A Cultural, Political
and Aesthetic Mapping
of Underground and
Fringe Music

SOUNDS OF THE UNDER GROUND

Stephen Graham

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Underground and Fringe Music

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Preface

The underground is an enticing concept. It suggests ideas of shadowy struggle and esoteric doings, whether we think of wartime resistance in France, of the nineteenth-century Underground Railroad in the United States, or of any number of obscure cultural movements. "Underground" has long served as a potent metaphor, suggesting as it does concealment, dissidence, and subversion. Cultural and political movements around the world have noticed this; right-wing extremist groups such as National Socialist Underground *and* leftist organizations like Weather Underground have eagerly seized upon "underground" as a readymade label implying stealth subversion and dissenting resistance.

Music has been no exception, with "underground" being adopted by practitioners and accorded by critics across many different genres as a marker of cultural distinction. Use of the term typically follows a loose sort of logic. Underground hip-hop or dance musics, for example, are positioned as distinct from supposedly compromised commercial forms ("straight from the underground!"). This is a kind of relative use of "underground" that plays on the term's suggestions of subversion and distinction. I have something different in mind in this book, even if I'm also calling up suggestions of obscurity and, to a point, subversion.

I'm writing specifically about noncommercial forms of music making that exist in a kind of loosely integrated cultural space on the fringes and outside mainstream pop and classical genres. What I'll call "underground" musical forms—noise, improv, and extreme metal but also fringe practices like post-noise experimental pop and even some kinds of sound art—share a world of practitioners burrowing away independent of mainstream culture. They may be trying to resist that culture politically, but they might also just be satisfying themselves by making music for small audiences and little to no profit.

My argument here is that due to shared practical, musical, and in many

cases political allegiances, these practices can be described collectively using the guiding metaphors of the "underground" and the "fringe." The first describes ultra-marginal music and the second closely related music that fringes onto either high-art institutions or the commercial marketplace. I use critical analysis and interviews with practitioners in drawing up a map of this broad territory. Those interviews are dotted throughout the book but concentrated across Part II, which develops the contextual introduction of Part I ahead of the closer focus on music in Part III.

This expansive and seemingly definitive organizing framework is used even while acknowledging that my version of the underground and its fringes is personal and partial. I'm offering a set of signposts rather than a hard proof, a starting point rather than a destination. There are other undergrounds, just as there other versions of this particular underground. I'm simply trying to provide some useful categories and details and in this way to open up conversation and spur further thought about a desperately neglected realm of musical activity.

PART I

What Is the Underground?

I

Introduction to the Underground and Its Fringes

1.1. Introduction: Contexts, Chronology, and Concepts

I've become used to bizarre sights and sounds. Men playing guitars with their teeth against a backdrop of murderous imagery. People bumping into each other in confused but cheerful huddles, trying to follow vague instructions written on cards. A woman covered in synthetic blood screaming into a microphone like a loosed warrior. A piece of amplified soft glass being eaten, spectacularly. These kinds of experiences are now routine to me. And similar things can be found in obscure or veiled places across the world, from basement rooms in rented accommodations in Detroit, to repurposed bars and clubs in Dublin or Berlin, to meetinghouses in Tokyo, to scrungy warehouses in London and Glasgow. At venues such as these concerts and festivals are held where sheets of paper are played with handheld fans and cymbals with violin bows, where contact microphones expose the hidden sounds of the most basic acts of friction, where turntables are mined for sound without the use of records, and where abrasive sonic tinkering and wild and sometimes rickety experiment is the order of the day.

This book is about all of these things. It tries to construct a map that might organize all of this activity and present it in some intelligible scholarly form based on a couple of key guiding metaphors, understanding the dangers inherent to this institutionalizing impulse all the same. It focuses on what I am calling "underground music," an umbrella term for the musical practices just described. These practices incorporate both ultra-marginal "underground"

music and underground music that fringes onto either more mainstream commercial or "high"-culture contexts. This fringe music can be seen in the case of the commercial fringe, for example, with artists such as Ben Frost and Laurel Halo making experimental electronic music and with "semipopular" festivals such as Roadburn in the Netherlands, Villette Sonique in France, and All Tomorrow's Parties in the United States and the UK. On the other hand, high-cultural fringe music can be seen with groups like Skogen and Polwechsel that fuse improvisation with contemporary classical music techniques. But for the most part, underground practices exist at something of a remove from the mainstream, "underground."

The "ultra-marginal" underground can be seen in noise artists such as Werewolf Jerusalem, the New Blockaders, Prurient, Hijokaidan, SPK, and Ramleh; in more or less obscure black metal artists such as Lord Foul, Leviathan, Wolok, and Xasthur; and in improvisers such as Okkyung Lee, Maggie Nicols, Annette Krebs, and Axel Dörner. These artists make work that sometimes gets programmed in the same venues and festivals; often gets written about in the same places; and, broadly speaking, operates in the same kind of exploratory cultural tradition where techniques and sounds both from "high"-art and popular forms, from free jazz to metal to techno and jungle, are variously important. The shared radical aesthetics and cultural marginality of these musics places them into some kind of continuum, notwithstanding important subcultural genre differences between them; extreme metal has its own scene economies when placed against, say, improv, as noise does likewise. But these don't cancel out the many cultural, aesthetic, and political interrelations we can see across these musics. We've long had words, however imperfect, to describe classical and popular and traditional musics. But my argument here is that we need a new term to supplement these monolithic categories in order to describe (and, yes, effectively institutionalize) the activity that falls between their cracks.

The underground has existed in some recognizable form outside and/or at the fringes of the cultural and social mainstream, with links to but partial independence from capital and institutions of the state, for forty-odd years. This is a period in which the kinds of oddball aesthetic mixtures and international networks of esoteric scenes that the underground is built on became possible, first as a result of mail-order networks, post-1960s cultural expansion, and fringe popular culture activities such as making 'zines and more recently as a result of the infinite promotional and productive capacities of the Web. These links to state and nonstate institutions have become more common in recent years, as I argue across Part II, due to ongoing changes in cultural policy. But they are still piecemeal and minor, doing relatively little to mitigate the underground's

extra-mainstream existence outside or on the fringes of the institutions—labels, venues, magazines, linguistic conventions, award shows, schools—that undergird other musical traditions.

Despite the dangers of my localized and specialist use of the rather popular term "underground," I prefer it to alternatives both because of its aptness as a metaphor and because it's already used to describe the kinds of music I'm writing about. While this use is far from canonical, it's vernacular to the point that practitioners and scene members should, I hope, recognize some link with the way they talk about the music already. This is even if, as will be seen throughout the book, the territory is far from settled in this respect.[1] Fringe, incidentally, seems to me to be a less controversial literary concept that gives some context and definition to the central image of the underground, mixing of metaphors notwithstanding.

The practices "underground" and "fringe" are being used to contain are in reality fragmented and even dissociated in some ways. Other practices might have been or could be absorbed into my framework. Experimental electronic urban cultures across the world, for instance, from grime in the UK to bubbling in the Netherlands, would reduce the feeling of a whitewash that often skews cultural visions like this one. Race, like gender and class, is obviously an important structuring formation in the underground, though these aren't research avenues I've found much room to go down, regrettably and predictably, in what is necessarily a foundational project. I have to set limits somewhere, and, rightly or wrongly, with cultural bias likely clouding my vision, I've concluded that, despite the lack of commercial success of certain forms of grime, for example, a marginality and lack they share with underground and with fringe popular/underground forms that I *do* cover, those grime forms don't *sound* sufficiently different from more commercially successful examples of the genre to be applicable within my model. As I've said, other versions of this project might have found a way to include those forms, to draw links between many *more* kinds of marginal cultural practices around the world, but this one doesn't.

The kind of boundary drawing and territory settling that I am attempting has inherent limitations, as we've just seen. But a key argument of what follows is that such mapping is justified. The underground and its fringes, while being integrated through marginal extra-institutional or fringe-institutional existence (what Britt Brown, musician and head of the Not Not Fun label, calls in our interview "connection and community, on however micro a scale"), is also organized around some core sense of aesthetic and political innovation and radicalism, notwithstanding the potential flaccidness of these terms as descriptors. I'd tentatively link this aspect of the underground and its fringes with some

notion of the avant-garde and of modernism, without, however, collapsing the underground into a simple continuation of those traditions or sets of ambitions. Various sonic and aesthetic strategies and techniques of contestation and subversion can be found in the underground, including techniques I describe across Part III as profanation, sublimation, and counter-magic. These various techniques are deployed to the effect of suggesting to underground audiences a kind of "reconfiguration of the sensible." This reconfiguration is somewhat in line with previous modernistic and avant-garde models of critique and institutional and linguistic innovation.[2] But it's also separate from these in its variety and in its ambiguous relationships with high-cultural modes of contest, politics, and invention.

Now someone might of course respond to all this by saying: "Fine, this music links together and also doesn't fit under existing labels, but why should we try to organize it rigidly?" Britt Brown even suggests that across what I would describe as underground music, "commonalities in modes of operation don't necessarily equate with commonalities in aesthetic. . . . They don't share an aesthetic beyond the basic civility and idealistic humanism required to run a business out of passion not profit." These are perfectly valid responses. A map is always a story of values and privileges and things missed. Identity is fundamentally a performance of failure, as Lacan likes to say; representing anything in language necessarily involves a kind of failure or contingency. And this is important to bear in mind: the underground and the fringe are heuristic concepts whose "reality" is fragmentary and incomplete and continually being formed and reformed. Not only that, but supplementary and potentially contradictory metaphors, such as the "margins," "outside," and even "the mainstream" are needed and indeed periodically employed in the book. But there is something powerful in the concept of a named thingness, even when that "thing" inevitably manifests loss and personal prejudice in its boundaries. The name or the bind—in this case the underground and its fringes, materialized in festivals and music and Web connections and forums and labels and so on—becomes a scrying mirror, a frame for socialities composed anew. And my contention is that the "commonalities in modes of operation" Brown speaks of are both so powerful as to make speaking of a global underground/fringe possible and also matched by aesthetic sympathies of innovation and experiment.

So the map being offered seems justified to me. But it needn't be seen as fixed, brutish, or final. The map is not the territory. Many other maps are possible, just as many other underground territories are possible. My map is instead intended to be finite, fragmentary, and nondeterminative, an open rather than a closed door, as much a question or set of questions as an answer.

1.2. *The Underground, the Fringe, and "High"/"Low" Culture*

What kind of relationships with other musical forms does the underground and its fringes have? Boundary drawing in music or otherwise is social work; it relies upon, and in turn creates, conventionalized structures of musical styles and normative and hierarchical cultural discourses. It is done by social groups or individuals keen to establish or maintain some kind of vested interest, cognitive authority, or professional integrity.[3] Boundaries always relate to specific goals and interests. Even entrenched boundaries, such as those that define "classical" and "popular" music, are not natural divisions. They are instead social conventions that help maintain the institutional power bases of each bounded practice. In reality—in terms of how people listen to, consume, make, and think and write about music—these genres are often inextricably intertwined, even if there are important social, cultural, economic, institutional, and aesthetic distinctions that need to be acknowledged between these musics.[4] In some ways these musics are incommensurable. But on the whole the qualitative historical distinctions people have drawn are constructed and conventional, not natural.

The same goes for underground music. It multiply overlaps with classical and popular forms in the proliferation of intersecting practices and technical and cultural problems that have defined Western musical culture in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This overlapping operates in two primary ways. These can be described using the spatial metaphors of "fringes" and "strata." Underground music butts up to and crosses over with other forms at their fringes, and vice versa, as I've been saying. But as well as fringing more mainstream commercial or "high"-art styles, from heavy metal to experimental composition, underground music also shares tools and influences with the "high" and "low" mainstreams in an interpenetrating way. These musics, the underground and the mainstream(s) (mixed metaphor notwithstanding), might be said to exist as strata overlaid, interpenetrating, up-and-down, with permeable boundaries separating them but leaving channels of cultural exchange open. The underground travels "up" and "down," grabbing and sharing influences and stylistic traits from throughout the cultural spectrum.

So my spatial metaphors indicate two kinds of relationship here between mainstream styles and underground styles; horizontal juxtaposition and overlap and vertical overlaying and interpenetration. Free improvisers such as Seymour Wright and John Butcher make music that clearly shares aesthetic interests and historical influences with free jazz musicians such as Mary Halvorson and Peter Evans on the one hand and experimental composers such as Michael Pisaro and Peter Ablinger on the other. But it wouldn't be fully accurate simply to

absorb musicians like Wright or earlier figures such as AMM into the "counter-hegemonic" experimental tradition of John Cage or the free jazz tradition of Ornette Coleman and others.[5] Even if these labels work up to a point, these musicians belong to a different institutional and economic and generic world. Something else is going on here. Similarly, post-noise fringe pop artists such as James Ferraro, LA Vampires, the Advisory Circle, and Fatima Al Qadiri—where "post-noise" refers to twenty-first-century music building off the viscous sounds, loose gestures, and anti-mainstream contexts of noise, while adding pop influences and even some commercial appeal (see chap. 9)—make work that uses popular culture, from 1980s films and the proto-digital soundtracks of 1990s advertising to popular musical sounds themselves, as bedrock influences. But they aren't simply pop artists at the extremes; their work demands some kind of other home. These would be examples of horizontally overlapping fringe practices.

Mixed allegiances like these can be found all over the place in a busy, mottled twenty-first-century musical world. Composers such as Lina Lapelyte, Ed Bennett, Seán Clancy, Yann Robin, Wolf Edwards, and Jennifer Walshe improvise and make music in noninstitutional contexts as well as composing traditional notated work. Sound artists such as Ryo Ikeshiro, Akio Suzuki, and Florian Hecker all benefit from the structures of the art and traditional high-cultural worlds while also existing outside them to a degree. These are all border examples, outliers, who hint at a territory while fringing on others. These fringe musicians, even while being close to well-established traditions, demonstrate the need for further terminological expansion.

In many other respects, beyond these "horizontal" links, the underground can be understood as a distinct zone of cultural activity existing "below" or "between," but permeated by and permeating, the high and low mainstreams. When Whitehouse explored extreme performing aesthetics, imagery, and sounds in the late 1970s, they were doing something different from any contemporary popular musicians or experimental or avant-garde composers of the era. The same goes for Merzbow, Consumer Electronics, the Haters, Pain Jerk, and many others in the 1980s and 1990s; Burning Star Core, Zeni Geva, Wolf Eyes, and so on in the 2000s; and Vicky Langan, Asva, Prurient, part wild horses mane on both sides, Astral Social Club, and many others in recent years. These noise, extreme metal, improv, and performance art figures clearly take influences from and exist alongside classical and popular musicians. But what they're doing deserves its own language, its own framework, its own territory.

The various spatial relationships just discussed are illustrated in schematic form in figure 1 below. Figure 1 tries to depict the horizontal relationships

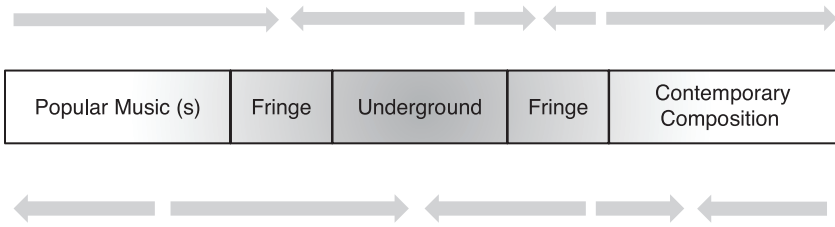| Popular Music (s)	Fringe	Underground	Fringe	Contemporary Composition

Fig. 1. The relationships among the underground, popular music, and contemporary composition

between the different musical practices (these could also be represented in any other number of ways of course, for instance, vertically). The two overlapping areas in figure 1 where the underground meshes with popular music and with contemporary composition respectively in the same image represent the category-ambiguous "fringe" artists and musics mentioned above. The white sections represent "home" characteristics, while the darkening gradients represent up-and-down right-and-left interpenetrating convergences among the three forms, such as the sharing of instruments and contexts between noise and pop or the importance of sonic abrasion in avant-garde music from both the academy and the underground. These interdynamic relationships and exchanges are depicted in both the gradients of figure 1 and the toing and froing arrows in the same image. The diagram's fixedness should be read loosely; the overlapping areas statically represent what are actually dynamic, intertwined, multiply border-crossing activities.

1.3. The Digital Age and the History of the Underground

While it *is* a concern to convey to some degree the historical development of underground music, whose direct origins I trace broadly to the late 1960s and early 1970s with acts such as the Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS) and AMM, it is a *particular* concern of the book to examine the concrete cultural existence of underground music in the digital age, that is, roughly since the 1990s. Underground music has developed and diversified to a considerable extent over the past two decades, chiefly as a result of the opportunities presented by cheap recording and reproduction technologies and the Web. In the 1970s, 1980s, and into the transitional period of the 1990s, the underground existed within the pages of fanzines and networks of distribution dominated by

mail order and, to a lesser extent, by the physical locations of record shops and concerts. While a taste for physical media such as cassettes, records, and CD-Rs persists in the underground, the former predominance of physically anchored distribution networks and media of criticism and promotion has shifted since the 1990s to embrace immaterial digital files and Web-based distribution and promotion practices. As such, we could speak of two chronologically distinct undergrounds, the second drawing its values and some of its procedures from the first but differing fundamentally in its media and its tools.

Some have argued that, due to the wide and often cost-free availability of all kinds of culture in the digital age, any notion of a viable underground has effectively disappeared in that period: this is an important argument to come to grips with when thinking about the history of the underground. For the critic Simon Reynolds, "the web has extinguished the idea of a true underground; it's too easy for anybody to find out anything now. . . . It's hard for me to see the changes as anything other than dis-intensifying."[6] David Keenan makes a similar argument, as, for example, in a piece for the *Wire* in December 2014. In his book *Retromania*, while discussing Dylan Jones's *iPad Therefore I Am*, Reynolds expands on this theme of a disappearing or disappeared underground, refining it somewhat to the specific context of "popular music":

> Dylan Jones retraces in *iPod Therefore I am* the trajectory by which seventies punk evolved into eighties style culture, which in turn led to the current state of play, where nothing is subcultural anymore and ideas of "underground" and "subversive" seem untenable, at least in popular music.[7]

It's not clear that the underground that Reynolds refers to here is identifiable with my version of the underground, despite his writing in many contexts about the kinds of music I cover in the present book. However, Reynolds's points about accessibility and the Web surely bear on my own discussion. I am arguing, contra Reynolds and Keenan, that an underground not only persists in the digital age but thrives. While the fundamental nature of the underground I am writing about has undoubtedly shifted in the past two decades, as Web archives such as Ubu Web, personal blogs and e-zines such as *Dusted*, discussion forums such as Dissensus and I Hate Music, and artist/label websites and SoundCloud, Bandcamp, and Facebook pages have all made both accessing and discussing underground music much easier, the characteristic that one must *go to* the underground instead of it coming to you, as Frank Zappa suggested in the late 1960s and 1970s,[8] is still in fact the case.

This above is true, even if that "going to" now largely consists of web searches

and Facebook likes as opposed to sending out mail orders or traveling to a record shop. Japanese musician Toshimaru Nakamura suggested in our interview that the Internet still only plays a small part on the underground scene, a reaction that is hardly unique, but this is surely a minority opinion at this point. Even within this context of Web accessibility, in any case, it's highly unlikely that the average music fan would regularly stumble across three-hour drone albums or seven-minute noise screeds in the way that they might a pop song or even a piece of classical music. And even if they did, it's equally unlikely they would engage with that music in a meaningful way. Wider political and cultural currents might mean that what Keenan calls an established "anti-canon" decays any potency a marginal underground might have, but this isn't clear to me at all, either aesthetically or otherwise: the richness of the underground, to me, lies in its marginality and range of musical styles, not in the political value of isolationism.

The "going to" remains. The quality of *unproblematic potential access* here does not seem as important to me as the *possibility of desiring such access*. The possibility of access, moreover, seems much less pressing to me here than the *fact of* the underground's marginal size and scope, which in themselves would safeguard its "undergroundness." The covert, esoteric, and marginal qualities of the underground have not been dispelled by the fact that underground cultures are now notionally open to all. The willingness of the general public either to turn away or to ignore its existence in the first place has been the historical source of the underground's marginality and reclusion, not that public's inability to locate it. The underground as a distinct cultural space survives, notwithstanding digital age changes. As Britt Brown told me, "Internet futurists love to herald how digital life has rendered any notion of an 'underground' obsolete and ridiculous, and admittedly lines are blurrier than they used to [be], but there's still a distinction, to anyone who cares to notice."

Other critiques or accounts of the underground and its supposed disappearance raise the issues of class and resources. They alight on the shrinking public sector and the increasing precarity of work in the West in the post–End of History, post–social contract political milieu of the twenty-first century, particularly since the global crash of 2008. These accounts suggest that independent artistic production of the kind represented by the underground might be seriously threatened without access to vital systems of support such as social welfare and cheap housing. Nina Power, for instance, points out when talking about the current intersection of art and economy that

the same material questions permanently hover in the background: who will pay you, and for what? I don't think there's a lack of ideas out there, just a ridicu-

lously extreme expanse between rich artists and writers, and the poor ones. The underground is no longer possible in cities which are so expensive that people cannot afford to be poor in them.[9]

While certainly not discounting these issues of political and social economy as pressing on underground practices, I would in response point to the underground's broad independence or at least partial autonomy from the state and its institutions. The effect of the collapse of public-sector support for the arts would in this way not be as damaging to that underground, which needs fewer resources and less support to maintain existence. This doesn't contradict the fact that many of its artists struggle nor the idea that those who don't might do so as a result of social privilege more than any underground independence from capital and market demands. It's simply to suggest that the underground's relative size and relative independence mean that the shrinking public sector in many countries may not be as directly detrimental to the underground as some fear, though these contexts obviously directly impinge on people's lives notwithstanding.

It's not just the size and relative independence that might mark the underground out from the depredations (and benefits) of neoliberal capitalism but also the nature of its independence when seen in light of other musical cultures and subcultures. While the mainstream has, with the digital age's explosion of content and value, undergone a process of "disintermediation,"[10] where the audience's access to the music is no longer blocked to anything like the same degree as it was by cultural intermediaries such as record companies and music magazines, the underground has never been set up around such blocking structures. It has always been what I would like to describe as an "anintermediated"—that is, never having been intermediated in these ways—cultural space, providing what has aspired in many cases to be an alternative or supplement to capitalist modes of exchange. Within this anintermediated space, little division has existed between musicians and other musicians, labels, and audiences. This flattened, participatory set of relations in the underground—although not universal—is one of its defining characteristics.

The underground's anintermediated status is as apparent when we look back to its earlier periods as it is today. For instance, groups such as the Los Angeles Free Music Society sold their material to small audiences and communicated with other, geographically distant underground musicians via mail order and mail throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This echoed on a much smaller scale earlier independent labels'—such as John Fahey's Takoma Records—setting up of self-governing distribution systems outside mainstream channels in the late

1950s and 1960s, as well as the alternative networks of performance and distribution built by left-leaning folk musicians in the United States in the same period.[11] This early underground self-sufficiency and autonomy embodies a form of what Robert Adlington has described, in relation to movements spearheaded by Ewan MacColl and Chris Cutler in 1960s and 1970s Britain, as "restricted scale . . . bottom-up, non-profit-oriented entrepreneurialism," which could claim some independence from capitalist "political and economic structures,"[12] though the situation is more complicated than it might appear at first blush (much more on this idea of autonomy and movements of resistance in chap. 4).

The LAFMS's use of mail order mirrors the contemporary methods of distributors and promoters such as Forced Exposure, Bang the Bore, and Banana Fish and labels such as Not Not Fun, Sustain-Release, and Hospital Productions. Record labels such as Broken Flag in Britain operated in the late 1970s and 1980s with a staff of only one or two people, creating releases with very limited recording and production budgets.[13] Small publishing houses such as the fringe-culture specialists RE/Search similarly compiled books and fanzines featuring interviews and writing on underground music culture.[14] None of these older operations were large or in any way ring-fenced off from their audience. And none of them differ to a substantial degree, at least in terms of the kind of material they put out, their relation to their audience, and the size of that audience, from comparable underground groups, labels, and publications of today, all of which operate within this context of anintermediation. It is due precisely to its continuing anintermediation and marginality that I am arguing here for the underground's existence in the digital age.

1.4 *The Book: Structure and Method*

I'm seeking here to map underground music and its fringes in as broad a sense as possible. As such, I engage in extensive cultural and political discussions, as well as more rigorously music-aesthetic ones, "aesthetic" referring here to artistic qualities considered at a remove from political or cultural issues that may otherwise be pressing on the discussion but are being temporarily bracketed away.

The structure of the book reflects this threefold focus. Part I introduces the cultural, musical, and political situation of the underground, extending the current broad introduction into an examination of specific underground and fringe music and musicians in the next chapter and then city scenes in different countries around the world in chapter 3. Part II uses interviews with practitioners to build up a more fine-grained picture of the cultural, political, and eco-

nomic contexts of the underground.[15] Part III shifts focus onto the music and the scenes around different underground genres, giving a historical analysis and aesthetic interpretation of key styles, all considered within the context of the wider arguments about cultural position and politics of the preceding chapters.

This three-part structure covers culture, music, and politics, then culture and politics, and then music, without treating any of these categories as autonomous from the others or from additional ones. Sections of music analysis in Part III overlap with discussions of cultural politics and political ideologies, for example, which themselves coincide throughout Part II with sociological discussions in turn, and so on. The sections overlap in a quite deliberate way.

My own experiences in the underground have obviously shaped my conception of it. Starting out as an audience member in Ireland in 2003 or so, I became an active critic on the underground scene in 2007, first in Ireland and then in the UK and Europe, the latter primarily in London (2008–present) but also in Brussels. I completed a PhD on the underground at Goldsmiths College in September 2012. This experience, as I see it, provides crucial context to the book without crossing over to traditional participant-observation models of ethnographic inquiry or, indeed, necessarily into the kind of autoethnographic approach explored by writers such as Carolyn Ellis,[16] where one's own subjective experiences are treated as a primary resource for analysis. I use my experiences on the scene as a mine of informal data that's fleshed out by extensive primary and secondary fact finding and research. I absent myself from the discussion, the better to give as broad and general account of the underground as possible, while acknowledging the profound personal bias that inevitably informs my account.

My musicological approach is interdisciplinary in spirit; I don't subscribe to any singular methodological principles or research design. Combining the observational field research just mentioned with flexible but themed narrative interviews, my research in these respects can be seen to echo qualitative ethnomusicological methodologies, such as that of Geoff Baker in his interview-led institutional critique *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth*.[17] But apart from being combined with extensive textual/musical analysis and cultural and political theory, even my interviews play a slightly different role from those in ethnomusicological work like Baker's or, to take another example, Mary Ann Clawson's sociological research into gender and adolescent skill acquisition in rock bands.[18] My interviews, in contrast to the anonymous telephone closed and open questions of Clawson and the anonymous accounts of Baker, are with named and significant practitioners, serving as a result both as sources of narrated personal histories, opinions, and anecdotes relating to the scene and also

as a document of vital factual data that helps give a concrete sense of what is after all a somewhat obscured cultural field.

I describe the interdisciplinary, nonsingular focus I've been discussing in terms of "pertinence" and "intertextuality." I'm using "intertextual" here, drawing on semiotic theory generally but Julia Kristeva particularly,[19] to integrate the many different media and cultural "texts" that fill out the discursive space of underground music. Kristeva's notion of "intertextuality" tries to describe how "every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it."[20] My use of "intertextual" relates closely to Kristeva's in the sense that I recognize the importance of paying heed both to "music" and to its various contexts, be they social, symbolic, iconographic, political, artistic, cultural, or otherwise. These contexts each represent different discourses of meaning and value, all of which interpenetrate to produce the meshed "text" of music. My intertextual argument is seen throughout the book in my emphasis on political and cultural factors, as well as on purely sonic ones. "Pertinence" is also crucial.[21] This means that the local details of each chapter determine the tenor of the analysis. The chapters of Part III, for example, shift with respect to what "texts" I see as pertinent to the broad topic of "listening to the underground," where recordings and performances and writings about the music are used as the main subjects of analysis. The writing in these sections, furthermore, adds passages of more lyrically rendered musical analysis. This is done so as to match the complex reveals of the music with their analogue in literary form.

Finally on methodology, I should note that I use "scene" throughout the book in order to organize the underground within a sociological framework. This term was chosen over other possibly useful concepts, such as "subculture" or "milieu," for its flexibility, its applicability to the global mesh of digital culture, and its colloquial use in music-critical discourse (e.g., the "Brooklyn scene"). It was also chosen for its importance in recent scholarship. The concept of the "scene," courtesy primarily of Barry Shank and Will Straw, has come to the fore as a way of explaining globalized music-social activity.[22] The "scene," according to Straw, is "usefully flexible and anti-essentialising."[23] "Scene," compared to something like "subculture," connotes a broader kind of context for music making, giving us a global paradigm into which we can insert local and global musical practices. As Straw indeed notes, globalized musical constituencies "value the redirective and novel over the stable and the canonical, or international circuits of influence over the mining of a locally stable heritage."[24]

Keith Kahn-Harris's work on the death metal group Sepultura[25] embodies the kind of approach taken here. Within this methodology, "scene" is understood as a "flexible, loose kind of space within which music is produced; a

kind of 'context' for musical practice."[26] Kahn-Harris proposes that the scene can provide us with an analytical perspective "that would enable us to relate particular cases to global processes."[27] In the same spirit, he goes on,

> a scenic methodology recontextualises musical texts, institutions and practices within the social spaces in which they are enmeshed. It provides an alternative both to atomising forms of research that ignore wider contexts of music production and consumption, and to forms of research that overdetermine those concepts in a subcultural framework.[28]

In his analysis of Sepultura's parlaying of local scenic "capital" to connect with the wider global death metal scene in the form of larger concert promoters and record companies with an eye on Brazil, Kahn-Harris shows us precisely how the "scenic methodology" can contextualize and explain local processes within their appropriate global context. For both Kahn-Harris and myself, global and local scenes construct themselves in relation to and reliance upon each other. The scenic model provides a way of conceiving of a global span of interrelated, multiply hierarchized activity, such as that of the global underground and its liquid digital and blunter physical networks, within an integrated, cohesive, but "usefully flexible" framework.

In sum, then, I use various analytical approaches as a way of "mapping," as my subtitle has it, the vibrant and sorely academically underexplored scene of underground and fringe music considered in terms of culture, politics, and aesthetics. It's to be regretted that considerations of space and natural limitations of personal circumstance have meant that scenes in countries such as the UK, Ireland, the United States, and Japan get much more coverage than scenes in South America or Eastern Europe do. Limitations of space mean that I also don't discuss fringe pop and post-noise musics such as hauntology, hypnagogic pop, experimental techno, and so on, either at all or in the depth they deserve as key nodes of the underground's commercial fringe (much other music gets left out likewise). Hugely important issues such as gender, race, class, and other social frameworks of oppression are also not covered in anything like enough depth. But I hope that the map of underground culture that emerges here is nevertheless wide-ranging, interesting, and provocative in the best way. In the next chapter I start to build the musical aspects of that map a little further.

2

The Music and Musicians

Extended discussion of music does not take place until Part III of this book, which is given over almost exclusively to the music, heard in concert with cultural and political issues. I'll discuss a few key representative examples of music and some musicians from across the spectrum of the underground now, though, in order to give a more immediate sense of the kind of music I'm writing about.

2.1. Underground Music and an Underground Musician

It's impossible to identify a strict set of criteria that would a priori define the underground and its fringes in musical terms.[1] But some guiding coordinates can be identified. First, underground music will likely be in some way aesthetically challenging or complex. These are of course problematic and also heavily subjective terms, so I won't argue for them firmly. But I would at least point to their usefulness as loose barometers for how a general audience might hear underground work. Less vaguely, underground music will usually exist outside or on the fringes of large institutions, as mentioned, such as public arts institutions or the marketplace. It will also largely adhere to self-determining models of production, promotion, and distribution (though there's a spectrum here, as with the other conditions). Finally, it usually holds essentially minor commercial interest or potential—although Rob Hayler's image below of a "no-audience underground" is obviously flippant, it's not all that far from the truth—and is invariably derivative of Western musical or cultural traditions in some way. These are core qualities that can usually be found in what I identify as under-

ground music. They represent hermeneutical conclusions derived from years of observation and analysis of the scene. Other, more structurally determined features, such as the predominance of white men, are perhaps typical of the experimental and contemporary classical scenes more generally speaking. These "core" qualities should not, though, be viewed as strict gatekeeping devices controlling entry to my underground "canon." They are instead convenient, porous boundaries that help fragmentarily define a territory.

Another interesting way to get a sense of what I mean when I use the term "underground music" is to look at an example of a typical practitioner and their work and in so doing get a direct sense of the language, networks, attitude, and repertoires in play here.

Rob Hayler runs the group blog and review site Radio Free Midwich and operates as a noise musician under the name "midwich." Hayler ran his own "microlabel," fencing flatworm recordings (and its tape label offshoot oTo), in the 2000s[2] and also used to cocurate a DIY/noise/improv experimental music club night at the Adelphi Hotel in Leeds, "Termite Club," which was originally set up in the early 1980s by musician Alan Wilkinson.

Hayler and his colleagues at Radio Free Midwich write extensively about what he calls the "no-audience underground," a territory basically in line with the one I am mapping here:

> Comrades . . . when I started Radio Free Midwich at the end of 2009 I claimed its function to be as follows: During the first five years or so of this century I created music (mainly) under the name midwich, released music on the micro-label fencing flatworm recordings which I co-ran with my colleague Sean Keeble, and helped run the Leeds experimental-music institution Termite Club. Now in my twilight years I think that this work might be fruitfully documented and made freely available to the world at large. Over the coming whenever I will be uploading documents, mp3s, photos, gig mementos and the like to create a small but perfectly formed archive celebrating my corner of the experimental, drone, electronica, free music, CD-R underground and its various no-audience-attracting projects.[3]

As can be seen, Hayler uses commercial appeal and loose genre labels to demarcate his zone of practice. It will also be seen that Hayler works broadly as a musician, label head, promoter, and writer—a collapsing of roles typical of the participatory, tiny, "no-audience" underground I am writing about.

As reviewers, Hayler and colleagues document tiny small-run releases on media such as CD-R and tape, long-out-of-date 'zines and other writings, ven-

ues and nights, paraphernalia, microlabels, Internet radio stations and podcasts, and so on. Hayler is part of an intimate, Internet-based community of blogs, forums, and label and magazine sites, which includes noise writer Idwal Fisher, the French funding platform and webzine *Amour & Discipline*, Irish label Deserted Village and British label Chocolate Monk, and the UK promoters and archivists Bang the Bore. The small constellated network represented by this list connects outward in various ways to some of the other networks of blogs and labels and promoters that constitute the cultural archipelago of the underground, while these and the present network in turn sometimes connect with wider scenic platforms and quilting points such as the *Wire* magazine and WFMU radio in America, much in the global and local scenic manner discussed at the end of the first chapter. Hayler likewise can sometimes be seen to have drawn on wider cultural frameworks in his career, as, for example, with the Termite Club's receipt of occasional funding from the Arts Council. But despite these intrascene and scene/mainstream connections, for the most part Hayler and other underground practitioners like him make and write about music for small audiences and with little financial reward.

In this way Hayler and the others involved with his site, Joe Murray, Luke Vollar, Sophie Cooper, Chrissie Caulfield, and Marlo Eggplant, are typical of the underground music scene, which sometimes finds itself in large institutions or hosting larger gigs from comparatively more popular acts such as Sunn 0))) and sometimes receives support from the public sector or reveals its close links with institutional forms such as experimental composition or sound art or fine art. But most often the scene exists outside institutions, on the Internet and in hired or bespoke venues, as a tiny, hidden, obscure part of our cultural environment. I'll now discuss three representative case studies from key underground/fringe genres in order to flesh out this general picture.

2.2. *Noise: Skin Graft—Dystrophy*

The broad harsh noise tradition, dating roughly to the late 1970s in Britain and the United States but really gathering international steam in the 1980s and 1990s, incorporates various interrelated genres of noise, from British power electronics to wall noise in Japan and the United States. It is a key tradition within the underground, perhaps its largest single definable genre alongside free improvisation. (The history, scene, and style of noise music are examined at length across Part III.)

Skin Graft (Wyatt Howland) is a harsh noise solo artist from Cleveland

whose coruscating, scream-written work echoes the sonic intensity and relentlessness of various 1980s Japanese acts, from Hijokaidan to Merzbow. It also feels of a piece with older British acts such as the New Blockaders and with more recent American noise music from the likes of Pedestrian Deposit and Werewolf Jerusalem in its (intentional) sometime crudity and loose unpredictability and in its bruising sonic chaos.

Howland's *Dystrophy* was released in 2011 on Hanson Records, a leading mail order noise label and record shop run out of Oberlin, Ohio, by Wolf Eyes' Aaron Dillaway. The album uses urban field recordings, cheap and/or dilapidated synths and pedals, and clanging metal to showcase Howland's jagged but sonically terrorizing style very well. As the sleeve notes on Hanson Records put it: "DYSTROPHY is complete audio horror texture. . . . This is the sound you hear when you are stuck upside down in the backseat of a hit and skidding car. Just HORRIBLE SOUNDS!"[4] (This gleeful emphasis on sonic horror and intensity is generically typical.)

The album's opening track, "Sleep-Walk," goes from creeping and creaking sound effects, through bulldozing distorted noise walls made from static, skidding metal and feedback, into a climax where those thickly layered walls of distorted sound score a series of distressed sampled voices heard screaming and pleading in strangulated array. These voices recall similar uses of tormented voices as vessels of intensification and revulsion in earlier British groups, such as Consumer Electronics and Whitehouse. (Howland's use of junk metal as sound generator on this album likewise echoes earlier British industrial acts such as Throbbing Gristle.) Opening phonographic uncertainty slowly builds in any case on "Sleep-Walk" into the full horror of a bristly, static-filled noise wall defined by thick, genocidal commotion and event.

This kind of dynamic narrative from calm to relative storm is largely absent from the album's two middle tracks, "Blood Gutter" and "Cold Shock." These play out subtly and even softly, nimbly developing little mechanisms of noise and static and balletic fuzz and din. But the dynamic narrative is present once again on the climactic ten-minute title track. Clanking keys, rattling chains, and isolated calls of feedback loop and build in the Cimmerian opening passages, before a droning, oscillating, crackling synth bass note enters three minutes in to anchor further stretching and jerking of the earlier feedback textures. This bass note closes out the album solo in slowly ripping waveforms, the tone being pulled at jerkily before disappearing into quiet. This closing track, then, brings together the harshness of the opener with the textural subtleties and dramatic variety of the middle tracks.

Dystrophy, like many other noise releases, deliberately stages abjection and

even revulsion in the intensity, volume, and relentlessness of its sonics, connecting the music to certain strains of avant-garde music, such as Schoenberg's expressionism, that have been described as seeking to depict and therefore critique in compositional idiom the oppressive mores of mainstream capitalist culture. But the album also shows the musical extensiveness of the noise genre, stretching as it does from nuclear harsh noise feedback climaxes to clanking industrial timbres to miniatures of great detail and unpredictability. Tracks of seven and ten minutes arc out musical drama in moving from uncertain tension to blast zone. Demolishing volume and timbres produce a sense of antirepresentation in those musical blast zone sections, of nihilistic detonation of any clear narrative or semiotic content. Yet these supposedly nonrepresentational, voiding noise walls also hold both great (right and left) political and emotional power for denizens of noise, one of the many contradictions of noise music—a genre that starts with contradiction in its very name—explored later in the book.

2.3 Improv: Derek and the Ruins—"Zomvobischem" from Saisoro

Derek Bailey (1930–2005) was perhaps the leading figure and exponent of free improvisation in Europe in his lifetime. His long and varied career stretched from 1960s collaborations with Tony Oxley and Gavin Bryars through stints as a label cohead (of Incus), magazine cofounder (*Musics*), author (of *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice*),[5] roving free improviser, head of ensembles such as Company, and collaborator with "improvisers" from across the cultural spectrum, from saxophonist Evan Parker to guitarists Keiji Haino and Buckethead and jazz tap dancer Will Gaines.

Bailey's style as an improviser was highly idiosyncratic. He consistently exploited the mechanics and resources of the lightly amplified, conventionally tuned guitar as a largely percussive, or at least non-pitch-centric, sound generator. Bailey used the guitar to explore pinched harmonics, scratched metallic sounds, percussive hits, and huge melodic disjunctions and leaps. The guitar, in Bailey's hands, was removed from its own history. In doing that removing, Bailey's instrumental practice connects very much with other underground and experimental guitarists, such as Jandek and Eugene Chadbourne. It also exemplifies one key strand of free improv aesthetics; Bailey's emphasis on the jaggedness and nonapposition of the individual gestures of his music contrasts well with the orchestrally and texturally smoother, depersonalized group textures of the so-called laminal improvisers, such as AMM and later performers such

as John Butcher, and John Stevens's "search and reflect" model of collaborative group improv.[6]

Bailey's idiosyncratic, jagged, guitar-based style remained resolutely itself over the course of his career, largely regardless of context (with the notable exceptions of his late-period 2002 and 2007 albums *Ballads* and *Standards*, on which shards of popular melodies and harmonic sequences shoot through his higgledy-piggledy peregrinations). It can be seen as an effort to work in what Bailey semifamously called "non-idiomatic" improvisation, a term that signals this music's distance from the genre coding that Bailey argued shaped improvisation in idiomatic musics such as jazz or flamenco. This term, "non-idiomatic," has been much discussed,[7] since it seems to disavow free improvisation's clear idiomatic anchoring in dissonance and aperiodic rhythms and in the communitarian, egalitarian politics shared by many of its practitioners. But Bailey's subtle point, made clearly in the second edition of his book, was already present in the first; he did not deny that freely improvised music might be "highly stylised" but merely noted that it "is not usually tied to representing an idiomatic identity."[8]

It's difficult to split hairs between these terms, style and idiom, but it's clear that, notwithstanding continuities across individual improvisers' careers and correspondences across their performing styles along the lines of those just mentioned, free improvisers tried or claimed to obstruct the familiar in their playing as much as possible, both for contestatory, counter-hegemonic political reasons and also for aesthetic ones. Bailey himself held a deeply felt belief in the power of placing oneself in challenging and unfamiliar improvising situations. He was confident that such situations were decisive in staving off artistic-improvisatory-affective stagnation, allowing a certain degree of flexibility and unpredictability into his playing. This kind of emphasis on an aesthetic of risk is shared by many other improvisers, as we'll see with respect to both Eddie Prévost and Mattin across Part II, as it is with noise musicians, with whom improvisers share key aesthetic concerns (such as improvisation and sonic abrasion). In light of Bailey's sense of risk and novelty in performing situations, I'll discuss a track from Bailey's 1995 album with the Japanese noise rock group Ruins, *Saisoro*, one of Bailey's typically surprising collaborative releases.

Ruins emerged in the mid-1980s in Japan. They are comprised of the virtuoso Tatsuya Yoshida on drums and vocals and a revolving cast of bassists. Ruins makes noise music with deep links to other styles, notably prog rock's exactitude and formal distension and Japanese traditional court music's hyper-ritualized "kiai" precision and glossolalic vocals. Playing off this hyperprecision and exactitude in their work, however, is a deep strain of probably much less precise sonic chaos and frenzied soloing. Ruins' vocals reflect this playing off

of abandon and precision, with Yoshida singing in a quite inscrutable artificial language of his own devising that offsets seemingly conventional textual narrative with noise-driven passages of more visceral vocalization. Ruins' music, then, largely moves between passages of open phrases and loosely organized distortion and vocalization, on the one hand, and highly intricate, closed-phrase drum-anchored sections in head-spinning micrometrical and microrhythmic configurations of prime-number patterning on the other.

Ruins had not up to that point in their career explored improvisation to the degree they did with Bailey on *Saisoro*. The tension between the two styles here—"traditional" free improvisation on the one hand and experimental Japanese noise rock on the other—is harnessed by the participants to produce something quite bewildering in syntax and profile. I'll look at one track, "Zomvobischem," in more detail to give a sense of how all this works at the level of the music.

"Zomvobischem" deploys many of the stylistic devices just surveyed, from glossolalic ululation and hyperprecise polymeters to Bailey's hacking guitar interventions. Over the first eight seconds of the track, for example, Yoshida babbles a circling four-note recitation (the style is somewhere between angry recitative and shouty madman) on the syllable "ba." The speech has the character of possession, of trance, an uncanny state of expression crucial to the cartoonish intensity of Ruins' music. Bailey enters at 0′ 04″ with a series of chop staccato chords in a clean, thin, and trebly mode, entirely dissonant and deracinated from any coherent or even discernible tonal profile. These chords (dyads and single tones are present too; the guitarist switches between sonorities), as is typical, appear defined to the listener through their general register, their rhythmic contour, and the mode of articulation Bailey chooses for them. They seem also abstracted, or certainly set against, the (admittedly free) rhythmic cycle of the vocals, so their plodding drollness undercuts the energy created by the voice.

At 0′ 09″ Yoshida enters feverishly on drums with a descending duplet and then a six-note pattern on tom-toms that acts as an upbeat to the incessant rolls that follow. In the ensuing loosely organized nineteen seconds the drummer solos riotously, concentrating on snare and tom roulades and hi-hat punctuations. He continues to vocalize frantically, sometimes joining in rhythmic unison with his drums but more commonly avoiding any synchronization with the parallel streams of guitar and drums, preferring to explore his own catatonia. Both musicians play non-pulse-based patterns, each clashing with the other. By 0′ 24″, Yoshida has seemingly reached a peak, exploding with shouts of "waa, waa, aah!" that bring the tension to fever pitch. In this passage (0′ 9″–0′ 28″) Bailey relentlessly sounds his chop chords, but the space between them has been greatly

reduced and their intensity magnified. He adds pinched harmonics as color too. Yoshida has clearly gotten to the guitarist.

The third musician, bassist Ryuichi Masuda, enters at 0′ 28″. As it is for the rest of the track (and indeed much of the album), Masuda's bass playing is concentrated in the upper range of his instrument. The tone is without much reverb and lightly distorted, creating a confusing mirroring with Bailey's guitar tone.

At 0′ 43″ Yoshida narrows his activity and plays a little figure on the ride cymbal. This sets all three off on twenty seconds of climactic zeal; Bailey lets out a sequence of dotted minim chords defined primarily by their unusually distorted attack, while drummer and bassist circle around this de facto cantus firmus with wild abandon in rhythms totally at odds with that of the guitarist.

This kind of playing off of group abandon, always hovering between suggestive hyperprecision and complete freedom, with sudden soloistic metric and dynamic interference that drives others into new areas, characterizes much of the rest of the track, which repeatedly climaxes and repeatedly collapses unexpectedly, in pre-echo of the next wave. The final two minutes of music, for example, see all three players working through the various ensemble possibilities in a pushing-pulling, climactic-collapsing dance. Yoshida repeatedly veers into standard-issue drum patterns of closed phrases and tight pulsing. The other two continue on in their distinct streams, each either periodically joining his partners with sympathetic commentary (for example, at 3′ 15″ to 3′ 21″, when Masuda reinforces the obstinate repeated notes of Bailey with some of his own, before veering into some slap bass at odds with the context) or happily burrowing away by himself. Coincidence, conflict, and segregation alternately characterize the performance, as is so often the case with nonlaminal group improv.

The track reaches a climax from about 3′ 30″, with Bailey playing violently distorted cluster chords, Yoshida soloing wildly, and Masuda (from about 4′ 07″) playing tremolo in the highest reaches of his bass against the open-string harmonics of the guitarist, which themselves become heavily clouded with distortion and ornament. The musicians each push this texture into a starker, disassembled passage from about 4′ 45″ to the close, where the bass tremolo ebbs somewhat, the drum patterns become slightly more spaced out, and the guitar becomes increasingly hushed.

"Zomvobischem" can be seen as an example of how two styles of music and improvisation can infect each other and lead collaboration into unexpected and fruitful areas. Bailey's dictums of bold collaboration and total spontaneity (as far as that is possible) in performance can be said to ring true to a degree in "Zomvobischem," a track where cross-genre pollination is explored excitingly. It would be idealistic to conclude here that this track represents a utopian coming

together that demonstrates the power of improvisation as a form to engender balanced, communitarian authorship and fresh forms and sounds. It promotes and manifests those values and sounds up to a point, but of course this music expresses as much interpersonal conflict and ensemble striation as it does comings together. It is also as constrained as any other by institutional and cultural limitations and blockages and by many other forms of social exclusion.

So we hear productive dialogue and cooperation in sections of this track, but tugging away underneath is our sense of the hidden hierarchies present between even these Western and Eastern musicians (in terms of both cultural identity and more local social disrelations invisible to those outside the collaboration). We might also get a sense of the gendered realities of the performance and the reception traditions around it and, in a more musical sense, of the presence of continuity between this performance and previous Bailey and Ruins performances respectively. Free improvisation, as we'll see at more length in chapter 6, is therefore a form aspiring to equality and spontaneity but dragged down to earth, or reminded of its place on earth, by inevitable privileges of various kinds and by inevitable pragmatic and aesthetic constraints on freshness and spontaneity in performance.

2.4 Extreme Metal: Earth, "Ouroborous Is Broken," *from* Extra-Capsular Extraction

To finish with these brief case studies I'll discuss an example of what might be called extreme metal music (following Keith Kahn-Harris)[9] that is, satellite, underground forms of heavy metal drawing on some of its distinctive blackened imageries and guitar- and drum-based musical languages but existing commercially and aesthetically at something of a remove from the chart appeal of mainstream acts like Metallica and Black Sabbath. Across chapter 12 I give an extended cultural and musical analysis of extreme metal, focusing there on drone and black metal music. The Seattle group Earth, led by Dylan Carson and active since 1989, is an important part of the former's story, of whose beginning they form a very large part.

In their early years Earth made heavily distorted, noise- and feedback-infused drone music of Ligeti-like massed sound textures subtly shifting in local detail and psychoacoustic effect. Examples of these distorted, distended performances—many of these early period tracks extended over long durations—can be found on their first full-length album, *Earth 2: Special Low Frequency Version* (1993), which features three tracks totaling seventy-five minutes in length.

Their first official release, *Extra-Capsular Extraction* (1991), meanwhile, includes the eighteen-minute "Ouroborous Is Broken." This is a pile-driving drone track featuring cavernous gong and cymbals tattooing, colotomic-like, the completion of every lurching, dragging cycle of low guitar and bass drone riffs (which play around with chromatic inflections, for example, a semitone above, of a sustained fundamental tone). The track also features drums pounding out slow-motion crotchets that fade somewhere along the circumference of the circling drone, before a long, dirgelike finale of bass and guitars sees the track ebbing out in eddies of gurgling sustained distortion and thrumming drone.

Earth's brutal reduction of metal's sonic material and forms to loudly played, distorted walls of downtuned guitar and bass drones and blunt percussion proved influential on later drone metal groups, from Sunn O))) (who took their name from Earth's choice of amplifier) to Asva. It also linked aesthetically with artists working in parallel more in what has been called "sludge" metal, such as the Japanese group Corrupted and the US group Sleep, and with the British drone group Skullflower, whose regular collaborations with British noise acts such as Ramleh and Whitehouse demonstrate the permeability of the underground scene I've already alluded to.

So Earth's early period, from 1989 to 1996, proved significant for much drone metal music. Their later period, from 2001 or so (particularly from the 2005 release of *Hex; Or Printing in the Infernal Method*), saw an expanded Earth changing tack fairly radically, their music now featuring simplified and clearly engineered sonic textures of clean, trebly guitars, bass, and drums, with the musical language having been transformed into a droning Americana somewhat redolent of cowboy music of a much earlier time. Earth's earlier glacial forms of slowly evolving static and thickening feedback were developed into simple, much more tightly woven and purposefully expanding minimalist cyclical forms. Like a condensed Philip Glass, later tracks such as "Ouroborous Is Broken (2)" (from 2007's *Hibernaculum*) and "Old Black" (from 2011's *Angels of Darkness*) place repeating melodies (chromatic, distorted guitar on the former, cello and clean guitar on the latter) over similarly repeating, cyclical, and tonally relatively simple ostinati. These cycles eventually and invariably move toward some sort of intensification or resolution of the bright drone at their core. Singing and clear lyrics were even incorporated on 2014's *Primitive and Deadly*.

Through both of these periods Earth can be seen to be echoing minimalism's emphasis on low information content, first in parallel with drone artists such as Phil Niblock and Eliane Radigue and later somewhat more in line with the pattern music of Philip Glass and Terry Riley. These links and parallels with cultural traditions that have often been associated with high art (though

of course minimalism's status in this respect is contentious) run alongside other important and obvious links to popular culture. These can be seen in the generic origins of drone and other forms of extreme metal in the doom and heavy metal of Black Sabbath and bands such as Electric Wizard and also, in Earth's case, in their early works actually getting released on Seattle's Sub Pop label, home to Nirvana (Kurt Cobain is even credited as having sung on "A Bureaucratic Desire for Revenge, Part 2," from *Extra-Capsular Extraction*). This double bind of aesthetic parallels and practical correspondences with both art and popular musics, not to mention important iconographic and other parallels between extreme and more mainstream metal, defines extreme metal forms such as drone.

These three musicals examples show the variety of music to be found in the underground and its fringes. They also signal three of its most important styles: noise, improvisation, and extreme metal—three ideal categories whose overdrawing here is complicated throughout the book with specific examples and discussion of various sub- and splinter genres. These musics and other underground musics like them share an aesthetic emphasis on different kinds of innovation and exploration, which could be read in contestatory modernist or avant-garde terms, and they even cross over in terms of collaboration. They also share an extrainstitutional existence outside or on the fringes of mainstream or high-cultural genres and contexts. Space permitting, I would have also examined some examples of the fringe underground musics mentioned in the first chapter. These examples might include the experimental fringe pop of artists such as Caretaker and James Ferraro, who use noise and conceptual aesthetics within the context of short pop forms and techniques; or sound art from the likes of Ryoji Ikeda (such as his *datamatics*) that exists in high-cultural contexts but that yet uses the glitch and pallor of underground forms in its sounds and images; or the crepuscular, gothic techno of electronic acts such as Ben Frost and Raime; or indeed the noise screeds of musicians like Pita that sit interestingly across noise, electronic, and other genres. But the examples of music and musicians that I have covered should at least give some concrete sense of the cultural crossovers, generic ambivalences, and extrainstitutional circumstances that characterize the core musics of the underground and its fringes.

3

Global and Local Underground/ Fringe Scenes

The underground scene operates globally across the Web and other media. But it's also anchored in local urban centers, mainly due to these centers' unmatchable affordance of resources such as venues, audiences, and money. However, music being produced within such local underground scenes doesn't generally explore a sense of place or employ local musical or cultural accents as markers of style. Instead, global flows of musical and cultural commerce guide musical style, echoing Will Straw's idea (see chap. 1) about international circuits of exchange versus a "locally stable heritage." A noise group from Japan, such as Hijokaidan, is likely to sound broadly similar in some respects to a noise group from Italy, such as Le Syndicat, or a noise group from the United States, such as the Haters. Differences in style across these groups have less to do with national identity than with (sub)generic convention.

At the same time, however, the texture of local political and cultural circumstances, such as an affluent capitalist economy where audiences have plenty of disposable income to spend on music or generous cultural policy, has a huge impact on the nature of local scenes. Equally, these local scenes are obviously shaped by general trends and styles in the global scene while, in turn, feeding back into global dynamics through the Web and through hosting and supporting things like touring underground musicians and visiting audiences. The relationship between the different levels of the underground scene, the local and the global, is one of multiform overlapping. Local influences local, global influences local, global influences global, and local influences global.

So while the digital age has seen underground music culture being significantly liberated from physical limitations such as record shops and snail mail, it's still the case that the global scene orbits around local physical scenic nuclei. Japanese "no-input mixing board" improviser Toshimaru Nakamura, for instance, described to me how, when he visited Berlin in the 1990s, "it would not be so difficult to get to know musicians there," since "there were a couple of places that have concerts" (such as the Tacheles arts center in Berlin Mitte and the Anorak club): "You would hop in one of those places and could meet someone." This persistence in physical scenes continues to this day, as we'll see. But it comes in spite of clear cultural and subcultural changes. We clearly conduct much of our lives in the "space of flows" of the Web. Many of my interviewees pointed to the utterly crucial role the Web plays in their practice, while underlining the decay of physical scenes. Discrepant label head Gonçalo F Cardoso, for example, praised the power of the Web while also lamenting the fact that he feels disconnected from any physical scene, even suggesting that the decline of record shops and so on means that scenes simply do not exist in the way they used to.

So while it's important to heed Nakamura's reminder that things may not "have changed so much in terms of communication within the music scene" and that "there are still a lot of people fond of physical flyers" as promotional devices for "sharing the music together . . . physically in the same room of the same place," Cardoso's point is hard to argue with. Dematerialization has clearly led to different norms of musical consumption and therefore of musical value. Live shows, festivals, and venues of the kind Nakamura references have proved an important bonding agent for the kinds of audience, artist, and promoter interconnections that might traditionally have been forged in person but are now commonly facilitated by the Web before they reach the face-to-face stage. Record shops may not be as prominent as they used to be, but they still exist in this context, as seen in the Hanson Records shop in Ohio, RRRecords in Massachusetts, and others besides. The kinds of interconnections built online may never reach this "bricks-and-mortar" phase of actual meetings—as we will see, underground artists such as Vicki Bennett and Scanner have engaged in international collaborations via file transfer platforms and email without ever meeting their partner in person—but in many cases digital connections lead to the booking or attending of concerts or to a trip to a record shop or festival.

City scenes still exist, chiefly through venues and festivals and surviving shops, as well as through the large collections of people high-density urban areas obviously throw together. These scenes provide local audiences with a physical scenic "front line," where a notable record shop or venue like Grrrnd Zero in

Lyon allows audiences to attend concerts, browse and buy recordings, and make connections with fellow scenic participants. And yet the death knell of dematerialization braids more and more of this physical activity through the liquid Web; even the longstanding Volcanic Tongue in Glasgow shut down in 2014, hot on the heels of many other important shops. It exists now only as an online shop. The Web is therefore unquestionably central to the current existence of the underground. Meanwhile, local city scenes still provide crucial—if evolving and increasingly Web-mediated—nuclei for that global underground.

3.1. Scene Conditions: Large Cities and Large Capitalism

What material, social, cultural, and environmental factors produce the conditions for city scenes' existence and their means of survival? Local iterations of the global underground scene demonstrate the importance for underground music of a few key but alienable conditions: concentrations of resources such as people, venues, and record shops; a degree of social prosperity; some kind of direct or tangential institutional/cultural backing; and a thriving, eclectic mainstream culture. These are all important in various ways to underground scenes. Indeed, probably the largest local scenes in the world—London, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles—enjoy all of these factors. But they aren't all absolutely necessary. The *in*alienable basis of all underground scenes, without which they couldn't exist but with which they have some chance of survival, is the presence of social permissiveness and some enthusiastic individuals. Without the former, as, for example, Malians under the current Islamist regime are finding out, it is hard to impossible to get any music scene off the ground. Without the latter, it's impossible.

Various scenes have surmounted local financial and cultural limitations in developing local activity. The underground is naturally fragile and marginal, and it doesn't take much to keep it going; even larger local scenes are built in part on the basic foundation of the efforts of a small number of musicians, promoters, venue owners, and audiences. However, those larger local scenes do draw in various ways on the conditions I laid out above for the existence and survival of underground scenes. In many ways it is actually capitalism that supports and helps sustain the underground. As David Keenan suggests, for example,

> The US has the healthiest DIY underground rock scene in the world; as a capitalist country it has the potential to support small economies and provide the conditions that allow them to survive while remaining relatively autonomous.[1]

Furthermore, cities with a rich cultural history, firmly established public arts institutions that might host large festivals with room for some kind of underground work, a healthy network of smaller venues that might house underground performances from time to time, and the sorts of federal or state arts subsidies that might in some way support smaller underground or liminally underground projects, unsurprisingly host the busiest underground scenes. This is an obvious consequence of musicians and promoters having access to a higher concentration of people, wealth, venues, and other resources than would otherwise be the case. This is perhaps an example of where the "trickle-down" philosophy of the political right is at least partially effective.

Perhaps somewhat ironically, then, capitalism has in this way been a reliable engine for the formation of critical and often far-left-leaning underground scenes. The concentration of people in urban centers that was accelerated by Fordist capitalism has produced a concomitant concentration of musicians, promoters, audiences, and other resources. Various underground scenes have exploited this concentration. Capitalism has also driven the growth of these scenes through the wide distribution of wealth via state apparatuses that has taken place in social democratic capitalist economies, as seen, for example, in public funding for the arts and artists and in social welfare programs. Other forms of cultural funding, as, for example, with artist or project bursaries from privately run foundations, similarly derive from capitalist structures, in this case in whole or in part from the personal wealth of private capitalist benefactors. In addition to all of this capitalist largesse(!), liberal democratic capitalism's (however illusory) granting of cultural and creative freedom to (some of) its citizens has been accompanied by the development not only of thriving mainstream cultures but also of smaller, more esoteric cultures, such as that of the underground and its fringes.

Capitalism has therefore provided the means and the freedom for local underground scenes to develop. This is not to say that there might not be an alternative economic and political system that would have provided for the underground in a much more consistent and generous way or that might have fostered a healthier cultural environment in a more general sense. It is merely to point to some of the ways that the underground has relied upon and benefited from capitalism and (neo)liberal democracy.

I interviewed the label head and radio presenter Jonny Mugwump about his experiences in the British underground. Mugwump is the presenter of the *Exotic Pylon* program on the leading independent station Resonance FM in the UK. He is also head of the homonymous record label,[2] which releases music by underground and/or fringe acts such as Frisk Frugt, Hacker Farm, Infinite

Livez, Dolly Dolly, and Kemper Norton. Mugwump provides an interesting illustration of some of the ideas I have been discussing here, since his practice connects heavily to aspects of both the physical and the digital, while also showing how important local scenic contexts are to individuals seeking to make their way in the underground.

Mugwump has recently prospered on the underground scene, but his success followed years of dissatisfaction in the North of England. Mugwump described to me his frustrations in trying to get his projects off the ground in Manchester in the 1990s:

> I lived in various cities before arriving in London in 2007 when I was 35, but I was in Manchester on and off for the longest time—10 to 15 years. I got obsessed with the idea of a post-everything broadcast and I conceived of a radio show that didn't exist and called it *Exotic Pylon*. There were seemingly lots of opportunities for radio in Manchester but I felt closed off at every avenue—everything felt totally locked and elitist to a Manchester mafia. I can't tell you that that was the reality but it certainly felt like it. I'm a northerner anyway—this was my turf but there was seemingly no way in so I worked at home on my own and broadcast to nobody.

So despite Manchester's comparatively healthy music scene, Mugwump's efforts, both in broadcasting and in other musical respects, came to nothing. Once Mugwump arrived in London, however, things changed dramatically. Mugwump quickly gained his own show on Resonance, which he parlayed into other ventures:

> Arriving in London plunged me into a creative environment. I started volunteering at Resonance FM, which took about 20 minutes to sort out as opposed to years' worth of dead ends everywhere else. And that was it really—after 6 months I was given the opportunity to host my own show and I continued to volunteer as an engineer as well. The freedom of the station and the ease of access to London meant that the show could host a chaotic revolving door of musicians and artists and the nature of Resonance meant this was of an incredible diversity.

The local physical scenic contact with a host of musicians and others that Resonance gave to Mugwump therefore proved crucial. Mugwump soon found himself enmeshed in a network of figures in which he found the kind of sympathetic support for his ideas that had been sorely lacking in what he perceived as the

more hermetic Manchester scene. These new London contacts and networks proved crucial in Mugwump's next move of setting up the record label:

> It was that level of constant contact that led to the label being formed. Deep in my heart I had probably always wanted to do this but it seemed like a ludicrous fantasy. Once settled in London it seemed, well, still daunting, but anything was possible at least.

Bearing these quotes in mind, it is obvious that the actual physical existence of the London scene clearly enabled Mugwump's blossoming from frustrated audience member to label head and radio broadcaster. And yet it's nevertheless the case that, as with the underground more generally, the digital proved a vital carrier and enabler of the physical in this particular example:

> The radio show gained in popularity almost entirely down to my subsequently hosting it and promoting it online. Similarly the label could not possibly exist without the web. I view it as an old-fashioned label attitude-wise (Factory etc.), but it's entirely modern—it wouldn't have been conceived without the internet being in existence. One of my grander designs is for *Exotic Pylon* to be nomadic and I am building towards this. EP can only survive releasing sometimes very "niche" sounds with access to a global rather than a local audience. Whilst the physical is vital so is the digital.

