taken to symbolize an instance of individual expression that originates from the composer. And while tonality obviously restricted those particulars from becoming too exaggerated, it contained a nearly infinite

range of possible combinations and permutations, and "above all, the possibility of being saturated with expression, so that the particular could enter into every universal" (666).

Adorno viewed the transformation of music into a realm of expression beyond tonality primarily as a mimetic impulse. In the search for a higher regime of expressive intensity, music sought to imitate "things that transpire inside human beings" (145). At the center of the human, toward the interior, was the expressive utterance: a pre-linguistic form that was represented by the first tentative moves away from the tonal system. The development of the twelve-tone method, however, represented "music's turn toward language" (145) The crisis then, which was threatening the very right of music to exist at all, lay in the aporia between music's search for a more liberated regime of expression, and by discovering the intensification of expression that it sought, the negation of the entire architecture that permitted that very expression in the first place. As Adorno noted, "After breaking down the idiomatic element for the sake of pure, unreified, immediate expression, it is no longer master of expression itself" (146). The turbulence of twentieth century musical styles becomes a history of those composers who attempt to re-inscribe the missing universal, and those who function as one of Seth Kim-Cohen's Imperial Guards, keeping the question of representation on the sidelines, only ever admitting the issue into a discussion when it relates to the internal dynamics of musical historicity.

There was a brief but ultimately doomed attempt to restore the universal to composed music in the neo-classical moment that followed the First World War (see Hess 2001a). Composers of nearly every aesthetic orientation participated in neo-classicism to some extent, whether through Stravinsky's experiments in the tradition of

Russian Formalism, or the structural approach taken by the Second Viennese School, with the use of the twelve-tone method within historical forms, passacaglias or sonata form, to name two representative examples (Lessem 1982). The neo-classical period was short-lived and characterized by philosophical incongruities, and after the Second World War, it had disappeared from the musical landscape—along with the so-called universal quality of tonality—supplanted by the strident particulars of high modernism.

In *Noise*, Attali expands on the same paradox of expression that Adorno spoke of a quarter-century earlier, as he describes music's post-tonal condition as one that lacks criteria for "truth or common reference for those who compose and those who hear." Within an individual work, the disappearance of the universal implies the creation of a style at the same time: "[M]usic today is led to elaborate the condition of truth at the same time as the discovery, the language at the same time as speech" (Attali 1977, 113). Rather than a fatal flaw, the mid-century musical Avant-Garde saw this dilemma as the challenge to be overcome. It was effectively the goal of that generation of composers to engender such a condition, to inhabit that world of contradictions and begin totally anew, consigning musical history to the scrap heap.¹²

The counter-attacks on Modernism came quickly, however, and with great intensity from all quarters. Berio's *Sinfonia*, written in 1968-9, challenged the notion of a single authorial voice and the notion of unity within a musical work. The third movement is "hung on a framework" of the Scherzo from Mahler's Symphony No. 2, however, and the unraveling of material unity is accomplished "not by presenting chaos but rather by dissolving away the structural grid (the Mahler scherzo) and by allowing a variety of materials to come to the musical surface instead" (Hoeckner 2006, 77). *Sinfonia*

¹² Boulez 1986, 445.

represents one of the most significant provocations of Postmodernism, yet it draws its potency from the history and materials of western art music. Warhol's *Campbell Soup I*, also from 1968, tackles the issue of originality and the familiar, yet he does so with images previously considered exogenous to art history. Likewise, his *Mao* (1973) employs similar techniques, both conceptually and technically, but Warhol moves toward an even more obvious instantiation of the political. Berio does no such thing, representing only familiar texts within the established canon of classical music. *Sinfonia* is an official declaration of musical postmodernity, but in spite of its conceptual strength, it is still reluctant to look beyond existing musical references for its content.

Steve Reich, who was a student of Luciano Berio, burst onto the scene in 1965 with *It's Gonna Rain*, a tape piece based on a short fragment of a 1964 recording of a Pentecostal preacher in San Francisco. This piece, and its younger sibling *Come Out* (1966), were, and still are to this day, radical acts of extra-musical infiltration. Reich's use of the voice was historically charged, as the recording functioned both as a found object as well as a concrete sound in the traditions of Robert Rauschenberg and Pierre Schaeffer respectively. In both compositions, the recorded voice is inherently political, as in each work the recordings are made of African-American men speaking (see Spivak 1985) at the height of the Civil Rights Era in the mid-1960s. The brilliance in these two works lies precisely in the transformation from the political into the phenomenological, as the voice disappears and reappears, as if heard through a kaleidoscope, by way of Reich's newly discovered compositional technique of looping and phasing. The great tragedy of Reich's work is that after the incredible success of these two pieces, he took his phasing method, which he called "Music as a Gradual Process," and began to apply it

to instruments. Reich moved away from the anxiety of the extra-musical and retreated to the safe space of the classical instrumentarium, where a manifestation of the universal could be discovered without any overt reference to the political.¹³

The second half of the 20th century was marked by a rapid explosion of musical styles, each marked by an eruption of aesthetic and social energy as the initial blossom of conceptual inspiration invented both a language and a speech at the same time.

New tonality, neo-romanticism, new simplicity, neo-serialism, minimalism, budding Boulezes, miniature Stockhausens, Xenakis copies, neo-impressionists, Donatoni cloning himself. . . If you looked at concert programme notes or festival brochures, you might think that an entire generation of composers is fixated on the past. "I don't know what notes to write anymore," a terribly confused composer told me recently (Murail 2005).

One could add Spectralism (and its so-called second and third generations), post-Minimalism, Saturation, etc.; the list could go on almost endlessly. And like heavier elements progressing down and right on the periodic table, each style is more unstable than the last, with a shorter and shorter half-life. As the hunt for the missing universal goes on, long forgotten historical movements occasionally pop up to provide fresh, yet short-lived inspiration.¹⁴

Ultimately, the crisis of meaning Adorno referenced in 1953, whose origins effectively date to the start of the 20th century, has become normalized and the aporia has come to represent a state of exception, carved out from the metaphysics of music. Giorgio Agamben echoes Adorno's philosophical concerns, but expressed in questions of law and politics rather than music. Agamben's influential 2005 book, *State of Exception*, explores

¹³ Music theorist Sumanth Gopinath writes, "Reich's involvement with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Bay Area artistic scene increasingly seems to have become—despite their formative influence on him as a composer—something of an embarrassment for him, and over the years he has attempted to distance himself from most of the work he produced in that period" (Gopinath 2011, 140).

¹⁴ See a recent discussion surrounding the investigation of the Ars Subtilior period as a frame to investigate aspects of complexity in New Music (Mahnkopf, Cox & Schurig 2002, 7).

how the suspension of law can be justified in order to preserve the very juridical order in which it functions. The state of exception is predicated on—but also produces—a blurring of boundaries between legal and illegal, public and private, war and peace. Reading the history of post-tonal music through Agamben, it becomes possible to take Adorno's aporia head on, and rather than trying to solve the impossible, simply articulate the nature of its boundaries. The state of exception provides a way to negotiate linkages between oppositional elements:

In truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside [of the juridical order] do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other (Agamben 2005, 23).

The oppositional forces at work in new music are on the one hand those that advocate for the restoration—in whatever fashion, however, often regressively—of the universal, and on the other hand, those forces that view the universal as unnecessary for their project, often invoking a technological, scientific ethos of research and discovery. Adorno's crisis has become permanent, normalized as a musical state of exception. What else can we expect from the normalization of paradox and irrationality, except irrationality itself? The only truth content arising from this situation is in the fetishization of musical materials as a symbol of technological and social advancement, which echoes strongly the discussion of Norman Foster's use of materials for the similar purposes.

The crisis in 1953 is not the same crisis in 1977. In a Hegelian reading of the situation, one could argue that the normalization of Adorno's crisis has produced generations of composers working in a state of exception. These composers have, of course, produced music that is existentially limited by the living-historical state of its materials, and unable to exceed its boundary conditions, despite the relative flexibility of

those boundaries. The crisis of composition stemming from the disappearance of the universal eventually encounters its own aesthetic lineage, and is itself sublated into a new form of crisis. For Attali, under repetition, crisis is "no longer a breakdown, a rupture, as in representation, but a decrease in the efficiency of the production of demand, an excess of repetition" (Attali 1977, 127). Production of demand is too low to ward off crisis because by and large, the demand for newly composed music is generally found only within the class of professionals that creates this music itself. In the Representation era,

learned music is restricted to a concert-going elite. It is no longer distributable among the middle bourgeoisie, since the instruments and techniques it uses make it impossible for amateurs to communicate or perform it... It is a spectacle organized by technocrats for technocrats (120).

