

THE TERRITORY FROM CHAOS TO NOISE
AN INTRODUCTION TO NOISE MUSIC

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Abstract

This dissertation attempts to discern an ontology of the artistic gesture as a libertarian practice driven by the motto of an inborn paradoxical nature, in order to provide a theoretical, aesthetical and political introduction to noise music in current times. This is made through the theorization and articulation of the idea of a dialectical paradox; the aporia that roots man's 'instability' in the arts practice. It is the attempt of 'destroying' 'art' in its dissolution in life, for the sake of life itself.

It is suggested that man's eager for creative practice is contained in a paradox 'primal aesthetical epiphany' of evolution, which provoked the detachment from survival and an awareness of self, therefore, of self in nature. It is this epiphany that will be the motto for the aesthetical and humanistic search for new forms of 'free beauty' in order to reach new territories of the 'chaos'. This search is understood as a political stance in the human social environment and the main essence of the avant-garde programmes.

Finally, it is made a contextualization of the world of late capitalism—the society of the spectacle—upon art, and discussed the 'noise of its silence'.

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1

The Paradox of Art

All the thinking and research I make on 'art' and aesthetics assures me more and more of my belief that this term containing a very erratic defining concept is actually an obstacle to what I regard as being the goal of the creative exploration, expression, and experiencing of aesthetics. For the attempt of defining 'art' and framing it as a sterile concept is precisely the gesture of confinement that provides it with its own imprisonment.

Paradoxically, there is no way of critically analysing the process of aesthetical creativity without utilizing the term 'art', even though its definition is never clear. In this chapter I will be making use of it as a signifier for 'aesthetic product of the human creative genius', and will attempt to express its aporetic self-destructive nature. This chapter will also provide the necessary base data to what I believe to be the inherent socio-political character contained in the root of artistic expression, which will constitute the body of this paper, in order to reach a contextual understanding of 'noise' in society of today and 'noise music' within it.

Prélude

Probably most of us who are interested in the deeper thinking of 'the arts' practice and aesthetics have been confronted with the intriguing inner thoughts or actual debates on whether something is or is not art. It is curious how people so many times can be so confident to declare 'FOR ME this is not art' based on the fact that it doesn't demonstrate great technical skills, or simply because it may not be 'beautiful'. For 'someone that makes stuff' (as I usually nominate

myself, for I never really had the nerve to admit that I am an artist and don't believe I am longing to consider myself one, for it is a social status I do not really aspire to), I am usually comfortable with some of my aesthetical creations to be 'not art'. Art is not something that I wish what I do to be, not a goal. I care about aesthetics and the way they 'work', I feel fairly indifferent on whether it is or not art. But then again, if one wishes to affirm that something 'is or is not art' one must sound the question: what is art? And, clearly, with some effort and dialectic one can maybe come up with some answers. But it seems to me that the answers that are given, yet in my understanding are very accurate about what the creative process is all about, they do not seem to reach what I consider to be the paradoxical essence of the existence of 'art'. And that is exactly the destitution of 'art' from its constantly reshaping 'tower' (which cyclically in history becomes ivory once in a while) and its dissolution in human creative, aesthetic and philosophic primal nature. A destitution of art for the sake of life and its natural forces; a returning to the first moment of sublime experience.

Framing the Primal Chaos

I consider art to be the practice of imagining (and perhaps re-imagining) life through means of sensation, and for that it functions parallel to it, as a proposal of life expressed through sensation. It is not a direct or objective translation of life. It is rather a different way of perceiving it, transcribing it, a subjective human approach, a proposal of a Utopia and a Dystopia, a world of its own.

"Art, in my definition, is neither a description nor an analysis. It is rather an analogue of human reality - an attempt to map the process of integration of the subject and object in history." (Russel, 2008, p.75)

Of course that this attempt Russel describes is clearly not a clinical survey of the process of integration of subject and object in history, it is rather a practice of a parallel process to the one of human life as its own exaltation. It functions as a statement of our existentialism for it is one of the first faculties of human life, if

not the first one to manifest in our primitive existence that succeeds the nature of survival.

I consider that the first artistic moment, and the first necessary moment for the development of an artistic gesture is the one of experiencing aesthetics out of the survival realm. By this I mean that the artistic gesture, which I understand is a moment of Kantian free beauty (2007)¹, comes right after the 'artistic' awareness of aesthetics (I say artistic for it takes creativity/imagination to sense the world in a non-utilitarian survival basis), which is an abstract and subjective realization beyond utility or instinct that focuses on the external to reflect the internal and vice-versa.

This first grasp is a moment of freedom from the 'survival totalitarianism'. It is the moment of awareness of self, and of self in the world, therefore it is the moment of questioning of life, which is a creative thought, a pro-active proto-philosophical moment, a moment of consciousness, a first imagining of life, the sublime moment in the root of the experiencing of aesthetics:

"Perhaps for the first time, rather than being aware of what he has heard he notices he is listening. This would be a monumental moment. The rain forest or savannah become a symphony hall." (Prévost, 2011, p.5)

I do not understand this 'moment' to have been a fleeting instant of epiphany in one man's life, but a gradual process of human development in its evolution. Although we all still punctually experience epiphanic moments that resemble this (which I believe is actually what we search for in the arts practice), mostly in our infancy when discovering the world, the difference is that we are already very distant to our instinctive survival nature. With this I mean that, in a way, as

¹ "There are two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*), or beauty which is merely dependent (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object should be; the second does presuppose such a concept and, with it, an answering perfection of the object. Those of the first kind are said to be (self-subsisting) beauties of this thing or that thing; the other kind of beauty, being attached to a concept (conditioned beauty), is ascribed to objects which come under the concept of a particular end." (Kant, 1790, p.32)

an outcome of this 'first epiphany', our nature of survival has evolved from one that is based on a direct utilitarian use of the senses to one that is freer from this utilitarianism and may exercise the abstract. I would argue that philosophy arose as the form of dealing consciously with this change in order to understand the environment in a new way.

This 'moment' was a long process of the acquiring of awareness of self, thus a milestone in human history.

I am convinced that this primal experience Prévost (2011) talks about is the main basis of the artistic gesture and of its paradox. I believe that this is the root for the later development of what we now define as art, same as for religion, philosophy and science. The creative attempt of the human being to 'connect' with what supersedes him. It is the attempt of handling humanly what we may call an understanding of a superior power: Nature vs. God.

"In fact, art always attempted to represent the greatest possible power, the power that ruled the world in its totality—be it divine or natural power." (Groys, 2008, p.2)

I would argue that the same happens with religion, philosophy and science, and one may realize that, in essence, the difference between the abstract conceptions of 'divinity' or 'nature' is not that substantial. The 'divine' and the 'natural' are both essentially human attempts to frame in a more tangible way, a concept, a representation of what he feels to out-power him, the 'metaphysical' attempt of understanding the dimension of life. In aesthetics, Kant (2007) calls the experience of being struck by this force the 'sublime' (referring to the perceived aesthetics of nature)². This is what I believe to be the aspiration of the artistic practice, an attempt to reach the reasonless sublime forces of 'chaos' by humanly exercising the understandless 'free beauty'.