This double bind of the physical and the digital is emblematic of an underground hanging onto older artifacts but casting forward to new modes of communication and interrelation. Local scenes are still crucial to the generation of opportunities and connection, but even these opportunities are eventually mediated and driven by the Web.

The example of Mugwump therefore shows in microcosm the ways that cities, via capitalist mechanisms and dynamics, among other things, facilitate marginal culture's development. Even in a city as large as Manchester, Mugwump felt that whatever underground networks were in place were too limited and closed off to outsiders to provide any possibility of infiltration. London, however, was so huge and many layered that Mugwump didn't take long to build up a network of contacts through both the Web and in-person meetings that soon spread from a radio station to bands to promoters, encompassing on- and offline correspondences and connections. The digital and the physical cross over continuously in the Mugwump example, with the in-person London scene providing focal points for concerts and radio shows and meetings and the Web

allowing Mugwump to build, nurture, experience, and expand on these relationships. The importance of capitalism's concentrations of people and amenities in centers of power, its facilitation of the spread of money, and its basic nonrenunciation of various cultural activities to all of this is clear.

The rest of this chapter goes into a little more detail on how the kinds of material, cultural, social, and political factors that are in part the product and guarantors of capitalism shape and even define the underground. I provide a general overview of various cities before moving on to my extended case study of Ireland.

3.2. Local City Scenes: Ireland, London, Berlin, Japan, and China

The underground scene in Ireland is patchy at best. Activity flares up from time to time in the strangest of places—for example, in a *literally* underground car park in Galway—while larger cities, such as Cork and Dublin, host fragmented and fragile scenes that nevertheless swell and strengthen from time to time on the back of a variety of environmental factors, such as individual efforts, governmental funding policy for the arts, the ebbs and flows of the local economy, and the happenstance of serendipitous comings together of people and circumstance. The scene in Ireland is obviously subject to wider economic and cultural processes, while also being heavily shaped by microsocial issues such as the abilities of small numbers of people to open and maintain a suitable venue or the willingness of friends to attend a show together. Meanwhile, changing technology has both hindered and helped the scene since it's harder to make money off the work but also easier to publicize and disseminate it from the perspective of both the artists *and* the audience.

These kinds of intermingling global (digital technology, public policy) and local (the existence and maintenance of things like venues and record shops) dynamics characterize all local underground scenes. The various scenes in Britain, for instance, benefit from high levels of local resources and from a permissive social context, while also not being hindered by the kinds of older cultural limitations of size and wealth that possibly constrict the Irish scene. In London, live activity takes place across a range of versatile small specialist or nonspecialist venues such as the Vortex, Boat'ting, Archway, Corsica Studios, Village Underground, the Shacklewell Arms, the Old Blue Last, and Café Oto. Shops such as Sound 323 and older venues such as the Red Rose formerly provided a physical core, but that function has largely been usurped. The Web presence maintained by London music writers, stations, labels, and promoters, such as the leading

black metal, death ambient, and noise "organization" Cold Spring or the online station NTS, is obviously also crucial for the scene. All of the scene's physical nuclei are anchored in various ways on the Web, but they are also aided and abetted by the flows of capital and other resources commonly found in large and modern Western cities like London.

Similarly, a relatively high amount of personal wealth, solid social infrastructures, and strong cultural traditions have seen healthy underground scenes flourish in America and mainland Europe, though, again, specific environmental social and historical factors shape the relative health of the different scenes. Berlin's cheap rents, extremely low cost of living,[3] and highly centralized artistic culture[4] combine to allow the development of an array of artistic activity.

A thriving underground scene in the city features improvisers such as Andrea Neumann, Annette Krebs, Alex von Schlippenbach, and Axel Dörner, alongside experimental dance producers like Robert Henke and an array of fringe underground pop and industrial artists such as Felix Kubin, Gudrun Gut, and Einstürzende Neubauten. As with other cities, the Berlin scene connects with the global underground through both Web and other platforms such as international magazines like the *Wire* and the (wide-ranging) festivals Transmediale and MaerzMusik. Like those cities, too, it orbits around core artists and figures (such as those above and others, from Hanno Leichtmann to Jason Kahn, Olaf Rupp, and Stephan Mathieu); labels such as AbsinthRecords and City Centre Offices; and local physical nuclei such as the Hard Wax shop in Kreuzberg and venues like the eclectic experimental space ausland, the improv-hosting KuLe, and the Tacheles arts center (which closed in 2012). A relatively small concentration of specialist venues, labels, and individuals within a thriving cultural scene, a populous and resource-rich but cost-cheap city, and a wealthy German liberal capitalist economy all mean that the underground scene in Berlin is thriving, with plenty of reserves and support to fall back on should it need them.

Japan and China provide instructive examples in terms of global/local influences and environmental factors. Japan's adoption following World War Two of capitalistic policies and a liberal democrat polity modeled on and open to cultural influences from the West has meant that Japan's underground scene has thrived, producing a startling number of prominent underground musicians. That list would go from Merzbow to Junko to Pain Jerk to Otomo Yoshihide to Keiji Haino to Sachiko M to Taku Sugimoto to KK Null to Toshimaru Nakamura; to bands like Ghost, Incapacitants, Hijokaidan, Masonna, Ruins, Boredoms, Mainliner, Melt-Banana, and Ground Zero; to a number of fringe undergrounders, such as sound artists Taku Unami, Akio Suzuki, and Ryoji Ikeda. Japan has also produced at least a handful of its own Western-influenced

underground genres—such as the wall noise Japanoise of acts like Pain Jerk and the "lower-case," silence-filled Onkyo improv of Sugimoto and others—that echo in their syncretism the recent traditions of Japanese cinema, popular music, and literature.

As with countries in the West, owing to population spread and distribution of resources the Japanese scene is concentrated in a couple of large urban centers, with Osaka and, particularly, Tokyo being at the forefront in this respect. Tokyo's postwar prosperity and rich artistic culture have facilitated the emergence of a flourishing musical underground. As so often happens (cf. Berlin's ausland and London's Café Oto), the Tokyo scene largely grew out of the efforts of a small number of people based around an important single venue—Bar Aoyama in Shibuya—where a confluence of musicians collaborated in performances, building on the experimental noise and rock scenes of the city and earlier "free" music practices at venues such as Minor to develop a thriving improv scene.

From 1998 onward a regular concert series, first entitled "The Improvisation Meeting at Bar Aoyama" and later "The Experimental Meeting at Bar Aoyama," was established by Tetuzi Akiyama, Taku Sugimoto, and Toshimaru Nakamura.[5] Nakamura described the impetus and circumstances of the series in our interview. Following early experiences in the late 1980s and 1990s in an improv-influenced rock band playing in Tokyo venues such as 20000 volts, NY Antiknock, and Club Quattro, Nakamura abandoned the guitar in favor of the no-input mixing board in 1995. He met his fellow Aoyama collaborators around this time:

> We three met each other in 1996. We didn't start to work together immediately, but the next year, Jason [Kahn, the Zurich-based electronic musician] had a plan of his second Tokyo visit, so I was looking for a place to play together. I asked Tetuzi if he had an idea, and he told me that he knew this place called Bar Aoyama in central Tokyo and was already asked to have some sort of concert series there by the bar master. Then we three played together at Aoyama with Jason.

Nakamura went on to describe how, despite not originally planning it as such, desire for a regular place to play where they could also invite collaborators to join them led to this one show mutating into a concert series that became a focal point for the Tokyo scene: "We hadn't originally planned to make it a concert series. But we wanted a regular place to play, so we made it anyway into a monthly series." Nakamura described the way that shows in the series would go:

We three hosted a guest or two, sometimes someone from outside Japan, sometimes someone local. Starting time was set at 9 pm, which was quite late for Tokyo, because we didn't want our audience to rush into our show from their work places with empty stomachs. "Get out of your office, wine and dine as you like, then come to our show!!" Something like this. Instead, people had to rush into subway stations right after the second set was finished as everything ran late. Nothing was perfect. But I think it was good we tried that way.

The Aoyama series was transferred in 2000 to Off Site, a new venue housed in a tiny residential property in Shinjuku, a ward of Tokyo. Off Site was run by the same three musicians, although Sugimoto retired as organizer in 2001. Like the Aoyama series (which also hosted all the following regularly), Off Site played host to performances from a range of important Japanese improvising, electronic, and noise musicians, including Sugimoto, Nakamura, Akiyama, Sachiko M, Aki Onda, and Otomo Yoshihide, as well as visiting artists such as Britons Kaffe Matthews and Seymour Wright and the Dutch synth musician Thomas Ankersmit.

Clive Bell described the Off Site venue and introduced a number of "Onkyo" improvisers—the lower-case subgenre of improv mentioned above that arose out of the new "Meeting at Off Site" concert series—in a piece from 2003:

> Off Site is one of a row of old, highly ordinary houses somehow clinging on in the shadow of Shinjuku's skyscrapers. These are flimsy constructions of wood and plaster. Inside, Atsuhiro Ito and his wife have converted their house into a Spartan gallery and performing space on the ground floor, seating about fifty maximum, and a welcoming café-cum-book-and-record shop upstairs. This is home for a gang of musicians playing a new kind of improvised music—usually quiet, sometimes bewilderingly minimalist, but astonishingly fertile.[6]

The "Onkyo" form of improvisation that Bell describes here has since been given international exposure through the aforementioned "Improvised Music from Japan" website and label, which releases the series "Meeting at Off Site" in addition to a range of other recordings. (This international exposure is comparable to that achieved by Japanoise musicians such as Hijokaidan, which in their case happened through Osaka-based self-run label Alchemy Records and through the wider noise network of global venues and 'zines and so on.) Through these recordings and the publicity that arose around the Tokyo scene, the aforementioned musicians began to develop a major presence in the international under-

ground scene, appearing regularly in venues and at festivals across Europe and America[7] and being written about in the usual underground contexts, a trend that has continued to the time of writing.

The Tokyo scene therefore provides us with an example where busy local activity enables practitioners to connect through global promotional machineries and personal links anchored in the Web to wider scene dynamics. Even though that local activity proved highly effective in giving local musicians a further channel outward to the international scene, it was concentrated around only a few individuals and venues. This shows very well how, even though local permissiveness and resources are often so important to the development and survival of scenes, it is often the initiative of a few artists and promoters that drives artistic production in the underground. Nakamura himself told me about how he feels the Aoyama and Off Site concerts might have provided something unique to audiences at the time and therefore played some part in catalyzing the scene, although he was reluctant to make any firm judgement either way on this: "Some of the audience told us after the show that what we were doing was innovative, and that they had never heard something like that. But it could be only those particular audience members' points of view."

Commerce and connection between the local and the global in the underground scene are invariably mediated through such portals as are visible here in the Tokyo example: concerts, collaborations and friendships, articles, websites, and record labels. The promotional possibilities of the Web as a resource for information (the Improvised Music from Japan site includes details of the biographies and current schedules of many key artists, for instance, as well as archival details on past shows and series) and for distribution of physical or digital music means that former physical limitations are less important now than they were in the past. This is the case even if physical concerts and meeting places and urban concentrations of resources have proved utterly crucial to the global underground.

Japan's Western-influenced postwar culture therefore created the conditions necessary for the growth of an underground music scene. On the other hand, communist or quasi-communist China's relative cultural and socioeconomic distance from the liberal or social democratic West, particularly in the pre-1980s era, has meant that underground culture, which as I have said usually relies on a thriving mainstream culture for its resources, its materials, and the social permissions necessary for it to flourish, has been more halting in its progress. Both historical and current conditions mean that underground music has a long way to go to gain much of any foothold in Chinese culture. But in recent years a

burgeoning scene has in fact developed in Beijing around a few key individuals and locations.

The improviser and promoter Yan Jun and artists such as FM3, Wu Quan, Wang Chan, and White have been key to the Beijing scene. Yan, for example, ran an annual underground music festival called "Mini Midi" between 2006 and 2010,[8] and for many years he also led a famous series of improvised and experimental music weeklies, "Waterland Kwanyin."[9] This series gave rise to the related label Kwanyin Records, which is an imprint of Yan's Sub Jam label. Yan's new event, Miji, along with the Noise and Experimental night Zajia Lab and the regular experimental event Zoomin' Night, which formerly ran at D-22 and is now based at the specialist venue XP,[10] again show the importance of physical nuclei for underground scenes. Yan's prominence also demonstrates how much influence one person can have on such a small scene. FM3, meanwhile, have appeared in Europe in concert and also received much publicity for their so-called "Buddha Box," a small speaker that emits a variety of preprogrammed drones that can be pitch-shifted and altered in volume.

The success of these kinds of local projects is of course to be welcomed, but it remains to be seen whether China's much vaunted economic prospects will lead to the further proliferation of underground music there in spite of the country's historical and cultural constraints on such activity. In any case, Beijing, like Berlin, London, and Tokyo, demonstrates very well the kinds of shifting historically and locally specific factors that shape underground scenes, in its case showing how a somewhat constraining political and cultural atmosphere has possibly hindered the development of Western-influenced underground music. Beijing, Tokyo, and other cities mentioned in passing, such as Osaka, also show how important both a municipal city environment and a few key individuals are for the fostering and development of underground scenes. We see this importance of individuals and small bodies in many cases worldwide, from Lawrence English and his Room 40 label in Australia to Christof Kurzmann's Charhizma of Vienna (a city that is also home to the important electronic noise label Mego). This much more localized, individual, bottom-up underground framework contrasts well with the industrial structures needed for the development and sustenance of large popular music cultures or the institutional framework that so often comes hand-in-hand with "high" cultural activity. The kinds of complex overlapping of individual effort and contextual and environmental support just discussed is borne out in the Irish scene, where cultural limitations are not enough to stop the many active participants in the country's underground scene from doing what they do.

3.3. The Underground Scene in Ireland

I remark above that the underground scene in Ireland is "patchy." This has been true through the years of the country's economic boom, from the late 1990s to 2008 or so, and on into its recession, even if that economic boom did at least see some growth of the underground in cities such as Cork. I'll track some of these changes below, while critically analyzing the meshing cultural, social, and political factors that have shaped the scene.

I interviewed three leading figures from the Irish scene. I spoke to Paul Hegarty and Gavin Prior originally in July 2010, when the impact of the worldwide downturn had yet to be felt on the scene in any clear or sustained way, updating my interviews with both in June 2013 and with Prior again in December 2014. I also spoke in 2013 to Brigid Power Ryce, a musician who is active in the West of Ireland scene, enjoying something of a bump in 2013, 2014, and 2015 due to the activities of labels such as Abandoned Reason. I place Hegarty's, Ryce's, and Prior's answers into something like a dialogue with my own observations, which are drawn in the main from extensive secondary research and also from participation on the scene as a critic and audience member. Hegarty gives a general sense of the Irish scene, particularly as regards its personnel and its venues, both pre- and post-crash. Ryce does something similar, as well as sharing with Prior a concern for the cultural context that both feel has hampered the development of the Irish scene.

Paul Hegarty is an author,[11] lecturer at University College Cork, member of noise group Safe, and head of the label Dot Dot Dot Music.[12] Hegarty spoke enthusiastically about a range of underground activities across Ireland, beginning by discussing the sorts of venues and musicians that have been important to the Cork scene since the late 1990s:

> I came to Cork from Nottingham in the late '90s, where I found there was a very healthy experimental music scene, notably in the Triskel Arts Centre, the Lobby, and Fred Zeppelins. There were also links between musicians that would feature in the Jimmy Cake [a notable Dublin band] and musicians down here, notably the band Philip K Dick (who became PKD), as well as with improvisers like Fergus Kelly, David Lacey, Paul Smyth.

These venues, which Hegarty acknowledges serve other musical agendas much of the time—the Lobby, for example, is more known as a folk venue than for anything more obscure—hosted a wide range of underground activities with decent audiences in attendance in the ten or so years from the late 1990s to the

crash. Ireland's capital city, on the other hand, lagged somewhat behind in the same decade, according to Hegarty:

> From then until now [2010], shows in Cork ranged from noise, to industrial, to free jazz, to weird folk, to DIY, to avant rock, avant metal etc. It took Dublin quite a while to reach the audience levels the music has down here, including in West Cork, with gigs at Connolly's and the Leap.

Hegarty expanded on the stylistic breadth of the activity just described:

> It goes from the rock end of Rest and tenpastseven, through the noise of Safe and laptop types, through free improvisation, through to hardcore industrial messiness, to sound art, as exemplified in the Quiet Club of Mick O'Shea and Danny McCarthy.

Hegarty was in fact keen in 2010 to stress what he thought of as the comparative health and prosperity of the Irish underground scene, which he saw as being full of fruitful collaboration across genres and forms and well integrated into the global underground scene:

> All this to show how much the Irish scene is internationally integrated and punches above its weight—which I'm not sure applies in classical/programme music. Brian [O'Shaughnessy, from PKD, and Hegarty's co–label head] curated a CD, "Grain", which was 99 tracks, and it features some very established artists, archive recordings, and artists from all around Ireland. I think that was 2002. In 2001, Brian and myself started our extreme noise band Safe, which is about to release its fifth album, having collaborated with world-renowned experimental writer Dennis Cooper for the fourth. Crowds are strong, and Safe (albiet just me) has played in several locations in Canada, and the UK, and once in Kazakhstan. Self-promotion halfway through, this is the point to say that this putting on of gigs has played some part in what is now a very varied, odd, and successful music scene in Cork.

Hegarty also addressed what he perceived in 2010 as the rich underground scenes of Irish cities other than Cork, stating, "Limerick has had a pretty vibrant experimental music scene for some time. Galway has hosted avant stuff, but I'm not sure how much of it is still going on, though Steven Stapleton of Nurse With Wound lives in Clare and DJs in Galway, along with characters like Peat Bog."

So, for Hegarty, putting on gigs, which facilitated meeting fellow practitioners, developing a physical network of contacts and venues, the cultivation of independent record labels, and a generally self-determining and enthusiastic practice, was the chief source of the success of the underground scene. Hegarty also underlined, though, that that success must be understood always to be constrained by natural limitations. He pointed out that within this context of esoteric and marginal music there is "an almost natural limit on audience size" and indeed that there is a natural limit on "how much can be going on at any one time." This limit notwithstanding, though, Hegarty believed in 2010 that "Ireland compares pretty favourably with European countries on that side, and we would definitely have better audience levels, even in raw numbers, than equivalent stuff in the UK."

Unsurprisingly, my later interview with Hegarty struck a different tone. Hegarty spoke in that second interview about the transformations as he saw them in the Cork scene, which could be summed up "in one word: dramatic":

> People have left, no one new is arriving to be postgrads or take culture jobs . . . students have no money, people have lost jobs. So, the outcome is: less gigs and much less audience crossover [between the underground and other music scenes]. People are being much more selective, so every gig is lucky to break even.

The impact of the Irish recession on Cork's underground scene has been striking. There are fewer jobs, which means less disposable income and also fewer people, whether they would have arrived from outside or they simply left the city. Hegarty underlined what he called "that one simple point" about people leaving, noting how social media sometimes gives a false impression of a show or scene's prominence and how the scene has tailed off in general:

> People have left. Members of bands are gone, potential musicians and gig attenders. Facebook gives everyone the warm glow of a million people attending. It feels quite a lot like about 10 years ago, when after decent hits with experimental dj-ing, free jazz, or noise gigs at loads of different venues, the crowd just dissipated.

Hegarty went on to say that "no one is bothering putting on really odd music any more. If I put on anything it is harsh noise, so I can't complain if we get the 25 people in."

Hegarty's earlier enthusiasm had evidently been tempered by 2013. How-

ever, Hegarty did also point out that "there is probably too much momentum for the scene to fade off like in about 2004–6." In a similar vein, he went on to compare the Irish scene favorably to Europe, noting how the Triskel Arts Centre's uniting of various artistic and social venues and facilities under one roof—the complex includes Plugd Records and its café and the Black Mariah, which puts on a variety of concerts and art shows—has helped to give the scene something of a nucleus:

> I'm playing more gigs elsewhere, and Ireland, especially Cork, still has a more encouraging atmosphere than most places without it being "just mates" that come to gigs. We still get loads more gigs in, have more of a performing public than towns this size have a right to expect, and can match major cities in that regard. I think Plugd is doing pretty well, and the cafe has helped there a lot, uniting the Triskel complex as a music-based location.

Hegarty therefore points to many positives in what he felt in 2013 was still a healthy underground Irish scene, even if it had inevitably dropped off a little since 2010. The relative health of the scene should be put down to the efforts of a small number of individuals, including Hegarty himself and others, from Andrew Fogarty[13] to Vicky Langan[14] to bands such as Woven Skull and Wreck of the Hesperus. In Dublin, groups such as the Redneck Manifesto, Children Under Hoof, Patrick Kelleher and His Cold Dead Hands, and others gig in venues such as Upstairs in Anseo and Upstairs at Whelan's, and, formerly, the contemporary art space the Joinery (which closed at the start of 2015), and the "box socials" on South Circular Road in Dublin, a "BYOB" venue with minimal cover charge, which hosted a series of concerts from 2009 to 2010 in the "shed behind No. 236."[15]

Notwithstanding these positives, Ireland's comparative lack of international visibility in the global scene is noticeable. Despite the underground's alienation from the mainstream, the healthy existence of such a mainstream is, as I have said, crucial to the success of any underground scene. Ireland, historically, has endured relative poverty, with concomitant cultural poverty in terms of the range of established institutions, mainstream cultural vibrancy, and substantial public funding programs, considering its famous writers and pop musicians or not. For this reason, perhaps, Ireland has simply not produced all that many significant artists working in classical or contemporary or underground music, areas of culture depending crucially on such public funding programs. Of course, there are many cultural reasons playing into this situation of comparative reclusion, only some of which concern money and capital.[16] But in the main I would argue

that these two factors—the lack of a core music-cultural mainstream on which to draw and the relative lack of public or private funding—have proved pivotal in undermining or simply forestalling attempts to launch an underground scene in any internationally visible sense.

Both the historical lack of public funding for underground and fringe culture—something that might be in the process of changing, as we'll see in chapter 5—and the importance of making personal connections with active participants on the scene were stressed by Brigid Power Ryce in our interview. Ryce is a native of Galway. She moved to London in the hopes of developing her music at the age of seventeen, before returning to settle in Galway after failing over a few years to build a satisfactory network of contacts and venues (showing that sometimes all the resources in the world don't automatically equate to personal fulfillment). A guitarist, button accordion player, and singer of weird folk-infused laments and dirges, Ryce is highly active on the Galway underground scene, where she performs solo and with Dave Colohan and Declan Q. Kelly in the band Gorges. Ryce also collaborates regularly with a collective of musicians under the Abandon Reason banner, which began as a radio broadcast highlighting the collective's performances at venues like the underground car park mentioned above and then transformed into a record label whose first release was a compilation drawn from those performances.

Unsurprisingly, Ryce stressed the importance of these Abandon Reason contacts and others, placing her relationship with these individuals above any abstract notion of what scene they might individually or jointly represent:

> When I came back to Galway I fell back into contact with Vicky Langan (we went to school together) and she pointed me in the right direction of other musicians who led me to others and others and others etc. It started off with meeting Keith from Rusted Rail, who then introduced me to Aaron Coyne (Yawning Chasm), to Dave Colohan (Agitated Radio Pilot, Raising Holy Sparks), to Eddie Keenan (The Driftwood Manor), and to Gavin Prior and Peter Delaney. Then I met Declan Q. Kelly a bit later on and that really opened up a whole new thing for me musically because I started collaborating with him and also Dave Colohan down in an underground car park . . . I find it hard to talk about scenes or even relate with the idea of them and I guess the reason is that I like and feel akin to the individuals more than any scene.

As well as underlining the importance of personal contacts, Ryce described the range of venues at which she and other Abandon Reason musicians have performed, naming in addition to the car park "fairyforts, houses, bookshops,

record stores and venues" and listing among the latter "Plugd down in Cork, the Bell, Book and Candle in Galway and Sean's Bookstore in Limerick." The variances in type of these venues, which run from houses to car parks, demonstrate both the small size and the fragility of local underground scenes and also the sheer invention that is often involved in putting gigs on and making music happen.

As did Gavin Prior (see below), Ryce had a number of complaints about the public funding situation in Ireland. As we'll see in later chapters, the underground and its fringes are rarely in receipt of any substantial public or private funds. This is due both to the music's "natural" marginality and to the skewed nature of existing arts policies toward traditionally "high" culture (as evidenced by the late-2013 Irish miniscandal around the awarding of Music Network recording grants to mainly high-cultural groups by a potentially biased panel),[17] even if this is showing some signs of change, as with the 2014 award of ten thousand euros to Vicky Langan and other developments outside Ireland. This rarity does not mean, however, that musicians don't find the situation frustrating. Ryce pointed to the "mediocre" projects that do get funding, while lamenting the governmental failure to get behind anything marginal or underground related:

> I haven't found the Arts Council or funding bodies of any help to the underground scene. I feel a lot of the time that they waste a lot of money on a lot of mediocre things. . . . You can just see with for example the Galway Arts Festival that it's not supporting local let alone underground musicians at all.

In the end, Ryce returned to her theme of personal connections as being the core binding factor in the underground scene, noting that "what's been important has really been the branching out and finding people on a similar wavelength, and it all kind of falling into place because you're doing it for the love of it and encouraging each other and sharing with each other." As we will see again and again, while contextual factors such as a supportive government and a concentration of resources like concert venues are vitally important, many underground scenes, being so marginal and small, survive due to the efforts and enthusiasm of a small group of people.

The failure of Irish cultural powers to fund or provide coverage of the country's underground scene was also heavily stressed by Gavin Prior, an improvising noise musician; head of the prominent Deserted Village label; and member of such bands as Toymonger, the Primal Barber Trio, Wyntr Ravn, and, formerly, United Bible Studies. Prior sees the problem of Ireland's comparative lack of visibility on the international scene in institutional and geographic terms,

whether identified in the failure of any Irish underground musician to attain prominence beyond the country's borders or in the lack of a significant bespoke underground venue or festival (although Hunter's Moon, running in Leitrim since 2011, came close in the latter case until folding in 2014). The media in Ireland, according to Prior in 2010, have been

> pretty much useless for underground music. United Bible Studies is a relatively accessible group compared to other projects I've been involved in, yet Cian O'Cíobháin is the only Irish DJ to play our music and the *Journal of Music* is the only Irish publication to have reviewed our last widely available release. I may sound bitter, but it's not as if our music gets no recognition elsewhere; we can tour the USA and get flown over to record radio sessions with VPRO in the Netherlands and sell records all over the world on labels from various countries. We make the effort to contact the Irish media and are ignored. On the other hand reviewers and DJs from the USA, Britain, Europe, and Australia write to us out of the blue looking for promo copies. Some reviewers even buy our records with their own money.[18]

Echoing the point, Prior also pointed out, "We released *The Soup & the Shilling* by The Magickal Folk of the Faraway Tree. It's a collection of folk songs from the British Isles, including many songs in Irish. We couldn't meet the demand for promos from around the world but never got a review in Ireland." Prior went on to suggest that the Irish media "don't bother seriously covering music unless there's a label or a PA firm behind it." Moreover, as he pointed out, underground musicians in the main lack the institutional backing that "classical experimenters" rely upon. The Arts Council, Lyric FM, and other media outlets concentrate on what Prior described as the "holy trinity" of jazz, trad, and academic composition, thereby potentially denying Irish underground music some of the attention it might deserve and surely needs. As Prior said:

> Classical experimenters have had the advantage of Arts Council funding and a very receptive Lyric FM so they can perform live without losing money. For example, the long running series of free concerts in the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin has made modern music accessible to all sorts of people, but focuses exclusively on academic music.

Compounding matters are the relatively small size and the unusual population spread of Ireland. With over a quarter of the people concentrated in Dublin, and the population density unevenly spread throughout the rest of the

country (62 percent of the population live on 2.4 percent of the land), tours of local or international underground acts can fall apart before they have begun. Promoters just can't book concerts outside the capital, meaning that visits from international acts are often not viable, as Prior pointed out. The geographical influence on underground activity shows that it's hard (though far from impossible), beyond economically established and institutionally rich locations, for underground scenes to reach maturity outside cities or in smaller cities. Prior laments the difficult geocultural Irish situation:

> So on one hand Ireland is a small country where the media are of no use to underground musicians, yet on the other it's where I live and enjoy playing live, so it's frustrating when we try to break even playing live especially when trying to bring musicians from overseas.

Prior went on to contrast the Irish situation with that of the United States, echoing Keenan's earlier discussion of the importance of the latter country's wealth in the development and undergirding of underground culture:

> The USA has the population to support a magazine like *Arthur* dedicated to the underground [though the mag is now defunct in print and online]. In the USA people can tour for a couple of months even if you only play to 40–50 people a night. When UBS [United Bible Studies] were there we got more money playing house shows than in the Knitting Factory [a prominent venue in New York].

This quote shows the importance (though not necessity) of wider prosperity and the sheer existence of human beings to play and listen to the music in the cultivation of underground scenes. Prior also elaborated in this respect on how his group United Bible Studies attempted to transcend local scenic constraints by using the new Web platforms afforded by digital technologies, something that, as he underlined at the end of 2014, is more significant than ever:

> Through trading CD-Rs, we've gotten our music released on underground labels in other countries. It was a case of "To Hell or to the Internet"! We could sell and swap our releases with people in other countries while mostly being met with indifference in Ireland. It's nothing to do with trying to be famous, but I'd like to see more Irish underground releases on labels in other countries and bands looking to sell their music abroad online. Many people are proud to not make a profit from their music, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't try to get people to hear it.[19]

So Hegarty's positive appraisal of putting on gigs and performing, of starting labels, of forming personal contacts, and of generating activity out of those means contrasts with Prior's stark observations about the institutional and geographic stranglehold in which the Irish underground scene finds itself, something that echoes Ryce. For Prior, the scene has been weighed down by Irish culture's retrograde emphasis on folk and classical forms, with the Irish Arts Council, as Prior observed in 2010, doing very little to support the recording or promotion of music falling outside these parameters. (As I've said, this is changing a little, though the situation is still drastically weighted in favor of established institutional forms.)[20] Prior pointed out in a similar vein in the 2013 interview that the "i and e" festival had had its funding cut, that DEAF (the Dublin Electronic Arts Festival) had folded due to lack of commercial support, and that the Dublin venue the Joinery had only survived after having its funding cut by carrying out a successful Fundit campaign (the Irish equivalent of Kickstarter). In December 2014, in our final interview, Prior pointed out that the Joinery was closing due to lack of funding and that, after three editions (and as I note above), the Hunter's Moon festival of experimental, fringe, and experimental music was no more. This combination of cultural isolation and possible audience indifference (arising for whatever reason) encouraged Prior to turn to the Internet to promote his own work and form the type of network of contacts that Hegarty had found through gigs and Ryce had found through personal relationships.

Prior finished our 2010 interview by pointing out some of the significant positive aspects of the Irish scene. He suggested that the country's then-new social deprivation might actually lead to positive cultural transformation:

> To me the Irish underground(s) seem healthier than ever. In Dublin a lot of places like The Joinery have been springing up where people can bring their own beer and all the door money goes to the musicians and the space. Our towns are already full of un-leasable retail spaces and many more are locked into completion. We might finally see the dawn of a squatting culture in Ireland. The combination of Arts Council cuts and a deep recession will make it easier to justify.

This quote interestingly contrasts with my earlier points regarding the importance of healthy capitalist economies in the formation of underground scenes and in this way supports Ryce's emphasis on the efforts of individual collaborators. Its positive sentiments were in fact largely echoed in our 2013 interview, albeit for different reasons, although later, in 2014, the "squatting culture" Prior

anticipated had yet to materialize, apart from a couple of examples. Where earlier Prior felt that a background of deflating wealth might prove to be the catalyst that the Irish scene needed, the 2013 interview pointed more to the abilities of a certain number of figures to maintain the backbone of the Irish scene, which Prior suggested compares very favorably to what one might find in a city as large as Seoul, where he had lived for a year in the intervening period (though Seoul's shared lack is probably down to historical cultural factors of the kind evident in the Chinese example more than anything else).

Against a background of "dying-off" independent record shops such as Road Records in Dublin, Prior heaped praise in 2013 and 2014 on the surviving specialist shops Plugd Records in Cork and Wingnut Records, the latter of which has locations in Waterford, Athlone, Galway, and Limerick and specializes in "independent and self-released records by Irish DIY bands and labels." Prior commended these shops, pointing out in the case of the latter, for example, that "there's no way such music would be on sale in those towns without Wingnuts." He also drew attention to what he saw as the productive activities of individuals such as Ian Maleney, who runs the Fallow Field label and publishes the 'zine *Hatred of Music*. Practitioners such as Maleney and events such as Hunter's Moon serve or served as vital cogs in the patchy and fragile but still lively Irish scene. Finally, in 2014 Prior emphasized the ever-increasing importance of the Web to practitioners such as himself, since there are "few places to sell physical media," whether as a resource for people to order physical media or to stream or download music.

In the end, then, while still regretting the failures of mainstream Irish society to support and nurture underground music and underlining the importance of material factors such as geography and population spread, Prior, like Ryce, emphasized how pivotal small networks and individual enthusiasm can be within underground scenes and how important the Web is to contemporary underground and fringe practices. The individual enthusiasm Prior stresses, as I claim above, is one of the key factors supporting underground scenes, alongside a socially permissive culture and general prosperity. Ireland shows how these factors can indeed drive the development of scenes, though in all the examples, Irish and otherwise, it's clear that additional local factors, such as amenable venues and networks of people and promoters, other extant music scenes, and the existence of social and/or artistic government provisions, have been key. This is evident, for instance, in the demise of Hunter's Moon on the one hand and the relative health of venues in places like subsidy-rich France, as we'll see in a

case study in chapter 5. These additional factors obviously rely on more general cultural and political structures, coalitions, vested interests, and processes than individual enthusiasm might. Part II attempts to get a handle on how such complicated processes shape underground music culture, first in a general sense and then in the context of a range of case studies, without leaving that key factor of individual enthusiasm out of accounting.

PART II

The Political and Cultural Underground

4

Politics and Underground/Fringe Music

4.1. How Can Music Be Political?

In general, identification of a piece of music as being in some way political does not necessarily derive solely from sonic *in*scription but rather also from critical or contextual *a*scription. Politics, to use Georgina Born's term, "enters into" musical sound in this ascriptive fashion, facilitated by and indeed acted upon by that sound itself. Music considered more broadly as a set of cultural and social practices intersects with politics in a multitude of ways, however. Music and politics multiply mediate each other. They do this through the association or alliance of musical events or musicians with politics, through lyrical representation of ideas, through the social relations of performance, through musical institutions, and through the politics of compositional and musical idioms (to summarize Born's five orders of the relationship of politics and music).[1]

Many writers have written around this last order of the politics of aesthetics or musical and compositional idiom. Adam Krims, Susan McClary, Robert Walser, Theodor Adorno, Steve Goodman, and Jacques Attali all attest to politics being readable in sound. Adorno, for example, interprets musical form and gesture in terms of the freedom or containment of an allegorical musical "subjectivity" and the relation of "advanced" modernist techniques such as serialism or atonality as models of critique and resistance against the established order in the form of market cooptation or emotional succor.[2] Goodman constructs a "politics of frequency"[3] related to the use of extreme frequencies as methods of control. Krims, McClary, and Walser "read" sound in terms of semiotic encoding, interpreting musical material referentially as, for example, expressing gendered

or racial meanings.[4] Attali mixes this sort of semiotic approach (where music "heralds," is "prophetic"[5]) with a more general discussion related to Born's notion of institutional politics of how, for example, the Association for the Advancement of Coloured Musicians and the Jazz Composers' Orchestra Association tried to mobilize forms of collectivity in opposition to mainstream capitalism in the 1960s and beyond through localized networks of self-organizing musicians.[6]

These are the various ways that politics can be seen to saturate the context(s) of music. We can identify political relations in how musicians perform or write music. We can link idiom or style to political allegory. We can look to the looser associations or alliances of music with political movements, such as Rock Against Racism in the UK in the 1980s or Party-legitimated composition in the Soviet Union. We can finally think about the contextual politics of musical institutions, of public funding policies for the arts, of more local things such as council ordinances about whether certain shows are allowed to go ahead or not, of wider attitudes to censorship, and so on.

For my purposes I variously draw on all of these "orders" here. I discuss general political-economic contexts of the underground. I move on in later chapters to discuss other general contextual factors, such as the digital economy. In Part III I debate some of the ways that both the immediate artist-centered contexts, such as performing styles and imagery on records, along with the sounds of the music, might be seen to encode or connote a politics.

4.2. Political Contexts of the Underground: Real Subsumption and Flexible Accumulation

I draw here on theories of "real subsumption," which derive from the Marxian critical tradition, and "flexible accumulation," or post-Fordism, which derives largely from David Harvey, as fundamental grounding concepts. After a general discussion I consider notions of self-organization/autonomy as possible resisting and/or circumnavigating techniques, where resistance represents a direct struggle against and circumnavigation a kind of "anintermediated" side-stepping of and separation from the status quo.

The category of "subsumption"—drawing on the term "subsumed," to absorb something into something else—was introduced by Marx in the unpublished (though later added as an appendix) sixth chapter to the first volume of *Capital*.[7] The category accounts for the way previously autonomous or exterior elements of work are absorbed or integrated into capitalist spheres of exchange, more specifically into the wage-labor relation. *Formal* subsumption, according

to Scott Eric Kaufman, "occurs when capitalists take command of labor processes that originate outside of or prior to the capital relation via the imposition of the wage."[8] In Marx's own language, "the labor process is subsumed under capital (it is capital's own process) and the capitalist enters the process as its conductor, its director; for him it is at the same time directly a process of the exploitation of alien labour."[9] Put simply, formal subsumption is the formalization of precapitalist labor, such as manual labor at a mill, say, under capitalist structures of ownership and control.

By contrast, *real* subsumption occurs for Kaufman where "the labor process is internally reorganized to meet the dictates of capital";[10] for Marx, this is summed up, simply, as the arising of a "capitalist mode of production."[11] So formal subsumption occurs when, for example, manufacturing processes that would have existed before capital are arrogated to capitalism through the imposition of the wage-labor relation in the taking control of owners, managers, and the employment of contracted laborers (and hence the imposition of Marxian surplus-value and commoditization on the products of the manufacturing process). Real subsumption, by contrast, occurs when the actual processes of manufacture are transformed by capitalism through, for example, the introduction of mechanized production processes and, later, the assembly line.

Contemporary thinkers such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and Steven Shaviro expand the category of real subsumption from capital to society as a whole. In this understanding, real (or sometimes "total") subsumption corresponds to the oppressive, Kafkaesque ambience through which so much of our lives is subsumed into capital in the form of what has been called affective/immaterial labor. This can be seen in the example of Facebook status updates and likes, blog posts, Twitter comments, Tumblr forwards, Instagram follows, and even word-of-mouth discussions of experiences of films and other cultural products, where our emotions are circulated and in this way commoditized. When we perform these actions we receive no financial payment, nor are we strictly under the wage-labor relation, even though our "affective labor" drives the profits of the large corporations and agglomerations who own these platforms and products simply by increasing the user base and content archive of those platforms.

Old Marxist categories of "base" and "superstructure" transform here, and we see the emergence of the key Hardt and Negri concept of "Empire": "Empire takes form when language and communication, or really when immaterial labour and cooperation, become the dominant productive force."[12] The real subsumption of society under capital (as opposed to the Marxian real subsumption of *labor* under capital), with the related collapse of the social contract and of

former Fordist wage-labor, unionized guarantees, is the context for Empire's emergence. Shaviro elaborates Hardt and Negri's theories:

> What they are describing, under the rubric of biopolitics, affective labor, and the "real subsumption" of all aspects of social existence—and indeed of "life itself"—under capital, is a living nightmare. . . . We are not just being exploited nine-to-five, but rather all the time, 24/7: in our leisure as well as our work, when we are not being paid as well as when we are being paid, indeed even when we are asleep. This is what it means for capital to capture, commodify, and sell not only quantifiable goods and services, but also such impalpable things as atmospheres, feelings, ways of being, or forms of life.[13]

Shaviro outlines the specific terms of this "real" subsumption in a review of Frederic Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future*:

> Private enterprise, the free market, cutthroat competition and the survival of the fittest; vast and highly diversified transnational corporations; shopping as a form of sexual satisfaction; shady financial transactions zapping across the globe in fractions of a second; mortgages, student loans, and credit cards that can never be paid off; the proliferation of brand names, corporate logos, and celebrity endorsements; gated communities and suburban McMansions on the one hand, and immense shantytowns and slums on the other: These are the contours of the world we live in.[14]

This notion of "Empire" based on a kind of real subsumption achieved through various kinds of affective/immaterial labor can be seen as a form of Stakhanovite managerial control, in which every aspect of our lives is absorbed into capitalist production as a value-producing process. This is indeed the central argument of Maurizio Lazzarato's *The Making of Indebted Man*, where it's shown how different modes of political economy, such as neoliberalism, create a variety of social rules that are internalized by capital's subjects, such that new kinds of subjectivity emerge that resemble Hardt and Negri's Empire-dwellers:

> In the institutions of the disciplinary society (school, the army, the factory, prison) the injunction to remain passive was dominant; now, the injunction to remain "active" mobilises subjectivities. But the activity is empty because it offers no possibility to evaluate, choose or decide. Becoming "human capital" and being an entrepreneur of the self are the new standards of employability.[15]

All of this rendering of personal affect as a new kind of labor that indexes, in turn, new kinds of subjectivity has taken place in what Manuel Castells has called the "information age." The information age is characterized by such phenomena as globalized economic interdependence among apparently distinct nation-states and the decentralization and dematerialization of labor processes and market dynamics. Castells's information age "network society"[16] is reliant on new digital communication technologies and produces new conceptions of political, economic, and individual value, such that even our most basic phenomenological categories, space and time, have collapsed in on themselves, being rendered anew as "timeless time and the space of flows."[17]

Relating closely to the decentralization and dematerialization analyzed by Castells is what has been called "flexible accumulation."[18] Flexible accumulation describes the post-Fordist situation of precarity, where the "regimes of accumulation" (the way capital is accrued), not the modes of production (the dichotomy of owners and workers), of traditional Fordist capitalism have shifted. Whereas steady, salaried labor and centralized mass-produced products used to be the norm for many, now part-time, "zero hour," and temporary contracts with few rights or benefits, alongside outsourced, subcontracted, small-batch, and automated production lines and services, dominate, all courtesy of a small number of huge conglomerates. Privatization and the collapse of the public sector have been other features of post-Fordist economies.

Flexible accumulation, then, ultimately sees an increasing bifurcation of society, where concentrations of capital and wealth are intensified, and day-to-day existence for what Guy Standing calls the "precariat class,"[19] among whom many of the underground artists discussed in this book count as members, becomes ever more financially strained. Adam Krims in fact well described many of these factors in his article "Marxist Music Analysis without Adorno."[20] Krims flags up the central paradox of post-Fordism (from the perspective of Adorno): the ever-increasing *concentration* of wealth that capitalism facilitates has not led in the context of flexible accumulation to a "standardization" of culture, but instead in the opposite direction, through the *deconcentration* of control that has taken place with outsourcing and dispersal of production, to a proliferation of music genres and audiences and an unprecedented quantity of local scenes "whose scale, in previous years, would not have attained economic viability."[21] The underground and its fringes might be seen as a consequence of this proliferation.

Philosopher and political scientist Jodi Dean views the situation in the same negative light as the others. Dean writes in *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*[22] and *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communi-*

cative Capitalism and Left Politics[23] about how networked communication media undermine political activism by displacing activist energy into "clicktivism," constraining that energy to the registration of opinion and the transmission of affect within those media. Dean writes in her article "Communicative Capitalism and the Foreclosure of Politics" that

> the proliferation, distribution, acceleration and intensification of communicative access and opportunity, far from enhancing democratic governance or resistance, results in precisely the opposite—the post-political formation of communicative capitalism.[24]

Communicative capitalism, for Dean, is the condition in which the market-influenced capitalist ideology of choice and thus (false) democracy dominates. Dean expands on this point:

> The concept of communicative capitalism tries to capture this strange merging of democracy and capitalism. It does so by highlighting the way networked communications bring the two together. . . . Instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence . . . the deluge of screens and spectacles undermines political opportunity and efficacy for most of the world's peoples.[25]

Dean's exploration of the way that "participatory" media such as Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Tinder, and Twitter serve to capture resistance by transforming desire for change into an affect of Lacanian *jouissance*—where feedback is "captured" by the "circuits of drive" that cause users' engagements with these media to devolve into an endless cycle of repetitive status updates and retweets—conveys something key about our experience of these media. Moreover, when Facebook, Twitter, and the rest are considered in terms of their corporate affiliation (with Facebook being a corporate behemoth in its own right and YouTube, for example, being owned by Google), the efficacy of their use by left activists (which some members of the underground count themselves as) becomes even more problematic.

Dean's work underscores two key tensions within the underground with respect to its artists' use of digital media. The possibly exploitative and contradictory relationship involved in those artists' using corporate tools in publicizing their work, on the one hand, and the positive aspects of the relationship, on the other, where tools of publicity, dissemination, and communication are made available to the (generally) impoverished underground musicians free of charge. Underground musicians may also redeploy these technologies for what they see

as positive political or cultural ends. That redeployment would connect to what has been called "codetermination." This occurs where organizations/figures who draw support from capitalism and/or the state accept their possible instrumentalization as "necessary supplements" utilized by power in doing so, while at the same time redetermining the function of that funding for positive ends.

4.3. Circumnavigation, Codetermination, and Counter-magic

Contemporary underground and fringe music is as beholden to this context of real subsumption, flexible accumulation, and participatory media as more explicitly capitalist or commercial practices are. While it's always relied on the kinds of "small batch" productions endemic to post-Fordism, and while, too, the sheer *size* of the underground's local scenes mean that to a degree it circumnavigates subsumption entirely, the underground nevertheless participates directly in mobilizations of capital through its existence in big cities and its anchoring in the same economic structures as everyone else and its normative use of capitalist tools such as Facebook and Twitter. The underground is also immersed in the discourses of precarity endemic to post-Fordist culture.

I'd suggest at this early stage that the underground experiences real subsumption and post-Fordism in a like manner to other cultural forms. But it's also the case that the underground's small size means that it might well circumnavigate the problem to a significant degree, in some cases offering a localized alternative to capitalism. This is reflected in Britt Brown's comment that "localized commodities exchange is a positive force. At the high-stakes corporate level obviously the dynamic enters another realm of Darwinistic capitalism, but in humble self-organized circles the ecosystem is quite mild and well-meaning." The underground might also be seen to embody the kind of "petty capitalism" discussed by Georgina Born in *Red Strains,* referring to "small-scale forms of commercial or entrepreneurial activity" that exist "somewhere crucial between full-blown corporate capitalism and the quite different but just as marked forms of cultural, ideological and aesthetic closure and policing that tend to characterize statist and other kinds of subsidised cultural institutions."[26] These kinds of extra or petty capitalist modes of production are typical in the underground (whether they're politically effective or positive or not, and whether we go along with Born's characterization of subsidized cultural institutions and her use of the term "entrepreneurial" or not). They fit into a broad history of generally antistatist anarchist, separatist, and autonomist models of art production and political activism of the twentieth century, from the gradualist anarchism of figures

such as Gustav Landauer, to the libertarian municipalism of Murray Bookchin and the "power-to" model of John Holloway, to the Italian autonomists of the 1970s such as Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti.[27] The possible limitations or contradictions of this circumnavigatory separatist model are discussed below.

Second, following this point about circumnavigation, the fact that many underground figures are engaged in projects that try to effect change from *within* capitalism through the codetermination of its resources—in other words, through putting its subsidies and grants into what they see as politically progressive events and projects—might mean that it can be seen to resist capitalism in more or less effective ways. Third, as we'll see across Part III, it might also be the case that the underground's *sounds* can be seen to serve a political purpose in their offering to audiences the chance to experience new ways of organizing sound and thus of experiencing the world. Steven Shaviro indeed suggests in this last respect that the realm of the aesthetic is one in which we might make contact with counter-hegemonic ideas and experiences:

> The goal of complete subsumption is of course never entirely realized, precisely because accumulation can never come to an end. Also, we cannot see, feel, hear, or touch this project or process: in itself it is a version of what Ivakhiv calls "magic." And to my mind, this makes the aesthetic a kind of counter-magic, a spell to force the monstrosity to reveal itself, an effort to make it visible, audible, and palpable.[28]

"Counter-magic" playfully suggests of certain aesthetic forms that they are able to manifest a kind of demystifying "spell" on capital and other norms or orthodoxies in their deforming, undermining aesthetic procedures. This "magic" would work at the level of cognition, encouraging receivers to imagine new possibilities and new routes through convention, as well as working more intensely at the level of affect as a yielder of unexpected emotions and psychoacoustical routes. The resistances it might occasion, if it had any effects on this level, would likely be small-scale, local, and difficult to describe in precise terms. It might even be that these resistances are simply a fairy tale imagining politics when there is only indulgence. But this would be to reject aesthetic experience as such as a harbinger of politics. Powerful affective transformations can take place as a result of aesthetic counter-magic. In Mark Fisher's words, musics "combine to produce dreamings—suggestive glimmers of worlds radically different from the actually existing social order."[29] Such experiences might even, at their extreme, serve to disarticulate our bonded relationship with the world of real subsumption and "no alternative" capitalism, if even just for a temporary glimpsed moment. Ambra Corinti in fact detects this kind of sonic social modeling in the

experimental underground scene in China, where citizens "may not be able to go into the street and protest, but they're doing this, anyway. . . . Because if you're doing experimental music, you give people a chance to listen to something different—and actually this, even this, can change people's way of thinking about things."[30]

I therefore—cautiously and with reserve—use the notion of *aesthetic counter-magic* as the third dimension of how I see the underground and its fringes operating in a political sense, following *circumnavigation* (which relates to the aforementioned anintermediation) and *codetermination*.

TABLE 1. Three-part typology of the underground's political character

Political conditions	Qualifiers
Anintermediated circumnavigation	Marginal culture mediated to some degree, e.g. through the use of the web or a venue, but fundamentally anintermediated. Applies to underground culture without direct and significant support from or links to the state.
Codetermination	Derives from anintermediated contexts, but involves some direct support from or links to the state/power, whether that is through funding for you or your collaborators, social welfare or the use of materials from popular culture.
Aesthetic counter-magic	The umbrella term for a collection of practices—including profanation and sublimation—that lead to a "reconfiguration of the sensible." Applies to all underground/fringe music to one degree or another.

The question might be asked in response to all of this as to whether the underground's small networks of extra or "petty" capitalist, anintermediated activity actually function, like the Association for the Advancement of Coloured Musicians and the Jazz Composers' Orchestra in the Attali example, to distance it from the workings of capital or to strike as a bulwark against that capitalism in any meaningful way. It's very hard to say. While it is easy to recognize in the underground's micro record labels and their highly restricted networks of distribution, in Brown's "localised networks of commodity exchange" and what he calls its "primitivist, anti-careerist styles," a degree of material distance and independence from capitalism, it is questionable whether that independence can be seen in any sort of positive, or at least effectively anticapitalist, political light. This purported independence could, for example, be criticized as Polyannaesque heads-in-the-sand abdication of activist politics properly understood without any meaningful political consequences.

The same kind of criticism has been leveled at self-run artistic communities and movements the world over, deriving from Italian autonism or not. In a 2014 interview for the journal *e-flux*, for instance, Italian Marxist theorist Franco "Biffo" Beradi points to the "rich ambiguity" of self-organizing alternative and autonomous movements as both the portals of escape from capitalism and the very innovated forms capitalism will likely exploit tomorrow (where underground communities act as "researchers" for the mainstream). Beradi also suggests that such a focus on localism undermines the conditions for social solidarity:

> Obviously, people will struggle for survival, and you can call it resistance. Small islands of temporary social autonomy will resist, but the conditions for social solidarity have been cancelled by the pervading precarity.[31]

This kind of negative framing of localized, communitarian activity can be found across the left. For instance, a debate opened up from 2013 onwards around the idea of accelerationism, which is a political movement that seeks to work *through* capitalism to a postcapitalist, possibly even communist state, by accelerating and pushing to breaking point certain capitalist tendencies (perhaps in a codetermining manner). This is as opposed to trying to reverse the massive cultural and technological transformations that have taken place within capitalism. Mark Fisher has suggested that "accelerationism maintains that there are desires and processes which capitalism gives rise to and feeds upon, but which it cannot contain; and it is the acceleration of these processes that will push capitalism beyond its limits."[32] Similarly, discussing the transition from early accelerationism into its more worked-out later state, Gean Moreno suggests that it could be employed "less as a drive toward meltdown than a cunning practice through which to capture and redeploy existing energies and platforms in the service of a re-universalized left politics."[33]

These accelerationist positions therefore very much get behind notions of codetermination, where processes that capitalism can't contain—such as possibly radical cultural movements—"redeploy" existing platforms for new ends. This is in contrast to localist separation. The *Accelerationist Manifesto*, in fact, makes an opposition between localism and codetermination explicit, rejecting the former as an ineffectual system of political emancipation:

> We believe the most important division in today's left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology. The

former remains content with establishing small and temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, eschewing the real problems entailed in facing foes which are intrinsically non-local, abstract, and rooted deep in our everyday infrastructure. The failure of such politics has been built-in from the very beginning. By contrast, an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow.[34]

Considering this hostility toward localist self-organization from within even the radical left itself, it is difficult to appraise such movements in positive political terms. It's difficult to adjudicate upon them in any definite manner, in fact.

Of course, many in the underground claim no such politics for what are often their radically separated, anintermediated activities. But it's also the case that many others explicitly engage with notions of circumnavigating independence and/or codetermination. These two simple but effectively broad concepts of the underground's political character will therefore serve, along with counter-magic, as thematic touchstones throughout the rest of this book.

Steven Shaviro remarks in the Jameson review quoted above that "we are missing what Fredric Jameson terms 'the desire called utopia.'"[35] Underground culture doesn't posit such a desire, even if as we will see figures such as Mattin or Eddie Prévost explicitly engage the *topos* of utopia, but instead refracts the desire into a series of nested alternatives existing within and around capitalism, some circumnavigating and anintermediated, some codetermining, and some working as counter-magic. How it does this should become clearer in the next few chapters.

5

Cultural Policy and Underground/Fringe Music

How do underground and fringe musicians get paid? What do they do for money, and does that clash in any way with any political beliefs they might have? Do their actions and practice say anything about the intersections of underground and fringe culture with political economy and cultural policy? How does cultural policy shape or constrain the underground in different countries? The next two chapters try to answer these kinds of questions. The current one focuses on a more general analysis of how underground artists get paid and the intersections of cultural policy and philanthropy with the underground in the United States, the UK, and Europe, while the one following hones in on the professional lives of specific working musicians.

5.1. Overview

Underground musicians' professional lives are fragmented, being split as they so often are among steady work, temporary projects, unpaid work, and no work at all: this is the precarity discussed in the previous chapter, though it's also representative of the kind of "portfolio" career that has long characterized working lives in the arts. Sources of income within this context are unpredictable at best. Some rare underground or fringe musicians are fortunate to make enough of a living from music that they don't need to take any supplementary work. Others have to source money from a variety of places,

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whether it's social welfare, subsidies, grants, their partners, or supplementary musical activities such as teaching. Others don't earn money from their music, either because they can't or because they don't want to for political or personal reasons.

A four-part scheme of underground incomes emerges from all this. The scheme goes from all or the bulk of a performer's income deriving from musical activity at one end to little or no income deriving from musical activity at the other. As ever, these categories should be read as setting out dynamic processes in static form. A musician might fit into one category now, but in the past or future that musician could easily slot into one of the other categories; as Barry Esson of arts organization Arika told me, "Most people in certain scenes have day jobs, and it's only when you get to a certain age and profile that people can make a modest living off gig money. People who do make money or get by just from music often tend to be the people with shops, distro or labels, I find." So as we will see, musicians can easily fall into more than one category at once or change categories as they go along. I use this scheme, finally, to build a wide-ranging discussion about money, political economy, and cultural policy in the underground and its fringes.

TABLE 2. Scheme of underground and fringe musicians' sources of income

Category 1	All or bulk of income from music.
Category 2	Musical income supplemented by secondary or tertiary artistic activities.
Category 3	Musical activity supplemented by public or private funds.
Category 4	No or very little income from music.

5.2. Category One: Income from Music

Only a very select few artists derive all or the bulk of their income from their activities as musicians (i.e., from sales or concert appearances). These would include only those underground musicians with the highest of profiles, such as Merzbow and the members of Sunn O))), or fringe underground artists whose music places them somewhat across generic and cultural boundaries. An example of the latter would be the stoner metal band Sleep, whose work corresponds directly with the type of music made by Sunn O))) in the single-track *Dopesmoker* album but generally exists in a more lucrative cultural context.[1] This category, as I said, is fairly exclusive: the underground and fringe's natural marginality means most have to rely on income from other, often non-musical sources.

5.3. *Category Two: Income from Music and Elsewhere*

Many underground musicians at least supplement their income by engaging in secondary and tertiary artistic practices, such as teaching or writing, as earlier alluded to by Esson (and he himself, as codirector of Arika, worked in other jobs for the first seven years of doing events, as did his partner in Arika, Bryony McIntyre). This is the case with Paul Hegarty at University College Cork and the many other artists who also take up formal or informal academic positions of one kind or another, such as improviser Steve Beresford (who also writes a lot of sleeve notes, among other things) at the University of Westminster and composer and improviser Jennifer Walshe at Brunel University. This practice of musicians taking academic posts is hardly unusual. However, these kinds of positions are much less viable for underground musicians; Bereford and Walshe are exceptions that prove the rule, with the latter not even being directly assimilable to the underground since her practice includes as much notated and institutionally supported work as otherwise.

I discussed the issue of earning money within a marginal artistic context with Steve Beresford. Beresford agreed that his was a "unique" position to be in as an improviser, "particularly in Britain." When I probed him on this, Beresford said that he wasn't sure how he ended up at Westminster, where he has been teaching since 1995. He remarked that "it may have something to do with my training in music, my degree at York and so on, but I really don't know." Ultimately, Beresford told me, since he took the position, he has been "earning more money as a musician than ever before" (which he agreed is likely more to do with his growing experience and reputation than anything else), but the money derived from teaching is nevertheless crucial.

But the second category doesn't just include moonlighting academics. A key secondary activity in the underground and fringe is running a record label. This happens with many musicians, for example, Aaron Turner of Hydra Head Records, Jim Jupp and Julian House of Ghost Box, Hijokaidan's Jojo Hiroshige of Alchemy Records, Britt and Amanda Brown of Not Not Fun, and Wolf Eyes'[2] John Olson and Aaron Dilloway of American Tapes and Hanson Records respectively.[3] The prevalence of artist-run labels is unsurprising in this context, since many of these labels are relatively small and have been set up to foster close-knit scenes. Still other money-making activities in the underground include designing instruments, music production suites, and software programs, as can be seen in the example of Robert Henke, who makes minimal techno under the name "Monolake" and had a hand in designing Ableton Live, as well as being a professor of sound design at the Berlin University of the Arts.

5.4. Category Three: Cultural Policy and the Underground

I've been referring in passing to the lack of public funding support for underground and fringe musicians, while also pointing to signs of change. I'll flesh that discussion out over the next few pages.

Some underground musicians supplement the earnings they derive from performance with arts funding from private foundations, local authorities and arts councils, and their national portfolio organizations. This sort of funding has been historically rare in this context, however. Because of traditional cultural hierarchies established over time and institutional norms that are produced by and reproduce these hierarchies, certain cultural forms have enjoyed the lion's share of subsidies in Europe and philanthropic support in the United States. This system sees a trickle-down flow from mainstream classical music to new music to the underground and fringe forms I've been discussing, each form getting less of the pie than the previous one.

While in some respects the support base of contemporary classical music—a form that's relatively close in sonics and aesthetics to much underground music—is clearly precarious, the music nevertheless enjoys fairly broad institutional support when compared to many kinds of underground music. It maintains a strong institutional base in universities and university presses, in culturally prestigious awards schemes and canons, in international networks such as the International Society for Contemporary Music, in national organizations such as GEMA in Germany and New Music America in the United States, and in large public arts venues, where it invariably retains a steady—if fragile—presence. Underground and fringe musics of the kind I'm writing about, by contrast, have almost by their very nature been excluded from commercial patronage and from the protection offered by high-cultural prestige and public or philanthropic funding.

So the underground exists largely outside institutional contexts, sometimes willingly, sometimes less so. But it should also be noted that this music *does* receive funding and support, particularly in countries such as France and the Netherlands where the arts have traditionally been heavily subsidized by national or municipal agencies. In Britain, Ireland, and other places the underground seems to be gaining more of a foothold as contemporary notions of the avant-garde and publicly funded art begin to change, with festivals and individual artists gaining a range of support from Arts Council–affiliated organizations and private foundations. The underground is by definition in a marginal position outside institutions, but it's also on the fringes or sometimes "inside" those subsidized, protected contexts. I'll provide extensive concrete details on this scenario before getting back to the fourth category of my scheme.

The funding situation in the UK, where a "mixed economy" of the philanthropic "prince" model followed in the United States and the more state-dependent subsidies of mainland Europe rules, is an interesting one to delve into in this respect. Arts Council England (ACE) is the main administrator of public funds for the arts in that country. (I discuss the equivalent public body in Scotland, Creative Scotland, in chap. 8.) In looking at ACE's most recent funding decisions we can see in action the "crumbs from the table" situation of social and liberal democracies I've been discussing.

Arts Council England's awards covering the three annual funding cycles between 2015 and 2018 (that is, 2015–16, 2016–17 and 2017–18) show a marked difference in the level of award directed toward mainstream and contemporary classical national portfolio organizations (agencies that compete for funds to distribute to respective sectors). The top five awards for National Portfolio Organizations (NPOs) in each of these areas, as illustrated below, vividly illustrate this.

TABLE 3. Top 5 NPO awards (Arts Council England 2015–18)

Traditional Classical	Award	Contemporary Classical	Award
Royal Opera House	£74,316,000 (down 1.8%)	Sound and Music	£2,113,977 (up less 1%)
English National Opera	£37,140,000 (down 28%)	London Sinfonietta	£1,498,695 (up less 1%)
Opera North	£31,158,000 (up 7.37%)	Birmingham CMG	£958,959 (up less 1%)
London Symphony Orchestra	£6,618,150 (up less 1%)	Huddersfield CMF	£724,881 (up less 1%)
Hallé Concerts Society .	£6,251,023 (up less 1%)	Oxford Contemporary Music	£557,349 (up 52%)

As can be seen, while Oxford Contemporary Music's grant rose significantly, but English National Opera's total grant fell by 28 percent (from £51,362,711 [roughly $80 million] to £37,140,000 when we compare the 2015–18 and 2012–15 cycles), and similarly, the Royal Opera House's fell by just under 2 percent (from £75,739,253 to £74,316,000), these two latter organizations' awards, like the £31,158,000 guaranteed to Opera North and the £6 to £7 million granted to the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO), the Hallé Concerts Society, and (not included in the table) the Philharmonia and London Philharmonic Orchestras, dwarf the awards received by national portfolio organizations dedicated largely

to new music, such as Sound and Music (at £2,113,977), London Sinfonietta (£1,498,695), BCMG (£958,959), Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (£724,881), Oxford Contemporary Music (£557,349), and (not included in the table) SoundUK (£301,740), Psappha (£246,000), and Octopus (£120,696).[4] Grant-making organizations such as the Genesis and Paul Hamlyn Foundations, the Leverhulme Trust, and, above all, the PRS Foundation do all provide new music practitioners with vital funding support. But even this support, while notable in many cases, is relatively piecemeal and localized when compared to the huge awards granted to mainstream high-art forms.

Now none of this is surprising. In terms of both audience appeal and cultural prestige, contemporary notated music clearly pales when compared to mainstream opera and classical music. This is even if new music nevertheless benefits from clear institutional privilege through the support of the organizations and institutions listed above that channel public and private funds into the new musical ecosystem and through the programs of orchestras such as LSO, opera houses such as English National Opera (ENO), venues such as the Southbank and Sage Gateshead, and festivals such as the Proms.