Nevertheless, the teaching, production and performing of new compositions requires fairly substantial capital resources, which in the former social-democratic countries of Europe and the British Commonwealth are still furnished largely by the state. In the United States funding is supplied primarily through private mechanisms, although philanthropy in the US tax code is akin to indirect government support, as the revenue that would have been collected by the IRS is instead re-directed to "non-profit" groups in the form of a tax deduction for a wealthy individual or corporation.

As Slavoj Žižek addressed the crowd of Occupiers in Liberty Square in October 2011, he said that it is easier to imagine the end of life on Earth than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.¹⁵ Truer words have never been spoken. Rajesh Venugopal, a professor at the London School of Economics describes neoliberalism in bleak terms.

It is found to be everywhere, but at the same time, nowhere. It is held to be the dominant and pervasive economic policy agenda of our times... Perry Anderson describes it as "the most successful ideology in world history"... Yet this powerful global hegemon is also one that dares not speak its own name

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32ShKRjLN3M>, accessed March 15, 2016.

(Venugopal 2015, 165).

The unofficially official neoliberal project has been waging a relentless war on democratic institutions, public health and education, local communities, small businesses and of course, public arts councils for the past 40 years. The point is that if writing and performing new compositions in the classical tradition is not a self-sustaining commercial enterprise, relying on the beneficence of either public or private donations, what is the political economy of what Attali calls this "music without a market"? His argument is that it simply "imposes itself on an international elite, which once again finds itself exceeding national cultural traditions, seeking the Esperanto it needs to function smoothly, to communicate effectively" (Attali 116). And indeed it does just that, as I outlined earlier, discussing the overflowing of capital markets into unified, supranational entities that produce global trends in music and architecture alike. Contemporary Classical music is one element among many in the cultural residue spawned from the endless neoliberal drift. As per Rem Koolhaas in *Junkspace*, "Change has been divorced from the idea of improvement. There is no progress; like a crab on LSD, culture staggers endlessly sideways" (Koolhaas 2002, 178).

What purpose, then, does this music serve, if not to enforce the legitimacy of the anti-democratic, technocracies of our neoliberal age? It is extremely difficult to take seriously the value of an art form that, in its claim for present-day legitimacy, asserts a relationship to the historical avant-garde in both lineage and current practice, when in fact neither of these connections is particularly authentic.

V. Making sense of the state of affairs

Without relying on the dramatic hyperbole of Adorno and the Darmstadt Festivals of the 1960s and 70s, New Music in the early 21st century is certainly facing a serious, complex challenge. The problem is manifold, but it resides primarily in the condition that Contemporary Classical Music—the light modernism of the Global Style, which is a craft-based model of material sublimation and self-referential fetishism—refuses to disentangle itself from the possibilities contained within the expanded field of New Music. The root of the problem is that there is no clear delineation between where the sonic vocabulary of Contemporary Classical Music's material fetishism ends and the possible forms of resistance within New Music begin. While neither blame nor agency can be ascribed to any person or institution(s) in particular, the current crisis of self-identification in New Music reveals how deeply it functions within, and indeed supports, a post-ideological¹⁶ technocracy. Michael Rebhahn's 2012 panel at the Darmstadt Summer Courses attacked this image of the present through an updated and re-purposed version of Joseph Beuys' original 1985 proclamation, titled "I hereby resign from New Music." Rebhahn made a powerful observation: "In conversations with a not inconsiderable number of composers of the younger and youngest generation, it does not usually take long for these words to be spoken: *Essentially, what I do is not New Music*" (Rebhahn 2012). This sentiment, which should be taken seriously, could be considered an

¹⁶ "The form of consciousness that fits late-capitalist "post-ideological" society – the cynical, "sober" attitude that advocates liberal "openness" in the matter of "opinions" (everybody is free to believe whatever she or he wants; this concerns only his or her privacy), disregards pathetic ideological phrases, and follows only utilitarian and/or hedonistic motivations – *stricto sensu* remains an ideological attitude: it involves a series of ideological presuppositions (on the relationship between "values" and "real life," on personal freedom, etc.) that are necessary for the reproduction of existing social relations" (Žižek 1994, 15).

un-theorized yet authentic reaction from young composers with creative ambitions who, because of the lack of clarity between these two streams of composition, are unable to separate out the shrinking possibilities of the material-driven world of Contemporary Classical Music from the open-ended, critical tendencies contained within New Music.

How would it be possible to begin marking distinctions between the technocratic function of Contemporary Classical music and the purportedly radical core of New Music? As Julian Johnson says about the latter, this is a "body of music which insists on a qualitatively different function" (Hoeckner 2006, 73). New Music cannot simply *sound* differently it has to *act* differently. It would be a mistake, however, to consider New Music as little more than a contemporary continuation of the historical Avant-Garde, although this area might not be the worst place to seek some clarity on the issue. In a 2010 update to his 1974 *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Peter Bürger revisits the conceptual foundations of the movement and outlines the fundamental precepts in this key passage:

At the center of this constellation [the avant-garde] is an interpenetration of two principles: the attack on the institution of art and the revolutionizing of life as a whole. Both principles go hand in hand, indeed they mutually condition each other. The unification of art and life intended by the avant-garde can only be achieved if it succeeds in liberating aesthetic potential from the institutional constraints which block its social effectiveness. In other words: the attack on the institution of art is the condition for the possible realization of a utopia in which art and life are united... By renouncing the idea of autonomy, the artist also gives up his special social position and thereby his claim to genius (Bürger 2010, 696).

If we can use Bürger's framework of the Avant-Garde to cleave away New Music from Contemporary Classical, even if only theoretically, it might be possible to create some boundary conditions for the present state of New Music and what qualifies for

inclusion.¹⁷ Here we return to Seth Kim-Cohen's barbarian hordes and their attack on Fortress Music, for in the best Adornian tradition, if we really want to know what composed music is, first we need to find out what it is not.

Kim-Cohen's reading of the history of Western music rests on the fundamental premise that its construction of meaning is based on internal referentiality. Music is either disinclined or unable to point to external referents.

Music had no obligation to point to the world and, as a result, did not find itself beholden to that world. Music alone could fold its form into its materials, and its materials into its form, rendering them not just indistinguishable but also identical (Kim-Cohen 2009, 41).

From at least the first instance of notated compositions, Western music has maintained a strict reliance on historical conventions. Encompassing social aspects of concert protocol, pedagogical methods, and the technical conditions of the production and execution of score-based works, Western music exists in a self-defined system of organization. Composing and performing is a value system, in both senses of the word, since the effective goal of musical notation is essentially to assign discrete co-ordinates on the grid, shrinking down the near-infinite limits of all possible soundworlds into an easily reproducible, highly legible method of conveying instructions for instruments. Kim-Cohen argues that the reduction of sonic practices into notation, in addition to formalization of music theoretical methods and instrumentation have "captured music in and as a numerical sign system" (96), in which certain musical or sonic elements become

¹⁷ In spite of its lofty ideals, criticism of the Avant-Garde was timely and well founded, with this piercing critique from Matei Calinescu in 1977, just three years after Bürger's initial theory was published. Here, he describes the Avant-Garde as "Originating from romantic utopianism with its messianic fervors..." and how a representative figure in the movement was "hypnotized by his enemy—of whom he makes an infinitely cunning and terrifying monster—the avant-gardist often ends up forgetting about the future" (Calinescu 1977, 96). For further critique, see Krauss 1985.

valued over others.¹⁸ This process of construction via exclusion, he argues, functions as a phenomenological reduction, in which "music's fundamental understanding of its own meaning-making process rests on similar premises of self-identity" (99). Western music is ultimately, for Kim-Cohen at least, a relatively self-contained poetic practice based on sound-in-itself, which occupies a privileged position during the collision of what he calls "*not-speech* and *not-noise*: sound that is neither speech nor noise" (156). It is at these interstices that music functions, and also precisely where the "extramusical" is not.

