

POP GOES REASON (Noise and Darkness)

JLIAT / James Whitehead - 2015

www.jliat.com

james@jliat.com

'Art remains loyal to humankind uniquely through its inhumanity in regard to it'

Adorno 1969
cited in Lyotard The Inhuman
– Reflections on time.



Cover picture: Detail from the demolition of the Alpha Television Studios, Birmingham.

Paper presented at:

DARK SOUND: DESTRUCTIVE POP 2015
2-DAY SYMPOSIUM THURSDAY 23 -- SATURDAY 25 APRIL
ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND THEATRE ARTS,
THE PERFORMANCE CENTRE,
FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

POP GOES REASON

Introduction:

The big picture outside of any musical genre, outside of any anthropomorphic vision or interest is that the universe is either fundamentally meaningful and purposeful, or it is not. Furthermore if the latter, the case of a universe which is essentially accidental¹ or chaotic then there is no reason at all why this universe would be amenable to reason². Such a universe is at odds not only with one which is pervaded by divine light and reason, a logos – word of God, purpose and telos, but also at odds with one as described or describable by even atheistic enlightenment thought and reason. The ‘idea’ from Greek reasoning which originated from the eidos is related to seeing (forms) which requires light, both metaphorically and literally. In an uncreated, purposeless universe, any light is brief and insignificant. This reality is dark and noisy. The psychological darkness of meaningless angst has as its binary meaning and the light of the word made flesh for us, however there is a darker darkness in which light amounts to nothing.

“the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep”

Pop Noise:

More by accident than avant garde design there is a very minor sub-genre of ‘popular’ music which originated in the 1990s which is termed ‘Noise’, whose essential feature is a lack or inability to ‘see’ or represent anything – yet alone this dark Khaos. If this noise is amenable at all to sense then it is not a vision **of** this darkness but **is its actuality**.

¹ Even “accident” might imply to much here - “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.” The Gay Science 109 - Friedrich Nietzsche.

² “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 originally infused with meaning.”

Ray Brassier, “Concepts and Objects” In The Speculative Turn Edited by Levi Bryant et. al. Melbourne, Re.press 2011 p. 59.

POP GOES REASON

This sub genre of popular? music – sometimes called noise-music, japnoise, Harsh Noise and Harsh Noise Wall is only ‘popular’ amongst a minority of practitioners, mostly a mixed bunch of amateurs who produce noise by various means. Notable amongst the genre where practitioners normally outnumber audiences, (hence a popular volk art!) are some exemplars, Merzbow (Masami Akita) The Rita (Sam McKinlay) and Vomir (Romain Perrot). In particular these three cover the wide spectrum of the genre, from Harsh Noise (HN) to Harsh Noise Wall (HNW)³. And what is very particular is they lack any outward ‘message’ which is recognizable in and as noise⁴. This represents my first – and it seems at times last – problem. Many noise ‘artists’ regard their work as expressive, of _____ (fill in the blank) and it is true that noise has its origins in, and can gloss into, Power Electronics and Industrial, whose expressive angst and cathartic outpourings are far from lacking any meaning. All of these genre’s can be regarded as ‘dark’ – but the darkness in P.E. and Industrial is anthropological, psychological, even psychotic. Both P.E. and Industrial’s darkness is of dystopian post apocalyptic industrial landscapes, alienation, cruelty, decay, disease, death and the occult. These themes also appear in Noise as ‘noise music’ – an oxymoron!, but appear only via the packaging graphics or interviewed statements. Noise in itself cannot, I will attempt to show, contain any meaning. This should be obvious and is objectively provable but that however is insufficient to prevent many ‘noise artists’ from maintaining their work is meaningful. The reasons for this clinging to meaning when in fact its lost demands more than the scope of this text. Why humans see patterns and seek meaning even where it patently does not exist. i.e. patterns of the ink blot test or divine images in clouds or natural phenomenon, is probably an evolutionary trait. Humans find meaning in

³ Harsh Noise consists of mashups of electronic and other sounds, pulses, feedback sonic screams.. normally processed through guitar effects pedals, principally distortion and overdrive to the extent that the structure is a jumble of feedback and bass sludge sounds. Harsh Noise Wall takes this one stage further in it being a continuous ‘wall’ of unchanging noise, reminiscent of a jet engine or missile launch.

⁴ “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

POP GOES REASON

the world, despite Kant's insistence that any meaning arises in the categories built into our consciousness. Kant would concur with the darkness of things in themselves...

'Noise' has also be regarded as an 'experimental music' and as having origins in the work of Pierre Schaeffer (*Musique concrète*), John Cage, Fluxus and the Futurist movement (Russolo's *Art of Noises* and his *Intonarumori*)... where such psychological darkness is missing. (In actuality what is missing in noise is anything of particular signification whatsoever.) And it is my (unpopular) idea that certain noise when it becomes 'pure' noise can convey no message whatsoever. The sound could be that of a Vomir track, or a shuttle launch, or interstellar radiation, a waterfall or tornado... there is left in the lack of any signal only the remaining tone, which if it communicates anything - it might be that there *is* something. But this something- is not "some - particular - thing"⁵, it is as described by Hegel "Being, pure being - without further determination..."⁶

⁵ "Something is already determinate" *Science of Logic* G W Hegel p 83. Noise here is indeterminate, and there are further reasons to explore the ontology of noise as being a universal beginning that is already begun... etc. in its existence both prior to and after any language and as representative of the nature of all meaningful languages which are doomed to become dead and meaningless... See Lyotard 'The Inhuman.'

⁶ a. being

Being, pure being - without further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself and also not unequal with respect to another; it has no difference within it, nor any outwardly. If any determination or content were posited in it as distinct, or if it were posited by this determination or content as distinct from an other, it would thereby fail to hold fast to its purity. It is pure indeterminateness and emptiness. - There is nothing to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or, it is only this pure empty intuiting itself. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or, it is equally only this empty thinking. Being, the indeterminate immediate is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing.

b. nothing

Nothing, pure nothingness; it is simple equality with itself, complete emptiness, complete absence of determination and content; lack of all distinction within. - In so far as mention can be made here of intuiting and thinking, it makes a difference whether something or nothing is being intuited or thought. To intuit or to think nothing has therefore a meaning; the two are distinguished and so nothing is (concretely exists) in our intuiting or thinking; or rather it is the empty intuiting and thinking itself, like pure being. - Nothing is therefore the same determination or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as what pure being is. G. W. Hegel *Science of Logic* p. 82.

POP GOES REASON

It has become a difficult task to convince even the noise community that this is the nature of noise. Which is strange as there are many respectable ideas about the essential meaningless of existence, and the chaotic, randomness of a contingent reality which could be another name for the random information-less signal which is noise. I will supply one supposedly novel 'objective' argument here of my own amongst other indications with respect to noise's darkness viz meaning. However I think it is the case more for those who see signs (in noise, in tea leaves, in the entrails of animals or in the data from SETI and CERN) to produce evidence of meaning and truth. OK someone might go out of their way to deliberately make noise, (and they do) and insist it has a meaning, (and they do) and the meaning might, for instance, relate to sexuality, or extreme right wing or left wing political ideologies... whatever!... but from the standpoint of any listener without other cues it will in terms of the information it delivers be all the same, i.e. it will deliver "Being, pure being - without further determination...". To argue that it can contain meaning, or to claim one sees a meaning is then more likely a product of the psychological nature of humans as described above - in seeing patterns in everything, Rorschach tests, The image of Christ in a damp stain on a wall, holy signs of the wrath of the Gods in thunder storms, the judgement of God in the destructions and plagues brought on humanity etc..