This varied institutionalization of new music in the academy, in various cultural canons, and on the edges of the performing repertoire might feel precarious in some respects, but it's extensive and entrenched when compared to the institutional presence of underground and fringe music. The contrasting institutional and historical cultures around these musics empower and constrain activity, identity, and value. Different codes of identification and modes of self-presentation, for example, attach to each music, even where artists are working in similar areas and with similar sounds in many respects; young composers regularly rustle the medals of their own institutional backgrounds and experiences with publicly funded organizations, for example, in stark contrast to the much more fragmentary bios of underground or fringe artists.[5] These different cultures therefore reproduce themselves both materially, in the money that circulates around them, and in "soft" semiotic terms, through the codes that reflect and further sanction institutional privilege and financial inequality.

Underground independence from institutions in the form of capital and subsidy is sometimes by choice. Politically, aesthetically, and (largely) financially independent venues such as ausland in Berlin and the Stone in New York cleave to this independence as a guarantee of artistic and/or political freedom. The Stone's owner, John Zorn, underlined that choice to me both in pointing to the "pool of 25 or 30 volunteers who each work one day a month" in staffing the tiny venue and in saying that "we want independence and do not like to ask for

grants or money that other people may need more than we do. . . . I believe it's easier to rely on ourselves rather than the uncertainty and sketchy nature of 'official' channels."

The Stone's running costs, as Zorn told me, come to about "$50–60k a year," consisting of "rent of $42k, utility $1k, piano tuning $5k, insurance $4k, and etc. $1k." With "100% of the door [going] to the artist," these costs are met through a combination of "monthly improv benefit concerts" (which earn "$20k"), "benefit cd sales" (likewise earning "$20k") and "donations" of "$10–20k," though Zorn was keen to point out that "people who believe in what we do send us donations even though we DO NOT make an effort to ask for them."

Ausland is run on a similar basis. Led by a team of six people in a cooperative-like fashion, it is, like the Stone, staffed on a volunteer basis. Though ausland does not receive donations comparable to the Stone, it instead supplements income with some small amount of public funds: "As a rule of thumb, the money made from selling beverages finances the infrastructure of ausland. The door money goes to the performing artists. Public money (when available) goes into financing projects and, through this, to the ausländers. . . . For the last two years ausland has been receiving public money to cover operational costs, however, it could still work without these rather small amounts." As with the Stone, then— Zorn told me with reference to this idea of cooperative organization that the venue "runs itself thanks to the friends who believe in us and are here to help; it's about community and we are strong in the downtown scene"—ausland clearly works hard to maintain an independent, community-based model of self-organization, notwithstanding the receipt of some small amount of public funds. This kind of preference for independence and cooperation links to clear political ideals in the case of ausland, as they suggest: "We think that the organizational structure of ausland is a pragmatic solution to the utopian idea of an artist-run venue."[6]

In contrast to the clear preference for economic, political, and aesthetic independence seen in these examples of the Stone and ausland, in other cases the underground's marginality derives from various forms of mainstream neglect, as for example with the Irish underground scene's struggle to get a foothold in a wider support system. But whether marginality and circumnavigatory independence comes through choice or imposition, it's always expected. By my own definition, in fact, underground and fringe music is either extra-institutional or institutional-fringing, perhaps getting lucky or piggybacking in either an experimental music platform or through the more commercially cultish appeal of some acts but generally burrowing away in tiny venues, dark corners of the Internet, and small festivals around the world largely independent of mainstream institutional patronage.

Arts Council England's funding decisions across both 2012–15 and 2015–18 demonstrate the independence and marginality of the underground in general terms. The listing page for the council's music awards in 2012–15, for example, gives details of grants and funding to a range of musical organizations and groups, which include:

> Britten Sinfonia, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, NMC Recordings, Inner City Music (Band on the Wall) and The Sage Gateshead . . . Birmingham Opera Company, Eye Music Trust, Africa Oyé, English Folk Song and Dance Society, Darbar Arts Culture Heritage Trust . . . Kapa Productions, Serious, Opera North, Punch, Music in the Round, Orchestras Live, The Opera Group and Welsh National Opera . . . Glyndebourne, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Royal Opera House, Darbar Arts Culture Heritage Trust and Inner City Music (Band on the Wall).[7]

While this list could be seen to accommodate fringe underground composers, sound artists, and even free improv, these would struggle to get representation, and it leaves even less space for underground genres such as extreme metal or noise. A traditional notion of which sorts of musical forms and practices are entitled to funding still obtains to some degree, particularly in proportions of awards.

And yet. Even if the general picture given by the list just quoted and by the specific data I discussed from the 2015–18 funding cycle is clear in expressing the marginality of the underground, when we look at the situation in a more fine-grained way, we can see that subsidy in the UK—and perhaps even the institutional boundaries around avant-garde musical practice in general—betrays a clear evolutionary momentum, as I've been suggesting. I'll look at the national agency for new music in the UK, Sound and Music, as a case study here, using an interview with its chief executive, Susanna Eastburn, as well as material relating to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (derived from my interview with its arts officer, Sarah-Jane Dooley), to fill out the picture.

Sound and Music formed in 2008 from the merger of the four previous main new music organizations in Britain: the Society for the Promotion of New Music, the British Music Information Centre, the Contemporary Music Network, and the Sonic Arts Network. Sound and Music saw its funding cut from £1.2 million in 2011–12 to around £0.7 million in the following cycles (2012–13: £700,599; 2013–14: £716,712; 2014–15: £735,347). The 2015–18 cycle largely maintains these 2012–15 levels. But what the organization is doing with this comparatively small bursary (at least when compared to, say, Opera North)

is very revealing about changing institutional and cultural boundaries in the twenty-first century. Sound and Music is the only national music agency on the 2012–15 and 2015–18 lists above that is affiliated in any substantial way with ventures that might reasonably be described as either "underground" or "fringe," as those terms are being used here. This affiliation is becoming more and more significant, with Sound and Music's already broad remit—as advertised in the 2012 open letter written by a range of anxious composers seeking to restrict Sound and Music's policies in response to its focus on forms such as sound art from 2008 to 2012[8]—becoming ever more expansive during 2013, 2014, and on into 2015.

Chief executive Susanna Eastburn took up her position among a new team in 2012. In Eastburn's words, Sound and Music seeks to promote "the full range of new music and the people who create it, including the increasing number who may defy ready categorisation," in this way offering support to genres from across the spectrum.[9] From 2008 to 2012, these genres, as quoted in that same open letter, ran as follows: "Electronic and Improvised; Noise and Art Rock; Notated and Modern Composition; Sonic Art; Multimedia and Cross Art Form; Jazz, World and Folk; and Alternative Rock & Dance"; the current administration's range of support is as wide as this list would suggest, though Sound and Music "now actively resist defining their areas of activity in terms of a genre list," as Eastburn told me in a follow-up to our interview.

This list clearly includes work from outside the academy and other large institutions, even incorporating some distinctly underground practices (again, accepting the slight contradiction in being described as "underground" while receiving financial and other support from a national agency). Specific examples of this can be seen for instance on Sound and Music's Touring Programme initiative. While this initiative operates on a relatively limited budget—amounting to, as Eastburn explained to me, about £50,000 per year, with two calls going out each year and individual awards varying from "£500 to around £15,000"— it has nevertheless made inroads into connecting underground practitioners with public funding. Touring Programme is particularly suited to this as it's less hidebound to traditional categories than other Sound and Music schemes *might* be, from Composer-Curator to Embedded to Adopt a Composer, though even there cross-genre improvised, sound art, and electronic work and artists such as the Bohman Brothers, SOUNDkitchen, Audiograft, and Ripshaw Catfish get support (suggesting that even terms such as "composer" are less restrictive than they might appear at first blush). In the 2014–15 Touring Programme alone, Sound and Music supported improv duo part wilde horses mane on both sides,

experimental pop composer Leo Chadburn, and instrument makers and sound artists MortonUnderwood.

I spoke to Eastburn at length about Sound and Music's breadth of support since its 2008 merger, particularly since the new leadership and team started in September 2012. I was particularly interested in discussing whether Eastburn and her team are conscious of the broad range of music represented in the kinds of projects and artists they support and in turn how they define funding criteria in terms of generic and stylistic definition. I was also interested in discussing the idea that Sound and Music's broad range might be seen as an example of institutional innovation, a kind of a redrawing of the very boundaries of new music in the UK that might open up the institution to underground and other forms of practice, while also, as a result, transforming the cultural character and authority of that institution as such.

Eastburn was happy to champion Sound and Music's broadness while also being keen to underline how natural it all felt. I asked Eastburn if she could define some basic criteria for Sound and Music's adjudication processes. As with my conversation with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Sarah Jane Dooley below, Eastburn emphasized that Sound and Music's awards and grants are very much decided on an individual and not a stylistic basis. Sound and Music "start with the artist or composer" when deciding on recipients. Eastburn even went as far as to suggest that "the distinctions that sometimes get used, like classical or experimental, often don't apply to or get used by people themselves, actually." Eastburn suggested that it is ultimately people making "original and new stuff," who are "in the developmental stage in some way and are in need of special support," that the agency looks to back. And while at first this might seem a fuzzy gauge, it is in reality no less fuzzy or open to bias than the generic frameworks we conventionally put around music, which always see boundaries being drawn by cultural decision makers in a loose and even unpredictable way for this or that social reason with various consequences in terms of power, policy, and representation. As can be seen in the richness and variety of the artists being supported by Sound and Music, the somewhat loose criteria set out by Eastburn above in response to "traditional boundaries blurring" and as a result of trying to find what she describes as "common cause" among artists have indeed proved to be a productive engine for the cultivation of an eclectic community of music makers.

Eastburn agreed that Sound and Music's broad focus, along with other initiatives it's exploring, from its Audience Incubator scheme of supporting practitioners and others with data-driven audience development to its Embedded program of placing artists and composers into host organizations could be

seen as an example of institutional innovation, though as with the discussion of funding criteria mentioned above, Eastburn suggested that this happens at a more organic than conceptual or verbal level. Eastburn spoke to me about how, despite Sound and Music's continued use of the possibly problematic "composer" label (though they suggest they are "trying to reclaim it, to go back to the Latin root about putting things together in new ways," and to "let it cover a breadth of practice"), each of their funding decisions is for her at least done both with an active design toward parity and in a very transparent way. Sound and Music always, in Eastburn's words, "look to support a balance of scales and size of work." The organization itself, meanwhile, is "always trying something new, some new idea or project." This balance of large and small work, of new and old, can indeed be seen to be expressed in the kinds of musics being supported by Sound and Music. This is even if older cultural hierarchies and unavoidable biases inevitably haunt their efforts to create a new sense of what musics and cultural practices might get institutional backing, where traditional "new music" ensembles and institutionally anchored composers young and old receive as much if not more support than those working outside such support structures, perhaps disproportionately so. This may not be a problem, and indeed it clearly reflects the defined nature of Sound and Music as an organization, but it reflects cultural history nonetheless and necessarily.

Second, in terms of transparency, Sound and Music's judging panels are always, according to Eastburn, "diverse, all with different tastes," and they are also "rotated consistently." The diversity and variety serve to "work against individual taste," so that any bias in that respect can at least be alleviated. Whether this works out in such idealized terms in practice is another matter, but it is clear that in the way the funding process is understood and laid out by the organization itself, no less than in how it is perceived by the musical scene in the UK, a clear pluralist ambition and self-perception are in evidence. Sound and Music in this way further militates against the kind of skewed situation referenced in the Irish case study discussed chapter 3, where those from a traditionally high-cultural background simply had the language and frame of references to hit funding hotspots and riffs in ways that noninstitutional artists may not have (although this story of absented generic prejudices, transparency, and personal taste is likely complicated and messy in practice).

All of these measures, local and historical generic and personal biases notwithstanding, enable Sound and Music to contribute to a redrawing of institutional and generic boundaries. As Eastburn told me in response to the open letter mentioned above, Sound and Music always try "both to lead and to serve" the new music community around them and "to make a powerful, unified argu-

ment about why this experimental new music stuff counts." They are "never just funders"; they always try to innovate new kinds of "audience research, funding, presentation and so on." These broad innovations, even if they inevitably inscribe new forms of bias and new limitations and circumscriptions (and opportunities) in practice, redefine institutions and cultural authority in the process, opening the new music establishment and public subsidy more generally to, for example, underground practices in an unprecedented way, in a British context at the least. This reframes music just as it reframes music culture more generally: new allegiances are forged, new links are made, and new institutions result.

This seeming expansiveness echoes wider developments. This is both with respect to the Arts Council itself, chiefly in the form of their "open access" Grants for the Arts, and other funding agencies. (It also echoes other reconfigurations of a smaller and smaller public pie, where, for instance, a range of jazz organizations, such as Jazz North Limited, have been recognized with substantial funds in the 2015–18 ACE cycle). In 2014–15 Creative Scotland awarded Arika, the arts organization formerly responsible for experimental festival INSTAL that I profile in chapter 8, £198,000, while the PRS Foundation has funded everyone from Evan Parker to the Brighton festival Colour Out of Space, the latter likewise profiled in chapter 8 and also incidentally supported through Sound and Music's Composer-Curator program in 2013–14.

Various foundations exist in the mixed economy of Britain that have begun to provide support to underground and fringe musicians, much in the manner of the evolving Sound and Music. Composer and ensemble leader Ed Bennett, whose work is as indebted to improvisation (he frequently collaborates with improv saxophonist Paul Dunmall, for example), minimalist, and popular music as it is to traditionally modernistic new music, relies on a part-time teaching salary from Birmingham Conservatoire. However, in late 2011 Bennett was awarded a Philip Leverhulme Trust Prize in Performing and Visual Arts. Bennett's prize is worth £70,000 over two to three years, which will allow him, as he told me, "to develop work with his ensembles outside the usual constraints of commissions." The prize will play a key part in facilitating, according to Bennett, "more performances and more recordings and more work with improvisers."

Since Bennett is a traditional composer with fingers in numerous cultural pies, his award is not that unusual. But while the kind of award received by Bennett *is* relatively uncommon in the underground, the last few pages tell a story of how this is changing. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation has awarded substantial sums to various improvisers and sound artists, from Evan Parker to Philip Jeck, since its Composer category was introduced permanently in 2007 (after one initial year of music awards in 1994). In 2011 and 2012, for a further example,

£45,000 and £50,000 were awarded to improvisers John Butcher and Steve Beresford. The broadness of the PHF's Composer Award is matched in the (postmodern liberal pluralist) diversity of its judging and nominating panels; the 2014 composer nominators included figures as diverse as Adam Hart, codirector of the Vortex Foundation, and folk singer Julie Fowlis, while the judging panel for the same award featured Hamish Dunbar, founder of Café Oto. Therefore, much like Sound and Music, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) can be seen to endorse a broad funding model, although it should be noted that the foundation is in a different position from Sound and Music in that is not publicly funded, nor do its "no strings attached" awards relate to any specific commission or program, instead simply intended to encourage artists to practice without financial pressures.

I interviewed Sarah Jane Dooley (from whom the term "no strings attached" came) about the PHF's seemingly deliberately wide-ranging Composer Award, for which she has responsibility. Like Eastburn, Dooley emphasized that the PHF's awards are the result of what they see as a transparent judging process and a diverse panel, with the foundation "very much relying on the expertise/ advice and knowledge of the external music sector (nominees and judges)" and remaining "neutral to the selection process and the composers that are put forward." This seeming transparency and adaptability—as with Sound and Music, while we must be careful in accepting the PHF's claims at face value, the range of the PHF's awards and the makeup of its various judging panels do lend some credibility to Dooley's claims—mean that the foundation is not in thrall as much as might be the case to older hierarchies clustering around terms such as "composer." But its broadened musical scope does not, despite this independence, come directly as a result of its will or design but instead, again, as a result of what is happening in music in the UK more widely considered. In Dooley's words, "PHF's broad music scope is . . . in response to the wide range of work being produced now in the UK and not an agenda that we have consciously created."

Again as with Sound And Music, Dooley emphasized that her foundation's broad scope does not necessarily relate to any conscious redrawing of music-institutional boundaries, but at the same time she "acknowledges that by running an Awards scheme that covers such a broad range of musical genres and composers we could on some levels be seen to [in my questions' words] 'harness and foster' a 'changing landscape.'" Again, though, Dooley emphasized individuals over styles, talking about how "there are many talented composers working hard to create music across genres and we believe in them as individuals rather than prioritising one type of music over another." The key thing in Dooley's eyes,

in the end, is "encouraging a wide range of music, not just traditional genres." In doing this encouraging, as embodied here in the large Composer Awards received by Beresford, Butcher, and others but also as is visible in the PHF's Open Grants scheme, which supports smaller organizations such as Café Oto, the PHF can be seen to recognize and respond to what Dooley suggests seems to be "a growing audience for, and an increase in programming within larger institutions of, a more diverse range of new music."

Continuing in this reconfiguring vein for a moment, Arts Council England has made numerous awards that redirect public money into fringe underground practices and in so doing brought those practices somewhat under the institutional umbrella. This can be seen with Sound and Music, as well as with more traditional "new" music endeavors, such as the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, which opens its doors somewhat to improvisatory and nontraditional experimental practices. It was also visible in April 2014 with the £66,347 that went to Tusk Festival in Newcastle and the £14,811 that went to the Convergence Festival in Village Underground, London, as part of the Grants for the Arts scheme. Both of these events are substantially dominated by fringe and experimental, nontraditionally "new" musical practices. We can also think of the newly recognized nonprofit OTOProjects, a production company emerging out of Café Oto in London, also profiled in chapter 8, which will receive a total of £224,799 over the three years of the 2015–18 ACE cycle. This is perhaps the most significant example of the underground subsidy mentioned so far. All of this British activity, finally, mirrors similar recent openings-up taking place in Ireland, where, for example, noise musician Vicky Langan, discussed in depth in chapter 6, received an unprecedented €10,000 Music Bursary artist award in 2014.[10] My overarching point about the changing nature of "new" music and therefore of the avant-garde in the West in the twenty-first century, and the underground's central place within that shifting cultural process, can be seen to be supported by the slow reconfiguration of institutional boundaries seen in these examples.

But despite these promising developments, the more general ACE statistics quoted above nevertheless convey the point that traditional "high"-art forms are in receipt of by far the most public monies, even if that sector itself is suffering from the more general drift toward neoliberal democracy and the shrinking of the public sector in Europe that has seen ACE, for example, having to dip into lottery money in order to supplement the 36 percent cut in funding it suffered from 2011 to 2104.[11] (Interestingly enough, however, far from seeing Sound and Music's budgetary issues as a constraint, Eastburn actually pointed out that the amount of money it receives keeps the organization at a manageable size:

"Frankly, we are really nimble as we currently stand; people can come to work and say they have an idea and this idea will be heard and acted on.")

One of the defining characteristics of the underground and the fringe is their distance from paternalistic models of social democratic patronage. We would not expect a large and publicly vouched-for organization designed to protect and support underground artists to exist in the first place. And yet, this kind of marginal culture would surely benefit—and by benefit I simply mean that its artists might have more secure lives and its venues might not struggle so much to survive—from some kind of sustained, reliable public funding. This can clearly be seen with the case of OTOProjects, whose various label, venue, and curating endeavors will now be able to gain a firm foothold at something of a safe distance from some of the financial pressures inevitably faced by the venue, as referenced by former concerts manager John Chantler in our interview. Such support does not necessarily compromise undergroundness tout court: as I argue above, it is people's unwillingness to engage with this kind of music, along with the music's abrasive and mongrel stylistic mix, that makes it marginal, not necessarily the difficulty that people have in finding their way to it.

Some organizations operating within the underground in fact clearly actively seek and receive such public funding, as does OTOProjects. Arika, which puts on events in Scotland and the United States, receives proportionally heavy funding from Creative Scotland and other agencies, as I mentioned. The Sonic Protest festival in France has likewise long received strong subsidy, sponsorship, and other forms of support in a mainland European context, where arts and artists of all kinds have been traditionally looked after by the state (though obviously, as everywhere in the West, this situation is changing for the worse). Taking place annually in Paris since 2004 (with a break in 2009), the festival played across five French cities in 2012; toured eleven French, Swiss, and Belgian cities in 2013; and, for its tenth edition in 2014, hosted nineteen evenings of music in fifteen cities across France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium (though with its main events still taking place in Paris). Sonic Protest has offered densely packed, underground-heavy programs featuring everyone from Merzbow to Jean-François Laporte to Astral Social Club to Keiji Haino. Despite the non-high nature of many of the artists it features, it's received all sorts of funding support. This support ranges from commercial sponsors such as local radio stations and magazines to municipal cultural agencies (as is the convention in France) such as Arcadi of the Île de France in Paris and La foundation suisse pour la culture in the last two years and, from 2012, Groupe de recherché et d'improvisation musicales of Marseille, a nonprofit voluntary association supported by the city of Marseille.

Instants Chavirés in the Montreuil commune of East Paris, one of Sonic Protest's regular venues, offers a particularly interesting mainland European example of an experimental, fringe, underground entity getting by largely on public money. Operating as a "laboratory for improvised, experimental and noise music" (un laboratoire des musiques improvisées, expérimentales, bruitistes),[12] as well as a site of visual and sound art, Instants Chavirés has played host to significant underground and fringe figures from Evan Parker to Steve Noble to Zu to Karen Gwyer, to name only a small selection. Its director, Thierry Schaeffer, told me that the venue relies on public funding for roughly 73 percent of its revenue, with commercial income accounting for 27 percent, at least as far as the most recent budget (from 2013) available at the time of our interview goes. This is all out of a total budget for that year of €457,000. This figure is noticeably higher than we find somewhere like the Stone, which operates on $50,000–60,000 running costs (equivalent to about €40,000–48,000), although artists are paid in the Stone's case through door revenue, thereby reducing total measurable costs. The size of Chavirés's budget is perhaps due to the venue's inclusion of fine art and also more fringe—as opposed to obscurely underground—musical practices in its program.

The public monies received by Instants Chavirés come from a medley of national, department (an administrative subdivision in France comparable to a county or state), city, local, and miscellaneous sources, as follows (all data derived from my interview with Schaeffer):

TABLE 4. Division of funding (Instants Chavirés)

Public Monies—73.4%			
National:	Ministry of Culture, Drac Ile de France	12.7%	€57,800
Local authorities:	Region, Iles de France	12.1%	€55,400
Department:	Département de Seine Saint Denis	25.1%	€115,000
City:	Montreuil	15%	€68,200
Various:	Subsidies for specific projects	8.5%	€38,700
Commercial Revenue—26.6%			
Ticket and bar sales:		19.1%	€87,500
Other (rental of venue, subscriptions etc.):		7.5%	€34,400

As can be seen, Instants Chavirés receives a substantial amount of subsidy from various public sources, chiefly its local department, although national, regional, and municipal monies are hardly insignificant. The depth and range of these public sources are unlike anything you would find in many other countries, with

the possible exception of somewhere like the Netherlands or Germany (despite shrinking public sectors in those countries likewise). Although *commercial* revenue accounts for only 27 percent of Chavirés's budget, that in itself is sizable compared to the Stone and other venues, at approximately €121,800 in 2013. This shows that a fringe, diverse venue such as this, where underground, art, and slightly more commercial or fringe musical artists appear alongside each other in a largely publicly funded artistic "laboratory," has potential to earn some amount of commercial monies even if the venue clearly relies upon the robust sponsorship of entrenched and diffuse French funding agencies.

This kind of paternalistic relationship can't be vouchsafed in other countries, whether we think of the United States, Italy, Ireland, the UK, or elsewhere. As Schaeffer observed to me, "the situations aren't the same from one country to another country. . . . In France we have yet a public policy that provides a means of existence for Instants." This is "even if," as we similarly saw with the discussion of subsidy skewing to traditional "high" forms in Britain above, "it isn't comparable to the big French cultural institutions." And yet, finally, even here in the French context of comparatively generous and stable public funding for experimental fringe and underground practices, Instants Chavirés "have the same problems as our colleagues": "It's always difficult to promote marginal artistic forms (why they are marginal would be an interesting question) and find the right economic model."

Many underground artists, then, such as the organizers of Sonic Protest and the team in charge of Instants Chavirés, are open to grants and other awards. A political opposition to arts funding coming from the radical left does not define the underground completely. Many are open to a strategy of codetermination of public funds. Others have no issue with the state or capitalism and would just be happy with the support. As the situation currently stands, though, such support will likely remain as it currently is—patchy, unpredictable, and unreliable, even in a relative stronghold such as France.

The situation in terms of federal funding for the arts is growing parlous elsewhere in Europe. Speaking about public funding for marginal experimental music, Steve Beresford suggested to me that "you're much more likely to find that in a country like the Netherlands," but recent changes there would suggest otherwise. Countries such as Ireland and the Netherlands have seen public-sector funding falling dramatically, in the former by over 25 percent between 2008 and 2013 and in the latter by 25 percent in 2013, from a formerly huge €800 million to €600 million, with smaller organizations being the hardest hit by the decline.[13] Arts organizations, in Ireland at least, are turning either to

crowd-sourced funds or the private sector for financial support.[14] All of this has expected consequences for underground musicians, whose commercial appeal to the private sector and audience size are naturally minimal. The music has survived for decades without any of this kind of support, but if personal income and more ambient cultural wealth continue to diminish in Europe, underground scenes might find it harder and harder to survive in the shape they're in now and might indeed find themselves turning more and more, in the spirit of OTOProjects, Arika, and others, toward the paternalistic state.

The situation of public subsidy for the arts is even more uncertain in the United States than it is in Europe. Consistent attacks from the political right in the United States on the issue of arts funding throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and specifically on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), led to the NEA dropping individual grants for artists in the mid-1990s. More generally, the NEA's appropriations budget has fallen significantly since the early 1990s.[15] The most significant fall was between 1992 and 2000, with the 2000 figure being equivalent to $79,000,000 in 1992. The 2013 budget saw a 6.7 percent decrease when adjusted for inflation compared to the previous year, at $138,383,218, while in 2014 appropriations rose to $146,021,000, an approximate 4.3 percent net increase. This, at least, sees the first material rise since 1992 (although the 2013 budget includes less enacted rescission and sequestration). State- and local-level funding bodies exist in the United States, but the generally straitened circumstances found at the national level in terms of subsidy and the emphasis on private benefaction obtain even more so there.

Compounding matters from the perspective of the underground is the fact that, first, the prominence of the philanthropic model in the United States means that marginal forms such as those of the underground find it hard to appeal to those keen to gain cultural capital and prestige by association from their performative funding of high-cultural entities such as orchestras and opera houses. Second, as with Arts Council England, the remit of the NEA is not particularly amenable to the underground and its fringes. New Music USA, the largest single funder of nonpopular forms of contemporary musics and a beneficiary grant-maker of the NEA, only fragmentarily supports nonnotated, nontraditional experimental musics.[16] The NEA's own rubric further underlines this exclusion, with the NEA supporting "performing ensembles and music presenting institutions including chamber music ensembles, choruses, early music programs, jazz ensembles, music festivals, and symphony orchestras."[17]

This lack of public funding in the United States can't necessarily be seen as too detrimental. The unprecedented amount of public and private wealth

that currently circulates in the United States means that there is a degree of runoff for more marginal and esoteric arts (even if trickle-down philosophies of the economy are usually a con, since the tendency of wealth and capital is to flow upward). The host of amenities and the great amounts of wealth that exist in the United States make the development and cultivation of underground, fringe, or other scenes and practices possible. However, as with Britain, it's clear that some degree of support would be welcome. Indeed, I examine the prominent American festival No Fun Fest as a case study in chapter 8, where this lack of public funding will be seen to have had a direct effect.

As I've been suggesting all along, underground musicians, like everyone, benefit from the ambient social goods and/or constraints of the countries in which they live. Austerity measures across Europe and America after the credit crisis of 2008 drastically reduced social protections, particularly for the young and vulnerable. This, along with ongoing processes of gentrification and financialization in many Western cities, means that the kind of music scenes that grow up in the context of the indirect social funding of state welfare and cheap, dilapidated buildings and related DIY concerts—for example, no wave music in New York in the late 1970s or, to take an example more directly from the underground, the DIY venue Grrrnd Zero in Lyon, France, which between 2005 and 2012 hosted hundreds of shows in a semilegal, unsupported municipal building[18]—may struggle more and more to get off the ground.

On the other hand, relatively healthy general social security in many territories, including the institutional-redistributive model of Sweden and the Revenue de solidarité active (active solidarity income) in France, where artists are able to claim supplementary income as a result of low earnings, mean that these advanced technocratic societies can still be seen indirectly to support underground, fringe musical activities (in addition to the direct medley of public funding mentioned with reference to Instants Chavirés). The same can of course be said of the more general levels of wealth and prosperity found in other countries, from Japan to Germany to the United States, where "healthy" independent capitalist economies drive underground activity through their provisions of basic discretionary income and high standards of living for the privileged among their populations, giving underground shows readymade audiences and places to play and the culture more generally media and other resources to exploit. So the underground doesn't necessarily need public monies to survive. This is even if such monies would certainly help and likewise even if increasing numbers of underground and fringe practitioners are not only seeking such money but being awarded it. I'll get back to my four-part scheme now.

5.5. Category Four: Income from Elsewhere

Many underground and fringe artists don't rely on music for the majority of their income (the first category), as is common across the "portfolio"-dominated arts sector.[19] For political reasons, some underground musicians, such as Consumer Electronic's Philip Best, deliberately separate what they do as artists from questions of income. Others, such as the members of Wooden Shjips, prefer to maintain a broad independence between their musical lives and their income, welcoming the degree of artistic flexibility such an arrangement allows.[20] Brigid Power Ryce told me that she works a day job in a music shop and makes little money from her music. However, Ryce suggested that she'd happily "keep going with it whether I was making a lot of money or no money at all." These are the first two kinds of musicians found in the fourth category: musicians who for political reasons do not want to make money off their music and those who are happy to keep their music as a purely artistic pursuit without the added pressure of having to use it as a source of income.

A third and more pernicious example within this category, though, is the many underground musicians who are forced to take "day jobs" in order to secure some sort of financial security. Venezuelan Carlos Giffoni has had to maintain salaried employment since his move to New York in 2000, despite running perhaps the most prominent underground festival in the world, No Fun Fest.[21] Jojo Hiroshige and his colleague in the noise group Hijokaidan, Toshiji Mikawa, both maintain day jobs to finance their activities as underground musicians. Mikawa and his partner in Incapacitants, Fumio Kosakai, have in fact been restricted in terms of touring abroad because of their jobs; Mikawa is a bank employee, and Kosakai works in a government office.[22] Jonny Mugwump of Exotic Pylon, discussed in chapter 3, worked full-time (in a compacted four-day cycle) in the Admissions Office of Goldsmiths, University of London from 2010 to 2013, while also being employed one night a week in the university's library. Mugwump used these library earnings "specifically for the costs of the label" (Mugwump took up a position as an administrator in the Music Department at Goldsmiths in 2014). Others who don't earn their living primarily from music rely on social welfare and other means for income, therefore crossing over with musicians in the third category who do make a substantial amount from their music but also use social welfare and other sources to supplement that income.

So most underground musicians, to summarize, fit into the latter three categories of my scheme. These musicians supplement their activities with secondary

or tertiary artistic activities (the second category), or they make use of grants, welfare, or funding from public or private bodies (the third category). The ability of musicians to use funding to supplement their work depends on what genre of the underground or fringe their music exists in, with experimentally contiguous fringe genres having the most likelihood of earning some support, at least in Britain and Europe (just as fringe popular genres are most likely to generate commercial revenue, and fringe pop/underground festivals, from All Tomorrow's Parties in the UK to Villette Sonique in France, can rely more on ticket sales than underground festivals can). Other musicians work day jobs (the fourth category), perhaps out of choice, political conviction, or necessity. Still others, finally, support themselves solely through their musical practice (the first category), though this is rare.

More generally speaking, the underground benefits heavily from general wealth, liberty, and cultural activity, despite its oft-proclaimed and indeed plausible outsider status, which in reality is more fine-grained and complex than it might first appear. It also exists in many respects outside institutions. When it does enter institutions, it usually remains at their fringes or steps into them only temporarily, as a result of the partial and unpredictable receipt of specialist public or private funds. This is even if, as my many examples throughout this chapter have shown, this situation—and indeed the nature of the contemporary avant-garde and public arts subsidy in general—might be seen to be both more eclectic, as in somewhere like France, and more dynamic and in flux, as in somewhere like Britain, than my thumbnail characterization might allow.

6

Artists and Music, Improv and Noise

6.1. Vicky Langan and Black Sun

Vicky Langan is a noise musician and performance artist based in County Cork in Ireland. I've referred in passing to Langan's 2014 receipt of a large Music Bursary Arts Council of Ireland award, but until that point Langan had only received partial and piecemeal subsidy support. Here I'll discuss the intersections of economics, aesthetics, and politics that are implied by this situation, first with respect to Langan and then with regard to other case studies.

Langan operates musically under the name Wölflinge and has collaborated with Paul Hegarty as La Société des Amis du Crime and also with artists such as United Bible Studies and Maximilian Le Cain. As a curator, between 2009 and 2013 Langan ran the Black Sun "outer limits/weirdo music and experimental film" events at venues such as Triskel Arts Centre in Cork, a crucial scene series that welcomed artists such as John Weise, Blood Stereo, members of Smegma, and Steve McCaffery, among many others, to Ireland to perform. Additionally, since 2011 Langan has been the cocurator, alongside founder Fergal Gaynor, of the Avant (although she sat the 2014 edition out). This is an annual festival of experimental and progressive arts that began in 2009 following a suggestion from UbuWeb founder Kenneth Goldsmith to Gaynor that he combine two previous festivals, the Quiet Music Festival and SoundEye, to form one single event. Langan's diverse underground activities have also seen her spend time (2003–7) as a DJ on Web-based underground stations Freak FM and CCRfm.

Langan's prolific activities as a musician, curator, and DJ have been accomplished without substantial supplements from other work, artistic or otherwise,

or through the sustained support of arts grants or bursaries (though we'll see where the 2014 award takes her). Langan therefore falls into my fourth category, those musicians for whom artistic and musical practices do not represent their primary source of income, though her receipt of social welfare and occasional state funding also place her into the second and third categories.

Langan began performing as a noise artist under her own name in 2004, while studying toward a music degree from University College Cork. Langan was unable to complete the degree. Nevertheless, in 2007, around this time, Langan expanded the range of her activities as a performing musician, adopting the Wölflinge name in 2008 and playing twenty-four concerts in 2009, following a previous annual peak of thirteen concerts in 2005.[1] The year 2009, as stated, was also when Black Sun was instigated. Langan's fairly busy performance schedule shows no signs of abatement; Langan performed seven concerts between March and May 2012, for example, including a support slot with Lydia Lunch,[2] and performed shows in the UK and the United States in 2013 and 2014. I include these details here to illustrate how busy an underground artist can be without much, relatively speaking, in the way of financial recompense.

Although Langan does derive some money from her musical activities, particularly considering the 2014 award, much of her income comes from personal resources and social welfare, a situation that is common in this context, as we'll see with Eddie Prévost, Mattin, and others discussed later in this chapter. Noise and other forms of cultural activity in this underground, fringe context are rarely, if ever, lucrative pursuits. Artists like Langan must rely on day jobs, basic ingenuity, support from partners, and other resources in order to make a living while pursuing artistic work in these arenas. Precarity, unfortunately, rules.

Langan's own performing activities obviously cross over heavily with her work as a curator. In September 2011, before Black Sun came to an end, Langan described to me the process of putting together events, touching on their lack of institutional support and the financial hardships that esoteric and marginal events such as Black Sun must face:

> We get no funding at all. I book the flights on my partner's credit card and push and push and push with PR in the hopes of convincing 60+ people that coming to the show will shake their minds.

Langan expanded on the point, emphasizing the personal costs of putting on the concerts:

It's such a struggle. If we break even then I can afford to throw Max [Le Cain] money for obtaining the rights to screen the experimental films. I end up paying for cabs, food and hospitality out of my own money. It's so unsustainable that it's impossible to continue like this. That's why I'm not doing shows at the moment. There's so much I want to programme but I can't even afford to buy my kid a new coat!

So Langan's efforts to cultivate underground and experimental culture in Cork, seen here in her curatorship of Black Sun, have yielded little financial reward, even seeing her having to shell out her own money to keep events afloat. At the same time, Langan has struggled to make ends meet as a performer; she told me in a second interview in 2012 about not being able to buy new cables or equipment since 2007 due to financial constraints. Additionally, although small commissions and paid performances of various kinds are regular for an artist of her repute, they rarely pay for more than what Langan describes as "transport, food, and accommodation costs." She cited examples of commissions from Drogheda Arts Festival and Galway Arts Centre in this regard. While some public support has been forthcoming, including the 2014 bursary and a 2011 commission for a performance art sound piece from the National Sculpture Factory that earned what Langan describes as a "proper" fee, these remain, unfortunately, exceptions.

Although the Black Sun events were successful in the sense of putting on concerts from vitally interesting artists who would otherwise likely not have performed in Ireland, they clearly take their toll financially on Langan. With her move into cocuration of the Avant, however, Langan has begun to be able to reap some sort of financial reward, at least in the sense of being able to work within a funded context:

I'm just emerging from a DIY place to a place where arts festivals are giving me a budget to programme for them, so I'm moving towards funding through my own hard work. I'm lucky that funded people have asked me to piggyback their fests because they like what I do. Black Sun was always about driving towards being a funded annual festival. I just wanted to build a track record on my own terms first!

In this progression from minor, independent, financially insolvent activity into partially funded curation, evidenced further by the bursary, Langan's career reflects that of many other underground figures, for example, improviser John Butcher, who, as we'll see, similarly moved from independence to some degree

of state cultural support. However, Langan's relative lack of financial gain in terms of her musical practices still places her in my fourth category. And it's not necessarily a category in which she wants to stay, lamenting to me as she did the many interesting creative projects in which she would engage if she had the means. Currently, although she's moving in her curatorial practice toward some model of funding support, Langan still clearly finds it difficult to put on interesting and challenging events such as Black Sun. Such privation corresponds directly with the pressure within a context of real subsumption to "marketize" one's practice through things like participatory social media, while more fundamentally highlighting the burden of the "precarious" living of post-Fordist capitalism, a precarity that is unfortunately pronounced in cultures such as that of the marginal underground.

This indeed has been a constant complaint from musicians and others I've spoken to. Many are happy putting on festivals and concerts as long as those events break even and possibly generate the possibility of further events of their kind—substantial profit is usually both in short supply and also not necessarily the point in this context—but the struggle against mainstream expectations is rarely enjoyed by artists and curators who believe that what they do merits *something* of a wider or more consistent audience. A point worth mentioning in this regard is the fact that Langan, like Butcher, sees no contradiction in securing some degree of public or private support for her musical and curatorial activities. As with many others in the underground, explicit political concern for creative and economic independence is less important here than is the search for a degree of perceived *artistic* integrity, over and above questions of political economy. The following case study provides an interesting contrast to this attitude, as well as introducing a whole range of political ideas and tensions, without necessarily rejecting it wholesale.

6.2. *Mattin*

Mattin is a Basque performer working across noise and improv. He performs solo, in collaboration with a range of underground artists (again demonstrating the importance of multiple temporary or permanent alliances in the underground) from Matthew Bower to Philip Best to Junko, and as part of the politically driven hardcore punk group Billy Bao. Mattin's work, in his own words, "seeks to address the social and economic structures of experimental music production through live performance, recordings and writing."[3] Mattin's per-

spective is therefore radically orientated. Left-leaning sympathies drive Mattin's musical practice, which he sees in terms of political and social allegory. I'll start this fairly wide-ranging case study with questions of politics before moving into a discussion of Mattin's personal sources of income and then concluding with a wider analysis of Mattin's views on the underground more generally speaking.

Mattin outlined his personal political history in our 2012 interview (with clarifications in our follow-up discussion at the end of 2014), connecting this to his perspective on improvisation, a form he links to both communism *and* (neo)liberalism:

> My political views since I was young were more directed towards anarchism, but lately I have been less and less interested in the emphasis on individual subjectivity, and so I am turning more towards communism. I find the notions of communisation, which describes communisation as communism in action, as a simultaneous getting rid of the labour theory of value, property, wage-labour and gender division by all the people involved without the need of a party agenda, very inspiring. In fact, one could see some similitude with communisation and improvisation in the sense of not having a programme and actively trying to deal with the situation at hand but from a radical perspective. However contemporary improvisation could also be seen as an ultimate expression of liberal subjectivity: let me be free as long as I can express my freedom.

Mattin went on to expand on this notion of a correspondence between the contemporary free improv idiom and the neoliberal ideology of personal freedom at all costs:

> If we look closely at the unsaid rules of improvisation, we can see how people allow other players to do whatever they want as long as they don't interrupt their "creative" process with their instruments. People are actually not that open if one tries to generate a different type of response that would be more intersubjective, where people would have to subject their individual virtuous qualities to a group experimentation.

These radical ideas around the fundamental organizational modes of improv being equitable to aspects of neoliberalism obviously mark Mattin out on the scene to a certain degree, contrasting, for example, with the kinds of notions of egalitarian democracy put forward by figures such as Keith Rowe and Derek Bailey, without being unique in wider cultural terms; Peter Bürger, for example,

references Poggioli's discussion of the symbiotic relationship between the "cult of novelty" in the avant garde and contemporary "bourgeois, capitalist and technological society."[4]

On the other hand, improvisation is seen by Mattin to hold radical, communistic potential. In a 2013 essay, Mattin expanded on the relation between "communization," as derived from the collective Théorie Communiste, which would be "the production of communism by the abolition of all capitalist social relations and the mediations that they entail," and improvisation. "Both," for Mattin, "are against the notion of prescriptive programs, emphasize activity rather than product, question representation, and strive toward unmediated social relations." Ultimately, "both perspectives challenge property relations by proposing a collective human activity beyond the capitalist subject-object relationship."

Mattin is therefore aware of both the radical and the conventional potential of improvisation. He argues, for example, that the political potential of improvisation has largely been lost since the 1960s to utopian malingering and the unquestioned idea of a "self-satisfying avant-garde niche" of counter-mainstream improvisers. Mattin wants to draw attention instead not to loosely cultivated allegorical dreams of equality and resistance but to closely monitored critique and scene self-questioning. This practice wouldn't necessarily be anathema to other improvisers, of course, though the intensity with which Mattin likes to disturb every performing situation at least puts his claims on their own solid ground. As he says, "Rather than fetishizing its claims on producing unmediated experiences, improvisation should question its own mediations both by looking at the informal habits and rules that [have] developed through the years and their relations to present material conditions." Working with the precarity of daily life and of the music itself in this way would, for Mattin, "generate a form of agency that goes beyond the improviser's self," a "negative improvisation" that would ideally lead to a link being built between freedom and *collective* rationality.[5]

In this spirit, Mattin calls throughout his writings and musical practice for a profound rethinking of the conventional limits of improvised and noise music. Mattin "aims to question the nature and parameters of improvisation, specifically the relationship between the idea of 'freedom' and constant innovation that it traditionally implies, and the established conventions of improvisation as a genre." Mattin "considers improvisation not only as an interaction between musicians and instruments, but as a situation involving all the elements that constitute a concert." He "tries to expose the stereotypical relation between active performer and passive audience, producing a sense of strangeness and alienation that disturbs this relationship."[6]

Mattin therefore seeks to complicate or at least diagnose improv's neoliberal focus on personal subjectivity and encourage a kind of intersubjectivity that would refashion both musical *and* social relations in communized terms. These radical music-political convictions are reflected in Mattin's practical activities, as, for example, his anticopyright stance; Mattin's label, WMO/R, releases a wide range of music on CD and CD-R by prominent underground artists such as Radu Malfatti and Maurizio Bianchi, while simultaneously making this music available free of charge on its website. Mattin likewise released the book *Noise and Capitalism* free of charge in 2009. These radical ideas are also embodied or explored in Mattin's performances. I discuss in chapter 8 a show at the 2010 INSTAL festival where Mattin didn't touch any musical instrument or sing, preferring to organize the "improvisation" as a strange, somewhat hostile (in that the nature of the experience was not flagged up and thus felt initially uncomfortable), but ultimately joyous group manifestation.

Mattin described another such radically anchored performance in a profile in the *Wire* in February 2010.[7] The show took place in Galicia in 2009 with Keith Rowe of AMM. Mattin's contribution was to ask the sound engineer simply to press "stop" on the recording of the concert made so far at the first applause from the audience and then to play the concert back again as the second half of the show. Because of Rowe and AMM's insistence on "open" improvisation, Rowe and Mattin did not discuss how the concert would go before it happened. Rowe played very minimally before packing up his instrument "performatively" at roughly 80 minutes in. The concert went on for another 20 minutes, finally concluding at 108 minutes with the first round of applause. Or so it seemed. The first 108 minutes were then played back in full to a presumably confused and possibly annoyed audience; even Mattin himself admits it was "the hardest performance of [his] life."[8]

These two examples are typical of Mattin's generally extreme and occasionally antagonistic performing style. They illustrate well how Mattin's attempt to expand the parameters of improvisation and noise to allow them to critique social relationships and incorporate extra-musical materials reflect the ideological commitments of someone like Eddie Prévost and other earlier-generation improvisers, while reorientating those commitments nevertheless to a more explicitly—or at least differently—communized and trans-"musical" program.

Mattin's work addresses specific issues of artist-centered political economy as much as it does allegorical or actual political-musical dialectics. Mattin has expressed concern that what I'm calling underground musicians should not earn money from what they do in order not to compromise their music, a fairly radical proposition endorsed explicitly elsewhere by Philip Best and Keith Rowe.[9]

When I asked Mattin to expand on the notion of there being a compromise in making a living out of this kind of music, he clarified the point by questioning the basis of the definition of "work" and "play":

> A question arises. Should we see what we do as work? I would suggest that the making of improvised music has more to do with Situationist notions of play (ludic desire and instability) than it does work (which is more fixed in its productivity).

Mattin reframes the question of a compromise by suggesting that the contradiction does not lie in making a living out of the music but rather in defining the music as "work." Mattin addressed the contradiction more directly at another point in our interview:

> I don't have much of a problem in getting paid for concerts or workshops, especially if one is asked to do things or to discuss things that you would not be asked to do if you were cleaning dishes or working in a factory. (By no means do I want to say that there is something more radical or politically effective in what one does in a concert situation or in a workshop than in what one might do in a factory; in fact the urgency from a factory might be much more powerful that whatever we might be talking about.) Every situation requires certain forms of compromise; these might be physical, social, economic. . . . You cannot just break away from everything out of the blue. We are embedded under certain conditions, and you try to push these conditions a bit further.

Considering what is said here, Mattin's apparent endorsement of Best and Rowe's notion of a contradiction must therefore be seen as partial at best. Mattin doesn't detect a contradiction, necessarily, in being paid for performing or for leading a workshop, but he believes at the same time in questioning the idea of such activity as constituting a form of work. Mattin also raises the pragmatic point that compromise will always be a necessary part of any program of political resistance. Ultimately, in a sense, Mattin ends up advocating the kind of "codetermining" of capital ("you try to push these conditions a bit further") discussed in chapter 4, interestingly revealing what appeared to be a radically separatist platform as an actually participatory one. I asked Mattin to expand on the idea of getting paid as a compromise:

> In regards to remuneration for what I do, I would not say that I am less ethically responsible for getting paid for a festival than if I was in a basement doing it for free. I often do both, but the structures that make me in need of money are

not going to be severely shaken by my doing 100 concerts for free. Such "shaking" would require some serious form of organisation, which might not need to resemble the party strategies, but for sure it will need to involve workers that produce material goods. How to create links with them from the music that we are doing is an extremely difficult question.

Despite his acknowledgment of the unavoidability and tolerability of compromise in commercial artistic pursuits, however, Mattin is keen to point out that in many such situations of receiving income or funding, a serious contradiction may arise between the desire of the musician to promote either a radical ideology or simply no ideology at all and the neoliberal ideology those musicians end up supporting through the receipt of such funds.

Another issue has to do with instrumentalisation and the way culture is used in order to promote a certain ideology. In this time of crisis where the funding for culture and arts is being dismantled and diminished very heavily, we can see how neoliberal ideology is infiltrating everywhere. Certainly in the arts, just to have the possibility to do something seems already enough to lure artists into tacit support of the ideology.

The pressure to submit oneself to neoliberal ideology, and by this to submit your art to a performative contradiction, is a very real one for Mattin. However, notwithstanding the real dangers of becoming affected by such contradictions, Mattin acknowledges the possibility of repurposing or, as noted, "codetermining" public neoliberal-derived funds, simply through questioning the conditions of the receipt of the funds in the actual deployment of those funds. He says that for underground music to have any "critical potential" it "should be able to be corrosive in regards to the structures that it is part of," concluding that "it would be ok to accept any conditions because this practice might question in some form or another those conditions or our relation to them."

This all serves to reposition Mattin's political conceptions of how the underground might be politically effective, from separatism to participatory critique within existing conditions. In our follow-up interview Mattin clarified the point somewhat, underlining that he doesn't see his work as breaking conditions or existing apart from them but instead as an opportunity to understand those conditions, and ourselves, a little better:

Maybe instead of pushing these conditions a bit further what I am doing (often with other people) is to try to understand them a bit more. But I would not say myself that I am able to push these conditions further in a communist or eman-

cipatory sense. At best I am able to understand their negative consequences a bit better. I am certainly not advocating that I am able to resist in any way, I am not prefiguring anything positive in the present. I am just trying to understand how we are constituted as individuals.

Mattin's own experiences as a working musicians needing to earn a wage speak interestingly to these broader questions of political economy. Mattin's career highlights the natural variegation of underground (and of artistic) activity, taking in as it does paying festivals and free basement concerts, teaching work and precarity.

I asked Mattin how he squares his rejection of "intellectual property" with the necessity to feed himself and any dependents he might have, to pay his share of the household bills, and so on. He had this to say in 2012:

> I am currently teaching at the Dutch Art Institute in Holland and doing some concerts, performances, lectures, and workshops, but this is not enough for living in Stockholm. My partner has a stable job, which at the moment pays for the flat. I am looking for paid PhDs, but no luck so far. I will therefore probably have to look for a day job.

Mattin is a highly prominent figure in the underground, appearing regularly across Europe and the United States in concerts and at festivals such as INSTAL and No Fun Fest, collaborating with many prominent musicians, and gaining a certain degree of notoriety and attention through publications such as the aforementioned *Noise and Capitalism*. But as seen in the quote, Mattin's many performance and speaking engagements, even with the addition of money from his teaching appointment at the Dutch Art Institute, were not enough in 2012 to support day-to-day living. This situation again shows the marginal status of the underground, where one of its most prominent ideologues and performers can fail to make enough money to live on. (Mattin has since, happily, started a PhD at the University of the Basque Country with Ray Brassier and Josu Rekalde.)

At the same time, and as with Butcher and Prévost below, the range of Mattin's activities, which incorporate musical performance, writing, and teaching, reflect the often fragmented and fundamentally precarious working lives of underground figures. Like Langan and Prévost, meanwhile, Mattin has similarly relied on his partner for financial support. In terms of my scheme, then, Mattin would fit into the second category. He derives income from musical activity while supplementing that income through secondary and tertiary artistic activi-

ties, in this case writing, lecturing, and leading workshops. Mattin's taking up of a PhD since our 2012 interview would also move him into the third category. The key point though is that his position, as with most other underground figures, is precarious, fragile, and open to change.

Mattin has much to say about the kinds of issues I address in chapter 4, notably around subsumption and circumnavigation and the localized circuits of exchange mentioned by Britt Brown. Mattin resists the kind of framing that would see the nooks and pockets of the underground as escaping real subsumption or resisting it necessarily. Mattin has instead emphasized the difficulty of ever completely escaping corporate influence and ownership. Writing in 2008, Mattin suggested that

> more and more we have the possibility to do our distribution without the need of big record companies. A good (or bad example) of this could be MySpace. One can produce a song and upload it to the internet straight away, without the need of a label, then send the information about it to a great number of people. There is no doubt that the original idea is good and it helps to create many new connections and contacts. But at what cost? First giving publicity to the company itself. Many contemporary artists use the MySpace website as their prime website; even before your name there is already a brand with a very clear ideology behind it. Whatever progressive music you make you will have tattooed upon your forehead the name of a company which has very close alliances with conservative ideology.[10]

In similar terms to Jodi Dean, Mattin underlines that even though underground musicians operate in marginal contexts, the tools they are deploying depend on capitalist, oppressive structures. Mattin also discusses the specific deficiencies of the MySpace service, which correspond to the idea that musicians' affective labor is simply and without financial reward co-opted by the site's parent company (which in 2008 was Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation) through proprietary software and large apparatuses that exploit musicians' need for promotion.

Now, while wider concerns about co-optation and subsumption are still pressing—the receipt of social welfare or even the simple use of big business–controlled Internet bandwidth, after all, opens individuals up to accusations of compromise—the situation regarding MySpace as described by Mattin in 2008 has undoubtedly shifted. In 2015, the dominant platforms for Web distribution and publicity have shifted from MySpace to such sites as BandCamp and SoundCloud, where music can be streamed at higher bitrates, sold or streamed in multiple formats, and managed with a greater degree of control over presen-

tation and distribution. Artists, for example, are able to host their music on their own sites with SoundCloud. Unlike MySpace, too, as of January 2015 Sound-Cloud and BandCamp remain (albeit very wealthy) independent companies. So some of the issues Mattin pointed to in 2008 are resolved with BandCamp and SoundCloud, even if the flow of capital facilitated by these platforms and others like them largely ends up in the same place it started, with the wealthy.

I asked Mattin to discuss the ways in which the situation may have changed since 2008 and to reflect specifically on the idea of real subsumption, digital music platforms, and underground culture. Mattin identified the problem not so much as residing in the possibility of tracing musicians' use of promotional tools back to big business, but more in the assumption of a neoliberal and capitalist mode of aspirational subjectivity reflected in the use of these digital tools and platforms. He even identified a problem with the assumption of an artistic-authorial persona in the first place:

> The idea of neoliberal instrumentalisation would also relate to these issues regarding SoundCloud and BandCamp. But after writing the "Anti-Copyright" text, what I thought was the crucial issue was: how do we identify ourselves as authors, as creative individuals who can produce something out of nothing? How do we market ourselves and the way that we need to constantly promote what we do? The problem is not so much how we frame our activities under capitalist technologies, but to what extent we shape our subjectivity through capitalist ideologies. So at the moment my rudimentary strategy is not to take for granted what I am as a musician or as an artist, but instead try to treat it as material for possible experimentation. I still get invited to do concerts as Mattin and still do want to do concerts, but that does not mean that what Mattin means or represents is something clear. Surely this Mattin persona is very questionable.

Mattin therefore wants to question not only performing and genre parameters but the very parameters of his persona as an artist.

A workshop entitled "What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?" in November 2014 in Bilbao saw Mattin and collectives such as Endnotes and SIC reflect further on these ideas of real subsumption and the Internet. Mattin's essay ahead of the workshop points up some of the continuing contradictions of late capitalism, where "working collectively appears to be very difficult, and when it does occur, it does so under very generic terms and demands, such as we are the 99% or ¡Democracia real YA!" The key questions remains: "Is thought entirely instrumentalised for capitalist self-valorisation (as Son-Rethel claimed

it was) or can we use it in order to comprehend the processes which lead to our own commodification?"[11]

This question raises once again the idea that even marginal forms such as noise and improvisation find it difficult to escape subsumption and atrophy of radical intent: pointing to the reformist ambitions of Podemos in Spain and even the willingness of a Basque figure like Izquierda Abertzale to seek change from within the institutions of representative democracy, Mattin instead reemphasizes the importance of communization, that is, the sundering of capitalist definitions and relations. Music's role within this would be, again, to allow us to examine and in this way to further understand the current political conjuncture, although, as Mattin argues at length, improvisation, for one form, can also at least reveal the importance of collective agency to musicians and audience.

Mattin sees the problem of being subsumed by capital less in terms of a straight fiscal subsumption and more in terms of interpellation, where neoliberalism and post-Fordism set the boundaries of our very selves by forcing a commodifiable bounded identity on artistic selves: hence the questioning of the very idea of "Mattin" mentioned above. This focus on identity, as well as Mattin's keenness to reframe and critique each performing situation, shouldn't disguise his considerable criticisms of the financial and ownership dimensions of capitalism, which manifest in the anticopyright stance and the desire to refigure collective underground artistic activity not as "work" but rather as community play and experiment. These twin poles, genre and self-critique and capitalist ownership and musical community, form the bedrock of Mattin's challenging, bold political take on underground music culture. The next case studies, of the free improv scene in general (the shift in register from individuals to the scene itself here seems fitting, considering the music's communitarian emphasis) and then of Eddie Prévost and John Butcher individually, offer interesting contrast to Mattin while also developing some of his points.

6.3. Free Improv: Eddie Prévost, Steve Beresford, and Maggie Nicols

Techniques and values of improvisation are vital in one way or another to a whole range of underground and fringe musics, which often evoke a wild version of what Andy Hamilton has called the "aesthetics of imperfection."[12] Free improvisation as a genre, though, grew out of various traditions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as covered briefly in chapter 1, most notably free jazz and the experimental tradition in art music, where a new emphasis was placed on indeterminacy, conceptual thinking, and performance. Groups such as AMM, the

Scratch Orchestra, the Spontaneous Music Ensemble, and Musica Elettronica Viva connected the improv and experimental scenes both in their loose but broadly post-Cagean approach to performance/sound and in their social contexts and personnel. Performers such as Steve Lacy, Togashi Masahiko, and Peter Brötzmann hovered across the thin line that still separates (some) free jazz from improv, while John Stevens, Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, Han Bennink, Maggie Nicols, Masayuki Takayanagi, and Lol Coxhill developed their own post-experimental, more or less free jazz–indebted improv scenes in the late 1960s and 1970s. More rambunctious acts such as Borbetomagus and the No Nihilist Spasm Band connected improv to noise and even punk rock aesthetics a little later in the 1970s and 1980s.

This "third way" improv tradition, in addition to the post-experimental improv and free jazz–fringing ones just mentioned, has lately continued with acts such as the No Neck Blues Band. The other two strains of free improv likewise continue today, with performers such as Seymour Wright, Mary Halvorson, and Taku Sugimoto in the case of the former and the punk- and funk-infused the Ex and Zu for the latter. Meanwhile, groups/collectives such as Polwechsel, Skogen, and Wandelweiser continue the rich experimental tradition in the twenty-first century, where some compositional predetermination cross-pollinates with improvisation in fruitful and interesting ways (to sum up an incredibly broad range of activity in a far too brief thumbnail).[13] I'll go into detail on some key practitioners.

Eddie Prévost is a founding member of the influential post-experimental improvised music group AMM, as well as being a theorist of the political and social dimensions of improvised music in books and publications such as *No Sound Is Innocent*[14] and *The First Concert—An Adaptive Appraisal of a Meta Music*.[15] Prévost owns the improv label Matchless Recordings and has remained active as a performer both as a member of AMM and in regular collaboration with such significant underground and fringe musicians as Jim O'Rourke, Evan Parker, John Edwards, and Max Eastley, as well as host of younger players, from Jennifer Allum to Matt Davis.

Like Takayanagi, Mattin, and many others Prévost has a deep investment in improvised music as a form uniquely placed to facilitate the formation of new social relations and communities. This would happen in his eyes both through the social and material relations of the scene itself—through its aspirations to communitarian egalitarianism in ensemble organization and its location in informal and cheaply accessed venues—and in the significances of improvised sounds themselves, significances that arise from the audience's perception of

the music as being formally undetermined and nonhierarchically distributed (to call up three of Born's "five orders" of the relationship of politics and music).

These impressions of free improvisation as orbiting around a notion of inclusive egalitarian democratic principles enacted through sound and/or self-organizing communities of performers is a commonly held one, although it is far from universal—as we saw, Mattin suggests, first, that a fruitful correspondence can be drawn between improv and neoliberalism and, second, that such self-assured narratives about supposed egalitarianism shouldn't be taken for granted. Experimental composer and improv performer Jennifer Walshe, who has appeared across America and Europe as an improvising violinist and vocalist, echoed Prévost's sentiments in any case when speaking to me about the small-scene, DIY, self-organized community practices dominant on the free improv scene:

> This is why I love improvisation—the entire community is built around a practice of getting together and playing. It's about finding the sound, and I've seen a level of dedication from free improvisers that is outstanding. The improvisers I work most closely with at the moment—Tony Conrad, Panos Ghikas, also Tomomi Adachi—the way we play evolved out of hours and hours of playing together in each other's houses. There was no funding, no grant applications, no commissions. It was just musicians getting in a room every week to play.

Steve Beresford, similarly, spoke warmly about the supportive mutual relations of the London scene over the past few decades. Beresford drew attention in particular to the range of tiny venues that have formed its backbone, including rooms above pubs with "mildly supportive landlords" and, to take a specific example, Old Chomeley's Boys' Club, where the caretaker "would always half forget who you were." (These kinds of nonspecialist venues show how improv existed at the fringes of culture, entering it intermittently but struggling to gain a steady foothold in many cases.) Beresford also spoke favorably about the specialist venue Café Oto and the now closed (due to the vicissitude of selling to a disinterested businessman) Red Rose, where he and other prominent improv musicians performed for over twenty years.

Beresford's emphasis through all of this was the ease and cheapness of access to these kinds of venues and the "democratic" nature of how they were run. For Beresford, this emphasis on democracy and equality, as opposed to commerce and single personalities, relates to a modeling of the same in the music itself—although he suggested that for him any political program in improv

would be more "implicit" than explicit. Beresford thinks that improv, at its best, "should be organised along democratic lines." This would include such things as "a democratisation of the roles of the instruments," for example, where "a hi-hat and a piano can be on an equal footing." And while this might not satisfy Mattin, we can see even here how improvising musicians try to build equality and undermine hierarchy at all points.

Eddie Prévost widely endorses these communitarian, self-organized aspects of the improv scene, while also developing the point in more theoretical dimensions pertaining to the organizations of the sounds and social relations of performance themselves. In *No Sound Is Innocent*, for instance, Prévost discusses improv as a form in which new musical and—by homology—social relations are both proposed and experienced. He remarks in his introduction that "in art we make the world," speaking of improvisation as being like making music for the first time, without specific goals or objectives:

> An improvisation has no perfect form to which it can aspire. If a commensurate sense of perfection exists for a free improv, then it is in the clarity of musical perception and execution. . . . For the musician it is like being in the eye of a storm, a subtle stillness within a maelstrom—an assured presence of mind at the point of playing.[16]

These kinds of sentiments were echoed by Beresford in our interview (even if neither he nor Prévost examined the subjective basis of improv in the same fashion as Mattin). Beresford admiringly cited John Stevens's idea that improvisation is "another little life," in the sense of both how the scene is organized and how it is embodied and produced in the sounds themselves. Prévost, for his part, more generally asserts in *No Sound* that improvised music should represent an instance of experiential "self-invention" where the potential marketability of the music is irrelevant and where the intensity of players engaging with each other in the moment is paramount.

Such ideas around music as being about more than just sound were expressed again in Prévost's 2011 publication *The First Concert—An Adaptive Appraisal of a Meta Music*, in which Prévost reflects on music's capacity to drive cognitive and cultural evolution. Similarly, Prévost states in the introduction to his workshop series of improvisations that the musicians involved are "urged to try and search without specific objectives and even without hope or expectation of finding anything."[17] Musical performance is here conceived as a spontaneous site of creation and self-personification, in which musicians' expressive capacities should not be trammelled by market dictates or overly burdensome musical

expectations or conventions. Musical decisions are understood by Prévost to be significant of wider claims around identity, politics, and sociality, just as they clearly are by Stevens, Walshe, and Beresford, even if the latter may not express such sentiments in as strongly theoretical terms as Prévost has or as strongly critical and radical terms as Mattin has.

Prévost has been exploring these same tensions among sound, social interaction, and significance in his musical practice for decades. AMM began in 1965 as a quartet featuring Prévost, Keith Rowe, Lawrence Sheaff, and Lou Gare, with such experimental music figures as Christopher Hoobs, Cornelius Cardew, and Christian Wolff joining them for temporary spells in subsequent years. John Tilbury joined in 1980 and is currently the sole core member alongside Prévost.

AMM questioned boundaries between music and noise, art and life, and, especially in the early period, jazz and free improvisation. Such exploratory playing can be heard throughout their album *Ammmusic*[18] from 1966. The album embraces the noise of metallic scraping and contact mics, the uniqueness of the undetermined and emergent musical form, and the melding or erasure of individual personalities alluded to in chapter 1 in my discussion of "laminal" improv.[19]

AMM's exploration of esemplastic laminal improv, as opposed to the jagged, gestural, "atomic" playing of Bailey, Evan Parker (in his early years, before adopting a more laminal approach emphasizing timbral change within continuous notes), and others, is in full flow on *Ammmusic*. The melding or erasure of personality results both from the volatile fluctuations in form and gesture in AMM's music—fluctuations that render attempts to personify the sound in terms of discrete competing personalities extremely difficult—and also from the musicians' denaturing of their instruments' "natural" sonic palettes through the use of contact mics and other unorthodox techniques of sound production. Such denaturing makes it hard, again, to tie sounds to particular instruments and particular musicians. The "blurring focalisation"[20] that results sees a consequent undermining of the ordering of discourse in a personified, discrete, hierarchized manner, perhaps in the manner of Mattin's "collective agency." The emphasis in this laminal and post-laminal music is therefore less on individual artistic expression either as a compositional prearbiter or as a dominant "voice" within the sound and more on mutually cooperative sonic communalities that try to model egalitarian or, maybe better, critical and questioning social relations.

