

**Luigi Russolo celebrated noise.**<sup>1</sup> He heard in the machine the sounds of progress, liberation and advancement of a people towards a better life that had overcome the imperfection of the menial and manual in the perfection of the machine. His work accompanied and sounded the Zeitgeist of objective ideality, of a faith or doctrine rather than the humanity in mankind should be overcome in the perfection of its creation.<sup>2</sup> After Fordism, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and into Global Warming and more modern and distanced warfare Merzbow et al. know that that is not what noise can do now.<sup>3</sup> Instead their work celebrates the almost solipsistic intensity of sound when it makes a racket rather than a piece. Noise is the autistic revelation of war, speechless but focused, producing a heavy weight in a fleeting time.

It is as if noise music lives out the trauma of the beginning of the twentieth century: sounding its consequences for community and tolerance. Acknowledging the abject and contemptible consequences of the technological and societal advancements pursued then, noise now, in its quasi inertia, is not about mass movement and progress, but about private and isolated fixity: listening on a heavy spot and pondering that position. Noise pulls my listening down to my feet. It is vertical rather than horizontal, rooting me in the location of my own hearing. Noise is not really inert, it remains strong and pounding, but instead of moving me on it draws a static horizon around my feet. There it develops the locality of hearing rather than the future of listening.

Noise does not have to be loud, but it has to be exclusive: excluding other sounds, creating in sound a bubble against sounds, destroying sonic signifiers and divorcing listening from sense material external to its noise. This can be achieved through tiny sounds that grab my



ear and make my listening obsessive and exclusive: a downstairs neighbour's quiet but persistent base beat has enough imperial ability to distract and colonize my hearing all afternoon. Sound is noisy when it deafens my ears to anything but itself. The philosophical experience and consequences of this idea are worked out in this part. Noise of the everyday and Noise-art are debated as extreme sounds that take possession of one's ears by one's own free will and against it, isolating the listener in the heard. In this way *Noise* expands *Listening* to an extreme and exaggerates the issues of communication, sense and non-sense as articulated in the last part, demanding through its uncompromising nature a direct confrontation.

### Bad Taste

Noise is other people's music: my neighbours' collection blasting at full volume through the open balcony doors on a hot and sticky summer night. My space starts to shrink as the enjoyment of my own environment vanishes. Other people's musical tastes foisted upon you in a peaceful hour, whatever it is becomes bad taste. The imposing nature of this disturbance does not invite me to listen to the sounds as music but pushes me out of the track, pushes me inside myself, to isolate and close down. Deaf to its music, I hear it as a nuisance, which stops me from hearing anything else. If you like your neighbours their music is less noisy. If you dislike or fear them any sound they make is noise, encroaching on you through the walls or over the garden fence.

My living room is increasingly saturated with *their* sound. This

lower litter my room and overpowers the design of my space.



so, and remains focused on the solitary production whereby, in this phantasmagoric practice, objectivity and subjectivity exist in a close and reciprocal bond. I acknowledged that the sense of such a practice might, for now, appear nonsensical, but stressed that in the process of sensing rather than understanding it, by practising listening itself, the import of its sensate sense on the philosophical and aesthetic methodology of enquiry will be revealed. Since, sonic non-sense as sense on trial forms the meeting point of the semiotic and the phenomenological project without finalizing their relationship in meaning, but by opening possibilities for production. So far, I have outlined only a tentative proximity, a tenuous link between the structure of meaning and its experiential content. Eventually an auditory aesthetics might be formulated from this fragile connection, commending its own formlessness in the concrete frame of a reciprocal subject-object relationship, which is the basis of its valuation.

### **The Rave (1993)**

Dancing at a loud and dark rave party in a big factory hall outside Zürich in the early 1990s I did not know who was dancing me: my body or the noise. The noise deafened my senses to anything but itself, and funnelled me into its own insistent beat. This was not really hearing music and sounds as much as feeling them through a vague and glorious pain in my ears, entering my body on their way to becoming this pain, and moving in reaction to its intensity. I and all the other hundreds of ravers became the visual interpretation of noise: a euphoric mass of isolated movement.<sup>5</sup> The vertical pull of noise intensifies listening's solitary experience. Noise exaggerates the isolation of my sensorial engagement and tightens the reciprocity between the listener and the heard. In the non-sense of a noisy life-world my



reciprocal intersubjective 'I' is held down to the ground by the weight and exclusivity of the sounds around me. The room to manoeuvre shrinks in my vis-à-vis with noise as it contracts my intersubjectivity, making me one with its sounds, alone.

Rave-nights demonstrate this ferocious isolation produced by noise. While the 1980s disco music allowed for a chat and a giggle at the movements of that guy over there, raves eradicate verbal communication. In its insistence that I hand over my body to its force, noise cuts the cord to the social and produces a euphoria, an ecstasy of freedom in the besieged but autonomous body. The tight reciprocity of this existence is made abundantly clear when I cannot hear myself anymore. Noise does not accompany me but swallows me, in its loud tones or compulsive smaller sounds it reins my sonic self, as I become part of it. My sensory-motor actions become reactions to the intense and obsessive demands of the sounds that command my space.

Noise does not only demand my attention but grasps it literally to the exclusion of all other sensorial possibilities. It works as an anaesthetic in its loud or quiet intensity. However, this is not a desensitized position, but the position of an acute sonic-ness. It is Michel Chion's 'clump of sensation' shrunk tightly onto the body.<sup>6</sup> In noise I am the body falling out of the tower block window onto the hood of the car. The clump is felt directly under my skin. The body of the sound has moved so close it is my body: I am the host of noise. As if taken over by alien forces noise usurps me and presents me back to myself as the mirror of its insistence.

This tight reciprocity confirms the solitary nature of a sonic sensibility, and the noisy non-sense produced by the individual dancer performing noise at a rave reinforces the fragility of communication. We all do roughly similar movements, but that is just the outward convention: language, so to speak. The communication in the sense of relating, connecting, does not take place. I move alone. Immersed not in the figure of the mass but in the singular body of my own thing-ness as noise-ness.



Noise ingests me and yet it is only noise because it works on my body. When I am not there my neighbour's stereo is not noisy. The relationship between noise and its hearer is uneven but reciprocal. Noise needs me, but demands of me more than any other sound my undivided attention and my abandonment to its materiality. This incorporation of myself into the sensorial material is what makes noise complex in relation to aesthetic discourse. It makes it abundantly clear that distance is not an option, and that joint time is demanded as the circumstance of experience. Noise takes time to unfold and to take a hold of our body and it is meant to do that. Merzbow works over 50 hours to make you his.<sup>7</sup> His sounds assault your senses until they have taken over. The effect comes earlier but the intention is clear: to totally submit to his world of noise that he as its composer has himself submitted to.

Noise is not necessarily an authorial act but an experiential space where the composer submits himself to the noises made. I imagine Merzbow hooked on the noise of his own creation, unable to stop the beast that has taken over his body and only wrestling free after 50 hours and probably not even then. This abandonment is not simply a passive attitude but an active participation in the siege of noise to experience the ecstasy of my own autonomous listening, which gives my formless subjectivity the concreteness of its particularity. Besieged by noise I am concretely the singular body of my formless thinging, speechless but ecstatically me.

### Otomo Yoshihide at the Corsica Studios (2005)

Otomo Yoshihide with Sachiko M.'s 2005 turntables, electronics, sine waves and empty sampler performance at the Corsica Studios in London made people clutch their bodies and hold their ears against his assault. Meanwhile he remained calm.