

Counter Culture (Routledge, 1992), *Women and Popular Music: Popular Music and Gender* (Routledge, 2000) and *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Identity* (Routledge, 2005), and editor of *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (Routledge, 1996) and *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008). She co-edited (with Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins) *Music Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Ashgate, 2002) and (with Jennifer Rycenga) *Queering the Popular Pitch* (Routledge, 2006). She is currently editing *Countercultures and Popular Music* with Jedediah Sklower (Ashgate, and Éditions Mélanie Séteun, Bordeaux) and, with Shara Rambarran, *Virtuality and Music*.

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Introduction

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Contemporary histories of popular Western musics may be more usefully read as a series of debates concerning what, sonically and experientially, actually constitutes music in the commonly understood way, and what then constitutes, or can be termed as, and typically dismissed as, non-music. Such debates are class-ridden, evidence racial prejudices and profiling, continually undermine traditional musicological assumptions, radically problematize the commercial framings of music, mark all pivotal shifts in music across at least one hundred years, relentlessly advance the ‘death of the author’, are called upon to define time, place and national identity, and outmanoeuvre demarcations of high art and low culture. Answers provided have formed the methodological foundations of the conservatoire as well as journalistic and academic approaches to music, and now pull in their wake a judicial apparatus of ownership, censorship and reparations.

Technologies have been calibrated to answers provided too: reproductions of sound that invariably brag about ‘noise reduction’. Noise, to music, is typically byproduct, accident, the unwanted, the unpleasant. And yet noise is inevitable and imminent to music: that inexorable presence that mixers and sound engineers do their best to exorcize, that gig-goers reflexively block out, plugging fingers in ears, when it takes the form of feedback. The exception that proves the rule in terms of contemporary music is folk: ‘natural’ sounds and pre-modern instruments (and, often, affectations) as a respite from the noise of the real or urban world and the noise of the musics that the real or urban world taints – a kind of bucolic, aristocratic asceticism, and one that implicitly casts noise as detrimental to musical, and human, interactions.

Noise, however, cannot just be confined to the idea of music performed or reproduced. In recent times, the watershed moment in the above process could be said to be a case of noise meeting noise: Beatlemania as both the



Exit, pursued by fans; stills from A Hard Day's Night (Richard Lester, 1964).

sounds of the Fab Four in the mid-1960s (complete with crescendos of yelling-singing, 'naïve' drumming, the hardness of the sound of the guitar) and the sounds of their screaming audiences.

The cacophony that resulted baffled cultural commentators and alarmed moral guardians: respectively – where was the experience of the music that spoke to so many, when it was drowned out by the sounds of hysteria? and where were the old proprieties of the calm or passive enjoyment of popular culture? The questions raised here are directly articulated by noise theorist-activist Mattin, writing in 2009 in respect to the power relations that are established and nurtured by live music, this 'prime site of the spectacle'

[...] where production and consumption are enacted at the level of experience. What is passivity? What is activity? Is the distinction that clear? What would it require to emancipate oneself from the situation and the roles that we accept when we enter such a space? How are social spaces produced in a given situation? What are the accepted conventions? Can we challenge them? Can we change them? Can we dare together by abandoning old conventions? (Mattin, 2011, n.p. ['Prologue to Unconstituted Praxis'])

The progressive cultural nature of the phenomenon of Beatlemania is still in advance of current thinking, and still represents a sonic-aesthetic assault on conceptions of art. To whisper or cough or sneeze in a classical concert or during a performance of a play, or have your mobile phone inopportunistly ring or buzz or bleep, is taken as a form of disrespect to a collective established on – to employ Gerard Manley Hopkins's description – 'elected silence'. As Halligan has argued elsewhere (2009), the 'elected' is merely imposed, prompted by faltering notions of worthy art forms for institutions that have been, *pace* neoliberal business practices, 'hollowed out'. When the art movements of the twentieth century have attempted to break with the meek compliance of establishment art, and the institutions that form parasitical relationships to the practices and production of art, they have almost always initially sought to do away with the very rigidity of modes of acceptance or experience of that art. Such modes exist in dress and behavioural codes and, more insidiously, in a respect to be evidenced in apparent concentration and silence. The bodily paralysis that is required – not to cough or sneeze, to decline from talk, indeed not to slouch or sleep – is akin to Wilhelm Reich's notion of 'body armour': an unnatural, self-imposed immobilization of muscles, resulting in a repression of emotions and of thought. To 'twist and shout', in this context, represents a breaking of the armour, and a freeing of emotions, and allowing for communication between the music and the self. The enemy of music of progressive worth, then, is not a measure of noise, but of the acceptance of silence.

