

ent part of a religious body without any personal expression); it could involve the transfer of a sourceless energy or the unconscious appropriation of an idea for another use. In the twentieth century, broadcast and recording media recast communication as a dialogic world system that could connect different cultural voices through an ever-improving technological network.<sup>15</sup> But the copresence of global connection also involves miscommunication, confrontation, and mutual breakdown. The mistake of communication theory, Peters argues, is “to think that communications will solve the problems of communication, that better wiring will eliminate the ghosts” (Peters 1999:9). In fact, the wired world generates more spectral voices than ever, and more Noise.

## MUSIC AS MEDIA

One aim of this study is to complicate historical narratives of popular music through the repetitions, delays, and distortions of technological mediation. I show how the jagged distribution of Noise set the stage for new waves of musical creativity, as its recordings were discovered and re-discovered by scattered listeners around the world. Noise’s perennial newness is generated by its irregularity in the time frames of popular media. It is out of sync with the speedy schedules of corporate industry, and also with local scenes of independent music and histories of avant-garde aesthetics. The newness of any musical genre is determined by the time it takes to become familiar, as it “breaks” in different sites of reception. Music is produced and distributed; it is heard and then named, identified, and placed in comparative relationships with other styles. The clock starts again as a new style is slowly broken into the world. It becomes known as it is distributed, historicized, diversified, and then, perhaps, lost, buried, and recollected in nostalgia.

But as media circulation opens access to an increasing catalog of global forms, its time lags and delays continue to amplify the effects of cultural difference. Distance and isolation are exploited to create separate markets within the misalignments of transnational distribution. When an American musician or band is described as “big in Japan,” this means that their music has run its course everywhere else. It is surprisingly popular in this unlikely place only through some sort of unnatural accident or coincidence, which seems to spring from the gaps between its original culture and its foreign reception. But global popular culture is not staged on a uni-

directional timeline, like a telephone game in which a message radiates outward, slowly losing its original authority and meaning in its expansion to distant, separate contexts, from which it never returns. It is constantly remediated through the transformations of feedback. As time lags and inequalities become part of circulation, they break new ground for musical creativity and generate new forms that are folded back into the loop.<sup>16</sup>

Mass-mediated genres of popular music are increasingly recognized as productions of cultural difference, as well as hegemonic objects of transnational capitalism. Social critics have long feared that the spread of technological media would eliminate global diversity. For ethnomusicologists, the rapid postwar expansion of recorded and broadcast music threatened a “cultural greyout” of the world’s musical resources (Lomax 1968). As media influenced the content of local knowledge and traditional instruments were replaced with electronics, separate music cultures might even cease to exist, as distinct expressive forms are consolidated into a homogenous global mass. In fact, the opposite has occurred: cultural difference has fed back into musical circulation with a vengeance. Popular music remediates local identity, sometimes as a fusion of transnational musical aesthetics adopted by ethnic and subcultural groups, and other times as an unfused essentialism of cultural nationalism.<sup>17</sup> Regional pop stars symbolize new political movements; “world music” channels the transcultural creativities of urban cosmopolitanism; and hybrid pop genres are heard as sonic hallmarks of mimetic influence and intertextuality.<sup>18</sup> Recorded music has become integral to contemporary senses of place and identity. Recordings inspire local revivals and provide material for emerging archives of cultural memory even as their sonic contents are remixed into new forms and alternative interpretations of history. In this feedback, it is difficult to describe any popular music as distinctly local, original, or independent. Local musical cultures have not disappeared. But they are constantly reproduced and remediated in dialogue with other new projects of listening, performance, emplacement, and selfhood.