Noise has an interesting role to play in Kim-Cohen's thesis, as it performs a dual-function in his conceptualizing sonic meaning. Because the ear is incapable of blinking, of ever shutting itself off from sensory input, the semiotic content of sound is conveyed in a kind of unending flow, similar to consciousness. The creation of meaning in sonic phenomena then is based on Derridean precepts by which the trace of alterity—the *différance* between enchainéd acoustic states—creates a network of implications. So when Kim-Cohen writes that "only noise is capable of purity" (100), he is referring to a particularly scientific definition of noise; noise as the total saturation of an audible acoustic spectrum with frequency energy, white noise, for example. His argument here is that signal—by which he means isolatable acoustic energy in an envelope shaped by the typical attributes of attack, decay, sustain and release—is a product of *différance*, it is always "impure, always shot through with the impurity of the other" (100).

Later on however, Kim-Cohen adopts another definition for noise, as a part of his

¹⁸ The batoned sentries also serve a double function. Not only do they safeguard the entries, but they seal off the exits as well. In Bürger's definition, the renouncing of autonomy means removing oneself from the hallowed shrine of composer geniuses. This myth is a powerful social construction, as one can see demonstrated so effectively in Paine Hall at Harvard. The proscenium, side and rear walls of the concert hall are ringed by a frieze, etched into which are the names of Great composers throughout history, beginning front and center with Beethoven.

translation into sound of Rosalind Krauss' 1979 diagram of the Expanded Field of Sculpture (155). Here, noise is defined in phenomenologico-linguistic terms, becoming a kind of floating signifier that is able to move between situations of legibility and illegibility. His geometry between noise and not-noise establishes the boundaries of what he calls the "sound-in-itself tendencies," which encompasses the expansion of 20th century sonic vocabulary based on Schaefferian aesthetics, including the proliferation of non-instrumental sounds, concrete sounds, or other sounds mediated by technology or non-classical instruments. Within the expanded sonic field, noise functions in parallel to Krauss' projection of landscape, as the "nonintentional ambience of the environment" (156). Despite its placement in of the sound-in-itself dyad, noise still operates according to materialist principles—it remains a listening activity, very much about hearing and decoding acoustic phenomena.

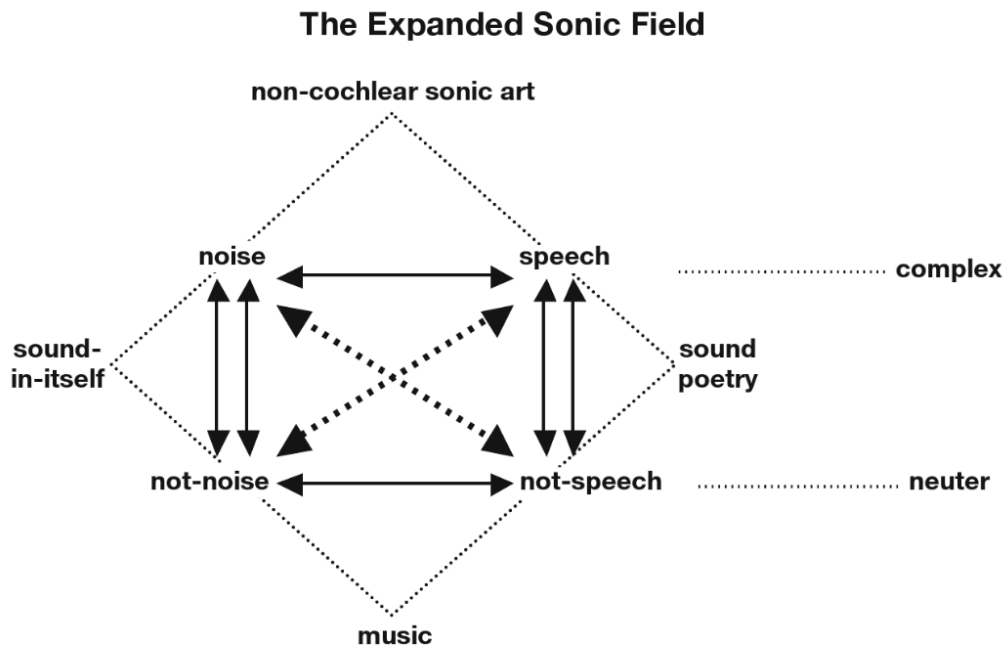


Figure 1. Diagram of The Expanded Sonic Field (Kim-Cohen 2009, 155)

Noise thus functions agonistically to Schaefferian phenomenology. In *musique concrète* Schaeffer advocated opening up the culturally acceptable sonic terrain to include anything and everything that could possibly be recorded onto tape. The term *concrète* in this context signifies both a concrete use of the sounds of the world as well as the use of those sounds in discrete chunks of acoustic material, like a brick in a wall. These blocks of sound were to be treated in and of themselves—the *objet sonore*—and he would compose by combining enough of these objects together according to an internally coherent logic. In the end, although the materials were shockingly radical, the process of internal organization was not entirely dissimilar to the self-contained referentiality of instrumental classical music. Schaeffer's aesthetics asserted a phenomenological practice, however, which maintained that the *objet sonore* was to be heard without any awareness of the origin of the sound. He borrowed the word *acousmatic* to describe his music, originating from Pythagoras, who when lecturing to his students did so from behind a curtain, such that they might focus only on the weight of his words and not on distracting minutiae. According to music theorist Brian Kane,

Within the tradition of *musique concrète*, the Pythagorean veil has been deployed to organise a set of mimetic identifications. The composer occupies the position of Pythagoras, unfolding a musical discourse or projecting a sonic message into the dark, while remaining hidden. The audience occupies the position of the akousmatikoi (the “hearers,” “listeners” or “auditors”) who receive the discourse while remaining outside the veil, listening with concentration to the emissions of the invisible master. The loudspeaker, the mixing console and the technical tools of the studio occupy the place held by the Pythagorean veil (Kane 2012, 179).

The listener should focus only on the immanent, perceptual qualities of the auditory, placing ontology *prior* to experience, in a naïve, non-evaluative reception of the soundstream.

John Cage was actually more of a Schaefferian than commonly thought. Just as Schaeffer hoped to distinguish and separate the phenomenological qualities from the semiotic in the *objet sonore*, Cage wanted to hear noise as not-noise. Many of his earlier works, from the *Imaginary Landscapes* to *4'33* were effectively about bringing noise in from the cold, as it were—about allowing noise to function in the sacrosanct space of the concert hall as equally valued as sound, as "not-noise." Douglas Kahn assumes a contrarian position on Cage, interrogating the hagiographic aspect of his legacy and challenging his openness to noise *qua* noise. Instead of a revolutionary instigator, Kahn sees Cage within a larger historical trend of composers prohibiting imitative sounds, dating from a late 19th century backlash against the mimetic qualities of program music (Kahn 2006). For Cage, the boundary between noise and not-noise might be interpreted a cultural barrier more than an aesthetic one, alluding to this as they do, the symbolic representation of his works as conventionally published musical scores. Cage's most (in)famous work, *4'33*, operates in the historical medium of the printed score, is written in three movements, and in concordance with classical tradition, instructs the performer to remain "tacit" when silent. *4'33* is a piece conclusively situated in the Expanded Field; after all, it does invites the sonic landscape (the nonintentional ambience of the environment) into the concert hall. It can, however, be more than adequately defined by Lydia Goehr's notion of the work-concept, with its fully scored representation, definitive starting and ending points (the time-based boundaries of the work enact a degree of specificity here that is even stricter than most classical compositions), and the ability of the piece to be programmed on numerous occasions as part of a program of works in a concert hall (Goehr 1992). In this sense, Cage's work functions as a kind of release valve

for the excess of a system in danger of destroying itself from within.

The thought of a communist revolution in the United States is so implausible, for example, that even the furthest left of American presidents—F.D.R., Barack Obama from 2009-10, and a hypothetical Bernie Sanders administration—always claim that their impossible mission of reform is to *save capitalism from itself*. In a certain sense, *4'33* could also be read this way. Cage expands the sonic field of the concert hall in order to save the concert hall (and classical music) from itself, to rescue the dull, auto referential, experts-only music from complete and total social irrelevance (see Babbitt 1958). The cost, however, is the flattening of noise into not-noise, or into the musicological conception of "sound"—stripping it of the semiotic qualities that give it its real power and reducing it to a phenomenological effect of sound-in-itself.

