INTERFERENCE / A Journal of Audio Culture
CURRENT ISSUE: NOISE

CURRENT ISSUE   ARCHIVE   ABOUT   EDITORIAL BOARD   ADVISORY BOARD   CALL FOR PAPERS   BOOK REVIEWS   SUBMISSION GUIDELINES   CONTACT

Share This Article

View As PDF

## Editorial: Noise

By Rachel O'Dwyer

"The noises of a society are in advance of its images and material conflicts. Our music foretells our future. Let us lend it an ear."

Jacques Atalli

Why make noise today, when the 'aesthetics of failure' now means plug-ins for attractive forms of analogue distortion and a healthy trade in circuit-bent Speak-and-Spells on the Internet? Why make noise today, when the rhetoric of subversion seems almost indistinguishable from the neoliberal reflexivity of governments and corporations, and our tactics resonate with those of viral capitalism and soft control? Why make noise if our noise no longer constructs difference?

We wanted to begin this issue with an acknowledgement that 'noise' today is not necessarily a disruptive force operating outside of what is being disrupted. Taking this as a starting point, how might we think of noise as a constructive set of audiosocial tactics that disturb systems (genres, institutions, orders) from within? This means thinking about noise not only within traditionally sonic categories such as tonal dissonance or vibrational force, but inviting an expanded view that considers how sonic strategies intersect with broader social, technical and political forms of conflict. Here an array of sonic considerations, from unwanted sounds, chaotic frequency distribution, deconstructive remainder, systemic glitch or excess, blend and gesture both to cultural practices of dissent and their broader socio-political resonances.

The papers in this issue are necessarily diffuse; they occupy anomalous zones of interference between genres and hopefully frusrate any easy definitions of noise. However, in different ways all of the authors explore how practices across music, performance, political theatre and public intervention multiply possibilities for resistance and transformation.
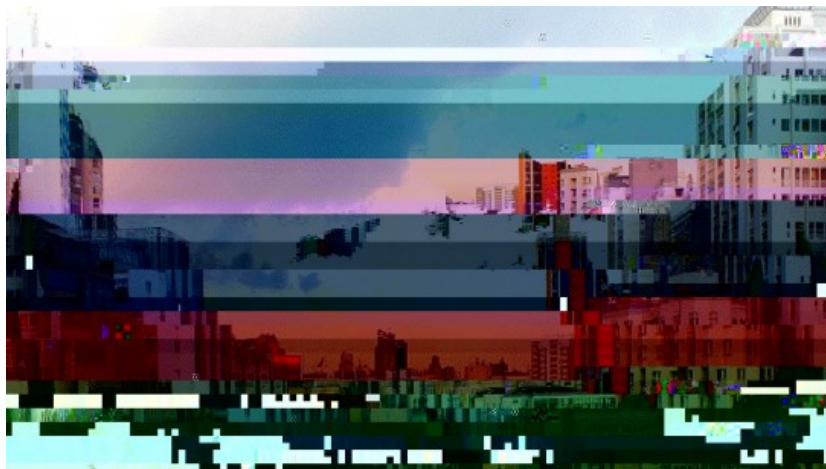
ROSA MENKMAN MUSEUM (2010)

Lara Frisch's article 'A Convulsive Encounter With Personified Noise' approaches the phenomenon of stuttering both as a communication pathology that breaks with language and as a phonic rupture

ABOUT INTERFERENCE

Interference is a biannual online journal in association with the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media (Gradcam). It is an open access forum on the role of sound in cultural practices, providing a trans-disciplinary platform for the presentation of research and practice in areas such as acoustic ecology, sensory anthropology, sonic arts, musicology, technology studies and philosophy. The journal seeks to balance its content between scholarly writing, accounts of creative practice, and an active engagement with current research topics in audio culture. [More]

TRANSMISSION DRIFT

Interference wishes to work collaboratively with the Irish Sound, Science and Technology Association (ISSTA) for their forthcoming conference *Transmission Drift* on August 28-29, 2013. This conference is an opportunity to create a special issue that reflects wider questions around sound, art and performance as well as science and technology. It is Interference's goal to publish papers that explore sound in a variety of academic and artistic contexts. [More]

CALL FOR PAPERS

General Issue on Methodologies (Issue 4)

Deadline for Abstracts Extended to May 18th 2012

While still a relatively new discursive platform, Interference would like to take the opportunity in our fourth call for papers to invite submissions for a more open call, stepping momentarily outside the strong thematics that have shaped our previous three publications. This call invites papers on any aspect of audio cultures, but places an emphasis on the methodologies and frameworks that inform your research. [More]