From these perspectives, it is clear why noise remains a pejorative term in two chief senses. First, noise as a negative aesthetic judgement, centred on that thing which is other than the authentic, organic creation of music. And, secondly, noise as the unwanted element for studio technicians, the evidence of the failings of technology, of dust on the tapehead, of the deterioration of reproductions, as denoting the technological limitations of yesteryear (and so in need of 'cleaning' for remastered reissues of albums). One could go further: noise is what generates complaints, and has become the basis for legislation (noise abatement, noise pollution); it has been claimed as one of the ills of contemporary urban existence, blamed for a variety of physical and mental disorders, and even applied for the purposes of torture. Philosophically, noise seems to stand for a lack of aesthetic grace, to be against enjoyment or pleasure, to alienate or distract rather than enrapture; it penetrates the body rather than transports the listener 'out of the body'. Enthusiasts of noise (particularly of the Second Summer of Love of 1989) tend to be termed 'survivors' now rather than seasoned connoisseurs. And yet the drones of psychedelia, the racket of garage rock and punk, the thudding of rave, the feedback of shoegaze and post-rock, the bombast of thrash and metal, the clatter of jungle and the stuttering of electronica, together with notable examples of avant-garde noise art, have all been inducted into the history of music, and recognized as key moments in its evolution. Postmodern theorizing about music lauds the DJ, the mixer or remixer, the very inauthenticity of sampling: the art 'after' the artist has vacated the artefact.

It is no exaggeration to say that it is the very opposite of melody and harmony – noise (dissonance, feedback, atmospherics and ambience, hiss and distortion), and the application and exploration of noise in and through music – that has overwhelmingly determined popular musics since at least the late 1960s. Indeed, as musicianship, musical virtuosity and prowess have faded from view, the sense of the indivisible totality of the noise of certain styles (most notably punk and post-punk, techno and rave) has become the primary point of reference. We tend to ask what it sounds like as much as, or rather than, who plays what, and when, and how. The enveloping experience of music determines popular music cultures, particularly those given over to gatherings, and to dance (or movement in general), rather than an appreciation of the sound of the bow, or plectrum, on the string. Sound is mixed for such environments, graded to fill and meet space and the potential for echo, to mingle with rather than exclude the sound of the masses rather than, or as much as to, showcase musicianship.

Noise, as the 'other' of music, has always been a concern of avant-garde artists and those who seek to operate on the margins of music, or outside its boundaries. A number of case studies can be found in this volume, from *Metal Machine Music* to 'noise rock', from turntablism to noise protest, that detail such experiments and interventions. In privileging noise in this

manner – and inviting our contributors to consider music via noise – we hope, in the first instance, to assemble an overview of the noise foundations of contemporary popular music. We look to Mattin's foundational question: 'Can we use Noise as a form of praxis going beyond established audience/performer relationships?' (Mattin, 2011, n.p. [‘Noise & Capitalism: Exhibition as Concert’]).¹ In the second instance, we seek to establish an expanded sense of sonic aesthetics, conducting close analyses of noise music texts to enable a more developed understanding of their technological, compositional and performance practices. Specifically, this involves an investigation of experimental and alternative modes of sonic composition: purposeful disorganization/indeterminacy, spontaneous noise, improvised noise, the roles of space and silence, of durational extremes, and the ways in which particular sound synthesis and signal processing techniques are appropriated and employed by noise artists in novel and unforeseen ways. Thirdly, we are able to encounter and, we hope, to an extent 'recover' those still déclassé forms of contemporary music which renounce artistic-subjective expression and the elevation of the individual – typically by replacing the human with the computer. In this regard, we look to instances where indeterminacy and improvisation are determined and motivated by noise. We examine how noise elements may be installed to purposefully subvert conventional composer-directed modes of composition and performance, and how noise scores raise pertinent questions in relation to issues of musical notation and interpretation.

