

**XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology**  
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**Art Process as a Non-Trivial Machine**

***Noiserr: the Generative Capabilities of Epistemic Disruption***

**Martina Raponi**

*“Semantic jailers may complain about my different usages of the noun noise in this text. If there is a term that one needs not to be puritanical about, it might as well be noise. I would rather play with its different meaning, than perpetuate noise as a musical genre”.*  
Mattin

Noiserr stands for Noise Reading and Research. It is a project that stemmed from the encounter between its co-founder, Max Hampshire, and I.

When we met we discussed our shared frustration about reading groups, which usually use “stiff” formats that don’t allow the absorption of a text in its entirety, assuming and expecting people to read beforehand an entire text (book), or expecting to read an entire (or just enough, and it’s never enough) book during the reading group.

We talked about this frustration while also getting to know each other’s obsession for Noise as a music practice, as an artistic practice, and as a theoretical topic and object of investigation.

We asked ourselves what does it mean to take part into a reading group nowadays, or at least: what does it entail? And what do we want to trigger, by organising a reading group about noise?

And if we widen the scope from the practicality of having to organise a reading group: what does it entail to see Noiserr as an artistic practice? How can we structure a reading group coherent with the topic investigated within it?

We continued our discussions by adding a very basic consideration - perhaps simplistic but still very relevant for what has then been the development of the Noiserr format/ method - : people tend to consume information in a twitter-format. I put myself in the “people” and I can say: are accustomed to consuming shrunk bits of knowledge. How can we deal with this in a project that claims to have the mission of spreading knowledge about a specific topic?

The issue with Noise is that it is a topic that can be accessed by many different entry points, and therefore it seems very easy (sometimes in a risky way) to tackle.

Noise is that something which challenges a reflection on our sensory capacities, it triggers an aesthetic event which is meant to disrupt, or understood as disrupting - when it doesn't fall into the genreified and normalised realm of predictability (especially in music).

By virtue of its "generally acknowledged" disruptive nature, it can mostly be described by what it is not, and always in relation to its context. Noise contains a fundamental contradiction: it is a term carrying along a lot of cultural baggage (hence its meaning shifts from culture to culture), subjective bias (what is noise for me might not be noise for my neighbour), and it can be related to many concepts or fields (it is about sound, it is about music, it can be related to politics, all sciences have their own noises, etc). And yet: we mostly use mainly that one word: Noise. By pronouncing it we tend to overlap all the meanings and layers of meaning we can think of - or that we know of - and we use the word sometimes consciously, sometimes not, knowing that its manifold metaphorical potential can help us mould and shape the meaning of it in order to create an idea of noise which can be closer to our experience of it.

In a way, the frustration that Max and I shared, for me as a writer who authored a book about Noise, published in 2015 and which I now consider absolutely outdated or incomplete, and for Max as a musician and sound artist, was about the fact that no publication or work or project about Noise is exhaustive enough, or manages to encompass all the possibilities offered by Noise, and doesn't appear in this world early enough to reflect and show Noise as Noise.

How could I transform my writing practice, and how could he evolve his composition practice? We had to reflect on the very fundamental qualities of the topic, and keep in mind not only how noise changes objectively in relation to specific contexts and subjectively in relation to individual experiences, but also how the meaning of Noise is constantly mutating due to how capitalist societies (the ones we live in and in which we operate as Noiserr agents) work.

As Jacques Attali explains in his "Noise: the Political Economy of Music" and as Michel Serres also states in his book "The Parasite", noise is a trigger for progress and evolution, but it is also that which cannot be contained within progress, or controlled by it. The moment a system gets changed by the introduction of noise, the parameters for the system to function in an orderly fashion change too, and that very noise that acted as a disruptor, as a trigger, as an agitator, as a parasite, or "thermal exciter" (as Serres puts it), is not Noise anymore. It becomes normalised, part of the system, allowing more noises, new noises, to emerge.

What was noise yesterday might not be noise today.

How do we deal with this?

I will quote here a passage by artist Mattin, from its PhD dissertation "Social Dissonance", which is also a performative project that has been presented in the latest dOCUMENTA

both in Athens and Kassel. The passage is from a section called "Noise as device". I got to read his dissertation almost one year after Noiserr went public, and I realised how close my purpose as a writer (or artist if you want) and his purpose as a musician/noise maker/artist were.

*"Noise pushes perception to the limits because there is in it something we cannot properly decipher. There is something that goes beyond our conceptual categorisation. It's not properly indexed yet and we don't have the right tools to deal with it. Either there is something wrong, or it actually shows our inadequacy to deal with reality. In this regard it brings us/our senses closer to reality and to our impossibility to ascribe meaning to reality. This is why noise, in some regards, is the most abstract yet the most concrete of cultural expressions. On the one hand it's abstract because it constantly forces complexity to reach another level which had not yet been explored and concrete because its specificity has to do with the unacknowledged residue that surfaced in a precise send-receiver situation.*

*So then, what would it mean to claim the possibility to use noise as a device? It would mean to incorporate and appropriate its own deciphering. While Shklovsky wants to prolong the 'artfulness' of the object as much as possible and by doing this, to prolong an aesthetic experience, I propose that the deciphering of noise could be a way to socialise the way its estrangement effect works. Inevitably this would mean the disappearance of this estrangement, but it would also allow us to understand how our cognitive and sensory capacities work. In doing so, we could translate the conceptual problems that are posed by noise into further techniques or devices."*

In agreement with this, I would say that Noiserr is a practice that uses Noise as a device, besides using it as an object of research. And having said this, I will share with you what were the steps which followed my very first encounter with Max, and how Noiserr came actually into life.

