

An idiots guide to noise.

Apologia.

Before beginning I must apologize for my poor English, and for any misconceptions that this text might generate, I hope others better skilled at communication will understand my ideas about noise and so better explain these to others. Another problem I have is that of an unseen audience who might think me pretentious, to which I admit I am, but the pretense is worth it if others get not 'my' message, but 'the' message. I apologize for this pretense which unintentionally produces incredulity and outrage in others in what is called 'The Noise community'. Outrage at the idea that something so seemingly trivial as noise, a noise which is meaningless, isn't in fact trivial at all, just as the hiss on your FM radio has in it the sound of the birth of the cosmos and the Quantum fluctuations of the Reality in which we find ourselves. Some might consider 'Noise' as just some minor musical sub-genre, I offer an alternative idea, it's THE REAL. (Capitals because this REAL is REALITY with or without human beings and with or without human understanding- a way big REAL). Finally, it might be that only an idiot can see that reality is not caputurable in reason', human or otherwise. So read 'the idiots guide' not as a guide for... but better, a guide by. An idiot's guide.

Introduction.

I didn't 'get' noise! I got punk, 'reaction to the overly complex and pretentious dexterity and elitism of prog rock', I got 'rock' – youthful challenge to the current social mores, influence of wider culture post war experience... I sorta got 12 tone, 'abandonment of totality as it could no longer fully express' ... I got minimalism and drone 'ecstatic sounds like veil paintings...' all of these and more 'I sorta got', but I couldn't get noise. And by noise I don't mean 'industrial', power electronics, Whitehouse, Throbbing Gristle.. et al. in their angst, cathartic antics as a critique of humanities seemingly pointless and senseless being, and also the work of the absurd, the situationists... I can get that. I've sat through Becket's Waiting for Godot, and kinda got that, I maybe couldn't get it – all, who is Godot, Becket will not say. And the bleakness of 'End Game' – phew! – a fun night out... but I could not get noise. And by noise I meant in the first instance, probably now 20 or more years ago, Merzbow... and then The Rita<sup>2</sup>. I could get the mistake of the "But a child of 5 could do it" criticism. I have got the general 'I cant get it all' idea as one explores art or anything... but what I couldn't get about noise in these cases was that it seemed there was nothing to get. This noise might be a cathartic criticism, gesture or whatever, but that had been done. So its a copy, a simple repetition, but a piss poor one to use a technical phrase. I'd once owned a EMS Synthi which this guy was waving around and knew he hadn't much of a clue of how to use it, or if he did he wasn't much bothered. I could hear the volume and distortion meant that any structure or skill would in anyway be lost, but there was none in the first place. Or did Masami Akita or Sam McKinlay look angst ridden, they didn't seem that bothered. They were not the usual suspects of adolescents who thought they had discovered Dada and performance art – yet again! Nope! I didn't get – this 'Noise', I got the other stuff – sort of... but not this? And it annoyed me, because here it was, even in The Wire! the journal of approval for the creators of the new and exciting adventures in modern music, to paraphrase its masthead. But I could see nothing to it. OK – supposedly recordings of sharks or skate boarders – who could tell! I couldn't. As far as I could hear it was simple incoherent noise, and those who thought it good seemed to me what are now called hipsters, phonies, just trying to be cool by attaching themselves to the next 'new thing'. Like the idiots in the 'emperor's new

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<sup>1</sup> "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise" William Blake, Proverbs of Hell.

<sup>2</sup> I mention only three makers of HN (Harsh Noise) and HNW (Harsh Noise Wall) from a potentially much larger group as being representative.... i.e. also.. Richard Ramirez, Werewolf Jerusalem, GRVD, Torturing Nurse, Pain Jerk, Zero Gravity Funeral...Sissy Spacek, Government Alpha...The Cherry Point.. Sewer Election... and a very much longer list from which many of the artists will argue their work is about communication and meaning... in this text I'm selecting just three examples where its debatable, but just as much with any others, the artists intentions as being meaningful and communicating may fail and may be irrelevant to certain critiques, touched on below.

clothes' tale, there were no clothes, there was no skill, no music, no message. Then occurred my 'Road to Damascus' event. You know the one where Saul sees Jesus, changes his name to Paul and starts something even bigger than Microsoft or Google – Christianity (T.M.) My Epiphany. That's what an epiphany is (I said this is for idiots). So what was mine re noise? Simple! All of the above was true! What! You might say, in fact many do, you mean you think noise IS RUBBISH! IS INCOHERENT! IS STUPID! Skill less nonsense... pour on the negative adjectives. But what about the fans who thought otherwise, held Masami Akita and Sam McKinley to be Gods, they, I now realized as the scales fell from my eyes (that's St. Paul again- pun here on musical scales – no!) were wrong. The fans were wrong, anyone could do noise, it had been done before – way back it seems by some Italians... Russolo, the Futurists and art of noises, and in the 50s in France and the USA, Musique concrète - Pierre Schaeffer and Studio d'Essai... and John Cage among others. So regarding this "new" noise-music of Merzbow and others there should be the police officer's voice at an accident, "nothing much to see here folks- move on, move on – nothing to see" – but there was – there was an accident!

