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# WHAT IS NOISE MUSIC ? AN ATTEMPT AT AN ANTI-SEXIST AND ANTI-COLONIAL DEFINITION

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This chapter aims at defining noise music in the context of its history, its aesthetics and its social organization. Throughout this chapter we criticize colonial tendencies to interpret the history of noise music only through the lens of Western Europe and North America. We also express our discontent about the continuous downplaying or silencing of the role of women and sexual minorities in the telling of the history of noise music.

This chapter offers a brief but dense account of the history of noise music. It also attempts to describe noise music as an aesthetic proposal. We illustrate the diversity of noise music scenes by highlighting some of its most notable sub-genres and associated genres. We also present some of the tools and equipment used by noise artists to produce the music. Finally, before concluding, we reflect on how noise music can carry social criticism and can facilitate transgressive practices.

## The elusive subject

Noise seems to be a very popular subject. Written material on "noise" abound. Indeed, a May 2016 search on the online shop Amazon.com revealed more than 3000 books related to "noise." Similar searches on Google Books revealed over 20,000 written books, documents and reports with the word "noise" in the title, almost 4000 titles in the Library of the Congress (United States) and almost 3500 titles in the British Library (Great Britain). This popularity could be a potential problem for the person interested in learning about noise music. How can one identify relevant information? Only a fraction of this vast amount of books and documents is relevant in the study of music. And, quite unfortunately, more often than not, "noise music" is understood at a metaphorical level.

This is true, for instance, of one of the most oft-quoted book on noise music. The book, *Bruits (Noises)* by French intellectual and public personality Jacques Attali, is a fixture in histories of experimental music. Indeed, for those who have a scholarly curiosity, the process of learning about noise music often starts with reading *Bruits*. The book provides a political economical analysis of noise and music (Attali, 1977). Attali's thesis is that

society's relation to noise and music allows for the prediction of social change. While the book is interesting at a sociological level, it is perhaps overrated in the conceptual tools it provides for the analysis of noise music. Its relevance is only superficial because there is little that is specific about noise music in the book. This is true not only for *Bruits*, but also for most books about music that claim to cover "noise music."

Applied specifically to music, the terminology "noise" as found in this wealth of written material, is often used as a synonym for all types of music in the context of social movements and social struggles. Several scholars studying cultural expressions of marginalized and discriminated groups have used "noise" to qualify the music they produced. Such a label is often more than sympathetic to "noise," it is seen as a very positive element of social change. To name only but a few examples, we see this in the case of Jewish rock music in New York City (*see* "New York Noise" by Barzel, 2015), Afro-American jazz and brass bands in New Orleans (*see* "Joyful Noise" by Smith, 1990), Afro-American and hip hop music in urban environments (*see* "Black noise" by Rose, 1994), white marginalized blue collar rock (*see* "Grit, Noise, & Revolution" by Carson, 2006) or social struggles as they are carried by various underground scenes in the United States (*see* "Bring the Noise" by Reynolds, 2009).

In a very ethnocentric yet sympathetic way, "noise" is also used to qualify music that comes from outside the direct cultural influence of the writer. For instance, noise is used to describe hip-hop outside the United States (*see* "Global Noise" by Mitchell, 2001), gospel music in the Caribbean (*see* "Mek Some Noise" Rommen, 2007) or non-Western music in general (*see* "Noise of the World" by Bordowitz, 2004). In these cases, music is called "noise" either because the sounds, lyrics and attitudes of the musicians shake the establishment or because of its perceived distance from the writer's cultural vantage point or the intended public of the work.

As this book tries to demonstrate, noise music in South East Asia often disturbs social norms and is sometimes perceived to be foreign, exterior or essentially different from Western music. When it mirrors the perceived discomfort of the Western world (if such a cultural ensemble has actually ever existed outside of civilizational imaginaries) when confronted with such music, calling the music produced in South East Asia "noise" is ethically problematic. Here, we hold no differences in the nature of music produced in South East Asia and the music produced in Western Europe or North America. We contend that using "noise" to label music—even in a sympathetic way—runs the risk of perpetuating perceived distances and differences. Thus, music should be referred to as "noise" when musicians or performers themselves use that label or when they belong to a genre that is usually associated with that label.

In November 2015, we conducted an online survey to know how the different scenes in South East Asia were referring to "noise music." Our goal was to assess the diversity of the vocabulary used by speakers of the many languages in the ASEAN countries. Over and over we were given very similar answers along these lines: "Yes, we have words to describe noise. But, to us, noise music is 'Noise music,' the English term." For instance, we were told that in Bahasa Indonesia, the official language of the Indonesian archipelago, "bising" (incidentally, the title of a documentary about noise music in Indonesia), "pekak," "hiruk pikuk," "berisik," or "gaduh" are a few words that could describe noise. However, in Indonesia and elsewhere, performers, organizers and fans use "Noise," an English word deriving from old French, signifying nausea, disturbance, disgust, annoyance or discomfort. Such a definition of noise music, however, suggests a normative position that would differentiate between good and bad, or pleasant and repulsive music. Is noise music really just a sound that people do not like or do not want to hear (Hendy, 2013)? As the rest of this book will show, many artists like to play around with this negative labelling.