The truly radical act is to allow noise to interact with not-noise without flattening its indexical content, to avoid being sublated into the abstraction of sound-in-itself. Music never addressed the crisis of representation the way visual art did, and as a result it is still largely functioning according to 19th century precepts. A century ago, Duchamp's Readymades bypassed the closed circuit of the Abstract Expressionist movement that would follow. This radical gesture permitted an artwork to avoid the

traditional obligations of mimesis and semiotic attachment to a referent. [They] reset the poles of representation such that the artwork no longer points at what it indicates. Instead, "indication" is replaced by "concern," the former being linear—from indicator to indicated—and the latter being constellative—a complex of interconnections from which something akin to representation (albeit significantly mimetic) might be extracted (Kim-Cohen 2009, 157-8).

Music could not do this at the time for two reasons. Firstly, the unavailability of recording technology to provide Readymades in sound, and secondly, because of the profound historico-cultural weight of music's antipathy to mimesis, representation and the

expanded field in general.¹⁹ When the technology for sonic Readymades did finally arrive, what manifested were the aesthetic abstractions of Schaefferian phenomenology. Noise, in the expanded field chart, *is a readymade*. It is a discursive transformation, "an intervention into the textuality of art and art history... nominating the object as art, not in the object itself" (Kim-Cohen 2009, 113). This is the way to understand noise today, not in the scientific relationship between recognizable signal and frequential saturation, nor as an invitation of the exterior soundscape, *vis-à-vis* landscape, to enter the musical texture and become subsumed into not-noise/sound. Rather, noise is to be understood as a process of objective nomination, of representation in music; a way of cracking open the dominant hegemony of antipathy and hostility to mimesis, iconicity and indexicality in acoustics.

In the radical New Music of the 21st century, the *objet sonore* is celebrated precisely for the identifiable attributes of its origin(s). On other occasions, it is the partially or barely identifiable origins of a noise that are elevated, since the richness of a concrete sound can be found in both its ability to be placed in a musical texture at just the right moment to create a strong semiotic contrast, or else as a generative element which drives a texture (or narrative) forward by means of its incomplete familiarity. The urge in the listener to recall a noise and situate it in a larger context is a powerful dramatic element. The deep network of associative properties latent in its concreteness is precisely

¹⁹ Classical music has often grappled with mimesis, with Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* being perhaps the most obvious examples to cite. However, the translation from external reference to an instrumental, musical instantiation always occurs through the flattening of the reference into historical musical characteristics. For example, in Vivaldi's *Spring* movement, as well as the third movement of Beethoven's Symphony #6 (*Merry Gathering of Country Folk*), the mimetic qualities arrive through a mood/affect captured or portrayed by the latent historical qualities of the references to which the music makes. Charles Ives' *Central Park in the Dark* (1906) could be one of the first genuine attempts to create a musical representation of an environmental sound source, without flattening it into existing musical forms.

from where the *objet sonore* draws its power. In this context of the expanded field, noise is a term used to describe the inclusion of the *objet sonore* in a musical texture, albeit without the acousmatic blackout curtain that conceals the source. This metaphor has a strong resonance with the practice of theatrical magic shows, specifically that clichéd moment when the magician yanks away the cloth, revealing underneath a transformation to either animal or *objet*, violating the laws of nature (or our expectations, really). Schaeffer wanted to transport the listener out of the concert hall and into the magician's parlor. He succeeded, but for some reason wanted to ignore everything about the magic act except to have the audience gaze into the arresting texture of the rabbit's fur, or to listen to the cooing of a caged dove. It is the nomination of an object (or an objective moment in sound) into a musical situation, however, which alters the textuality of the work through its present and historical relationship to musical tradition: this is what allows us to witness the magic act as it was meant to be.²⁰

Noise becomes a revolutionary element when used as a degree of measurement indicating the presence of the extramusical. One could, in fact, read the history of noise in the 20th century as the attempt of the extra-musical to infiltrate music's abstractions. Noise was constituted music's attempts to deal with the question of representation beyond self-affirming forms of phenomenological self-validation and structures of internal logic. As evident in some of the most important instances of the expanded sonic field in the 20th century—Schaeffer, Cage and Reich, for example—noise succeeded in breaching music's outer hull of pure abstraction, as it were.

But instead of expressing the alteration of its geography dialectically, as a

²⁰ Trevor Wishart writes extensively about source recognition and the morphology of concrete sounds in his important book from 1996, *On Sonic Art*.

negotiation between interiority and exteriority, music stubbornly expanded its own terrain, swallowing up and stamping out the unknown the same way our physical universe expands ever outward into the blackness, reproducing itself endlessly. This is one likely source of what Brian Kane (2013) calls Seth Kim-Cohen's "musicophobia." In a brilliant demonstration of deconstructive reasoning, Kane argues that in Kim-Cohen's "non-cochlear" aesthetics,

the perceptual features of some specific sound work do not really matter since the purpose of non-cochlear works is to acknowledge the expanded social, institutional or contextual situation of the work. The problem with this view is that one cannot tell why the specific sounds matter. In what ways do the specific sounds act as a constraint on the relevant social questions? (Kane 2013, 16)

Kane is absolutely correct: there is a perceptual imperative within any discipline that places sound at the center of its practice, whether "sound art" or music. The radical act then would be to engage music head-on and to expand its boundaries, rather than abandoning it altogether in the way Kane summarizes Kim-Cohen's "*forced* choice; sound art can follow the bad path of Music, or the good path of the gallery arts."

Returning to Bürger's account of the avant-garde, which is an art practice that attacks the institution of art itself while simultaneously revolutionizing daily life, it becomes clear how the intrusion of the extramusical into the historicity of classical music fulfills, at least partially, the historical avant-garde function. Partially, only because it would be naïve, in light of the historical avant-garde's failure to truly revolutionize daily life, that New Music could hold so great a power itself. Instead I prefer Hal Foster's perspective from his most recent book, *Bad New Days*, in which he describes the operation of the avant-garde in one of two ways: either as vanguard, the position of radical innovation, or as resistance, the refusal of the status-quo. Foster proclaims his faith with the "old avant-

garde,” but not according to this traditional dyad, instead his faith arrives from a position of sagacity and wisdom, drawn from experience.

The avant-garde that interests me here is neither *avant* nor rear in these senses: rather, it is immanent in a caustic way. Far from heroic, it does not pretend that it can break absolutely with the old order or found a new one; instead it seeks to trace fractures that already exist within the given order, to pressure them further, even to activate them somehow. Far from defunct, this avant-garde is alive and well today (Foster 2015, 4).

VI. Emergence and Emancipation

Just over a century ago, the Futurist artist Luigi Russolo outlined the future of twentieth-century musical aesthetics in strikingly prophetic detail. Dated March 11th, 1913, Russolo’s letter to his composer-friend Francesco Balilla Pratella was titled *L'arte dei rumori*, The Art of Noises. At the core of his manifesto, Russolo asserts the existence of a dialectical relationship between noise and sound, similar to Kim-Cohen's co-ordinates in the expanded field of noise and not-noise. Russolo's definition is similar to Krauss' landscape function, where noise is the audible sense data of the "nonintentional ambience of the environment." Functioning in opposition to what he calls "pure-sounds," Russolo's definition of noise makes no distinction between the natural and the artificial; noise emerges equally from a thunderstorm as it does an industrial factory. What Russolo calls "pure-sound," however, blossoms exclusively from the classical instrumentarium, mediated by both the cultural history and political economy of Western music. In Russolo’s taxonomy, pure-sound is the bearer of artifice. In opposition to noise, sound was consciously developed “as something apart, different from and independent of life.

The result of this was music, a fantastic world superimposed upon reality” (Russolo 1913, 5).

Russolo interpreted the sounds and landscapes of his environment through what he called the "modern ear," which we could likely describe as a mechanism for hearing that had become attuned to the effects of the industrial revolution and the machine age on urban life. And indeed, his modern ears significantly colored his reading of Western music. Reflecting on the most complex instrument to date, the symphony orchestra, he found it lacking, deeming it too restrictive in “the variety and the quality of its tones” (6). Russolo dismissed the orchestra as a vehicle to expand the known universe of sound/not-noise because the orchestra itself was fundamentally burdened by the weight of its own cultural and aesthetic history. Hoping for the satisfaction of hearing the acoustic explosion of modern life recreated in the orchestra, he could only hear the symphonic ensemble as a discrete categorization of five instrumental colors: plucked strings, bowed strings, winds, brass and percussion, a sum that could not be greater than its parts.²¹ The palette of instrumental sounds used to entice music out of this great assemblage of bodies and things were predictable signifiers: “[E]ach sound carries with it a nucleus of foreknown and foregone sensations predisposing the auditor to boredom, in spite of all the efforts of innovating composers” (6). In 1913—at the precipice of a world soon to experience a devastating and complete reconfiguration—Russolo was able to do more than simply decode orchestral ontology; his analysis of the period’s deteriorating musical forms also contained a prediction of the imminent upheaval. For as Attali writes, “More

²¹ While we might find this viewpoint today somewhat naïve, *L'Arte dei rumori* had just barely pre-dated *Le Sacre du Printemps*, and the most experimental orchestral music at the time would have likely been that of the outsider American composer, Charles Ives.

than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies... In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men” (Attali 1977, 6).