The aspirations of AMM's music toward these various liberatory signifiers reflects Prévost's personal advocacy of communal collaboration and "emergent" musical forms in his writing. That advocacy is likewise reflected in Prévost's

weekly improvisation workshops, mentioned in passing above, which he's run in London since 1999.[21] The workshops see a range of between six and twenty amateur and professional players meeting to discuss improvisation theory under the guidance of Prévost or, if he is absent, under that of another experienced participant, such as Ross Lambert. The players collaborate in a series of small group performances, before joining for a climactic group performance. The workshops have been complemented since February 2009 by a periodic concert event at Café Oto entitled "The Workshop Series" (which moved to Oto's Project Space in 2013).

For Prévost, then, music, particularly the performance event, which he privileges as a unique site within musical discourse, is a place of contention where identities are fought over, territories are gained or recovered, and politics of one kind or another are immanent. This sense of politics as saturating musical discourse, as being apparent in the significance(s) for the audience of the notes themselves as much as it is in the material relations of capital and bodies and spaces and instruments that precede, make possible, and accompany those notes, is shared by many on the scene, not least Scottish vocalist Maggie Nicols.

Maggie Nicols has been active on the improv scene in Europe since the late 1960s. In 1968 she joined John Stevens's rotating-membership improv group the Spontaneous Music Ensemble (SME), whose lineup featured everyone from Trevor Watts to Paul Rutherford to Evan Parker, and from Johnny Dyani to Julie Tippetts to John Butcher, in its almost thirty-year run up to 1994. SME's music moved from loud free jazz constructions of front- and back-line soloing and rhythmic support in the earlier 1960s to quieter "search and reflect," "insect-like" improv somewhat in the mold of laminal AMM for decades after.[22] Nicols performed as part of a SME quartet on the 1969 album *John Stevens Spontaneous Music Ensemble* on Marmalade. She went on to collaborate with many of the improv scene's most significant figures in the 1970s and beyond, including Keith Tippett in the fifty-part group Centipede; fellow vocalists Phil Minton, Julie Tippetts, and Brian Ely in the quartet Voice; and sundry musicians elsewhere, from Lol Coxhill to Pinguin Moschner to John Russell.

Nicols has been politically active throughout her career, often focusing on the radical potential of improvisational music, dance, and theater to inspire individual activism. In the late 1970s, alongside Lindsay Cooper, Nicols cofounded what she described to me as the "mixed-race, mixed-class, mixed-ability" Feminist Improvising Group. Nicols also started running women's workshops focusing on improvisation across a variety of mediums, entitled "Contradictions," in 1980. In speaking to me about the political potential of improv, Nicols pointed both to the political qualities of improvisational performance and to the impro-

visational qualities inherent in political performance. I reminded her of how she spoke in certain concerts about Western culture not giving enough space or time to improvisation:

> I was referring to the creative power of improvisation to make a difference in direct action and activism in general. When on demonstrations, there's so much more we could do if we all felt confident enough to use free improvisation in sound and movement etc. . . . I remember seeing Dario Fo in performance and he spoke about the medieval resistance to authority from improvisers and how when they were asked to provide a script to be considered for censorship, they could genuinely say they didn't have one.

Nicols's "collective improvisation" event the Gathering typifies the conjunction of political activism and improvisation pointed to in the quote, a conjunction reflective of the scene's wider emphasis on the apparent liberatory power of horizontal communitarian organization and cooperation as enacted through musical performance. Started by Nicols and others following a meeting of the London Musicians' Collective in 1989, the Gathering has run in London, Wales, and more recently Graz and Liverpool. It is a place where experienced and amateur players get together to collaborate and where improvised performance can include everything from a sigh to a scratch, a poem to a drawing, a song to a space.

As Nicols told me, these events are "not money based" but are instead "open to anyone and run on donations," embodying the communitarian collectivity aspired to by many improvising ensembles. Unlike Nicols's previous ventures and in contrast to Prévost above, the Gathering "is not a workshop or a performance" but instead gets to the core of the leaderless ethos of the SME and other groups by simply seeing a group of specialists and nonspecialists alike join together "to explore and experiment in a welcoming environment," where the group can perhaps go beyond what we are usually "socialised to believe is 'proper' music."[23] This seeks to reflect Nicols's idea that

> free improvisation subverts the notion that unless we're directed we fall apart and can't function. It allows different initiators and responders to emerge, as well as times where no one is leading or following; an intuitive negotiation of shape shifting creative/social relating.

This quote directly links to ideas about communitarian collectivity put forward or referenced so far by everyone from musicians such as Prévost and Beres-

ford, to music writers such as Ben Watson, to political theorists such as Murray Bookchin and autonomist Antonio Negri. Bookchin, for one, speaks in relation to libertarian municipalism about a notion of organization that is "democratic and nonhierarchical to its core," about a kind of "communitarian society . . . based on an ethics of complementarily and solidarity."[24] This mirrors many of the things said by improvisers about the ensembles in which they participate, perhaps even gesturing toward something like Mattin's collective agency, even if the dangers of creeping conservative localism discussed in chapter 4 and the supposed impossibility of escaping real subsumption through circumnavigation mentioned by Mattin haunt these efforts at "local revolution" all the same.

These radical political ideas have driven free improv since its early years in the 1960s and 1970s, though they may well hold less of a central position on the improv scene these days. Many improv musicians seem now to focus as much on musical style seen in aesthetic terms as they do on political theater, a development also seen with many noise musicians. As Nicols told me, the scene is perhaps now "less ideologically divided, more open than it was. . . . It still happens in small independent spaces but also has a wider audience." But these political principles are still key mediators of how most people encounter this music as both historical and contemporary form, whether that's through reading the music framed in this way or seeing a performance. While we certainly must be wary of mythologizing improvisation through this political freighting as a route out of structural inequalities or indeed more personal political problems in ways hinted at here, the improv scene does at the least show the artistic richness possible in toying with formerly sacred social and creative hierarchies. It also gives us clues, in the attempts of many groups to cultivate music in which social relations among members are rethought against prevailing social and cultural norms, as to what communitarian and cooperational modes of organization might look like in practice. Spoiler alert: they're often prone to familiar social hierarchies borne out of culture and etiquette and habit, though they likewise serve as counter-performatives, upsetting routine and putting these norms into question in potentially powerful ways.

Georgina Born's firsthand account of the 1970s experimental improvising rock group Henry Cow points up many of the inevitable roadblocks (as in these norms) faced by such idealistic endeavors as the Gathering, Prévost's workshops, the Spontaneous Music Ensemble, or otherwise.[25] These include the persistence of gendered, raced, and classed social relations in the decisions being made outside and inside performances and also unavoidable problems in sidestepping or combating wider systemic issues in attempting to produce music that resisted subsumption. These specific problems reflect both the dif-

ficulty of escaping subsumption and also, more specifically, the improv scene's wider and ongoing skewing toward white, middle-class men as its dominant performers and figures (and to this we could add the many personal and/or micropolitical tensions and decisions that affect improvised musical performances, such as those suggested with reference to the Ruins and Bailey in chap. 2). But Born's account, along with Nicols's and Prévost's and Stevens's and many others' sustained achievements on the scene, also shows that improvisers have license to claim some success in subverting norms of artistic performance, sonic convention, and, perhaps, the political valences of these things at the same time. It's a start: even if it would take a lot for these localized models of change or at the very least of denaturalization to affect wider conditions in any substantial way.

6.4. Eddie Prévost

Eddie Prévost provides something of a touchstone in the previous section on improv, music, and politics, but now I want to focus more directly on his sense of political economy and his work as a musician. Much of the context for my questions to Prévost was provided by the quote from Mattin referenced earlier: "In conversations with Keith Rowe (ex-AMM) and Philip Best (ex-Whitehouse, Consumer Electronics), they agree that one should not make a living out of making this kind of music because the music is compromised if you do."[26] I asked Prévost to expand on Mattin's point, particularly with regard to his own political convictions and how he sees his activities as a musician supporting or undermining those convictions:

> I do not see the logic of the assertion that making a living from playing improvised music "necessarily" compromises the music. If the commissioner of work (e.g. concert organiser, curator etc.) finds that improvised music meets the appropriate criteria, then there is some kind of aesthetic match.

For Prévost, then, in contrast to Rowe, Mattin, and Best, remuneration does not "necessarily" involve artistic compromise (even if, after being pushed, Mattin accepted that some compromise is inevitable). If the goals of the promoter and the musician are in alignment, then Prévost doesn't see any contradiction or ethical/artistic compromise in accepting payment for performance. Maggie Nicols echoed this kind of middle-ground position, suggesting that it's impossible to escape subsumption but that it's also possible to find ethical routes within it. She pointed out that "under Capitalism we are all dependent, if we are earning mon-

ey, on state funding or private money," but that at the same time "all we can do is avoid the worst offenders and support any boycotts we are asked to support."

Beresford, too, takes this kind of line, saying that he "doesn't see the problem" in earning money or receiving public or private funding. He applauded the sums received from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation by John Butcher and from the Genesis Foundation by Café Oto's Hamish Dunbar and also the more general success of his sometime collaborator Christian Marclay. At the same time, Beresford was nevertheless also quick to emphasize that such funding is rare on the scene, suggesting as he had earlier in different terms that "it's more likely to happen in other countries than in the UK." In fact, Beresford drew attention to the infighting that an influx of money caused on the experimental and improv scene in the Netherlands, where "half of the musicians wanted to kill the other half." With the advance of a right-leaning government in that country, in any case, such money has largely disappeared.

While Prévost rejects the idea that getting paid or receiving funding is automatically compromised, he was also keen to point out that such an arrangement is vulnerable to compromise in the forms of the commercial imperative and the profit motive:

> The problems arise for an improvising musician when the commissioner/market place decides it wants something else which excludes the artistic output of such musicians. This is why (surely?) improvised music has over the years resorted to self-promotion and co-operative ventures. These are the only secure ways to maintain an (albeit limited) public platform. As important, these initiatives provide space sympathetic to the kind of discourse the improvising community wishes to engage. Of course, if the improvising musician has acquired a taste for (or has become materially dependent upon) the "better paid" gigs and higher cultural status of state/business subsidised events, then they almost inevitably will have to tailor their output to meet the changing whims and fashion of the art market place. Or, keep quiet about their ideological hopes.

The pervasiveness of compromises between art and commerce, in Prévost's eyes, means that it has been necessary for the ideological ambitions of what he describes as the "improvising community" to be realized within frameworks of self-promotion and cooperation. Improvisers have tried to avoid the risks of compromise inherent in accepting outside funding by focusing on community-run performing spaces and ventures.

Such self-promoting and cooperative frameworks are visible in London, for example, in the highly localized, self- or independently run performance spaces

of Prévost's workshops, the monthly improvisation night Boat'ting, and small jazz and improvised music venues such as Archway and the Vortex, in addition to the venues mentioned above by Beresford. These venues/events' relative independence from subsidy or corporate influence—the Vortex, for example, is volunteer led and not for profit and is "not in receipt of any regular source of public funding," surviving "by keeping its costs as low as possible and sourcing individual grants and donations where available"[27]—makes them potential examples of just the kind of uncontaminated-by-the-fashions-of-the-marketplace ideological paradigm that Prévost asserts on behalf of the improvising musician, though as ever the specter of compromise and subsumption haunts the discussion.

Prévost reflected in our interview on the various ways in which he's maintained his lifestyle and activities as a musician without having recourse to salaried labor:

> At the moment I am in the happy position of being in receipt of the basic old age pension: A valued resource to which I owe thanks to the struggle of earlier generations of political activists. This together with the receipts from (modest) royalties from CD and book sales and the occasional "paid for" article. This plus the (slightly) more respectable fees paid for (mainly overseas) concerts accorded to someone of my experience and antiquity mean that my modestly fashioned lifestyle can be afforded. Paying off the mortgage was a great moment in securing some kind of respite from an economy which has no space for limited consumption.

Betraying typical political intensity, Prévost here points to his current independence from capitalist strictures and cultural pressures achieved by securing independent ownership of his home, while also acknowledging his dependence on the state for his pension, a familiar double-bind of independence and capture. Prévost also outlined the sporadic flows of income he receives from books, articles, recording sales, and concerts, flows that mean he has been able to afford a "modest" lifestyle, both currently and going back to earlier in his career, when he supplemented his musical performances with similar secondary and tertiary artistic activities, including "sporadic" lecturing and teaching.

Turning back to my earlier scheme, Prévost's mix of incomes, from musical activity, to tertiary activity (writing), to state-derived funds, means that he fits into my second (supplementing income) and third categories (receipt of funds). The fragmented, multiple nature of Prévost's income, which relates to similar fragmentation in the Mattin and Langan studies, reflects the more general financial precarity and poverty of underground culture, which has customarily drawn

on various sources, from public to private, from musical to salaried income, in carving out an economic framework of survival. This piecemeal approach, as I've been saying, is not all that different in kind from other "portfolio" arts careers, though the particular fragmentation, precarity, and extra-institutionality of the underground/fringe context are distinctive.

Prévost told me about the specific details and hardships of the relative financial poverty of underground culture, pointing out as others had before the significance of having a financially (and emotionally) supportive partner. This underlines once again the very personal, individual basis of underground culture, where the existence of a supportive partner might be the difference between being able to continue with music or not (though this obviously applies to other kinds of musicians and indeed work too):

> The key is reducing your overheads and material expectations. These things impact upon your family. What is missing, so far, from this list of economic supports is my partner and mother of my children. I note that many of my contemporaries had (have) strong support from their partners, economically as well as morally. I count myself fortunate not to have been driven to finding paid employment outside of my own work for many years. I have been lucky and careful.

I asked Prévost to speak more directly to the relationship between his musical practice and his political ideology, particularly in terms of the question of state subsidy and artistic/political independence and the ideas of capture and subsumption I've been addressing:

> I believe that state and business support for the arts is ultimately dependant upon ideological compliance. Improvised music has only ever gotten a few fallen crumbs from the feasting table. . . . If you offer an amalgam of material and social responsibility—as I believe can be read into some improvising work—then the best you will receive is condescending pity. The "end of history" ideologues (even though they may not recognise this description) are currently in charge of our cultural destiny. For them there is no viable alternative; although they might want to shuffle the bits around so as to make it look like development.

Prévost's answer here strikes pessimistic notes, arguing as it does for the inalienable ideological compromise entailed by state and business support for the arts, while also insisting that the amalgam of "material and social responsibility" detectable in some improvised music has effectively fallen on deaf ears. The re-

sult of all this, for Prévost, is that improvised music, as I've suggested is also the case with other forms of underground and fringe culture, has only gotten "a few fallen crumbs from the feasting table." (As I point out, however, this situation might just now be undergoing some change, in Britain at least, and might also not apply in the same way in countries such as France and Germany.)

Prévost had already suggested in our interview that he saw no contradiction in making a living from performing improvised music once "ideological compliance" was not demanded. He likewise argued that the question of whether a contradiction is evident in musicians with radical agendas accepting state funds is dependent on certain factors such as the precise source of the improvised musicians' funding:

> It depends upon your perception of the term "state." If it is completely wed to the promotion and delivery of the liberal/capitalist dream, then it would be dangerous and pointless to engage with its funding policy.

Prévost sees state funding in problematic terms. But he also points out that such monolithic notions of "state" and "government" rarely hold in practice: "Things are rarely that straightforward. Mavericks lurk in corners. Politics is (hopefully) always a bit fluid. Dreamers (like myself!) can always hope things will change." The question of a necessary compromise in the case of a radical musician accepting state funding is therefore rethought by Prévost as a question of political ontology, which he sees as fragmented and fragile and therefore open to change; governments are not monoliths, and states are not omniscient, even if subsumption is hard to escape. Local resistances and narrow but potent possibilities for political change will always be present.

Prévost went on, finally, to discuss the dominance of types of resistances that work *within* systems as undermining agents, rather than outside those systems as radical but possibly unattainable alternatives.

> Most political programmes from the left during my life time have been mostly concerned with gaining political influence. In this respect agit-prop was always more important than programmes which reflected and practised activities which might legitimately be seen as signifiers of a different ideology. For example, the idea of engaging in dialogue as a collective creative mechanism is not the subject of any significant art programmes—as far as I am aware. Although, I note that from time to time that something like these things has become useful (if fashionable and temporary) rhetoric.

So the type of collective creative mechanism represented by improvised music has rarely proved fashionable or useful to mainstream left-leaning political activists, who have preferred more straightforward agit-prop modes of expression and activism. For Prévost, as he told me, such efforts are doomed to "failure and compromise," since they do not offer an ideology that is significantly distinct in principle from the ideology being propagated by the state (this calls up the old opposition between progressive musics premised on pleasure and populism and those premised on critique). This suggests how important supposedly independent, self-sufficient models of culture are, raising the possibility of Prévost advocating the anintermediated, circumnavigatory mode of left separation discussed in chapter 4, even if his emphasis here is very much on a participatory model of counter-ideological community building.

Prévost's career shows consistent attempts to implement these kinds of ideas in practice and a working life defined by the kind of piecemeal, precarious existence emblematic of underground musicians in the age of flexible accumulation. But Prévost shows that such a piecemeal and fundamentally precarious existence can in the end add up to what the musicians themselves see as a life well lived.

6.5. John Butcher

John Butcher is a prominent improvising saxophonist and sometime composer who performs at international venues and at experimental music festivals of various kinds, from Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival to Unsound in Poland. Butcher also engages in a variety of one-off installation/performance pieces, such as his 2006 performance and recording at the Oberhausen Gazometer in Germany and his performance the same year inside the Hamilton Mausoleum in Scotland. Butcher engages in these activities while also maintaining a steady and consistent performance schedule in and around London, where he plays with regular collaborators such as Evan Parker, John Edwards, Chris Burn, Gino Robair, Phil Minton, Tony Marsh, Phil Durrant, and a wide variety of other musicians.

The progression of Butcher's career reflects, at various points, different parts of my four-part scheme. Since 2000, as Butcher told me, his activity would broadly fit into my first category, that of musicians who fund themselves exclusively through music:

Since 2000 I've earned all of my income from music—either improvised or closely related. 90% from playing concerts. The other 10% comes from radio/

performance royalties, occasional lecture/workshops, and very occasional commissions—like Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival [which commissioned a piece from Butcher in 2008].

This sort of music-dependent lifestyle is obviously difficult and, even for a musician as prominent as Butcher, fundamentally precarious. Butcher pointed out that it "necessitates a lot of traveling to where there are possibilities, and playing with a lot of different people." Having said that, though, the lifestyle obviously has certain benefits since it allows Butcher a degree of artistic and personal independence.

In contrast to the relative simplicity of his post-2000 career, Butcher explained the ways in which the situation was rather different in his earlier years:

> From the early-1980s to 2000 I also taught part time. Without this it would have been impossible to survive playing this music. I taught saxophone at home and physics and maths at an A-level crammer. So there were 30 years of "underground" work before the PHF Award came alone.

So in the years before 2000 Butcher fell into the second category, those who supplement their activity through secondary or tertiary artistic activities. And yet, running across both of these periods (i.e., pre- and post-2000) have been elements of the third category, the use of funding from private or public bodies.

Reflecting on the general situation of the independence of underground musicians and improvisers, Butcher outlines the ways in which such individuals in fact often obliquely receive institutional support of the kind he referenced in regard to his "PHF Award":

> Currently this activity survives (for UK musicians, most of the time) almost entirely without institutional support. The odd concert at King's Place [a large venue with private/public backing] notwithstanding. That said—I benefit from cultural support given to numerous European organisations, in the sense of being invited to play funded festivals, clubs, universities etc. Also, from the mid-80s for about 10 years, the Arts Council was quite helpful with small funds that made all the difference. There was an "improvised touring scheme"—where you set up the concerts yourself and got a subsidy.

This type of small, fragmented funding was crucial to Butcher's activities at the time:

> It was very important for me. Meant I could invite some European players over to tour—develop the music and some valuable projects/relationships. Also my

label (ACTA) got a few Arts Council grants back then—which was also vi-
tal, in the expensive days before CDs. The touring scheme got devolved to Jazz
Services and the subsidy became pointless. They sent the last one I applied for
back. And the London Musicians' Collective was a valuable organisation before
it got cut.

Butcher therefore relied in his early career on a variety of funding supports
(in addition to his activities as a teacher), from small grants for tours or record-
ings from the Arts Council to the backing of an umbrella organization such as
the London Musicians' Collective. These types of income supplements, though
small and not sufficient in themselves to support Butcher's activities as a per-
former, nevertheless proved vital in allowing Butcher to pursue the marginal-
ized, minority music in which he was interested and that represented, for him,
an "ideological" and not a "genre" choice (thus echoing Prévost and others).

> I started out in the very do-it-yourself mode. Playing in hired rooms above pubs
> for years—or places like the Workers Music Association. Not having to fit into
> standard performance modes—whether to do with commercial or institutional
> weight—was vital. And I'm of an age to have got involved when improvising
> was an ideological choice—not a genre choice. (On the non-aesthetic side—it's
> also very satisfying when you earn your money just from when people pay to
> hear you.)

In addition to these varying sources of income, in 2011 Butcher's achieve-
ments as a musician were recognized by an award of £45,000 [roughly $70,000]
from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), as previously discussed. The PHF,
"one of the larger independent grant-making foundations in the UK," prefers "to
support work which others may find hard to fund, perhaps because it breaks
new ground, is too risky or is unpopular,"[28] a contention borne out in Sarah-
Jane Dooley's answer to me in the last chapter.

Butcher's and Beresford's Composer Awards, though not isolated in them-
selves, serve as something like the fringe underground exception that proves
the rule that, even in the context of private funding, underground musicians lie
behind other comparably commercially marginal cultural forms. The heading
"About the Composer" on the page of the Hamlyn website detailing Butcher's
award is a dead giveaway in this regard. The roster of recipients and the nature
of the award designation betray a clear high-cultural residue, as Sound and Mu-
sic's awards schemes do likewise, up to a point (which is understandable, given
the organization's history), although like Eastburn Dooley was keen to register

her reservation over the continued use of "composer" as a designator, which she explains in terms of differentiating the award from the Artist Awards the PHF also gives out to visual artists, and as a simple means to an end: "The terminology needs to be clear to non-specialists. It's not an ideal description, but we think the alternatives are less ideal."

Reflecting on the Hamlyn award, Butcher pointed to its distinctive "no strings attached" character, as discussed previously:

> The Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award is unusual in that it's given for doing what you do. To only exaggerate a little: there's too much of people dreaming up ideas just to fit funding schemes, creating a world of subsidised activity with no real need for existence.

Butcher also underlined how important the award will be to his activities as a musician:

> I meant it when I wrote for their site that, "Such generous support will significantly help me to continue to explore, without making compromises, the music I have been developing for the past 25 years. Numerous, previously precarious ideas and projects now become possible, and I particularly look forward to the ones I haven't even thought of yet." It comes in 3 yearly chunks—and the main fruit this year is getting some new saxes. I've been playing the same ones for 25 years, and the numerous accidents (not unconnected to this itinerant life) they've suffered had taken their toll.

These quotes point toward the fact that many awards of this type do not, in fact, encourage total independence of artistic creation (entailing as they do fidelity to some sort of agreed-upon criteria for assessment), nor do they allow independence from the state in the way that a private foundation such as this one does. This supports Prévost's claim that funding of this nature might in some cases entail ideological compromise and once again underlines the dangers of capitalist subsumption and the difficulties inherent in underground separation.

With Butcher, in any case, we see a musician whose working life as a musician has been typically varied. He has relied throughout his career on institutional support, in the early stages on a small scale and more recently in a more substantial sense, while progressing from a musician who supplemented his artistic practice with teaching work of different kinds and the aforementioned institutional support to someone who is able to support himself primarily through performances, recordings, and commissions. We therefore witness here

the importance of state funding to underground musicians, particularly in the early stages of their careers. We also see that even within such a marginal musical context it is indeed possible to progress from piecemeal, precarious worker to consistently jobbing professional performer and even to be in receipt of a substantial financial award from a private foundation. This is the case even though musical performance in itself—underground or not—is a somewhat naturally precarious pursuit.

These case studies have, in sum, shown that underground artists are as entangled in the political contexts of post-Fordist flexible accumulation, precarity, and digital age real subsumption—late capitalism—as much as more mainstream cultural practitioners are. These entanglements have real material impacts on underground musicians' working and personal lives, many of which are financially piecemeal and fragmented. Meanwhile, the habitual funding policy prejudices of public institutions and private foundations, although showing some significant signs of transformation and nuance and indeed being somewhat tangential to the self-organized and politically independent contexts of the underground in many ways, have a long way to go before they award underground and fringe musics, as they are being defined here, funding in amounts that would be comparable to what other special-interest music forms receive. These same kinds of tensions among the marginal underground, mainstream processes, and questions of politics and money are taken up in the next chapter, which focuses on digital piracy and record labels.

7

The Digital Economy and Labels

The digital age has produced a range of material effects in the music industry. In the underground as elsewhere the emergence of free digital tools of production, promotion, and dissemination has proved transformative. Music is no longer trapped the way it once was in physical channels of market-controlled commodity exchange. Although as I have said digital age transformation is less destructive of industrial capitalist paradigms here as it has been in more mainstream music, simply because these have always been less prevalent in this context, the underground has nevertheless been fundamentally altered. Cultural activities that were already marginal have in many cases been completely liberated from capitalist spheres of value, such that much underground material is freely available at the click of a button on the Web (although this of course usually implies deeper structures of capital and subsumption).

Some figures on the underground scene welcome this apparent liberation from the wage-labor relation as an emancipatory process that leads to less "contaminated" art. Others rail against the digital age's undermining of whatever meager potential underground musicians had of earning money from their work in the first place. Still others argue that the liberation of content in ETEWAF (everything that ever was, available forever)[1] culture leads to a devaluing of cultural experience to the extent that engagement with underground culture— which had once been the prized result of much toil on the part of the audience member—might have become superficial and passive. This chapter draws out this debate, moving from a general overview of the situation into case studies of record labels on the front line of these issues.

7.1. The Digital Economy

As just indicated, underground perspectives here range from appraisals that emphasize the liberation from object fetishization and the formerly "natural" limitations of physical isolation and distance that global digital culture facilitates to critical, in some ways antidigital and (what I call) avant-conservative denunciations that say that free music is inherently exploitative for artists seeking to make money from their work. The broadly shared radical and anticorporate political base of the underground and fringes splinters into a range of responses to the specific issue of the digital economy, an issue as layered, messy, and confusing as they come.

Strident voices from the "avant-conservative" side of the debate have come from critics and writers such as Mark Fisher and David Keenan, Henry Cow musician and improviser Chris Cutler, and co–label heads (of Not Not Fun, examined below) and musicians Amanda and Britt Brown. For these figures, the digital age has seen a cheapening of the potential richness of culture through the facilitation of a superficial, trouble-free, consumer-focused model of cultural exchange and experience. The old struggle to source obscure music, to make contact with obscure musicians and obscure audiences, has supposedly been replaced with instant gratification.

David Keenan in the *Wire* reflects on the situation as he sees it:

> Digital downloads—not to say Wikipedia entries, music blogs and even sites like UbuWeb—encourage a superficial engagement with culture. The quality and depth of interaction between an individual and a piece of art is no longer paramount. It's all about how much you're packing. The internet is a great, dull leveller, throwing out Cecil Taylor bootlegs and scans of rare mimeo zines as indiscriminately as virals for underarm deodorant. The idea of the quest, the concept of an encounter with art that happens in the context of your own life, is rapidly being replaced by an endless series of simulacra.[2]

Amanda Brown makes a similar point in another edition of the same column, drawing attention not only to the possible reduction in attention span that digital culture has brought about but also to what she sees as the consequent frivolity of our engagements with music:

> The climate of indiscriminate cultural channel-surfing seems to be having an effect on our collective attention spans, too. Albums are ditched in favour of one or two key tracks; we even fast-forward through YouTube clips. When music

has been reduced to the status of junk mail, and groups' entire discographies are skimmed and dismissed in half an hour, what depth of understanding or appreciation for these creations can we have? How do we remember what we've eaten if it's been swallowed, not chewed?[3]

Britt Brown, who echoes Amanda Brown on this, clarified his own position on supposed listener passivity in our interview when I asked what sort of basis these views have:

> I have no proof that people having access to all music on the planet instantaneously, for free, makes them more passive listeners, or if that's a uniquely superficial method for consuming culture. But I've found it to be true in my life, from the people I meet, both in person and online. You used to come across real specialists more often—people who were borderline encyclopedic on a niche topic or two (70's Italian horror movies, early LA punk, whatever), but who seemed to know basically nothing about everything else. This knowledge was hard-won, over many years of (usually) self-funded research. The internet's gift has to been to make it so that now nearly everybody has some surface-level familiarity with nearly everything.

In this same spirit, Mark Fisher outlined a sense of what he describes as the "digital communication malaise" in a talk entitled "No Time" at Virtual Futures 2011, a conference held at Warwick University. Fisher drew attention to the revolutions in distribution and consumption of the digital age, while insisting on the lack of a concomitant revolution in content:

> [IPods] seem to have changed everything, but only at the level of consumption and distribution, not content or culture. . . . The more things change at the level of consumption, the less they change at the level of production. So what I want to draw attention to is two different speeds: the ever-increasing speed of communicative capitalism and the slowing, retarded time of culture.[4]

Fisher is drawing here on Jodi Dean's notion of communicative capitalism, discussed in chapter 4, in which participatory media such as Facebook are serving to reconfigure the cultural landscape of our everyday lives and bring it into direct alignment with technological advances, while at the same time relating this to a notion of cultural retardation, where "there's a sense that everything has changed but nothing's really happened" and where "technological upgrades have taken the place of a kind of cultural development."[5]

In addition to this idea of an increasingly superficial, frivolous culture in which technological growth is not matched by a corresponding evolution in content, the avant-conservatives draw attention to what they see as the parlous and exploitative economic realities of the digital age. Amanda Brown detects a squeeze taking place, where underground musicians are being forced either to take day jobs or to try and cross over into the mainstream in order to generate enough income to subsist in the absence of the "self-sustaining feedback loop" between "creators and appreciators."[6] Britt was similarly pessimistic in our interview, suggesting that he imagines that

> within the next decade or two 90% of music purchased will be digital. It makes no sense why it'd be otherwise; if something is free, who bothers paying for it? Only the extremely wealthy play at philanthropy. It's not surprising that less and less people cut out music from their budget, but the result is that quite quickly most labels won't be able to break even on a physical release, so LPs will eventually be more for show, like promos, to lend authenticity to a title.

Chris Cutler echoes the Browns' pessimism, directing attention to the amount of "musical projects [that] never leave the notebook because of problems with the pocket book" and drawing an emotive comparison between the wage-labor relation in normal contexts, such as that of a "plumber" doing his/her job and then getting paid for that job, and the breakdown of such a relation in musical culture.[7] For Cutler, this breakdown will lead to the closure of many independent labels (such as his own ReR) and as a result to the production of profoundly less experimental, difficult, contestatory music, underground or otherwise.

The avant-conservative critical position, as seen in these examples, therefore derives from two closely related areas, that of the exploitative digital economy and its negative effects on the already marginalized underground and that of the "superficial," trouble-free, access-all-areas model of cultural engagement that the digital age has supposedly facilitated. It comes down to money and attention.

The "opposing" side organizes its arguments along similar lines, with vastly different results. A range of figures can be said to support what I will call this "digital liberationist" position, from musicians John Maus and Scanner/Robin Rimbaud to sound and film artist Vicki Bennett, UbuWeb founder Kenneth Goldsmith, and writer Marcus Boon. These figures speak, as Keenan et al. have, about the impact of digital culture on the nature of people's engagement with underground culture and on the (political) economy of artists' lives. But they see this impact in positive rather than negative terms.

Hypnagogic/fringe pop musician John Maus rejects the sort of object fetishization (albeit a fundamentally reconfigured fetishization for objects circulating in local circuits of exchange) that is implicit in Amanda Brown's and Keenan's accounts and explicit in my interview with Britt, where he suggested that "object fetishism is a great unifying force . . . a tape [is] a peace pipe, a business card, a time capsule and, occasionally, a small piece of art, all spooled into one." In a Pitchfork interview, by contrast, Maus outlined his delight at the demise of record shops. He speaks about the removal of the social "exchange" implied by the setting, the expense of "physical" music, and the growth of free digital culture, although it should be noted that his consumer-centered account says little about how we might organize the payment of underground and fringe musicians in a more equitable way:

> You don't know how happy it makes me that the days of the record store are coming to an end. $20 for an LP? Do you remember going to the record store and not getting what you want because there was no other place to get it? Now we can get it all for free, and I think that's wonderful. There was always something really depressing to me about record stores and music equipment stores. There's something oppressive about them, like the guy who looks you up and down and looks at what you're buying. You're bound up in exchange with the snobby clerk. So I'm glad they all have little "closed" signs on their doors now.[8]

Vicki Bennett likewise eulogizes the liberating potential of digital culture, this time from the perspective of both the consumer and the artist in search of collaborators and material. Bennett's collage music and film work, as People Like Us, clearly benefits greatly from her having access to a wide variety of sources, a benefit that Bennett relates directly to the freedoms enabled by the emergence of broadband. For Bennett, "the shift in 1999/2000 to digital and broadband was probably the breakthrough moment for me."[9] Broadband "changed [Bennett's] life," no less, allowing her access to previously inaccessible "raw material":

> Since 2000, albums I've made with Ergo Phizmiz and Wobbly were created remotely, as a result of being in different parts of the world, through ftping multitracks. Many are surprised to hear that such methods could be successful, but working alone on site, and in collaboration online, can be a winning combination. Once completed, it can be shared online. If you work with the right people you'll reach thousands of listeners. In turn, some of those listeners will be working in areas where they can offer concerts, commissions, or play you on their radio show. This is called the Gift Economy.[10]

So where Cutler, the Browns, Fisher, and Keenan detect destructive tendencies in this phenomenon of content liberation, Bennett instead sees the liberation in more productive terms. She outlines the richness of online musical experience, drawing attention to "thousands of dedicated, knowledgeable music blogs," which share "out-of-print material, with tags linking to related areas" and "links to 25 other websites and radio stations with similar interests."[11]

These positive sentiments notwithstanding, Bennett's views are not wholly optimistic. In an interview with *Abject*, Bennett echoes Keenan in drawing attention to some of the pitfalls of ETEWAF culture, saying, "It's taken years for people to get used to this culture. . . . It takes a lot of discipline and self-enforced limitations to actually do something good with all that data."[12] However, while this quote does raise ideas of passivity and superficiality, aligning Bennett with the avant-conservatives to a certain extent, even here Bennett is not so much addressing issues of digital *economy* as she is digital practice. There is indeed often a dearth of argument from the digital liberation side as to how artists should get paid, if indeed people think they should seek payment, though as Bennett points out above, she, for one, holds that liberation of content and communication can eventually lead to paid opportunities.

In a similar vein to Bennett, Scanner/Robin Rimbaud discusses the closure of the traditional distance between collaborators and between listener and producer that has taken place. Rimbaud highlights what he sees as the profound *social* implications of these new closures, or, better, these new *connections*, which are as easily achieved as sending an email.[13] Marcus Boon's book *In Praise of Copying*, meanwhile, draws attention to the ubiquity of copying and mimesis in human culture and highlights the constructed, agenda-filled concepts of property and ownership.[14] For Boon, some of the arguments against the digital culture of copying orbit around a proscriptive notion of the market, which is undermined in the new framework of liberated content:

> If you're a Marxist you could just say that so much of what happens today is driven by an economic structure and what it allows and what it doesn't allow. For example, there are laws around intellectual property which serve to allow certain types of commerce to continue and those laws are part of a structure that tries to make its way, historically tries to make its way . . . and then in the digital environment this thing happens which renders those old structures problematic. . . . It just opens up all these contradictions.[15]

Boon ultimately perceives the potential of a "utopian" aspect in digital culture, discussing the "utopia of an infinite amount of stuff, all to be had . . . for free." For him, the ability to access any piece of music, anywhere and anytime, is a

deeply positive development.[16] The task now is to find ways to expand that freedom into other domains, such as, as he suggests, those of the economic and the political.

Finally, in the interview with Marcus Boon from which the block quote above was taken, Kenneth Goldsmith echoes the point that the anintermediated marginal status of the underground might lead to its escape from subsumption to a large degree. Goldsmith points out that the kind of culture in which his site is interested simply falls outside "legitimate economies," even ending up unreleased as a result. UbuWeb is intended to offer something of a corrective to this inaccessibility.

> Well, it's a way of flaunting all the rules, somewhat safely. I've actually found a major loophole in copyright culture, literary culture, in distributive culture. . . . It's really got no commercial value whatsoever. It has great historical and intellectual value, but people lose money when they try to release this stuff so most of it goes unreleased. So it's been this, kind of, really beautiful grey area where it's all out in the open and it's all in front but you get a pass on it in a way that legitimate economies don't give you that latitude.[17]

For Goldsmith, then, the underground—along with the other kinds of avant-garde/experimental culture that he hosts—does indeed represent an anintermediated culture that effectively circumnavigates mainstream models of ownership and distribution. This allows people such as him to exploit that circumnavigation by making the material available free of charge over the Web.

Maus, Bennett, Boon, Goldsmith, and Rimbaud therefore perceive a kind of liberation of creative and social potential in the digital age. These figures have less to say on the issue of the digital economy, at least as I have presented their arguments, but theirs is not necessarily a disavowal or denial of the potential deprivations and exploitations of digital culture. They largely reframe the debate in terms of creativity and potential, as opposed to the destitution of their (implied) antagonists. The avant-conservatives are simply trying to think equitable models of purchase and payment, whereas the others focus on the perceived transformative novelty of digital culture. That being said, for Bennett at least, the new digital culture is rich with economic possibility; Web exposure and widespread digital dissemination have for her led only to more work, more art, and more music. It's not clear, though, if underground artists working in different mediums or different ways from Bennett would be able to replicate her obviously productive model, in which digital tools are put at the service of a liberated, international series of collaborations.

Various individuals, entities, and practices could be placed somewhere in

the middle of these (supposed) avant-conservatives and digital liberationists. Many in the underground lament devaluation of music while also warmly welcoming ease of access to an unprecedented amount of culture and to international channels of communication between audiences and collaborators. The French donation platform and webzine *Amour & Discipline* (*A&D*), a nonprofit DIY organization run by many of those involved with Grrrnd Zero in Lyon, is an excellent illustrative example. While *A&D* argues at length that the global noncommercial culture of file-sharing music undermines formerly important sources of income for marginal musicians, its members also accept that the open channels of communication and exchange of the digital age have clear positive benefits. They acknowledge that there are people "who share culture without caring about the bands whose music they eagerly download," suggesting that "there is a parallel between corporations at war with sharing and people who take universal culture sharing for granted and don't see the necessity of combining it with some kind of support." They aver, though, that "irresponsible culture sharers are a minority" and point to "studies [that] prove that people who download music illegally also spend more money on music than anyone else."[18] So instead of stigmatizing audiences, as they suggest large record companies habitually do, *A&D* argues that in response to the complicated digital age context of file-sharing and devalued music, "the question cannot be 'how can we stop it?' but 'how can we handle it?'"[19]

Amour & Discipline frames their donation platform in terms of this shift from what they call "an economics of scarcity" to one of "abundance."[20] Their aim in setting up their donation platform, "where people can donate to any independent band or label in the universe,"[21] is to work within the gift economy alluded to by Bennett so as to harness it in the service of generating money for artists and labels sorely in need of financial support, many of whom share some of their music via the *A&D* site. *Amour & Discipline*'s moderate, reconciliatory, productive approach is surely typical of many underground actors, implicated as we all are in digital liberation and also digital economy deprivation.

The question of our so-called superficial engagement with culture in the digital age, beyond this question of money and politics, is difficult to resolve. The superficiality suggested by Keenan and others, such as Simon Reynolds,[22] is, for example, simply not recognized by Bennett et al., who see the new permeable and accessible frameworks opened up by the digital platforms as something like cultural emancipation. A label head such as Mugwump embraces the access that the Web allows to audiences, all the while relishing the *tangibility* and perceived *depth* of the physical artifact, reminding us of the strange agency and power of

these objects in the mangle of cultural practice discussed below. And there is a body of evidence that suggests merit on both sides of this complicated argument.

A British Music Rights and University of Hertfordshire study from 2008[23] and an Australian Online Journal of Arts Education paper from 2006[24] each attest both to the variety of young people's listening habits and to the depth of their engagement with music. This sort of material obviously tends to undermine Keenan's arguments about increasing passivity and superficiality of listening. A 2006 study led by Adrian North of the University of Leicester contradicts these findings. After monitoring 346 people's listening habits over the course of two weeks, the paper suggests, according to North, that the "accessibility of music has meant that it is taken for granted and does not require a deep emotional commitment once associated with music appreciation." North goes on, "People now actively use music in everyday listening contexts to a much greater extent than hitherto. . . . However the degree of accessibility and choice has arguably led to a rather passive attitude towards music heard in everyday life."[25] The prevalence of downloading discussed by all is little disputed, of course, but one of its consequences, the so-called library music effect, has led, according to data compiled by Broadcast Music Inc., to "the substantial diversification of the music that listeners hear."[26]

Whether that diverse range of music is listened to at a superficial or an engaged level, however, remains something of an unresolved point. Social behavior such as music consumption proceeds according to cultural norms and conventions, which are of course created, reinforced, and developed in reaction to various economic, institutional, industrial, and societal influences. The prevailing norms in the twenty-first century have been, first, the increased availability of cheap and/or free digital downloads and, later, cheap and/or free cloud streaming services such as Spotify, alongside the still-prominent downloads. This "celestial jukebox," a term of Philip Auslander's borrowed from Paul Goldstein,[27] introduces practices that contrast clearly with older modes of consumption and indeed suggest evolving cultural norms of musical value. Anne-Kathrin Hoklas, working as part of a large German empirical research project into the mediatization of music under the leadership of Steffen Leppe and Stefan Weinzierl, indeed pointed in 2014 to the ways that older people are "orientated to tangibility" in how they encounter and choose to consume music. On the other hand, members of what she called the "digital generation" instead see music as a freely floating object, accessible at any time or place. This shift obviously has implications for the cultural rhythms of music consumption and therefore for different generational senses of musical value.[28]

However, the situation is not so clear-cut as it might seem. Sociologist Pau-

lo Magaudda, for instance, has suggested that dematerialization is the wrong theoretical frame in which to see digital age practices. Magaudda argues that "the social presence of musical objects and accessories" has only increased in recent years, with "the number of material devices conceived for music listening and collection in general" proliferating rather than dying away.[29] The many specialist, bespoke objects of the underground would seem to support this more general point: even if many in the underground and its fringes find themselves consuming music more and more through digital media, they remain "orientated to tangibility" both in the sense that Hoklas means it and in Magaudda's more expanded vision of musical materiality.

The social presence and cultural value of physical objects—'zine, record, tape, synthesizer, or whatever—remain key in the underground, perhaps to a degree that means we are dealing with a special case here, where digital age devaluation, perceived or not, is being consciously countered by practitioners and audiences keen to preserve tactility and "slowness" in how they consume music. But as we've also seen, the evolving sense of what music means and where/how it exists in the digital age, as discussed by Hoklas, is felt as strongly in the underground as anywhere else, through the characteristic ambivalence that dominates the scene, where increasingly free-floating and Web-based files and embrace of digital accessibility are couched in conscious preservation of artisanal objects bought in person or on the Web. Just as it's hard to reach a conclusion on the matter of passivity, it's difficult to resolve this question of value. Either way: what is clear is that devaluation, access, and modes of listening are important structures of value in the underground, codes that frame discourse and practice around the music. The next section carries some of the same tensions into concrete case studies, where we'll see how particular individuals and labels have gone about approaching these issues in practice.

7.2. Record Labels and Physical Media

My focus here is on underground labels that prioritize physical products—not a difficult thing to find in an underground where artifacts such as bespoke tapes, CD-Rs, and records are all still important. My argument is that the persistence of such apparently retro media forms can be seen to express three related desires: first, a nostalgia for the media of the practitioners' childhoods; second, an eagerness to secure some kind of economic surety against creeping (or perceived) devaluation; and third, a concern to counter the mainstream narrative of obsolescence that now dominates these media, vinyl revival or not, by using

them in particularly intensive, artisanal ways, through this further articulating the underground's separateness from that mainstream and, perhaps, countering passivity and superficiality in listening.

Vinyl heft, tapes' puppy-like cuteness, and CDs' android poise encode cultural capital and deliver different experiences by serving as nostalgic mediators of Simon Reynolds's slow "analogue time," in contrast to the supposed passivity and speed of digital culture I've been discussing. In this analogue time the frantic nature of digital communication and consumption is replaced with older patterns of exchange, affect, and cultural engagement, with what Reynolds has called "a particular sense of temporality, structured around delay, anticipation and the Event."[30] This sense of temporality has been framed by Reynolds and other writers in a desirable way as a "slow" mode of cultural engagement, chiefly under the banner of what has been called the "slow media movement." Jörg Blumtritt, Benedikt Köhler, and Sabria David's "Slow Media Manifesto" rails against digital speed and promotes the "auratic," "palpable" nature of physical media, for instance.[31] Nicholas Carr's book *The Shallows* takes a similar line, arguing that the hyperlinked Internet encourages floaty cognition that undermines focused thought and engagement.[32]

From pored-over sleeves to vinyl's brushy grooves, from the docile homeliness of easily copied and carried tape to the similar pliability of CD-R, the tangibility of these media is crucial to their analogue-marked "slow" character. Material objects, as *things*, act and shape experience in concert with personal, cultural, social, and institutional agencies. This is very much in the manner of the "dance of agencies," of the "mangle of practice," discussed by Andrew Pickering and others as a kind of epistemological and sociological "theory of everything."[33] Physical music artifacts participate in this "dance of agency" as commodities, texts, and objects activating and enabling meaning through their brunt and significance.

Physical music media therefore play an important role in the contemporary music industry, both supplementing digital speed and making available key social rituals (as well as providing a further revenue stream, of course). But as I've said, there remains a peculiar and intense cachet to selling or buying physical music within the underground. Physical media serve various political, social, and cultural functions in the underground. These functions are related to the exclusivity, materiality, and identity discussed above with reference to mainstream physical media coding of cool but glint with their own localized character. In slowing down the whole process of buying and listening to music by producing "beautiful," prestige, intensely unique, and bespoke objects that listeners can pore over and that give a sense of physical reality both to the music itself and

to the whole process of recording and putting it out, independent underground microlabels both secure subcultural capital and locate the surrounding process in a different sense of time and tangibility, using 'zines and tapes, records and t-shirts, to anchor the underground, just as venues and festivals do.

This sense of underground distinction was explicitly echoed in my interviews with label heads. As Britt Brown told me, producing bespoke objects for connected audiences creates "an intimacy that's rare in other spheres," underlining how "underground cultures are about connection and community, on however micro a scale, and physical media are an ideal vehicle for building that." Similarly, Richard Skelton, who has made music as A Broken Consort, ran Sustain-Release, and currently runs Corbel Stone Press alongside Autumn Richardson, told me that he "was interested in creating a world from scratch, without reference to anything external, rather than being grafted onto something that already existed. . . . I was interested in fostering a more intimate relationship between 'producer' and 'consumer'—hence editions were personalized for the recipient, and many 'customers' soon became friends." Exotic Pylon's Mugwump also pointed out to me in the same spirit that

> it is essential that most of the things we release have a real-world physicality. Objects are important, and the engagement with a sonic object is a vital part of the ritual of entering the world of the thing you are about to listen to. . . . As much as I love digital I still feel that there is a weird kind of validation missing if a piece of music doesn't have some kind of physical existence.

In exploring these issues of physicality and extra-mainstream distinction further, I look in detail here at four labels from around the world—Discrepant, Trensmat, Sacred Tapes, and Not Not Fun—while making reference to others by way of building context.

A. Discrepant

Discrepant is a Portuguese label run by Gonçalo F Cardoso. It releases music by a wide range of European underground artists. From Italy's experimental improvising audio-visual act My Cat Is an Alien, to Belgian underground techno artist Cédric Stevens, British collage composer Ergo Phizmiz, and Chinese-based French field recordist Kink Gong, the roster is as wide-ranging as it is interesting. The label has international reach for its vinyl releases through distributors such as Cargo Records in the UK, Forced Exposure in the United States, A-Musik in Germany, Clear Spot in the Netherlands, and Meditations

in Japan. Vinyl accounts for what Cardoso told me is the vast majority of the label's output. However, it also sells a certain amount of digital music through Web retailers such as Boomkat, while also making use of its website as a promotional tool by making mixes and other material by relevant artists available around the release of each of its physical albums.

Discrepant evolved from the eponymous Internet radio site, which collected mixes from notable underground artists and released them as podcasts. However, this clear anchoring in the Web, reflected also in the use of the aforementioned Web distributors, as well as, for example, the label's use of its two Facebook pages (with 1,426 likes and 2,359 friends, respectively, at the start of 2015) to publicize its releases, is offset by the fact that those Web distributors ultimately sell physical Discrepant product, in the main, and by the label's emphasis on physical releases in general.

I asked Cardoso to speak a little about this double bind of underground Web culture, where the Internet is both vital tool and also potential agent of decline:

> Discrepant is hugely dependent on the web to get our stuff across. Even with a worldwide distribution network, most of our "marketing" is based around blog reviews, social media and building hype around a release. We still grow with every release. With the lack of a scene or physical presence (record shop, etc.) I can't imagine how Discrepant would thrive. So yes, the web is crucial for it to survive.

As we'll see below again and again, the Web is utterly crucial as a tool of marketing and distribution for underground labels. However, as noted, it has also aided and abetted the failure of many record shops to maintain their foothold in underground scenes.

While again underlining how important the Web is to Discrepant, Cardoso regretted the decline in local scenic nuclei such as record shops, even claiming that recognizable local scenes don't exist in anything like the same way they used to:

> These days everything seems to happen online where "likes" and tweets decide if something is worth your attention or not, regardless of quality. Blogs and trend-setting online shops can get an act out there or completely ignore it. Scenes used to be built around a very physical presence, a venue, a record shop where a direct interaction could happen. With both in decline it's no wonder that everything happens in the virtual world. . . . We're not really part of a specific scene, nor do

I think that there are any specific scenes left anymore. However, there seems to be a good connection between like-minded people within the underground community where artists and labels trade, and enjoy and respect each other's work. Because it's rarely a money making thing, these days there seems to be an honest and genuine interest in each other's work.

So Cardoso laments what he sees as the disappearance of physical scenes but also underlines the positive collaborative spirit he experiences in the underground, where, as he points out, money is rarely the point. These collaborations happen at shows, pointing toward the persistence of physical scenes, but they are also crucially reliant on the Web, such that the agent of the physical's demise is now also one of chief tools of building connections and networks.

Cardoso's attitudes are shared by many on the scene. This is particularly the case with respect to Discrepant's decision to sell mainly physical music. Cardoso puts this down to his own tastes, saying that "80% of the music I enjoy is on vinyl" and, as such, that "there was never any doubt that the pillar of the label would be vinyl." As with other label heads, though, the reasoning behind this taste for vinyl is more personal than anything else. When I asked about his preference for vinyl, Cardoso spoke about "better sound quality, collectability, touch & smell," and asserted bluntly that for underground music, digital releases "will always serve purely a promotional/sharing purpose." Digital here simply advertises the fact this music exists somewhere in *tangible* form. Whether this emphasis on the digital is shared by audiences to the same degree it is by label heads is something of another matter—indeed, Mugwump suggested that, for an audience member, digital is far more user friendly and flexible—and as we saw with Hoklas, this might be more a generational feature than anything else, but Cardoso nevertheless pointed toward the demand Discrepant feels from customers for physical media and underlined his perception that there is a strong audience out there that values the tangibility and concreteness of records and the like just as much as he does.

B. Trensmat[34]

Trensmat Records is an "independent record label who specialise in transmitting oscillations & grooves."[35] Trensmat has been active since 2005, with a break in activity occurring between mid-2009 and early 2011. The label is run by Stephen and Barry (they prefer to keep their surnames anonymous). I spoke to the former as part of this research. As Stephen told me, the duo running the label

"also operates as the band Whirling Hall Of Knives and separately as Magnetize and The Last Sound respectively."

Stephen describes the label's focus as being comprised of "a blend of hypnotic rock/electronics/drone with very frayed and dirty edges." He suggests that "there is definitely a Trensmat sonic style, but it's hard to put into words." Trensmat has released music by such prominent underground artists as Astral Social Club, the Telescopes, Mugstar, Bardo Pond, Black to Comm, Mudhoney, and Acid Mothers Temple. The label has a particular affinity with British artists orbiting the A Band/Vibracathedral Orchestra axis of improvising Noise and Drone musicians. The label has released three 7-inches from the Telescopes, for instance, a group that started out playing Jesus and Mary Chain–influenced shoegaze but that now, with the Vibracathedral Orchestra's Bridget Hayden partnering with founder member Stephen Lawrie, make vibrant and chaotic drone dirges. Trensmat therefore participates in the wider global underground while supporting and even producing local scenic iterations concentrated in Britain and Ireland.

Trensmat's release schedule is taken up entirely by physical releases, dominated by 12-inch and, particularly, 7-inch records. As of January 2015, Trensmat has released forty-four records and one CD, a 2009 compilation of the best of the label's releases to that point (some releases have been available as CD-Rs too).[36] Tlaotlon's *Squirt Image Flex*, the label's first full-length original album, was released through mail order in February 2012. Trensmat has since released a whole range of further albums from other artists.

While its catalog is exclusively physical, with specific sleeve designs and notes being tailored for each release, Trensmat conducts almost all of its business through its website (and through the popular database Discogs), at least in terms of customers' placing of orders. The records or CD are delivered via mail order, echoing earlier underground practices. Additionally, Trensmat offers samples of each release (usually the first minute or so of each track) through embedded SoundCloud files on its site and download codes for digital copies of selected physical albums from its catalog at point of purchase.

When I asked Stephen about the label's decision to focus on physical media, he discussed his and Barry's background, outlining their decision to reject what he sees as the "background element of digital," an observation that obviously echoes claims made by Cardoso, Keenan, Reynolds, the Browns, and others:

The label was started in 2005. We had variously been involved in a few labels since the mid-1990's, but by 2004 things had started to turn more & more to-

wards digital & CDs/CD-Rs. We preferred vinyl for its sound, tactile element and the active event of listening to it as opposed to the background element of digital.

Stephen went on to discuss Trensmat's particular affection for the 7-inch record, sketching the background for the duo's decision to focus on that medium:

> The 7″ was the purest vision of this [physical media] in our opinion. We had been in touch with Stephen Lawrie of The Telescopes and had been blown away by their then current LP "#4", while also being fans of their stuff since they started. We wanted to release some of the music he had sent us which was amazing. So the first release on Trensmat was two of those tracks—the "Night Terrors" 7″.

Discussing the particular appeal of the 7-inch, Stephen once again invoked the (assumed) opposition of digital culture as unengaged and analogue as multi-faceted experience, while noting, in this case, the distinctive cultural resonances that the medium has for him:

> The 7″ is the perfect musical statement as far as we're concerned—an active experience in these days of music as background playlists. This is why it's very important for us to provide good artwork . . . occasionally coloured vinyl . . . but of course the primary concern is that the two tracks are firstly great and secondly work together with the sleeve, etc. as a package. As a child of the late 70s/early 80s the 7″ has a real cultural resonance for me too.

Trensmat's profound preference for physical media is carried over into its side project, Nute, which releases everything from "clean electronica" to "lo-fi scuzz" albums on "cassette and CD." With this preference, Trensmat clearly seeks to displace the hustle and speed of digital culture with the "older," slower sense of time and cultural experience discussed by Simon Reynolds, where the "particular kinds of affect" of the "analogue system" have a "particular kind of temporality."[37] Again, however, this impression of a distinctive "analogue time" seems largely to be based on subjective, anecdotal attitudes to digital culture. This is not to criticize the perspective, which after all never claims in this context to be anything other than a personal preference; it's merely to point out its subjective basis, something that was clear in Stephen's answers, as it was others'.

So while Trensmat's business is, as Stephen observed, "unavoidably" con-

ducted through the Web in the first instance and in terms of getting digital files out to people—echoing the importance of the Web to Discrepant and other labels—Trensmat is nevertheless assiduous in cleaving to what its founders see as the richness of the "active" experiences that physical media facilitates.

C. Sacred Tapes

Trensmat's and other labels' (such as Irish tape label Fort Evil Fruit) persistence with physical musical media is of course characteristic of many labels working within underground culture. All sorts of labels follow this trend of producing bespoke, artisanal physical packaging, from Prophase Music in America's comic strip−accompanied 7-inches to Not Fun Fun's gift-wrapped fringe pop and noise tapes, profiled below, to Manchester label Sacred Tapes.

Sacred Tapes is a noise label run by Callum Higgins, also a musician operating under names such as Yes Blythe. Since 2013 the label has released music on cassette and, latterly, vinyl, by acts such as Swaggerjack, River Slaughter, and Druss. Sacred Tapes also sells downloads through online retailers such as Boomkat. This allows, as Higgins told me, "further documentation" and "more ready access to what [he's] putting out." Sacred Tapes therefore embodies and responds to the digital/physical tensions discussed above.

Sacred Tapes operates as a hub within a network of small musician-run labels on the Manchester noise and experimental underground music scene, including Tesla Tapes and Tombed Visions. Higgins's initial ambition with Sacred Tapes was to "to try and keep a pace of a new release every few weeks," somewhat in the manner of the "thousands" of tape and CD-R releases on Wolf Eyes member John Olson's American Tapes label. This led Higgins "to use cassette tapes, given how cheap they are to produce." Higgins underlined in this spirit the ease and independence that the format grants him: "With all the releases I have dubbed each tape in real time myself, the reason being that I can control how long it takes for a tape to get made and realized with no waiting round for pressing plants or places to dub the tapes for me."

Higgins's emphasis on ease and cheapness in production and also therefore in distribution is typical within the underground. This is particularly the case in a global noise scene where cassettes are the leading format, as seen in tape labels such as Broken Flag, Ascetic House, Hooker Vision, American Tapes, and Posh Isolation. But as with other labels and musicians I spoke to, Higgins didn't just point to the cheapness and convenience of tapes as a reason to choose the format, instead also underlining the personal attraction he has to it:

> Cassette tapes were chosen because of their ease of production and cheapness to produce (meaning cheaper to sell on to the audience). But they were also chosen for some deep rooted attraction that I have to them. When I play live as Yes Blythe and in a number of other noise/improv bands my setup has always consisted of a number of cassette players and Walkmen fed through guitar pedals and a mixer. . . . I'm very much a fan of the sounds of tape and the mechanical physicality of them. . . . Perhaps this personal fascination with cassette tapes was the main factor for choosing this medium for the label and the cheapness and practical-ness of using them was only what made it possible.

While Higgins was reluctant to pin his love for tapes down to nostalgia, more broadly speaking label heads told me again and again about their nostalgic focus on a specific medium from childhood. Nostalgia is an important engine of these formats' revival and of the way in which value and cultural capital get attached to them. Certain specific material and pragmatic qualities of each format—from the ease, cheapness, and corresponding generic favoring of tape, to the comeliness, cultural resonance, and winning balance of heft and delicacy of the 7-inch record—resolve personal, maybe generational attraction in actual practice, as suggested by Higgins.

But these aspects of nostalgia and personal and cultural resonance, and the material, ritual, and pragmatic realities that ground those resonances, are of course given specific direction in many cases by feelings of a slightly more negative character, where the digital is seen as superficial and passive when compared to the "slow time" of analogue. Higgins himself betrayed something of a negative attitude toward digital versus physical media. This can be seen clearly in his reference to a label he formerly ran with his friend John Moffatt, Baptists and Beggars, which unlike Sacred Tapes didn't supplement its physical releases with digital downloads. When running that label, Higgins and Moffatt

> thought that digital was too throw-away; we wanted to encourage people to go back to physical. We were very anti-digital at the time. We felt that having a short run of something, say 200 records, and then having a digital version as well, completely undermined what made the short run of records exciting. It devalued the release completely.

The infinity of digital containers and the potentially infinite reproducibility of digital files are seen here to create a "throw-away" culture that devalues analogue distinction and scarcity, much in the vein of the arguments put forward by avant-conservatives.

This attitude is common in this context. Trensmat's Stephen, for example, told me that the label's preference for vinyl derives from the format's "tactile element and the active event of listening to it, as opposed to the background element of digital." But it's far from universal. Richard Skelton of Sustain-Release and Corbel Stone Press, while acknowledging that "slow formats" may "mitigate somewhat against" issues like piracy, doesn't see digital culture as a "compromise or a concession," but instead as an "unexplored domain." As he told me, he and Autumn Richardson want to make their work "as accessible as possible" so as to "enable more people to hear about it and to be able to experience it." Releasing music in digital formats facilitates this. As we can see, the issue of digital devaluation is a nuanced one even in this localized, analogue-heavy context.

Sacred Tapes displays a characteristic split practice not only in using both physical and digital media but also in favoring both cheap formats and expensive bespoke packaging. Eye-catching bespoke packaging builds here on the self-producing aspect of making tapes and CD-Rs but brings it to a boutique extreme. Two forms of DIY practice collide here, the artisanal and the grimy, coding both underground craftiness and subcultural contrast to mainstream forms of physical and digital mass production. Sacred Tapes' "Archive Box" is a case in point: released in a kind of "novelty" concrete box in June 2014 as a collection of the first six tapes put out by the label, this box manages a fine dance across both bespoke exclusivity and genre-specific coarseness. With its component parts originally selling for £1 a tape in short runs of twenty (with each album visible to the right of the below image), the box costs £65, or $110 plus $67 shipping to the United States.

Higgins spoke to me at length about the thought process behind the box and the material processes of construction it required. His answers reveal the intimacy and informality of underground practices, which tend to happen among small groups of like-minded artists and audience members in small scenes connected nationally and internationally via various underground quilting points. They also show the skill and care that goes into producing the work, Higgins himself running the label, making music that gets released on it, and also molding the concrete boxes.

This concentration of production in the label head is characteristic of the underground, where labels from Exotik Pylon to Not Not Fun see their heads embroidering and crafting for many releases. This doesn't, of course, discount the common use that underground labels make of things like printing companies and pressing plants. Higgins himself used a pressing plant to produce the vinyl and packaging for *Initiate Screen Prevails*, an EP from Yes Blythe released in August 2014, and also a printing company, Mono, to produce, as he told me,

Image 1. Sacred Tapes' *Archive Box* (ST 001–006)

"a risograph printed recycled card insert containing track listing, etc." Amanda and Britt Brown of Not Not Fun, meanwhile, spoke to Simon Reynolds in 2011 about regretfully but necessarily shifting from handmade bespoke packaging to factory processes for many of their releases, though they still (at that point) occasionally "silkscreen[ed] a tape or a 7″," and likewise took great care over the appearance over their factory-produced items.[38]

These engagements with factory processes and external companies don't undermine the self-producing model I've been speaking about. They merely demonstrate how even for tiny, marginal labels operating in musical contexts of minor or fringe commercial appeal, such collaborations are necessary. In most cases the music ends up being self-distributed and produced in comparatively short runs anyway, and in all cases it circulates through independent channels, short-term collaborations with pressing plants or printing companies notwithstanding.

Although representing something of an extreme in terms of underground artisanal practice, Sacred Tapes' "Archive Box" illustrates well the contrast I mentioned above between small runs of (very) cheap albums on physical formats such as tape and CD-R and the more expensive literal or figurative embroidering of those releases with elaborate packaging of one kind or another. This kind of contrast or tension between scene intimacy and cheapness on the one hand and elaborate and expensive craftiness or production on the other—a tension also that crops up in much less marked terms when underground and fringe labels from Trensmat to Alchemy Records in Japan use pressing plants to produce vinyl in small runs for what ends up being tiny audiences—can be seen in the practices of many other underground labels.