### Deliberate Accidents.

So what was this accident, and are the perpetrators aware of it? Well the accident is noise, and awareness can be put on one side for the moment, though in passing Masami Akita and Sam McKinlay I think were well aware, but others in the scene, genre... might not be... its not that important, as accidents are accidents, say in the case of a car crash, a smashed car, deliberate or accidental, is a smashed car. It is no longer a car. It wont function as a car, as a means of transport because it's broken. Maybe noise was discovered by accident, maybe not, that's the historians job, but it seems likely that feedback was accidentally discovered as was overdriving an amplifier. All these effects were obviously at first used as aesthetic devices in music. What occurred in harsh noise and harsh noise wall was if sufficient effects are used, especially distortion, eventually the sound structure is dissolved into a fairly uniform mess in the case of harsh noise wall, or random (stochastic) events in the case of Harsh Noise, with no seeming structure or meaning. What interested me was these results, the meaningless wreckage of entangled broken sound. Broken, not working, failed, dead, destroyed... as some comment on society? No. Why not, because it was so broke you couldn't tell. Well I couldn't tell. I couldn't get it! Big deal? Yes...! Why? Well there are other things I don't get. Number One is THIS. No, not this- this, this text, I get that! Even if you don't. This big 'this', life, the universe ... everything. I doubt if any Jehovah's Witnesses are reading this but they, and many others, do get THIS. I don't. Now this might be because I'm stupid, or doomed to hell by a God who made me so, or for many other reasons, but my reason of choice is the reason I don't get the big picture, the reason for life the universe and everything is, (fanfare) its not gettable! To quote a smart guy-

"We gain access to the structure of reality via a machinery of conception which extracts intelligible indices from a world that is not designed to be intelligible and is not originarily infused with meaning."<sup>3</sup>

Translation: The universe is stupid, accidental, pointless, arbitrary, nonsensical... meaningless without cause purpose or direction. Nietzsche makes a better picture in Will to Power – (which is not about human will at all, if you are some fascist reading this.. why?)

“And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by “nothingness” as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Brassier, “Concepts and Objects” In *The Speculative Turn* Edited by Levi Bryant et. al. (Melbourne, Re.press 2011) p. 59.

rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms striving toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself— do you want a name for this world? A solution for all of its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?— This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!”<sup>4</sup>

Or more?

“The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms. Judged from the point of view of our reason, unsuccessful attempts are by all odds the rule, the exceptions are not the secret aim, and the whole musical box repeats eternally its tune which may never be called a melody—and ultimately even the phrase “unsuccessful attempt” is too anthropomorphic and reproachful. But how could we reproach or praise the universe? Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites: it is neither perfect nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man. None of our aesthetic and moral judgements apply to it. Nor does it have any instinct for self-preservation or any other instinct; and it does not observe any laws either. Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities: there is nobody who commands, nobody who obeys, nobody who trespasses. Once you know that there are no purposes, you also know that there is no accident; for it is only beside a world of purposes that the word “accident” has meaning. Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type.

Let us beware of thinking that the world eternally creates new things. There are no eternally enduring substances; matter is as much of an error as the God of the Eleatics.”<sup>5</sup>

Maybe some of you get this – even if you don’t agree – that my description of some particular noise (not all!) resembles the picture of the universe painted above. Not just by Brassier and Nietzsche or me, but even in Physics-

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<sup>4</sup> Will to Power - 1067

<sup>5</sup> The Gay Science 109 – Friedrich Nietzsche. (anyone sniggering (snickering – U.S.) over the word ‘gay’ will be asked to leave the room!)

“This leads inevitably to a depressing end to science. What is the point of exploring further the randomly chosen physical properties of our tiny corner of the universe...?”<sup>6</sup>

“The argument that mathematics contains unprovable statements, physics is based on mathematics, and therefore physics will not be able to discover everything that is true, has been around for a long time.”<sup>7</sup>

Even supposing, and it an extremely big suppose, that the universe happens to be reasonable we have no guarantee that our reason can achieve any sort of reasonable understanding. Why is there any reason that reality is reasonable.... The history of science and knowledge is one where the seeming obvious nature of a world made for us is seen to be only a bias of our standpoint. Even the name of our planet reveals this, we call it Earth, though its mostly water.

All this resonates with recent philosophy variously called Speculative Realism, Speculative Materialism, Object Oriented Ontology... of which Ray Brassier is associated as is Graham Harman – who has a theory that the objects in the world are non totalizable- which means they escape our understanding. We can never fully ‘get them’, Graham Harman actually thinks we never get anything of them, but that’s getting deep.