² "The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness, yet with a superadded thought of its totality. Accordingly, the beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding, the sublime as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason." (Kant, 1790, p.40)

But to understand better this turning moment of perceptive breakthrough, one may consider that it is the framing of a concept that makes it exist, and for that I call Elizabeth Grosz's (2008) aesthetic theory of 'chaos and territory'³:

According to Grosz, art is the intensification and monumentalization of sensation as it enables matter to become expressive, resonating with the bodies that experience it. This means that sensation autonomized itself for the sake of pure pleasure of the aesthetical experiencing, the 'letting go to glance chaos'. This chaos may be understood as 'the beginning', nature, cosmos, the vibration of the universe. It is what is there that is, and transcends, our human nature.

The first step we take to define what art is in any form, is to understand its boundaries, that is, its 'framing'. The first artistic gesture is always the architectural one, which is the shaping of a territory, the frame. This territory is delimited out from chaos, and it directly communicates with it and functions as a 'window' of intensification, a port for sensorial deterritorialization. It frames chaos to permit an intensified relation with the one experiencing it, the one that destroys the frame again to experience that 'piece' of chaos.

"With no frame or boundary there can be no territory, and without territory there may be objects or things but not qualities that can become expressive, that can intensify and transform living bodies." (Grosz, 2008, p.11)

But what is exactly this territory that can intensify and transform living bodies?

In my interpretation of it, this territory is shaped by nothing else but the limits of one's perception, for to 'intensify and transform living bodies' it is the perceiver the one who demarks the territory of perception and fruition over the creator's framed territory of conception.

I interpret this framing of territory out of chaos as being the various possible perceived elements that characterize an aesthetical product, regardless of its medium of expression. One may understand them abstractly as the 'cubes' that

³ See Grosz 2008 p. 10-24.

build a house and their 'functions'. I mean: Colours, shapes, textures, the characteristics of a whole...

But one ought to bear in mind this understanding of chaos/nature, for it is within it that lies the paradox of art.

The Paradox of Detachment

"It was the body that despaired of the earth—that heard the belly of being speak to it.

And then it wanted to get its head through the ultimate walls—and not its head only—over into the 'other world'.

But that 'other world', that inhuman, dehumanized world which is heavenly Nothing, is well hidden from man; and the belly of being does not speak to man, except as man."

(Nietzsche, 2003, p.59)

From the moment human firstly had the epiphanic experience that we may call the 'detachment from survival', Man himself stood aside the chaos that involved him and whose he was an integral part (which would be at time, the natural organism that integrates the survival nature) to be able to sense it from a perspective. This new 'ability', as we may call it, implies a development of self-consciousness for, to experience one needs awareness of self as experiencer, for an experience is an endless cycle of awareness of one in the experiencing environment and vice-versa. One reflects oneself in chaos by reaching to chaos and reflecting it on oneself. My argument is that one, as a human being, cannot experience chaos without self, therefore chaos can only function reflexively. Positioning one's self in perspective to this chaos means but acquiring an awareness of self in chaos, which becomes a framed abstract concept that determines self-identity. It is an awareness of power, the genesis of humanity.

The reaching to chaos is not a reaching to the infinity whole of cosmos, but reaching to the human-chaos that lies in one's primal self. It is an unconscious attempt of re-enactment of the first awareness of self, therefore essence of nature in human and human in nature. But as we may withdraw, from Adorno (1970), to corroborate this thesis, is that human understanding of nature is

cultural⁴. Nature is cultural as for its framing, as nature is a human rational attempt of detaching himself from it, therefore making an artificial distinction between himself and nature, so he can then find his detachment from the primal self within nature.

"Art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural beauty, but natural beauty as such. This denominates not only the aporia of natural beauty but the aporia of aesthetics as a whole. Its object is determined negatively, as indeterminable. It is for this reason that art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it." (Adorno, 1970, p.72)

Taking apart this aporia of aesthetics, one may find the paradox of art as I believe it to be:

The first moment of experiencing aesthetics as such, bestowed by the force of the sublime chaos is the first moment of creativity beyond utility, therefore the moment that leads "the theorizing mind to theorizing, and the emotions of human beings are continually aroused by encounters with nature" (Cage, 1961, p.10)⁵. The original epiphany of sensing of aesthetics is the creative impulse provoked a conscious detachment from self and chaos, the split that outlined human's self-consciousness by contrast to human's perception of 'chaotic power'. The original artistic exaltation is the one of sensing the 'chaotic' world in an aesthetical way (the human out of survival) without an intention of understanding (free beauty) and as an intensifier of sensation. The original artistic gesture is the one of perceiving reality in a creative manner, as a resonator of the body. Only then comes the creative attempt of understanding.

⁴ See 1970, p. 219. Adorno disserts on the concept of nature as a romantic imaginary of wilderness: "That today any walk in the woods, unless elaborate plans have been made to seek out the most remote forests, is accompanied by the sound of jet engines overhead not only destroys the actuality of nature as, for instance, an object of poetic celebration".

⁵ Cage refers to "*hearing sounds which are just sounds*" in this sentence, which I understand as being an exact analogy for what I am defending.

Then, more splits are generated, by framing the different faculties of the understanding of the perception of the world: religion, philosophy and science.

“Aristotle said that philosophy begins in wonder—wonder at the fact that things are how they are. For Nietzsche, by contrast, philosophy begins with horror—existence is something both horrible and absurd.” (Pearson, 2005, p.10)

Taking these two apparently contrasting ideas apart, we shall find that, in their essence, they have much in common. I understand this Aristotelian wonder as exactly the ‘epiphanic moment’ I have been mentioning before. It is the one that leads to further creativity in the production of an outcome, may it be philosophical or artistic. But, this wonder, rather than being at the fact that ‘things are how they are’, has to be at the fact that things are how we perceive them, which makes a significant difference for the statement. It replaces human from this rational absolutism, godlike entity into a subject of fallible qualities. We cannot actually claim that grasp of ‘noumenon’ reality (that chaos), for we can only deal with our own perception, therefore things are how we perceive them individually, integrated in the context we are in as objects of our senses. This slight change on dialectics makes possible a straight connection to Nietzsche’s existentialist idea where the wonder becomes horror because of the realization of one’s condition of individual existence in the world, the detachment to Nietzsche’s Dionysian world, where the separate identities are dissolved and human beings are reconciled with the elemental forces and energies of nature—how I understand to be the ‘primal/original cosmic chaos’, where the human being is dissolved in, has a perception of (what I before have called the idea of sublime one strives to reach with the practice of art), but has no grasp at, except for its inner common human part—the human-chaos.

This Nietzschean ‘horror’ is the realization of the absurdity of existence. It is the recognition of our cosmic insignificance, i.e. the understanding of one’s uselessness of self in cosmos, the lack of an ultimate purpose to human existence. Given this, I believe art acts again as an important paradoxical subject to this equation. It is exactly the emphatic element to this ‘horrified’ existentialism, it is the stress of human condition by reiteration, that, all the

same, functions cathartically as well as it deepens the human being in its existentialism of insignificance and uselessness by presenting itself as a reflexion of that same uselessness.

Art doesn't function as a tool of understanding but rather as an analogue of life, a statement of existentialism, a framing of the chaos, which is nothing but a humanized perception of it, our own Umwelt.⁶ Its paradox is that it is rooted in the sublime experience of the chaotic forces that it strives to achieve as a product of the exercise of free beauty. Art is the human attempt to transcend its condition, to reach the humanly unreachable nature/chaos by magnifying, enhancing, emphasizing its own humanity. This falls back into the framing of the '(chaos) reflected self-identity' against the framing of a selfless cosmic chaos. This is the framing of human creative territory that paradoxically aspires to eliminate that same territory in order to achieve back the 'original chaos', which results in the re-enactment of the primal sensing of aesthetics by the praxis of free beauty.