Noise music is more complex than "bad" or repulsive sonic aggressions (Hainge, 2013). It is also more complex than an imitation of the sonic environment (Goddard, Halligan & Spelman, 2013). In this book, we use "noise music" as a label that is mostly self-attributed by artists, organizers, label managers and fans. It refers to relatively well-established genres or scenes in the history of music. This chapter attempts to show that noise music is a series of genres with a long history that parallels both music and sound art yet it is necessary to avoid any confusion as to what is "noise music." Let us now highlight some historical milestones in order to comprehend the complexity of noise music or noise musics.

**Some historical milestones of noise music**

To describe the itinerary of noise in South East Asia, we have to talk about the genre's larger history. Talking about the social and organizational history of noise is one way to highlight its specificities and to contribute in its definition. Indeed, from the social analytical point of view, noise is more than just aesthetics; it is a social practice that is being constructed through complex interactions. It is also the result of specific social, political, cultural and economic contexts. Describing interactions and specific contexts in relation to the history of noise music would be the project of an entire book. Thus, we do not pretend to be able to achieve that in this chapter nor this book. The following section attempts to give the reader—who has presumably little knowledge about noise music—some milestones in the history of its associated genres. A later chapter in the book gives an account of the history of noise and experimental music solely focused on South East Asia.

Narrating the history or telling the story of noise music is a dangerous endeavour. Historians know this issue very well. There is a high risk of recreating *a posteriori* links with events that are otherwise unrelated. Historian Hackett Fischer warns us of *post hoc, procter hoc* fallacy, the mistaken idea that because event "A" happened before event "B," then the latter is the direct result of the first event (Hackett Fischer, 1970, p. 166). Contemporary reinterpretations of the genealogy of noise music are often laden with anachronistic claims. For instance, it would be false to assume that contemporary noise music derives in any way from shamanic culture because "shamans" or "traditional medicine men" have used sounds (that may be perceived as noise) to induce spiritual and somatic experiences. One needs traces of a continuous path or vectors of transmission to be able to appropriately tell the history or the story of noise music. If noise musicians would like to claim a relationship with shamanic culture, then this is interesting from the discourse analytical point of view even if it does not make much sense historically.

Here, we attempt to be as faithful as possible to historical events and their continuity. But because much of the historical material we use for this book is also based on personal accounts, we have adopted the stance that people are what they say they are. We understand history as a storytelling and this storytelling serves a social function. In putting together the stories of noise music, we have to respect possible unsubstantiated claims and place them in the context of efforts to build a scene and to seek legitimacy.

For instance, the history of modern noise music often begins with references to Italian avant-garde artist Luigi Russolo or the Berlin dadaists. The manifesto *L'arte del rumori* (*The Art of Noise* - 1913) by Russolo includes statements about how music must incorporate the novel sounds of the industrial age. As Europe became increasingly industrialized, the Italian artist wanted to celebrate machines and progress that offered a seductive way into new worlds, far away from the dark ages of tradition. For him, noise in art was both avant-garde and a social rupture.

History can easily trace the emergence of contemporary noise music back to the late 1970s and early 1980s (Kahn, 1999; Labelle, 2001; 2006). Many empirical and material traces are available. However, how do we trace a continuous path between European avant-garde (e.g. Russolo or the Berlin Dadaists) and contemporary noise music? Possible vectors of transmission supporting the idea that the history of noise music began with early 20th century European avant-garde include continuous experimentations in soundtracks, music and sound art (Goddard, Halligan & Hegarty, 2012; Prendergast, 2000). In the following section, we have highlighted some streams that have contributed to this idea. Here, we have focused mainly on performances and recorded pieces, which have the most documented connections in the history of noise.

*The academic stream*

The first stream of noise music history includes composers and experimentalists close to the European and North American academia. By all accounts, this is true in the case of the ground-breaking *Wochenende* (1930), a movie without images by German filmmaker Walter Ruttmann, or *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948) by French composer Pierre Schaeffer, and his later opéra *Orphée* (1953) with fellow French composer Pierre Henry. In the 1950s, many academic pieces led to a path toward experimental and noise music. Influential pieces were, for instance, *Poème électronique* (1958) by French composer Edgard Varèse, and *Scambi* (1957) by Belgian composer Henri Pousseur. The 1960s and early 1970s were also very rich in seminal experimentations in the music produced by the European and North American academe. *Orient-Occident* (1960) by Greek-French composer Iannis Xenakis, *Four Electronic Pieces* (1959-1966) by United States composer Pauline Oliveros, *Electronics in the World of Tomorrow* (1964) by Finnish polymath Erkki Kurenniemi, *The Wolfman* (1964) by American composer Robert Ashley, *Adversus (Homemade Electric Music)* (1966) by Italian composer Walter Marchetti, *Le voyage* (1967) by Pierre Henry, *Silver Apples of the Moon* (1968) by US composer Morton Subotnick are some more examples.