For instance, Ftarri/Meena/Hitorri, sublabels of Improvised Music from Japan, engage in precisely the kind of split practice seen with Sacred Tapes. In late 2013 Meena released the Ftarri Collection, a compilation of seven CDs of music from different editions of the Ftarri Festival from the previous five years. These discs consist of delicate, refined, often elusive recordings of improvised and composed music from artists such as Taku Sugimoto, John Butcher, Toshimaru Nakamura, and Sachiko M. The seven CDs are housed in picture sleeves. Each purchase comes in a specially made felt bag with a numbered card alongside the CDs. The collection is sold for 9,300 yen (approximately £54, plus postage outside Japan), in numbered editions from 1 to 200.

Similarly, in March 2014 Exotik Pylon released forty copies of a CD from the Lord, *Gettin' Off the Meths*, which were housed in a hand-knitted bag made from socks, towels, and dressing gowns (digital copies of the album were also made available via the label's Bandcamp). To take another example, Crooked Tapes in Tokyo released a limited run of LA-based duo (Alex and Britt Brown) Robedoor's *City of Scum* in October 2012, which as seen in the image below featured a two-color screen-printed vellum J-card with insert.

Finally, Richard Skelton's Sustain-Release released music of poise and pol-

Image 2. Robedoor's *City of Scum* (Crooked Tapes, CRK-008)

ish from A Broken Consort and other Skelton aliases on formats such as CD-R. The music, though, was housed in hugely elaborate, barky packaging, often with detailed poetry and literary booklets included alongside the disc and alongside various physical mementos of the Lancashire countryside and moors that inspired the work. As Skelton told me:

> Music itself is quite intangible, but it has always been important for me as a way of engaging with landscape. I therefore wished to ground the music in the physical—to give it a real world underpinning. The objects and natural ephemera that I included with my editions—small stones, bark, leaves, phials of water—these things were literally "of" the landscape which the music invoked. They weren't simply an aesthetic garnish, or pandering to some notion of limited edition object fetishism.

These features can be seen in the image below of Skelton's 2007 album as A Broken Consort, *Box of Birch*. The first edition of this album included artwork by Louise Skelton, Skelton's late wife, whose passing in 2004 motivated much of Skelton's work on Sustain-Release, alongside artifacts from the countryside such as birch leaves and cones. The first edition of *A Box of Birch* sold for £50. This is an understandably high price, but it's comparable with other works from Skelton. This can be seen, for example, with the *Editions of One* series available through both Sustain-Release and now Corbel Stone Press, on which Skelton and, latterly, Richardson, personalize booklets and recordings with specific dates and names, or the *Landings* series, special editions of which were available for £75. (All of the Sustain-Release and Corbel music is also available in digital format via Aoelian Editions for roughly £8 or £9 an album, as alluded to in Skelton's earlier-quoted discussion of the benefits of digital accessibility.)

All of these examples of bespoke packaging show labels keen both to code subcultural specificity and to counteract or supplement the supposed speed and weightlessness of the digital regime. While both the Crooked Tapes and the Exotik Pylon examples sold for relatively cheap amounts (at $12 and £8.95 respectively), at least when compared to the Ftarri Collection, the "Archive Box," and Sustain-Release's output, like those other releases even these cheaper examples serve as a counter to devaluation, while obviously going against the grain of dematerialization all the same. Even the huge, cheap output of *echt* underground noise label American Tapes, run by Wolf Eyes' John Olson, can be seen to participate in this analogue resistance, since its releases facilitate "slow" experiences both in the musical formats they use (CD-R and cassette) and in the packaging

Image 3. A Broken Consort's *Box of Birch* (Sustain-Release, SRL07)

these releases come in, which, while always generically low grade and grimy, is usually evocative and detailed all the same. This can be seen, for example, in the 'zine-like newspaper wrapping of a twenty-five-run 2014 release by John Olson, *Inzane State Journal Vol #2*. As seen on the University of Michigan Press site at http://www.press.umich.edu/p/graham, this image, as with others in the Inzane State series, features a cut-up, messy, and deliberately amateurish aesthetic that codes a kind of visual noise to parallel the music.

All of these underground and fringe labels hope to entice purchase while also enchanting the objects and making available cherished rituals and processes for the musicians or label heads themselves. The tangible materials activate certain possibilities and reference points within audiences' mangled, "slow" experiences. Those different "analogue time" experiences counter devaluation and dematerialized digital engagement (passive or not) with slow, tangible, tactile rituals marked by thrifty and scuzzy subcultural character. Underground and fringe labels the world over facilitate these kinds of experiences through low-grade CD-R and tape releases and through more crafted packaging. These low- and high-value counters to devaluation and dematerialization operate both as gestures serving political ends and also as subculturally specific, not necessarily

political gestures coding cultural capital and exclusivity and facilitating material practice and exchange.

These sorts of creative, bespoke approaches to the physical musical artifact are almost ten-a-penny in the hobbyist underground. However, even more characteristic of underground labels is the deployment of a mixed release schedule of physical and digital releases, where audiences are free to make their own choice about what to buy, as we've been seeing in the case of Sacred Tapes and others. The online independent music retailer Boomkat, for example, carries music from a range of the more prominent underground, fringe, and alternative labels, with genres from extreme metal to sound art to dance. These include Southern Lord, Raster Noton, Hyperdub, Room 40, Mego, and many more besides. Boomkat's multiformat model, with much of the music available on vinyl, CD, MP3, and lossless FLAC (depending on the label), is emblematic of how this somewhat more prominent music is getting released and consumed, as seen on other online sites for this kind of music, such as Experimedia.

This "mixed" approach is pervasive. For example, despite the fondness for physical media expressed earlier, Exotic Pylon's Mugwump firmly rejects the nostalgia associated with mediums like vinyl, underlining vinyl's prohibitive costs and pointing out, "I am not a bedroom boy, and on a personal level digital actually holds the most value to me as I can bring it with me." He also points out that "now is now and this is what you work with." Mugwump therefore releases music in a wide variety of formats, the better to suit the varying needs of his audience. However, while praising the flexibility of digital, Mugwump reserves a degree of warmth for the "physicality" of "sonic objects," particularly the cassette, which he describes as "an awesome item that is incredibly tactile, a little odd, and really cheap and accessible to manufacture."

So in the spectrum of underground labels we have labels focusing exclusively on physical releases such as Fort Evil Fruit and Trensmat on one side, with mixed-media labels such as Discrepant and Southern Lord somewhere around the middle, and then download-only labels on the other side. Examples of the latter are not especially common, but they do exist, as, for example, Year Zero Records, a not-for-profit label dedicated to "the distribution of 'Interesting' musicks."[39] However, this "download-only" approach is rare in an underground where fetish or favor for the object and everything it is seen to represent, perhaps for generational reasons—timefulness, nostalgia, anti-mainstream, and anti-industry values—is common. Amanda and Britt Brown's Not Not Fun, my final case study here, is just one further example of this prevailing object fetishization or favoring.

D. Not Not Fun

The California-based Not Not Fun (NNF) represents a range of key American underground and fringe pop and noise artists, many of them operating within or around the scene of what was called hypnagogic pop in 2009 and 2010, their work encompassing noise and fringe underground pop music and post-noise. The roster includes acts such as LA Vampires and Pocohaunted (the latter having split), both of which include or included Amanda as a member, Sun Araw, Magic Lantern, Xander Harris, Dylan Ettinger, Dolphins into the Future, and many more. NNF's music, including that of its 100% Silk imprint, is exclusively distributed worldwide by Revolver/Midheaven.

Not Not Fun started in 2004 as a joint venture between Amanda and Britt Brown, with small-run releases (in editions of "anywhere between 32 and 300"[40]) of cassettes, CD-Rs, and vinyl from local LA bands such as My Sexual Dad, Foot Village, and the Browns' own group Weirdo/Begeirdo.[41] These releases were each presented in artisanal, handcrafted packaging. Britt gave a short history of the label's development in an interview with Samantha Cornwell:

> It started in 2004. I had known Amanda about a year at that point, and she had talked about doing a label. We had started making music together, and I was in another band, and we had some other friends who were in bands. She decided that it would be fun if we made a two-song-per-band compilation cassette, and sell them for $3 to people we knew. We decided that as long as we were making a mixtape, we might as well act like we were a record label and call it something. The way we operate the label has changed tremendously since then. Now it's our full-time job that we both do 6 or 7 days a week, and we ship records all over the planet.[42]

As with other underground labels, NNF therefore began as a tiny personal venture to release music by friends but grew into a professional outfit. Indeed, as Britt indicates, the label has grown into a substantial enough endeavor that it is now represents a full-time occupation for both Amanda and him. As he told me, reflecting typical underground personal investment, precarity, and marginality, "Making the focus of your life working on supporting other people's art—when we live in such a self-obsessed society—feels important, and rare. . . . Six-day workweeks year-round at subminimum wage aren't sustainable unless there's a fairly substantial human motivation."

In that same interview with Cornwell, Amanda Brown gave more detail on

the development of the label from a small-run concern into a business, where factory pressings of vinyl releases have become the norm:

> When we first started out, we were absolutely insistent that everything have a sort of handmade feel to it. As we got a little more popular, and as the bands got a little more popular, we had to start manufacturing, which is fine. We're absolutely happy with it now, but we still insist that artists really think about the way they're coming across.[43]

And yet despite this expansion, NNF has maintained its early affinity for bespoke packaging, a rejection of what, as we have seen, the Browns perceive as the superficiality of digital culture. Although the vast majority of the label's current and recent physical releases are pressed and packaged in factories, the Browns still occasionally "silkscreen a tape or a 7","[44] as they told Simon Reynolds, while the physical appearance of even factory-produced items is still of paramount importance.

Even though NNF's expansion has necessitated a move into the digital market, with releases available as digital downloads from eMusic, Boomkat, and Revolver, the Browns were particularly reluctant to make this move. They both still maintain a preference for analogue, physical media, even while acknowledging the potential for wide dissemination that digital media holds. This holds a particular value for them, as Britt told me and as I quoted above, "object fetishism is a great unifying force. . . . . in humble self-organized circles the ecosystem is quite mild and well-meaning." Similarly, from the Reynolds interview:

> MP3s are anathema to NNF. "We don't listen to any digital music, we don't own iPods," says Amanda. "When things started to turn toward everything-digital that was such a struggle for us. We try not to be Luddites but we are a bit like, 'I can't believe you don't want to hold this thing in your hand! What's wrong with you?!'" But Britt says that they believe in the music too much to keep it limited edition. "I feel it's our duty to make it available. If we did an edition-of-50 tape and it sold out in two hours, that's frustrating to me because clearly the demand is there. And if I was a fan of the band, I'd be like, 'Do you actually want me to just listen to it as a shared MP3 on the internet?'"[45]

Amanda went on in the same interview to outline more of her attitude to digital music culture, echoing the discussion in the first part of this chapter:

> I would say we're part of the resistance to things that almost don't exist. . . . It feels like the music doesn't exist. To some people, I know, this doesn't lessen the quality of it. But it actually does to me. We all have certain ages of our life where we stop growing. And there are certain tenets I had aged 14 that I still have now I'm 29. I remember how hard it was to get stuff. There was this one PJ Harvey import CD and I'm still getting chills at the thought of how difficult it was to acquire.[46]

In Marxian terms, Amanda Brown here seems to value the commodity over the experience or at least to render (reify?) the commodity *as* the experience, while also expressing clear nostalgia for older models of time and culture. In this she echoes the thoughts of many. Cardoso, for example, told me that "sometimes the artwork/packaging is as important as the music itself." This kind of emphasis on the analogue act of consumption is hardly restricted to digital avant-conservatives. Kenneth Goldsmith, for instance, observes about digital culture and its myriad paradigm shifts that "what we've experienced is an inversion of consumption, one in which we've come to prefer the acts of acquisition over that which we are acquiring."[47]

In any case, while the Browns maintain their skepticism over certain aspects of digital culture and its contexts (Britt, for instance, suggested to me that "the past couple years seems like a returned appreciation of talent-over-ideas, pop/rap star constructs, hype-for-hype's-sake, and meme fads"), like other label heads they are keenly aware of what Simon Reynolds describes as the "productive tension" of being "digi-phobes dependent on the net,"[48] where, echoing Scanner/Rimbaud, the Internet is seen to open up new possibilities of communication and connection. Reynolds goes on:

> Not Not Fun resist some aspects of digi-culture but embrace others: the liberating lines of communication opened up by high bandwidth networks, which enable the aggregation of dispersed fans into a viable market, and, more importantly, connect them with artistic like-minds.[49]

With the net, therefore, scenes are no longer physically parochial but are rather "parochial in sensibility."[50] Reynolds spurs Britt into a consideration of what this global digital framework means for contemporary conceptions of the underground:

> So what defines "underground," then, if not opposition to the commercial overground? "It's more to do with an operational procedure," says Britt. "Booking

your own shows, playing somewhat non-traditional venues. You're 'underground' if you're putting out your own records, or if whoever is putting out your records is not that much above you." It's not about avoiding professionalism but about not having too many levels of intermediation between yourself and the listener: agents, managers, levels of business hierarchy.[51]

This point about the underground residing in notions of cultural intimacy and a lack of intermediation reflects my earlier observations about anintermediation. Britt maintained this kind of stance in our interview, where he praised "home-built" styles, even as he suggested that he thinks "DIY culture as such is fast falling out of vogue."

It is perhaps in the sense of intimacy created by their artifacts and their own openness to communication with audiences, the "personal quality" Britt spoke about in our interview, where the most positive interpretation of the Browns' fascination with physical media can get going. In constructing packaging and elevating direct contact with an object, in building a local physical scene around them in LA through patronage and friendship and audience cultivation, in securing physical proximity to practitioners via the commodity, and even in looking for scene-based shared personal interactions that are digitally mediated or not, the Browns and others like them rebuff digital culture's emphasis on anonymity and physical isolation, while, perhaps, countering devaluation and passivity, if these qualities are useful labels for what is going on in music. In doing so, they offer an illustration of the potential richness and value of analogue models of cultural experience. And it should be stressed that these "analogue models" do not necessarily have to be seen to be in opposition to those of digital culture; they might instead serve as supplements to them, providing an alternative in the sense that the underground itself provides an alternative.

Conclusion

The various underground objects discussed above counter digital economy liquidation with the allure of the physical, earning money as they do. And they serve and draw upon nostalgic functions, connecting musicians, label heads, and audience members (who are often one and the same person in this participatory culture) to formats marked by childhood associations and rituals and a sense of resistance to a digital malaise that seems pervasive, even if, as Magaudda points out, the "digital" nature of the current cultural formation doesn't exclude the physical and even if "malaise" may be too negative a framing for what many

see in positive terms. Delicately crafted small-run editions of handmade em-broidered cases; concrete boxes; silkscreen printed insets and covers; specially made comic books; actual birch and twigs; grimy newspaper wrapping: all these things code musical and cultural difference in material form. This music and its listeners become distinct not only through loud, blasted, tousled sounds but also through physical packaging, where music's natural liquidity is imbued with extra-musical weight and brunt, musicians and labels literally in some cases braiding aesthetic allure and social and economic value into musical experience through physical formats and eye-catching packaging.

Taste distinctions of these kinds are obviously found in all music cultures and subcultures; the expanse of the concert hall, the bunch of flowers for the female soloist, the silent attentive listening in classical music all encode class identity through clearly marked social performance. The same process of iden-tification through social ritual as grounded in physical experiences and "slow" processes of exchange is happening here. And it's one that is particularly potent in a context of evolving cultural norms of musical consumption and, therefore, value, where free-floating music is engaged by audiences in newer and newer ways, superficial and passive engagement possibly among them.

The admixture of the Web and the physical artifact seen above remakes an-alogue models of distribution and consumption in a new image. The digital age has in this way immanently transformed the underground and its fringes. Though it was always "anintermediated," the digital age has shifted the char-acter of that anintermediation from physical 'zines and mail-order music to easily maintained digital Web platforms. Artists now form relationships as a direct result of the Web, which would not only have been much more difficult to maintain in a predigital age but would never have been possible, simply be-cause the Web *creates* the links through which these artists make contact. Much music is now also made as a direct result of the availability of so many tools of music making. Intermediations of the digital and the physical, and resulting tussles over value and political economy, define the current underground. These same kinds of tensions between money and politics affect venues and festivals programming underground/fringe music as much as they do labels selling and writers writing about it, as we'll see in the coming chapter.

8

Festivals and Venues

Music venues that host underground concerts and festivals, whether these venues are specialist, temporary, or more mainstream, provide a front line of mutual engagement for underground musicians, audiences, promoters, and so on. Where they exist in any kind of permanent sense, this function is pronounced; speaking from personal experience, I've met countless numbers of people and seen countless numbers of artists at Café Oto in London, a venue that also sells music at its café from its own label (and housed Sound 323 for about a year in 2009–10). Upstairs at Whelan's and, formerly, the Joinery perform/ed similar functions in Dublin, as do Kajia Lab and XP in Beijing, ausland in Berlin, and so on. Annual festivals likewise serve as bonding agents for the underground, in this case in a more global sense where large festivals such as Roadburn, Sonic Protest, and No Fun see audiences from all around the world converging to hear music, buy merchandise, and build various kinds of connections with peers.

Without such festivals and venues the global underground scene would be mainly digital, manifesting physically only in the musical artifacts, the bodies of its members, and transient concerts held at venues dedicated to other kinds of music. These latter venues are of huge importance to the underground in its current state, but more permanent venues that regularly house underground or underground-adjacent gigs, although relatively rare, really allow the development of a physically bounded and tangible local scene. Similarly, recurring festivals provide physical nodes that anchor the international networks of the scene just as websites and forums serve as digital anchors.

The underground's natural fragility, in combination with the global recession and European governments moving increasingly to the American model of

limited arts funding, means that such festivals and venues are in an extremely precarious position. This chapter looks at how such festivals and to a lesser extent venues—building on my discussions of ausland and the Stone in chapter 5—survive in this precarious context. My first case study is the longest and most wide-ranging of those included in this chapter. It's not so much of a specific festival as it is an organization that runs festivals in Scotland and America, Arika, one of whose directors, Barry Esson, I interview here.

8.1. Arika

Arika is a Scottish-based organization that runs events giving a platform to practices that, in their own words, "could variously be described as DIY, experimental, underground or autonomous"[1] (difficulties of classification arise here as ever). Arika's two primary festivals until 2011 were INSTAL and Kill Your Timid Notion. It also ran Music Lover's Field Companion from 2004 to 2007 and many one-off tours, such as the 2006 Resonant Spaces program of John Butcher and Akio Suzuki concerts. Arika's two festivals were subsumed into a wider thematic-based program in 2011, which has so far seen them stage six "Episodes," crosses between "salons, festivals and live magazines,"[2] between January 2012 and January 2015, featuring music, philosophy, film, and art, all orbiting certain themes. The theme for the second episode, for example, was the question of how "ideas of nihilism, darkness, subjectivity and abjection play out in experimental music, performance art, supernatural horror; in neuroscience or philosophy."[3] Arika's events are usually staged in Glasgow, most commonly at venues such as Tramway and the Arches, although they also organize concerts and other events elsewhere; "A Survey Is a Process of Listening," for example, took place at the Whitney Museum in New York in May 2012.

Arika is a particularly interesting case study in this context since its programming of underground (etc.) music is accompanied by a correspondingly radical or "underground" set of political convictions. Its festivals, though, are heavily supported by the state. We've already seen how this kind of situation might be seen in codetermining terms but also how it might open Arika up to accusations of contradiction. David Keenan, ever the provocateur, underlined in this respect what he sees as the contradictions in radical actors taking state funding in his provocation-question, "Is there anything more contradictory and hypocritical than a 'radical' music festival that's essentially government sponsored?"[4] I'll come back to this, but for now I'd point out that such possible contradictions are directly acknowledged by Arika in its own publicity:

We talk about, support and undertake this kind of work, whilst paying for this through public funding. We've decided to do this so that we can be involved in things that maybe make a bigger impact, without having to rely on any commercial income. We are not-for-profit.[5]

The sense of "impact" mentioned in the quote above coheres for Arika around the idea that pieces of music that explicitly address the political dimensions of aesthetics are fundamentally not just a "sounding" form somehow reducible to notes-on-a-page or sounds-in-the-ear. From the "Programme Note" to INSTAL 2010:

In organising INSTAL, we have asked ourselves: isn't music about more than just music? In fact, music is never just about music: it is always the product of its wider situation. Some musics reinforce the status quo. Other musics try to affect the collective conditions of existence. We're interested in the latter: not once radical, now stagnant scenes, but musics that continue to develop useful ways of acting and thinking outside dominant ideologies; musics as part of that wider situation, with something to say about and offer back to it. Through performance and discussion, INSTAL 10 will attempt to address itself to these and consecutive matters.[6]

So for Arika the performance of experimental and radical music can open up a potent allegorical and affective space outside the status quo, where social, cultural, philosophical, and ideological questions can be invoked and tackled, thereby calling into question "dominant ideologies."

At INSTAL 2010[7] attendees were indeed exposed to such situations consistently throughout the three-day program, sometimes with revelatory results. Mattin gave an unbilled Friday-evening performance to a crowd of approximately 250 people. The performance consisted of Mattin standing in the middle of the space, planted squarely about fifteen yards from each side of the U-shaped, seated audience. That was it, apart from the additional but crucial factor of a microphone channelling the sounds of the space back through the PA in 2/3-minute loops with minimal mixing or processing. The realization slowly dawned on the crowd that the situation as such *was* the performance. We grew into the assumption of our liberated roles, slowly moving about the space, emitting strange sounds, communing with strangers and with Mattin, setting up a feedback loop with the PA. By the close of the performance no one was left in the seats; instead, composite repeating patterns of various

groups of people moving about in circles and dancing mirrored the aquatic looping sounds.

These are hardly new ideas, but they were executed with such directness that they led to a situation of real surprise and intense social richness. Another "performance" later in the weekend saw attendees moving about the performance space quite freely, circulating pieces of paper with instructions from artist and writer Brandon La Belle that guided or "suggested" how the crowd might conduct itself. Many other performances throughout the festival likewise invoked and involved the crowd. A workshop entitled "The Great Learning," following Cardew and Confucius, ran throughout the festival. The workshop allowed philosophers, musicians, and members of the audience to discuss the events and themes of the festival and to plan a realization and perhaps resolution of some of these themes. The final night of the festival was given over to the results of this workshop, which saw bands of unskilled performers, intimate and strange theatrical presentations, discussion groups, and so on, take place.[8]

Again, these are hardly novel actions, and once again, it would take a miracle for them to affect current conditions. But they might do so in their own way. If one holds in any way to some idea of art and music as being transformative phenomena capable of affecting the social body in some interesting or enlivening fashion—even if that transformation might bring up further contradictions or irresolutions in turn—then Arika's approach as exemplified here in INSTAL 2010 can at least be credited for the boldness of its ambition and the whole-heartedness of its execution. Arika's wider relation to institutions reflects its conscious toying with the social relations of "musical" performance. My interview with Barry Esson orbited around such notions of social change, radical practice, and public subsidy.

I was interested in getting a sense of the importance of Arika's receipt of public funding and of the kinds of money it receives and needs to survive. I asked Esson to define how crucial a role subsidy plays in enabling Arika to exist and put on its festivals in relation to commercial revenue and so on and also to discuss what he has found the attitude of those funding bodies to be toward the kind of work that Arika does:

> Arika has been putting on events since 2001. We started out working as free-lance "curators" I guess, which meant that all of the money went through part-ner venues, who also did a lot of the admin. The first INSTAL cost about £5k [roughly $8,000], half of which was box office income and the other half was

put in by the venue. Out of that £5k though, nobody organising the event got
paid, and the Arches had to do a lot of admin for no cost.

The first edition of the festival therefore proved to be anything but lucrative,
with none of the organizers being paid and the venue itself even having to cover
some of the administration gratis. Such is the natural precarity and fragility of
the underground.

Arika's approach radically evolved through the subsequent festivals, both as
a result of it becoming recognized at an institutional and a public level and as a
result of the increasing importance to Arika of a distinctive set of political and
artistic convictions. These convictions have moved them both to commission a
lot of new work and, in doing so, to pay as much for that work as possible:

> Over the years we built up our events and the level at which we deliver them.
> This has required more money. We've also moved to be more independent, and
> not rely on venues to do all the admin work, as with that comes a level of control
> that they seek to exert on what we are interested in doing. This has meant that
> Arika has had to find the money to pay staff, accountant, etc. and so on . . . so
> that we can manage what we do. Similarly, we want to pay artists as much as we
> can and to do more than just book what is going on, but commission people to
> make new work, which takes time and effort which it is good to pay for.

Like Not Not Fun and others Arika therefore moved from a comparatively
amateur approach toward a more professional, proactive, and disciplined style.
Along with this shift in policy and growth in size from the first INSTAL in
2001 to the more recent Arika events came a concomitant increase in costs,
which, in the absence of substantial commercial revenues or even the desire to
exploit this music commercially, necessitated reaching out to the public sector
for funding support:

> The last INSTAL [2010] cost almost £60k. The box office income was about
> the same as for the first ever INSTAL—£3k. The first INSTAL I think was
> £15/day, the last one much cheaper than that. We're not interested in making
> money, and we're not interested in exploiting experimental music, so we have
> tried all kinds of ticket prices (from free upwards) at our events to see how best
> to get people along.

Arika's very clear imperative is that the building of artistic communities
and the fostering of experimental forms of artistic expression take fundamental

precedence over commercial interests, to the point where profit seems to be of little or no concern to the organizers. This attitude is typical of underground promoters and venues, as we saw with Vicky Langan and Black Sun and as we'll see with No Fun, Colour Out of Space (COOS), and Café Oto. We should remember, however, that the absence of a profit motive in underground music is not always directly allied with a political agenda, as it is with Arika. Sometimes, as with Langan and COOS, profit is unimportant simply because it's necessarily unattainable in the context of such an esoteric and marginal cultural form. Underground music certainly boasts plenty of idealists for whom profit is a contaminate, but many also see profit simply as an unattainable luxury.

Esson expanded on the costs of recent INSTALs in the context of other festivals featuring comparably experimental forms of music:

> In terms of that £60k, it's in keeping with what for example Le Weekend [another Scottish festival, which was curated by David Keenan] used to cost (£40-£55k, I think I was told when it was on). It's more than what for example Colour Out of Space costs, (which I'd guess costs about £20k, given that they get £13k from ACE [see below]). We probably pay musicians more than COOS does (that's not a criticism of them). Festivals like Transmediale in Berlin or even UNSOUND in Krakow have much bigger budgets and state funding. Subcurrents when it happened at the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) last year probably did not have public funding and worked off door money (is my guess), but the first few years it was done (before the previous director at the CCA left) it had a significant publicly funded budget larger certainly than COOS and closer to £30k/£40k.

The quote raises an important point about state funding; in contrast to the small British underground festivals (COOS, INSTAL, Subcurrents, Le Weekend) in receipt of a small, or at least comparatively small, amount of state funding, European festivals such as Transmediale and UNSOUND, as well as others, such as Sonic Protest, are able to put together much more extensive programs in larger venues and with larger teams. Transmediale in Berlin, for example, is run by a central team of thirty people, alongside adjunct Web staff and others.[9] This is a direct result of the fact that its state funding, from the Federal Cultural Foundation in the case of Transmediale, is so ample. In further contrast to this, as we'll see below, is the American No Fun festival, which has arguably been the most prominent of all underground music festivals and which yet receives precisely no state funding or external subsidy of any kind.

Esson described the precise details of Arika's funding in our interview,

breaking down what happens to the money it receives in each cycle, which as I've said in 2014–15 was £198,000:

> We are Flexible Funded by the Scottish Arts Council (now Creative Scotland). That is the middle tier of funding in Scotland (for now). It is the level that all funded production companies are on. We get just about the average of all those 60 production companies. This funding pays for us to have 2 fulltime staff and a part time administrator, plus putting money towards an office, an accountant, and all the other stuff that we choose to do ourselves rather than rely on venues. Without Arts Council money our events would not be doable in the way that they are now. We don't generate any "commercial" revenue.

Esson went on to summarize Arika's funding situation in proportional terms:

> So: about 75% of our funding comes from the Arts Council, 20% from other trusts and funds like the city council, PRS Foundation for New Music, international funders if you're bringing say a German or a Japanese musician over and probably less than 5% from box office income, which we choose not to exploit.

In addition to these details about funders, Esson also told me about the crucial support Arika has received from venues such as Tramway and the CCA, which have offered them cheap noncommercial rates. When I asked why this might be, Esson suggested that, while not being "directly supportive" of experimental underground music, these venues at least "can see a value in it" and want it to happen "in their venue rather than somewhere else." This suggests that these venues possibly use the perceived prestige of specialist forms such as those of the underground as an alibi for respectability and cultural engagement.

Arika has therefore not only relied upon state support through Arts Council grants and to a lesser extent on support from local authorities and private foundations; it has also benefited from cheap or gratis rates at the venues at which it has held concerts and festivals. In this sense, not only does it codetermine public funds, but it also derives crucial support from the private sphere. Underground culture, here, creatively accepts the context of real subsumption and precarity, seeking to mitigate its own limited resources with those of more sizable economic formations.

So in the case of Arika it's reasonable to conclude that its own ambitious and extensive programs of underground music and film would simply not happen without state and private subsidy. The audience for underground music is simply too small and the revenues it generates too tiny for it to be able to subsist

in the context of larger festival programs or for its musicians to be able to travel internationally for shows without some form of subsidy. Arika struggles to get by, and it is intensely reliant on the opportunities afforded through public subsidy. Other festivals, such as All Tomorrow's Parties and Roadburn, mitigate this marginality by including fringe pop/underground figures and other more commercial figures on their bills, but festivals such as COOS and INSTAL do not give themselves that option.

Does this reliance on subsidy in a supposedly radical artistic field generate contradiction of the sort discussed by Keenan?

> What I would say is that we have taken the decision not to exploit music commercially, where others have. We have tried to find ways that we can raise money so as to further our art forms, and to pay people for their efforts. We pay everybody who works on our events the same sum (the UK national average annual salary, as a day rate, for the number of days they attend the festival, plus one day preparation). As a rule of thumb, we pay out total artists fees annually in excess of what we spend on Arika salaries (and we work all year).

Arika is therefore conscious of the political dimensions of salaries and of music as a commodity form. It acts accordingly, seeking not to exploit music commercially and endeavoring to pay artists and workers on the festivals a rate commensurate with national wages. Regarding the idea that radical artistic practices are co-opted or subsumed by capitalism through the acceptance of state subsidies, Esson suggested that "of course there is no position outside capitalism, that's its point." But, he went on:

> Just as we would maybe argue for a maximum demand that goes beyond the current horizon of (at best) social democracy, we are not stupid enough not to have minimum demands also. Many people would argue for forms of social relations that are not mediated by a capitalist state, but that does not mean that we do not fight to save the small gains already made in state provision (the NHS, State Schools, the EMA), which hope to exclude areas of our lives from commercial exploitation. The independent economy that David's piece argues for is a commercially (self) exploitative one, which we're not interested in. We would rather work with the contradictions of dealing with "arm's length" state funding (which is supposed to be non-political, although of course it rarely is that) than with having to commercially exploit an art form. In doing so we can actually put more money in musicians' hands, give them time to create new work, support their work at a level we could not otherwise.

Esson draws a careful distinction between a politics of ideals ("maximum demands") and a politics of actually existing reality ("minimum demands"). Under the terms of the latter, Arika is prepared to engage with, to codetermine, "arm's length" state funding, which allows it to channel capital into underground music and to create new work out of resources that may otherwise have been used for less worthwhile ends as Arika sees them, while at the same time acknowledging "the soft ideology of funding bodies that seek to determine the ends to which their funding is used: we try to access the funding explicitly for use in relation to our and our allies' ends." On this point, Esson states that with INSTAL, the "Episodes," and so on Arika is "basically interested in raising the level of critical discourse in our art form so that we can frankly work up some tools and perspectives that allow us to ask whether what we're doing is of any use, what role it can have in society."

Arika's codetermining strategy echoes those of many others in the underground, from artists receiving social welfare or grants to venues exploiting cheap rents in rundown areas. It also relates to a wider political strategy utilized by many activist entities. The magazine and organization Mute, for instance, defended its own public funding, which came to an end as of 31 March 2012, by explicitly using the term "codetermine":[10]

> Our state funding makes Mute one of many European cultural organisations which discuss, profile or support autonomous practices while receiving their own financial support from the state. There are those who feel this generates unacceptable contradictions. Others regard the situation as merely a delicious irony. Mute conceives of its present grant dependence as an opportunity to co-determine the purpose of such monies as well as use the investment to develop a model of self-sustainability. If the state has earmarked funds to keep alive its conceptions of citizenship and the public sphere, then there is scope for organisations to redirect these towards emergent alternatives. Rather than functioning as instruments to an authoritarian agenda of "social inclusion," at this juncture it seems imperative for us intermediaries to invite structural redefinition through public participation.

Mute, like Arika, rejects the notion put forward by Keenan (who would prefer the development of alternative, independent economies not reliant on state subsidy) that the pursuit of autonomous practices is fatally contaminated by institutional backing. Keenan's point has some merit to it, of course, since autonomy and "self-sustainability" imply complete independence, and the effort to redirect

or codetermine funds in the service of "structural redefinition" implies some sense of coextensiveness with the state. However, once we accept the Faustian potential and risks of the pact, and also, perhaps, acknowledge the inevitability of subsumption to some degree, such codeterminations seem as valid—and as contradictory—a form of critical practice as complete circumnavigation or separatism do. Why not, *Mute* and Arika and others ask, try to use some of capitalism's resources against itself in the manner of the accelerationists?

8.2. Colour Out of Space

*Colour Out of Space (COOS) is a Brighton-based three-day "festival of experimental music and film."[11] It has taken place annually since 2006 (although it didn't run in 2010, 2012, or 2014) and has played host in that time to a wide variety of underground musicians and sound artists, including Henri Chopin, part wild horses mane on both sides, Joseph Hammer, Bridget Hayden, Rat Bastard, Skin Graft, Aaron Dilloway, Morphogenesis, and more. COOS is run by Open Music, which is a not-for-profit Brighton arts group based in Brighton. It's coordinated by Dylan Nyoukis and Karen Constance, noise artists and members of the groups Blood Stereo and Prick Decay, and also by Michael Sippings. COOS takes place across a variety of venues, the most prominent of which is the Sallis Benney Theatre.

COOS is a relatively small festival, with attendance each night averaging approximately 250 to 350 people. Venue costs and artist fees are obviously substantial, and with such small amounts of revenue being generated from tickets (the price of a full festival pass in 2011 was only £30, with day tickets at £12, for example), the organizers have been compelled to utilize alternative forms of funding.

As already indicated, COOS receives state funding in the form of a grant from Arts Council England, derived from the National Lottery fund administered by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport. In 2011, this grant was £13,690, representing a sizable proportion of the event's running costs. The extent of the festival's reliance on this public-sector support was demonstrated in 2012 when, due to unexpected funding cuts from the Arts Council, that year's edition had to be canceled.[12] The organizers, I have been told, only received news of their successful bid for funding for the 2013 festival in late July of that year (the festival was due to take place in November), with the running of the event having been dependent on the Arts Council's decision. COOS's receipt

of £17,900 enabled the festival to go ahead. Michael Sippings told me about the precarious financial situation of COOS, mentioning how even if artists were to pay their own way the festival would still rely on state funding:

> It wouldn't be possible to run the festival in its present form without funding. Even if the artists were willing to pay their own travel and accommodation I still think we'd be unable to break anywhere near even without a huge hike in ticket prices. Venues alone last year (2011) were over £6000.

In contrast to Arika, Mute, and others, the organizers of COOS do not see any contradiction in accepting state funding in order to subsidize a festival of radical art and music. COOS doesn't connect its acceptance of these sizable public funds, according to Sippings at least, though also evidenced by the lack of the kinds of explicitly political events programmed by Arika, with a strong notion of progressive codetermination or structural redefinition. For Sippings, the cultural-aesthetic aspects of festivals such as COOS are separable from questions of politics and political economy. These cultural aspects can in actual fact be seen to ground the scene without grounding it in politics, for Sippings and many others. COOS's receipt of funding, according to Sippings, is justified by the external metric of government-sanctioned Arts Council criteria, nothing more and nothing less:

> Everyone involved in COOS has been putting on small scale experimental music/film events for years, and the festival is very much an extension of that scene. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with things outside that scene. I don't see any contradiction in what we do regarding state funding—we fulfil Arts Council criteria through the promotion of experimental approaches to music and film.

While expressing gratitude for the state support his festival receives, Sippings at the same time underlines the precarity of that very support in outlining how COOS "applies yearly, and it's by no means certain that we'll ever be funded again," an observation that was borne out in 2012, for example.

Going on in the same vein of the links or separation between radical aesthetics and radical politics, Sippings emphasizes the distance, as he perceives it, between the kind of radical *artistic* practices that he, Constance, and Nyoukis are assiduous in supporting and cultivating with COOS and any questions of political economy that those practices might point toward. This is, according to Sippings, a scene that has little necessarily to do with activist politics, even if

for Esson, Prévost, Mattin, and others the links between the aesthetics and the politics seem second nature:

> We don't consider ourselves politically radical or anti-corporate. That kind of sentiment has never been expressed on any of our programmes or in any of our agendas; we're simply a festival playing music and films.

While this sort of disavowal of the political dimension of public funding might be anathema to Arika, Sippings's position is obviously a perfectly valid one. For him, music is expressly *not* about "more than just music," as it is for Esson and Arika. Instead, it is possible to exist in the world as a festival playing music and films, according to Sippings, without consciously engaging the wider conditions of political economy that make that existence possible.

Sippings's seemingly apolitical position, at least in this context, is of course far from rare in the underground. But it's especially interesting in that its disavowal of the ideological basis of Arts Council funding goes against the seeming homology that often exists between radical and questioning aesthetics and radical politics. This is a point that indeed reminds us of the ascriptive quality of so many music-political discussions. The politics are not writ in bold letters in the music and/or its context, or at least not if you look at the music/context in a certain way. They enter into and mediate the music and it them in certain respects, to use the language from chapter 4, but in order for that mediating relationship to become clear, decisions need to be made to *articulate* the situation in those terms. Mute and Arika happily do so, while Sippings and COOS order the situation differently, seeing politics as being "out there," separable from culture.

In more basic terms, the example of COOS demonstrates once again both the underground's direct and important reliance on capital and the public sector and that sector's occasional willingness to fund it, while also providing an interesting, broadly apolitical contrast to the radical ideological investments of Arika and others. The next case study, of Café Oto, once again demonstrates how vital such support is, while also showing how a more sustained and more commercially independent model can succeed within the underground.

8.3. Café Oto

Café Oto is an independently run, not-for-profit experimental and underground music—or, in its own words, "creative new music that exists outside the

mainstream"[13]—East London space. Oto is a prominent and internationally important underground and fringe-dominated venue (improv and noise feature heavily on the program, though alt-contemporary classical such as Kammer Klang, experimental folk, and many other marginal forms also appear). By way of establishing that prominence, here's a passage from the citation for Hamish Dunbar from one of the venue's supporters, the PRS for Music Foundation:

> Café Oto opened in April 2008, with little money, in what was an old, disused warehouse in Hackney. Since then it has built up an international reputation for presenting experimental music and sound art seven nights a week, and has had a great impact on the UK music scene. It is the only venue in the UK programming this sort of music and runs a year round schedule of live performances, talks and salons, with an average of 290 events a year and over 23,000 people attending.[14]

While this citation is a little inaccurate—many other venues offer "this kind of music," albeit maybe not on so sustained a basis—its positive tone and some of the details it includes about the venue demonstrate just how well Oto has done not only to stay open this long but also to maintain the quality and range of its activities. In fact, Oto continues to expand, with its label Otoroku and the Artist and Promoter Fund it set up in 2013 being just two more recent examples of its success. The new National Portfolio Organisation Arts Council status of OTOProjects, which as I point out in chapter 5 will receive a total of £224,799 over the three years of the 2015–18 ACE cycle, is probably the most significant marker of Oto's prominence and indeed now institutional foundations: another example of underground and fringe practices entering into formerly high-cultural subsidized contexts.

With a total capacity of two hundred people in the main space, a cover charge that is rarely above £10, and minimal bar and door staff ("Café Oto is run by a *very* small team of people"[15]), it might seem surprising that Oto has done as well as it has. However, a variety of factors play into that success. Oto's clear identity as a kind of holdall host for underground/experimental music of all kinds, with something of a focus on improv, noise, and Japanese music (as indicated by the name and by the Japanese co-owner Keiko Yamamoto, improviser in her own right with Rie Nakajima), means that it has become a reliable scene nucleus for Londoners and visitors. Its multifunctionality as a music, art, and discussion venue, as a shop, and as a café replete with craft beers and ales also secures a sense of quasi-hipsterish subcultural capital for the venue, allowing audiences to participate in a very specific coded scenario of esoteric aesthet-

ics and (in a sense) nonmainstream interests. Oto's strategy of programming themed minifestivals and residencies has also proved very effective, since this means it maximizes the benefits of the cost of bringing foreign musicians such as Sachiko M or Joe McPhee to London by having them perform in a number of concerts. (The trade-off is mutual, with visiting musicians getting not only to perform at a leading venue in London but also, usually, to either bring collaborators with them or engage in a series of collaborations with prominent local musicians.) All of these decisions have meant that Oto has been able to exploit with skill the clear gap that existed in the hip and multisubcultural London scene for precisely this kind of space, just as the Stone has done similar in New York, even if the craftiness of Oto is less important there.

Dunbar, Yamamoto, and the team are clearly working hard to maintain Oto's success, with OTOProjects being the most notable symbol of their expansive ambition. This success could possibly be used a model for other underground venues. However, a number of factors would need to be met. Not least among these would be the existence of the extensive amenities and resources that come with large cities capable of supporting such ventures, as well as either the kind of generous state apparatus seen with ausland in Berlin or the kind of scenic celebrity and vibrant community enjoyed by the Stone. The fragility of Oto's success should also not be ignored, large grant from the Arts Council or not. Oto is operating within a scene whose wider appeal is extremely limited. Its funding opportunities are likewise constrained, even if that's changing (although a shrinking public sector may put paid to this source of support either way). Such limitations directly circumscribe whatever success underground-focused ventures such as Café Oto can ever enjoy, as we'll see again with No Fun below.

John Chantler, former concerts manager of Oto, emphasized to me that despite the current outward appearance of success, the venue is always struggling against thin margins and naturally small audiences. Speaking to me in 2013 about Oto's then-current health, Chantler would say only that "things seem to be ok." In the same spirit, Chantler also underlined the fragility of Oto's situation, pointing out both the drastic fluctuations in attendance that the venue suffers and the fact that even on sold-out shows Oto doesn't make all that much money:

> I looked at attendance figures this morning and on average we're doing roughly similar to how we were doing last year [2012]—though at the level of individual concerts things continue to fluctuate wildly between sold out shows (200 people) down to audiences as small as seven! . . . And we don't make very much money on the sold out gigs.

The fluctuations in attendance figures signal very well the range of the underground's reach, at least if we incorporate fringe artists; a sold-out show with people being turned away at the door from noise jazz group the Ex, in contrast to thirty to forty people at a Junko show (both of which I witnessed happening in 2013), show the range of that reach well. Even if the situation has improved recently in terms of subsidized backing, Oto's capacity and the commercial appeal of the music it programs have not, meaning that the venue will always likely struggle to make ends meet.

The fluctuations in attendance might suggest that Oto's situation is rather unpredictable, but Chantler says in the main that is not actually the case: "It's mostly predictable . . . but there is the odd curveball." Despite this predictability, though, Oto still struggles to balance its books, mainly due to the aforementioned thin margins, even if it does, as Chantler says, manage to balance the loss-making gigs with the more profitable ones:

> As I said we don't make very much money on the sold out gigs, and so it's sometimes hard to balance [these] off with the ones that loose a chunk. We do seem to get it right more often than not though.

So, Oto plays acts with more reach off against even more marginal interests. In this, according to Chantler, it does quite well. Even still, Chantler underlined that Oto's continuing survival cannot be taken for granted and suggested that its success ultimately depends on audiences, who will "hopefully continue to come out and support the music that we put on here and we can keep on doing this for some time to come." This echoes Oto's statement that audiences coming to concerts are "why we do this and what keeps us going."[16]

Oto's reliance on its audience is of course to be expected, but the marginality of the music it programs means that it's had to reach out to various funding bodies and advertisers in its efforts to survive (as well as including the expected "support" page on its site, where anyone can contribute to the venue for various rewards). In this respect, and as mentioned in part, Oto receives support from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Arts Council England, and the PRS for Music Foundation, with project support also coming in the past from the British Council, Sound and Music, and the Goethe Institut.[17] In addition to this continuous and bespoke support, Hamish Dunbar was the inaugural winner of the £25,000 Genesis Prize, an award from the Genesis Foundation that recognizes "outstanding mentors of young artistic talent covering all art forms."[18] The prize citation described Café Oto as "an innovative space that has created a new audi-

ence for avant-garde music,"[19] something that is likewise also reflected in the large grant OTOProjects is receiving from Arts Council England.

Café Oto therefore enjoys a wide range of financial support from public and private sources, while also gaining a great deal of recognition as a noteworthy music venue. Without divulging precise details, though, Chantler told me that he and the other owners were often (at least when he worked there) "short on time" and that, despite the diversity of their sources of support, "clearly whatever funding/income there is" was simply "not enough," something that as I've said likely won't change with the recent award. So as with Arika earlier, although the team behind Oto has done enough to secure both state and private subsidy, because of the marginal character of the projects and the music with which they are engaged, the support they receive is proportionately minor. Similarly, due also to the necessarily small revenues it derives from ticket and bar sales, Oto consistently struggles to maintain solvency. This notwithstanding, the venue's successes, such as they are, do show that through canny, sensitive, and dedicated management, underground- and fringe-dominated venues have some chance of staying afloat, at least in large cities in countries with healthy amenities (wealth, airports, public transport), a backbone of public and private arts funding, keen audiences, and social permissiveness, as can also be seen variously in the previously discussed examples of the Stone, ausland, and Instants Chavirés. My next case study supports this hypothesis, though in its lack of public funding underlines that it's possible to thrive without such supports even if the social and cultural conditions just raised are imperative to its survival.

8.4. No Fun Fest

No Fun Fest is a New York festival of noise music run by Venezuelan musician Carlos Giffoni. No Fun has taken place six times annually from its first edition in 2004,[20] though it's currently on extended hiatus. The festival runs across three days and until 2009 generally took place across two stages. In 2007 the schedule was extended to four days to accommodate the fact that the secondary performance space was temporarily closed. The inaugural edition took place in Northsix, a small venue in Williamsburg, while the following three events all happened at the Hook, which, as with almost every other No Fun venue,[21] is located in Brooklyn. The 2008 No Fun was housed in the Knitting Factory, while the largest event so far, the 2009 festival, took place at the Music Hall of Williamsburg.

No Fun quickly became one of the leading international noise and underground music events. No Fun has seen headlining sets from prominent underground musicians including Merzbow, Wolf Eyes, Smegma, Cluster, Borbetomagus, and the Haters, with the 2009 event even featuring headlining appearances from well-known noise rock acts Bardo Pond and Sonic Youth. Attendance has been sold out every year, with the six-hundred-capacity Music Hall of Williamsburg being easily filled each night of the 2009 festival. Articles about and reviews of the festival have appeared in a range of publications, from the *New York Times* to *Spin Magazine* to *Village Voice* to *New York Press* to *Pitchfork* to *ArtForum*. And the festival's unusual success has also extended into other areas, with Giffoni having set up No Fun Productions in 2005, a label that puts out Giffoni's own music alongside releases from acts such as John Wiese, Burning Star Core, Pita, and Prurient, in addition to a number of live and DVD recordings of sets from the festival.[22] No Fun's achievements even extended to a foreign edition of the festival: No Fun Fest Sweden took place in Stockholm in 2009, curated by Giffoni alongside Joachim Nordwall of Ideal Records. Finally, No Fun also organizes many one-off events and tours, such as Oneohtrix Point Never's European tour of 2010 and the one-day No Fun Fest, which took place in Montreal in June 2010.

Since 2010, partly as a result of its success, No Fun Fest has been on temporary hiatus. No Fun is in fact a one-man, non-state-affiliated or externally funded event, and this mode of organization simply wouldn't lend itself to further expansion. Giffoni is responsible for booking all the acts, paying their travel expenses, booking venues, monitoring the running of the festival itself, and organizing promotion. Giffoni indeed describes himself on the festival's website as "Director/Organizer/Curator/Godfather/Travel Agent/Catering/backline/webmaster/driver/host/Musician /Synth Magician/etc."[23] No Fun is therefore both economically and curatorially independent.

In these respects of unilateral organization and nonreceipt of private or public funding or subsidy, No Fun has the character of an *echt* DIY event, comparable to smaller events such as Black Sun and also to small, self-run, and only minimally (if at all) financially supported venues such as Brussels's Recyclart or Dublin's Boom Boom Room. It also shares with successful venues such as Café Oto the double bind of marginal cultures, where sold-out shows do not necessarily equate to lucrative financial rewards or even to breaking even.

Giffoni has sought with No Fun to place noise music into a professional, non-DIY, well-run performing context, akin to the efforts of Arika and others:

It has always very much been a super-important part of the festival to use proper venues, with proper staff, with a proper sound person and sound system, bar/

security, everything legal and properly done. That is a big reason why the fest is still going after five years. I am a musician myself so I know what a big difference it makes to have these things and the importance of other small details.[24]

While acknowledging the benefits of DIY underground presentations, Giffoni points out their many pitfalls:

When you do things DIY, there is a lot of room for problems, last-minute circumstances, legal situations, etc. And people are more willing to come to a venue they have heard of before than to a field in the middle of nowhere. Of course, there is a lot of merit to DIY venues and I love playing in them, but then that would be a very different fest, not No Fun.[25]

The emphasis on professionalism seen in these quotes has accompanied Giffoni's attempts to derive No Fun's considerable running costs, which he places at anywhere between $10,000 and $25,000 each year, from ticket sales alone.[26] In Giffoni's words, the festival "receive[s] no arts funding; all the money to fly people and pay acts and all expenses come from ticket sales."[27]

While No Fun "has sold out every year," with "audiences between 400 and 600 every night of the fest,"[28] the festival still represents a grave financial risk to Giffoni:

If you want to know the amount of risk, basically we are talking about potentially losing between $10,000 and $25,000 if things were to go wrong. It's pretty much the same every year. For me, that's a huge risk; I don't have a trust fund or a rich family or anything like that. I am on my own, and already have plenty of debts to take care of.[29]

Giffoni expanded in a different interview on the precise breakdown of his risks and how he funds the festival:

That's the million-dollar question, like how did I make it work financially. I have to say that I took a giant risk, especially on the first year, with all the costs, where for some reason, credit card companies really like me. I have these credit cards with a really high spending limit. . . . So the reality of it is that I always have one or two credit cards where I put all the cost and then I pay it back with the ticket sales, and that's how it's worked. I did kind of like a sponsorship from a beer company at one of the fests that the venue worked out so we had something to work with up front. But it just basically pays for itself with ticket sales and there's been like a few years where I lost some money. . . . It's just me and my credit cards, man; it's not easy.[30]

No Fun Fest, then, clearly represents a grave financial risk for Giffoni. In order to alleviate the risk involved, No Fun has charged in the range of $50 to $60 for weekend tickets. This approach contrasts slightly with the grant-offset ticket prices of British Festivals such as Colour Out of Space and INSTAL, both of which limit entry to around £20 to £30 (not that much below No Fun), while contrasting considerably with similarly independently run fringe underground events such as Supersonic in Birmingham (£80 in 2012) and Roadburn in Holland (£140 in 2011). The key point, though, is that in the context of DIY *noise* events in the United States, the cover charge is sizeable.[31] No Fun's use of advertisers, even for only one of its years, likewise reflects this contrast.

Since No Fun is a noise festival, and since that musical form has grown out of a prideful ideological emphasis on DIY concerts and noncommercial sounds and release aesthetics, the dissonance between content and cover charge just outlined has led to complaints from some quarters. As journalist Steve Underwood observed:

> When the first festival was announced in 2003, praise and jeers rained down in equal measure. While many fanatics bit their lip in anticipation of seeing Wolf Eyes … Hair Police … and others in one location over one three-day weekend, others bristled. Some were irked by the door price, feeling that noise was best served with close friends, an under-$5 cover charge, and complimentary pancakes.[32]

Notwithstanding these complaints, Giffoni's clear vision for the festival involved, as noted, a professional emphasis that would have been impossible to achieve if ticket prices had been kept to the minimum of subsidized British and European festivals such as INSTAL, COOS, Kraak in Belgium, Transmediale in Berlin, and many others. Such funding is simply unavailable to No Fun. This is due both to the comparatively impoverished cultural support structure in place in the United States and also to the abrasive and foreign character of the festival's music, which generally avoids such possibly reconciliatory or high culturally respectable music as improv or sound art on the one end or (for the most part) more commercially viable fringe pop forms on the other. This abrasion places the music outside the usual frameworks of support in terms of both the types of federal funding surveyed earlier and the private benefactors who do things like subsidize American orchestras so heavily. The only alternatives lie in the commercial realm of ticket prices and advertisement.

Considering all of these details about financial and curatorial independence, lack of funding support, and complaints about ticket prices, two things arise out of the case of No Fun. The first is that, as suggested earlier, its financial inde-

pendence, its ad hoc organizational nature, and its lack of aesthetic compromise mean that it links directly to fundamental and often ideologically configured underground notions of DIY communitarianism, marginal aesthetics, and independence from the state and large institutions. In this respect, it circumnavigates or sidesteps capital as an anintermediated and nested microeconomy, potentially avoiding the strictures of real subsumption and the corporate dynamics discussed by Britt Brown due to its tiny, self-organizing size (though Mattin would demur). Giffoni himself reflects on these communitarian, intimate aspects of the festival, which might remind us of the volunteer basis of the Stone, another New York venture:

> There's no state funding like there is for festivals in Europe. So I think that part of the charm of the festival is that it's personal; it's more of a community-driven type of thing, at the promotion level, the booking level, everything that's done for it. And the volunteers that help me, at least half of them are friends that really want to help me out and who want to be there.[33]

The second point arising out of No Fun is that, even acknowledging the "traditionally" underground aspects of No Fun, the festival represents a limit case for that underground. This is music without mass appeal and without much potential for mass appeal in the future. The possibility of the underground attaining some degree of recognition as a fashionable—albeit marginally fashionable—scene is admittedly ripe, as seen in Café Oto's case and more generally in the seeming ability of organizations in places like France to secure public support and in the increasing likelihood of institutional backing being given in the UK and Ireland to underground or fringe practices. But I'd suggest that, with the mainstream coverage that No Fun receives and with mainstream bands such as Sonic Youth occasionally appearing on its lineups, the festival represents possibly the furthest imaginable encroachment of this music into public acceptance, even as it remains at best on the fringe of that mainstream. As Giffoni himself states:

> I think that as far as getting super popular, I don't think it'll ever happen. I think that when we talk about popular music, we have to talk about something that can be liked by at least half the population of the world. And I feel like that's not really for experimental music to succeed in that way, just because there's no giant machines that are behind it, promoting and making things happen and exposing it to a number of people in the world that it becomes pop music. . . . With noise and experimental music, it's always going to be underground.[34]

Some sort of limit is reached with No Fun. Without the music shifting into something else entirely, it's difficult to envisage an event of this kind of larger size taking place anywhere in the world. And this limitation means that festivals such as No Fun, with relatively sizable crowds, programs, and costs, but with no support from the state and almost no support from advertisers for ideological and practical reasons, will struggle to find the pitch at which they can continue to exist and to succeed. This struggle isn't universal in the underground. John Zorn, for one, told me with respect to the Stone "that there is no struggling at all . . . we are getting stronger every year! and people who believe in what we do send us donations even tho we DO NOT make an effort to ask for them . . . it runs itself thanks to the friends who believe in us and are here to help." But this should probably be seen as an exception, arising perhaps out of Zorn's scene celebrity, that proves the more general rule of underground and fringe precarity, as seen in the case of No Fun and almost every other musician and label I've profiled.

Giffoni recognizes the transitional state in which the festival finds itself, prone at the point of further expansion that would likely necessitate a shift away from its aesthetic and cultural roots as an independent, relatively small festival of extreme music. Giffoni has chosen, indeed, to take an extended break throughout 2011–15, with no indication at the time of writing of this break coming to a close. On both the financial and the personal levels, No Fun seems to have come up against some sort of natural breaking point in 2009, a point through which Giffoni has yet to decide whether to venture:

> The fest has been successful and grown beyond my wildest dreams. But it's also at the point where the level of success it has reached has been putting a heavy demand on myself and put me at a crossroads point where I have to either grow it further as a "business" or take a step back and refocus it. I have chosen the latter.[35]

Considering the relative vibrancy and wealth of New York culture more generally, it is probably the case that there are few other territories where even No Fun's level of commercial successes could be achieved. Subsidies in France, the UK, Germany, and elsewhere are given in recognition of the innate commercial limitations of those countries' festivals and are in any case modest when compared to those of more traditionally state-supported arts such as opera or classical music. Without even these modest subsidies, however, it takes a lot of personal risk and private capital and resources (probably derived from big business and/or volunteers, as Giffoni's has been) to stage an underground festival

or run a venue on anything like a sustainable basis. Even if such risk were to be engaged and such capital mobilized, though, the potential commercial success of the festival would be naturally limited; the biggest edition of No Fun only sold six hundred tickets. There may also be political questions to consider in the case of such an expansion. As Giffoni points out, for No Fun to grow any larger, it would be necessary to abandon its DIY business model altogether and seek corporate or federal funding of one kind or another. It remains to be seen if the aesthetic aspects of noise and other underground musics would support such an expansion. But the case of No Fun certainly suggests that its DIY commercial aspects would not.

As well as discussing things like the importance of location, of individual and scene efforts, and of the Web and digital culture and social permissiveness and so on in driving and shaping underground and fringe music scenes, we've seen over the past few chapters the primacy of various senses of politics around and within the global scene. The varying political positions, affiliations, and tensions analyzed across Part II speak to the prominence within the underground and its fringes of notions of radical codetermining or circumnavigatory politics and more specifically to the importance of a notion of the stakes and values of culture as playing a role in discursive and concrete formations of politics, even if these things don't always shape practice or even rise above a story the scene likes to tell itself.

    This primacy of politics will be observed likewise in the coming chapters, where the register shifts from explicit, primary-research-based analyses of political economy into music-centered intertextual investigations of various music genres. I begin with noise, where questions of politics are rarely far from the discussion.

PART III

Listening to the Underground

9

Noise as Concept, History, and Scene

Noise has always been at the core of the underground, speaking in terms of both the genre of noise and the more nebulous resources of conceptual and sonic noise. Along with principles of improvisation and outsider DIY organization and politics, noise—sonic distortion, static, feedback, as well as the concept of disturbance and disruption—as a marker of marginality and turbulence has been important for underground musicians and thinkers. Noise indexes relative difference and exploration very well, whether we think of Lou Reed and *Metal Machine Music*, the Beatles and songs like "Helter Skelter," Edgard Varèse in classical music, or more directly underground examples such as Merzbow or the New Blockaders. Noise connotes deviation from the norm in most contexts in which it is used. As such, it's only to be expected that underground forms would deploy noise in ways that mark them as separate from the more polished and "musical" mainstream(s).

So noise is important across all underground forms, just as some notion of improvisation is likewise. But the *genre* of noise is also at the core of the underground. Developing in tandem with the earliest iterations of the underground in the 1970s, noise really came into its own as a genre in the late 1970s and 1980s with acts such as Whitehouse, Hijokaidan, Maurizio Bianchi, and others. It flourished throughout the following decades, as covered briefly in the Skin Graft case study in chapter 2, and currently boasts an array of subgenres across the United States, Europe, Japan, and elsewhere.[1]

The genre of noise is musically characterized by severe volumes; extremity and saturation of the frequency spectrum (tending to white noise);

distorted, overdriven, and fuzzy timbres; and a certain quality of antirefinement in form, gesture, and technique. Words are usually present only in the form of titles and band/artist names or as sloganlike mottos shouted by the musicians. The use of nonmusical instruments and of electronic instruments, both analogue and digital, is common, as are guitars with distortion pedals. In recent years, sophisticated digital audio workstation platforms have become common in noise, although many proponents of the genre cleave to older methods of sonic distortion and processing, such as cheap fuzz, delay, and echo effects pedals; contact microphones used with everyday objects, with musical instruments, and with the body; and very loud amplifiers.

Noise might reasonably be understood to include everything from power electronics (PE) to industrial, some forms of free music, post-noise genres such as hauntology and hypnagogic pop, DIY, avant-rock, and more. Not only this, but the noise genre and the concept of noise are among the underground's most examined subjects, as seen, for example, in Paul Hegarty's work, Iles and Mattin's *Noise and Capitalism*,[2] Nick Cain's "Primer" on noise,[3] Douglas Kahn's wide-ranging account of sound in the arts in the twentieth century *Noise Water Meat*,[4] David Novak's *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation*,[5] and the extensive range of noise 'zines and blogs.[6] Yet it's important to distinguish between the relatively integrated, if broad, genre of noise music (which incorporates subgenres like harsh wall noise and lo-fi and derivations such as industrial), on the one hand, and, on the other, underground musical approaches that might be seen to contain and play with noise techniques, such as post-noise, death ambient, and improv, but that, for general reasons of stylistic allegiance, are better considered as separate generic phenomena.

I'm focusing on noise and closely related genres in this and the next chapters. I develop an account of noise in terms of its aesthetics, which I relate in part and cautiously to deterritorializing processes of profanation and sublimation. These sorts of processes, discussed with respect to noise and lo-fi in these current chapters and developed in the context of the "productive nihilism" and *jouissance* of the extreme metal of chapter 12, should be taken as exemplary underground aesthetic modes. I start with a conceptual analysis of noise, before moving to more straightforward accounts of the music's history and the noise scene, using an extended case study of the Los Angeles Free Music Society to frame the former. Chapter 10 looks at the politics of the aesthetics of noise as an emblem of wider underground aesthetics.

9.1. Noise as Concept

In the beginning was the noise.[7]

Think of another noise: the chain is broken again and everything vanishes in the bewildered flight. The noise temporarily stops the system, makes it oscillate indefinitely. To eliminate the noise, a non-stop signal would be necessary; then the signal would no longer be a signal and everything would start again, more briskly than usual. Theorem: noise gives way to a new system, an order that is more complex than the simple chain.[8]

Michel Serres gives us a vision of noise as an interference that yet constitutes the (radical) origin of all systems. Noise here is the disorder that creates tension, instability, and ultimately development. Serres asks earlier in the same text, in deference to the notion that things "work because they do not work": "Can we rewrite a system . . . not in the key of pre-established harmony but in what [Leibniz]) called seventh chords? Not with the equilibrium he loved to mention in mind but with the waves and shock on line in mind?"[9] Noise here functions as a metaphor for the nonsymmetry that governs the universe. Noise stands in simply on the one hand as the antinomy of desired communication or arrangement and complexly on the other as the interruption of systems. Yet it is more than that, because even if noise "stops the system" by making an interruption, then in that interruption, in that moment of open possibility or active negation, the opportunity for change arises, and things can be set on a new course. Serres isn't addressing noise music directly, of course, but his speculations serve quite well as structuring metaphors for how we might understand how noise is seen to operate, ideally, within noise music, as a sonic or indeed visual disturbance that transforms environments and opens listeners and musicians up to new possibilities, even if these seem gloamy and opaque or overwhelming.

In his twelve-part *Theses on Noise*[10] (see fig. 2) our old friend Mattin speaks about the "undifferentiated" and unpredictable conceptual and social force of noise as both sound and code, as opposed to its specific domestication in noise-musical discourse as a genre synecdoche or signifier, though he does also emphasis its sensual qualities. For Mattin, noise is potential, not something to be settled as genre or in the "self-satisfied avant-garde niche" he spoke about in chapter 6.

Dominick Fernow, the person behind such noise acts as Prurient and Vatican Shadow, echoes Mattin in identifying an extra- or trans-generic dimension to noise, where it's seen less as a specific set of sounds and sonic techniques and

I

What the fuck is Noise?

Precisely because of its indeterminacy noise is the most sensuous human activity / practice. To

try to fix it or to make it a genre is as fucked up as believing in democracy.

II

If you make noise it is likely that somebody else is going to hear you, this means Noise is a

social activity.