Here the truth or not, of all of this I do not question, I want to explore the consequences of meaningless data, "Being, pure being - without further determination..." and argue that it is 'dark'. In fact much darker than any psychological darkness as it existed before animate being could sense darkness, existed before reason and sense, and will continue to exist when reason and sense can no longer occur⁷. This marks another 'darkness' of the possible limits of knowledge, both human and artificial, furthermore this limit, beyond which is unreason, is a significant part of 'noise-theory' in that already it can be appreciated at a personal level, at my level for instance,

⁷ "The heat death of the Universe is a historically suggested ultimate fate of the universe in which the Universe has diminished to a state of no thermodynamic free energy and therefore can no longer sustain processes that consume energy (including computation and life)."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat_death_of_the_universe.. However alternative scenarios are possible -

"This makes them [Black Holes] likely end points of all entropy-increasing processes, if they are totally effective matter and energy traps. "

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy>

POP GOES REASON

much of the universe is unknowable and so dark. (Pop science is not the real explanation.) Only by some religious or pseudo-religious faith can a future become enlightening..... Such a belief is tautological in that it supposes an understanding which provides a reason or reasons.

Darkness and unreason:

Darkness and unreason go together, within the narrow bandwidth of sound, and all other signifying media and bandwidths, noise signifies nothing. Nothing other than Hegel's "Being, pure being - without further determination..." which immediately becomes "Nothing, pure nothingness; it is simple equality with itself, complete emptiness, complete absence of determination and content; lack of all distinction within." ⁸

This 'pure' nihilism of noise - represents, or better IS the actuality of an un-meaningful and non-purposeful universe. The idea of structuring noise via punk, rap or metal or anything else denies this and gives us a meaningful and purposeful universe, even if this is the psychological need to communicate the purposelessness of reality, this is a purpose, to communicate the idea of Nihilism is an act of saying 'something'- as opposed to saying something else, it is **determined**. So maybe these expressions of Nihilism are self defeating and contradictory. But the fact of noise, pure noise outside of any reason does exist and the inability to differentiate that noise from other noise which may be intended means they are one and the same - logically at least⁹. We of course are always free to be irrational!

Noise, sound, can be useful, noise can be put to the service of making meaning, giving pleasure, etc. just as smoke can make signals... etc. but the remarkable thing was, perhaps almost by accident, a pop culture sub-genre at some moment became the most significant art form - in the expression of THE REAL. As THE REAL which is not of a purposeful, created world made for the enjoyment of man...or for any other reason. This Noise does not signify this reality, it was and is in effect that reality itself. And it is this reality for the very reason that it cannot merely be a part of this reality, for the reality of pure being is indeterminate, has no distinct features or parts...

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Identity of Indiscernibles is a principle of analytic ontology first explicitly formulated by Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Section 9 (Loemker 1969: 308). It states that no two distinct things exactly resemble each other. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

POP GOES REASON

that IT IS THE REAL.

So why Dark:

'Dark' might be a metaphor for un-reason, however it also seems to be a fundamental property of the physical universe as well. This may prove instructive, especially given the recent interest in 'The Real' from certain philosophers¹⁰. Philosophy is the "love of knowledge, pursuit of wisdom"- from which to know we trace, "I know;" Greek oida, Doric woida "I know," idein "to see;" Old Irish fis "vision," find "white,"... " to know, perceive" viz - to see. To see is to need light, which is associated with meaning, to throw light on the matter, to find truth, knowledge and wisdom- "Do you **SEE** what I mean" - and light has long been employed as such in mythology, religion and in common usage.

Apollo is the god of light and the sun, truth and prophecy, healing, music, poetry- Dionysus is the god associated with chaos, the god of wine and ecstasy.. frenzy or madness, of women - the maenads- tearing apart animals--and sometimes tearing men apart -and devouring the raw flesh... it is the Darkness of Unknowing that Camille Paglia¹¹ writes about, the Apollonian and Dionysian in *Sexual Personae*, a concept borrowed from Nietzsche. For Paglia, the Apollonian is light and structured whilst the Dionysian is dark and Chthonic. (Underground, earth mother... also a Taiwanese metal band, formed in 1995!)

The Chthonic (Dionysian) is associated with females, wild/chaotic nature, and unconstrained sex/procreation. In contrast, the Apollonian is associated with males, clarity, celibacy and/or homosexuality, rationality/reason, and solidity, along with the goal of oriented progress: "Everything great in western civilization comes from struggle against our origins."¹²

¹⁰These are the 'Speculative Realists' - Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux amongst others - who now may not enjoy this title... but who take an interest in a type of Reality more than previous 'continental' thinkers.

¹¹ Paglia, Camille (1990), *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickson*, London: Yale University Press.

¹² *ibid.* p. 40.

POP GOES REASON

There is more to this idea of the gender of noise, despite admittedly its popular adherents might be unreasonable, they are also predominantly male and in cases extreme misogynists.

"Noise (n.) early 13c., "loud outcry, clamor, shouting," from Old French noise "din", disturbance, uproar, brawl" (11c., in modern French only in phrase chercher noise "to pick a quarrel"), also "rumor, report, news," apparently from Latin nausea "disgust, annoyance, discomfort, " literally "seasickness" (see nausea)."

Another theory traces the Old French word to Latin noxia "hurting, injury, damage." OED considers that "the sense of the word is against both suggestions," but nausea could have developed a sense in Vulgar Latin of "unpleasant situation, noise, quarrel" (compare Old Provençal nauza "noise, quarrel"). Meaning "loud or unpleasant sound" is from c.1300.

Replaced native gedyn (see din)."

Here again we see the two threads of noise, the anthropomorphic subjective 'discomfort' and another idea less so in the origins of "din".

*"din (n.) Old English dyne (n.), dynian (v.), from Proto-Germanic *duniz*

(cognates: Old Norse dynr, Danish don, Middle Low German don "noise"),

*from PIE root *dwen- "to make noise" (cognates: Sanskrit dhuni "roaring, a torrent").*

before 900; Middle English din (e) (noun), Old English dyne, dynn; cognate with Old Norse dynr 'noise', Old High German tuni, Sanskrit dhuni 'roaring'"¹³

The roaring torrent is not a human sound as such – but an example of Harsh Noise or even Harsh Noise Wall.

"...and his voice as the sound of many waters."¹⁴

¹³ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=noise>

¹⁴ The Book of Revelation, Chapter 1 The voice of The Son of Man...

POP GOES REASON

And just to follow this tangent a little further, but not here in the detail it perhaps deserves...

"A dhuni is (according to the Indian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc.) a sacred site represented as a cleft in the ground. This cleft is emblematic of the yoni or female vulva and generative organ.- A dhuni therefore represents a site of worship dedicated to Shakti.

"The etymology of the word Dhuni is connected with the Sanskrit root dhvan, to dun or to din. Sayana explains it by bending or shaking, and Theodor Benfey, too, translates it by to shatter.

dhuni adj. roaring

dhuni adj. boisterous

dhuni adj. sounding

dhuni f. river

dhuni f. agitation

dhuni f. shaking

dhuni f. river

Shakti - meaning "Power" or "empowerment," is the primordial cosmic energy and represents the dynamic forces that are thought to move through the entire universe in Hinduism.