The bottom line is my ‘not getting’ noise could be (proviso: in some cases) that this noise was like reality, it was not gettable, because there was nothing to get! This didn’t mean it was an empty nothing, but what was there was not in anyway a message to get, to understand or appreciate.

“There is absolutely no message whatsoever in my work”<sup>8</sup>

This was my Epiphany! But what of all the other noisers, angst ridden semi naked sweating and screaming into microphones and anguishingly twisting knobs!.. in horror at life and the nihilism of existence. Fine, that’s how they feel, right or wrong, that’s what their noise is, for them and their audiences. And they are in no way wrong. Or right?

“I threw all my past music career in the garbage. There was no longer any need for concepts like 'career' and 'skill'. I stopped playing music and went in search of an alternative.”

—Masami Akita

"no dynamics, no change, no development, no ideas" – Vomir

Well do the two quotes above prove my argument that some noise is meaningless and so like the universe? Maybe? But that is not so important as in modern criticism even the authors or artists intentions are not definitive. (And that goes for the audience’s too) And we could spend much time examining that, but briefly, The Intentional Fallacy, The Death of the Author – Barthes, and the work of the Silver Fox<sup>9</sup> and deconstruction all show that interpretation by the viewer, listener or reader is as important or more important than the artist’s intentions. This is all very upsetting to the simple idea of communication in which I write “The cat sat on the mat” and you read these letters and spaces, and picture a cat, on a mat.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Steinhardt Albert Einstein Professor of Science at Princeton University, in What is your Dangerous Idea Edited by John Brokman (London, Pocket Books, 2006) p.124.

<sup>7</sup> Impossibility: The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits By John D. Barrow

<sup>8</sup> Vomir in Anti-Musicality: An Interview With Romain Perrot Of VOMIR, Russell Williams , August 20th, 201

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida.

And a rejoinder here could be that these critics in the humanities may make up such crazy stuff as to deny the artists intention as some final arbiter of what is being done or said, but common sense would see it otherwise, there is an intention and one which is clear and definite. Only in the humanities is such a confusion found. However that is not true, a simple example is Einstein and his work which was foundational to the manufacture of the Atomic bomb, his work was- although he had no such intention and the consequences of his theory in the ability to make such a weapon had to be pointed out to him!

Have I shot my foot? Well even if someone like Vomir can make meaningless noise it's possible to find a meaning in it. Sure. It's possible to find a meaning in tea leaves and Rorschach drawings (ink blots). The universe might have a meaning, a purpose, (AKA a Telos), but I think its for those who say it has to give the evidence. We might touch on the God thing again, for when Nietzsche famously declared God dead, the big deal wasn't getting rid of some stupid thinking, that would have been great! What upset Nietzsche is the consequences of not having any access to some final absolute guaranteed meaning or purpose for 'This'. And the fall into bleak nihilism, and what followed, existentialism. The noise artists, who are really into Power Electronics are crying over the spilt milk. Merzbow isn't. There is nothing to spill! I wont go on too much about God and the lack thereof, but even bringing god back doesn't help me, I simply acknowledge though there maybe absolutes, though some god or guy might reason out everything... I for one know I can't. There is no mystery, there is no answer to the Why? because it isn't a question. We are as Heidegger says – just thrown into the world. His great claim was the impossibility of dealing with 'WTF'.

HNW = WTF. Its not that this meaningless noise represents reality – IT IS REALITY. In an attempt to be cool I call this noise 'noise qua noise' – qua being a trendy word at the moment in philosophy, Noise as noise- and nothing else. And once again I know that much of noise in its creation and consumption is not, noise qua noise, but noise qua fun, noise qua anti capitalism, noise as fascism etc etc. And I accept that, I do not argue it is not so, I just argue that some noise isn't about anything, some, not all<sup>10</sup>, and this tiny portion, a sub genre of a little genre is in fact the tiny tip of an iceberg, the iceberg is called THE REAL, and the Titanic ship sailing towards might be called 'Human Understanding' or 'Correlationist thinking'.

So lets get Philosophical.

A brief philosophical background. First off philosophy (as metaphysics - tends to) seeks absolute truths, not just practical solutions<sup>11</sup>. Ask a philosopher if he witnessed an accident and he might reply he is not sure, and never can be. Ask him if he is certain about his being not sure and he will disappear into infinite regression. All such talk justifies many in thinking philosophy is bunk or pretentious nonsense. However ideas such as democracy, human and animal rights, racial and gender equality ... and much else all stem from philosophical argument. Philosophy originated as we typically understand it<sup>12</sup> in the Greeks around two and a half thousand years ago and can be grossly generalized as the desire to understand the world without recourse to religion or superstition. During the period of the dominance of Christianity, Greek philosophy mingled with Christian and Jewish theology, but around the seventeenth century a philosophy which didn't depend on theology, but on reason for its foundation once again developed. This was the 'Enlightenment' and it lead to the development of science, technology, the industrial revolution and the French and American revolutions. (or War of independence in the latter) Aristocrats could no longer argue a divine right to rule. It would be difficult to see anything of greater significance to how we live and think today, unless you are living in some primitive society, which if you are reading this then you are not. You may not like the rules, laws and

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<sup>10</sup> I emphasise this because I constantly seem to be attacked for saying **all** noise is meaningless, and I am not. Most human made noise, most or all animal noise is about communication and meaning.