"Art is not the accomplishment of 'higher' existence, whether conceived mentally or spiritually, but is an elaboration of the most primitive and elementary fragments of an ancient animal prehistory." (Grosz, 2008, p.35)

The paradox lies in art which is itself a paradox. It is the attempt of reaching the extra-human forces of chaos, what cannot be done without their reflexion on our human condition, which turns out that that is our 'chaos'. Our humanity is in itself part of the cosmic chaos, so the attempt of reaching chaos with the practice of aesthetics will fail at the same extent as it will succeed: *"Each something is a celebration of the nothing that supports it"* (Cage, 1961, p.139). Art is fuelled by

⁶ Meaning 'environment' or 'surrounding world' in German, Umwelt is the term used by the Estonian biosemiotician Jakob von Uexkül (1957) to define human and animal's world of perceptions by their biological functions, i.e., the way different species experience their lifeworlds through the understanding of their milieus and the milieus' interaction with their sensing-bodies; "It is literally a form by which nature can be understood as dynamic, collective, lived rather than just fixed, categorized, or represented." (Grosz, 2008).

the pursuit of its own destruction. It aims to the infinite where it dissolves back
into life.

2

Interlude: on Music and Territory

“[Music] strips bodies of their inertia, of the materiality of their presence: it disembodies bodies...”

(Deleuze, 2003, p.21)

We shall now quickly drive our attention toward an ontology of music as a continuity from the reflection on ‘the paradox of art’. The information discussed in this chapter will serve as one of the bases needed for the last chapter, which will finally debouch in a contextual introduction to what may be understood as noise music. I have named this chapter ‘interlude’ because I understand it in a way as an extension of the last chapter, only a more specific grasp on music and its relation to the human animal. Throughout this chapter I will be studying and considering mostly the ontological perspective of Elizabeth A. Grosz’s on music and territory, who in turn disserts on Darwin and Deleuze and Guattari. After this necessary interlude I will be attempting to move forward to a more political, practical and contemporary articulation of art in the modern world since the 20th century, so that later on I shall focus more specifically on its condition of self-destruction and rejuvenation with ‘noise’ out of the ‘silence’.

The Animal in Music

“Music has survived, not because it is reducible to something useful or practically relevant in everyday life, precisely because it is not useful but serves the vaguer purposes of evocative intensification and pleasure.”

(Grosz, 2008, p.35–6)

Before the evolutionary step that made the human being detach his creative expression from his primal nature, art was dissolved in life as part of this nature,

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and it is suggested that, especially music, arouse from within the territory we may define as sexual selection.

According to Darwin, “music precedes language and is the direct result of sexual selection not of natural selection” (Grosz, 2008, p.31). With this it is suggested that human’s music origins lie deeper in survival than the necessity of a creation of a language for communication, as the ability to attract a mate. It is rooted in sexual selection as for its origins lie in its erotic and enticing appeal. Language arises later as the normalized adaptation of this primarily sexually elaborated characteristic.

It is interesting to understand that maybe a subliminal awareness of this sexuality contained in art and especially in music remits back to ancient Greece by the fact that the word ‘music’, derived from the Greek word *mousikē*, which does not mean ‘music’ itself for there was no word for such in ancient Greece, its meaning rather embraces all the cultural activities which we may call today humanities. The word literally means ‘the business of the muses’ (Hamilton, 2007, p.13). Muses were the goddesses of artistic inspiration who sponsored all intellectual and cultural activities and curiously, sometimes referred in myths as water nymphs, or in others, as daughters of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and procreation.

Darwin suggests that perception, if not enjoyment, of musical cadences and rhythm is probably common to all animals. Vibration affects living bodies depending on the common physiological nature of their nervous systems. It seems that even crustaceans, which are not capable of producing any sounds of their own, possess auditory hairs, which vibrate when the proper musical notes are struck. Dogs howl when subjected to particular tones and seals apparently appreciate music, which is a fact that their hunters seem to know since ancient times, and take advantage of it.

There is something about vibration, even in the most primitive creatures, that produces pleasurable or intensifying sensations, it “excites organs, and invests movements with greater force or energy” (Grosz, 2008, p.33). What one can conclude from this is that this force is not directly addressed to survival or the

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acquisition of pragmatic skills, but rather linked to sexual selection in the form of expression and intensification, to “the increasing differentiation of sexes from each other and to the operative value of attractiveness and taste in the appeal that individuals of each sex exert (or do not exert) for their desired partners” (Grosz, 2008, p.33).

By extrapolating from the birdsong, which for Darwin is what “most clearly reveals the sexual nature of song, the productive role of sexual selection in the elaboration of arts” (Grosz, 2008), perhaps one can get an idea of the existing relation between music/‘song’ and living bodies in its primitive form embedded in life. Similarly to ‘art’ of humans, as seen before, birdsong intensifies lived situations, it reflects the bird’s own experiences and observations on other birds: fear, anger, joy and triumph.

“With birds the voice serves to express various emotions, such as distress, fear, anger, triumph or mere happiness. It is apparently sometimes used to excite terror, as with the hissing noise made by some nestling birds... The true song, however, of most birds and various strange cries are chiefly uttered during the breeding season, and serve as a charm, or merely as a call-note, to the other sex.” (Darwin, 2008, p.37)

One can make the parallel between bird and human song, and detect some proximities, for similarly as in human song, emotional sensations are the aim; they are what is intended to be elaborated and intensified. “Something like ‘love’ or courtship functions as the most common theme, which tends to confirm its primarily role in sexual functioning” (Grosz, 2008, p.37).

“Music develops and survives not because it bestows upon us, its agents and listeners, some direct advantage but because it is pleasing and thus serves to attract others to us and us to others.” (Grosz, 2008, p.36)

However, according to Nietzsche, absolute music (the one that is purely the exercise of creative abstraction) does not have this same relation with emotion, but rather with sensation. It is not very significant for our “inner world, not so

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profoundly exciting, that it can be said to count as the immediate language of feeling; but its primeval union with poetry has deposited so much symbolism into rhythmic movement, into the varying strength and volume of musical sounds, that now we *suppose* it to speak directly *to* the inner world and to come *from* the inner world.” (Nietzsche, 2008, p.80) I do agree with this. I believe absolute music is, rather than a communicative expression of feelings of one’s inner world, it is directed to an exploration of territory in chaos, attempting the sublime ‘paradox of art’ in aesthetic experience. Rather than communication, it is an attempt of connection to the ‘primal chaos’, a greater frame.

[Absolute music is] at a primitive stage of music in which sounds made in tempo and at varying volume gave pleasure as such, or symbolism of form speaking to the understanding without poetry after both arts had finally been united over a long course of evolution and the musical form had finally become enmeshed in threads of feeling and concepts ... In itself, no music is profound or significant, it does not speak of the ‘will’ or of the ‘thing itself.’” (Nietzsche, 2008, p.80)

All the parallels we may do with human music and birdsong have to acknowledge the bird’s utility in aesthetical expression despite its development in form and creativity.