We decided to start from what we knew best: the personal. We shared our backgrounds, our ideas of noise, and what do they reference to, meaning: we collected our personal experiences, and shared with each other our book collections, discussing what was important for us, and why. This phase was fundamental, as it made clear how our understanding of Noise was ramified, at times our individual ideas overlapping, sometimes diverging, creating a much richer picture and notion of a subject I thought I had discovered "enough" about.

Our next step was extracting from our personal literatures on noise the fragments of text we deemed as most important, or fundamental in order to understand a specific stance or idea of Noise.

We collected all the fragments, and we made sense of them via concepts, or keywords, they referred to (for us) - sometimes in a direct sometimes in a looser way.

These keywords became the index that we used to organise the texts, not in a consecutive fashion, but as clouds intersecting other clouds, and part of a bigger (and ever expanding) cloud. In this way the reading material can be navigated in a non-linear way, and the connections - the suggested ones or the ones emerging during the sessions - can become alive and effective.

Noiserr's participants join the sessions with different understandings of Noise. Some come with little or no knowledge of some of the Noise theories we selected, some add more theories we did not know about, some join because they are musicians, some others bring their engineering point of view to the table, some come with their fine arts background, and some others contribute references from poetry or literature. The requirements to participate are not demanding. An input is selected beforehand, that can be read or not before the session. We start from that, to follow one of the possible directions contained in it.

i.e. A fragment from the chapter Repeating, from Noise the Political Economy of Music by Jacques Attali is suggested as starting point, as part of the cloud of Control. The same fragment though might be present in other several clouds (Experimentation, Music, Silence, System) and the option is to pick up whatever direction suggested by the conversations arising from the reading of that specific fragment (sometimes the way to follow is clear from the discussions, some other times it is needed to negotiate the most relevant/appealing/viable direction to take in order to continue the reading and research exercise). What happens is that we either explore the material within a cloud, or follow the possible connections among texts, taking detours which are indicated by suggestions of videos, sound pieces, images, or more texts, that are coming from the participants - all the suggestions become part of the ever expanding cloud of Noiserr's Noise, and feed back into it.

There is not one valid truth about Noise, and the format of the reading group intends to show that. As it is known and as I explained briefly, rarely can Noise be described in a purely objective way, which means that the subject's contribution is fundamental.

Noiserr is a practice which reflects pure process, negotiation, knowledge construction. The complex and ever-shifting nature of the topic makes it necessary to tackle it in such a way in order not to pin it down in a conclusive and defined way, but to allow the knowledge about it to be developed, shared, broken down, analysed, expanded, interconnected, negotiated, hyperlinked, navigated, confuted, or accepted.

As a facilitator, it is important for me during the sessions to counterfeit the authority of knowledge, and allow everybody to have their say and contribute their own comments

and materials to the discussion. Noiserr refuses to generate defined outcomes or objects - so I don't have any interest in "leading" the reading group. I will borrow again Mattin's words (I will substitute the word "improvisation" in his text with the word "Noiserr"): *"One should try to activate the room as much as possible and disrupt previous habits and behaviours to create different ones. In other words, to go against the normalisation process. I have found Noiserr to be a practice which takes into account everything happening in the room. Not to create something new that can later be used elsewhere, but as a way of intensifying the moment through social relations".* And to reconnect back to what we have mentioned about the nature of Noise: *"The nihilist character of noise makes it antagonistic to democracy, and it is absolutely realist in its given understanding that we are never going to be in a state of equality; even less so under capitalism. This does not mean that we should not try to understand each other as much as possible from our different positions and create democratic process, based upon a present, and not a future position (planning what we can gain at a later date)."*

Noiserr is a composition practice, a writing practice, a negotiation practice, a cybernetic practice that interconnects individual knowledges in their own making. It is a process that tries to reclaim "doing" from "done" and tries to prevent "praxis" from petrifying into mere "being" (I borrowed these last words from Alexander Locascio in his introduction to Mattin's collection of texts *Unconstituted Praxis*). It is a practice that disrupts and - allow me to use this verb - betrays the different epistemologies that create compartmented notions of Noise, in order to create bridges, connections, hyperlinks among different understandings of it, among the different sciences that claim to have found a definition for it without thinking it would go on evolving further.

The result is the negotiation of a series of truths about Noise (valid on an individual level and/or on a collective level, in the contexts of the different sessions) which reflect its ramified nature as much as its ever-changing meaning, while also using Noise itself as a tool for its own deciphering, resisting the process of normalisation and crystallisation of this or that definition of Noise.

The truths emerging are not considered in their states of "outcomes" but as "processes".

Noiserr is an artistic practice which refuses to produce any outcome, or object. It is a practice meant to continue moving, it is a process, and it wants to create tools and devices that allow to investigate and experience noise while resisting its genreification, and while retaining its complex and noisy qualities.

I will quote again Mattin *"'Capital doesn't like noise - Miguel Angel Fernandez Ordonez, Governor of the Bank of Spain.' Countability, separability, measurability are intrinsic qualities of capital. For a commodity to achieve its value and therefore become a commodity, it needs to be counted as one. Rumour is elusive and unstable, impossible to count, it can be defined as noise. Noise exceeds the logic of calculability"*. Noiserr

accepts this stance and its aim is to avoid being absorbed and normalised within capital, accepting the residual excessive, and most importantly: affective, nature of knowledges and practices about noise.