ISSUE 3 PHOTO CREDIT

Rosa Menkman; *Museum*; 2010; Images courtesy of the artist.

rosa-menkman.blogspot.com

ISSN: 2009-3578

INTERFERENCE NETWORK

Facebook
Flickr

that foregrounds the sonic potential of 'background noise' (Serres), opening speech to excess. Frisch's account explores how, when meaning itself seems to falter, language as pure sonic potential escapes circulation within an ordered system, provoking the static between subjective experience and what can and cannot be formally articulated. A philosophically grounded discussion is here channelled through the work of experimental composer Dieter Schnebel, an artist who is particularly concerned with the limits of music and the extended possibilities of human vocal performance.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the parallel development of systems theory (concerned with the management of noise and equivocation) alongside an acknowledgement and celebration of textual ambiguity in the arts seems to suggest an ideological impasse between scientific and cultural approaches to noise. Where many sonic practices of this time relied on scientific techniques for the quantisation, synthesis and transmission of sound as information and at the same time were formally influenced by stochastic and aleatory compositional techniques, this dialectic has had a significant impact on audio culture, and the fluctuating signification of noise in particular. Frisch's paper considers stuttering as it operates in this space between communication and noise. To open communication up to 'static' is not to surrender to the void, but to potentially open up a space for other forms of expression to come to the fore.

Dario Sanfilippo echoes this idea in 'Turning Perturbation into Emergent Sound, and Sound into Perturbation', theorising a creative practice for noise that goes beyond the tradition aesthetics of failure. As a composer, performer and sound artist, Sanfilippo explores feedback as a constructive practice in sonic art. Here noise does not imply a formal malfunction or collapse such as with the glitch; instead, complex feedback systems are used to reflexively push materials to their *functional* extreme. As such, the author outlines a sonic practice that perturbs the technological 'script' (Akrich, 1992) of electronic media and tools for performance. As well as a thorough detail of the theory and functionality of feedback systems – useful for those readers who are unfamiliar with the ins-and-outs of dynamic systems – Sanfilippo recounts the concepts and behaviours of two Human-Computer Interfaces for audio installation: *LIES* and *SD/OS*.

'Contemporary Art and the Noise of TENDING' by Caleb Kelly and Ross Gibson pushes at the boundaries of noise in an audiocultural context. Interestingly, given the authors' theoretical position in audio cultures and media theory, the chief focus concerns the 'noise' that emerges where relational and community-based art projects intersect with institutional contexts such as the university, the gallery, concert hall, or public park. The authors describe the germination of TENDING, a community garden cultivated by staff and students from Sydney College of Arts, detailing the agitations that emerged in this process: between the institution and the public; between nature and culture; and between signal and noise. Attending to these antagonisms, the authors ask if it is possible to foster a clearer understanding of the structure of a sociopolitical system through the discourse of noise. The authors use theoretical frameworks from audio culture in order to theorise inaudible sites of conflict. In TENDING, this is achieved not by trying to find correlations with noise as a purely auditory phenomenon in the garden, but by 'listening' to and questioning the surrounding institutional frameworks of the site.

Noise as aesthetic subversion and noise as direct action coalesce in Jeremy Woodruff's 'A Voice in the Dark: Subversive Sounds of the Living Newspapers and the Flint Sit-down strike of 1936-37'. Woodruff's perspective looks at noise not as extramusical expression but as affective contagion in forms of political protest and direct action, specifically exploring correspondences between theatrical and political demonstrations in the labour movements of the 1930s. This history runs parallel and sometimes counter to the more usual accounts of futurism, musique concrète and free jazz. The author's research identifies powerful and complex feedback loops between experimental sound and electronics in workers' theatre and forms of noise as agitation, immersion and subversive amplification used in labour protests and demonstration at this time. Woodruff finishes with the suggestion that the convergence of aesthetic, political and everyday experience has powerful possibilities for political agencies today.

This issue also includes Robin Parmar's review of Hillel's Schwartz' *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (Zone Books, 2011).

References

Akrich, M. (1992) 'The De-scription of Technical Objects. *In* Bijker, W. and J. Law (eds.) *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change.* London: MIT Press, 259-264.

Attali, J. (1985) *Noise a Political Economy of Music.* London: The Manchester University Press.

Return to Current Issue