Even if they may not have been part of a continuous progressive movement towards contemporary noise music, these pieces certainly help in understanding how contemporary noise music has made its way from the early 20th century Western avant-garde. The sonic references are obvious and so are the influences as quoted and claimed by contemporary noise artists.

*The avant-garde experimental stream*

A second concurrent, but more contemporary, stream pertains to performance art, underground music and avant-garde rock experimentations. This is, for instance, the case of *Loop* (1966) by The Velvet Underground, an experimental art rock band from the United States, and *Metal Machine Music* (1975) by one of the band's musicians, Lou Reed. We could also think of *Jihad* (1980) by Canadian punk band Tunnel Canary, *The Ascension* (1981) by US guitarist Glenn Branca or *23 Drifts to Guestling* (1983) by British combo COUM Transmissions, whose members came to form the seminal industrial band Throbbing Gristle. The US band Swans and rock experimentalist Thurston Moore (of Sonic Youth fame) and their early 1980s "no wave" art punk rock are other important markers in the history of noise music as seen through Western eyes.

The connection between these experimentations and that of contemporary noise is perhaps stronger than that of the academic stream. For instance, seminal noise bands like Whitehouse (formed in 1980) and NON (fronted by

the US artist Boyd Rice, who has been active since 1975, and first published his work in 1977) have known connections with performance art.

*Two streams evaluated*

The streams we have presented constitute two main discourses or narratives in the history of noise music as told from the viewpoint of Western men. They are not mutually exclusive of each other. Proof of material continuity or vectors of transmission between the early 20th century avant-garde and contemporary noise music rely mostly on the self-narrated history of the scene (for instance, in interviews and liner notes). Still, these narratives remain to be very selective interpretations of the empirical history of noise. We contend that, often, this history is focused on Western Europe or North America, its modernities and on the contributions of male artists. Overall, one can say that the history of electronic music (and noise music, for that matter) "seem[s] to flow naturally into the colonialist discourses articulated to electronic sounds in Cold War popular culture, the sexist imagery that has characterized many electronic music album covers and advertisements, and the militaristic language that inflects contemporary music-production terminology" (Rodgers, 2012, p. 6).

Russolo's noise futurist manifesto (1913) and the Berlin dadaists were typical examples of modernist discourses and must be critically evaluated. For instance, the *Art of Noise* has to be understood in the context of criticism against conservative early twentieth century society. The two streams we have presented have somewhat divergent stances on modernity that may distance them from Russolo's position. The first stream of composers and experimentalists from Western academia has, in general, not strayed far from modernist discourse and all of its shortcomings and idiosyncrasies. The second has largely been more critical. For instance, industrial music, in connection with the avant-garde stream and its imaginary, is clearly a criticism of modernist discourses (Neil, 1987; Parfrey, 1987; Thomson, 1994). Industrial music takes the imagery of the modern world (technological warfare, industry, computers, etc.) and shows some of its possible detrimental social impacts (Dwyer, 1995; Vale & Juno, 1983). However, despite some interesting criticisms of Western modernity in industrial music, "electronic music can (or has failed to) express possibilities for more imaginative and ethical encounters with technology and difference now and in the future" (Rodgers, 2012, p. 10).

In 1997, the UK label Susan Lawly released a compilation entitled "Extreme Music From Africa." While this compilation was revealed to be a hoax (the tracks were produced by a British man named William Bennett) it is interesting to note that Bennett, one of the most important players of the noise scene, had tried to establish connections outside of the "Western world." Bennett's intent was most likely to create an exotic twist to the otherwise Western-centered noise scene. Nonetheless, it is important to note

that noise music is only Western-centered in the hegemonic discourse of its history.

Examples of overlooked elements of the non-Western history of noise music are abundant. For instance, Japan occupies an interesting place in the history of noise music and is often used as a justification against the failure to include non-Western centered elements in the story of how noise music came to be. We share some of these elements below. As a supporter of Japanese extreme music, Bennett would have been fully aware of this. While Japan has contributed a lot to the history of noise, it remains the exception in the rule of ethnocentric story of noise music. Additionally, beyond what is known as Japanoise, quite a few milestones from the history of experimental and noise music in Japan have been overlooked in favour of the avant-garde experimental stream and its direct influence in Japan.

For instance, often forgotten in the narrative about the emergence of noise music are the works of Jikken Kōbō (実験工房), which explored various disciplines in the arts in the early 1950s. Jikken Kōbō attempted to experiment with sounds away from academia (Fuji, 2004; Loubet et al., 1997). Outside of Japan and Western Europe and North America, other experimentations have been seminal, yet understated. Furthermore, the contributions of artists from the Soviet or Communist blocs should also be considered. For instance, Alexander Lebedev-Frontov (Александр Лебедев-Фронтов) from Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) in the former Soviet Union, Andrej Zdravič and Marina Abramović (Марина Абрамовић), from Slovenia and Serbia in the former Yugoslav Republic respectively, have, since the 1970s and 1980s, explored sound in experimental ways that certainly share many artistic affinities with sound art and contemporary noise music. There may be, in fact, no true traces of continuity between these artists and contemporary noise music, but, as we argue, the history of noise music is a story that silences the work of others in the course of talking about its own lineage. This is detrimental to the development of noise music as it fails to be inclusive.