<sup>11</sup> I'm aware of Pragmatism, moral philosophy and others... skip this if I'm being to simplistic!

<sup>12</sup> As in 'Western Philosophy'.

conditions in which you live, but the current ideas floating around are philosophical, any thought that this is meaningless or wrong is a nihilism which is also philosophy, even deciding to not be philosophical is philosophical. From philosophy the sciences spun off, first physics, once called natural philosophy, and mathematics and logic, sociology, psychology etc. In the arts it forms the theoretical ground, even if this is an anti theoretical ground. In our brief sojourn I should mention Kant, probably the first and greatest 'modern' philosopher who wanted to avoid the sceptical doubt of Hume and gain a philosophy which could explain absolutely using reason why the world is as it is. He came up with the idea that in actual fact we can't know the world as it is, only as we perceive it, via our senses and by reason. This was an incredibly powerful idea, one which moved the nature of reality from what is out there, to what and how the human mind is and works. This focus developed through German Idealism, (Hegel) where the nature of reality could be obtained by pure thought and reason alone. The counter to this was irrationality... or Romanticism, and also towards the end of the nineteenth century the beginnings of Existentialism and Nihilism. Nietzsche having a profound influence in the arts- he saw the artist as a heroic figure. Some think him a nihilist, but that is the thing he wished to combat. He did so by imagining the most terrible truth, that life was meaningless, there was no right or wrong, God was dead and anything is justified as there was no such thing as justice. He thought artists like dictators were great men, who made the rules rather than obeyed them, and the rest of us rabble were the herd. But he went even further- humankind anyway is nothing. Given this the individual (or overman, superman) accepts his fate gladly. Obviously this relates closely to the physiological problems of life. The recent Speculative Realists have and are attempting to reverse this or replace this human centred view (in some cases!). Looking at science which doesn't seem that bothered with the human perspective in the study of cosmology and the structure of the universe, they seek to speculate about reality which is not dependent on the human or human condition. What is interesting is whereas the existentialists were totally wrapped up in this human condition the S.R. philosophers are not, even though they are heirs to this philosophy, notably of Heidegger and Husserl. Here we can see that Noise as Harsh Noise and Harsh Noise Wall though apparently deriving from Power Electronics and Industrial, Punk, Dark Metal etc. which is typically also bound to the ideas of nihilism and extremes of violence and amorality, some in HN and HNW, myself included, recognise that noise at its extreme escapes the human condition altogether.

While we are alive and fairly conscious we all have a 'world view' or Weltanschauung<sup>13</sup>, we may think its our own, its more probably an ideology given by the culture and society in which we find ourselves. Lots of people in noise it seems hate such ideas as well as philosophy, they hate anyone who points that out – which as above I said is a philosophy itself. Music, art, might express these 'world-views' and our attitudes and feelings, so also can and does noise as noise-music express and attempt to communicate some feelings about being, but at a certain extreme point even this intention can and does fail. Actually 'Noise music' is an oxymoron, (think moron- e.g. military intelligence, why, because for some the military is defined as stupid...) Music has been defined as organized sound or organized noise, which is what speech is, noise is therefore not organized, but becomes speech and music when it is organized. Once you organize noise it becomes something else. It becomes some thing. 'Thingness' is when we recognize it, we 're' 'cognize' – think of it again – as a thing. It's what we do when we cognize, think, reason. As I write this I'm trying to make you re-cognize, re think my thoughts, and I'm using language to do this. (OK badly!) When we perceive, we perceive 'things'. (if you are smart you just thought things = beings!) Well yes and no. (I did say Lets get Philosophical!) WTF or philosophy posits

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<sup>13</sup> This is just German for 'world view'- philosophers use German as its cool, nothing more. So the human condition of WTF or being thrown into the world without reason is called Dasein, a germanish word made up by Heidegger – literally 'being there'. Beings, cars, protons, coffee mugs are just beings... not 'there'...but we authentic humans are like - OMG WTF... coffee cups for Heidegger don't do that! Interestingly they do for Graham Harman. For Heidegger 'OMG WTF' singles out the authentic person. In Sartre a person who isn't OMG WTF..., is inauthentic or in bad faith. Being is terribly important, obviously! The study of 'being' its 'ology'- biology, sociology... is ontology. V cool term in philosophy. The only other cool term being (Ah! there it is again) Epistemology. The ology of knowing. So WTF is 'What' – that's knowledge or epistemology – how do you know – how are you sure (Descartes!) 'The Fuck' this being... ontology. How do you know what being IS? BTW if you think all this is pointless – OK – but did I say it wasn't! I think not. Remember I don't get (the point) because I think there isn't a point to get....

the two questions, 1. How do we know what we know (doh!) and 2. How do we know what it is, as to know what it is, (what is its being!) we first need to know what "is", is (Aghhhhhhhhh!). (This is the bit in the Matrix where you have to choose between the blue and red pill- ) So you wake up and Noise is just a version of punk- sigh! And you can go back to your job as a Microsoft employee... or...