To illustrate how musical cultures are formed in circulation, I describe a diverse range of listening practices that brought Noise to the ears of a transnational audience. These creative receptions are not necessarily exclusive to Noise or to its audiences in the United States and Japan. As recordings became ubiquitous to musical knowledge in the twentieth century, listening was transformed on a global scale. The “audile techniques” of recorded sound—the technological isolation of listeners, the construction

of private acoustic space, the introduction of historical forms into mass culture, and the complex relationships of sonic “fidelity” between copies and original sources—were particularly crucial in forming the aural subjectivities of “alternative modernities” (Gaonkar 2001; Sterne 2003). Charles Hirschkind, for example, has described how cassette-recorded sermons in contemporary Egypt constructed a political public sphere of “ethical listening,” and Amanda Weidman discusses the impact of phonographic listening on transmission and performance practices in South Indian Karnatic music (Hirschkind 2006; Weidman 2006). Recordings generated new discourses of collection and connoisseurship, as well as diverse contexts of mediated performance (e.g., remixing and reperforming recorded music in dub, hip-hop, karaoke, mashups, and so on).<sup>19</sup>

Narratives of global media often focus on the displacement of circulating forms from their original sites of creative production. But audiences bring music back to place through their own sonic explorations. Noise fans create maps of recordings—guides to record stores, lists of essential tracks and albums, indexes, charts of performance sites, and collections of sounds—that chart the underground networks connecting Tokyo to New York to Osaka and point to distant horizons of creativity. Recordings become points of access to a hidden world of sound that echoes beneath the surface of everyday life and moves scattered listeners to imagine the space of a global music scene. Through their geography of consumption, they transform the creative landscape of Noise: fans become musicians, receptions become productions, and techniques of listening turn into frameworks of performance.

In *Japanese*, I trace the feedback between recorded media and performance in contemporary musical experience. Sensibilities of recorded sound are an especially crucial common ground for audiences separated by geographic, linguistic, economic, and cultural divides. To close the distances of global circulation, listeners and performers alike become deeply invested in the personal embodiment of sound. Absorbed in sound, they bring recordings into their senses, and then feed their experiences back into public discourse as a mediated form of musical knowledge. Live performances of Noise create an intensely powerful sonic atmosphere that inhabits public space with a private emotional sensibility. The sheer loudness of Noise can produce sensations of interiority, and live shows are valued for this immersive experience, especially in the tiny “livehouses” of urban

Japan, where audiences are suffused in an intense environment of overwhelming volume. But Noise's "liveness" emulates the sonic production of recordings, which create an equally powerful aesthetic of "deadness" in individual experiences of sound. Listeners identify the special qualities of Noise through its embodied sensations (e.g., "harsh"), which are incorporated into special techniques of production and mastering that can make Noise recordings sound loud at any volume.

Another goal of this book is to examine the role of technology in the formation of cultural subjects. Here, feedback stages the technocultural subjectivity of Noise, which takes shape in its sonic practices of creative destruction. In Noise, disparate things get plugged together. Outputs go back into inputs, effects are looped together, and circuits are turned in on themselves. Sounds are transformed, saturated with distortion, and overloaded to the point that any original source becomes unrecognizable. Controls no longer do what they are supposed to; each discrete function is tied to the next in a fluctuating, interrelated mass of connections. Sound seems to generate itself. In the next moment, the circuit is overturned, the gear is wrecked, and the network is destroyed.

Feedback generates a powerful ambivalence around the terms of musical authorship.<sup>20</sup> Individual practitioners began making Noise in isolated experiments with consumer electronics, which eventually overlapped in performance systems based in "circuit-bending," overload, and distortion. In the process, they bent the linear narratives of musical history into an unpredictable, self-reinforcing network. But if performers celebrate the inventive possibilities of technological participation, they also debate its violent effects on individual sensibilities. Their electronic feedback embodies a human-machine relationship that is uncertain, excessive, and out of control. Noisicians forced their listeners to witness the technological overload of individual consciousness in consumer societies. The millennial narratives of Japanoise extended the aesthetic modernisms of futurism and surrealism to the symbolic power of 1980s industrial music and postapocalyptic anime. This technocultural critique fused Noise to Japanese culture through a global imaginary in which postwar Japan has become iconic of the destructive impact of modern technologies. In this process, Japanoise was linked into Japanese cultural politics through geopolitical histories that are anything but random.