Aside from refusing to separate the history of noise music in the so-called Western world from its history elsewhere, especially in South East Asia, we are also attempting to acknowledge the often forgotten or undervalued role of women in the history of music, electronic and experimental music included. In 2000, the label Susan Lawly also acknowledged this through the release of a compilation, semi-fictitious this time, entitled "Extreme Music from Women." However, by telling "herstory," we have to be very careful not to separate the history of music and the history of women in music. The former should be told as an integral part of the history of music in which contributions by some social groups, women in this case, are marginalized or silenced.

The history of electronic, experimental and industrial music has not fully acknowledged the role of the many women that have shaped it. There are, however, some exceptions. Laurie Anderson and Pauline Oliveros are perhaps the most documented female experimental electronic music artists (Rodgers, 2012, pp. 27-33). We have mentioned some others in the previous paragraphs but many more women have influenced the history of electronic and experimental music. These are, for instance, Bebe Barron, Clara Rockmore, Delia Derbyshire, Daphne Oram, Laurie Spiegel, Beatriz Ferreyra, Eliane Radigue, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Wendy Carlos, Gudrun Gut and Kaffe Matthews. Nevertheless, the story of experimental and noise music, especially in the two streams we have presented is, more often than not, very quiet about their contributions.

To recap, the story of noise music is made up of two streams: one from Western academia and another from the avant-garde. As we have attempted to highlight, however, these two narratives are ethnocentric and male-centered. Telling the story of noise music is one way to define it by showing the specific historical markers that make noise music more than just a reproduction of the sonic environment. Now that we have presented some milestones in the emergence of noise music and have tried to emphasize some of the shortcomings of the dominant narratives, let us present a description of what noise music sounds like.

**A sonic and acoustic description**

One way to attempt a definition of noise music is to describe its acoustic and musical aspects. In terms of describing the aesthetics of noise, we can think of a negative and a positive definition. The first, by abstraction, would explain what noise does *not* sound like while the second will try to put noise music's sonic explorations in words.

*A negative definition*

A negative definition of noise describes it as not resembling any commonly known music, especially popular music. While noise music is generally accepted as being an artistic practice and part of the art world, noise music does not always claim its direct relationship with music. Even if it seems to be a value-laden and patronizing judgment to say that noise music is "not music," this poses no actual issue at all for many noise performers. For the most part, it is not performed with instruments taught in music academies and many artists would not fight to be classified as musicians (Toop, 1995). Noise music is not necessarily based on scores, on usual musical structures or on notes.

One scholar describes noise as having "such a degree of dissonance and discordance as to be unlistenable even to avant-garde cognoscenti familiar with Varese, Cage, musique concrète, Stockhausen, free jazz, or, indeed, fans

of the extremes of rock, Hendrix at his wildest, the Who at their most auto-destructive, heavy metal, grindcore, death metal" (Wilson, 2015, p. 173). This idea is revealing of the author's position. We, and many other noise musicians, have been confronted by those very subjective ideas and have found it very restrictive.

*A positive definition*

A positive definition, on the other hand, will attempt to describe noise while refusing to use too many normative statements. It is a difficult task, as descriptions are never neutral. One way to put it is to say that noise music is the art of organizing sounds (Landy, 2007). The following statement is a nice way to describe the experience of listening to noise music or organized sound. "Listening to noise can take the form of a Dionysian experience during which individuality is abandoned and the limits of the senses are exceeded in a heightened state. The noise becomes a felt physical force—a physical phenomenon in space which the body cannot avoid" (Shryane, 2011, p. 49). However, this statement is laden with normative and poetic statements about the somatic aspects of noise. It remains difficult to understand the aesthetics of noise based solely on such a description.

Thus, let us add a few other descriptive elements. Noise music uses various frequencies from the whole spectrum that might include very high and/or very low frequencies. Noise music, especially when played or performed at a high volume, might create states of mind that have somatic effects (Toop, 1995). For instance, one can feel that their eardrums are about to be pierced, or feel that the sound induces some form of trance, especially when noise music is repetitive. Noise music is often improvised. However, in its recorded form, it can be the result of highly edited and sequenced sounds. Sometimes, a rhythm is produced by drums, a computer or a rhythm machine.

Both these negative and positive definitions still fail to fully encompass noise. The following section attempts to define various genres or sub-genres of noise music and to show how diverse they are, both in understanding and in practice.

**The various noise scenes, genres or sub-genres**

We have already stated that noise music is more than a single genre. It is very diverse in historical, social and aesthetic terms. Noise music is a vast territory defined by its many influences ranging from underground radical or extreme subcultures, pop music (or vernacular music) and academic cultures. It lies perhaps somewhere between an iconoclast genre of music called industrial music and the more academic genre of electroacoustic music (Atton, 2011; Demers, 2010; Hegarty, 2006; Van Nort, 2006). All these influences converge, blend and create different chemical reactions. The following sections render the complexity and diversity of sub-genres for

which artists identify a connection with noise music. It is important to note that these sub-genres are flexible and many artists do not feel comfortable with these labels. Many noise performers and bands evolve and move in different directions throughout their careers. This is the case with the famous US noise combo Wolf Eyes, which has performed in different genres ranging from harsh noise, noise rock or even doom noise metal.