III

The capacity to make Noise is available to all, but its revolutionary potential comes from those

who want to disturb the commodification of Noise…

IV

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

Fig. 2. The first four of Mattin's "Theses on Noise"

more as an existential or moral category. This echoes John Butcher's separation of improv into "ideology" and "genre"; these types of distinctions are typical of the ways that politics sometimes plays out in the underground on a discursive level, where musical sound or music-derived concepts are framed in heavily symbolic, political terms and come to be used as cultural resources. According to Fernow:

> The way I define noise is the freedom to pursue personal obsession, outside of genre and audience. I think that's largely been lost; in a scene that's supposed to be approaching some kind of freedom, it's sad to me how conservative and conformist it's become. I think there's a problem now where noise for many people simply means distortion, and to me that might be noise *sound* but the ideology of it is really just total selfishness and self-exploration. . . . My involvement and interest in noise is entirely anti-musical; it's all concept.[11]

The philosopher Ray Brassier, meanwhile, in contrast to Fernow and Mattin, seems to conflate noise-as-concept and noise-as-genre:

> What I consider interesting about noise is its dis-organising potency: the incompressibility of a signal interfering with the redundancy in the structure of

the receiver. Not transduction but schizduction: Noise scrambles the capacity for self-organisation.[12]

Regardless of whether noise is being explicitly conceived in genre or conceptual terms or not, these are all moral and politically scored readings. And political potency of a general kind drives the noise genre, as seen across its various lexical (slogans, imagery), physical (riots, confrontational and/or violent performance approaches), and sonic (harmonic density, dynamic extremity) levels. Phillip Tagg and Karen E. Collins remind us of this political dimension of noise, quoting Jacques Attali and Claude Lévi-Strauss:

> Jacques Attali calls noise "violence . . . a simulacrum of murder." Lévi-Strauss found noise-making instruments to be associated with "death, decomposition, social disorder and cosmic disruption," calling them "the instruments of darkness." Dissonance is also associated with fright, terror, doubt, confusion, bitterness and fear. Using noise, like using volume, then, is seen as a method of empowering oneself against oppressors.[13]

In this vein, for Paul Hegarty:

> Noise is a negativity (it can never be positively, definitively and timelessly located), a resistance, but also defined by what society resists. It works as a deconstruction, so, in practice, this means that identifying the noise in a piece of music is only the initial step; the next is to see noise as the relation between that first, explicit noise, and that which is not noise.[14]

Hegarty subscribes to a relational conception of noise whereby a thing (a sound, for example, or a musical-performative gesture) is formally constituted as noise by its context and its reception. He suggests at the start of his book that "noise is not an objective fact. It occurs in relation to perception—both direct (sensory) and according to presumptions made by an individual. . . . Noise is cultural."[15] So noise is intersubjective, a judgment made by individuals in an intersubjective way, drawing on experience and depending on context, even if basic sonic phenomena such as distortion and feedback might be more readily seen as "noise" than other phenomena would be. Noise is cultural, but some things are more securely noisy than others are.

But noise is also that which is resisted, that which supervenes the relationship between itself and not-itself, such that it becomes a deconstructive force redefining the signal against that which it's placed in relation. This deconstruction, again, depends on who did the constructing and who is doing the decon-

structing. As Attali observes in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, "What is noise for the old order is harmony to the new: Monteverdi and Bach created noise for the polyphonic order. Webern of the tonal order. Lamont [sic] Young for the serial order."[16]

For Hegarty and Brassier, as much as for Serres and Attali, noise, qua abstract concept *and* qua specific sonic event, *reveals*, whether that revealing is of the limits or frailties of a system; of the "redundancy" or lack in the perceiving systems of its receiver; of the artificiality of seemingly "natural" boundaries between, for example, tonality and atonality in music; or, in a more positive sense, of new possibilities and alternative, even emancipatory, principles and procedures.

These various connections among systemic, musical, and cultural noise key us into an allegorical understanding of noise. The point is that the conceptual and the aesthetic and political are all joined in the multiple and mobile discourses around noise. I'll consider each of these (inter)textual levels in turn through discussions of the history and then the scenic contexts of noise.

9.2. *Noise as History*

Noise, like other music, evolves under the influence of technology and culture; music is, in Simon Frith's words, "an effect of historical forces—social, technological and musical."[17] Music history is multiply mediated by these various forces and, like all history, is messy and endless. I'm not therefore suggesting that the musical developments surveyed below should be seen in a strictly causal historical relationship, but merely that they can be seen as correlates. I'm not, likewise, suggesting that these developments existed in a vacuum of "pure" music, but merely that these musics developed from broadly shared cultural and social and political and technological contexts and practices, such as the emergence of popular music as a mass cultural form, the new availability of cheap electronic musical instruments, globalization and the spread of neoliberal capitalism, and a postmodern "information age" blurring of boundaries between the "high" and the "low" through potentially converging cultural values.

The history of noise music in recent times, bearing all these influences in mind, is usually traced through a series of fairly recognizable historical moments and practices. It often goes from Schoenberg's famous "emancipation of the dissonance" at the start of the century; through Futurist writings on modern machine culture and noise makers such as their Intonarumori that sought to infuse music with "dissonant, strange and harsh" sounds;[18] then on through innovations in popular music and jazz in the interwar years that brought various

modes of the urban together with song. It moves on through exploratory music using electronics from John Cage (such as his *Imaginary Landscape* series) and Edgard Varèse in the 1930s and 1940s to Daphne Oram in the 1950s and 1960s; through artists from Pierre Schaeffer to Terry Riley to the Who to the Beatles to Lou Reed, using new technologies and unexpectedly "noisy" sounds in their work in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. It culminates in exploratory free musics such as free jazz, exploring structural and sonic noise in the late 1950s and beyond. Various other popular musics and/or composers are often used to update the story a little, from dub to jungle and so-called Intelligent Dance Music (IDM) to modernists or neomodernists such as Helmut Lachenmann and Rebecca Saunders. The noise genre itself gets less coverage, though artists such as Merzbow sometimes prop up the narrative.

The ready availability and particular historical framing of all this music as valuable means that this male- and white-dominated narrative is one that seems to serve as the canonical cultural history of noise in the twentieth century. Kahn and Hegarty inhabit this kind of narrative for the most part, for example, though Hegarty, for one, is aware of how easy and potentially deadening such a familiar "series of historical negations" and "sequence of avant garde moves" might become without analysis and complication.[19] We'll keep this useful, if skewed, historical background in mind in outlining the development of the noise genre itself in the United States, Europe, and Japan from the late 1960s on.

A. The Los Angeles Free Music Society and 1970s/1980s "Amerinoise"

The Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS), mentioned in passing in chapter 1, is a loose federal organization that originated as an eponymous record label and a sort of defining framework—"a bunch of people with the same fetishes"[20]—for a scene in East Los Angeles in the early 1970s. I'll spend a bit of time discussing both the music and the cultural contexts/practices of the LAFMS groups here as they provide important historical context for how the underground and fringe was configured in its early years and for the origins of the noise scene. (I analyze some of the music in more detail in the next chapter.) Information on the LAFMS is much more widespread than it used to be,[21] but in order to plug some gaps and get an insider perspective, I interviewed one of the founding members of the organization—or, as he preferred to call it in our interview, "disorganization"—Joe Potts.

The first direct moves in the direction of the LAFMS were made in 1973 by Joe and Rick Potts and Chip Chapman. Their group, Patients in East L.A., made improvised music featuring taped cartoon samples. They were later to

become Le Forte Four (following a transitional point using "Los Angeles Free Music Society" as an actual band name), with the addition of Tom Potts in 1975. Around the same time, musicians Tom Recchion, Harold Schroeder, and, later, Juan Gomez were gathering in the Poo-Bah Record Shop (in Pasadena) and making music of a similar art brut bent. The Doo-Dooetes, as these three were to be known, along with the free-form group Smegma (whose improvisational music featured strange trinket noise makers, alongside tapes and turntables), also of Pasadena, were to merge with Le Forte Four (and others) in 1975 under the banner of the LAFMS.

These musicians banded together around an identity as "mockers" who drew inspiration from jazz by the likes of Coltrane and "hippy" performers such as Charles Lloyd, weirdo and odd rock music such as Beefheart, and "nerd culture" in general.[22] The LAFMS is often positioned as an outgrowth of "weirdo" rock music and things like musique concrète—though Ju Suk Reet Meate of Smegma maintains that that group was "more of a rock band whereas the rest of the LAFMS were more arthouse"[23]—but I wanted to get some detailed sense from Joe Potts of the group's past experiences and their relation to other musics, especially things like outsider culture and art music. Potts's answer reveals a deep variety of musical experience in his and his peers' background, courtesy particularly of one important art teacher:

> At San Gabriel High School when I attended between 1967 and 1970 (Chip and Rick a few years later and my brother Tom a few years earlier as well) there was a teacher named Donald Sickler who taught an American Art History course. Along with surveying visual art from pre-1776 to the present, Sickler played the corresponding American "classical" music. Through that class we were exposed to Gottschalk, Copland, Nancarrow, Parch, Ives, Cage, Feldman, Tudor, Ashley, Crumb, Oliveros, Subotnick, Riley, Reich etc. Sickler also introduced us to the bargain labels like "Nonesuch" and "Odyssey."

Potts went on in our interview to describe his and the others' explorations of contemporary music of various kinds, revealing a depth of knowledge and engagement that suggests that this broadly described "art" music—as can be heard in the work of the LAFMS groups themselves—was at least as formative and important for the LAFMS as experimental rock and jazz were (showing similar lines of influence to the "free jazz, rock, improvisation, psychedelia, contemporary composition" connections Hegarty thinks a "certain listenership" would readily make with noise):[24]

After I met Chip I discovered Varèse because Chapman knew that he influenced Zappa. Once Chip started studying electronic composition at Cal arts he played us all of the stuff he was hearing such as works by James Tenney, Ingram Marshall, Morton Subotnick, and Harold Budd who were all on the faculty. By way of Chip's record collection I heard Stockhausen, Kagel, and Xenakis. One of the Cal arts faculty, Barry Schrader, started the first electro acoustic music series (in the world?) called Currents, at the Theater Vanguard in West Hollywood. Currents was a monthly tape concert that featured works by composers such as Marianne Amacher, Paul Chihara and Bebe Barron. . . . Also, I found a series of periodicals called "Source: Music of the Avant Garde" (1967–1973) that had scores by many contemporary composers. I remember a water piece by Max Neuhaus that made a huge impression on me because it straddled so many different boundaries.

Considering the variety and range of the LAFMS's influences (from Joe's perspective) and the way its groups are often written about and indeed self-described as concrète-influenced "mockers," it's interesting to note the mesh of influences seen here from different music traditions and contexts. Potts placed a perhaps surprising emphasis on the notion of composition in expanding on this idea of influence, while also making the expected connections to musique concrète and Frank Zappa:

Other LAFMS members have said something like "we were exploring the idea of being musical composers," the emphasis being on the act of making a composition rather than the content or form. With Le Forte Four (and the rest of the LAFMS perhaps to a lesser degree) we saw what we were producing as relating to musique concrète. All of the Le Forte Fours LPs were pieced together from stacks of recordings both original and found. We paid irreverent homage to the composers and music we loved. But, we were not interested in working from scores which seemed irrelevant in a tape composition, a bit like a phony attempt to legitimize improvisation. What L-44 was engaged in was a self-conscious tongue in cheek form of appropriation more or less inspired by The Mothers of Invention and The Mothers with Flo and Eddie. We appropriated the stuff we were listening to, laughing at, smoking, eating, drinking, and watching. We included our friends, enemies, our current vocabulary and in jokes. Then we took a step back a la "200 Motels" and appropriated ourselves trying to make the recordings. L-44 considered "serious" compositions, musical proficiency, and "musical expression" pretentious to the point of being laughable.

So Potts outlines here a typically postmodern mélange of high and low influences processed in a loose, irreverent, even deterritorializing way. He and his peers rejected what they saw as the pretensions of written composition while also trying to mimic Zappa's distinctive blend of high/low satire, his crossing of institutional and genre lines, his concrète and bricolage techniques, and his use of compositional approaches within the context of nontraditional composerly sounds and instruments.[25]

This humorous, caustic, and sometimes wild mix, amounting to the kind of broad modernist innovation without strict high-art allegiance discussed in chapter 1, is rife in the music (as we'll see in the next chapter); in contrast to the technical sophistication of contemporary composition and Beefheart (where the asymmetric polyrhythms and aperiodic phrasing emerge out of highly sophisticated musicianship) and, sometimes, Frank Zappa's keenly edited and compiled "Xenochronic" work, the LAFMS's music displays an intense sense of Dada disorder and juxtaposition, a consistent formal jaggedness, and a taste for surreal sonic collage. Although these qualities are obviously sometimes present in Zappa's music too, in the LAFMS things feel barely in control.

The disorganization's various groups' musical activities ranged from intimate tape collages, to wild noise improvisations, to tiny sonic curiosities derived from circuit-bending activities with basic technology and objects. In Byron Coley's words, "improvisation, concrete assemblage, kraut-moosh, tinkling, noise, and weirdness for the sake of weirdness were all perceived as hallmarks of the LAFMS ethos." [26] That "ethos" can be heard most notably on the debut Le Forte Four album *Bikini Tennis Shoes*.[27] It's also present on the various compilations promoting affiliate groups' music that were independently released through mail order by the LAFMS, including, between 1978 and 1980, the three-volume *Blorp-Essette* series[28] and the 1976 open-invitation pay-to-play *I.D. Artist*.[29]

As Edwin Pouncey has said, the LAFMS "held Fluxus-style concerts and happenings, (and) published a magazine called *Light Bulb*"[30] throughout the late 1970s, but I wanted to get a fuller sense of how the LAFMS groups related to each other at this time, how exactly they built an audience and communicated with that audience, and what kinds of shows they put on. Potts's answer is highly revealing not only of how a predigital underground went about building its primarily in-person and physical DIY networks but of how such an early underground practice couldn't even rely on the 'zine and label culture that grew up under the LAFMS influence in the 1980s:

> When we first started to try and distribute *Bikini Tennis Shoes* we had one outlet, Poo-Bah. We carried copies to art events and gave copies to friends (some of

whom returned them). We would take copies to artist lectures and concerts and give them to the "celebrity." There was no social media; there were no weekly art and music giveaway papers in LA and no zines. There was an active Mail Art scene which allowed us to mail free copies to people we were in the correspondence loop with, like Irene Dogmatic, Buster Cleveland and Jad and David Fair. We would send copies to groups like Throbbing Gristle and the Residents who were also active in Mail Art. I remember Genesis P'Orridge [of Throbbing Gristle] responding that it was impressive that we went so far as to make an LP period.

Potts's answer really shows the DIY nature of the early underground, where musicians would bring copies of their music to sell at various gatherings and where one or two record shops would serve as a physical anchor point for the groups. It also shows how important snail mail was in this period, with the LAFMS making connections with other artists and musicians in America just as they did with groups such as Throbbing Gristle (TG) in the UK. These kinds of connections even extended as far afield as Japan, where the group's influence has been profound:

I had an art exhibit in 1977 in Tokyo at Galleri Lunami, which included the AIRWAY single. Through that single several people in Japan discovered the LAFMS and in the early '80s a number of LAFMS releases were purchased by Japanese record outlets. Takuya Sakaguchi [a journalist who runs the Neurec label] visited us in the early eighties and since then has consistently reviewed our work in Japanese magazines, released our records and forged partnerships between the LAFMS and Japanese artists.

Potts also discussed how important Poo-Bah Records was as a physical nucleus for the scene and how important snail mail was to the scene:

For our little area of LA, the San Gabriel Valley, PooBah was a lightning rod for strange music freaks and Tom Recchion saw what everyone was listening to and would suggest music he thought they should know about. Beyond that, Tom was (is) an avid correspondent and particularly in the 70's when he was ordering records to sell at PooBah, Tom made contacts with experimental musicians all over Europe and the US. He also spent a number of weeks in the late Seventies (?) hanging out in London with musicians like David Toop and Paul Cutler. Tom lived briefly in New York and spent a very short period playing drums in Sonic Youth there. All the while Tom was (as he still is) the LAFMS ambassador. Also in the '80s Fredrik Nilsen spent a while living in various Eu-

ropean countries and connected with some experimental musicians such as Einstürzende Neubauten.

In addition to the importance of mail and the record shop, this quote also underlines the global underground's *physical* basis in the 1970s and 1980s, showing how important *travel* was to the making of connections in that physically bounded and hardly well-publicized underground.

As far as building an audience and a reputation (to the extent that they had any kind of audience), Potts suggests that it was the work of a few good advocates, such as Ace Farren Ford with his Blub Krad releases, that was crucial in getting word out about what the LAFMS was up to, connecting them to audiences of somewhat similar weirdo acts such as the Residents and Beefheart. In addition to these important advocates, the LAFMS performed concerts for friends and others. Though, as Potts says, "very few venues would let [us] perform—usually when we tried to play in clubs or theaters it was not a good fit (as in we got kicked out)"—the LAFMS organized a range of shows in places like an "abandoned building next to Poo-Bah" and some small art spaces, mainly for "audiences of friends." Meanwhile, the LAFMS groups performed for more diverse crowds at places such as the publicly funded and community-focused Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions space (and even here we see the tentacles of mainstream society piercing something that is extremely underground and marginal), where they connected with industrial and noise groups such as Monitor and Boyd Rice's Non.

Underscoring the physical constriction of underground scenes of the 1970s and 1980s, similar to the audience constriction just referenced, Potts talked about how the LAFMS and other LA-based groups "really didn't know each other before that because we lived in different parts of LA and at that time there was no way to find out about events except through bulletin boards at local independent record shops and local college art departments." This isolation and marginality, in fact, are part of the reason why the LAFMS banner was invented and deployed by all its groups, as a way of uniting "a bunch of basically independent limited edition projects under a single name, and probably [giving] them much more visibility at the time that they were produced, and possibly a much more lasting impact."[31]

After just under a decade or so of activity, some members of the LAFMS, notably Tom Potts, Chip Chapman, and Susan Farthing (Chapman's wife and a collaborator of Le Forte Four), "retired." While the intensity of the 1970s and early 1980s tapered off somewhat, more generally speaking, some of the LAFMS acts remain busy to this day, performing all over the world at festivals

such as Colour Out of Space and No Fun Festival (in addition to 2010's Lowest Form of Music, a London festival dedicated to their work). In fact, Potts mentioned his and his brother's performance at the 2008 No Fun as Dinosaurs with Horns (a group that usually includes Rick and Joseph Hammer), good-naturedly observing that they "were not a hit with the harsh noise crowd" and that "only the 'potheads' liked [them]"; they had, it seemed to Potts, "broken an unwritten noise law."

Notwithstanding this apparent disappointment, Potts pointed out just how much correspondence he perceives between today's underground and the LAFMS, in terms of both sounds and tools:

> It is odd to see how the things that we were doing out of necessity have become so entrenched in the experimental sound and harsh noise community. I am thinking of daisy-chaining rock effect boxes, using hand-made electronics and altered toys. I don't think that it is necessarily due to our influence but more a case of different generations of artists reinventing or revisiting it. It is also curious how some of the aesthetics that we gleaned from the experimental musicians before us (and either used or made fun of) have become so entrenched in the experimental music scene today. I am thinking of the avoidance of beats for one.

These aesthetic commonalities, while notable, contrast with the drastically transformed nature of the underground on a practical level over the past twenty or so years. In our interview, Potts lamented to a certain degree the lack of existence of spaces where musicians can go and collaborate freely—he himself runs a "soundShoppe," an informal experimental sound workshop in a publicly funded art space in Los Angeles, where "people just show up with their equipment and play together for three hours." He spoke in this respect about various efforts, so far inchoate, to cultivate such a space on the Web.

Potts, like Cardoso and others discussed earlier in the book, understandably regrets the relative absence of such local scenic nuclei in the digital age:

> It is very hard for experimental musicians to find opportunities to play and almost impossible to be able to informally "jam" with people that you don't know. Part of what created the LAFMS (maybe a large part) were those kinds of informal jams at PooBah after hours, in the Smegma house, at the 35 South Raymond studios, in the Potts family living room, in the synthesizer studios at Cal Arts and the group experimentation that they generated.

At the same time, though, Potts recognizes how easy it now is to get access to even the most obscure discographies, saying that he "thinks it probably greatly expands the influence" of "obscure artists" such as the LAFMS groups. Potts also described to me how he's further adopted digital modes of working in his own practice, releasing "small editions of CD-Rs," which, he suggested, "if people want to post [online] after they sell out, so be it. . . . We never made money on our records (who does?); the main thing is getting the material to as many interested people as possible." Contrasting this possible widespread digital dissemination of what started out as a physical "product" with the older analogue model, Potts finally pointed out that the LAFMS "used to struggle to get rid of 200 LPs—it took us years sometimes."

The LAFMS, then, survives into the digital age, still somewhat marginal, though its influence has clearly spread, but also engaging with and participating in various digital ways of working while lamenting the breakdown of physical scenic nuclei so pervasive in the 1970s.

The LAFMS case study reveals a number of key things about the early underground. It shows us, first of all, the predominance of physical media and physical distribution channels in the 1970s. Second, it underlines the importance of local scenic locations and *personal* relationships in both establishing local scenes and connecting those scenes to the global underground. Similarly, the improvisatory, collage/concrte, oddball humor, and avant-gardish DIY noisemaking-as-musical-performance/composition of the LAFMS groups has proved to be of signal importance for the noise genre. The LAFMS groups can in fact be seen to have provided a DIY noise template—both in terms of their anintermediated self-generating mail-order network and local physical embeddedness and in their deforming, quasi-modernist innovative aesthetic techniques—that not only continues to be explored by noise artists active today but also, in itself, deserves to be recognized as noise and underground practice *as such*. In Byron Coley's words:

> The LAFMS was a lightning rod for pre-punk & non-punk musical whatsis from all over the globe. . . . One of the LAFMS' prime functions was to transform itself (via "mere" extended activity) into a kind of magneto-art-sump for universal noise oddballs. Because it was physically locate-able, and copiously documented its members' gush, the LAFMS drew disaffected weirdos to its hub in the way that doughnuts attract fat cops. Its name became a kind of secret handshake that allowed culturally disenfranchised puds & pudettes to identify each other. [32]

The various LAFMS artists, alongside early noise groups such as Non and sonic anarchists the Residents, might jointly be described in generic terms as something like "1970s and 1980s Amerinoise." The nomenclature is not that important, however; the wider point I'm trying to make about these musicians is that they can be seen to constitute a cultural scene with European and American, art and popular roots and also practices that were to prove of signal influence on the future underground in general, from tape labels to Japanoise, free improv, and post-noise fringe pop forms alike. As such, I'd suggest that the LAFMS provides a particularly useful early identifier for the emerging outsider strains of culture linked in part to high-cultural modernist traditions and also to popular cultural developments that were to flourish within the underground in the coming decades.

B. A Rough (Musical) History of Noise Music from the Late 1970s on

Noise music understood as such emerged in the late 1970s in Europe and America, following the LAFMS and other early forerunners, with a number of interlinked genres orbiting around the central sphere of harsh noise, the latter being a broad generic category that covers much noise music. Noteworthy examples of artists include industrial and power electronics artists such as SPK, Non, Throbbing Gristle, Whitehouse, and Nurse With Wound. Slightly later, in Japan, the LAFMS- and harsh-noise-influenced Merzbow, Ground Zero, Monde Bruit, Masonna, Incapacitants, Pain Jerk, Hijokaidan, and others, including more rock- or metal-anchored acts such as Zeni Geva and Ruins, all came to the fore of what was to become known as the "Japanoise" scene.

The industrial genre, one of those "fringe" underground genres that exists, in this case, on the fringes of popular culture and the underground, was named after Throbbing Gristle's DIY record label, Industrial Records. In its first decade or so, acts such as TG, This Heat, and Coil blended extreme postpunk and electronic music noise experiments in a manner directed at revealing control systems in society and at invigorating audience emotion and disgust in response to what Hegarty summarizes as "a world of taboos, controls, limits [and] normalised behaviours."[33] In TG's case, spoken-word or garbled/sampled or chanted narratives of abjection (as in, for example, 1978's "Hamburger Lady") would be encased in skulking static and crude, pulsing beats, while other songs bleeped about in an ambient, noisy swirl (though gleaming or growling synth pop was also in their repertoire, as seen on 1978's "AB/7A" and 1980's "Adrenalin"). Concerts were confrontational and would sometimes end in harangues of audiences, as heard on "Maggot Death—Brighton" on

Second Annual Report. All of this, the concerts and the brutalized music, was delivered in the context of transgressive lyrical and visual themes building on the pre-TG 1970s performance art group COUM Transmission and their immersive Dadaist happenings, such as, most famously, the 1976 *Prostitution* show at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, the public funding of which caused an MP to proclaim COUM "wreckers of civilisation" (a rare public acknowledgment for even this fringe underground genre, predictably resulting from perceived moral offense).

TG's Cosey Fanni Tutti relates all of this taboo questioning to a political documentation program: "Industrial music was closest to journalism, a documentary in black and white of the savage realities of fading capitalism." TG's leader, Genesis P-Orridge, has likewise said, "It's the death factory society, hypnotic, mechanical grinding, music of hopelessness. Film music to cover the holocaust."[34] Chris Carter, another TG member, meanwhile points in the sleeve notes to the group's reissued 2011 catalog to the importance of noise in their music: "The Throbbing Gristle repertoire consisted of a diverse range of intentional (and unintentional) tonalities, timbres including: tape hiss, phase errors, white noise, distortion, clicks, pops, extreme high and low frequencies and occasionally silence. Please bear this in mind when listening to these recordings."[35] These industrial themes and practices, where sonic, political, social, and cultural disturbance formed by the capitalist crucible was prioritized, would be utterly crucial to much noise music for decades to come, the West Coast hippie- and LAFMS-inspired experimentalist tinkering of DIY improvisers such as the Sonic Catering Band notwithstanding: Paul Hegarty indeed suggests that "in Europe there is a clear continuum [in noise] with industrial musics of the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s," which he argues is "in the background of any globally situated noise music."[36]

Power electronics (PE), related to industrial in its emphasis on confrontation and transgression but of a harsher bent, was named by Whitehouse's William Bennett and features analogue and cheap digital synthesizers playing piercing high frequencies, distortion, and subbass rumble, in addition to (distorted) sampled speeches and screeched and screamed lyrics. All of this happens in a context of aperiodic, amelodic, and atonal gestures and designs, where song form is fractured into a loose rallying call of repeated lyrics and passages of blistering noise. But despite the even more extreme disturbances of PE as compared to industrial, as Nick Cain suggests, what *unites* industrial and power electronic artists is a desire to explore "linkages between noise, transgressive behaviour and taboo imagery."[37] The Japanese groups coming after all this, meanwhile, explored noise less as a political than a musical phenomenon, broadly speak-

ing, where the negating, resisting impulse of industrial music had been broadly subsumed by *musical* and/or affective concerns, though the symbolic political dimension of their practices and sounds as rejections of and revolutions within musical propriety and ontology should not be ignored, as it shouldn't be in later noise or post-noise music, where the taboo-baiting of earlier artists might be similarly absent.

Since the 1990s the noise scene has undergone wide hybridization. Latter-day harsh noise subgenres, such as harsh wall noise, which developed concurrently in the American and Japanese noise scenes of the 1990s with artists such as Monde Bruit and Incapacitants for the latter and Skin Crime and Black Leather Jesus for the former, are practiced by all sorts of artists, from K. K. Null to Werewolf Jerusalem, Kites, Hum of the Druid, and Wolf Eyes. These harsh noise genres sit alongside diffuse techniques and practices, from persisting power electronics (Genocide Organ); to DIY noise improv (Prick Decay, Sonic Catering Band, Morphogenesis); to the noisier ends of lo-fi, noise performance art (Justice Yeldham), concept-laden noise rock, and improvisation (Mattin); and to the wide genre(s) of post-noise music.

My use of the "post" prefix here denotes an evolutionary shift in the style while anchoring the music in various senses to the wider and original noise scene. Its alteration of noise should, I suggest, be seen in the same light as its transformation of rock; post-rock, according to that term's originator, Simon Reynolds, employs "rock instrumentation for non-rock purposes, using guitars as facilitators of timbres and textures rather than riffs and power chords."[38] Post-noise, I suggest, performs a related invigoration of noise technique, breaking apart its orthodoxies and inserting newer influences and references from popular culture alongside dyschronic affects (as in hauntology, particularly) and subliminal modalities (more on this later), both functioning as vital new elements of the music's expression. The addition of the prefix "post" works, then, to distinguish Daniel Lopatin's and his peers' music from its noise ancestry.[39] It also indicates their music's continued allegiance to noise experimentalism, cultural independence, and production and procedural techniques, such as the saturation of musical texture with FX and feedback and the preference for a viscous, indefinite sonic object over a refined musical canvass of more or less distinct tones and rhythms.[40]

All of this gives us a broad spectrum of current noise activity. The simple graph below shows representative examples of noise and noise-using genres in the lower row. The graph goes from left to right in order of importance of genre-coded "noise"—sonic extremity, confrontational performance, and so on—to the music's aesthetics.

Harsh noise	→	cross-genre noise	→	post-noise
e.g. Wall noise		e.g. DIY noise improvisation		e.g. hypnagogic pop
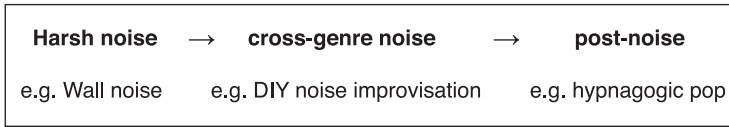
Fig. 3. The range of noise activity in 2016 ordered by importance of noise

9.3. Noise as Scene

In terms of record labels and so on, much of the noise scene is dependent on self-circulation, or at least on circulation by independent labels and local distributors such as Cargo Records or Forced Exposure. While the Web obviously enables musicians to sell their work online without much hassle, the kinds of small-scale, personally grounded relationships we saw in the LAFMS and Not Not Fun examples remain dominant. A close relationship has existed, for example, between New Age Tapes, which is the label post-noise LA musician James Ferraro used primarily for small-run releases of his music on CD-R or cassette, and David Kennan and Heather Leigh Murray's Volcanic Tongue.[41] Volcanic Tongue, mentioned a couple of times so far, is a distributor, a label, and, formerly, a shop, operating out of Glasgow and through its website. It provided Ferraro's UK and European audience with direct access to physical instances of his work when the shop was open. This access was especially prized given the cost of shipping from the United States to the UK and Europe, something that is still bypassed somewhat by Volcanic Tongue mail order. The physically marked but Web-facilitated relationship between New Age Tapes and Volcanic Tongue is exemplary in terms of international scenic channels.

In addition to this Web-facilitated physical nexus, there are, of course, myriad small, independent distributors of noise music that, because of the possibilities of the Web, have been able to enjoy wide access to international artists and that likewise enjoy an accessible presence on the Web for those who know where and want to look.

The American group Wolf Eyes provides an interesting example in this regard. Wolf Eyes has released some albums on a comparatively large label (*Burned Mind* and *Human Animal* on Sub Pop) and some on smaller but sizable noise and noise rock imprints (*Dead Hills* on Troubleman Unlimited, *Always Wrong* on Hospital Productions). However, the group releases the majority of its vast output, which generally takes the form of CD-Rs, cassettes, and, occasionally, LPs, on its own labels, American Tapes (run by John Olson, now defunct except for its Web store) and Hanson Records (run by former member Aaron Dil-

loway). Wolf Eyes has also been typical of the noise scene in the frequency of its collaborative releases, as for example with its albums with Anthony Braxton (*Black Vomit*), Smegma (*The Beast*), and Prurient (*The Warriors*); its split cassette with Metalux (Untitled); it split LP with the Skull Defekts (*Yes, I Am Your Angel*); and its split 7-inch with John Weise (Untitled), to name only a very small selection.

So while Wolf Eyes is untypical of noise artists in that it has released albums on a (comparatively) major record label and in the (again, comparatively) very wide exposure that its music has achieved, it's also highly typical of the scene in that its members collaborate widely and run their own limited-release, physical-media-focused labels whose activities are facilitated almost exclusively by the Web.

It also goes without saying that, in addition to the Web-mediated local to global and global to local connections of distributors and labels such as Volcanic Tongue and New Age Tapes, and the Web-mediated sales of labels such as American Tapes, much noise music circulates on blogs and peer-to-peer file-sharing services. These are simply too many in number to name, but significant examples of the former include Noise Not Music (which attempts to limit its sharing to "out of print or otherwise unavailable CD-Rs, cassettes and vinyl"), [42] harsh noise, the Static Fanatic, Mutant Sounds, Rob Hayler's Radio Free Midwich, and New Noise Net.

In his essay for *Noise and Capitalism*, Mattin discusses this kind of underground framework of DIY concerts, collapsed notions of producer and consumer, and Web-distribution models as they are exemplified in the noise scene:

> The noise scene is founded upon people organising concerts in all kinds of places, releasing music in any kind of medium and finding, along the way, different means of distribution. This allows for many collaborations to occur. In this scene the do it yourself ethos is part of the survival. . . . People have been self-organising themselves by organising concerts wherever possible and more. This self-organisation, which constantly makes people change roles; from player to organiser, from critic, to distributor, helps people understand each other's roles. An example of this is Daniel Löwenbrück, who for the last 15 years has run the label and mail order outfit Tochnit Aleph. He has just opened the record shop Rumpsti Pumsti (Kreuzberg, Berlin), he performs under the name Raionbashi and he has organised concerts for some of the most radical artists in Berlin. [43]

This all points to a clear DIY ethos that uses new forms of media and the distribution and promotion they facilitate to produce the sort of self-determined net-

works of performer/composer-label-distributor-consumer/listener so common to the current underground model of culture, as we saw relatedly in the discussion of free improvisation in chapter 6. In this respect of collapsed boundaries among "producer," "distributor," and audience," the noise scene, again like the underground more generally, can be seen to be a small-scale exemplification of Henry Jenkins's "participatory culture,"[44] where hierarchies of consumption and production are made permeable to a substantial degree, and the resulting networks embed social as well as financial exchange. In addition, in the noise and underground context, the problems of subsumption and exploitation by large corporations entailed in the Web 2.0 contexts discussed by Jenkins are potentially circumnavigated to a degree through the scene's comparatively tiny, anintermediated local nested circuits of exchange. We saw how this anintermediation and circumnavigation might connect to political ideas across Part II. I'll turn now to questions of how politics further shapes, enters into, and is produced by this underground music "itself," using specific noise "texts" to examine this question.

10

The Politics of Underground Music and Noise

A dual sense of noise-as-music and noise-as-politics has been at the heart of much noise music. But some in the scene look for a decoupling of politics and noise. A letter by noise writer Idwal Fisher printed in the January 2011 issue of the *Wire* raises some important points in this respect. The letter was written in response to the Mattin-esque plea in the previous month's issue by the magazine's editor, Chris Bohn, for noise musicians to work out—in light of the supposed absorption or exhaustion of formerly transgressive practices common to noise, such as the use of images of dead bodies or Nazi imagery on record sleeves—"new strategies for telling unpalatable truths."[1]

> Can't you make noise and experiment with noise and use what the hell you want for cover art or T-shirt art without recourse to explain yourself? Can't you make noise and industrial music just for the sheer pleasure of it? Because you like the sound of what you do? . . . How many noise/industrial artists still think of themselves as controversial?[2]

Some clearly want noise for noise's sake, while others see noise as tied productively to notions of allegory and critique. This kind of tension can be found throughout the history of the genre, where politics has always been an important but contested trope. I'll discuss this close link between noise and politics generally as a lens for understanding key underground political dynamics before moving on to a case study of the Australian group SPK.

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10.1. Noise and Underground Music as Politicized Critique?

Noise music is able to reflect in the severity of its subject matter and sonic extremity the unvarnished force relations of society, to stage the brutality and grime of life and thus reveal in some way the tensions that afflict that life. Akin to the "counter-magic" advertised in chapter 4, this staging and brutalization or subversion of control and hegemony can be seen in aspects of Throbbing Gristle's "death factory society" music. Noise does all this, at least for its defenders, in a way that little other music is able to, chiefly through the sheer bluntness of the way the allegory is staged through extreme sound, lyrics, and imagery.

As with extreme metal, and as we saw with industrial music, many noise musicians have as their stated goal the desire to "cleanse" in some way what they see as a putrid, pathogenic, pathological society. Italian power electronics artist Maurizio Bianchi's desire to "produce technological sounds to work for a full awareness of modern decadence"[3] is typical. Similarly, across all of the noise artists examined below we find either a tangential engagement with radical ideas through extreme aesthetic choices or direct grappling with issues of social justice and critical frameworks of cultural apartheid derived from thinkers such as Michel Foucault. This grappling often takes the form of the miming of or overidentification with the practices of the "ruling ideology" in order to expose the internal contradictions of that ideology. An illustrative example would be the Slovenian industrial group Laibach. The group's name is taken from the German version of Slovenia's capital, and they model their concerts after fascist rallies turned into (sometimes kitsch) musical spectacle, complete with demotic rhetoric, uniforms, and Nazi iconography.[4] Laibach are the musical wing of the "Neue Slowenische Kunst" collective, whose "mission," in its own words, "is to make evil lose its nerves."[5]

The philosopher Slavoj Zizek pursues a rhetorical strategy similar to Laibach's in his own work. Zizek builds in this respect on Lacan's ideas about Law inscribing an "inherent transgression," such as minor sexual deviancy, that the system has already accounted for as a kind of acceptable obscene supplement and that is thus useless as a mode of transgression (and has even become primary, an "authoritative obscenity," in permissive late postmodernism).[6] Zizek recognizes that transgression hits a stumbling block by thus being unable to move beyond a mode of behavior that is conceived within the system the behavior is supposedly critiquing or undermining. (And transgression might also become useless merely through age and emerging convention.) This might well describe the absorption of, for instance, pictures of COUM's and TG's licentious performances into the parade of consumer society archival imagery. Zizek tries to

get beyond this inevitable recuperation and indeed predetermination of transgression as internalized expressions of the system's supposed democracy. He attempts to take the capitalist, neoliberal system at its word in a sort of grand and extended *reductio ad absurdum*. Zizek accepts the underlying prejudices and distortions of hegemonic or totalitarian ideologies on their own terms, shifts them to their logical extremes, and pantomimes them. This threefold process aims to expose the paradoxes inherent in such ideologies:

> In order to function properly, power discourse must be inherently split, it must "cheat" performatively, to disavow its own underlying performative gesture. Sometimes, therefore, the only truly subversive thing to do when confronted with a power discourse is simply to *take it at its word*.[7]

Zizek even compares his own rhetorical strategies to those of Laibach:

> The big question that everybody is asking herself or himself apropos of Laibach of course is, are they taking themselves serious [*sic*] or is it meant in an ironic way? Well I think of course this is the wrong alternative. . . . I think that the whole point, the basic underlying premise of Laibach's strategy is that, in this whole, not only for Slovenia but let's say generally, for so-called late capitalism in general even, that the system itself has as its inherent condition of functioning that its own ideology must not be taken seriously. . . . The only way, I would even say, to be really subversive is not to develop critical potentials, ironic distance, but precisely to take the system more seriously than it takes itself. . . . I think that this is one of the keys to Laibach's strategy.[8]

Zizek, Laibach, and many of the noise and even extreme metal artists examined below mimic or overidentify with extreme transgression in this way in order to expose it (at least that is how their arguments often go—whether they are successful or not is another matter). Theirs is not a comfortable, politically correct critique with clear answers and a balanced weighing of opinion. It's a model of critique that is organized around provocation, around asking questions of the audience's desires and predilections, rather than seeking to establish the desires and predilections of musicians/critics as something to be aped. Risk is inherent to the performance.

This is why in his shows Rat Bastard manhandles a blow-up doll of a naked woman. This is why Consumer Electronics' Philip Best shouts lyrics of questionable moral intent. Rat Bastard replays normative social inequalities symbolically, but in violent, intense, confrontational, and profaned contextual form in

order to unsettle his presumably liberal audience. Should we enjoy this? What does this mean? Is this adding to or standing outside conventional oppression? Best and Rat Bastard and others open the windows of comfort to suggest that something unexpected, something uncontrollable, could happen. That's the function that noise seems to aspire to, just like other underground forms, from performance art to extreme metal and even improv of the kind practiced by Mattin and others: the arousal of our sense of risk and disquiet. What would be interesting or challenging about Best simply shouting, for example, "racists are bad"? This needs to be said in other contexts, but something more extreme and risky is going on in these kinds of performances, which serve, at their best, potentially to create an upset of social controls and norms. Even if "transgression" has the potential, through repetition and age, to become self-referencing and flaccid as a mode of critique, society hasn't yet absorbed all these avant-garde and performance art and anti-"musical" tactics into its daily running order. Noise of this and other kinds still has the power to confound or disturb expectations and, in this way, to operate as noise.

The very ambiguity of these noise music-based critiques—which could even be taken as the opposite of critique, as straight-up and typical symbolic violence—does lead some to question whether the music ends up endorsing that which it's supposedly trying to undermine and indeed even to question whether undermining is the desired effect in the first place. It leads others to question how effective as contestation such an ambiguous strategy could possibly be. These seem reasonable enough responses. However, we should at least recognize the kind of critical framework that noise is often operating in, and think about how it is using that framework, before making summary judgment on its potency as a political and aesthetic form.

As we'll see below, many noise artists have indeed been accused of subscribing to far right ideologies as a result of their adoption of and (over)identification with iconography and imagery from these movements. My argument is that, through various contextualizing means, the noise music I examine resists such dichotomized, simplistic adjudication. We might even see it in terms similar to those discussed in relation to the Zizek/Laibach model of contestatory resistance, where the framework of miming transgression for some sort of ambiguous, critical, or dissimulating purpose rules.

10.2. SPK

The case of Australian noise group SPK is an instructive one in this context. Operating primarily within the industrial scene, SPK was started by two men-

tal health workers, Neil Hill and Graeme Revell, in Sydney in 1978. SPK's goal was as follows: "The project ideal is to express the content of various psycho-pathological conditions, especially schizophrenia, manic-depressive psychosis, mental retardation and paranoia."[9]

This mission statement obviously calls up associations with the Bianchi quote above, as well as with other noise mottos, such as Philip Best's "come on, come clean!" A sense of political engagement, where society's ills would almost literally be reflected back on it, anchored SPK's vision of itself:

> A lot of what we're doing is dirt, is filth, and we live in a society that pretends to be exceptionally clean. It cleans up everything, it paints facades and makes things shiny and bright. I think the unifying theme is that we are very conscious that whenever there's a winner in a clean society, there's a filthy loser as well. But that tends to be just shoved away either in a back ward or a jail or a back street or a dirty little squatter.[10]

SPK wanted to nullify what they saw as illusory "cleanliness" through an accentuation of dirt and filth, through a subversion in music and text of the rigged stage set of socially constructed and controlled reality. SPK's stated goals in this regard were comparable to those of Throbbing Gristle: "The idea: to heal and reintegrate the human character. To set off psychic detonations that negate control. . . . To exchange and liberate information."[11]

SPK's political program, riven through with this concept of cleanliness and therefore control, saw them endorsing a Marxist/Foucauldian political diagnosis—present most notably for the latter in his *The Will to Knowledge* (*La volonté de savoir*)[12]—that orientated around the iniquity of power relations of Western capitalist society:

> SPK is trying to be a voice for those individuals condemned to the slow decay of mental hospitals and chemical/electro/surgical therapy, without fetishising them into blatant entertainment product. "SONIC FOR MANICS" aims to be a vehicle for sharing mental experiences through sound.[13]

SPK's derivation of its name from the manifesto of the radical Marxist group Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv, "a patients' collective founded in Heidelberg in February 1970, by Dr. Wolfgang Huber,"[14] was fitting. The collective's principle goal, as stated in the title of its most famous publication, was to "turn illness into a weapon."[15] The programs of the musical group and the Marxist group therefore both orientated around a distinct oppositional stance to mainstream society, where oppressed or neglected elements of that society (the diseased)

were seized upon as possible focal points for resistance in the circuit of oppression that might be used, through rearticulation, *against* that oppression.

But SPK's politics weren't advanced through an explicit engagement with grassroots political organizations or activism or lobby groups, nor were they couched in dialectical-materialistic terms. Rather the group sought to stage an *aesthetic* catastrophe, a symbolic presentation of "the system's own intolerable sins against it," in this way echoing Laibach and Zizek and other noise artists.

> Power always rests in the last instance on the power to put to death—actual, threatened or symbolic. And in the modern case this power operates symbolically by the naturalisation, or MEDICALISATION of life and death. . . . Death is everywhere in life. SPK is not fetishising a situation. It is exposing this cathedral of death. The strategy is not dialectical—liberation vs. control, unconscious vs. conscious, deviant vs. normal, sexual vs. chastity. The strategy is CATASTROPHIC—pushing the situation to the limit. The strategy is SYMBOLIC—using the system's own intolerable signs against it.[16]

Of course, even by pushing artistic representation to the limit in portraying disease and other suppressed aspects of Western society, SPK may have been playing into that very system, performing its "inherent transgression" as a release valve for those kinds of energies that might have been better spent in activist politics. But relegating this kind of bitingly and aggressively satirical artistic critique to the realm of ineffectual—and permitted—satire doesn't quite seem to tell the whole story.

SPK conceived of the diseased as a site of possible weaponized revolt. SPK's symbolic presentation of the dominant system's injustices was conveyed in musical, textual, and visual form through their tapes and records and in physical form in their concerts, where practices such as mutilating dead animals on stage were common.[17] *Two Autopsy Films: Human Postmortem*,[18] from 1983, is exemplary in terms of SPK's thematic obsessions. Original music and image manipulation by the group are featured in the first video, with the second being simply the original autopsy film untouched. These videos show SPK's desire to expose both the discursive processes that exist around the subject of death—in their actions here seeking not a sense of spectacle but rather the exposure of a clinical catastrophe, a heightening of a medicated coldness through aesthetic condensation—and also *the basic fact of death* in Western society. SPK's titles and lyrics are also suggestive of these themes. The title of their second album, 1982's *Leichenschrei*,[19] translates as "the scream of the corpse." An early track, 1979's "Slogun,"[20] more explicitly addresses in lyrics the group's "ideal": "Kill, Kill,

Kill for inner peace / Bomb, Bomb, Bomb for mental health / Therapy through violence / SPK, SPK, SPK, SPK!"

Musically, "Slogun" is typical of the group in its earliest phase, which ran until the suicide of Neil Hill in 1984. A superficial impression of six minutes of unalloyed screed overlaid with voices frantically shouting the aforementioned lyrics disguises some of "Slogun"'s distinct musical textures. An opening forty-five seconds of stereo-panned lo-fi noise gives way to a thudding drum and monotonal bass synthesizer loop, over which the lyrics are screamed in a metrically unrelated time. At around the two-minute mark, the loop gives way to a shipwreck of sounds, with two voices now growling in each speaker, one in French and the other inaudible. They suddenly pronounce, "We will win!" The loop kicks in, now hyperpaced and higher in register, with screaming feedback, metal thrashing, and processed tape noises, in addition to pulsing synthesizer at the back of the texture, dominating. The final two minutes of the track feature the original form of the loop amid a cloud of noise, the whole gradually fragmenting-forming into the crash ending. The overall impression is of an intense chaos, a formal dissolution of music into turbulence, struggle, and fury, where specks of previous and future styles exist on the same plane as outright noise and heightened political sloganeering. Precision politics are less important here than a bludgeoning affective intensity with various claims on terror and discomfort.

While "Slogun" is typically aggressive and passionate, not all of SPK's music is filled with bluster and turbulence. A track such as "The Agony of the Plasma," from side 2 of *Leichenschrei*, is more ambient, more calculated in its wedding of noise aesthetics to collage and spoken-word forms, recalling both Throbbing Gristle and later death ambient artists such as Lustmord and Strigoi Mortii. "The Agony of the Plasma" is comprised of a woman's scream, quickly followed by smashing glass and surrounded by isolated synthesizer tones and sparing tom-tom fills. This is all underlain by a barely audible but authoritative voice intoning words that hint at the subject of epidemics, savages, and disease-as-predation.

The drama of the music here is rich, with various intensities and volumes nimbly placed around each other in unexpected and nerve-wracking combinations and sequences. Textural and stereoscopic turbulence of this nature is a typical noise trait. "The Agony of the Plasma" in this way features a very deliberate use of musical space, each element being set in its linear and vertical place, allowed to build and coalesce before a restrained but forceful climax of drums and noise arrives. Here, the unwieldy (though purposeful) sonic chaos of "Slogun" is contextualized by a sense of moderation and a command of sources,

which range more generally in SPK's output from samples from films to field re-cordings, metallic percussion, and more conventional musical instruments. "Na-palm (Terminal Patient)," from the same record as "The Agony of the Plasma," displays a similar sense of purposeful, turbulent design. Clanking metal and gurgling synthesiser subbass along with menacing and mixed-low spoken word move in and out of different sonic atmospheres, with white noise, high frequen-cies, and processed noises akin to planes landing building a textural dynamic as subtle as "Slogun" was cauterizing.

In these tracks and others SPK use a sort of subliminal modality—which we could also call a sublime aesthetics, though "subliminal modality" is less his-torically freighted, denoting both sublime transcendence of conventional cog-nitive capacities and also the kinds of masking, concealing, and dissimulating processes and affects that dominate this music—where ambient textures filled out in fracture across the audible spectrum disguise buried voices, or industrial metals and frenzied noise serve as rickety and volatile counterweight to impas-sioned screams and uncontrolled screeching. Masked and ambiguous sounds, inaudible or all too audible, create sublime awe, all while hovering in and out of perceptible range. The lyrics and images don't homologize the music precisely, or vice versa, but the strategies and goals SPK pursue across each of these tex-tual "levels" can be seen to be sympathetic and mutually informing. All of it is directed at themes of "dirt" and oppression through engineered ambiguity, intensity, and shock.

In their own words, referring to the "Information Overload" concept of their debut album, *Information Overload Unit*, SPK rather plausibly condense their mission and their process, suggestively building a bridge to my own discussion of their subliminal modality: "Information Overload supersedes normal, ratio-nal thought structures, forcing deviation into less restrictive mental procedures of so-called 'mental illness.'"[21]

Whether we grant political potency to SPK or any other noise artist or not, the subliminal, destabilizing modality I've been discussing allows these artists to stage themes of contamination and terror in a deeply unsettling manner. In this they can at least be seen to treat these themes and the suffering people they point toward with the severity and depth they deserve.

10.3. *Broken Flag and Power Electronics*

Broken Flag is an independent power electronics label run by Gary Mundy of PE act Ramleh. Broken Flag has released, among other things, the important

1982 *Neuengamme*[22] compilation of a range of British and Italian noise artists. Many artists associated with the label used, or seemed to use, the transgressive, miming model I've been discussing, while also reflecting SPK's extreme focus on death, suffering, and so on. Shocking imagery was common on record sleeves. A famous example is Ramleh's *Return to Slavery*,[23] which features an autopsy photograph and was banned by the large record distributor Rough Trade in 1983. The original Broken Flag issue of *Neuengamme* itself depicted a photocopied image of dead bodies (possibly Jewish victims of the eponymous concentration camp). Broken Flag acts also derived names and titles from the Nazi movement. This can be seen, for example, with the group Swastika Kommando and indeed with *Neuengamme*, which was the name of a Nazi concentration camp. Broken Flag's *The Future Calls*,[24] from its *Soundtracks* series of cassettes using Third Reich and far right material with power electronics backing, even features a recording of a National Front meeting.

These sorts of provocations might be dismissed out of hand as insensitive attempts to offend. They might also be taken as endorsements of Nazi ideology. And yet, they can also be interpreted in a more complex, layered way, such that whatever unease we might feel can at least be balanced by some sense that these images are performing a function that isn't reducible to outrage, particularly when read with the music to which they are attached. This "complex" reading isn't *necessarily* better than the other readings, but it does at least allow these musics to be heard in their fullest sense as attempts to say something compelling.

Provocation in this music doesn't just happen on sleeves or in lyrics. Many of the early power electronics concerts featured violence, even degenerated into miniriots. This can be seen, for example, with Whitehouse/Ramleh's 1 July 1983 Roebuck Pub "live aktion," where, following glasses being thrown amid violence in the crowd, the police raided the venue and, after being blocked entrance, eventually made a number of arrests.[25] I myself have attended many noise gigs where the threat of violence feels immediate. Whitehouse shows habitually see William Bennett being extremely confrontational with the crowd such that the room becomes incredibly charged. The same goes for Rat Bastard, the New Blockaders, Consumer Electronics, and many others. Again, this sort of performative style might be seen as mere posturing by men (in these cases) seeking to unleash violent energy, as a mere fetishization of violence for violence's sake. But the violent scenarios of noise can be also be seen not as simple expressions of empty violent urges but as attempts to imbue social relations with the same kind of intensity that is present in a crisis; to use noise as violence in the sense Serres meant (see the start of the last chapter), as a disorder; to create risk and, therefore, the possibility of change. Power electronics' and noise in general's mix

of shocking imagery, confrontational performance, and brutally loud and rough sonics can have a real potency that, for me, has translated into powerful political realizations and actions.

Compounding the difficulty facing anyone adjudicating noise's politics is the fact that noise's political motivations are generally ambiguous, sometimes not seeming to have developed further than a generalized nihilism and a desire for cleansing. Noise music—power electronics or otherwise—has unsurprisingly been placed variously along the spectrum, with the Nazi imagery and far right sloganeering obviously suggesting certain allegiances and the experimentalism, the philosophizing, and the taboo-baiting self-awareness suggesting something quite else. There is therefore a split in evidence between the apparent explicit political content of the words and images on one side and, on the other, that content's undermining, deformation, and overcoding in the artists' noisy, exploratory, unpredictable music and their excessive, carnivalesque stage antics.

In response to the point that the Nazi imagery is presented "without any explanation or apology" on Ramleh releases and consequently is more "ambiguous" than punks using swastikas on their clothes, Gary Mundy echoes these points, as well as calling back in spirit to the Zizek/Laibach strategy of overidentification:

> I liked the ambiguity, and I didn't want it to be obvious whether it was pro- or anti-Nazi, or whether it was ironic or not. I was certainly OK with the idea that it might cause offence at the time, although I think when you listen to a lot of the stuff it's fairly obvious that it's not Pro-Nazi. . . . I think because it was so extreme it was assumed it couldn't be for real and we were mostly left alone.[26]

Noise artists such as those associated with Broken Flag were clearly content to put potentially upsetting statements out into the world without explanation. The possibility that their output could be taken as endorsing one thing or another is part of the point; this material works with techniques of overidentification, satire, and critique that push the audience into thinking things through as fully as they can before deciding on judgment. As with improv attempts to reorganize social relations in Part II, this critique would be very hard-pressed to effect broad change. But taken as part of the apparatus of avant-garde aesthetic activity, it certainly has local and maybe even substantial general effects.

The very excess of the imagery and words of this kind of noise material, in concert with the subliminal modes of the often similarly excessive and violent music, undermines the very foundation of the apparent transgressive content of the work. The Rockwell *Hate*[27] cassette, for example, features electronic

intensification (using extreme volume to amplify certain statements) *and* undermining (in the spacing and distancing effects of echo and distortion) of the sampled speech of George Lincoln Rockwell, the American author of the infamous book *White Power*. The Whitehouse track "Buchenwald,"[28] which features high-pitched grainy whistling sounds over metallic notes of barely ordered feedback stumbling around some sort of desolation site, is simply too uncanny, too spectral, to be interpreted in anything other than ambiguous and confused terms. The same group's "Ripper Territory,"[29] which features a recording of the voiceover from the nightly news on the day of Ripper murderer Peter Sutcliffe's arraignment at court and which sets this over a hair-shirt bed of low-level noise with bursts of violent feedback, similarly presents the listener with a confusing, unsettling experience.

It would be very difficult to rally round these tracks as celebrations of their subjects. We're not accustomed to seeing such oddness being honored by far right demagogues. However, it's also music that is difficult, challenging, hardly communicable to certain sections of society, such that its aesthetic organization around a subliminal modality gets blocked on its way to some listeners, who take the subject matter as an advocation and as a result get upset. Feeling upset is not inherently wrong, but kneejerk condemnation surely is. The manner in which that subject matter is largely treated in the noise context, not with the apparent certainty of a terrace chant but with haziness and discomfort, leaves the actual far right sympathizer in a difficult position of allegiance. This point is reflected in the Gary Mundy quotation above.

10.4. Subliminal Modality, Profanation, and Counter-Magic in Underground Music

The excess of the music and imagery and the subliminal manner in which these things interact mean that this music performs a sort of *ambiguous dissimulation*. This is a term of my own that tries to get at the very intense sense of noise's ironizing dissembly. It's "ambiguous" since it doesn't unequivocally signify one way or the other but instead suggestively points to a kind of disavowal of the immediate political content. Ambiguous dissimulation can be described as a perception arising from the experience of the listener, which is shaped by the subliminal deformations analyzed above. More generally, ambiguous dissimulation relates to the underground's common mode of *profanation*, a Giorgio Agamben term denoting a kind of reclamation of symbols and signifiers for emancipatory or intended-to-be-emancipatory ends.[30] Relatedly, one of Paul

Hegarty's key points about noise music is that it has misuse at its core, whether that's of instruments, machinery, contexts, or practices. For Hegarty, "such improper use is part of the failure that constitutes noise," and these uses "end up revealing disruptions, cuts, and interferences that are always already present in the proper functioning."[31] This misuse relates closely to profanation.

So noise, like other underground forms, uses a kind of profaning subliminal modality where sounds and words are swamped and jumbled rather than perfected, are worked into Hegarty's "breakdown" rather than framed in the context of simply stated "achievable goals."[32] This creates a sense of ambiguous dissimulation, which relates to a wider aesthetic principle of profanation. All of this combines to produce the aesthetic "counter-magic" described in chapter 4. By confronting listeners with even a microcosm of the violence and discomfort of its subjects, noise musicians, like extreme metal artists with their similarly intense subjects and sonics, have the courage to risk paying a back-handed compliment to that violence while also exposing its full horror and in some way providing to listeners a counter-spell to the pervasive one. Noise's extreme subject matter allows the musicians sonically and symbolically to stage a concealed otherness (such as the death and contamination fixation of SPK or the noise of Nazi death camps) and therefore to reveal suppressed features of a society. This function is continuous with the use of Nazi and pagan imagery and words in extreme black metal. These musicians work from a point of exclusion from mainstream society. One of the ways they reassert themselves is by representing excluded others. By doing so they expose to that society simply that it *excludes* and *conceals*, first, and, second, that that exclusion and concealment have, to a degree, failed. This can serve as *counter-magic* for those paying attention to the complex signals with which all of this underground music is playing.

Jacques Rancire, in this sort of spirit, has written about the political possibilities of art actually lying in its ability to "re-distribute the sensible," where this is understood as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it."[33] Aesthetics can be understood, according to Rancire, "as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience"; and thus he concludes that there is an aesthetics "at the core of politics."[34] It follows from these points that "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak."[35] Finally, "the arts can only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation . . . what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible."[36]

In this sense of politics revolving around an aesthetic discourse of what is visible and who gets to speak, it's not unreasonable to suggest that the transgressive subjects and the extreme sonics of noise music, like other underground tropes, such as, for example, the collective agencies of improvisation and the social distortions and performance art of noise group the Haters, can be seen to expand both what is open to experience and *who* gets to comment on experience, even if that commentary is sometimes delivered by proxy. In this respect, noise, in the words of Alain Badiou, serves as "the creation of a new knowledge"; as a presentation of "something before the facts"; as "a new vision of the world";[37] or, for Mark Fisher, as quoted in chapter 4, as "dreamings" of "worlds radically different" from our own. Noise can be understood to be engaged in a program, successful, partial, and limited or not, of aesthetic expansion and counter-magic that is directly relatable, through Jacques Ranciere, to a form of political emancipation that reconfigures the sensible.

Of course, it's important not to get too carried away with these ideas of profanation, counter-magic, and reconfigurations of the sensible. The political content and effect of the music and the actions are overdetermined and consistently ambiguous. The point also stands that noise might be seen actually to *absorb* oppositional energy in a like manner to the participatory media of Jodi Dean, the scene's self-determining production models and the neural rewirings of the music itself potentially obstructing critical practice and giving people the feeling that they are, somehow, liberated from capital and subsumption. In other words, noise *may* function as a sop on the more general conditions as opposed to functioning as a localized antigram (an announcement of novelty) or diagram (a reflection of iniquity) of those conditions. A final point to note here is that overreading is certainly a real danger in writing about this music; let me just note that, in many cases, noise simply provides listeners with pleasing aesthetic experiences.

11

The Sounds of Noise

I go into a lot of detail in the last chapter on a particularly potent era of noise music of the 1970s and 1980s, with a focus on the UK. While the listening and political frameworks established there of subliminal modality/ambiguity and of profanation/counter-magic are maintained into this chapter, the goal here is to provide a more aesthetically based extrapolation of this interpretative aesthetic-affective framework—which is supplemented by my own aesthetic concepts of accidental audition, comfort noise, and the performative everyday—*and* a broad-based technical description of a wide(r) range of noise music.

11.1. Dialectics of Form and Texture

A "loud as possible" attitude is typical of the noise scene, in every sense (Hegarty's "extreme volume and extreme content").[1] This can be seen again and again in sonically violent releases pitched at ear-splitting volumes. While sheer volume of this sort is critically important to the scene, I attempt to be a little more exacting in my investigations of what is sonically important. Some fundamental dialectical processes (where dialectics functions as a metaphor for polarized tendencies in constant flux) are detectable in noise music: a "horizontal" one between mostly defined song-based and free forms on the one hand and a "vertical" one between edificial and more refined textural approaches on the other.

A. Japanoise and Early Dialectics

These two dialectical processes of form and texture permeate each other in practice. Harsh wall noise clearly implies a certain formal agenda; if pieces or tracks consist of superficially homeostatic walls of sound in terms of texture, then songlike forms (or any other conventional organizational models) would seem to be alien. Likewise, even in the most extreme power electronics songs of intense volume and screeching sounds, there are nevertheless discernible metrics and lyrics commonly in place, and as such formal definition is more easily pinned down. Texture and form define and determine each other here. These mutually characterized dialectics are evident in the contrasting cases of contemporaneous Japanese noise acts Merzbow (Masami Akita), Incapacitants, and Hijokaidan.

Drawing on the heritage of industrial music, Merzbow's work is conceived—to an extent, though Akita has been quoted as saying that "there are no special images of ideology behind Merzbow"[2]—under a culturally engaged program, where an association among the sexual, the transgressive, and the intuitive initially bound Akita's conceptualization of noise practice, before various ecological and animal rights concerns took over in the 1990s and beyond. Akita states the following on the subject:

> In the beginning, I had a very conceptual mindset. I tried to quit using any instruments which related to, or were played by, the human body. . . . The first U.S. tour (1990) was a turning point for finding a certain pleasure for using the body in the performance. I am using more physically rooted Noise music not as conceptually anti-instrument and anti-body as before. If music was sex, Merzbow would be pornography. . . . Pornography is the unconsciousness of sex. So, Noise is the unconsciousness of music.[3]

This focus on pornography manifested in two directions: in direct use of pornographic images in the packaging of Akita's cassette releases in the 1980s (when he was involved in a mailing network with artists such as the Haters and Maurizio Bianchi) and also in conceptual terms. For Akita, "Noise is the most erotic form of sound."[4] And yet here we have a split case, since even as Akita emphasizes his notion of sonic erotics, he insists that "Western Noise is often too conceptual and academic," whereas "Japanese Noise relishes the ecstasy of sound itself."[5] Hence Merzbow can be seen to be engaged in extra-musical conceptualization while also endorsing a focus on "sound itself," albeit sound as affect. This

is largely borne out by his music, which often deploys extra-musical semiotic framing in a context of powerful sonics.

Like Akita, Incapacitants (Fumio Kosakai and Toshiji Mikawa) and Hijokaidan (Jojo Hiroshige and Mikawa, with other members, such as Junko, coming and going) came to prominence in the early 1990s. The two groups released a number of important harsh noise albums—such as Hijokaidan's *Windom* and Incapacitants' *Feedback of N.M.S*[6]—on the leading Japanese noise label Alchemy, run by Hiroshige and based in Osaka. (Each act also worked with other labels, for instance, Incapacitants' association with now-defunct American experimental label Zabriskie Point.) Like Akita, too, both acts tended to use electronic instruments and other noise generators, such as no-input mixing desks, as key media, with voice and other instruments, such as electric guitar, also being important. Like *and* unlike Akita, Incapacitants and Hijokaidan do not underwrite their music with any cultural or political baggage. What we have with these artists is a form of noise supposedly driven by "purely" musical ends (reminding us of the tussle between noise as genre and noise as ideology discussed in the previous chapter). Such a program of absolute music was to become standard both in Japan, where it was taken up by later artists such as Masonna, Melt Banana, and Government Alpha, and elsewhere, as, for example, with Wolf Eyes and Werewolf Jerusalem in the United States and Jazkamer in Europe (though bondage imagery, for instance, seems to have returned recently to harsh wall noise).