So a guy called Kant solved the problem posed by Hume. (sort of) How do we know what 'really' is... yes that question again 'is' and 'real'... And his solution was - How can I know what really is? Kant: "You can't" You can only know things as they are for you. And by that, not your opinion, but the structures which are human, of reason, logic, time, space, causation, without which you (or I) would just be a mess. The brain sorts experience by using pre given rules, or categories into something we can deal with. Time and space, causality, may or may not really exist, but without having these inbuilt ideas we couldn't function. For example- so we see the world through the eye, which is a lens, which distorts and bends light into a picture of the world – FOR US. Just as we see the ball break the window, and say that the ball caused the window to break, 'for us'. You may have got the eye-lens 'for us', but maybe are not going with the cause or lack of 'real' cause of the broken window. OK, Kant just solves the philosophical problem set by Hume, it needn't bother you. (However he is closer to reality than you might think – events actually don't occur against a fixed space-time frame work- Einstein (again) showed that events occur in different sequences to different observers... space and time are relative...) but lets not go there- there is no need. Kant solved the philosophical problem, but at a cost. Not that many were bothered, but some were. The cost was we can never know things in themselves, only our interaction with them, our perception. Real reality is removed from us and replaced by our picture of it. The Speculative realists, for good or bad, fame and fortune..! hate this and want to get to reality itself. They see all of philosophy since Kant as a big mistake. Even the silver fox's reality is only a reality "for us". That's speculative realism. (OK, so they are slowly building up your muscles and feeding you Tasty Wheat..) The SR mob then want reality without humans. They don't want The Matrix – the Kantian fabrication that keeps everything NICE. Just as the computer creates the Matrix in The Matrix, for Kant "The Categories" in your head – in built- create the reality you and I experience. We do not experience THE REAL outside of the Categories, the real outside of The Matrix. Whether the S.R. guys can get it ("The real", "The Great Outdoors"... ) or not is interesting for me, but not important here. They are though very pissed, as it seems whilst philosophy was all about the reality of being thrown into a nihilist existence, angst and cathartic existentialism- A.K.A. - P.E. (power electronics) emo and not having a girl friend and being miserable – flunking college and broke... the sciences were boldly going back in time to a big bang 13.5 billion years ago, and into the future trillions of years, and into deep space... with stuff like string theory and Large Hadron Colliders.. and generally having a big deal of a time. I mean philosophy was like Kierkegaard who chucked his girl friend then moaned about it for ages in Danish before dying...

Sorry, distracted. This is about noise and music, OK. But looky here, what is music but "Music for Us", His Masters Voice... We are like Kierkegaard, or Morrissey just moaning about how bad the world is 'for us'. Which seems no different to P.E. and Goth, black metal emo! When they – the scientists- are thinking about dinosaurs, quarks, black holes, traveling at the speed of light... if the universe is curved, how it really began, and how it really might end... Music is then only about our sad existence, not having a girlfriend, or having a girlfriend... but not the big real of everything - oh! time for Nietzsche again...

"Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were

eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened<sup>14</sup>.”

Hmmm. So music, art isn't such a big deal. And science can think of a universe without humans – trillions of years hence – but art is just a moaning about something which in the scheme of things is nothing... and so such art is not very representative... is it?

Language and meaning...

Some see in HN and HNW, myself included, that noise at its extreme escapes the human condition altogether.