In this book, we have often extended our understanding of noise music beyond the self-identified label "noise music." Indeed, we have also associated "electroacoustic music," "industrial music," "experimental music," or "sound art" when they relate to the positive sonic and acoustic definition given in the previous section. To some extent, we could have extended our definition of noise to include krautrock, post-rock or noise rock performers as they use elements of noise (Fletcher, 2012; Stubbs, 2014). Indeed, seminal bands like Cluster or Faust from Germany, Sonic Youth from the US, and, more recently, Godspeed You Black Emperor! from Canada, Sigur Rós from Iceland, The Observatory from Singapore or Explosions in the Sky from the US also definitely have elements of noise music. The same could be said of some forms of free jazz and avant-garde jazz from the likes of US musician John Zorn or German musician Caspar Brötzmann. Many pieces of acoustic ecology, soundscapes or field recordings have elements akin to some of the ambient noise sub-genres, such as in the work of French composer Éric Cordier. All these examples do not necessarily constitute noise performers or sub-genres of noise music in the sense that performers and artists in those genres do not necessarily identify in that category. They overlap with noise music because they share some aesthetic and/or organizational elements.

In the following sections, we have included descriptions of performative acts where relevant. This is not an exhaustive list of descriptions of the various genres or sub-genres of noise music but an illustration of some of its most notable sub-genres. Our goal is to help the reader—presumably unfamiliar with noise music—understand the main sub-genres making up the diversity of noise music. In one way or another, one can find noise in South East Asia in continuity or in explicit rupture with most, if not all, of these sub-genres.

*Japanoise*

One of the most famous sub-genres of noise music is certainly "Japanoise." In terms of the size of the scene, Japanoise is not the most important noise genre but it is without a doubt the most documented noise scene in academia. It is especially true in the case of the works of Akita Masami (秋田昌美) aka Merzbow (*see for instance* Alarcón Jiménez, 2006; Hegarty, 2001; James, 2011 or Novak, 2013). Based only on scholarly literature, one could wrongly conclude that noise music and Japanoise are interchangeable terms and what holds true for the first holds true for the rest. The reason for this is probably related to the exotic appeal of modern Japan in "Western" educated culture.

The term Japanoise seems to have appeared in the late 1970s, a contraction of Japan and noise (ジャパノイズ). Nevertheless, clearly defining it is not an easy task. On one hand, it seems to lump together two currents, one from the South Central Japan region of Kansai (Osaka and cities around), and the other from the capital, Tokyo. Many of the pioneers of Japanoise came from the 1970s psychedelic, experimental rock and punk music scenes. Among them were Hijōkaidan (非常階段, from Osaka) and Akita Masami (from Tokyo). Japanoise has enjoyed great recognition in experimental scenes around the world, so much so that from outside Japan, it would seem that the country is filled with noise. However, this is not the reality and it is actually hard to find a certain unity in the so-called Japanoise scene, even in the small pockets where noise artists perform and record.

Japanoise is often recognized for its roughness, the sonic violence expressed in its scene and, perhaps for some or at least in the past, the extreme behaviour of its performers. This is the case, for instance, with artists such as Masonna (マゾンナ) or Incapacitants (インキャパシタンツ) whose performances are very physical, The Gerogerigegege (ゲロゲリゲゲゲ) whose performances have included masturbation and eating feces, Hanatarash (ハナタラシ) whose performance have included self-cutting, dissection of dead animals and even bulldozing a venue's wall with a construction vehicle, or Hijōkaidan whose performances have repeatedly included smashing up equipment, urinating on stage, and throwing garbage at the audience. These are just a few examples that illustrate the diversity and the perceived violence of Japanoise. As explained by Masato Matsumura, "currently, the noise scenes in Tokyo and Osaka are at once very alike and highly different—the only constant to 'Japanoise' is the wide variety it contains" (Matsumura, 2014).

In South East Asia, artists who perform in ways similar to Japanoise are Writher (Vietnam), Bertanduk! (Indonesia), Control-Z (Indonesia), Sodadosa (Indonesia) or Mindfuckingboy (Singapore).

*Power electronics*

Another influential genre of noise music is "power electronics." The term was originally coined by the British combo Whitehouse (fronted by William Bennett) on their album *Psychopathia Sexualis,* published in 1982. However, the genre existed even before it had been given a name. Artists belonging to that genre were already active in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when it was associated with industrial music. While industrial music tends to be eclectic in its sound, power electronics mostly follows redundant patterns that tend to consist of screeching sounds and/or feedback, analog synthesizers and/or pedal effects and screaming, distorted voices, without percussions or melodies. Power electronics performers were initially mostly from Europe and predominantly from Great Britain.