The other significant difference between these Japanese acts lies in the music itself; where Akita's work is often dynamically vigorous (in spite of his own static performing state, in contrast to the noise contortions of the body of Masonna), unpredictable even, both Incapacitants and Hijokaidan favor walls of noise, with the former tending toward fused high frequencies and extended blast surfaces and the latter's feeling differentiated at least by their sense of layered tectonics and their sometime explosive instrumental detail. (The vast output of all these acts, but particularly Merzbow, makes generalization hard, but what I have said here holds for at least a fair amount of their work.) An example of the former would be Incapacitants' "Apoptosis," from *As Loud As Possible*,[7] which places unyielding though comparatively mild high-frequency feedback over about ten minutes of low-end explosions, crash gestures suggestive of a noise wall juddering to the ground. Through the course of the track, the high-end sonics gradually congeal, and the final seven minutes, after the first ten, seem to resolve the previous separation into a cohesive and now brutal total wall, bulldozing into a spent finale of bleeping AM scratches.

Meanwhile, Hijokaidan's early work in the 1980s (on albums such as *Tapes*[8])

is akin to the kind of performance art aesthetic (which in Hijokaidan's case involved literally destructive live performances) and Dada noise improvisations of the No Nihilist Spasm Band or Borbetomagus. But by 1990, with the vicious noise-tunnel one-track *Romance*[9] album, the group had showed its wall noise allegiances, though certain of its 1980s traits persisted, as, for example, with the hectic and chaotic guitar and drum parts—the latter usually played, incidentally, by Masami Akita—of tracks such as 1997's "What A Nuisance."[10]

Before moving on from the Japanoise scene, I'll go into a little more depth on the music. "Spiral Blast," from Merzbow's *Pulse Demon*, demonstrates well the type of approach common to Akita's work. The track plays out as if someone has fitted welders or other metalworkers with contact mics and asked them to go about their business. There is an astonishing intensity to the sound, an intensity that marks the music out from even other harsh noise repertoire; we are here in the thick of disturbing drilling, blasting, and mouse squeaks, sounds that assault the ears with an emotional pull that plays with notions of dangerous indulgence, cruelty, and transformation or takeover. These foreground features are set over a bed of continuous, explosive static. However, there's a clear formal dynamic at work here, with, for example, the scratchy gestures of the surface becoming gradually subsumed in the third minute by a more pressing, ascending wave of notes. By the 2′40″ mark these ascensions seem to have split apart the wall. All sorts of competing dynamic forces drive the bleached sonics to a kind of collapse at 3′40″, before a repetitive little coda and a squall of radio feedback and condensed chaotic activity bring the abrasion to a close.

"Woodpecker No. 1," the opening track from the same album, demonstrates the same bullish intensity, while also exploring repetitive, quasi-sequential passages and gestures akin to the banging beats of techno. A wall of static falls out every few seconds, while a gurning but strangely funky pulsing noise figure of four to nine steady beats steals in to suggest an alternative direction. The static gradually supersedes the grisly noise beats, before these beats (the woodpecker of the title?) return, briefly, now sonically more refined than before. The consuming radio feedback and white noise static returns to the fore, however, with the pulsing figure reduced to high-frequency clicks, which are now omnipresent. At 2′48″ the whole texture jumps brilliantly into a mangled wedding of the two pulsing figures, now beating continuously, but the pull-to-static and white noise, with the ever-present radio scratches, soon take over.

These three features—obscure, subbass pulsing; a tendency toward white noise; and febrile and coruscating high-range scratches—in fact dominate Merzbow's so-called analogue era, which lasted roughly until the late 1990s and which saw Merzbow operating in the kind of theater of cruelty and extremity

that would become de rigueur for harsh noise acts keen to stage masochism and sonic consummation for audiences driven to their own consuming ecstasies by the confounding sound. The following three minutes of the track here see noise turbulence swaying this way and that, with the clean beating figure now faint, now loud, below the molten and coarse scratching and static. At 5′50″–6′54″, a neat little coda emerges, where the gestural palette of the track is rifled through in flits and starts, the intensity and textural density wound down somewhat before a sudden thudding and crackly twelve beats bring the track to a close.

The gradation of formal and textural properties (which, as I have said, are mutually characterized) in "Woodpecker No. 1" can be seen on the Sonic Visualiser spectrum analysis (or "spectrogram") available at the University of Michigan Press site http://www.press.umich.edu/p/graham.[11] The spectrogram gives a nice visual illustration of the music's form, frequencies, and dynamics. It shows the wide frequency range of the track, which sustains throughout across a range of approximately 21Hz → 8,800Hz (Merzbow's music is distinctly frequencially spacious in this respect). The dynamic intensity of the track, which is played extremely loud, can be seen in the shifts between -3 Db → -18Db (the red to yellow patches on the analysis). Meanwhile, the scan parses the form of the music quite succinctly; a low-range bass-frequency intensity runs throughout, while sudden and jagged shifting between the beating gestures and the more sustained blasts of noise of the track is pictured in red and yellow blotches, which indicate the sustained noise, and the gaps in between, where the beating suddenly takes prominence.

"Woodpecker No. 2," the following track on the same album, features a similar formal marshaling of white noise and beating gestures as the above track, though the surface here is even more discontinuous, the track playing out like a misremembered nightmare of the preceding one.

Although Merzbow's output varies wildly, as I've said—even within the analogue era an album such as *Noisembryo* is organized into a much more monolithic slab of noise, with its sixty minutes simply carved up into parts one to four—the type of sonic and gestural procedures found on these tracks are nevertheless prevalent. Merzbow's music, though invariably violent and very, very loud, can be characterized by this sort of tension between rasping and tumultuous sonic walls on the one hand and gestural definition and formal dynamism on the other, all keyed into brutalizing sonic assaults for audiences. This tension is in marked contrast to the more unremitting, though of course internally dynamic, noise homeostases of Incapacitants and Hijokaidan.

The Japanoise scene, then, even while being musically differentiated to a degree, largely existed in its early years and indeed continues to exist as a musical

scene united by certain core themes. Those themes include the exploration of analogue (and, later, digital) walls of noise and extremities of affect within a context of underground modes of performance and distribution. The use of physical channels connecting the local scene to the global noise scene, as evidenced in Akita's mail order network with Bianchi, is also important. The Japanoise scene, finally, mirrors contemporary developments in the noise scene, which has likewise moved away from the explicit politics of power electronics into a more submerged *aesthetic* politics and/or sonic ecstasy and brutality, where musical and performative possibilities are exploded but explicit political themes of transgression are sublimated. The Japanoise scene also mirrors the development of the global scene more generally speaking in the use of snail mail networks and, later, in the impact of the digital age, which has led to unprecedented global publicity and reach.

B. US Noise and Later Dialectics

Formal and textural dialectics continue to dominate the harsh noise scene in the twenty-first century. In the case of artists such as Religious Knives, Prurient, and Whitehouse, for example, we can draw up a formal spectrum as a representative organizing metaphor. In such a spectrum, the "pure" harsh noise, free-form, screamed, and severely treble-laden music of Prurient[12] would sit on one side; Whitehouse, with their broadly lyric-led loose forms (even in the later Italo disco and African percussion stages), would sit somewhere in the middle; while Religious Knives, whose stoned psychedelic noise songs are comparable in their punchy form and comparatively mild sonic texture to post-noise fringe underground pop music such as Broadcast or LA Vampires, would sit toward the opposite end of the **free–song** formal spectrum. And many other examples could indeed be chosen to fit into the threefold framework, for instance, Incapacitants, Wolf Eyes, and Throbbing Gristle. The point is that choice of formal strategy (and texture) is key in noise music, providing as it does a comprehensible framework for the organization of the scene into an internally dynamic model of musical practice, while also demonstrating the internal variety of what is sometimes accused of being a basically uniform scene.

That dynamism and variety are especially evident when we come to examine a more recent artist such as Kites.[13] Kites's style, as can be seen on the extended piece "The Hidden Family,"[14] mixes Merzbow and concrète-like cut-ups with, variously, callused harsh noise; subbass drones, and wallish textures; witty collage jitteriness; touches of folk harmonies and lyrics; and off-the-wall vocal hooks and interludes (a range of influences not that far from the LAFMS

laundry lists). As such Kites must be seen adhering to my spectrum in a mobile, multiply centered way. This is much in the way that Skin Graft's work, examined near the start of the book, hovers between various noise allegiances and styles. The spectrum in this way would simply be a tool through which the broad differences that inhere in the noise scene and even within artists' own outputs can be graphed.

The harsh noise subgenre of harsh wall noise that arose in the 1990s in the United States and Japan—where the Merzbowian notion of the "ecstasy of sound" seems to have been of much more importance than the charged political enthusiasms of industrial and power electronic artists, though, as I've said, politics is certainly still here, albeit in sublimated form(s)—features a range of artists for whom the notion of a dialectic between sonic stasis and friction is vitally important. Werewolf Jerusalem (Richard Ramirez) and Hum of the Druid (Eric Stonefelt) are just two artists whose music provides variegated experiences to the keen-eared listener of apparently monotonous noise music.

Ramirez puts old radios (from the 1970s and 1980s) through distortion, delay, and reverb pedals, turning the volumes of the radios up to what he describes as a "complete buzz sound."[15] He also makes use of things like blown speakers facing each other to produce heavy screeds of feedback. Ramirez's work features an almost unrelenting concentration of energy, where a track such as "Bound"[16] (from the album *Masked Spider of the First*) showcases his obsessive tracking of subtle gradations of static and distortion in the context of a bulldozing wall of noise. That wall of static and distortion, apart from a number of short passages where the spectral low end drops out completely, is unrelenting. While the four and a half minutes of "Bound" appear to the ear as a bizarrely empty passage of nonsound, of blown speakers arching out in tiny climaxes of extra-loud static and crackle to the accompaniment of an indistinct and ominous low test tone coming and going in the ear, the spectrum analysis at http://www.press.umich.edu/p/graham demonstrates the faint but vital mutations that give form and shape to the material. In contrast to "Woodpecker No. 1," the relatively circumscribed frequency range (approx. 21Hz → 3,800Hz) and the relatively unvarying dynamic range of this track can be seen clearly in the spectrogram's unity and constancy. The form here is much more monolithic and internally homeostatic.

Werewolf Jerusalem's "Slit" (from the same album) appears first as unrelenting as "Bound," though if anything it seems even more abrasive and violent. And yet it contains within its heavy volume a vibrancy of sonic activity, where a middle-register overtone motif seems to provide the higher-range distortion and static with a mournful summary, a call from beyond that lifts the track into a definable space of aesthetics.

In contrast to Ramirez's focus on retro technology and its crackling secrets, Hum of the Druid's Stonefelt seeks, through the use of electronics and voice, a form of naturalistic white noise that is closer to what he calls "the white noise of reality," which, he suggests, is distinct from the "cheap" static of other wall noise musicians.[17] Stonefelt emphasizes the "individual components" of his noise walls. He examines their interlocking and shifting timbres, constructing graceful leaps and delicate sutures of material much in the manner of Skin Graft, while drawing out an acute textural complexity in the development of his sonic ingredients. Stonefelt's process, which uses an array of found sound recordings (from a footfall to a distant phantom fart), as well as vocals and assorted other sources, thus contrasts with the single-sound sources of Ramirez.

The first three minutes of Hum of the Druid's "Norse Fumigation"[18] vividly evoke such "individual components" and "complexity," as seen in the spectrogram at http://www.press.umich.edu/p/graham. Contrasting with the deliberately scuzzy, static noise of Ramirez, Stonefelt moves in this track from tolling and atmospheric tone reverberations into thick midrange microphone smothering (approximately five seconds in) over sustained drones in the sub-500Hz range, with punctuation from flecks of higher sounds. This then moves at thirty seconds into a much more spacious, phonographic sense of detail, where thuds and background smothering are contrasted with specky sounds of frantic industrial tinkering. At approximately 1′46″ these phonographic elements are almost subsumed by the sudden prominence of a fractured and fluctuant processed bass and drum pattern (which is visible in the flare-ups of red in the last minute of the scan between 473Hz and approximately 2,000Hz).

The full excerpt, though brief, conveys well the dual engagements of Stonefelt's music in a kind of harsh wall noise on the one hand and in a strong sense of compositional detail and sonic variety (as seen in the comparative variation of the scan) on the other. The excerpt mirrors the kind of subterranean dungeon crawl pictorialism of the death ambient genre while remaining comfortably within the distinctive static and scrawl contexts of noise.

Despite the significant differences in texture and process between Hum of the Druid and Werewolf Jerusalem, Stonefelt's music, as, for example, in the extended piece "Raising the New Flag,"[19] with its shift from harsh walls of screamed vocals and barrages of metallic electronic noise of a refined, atomic detail into a more spacious subbass ambience that yet preserves some of the gestural impact and intricate textural detail of the first section, nevertheless compliments the noisy and monolithic crunch and crumbles of Ramirez's Jerusalem. Stonefelt's music as Hum of the Druid features after all a comparable exploration of subtle gradations of static and crackle in the context of high volume and

dynamically restricted sounds as Ramirez's does. Both, in any case, serve as a testament to the sheer variety that can be found in the contemporary harsh wall noise scene, even within one country.

The elaborate processes of textural and dynamic mutation in harsh noise music, I would suggest, are at the center of listeners' experiences of that music. It's not simply the ear-splitting volumes at which much of this music is heard that drive the music into people's affections, nor is it just its intense performance situations. As demonstrated above, sonic nuance is crucial to harsh noise, even if such nuance is hard to parse, set into a context of masking distortion and diverting, sublime volume. In harsh noise a sort of dumb extremity is epitomized. The music appears broad, aggressive, and turgid, but on closer examination, upon learning its codes, the listener appreciates its internal and intragenre dynamism and distinction. It is the same process of appreciation that goes on with any music genre. Just as important as outward distension here is a *musical* sense of detail and color. This is sublime and subliminal music full of potentially profaning confusion and chaos, both for producer and listener, which yet submits to parsing, explanation, and change.

10.2. Lo-Fi Music and Noise Affect

> Bennie knew that what he was bringing into the world was shit. Too clear, too clean. The problem was precision, perfection; the problem was *digitisation*, which sucked the life out of everything that got smeared through its microscopic mesh. . . . *An aesthetic holocaust!*[20]

Lo-fi music, broadly speaking, is characterized by an enthusiasm for antiquated, particularly analogue, recording technologies, though digital media are also used. The crucial conceit of lo-fi is the rejection of sonic finesse and, I suggest—expanding the framework of lo-fidelity music from the sonic to the gestural—the corresponding emphasis on the music of the everyday and the punk-derived ethics of nonspecialist musicianship. I'll call the latter the "performative everyday."

The lo-fi genre itself, examined in this case study, exists at something of a tangent to noise. It's either a subgenre of it or a discrete form of fringe noise/pop depending on what *kind* of lo-fi is being discussed (fringe noise/pop would be reserved for the more commercial end of lo-fi). It might not, in the sense being used here, even be a genre, instead serving as a metageneric stylistic descriptor connecting various forms of underground and popular musics. Either way, the

fact that noise music is almost exclusively lo-fidelity means that this case study can be taken to be directly germane to my wider discussions of noise aesthetics and theory: the interpretative aesthetic framework I end up with here applies both and together to lo-fi and to lo-fi/noise music. Examples of noise are, in any case, considered alongside more strictly "lo-fi" music.

A. Lo-Fi versus Hi-Fi

"Lo-fi" began to gain traction as a descriptive term as soon as recording earned the designation "high fidelity." This took place sometime around the 1960s, when recording technology enabled previously unprecedented accuracy of frequency response and minimized noise and distortion. Music is sometimes lo-fidelity as a matter of circumstance, where, for example, someone only has access to cheap technology. The lo-fi music (or music with heavy lo-fi elements) being investigated here features lo-fidelity sounds by choice. The lo-fi genre itself originated roughly in 1980s America. I want to trace the musical origins back a little further, however, to earlier free music artists such as the No Nihilist Spasm Band and the artists involved in the LAFMS, as well as to garage bands of the 1960s. With their ramshackle production and performing styles, these groups produced "authentically" lo-fi works before the term itself came to have generic or metageneric distinction. The lo-fi genre or metagenre itself is both *of* the underground and elsewhere, on its fringes and on the fringes of popular culture, as I said above. The latter may be seen in such commercially and artistically assorted artists as Beat Happening, Beck, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Guided by Voices, Elliot Smith, and Neutral Milk Hotel, to name only a small selection. Beat Happening's music conveys quite well how a lo-fi aesthetic has come close to the mainstream. The group favored live analogue recording, simple song and harmonic structures, repetitive and somewhat childlike lyrics, a conversational style of delivery, and almost primitive percussion instruments. Such qualities are in evidence on the title track of their second album, 1988's *Jamboree*,[21] which track also evinces the irregularity of tempo that so characterizes the sense of the "performative everyday" that I suggest is critical to lo-fi music. But my focus is a little away from such quasi-mainstream sections of the lo-fi genre and instead on various underground styles that use lo-fi as a key ingredient.

B. The Performative Everyday: Conversationalism, Primitivism, and Sonic Indeterminacy

My notion of the "performative everyday" takes various forms. In brief, it's an attitude and sensibility of the everyday, of the relaxed and antiformal. It's con-

veyed in the music through various means, most obviously arrangements, production style, and performing techniques. While this notion is being developed specifically within the context of lo-fi, as with profanation and counter-magic, it should be understood to apply to underground music more generally as a core technique and affective mode.

The variability of the concept of the performative everyday can be illustrated if we contrast the No Nihilist Spasm Band's wild gestural primitivism in its vocals and in its sense of ensemble with the more casual conversational intensity of a track such as Throbbing Gristle's "Persuasion," from their 1979 album *20 Jazz Funk Greats*.[22] This industrial track features a bare synthesizer outlining a calm two-note bass figure of a rocking minor third, both notes getting four thudding beats each, while singer Genesis P-Orridge intones a narrative of creeping subjugation in a mannered, speech-song style, all of this supported by quiet moans and effects and punctured intermittently by a strained and distorted overdriven synth gesture mimicking a woman's scream. "Persuasion" performs a sense of the everyday through its simplistic musical materials and its conversational vocal style. The Spasm Band, meanwhile, perform a hyper-everyday through their antiformal wild and "primitive" music.

For another version of the "performative everyday" we can turn to the distinctive noise improvisations-compositions of LAFMS-affiliated artists such as Smegma and Le Forte Four. Using everything from hand toys to reel-to-reel tape to contact mics to more conventional instruments such as piano and (spoken, sung, or screamed) vocals, these artists set out a template of hiss, crackle, and pop in sonics, and looseness of structure and technique in the design and playing, that is still being explored in the murky soundscapes of such post-noise artists as Sun Araw and Moon Wiring Club. (The connection of the LAFMS style to Zappaesque postmodern satire and high/low institutional crossings is drawn in chapter 9.) The LAFMS artists "perform the everyday" in a like fashion to the Spasm Band (SB) *and* Throbbing Gristle, while adding a third layer to TG's simplistic conversationalism and SB's wild primitivism: sonic indeterminacy. Such indeterminacy, present here due to the deliberately lo-fidelity quality of the recordings and the improvisational nature of the compositional processes, ends up manifesting a sense of the *sonic* everyday, of the kinds of ramshackle sonic contexts most of us experience all the time in our lives, whether we're at a bus station or in town or sitting at home.

I'll use some examples from the LAFMS artists' extensive catalogs to flesh this out. All of the music discussed below is available on the 1996 ten-CD retrospective entitled *The Lowest Form of Music*.[23]

Le Forte Four's "Telethon Returns" (from a longer session of the same name

that was cut up for the *Live at the Brand* album) features a set of glasses being struck in imitation of Balinese gongs and gender. At the same time, percussion again akin to Balinese gamelan, at least in its insistent beat, trots along in the background, before a humorous conversation between the musicians occurs on the theme of the gallery telethon they hosted when Joe Potts was a postgraduate student at the Otis College of Art and Design, with voices being subject to echo and various noises driving things to the edge of chaos. Meanwhile, "Down the Congo in a Backwards Canoe," "Simple Circus," and "Keep that Point Up" evince the group's predilection for creative yet straightforward use of what we'd now call samples. The first simply plays back the Beatles' "Ballad of John and Yoko" with the first two beats of each bar being replaced by the sound of a decaying re-winding tape. This track again shows how fitting the "mockers" label was to the group (though, as I point out earlier, this doesn't fully capture their high/low blend) and how fitting the postmodern descriptors of collage, intertextuality, and pastiche are likewise. The other tracks show these things too. "Simple Circus" runs a fairground waltz backward to kaleidoscopic effect. "Keep that Point Up" toys with field recordings of Congolese boatmen, playing them backward and looping certain sections.

Another, shorter version of "Telethon Returns" features some random clattering of pots and pans, with an excerpt from a conversation being audible before the track finishes. "To the Crow" places a woozy carnival barker in front of a drunk and fuzzy Dixieland band falling apart at the seams for a blistering seventy seconds. Meanwhile, Smegma member Ju Suk Reet Meate's *Solos 78/79* focuses on a similarly sonically degraded, chaotic sense of structure and texture and sample and loop aesthetic to the Le Forte Four music just discussed.

Le Forte Four unite the carnivalesque, music-hall approach of the Bonzo Dog Dooh-Dah Band with the primitivist improv aesthetic of a group like the No Nihilist Spasm Band, adding an enthusiasm of their own for concrète sonic chaos and experiment—an enthusiasm that is particularly focused on sounds and procedures relatable to a notion of the everyday while being derived, as we saw, from a heady range of high/low influences. In this they can be seen to participate in the aesthetic of the performative everyday on both the sonic and the gestural levels. So as noted, LAFMS music echoes TG's conversationalism and SB's primitivism while adding its own sense of the indeterminate sonic everyday, all of these deriving from the broader "performative everyday" I've been discussing.

Lo-fi music of the kinds just surveyed *might* remind us of a time when art and life were in less of a mutually opposing relation (or at least might produce the illusion of such a time), where the artifices of the everyday and the artifices

of art are joined together as composite and interpenetrating phenomena accessible through music and musical performance. These are the kinds of affective parameters that I have been trying to pin down in the concept of the "performative everyday."

C. Accidental Audition and Comfort Noise: *Mantic* and Noise Music

Mantic, a 2010 album by Lady Lazarus, sounds as spectral and numinous as it does both because of Lazarus's very deliberate use of a dust-blown, out-of-tune piano and because of the fact and manner of her use of a Tascam four-track to record the album, an anachronistic analogue recording device that first emerged in 1979. In accordance with my earlier expansion of the notion of the lo-fi aesthetic from the purely sonic to the gestural, it should be remarked that Lady Lazarus's spindly, frail pianistic style and the halting, conversational writing and singing on *Mantic* are equally important to the music's lo-fi status.

Intimate and dust-covered, quiet and trembling, the intensity of *Mantic* emerges directly out of its apparent sonic frailties. The broadly lo-fidelity quality of the album is evident in the smeared tuning of the piano; the frail intonation of the voice; the ghostly and opaque capture of the sonic picture in the recording and production process; and, on a more oblique level, in the baggy, nonfinessed approach to line and color in Lady Lazarus's performance style. *Mantic* features a set of sonically overdriven, reverb-heavy, and high-distortion analogue recordings of tumbledown songs that drift in and out of steady periodic time. As with any form of artistic experience, while listening one attunes to the distinctive qualities of the work being experienced, in this case adjusting one's ears and expectations to the peculiar timbres and timescales of the music that result from its particular sonic organization and performance style.

Two of the tracks on *Mantic*, "Sick Child" and "Immortal Youth," can be seen to exemplify some central features of what I identify as the expressive currency and affective modality of both lo-fi music specifically and noise music more generally. "Sick Child" features a speeding-slowing sextuplet arpeggio in the right hand and a simple rising third in the bass of the piano, both of which are repeated with minimal variation throughout the song. The vocal is characteristically light, conversationally vernacular, and thin at points of sustain and melodic apex. In its intimacy, looseness, and unlearned idiom the style is already *echt* lo-fi in the same way that the music of a slightly more mainstream act like Beat Happening would be, though there is an intensity and obscurity to "Sick Child" that align it more directly with tendencies within the underground scene. The ascent of the left hand of the piano in the track from the tonic note

to the third note of the scale coincides at its peak with the descent of the primary note of the treble arpeggio from its tonic to the sharpened seventh. This tonal event takes place in a sonic environment of overdriven, high-gain tones, such that as the third and seventh degrees collide, a shard of feedback sparks off the two, producing a ringing third-degree harmonic fully two octaves up from the bass third. Buried, almost subauditory assertions of further layers of overtone activity gleam off the vivid and curious audio picture. As one listens, these sparks emerge from the ground of the music to draw unpredictable little figures on the sound's surface.

"Immortal Youth" shares with "Sick Child" an idiom of simple conversational looseness, a similar desire to manifest this sense of the everyday in the realm of music. The use of a non-equal-tempered African thumb piano as accompaniment to the vocals on "Immortal Youth," however, makes even more explicit the indebtedness of the lo-fi aesthetic to noise principles of psychoacoustic emergence and chance harmonic and sonic texturing. This sort of chance calls back to the more chaotic but related sonic indeterminacy of the LAFMS artists.

These various noise principles, expressive ultimately of what I've called the performative everyday, can be seen to connect, if indirectly, to Freud's discussion of *accidental audition* in the context of a patient who heard a "noise" when lying with her lover. Freud relates this apparent noise to the "primal scene" of the parents awakening the child. He initially describes the noise in terms of a typical "overhearing," but, as explained by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, he "immediately corrects himself by saying: "It is doubtful whether we can rightly call the noise 'accidental.' . . . Such fantasies are an indispensable part of the phantasy of listening."[24] Although Freud is talking about noise in a separate sense, I'll nevertheless use his observations as the basis for my own version of "accidental audition." Within this model, whether emerging from fundamental psychological drives or not, listening is seen as a fundamentally uncanny sensory experience, full of strange resonances and unexpected conjunctions. Here I'd call attention to the description of sound contained in David Toop's *Sinister Resonance*. Toop states that "sound is a haunting, a ghost, a presence whose location in space is ambiguous and whose existence in time is fleeting."[25] The ambiguity to which Toop refers here is *always* present in musical experience, but in lo-fidelity noise music that ambiguity is magnified by the music's lack of harmonic polish and syntactical rigor.

Bart Kosko's theory of noise can be seen to be in sympathy with all this. Toop writes of how Kosko emphasizes that noise, far from being "a sudden incidence of disruption," actually exists as "the constancy through which events of high value are highlighted."[26] Sonic finesse and transparency, in this respect, would

be understood to rob listening of its natural ambiguity, as well as, paradoxically, to remove the clarifying potential from noise, a potential richly preserved by lo-fi noise processes. So lo-fi and noise would in this sense offer to their listeners a refracted, subliminal, and unpredictable version of already spectral conventional modes of listening, whether we think of the murky profanations of power electronics and industrial or of the herky-jerky conversationalism and/or primitivism of the LAFMS and the Spasm Band.

The concept of comfort noise is apt here. Comfort noise is a dimension of sonic perception that contributes to such processes as accidental audition being as pleasurable as they are. Eric Abrahamson and David H. Freedman, the authors of *A Perfect Mess*, describe the phenomenon of ambient background noise in phone conversations: "This noise feels right to us: at an unconscious level, it is reassuring. The technical term for this type of background noise, in fact, is *comfort noise*, and trying to talk to someone in the absence of it is a bit disorientating."[27] For my purposes, comfort noise has to do with the sonic ambience in which we all conduct our daily lives; the concept of comfort noise suggests that we draw comfort from that submersion. When we hear digitally compressed recordings where dynamic range is limited, vibrancy of frequency suppressed, and other random noises edited out, productive aspects of sonic perception are expelled (though others are, I hasten to add, created). Lo-fi noise music restores aspects of this *comfort noise*, this sonic detritus, to us.

An album like *Mantic*, then, could be seen to satisfy contemporary ears by restoring to them the sonic ambiguity that recent recordings have been so keen to excise. Noise and lo-fi more generally, in contrast to, for example, the minute frequencal control explored in spectral composition, seek instead the fortuity of disarray, the improvisatory serendipity of relatively open approaches to musical organization and technological experimentation. With harsh noise we would, admittedly, be employing the notion of "comfort" not perhaps in the sense of a palliative but rather in a looser metaphorical way where sonic freedom provides ears with pleasurable opportunities to seek out patterns, tension, and dynamics where superficially there appears to be none. By contrast, with artists such as the noise rock groups Hair Police and Billy Bao, where short, detuned, and distorted guitar songs dominate, the importance of accidental audition and comfort noise rests less in intricate aural engagement than in the experience of a liberated sonic and organization sense, where form and gesture themselves convey a sort of caprice that connects directly to an accidental model of cognition. In all of these examples different versions of the performative everyday lead directly to affects of comfort noise based on the presence of accidental audition.

I'd suggest, in conclusion, that the attraction of lo-fi noise music (that is, all

noise music and the noisier examples of lo-fi music I've been discussing), which I have organized around concepts of accidental audition, comfort noise, and the conversational and/or primitive performative everyday, is a reminder of the fact that aesthetic judgements are not absolute. We can appreciate a dingy, out-of-tune recording for the same reason that eyes attuned to digital high definition will happily watch grainy footage on YouTube; aesthetic appreciation doesn't arise out of a set of fully developed principles that beget merely rigid expectations but rather from a set of principles that allow for malleable circumstance. We adjust, *attune*, our critical faculties to account for the variance of the situation. To hear Mitsuko Uchida play Schumann on an out-of-tune piano or Katy Perry through a dodgy PA would be troublesome for most, but listening to Merzbow or Lady Lazarus or Le Forte Four, we pay much less heed to the fidelity of the instrument(s). As well as furnishing us with rich sonic experiences and refreshing musical idioms of chaos and experiment, then, lo-fi noise music affirms for us the relativity of aesthetic appreciation, an insight as revelatory as it is straightforward.

I'll carry forward all these concepts of the performative everyday, accidental audition, and comfort noise, alongside the previously discussed subliminal modality, profanation, and counter-magic, into my final chapter, which examines extreme metal music that fringes on and also exists within the underground and which shares these aesthetic and political traits with much other underground music.

12

Extreme Metal

This chapter deals in an intertextual way with extreme metal of the last fifteen to twenty years, focusing on drone, sludge, and black metal. The first two of these genres are based in various ways on droning strategies, with black metal being a somewhat distinct but aesthetically and politically closely related genre of extreme metal. Black metal emerged in Europe and America in the 1980s under the influence of thrash and heavier forms of metal. Sludge came a little later and was heavily influenced by doom and proto-doom acts such as Black Sabbath. Drone metal, finally, emerged in the 1990s as an avant-garde and brutally minimalist outgrowth of forms such as sludge and minimalist drone composition, as seen in brief in the case study of Earth in the opening chapter.

My analysis of extreme metal and related genres follows the scenic logic used so far. However, because of the extreme social separateness of the metal being considered, because of its unique aesthetic, iconographic, political, and cultural nature, the framework has to stretch a little to accommodate it. This extreme metal music has to be understood as an enigmatic (global-)scenic singularity whose members comprise something like a "neotribe" (equating to "a certain ambience, a state of mind"),[1] a singularity that nevertheless connects to and is even subsumed more generally by the global underground. In its resistance and obscurity this metal music must be considered to be *of* that underground, even as it sunders community and unity in its music and behavior. In this way, the music provides a critique of global forms of capitalist production in a manner to be expected of underground music but also embodies the radical individualism that is the engine of that very globalism (and indeed, according to Mattin, might be an important part of improv aesthetics).

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So in the case of these chthonic and apophasic forms, these blackened musics of brutal sonic and thematic abrasion, it will be observed that their neotribal moral-political sensibility provides a vital internal connecting tissue. That sensibility is constructed through the sounds of the music, of course, but it's also crucially constructed and communicated through various other pertinent texts, such as the music's incantatory names and titles, its imagery, and the behavior of the musicians and their audience. I examine all of these textual levels below, moving from scenic to historical, moral, political, and musical contexts as I do.

12.1. The Extreme Metal Scene

As with other underground forms, the extreme metal scene utilizes familiar guerrilla tactics of distribution and promotion. Record labels are small, independent, and often artist run and Web based. Close collaboration between bands that results in split releases and shared membership is common, and Internet-based promotional and distribution strategies dominate.

By way of illustration I'll discuss a couple of notable examples of extreme metal labels. Hydra Head is a label run by Isis frontman Aaron Turner. It includes such varied acts as Agoraphobic Nosebleed, Boris, Lustmord, Purient, Khanate, and Xasthur on its extreme metal–centered roster (though it also promotes noise and other underground forms). Hydra Head began as a small distribution company in 1993 but flourished—before hitting financial issues in 2012 that saw its demise as a label that releases new music[2]—as a promoter and distributor. This work was anchored in its LA headquarters but was also conducted via its website, helped along by important advertisements and promotion in magazines. The label's music has been released in multiple formats, including LPs, CD-Rs, tapes, and MP3s, thus satisfying the extreme metal scene members' particular neotribal predilection for intense engagement with the world of the tribe, channeled here through the semiotically marked artwork and objects of the physical musical artifacts. This predilection is also met by Hydra Head's range of artwork, books, live recordings, and band merchandise, the latter including t-shirts, jumpers, and posters. All of this material allows the neotribal member to code him- or herself publicly as belonging to the tribe, while also enabling him or her to burrow further into the scene on both the intellectual and the property levels through the reading of related literature on the one hand and the owning of items such as posters and small physical paraphernalia on the other.

Another artist-run label, Southern Lord, boasts a similarly eclectic roster.

Southern Lord is run by Sunn O)))'s Greg Anderson and focuses on extreme metal such as that made by drone artists like Om and Earth, more recently also promoting and selling the work of black metal fringe mainstream groups such as Twilight and Wolves in the Throne Room. From its California base Southern Lord use its website to run a worldwide distribution network that takes in music, merchandise, and artist ephemera. While the scope and reach of these labels—Southern Lord's releases are sold at innumerable physical locations around the world—are comparable to the older model of the medium- to small-sized independent record company, it's the case that, and of course this is applicable to the scene's host of smaller "micro" labels, the flattened, accessible model of Web distribution and self-promotion has proved an unprecedented boon, allowing these formerly small, artist-run imprints to flourish (at least in terms of releasing lots of music).

As regards the scene's close collaborations between bands, we can think here of the ongoing movement of members among Melvins, Big Business, Men of Porn, and Fantômas (drummer Dale Crover unites all these, although much more crossover exists). The alignment that's built on the centripetal foundation of Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson's Sunn O))) is similarly enmeshed. Links in the latter spread across acts such as Thor's Hammer, Burning Witch (these two featuring O'Malley and Anderson in pre-Sunn days), Earth (with whom Sunn share a collaboration with bassist Joe Preston, aka Thrones), Khanate (O'Malley's band after Burning Witch split), Xasthur (Malefic toured with Sunn in support of their *Black One*[3] album, on which he provided vocals for "Báthory Erzébet"), Asva (whose leader, G. Stuart Dahlquist, and drummer, B.R.A.D., were in Burning Witch), and Goatsnake (which involved Greg Anderson and Asva's Dahlquist). And this is to name only the most obvious of connections. In fact, even these two networks can easily be linked; the doom band the Obsessed included Wino, Greg Styles, and Dale Crover as members, with the first two also being members of Shrinebuilder, a group that features Al Cisneros of Om and Sleep, both groups signed to Southern Lord.

Close collaboration of this type among a wide range of artists is a distinctive hallmark of underground models of production, where emphasis is less on discrete artistic identities as revenue generators and more on the synthesis of various artistic credos (though obviously collaboration is a hallmark of most music scenes). As elsewhere in the underground, the pool of musicians on the extreme metal scene is limited, but alliances are plenty.

Scenes within the underground are obviously often anchored to a particular location, dematerializing digital influences or not. This is no less the case here, as is seen with the Norwegian black metal scene of the 1990s or the Seattle-

based avant-metal and sludge alignment that included bands such as Earth and the Melvins and orbited around labels such as Sub Pop. However, as networked media destabilize the former reliance on geographical proximity, global scenes, with their foundations in the sort of digital media examined in chapter 7, allow the familiar scenic dynamics of audience interaction, musical collaboration, and product dissemination to take place across material boundaries. This is the framework that sees labels conducting activity chiefly through the Web; that sees forums and blogs flourishing—Metal Ireland, for instance, is currently unmatched in its range of coverage and vibrancy of participation in the Metal community in Ireland[4]; and that sees even prominent artists such as Xasthur/ Malefic, for instance, choosing to conduct much of their promotional activity on the Web. Notwithstanding occasional deals with labels to distribute his music, as happened in March 2012 with the retrospective collection *Nightmares at Dawn* (the name "Xasthur" was retired in 2012 in favour of Nocturnal Poisoning, though looked at being readopted in 2015),[5] Malefic personally sells the majority of Xasthur's material on eBay[6] and his own website.

In these ways the extreme metal scene is *of* the underground, while also commercially and aesthetically sitting closer to its fringes (although many black metal acts entertain miniscule audiences throughout their careers), verging on popular music forms as it does. Yet as I've said, it is also set *apart* from it as a neotribal singularity. Metal fans have long been known for their "geeky," eager, encyclopedic tendencies. These tendencies have produced a number of outlets providing valuable information about extreme metal bands and genres. For example, the Encyclopedia Metallum is a huge Web database of metal reviews, band biographies, and more. This database stretches to the underground fringe as it does more mainstream forms of metal. A.N.U.S (American Nihilist Underground Society) features similar material, alongside criticism, theory, and other such matters relating to nihilism, philosophy, and metal. Transcix's Metal Archive, meanwhile, hosts a range of useful and extensive links to metal-related sites, including, alongside the expected reviews and so on, a horde of links to business, social, political, academic, gender, art, activism, and historical topics as they relate to metal, frequently to extreme metal. Finally, mainstream metal magazines such as *Kerrang!* often feature bands and artists from the extreme end of the metal spectrum, while slightly alternative publications such as *Pitchfork* include regular metal columns, as is the case with *Pitchfork*'s regular "Show No Mercy" feature.[7] These many platforms do not equate to popularity *as such* but do mark extreme metal underground forms out from other underground musics, just as, for instance, sound art is marked by its own institutional and cultural separation.

So extreme metal's neotribal underground status arises both from its distinctive moral-political sensibility and aesthetics *and*, as shown here, from its fringe character as a derivative form of heavy metal. The wider metal neotribe is characterized by an intense devotion to its scene, and the extreme metal subdivision is no exception: for example, substantial resources are mobilized, often free of charge, in the service of compiling and maintaining the sorts of sites and publications just mentioned. This is no less the case for the "producers" than it is for the audience, both of which commit much time, energy, and resources to a form that is almost as marginal and financially precarious as other underground forms are. Extreme metal's neotribal status does not fully sunder it from its fundamental correspondence with underground practices of self-promotion and distribution, aesthetic extremity, and cultural reclusion, even if it allows it to appeal to a broader constituency than is available to, say, Skin Graft.

12.2. On the Genealogy of Metals

As metal practice diversified in the 1980s and 1990s, from the decelerations of Black Sabbath and the theatricalities of Judas Priest and so on in the 1970s and early 1980s, a host of subgenres and derivative styles came into evidence. Classification consequently becomes a little more difficult. I'm interested specifically in Kahn-Harris's "extreme metal":

> The extreme metal scene emerged in the 1980s out of an interconnected musical and institutional rejection of heavy metal. Influenced by punk, bands such as Venom began to develop more radicalised forms of metal that eschewed melody and clear singing in favour of speed, down-tuned guitars and growled or screamed vocals.[8]

One of the most important strains of this extreme metal scene can be seen in the first and second waves of black metal in the 1980s and early 1990s. As described by Brandon Stosuy in an article for the *Believer*, these two waves included pivotal acts such as Venom, Celtic Frost, Bathory, and, in the second, Burzum. Both utilized quick drums, buzzing guitars, and "lo-fidelity recordings, Satanic lyrics and [a] grim vocal style."[9] Along with the continued development of black metal, the 1990s and 2000s saw the emergence of sludge metal (sometimes knows as "stoner" metal, though I'll use the former term). This genre featured acts such as the Melvins, Corrupted, Sleep, and Bongzilla, all of which emphasized the reduction of musical material, pace, and surface detail found in 1980s doom acts such as Candlemass and earlier in Black Sabbath, favouring down-tuned and

reverb-heavy bass- and guitar-led tracks often built on the architecture of a single, repeating intensifying riff-texture. Sludge musicians preserved Sabbath's repetitive proto-doom sense of pulse, commonly making music using low BPMs while also adopting Sabbath-type chromatic riff tectonics. For example, much of the Japanese band Corrupted's output ("Nieve-Segundo"[10] and "Nieve,"[11] for instance) hovers merely in the high 60s. Seemingly more common are BPM in the low 70s, as is the case with bands such as the Melvins ("Boris"[12] being a famous example), Harvey Milk ("I Just Want to Go Home"[13]), and Dystopia ("Diary of a Battered Child"[14]).

Drone metal, emerging first in the 1990s, adopted similar musical ingredients to sludge, though in its intellectual framing and curated sense of musical detail it felt and feels more modernistically inclined. Drone metal artists such as Asva, Nadja, Sunn O))), and affiliates such as KTL often abandon any sense of metrical periodicity, for one, while duration extends well beyond conventional song lengths, volume and register are pushed to their limits (respectively, upward and downward), and conventional notions of musical complexity are inverted from figuration to *density*.

As I hope to show, drone metal, through these innovations, configures music cognition as percept-affect (to use a Deleuze-Guatarrian term),[15] highlighting listeners' own affects and bodily presence in the world and the world's (in the form of the drone and the space of audition) resonance in the listeners' own bodies.[16] All music does this, but the droning extremity of this work, like the assaultive squalls of someone like Merzbow or Kites, pushes the affective world of this particular underground/fringe music into distinctive areas. Similarly, the hard, violent, wraithlike sonic edge and fascist associations of much black metal music are transmuted to something more enigmatic by the extremity of drone's plasmodic structures and abrasive-amniotic sonic surfaces. These things detonate some of the tension found within black metal, dispersing its wound-up aggression into something more politically ambiguous (recalling noise music), even as black metal itself can be seen to problematize these things in its own music. All of that's another mouthful, but the music's intensely consuming volumes and haptic subbass can support such theoretical flights of fancy.

12.3. On the Genealogy of (Extreme Metal) Morals: Against the World, against Life

It was like the drone of some loathsome, gigantic insect ponderously shaped into the articulate speech of an alien species. . . . There were singularities in timbre, range, and overtones which placed this phenomenon wholly outside

the sphere of humanity and earth-life. . . . When the longer passage of buzzing came, there was a sharp intensification of that feeling of blasphemous infinity which had struck me during the shorter and earlier passage.[17]

These words come from H. P. Lovecraft's novella *The Whisperer in Darkness*. Lovecraft (1890–1937) was an American author of weird and fantastic horror literature who attained (largely) posthumous fame for a constelled canon of interconnected short fictions centering around the Cthulhu mythos. Rotting, viscous, oozing flesh, terrible tentacles, fetid odors: these are the matter of Love-craft's fictive bestiary, matter shared with extreme metal.

Expressed again and again in luminous, poetic prose that unfurls both metal's occult thematic obsessions and its organizational principles of circling repetition and bold riff-based rhetorical gesturing, Lovercraft's prose mytholo-gies have proved hugely influential to a whole host of musicians but particularly so to metal artists. Lovecraft's stories are nihilist in their thinly veiled rejection of mainstream society but also aesthetically delectable, sensual in their exorbi-tance, extravagant in their trance-invoking chanting and their fixation on the terrible. In revealing the weird, unknowable angles and whispers of the world as phenomenological experience, Lovecraft affirmed the involuted quality of life itself, the bristling Real that Lacan described as being buried beneath what we perceive as reality.

Lovecraft's vision of the universe has been of signal importance to a huge number of heavy metal musicians. Lovecraft's literary texts provide a model for the repetitious, incantatory musical modes that have been and continue to be explored in black and drone metals. The correspondence, though, is never closer than in the reverence each has for the mystificatory power of language, for its ability to express both denotative and musical meanings. In the author's work we find baroque, penumbral terroristic formulations such as "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn" and "Ia! Shub-Niggurath! The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young!"[18] In extreme metal we find a similar emphasis on poetic haunting and gothic estrangement. This emphasis is present in the band names, in the album and song titles, and in the lyrics, all of which aim for the same sort of quasi-ancient, blackly mythic feel of Lovecraft. In the review section of the June–July 2010 issue of *Rock-A-Rolla*, one of the lead-ing paper publications on the extreme metal scene, we find the following bands (in bold) and their albums:

The Austerity Program—*Backsliders and Apostates Will Burn*
Bison B.C.—*Dark Ages*

Coffinworm—*When All Became None*
Culted—*Of Death and Ritual*
Hooded Menace—*Never Cross the Dead*
Ramesses—*Take the Curse*
Twilight—*Monument to Time End*

For more on this "quasi-ancient and blackly mythic" neotribal ambience, we can look to the track titles of a significant black metal album, Burzum's 1991 self-titled debut:[19]

1. "Feeble Screams from Forests Unknown"
2. "Ea, Lord of the Depths"
3. "Black Spell of Destruction"
4. "Channeling the Power of Souls into a New God"
5. "War"
6. "The Crying Orc"
7. "A Lost Forgotten Sad Spirit"
8. "My Journey to the Stars"
9. "Dungeons of Darkness"

This almost delirial tendency toward the *naming* of a sort of nihilism that rejects mainstream society and, in the case of second-wave Norwegian black metal musicians at least, celebrates destruction, genocide, and sempiternal nightmares relies both on the mystificatory power of the language being used and on the libidinizing force injected into that language by the music to which it's set. The gothic, ritualized, paganistic symbolism of the lyrics and the music are matched in the ritualistic live shows, the costumes adopted for those performances, and the logos and imagery associated with each artist (a multimedia intensity again comparable to noise, particularly power electronics). The following images of two band logos and two bands should convey well enough the kinds of quasi-medieval, paganistic, and grave iconographies with which these musicians play. Following the images, I move on to a more theoretically rigorous staging of the relationship among nihilism, Lacanian *jouissance*—where an excess, an exorbitance of pleasure breaking through the pleasure principle, produces a sort of traumatic bliss, a moving into and out of the frame of pleasure in a haze of feeling[20]—and extreme metal, focusing in the first instance on black metal.

Images 4 and 5. Band logos: Burzum, Xasthur

12.4. Black Metal: Theory, Politics, and Musical Style

In 2009 and 2011 respectively, two symposia on black metal—"Hideous Gnosis" in New York and "Melancology" in London—took place, the first initiated by associate professor of English and medieval studies at Brooklyn College Nicola Masciandro and later published as a book by Createspace, and the second by Scott Wilson, professor of media and cultural studies at Kingston University, London (though both see this work on black metal more in terms of para-academic rather than straightforward academic activity). In the words of Nicola

Images 6 and 7. Musicians: Gorgoroth (Gorgortoth I–II, photo by Allna Sofia, Flickr) and Sunn O))) (Image courtesy of Southern Lord Records © 2008 Jon Kristiansen)

Masciandro, these symposia, like black metal theory itself,[21] can be thought along the following lines:

> Black metal theory territorializes the potentiality of a non-systematizable co-herence, a substance without law. Or we could say that black metal is formally equivalent to Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem, that its topos or place is the black spaces or unreachable interiors/exteriors that system per se cannot reach.[22]

Masciandro here recognizes the tensions between black metal's unknowabil-ity or resistance to being thought—something inbuilt to all artistic forms but intensified here due to the aforementioned extremities of sound and the affect resulting from that—and the desire to think about it in theoretical terms. These tensions point toward an essential quality of the music; namely, that it is haunt-ed by the possibility of its own explanation, that it even renounces that explana-tion in a queer moment of apophasis. This resistance to the world of thought is at the heart of the music's moral-political sensibility.

Scott Wilson gives important pointers as to the nature of black metal as a form of cultural practice, with reference to "Melancology":

> As a musical form that evokes frozen, desolated landscapes, infernal forests real and phantasmal, physical and metaphysical, for example, Black Metal is clearly a form of environmental writing, but one that could not easily be accommo-dated into current ecological discourse. Participants seriously considered the idea of melancology . . . as an ethos, looking at black metal as the re-occultation of black blood and bile in rituals of mourning and celebration for the death of God and the extinction of his creation, particularly humanity, under the black sun of melancholy.[23]

Wilson's suggestion here that black metal might constitute a form of "environ-mental writing," a form of writing that "re-occults" both the body and the land-scape external to that body, chimes with the lyrical and sonic-aesthetic content of the music itself.

The group Immortal were at the center of the Norwegian black metal scene, alongside Mayhem, Gorgoroth, and Burzum. In contrast to the Satanic, anti-Christian lyrical themes common to these groups and to 1980s black metal acts such as Bathory and Celtic Frost, Immortal introduced forests, winter, and genocidal nature to the lexicon of the scene. Their second and most themati-cally exemplary album, 1993's *Pure Holocaust*,[24] offers a counterblast to theism by

underscoring both sonically and lyrically the sempiternal, cataclysmic power of nature. God was dead, as with Gorgoroth and the others, but for Immortal this death was largely an irrelevance. Much more important for them were the pagan forces of nature that would wreak a "burning hell" on all of humanity.

The third track of the album, "The Sun No Longer Rises," lyrically describes a "mist of the twilight," with "endless woods" and a "freezing earth." "Shadows move with grotesque eyes," "demons rise," and "the eyes of the dark ones" look on in "sempiternal woods," waiting only for the subject of the song. Here the human, the individual subject of the song, enters willingly into a communion with nature that will see his or her own effacement to the forces of "Eternal Winters" and "Eternal Frost." The music stages such effacement in a characteristic black metal lurching among double, normal, and half-time sections. These are saturated in a wash of "cold" guitar feedback, a sonic drone that serves as a kind of figuration of the immanent natural world in which humanity is seen merely to be a weak actor. Frantic, nonsyncopated semiquaver blast beats introduce us to the fevered tellurian world of the track. The central body of that track consists of a stream of tremolo and power-chord guitar riffs (with bass mixed low) that move around the chromatic scale loosely while cleaving always to an itch centering on F, with raspy, spoken-screamed lyrics issuing forth across the bleached surface. At the word "desecration" the blast-beat intensity of the opening returns, as if to perform that very desecration itself. These blast-beat, cold drone textures are typical of underground black metal.

It is in the centering of a pontificating moral discourse that is exclusionary, callous, and dismissive of Immortal's "blasphemous masses" where black metal's identity might be seen to lie. And there, for some, is the rub, raising similar moral issues to those faced by noise musicians deploying extreme imagery and words in their music. Accompanying the radical aesthetic forms of black metal are lyrics that seem to endorse a deeply troubling sort of moral escapology, an abdication of community in favor of the elevation of individual judgment and mass damnation. This morality rhymes with that of Lovecraft in detail as much as goal. It can also be usefully related to the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson, specifically to his essay "Self-Reliance," where a radical individualism struggles against the demands of conformity, community, and society: "The man must be so much, that he must make all circumstances indifferent. Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age."[25] Emerson here rejects the a priori demands of the Hobbesian social contract, extracting himself from what he sees as the dead decrees of tired institutions and vestigial systems of thought. At the same time, though, Emerson emphasizes that self-reliance must be a starting point for ethics, a principle from which might issue virtue and empathy. The emphasis

in black metal is so far from Emerson's self-regarding ethical concerns as to be antinomial. Black metal and Emerson share a radical individualism but diverge on what that individualism might mean.

The political philosophy of black metal thus seems caught between Emersonian self-reliance and a nihilistic renunciation of worldly bonds, while its music adds texture to and destabilizes that contradiction in its radical, avant-garde charge. But it's important not to binarize the music and the words. Just as the music embodies a destructive sonic-aesthetic urge that might prove truly radical, the lyrical content and ritualistic posturing and behavior of the musicians themselves seem to limit and capture that radical destruction in a discourse of baleful hate. But it's not always this way. In latter strains of black metal the nihilism and negativity of earlier bands, already equivocal and hardly straightforward, is "queered" to the point of ambiguity. As with drone metal, latter-day black metal uses the radical nihilism of early black metal in new contexts. I'll discuss some of that latter-day music now before moving on to drone metal more exclusively.

Xasthur was at the forefront of the contemporary black metal scene until the name was retired in 2012. From 1995, the band's sole member, Malefic, adopted the corpse paint and lo-fi techniques (including recording on a four-track tape machine) of such acts as Burzum, Immortal, and Bathory, while at the same time jettisoning their Satanic or paganistic lyrics in favor of a bewildering, excessive focus on death and detestation, on "murder, winter, suicide, astral projection type of subjects."[26] The track titles of 2007's *Defective Epitaph*[27] are worth surveying both for their illustration of favored Xasthur themes and for their communication of the strange mixture of the ridiculous and the revolting that, even in this more advanced, "complex" form of black metal, still defines the genre:

1. "Soulless Elegy"
2. "Purgatory Spiral"
3. "Cemetery of Shattered Masks"
4. "Malignant Prophecy"
5. "Oration of Ruin"
6. "Legacy of Human Irrelevance"
7. "Dehumanizing Procession"
8. "Funerals Drenched in Apathy"
9. "Worship (The War Against) Yourself"
10. "A Memorial to the Waste of Life"
11. "The Only Blood That Pours Is Yours"
12. "Unblessed Be"

Musically, blast beats are less important to Xasthur (particularly the case as regards *Defective Epitaph*, where acoustic drums were first favored over the previous drum machines) than to earlier acts such as Immortal, though they are important here and there, as on such releases as 2003's *Funeral of Being*.[28] The characteristic black metal lurching to and from half-time sections in a broadly slow, texturally churning context is present though.

Of utmost importance to Xasthur is the total saturation of the sonic picture with thick fields of fuzz and distortion and screamed, buried-in-the-mix vocals. Similarly important is the music's rich use of chromatic modal riff structures (where modally identifiable movement around the chromatic scale meshes with total white noise chromaticism). In their flanging, reverb-heavy state, these produce ornate and complex overtone fields and crackly tone clusters that invade the body and close down the space between in here (your body) and out there (the world). Blocks of riffs move in slow motion in the field of white noise, driving each Xasthur track through waves of distortion and looped, phasing slabs of music, occasionally stopping off in episodes of half-time punch and clarity or intensifying with tremolo picking and violent detonations of feedback. The screams that complete the violent frontage and chromatic noise textures of Xasthur's music, meanwhile, are amelodic and primarily atmospheric in effect, the voice having undergone delay and saturation in FX, even being "more or less improvised"[29] in the first place. "Prisoner of Mirrors," from 2006's *Subliminal Genocide*,[30] is a roughly twelve-minute track that encapsulates these central qualities of Xasthur's music. It's formally more convoluted and extended (though essentially repetitious) than some of Xasthur's other tracks but nevertheless aesthetically representative in its abrasion and sonic violence and chromatic modal musical language.

Theorist Dominic Fox reflects further on Xasthur's strange figuring of the extravagant bile of acts such as Burzum, discussing the genre's nihilistic, annihilatory impulse:

> Insofar as Xasthur's music is at all "Nietzschean," it is so because of its obsession with the "death of God"; but its god-less universe is structurally identical to the "one God universe" derided by Burroughs. The place of God is empty, but not closed; the cosmos whirls to extinction around an evacuated throne. As with Lovecraft's mythos, Xasthur's aural chaosphere is oriented towards the confabulation/disclosure of an existential horror.[31]

The existential horror that Fox identifies here pivots in Xasthur on a structural reaffirmation of the Judeo-Christian universe, a replacing of God-as-center

with no-God-as-center. This represents another contradiction of black metal: the *authority* of mainstream society is to be revoked in favor of the antitheistic *authority* of Satan, of the earth, of nature, or simply of destruction. Black metal does not identify a structural problem with the way society and its knowledge work, but simply wants its own form of that structure to take precedence, a form where hate trumps love and death trumps life as the new reality principles.

Aspects of radical and complex aesthetics found in earlier black metal find strange expression in Xasthur and in related acts such as Leviathan and Judas Iscariot, twisting in on themselves in the extremity of the musical designs and sonic textures even as the titles and lyrics seek the same genocidal destruction or chthonic sacrament as earlier groups such as Gorgoroth and Bathory. Even with these earlier acts, the radicalism and coarseness of the music, as with the sheer extremity of the subject matter, meant that political or aesthetic interpretations of either radicalism or simple hateful revulsion were never quite on solid ground, an ambiguity that recalls various affects produced by harsh noise music. With later acts such as Leviathan and Xasthur, this fragility and ambiguity have only been intensified.

So it seems reasonable to see early and late black metal, in the words of a *New York Times* article published in the wake of the "Hideous Gnosis" symposium, as a music that plays with and aspires to the expression of "decay, radical individualism, misanthropy, negativity about all systems and awe of the natural world."[32] Such radical individualism and misanthropy are matched, as I've tried to show in the case of Xasthur, to an aesthetic radicalism that creates a duality of sensibility and affect that does profaning work as with noise.

Benjamin Noys's chapter in *Hideous Gnosis* takes up some of these ideas of dualism and political ambiguity in black metal:

> If we were to define a degree zero of Black Metal politics then it would be an unstable amalgam of Stirnerite egoism and Nietzschean aristocratism: a radical anti-humanist individualism implacably hostile to all the ideological "spooks" of the present social order, committed to creating an "aristocracy of the future" and auto-engendering a "creative nothing."[33]

In addition to this basic framework of authoritarian antihumanism and individualism, though, Noys also sees black metal as evincing a sort of "racial-national metaphysics" and quotes La Sale Famine of French black metal group Peste Noire, who places the music rather bluntly to the far right of the mainstream political spectrum: "Without being necessarily N[ational] S[ocialist], real Black Metal is always extreme right-wing music."[34]

Noys sees the duality of radicalism and revulsion that I've been discussing as a "functionally coherent incoherence," a "constitutive impurity."[35] While many of the groups seem to subscribe to a "völkisch" notion of essences and people-land correlates, their music, for Noys, simultaneously undermines such a "purifying" aspiration. It would be a mistake, says Noys, simply to assert that the one (the music) completely subsumes or reterritorializes the other (the more explicit ideological leanings). The music's curious "mixture of pathos and bathos"[36] instead articulates a centrally consistent contradiction. This is not "pure" or classical fascism, nor is it a liberatory profaning or overidentification in the manner of noise; it is all of these things at once.

All of this talk of a Lovecraftian anthroperipheral universe places us firmly in the context of nihilism. But this nihilism is not so simple as to bear an empty belief in nothing. In *Nihil Unbound*, Ray Brassier explores the idea that Nietzsche's nihilism, so often misinterpreted as a gesture of hopelessness, actually represents a bold finale to the expanse of thought itself, where a notion of the universal is finally accessible through the mathematization of thought (a universalization that echoes in its scientism black metal's emphasis on ultimates).

The conviction outlined here of the inability of humanity to master the world can potentially be taken in a number of different directions. A link to the trans-human ontology of speculative realism is one obvious correlation. Alain Badiou provides another. Badiou discusses the intellectual and cultural context of what we might call nihilism in his diagnostic *The Century*.[37] Drawing parallels between, on the one hand, the tendency of the art and culture of the 1890–1914 period to sunder its relationship with its own language (which he exemplifies in Schoenberg, Mallarmé, Freud, Picasso, Proust, and Chaplin) and, on the other, the century's totalitarian political movements' desire to create a new humanity by destroying the old, Badiou asserts an antagonistic and confrontational account of the period:

> The century's subjectivity, prey to the passion for the real and placed under the paradigm of definitive war, stages a non-dialectical confrontation between destruction and foundation, for the sake of which it thinks both totality and the slightest of its fragments in the image of antagonism.[38]

The century in Badiou's eyes is therefore one of destruction and disjunction where the project of annihilation is often masked by the call of the new, the appeal for a sort of a holy cultural war. At the heart of modernism is a negation in this sense, just as at the heart of black and drone metal stands a central negation.

This negation relates to nihilism, of course, both explicitly and implicitly.

As I've said, black metal tends to perform this nihilism bathetically, though it's a queer and ambiguous bathos. The excess of the posturing, the plasticity of the work's fiction-fact intermediations (where the musicians' lives have been important qualifiers of meaning in the music), the radical independence of the music's individualist mode of production, and the abrasion and extremity of the sound all equally serve an expressive function in articulating the genre as already complex. Likewise, we should be careful not to equate work with artist here. Forms like black metal and power electronics that play with potentially problematic concepts and associations should accordingly be considered complexly, as composite-voiced utterances whose meaning is not trapped in or limited to the face-value indications of its musicians' behaviour or the basic denotations of the lyrics. As we've seen, despite differences in character and content, both early and late black metal stand as politically complex forms drawing on a range of affects and associations in their efforts to stage confrontation through extremity, hampered as they are or not by the bathos that sometimes results from the tension between various aspects of their work. Drone metal, meanwhile, which I'll focus on from here on out, moves beyond many of these tensions with its powerful, subsuming sonic crises of movement and definition, figuring nihilism radically, pushing it into altogether stranger territories.

12.5. *The Metallic Drone*

How do the political and cultural issues considered above mediate and get mediated by the sounds of drone metal? I make use of a two-pronged music-theoretical interpretative approach in discussing this music, on the one hand contextualizing its use of repetition in terms of Richard Middleton's ideas and on the other analyzing its use of tonality, modality, and chromaticism in terms of Walter Everett's writing. Drone metal shares many practical qualities with black metal, as can be seen in its exploration of similar occult titles and lyrics, the similarly dark and portentous iconography on its sleeves and merchandise, and its similarly ritualized performance practices. Yet its music is something else, even if it can be broadly aligned in terms of harmony with Xasthur-type modal or pitch-centered chromaticism. The emphasis here, compared to the cold, alienated sonics of black metal, is on warm, reverberant, haptic audio drones stacked on subbass frequencies recorded at extremely high volume. Where black metal complexly figures alienation and terror in its wintery white noise textures, drone metal instead matches a similarly dense, clustered chromaticism made out of

distorted guitar power chords with down-tuned, humming, oceanic drones of strange aspect.

A. Drone Metal: Repetition, Form, and Affect

Riff-based structures ground this music, while consuming drones anchor those riffs in sensation-ordering sound. Repetition is here used for its own erotic affectivity, although it's hidden from the listener *as* repetition in some of the more ambiguous drone structures.

Richard Middleton has given us a simple way to talk about the formal strategies of drone and sludge metal. In his article "In the Groove or Blowing Your Mind? The Pleasures of Musical Repetition," Middleton separates repetition into two basic models (the binary here understood to be permeable in practice): "musematic" or intensional forms, which we could update a little and also describe as groove-based forms, following Robin Attas,[39] and "discursive" or extensional forms.[40] The first of these features short interlocking units such as riffs (understood holistically to encompass rhythm, harmony, melody, and color) that exist undeveloped within unitary structures of cycles and replication. Discursive repetition relates more to longer units of music developed as narrative, with repetition happening within complex structures where hierarchy is constantly asserted, undermined, developed, and resolved.

Extreme metal makes use of both of these strategies while complicating each one. Musematic or riff-based repetition would seem the obvious model. But while it makes sense to pick out the loose riff-based structures of sludge and even drone metal, these structures are so ambiguously and freely developed over long time spans (frequently of ten minutes and up) that they become much less clearly riff-based. This is also the case in some black metal, where, for example, Xasthur cleaves to formal ambiguity within a song-based context of one or two main zones of repeating material. The structures and the riffs of drone metal become only fuzzily recognizable as themselves over the time spans just mentioned. Musematic repetition provides the template, but the uncanny, profaning impulse common to the loud volumes and low velocity of drone metal forms provides the affective key.

At the same time, in the Philip Glass–like winding and simple ostinato of later Earth primarily, but also increasingly in other groups such as Corrupted and Asva, riff forms get stretched out to the point where it only makes sense to think of them in terms of larger, discursive formations. The authority of the riff over those long durations and within the sticky, gelatinous flow of the drone

edifices is undermined. We don't know what is structuring the music other than a vague sense of repeating phrases and stretched-out blocks of riffs-come-sentences. In this way, the music hovers compellingly between Middleton's two basic models. Sunn O)))'s "Aghartha," examined below, is the clearest instance of such hovering I discuss at length here, but many other examples exist besides. Extreme metal forms such as sludge and drone, but also black, therefore articulate a "both/and" version of the musematic/discursive model.