What is a sign? Everything makes signs, well anything that never made any sign would be unknowable, unrecognizable. We look at some worn stairs, chipped paintwork, a dent in the bodywork of a car, a scar on someone's arm. The tracks of birds and animals in the snow. The sound of cars and the city. The distant starlight, the signs of life, a pulse, the breath clouding a mirror. Signs can be meaningful, a track of a wolf can show a limp, the temperature of a patient is high and so indicates a fever. The ominous shadow on a lung x-ray. The feeling of pain when one is hurt, hunger, a sign one needs food, thirst... a sneeze. The creak of a door signals that it needs oiling. Then there is semiotics. Semiotics studies 'signs' and 'meaning' but there is a major, one might say 'significant', difference to the study of signs given above. The vital signs of a patient will be studied by a doctor, an animals tracks might be studied by a hunter... In semiotics the study is not of the meaning of the sign, but of 'meaning-making' – that is the deliberate making of meaning, or better, language and communication using signs. Signifiers, letters, sounds which designate a signified (a thing) not by belonging to the signified, or produced from it, but as abstract arbitrary signs, or sounds, like 'cat' or 'dog', in which letters and sounds there can be found no cattyness or doggyness. Another idea regarding communication which is related is that of a 'language game'. These 'games' are so called because they involve a set of rules that the users of the language communicate to each other with. Within language games or semiotics we can find the use of signs which use analogy and metaphor. In fact some maintain that all language is metaphor. Fires literally burn, desires do not. For our purpose we do not need to know how semiotics or language games work in detail, other than the principle of language in communication, which is that of a set of rules understood by those involved and a set of signifieds which are communicated by signifiers. This is of a different order of representation to the signs just given by any phenomena. The invention of language by humans, and from that writing, has had a profound effect on human evolution. Writing gives a written record, it allows me here to attempt to communicate specific and subtle things. Such is the significance of language that it attains a religious and magical power in human culture. God in the Old Testament makes things not by doing but by saying, 'Let there be light' etc. And the idea that certain phrases can have power, a magical spell. The mere act of saying will cause physical things to occur. And this is not so fantastic, we can read a book which makes us happy or sad, we can have erotic literature and pornography which will definitely (in some cases) cause physical changes at fairly basic biological levels. I'm taking time here as I think the difference between language and the thing itself has, and is, often glossed. A detailed written description of an event is not the same as the event. In order for the description to work we first need to know the language and its rules, and secondly, and this is important, the signs used are arbitrary. Someone who doesn't know English could not get aroused by a pornographic story in the same way as someone who does. Someone who doesn't use English could not take a shopping list to a store where no English is understood, or goods labeled in English, and successfully fulfill the list. If I want to communicate that I'm hungry the recipient needs to know what the letters "hungry" mean. Here the meaning is very different to the idea of what feeling hungry means, that I need food. The sign here is a feeling of the actuality of hunger, not an arbitrary set

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<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense'



of letters, which are different in different languages. Furthermore, as I know, using language which has rules it is possible to make mistakes and get things wrong. This is not the case with the other term that 'sign' designates. 'The cat sat on the mat.' can clearly be interpreted as being part of a language game. If someone has the image of a zebra in a pool of custard, something as gone wrong with interpretation. Wrong perhaps from the senders perspective. There is in a language game nearly always two or more taking part, even if these are the same person separated by time, a diary or a shopping list for instance. Lets call the signs we see in the world 'phenomena', and those in language, 'language games'. We of course interpret both phenomena and sentences, but in the latter is the idea of someone who is using signs to communicate something other than what the sign directly pertains to. The letters Z E B R A are not stripped, the stripes on a zebra do indicate some of its zebranness. It then becomes possible to conflate the phenomenal sign with the linguistic sign. If I now apply the language game to phenomena you might spot the mistake that is being made regarding some noise. You might not, communication can fail. The sound of thunder is the sign of a storm, some weather phenomena, or it might be the sign of the anger of the God's. The famous earthquake of 1755 in Lisbon was taken as a sign of Divine retribution by some. Voltaire though thought it proved that the world was not designed as the best possible one by a benevolent God. Many still believe that events such as these have another semiotic meaning than the mechanics of their cause, they believe they are the response from some powerful non human intelligence. Others believe that tea leaves and the cracks in burnt bones can be 'read' and understood semiotically and not just phenomenally. Ink on paper is a phenomenon, as is everything we perceive, but the patterns of ink can be deliberately made to communicate, or not. I can (attempt) to write good English to communicate, or gibberish. I can use noise to communicate, pulses of it in the case of Morse code... But without structuring noise, or ink, or letters I cannot communicate within a language game. The received phenomena may appear to be a language, but without knowing the rules it cannot be decoded, understood, and its meaning communicated. How this works, its been argued, is by the play of differences and repetitions within the organised structure. So lets finally (though I doubt any finality here) get to Art and music. Keeping things short, certainly all written art, poetry, novels, plays are using a language game. Representational drawing and painting do also, a picture is a flat plane, yet using perspective we can signify depth. Music also can convey emotions, or demonstrate complex forms. But from the end of the nineteenth century it became apparent that the communicating structures in western music were not universal, but worked within a given culture, like other language games. This occurred when music from non western sources was considered not as a primitive form, but as using different semiotics. Music could be considered the most abstract language game in art, akin to mathematics, and it's true many of its structures are very mathematical. It has because of this been considered the highest artform, but so to has poetry for different and opposite reasons. If you don't think music has or is a language game then I cant here argue the point in detail. It certainly has rules, one can be out of tune, and miss the beat. One can even fail to 'get it', when there is a something or not to get<sup>15</sup>. The subtleties of classical music and its construction using fairly complex tonal scales might be missed by some, but they are there, music is difficult to play and requires skill to do so, as it does to write.