Russolo was chiefly a painter, not a composer. Instead of focusing his efforts to re-invent the symphony orchestra through score-based compositions—as Igor Stravinsky had been doing at that exact moment in *Le Sacre*—he instead turned his attention to the more tangible and immediately accessible: the acoustical features of his surroundings.

Let’s get out quickly, for I can’t repress much longer the intense desire to create a true musical reality finally by distributing big loud slaps right and left, stepping and pushing over violins and pianos, bassoons and moaning organs! Let’s go out!” (Russolo 1913, 7)

We see here in Russolo's exact language an early metaphor of the expanded field. The intense and urgent yearning to "go out" is not just a physical call to exit his apartment and the concert hall, but also to open up and expand the sonic field. And so, upon his listening-directed ventures out into the streets, he indeed found himself fascinated by the noises of modern life. Imagining orchestrations of the city's soundscape, his ear was drawn to "the whipping of flags... department stores' sliding doors, the hubbub of the crowds, the different roars of railroad stations, iron foundries, textile mills, printing houses, power plants and subways" (7). Perhaps most troubling—as with many of the Futurists' obsession with armed conflict—was Russolo's attraction to the sounds of modern warfare, or what he called “the orchestra of a great battle” (7). Irrespective of his politics, however, we find his most powerful observation in the middle of the manifesto:

Every manifestation of our life is accompanied by noise. Noise, therefore, is familiar to our ear, and has the power to pull us into life itself. Sound (that is, orchestrated music) is extraneous to life, always musical and a thing unto itself, an occasional but unnecessary element, and has become to our ears what an overfamiliar face is to our eyes. Noise, however, reaching us in a confused and irregular way from the irregular confusion of life, is never entirely complete, and promises innumerable surprises (Russolo, quoted in Larson 2012, 51).

Russolo's rejection of music and the world of composed sounds can be read partly as a reaction against the codes of European society in the first part of the twentieth century. Still, Russolo, the self-declared Futurist, is equally invested in the invention of new codes for subsequent generations. Because of his unambiguous concern with posterity, it is important to consider his guiding motivations. Françoise Escal, writing on the topic in 1975, sees a place in Futurist music where

in between the noises and the art of noises there is the mediation of the artist as full, inspired subject... Russolo remains a prisoner of the traditional (i.e., romantic) conception of the author as a superior being elected to deliver his message to ordinary mortals (Escal, quoted in Chessa 2012, 138).

Luciano Chessa, in a recent and well-researched text on Russolo's life and artistic practice, intersects with Escal's argument on the romantic figuration of Russolo as a personage of supernatural inspiration. "Like most futurists, Russolo was moved by a cosmogonic ambition." This cosmology, according to Chessa, was a type of spiritual alchemy, an occultist theosophy concerned with the "creation of life" by means of black magic, a magic that would ultimately produce a "spiritual" art (Chessa 2012, 137). Chessa's thesis is compelling and confirms the grandiosity of Russolo's self-perception, but it is challenging not to interpret it as something of an apologia, or at the very least, a method by which to deflect attention away from the overtly fascist politics of the Futurist artists.

Having to leave aside politics once again, we follow Russolo as he retreated to Milan, urgently inspired to bring his new sonic concepts into fruition. With the assistance of long-forgotten schematics from Leonardo da Vinci (who centuries earlier had been similarly inspired to invent a suite of new instruments and left behind an array unfulfilled sketches), Russolo completed four new instruments in only two months, and

sixteen by the end of August 1913 (Chessa 2012, 170). With the Futurist belief that literature (and by extension, music) would not be replaced by modern technology, but rather absorbed into it, Russolo's noise-instruments, which he called *intonarumori*, represented his first post-manifesto attempt to harness the power of noise in an instrumental context; to compose with it and attempt to reinvigorate music in the process. These new Futurist noise-instruments would take center stage in their first public concert on June 2, 1913, only four days after the notorious Paris premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

Jacques Rancière defines emancipation as “emergence from a state of minority” (Rancière 2009, 42). If we read the narrative of 20th century music as an accelerating pattern of emergence into the realm of the socially and aesthetically permissible of musical attitudes and techniques that were either prohibited or unconsidered, *L'arte dei rumori* could be seen retrospectively as the theoretical catalyst for the explosion of styles and techniques in the 20th century. Russolo's manifesto is ostensibly a call to expand the sonic field to include more than just sound (not-noise), which at this point in history (musical history, at least) is a serious outlier. This is a disruptive text, agitating to radically reconfigure the socio-acoustic space to become equally inclusive of sonic phenomena (noises) that had always been considered ontologically as a residual occurrence. Perennially subordinated by sound, noise was considered, and still is, an undesirable element. When studies are conducted on the topic, for example, the use of scientific language does not refer to *sound pollution*, obviously. Here the language used is unambiguous: only noise has the capability to pollute our environment in the same way that airborne particulate matter does, or how toxins leach into the water table. Thus

privileging noise with the same critical form of active listening we assign to sound/not-noise is a destabilizing, democratizing position.

Russolo's manifesto ends with eight conclusions, each addressing a different facet of the noise-emancipation project. The first six are prescriptive, while the final two are substantially more philosophical in nature. It is quite startling to read them today and observe how the seeds of nearly every major movement in 20th century avant-garde/experimental composition were planted within this century-old text. The first conclusion touches briefly on the issue of complex dissonances, stating, "it can be noticed that all contemporary composers of genius tend to stress the most complex dissonances. Moving away from pure sound, they nearly reach noise-sound." Arnold Schoenberg, already composing complex atonal dissonances at the time, would codify the method thirteen years later in *Opinion or Insight* (1926), when speaking about the "emancipation of the dissonance." Schoenberg notes, "the ear had gradually become acquainted with a great number of dissonances, and so had lost the fear of the 'sense-interrupting' effect" (Schoenberg 1950, 104). The trajectory followed out of Schoenberg's development of the twelve-tone method is of course extremely familiar, but his reference to the "sense-interrupting effect" and the time-based cultural conditioning of the ear to overcome is an intriguing one, which prompted Adorno to investigate this very issue in a 1931 essay, *Why is the New Art so Hard to Understand?* (Leppert 2002, 127)

The second conclusion states, "[W]e must replace the limited variety of timbres of orchestral instruments by the infinite variety of timbres of noises..." Here it should be possible to link this demand with the development of percussion as an instrumental grouping with discrete musical potential, not simply as the ancillary expression of noise

elements within an orchestral context. Edgar Varèse's *Ionisation* (1929-31, premiered 1933) was the first work for percussion ensemble in the European tradition. Varèse himself had been greatly influenced by Russolo and the Futurists, and his notation for the high and low sirens in the score was directly influenced by the invented musical notation in Russolo's only surviving *intonarumori* composition, *Risveglio di una città* (Radice 1989, 13). Interestingly enough, Varèse, had known both F.T. Marinetti (the author in 1909 of the first ever Futurist manifesto, *Le Futurism*) and Russolo personally, but he took issue with the Futurists and complained that their ideas about sound were too limited. According to Varèse, "new instruments must be able to lend varied combinations and must not simply remind us of things heard time and time again. Instruments, after all, must only be temporary means of expression." Some of Russolo's *intonarumori* were modeled after commonly heard instantiations of noise. "The Burster," for example, sounded like an early automobile engine and "The Croaker" sounded, naturally, like an army of frogs (Brown 1981-82, 43). The second conclusion also speaks to the flowering of extended instrumental techniques in the post-war period, in the sense that the methods of their acoustic production represent a suppressed element of instrumental music making. Concealed from our hearing in earlier forms of composition, their emergence is unsympathetically considered an error in execution that classical interpreters studiously avoided: the squeak of the reed, the scratch of the bow, or the over-blown squeal of a mouthpiece, for example. By the 1960s, however, Helmut Lachenmann was exploring these noises in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Under the banner of *musique instrumentale concrète*, a new instrumental style emerged, based on a social critique of the traditional instrumental performance practice.