Birdsong has various functions to the bird in its milieu, and they are all ultimately related to its territory, which is acoustically demarked by it. It is the bird’s demonstration of singing skills by presenting its features of loudness, beauty of melody and number of variations. By these vocal features the bird has the ability to demark both a desirable territory for potential mates and a dangerous one for potential competitors.

Like other forms of exteriorizing expression, music is the acoustical form of relating with territory.

Based on Darwin, Grosz suggests that music is the product of an extension, an extrapolation from a sonorous ‘refrain’. This refrain is understood to be, for example, the bird’s short melodic phrases or a human’s exteriorized sonorous

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expression, like an unconscious humming one may do when impatiently waiting for something or the tapping a child makes when wandering around aimlessly.

This refrain is a sonorous exteriorization of one's living experiences reflected upon himself. It is the instinctive character of being emerging. One may argue that these instinctive reactions we render sonorous, or even the ones we do not, remain part of our primitive survival and sexual nature, as a need for exploration and acknowledgment of the surrounding world.

Grosz argues that it is this refrain that is the content of music in opposition to being its raw material, for it is this refrain what "music must deterritorialize in order to appear". Thus, directly related to what we've discussed before regarding art, "music, whose vibratory force is perhaps more immediate, more visceral, more neural than all of the other arts, consists in deterritorializing the voice, deterritorializing sound, making each resonate with a different set of vibrations than those (chaotic forces) the refrain attempts to ward off" (Grosz, 2008, p.58).

We may conclude, that in direct relativity with the 'paradox of art', music does not function as a translation, conversion or restructuring of the 'refrain' or the evident forces of the natural world reflected by human, into a vocalization or sound rendering by instrumentation, but it is the rendering of forces themselves, rendering of forces out of chaos which are themselves not sonorous into a sonorous form: "Music sounds what has not and cannot be heard otherwise" (Grosz, 2008, p.57), and that is inarguable.

To illustrate this idea that music is the rendering of forces from chaos into a form of expression that has no equal in essence into a demarking of territory, I call Bruce Chatwin's "Songlines" (Chatwin, 2008) where Chatwin describes the relationship of Australian aborigines with their land and their music. This relationship, might I opine, is such a beautiful one in my view of what art's relation to life is. The aborigines since prehistoric times sing out the names of everything they come across: plants, animals, rivers... it is a form of orientation and connection to their world, marking their debt to and affinity with the earth and its particular qualities: "This trail of words, rhythms, and melodies, along with dance and painted forms, religious and cultural rituals, commemorates and

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celebrates this primordial origin—the origin of territory out of natural milieus and chaotic forces” (Grosz, 2008, p.50). They are rendering territory into existence by means of singing it.⁷

⁷ “In theory, at least, the whole of Australia could be read as a musical score. There was hardly a rock or creek in the country that could not or had not been sung” (Chatwin, 2008, p.50).

3

The Paradox of Vanguard

Western art history, in the last centuries since the renaissance and with special emphasis in the romantic era, has evolved from a religious based patronage system to a secularized and free form of expression not necessarily connected to a specific 'patron'. This means that, in fact, art freed itself from serving a mainly religious purpose to be able to affirm itself as a single, unitary, self-sufficient and self-sustainable form. But in fact, the field of the art practice ceased to be religious orientated to loudly shout *ars gratia artis!* (=art for art's sake) as an acclamation of this achievement, expressing a philosophy that the value of art and the only 'true' art is detached from didactic, moral or utilitarian functions. Meaning that art shall serve no purpose but itself as a conceptual quest in its own morphology. Hegel himself, in a way of expressing this same change, proclaimed that "art is a thing of the past and that our epoch has become the epoch of the Concept[. This] was a proclamation of victory of the iconoclastic Enlightenment over Christian iconophilia" (Groys, 2008).

"Art's value becomes secular, aesthetic and social. It moves from sacred buildings to private ones, and gradually becomes more public: aristocrats and monarchs build collections of art and curious objects, which are displayed to their peers, the bourgeois class follows suit, and the public museum is created." (Hegarty, 2009, p.169)

In this chapter I intend to develop on the idea of 'the paradox of vanguard', which, directly related to 'the paradox of art', consists on the idea that the essence of the western world's avant-garde programs function as forms of radicalism (may we call it that way) in aesthetics and are ultimately condemned to fail by at the same time succeeding, working through the forms of 'paradox-

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objects', having their apogee and punctual achievements before being consumed by the 'art world', leaving then place to another cycle of renovation in history of arts. I intend to make a connection between some highlights I consider to be fundamental in the more radical forms of the vanguards in the art history of the post-world war II with their socio-political context in the late-capitalism era. This will be the motto that will base my next and final chapter, 'New Territories, New Paradox: The Noise of Silence', which is the point to which I have been searching and substantiating my ideas in.

Aesthetical-Codes and Free Beauty

"We should not forget that all avant-garde art was made against public taste—even and especially when it was made in the name of public taste."

(Groys, 2008, p.6–7)

To get the sense of how I consider the avant-gardes to consist, we need to get back to the subject of the Kantian free beauty:

Art consists on the pushing of boundaries of our experience as human beings. It is the monumentalization of sensation. By trying to outstand mere human condition it is actually stressing it in its full majesty, it is pushing its boundaries, driving man forth. Free beauty is the sensing of aesthetics rid of prejudices or pre-defined models, paradigms that dictate aesthetical appreciation of the object in question. This free beauty stands in direct opposition to what I call 'aesthetical-codes'; it is what the vanguards strive to reach in its totality; it is the perpetual search of a refreshment of previous attained thus petrified aesthetical-codes:

"If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the object by means of understanding with a view to cognition, but by means of the imagination (acting perhaps in conjunction with understanding) we refer the representation to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure. The judgment of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgment, and so not logical, but is aesthetic—which means that it is one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective." (Kant, 2007, p.19)

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I believe that aesthetics are to a large extent social and cultural codes that work in ways of gathering people. I mean, aesthetics is clearly a subjective topic as Kant states, but one can notice that there are greater aesthetical differences from culture to culture depending on chronology and geography. Therefore I believe that this subjectivity has much to do with one's social and cultural background.

What defines an existing 'aesthetics'⁸ and consequently a taste is the reproduction of its 'mannerism', this is, the repetition of its defining traces. To have a pre-defined aesthetic taste means that the object of this taste is something that formally has been repeated time and time again and which frequently solidifies into a formula. I understand it as the falling into the repetition of framing of some parts territory out of chaos. This possibility of solidification may be important in cultural terms, as a defining of a common cultural identity among people; I mean, when it connects directly to life and life activities or it becomes an active agent in rituals of social gathering (for example the punk movement of the 80's or the surrealist movement of the first half of the 20th century) but, in the same way it may become a barrier of conservatism if there is stagnation in relation to its political and cultural contexts, if there is no adaptation of the people onto new approaches to fit the environment. In this case, art becomes a familiar mannerism governed by specific rules, it distances itself from a plausible freedom of form, therefore also from a 'freedom of beauty' for it gets boxed in a formality—it then becomes *pulchritudo adhaerens*⁹ and a conservative reiteration of history that loses pertinence.¹⁰

"The avant-garde of today that does not reiterate accepted mystifications is nevertheless socially repressed. The movement society desires is the one that it can buy up — it is the pseudo-avant-garde." (Sturm et al., n.d.)

