Does He Cut It?

Struggles with authorship in the noise and improvisation practice of Mattin

Fig. 1. Mattin, *No Fun Festival* performance, 2009 (brief caption).

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Abstract

For over a decade, Basque artist Mattin has worked collaboratively to make improvised noise concerts characterised by clusters of silence, scything feedback howls, and haunting shrieks, which are produced digitally with guitar, amongst other instruments. Often improvising with a an invited set of guests, Mattin's noise concerts create situations of instability and uncertainty, and perhaps even a sense of danger, through the drama of his aesthetic which antagonises his audience, forcing them to become active participants whether they are willing or not. By engaging collaborators and audience alike, Mattin uses his noise concerts as a tactic to activate a shared state of political agony in a period of Western capitalist society's demise.

Operating at the borders of noise music as a genre, Mattin's improvisation practice is supplemented by his exploratory writings on improvisation and the importance of free software — a position he claims against the perils of intellectual property, defying any sense of ownership or property we may have. Mattin has over seventy albums attributed to him under several labels around the world, and has also independently founded the experimental record labels w.m.o/r and Free Software Series, as well as the net-based label, Desetxea. He releases and distributes his music under the no-license of anti-copyright, which further ramifies his political methods that are non-conformist and non-profit.

Problematising the occularcentric tendencies within art history, which privilege the visual over the sonic, this paper investigates Mattin's practice in terms of his own doctrine of noise practice, situating it as worthy of analysis within this disciplinary frame. Centering on Mattin's contemporary practice I will investigate what is at stake in his quest to "cuts things up" and will do so by identifying a wider historical and socio-political context for his practice, touching on rock history and a number of other conceptual artistic practices. Through this lens, I will examine the political efficacy of Mattin's methods in challenging authorial status; the relationship between performer and audience; as well as how such socially-inclined art practices can engage and contribute to the struggle against our commodified mode of existence.

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INTRODUCTION

Mattin: from Getxo Sound to noise

In the early 2000s Basque artist Mattin (1977-) arrived on the European improvisational music scene as a noise computer musician: an unconventional technique of instrumentation that ranges from (mis)playing the computer as an instrument to using its technology to create improvised sounds, and in his case feedback and noise. Around the same time, Mattin also began to deal with social issues more explicitly through his practice in an effort to investigate the political potential of music — an idea that is steeped in his musical upbringing.

A guitarist by training, Mattin started playing music in the early 1990s in the wake of the so-called "Getxo Sound" in Basque, Spain. Its 1970s-affiliated punk predecessor Herriko Rock Erradikala (or "Basque Radical Rock" in popularised English usage) is privy to the likes of the cut and dry violent aesthetic of the British punk forerunners: the Sex Pistols, known for their layered sound and punchy staccato lyrics. Getxo on the other hand, is typically softer in sound and takes after the likes of the American alternative rock band Sonic Youth. Gexto is further characterised by full melodic tones, often counterbalanced by general guitar-heavy noisiness, and completed by self-reflexive lyrics. Often sung in English, Gexto bands featured introspective or "EMO" lyrics such as El Inquilino Comunista's popular 1995 release *Brains Collapse*:

> "… Branch & concrete angels are falling with fire back
> dropping on top of your head it's hard to forget
> They're calling you're there old regrets
> Trapped insects in little paper bags
> So in your seeping gravel bed, twilight open ear
> It's so hard to hear
> It's killing me... "[1]

While popular Basque Radical Rock bands like Vomito chanted more charged lyrics:

> "I am a bomb,
> Nuclear bomb,
> My body is full of radioactivity,
> I kill people with my imagination,

[1] Transcription from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPSYKPf2dmI (11/12/2014).

My brain is a weapon of destruction".[2]

Despite their sonic differences, both Gexto and Basque Radical Rock have been inevitably shaped by the politics of the Basque Country and its long struggle for independence from Spain. General Francisco Franco (1892-1975) is responsible for the bombing the Basque town of Guernica[3] during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) with the support of his allies in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Under Franco's repressive rule, Spain was dragged through a Civil War and both World Wars with the military support of local fascist, monarchist and right wing groups.[4] Franco's totalitarian regime ended with his death in 1975 and was succeeded by King Juan Carlos I (1938-) who is credited for transforming the country into its current democracy.