The power electronics scene played around with many social taboos. This is especially true in the case of Great Britain where Sutcliffe Jügend, a band, was named after a serial killer (Peter Sutcliffe) and Nazi's youth brigades (Hitler Jugend). Italian noisemaker Maurizio Bianchi is also known to have included many references to fascism and nazism in his aesthetics. However, one should be very careful not to jump to conclusions and interpret these references as an endorsement of fascist politics and racism. During an era of conservative politics, power electronics attempted to shake the status quo much like the punk and industrial scenes did. Under the regimes of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States, they willingly played with imagery known to shock.

In South East Asia, Bangkai Angsa (Indonesia) and Shoah (Indonesia) are some of the few artists performing in ways similar to power electronics.

*Harsh noise wall*

Harsh noise wall or HNW is another genre of noise music. It is characterized by its loud, often static, monolithic and non-dynamic sound. Some HNW is reminiscent of the 1970s–1980s experimentation by US provocateur artist Boyd Rice, also known as NON. Often confused for power electronics, it differs in the fact that it emphasizes loudness; it has very little variation and fewer vocals. In fact, as a monolithic ensemble, it often feels like the listener is being hit by a wall. Tracks are often just one single block starting and ending with the same sounds and volume.

Some notable artists of the genre are Richard Ramirez (of Black Leather Jesus) from the United States, and The Rita and The Cherry Point from Canada. Artists in the sub-genre use the imagery of violence, war and pornography. This is particularly true for the openly gay Ramirez who uses hardcore gay pornography.

In South East Asia, artists who perform similarly to harsh noise wall are Radioage (Indonesia) or Shoah (Indonesia).

*Black noise*

Black noise or blackened noise is a type of noise music that uses abrasive elements of noise, drone, black metal, doom ambient, or even industrial. The genre itself sometimes flirts with power electronics but the inclusion of metal (often black metal) elements in the sonic structure is a major difference. Indeed, this genre is often associated with doom and drone metal by the likes of the US bands Earth and Sunn O))) or Boris from Japan.

Some artists involved in this genre are Aderlating and Gnaw Their Tongues from the Netherlands, Abu Lahab from Morocco or Mhnunrrn from the Czech Republic. Influences on this genre of noise music are metal bands like

the US band Neurosis (and their side-project The Tribes of Neurot) of Swiss band Celtic Frost.

We are not aware of any artists in South East Asia performing in ways similar to black noise.

*Ambient noise*

Another genre of noise music is ambient noise, sometimes also referred to as power ambient or industrial ambient music (Collis, 2008). It is certainly even less cohesive than the previous genres mentioned. However, it is a very important contributor to the various streams of contemporary noise music around the world and in South East Asia.

Ambient noise music emerged from the industrial, krautrock, progressive, and contemporary music scenes. Lustmord, Nocturnal Emissions and :zoviet*france: in Great Britain are often thought to have set the stage for dark or industrial ambient music in early 1980s. The seminal 1994 compilation *Ambient IV: Isolationism* reveals the diversity of the genre and its influences very well as it ranges from minimal guitar to micro-tone synthetic experimentations.

The term "ambient noise" may be misleading because this type of noise music is not necessarily played or performed at low volumes or meant to be played in the background. In fact, many ambient noise musicians use repetition, texture and minimal changes to create tension, calling for a very focused experience from the listener. It sometimes has great amplitude with moments of silence or barely perceptible drones and can have moments of explosion with harsh noise. This is true in the case of US ambient noise performer Daniel Menche.

In South East Asia, Sulfur (Indonesia) performs in ways similar to ambient noise.

*Drone*

Non-traditional, non-classical drone music may be associated to different genres such as minimalist music, dark ambient, ambient, drone metal and noise music. Its main cohesive characteristics are the absence or quasi-absence of rhythm and percussions, one or more sustained tones, rather low pitch, few and/or slow variations and its meditative aspect.

Although the genre was first rooted in minimalist classical music from the 1950s and 1960s, electronic and electroacoustic composers (and, a few decades later, rock and metal musicians, soon adopted it). Some composers worth mentioning throughout the history of drone music are American composers La Monte Young (*Trio for strings*, 1958), Charlemagne Palestine

(*Open-Closing*, 1968), French composer Jean-Claude Eloy (*Shānti*, 1972-73), American composers Alvin Lucier (*Music on a long thin wire*, 1980), Maryanne Amacher (*Living sound*, 1980), French composer Eliane Radigue (*Jetsun Mila*, 1987), American composer Stephen O'Malley (*Dolmens & Lighthouses*, 2009) and Iranian composer Honey Haq Pazhutan (*Wetware Waves*, 2015).

In South East Asia, artists performing in ways similar to drone music are (((...))) (Indonesia), Artmosf (Indonesia), Menstrual Synthdrone (Indonesia) or Roman Catholic Skulls (Indonesia).

*Noisegrind*

Noisegrind has its roots from the grindcore scene. It is a more extreme and noisier version of grindcore. The use of feedbacks and heavy distortion together with drums, voice and most of the time guitar or bass, sometimes together with electronics constitute the usual setup. The genre appeared in the late 1980s, one of the pioneers of the genre is the Australian band Seven Minutes Of Nausea (7MON), the genre became more widespread from the mid 1990s onwards with Japanese bands Nikudorei (肉奴隷) and global or Belgian band Permanent Death for example.