⁸ 'Aesthetics' not in philosophical terms but in a social context: an 'aesthetics', in the sense of a common recognition of an aesthetical language, a familiarity with the expressive traces of an aesthetical product.

⁹ In Kantian terms, as seen before: 'beauty which is merely dependent'.

¹⁰ "History that repeats itself turns to farce. But a farce that repeats itself ends up making history." (Baudrillard, 2010, p.9)

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After all, art, as strictly part of human life, cannot be conceived as not being strictly connected to its milieu, for it is in fact, an active part of it:

“Today the great passions of unity and freedom disturb the world. Yesterday love would drive us to individual death. Today the collective passions make us run the risk of universal destruction. Today, just like yesterday, art searches to save from death an living image of our passions and our sufferings.” (Camus, 2011, p.84)¹¹

I would argue that what we are searching in the aesthetic experience is to expand consciousness; in the way we expose ourselves to experience something new that is ‘refreshing’ to our own sensing self. I do not perceive this ‘sensing self’ as a shallow concept. It is one’s full body, mind and ‘spirit’ that reflects itself and is reflected by the experience it can take out of an artwork, which is an “attitude of intensified or enriched experience which Kant rightly described as disinterested, that is, devoid of practical interest” (Hamilton, 2007, p.1). The sensing self is the one that dares to take the trip to the experience by letting itself be absorbed and touched by the forces of chaos.

On what this matters, my argument is that the forces that form an avant-garde attitude are the forces that act contrapuntally¹² to a given *status quo*, propelled by an eager thirst of aesthetical ‘refreshment’, in the search for a breakthrough, striving to reach a pure as possible *pulchritudo vaga* (free beauty) with each presented ‘singular example’, that attempts to reorient the avant-garde activity providing a proposal of “alternative ways to think, act, feel, and be” (Miller, 2009). This explains also the close relation that the vanguards maintain with

¹¹ Translated by me from Portuguese: “Hoje as grandes paixões da unidade e da liberdade perturbam o mundo. Ontem o amor conduzia à morte individual. Hoje as paixões colectivas fazem-nos correr o risco da destruição universal. Hoje, tal como ontem, a arte procura salvar da morte uma imagem viva das nossas paixões e dos nossos sofrimentos.”

¹² I use the term ‘counterpoint’ inspired in Uexküll’s interpretation of nature and its living beings’ *umwelten* as a musical composition. Different species’s *umwelten* are significantly different ‘bubbles of senses’, different evolutionary worlds developed in perfect adaptive shape of senses in a way it resembles a musical composition, in fact, a Schaferian (1977) variation of the soundscape of the world: “Every *Umwelt* of a normal animal is a faultless composition of nature—you have only to understand how to look for its themes and its notes” (Uexküll, 1957, p.120). Thus, my usage of the term is not necessarily a critical evaluation but rather a comprehension of a relationship of dependence either symbiotic or parasitical, if we may.

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science and technological advance as sources for new mediums, thus new and wider exploring ground for the 'quest' of *pulchritudo vaga*.

The Paradox-Object

"The field of modern art is not a pluralistic field but a field strictly structured according to the logic of contradiction."

(Groys, 2008, p.1)

One could argue that all art has an inherent and innate political essence, such as any living human being who expresses himself, in the sense that it functions as a reflexion of its producer in its specific environment, and vice-versa, may it be its social, cultural, political, natural or inner-self environment. Art inarguably reflects one's visions and fantasies of being in the world, and one who is in the world has no chance of not being political in some way, even if one refuses to be actively engaged with such thing as politics. One can argue that even the refusal of a political expression or position is likewise a political stance, regarding that the way one lives in his own cultural and social background affects, in a bigger or smaller scale, the environment around him.¹³ However, much on politics and art can be discussed, nevertheless I shall focus my attention on what I believe to be the most politically important artistic forms of expression, for their attempts of breaking through toward new territories of human perception, expression and way of being in the world: the ones belonging to the vanguards.

According to Boris Groys the paradigm of modern art, which grew since the classical modernity (thus embodying the vanguards since the beginning of the 20th century) lies in the artists' creation of 'paradox-objects'. These paradox-objects are the result of an art that is not religious nor political propaganda.

¹³ Politics derive from the Greek word *politikos*, which means 'of, for or relating to citizens', so politics are what concerns to people as social beings, it is what is in between relationships between people and their environment. Recalling Uexküll's notion of the natural organic operation of species and their environments, politics are the articulation of human beings in relation to their common (or not so common, but connected) umwelts.

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They're the expression of modern art, a product of the enlightened atheism and humanism.

Groys states that art, as an expression of the modern world thus an expression of the modern beliefs, believes in balance of power. Art has always attempted to represent the greatest power in order to present a proposal of balance of power. He states that the "death of God means that there is no power in the world that could be perceived as being infinitely more powerful than any other" (2008, p.2), therefore modern art, as an expression of this, has its own regulatory character and its own power. One ought to understand this regulatory power as the reactive capacity of art to the context it is inserted, the counterpunctual character to its milieu in the conquering of new territory. Thus, in my understanding, this is the reason of being of the 'paradox-object' that is a specific counterpoint to a change of paradigm.

The paradox-object appears when the art world begins to function redundantly in its space/environment/influential area. The art world starts to serve its own purpose, that is, to theorize its own nature into a pleonasm, which begins to alienate itself from life, an art market is formed and art begins to be sterilized and stratified in an independent 'cosmos' or, we may call it by analogy—'umwelt'. This 'umwelt' of the art world/market, is carrier of a big heavy body for it imperializes a specific notion of art and of what is modern, so it devours all art surrounding it with its laws and rules and also all art historical past. All this through a logic of capital and marketing. This is how the art world's bubble starts losing its 'perceptive sensors' and isolates the 'organism' from other 'perceptive inputs', reducing the size of the umwelt into the alienated art market still imperialist in it's outer world, like a blind giant with heavy feet.

Faced with this evolution from the art 'patronage' system logic, which is basically an evolution from a simple patronage system to a complex one based on a capitalist economy system, the art world is sucked into "the reigning economic system [which] is a vicious circle of isolation. Its technologies are based in isolation, and they contribute to that same isolation" (Debord, 1967, p.15); this also inevitably happens in the 'art world' for it becomes inserted in the economic system.

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As a response to this, artists have antagonized and ridiculed this logic in a way, the inherent notion of art value and even and most importantly the notion of art itself. This is the genesis of what I consider to be the paradox-object;¹⁴

“In the context of contemporary art, individual artworks began to be paradox-objects that embody simultaneously thesis and antithesis.” (Groys, 2008, p.3)

To name some examples, one may remit to the early modernist vanguards onwards. Dadaism was one of the early predecessors of this ‘paradoxical’ and counter-active logic. R. Mutt’s (Marcel Duchamp) fountain may be considered one of the first paradox-objects, which revolutionized the status of art in society, artist in the ‘art world’, medium, object in opposition to *œuvre*, and the economical value of a piece. The intrinsic paradoxicality of the work is what renders the piece humorous, it is the sabotage of pre-established values, the ones of social, political, artistic and aesthetic conventions of yore. In short, ‘The Fountain’ was the profanation of the sacredness of the art gallery by exhibiting ‘a joke’ which turned upside down (literally) all the pre-conceptions of the status of art-work. Duchamp exhibited an idea, a political resistance to the reigning art system’s logic in the form of a paradox, an interference, ‘noise’, a deadlock in the logic of the settled economic system of the art market. By placing an upside down urinal in a gallery, Duchamp was tearing down the artist’s ivory tower and affirming a connection between art and life (for art, as we have concluded before is directly connected contrapuntally to our living ‘*umwelt*’ and is reactive within our milieu, therefore free and critical) by exposing a paradox of the ‘lack of context’ of that object in the gallery.