Basque Radical Rock is influenced by this turbulent period and its music became an explicit expression against the neoliberal brand of democracy promoted by Juan Carlos's government. Whilst it could be said that the 1975 democratic regime once again opened Spain up to the world, this openness brought with it the championing of neoliberal ideals manifested most clearly in a suburban way of life.[5]

Categorically then Getxo Sound developed out of Basque Radical Rock and the socio-political changes of that time. Getxo is also originally the name of a small industrial and affluent coastal town of about 80,000 inhabitants located in the province of Biscay. A small avalanche of music groups emerged from this location, which led to the establishing of a municipal subsidy scheme in the 1990s that in turn supported the development of Getxo rock.[6]

Seen within this context, Mattin's political voice thus arguably stems from the Getxo scene supported by government funding. However, by the time he started playing music in the 1990s, the political climate in the Basque Country had begun to depoliticise as a result of widespread gentrification. To play Getxo music became a

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[2] Translated English chorus to *Soy Un Bomba*, original reads:
"Soy una bomba, una bomba nuclear
Mi cuerpo está lleno de radioactividad
Mato a la gente con mi imaginación
Mi cerebro es un arma de destrucción".
Translation provided by Larraitz Torres

[3] http://webapps.aljazeera.net/aje/custom/2014/fightforbasque/index.html (15/01/2015).

[4] http://webapps.aljazeera.net/aje/custom/2014/fightforbasque/index.html (15/01/2015).

[5] http://www.elcorreo.com/vizcaya/v/20110428/margen-derecha/getxo-sound-marco-estilo-20110428.html (16/01/2015).

[6] http://www.elcorreo.com/vizcaya/v/20110428/margen-derecha/getxo-sound-marco-estilo-20110428.html (16/01/2015).

means of extracting oneself from this ubiquitous suburban reality. As a result of the influence of Anglo-Saxon bands on Basque Radical Rock and Getxo Sound, according to Mattin, "people had started singing in English, to distance themselves from their [neoliberal] immediate environment… It was also a class thing."[7] At the time, Mattin played Getxo rock in the small indie band Intedomine, who gained little acclaim.[8]

Informal Knowledge: "It's not the bohemian thing…"

Mattin began his visual arts and music education simultaneously. In 1995 he moved to London to improve his English and eventually enrolled in the Camberwell College of Arts for his undergraduate degree. He attained his Masters at Goldsmiths where he met and studied under English percussionist and founder of the free improvisation group AMM, Eddie Prévost (1942-), who influenced his practice a great deal. Mattin recounts their encounter in an interview:

> "Eddie's generosity was exemplary in the sense of giving us the courage to just go and do it. It inspired us to self-organise, get our concerts, get labels running, and write about what we do and so on…. Eddie had a kind of strategy, like ways of playing, duos, trios, and quartets. There wasn't much talking. Maybe that was kind of part of the AMM thing. After the workshops we'd go to the pub, and there we'd talk. Share information, organise concerts… I like talking! I don't make a distinction between talking and improvising anyway; they're both part of the same thing. I don't believe there's any kind of purity in playing music. There's a musical quality to talking and a conversational element to playing, and they feed each other. They're both ideologically and historically constructed practices, frameworks that limit (or focus) our scope of action. The more that we talk about them, the more we're able to understand and transform them."[9]

Mattin adopted Prévost's method of improvising by blurring the lines between performance and life outside his concert situations – similar in spirit perhaps to the lively New

[7] http://www.elcorreo.com/vizcaya/v/20110428/margen-derecha/getxo-sound-marco-estilo-20110428.html (18/01/2015).
[8] Mattin continued to play bass with band mates Iñigo Eguillor and Josetxo Anitua until the group officially disbanded in 2008 upon Anitua's death.
[9] http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/mattin.html (07/06/2013).

York social scene of conceptual artists during the politically charged decades between the 1950s and 1970s. Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner (1942-) for instance describes going to the Cedar Tavern, The Five Spot, Dillon's and Max's in New York as a youngster to "network"[10] and in an *Art in America* article published in December 2013 he reminisces:

> "Everybody that was part of this amorphous scene, trying to change society, put in two or three nights in a bar, just to continue the conversations. The mise-en-scène set by artists, and the lifestyle that they are able to engender, is part of being an artist. It's not the bohemian thing, it's not the party, and it's the idea that they can engender a lifestyle that stays within some kind of concept of their own needs".[11]