In South East Asia, artists performing in ways similar to noisegrind are Haramjadah (Malaysia) or Aneka Digital Safari (Indonesia).

*Onkyō*

Onkyō or onkyōkei (音響系 for 音 "*on*" Japanese for sound or noise, 響 "*kyō*" reverberation, 系 "*kei*" school or group) could be seen as the antithesis of Japanoise or power electronics. While the latter sound like a total destruction, a sonic and sometimes visual destruction, onkyō plays with silence and quietness. It is an extremely minimal approach to a mostly clean and pure sound. For instance, it uses music composed with no-input mixing desks, synthesizers, computers, turntables, guitars and self-made tone generators. Onkyō remains quiet above all and focuses on the texture of sound rather than the melody or harmony (Plourde, 2008; Novak, 2010).

Onkyō is strongly associated to the small venue Off Site in Tokyo where several musicians such as Ōtomo Yoshihide (大友良英), Sachiko M (松原幸子), Nakamura Toshimaru (中村としまる), Taku Sugimoto (杉本拓), Akiyama Tetuzi (秋山徹次) and others have performed. They all experimented with the possibility of performing tiny sounds, quiet and minimal music, silence and uncontrolled surrounding sounds coming from outside. Those elements and conditions were partly determined by the specific material conditions related to the artists' housing situation. In order not to disturb neighbours, onkyō musicians had to play quietly. The cramped space of Off Site (around six by two meters) did not allow them to physically express themselves wildly,

hence gestures were minimal, and the musicians focused on their own sounds and silences.

Onkyō is also defined by its sonic dynamics, its volume and the performance itself. It is a real listening experience, as one has to be focused to hear and connect to the music. Onkyō requires a fully active listening experience.

In South East Asia, Goh Lee Kwang (Malaysia) is one of the artists performing in ways similar to onkyō.

*Danger music*

This particular sub-genre of noise music is connected to performance and conceptual art and artists such as the US machine performance group Survival Research laboratories (SRL) but also with art movements such as Fluxus and Dada. The idea of danger music is to perform in such ways as to pose threats or make the audience fear for their physical integrity. Although it was first conceptualised by Fluxus' US artist Dick Higgins, he did not perform the music himself.

A danger music performance may push the audience to believe that a dangerous situation could happen. This is the case in a performance art piece by Phil Corner entitled *An anti-personnel CBU-Type cluster bomb unit will be thrown into the audience* (1969). In this situation, the music piece itself was nothing other than hypothetical; the performance consisted of announcing that the performance had been cancelled. Nam June Paik's (백남준) *Danger Music for Dick Higgins* (1962) operated in a similar fashion.

The most threatening danger music is obviously the one played at extremely loud volumes, such as the piece *Jet Engine!* that closed a performance at the Occidental College in Los Angeles in 1968 (Cope, 2008).

We are not aware of any artist in South East Asia performing in ways similar to danger music.

## Social organization and tools

So far, we have defined noise music by its specific relation to the history of avant-garde art, by its aesthetic proposals and by describing some of the ways it is performed. Noise music is also a specific social organization and a relationship to material elements such as tools and equipment.

*The organization of noise*

Noise music very much resembles the organization of underground musical subcultures and, to some extent, popular musical genres. Noise music is usually performed in places where any music is performed. However,

sometimes, noise performers will invade public space. It is not uncommon for noise performers to play concerts in front of unsuspecting and surprised passers-by. Finnish duo Pan Sonic (Panasonic) are known to have inflicted their radical electronic noise pulses to shoppers on parking lots, Canadian noise punk band Tunnel Canary did their first performance on the streets of Vancouver with the singer screaming and shouting without a microphone until the police eventually came. In Indonesia, Jogja Noise Bombing is bringing noise to public space by doing impromptu noise actions in streets or parks. Indra, one of their members, told us in an email conversation: "We see it as our way to have fun in doing noise gigs without being limited by space, money and permit."

In terms of the circulation of recorded music, noise music answers to the same rules or organization as most sub-genres of "extreme" or "underground" music. Recordings of noise music, usually on vinyl, CD, cassettes, USB keys, hard drives and/or digital releases are used. Currently, we are seeing a comeback of cassettes (tapes) especially in the harsher noise scenes where tape culture never totally disappeared.

Noise music also belongs to the field of contemporary arts, especially in the field of performing arts. The vast majority of noise performers perform solo, meaning they compose their own sound and the performance is sometimes the result of planned or improvised scenographies. Reflections by noise performers about sound design and compositions usually refer to the history of art and sound art practices. Some refer to the history of performance arts and for many performers, gesture is almost as important as the sonic dimension (Sangild, 2004). For these reasons, we indistinctly use "musician," "artist" and "performer" throughout this book.

*The tools of noise*

There are various ways to perform and record noise music. The tools range from the most current digital tools to vintage analog instruments. Noise music, when performed digitally and for the most part, uses software for music composition and performances that are popular in other electronic music genres. Software used by noise artists include sound generators, sequencers, varying from Pure Data (PD), Max MSP, FL Studio (FruityLoops), Ableton Live, Sensomusic Usine and other granular synthesis software methods. In the early 1990s and 2000s, simple sound sequencers such as trackers were also popular in the electronic noise scenes. Granular synthesis, a software technique of sampling and splitting sounds into micro-elements, grains or particles, is popular in the microtone and ambient noise sub-genres.