Similarly to Duchamp, in the world of music, John Cage was the responsible for a ‘revolution’ of the same kind. In an early ‘post-modernist’ era, in 1952 John

¹⁴ “Significantly, this understanding of art is also shared by the majority of those artists and art theoreticians who aim to be critical of the commodification of art—and who want art itself to be critical of its own commodification. But to perceive the critique of commodification as the main or even unique goal of contemporary art is just to reaffirm the total power of the art market— even if this reaffirmation takes a form of critique” (Groys, 2008, p.6).

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Cage presented the piece 4'33", the 4 minutes and 33 seconds of instrumental quietness. Like Duchamp's fountain, this piece also acts paradoxically inside previous conceptions of what is music, the status of the composer and the audience, and the value of a piece. This piece is an 'artificially' staged piece of idea witnessing the artificiality of the system where it is inserted, which would not work without the previously discussed redundancy and self-consciousness of the art market imperialized artwork. It is the witnessing of an interference to life in the essence of the art world. The witnessing of a 'paradox' of life in the essence of creation in freedom, and in the creation of free beauty, and it is exposed through a paradox, an object. This paradox is contained in the act of framing what otherwise should not be necessary, the affirming art as life, by breaking the paradigmatic aesthetical-codes of experiencing music, driving an attention to a widening of perception for an awareness of self in cosmos—the paradox of art.

To reach this paradox (the object's), is to attempt a system jamming for a breakthrough in a search for freedom in its every sense. It is to propose an alternative to the convention, an escape from a vicious cycle, a 'singular example' of life framed out of the chaos.

"And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life—not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord." (Cage, 1961, p.12)

I believe that this paragraph by Cage aims exactly to what I have been defending until now. Taking it apart, by dealing with sounds and not purposes it is implied that what music is dealing with is the 'effects' of sounds in sensation. The paradox of 'purposeful purposelessness' Cage suggests stands exactly for Nietzsche's philosophical 'horror' of existence, where one recognizes his condition of cosmic insignificance and uselessness; the atheistic realization of the lack of an ultimate purpose. But at the same time, this perspective brings the

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embracing of life as being an equal part to any other 'cosmic body'; it ceases to be a 'horror' of existence to become the Dionysian experience of seeking pleasure in existence instead of an ultimate goal; seeking a purposeful purposelessness: life itself. That is why, against a Groszian logic, Cage affirms that it is not 'an attempt to bring order out of chaos', for it is exactly an attempt of the opposite, as we have concluded before; Cage's attempt is explicitly the one of reaching one direct connection, one pure form that dissolves art into life, the unending paradox of grasping the first epiphany of aesthetic 'purity', experience of sublime integral to life. Art becomes a complex form of a pursuit for a life where there is nothing but a hedonist possibility of facing it. It is, thus, a political stance in the world. Each piece is a singular paradoxical proposal of a purposeful purposelessness, a 'singular example' proposal of experience.

Tyrus Miller (2009) suggests that post-World War II avant-gardes reinvented exemplarity¹⁵ in their use of dialectics. This exemplarity stands for the symbolic essence inherent to an art object, the intellectual tool to its production and the 'cultural/social' content to its experience. Miller argues that traditional forms of exemplarity tend to rely on existing sources of authority, like tradition, morality, religion or history. At the same time, these sources of authority act as a symbolic code, which, in my understanding is a form of pre-established/conservative/'doctrinarian' like aesthetic-code.

Miller terms this new exemplarity 'singular examples'—for it “embodies the paradoxical nature of this reinvention of exemplarity by the avant-garde and hints at its distinctiveness” (2009, p.8). This term is a parallel to what we have been discussing as paradox-object, in fact, I find that both theories are very compatible, and complement each other. Singular examples explain the paradox-objects: they are the emergence of a 'post-conventional'¹⁶ society, and the “programmatically commitment of the avant-gardes to freeing themselves from tradition and convention” (Miller, 2009, p.9).

¹⁵ In Roland Barthes's words, *exemplum* “is a detachable fragment, which specifically involves a meaning (heroic portrait, hagiographic narrative)” (2009).

¹⁶ As characterized by Jürgen Habermas (Miller, 2009, p.9).

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This commitment Miller mentions is exactly what I understand to be the paradoxical nature of the avant-gardes, in addition to the paradox-objects. Paradoxical, but not at all in a negative sense, for it is this nature that keeps motion to new vanguardist achievements.

“What is relevant is the result: the loss of legitimacy of traditional forms of exemplarity and the range of responses to this loss by avant-garde culture.” (Miller, 2009, p.9)

The paradox of vanguard is the constant circular forward motion of the vanguards in getting free from convention and tradition—a successful search for free beauty—and inevitably becoming conventional, familiar, aesthetical-codes, giving place to new breakthrough avant-gardes. Similar to Kandinsky’s conception of the ‘spiritual triangle of humanity’, as we may call it, where he metaphorizes humanity as a constantly clockwise rolling triangle, divided by horizontal unequal segments (the lower the segment the greater it is in breadth, depth and area): “Where the apex was today the second segment is tomorrow; what today can be understood only by the apex and to the rest of the triangle is an incomprehensible gibberish, forms tomorrow the true thought and feeling of the second segment” (2006, p.30). The triangle spins very slowly, and what was once revolutionary has now inescapably become conventionalized; and, in the world of late capitalism—commoditized.

The active practice of attempting to destroy art is the motto of the vanguardist action in pursuit of creating free beauty.

an *anti*-catalog

Because it calls the neutrality of art into question, this Anti-Catalog will be seen as a political statement. It is, in reality, no more political than the viewpoint of official culture. The singularity of that viewpoint—the way it advances the interests of a class—is difficult to see because in our society that viewpoint is so pervasive. In this Anti-Catalog, we have attempted to elucidate some of the underlying mechanisms and assumptions. Our effort is not intended simply as a critical exercise. Culture has the power to shape not only our view of the past but also the way we see ourselves today. Official culture can only diminish our ability to understand the world and to act upon that understanding. The critical examination of culture is thus a necessary step in gaining control over the meaning we give our lives.

(Rudolph et al., 2012)

4

New Territories, New Paradox: The Noise of Silence

"Today's revolution of aesthetics shall be part of the total revolution. A revolution that creates a society where arts be an integral part of life, like in primitive societies, and not an appendix of wealth."

(Black Mask, 2011, p.90)¹⁷

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to understand the creative impulse in and of humanity existence; its ontology as an affirmation of sexual and social territory, and its proto-philosophical character in the epiphany of self-awareness and distancing of self from an idea of nature, through the identification of the paradoxes that drive the human eager of producing artistic objects, so to say. It was suggested that art, aesthetical creation, is product of our most primitive creative action in the placement of self in the world, which paradoxically separates self from the primal chaos into an existentialist reflection. Later on it was suggested that this expression and search of a renewal of free beauty has a strong political value in the struggle for freedom, in the questioning of conventions and traditional values of social-codes.