Shakti responsible for creation, it is also the agent of all change. Shakti is cosmic existence as well as liberation, its most significant form being the Kundalini Shakti, a mysterious psychospiritual force. Shakti exists in a state of svātantrya, dependence on no one, being interdependent with the entire universe.

Kundalini has been called an unconscious, instinctive or libidinal force."¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhuni>

POP GOES REASON

Getting physical:

If we look at modern cosmology- one which detects the distant noise of the universe's expansion we find that the universe is 95% dark matter and dark energy - *being interdependent with the entire* [Visible] universe. A cosmology whose structure has moved from a universe with man at its centre to progressively less and less anthropomorphic realities until currently even a single universe - for us - is in question. And what follows from this is more than some problem in philosophy and the humanities.

A terrible dark idea in the arts is that art is not special, a terrible idea is that humanity is not special ¹⁶, even in science the 'not being special' is a terrible and dangerous idea.

*"A dangerous idea - [is] we live in a multiverse... it leads to a depressing end to science. What is the point of exploring further the randomly chosen physical properties in our tiny corner of the multiverse if most of the universe is so different? This is a dangerous idea I am simply unwilling to contemplate."*¹⁷

Some may see the brutality of noise as something to gain a pleasure from or as a mark of individuality. That I think misses the point completely and renders noise as just one more music. And this point is one that puts the human into perspective. A noise as cosmic noise, for and in itself is noise qua noise. And noise and the cosmos as unthinking inanimate matter is far greater a reality than our negligible existence in comparison. We are little or nothing, whereas the cosmos and our knowledge of it at such extremes is complex- though without any real practical use. The acquisition of such knowledge can be criticized as idle curiosity and a waste of resources, it can

¹⁶ "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." Nietzsche 'On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense'

¹⁷ Paul Steinhardt Albert Einstein Professor of Science Princeton university.

POP GOES REASON

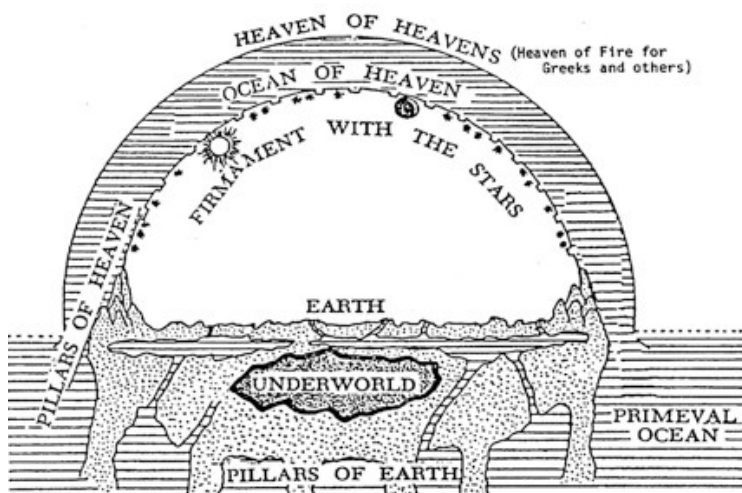
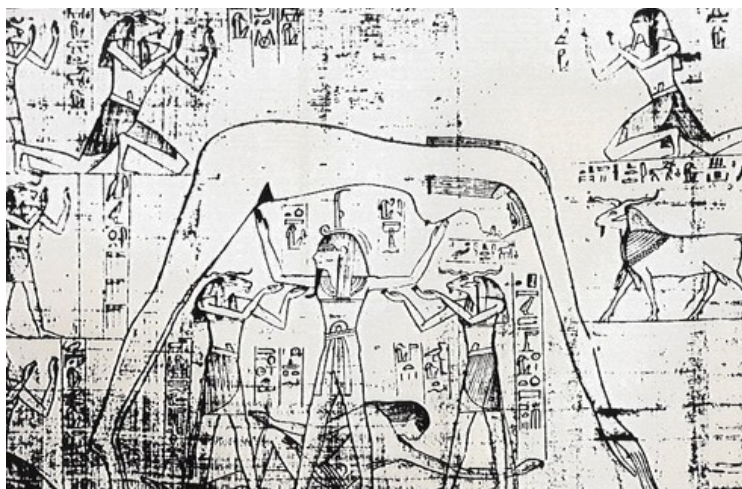
also contextualize our situation, it, the cosmos, is a big unfriendly ocean and not a benign goldfish bowl. Music is vibrations in Air, with which global warming will alter! That is nothing of a major consequence however. Certain vibrations in a mixture of nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide on a small planet which orbits an average star in one of many millions of galaxies within a universe which we now assume this material accounts for less than 1%, this is ordinarily what music is thought to be. Thus music can hardly be representative of Reality, and of course music's very rarity makes it of great value - for humans. Just as the insignificant amounts of those gases are of great value - for us humans. Global warming is a political event in its significance, as a cosmological event it is irrelevant in the extreme. Noise on this scale raises political issues in it's a-political ontology. A noise-artist without reference to the above cannot in their humanity escape the polis of being political. An individuals a-political attitude is a political attitude - noise qua noise is ontologically a-political because of - for it - the irrelevance is humanity. This is a reciprocity of irrelevance- noise qua noise is irrelevant - for humanity- humanity is irrelevant to noise-qua noise - that is to/for the cosmos & the real. We have an ontological darkness in noise.

If the real is relevant to us and for us- qua Meillassoux¹⁸ and most religions- and those who believe in an anthropic universe¹⁹ we might ask why the apparent waste of 99.9999999999...% of space, time and matter just to support human life? (The earth being created to manifest a single microbe is more understandable.) Noise Theory does engage us in such politics as it splits the Real from our relevance. Again this is yet another issue to emerge out of the darkness...

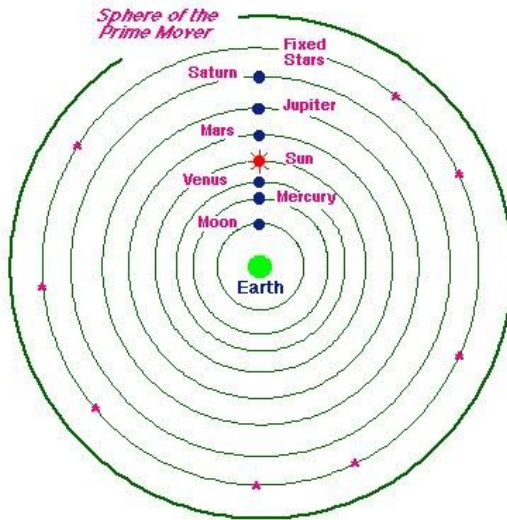
¹⁸ Despite his ideas regarding Correlationism, recently Meillassoux now hopes for a future deity arising out of his contingency to bring about justice to the dead.

¹⁹ Barrow, John D.; Tipler, Frank J. (1988). *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*. Oxford University Press.