Mattin's participatory and collaborative practice seems to echo the experience described by Weiner, in that Mattin looks to instigate settings where informal knowledge is in constant exchange. In addition to studying under Eddie Prévost, another formative moment in Mattin's career was during his attendance at Off-ICMC (International Computer Music Conference) at the Podewill Centre for Contemporary Arts, Berlin in 2000, where the likes of Polish experimental musician and composer Zbigniew Karkowski were also in attendance. In the same interview he recalls:

> "When I came back to London I got a computer. I basically liked that the computer was not only an instrument for music but for many other things. I could basically run my label with the computer: email, [make] covers, website, music, mastering, burning CDRs… But more and more I think the idea of the instrument is problematic. We're faced with so many possibilities: focussing on a single instrument sounds very reductive. Especially now that trumpets try to sound like electronics, and electronics like acoustic instruments, and so on. I try to think of ideas as instruments, to have a more open understanding of what improvisation could be, rather than focus on formal terms as it was before. At some point improvisation became so enclosed."[12]

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[11] http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/art-bars/ (18/01/2015).
[12] http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/mattin.html (07/06/2013).

The Off-ICMC conference set the tone for Mattin's approach to music — driven by an anti-copyright ethos and a search for innovative ways of playing less concerned with traditional composition set by the Western Harmonic Scale.[13] Building on a predominantly musical context, Mattin entered the art gallery setting in the early 2000s often collaborating with professional and non-professional improvisers and musicians alike in making noise concerts. The participatory performances conducted together with these practitioners characteristically include discussions and some kind of instrumentation, where each contributor adds elements from their area of expertise that is in turn improvised together to make the noise concert. In other words noise practice occurs at three levels in Mattin's practice: he makes noise records, he performs noise music to / with a noise familiar crowd and makes conceptual improvised concerts with collaborators and participants within a gallery setting that is not always familiar with the noise genre. Mattin's repertoire of collaborators includes philosopher Ray Brassier (1965-), writer and editor Anthony Iles (n/a), improvisation musician Taku Unami (1976-), artist Emma Hedditch (1972-), trombonist and composer Radu Malfatti (1943-), as well as composer, sound artist, film maker and original member of Theatre of Eternal Music, Tony Conrad (1940-).

As part of his artistic practice, Mattin also aims to wrestle with the social and economic structures of experimental music production. That is, within traditional improvisation an instrument is typically played unconventionally and in relation to surrounding stimuli in any given environment or as prompted by a musician's emotions. This is typically done as a method of freeing the performer from their discipline and revealing new patterns. Mattin attempts to build upon this approach, working conceptually "to question the nature and parameters of improvisation, specifically the relationship between the ideal of freedom and the constant innovation that it traditionally implies, as well as the established conventions of improvisation as a genre".[14] It is here that Mattin establishes the borders of improvisation and begins to challenge them. Following the footsteps of pioneers in experimental music practice of the 1960s such as John Cage (1912-1992), improvisation for Mattin should be an inclusive discipline that considers and problematises all of the elements in a concert situation, including its

[13] This aspect of his style is explained in greater depth in the second chapter of this paper.
[14] http://www.mattin.org/recordings/biography.html (07/06/2013).

material conditions such as the architecture of the performance space, its social relations, and its audience, next to the more obvious relationship between the performer and their instrument. To summarise using Mattin's own words, he "tries to expose the stereotypical relation between active performer and passive audience, producing a sense of strangeness and alienation that disturbs this [dichotomy]"[15].

"The culture of the ear"

In addition to Mattin's performance practice his writings on improvisation and the perilous notion of intellectual property include a handful of publications: *Unconstituted Praxis* (2012), a compilation of most his texts to date; as well as his co-edited *Noise and Capitalism* (2009), a collection of essays dealing with music as a commodity in response to whether noise can escape commodification. These references, alongside Mattin's performance at the *No Trend* Festival (2006); an album release *Broken Subject* (2007); and a project exhibition at Contemporary Art Centre Brétigny, France (2012), will serve as case study material for this thesis. Together, the case studies demonstrate an evolution in Mattin's work and also delineate the possible limitations of this type of practice together with that of the noise-improvisation model in general.