But our shared remit is not ultimately a matter of formulating new meanings, coining new terms, or expanding the lexicon of critical writing. It became apparent, in editing these chapters, that noise *per se* refuses fixed identities – an ontological equivocation often couched in semiotic terms. The debate is then forced open, and becomes radically ambiguous – not in the sense of a mystification, or the failing to provide an answer, but in the sense of indeterminateness. Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Teorema*, which sought to address the revolutionary events of 1968 at the time of 1968 through the dramatization of the implosion of a bourgeois family, terminates at such a moment: the narrative is obscure, its stories unresolved, and the protagonist, in uncertain, volcanic surroundings, screams. Pasolini commented:

So there are new problems, and these will have to be solved by the members of the bourgeoisie themselves, not the workers or the opposition. We dissident bourgeois cannot solve these problems, and neither can the 'natural' bourgeois. That is why [*Teorema*] remains 'suspended'; it ends up with a cry, and the very irrationality of this cry conveys the absence of an answer.

(quoted in Stack, 1969, 157–8)

Teorema... and *Porcile* [1969] are free, experimental films. They propose no outcome nor solutions. They are 'poems in the form of a desperate cry'. (quoted in Moravia, Betti, Thovazzi *et al.*, 1989, 129)

The presence of noise seems to offer the potential to radically problematize or suspend the traditional machinations of finding meaning, or making meaning, in popular music, and in the social sphere. In convening an international conference to probe this idea further, we adopted as a name a fragment of speech found in an early track from the post-rock group Mogwai.² 'Yes! I Am a Long Way from Home' (from 1997's *Young Team*) opens with a spoken description of the experience of the band live, delivered haltingly, and with some confusion. The music is described, counter-intuitively or as seemingly arising from non-native English, as 'bigger than words and wider than pictures'. Noise, we maintained, offered the potential to transcend correct adjectives too, so as to feel a way towards an expanded understanding of the sonic: to be louder than song, quicker than harmony, nearer than mixing, harder than sound.

Such an expanded understanding has remained difficult to locate in academic disciplines related to music. Traditional musicology, as applied to much classical music, has historically tended toward a near-exclusive consideration of melody and harmony. At the same time, popular music studies, especially as practised in academe, has been overly reliant upon its given foundation of lyrical poetry, allied with 'Eng Lit', as the artistic-subjective expression of the singer-songwriter, and the concomitant glorification of the individual (failings which are especially apparent in 'Dylanology'). And, while research emanating from the fields of popular and critical musicology has gone some way to redressing the balance, there still remains a general disparity with respect to the degree of detailed analysis ascribed to each musical parameter, as investigations of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic aspects still typically feature above more cursory explorations of sonic elements. So forms of music which privilege noise and rely upon high levels of sound manipulation continue to remain, to a significant extent, an unmapped territory in terms of contemporary musics.