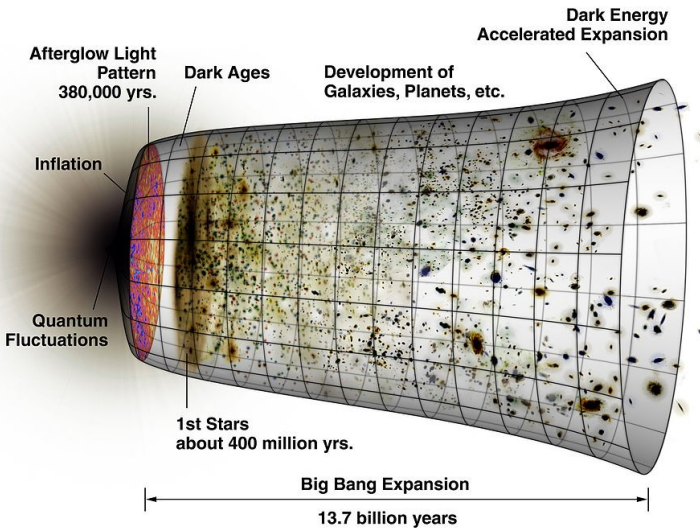
POP GOES REASON



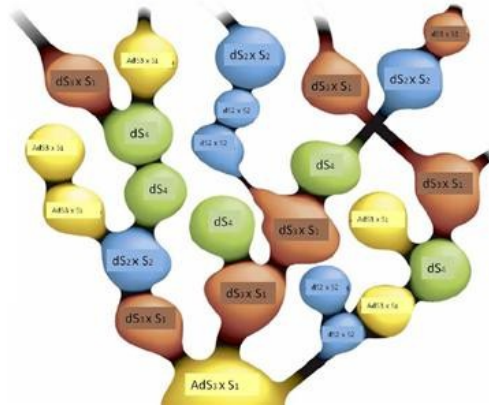
POP GOES REASON



As of 2014



POP GOES REASON



Now keep in mind that noise is posited in this text as not a sub genre of popular music but something of meta cosmological phenomenon which can account for everything.

The significant function of noise theory is rather than to move our focus from the human, perhaps a Kantian impossibility, is to effectuate a removal of an inwards foci. Rather than singing songs, even angst ridden and nihilistic ones, around our little camp fire we can if we wish turn around and experience the reality of darkness outside, in the real wide-world. We might not want to do this, we may not like this, but if we want an art which is involved with the real qua real, we can do so²².

Getting philosophical:

Within speculative philosophy, as mentioned above, we can identify a group who have sort to think of objects not under the auspices of any science but by virtue of a new metaphysics, examples being Speculative Realism, Object Oriented Philosophy and Object Oriented Ontology. Here objects are 'explored' 'metaphysically' as things in themselves, as an attempt to philosophise beyond the Kantian prohibition and yet avoid Hegelian Idealism. However 'reason' (and its light) is still retained though this presents a problem and such philosophies seem at times to dance on the very edge of rationality as if to escape the logic of mathematics and the physical sciences. It is of course 'their' problem, one which some like

²² This is nothing other than a reverse of Plato's cave analogy in which reality is not the reasonableness of daylight, but dark and un-reasonable.

POP GOES REASON

Graham Harman see mitigated by aesthetics!

It is interesting in the case of Harman that for him objects withdraw from us and from themselves, and he has described this reality in terms of darkness and noiseIn *Guerrilla Metaphysics*²³ he writes of

*“muffled objects hovering at the fringes of our attention”... Black noise is the “object like status of the clouds of qualities surrounding... an object...Black noise is the contiguity interior to objects. It is black as it is the “obscuring fluctuation” of the object and noisy because it is “some thing audible” It is the result that “objects belong to each other and fail to do so... separation with a unity” . Black noise is one world level of engagement that has been solidified. “TIME is black noise”.*²⁴

A Reality of Blackness which also appears in the work of François Laruelle where the theme of Philosophy’s pushing back the darkness such as in Plato’s Cave is reworked- “The problem is philosophy is *not dark enough*.”²⁵

Le noir univers est l'opacité du réel ou la « couleur » qui le rend invisible. Aucune lumière n'a jamais vu le noir univers. Noir est antérieur à l'absence de lumière, que cette absence soit l'ombre où elle s'éteint, qu'elle soit son néant ou son positif contraire. Le noir univers n'est pas une lumière négative.

The black universe is the opacity of the real or the “color” that renders it invisible. No light has ever seen the black universe. Black is anterior to the absence of light, whether this absence be the shadows that extinguish it, whether it be it nothingness or its positive opposite. The black universe is not a negative light.

Voyez noir! Non que tous vos soleils soient tombées--ils sont déjà revenus, un peu plus pâles--, mais Noir est la « couleur » qui tombe éternellement de l'Univers sur votre Terre.

²³ *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (2005)

²⁴ <https://avoidingthevoid.wordpress.com/dictionary-of-concepts-for-graham-harmans-object-oriented-philosophy-draft-work-in-progress/>

²⁵ Alexander R. Galloway Laruelle, *Against the Digital*, University of Minnesota Press 2014. p.134 (A chapter titled ‘The Black Universe’)

POP GOES REASON

*See black! Not that all your suns have fallen-- they have since reappeared, only slightly dimmer--but Black is the "color" that falls eternally from the Universe onto your Earth.*²⁶

Laruelle is not considered part of the Speculative Realist 'movement' but is associated with it by virtue of Ray Brassier's use of Non-philosophy (Non-Standard Philosophy) in *Nihil Unbound* – another dark text! Brassier is also associated with Noise in collaborations with Mattin and has written on the subject. "Noise has no such epistemic valence – it does not yield the sort of cognitive information that provides the basis for true or false judgments"²⁷

Mattin - from http://www.mattin.org/essays/THESES_ON_NOISE.html

"What the fuck is Noise?"

Precisely because of its indeterminacy noise is the most sensuous human activity / practice. To try to fix it or to make it a genre is as fucked up as believing in democracy.

To say "this is good Noise" or "that is bad Noise" is to miss the point.

*Noise without meaning nor finality is revolutionary as long as it does not support anything or anybody..."*²⁸

This takes noise into the political domain rather than the metaphysical, yet its lack, its darkness is still even in these cases being utilized. The success or failure of such utilization is not an essential part of our concern here, just the very dark nature of noise is, however I think this opacity makes it more useless than useful. For instance Boyd Rice is a Neo-Nazi, and is also considered by some a noise 'artist'. Rather than noise being of some use, it is of any use, its darkness is so dark that it consumes anyone and anything

²⁶ François Laruelle "Du noir univers: dans les fondations humaines de la couleur,"
Translated by Miguel Abreu in the catalogue Hyun Soo Choi: *Seven Large-Scale Paintings* (New York: Thread Waxing Space, 1991)

²⁷ <http://ny-web.be/transitzone/against-aesthetics-noise.html> See also
http://www.toliveandshaveinla.com/genre_is_obsolete_brassier.pdf

²⁸ See also *Anti-Copyright: why improvisation and noise run against the idea of intellectual property* published in the book *Noise and Capitalism* (Edited by Mattin & Anthony Iles)

POP GOES REASON

who engages with it. I think noise as such, noise qua noise is far more dark and dangerous than those who seek to utilize it know. In reading such philosophies- especially Laruelle's I for one tend to get lost and confused in the terminologies and performativities of the texts, dark themselves for me!

So keep it simple?

Noise is like a Polar Bear! That is simple! Greg Chaitin's²⁹ Polar Bear!

"Its like having a Polar Bear as a pet, you've grown up together, he's a wonderful pet, he's big, he's fast, he plays in the snow beautifully, but there is always the chance one day that he will get annoyed with you and - erm - bite off your head! So we are playing with fire I think."