It is now my simple contention that unstructured noise is incapable of being used in a language game without alteration to impart signification. That the alteration thus renders noise into music.

And that the producer of noise can intend not to signify, or they can intend to do so and this can fail. This makes noise not part of a language game, but a phenomena. There is then no difference in such noise regarding its communication of specifics than accidental and natural noise. Its cause is different, but its content is the same. Empty. It is of course possible to read into these signs meanings, but they are not there, or if they once were, the very form of noise destroys the coherence of the language game, if there actually was one. This is why I couldn't get noise, as either there wasn't anything there to

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<sup>15</sup> A famous example is The Concert for Bangladesh, August 1971 Madison Square Garden, where many of the audience mistook Ravi Shankar's 'groups' tuning up for an actual piece of music.

get, in the case of HN and HNW, or if there was the phenomena of unstructured noise meant that no communication – language game- could take place. This explains why the skill needed for noise is insignificant, and its rules are lax or non-existent. If any are there or intended the phenomenological nature of noise prevents their communication.

I have had this discussion many times now and there persists an argument that HN and HNW does communicate and is a language game. Whenever asked to say just what is being ‘communicated’ the answer is either missing, or it is that a human is making the noise, and intends to do so. This is a description of the phenomena, not the internal meaning, not the language. Dickens’ wrote ‘Hard Times’, and true, it is communicating his intention to write a book. Yes, but the book contains sets of meaningful signs... Hard Times as a phenomena communicates nothing different than ‘A Tale of two Cities’, Beethoven’s ninth symphony is yet another symphony – but as a symphony it has significant different internal form, significantly different to the 8<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and so on. The story of Hard Times is different to A tale of Two Cities.. very different and particular. Do the same with noise and you are making music. Language has an internal language game as well as being a phenomena, music is like that, noise isn’t. No one yet has managed to give accounts of the subject from just listening to noise work, furthermore without external clues much of HN and HNW cannot be differentiated from accidental noise which is also not a language game, though can be the sign of some phenomena. The sign of a phenomena doesn’t seem to have skill associated with it in its production, or is its production judged better or worse when applied to some rule system, as none exists. Thus whilst Rock Guitar requires skill, and rule systems can judge and compare, no such systems occur for phenomena. Any such rules are external, there is no agreed game. Again Noise in HN and HNW appears rule-less. It is Phenomena, not a language game, it is noise and not music. The Rita’s ‘Skate’, for me, is not semiologically different to ‘Thousands of Dead Gods’. Merzbow’s Bloody Sea doesn’t give any anti-whaling message in its work, only in the title and CD blurb. As I can’t tell the subject of Bloody Sea just from listening... it is not employing a language game, AKA music. So I think noise is different to music. I also think it is different as a cultural phenomenon.. requiring little or no skill. Those who see it as just a musical genre, contra Merzbow, want to de-radicalize it as being just phenomena, and make it like music some language game for their use. I suspect for psychological reasons rather than anything demonstrable. However noise as noise, noise qua noise, is not communication, is not a language game but just phenomena, like all other phenomena,.. like the world as phenomena and the universe as phenomena... which in the history of art singles noise out as being unique.

Another objection to that last proposal is that like avant garde music, noise is not just ‘phenomena’. True – abstract art might be non-representational but it has a recognizable subject, abstract paintings subject is ‘painting’, music concrete – sound/music, but contemporary noise lacks both intention, context and form in which the examination of art as art can take place, which in any case has already occurred. To repeat endlessly this experimental music is to say nothing new, and so in modernity’s terms, from which it came, is to say nothing. It once again is just phenomena.

Psychology!

So the psychological failure of noise is a part result of its intellectual and musicological failure to be ‘new’, ‘experimental’ or in anyway skilful.

“But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus *Stupid*.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus. ‘One must imagine Sisyphus happy’ is the correct quote!

There is the dichotomy between the idea expressed by Masami Akita regarding skill and those who insist noise, especially harsh noise as opposed to Harsh Noise Wall is both skillful and communicative. There is also a dissatisfaction with the apparent failure of the genre to 'move on' or 'break new ground'. I'm thinking here of such as Dominick Fernow's numerous projects and permutations of noise, and also John Olson's recent comments -

"So what they're coming out with is on the wrong side of naive and amateur. It seems like a lame attempt to get more people to gigs. Socialize the music instead of keeping it alien and abstract.

Question : *Is noise over?*

Completely, 100 percent. That's part of why I'm quitting the label. All the categories, everything has run its course. The whole solo culture of it has invented a million people playing by themselves trying to be geniuses. You're getting a million one-way conversations."