The 'purposeful purposelessness' of art embodies the paradox of its existence as the struggle to life needless of a meaning, the reaching onto primal chaos, the not needing of a purpose for life in the experience of life itself.

On this last chapter I will attempt to relate the development of the world of late capitalism with the theory of what some regard as "the *only* political writing of our time" (Jappe, 2008, p.79), Guy Débord's *Society of the Spectacle*, with

¹⁷ Translated by me from Portuguese: "A revolução estética de hoje deverá ser parte da revolução total. Uma revolução que crie uma sociedade em que as artes façam parte integral da vida, como nas sociedades primitivas, não como apêndices de riqueza."

Baudrillard's theory of 'Simulation and Simulacra', and also with the Situationist International's artistic and political 'programme', in order to reach some kind of understanding of the 'intentions' or 'purposeful purposelessness' context of noise music of today, by discerning a more abstract understanding of noise and silence in society. I shall illustrate and take as an analysis model for extrapolation the work of Mattin. I also intend to, throughout this chapter be able to articulate the information discussed previously in this paper until this point, in order to make some sense, or at least try to make some coherence, of the aporias contained within the problematic of the artistic practice in human nature: the paradoxes I have acknowledge in culmination to a last paradox of actuality. Noise out of silence.

Spectacle, Simulacra

"Art can promote a sociobiological solution of the problems that is as energetic as the revolutionaries' political action. The supposed 'apolitical' approach to art is a fallacy. Politics that are free from bribes, party connotations or more transient tactics is the method by which humanity makes ideas real, for the welfare of the community."

(Moholy-Nagy, 2011, p.92)

The consequences of capitalism in the modern society are the responsible factors for the birth of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). There he argues that reality within societies that are dominated by modern conditions of production becomes a fake universe of 'images' that mediate the subject's relation to real life alienating him from it. Reality becomes an unreal spectacle that dominates one's life against what life actually is. The unreal world of images, simulations of a different reality based on something else than life, becomes the known real and something which is imperialistic upon our lives. Debord's argument is that in the world of late-capitalism "everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (Debord, 1967, p.7). These representations stand in direct relation to what Baudrillard defends to be the main drive in a capitalist society—consumption.

This phenomenon (the spectacle in the capitalist world of consumption) is responsible for the change of the paradigms of everyday life, everyday environment, and therefore changing social, political and artistic practice paradigms as well. The spectacle is responsible for the fragmentation of life in separate individual cells that less and less connect to each other at a social level (e.g. religion, art, science, philosophy, etc.).

“When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings—dynamic figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behaviour.” (Debord, 1967, p.11)

Baudrillard presents a compatible idea to Debord’s spectacle: the simulacra. He claims that in our current society reality has been replaced by ‘images’, that of symbols and signs, that represent but a simulation of actual reality. But this ‘reality’ which is a models based system, has lost its grasp in what reality actually is, being now just a self-built ‘hyper-reality’ with no other reference than itself.

To illustrate this ‘reality’ which he argues to be demolished into simulacra, Baudrillard refers to a Borges’ tale: “where the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory” (Baudrillard, n.d., p.1). This map is the simulation of reality, “but where the decline of the Empire sees this map become frayed and finally ruined, a few shreds still discernible in the deserts... rather as an aging double ends up being confused with the real thing” (Baudrillard, n.d., p.1). But on Baudrillard’s perspective, it is no longer the territory that precedes the map, nor survives it, but rather the reverse. It is the map that precedes territory and “if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map” (Baudrillard, n.d., p.2).

In an attempt to articulate this conception of the world as a spectacle or a simulacrum in the terms we have been discussing, I understand that what has happened is that the distancing of human-self to nature (the cultural nature, the image of the chaos), the framing in between human being and the framed cosmic chaos has been reframed time and time again. It was created a human territory

by the creation of symbolic 'frames'/images that substituted the frame of perceived chaos. Therefore, this reframing of the perception of chaos begins to have no resemblance to its original intangible nature, the perception of natural sublime in human life.

In other words, the reigning economic system has created an abstract territory of power that violates and substitutes the individual freedom of a subject to 'build' a territory of what we may consider the 'free beauty of life'. By creating an illusion of life, a spectacle, an unreal reality, it covers a possibility of grasping the real chaos.

What once was the framing of territory out of chaos to experience the deterritorialization onto chaos, is now the framing of territory out of a framed territory of a simulated 'chaos' of pre-framed territories which now function as models of experience and aspiration in the form of alienation. It is necessary a consciousness of the spectacle to be able to attempt to run from it: "The more he [the spectator] contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires" (Debord, 1967, p.16).

This spectacle is the result of the capitalist reification of commodity (hence the 'paradox of the vanguards', whose radicalism is ultimately mummified in the form of image commodities).

Reality has now become a paradox. It hides real life from the living in order to feed a machine of images of fake into a nowhere going existence of commoditized alienation.

The art market serves capitalism presenting itself as a commodity. This makes it an exclusive bourgeois product for in its essence it is a reiteration of itself inside a closed circle ran by economy that makes art lose its umbilical connection with life to exchange it for a world of images that already attained their legitimacy in a world of the spectacle. The art market is dominant in the art world. Therefore the image of the art world is serving this spectacle itself.

According to Groys, “art becomes politically effective only when it is made beyond or outside the art market.” (Groys, 2008, p.7)

Debord and the Situationist International pursued a policy of ‘revolutionary action within culture’, based on their belief of the ‘revolution of everyday life’. Their solution was “the re-invention of life outside the rules unilaterally laid down by the spectacle.” (Russel, 2008, p.85) With this as a basis, within the arts, they theorized ‘a way out’, a resistance to these rules, an ‘ultimate weapon’: the ‘constructed situation’. Fundamental to this idea is the understanding of the Situationist project as an attempt to build a new form of subjectivity and social consciousness, structured on a strong idea of freedom. The goal was to break the ‘perfectly closed circle’ of the spectacle, and re-enter real life experience.

These ‘constructed situations’ work basically as subversive anti-spectacle actions. In my understanding they are based on the idea of the vanguardist search for ‘free beauty’ we have discussed before, in the way that they work as an attempt of breaking through into chaos, to be revolutions of human experience, to provide a new connection and relation to real life. The attempt is to exceed human condition, it is Zarathustra’s quest to achieve the over-man. (Nietzsche, 2003)

Noise

“Noise is best defined as interference.”¹⁸

(Reynolds, 2006, p.55)

Jacques Attali, on his book *Noise* (2009), claims this society of spectacle as being also the society of silence, for it “eliminates dialogue; the organization of the monologue by political and economic organizations isolates and prevents direct, localized, non-repeatable communication” (Toth, 2008, p.27). Csaba Toth states that “these considerations enable us to theorize the rise of noise music as

¹⁸ I shall adopt Reynolds definition of noise as my own henceforward.

a form of cultural disturbance in the silent and silenced deindustrialized space of late capitalism” (Toth, 2008, p.27). Indeed. My understanding of the silence Attali declares to be the ‘acoustics’ of the current society, is that thus silence can at the same time be the most unbearable noise, when one is aware of it, or better. My argument is that, if one considers noise as interference, the ‘silence’ of the spectacle is the biggest interference to real life.

John Cage state’s that “wherever we are, all we hear is noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.” (Cage, 1961) I believe nowadays society functions reversely. Wherever we are, all we hear is silence. When we ignore it, we remain hypnotised. When we listen to it, we find it unbearable!