My research method engages with the argument that Western culture is predominately visual in nature, while understanding that an audio culture rose in the past half-century, dubbed "the culture of the ear" by music professors Christoph Cox (n/a) and Daniel Warner (n/a) in their seminal book *Audio Culture Readings in Modern Music* (2004).[16] My research positions itself within Cox and Warner's critique of a visually obsessed culture and works to challenge the ocular-centric nature of art history studies, in order to contribute to an audio-visual approach. Rather than attempting to resolve issues within the space of music history alone, I situate Mattin's performative practice within experimental art and the contemporary gallery setting. Furthermore by referencing throughout this paper artists who blur the visual and

[15] http://www.mattin.org/recordings/biography.html (07/06/2013).
[16] Cox and Warner 2004, p. 8. The authors go on to explain: "In the art world, sound art has suddenly become a viable field, finding venues at prominent museums and galleries across the globe. And, in music, once marginal sonic and auditory explorers – Luigi Rissole, John Cage, Pierre Schaeffer, Pauline Oliveros, R. Murrey Schafer, and others have come to be acknowledged as ancestors and influences by an extraordinary number and range of musicians working across the boundaries of jazz, classical, rock, and dance music".

sonic binary, I hope to illustrate the importance of critiquing noise performance from an art historical perspective and will argue for the necessity of further developing an aesthetic that considers the sonic dimension of artistic practice as well.

Divided into three chapters, the first deals with the notion of authorial status so as to investigate what is at stake when Mattin attempts to escape his own. Set against an historical background of rock music, my exploration attempts to contextualise Mattin's practice by identifying the (rock) history behind his tactics. A key reference here is artist Dan Graham's (1942-) essay film *Rock My Religion* (1982-1984) which establishes a history of rock music and a critique of modernist consumer culture or "spectacle society" as coined by Situationist Guy Debord (1931-1994), thus grounding Mattin's politically charged intentions for noise and improvisation. Juxtaposed with Debord's notion of the spectacle, is Roland Barthes's (1915-1980) interrogation of authorial roles — most popularly explored in his text *Death of the Author* (1967) — and apply this to Mattin's practice.

As a further contextualisation of Mattin's own interrogation of the author status, the second chapter will investigate the notion of power as established by philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and later developed by philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guatarri (1930-1992). I will explore the complications of Mattin's endeavour by examining one of the most epic disputes in the last century in music concerning ownership: namely that of Theatre of Eternal Music (ToEM), an experimental drone music group operating in the mid-1960s. An insight into Post-Cagean aesthetics help us establish the roots of the conflict, while also providing one more of the lineages informing the core subversive traits in Mattin's noise and improvisation.

Finally the third chapter of this thesis places Mattin's practice in a contemporary context, drawing particular attention to his self-processed "social studio". To help situate the term, the chapter focuses on the intersubjective space between performer and audience. As an underpinning, a discussion of the debate between art historians Clare Bishop (1970-) and Grant Kester (n/a) concerning socially inclined art practice is used to introduce a third perspective, that of Ray Brassier (1965-) who deals with the non-aesthetic of noise. This chapter, together with the following, works to hold Mattin's practice up against him to investigate of whether one can in fact escape one's own authorship. And in the

case of Mattin, the question remains as to whether he himself makes the cut concerning his ultimate critique of John Cage’s apparent inability to “cut himself up” as an author.

CHAPTER ONE

The Authorial Status

In the following chapter, I apply a four-part approach to addressing the question of: what is at stake in Mattin's performative practice when he attempts to escape his authorial status? The chapter focuses primarily on Mattin's use of noise and improvisation through which he aims to "address the social and economic structures of experimental music production through live performance" and to "work at the borders of noise".[17] Using artist Dan Graham's rock genealogy: *Rock My Religion* (1982-1984) – which argues that modernist mass cultural practices inherited and transformed religious practices of the 18th and 19th centuries in America – I will foreground a critique of modernist consumerist culture enveloped in rock music. Via Graham's genealogy we can then trace back to Marxist theorist, writer and filmmaker Guy Debord's critique of the spectacle society in modernism in order to frame Mattin's stance against capitalism in the rock genealogy decades later. I will highlight Graham's association of rock music with politics, which is inherent in rock's entanglement in and criticism of consumerism. A discussion of Mattin's attempt to undermine his author status closes the chapter, drawing on philosopher Roland Barthes's 'Death of the Author' (1967), which will set the stage for a wider discussion of authorship and power in the second chapter of the thesis.

[17] http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/public-lecture-mattin-unconstituted-praxis (13/06/2013).

No Trend noise festival

Fig. 2. Lou Reed, *Metal Machine*, 1975 (brief caption).