When performed analogically, many noise musicians use both vintage and newer synthesizers to produce a rich and thick sound. Other noise musicians often use some of the equipment familiar to rock musicians, such as mixers,

guitar pedal effects and guitar amplifiers. However, it is very common in the noise scenes that equipment is used in ways that are different from that intended by the manufacturers. For instance, some noise musicians will use a mixer without sound input, rerouting the different channels in ways that will create noisy artefacts called feedback. This "no-input mixing" pushes the equipment to its technical limits and the noise generated this way reveals the stress to which the mixer is being subjected. In similar ways, many noise musicians will create feedback by routing guitar pedal effects into each other. An additional use of acoustic sources for noise music is the use of microphones, either cardioid microphones or contact microphones through pedal effects such as distortion, delay, fuzz and so on. The first one is used with the voice of the performer or to feedback the sound coming out of the speakers. The latter one is used on various objects to capture the vibrations that may be directed through various manipulations and effects. Some noise performers have also included more "traditional" instruments. This is the case of Keiji Haino (灰野敬二) of the psychedelic experimental rock band Fushitsusha (不失者) who has used the hurdy-gurdy to create analog noise. In Indonesia, the instrument builder Wukir Suryadi (Bambu Wukir of the band Senyawa) is known to transform bamboo and agricultural tools into stringed instruments, which can produce a wide range of high and low-pitched sounds.

## Contesting social order

Noise music can also be defined by its tendency to be transgressive and critical of the social order or the status quo. As indicated earlier with power electronics and conservative politics, often, but certainly not always, noise music carries a discourse that is critical of political, social and economic institutions in its aesthetics. This is perhaps more visible for harsher noise sub-genres than it is for noise ambient.

For instance, veganism and vegetarianism are quite visible in the noise scenes (William Bailey, 2012, pp. 118-147). Veganism and vegetarianism are ethics under which a person refuses to eat animal-based products and to use any animal product or by-product (such as in clothing, beauty products, etc.). Veg*ns—a neologism to include both vegans and vegetarians—contest animal exploitation in different ways. Veg*nism is a discourse about society and against the domination of one species, humans, over other animal species.

We, the authors of this book, have each been vegan and vegetarian for many years. In our years of experience in the noise scene, we have met many fellow veg*ns. We can hypothesize that veg*nism is as much a movement of political and social conscience as noise music is. This is the case not only for noise music, however, but also more largely in other "rebellious" music genres such as punk, hardcore, antifascist skinheads and to some extent, underground electronic music.

Another example of the participation of noise scenes in critical social practices is the proximity of noise with BDSM scenes (Hegarty, 2013) and other sexual subcultures such as pornography, and perhaps to a lesser extent, sex work. BDSM, which stands for "Bondage, Dominance, Submission, and Sado-Masochism," is an often frowned upon set of sexual practices based on the reception and infliction of pain. It is political when it criticizes social clichés on deviance and norms. It is also micro-political when it plays on gender stereotypes and the dynamics of power. It is sometimes lived as a lifestyle with visible signs (such as the use of leather, collars, etc.) and/or lived only in the privacy of the bedroom or dedicated spaces and events.

Many noise artists, especially in Japan, have integrated elements of BDSM into their work. Merzbow, for instance, has released a two-CD set entitled "Music for Bondage performance." He has also collaborated to a book about the history of Japanese bondage whose accuracy has been challenged. Hino Mayuko (日野蘭子), a member of C.C.C.C., is a former female bondage performer. Portuguese Pedro Cordas (Pedro Diniz Reis), a contemporary artist active in sound and video art, is a respected *kinbaku* (the art of Japanese erotic rope bondage) artist. William Bennett, frontman of British noise band Whitehouse, has repeatedly indicated his interest in bondage and so has Richard Ramirez, specifically for gay bondage pornography.

It is to be noted that, as a counter-reaction to the male-dominated scene and regular references to domination and hetero-centered pornography, some pro-feminist, LGBTA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and associates/ allies) and egalitarian noise artists have raised their voices to fight, not only against mainstream society's clichés, but also the perpetuation of those clichés in the industrial, power electronic and noise scenes. Among them are the Russian female noise collective Pripoy (Припой) and the British experimental artist Elizabeth Veldon and her project Gender Free Childhood.

This gender gap affects much of the noise scene worldwide but for some cultural reasons, the provocative truisms of sexism, anti-everything or dubious right-wing references have very little if no place in South East Asia where priorities tend to focus on political and social problems or facts that directly concern the artists and their daily lives.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have emphasized the diversity of noise music scenes and the complexity of their history. We have attempted to show how difficult it is to limit the definition of noise music based solely on its aesthetics. We have underlined some issues of colonialism and sexism existing both in the practice of noise music and in its history. We have acknowledged past and existing problems but we also realize that the noise music scenes can be platforms from which society can be criticized, reorganized and changed.