This is from the BBC Horizon program 'Infinity and Beyond' but the analogy is a good one I think, in its simplicity!

What is more significant for us here is not only the blackness of Reality, but that this reality is sort by the Speculative Realists to be a reality independent of us, independent of human subjectivity. I will argue that this 'real' is beyond us and black, just as noise exists independently of our subjectivity and is essentially dark. The naivety of the noise 'artist' in the accidental stumbling out of subjective angst and into what Quentin Meillassoux calls 'The Great Outdoors' is what for me is the most important feature of noise. The Great Outdoors being the space enjoyed by the Scientific and Mathematical views of reality, an objective reality posited as existing independent of humanity. (Chaitin's Polar Bear!)

At this other extreme of scientific objectivity Max Tegmark³⁰ (et. al.) sees

²⁹ Talking about Infinity - Chaitin has also produced another variant of Gödel's limit to the knowable... mapping the dark outside of knowledge? And his version (another being Turing's Halting problem) is the simplest for me to follow. Imagine a program to compress files, like JPEG or Zip files. Is there anyway of knowing that the current 'best' will remain so. That somebody someday wont create a better one, which compacts things even smaller. We can never be sure. And all theories of the World - of anything! - are just the same, we can never be sure if we have the final theory. That a better more comprehensive and compact theory wont one day be thought. Furthermore this territory of what we don't know- is opaque and totally dark.

³⁰ Max Erik Tegmark is a professor of cosmology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author of Our Mathematical Universe (2014).

POP GOES REASON

reality as being fundamentally not **just** describable by mathematics but **as being mathematics itself**. This gets very complex, and mathematics we believe is in itself incomplete³¹. Tegmark also has a problem with the continuum³² and Real Numbers!

Perhaps both Philosopher and Scientist will acquire an enlightenment in which there can never be any doubt, no longer uncertainty or darkness. I see such a state of affairs as not a practice anymore but an end to practice. Moreover such a state of affairs is far removed from the 'popular' - polis - of the noise artist and noise theoretician, for if the universe is at some point capable of being understood, I for one know that it is for me not the case, my enlightenment was that noise offers the truth that I will be eternally in the dark. So we will 'keep it simple stupid'...

The thing about darkness is you just cant figure it out, though you can experience it. The Correlationist error of a philosophy dependent on the human subject can be used as a critique of art and aesthetics and I have identified the genre of noise as one such potential strategy for something not dependent on any correlation, or any thing. Noise, unlike music, has an ontology which is not based in any human subject - musical / object relationship. Noise, in nature, has been around for at least 13.5 billion years and echoes of the cosmos will continue into whatever the final fate of the universe becomes in trillions of years time³³.

The bifurcate nature of noise is dark, only one is far more dark than the other. If the darkness of P.E. (Power Electronics) is dark, the darkness of noise as noise qua noise is infinitely darker, and objectively so. Here is another point of departure- or "emblematic cleft"...

³¹ Yes! Gödel!

³² In the mathematical field of set theory **continuum** means the Real Numbers or the corresponding (infinite) Cardinal Number \mathfrak{C} . It is known that the cardinality \mathfrak{C} is

larger than the smallest infinity, namely \aleph_0 . Ugh! What is obviously not known or is knowable is the actual number! Here if you like the mathematical Limit has within it a darkness of inaccessibility.

³³ Long after the passing of noise artists, philosophers and mathematicians...

POP GOES REASON

Being pedantic I'll use the dictionary definition

noise

(noiz)

n.

1.

a. Sound or a sound that is loud, unpleasant, unexpected, or undesired.

b. Sound or a sound of any kind: The only noise was the wind in the pines.

2. A loud outcry or commotion: the noise of the mob; a lot of noise over the new law.

3. Physics A disturbance, especially a random and persistent disturbance, that obscures or reduces the clarity of a signal.

4. Computers Irrelevant or meaningless data.

5. Informal

a. A complaint or protest.

b. Rumor; talk.

c. noises Remarks or actions intended to convey a specific impression or to attract attention: "The U.S. is making appropriately friendly noises to the new Socialist Government" (Flora Lewis).

tr.v. noised, nois ing, nois'es

To spread the rumor or report of.³⁴

So 1. is subjective. But then in that case Mozart can be considered noise - any music- any sound to anyone. So not a good or useful definition. And one which only relates noise to sound - and noise is not just sound³⁵.... so that also rules out 2.

3 and 4 provide objective definitions. A good place to start then - unless we are not that bothered with understanding what noise is- which is reasonable as things can get a little pedantic... certainly for the more 'sensitive' human noise artist... But again there is more than just a gloom in this pedantry, there is a deeper inhuman darkness...

So taking tools and methods from 3 and 4 we can see that the noise of Merzbow and the likes can be clearly and objectively defined as noise - and noise as such has no signal - cannot signify!

³⁴ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/noise>

³⁵ Noise occurs also in vision - 'snow' on analogue T.V.s and across the entire electromagnetic spectrum...

POP GOES REASON

Nonsense to prove nonsense:

‘Standard deviation’ is a statistical method widely used in science and data analysis. It is used for measuring confidence in data sets as well as having other functions. Confidence in these data sets as being meaningful and of value. Though somewhat complex to non mathematicians and those not concerned with statistical analysis – and I include myself here - the principle is fairly simple. Standard deviation measures not the average (the mean) of a dataset but the spread of data around this mean. This supplies the idea of “confidence” – if the standard deviation is low then the data clusters around a mean (average), whereas if it is high it is evenly spread out across the range of possible results, it is more random. A low standard deviation indicates that there is some structure, and so possibly meaning which is of value, a high standard deviation the opposite.

For example – a data stream might carry numbers from 1 through 10. Here are two streams of data.

4 6 7 5 6 4 6 5 6 5

9 2 3 4 10 5 6 1 7 8

The average of these two streams is 5.4 and 5.5 respectively.
The standard deviation is 0.97 and 3.03.

The first dataset seems to have a ‘fiveness’ about it, the second seems arbitrary. In other words the first data set seems to provide us with information- it has a ‘message’ – the second set has no information, no message and is termed – ‘noise’. The higher the standard deviation indicates a more ‘noisy’ data stream. At extreme levels no coherent ‘message’ can be found – the signal is random, chaotic, noise. It follows that random data will have a greater standard deviation, as it is not related to anything particular within the dataset or itself.

The second measurement methodology is Signal-to-Noise Ratio.

“Signal-to-noise ratio is also called SNR or S/N, is defined as the ratio of signal power to the noise power corrupting the signal. The Signal to Noise Ratio (SNR) is the defining factor when it comes to quality of measurement. A high SNR guarantees clear acquisitions with low distortions and artifacts

POP GOES REASON

caused by noise. The better your SNR, the better the signal stands out, the better the quality of your signals, and the better your ability to get the results you desire. SNR measurement is commonly used in the field of science and engineering. A ratio higher than 1:1 indicates more signal than noise. While SNR is commonly quoted for electrical signals, it can be applied to any form of signal."³⁶ This in statistical terms is as difficult as we need to get. But even so I have been criticized by both the artistic community for attempting to examine an artform in such crude terms, and by members of the scientific community for misappropriating the methodology, though neither have provided much in support of their criticisms.