By 2010, at the time of this conference, noise appeared to be a declining paradigm. Certainly there had been some key and relatively recent publications such as Douglas Kahn's *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (2001), or Paul Hegarty's *Noise/Music: A History* (2007), both following in the wake of Jacques Attali's seminal *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985). And, at this point, many of the pioneering groups associated with noise-based popular musics discussed in this volume had met with wider acceptance and belated acclaim (the experience of seeing the reformed My Bloody Valentine had also prompted the convening of the conference), or stubbornly persisted, as with The Telescopes, in their sonic experimentation. And yet in other respects noise seemed to be increasingly



Final moments of *Teorema* (Theorem, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1968).

disavowed in the smooth era of virtual communications and digital media. Typically noise was treated as if it were a strictly analogue phenomenon, to be consigned to the trash heap of history along with discarded vinyl records and phonographs, cassette tapes, video cassettes and floppy discs. Part of this rejection of noise was not just a passive abandonment but an active rejection of its transgressive assumptions and claims. So, although Simon Reynolds entitled a retrospective collection of his journalism *Bring the Noise* (2007; the title was also a nod to Public Enemy), the volume constituted a spirited attack on noise, both as a paradigm and in the practice of noise music as a pseudo-transgression that no longer offends anyone. Such sentiments were echoed in Steven Goodman's *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (2010), which argues against the radicality of 'white noise' musics in favour of the bass-heavy dread of dub and dubstep, as well as in Ray Brassier's article 'Genre is Obsolete' (2009), that may as well have been entitled noise (music) is obsolete, were it not for a few exceptions made to the generic conformity of noise musics, and indeed Brassier's own collaboration with Mattin. A more promising sign was the then recently published *Noise and Capitalism* collection (Mattin and Iles, 2009), which situated noise practices politically beyond both the clichéd gestures of transgression and their equally clichéd critique, and in a profound relation with capitalism as both its co-opted product and immanent critique.

Since that time there has been a veritable flood of noise-related publications, falling into several distinct categories. One of these areas of research has been in relation to digital culture, and more specifically the phenomena of 'glitch' and the methodology of media archaeology. In terms of the former, the work of Rosa Menkman as glitch artist, curator and writer is a case in point, and one that has been taken up in a number of contexts.³ Several recent books such as *Noise Channels: Glitch and Error in Digital Cultures* (Krapp, 2011) and *Error: Glitch, Noise and Jam in New Media Cultures* (Nunes, 2012) pursue these connections between noise and the digital via the concepts of glitch and error, showing that noise is hardly only an artefact of earlier, less perfect technologies and modes of communication. Indeed noise can be seen, in general, as a key concept of media archaeology, facilitating its non-linear histories of media, technologies and inventive practices. Other work on noise such as our own sister volume to *Resonances, Reverberations: The Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics of Noise* (2012), along with Hillel Schwartz's mammoth opus *Making Noise – From Babel to the Big Band and Beyond* (2011) and Greg Hainge's *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise* (2013) situate noise in cultural and philosophical contexts, showing how questions of noise go well beyond sonic phenomena to enter such fields as information theory, urban space, audiovisual practices and literature, to name but a few.

This expansion of noise 'studies' into multiple fields, while a timely riposte to its delimitation as a purely sonic and/or analogue phenomenon, does risk, however, a loss of focus on, or dispersal of the relation between, noise and music. The current volume aims to address this in the context of this expanded field of noise research, zeroing in on the specific relationships between a range of contemporary musics (post-classical, improvisatory, psychedelic, [post-]punk, industrial and noise music proper) and their respective deployments of noise, in order to extend some of the earlier work on noise and musics as well as to answer some of the critics who would seem to be arguing for the abandonment of noise as a useful paradigm for engaging with these musics.

Noise remains a lacuna in the vast majority of accounts of contemporary popular music, and in a critical exploration of noise lies the possibility of a new narrative – one that is wide-ranging (a continuum across numerous genres of music), connects the popular to the underground and avant-garde, posits the studio as a musical instrument, problematizes standards and assumptions about music and consumption/spectatorship, and prompts new critical and theoretical paradigms and approaches from those seeking to write about music. This edited collection addresses and traverses this untold story. It seeks to identify and analyse types of noise and noise-music, to understand noise as both applied and designed, and accidental and courted, to propose and test new theoretical frameworks for the discussion of noise, to highlight the way in which noise redefines and reshapes the relationship between the performer and audience, or artefact and appreciator, and to posit noise as an essential category in and for the writing about music.