John Olson (Wolf Eyes)<sup>17</sup>

Add to that the common observation that at many noise 'gigs' performers often outnumber the audiences, and the noise 'artist' is not constrained by the normal parameters of skill and career, and the number of noise releases, several a day, should indicate a difference. A look at the Forums about noise will show this... from digital only downloads to extremely limited editions, hand made cassettes, CDs... some for sale others for trade or sale. From the fairly elite Japanese scene to a moderate European one of 'usual subjects' in the U.S.A. noise has become a fetish of consumerist unlimited production. A sign of a psychological lack and need to both be something, and somebody in a culture which alienates the outsider and the unsuccessful. Noise in America could be considered the schizophrenic antidote to U.S. Capitalism even if those producing skillless non experimental noise consider it far from that. It raises the banal and simplistic nihilisms of rampant capitalism and lack of social responsibility via the American idea of individualism to something of worth, but only a seemingly worth, like Pacific Cargo cults, it imitates the 'music industry', but in its mimicry it is empty of technique and worth. The valueless declared as genius has strong dislike for theory, and this text? The poorer the quality the more naïve the negativity and refusal to conform, the greater the noise scene conforms to a psychological phenomenon. The phenomenon of failure in a land of plenty where success in material terms is the goal is the driving force psychologically of much recent noise. The discovery of the noise genre gives an artificial value to the individual nihilisms, the idea of individual geniuses and creativity devoid of any formal criteria, in fact in spite of it. This whole phenomena anthropologically is interesting as it is philosophically, a contradiction and a failure. It achieves in this sincerity of purposeless purpose the seriousness of failure where the sly irony of post-modern art fails. It succeeds in displaying not only a pointless reality of the great outdoors but the inner banality and purposeless of any intellectualism or artistic practice. The human's ability to gain a purchase on reality is an impossibility demonstrated in this phenomena, the genius of past art is only the subjective dictates of culture and elites, this is the reality that the 'noise scene' exposes. This is why perhaps any attempt to deploy it in some form of philosophical, political programme always fails. The whole thing oscillates between outwardly claiming itself to be a joke and inwardly claiming it to be serious, and at the same time the reverse, outwardly a serious comment which inwardly is only a joke. No art has ever achieved such a schizophrenic state, and one free of a culture industry of elite galleries and concert performances. And given this inability of any achievement it continues, despite the claims to the contrary. It marks not only a technical end game, a musicological end game, but a psychological end game.

Noise as phenomena, if not music, escapes the human condition! 'Noise qua noise' is not 'noise for us' but 'noise for itself', its noise for noise. Noise occurs everywhere, in the big bang of cosmic background radiation, the random movement of sub-atomic particles, in computing, as in any attempt at communication, noise as in no organization (Deleuze's BoW -)... noise as is chaos... and in the idea of contingency. And where do we find this idea of phenomena as more than a 'for us' is in Speculative

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<sup>17</sup> [http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/crossfade/2013/12/wolf\\_eyes\\_interview\\_basel\\_miami\\_2013.php](http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/crossfade/2013/12/wolf_eyes_interview_basel_miami_2013.php)

Realism's desire to think the real, outside of the correlation between human thought and perception, to undo Kant, and get down and dirty with reality qua reality. And what is sound when sound is not for us, when its not speech, or music or language- YES it's NOISE. So though much of music and art can be considered as correlational<sup>18</sup> Noise can be considered ( I emphasize CAN) as non correlational, as just noise. Here we can now become super-smart.

Noise can and is (in the case of Merzbow, The Rita, Vomir et al) epistemologically and ontologically identical with the vast majority of reality, in it being meaningless presence and becoming, without any telos. Phew! If art ever wanted to picture reality, and not just reality for us<sup>19</sup>, but reality as it IS, it failed, no matter, because noise is more than a picture (or less!), it IS THE REAL. And even we puny humans can and have made noise as 'noise qua noise' Yey!

Well I hope someone gets this, and hopefully a small group who can see the insights that noise qua noise can give, in our inability to 'get it'... we cannot capture it, kill it and make it into a commodity, even though others can and do.

Final Apology. If I've failed its understandable. Failure seems inevitable. But here the process again becomes the incoherence of noise, the understanding of failure to be true understanding should fail, is it not required to fail.. to be... or... not to be?

“There was no longer any need for concepts like 'career' and 'skill'. I stopped playing music and went in search of an alternative.”

Final finally – if noise leaves a perceptual ringing in the ears, it leaves a conceptual confusion in the head... which is never final...

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<sup>18</sup> The speculative realist guys may say they have nothing personal against correlationism, that its perfectly valid, but I detect more than that. Anyway the correlationist view is the same as the bigot, the prejudiced who only can see from one point of view – their own!

<sup>19</sup> 'For us' is generally considered bad. Cows are meat, for us. Mountains are entertainment or sources of minerals – 'for us' ... if the 'Us' is a male then in the past and still what are women – for us? Etc. This goes way back to the idea that God created the universe for "Us". And in late capitalism that the universe is exploitable for us, and existence is the manufacture of commodities 'for us' .... get the picture?