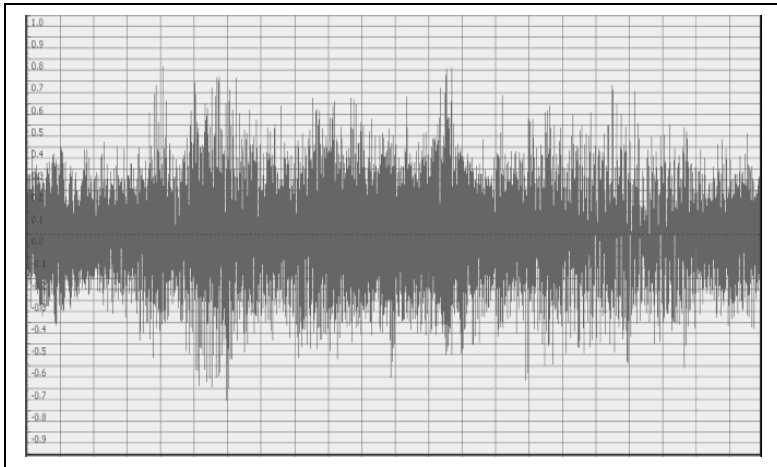
Computers and the Sound of Music:

When sound (or anything) is recorded digitally it is rendered into numbers. In the case of computers - binary numbers- in the case of sound on CDs and other digital devices various forms of binary representation, MP3, PCM etc.. PCM³⁷ is used for CDs and it is a relatively simple method. The sound wave is sampled at periodic intervals - very short - and a number generated, this set of numbers effectively 'plots' the shape of the wave numerically. Here is a PCM sample (A short sample from Mozart's Symphony #40) loaded into a program so the sound waves can be 'seen'.

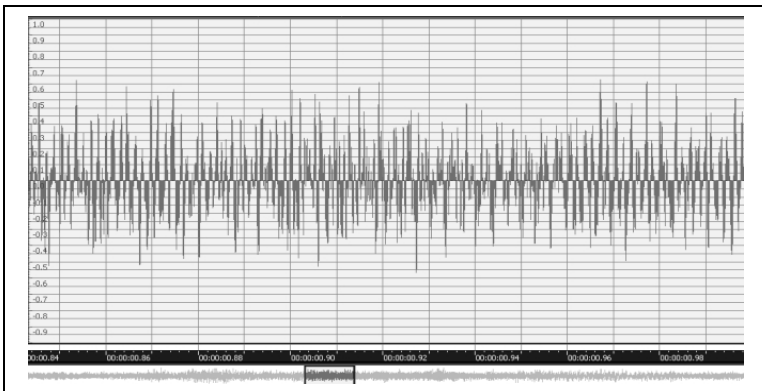
³⁶ <http://ncalculators.com/statistics/signal-noise-ratio-calculation.htm>

³⁷ "Pulse-code modulation (PCM) is a method used to digitally represent sampled analog signals. It is the standard form of digital audio in computers, Compact Discs, digital telephony and other digital audio applications. In a PCM stream, the amplitude of the analogue signal is sampled regularly at uniform intervals, and each sample is quantized to the nearest value within a range of digital steps." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulse-code_modulation

POP GOES REASON

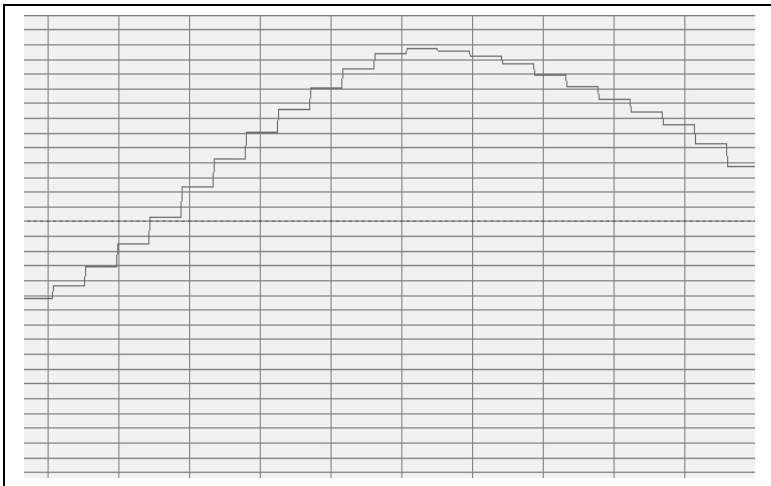
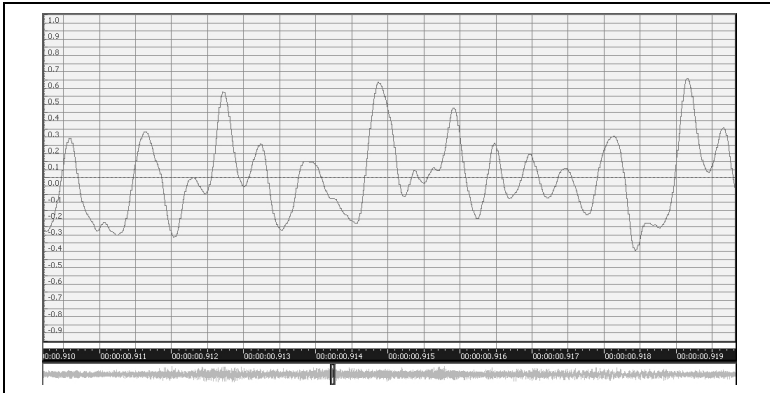


Each sample is 'taken' once every $1/44100$ of a second. Above is just two seconds of sound.



As we 'zoom' in, how the sound is captured in PCM data can be seen.

POP GOES REASON



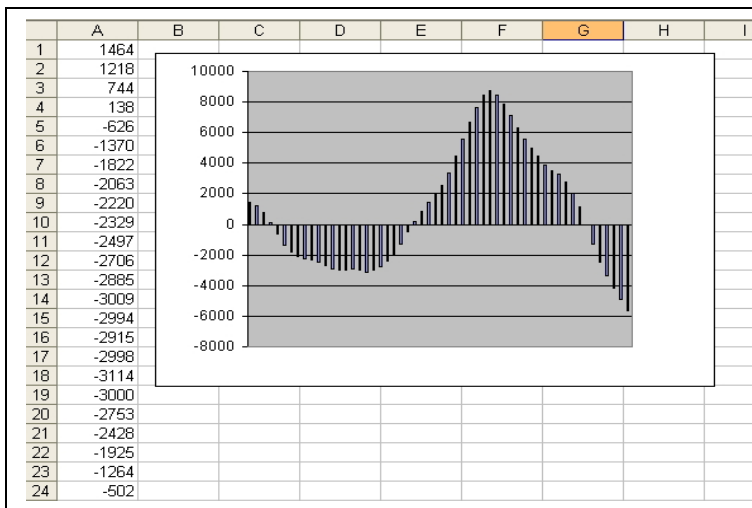
Above shows that the smooth waves are in fact made of discrete steps. Each step represents $1/44100$ of a second.

POP GOES REASON

The data (numbers) in decimal notation looks like this:

1464
1218
744
138
-626
-1370
-1822
-2063
-2220
-2329
-2497
-2706
-2885
-3009
-2994
-2915
-2998
-3114
-3000
-2753
-2428
-1925
-1264
-502

If we plot these in an Excel spreadsheet the wave shape can once again be seen.