Together with *temA* and *Pression* for cello, *Air* exemplifies in my creative process a conscious break in social-aesthetic matters of course: an attempt and offer of beauty not by mere rejection of the common but also through disguising the conditions of ruling beauty: as suppression of the underlying physical requirements and energies, as suppression of the underlying efforts; if you like: the hidden work (Hockings 1995, 8).

As evident in Lachenmann's own title for the style, *instrumental* concrete music, the production of these noises was part of an effort to sublimate them into the acceptable catalogue of sounds for inclusion in music. In spite of Lachenmann's social critique of music, which was at the time both radical and extremely effective, the sonic materials that he employed to formulate and shape his arguments became a part of the very world that he was trying to disrupt. Lachenmann's critical contribution to the field today is sadly disempowered, as the immense variety of instrumental noises that he discovered were fully systemized through notation practices and have become just another sonic element among many at the disposal of the contemporary composer. Although notation practices had to expand themselves to accommodate these new playing techniques—which subsequently engendered new experimental outlooks and compositions based on a critical approach to notation itself—the approach of almost all theoretical and material development stemming from *musique instrumentale concrète* has been founded on the essentializing principle of expanding the range of not-noise to encompass a larger swath of noise for acceptable use in traditional musical forms and spaces.

The third conclusion calls for the freeing of musical structures from “facile, traditional rhythms.” The restrictive nature of the simplistic metrical organization at the time—the use of specific time signatures was based largely on genre, rather than an independent and dynamic expressivity of the music itself—precluded future musical advances in the same way tonality was similarly limiting. Instead, Russolo asserts that it

is within "the domain of noises [that] the means of development and renewal." will be found (Russolo 1913, 11). Russolo makes an interesting statement in this conclusion that necessitates some unpacking when he writes, "[N]oise offers us the union of the most diverse rhythms as well as its dominant one" (11). What he seems to offer here is a simplified account of complex rhythm, implying that the irregularity or aperiodicity of the "dominant" rhythm of a noise is only the first layer of a complex, poly-vocal rhythmic structure. Imagine the sound of clothes tumbling in a dryer, for example.

There are three essential components to this situation. The first is the baseline electrical hum of the dryer's motor, which is amplified by both the large resonant cavity at the center of the dryer and the metal construction of the dryer itself. The second attribute is the rhythmic regularity of the tumbler as it spins at a constant RPM speed. The last attribute is the most rhythmic in nature, which is the sound of the clothes spinning around the tumbler, moving in and out of certain physical arrangements with other clothes, so that the button on a pair of jeans might be regularly hitting the interior metal wall of the dryer for a certain time, and not at all at other times. The fusion of these three layers of noise creates a unity of rhythmic complexity, in which some rhythms can be pulled out as "dominant," and others as more "diverse." The diverse aspect of these rhythms, which we can re-interpret as "complex" is where the fun begins.

The third conclusion is one of the shortest of all eight, only one sentence in total. Russolo asserts that developing complex rhythms will be easy, via noise composition, but this almost appears based less on faith in acoustics than it does in mathematics. And because of all the musical parameters, it is rhythm that maps most easily onto numbers, we can chart the trajectory of this conclusion quite handily, following the development of

Schoenberg's 12-tone method into the total serialism of the post-war composers, notably Babbitt, Stockhausen, Boulez and Nono. Unconvinced by the Second Viennese School's generally non-systematized use of rhythm, the post-war Serialists deployed formalized structures that related the systematization of rhythm together with pitch content, among other musical parameters. Brian Ferneyhough issues one of the more brilliant critiques of serialism in his collected writings, when he mentions that

the deepest doubts concerning serial thinking are related to the perception that total mobility of parametric deployment tended to generate a series of contextless monads, whose aural logic by no means obviously followed from the abstract rules of play to which they owed their existence (Ferneyhough 1995, 26).

In simpler terms, the large-scale behavior of the musical results created by the system demonstrated no actual correlation to the behavior of the system itself. Adorno actually foresaw this very problem when describing the emerging work of a very young Pierre Boulez in 1955.²² If we apply Ferneyhough's critique of total serialism to the generative potential of noise—remembering as we must that noise is the sounding result of physical processes—then the use of rhythm as a compositional element in the music of Brian Ferneyhough comes closer to Russolo's prescription.²³ Instead of treating rhythm in a Cartesian manner (as successive points on a graph where x might represent pitch and y rhythm), Ferneyhough relies on perceptual constraints, using “the flow of space/density ratios” (Ferneyhough 1995, 52) to create meso-level structures in the work. Rhythm, for him, becomes not simply the time-based bearer of pitch information, but another element among many in form-creating transformational processes.

²² See Theodor Adorno, *The Aging of the New Music* (Adorno 1935).

²³ Making the distinction between noise as landscape (as the definition in the expanded field) and noise as digital detritus is one possible avenue of inquiry, but in Russolo's time this would not have been relevant.

An even better example of the translation of Russolo's vision into musical reality is *Pithoprakta*, by Iannis Xenakis. The work, written in 1956 for 46 string instruments, two trombones, xylophone, and a woodblock, is based on the statistical modeling of gases, wherein each individual instrument represents a single molecule performing its role in a Gaussian distribution of temperature fluctuation. The correspondence between the physical event and its acoustic trace made evident in orchestra string glissandi are very much present in *Pithoprakta*, and in all likelihood this piece is probably the closest that rhythmic modeling in composed music has come to avoiding the flattening of noise into not-noise. The stochastic basis of Xenakis' compositional method follows the molecular movement of the gas moving in space and time itself. By establishing the parameters of algorithmic structures, yet declining to exercise compositional control within those same structures, Xenakis is consciously engendering a musical environment into which noise is invited, yet the agentic properties of noise are permitted to act independently, without being guided by the hand of the composer—the same hand of course, which is moved primarily by the weight of musical history.

Ferneyhough deploys a similar level of algorithmic complexity in his rhythmic language, but he strives to compose with the elements, converting their noise potential into not-noise, rather than allowing them simply to instantiate in the musical texture as uncompressed objects in the way Xenakis does.

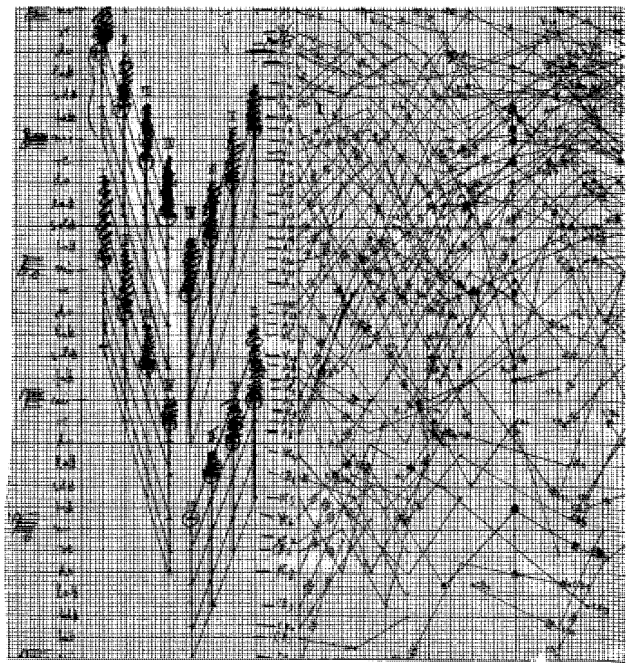
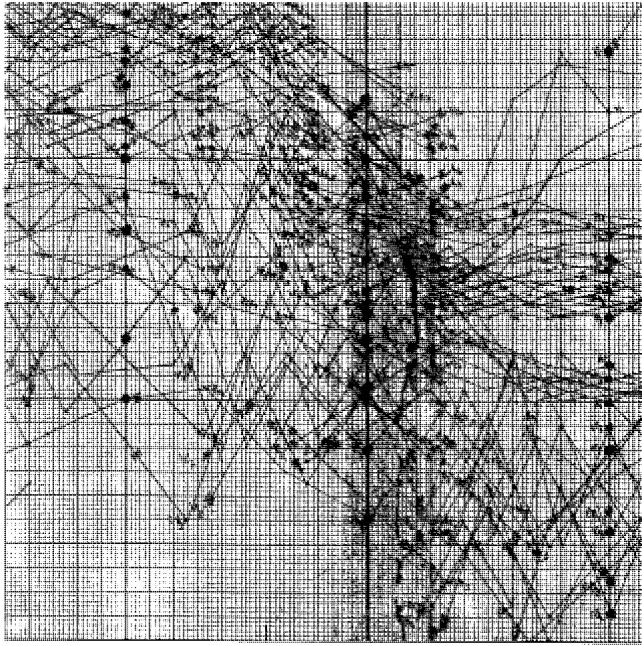