B. Drone Metal: Tonality and Affect

In his 2004 *Music Theory* article "Making Sense of Rock's Tonal Systems," Walter Everett provides a template for thinking about tonality in popular music that can usefully be applied to the harmonic strategies of black and drone metal (though I, unlike Everett, layer such strategies within a broadly hermeneutic and affective reading).[41] Everett orders rock's tonal systems in terms of distance from common-practice tonality, by his sixth category reaching the "chromatically inflected triad doubled or power chord doubled pentatonic systems of early metal."[42] In this category a tonic key, if supported at all, would be so only by assertion and not syntax. In other words, the music wouldn't consist of a series of functionally related chords articulating movement to and from a central, preeminent chord or tone, but would rather consist of a tone or chord that *feels* central through its blunt repetition and projection as such, as, for example, with Black Sabbath's eponymous track, where the home tone G is tonicized much more through simple repetition than any voice-leading or fifth-based harmonic drive.

Everett shows how this sort of pentatonic practice shifted, through the use of simple semitone embellishments (comparable to the kind of "filling in" of modal inflections across the music of Wagner, Debussy, and early Schoenberg), into his next category (6b), which features chromatically related scale degrees with little dependence on a pentatonic basis. There, tonal-harmonic and voice-leading attractions and tensions are irrelevant at deeper levels as well as at the surface; "tonal centres are given little or no syntactical support."[43] Everett gives an example of an Alice in Chains track, "Them Bones," in which the progression C#5-D5-D#5-E5 forms the nucleus of the song.

Everett's "6a" and "6b" categories are extremely useful for analysis of black and drone metal, though they need to be qualified a little. Everett shows in his article how over the course of rock history, specifically in metal, major- and minor-mode systems founded principally on diatonic tensions and harmonic drive (and simplified of the enrichments such systems underwent in jazz and on Broadway) were destabilized by blues-derived chromaticism in the rock music

of the 1960s, before being totally unsettled in heavy metal in later decades. But he doesn't quite go far enough for my purposes. To Everett's six categories I therefore want to add my own seventh category. This category features broadly atonal designs that yet show vestigial organizational principles familiar from pentatonic modal rock and metal, chiefly in the importance of power-chord riff designs in the music. This category refers to music that hovers between complete atonality and some sense of the kind of power-chord modal hierarchy of Everett's 6b. Such designs can be found all over Norwegian black metal, in some of Xasthur and Leviathan's tracks, and in drone metal. The modal chromatics and circling always to the fundamental tone through riff- or drone-based vocal and instrumental sections style of acts such as Noothgrush, Corrupted, Bongzilla, Dystopia, and many others lean more on the tonal/stable pitch vestiges of category 6b than purely drone acts would, but the line between 6b and 7 isn't sharp. Corrupted, for one, use distortion and volume in such a way as to undermine stable pitch centricity and identity (and here lies the key difference between Everett's 6b and my 7).

Sunn O))) commonly work in this tonally liminal way, moving in and out of stability and clear pitch identity chiefly through the saturation of the texture with feedback and sonic distortion. The group's tracks "Hunting and Gathering (Cydonia)" (from 2009's *Monoliths and Dimensions*)[44] and "Death Becomes You" (from 2002's *Flight of the Behemoth*)[45] feature such movement in and out of stability and tonal hierarchies. The latter moves magmalike away from and back to a low A-E-A power chord (with the guitar's bass strings tuned down from their conventional E-A-D), emphasising Bb5 and Db5 but also moving to Gb and F at various points (hinting at the sort of chromatics without syntactical background support of 6b). These power-chord riff patterns extend throughout the track's thirteen-minute duration and are played in very, very loose tempos, meters, rhythms, and orderings. This is all done within the group's invariable setting of oceanic drones and distortion, the latter of which is allowed to build here such that the last few minutes of the track, in seeming slow motion, with the earlier riff movements stagnated to viscosity, are filled with glinting and diving overtones giving great variety to the gurgling bass sound. "Death Becomes You" therefore asserts A as the central tonality through its anchoring function and through its chromatic movements away from and back to that A, while also being filled with nonequal temperament sounds that have little to do with any sense of tonal or modal stability.

Because of the droning, repetitive musematic/groove-based nature of drone metal, it's important to note that a tonal or pitch center is still preserved after a fashion (despite the prevalence of crackling overtone fields and chromaticism).

The pentatonic-derived musematic riff structures of Everett's 6b are under-
mined to the point of collapse quite often in "Death Becomes You," for example,
but a pitch is centered nonetheless. This doesn't happen through tonal syntax
but more through the rhetorical weight of the fundamental tone, which is as-
serted again and again as the foundational note both through the riff vestiges
from other points in the track and through its registral importance within the
compound pitch array of the music. Category 7, then, even in the most extreme
drone metal music, almost always retains some sense of pitch hierarchy.

My Bloody Valentine's thirty-minute drone jams at the end of concerts,
played as the interlude to their track "You Made Me Realise," demonstrate this
point in their anchorage on the lowest tone of the pitch array being deployed.
The aforementioned "Báthory Erzébet" from Sunn 0)))'s 2005 album *Black One*,
which features guest Malefic singing/screaming from inside a coffin, does some-
thing similar. And "Báthory Erzébet" is a representative track in other respects
too. It's music that's more about atmosphere, timbre, and texture than any tight
formal or tonal plan, although riff structures remain somewhat important. The
music wobbles, flickers between categories, rarely settling into a resolved formal
or chordal shape long enough to be pinned down as one thing or another. It's
chromatic *and* pitch-centered, riff-based *and* ambiguously discursive. The mu-
sic's complication of conventional codes of musical organization means that it
impacts in the register of confusing and unstable *jouissance* as opposed to that
of clear discernment. This is even the case in the more texturally refined and
orchestrally enriched music we find on Sunn O)))'s and Earth's later albums,
such as *Monoliths and Dimensions* and *Angels of Darkness, Demons of Light I*,[46]
respectively, where the addition of instruments such as cello (Earth) and brass,
winds, and strings (Sunn O)))) does little to domesticate the eldritch inscruta-
bility of the droning sonic flows . . . at least for those willing to hear the music
in this way.

The opening track of *Monoliths*, "Aghartha," provides a nice demonstration
of how the sublimity and subliminal magic of drone metal are retained even
with much less distortion and feedback in the sound. This shows that the genre's
strangeness (admittedly read by some as mere posturing) isn't just anchored to
loud volumes and amplifier effects. "Aghartha" unfolds a huge, reverberant chord
sequence over its 17′35″ length on down-tuned guitar, which slows as the track
progresses and ebbs and eddies according to the whims of the performance it-
self (metrical time is often stretched out, elasticated in this rolling, adamantine
music). The drawn-out cyclical sequence, E5-Eb5-C5-B5-C5-B5-Eb5-B5-(Eb5)
(with chord names here to be understood as loose approximations of a bristling
overtone field of vibrations and feedback), is repeated as the basis for the first

ten or so minutes of the track. The first iteration lasts 1′25″, the second 1′35″, the third 2′20″, and the fourth 1′50″ (with Attila Csihar's high-in-the-mix, semispoken, semiglowered horror incantations entering here). Just as the fifth iteration is winding to a close, around 9′20″, the sequence breaks down, with the harmonies moving down to A, then hovering between A and D briefly, before returning to an oscillation on Eb and C. A Tibetan "Dung Chen" long trumpet appears, winding out a buzzing and see-sawing drone. This gradually comes to dominate the track, closing it starkly in isolation from electronic drones and feedback.

Album closer "Alice" shifts the group much more directly into late Earth-like clarity of harmonic progression, form, and texture. The chamber array of instruments refracts and reflects some of the inherent richness of the droning progression, just as the vocal and orchestral elements of "Hunting and Gathering (Cydonia)" do. With these chamberlike tracks we are as far from timbral and textural obscurity as drone metal gets, and yet still the enigma, still the sustained tones and the emphasis on subtle tonal/pitch spectrality and even formal complexity, is there.

Tracks such as "Aghartha," "Báthory Erzébet," and many other drone pieces can consume our sense of self in their enwombing power, articulating our own flesh as a mesh of surface and vibration, barrier and resonating field. It's easy to lavish this sort of extravagant language on this music, but really its loud volumes and brimming drones simply tap into the consuming power of volume and bass, a power easily accessible to all musicians. Drone metal's particular harnessing of enwombing, bassy drones can be seen to place an emphasis on percept-affect—on the bodily experience as opposed to just the cognitive processing—and therefore on cognitively transcending *jouissance* as a primary mode of reception. The music shifts our sense of complexity from the surface filigree and subterranean mathematics of some other avant-garde musics into an immersive, trans-subjective body-knowing-feeling. Drone metal, again hardly in an especially ingenious or novel way, may offer listeners the experience of the kind of proprioceptive aesthetics proposed by Barbara Montero, where the body is suddenly at the fore, and the listeners' experience becomes about orientating themselves to their body and their body in space.[47] All music can and does do this, but again the extremity of the sounds and the volumes here means this music is especially well placed to do so, as well as to mobilize a sense of change and transformation.

Time and space, in addition to the body and cognition, are also configured interestingly in drone metal. Drone music in general underlines the nature of time as an *affective experience* (as opposed to a transcendent category), where its objective existence is subsumed by the delicate and fragile negotiations and

modulations of time-as-lived-in-the-drone. The size and sonic "weight" of the drones in drone metal accentuate the lived experience of time and space, rendering spaces and inner time daunting and strange. Drones also conspire in their dense fogs of feedback and distortion to produce perceptions of microacoustic profiles (even outside the context of microacoustic planning), thus challenging notions of authorship. This trans-human bearing echoes the same tellurian philosophies of black metal discussed earlier, while configuring these not as destruction but transcendence. So the sheer volume on the one hand and the ceremonial aspect of the live shows on the other ratchet up the enwombing, consuming element of the drone experience. At a Sunn O))) show I attended in 2007, for example, the group had the venue falsely set off the fire alarm before they walked on stage. Their singer (Csihar) was dressed as a rotting tree throughout, while the stage was almost completely consumed by darkness and smoke in such a way that it was hard to make out just what it was screaming at the front of the stage. A whole range of strange intraband conflicts seemed to occur throughout the set. The first sound that the fire alarm–panicked audience heard at this show was a huge bass tone that felt like a ghostly push in the gut. The rest of the show proceeded from this traumatic, confusing opening into even more sonic trauma, as icebergs of distortion and feedback lashed the whole together as a feeling mass of throbbing nerves.

Drone metal is already intense in its total sonic immersion, but with live shows such as this the audience experiences traumatic revelation, glimpsing, if you will, Lacan's Real through the enigma of *jouissance* (or just being set apart from their thoughts such that they experience something strange and potentially transformative or moving). In this state, conventional categories of cognition and perception potentially collapse into each other in the kind of body-thinking-feeling composite discussed earlier.

By all the above means of chromatic enrichment and ultimate destabilization of metal's pentatonic basis, of the deployment of related theatrical and ceremonial live tactics derived from noise and black metal and of a tactical but muddy use of repetitious, riff-based, but discursively cyclical formal plans, drone metal music produces an affectively confusing and even unsettling aesthetic model. Both drone and black metal move in the productive nihilist world—the neotribal moral-political ambience I've been discussing—without ever securely suggesting a clearly stable political or aesthetic reading.

I've also tried to frame the exorbitance of drone metal and other forms here within a psychoanalytic context of *jouissance*, relating to the music's inversion of musical complexity from figuration to density and its configuring of cognition

as a more subliminal and enwombing percept-affect that defeats attempts at musical intellection in a conventional sense. But what might drone metal's production of a sublime or subliminal new aesthetic and affective "space" (a space that enhances the conflictual destructive tendencies of black metal) actually mean in a wider sense? While clearly corresponding to the wide underground practices of profanation and aesthetic "counter-magic," secured as with all the different types of noise covered earlier through the use of accidental audition and comfort noise, I believe we can look to the Lacanian theory of sublimation for a more pertinent answer. Alenka Zupancic describes Lacanian sublimation in the following terms:

> The Lacanian theory of sublimation does not suggest that sublimation turns away from the Real in the name of some Idea; rather, it suggests that sublimation gets closer to the Real than the reality principle does. It aims at the Real precisely at the point where the Real cannot be reduced to reality. One could say that sublimation opposes itself to reality, or turns away from it, precisely in the name of the Real. To raise an object to the dignity of the Thing is not to idealize it, but rather to "realize" it, that is, to make it function as a stand-in for the Real.[48]

The unreal is seen in these terms as "realer" (i.e., closer to Lacan's "Real") than "reality," in place of which opposition we could substitute drone metal on one side (as the "unreal") and musical norms, such as those of heavy metal (as "reality"), on the other. Drone metal forms would in this respect be seen to perform a sublimation, to move beyond conventional aesthetic forms and experiences so as to produce instead a basically new space, a new "Thing," through an encounter with a kind of affective void (the *jouissance* referred to throughout). This new "Thing" exists within the strictures of mainstream ideology (in this case "within" heavy metal discourse) and yet provides an affective and cognitive map for the thinking and experiencing of a space beyond that ideology. This sublimation has clear parallels with the desires of some of the theorists covered in chapter 4 and elsewhere for new dreamings of existing social orders, for counter-magic that might suggest new ways of thinking and living to audiences, in however limited a way.

Drone metal would therefore help us, in Zizek's language, to "traverse the fantasy" of domesticated *jouissance*, to move, through sonic trauma and sublimity, to an experience of some mysterious sense of the "real."[49] Noise and post-noise forms might be similarly positioned as performing kindred sublimations within their own scenes. I prefer to describe their "profanations" in terms of a

more basic "counter-magic" due to their lack of emphasis on drone metal's very particular mode of cognitive transcendence. But drone's sublimation and noise's profaning counter-magic can be seen in the same spirit. Such deindividualizing sublimation and counter-magic are at the heart of the underground and fringe culture I've been discussing throughout the book, matching the community assemblages and agencies of improv with channels to intersubjective affects and relations of their own.

Conclusion

I've tried to demonstrate the richness, vitality, and variety of underground and fringe music as I understand them, whose boundaries have been mapped and in some way "invented" here, even if, as I said, whatever boundaries I've laid down should be understood as liquid and tentative.

I've talked a lot about the links that bind the underground and its fringes together. I've pointed to global correspondences across practically, politically, and aesthetically tied local and global underground scenes. But it's important also to remember the institutional and stylistic divisions that still separate these musics from each other and from other musics. While this is a story of sameness and integration, various battles and distinctions of taste separate these related music cultures of the underground from each other. Just because someone listens to noise doesn't mean they'll want to listen to or even recognize an alliance with improv or extreme metal or fringe pop or experimental techno or whatever. And yet, as I've tried to show, there *are* notable political, cultural, and aesthetic qualities running through all these musics, pushing them outside the high and low, modernist and postmodernist, classical, pop, and folk categories that still pigeonhole and make still musical cultures that are sprawling and many-layered. It might be argued that all I've done is simply supply a third term to the high/low spectrum, but if that's the case, it's at least preferable to the pervasive pedagogical and critical standard of art versus popular forms that still informs so much discussion of music.

I suggest that the underground exists in a primarily extra-institutional, an-intermediated space that stretches to the fringes of the marketplace and high-art institutions. At the same time, it can't really ever escape *or* be subsumed by the political contexts of late-capitalist flexible accumulation. I've discussed how some of its musicians and figures tried to use those "mainstream" materials (cultural or economic) in a codetermining and politicized way, particularly with

public funds more and more coming underground artists' ways, and how others simply burrowed away in a not knowingly political fashion for little money and for small audiences. I've tried to point out the limitations and contradictions of these approaches, while also acknowledging that within the limited horizons given to us as late capitalist subjects, codetermination and/or localist independence might be all we have, short of wide-scale revolution.

I've also, finally, discussed how underground and fringe music uses various profaning, subliminal, and sublimating techniques to suggest reconfiguring counter-magic to audiences or to model a kind of egalitarian social relation reflected outside the music in self-organizing shows and labels, all of this often informed by a sense of the everyday and infused with noisy sonics and accidental auditions. These efforts aren't always successful. But in this messy, sprawling, international effort to cultivate a cultural space that exists broadly outside the two cultural mainstreams, underground and fringe artists, practitioners, and audience members can be seen to have collectively engineered something rather profound. This cultural space, outside or on the fringes of high and low institutions, may point the way to future modes of minority artistic creation, where the kind of dense, intricate expression formerly tied to high culture might, in the context of a shrinking public sector and the seeming collapse or evolution of the older model of subsidized high art, more and more take place.

List of Interviewees

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people I spoke to, listened to, and wrote about for and in this book. These interviews were conducted by email, unless noted otherwise.

Artists

Ed Bennett, July 2011
Steve Beresford, September 2012 (phone)
John Butcher, April 2012
Seán Clancy, May 2010 (in-person)
Paul Hegarty, July 2010, June 2013
Vicky Langan, September 2011
Mattin, May 2012, December 2014
Toshimaru Nakamura, May 2014
Maggie Nicols, May 2014
Joe Potts (LAFMS), May 2013
Eddie Prévost, March 2012
Gavin Prior, July 2010, June 2013, December 2014
Brigid Power Ryce, June 2013
Jennifer Walshe, February 2012

Labels

Britt Brown (Not Not Fun), June 2013
Gonçalo F. Cardoso (Discrepant), June 2013
Paul Condon (Fort Evil Fruit), October 2011
Callum Higgins (Sacred Tapes), August 2014

Jonny Mugwump (Exotic Pylon), April 2012
Richard Skelton (Sustain-Release, Corbel Stone Press), August 2014
"Stephen" (Trensmat), December 2011

Festivals/Venues/Funding Bodies

John Chantler (Café Oto), February 2012, June 2013
Sarah Jane Dooley (Paul Hamlyn Foundation), June 2014
Susanna Eastburn (Sound and Music), June 2014 (in-person)
Barry Esson (Arika), August 2011
Thierry Schaeffer (Instants Chavirés), September 2014
Michael Sippings (Colour Out of Space), December 2011
John Zorn (the Stone), September 2014

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Examples of previous use of "underground" similar to my own can be found in magazines like *Sound Projector* (Ed Pinsent, "USA Underground," and "UK Underground" [2012]: 3–8, 23–26) and the *Wire* (Simon Reynolds, "Not Not Fun" [May 2011]: 36–43; David Keenan, "Collateral Damage" [July 2011]: 19); on sites such as Altered Zones ("About," http://alteredzones.com/about/ [accessed 18 Sept. 2012]) and Forced Exposure (http://www.forcedexposure.com/ [accessed 20 Mar. 2013]); and in various other contexts, from promotional material for a regular noise night in London (http://nnnnn.org.uk [accessed 17 June 2014]) to festival programs ("Instal 2006," http://arika.org.uk/instal/2006/instal_06_music_festival.html [accessed 3 Mar. 2012]).

2. This is exemplified in the first instance by Björn Heile's writing about modernism's critical core in the introduction to *The Modernist Legacy* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009) and in the second by Peter Bürger's description of avant-garde movements as being focused on critiquing social and political institutions and institutions of artistic convention in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester University Press, 1984). Alain Badiou's idea that avant-garde movements are "always a matter of going further in the eradication of resemblance, representation, narrative or the natural" is also relevant as a description of important tendencies within the underground: *The Century* (London: Polity Press, 2007), 132.

3. Barry Barnes, David Bloor, and James Henry, *Sociology of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 168.

4. Georgina Born and Desmond Hesmondhalgh discuss the limitations of utopian postmodern arguments about the loss of core/periphery and high/low structures, pointing out how they conceal important "divisions of status and discourses of differential value": *Western Music and Its Others* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 20.

5. John Corbett discusses the possible hegemonic aspirations of experimental mu-

sicians and composers, and the persistence of orientalist and exoticist tropes in their music, in "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others," in Born and Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and Its Others,* 143–162.

6. The quotation originated in a *FACT* magazine interview with Reynolds on the release of his *Bring the Noise* collection. The interview is currently unavailable, but the quotation reappears across the Web and is quoted in Glen Creeber and Royston Martin's *Digital Culture: Understanding New Media* (New York: McGraw Hill International, 2008), 100.

7. Simon Reynolds, *Retromania* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 115.

8. The provenance of this has been difficult to trace, but it has been cited as Zappa's in many different contexts, for example: Lawrence Zeegan, "Going Underground," Computer Arts, 24 July 2012, http://www.computerarts.co.uk/features/going-underground.

9. Cited in Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson, "Art Criticism in Europe Today," The Brooklyn Rail, 16 May 2014, mx1.www.brooklynrail.org/special/ART_CRIT_EUROPE/about-aica/art-criticism-in-europe-today-libia-castro-lafur-lafsson-ask-nina-power.

10. Anthony Bruno, "Blog Jam: As Internet Marketing Comes of Age, Can the Majors Keep Themselves from Ruining the Cool?" *Billboard* 118, no. 7 (18 Feb. 2006): 28–29.

11. Robbie Lieberman writes about these alternative networks in "'Put My Name Down': US Communism and Peace Songs in the Early Cold War Years," in Robert Adlington, ed., *Red Strains* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119–132.

12. Adlington, *Red Strains,* 17.

13. All of these labels reflect in their size, self-sufficiency, and market the sort of "micro-independent" label modeled by Robert Strachan: "Micro-Independent Record Labels in the UK: Discourse, DIY Cultural Production and the Music Industry," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 245–266.

14. RE/Search's *Industrial Culture Handbook,* for example, includes interviews with and profiles of many leading Industrial music artists, such as Throbbing Gristle, Boyd Rice, and SPK; *Industrial Culture Handbook,* special issue, *RE/Search,* nos. 6–7 (1983).

15. See the full "List of Interviewees," broken down by category.

16. Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004).

17. Geoff Baker, *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

18. Mary Ann Clawson, "Masculinity and Skill Acquisition in the Adolescent Rock Band," *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (Jan. 1999): 99–114.

19. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* trans. Thomas Gora, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

20. Cited in Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 105.

21. "Pertinence" is derived in part from Richard Middleton's introduction in *Reading Pop,* where Middleton ends up advocating just such a flexible and adaptable approach:

"Introduction: Locating the Popular Music Text," in Richard Middleton, ed., *Reading Pop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–19.

22. Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (1991): 368–388.

23. Will Straw, "Scenes and Sensibilities," *Public*, nos. 22–23 (2001): 248.

24. Straw, "Systems of Articulation," 385.

25. Keith Kahn-Harris, "Roots? The Relationship between the Global and the Local in the Extreme Metal Scene," in Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee, eds., *The Popular Music Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 128–136.

26. Ibid., 128–129.

27. Ibid., 128.

28. Ibid., 134.

Chapter 2

1. The same kinds of problems are faced by any attempt to define a musical form. The 2005 *Popular Music* editorial symposium on getting rid of the word "popular" in "popular music," for example, includes a proliferation of competing, even contradictory arguments about the definition of popular music: Various, "Can We Get Rid of the 'Popular' in Popular Music?" *Popular Music* 24 (2005): 133–145.

2. Pete Coward and Seth Cooke wrote an overview of the label and Hayler's activities for Bang the Bore: "Thoughts on Fencing Flatworm Recordings, oTo, Rob Hayler, Midwich and Radiofreemidwich," Part One, 28 Sept. 2011, http://www.bangthebore.org/archives/1600, and Part Two, 12 Nov. 2011, http://www.bangthebore.org/archives/1889.

3. Hayler, "About Us and This Blog," *radio free midwich* (blog), http://radiofreemidwich.wordpress.com/about-me-and-this-blog/ (accessed 20 May 2014).

4. Anonymous, "Dystrophy," Hanson Records, http://hansonrecords.bigcartel.com/product/skin-graft-dystrophy-cd, (accessed 11 June 2014).

5. Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Derbyshire: Moorland Publishing, 1980).

6. For a discussion of laminal improvisation in the context of Evan Parker's career, see Hazel Smith and Roger Dean, *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts since 1945* (Oxford: Routledge, 1997), 68–69. Chapter 4 develops this concept of laminal improvisation.

7. See Ben Watson's long defense of the concept in *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation* (London: Verso, 2004).

8. Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice*, rev. ed. (London: British Library National Sound Archive [UK], 1992), xii.

9. Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006). Kahn-Harris's extreme metal mainly covers black and death metal, whereas my definition is a little broader.

Chapter 3

1. David Keenan, "Agent Provocateur," *Wire*, Feb. 2010, 33.

2. homonymous, http://exoticpylon.com/ (accessed 21 Sept. 2012).

3. "According to the Mercer Worldwide Cost of Living survey 2010, Berlin is the least expensive location of any major MBA city in Europe": Business Because, 6 Sept. 2010, http://www.businessbecause.com/news/MBA-Europe/cost-of-living-at-b-school-berlin-8448 (accessed 23 May 2012).

4. Hundreds of gallery and concert spaces are concentrated around such central districts such as Kreuzberg, Mitte, and Friedrichshain.

5. "Bar Aoyama," Improvised Music from Japan, http://www.japanimprov.com/baraoyama/profile.html (accessed 23 May 2012).

6. Clive Bell, "Off Site," *Clive Bell* (blog), http://www.clivebell.co.uk/offsite.htm (accessed 24 May 2012).

7. For example, Otomo Yoshihide and Sachiko M had a three-day residency at Café Oto in 2010, while their duo Filament has undertaken numerous European tours. Incapacitants, Haino, and Merzbow all performed in New York at No Fun in 2007. Rie Nakajima has performed at Café Oto, the White Cube Gallery, and many other U venues; Nakamura performed at Instal 2010 in Glasgow and released a duet album in 2012 with the British musician John Butcher, who himself has performed regularly with Japanese Sound Artist Akio Suzuki. Yoshihide has in fact released collaborations with everyone from Derek Bailey, to Fennesz, Christian Marclay, Luc Ferrari, and David Sylvain.

8. The following article outlines in brief the context of Mini Midi and of the Beijing underground scene more generally as of 2010: "Mini Midi Festival Brings Experimental Music to Wuhan This Summer," echinacities, http://www.echinacities.com/wuhan/city-life/mini-midi-festival-brings-experimental-music-to-wuhan-this.html (accessed 3 June 2013).

9. The record label Subjam, headed up by Yan Jun, produce the nights: http://www.subjam.org/archives/25 (accessed 28 May 2012).

10. Tung, "Scene Report," provides a nice overview of some of these recent activities.

11. For example, Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (London: Continuum, 2007). I discuss this book in chapter 10.

12. Dot Dot Dot sells music on physical media by noise artists such as the New Blockaders, accepting payment through Paypal. This type of setup is common in the underground, as we will see in Part II; see http://www.dotdotdotmusic.com/ (accessed 22 May 2012).

13. Andrew Fogarty is a member of weird electronics outfit Boys of Summer and Toymonger and head of the Munitions Family label.

14. Vicky Langan runs the Black Sun weirdo/outer limits music and film nights in Cork and performs as a solo artist under the name Wölflinge. Langan is examined in greater detail in chapter 6.

15. *Pascals Country Sounds* (blog), 23 June 2009, http://pascalscountrysounds. blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/our-anniversary-10th-box-social-show.html.

16. Harry White, for instance, argues that Ireland's comparative dearth of prominent composers can be traced to residues of cultural imperialism that attach themselves to classical music: *The Progress of Music in Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

17. This "mini-scandal" is detailed at length by blogger Nialler9 in "Problems in the Awarding of Music Network's Recording Scheme," *Nialler9* (blog), http://nialler9.com/ e71500-awarded-musicians-music-networks-recording-scheme/ (accessed 18 June 2014).

18. I should say that I was the author of the review Prior mentions: "United Bible Studies," *Journal of Music* (Oct.–Nov. 2009), 56.

19. Prior here paraphrases Oliver Cromwell's famous command to Irish natives in the seventeenth century, "To hell or to Connaught."

20. Prior compared Ireland with Norway during our interview: "Irish acts tend to go to London to get on major labels whereas the Norwegian government nurtures independent labels so artists stay with them. In Finland the 'fonal' label has done great things for local artists with government funding. I can remember Angela Dorgan of First Music Contact telling a group of musicians that The Arts Council didn't fund album releases because they were commercially available. This reasoning has never been applied to sculpture and painting, for instance." (It's important to note, as I said above, that, with the council's burgeoning support of artists like Vicky Langan, this policy seems to be shifting, with songwriter Laura Hyland, for instance, getting Bursary funding from the Arts Council in 2014.)

Chapter 4

1. As outlined in Georgina Born, "Music and the Social," in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, eds., *The Cultural Study of Music*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 261–274, and "On Music and Politics: Henry Cow, Avant-Gardism and Its Discontents," in Adlington, *Red Strains*, 55–64.

2. This approach is of particular significance in such essays as "The Aging of the New Music" and the book *Philosophy of Modern Music:* Theodor Adorno, "Aging of the New Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. with commentary by Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 181–202; *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Wesley V. Blomster and Anne G. Mitchell (New York/London: Continuum, 2004).

3. In Matthew Fuller, "Beat Blasted Planet," http://www.spc.org/fuller/interviews/ sonicwarfareinterview/ (accessed 2 Mar. 2012).

4. Adam Krims's book *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2000) examines music from the artist Ice Cube in terms of its articulation of a notion of a "revolutionary identity." Robert Walser analyzes Public Enemy's work in political terms in "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 2 (Spring–Summer, 1995): 193–217. Susan McClary seeks to show how, in her words, "many of the forms and conventional procedures of presumably value-free music are saturated with hidden patriarchal narratives, images, agendas": *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 154.

5. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 4.

6. Ibid., 138.

7. Karl Marx, "The Direct Production Process," Marxists.org, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/economic/index.htm (accessed 24 Aug. 2011).

8. Scott Eric Kaufman, "What in the Hell . . . Is Real Subsumption?" *What in the Hell* (blog), http://whatinthehell.blogsome.com/2008/12/19/is-real-subsumption/ (accessed 25 Aug. 2011).

9. Marx, "Direct Production Process."

10. Kaufman, "What in the Hell . . . Is Real Subsumption?"

11. Marx, "Direct Production Process."

12. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 385–386.

13. Steven Shaviro, "More on (or against) Bio politics," *The Pinocchio Theory* (blog), *17 June 2011*, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=987.

14. Steven Shaviro, "A Desire Called Utopia," *Stranger*, 15 Dec., 2005, http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=25666.

15. Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, Semiotext(e) Intervention Series 13 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 145.

16. Manuel Castells, "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 5 (Sept. 2000): 695.

17. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (New York: Blackwell, 1996), 423.

18. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 141–200.

19. Guy Standing, *The Precariat* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

20. Adam Krims, "Marxist Music Analysis without Adorno," in Allan Moore, ed., *Analysing Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131–157.

21. Ibid., 136.

22. Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

23. Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

24. Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism and the Foreclosure of Politics," *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (2011): 51–74.

25. Ibid.

26. Born, "On Music and Politics," 64.

27. See Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1950); Murray Bookchin, "Libertarian Municipalism," The Anarchist Library, 2 Sept. 2011, http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-libertarian-municipalism-an-overview; John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, eds., *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980).

28. Steven Shaviro, "Post-Cinematic Affect Symposium," *The Pinocchio Theory* (blog), 2 Sept. 2011, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1006.

29. Mark Fisher, "A Social and Psychic Revolution of Almost Inconceivable Magnitude," *Accelerationist Aesthetics*, special issue, *e-flux*, no. 46 (2013): http://www.e-flux.com/journal/%E2%80%9Ca-social-and-psychic-revolution-of-almost-inconceivable-magnitude%E2%80%9D-popular-culture%E2%80%99s-interrupted-accelerationist-dreams/ (accessed 28 June 2013).

30. Liz Tung, "Scene Report: In China, Experimental Music Reaches Its Critical Mass," *MTV Iggy*, 25 June 2013, http://www.mtviggy.com/articles/scene-report-in-china-experimental-music-reaches-its-critical-mass/.

31. LaborinArt, "Running along the Disaster: A Conversation with Franco 'Bifo' Beradi," *e-flux*, no. 56 (May 2014): www.e-flux.com/journal/a-conversation-with-franco-%e2%80%9cbifo%e2%80%9d-beradi/ (accessed 19 June 2014).

32. Mark Fisher, "Social and Psychic Revolution."

33. Gean Moreno, "Editorial," *e-flux*, no. 43 (2013): http://www.artandeducation.net/announcement/e-flux-journal-issue-46-accelerationist-aesthetics-guest-edited-by-gean-moreno-2/.

34. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *#Accelerate Manifesto*, section 3.1, Critical Legal Thinking, 14 May 2013, http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/.

35. Shaviro, "Desire Called Utopia."

Chapter 5

1. Sleep even signed to London Records, a subsidiary of Universal, in 1995, following the relative success of their album *Sleep's Holy Mountain*.

2. Carlos Giffoni, a collaborator with the group, gives an idea of the context: "Wolf Eyes. Those guys, they're not working; they don't have day jobs. But, you know, they have to be touring all the time and they have other avenues of making money, like with their own label and things like that—it's a lot of hard work": Hank Shteamer, "In Full: No Fun Fest's Carlos Giffoni," *Dark Forces Swing Blind Punches* (blog), 12 May 2009, http://darkforcesswing.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/in-full-no-fun-fests-carlos-giffoni.html.

3. Money, however, is evidently far from the only reason these labels have been set up; Aaron Turner issued a statement in Sept. 2012 about the loss-making status of Hydra Head and its "imminent demise," which came to pass the following year: "The Im-

minent Demise of Hydra Head Records," *Hydra Head Records* (blog), 10 Sept. 2012, http://hydraheadlines.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/the-imminent-demise-of-hydra-head.html?spref=tw. Besides this, many underground labels exist primarily as curatorial entities, as with Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace, or as devices of self-publicity, as with Prurient's Hospital Productions.

4. All data is taken from the "Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisation Report 2015–2018," http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment-2015–18/national-portfolio/new-portfolio/ (accessed 15 Nov. 2014).

5. See, for example, the contrasting bios of composer Seán Clancy and noise musician Marlo Eggplant, two figures whose work in a broad range of musical institutional and noninstitutional contexts means they are probably closer in spirit that this evident contrast would suggest: "Seán Clancy," The Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland, http://www.cmc.ie/composers/composer.cfm?composerID=207 (accessed 16 Nov. 2014); "About Me" and "Background," Corpus Callosum Distro, http://www.corpuscallosumdistro.com/marlo_eggplant.html (accessed 16 Nov. 2014).

6. All quotes attributed to ausland here can be found in "Interview about Self-Organisation," alongside other details about operational decisions and political and aesthetic values, ausland, at http://www.ausland-berlin.de/interview-about-self-organisation (accessed 15 Nov. 2014).

7. "Music," Arts Council England, http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-artforms/music/ (accessed 30 Mar. 2012).

8. The open letter is available at The Holst Foundation, 27 Mar. 2012, http://www.holstfoundation.org/media/Open-Letter-SAM-ACE.pdf.

9. Susanna Eastburn, "The Language of New Music," Sound and Music, http://soundandmusic.org/blog/language (accessed 23 May 2014).

10. "Who We Funded," The Arts Council, www.artscouncil.ie/funding-decisions/?&Fund=Bursary%20award&Year=2014#search (accessed 21 June 2014).

11. For an an overview of these public-sector arts cuts, see Ian Youngs's "Arts Council England Funding: Crunching the Numbers," *BBC*, 1 July 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-28035980 (accessed 27 Nov. 2014).

12. Instants Chavirés, http://www.instantschavires.com/ (accessed 25 Nov. 2014).

13. For context see Various, "Responses to the Recent Cuts to Arts Funding in the Netherlands," *Fillip* 14 (Summer 2011).

14. An *Irish Times* article gives a broad account of the decline of state arts funding and the increasing importance of private funds: Suzanne Lynch, "Should Art Groups Jump at Private Funds?" *Irish Times*, 24 Sept. 2012.

15. Cynthia Koch's article "The Contest for American Culture: A Leadership Case Study on the NEA and NEH Funding Crisis" fleshes out the context of this decline up to the year 1999; Public Talk, http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/ptkoch.html (accessed 23 Apr. 2012).

16. As can be seen from its "Projects" page: New Music USA, www.newmusicusa.org/all-projects/ (accessed 13 June 2014).

17. From the NEA's own site: "Music," National Endowment for the Arts, http://www.nea.gov/grants/apply/Music.html (accessed 23 Apr. 2012).

18. For an overview of Grrrnd Zero and its predicament in 2012, when city ordinances and a notice of eviction put it out of commission, see Anna Barie, "The Plight of Lyon's Grrrnd Zero," *Impose*, 12 Apr. 2012, www.imposemagazine.com/bytes/the-plight-of-lyons-grrrnd-zero (accessed 19 June 2014).

19. Mary Ann Clawson's article 'When Women Play the Bass: Instrument Specialization and Gender Interpretation in Alternative Rock Music," *Gender and Society* 13, no. 2 (1999): 193–210 (esp. 197), contains details about a certain demographic of Boston-based "alternative rock" musicians, none of whom supported themselves through performing or recording.

20. The members of Wooden Shjips discuss these matters in a profile article on the group by José Carlos Santos in *Rock-A-Rolla*, no. 33 (Aug.–Sept. 2011): 24–29.

21. Shteamer, "In Full."

22. "Profile," Improvised Music from Japan, http://www.japanimprov.com/incapa/profile.html (accessed 21 Mar. 2012).

Chapter 6

1. Vicky Langan, "Performance History," Vicky Langan, http://www.vickylangan.com/performance-history/ (accessed 30 Mar. 2012).

2. Ibid.

3. Mattin, "Biography," Mattin, http://www.mattin.org/recordings/biography.html (accessed 23 Apr. 2012).

4. Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Snow (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), viii.

5. All quotes in this paragraph are from Mattin, "Improvisation and Communisation," Mattin, http://www.mattin.org/essays/Improvisation_and_Communisation.html (accessed 18 Dec. 2014).

6. Mattin, "Biography."

7. Keenan, "Agent Provocateur," 30–33.

8. Ibid., 32.

9. Mattin, "Anti-Copyright," in Anthony Iles and Mattin, eds., *Noise and Capitalism* (Arteleku Audiolab, 2009), http://www.arteleku.net/audiolab/noise_capitalism.pdf; also available on Mattin's website: http://mattin.org/essays/Mattin-ANTI-COPYRIGHT.html (accessed 25 Apr. 2012).

10. Mattin, "Anti-Copyright."

11. Mattin, "What Is to Be Done under Real Subsumption?" Mattin, http://www.mattin.org/essays/what.html (accessed 18 Dec. 2014).

12. Andy Hamilton, "Composition and Improvisation," in *The Aesthetics of Music* (London/New York: Continuum, 2007), 192–213.

13. Todd S. Jenkins gives some historical background and chronological detail on the

links between free jazz and improv in "Paths to Freedom," in *Free Jazz and Free Improvisation: An Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 2004), 1: xxxiii–lxviii.

14. Eddie Prévost, *No Sound Is Innocent* (London: Small Press Distribution, 1996).

15. Eddie Prévost, *The First Concert—An Adaptive Appraisal of a Meta Music* (London: Copula, 2011).

16. Prévost, *No Sound Is Innocent*, 1–3.

17. Eddie Prévost, "About," *The Workshop Series* (blog), http://workshopseries.wordpress.com/about/ (accessed 6 Apr. 2012).

18. AMM, *AMMMusic 1966* (ReR Megacorp, 1989), ReR AMMMCD.

19. The laminal approach of AMM and groups such as the Spontaneous Music Ensemble was later developed in what I'd call "post-laminal" improv. The post-laminal approach can be heard in the aforementioned Japanese Onkyo improvisers, in groups such as Polwechsel, and in the music of artists such as Rhodri Davies and John Butcher. Alongside the timbral and performative extensions of AMM, we find in these artists an openness to new electronic resources; a wide range of musical reference points; a preference for discreet, even tranquil performances; and almost ambient textures.

20. In Gérard Genette's literary theory, "focalization" is the articulation of the different perspectives (for example, internal or external; an omniscient narrator equates to zero focalization) through which a narrative is presented: "Mood," in *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 161–211.

21. John Eyles gives an account of a 2010 workshop in the following piece: "Eddie Prévost's Workshop," *Let's Dance About Architecture . . .* (blog), 5 Apr. 2012, http://letsdanceaboutarchitecture.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/eddie-prevosts-workshop-part-2-modus.html. Prévost himself writes about the theory underlying the workshops, and their history, in "About."

22. Martin Davidson's history of the Ensemble and its nominal leader, "John Stevens: An Appreciation," is available at European Free Improvisation, http://www.efi.group.shef.ac.uk/mstevens.html (accessed 20 June 2014).

23. Maggie Nicols, "The Gathering," Maggie Nicols, http://maggienicols.com/id13.html (accessed 19 June 2014).

24. Bookchin, "Libertarian Municipalism."

25. Born, "On Music and Politics," 55–64.

26. Mattin, "Anti-Copyright."

27. "The Vortex Jazz Club," Vortext, http://www.vortexjazz.co.uk/about-the-vortex.html (accessed 25 Sept. 2012).

28. "The Foundation," Paul Hamlyn Foundation, http://www.phf.org.uk/page.asp?id=1021 (accessed 23 Mar. 2012).

Chapter 7

1. Patton Oswalt, "Wake Up, Geek Culture. Time to Die," *Wired*, Jan. 2011.

2. Keenan, "Collateral Damage," 18.

3. Amanda Brown, "Collateral Damage," *Wire*, Sept. 2011, 14.

4. Mark Fisher, "No Time," reproduced at Virtual Futures, http://virtualfutures. co.uk/2011/08/15/markfisher/ (accessed 25 Apr. 2012).

5. Ibid.

6. Brown, "Collateral Damage."

7. Chris Cutler, "Collateral Damage," *Wire*, June 2011, 14.

8. John Maus, "Guest Lists: John Maus," Pitchfork, 3 Aug. 2011, http://pitchfork. com/features/guest-lists/8003-john-maus/.

9. "People Like Us," City Sonic, 25 Sept. 2012, http://www.citysonic. be/2012/2012/09/25/people-like-us-vicki-bennett-interview-city-sonic-a-voir-au-vernissage-de-sonic-cinema-ce-jeudi-27-septembre-a-galeries-bruxelles/.

10. Vicki Bennett, "Collateral Damage," *Wire*, Mar. 2012, 14.

11. Ibid.

12. "Vicki Bennett Interview," Abject, http://abject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/ VickiBennettInterviewFull.mp3, accessed 26 Sept. 2012.

13. Robin Rimbaud, "Collateral Damage," *Wire*, Sept. 2011, 14.

14. Marcus Boon, *In Praise of Copying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 4–6.

15. Marcus Boon, "Kenneth Goldsmith," *Bomb*, http://bombsite.com/issues/117/ articles/6071 (accessed 27 Sept. 2012).

16. Marcus Boon, "Digital Mana," in Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli, eds., *Cutting across Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 24.

17. In Boon, "Kenneth Goldsmith."

18. "AMOUR & DISCIPLINE BREATHTAKING FULL MANIFESTO," Amour & Discipline, http://amour-discipline.org/infos/ (accessed 20 May 2014).

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. "Foreword," Amour & Discipline, http://amour-discipline.org/infos/ (accessed 21 May 2014).

22. See, for instance, Simon Reynolds on the richness of "analogue time" versus "digital time" and the superficiality of digital age listening in "Retromania," *Wire*, June 2011, 30–35.

23. British Music Rights, "Music Experience and Behaviour in Young People, Spring 2008: Main Findings and Conclusions," Music Tank, http://www.musictank.co.uk/re-ports/music-experience-and-behaviour-in-youngpeople/ (accessed 25 Apr. 2012); British Music Rights. "What Does the 'MySpace' Generation Really Want?" University of Hertfordshire, http://www.herts.ac.uk/news-and-events/latestnews/ (accessed 25 Apr. 2012).

24. Peter A. de Vries, "The Digital Generation: The Influence of Portable Music Listening Habits of First Year Pre-Service Education Students on Their Future Practice as Primary School Teachers," *Australian Online Journal of Arts Education* 2 (2006): http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/education/teach-research/arts-ed/aojae/2–2.pdf   (accessed 25 Apr. 2012).

25. Adrian North, as quoted in "Press Release," University of Leicester, http://www2.
le.ac.uk/ebulletin/news/press-releases/2000–2009/2006/01/nparticle-wxc-b9c-7hd
(accessed 26 Sept. 2012).

26. "The 'Library Effect': Digital Age Brings Increased Use of BMI Music Catalog,"
BMI,   http://www.bmi.com/news/entry/the_library_effect_digital_age_brings_in-
creased_use_of_bmi_music_catal (accessed 26 Sept. 2012).

27. Philip Auslander, "Looking at Records," *Dramatic Review* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2001):
77.

28. Anne-Kathrin Hoklas, "Generational Differences Regarding the Role of Mate-
riality for Everyday Music Listening Practices in Germany: A Qualitative Case Study,"
paper presented at Musical Materialities in the Digital Age (University of Sussex, June
2014). Details on the wider project can be found at Mediatized Worlds, 23 Oct. 2014,
http://www.mediatisiertewelten.de/en/projects/2nd-funding-period-2012–2014/
survey-music-and-media.html.

29. Paolo Magaudda, "When Materiality 'Bites Back': Digital Music Consumption Prac-
tices in the Age of Dematerialisation," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 11, no. 15 (2011): 19.

30. Reynolds, "Retromania," 32.

31. Jörg Blumtritt, Benedikt Köhler, and Sabria David, "The Slow Media Manifesto,"
Slow Media, 2010, http://en.slow-media.net/manifesto (accessed 15 July 2014).

32. Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

33. Keith Guzik and Andrew Pickering, eds., *The Mangle in Practice* (Durham and
New York: Duke University Press, 2008).

34. The material I'm using for this case study was generated in part through inter-
views I originally conducted for the magazine *Journal of Music.*

35. "Index," Trensmat, http://www.trensmat.com/index1.html (accessed 25 Apr.
2012).

36. Trensmat's full catalog is available to view on its home page: http://www.trens-
mat.com/ (accessed 25 Apr. 2013).

37. Reynolds, "Retromania," 32–33.

38. Reynolds, "Not Not Fun," 38.

39. "Year Zero Records," http://yearzerorecords.blogspot.co.uk/ (accessed 25 Apr.
2012).

40. Reynolds, "Not Not Fun," 36.

41. See "No Fun Discography," http://www.discogs.com/label/Not%20Not%20
Fun%20Records (accessed 26 Apr. 2013).

42. Samantha Cornwell, "Label Profile: Not Not Fun," Altered Zones, http://altered-
zones.com/posts/503/label-profile-not-not-fun/ (accessed 26 Apr. 2012).

43. Cornwell, "Label Profile."

44. Reynolds, "Not Not Fun," 38.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 38.

47. In Boon, "Kenneth Goldsmith."

48. Reynolds, "Not Not Fun," 39.

49. Ibid., 39.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 40.

Chapter 8

1. "About Arika," Arika, http://arika.org.uk/about-us (accessed 31 Mar. 2012).

2. "About the Event," Arika, http://arika.org.uk/events/arika14-episode-6 (accessed 20 June 2014).

3. "A Special Form of Darkness," Arika, http://arika.org.uk/events/episode-2-special-form-darkness (accessed 1 Apr. 2012).

4. Keenan's fuller statement is: "So arts funding has been slashed? Good. Is there anything more contradictory and hypocritical than a 'radical' music festival that's essentially government sponsored? The future for the underground lies in refusing these narcotic compromises while daring to create its own economy." See Keenan, "Collateral Damage," 18.

5. "About Arika."

6. Barry Esson, "Programme Note," Glasgow School of Art, http://www.gsa.ac.uk/life/gsa-events/events/barry-esson/ (accessed 3 Apr. 2012).

7. I attended Instal 2009, Instal 2010, and "A Special Form of Darkness."

8. The following piece gives a good overview of the festival, particularly the events of the final night: Richard Pinnell, "Instal," The Watchful Ear, 15 Nov. 2011, http://www.thewatchfulear.com/?p=4228.

9. "About," Transmediale, http://www.transmediale.de/about (accessed 4 Apr. 2012).

10. Mute's website states the following: "After running on a mixed economy of barter, grant and private monies since its inception in 1994, Mute started receiving revenue funding from the Arts Council of England in 1999, which ends on 31st March 2012. Our last 'Regularly Funded Organisation' grant was set at £68,912 (for the year 2011/12), going towards the core costs of staff, premises and production."

11. "Colour Out of Space," Colour Out of Space, http://www.colouroutofspace.org/html/info2011.html (accessed 4 Apr. 2012).

12. Emily Kawasaki, "Colour Out of Space Goes on Hiatus," Wire, 8 Aug. 2012, http://www.thewire.co.uk/articles/9544/.

13. "About," Café Oto, http://www.cafeoto.co.uk/about.shtm (accessed 23 Apr. 2012).

14. "Hamish Dunbar," PRS for Music Foundation, http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/About-Us/Guest-of-the-Month/April-2012-Hamish-Dunbar (accessed 21 Apr. 2012).

15. "Contact," Café Oto, http://www.cafeoto.co.uk/contact.shtm (accessed 23 Apr. 2012).

16. "Support," Café Oto, http://www.cafeoto.co.uk/support.shtm (accessed 17 July 2013).

17. "Oto Projects," Café Oto, http://www.cafeoto.co.uk/otoprojects.shtm (accessed 23 Apr. 2013).

18. "Genesis Prize," Genesis Foundation, http://www.genesisfoundation.org.uk/content/hamish-dunbar-caf%C3%A9-oto-awarded-inaugural-%C2%A325000-genesis-prize (accessed 23 Apr. 2012).

19. Ibid.

20. An archive containing details of venues, lineups, and links to reviews and articles can be found at the No Fun website: "No Fun Fest," http://www.nofunfest.com/ (accessed 20 June 2014).

21. However, at the time of the 2008 festival the Knitting Factory, which has since moved to Brooklyn, was located in Manhattan.

22. No Fun Production's complete catalog is contained on the following web page: http://www.discogs.com/label/No%20Fun%20Productions (accessed 19 May 2012).

23. Carlos Giffoni, "No Fun," No Fun Fest, http://www.nofunfest.com/2010.html (accessed 19 May 2012).

24. Carlos Giffoni, quoted in Steve Underwood, "No Fun," *As Loud As Possible*, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 73.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 72–74.

27. Ibid., 72.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 73–74.

30. Giffoni, quoted in Shteamer, "In Full."

31. By way of contrast, most concerts at Glasslands Gallery in Brooklyn, a DIY "community art and music space," have a ten-dollar cover charge. Smaller off-radar DIY shows in the city, from my own past experience, rarely charge more than a complimentary fee for entry.

32. Giffoni, quoted in Underwood, "No Fun," p. 72.

33. Giffoni, quoted in Shteamer, "In Full."

34. Ibid.

35. Giffoni, "No Fun."

Chapter 9

1. Paul Hegarty, interviewed in chapter 3, has various texts that cover the history of the genre: "Brace and Embrace: Masochism in Noise Performance," in Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle, eds., *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorising Sonic Experience* (New York/London: Continuum, 2013); "Noise/Music," in Caleb Kelly, ed., *Sound* (London/Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2011); and *Noise/Music: A History*.

2. Iles and Mattin, *Noise and Capitalism.*

3. Nick Cain, "Noise," in Rob Young ed., *The Wire Primers* (London/New York: Verso, 2009), 29–36.

4. Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

5. David Novak, *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

6. Out of many examples, the 'zines *Blastitude* (www.blastitude.com), *Personal Best, Sound Projector,* and *As Loud As Possible* are worth mentioning, likewise the blogs *Terror Noise Audio* (http://terrornoiseaudio.blogspot.co.uk/) and *Idwal Fisher* (http://idwalfisher.blogspot.co.uk/) and the forum Noise Guide (http://forum.noiseguide.com/).

7. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 13.

8. Ibid., 14.

9. Ibid., 14.

10. Mattin, "Theses on Noise," Mattin, 25 May 2006, http://www.mattin.org/essays/THESES_ON_NOISE.html.

11. Dominck Fernow, in Kiran Sande, "Interview with Dominic Fernow," *FACT*, 1 Apr. 2012, http://www.factmag.com/2012/04/01/prurient-and-still-wanting/.

12. Ray Brassier, "Metal Machine Theory 3," Mattin, http://www.mattin.org/essays/METAL_MACHINE_THEORY_3.html (accessed 30 May 2011).

13. Philip Tagg and Karen E. Collins, "The Sonic Aesthetics of the Industrial: Re-Constructing Yesterday's Soundscape for Today's Alienation and Tomorrow's Dystopia," paper presented at the Soundscape Studies conference (Dartington College, Feb. 2001), http://www.tagg.org/articles/dartington2001.html (accessed 20 June 2014).

14. Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History*, ix.

15. Ibid., 3.

16. Attali, *Noise*, 35.

17. Simon Frith, review of *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack, special issue, *Popular Music* 31, no. 2 (May 2012): 313.

18. Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises," in Robert P. Morgan, ed., *Source Readings in Music History: The Twentieth Century*, (1913; New York/London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 58–64.

19. Hegarty, "Brace and Embrace," 133.

20. David Stubbs, "Interview—Joe Potts," *LAFMS-the book* (blog), http://lafms.wordpress.com/joe-potts-interview/ (accessed 12 July 2013).

21. A useful compendium for all things LAFMS is at http://lafms.wordpress.com/ (accessed 13 July 2013).

22. See Stubbs, "Interview—Joe Potts."

23. Ibid.

24. Hegarty, "Brace and Embrace," 134.

25. For a further account of Zappa's mélange of influences and references and tech-

niques, see Michel Delville, "Zappa and the Avant-Garde: Artifice/Absorption/Expression," in Paul Carr., ed., *Zappa and the And* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 185–199.

26. Byron Coley, "Forever Expanding Internal Horizons," Cortical, http://www.cortical.org/spores/ByronColey.html (accessed 13 June 2011); also available at *LAFMS-the book* (blog), http://lafms.wordpress.com/byron-coley-essay/ (accessed 17 Aug. 2012).

27. Le Forte Four, *Bikini Tennis Shoes* (1975, LAFMS 001).

28. Various, *Blorp-Essette* vols. 1, 2, and 3 (1978, 1980, 1980, LAFMS 005/010/011).

29. Various, *I.D. Artist* (1976, LAFMS 002).

30. Edwin Pouncey, "The Los Angeles Free Music Society," Cortical, http://www.cortical.org/pouncey.html (accessed 20 June 2011).

31. Stubbs, "Interview—Joe Potts."

32. Coley, "Forever Expanding Internal Horizons."

33. Hegarty, "Brace and Embrace," 135.

34. Both cited in Tagg and Collins, "Sonic Aesthetics of the Industrial."

35. Cited in Timothy Gabriele, "After Cease to Exist: The Far-from-Final Report of Throbbing Gristle," *Popmatters*, 1 Feb. 2012, http://www.popmatters.com/feature/152265-after-cease-to-exist-the-far-from-final-report-of-throbbing-gristle/.

36. Hegarty, "Brace and Embrace," 134.

37. Cain, "Noise."

38. Simon Reynolds, "Shaking the Rock Narcotic," *Wire*, May 1994, 28–35.

39. For context see Simon Reynolds, "Brooklyn's Noise Scene Catches Up to Oneohtrix Point Never," *Village Voice*, 6 July 2010, http://www.villagevoice.com/2010–07–06/music/brooklyn-s-noise-scene-catches-up-to-oneohtrix-point-never/.

40. My dissertation gives much more analytical detail on these post-noise musics: "Notes from the Underground" (PhD diss., Goldsmith's College, 2012).

41. See http://www.volcanictongue.com/ and http://www.volcanictongue.com/labels/show/329 (accessed 20 Aug. 2012).

42. See https://noisenotmusic.wordpress.com/ (accessed 20 June 2012).

43. Mattin, "Anti-Copyright."

44. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

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1. Chris Bohn, "Masthead," *Wire*, Dec. 2010, 4.

2. Idwal Fisher, "Letter," *Wire*, Jan. 2011, 6.

3. "Maurizio Bianchi Discography," http://www.discogs.com/artist/Maurizio+Bianchi (accessed 12 June 2011).

4. A performance at Tate Modern in May 2012 had the band performing in militaristic uniform, with videos of industrial factories and Nazi space characters (from the 2012 "Nazis in space" film *Iron Sky*); see Agata Pyzik, review of Laibach live in London, *Wire*, June 2012, 75.

5. Quoted in Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 95.

6. See the following essay for a discussion of Zizek's use of Lacan's notion of Law and transgression: Christian Thorne, "Three Essays on Zizek: 1," Christian Thorne: Commonplace Book, 16 June 2013, http://sites.williams.edu/cthorne/articles/three-short-essays-on-zizek/.

7. Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 237.

8. Zizek, quoted in "What the Hell Is Laibach About?" YouTube video, 11 Mar. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BZl8ScVYvA.

9. SPK, "Dokument 1," <<SPK>> DOKUMENTS, http://home.pi.be/~spk/spkdokuments.htm (accessed 17 June 2011).

10. SPK, "Interview," *RE/Search #6/7: Industrial Culture Handbook*, http://www.researchpubs.com/books/ichprod.php (accessed 15 June 2011).

11. Genesis P-Orridge, "Behavioral Cut-Ups and Magick," in *Rapid Eye #2* (Annihilation Press, 1992).

12. Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998).

13. SPK, "Dokument 1."

14. "SPK," Patientenfront/Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv(H), http://www.spk-pfh.de/Gossipcide.htm (accessed 29 June 2011).

15. "SPK," Patientenfront/Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv(H), http://www.spk-pfh.de/Iatroimperialism.html (accessed 30 June 2011).

16. SPK, "The Post-Industrial Society," *RE/Search #6/7: Industrial Culture Handbook*, http://home.pi.be/~spk/spkthepostindustrial.htm (accessed 12 June 2011).

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18. SPK, *Two Autopsy Films: Human Postmortem* (Twin Vision, 1983, VHS).

19. SPK, *Leichenschrei* (Thermidor, 1982, T 09).

20. From SPK, *Factory* (Side Effects, 1979, PRS 2643).

21. SPK, "Dokument 1."

22. Various, *Neuengamme* (Broken Flag, 1982, STFV No. 1).

23. Ramleh, *Return to Slavery* (Broken Flag, 1982, BFV 02).

24. Various, "*The Future Calls*" (Broken Flag, 1983, 12).

25. Steve Underwood, "Broken Flag," *As Loud As Possible*, no 1 (Fall 2010): 85–86.

26. Mundy, quoted in Underwood, "Broken Flag," 87.

27. Rockwell, *Hate* (Broken Flag, 1983, BF09).

28. Whitehouse, *Buchenwald* (Come Organisation, 1981, WDC 881013).

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31. Hegarty. *Noise/Music: A History*, 181.

32. Hegarty, "Brace and Embrace," 135.

33. Jacques Rancire, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), 12.

34. Ibid., 13.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid, 19.

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1. Hegarty, "Brace and Embrace," 135.

2. Masami Akita, "An Interview with Merzbow," in Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (London: Continuum, 2004), 60.

3. Ibid., 59–60.

4. Ibid., 60.

5. Ibid.

6. Hijokaidan, *Windom* (Alchemy Records, 1991, ARCD-038); Incapacitants, *Feedback of N.M.S.* (Alchemy Records, 1991, ARCD-022).

7. Incapacitants, *As Loud As Possible* (Zabriskie Point, 1995, POINT 13).

8. Hijokaidan, *Tapes* (Alchemy Records, 1986, ARLP-012).

9. Hijokaidan, *Romance* (Alchemy Records, 1990, ARCD-018).

10. From Various, *Noise from Trading Card* (Alchemy Records, 1997, ARCD-098).

11. *Sonic Visualiser* is a software program developed at Queen Mary University for the analysis of audio files. Each of the scans I include here was done using the same color scheme, gain level, and frequency and intensity resolutions, thus providing a solid basis for comparison.

12. The Prurient, that is, of music prior to 2011's *Bermuda Drain* (Hydra Head, HH666–220–2), which, like subsequent work, contains a range of thematically linked electro songs of comparatively transparent textures and forms, as seen also in subsequent releases.

13. This is the alias of Christopher Forgues, who also operates under the name "Mark Lord."

14. Kites/Prurient, *The Hidden Family/White* (Load Records, 2004, LOAD 062).

15. Richard Ramirez, in Sam McKinlay, "The Politics of HNW," *As Loud As Possible*, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 14.

16. Werewolf Jerusalem, *Masked Spider of the First* (Troniks, 2007, TRO-273).

17. Stonefelt, in McKinlay, "Politics of HNW," 17.

18. Hum of the Druid, *Norse Fumigation* (Scratch and Sniff Entertainment, 2010, SNSE077).

19. Hum of the Druid, *Raising the New Wing/Braided Industry* (Scratch and Sniff Entertainment, 2008, SNSE 072).

20. Jennifer Egan, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (London: Corsair, 2011), 23.

21. Beat Happening, *Jamboree* (K, 1988, KLP 002).

22. Throbbing Gristle, *20 Jazz Funk Greats* (Industrial Records, 1979, IR 0008).

23. Various, *The Lowest Form of Music* (Corti, 1996, 11.1).

24. Freud, in Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1986), 18.

25. Ibid., xv.

26. David Toop, *Sinister Resonance* (London/New York: Continuum, 2010), 61.

27. Eric Abrahamson and David H. Freedman, *A Perfect Mess: The Hidden Benefits of Disorder* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007), 51.

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1. Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage, 1996), 98.

2. See Turner, "Imminent Demise."

3. Sunn O))), *Black One* (Southern Lord, 2005, Sunn50).

4. See http://www.metalireland.com/ (accessed 6 Oct. 2012).

5. Xasthur, *Nightmares at Dawn* (Avantgarde, 2012, AV211).

6. The following post well illustrates Malefic's preferred method of sales: http://xasthurnews.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/out-now-and-ending-now.html (accessed 5 Sept. 2012).

7. Brandon Stosuy, "Show No Mercy," Pitchfork, http://pitchfork.com/features/show-no-mercy/ (accessed 6 Sept. 2012).

8. Kahn-Harris, "Roots?" 129.

9. Brandon Stosuy, "A Blaze in the North American Sky," *Believer*, July–Aug. 2008, http://www.believermag.com/issues/200807/?read=article_stosuy (accessed 28 Aug. 2012).

10. Corrupted/Phobia, *eponymous* (Rhetoric Records, 1999, RH55).

11. Various, *Twin Threat to Your Sanity* (Bad People Records, 2001, BPR-017).

12. Melvins, *Bullhead* (Boner Records, 1991, BR25–2).

13. Harvey Milk, *A Small Turn of Human Kindness* (Hydra Head Records, 2010, HH666–206).

14. Various, *Twin Threat to Your Sanity*.

15. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

16. Merleau-Ponty's notion of "the flesh," where our bodies are involved in what has been described as "a complex movement of overlapping and folding that exceeds all binary oppositions," seems particularly apt here: see the discussion in Anneleen Masschelein, "Flesh World: On the New Uncanny," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 17 Aug. 2012, http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/flesh-world-on-the-new-uncanny.

17. H. P. Lovecraft, *The Whisperer in Darkness*, http://www.dagonbytes.com/thelibrary/lovecraft/thewhispererindarkness.htm (accessed 3 Sept. 2012).

18. From H. P. Lovecraft *The Call of Cthulu*, http://www.dagonbytes.com/thelibrary/lovecraft/thecallofcthulhu.htm (accessed 3 Jan. 2011).

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20. Adrian Johnston's essay "The Forced Choice of Enjoyment: *Jouissance* between Expectation and Actualisation" discusses the nature of *jouissance* and its divergence from Freud's pleasure principle: Lacan dot com, http://www.lacan.com/forced.htm (accessed 2 Sept. 2012).

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25. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm (accessed 8 Feb. 2011).

26. Malefic, in Roberto Martinelli, "Xasthur, an Interview by Roberto Martinelli," *Maelstrom*, http://www.maelstrom.nu/ezine/interview_iss11_130.php (accessed 25 Feb. 2011).

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28. Xasthur, *Funeral of Being* (Blood Fire Death, 2003, BFD 014).

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33. Benjamin Noys, "Remain True to the Earth," in Niccola Masciandaro, ed., *Hideous Gnosis* (Createspace, 2010), 105.

34. Ibid.; "Famine," quoted in Noys, "Remain True to the Earth," in Masciandra, *Hideous Gnosis*, 108.

35. Ibid., 125.

36. Ibid.

37. Badiou, *Century*.

38. Ibid., 6–8, 39.

39. Robin Attas, "Meter as Process in Groove-Based Popular Music" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2011), https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/33822.

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41. Walter Everett, "Making Sense of Rock's Tonal Systems," *Music Theory Online* 10, no. 4 (2004): http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.w_everett_frames.html (accessed 14 Sept. 2010).

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