We now have some tools for measuring data, and a way of visualizing sound (including music) as numerical data. We can then process the sound files as numbers in Excel and we can use its Standard Deviation function (Stdev) as well as others to build up data for various types of sounds.

POP GOES REASON

Historical Background:

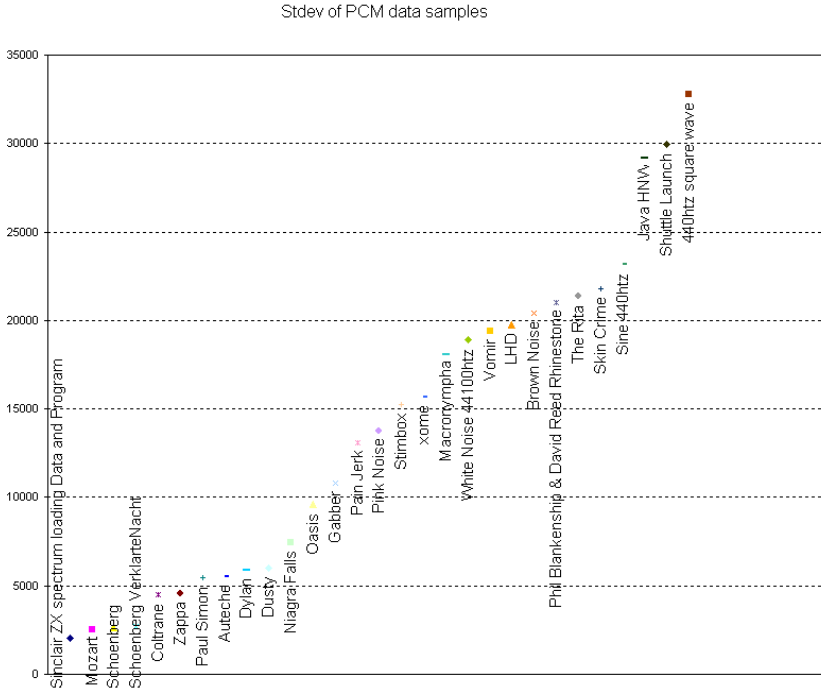
I have previously been working with sound generation using pure numerical data and almost by serendipity loaded a few samples of sound files into Excel and calculated the standard deviations. The files were ones I had to hand, a piece of Mozart, some popular music from a mp3 player and 'noise'. Some of the noise 'natural' others from 'noise' 'artists'. To my surprise the correlation between a high standard deviation and noisy recordings was immediately obvious and it was apparent that 'music' did have lower values than that of the noise samples, which would in data communications indicate a signal being present rather than noise. For example scanning a FM radio it is obvious for humans but also for the electronics which scans for transmissions, what is a signal being broadcast by a radio station and what is just static or noise. (this static is made of the random motion of electrons and outside interference – some of which is cosmic radiation including in this the noise of stellar objects...)

The final example in this case was that of the "sound" of a Sinclair Spectrum program on cassette tape when loading,³⁸ which gave another interesting result. It was argued that this sound was "noisy" and a high standard deviation was predicted despite the fact that the data was extremely organised, it being computer code. The sound was sampled, converted into numeric data and over several runs an average produced a very low standard deviation which indicated a highly organised data stream. Perhaps the data which was organised, and to some listeners was recognisably so, to the taste of others was sufficiently unlike traditional western music to be unpleasant, and so thought of as noise. The presentation of the sound may alter in its superficial form but in order for it to carry information it must have structure.

³⁸ Early personal computers stored data and program code on audio cassette tape, this was done by modulating the binary data into sound, pitches of different values representing the zeros and ones. Not only did you hear this on saving and loading, the audio tapes were just that, you could play them on any cassette tape player and 'hear' the data and programs as 'noisy?!' sounds. Obviously these sounds represented not noise at all but very determined structures of computer data and code. The graph 'appears' to 'detect' this fact! despite subjective responses to the opposite.

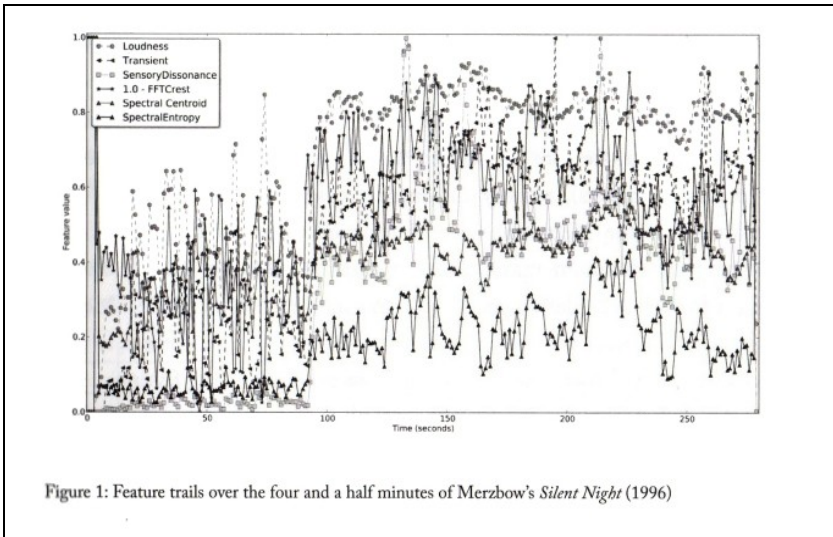
POP GOES REASON

Here is the original graph.



Despite much argumentation a clear correlation seems to exist between the Standard Deviation of a sound sample and its noisiness - or lack of meaningful data. In order to supplement this first graph which was quite ad hoc other data sets from a more rigours methodology and using not only Standard Deviation but also the Signal to Noise Ratio's of the sample data were produced. The results concur with this original graph. Furthermore I have since been made aware of the work of Nick Collins using far more sophisticated techniques which also concur with the rather simplistic methodology used above.

POP GOES REASON



Nick Collins using Supercollider- see Noise in and as Music Aaron Cassidy & Aaron Einbond Eds. P.79 University of Huddersfield Press 2013.

Towards a conclusion:

Any decision to make noise without structures has no effect on its information content, whatever the motivations for making noise, from whatever source – animate or inanimate – noise cannot contain information. Noise which is pure noise and not ‘contaminated’ by structure- which is the exploitation of noise, which gives it meaning and so value – and so the possibility of meaning, has no meaning. That some noise within the noise community has a value is odd, and was in my first encounter with noise problematic. I just ‘didn’t get it’, then I realised ‘there was nothing to get’!

Outside of our scope here, but aesthetics and beauty as a psychological object can be the inverse of given taste, or the perverse of the norm. It is also far from fixed. Mountains like oceans were once thought ugly, sunsets we now think beautiful I don’t think would be seem so to primitive humans in a wilderness of nocturnal predators. ... But noise is more than human taste or fancy, more than human creativity and imagination. (more or less) Deliberate or accidental – pure noise is null information. It has no parts- it

POP GOES REASON

is non differentiated being – which in Hegelian terms immediately becomes non differentiated nothing. Thus Noise and ‘Silence’ – a complete lack – is not the same but in Hegel’s dialectical terms is identical with its complete excess- in noise- or complete lack - silence. This marks the beginning of Hegel’s dialectic, and a move towards things, becoming, and eventually the Absolute³⁹. AKA The exploitation and commoditization of noise/ being.