I believe that the in the wide understanding of noise music, one can find the current equivalent to SI’s concept of ‘constructed situation’, a response and a resistance to the hypnotist power of the spectacle.

“Noise’ not only designates the no-man’s-land between electro-acoustic investigation, free improvisation, avant-garde experiment, and sound art; more interestingly, it refers to anomalous zones of interference between genres: between post-punk and free jazz; between musique concrète and folk; between stochastic composition and art brut.” (Russel, 2008)

Since Russolo’s *The Art of Noises* (1986) in 1913, that the use of non-musical sounds in music became a reality. Russolo thought contrapuntally to a new-born industrial society and decided to use the sounds of this new world of machines as a musical response, and adaptation into the exploration of new creative territory.

Nowadays, society’s noise is silenced in alienation; it is the interference provoked by the spectacle of reality. Noise music acts contrapuntally to this society in reflecting this ‘silenced noise’ subversively as an aesthetical experience, which breaks the paradigms and conceptions of what is music, transforming it into new constructed situations. In a world where “popular music is pre-digested” (Adorno, 1941), a commodity of masses, an engine of the

spectacle, noise music attempts to tear down what there is of 'music' in itself, as a vanguard, it is a counter-cultural attempt of eradicating what of art it may contain, which, paradoxically makes it take the step into the new unframed chaos.

The free utilization of noise, as in noise music, is the paradox-object of the spectacle, it is its thesis and anti-thesis. Noise's paradox functions analogue to John Cage's 4'33" for it is an emphasizing of what is already there, it ceases to be silence to become the foreground of contemplation, an empowering of awareness. Then one can finally distinguish the spectacle from life.

This I believe Mattin's performative work has achieved radically, cannot be achieved if one doesn't dare to leave behind their safe zone "and expose [oneself] in the face of the internalized structures of judgment that govern our appreciation of music." (Mattin, 2008, p.20)

Mattin's performance work is what I consider to be a very important 'singular example' artistic reaction, for its pertinence and aesthetical character.¹⁹

Mattin is a Basque artist working with noise and improvisation. His work addresses the social and economic structures, with a radical political approach, of experimental music through live performance, recordings and writing. He explores the world of improvisation and experimentation as an attempt "to achieve freedom whatever the fuck that means." (Mattin, 2007) Mattin aims to question the nature and parameters of improvisation, and specifically, the idea of 'freedom' and the constant innovation that it traditionally implies, and the established conventions of improvisation as a genre. This reflection of freedom in improvisation is directly related to the raised questions of social relationships between public and performers, the distinction between artist and audience, the interaction between performer and instrument, social space and physical space,

¹⁹ See Appendix.

which Mattin jeopardizes and pushes boundaries of, exposing the fragility of these social negotiations when faced in an unfamiliar situation.

In his performance work, he utilizes noise not only sonorously, but constructing a situation where a spectacle of interference is created. He creates a game of power and territory where he takes control of the social reality, imaging this idea of the spectacle, he exposes it as social noise with uncomfortable silence, and transforms it sonorous noise, rendering social alienation. Mattin recreates a spectacle that acts as a playful allegory of the society of the spectacle.

We can understand that noise music, paradoxically by striving for the obliteration of the conception of music (the conventionally accepted music) approaches more Nietzschean concept of absolute music, as seen in the 'animal of music', for it is completely disconnected to an 'inner world' or to the expression of personal feelings as in poetry. It is rather the reflection of a world that is corrupted by the spectacle, for it is the counterpoint response to the current *status quo* that can break into the chaos to frame it contextually. Noise music puts the spectacle in contrast to real life, it has a primal approach into the unveiling of the spectacle, just as the Australian aborigines, noise 'sings' the territory of reality into existence.

Noise music is definitively a no-man's-land in its morphology and is a paradox also, for it only remains noise while it functions as interference. "Success, would, in any case signal the end of noise" (Hegarty, 2009, p.126), therefore, this success (as acknowledgment and conventionalization of its form as a culturally accepted aesthetics—in a society of spectacle perhaps) will only give place for a new form of noise, a new form of vanguard for the advancement of man as a being of chaos.

One may conclude that noise, defined as interference, is *a priori* an amorphous concept, for it is only recognizable inserted in the context it is presented. Therefore one may understand the radicalism of the vanguards of the past and the eager of man to leave his comfort zone and reach out to new territory of chaos as forms of noise in their specific sociopolitical contexts, for it is necessary to 'interfere' with conserved conventions to breakthrough onto new freedom.

Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to map ontologically the relation between human being and its creative genius, and argue the politicality of art in human social environment/umwelt. I believe that we may conclude that the paradoxical relation of man with his umwelt in what concerns to man's own placement in nature or chaos, is what drives him forward in exploration of new territories of 'humanity'. Noise music is, I believe, one of the current forms of aesthetical rebellion toward a 'total revolution' for 'total freedom', "whatever the fuck that means", it is the goal of a living experience. It is surely the 'noise of music', until it ceases to be noise... and is silenced back in the simulacrum of reality... it shall be the resistant power that exalts life into existence.

5

Appendix

In September 2009, I attended to Today'sart festival, in The Hague, Netherlands. It was there that I had my first contact with the work of Mattin, which caused an immense impression on me.

Mattin's performance at Today'sart was to be mistaken for a concert, for there was no title to it except for his name.

One would enter a room where there would be nothing but Mattin at its centre, standing in front of a microphone with a burning hot bright spotlight pointed at him. The audience's reaction was to find a place to sit somewhere on the floor and wait... wait till everyone comes in... and then wait till the 'show' starts... but no one really noticed the 'show' was already going on for awhile. Thus, the audience enjoyed the relaxation of the preliminaries of a concert while talking to each other, filling the room with the usual human voice hum. Mattin remained quiet, looking quite tense and static. His presence generated some discomfort, but nothing that could not be ignored. The audience was uncertain on whether to shut up or not. This tension grew with time. Of a sudden, lights go out and, making people hop of scare, a striking, deafening, painful wall of noise is fired off the speakers, that shakes even the floor tiles. This painfully loud noise lasted, I may guess, for around five minutes, in pure darkness. One was immerse in a violent whirlpool of invisible matter that would shake one's bones. All perspective was lost, reality was destroyed. There was just a screen of darkness, retina noise and a wall of sonorous concrete. Some people could not bear it and left the room.

Lights turned on again and noise ceased again unexpectedly. Everyone seemed at least a bit shocked. Silence reigned for a while, while the tympana adapted to the sudden changes and contrasted the silence with the reminiscent noise still ringing in our ears.

Appendix

At some point, with much time of uncomfortable lingering in a silent room and now with the 'fear' of a second scare, Mattin mumbled a few words on his trembling voice. His improvised broken speech, in the little I could understand of it, was impelling the audience to do something, to say something, to improvise, and at the same time 'threatening' with noise. I remember him saying stuff like: "The noise will come back", "You have the power to unmute the track by saying something" to which I responded "Something!" and had no more than his eyes fixed on me for a while, and great discomfort. The tension was huge, until the noise stroke again! Each time it seemed longer. Each time more people would leave the room.

This cycle was repeated 6 times. Until in the last flood of noise and darkness, with five people remaining including me; Mattin left, leaving us to look at a microphone and an open door when finally the lights went on.

6

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