> "My disappointment continued with the noise scene. What had seemed to be a practice exploring the extremes, revealed itself, at a certain point, as a self-congratulatory, ego-maniacal and uncritical mode of expression. The parameters of where this activity happens seem to be already well defined and rarely exceed the reproduction of existing stereotypes and characteristics of what is supposed to be noise. This includes ear splitting volume, dissonance, shock effect, aggressive often misogynist lyrics or introverted-not-giving-a-fuck-attitudes… yes I have done some of those for quite some time but at some point enough is enough). It is not surprising that both scenes are male dominated and give little indication of reflection on gender relations… We can appropriate the type of self empowerment and alienation that noise can produce, not to try to create some sort of sublime experience, but to question what the notion of experience is really about… If the material conditions that we are living in are immersed in a capitalist logic, can we pervert this logic by improvising ourselves?"[18]

The summer of 2006 marks one of Mattin's earliest

[18] Mattin, 2011, p. 10.

conceptual performances in his noise career. In London, Mattin took part in the two-day *No Trend* noise festival – a must for fanatics of this niche genre. His attendance is a self-professed "epic moment",[19] and marks one of his earliest attempts to interrogate "the social structures of experimental music practice"[20]. The event also served to catapult his understanding of audience engagement in a noise rock context and his pursuit of a democratised relationship between performer and audience. In his text 'Noise versus Conceptual Art' (2010), he recalls the event:

> "After thirteen concerts of intense and loud noise, I stood up on stage holding a microphone and wearing mirror sunglasses, looking like something in between a *Ramblas* human sculpture, and Lou Reed in the *Metal Machine* music cover. I stayed there holding the microphone without moving for ten minutes. The microphone was recording all the stupid comments, all the heckling, the insults, and spit that the audience threw at me. After ten minutes I played the recorded file at ear splitting volume."[21]

Mattin's taunting performance introduced an unfamiliar role reversal to the crown in that his audience took on the role of performers behind the microphone. This performative gesture most famously recalls John Cage's *4'33"* (1952) composition where he relies on an audience's unwitting participation and the given environment to complete the piece. Cage's score instructs its musicians not to play their instruments for the duration of the composition, enabling the sounds of the setting to take precedence and ostensibly make the work. In a similar vein, Mattin's understanding of performance is not restricted to the musicians and their instruments on stage but extends to include the audience, their social interaction and the common concert space. Mattin was thus – and also in his understanding – improvising with his concertgoers.

Besides a few eyewitness accounts on blog posts there is hardly any documentation of this performance. Yet counterbalancing Mattin's grandstanding rendition of it is an account by jkudler via music writer Richard Pennells's blog, *The Watchful Ear*. jkulder responds:

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[19] Mattin, 2011, p. 44.
[20] http://www.mattin.org/recordings/biography.html (07/06/2013).
[21] Mattin, 2011, p. 44.

> " … as we know there is nothing pure in noise. It would be impossible to represent the atmosphere, the smell of alcohol, the asshole feeling that a member of the audience said that he felt. Noise only exists in the present."[22]

Despite the particularity of a single testimonial account, one may at least begin to imagine the confusion of the noise-ready crowd at the concert. Even in retrospect, upon reading Mattin's written reflection, jkudler accuses him of misrepresenting the noise music genre. With his double-barrelled argument jkudler not only defends his right to act up at noise concerts ("the asshole feeling") but he also defends subversive behaviour as an integral part of noise music at large. Another testimonial on the music platform lastfm. recalls the festival as: " …brilliant. Plenty of shit-throwing, toy guitar-playing, windshield-eating action…"[23] From these accounts it becomes at least clear that self-inflicted violence and subversion are common enough practices of noise rock music and that its rebellious essence is difficult to capture. This is only underscored further by Mattin's theorisation in his own text, 'Noise versus Conceptual Art' (2010): "if conceptual art is clean, noise is dirty. If conceptual art is subjective, noise is asubjective. Of course, it is the artist who produces his or her conceptual artwork. By contrast, noise is everywhere."[24]

Mattin's records can also be characterised as exhibiting a similar dissonant spirit. Extended silences and monotonous drone-like sounds are typical and these are often interrupted by tormented cries into the microphone or some other scathing sound. Released as the fourth and solo album under his Free Software Series, *Broken Subject* (2007) features Mattin's typical no-nonsense approach to noise music: recorded on the computer (computer noise) rather than on the stage or improvised with others. The album stitches together an assortment of ten tracks, each seemingly focussed on a small set of violent electronic sounds that are stretched and suspended over non-rhythmic time. The tracks are loud, and perforate any impulse of tonality by saturating the sonic sphere with squawks and drone noises. And when finally the full sound dissipates into stoney silence, anticipation creeps in. As the first

[22] http://www.thewatchfulear.com/?p=3642 (17/01/2015).
[23] http://www.last.fm/group/NO+WAVE+-+NOISE+-+ARTROCK+-+etc/forum/18458/_/78772 (17/01/2015).
[24] Mattin 2011, p. 43.

shriek in the album warns these silent moments are not peaceful in nature but are a signal for something loud and terrifying to come.