The logic that Hegel exploits is reasonable⁴⁰, and he is after all building a structure – philosophy is the love of wisdom, or insight... and its opposite is folly – stultiloquence – AKA Babble. Now I’m in no position to attack philosophy, even if its adherents are foolish lovers, and I think they are not. If Philosophy seeks the (hidden) meanings of the world, as does science, noise certainly can perform no such task. Noise utilized as art or by an art form can (and does) achieve the hidden in darkness, in the non-meaning of the world.

I’ve used sense to prove that noise is senseless, or proved that any attempt at making sense is subject to the possibility of failure.... As elsewhere I maintain that noise theory is in the end, or should be, self-defeating.

³⁹ “If the world had a goal, it must have been reached. If there were for it some unintended final state, this also must have been reached. If it were in any way capable of a pausing and becoming fixed, of "being, " then all becoming would long since have come to an end, along with all thinking, all "spirit." The fact of "spirit" as a form of becoming proves that the world has no goal, no final state, and is incapable of being.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 1062

“That a state of equilibrium is never reached proves that it is not possible. But in an indefinite space it would have to have been reached. Likewise in a spherical space. The shape of space must be the cause of eternal movement, and ultimately of all "imperfection.” “

Ibid – 1064

⁴⁰ “Reason is the capacity for consciously making sense of things, applying logic, for establishing and verifying facts, and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs based on new or existing information. It is closely associated with such characteristically human activities as philosophy, science, language, mathematics, and art, and is normally considered to be a definitive characteristic of human nature.” – Wiki

POP GOES REASON

The idea of success and reason – logic in achieving a truth or the truth itself is questionable – or can be not so much disputed as disrupted by what I call noise theory (a self defeating non-theoretical practice)... which is only an image of THE REAL⁴¹.

Parting shots:

“dark (n.) early 13c., from dark (adj.). Figurative in the dark "ignorant" first recorded 1670s”

“To recognize untruth as a condition of life: that, to be sure, means to resist customary value-sentiments in a dangerous fashion; and a philosophy which ventures to do so places itself, by that act alone, beyond good and evil.”⁴²

The bulwark of science is the logic of mathematics and its ability to do this-

⁴¹ “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 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!” Ibid – 1067

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

POP GOES REASON

$$2 + 2 = 4$$

However practically wonderful this may be, more than the invention of fire, the wheel or the iphone in it lies one deep problem, one idea that is fatal. It marks a completeness, an Alpha and Omega. And once completed - whatever it is- no beginning can be made- not without recourse to something outside. (god)

If a process is completable given an infinity it will be completed. And such a completion would as a proportion of infinity be nothing. Noise as incompleteable nothing, is noise as constant failure to express, to muse(ic), to convey, to work to have meaning and value.

The universe is not describable in mathematics because the universe exists and persists. This is another of my ridiculous and erroneous claims for noise.

Given that $2 + 2 = 4$

The correct result! Is singular and completed.

The incorrect results are however infinite - here-

$$2 + 1 = 4$$

$$2 + 3 = 4$$

$$2 + 4 = 4$$

$$2 + 5 = 4$$

$$2 + 6 = 4$$

....

$$2 + \infty = 4$$

...

Can proceed and will proceed forever.

Getting it wrong - stupid is not just the pre-text for a small sub-genre of popular music, or the cul-de-sac of high modernity, but the actuality of the world. The actuality of a future even if this is infinite...

Heidegger uses *aletheia*⁴³ in describing a work of art, not a raw truth but a poetic unconcealment. However as a point of departure from Heidegger's

⁴³ He also sees all of western philosophy - excluding his own! - as a forgetting of this unconcealed truth of the Greeks...

POP GOES REASON

programme it might be better now to keep things in the dark? Unconcealment has become ubiquitous and so pornographic. Have you not read the news today?

And Heidegger's programme is the desire for truth, albeit a non-technological poetic truth, he still wants a revelation, a knowing, a thinking, deciding, judging, enlightenment...

*"In Classical Greek, the word lethe literally means "oblivion", "forgetfulness", or "concealment". It is related to the Greek word for "truth", aletheia (ἀλήθεια), which through the privative alpha literally means "un-forgetfulness" or "un-concealment."*⁴⁴

Whose origin is the river Lethe which runs through Hades- a river of forgetfulness and oblivion ⁴⁵.

*"Near the Cimmerii a cavern lies deep in the hollow of a mountainside, the home and sanctuary of lazy Somnus, where Phoebus' beams can never reach at morn or noon or eve, but cloudy vapours rise in doubtful twilight . . . there silence dwells: only the lazy stream of Lethe 'neath the rock with whisper low o'er pebbly shallows trickling lulls to sleep. Before the cavern's mouth lush poppies grow and countless herbs, from whose bland essences a drowsy infusion dewy Nox distils and sprinkles sleep across the darkening world."*⁴⁶

Music like literature and all writing depends on memory to function. It is obvious that in all music time and the recognition of time is crucial. From establishing a rhythm, sequences of notes which become tunes through repeated phrases, verses, and sequences in its structure, in a play of semantic recollection and anticipation it develops its aesthetic. Without memory this would simply not work - its aesthetic is temporal unlike the immanence of the plastic arts. Lethe, forgetfulness, would be fatal to music, though not to noise. Within the unstructured structure of noise any play across time is arbitrary, and recollection supplied only by a listener. Noise effaces the possibility of experiencing time as it effaces the possibility of

⁴⁴ Wiki.

⁴⁵ Ἄιδης, *Haidēs*. Later the iota became silent. Originally it was **Awides* which has been claimed to mean "unseen".

⁴⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11. 602 ff

POP GOES REASON

knowledge and meaning.

*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.⁴⁷*

Music or any communication without memory would sound as noise. Strangely this would be to hear music as it is, free of its anthropomorphic use and value. It would be to hear it as timeless, meaningless noise. To lose ones memory would cease any ability to think. Words, concepts, ideas need to be ‘remembered’ in order to be used in the play of differences and repetitions that even simple computers use. Without the ability to remember the world vanishes from consciousness. The bleakness, blackness of human dementia is only a form of a greater blackness which is entropy (‘a law of nature in which everything slowly goes into disorder’).

Time and identity cease in a blackness which in physics is the boundary beyond which no knowledge can be brought to light.

10¹⁰⁵⁰ years from now (is 1 followed by 10²⁶ (100 septillion) zeroes) –

“Low estimate for the time until all objects exceeding the Planck mass collapse via quantum tunnelling into black holes, assuming no proton decay or virtual black holes. On this vast timescale, even ultra-stable iron stars are destroyed by quantum tunnelling events. First iron stars of sufficient mass will collapse via tunnelling into neutron stars. Subsequently neutron stars and any remaining iron stars collapse via tunnelling into black holes. The subsequent evaporation of each resulting black hole into sub-atomic particles (a process lasting roughly 10¹⁰⁰ years) is on these timescales instantaneous.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The Gay Science – 109

⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_far_future

POP GOES REASON

*"The black hole information paradox results from the combination of quantum mechanics and general relativity. It suggests that physical information could permanently disappear in a black hole...."*⁴⁹

2 + 2 = ?

Here noise becomes the best description I can think of before thought ceases in blackness...

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Dylan Thomas, 1914 – 1953

⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hole_information_paradox

POP GOES REASON

'Why why says the junk in the yard.'
Paul McCartney