Figure 2-3. Graph of Bars 52-57 of *Pithoprakta*

This figure displays a page of a musical score for the piece *Pithoprakta*, specifically covering bars 52 through 57. The score is arranged in a traditional orchestral format with the following sections and staves:

- W. Bl. (Woodwinds):** Includes flutes (1-3), oboes (4-5), clarinets (6-7), and bassoons (8-9).
- V. I (Violins):** Violin I section, staves 10-14.
- V. II (Violas):** Violin II section, staves 15-19.
- A. (Alto Saxophones):** Alto saxophone section, staves 20-24.
- Vc. (Violoncellos):** Cello section, staves 25-29.
- C. B. (Contrabasses):** Contrabass section, staves 30-34.

Key musical markings and features include:

- Tempo/Character:** *Allegro* (implied by the notation style).
- Dynamic Markings:** *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte) are used throughout.
- Performance Techniques:** *pizz. gliss.* (pizzicato glissando) is indicated for several instruments, notably in the woodwinds and strings.
- Bar Numbers:** The page is numbered 55 in the top right corner, and the bar number 55 is also marked within the score.
- Complexity:** The score is highly complex, featuring dense rhythmic patterns, frequent accidentals, and intricate phrasing across all sections.

Figure 4. Bars 52-57 of *Pithoprakta*

The fourth conclusion, wherein “Each noise possesses among its irregular vibrations a predominant basic pitch...” speaks directly to the so-called “spectral” compositions of Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, and their search to explore the interiority of sound through sonogram analysis. In many ways, the attitudes of the spectral composers match most closely Russolo’s vision of noise-based composition. It was in a certain sense the disenchantment with the limitations of traditional notation and the conception of sound as the result of instrumental properties, not as an infinite range of possibilities, that motivated the spectral movement.

Our conception of music is held prisoner by tradition and by our education. All has been cut into slices, put into categories, classified, limited. There is a conceptual error from the very beginning: a composer does not work with 12 notes, x rhythmic figures, x dynamic markings, all infinitely permutable; he works with sound and time. Sound has been confounded with its representations, and we work with these, with symbols. Since these symbols are limited in number, we quickly come up against the wall (Murail 2005, 137).

These concerns perfectly echo Russolo's initial consternation that initially moved him to write *L'arte dei rumori* sixty years before the appearance of the first spectral works of Grisey and Murail. Still, as we find in other musical movements of the twentieth century, the expansion of the sonic field occurs simultaneously with Western music's unceasing drive to prohibit the interference of noise into the musical texture as noise itself. Spectral composition approaches the question of representation by placing at the center of each piece a carefully selected concrete sound (this object can equally be either a sound or a noise/not-sound) that will be subject to a spectral analysis. The data provided from the sonogram is then used to create aesthetic and philosophical linkages between the form and meso-level structures of the composition, along with its harmonic language, pacing of musical drama, timbral and color choices, as well as other peripheral musical

parameters. This nominated sonic object, initially exogenous to the work, undergoes the same transformation, however, from not-sound into sound. Whether the represented object is an instrumental sample, as in Grisey's *Partiels*, or a more "othered" not-sound, the excerpt of Tuvan throat singing at the foundation of Murail's *L'esprit des dunes*, for instance, the object itself always undergoes a sublimation into sound/not-noise.

The end of the fourth conclusion addresses the technical requirements needed to produce noises that are tuned to what he calls the "predominant basic pitch," or what we refer to today in spectral vocabulary as the fundamental frequency. Russolo hopes that these new instruments, in their multifaceted tunings and transpositions will not "deprive each noise of its characteristic timbre, but, rather, increase its range" (Russolo 1913, 11). Followed by the fifth and sixth conclusions, which are ostensibly addenda to the fourth conclusion's call to invent new noise-instruments, this prediction has been perhaps the most successful of them all.

On the one hand, we have seen the physical alterations to existing instruments, such that they can incorporate tuning systems smaller than the semi-tone (the 24-tone accordion is a particularly excellent example of progress in this regard). On the other, however, Russolo truly sees the *intonarumori* as the future of instrumental music, and in this case no greater progress has been made than with the digital sampler. The sampler is an instrument that can be programmed to include any and all possible sounds (in fact the distinction is nil for a sampler, since it does not judge the content aesthetically or sociologically, it simply plays back a waveform without question). Furthermore, a sampler can either be manipulated at the source of playback to be transposed or tuned in any manner, or else included among an array of other digital effects (reverb, vocoding,

delay, ring modulation, etc.). The sampler is Russolo's true, complete and faithful *intonarumore*. The real question is what Russolo himself would have done with this technology should it have been available to him in 1913.

In the sixth conclusion, he writes that the new instruments “will produce the most complex and newest sonic emotions, not through a succession of imitative noises reproducing life, but rather through a fantastic association of these varied sounds” (Russolo 1913, 11). Russolo, when concluding his manifesto, confesses to Pratella his incompetence in the sphere of music, yet because of his position as a Futurist painter, “projects on a profoundly loved art [music] his will to renew everything” (12). Bored with it at the time, Russolo “conceived the renovation of music through the Art of Noise” (12). Here the key word is “renovation.” Is Russolo acting upon music in the same way that Duchamp was with the plastic arts, which is to say, inserting himself into the textuality of the art form itself? Or, was Russolo simply charting the eventual course of the twentieth century as we have already witnessed? Was The Art of Noise merely the precursor to the explosion of sonic vocabulary in music, as noise became subsumed into the category of not-noise?

Simply put, it is difficult to say conclusively. In the middle of the manifesto, Russolo makes it quite clear that he wishes to “score and regulate harmonically and rhythmically these most varied noises” (9). And because each noise “possesses a pitch,” this gives composers the chance to notate and score them. While this trajectory of imagining leads us to the too-familiar place of noise becoming not-noise, he makes a rather abrupt turn in the seventh conclusion, which is less of a demand than it is a philosophical extension of the sixth. Here he proposes a distinctly utopian conception of

the future of music and noise, writing, “[O]ne day we will be able to distinguish among ten, twenty or thirty thousand different noises. We will not have to imitate these noises but rather to combine them according to our artistic fantasy” (9). In the eighth and final conclusion, addressing the cultural evolution of hearing in a manner similar to Schoenberg's post-Emancipation of the Dissonance discussion, Russolo makes a fascinating prediction: “Our expanded sensibility will gain futurist ears as it already has futurist eyes. In a few years, the engines of our industrial cities will be skillfully tuned so that every factory is turned into an intoxicating orchestra of noises” (9).

Here we can imagine a musical landscape disconnected from the tradition of concert halls and recitals. The new music would still happen in traditional venues, but based on the thousands of sounds available from the new *intonarumori* and their endless permutations and combinations. Outside the concert hall, however, Russolo is dreaming of music everywhere, emanating from factories that have been retuned, as it were, to create an artistic-mechanistic synthesis between *intonarumori* and industrial machine that produces music simply by being switched on and functioning. This is truly a wild fantasy that in many respects fulfills Bürger's definition of the avant-garde quite perfectly.

VII. Representing Noise

In her phenomenally researched 2012 book on Cage and Zen Buddhism, Kay Larson writes, “Dada and Futurism would become John Cage’s first spiritual teachers” (Larson 2012, 24). As discussed previously, however, the legacy of John Cage and his relationship to noise is anything but clear. In Cage’s own 1937 manifesto (published in

1940), *Future of Music: Credo*, he writes, “Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain” (Cox 2004, 25).

Cage predicts that one day, composers will be able to make use of electric instruments to produce all the sounds that can possibly be heard, including among them all possible instances and variations of noise. He goes on, in historical agreement with Russolo, stating, “we want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as *musical instruments*” (Cox 2004, 25-6, emphasis added). Without taking into account the prior discussion of Cage's more conservative understanding of the relationship between noise, the expanded field and the work-concept, it would be safe to assume that his noise project was one indeed focused on representation. The status of Cage's involvement, however, remains up for debate, and it seems clear at this point that the challenge of representation in music has gone, still to this day, almost entirely unattempted.