One might ask however, what lays behind Mattin's noise rock tendencies? What is at play when Mattin draws violence from the crowd, entangling them as performers in curt lessons on shared authorship? Or when he counterbalances silence with noise and riddles this equation with a dose of self-alienation in his festival performance and recorded albums? Dan Graham's understated yet poignant film essay *Rock My Religion* (1982-1984) provides an idiosyncratic history of rock music and with it, albeit unknowingly, a history behind noise rock with a particular focus on the front woman or man. Graham's rock genealogy establishes a partial historical landscape grounding Mattin's noise performances and recordings and delineating the borders of established noise rock tendencies at which Mattin operates in his pursuit of non-commodified modes of existence under capitalist production and in his interrogation of the author status.

Rock My Religion: an unrestored history

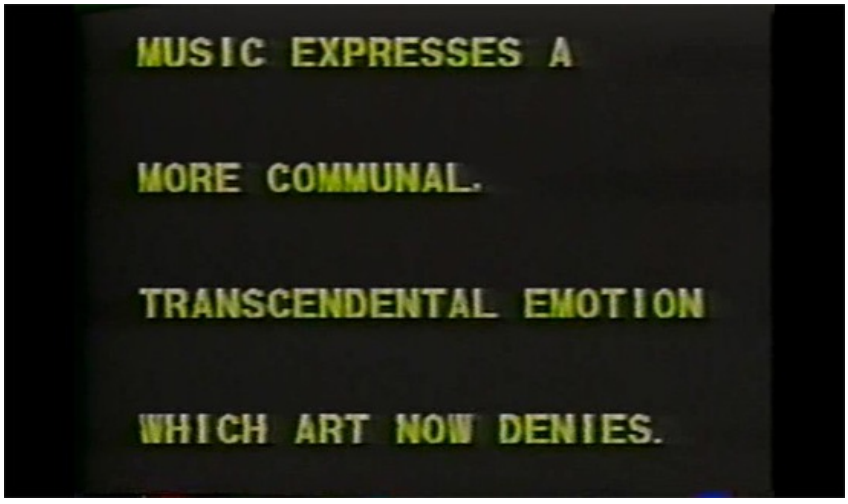

Fig. 3. Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion*, 1982-84 (brief caption).

Music has influenced the artistic practice of Dan Graham from the early stages of his career, although he is mostly celebrated for his achievements in curating, writing, performance, installation, video, photography and architecture: most notably his glass mirrored pavilions (1980s-). Graham's writings on music are equally influential, having published in art journals such as *Real Life*, *Open Letter* and *ZG* between 1968 and 1988.[25] He is also one of the first contemporary artists to embrace

[25] http://autoitaliasoutheast.org/projects/dan-grahams-rock-my-religion/ (12/05/2015).

Punk, Postpunk and No Wave into his multi-disciplinary practice and is often dubbed as a figurehead of these music movements.[26] During the 1970s and 1980s, he developed close working relationships with the influential avant-garde composer Glenn Branca (1948-), and musician Kim Gordon (1953-), co-founder of the renowned noise rock band Sonic Youth. Gordan is said to have started her music career by taking part in one of Graham's performance pieces, which eventually didn't go according to plan,[27] but turned into a full-fledged concert instead.[28] Branca went on to release the first few albums of Sonic Youth under his self-founded Neutral Records record label. Similarly Graham's video-essay *Rock My Religion* (1982-1984) is populated by punk performers and traces the beginnings of rock music, linking the arrival of the religious sect the Shakers in North America in 1774 with the development of rock 'n' roll. The film also chronicles an array of rock performances since the origins of the genre in the 1950s, weaving these together the more popular Jim Morrison or The Doors (active between 1965 and 1973) with hard-core punk bands like Black Flag (1976-1986). Additionally, as if to balance out the male-dominant genre, Graham introduces a corrective history by setting musician Patti Smith as his protagonist. He underscores and catalyses his narrative with Smith's belief that rock music is in fact a religion.