The last century of compositional experiments has seen the emancipation of every kind of sound that an instrument can produce, and even the emancipation of music-making from those instruments themselves. Noise itself has become a familiar, and oftentimes welcome presence in the concert hall (cf. works by Lachenmann, Chaya Czernowin, Franck Bedrossian, Raphael Cendo, and Aaron Einbond, among others). Noise is a powerful force, for indeed, as Morton Feldman describes it, “Noise is something else... It bores like granite into granite. It is physical, very exciting, and when organized it can have the impact and grandeur of Beethoven” (Feldman 2000, 1). But—and this is a very large “but”—the use of noise in the 20th century has been governed by

Kim-Cohen's batoned sentries, keeping out representations of noise *qua* noise, only ever admitting into the special club the noise which renounces its indexicality, its legibility, its possibility of representation. The only noise allowed in is that which becomes a sound.

To capture a particular moment of our experience we rely on recording devices. When we take a picture or record a video, we are clearly transforming and compressing epistemological data from our existential reality into a mechanical reproduction. No one would ever claim, when watching a video made of a birthday party, for example, that the event is happening exactly as it was before and the viewers are reliving exactly, rather we create a representation of the event, in whatever medium is appropriate. A photograph is the same as an audio recording; what differs is the medium of representation. Both documents, however, function as a representation, as an *image* of reality.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière attempts to circumvent what he interprets as the two major visions of artistic modernity: the "happy model of the autonomy of art" and "the tragic model of the 'sublime'" (Rancière 2009, 121). Rancière instead proposes a third way, characterized by what he calls the "pensiveness of the image":

It is not the abolition of the image in direct presence, but its emancipation from the unifying logic of action; it is not a rupture in the relationship between the intelligible and the sensible, but a new status of the figure... In the [new] aesthetic regime, however, the figure is no longer simply an expression that takes the place of another. These are two regimes of expression that find themselves intertwined without having a clearly defined relationship... The Pensiveness of the image is the result of this new status of the figure that conjoins two regimes of expression, without homogenizing them (121-22).

The pensiveness of the image is at the heart of representing noise in a musical context.

Returning to Seth Kim-Cohen's map of the Expanded Sonic Field,²⁴ we see the division of the acoustic realm into a geometry that places what he calls "non-cochlear sonic art" and music into opposition with each other. Music, at the intersection of not-noise and not-speech, is dialectically related to sonic art, which derives from the combination of noise and speech. Sonic art, what Kim-Cohen calls the excess of music, that which overflows music's containers, is centered on domains of legibility and indexicality. As he describes it, non-cochlear sonic art is "noise that functions linguistically, and is therefore read as much as it is heard" (Kim-Cohen 2009, 156). Rancière acts on the Expanded Sonic Field, essentially, by folding the map exactly in half and overlaying music onto sonic art and vice versa. The pensiveness of the image is what enables us to activate the dotted lines between noise and not-speech, speech and not-noise, and most importantly, allowing the two distinct regimes of expression—noise and not-noise—to exist conjointly and simultaneously, without homogenizing them.

Using language so clear and instructive that one feels almost that it was written exactly for this particular topic, Rancière straightforwardly describes how to represent noise within the textuality of a musical work, without falling prey to the traditional sublimation of the nominated object into the text. The role of the artist, he describes, is to “weave together a new sensory fabric by wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affections that make up the fabric of ordinary experience” (Rancière 2009, 56). By placing these percepts and affects into the pensive relationship, we could succeed in placing noise as an object of representation within a regime of musical expression (or vice versa), without flattening either form of expression.

²⁴ Although Kim-Cohen cautions the reader that the map is provisional and a slight mimicry of Rosalind Krauss's original diagram, it still functions effectively in spite of his warning and serves an essential need.

By composing with noise *qua* noise, representing it as itself within a musical texture, we open possibilities for what Rancière calls “dissensus.” When we work with this material, making creative and musical decisions about transforming and modulating the sounds we find familiar from our perceptual reality, a dissensual space is opened.

This type of composition is described as,

an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities... This is what a process of political subjectivization consists in: in the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible, in order to sketch a new topography of the possible (Rancière 2009, 49).

The representation of noise fosters acoustic situations that engender intersubjective relationships between components of perception and signification. By emphasizing this method, we can begin to change expectations of what is possible. The mediation between interiority and exteriority, and the supposed natural order of our world, can be imagined as far more fluid than ever before. As Rancière says, “Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations” (72). Returning to Peter Bürger, Hal Foster and their conception of the avant-garde, it is the creation of work that represents noise without sublimation, conjoining the two regimes of expression without homogenizing them: this is what a musical avant-garde would consist of today. If New Music is to mean anything at all in the 21st century, beyond the bleak and ultimately tragic function that Attali describes, it should begin to confront the fact that it has no concept of how to deal with representation. As eldritch Priest asks of us,

Isn't art's purpose to enliven, to vitalize, and thus to increase and multiply our ways of connecting and interacting with things? For example, one typically goes to a concert or listens to music in order to be affected, to be moved from one state to another, and thus, in a sense, to affirm one's own capacity to change, to become something otherwise... Musical sounds have a way of enveloping and folding us within an illusion of vital activity such that, particularly in its everyday use, music is treated as a modulation device, an affective simulacra if you will (Priest 38).

The real crisis in New Music would be to ignore this momentous opportunity, for not since the dissolution of tonality has there been a greater opportunity to infuse both meaning and significance in not just the composition of music itself, but also in the relationship between New Music, the Arts and society at large. The technology exists to accomplish feats of artistic imagination scarcely yet conceivable, and there is now an entire century of dedicated experimentation on the books, with both serious theory and practice against which we can both study and test. Feldman said that it is only noise that we truly understand: "It is only noise which we secretly want, because the greatest truth usually lies behind the greatest resistance. Sound is all our dreams of music. Noise is music's dreams of us" (Feldman 2000, 2). Or, in the words of Jacques Attali, "nothing essential happens in the absence of noise" (Attali 1977, 3).

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APPENDIX

On my own work

On These Bodies Kill Fascists:

Originally written in 2012 for the Ensemble Intercontemporain (with 11 musicians), this piece is an aural, narrative re-imagining of both my own experiences in the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York, and from recordings I found on YouTube of related protests in Oakland, CA and Athens, Greece. I made use of a software tool called *Audioguide*, developed primarily by Ben Hackbarth during his time in an IRCAM Research Residency. This software, based on concatenative synthesis modeling (Hackbarth 2010), allowed me to feed it audio target data (the sounds of protests), and have it be reconstructed using samples of orchestral instruments. In this manner, I was able to infuse the acoustic instrumental writing with a technologically mediated aspect of the important events and my own personal experiences that were happening at the time. The software was heavily experimental at the time, and after many hours of testing and having already obtained a particular sound world from the results, I finished composing the piece intuitively. The orchestra version seen here was originally written in Autumn 2012, and then heavily revised in Summer 2015.

On Zoopoetics

The term “zoopoetics” is a Derridean neologism from “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More To Follow),” in which he referred to “Kafka’s vast zoopoetics” (Derrida 2002,

374). A 2014 definition of the term by Aaron Moe calls zoopoetics “the process of discovering innovative breakthroughs in form through an attentiveness to another species' bodily poiesis” (Moe 2013, 10).

Zoopoetics is a piece that approaches (non-human) animals not only as a kind of pure inspiration, but also an investigation into the sounds and proto-languages used by these wonderful creatures. By looking into the mechanisms of sound production, the bodies of animals become instrumental, and species categories flattened; for example, a howling wolf sends air through her trachea, mapping the interior topography of her body. The data we gather from the sound is deeply intimate, moreover, on an abstract level, semantic connections abound. How do we understand the sound of a wolf howling out of context, especially when, for brief moments, it sounds exactly like a clarinet multiphonic?

These two works represent, in many respects, the artistic goals that I have outlined in this dissertation. Each engages with sound sources and references that are external to the classical concert hall and instrumentarium. In one sense, the instrumental writing requires a kind of denaturing—noise and extended techniques are called upon heavily in order to widen the sound world to furnish it with referential capacities. This type of extended instrumental writing is purposeful, however, and not employed based on a desire to use the results as musical materials *sui generis*, but as means to achieving an end.