A reading of filmmaker and theorist Kodwo Eshun's (1967-) in-depth examination (also entitled 'Rock My Religion' (2013)) of Graham's video however aptly points out how incomplete Graham's rock history actually is. Whilst it places a female rock star at its centre and connects rock to particular moments in English and American white working class histories, it does not do the same for the black American working class and thus fails to account for the influence of African American culture and music on rock 'n' roll. In 'Rock my Religion', Eshun unpacks Graham's incomplete narrative by following art historian Benjamin Buchloh (1941-), in 'From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Video Works'

[26] http://autoitaliasoutheast.org/projects/dan-grahams-rock-my-religion/ (12/05/2015).
[27] http://autoitaliasoutheast.org/projects/dan-grahams-rock-my-religion/ (12/05/2015).
[28] Writer Kirsten Dombek's explains in her review of Kim Gordan's publication *Girl in a Band* (2015) "Her first musical performance in New York was with Graham, in *Performer/Audience/Mirror*, as part of an all-girl band that was supposed to act out a rock show in front of a huge mirror, and comment on the audience between songs, disrupting their desire to consume the performance invisibly. The women didn't do what they were supposed to do, Graham was upset, but Gordon felt something 'lodging new in my brain', realized that performing was like 'a high-altitude ride'." http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n06/kristin-dombek/woman-manly (25/03/2015).

(1985), as well as philosopher Dieter Lesage (1966-) and artist Ina Wudke (1968-) in their catalogue *Black Sound White Cube* (2010), to draw attention to Graham's disservice in the joint task in restoring a broken "historical memory".[29] Eshuan credits the first substantial critique of Graham's video-essay to Buchloh, writing:

> "Thus it is astonishing that Graham should omit from his contribution of panorama of religious and musical consumption any reference whatsoever to the fact that this history cannot possibly be written without considering the contribution of black working class and its musicians or reflecting on its cultural contribution in the context of its role as the traditionally exploited and oppressed proletarian class of American society."[30]

And more recent in history, Eshun traces the appraisal of Lesage and Wudke, where they astutely remark that

> "… However, obvious obligatory historical references to black culture in general (the dancing and trance in black 'sanctified' churches) and black sound in particular (rhythm and blues) are almost completely missing from this ambitious attempt to 'contextualise' one's own (rock) culture and background."[31]

Eshun thus cautions against the further institutionalisation of the video-essay as a rock history lesson arguing that Graham is ultimately a "vengeful nerd" out to get back at critics who omitted rock music, which mattered most to him and his friends, from history.[32] Eshun further argues that Graham "works with historical images and archival sounds in a way that is not historical, but rather ahistorical and transhistorical; not academic or theoretical so much as associative and speculative".[33]

Graham's revenge then, according to Eshun, is to translate noise into ecstasy through a process of aestheticisation, and situating rock music within the period of industrialisation in order to make ties with an oppressed white working class. Given that Graham's film was made in the early 1980s, a more contemporary

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[29] Eshun 2012, p. 5.
[30] Buchloh 1985, p. 220.
[31] Eshun 2012, p. 5.
[32] Eshun 2013, 'Rock My Religion' book launch presentation, Whitechapel Gallery, mp3.
[33] Eshun 2012, p. 5.

corrective history – which was seemingly not Graham's concern – would have accounted for the disenfranchised people connected to the story he tells. An example of this could be in naming Otis Blackwell (1931-2002) as the African American songwriter behind the 1950s song *Great Balls of Fire*, then popularised by Jerry Lee Lewis.

This however is not to say that a complete history is even possible. Indeed as proven by Graham's film, any attempt at filling in the gaps in a historical record inevitably creates more holes, dug out by one's own limitations. Or as Buchloh writes in his essay:

> "[Graham's] approach and handling of the material is clearly marked by the individuality of an artist as author, and we are confronted with a highly subjective reading of a history that may tell us more about present day circumstances that about its historical material".[34]

A corrective history that aims to restore it in a more inclusive way is nevertheless our joint contemporary task if we are to heal the wounds of our colonial past. That said it is beyond the scope of my investigation to fill in Graham's omission of black culture in *Rock My Religion*, indeed Eshun's exquisite examination registers these exclusions more comprehensively.[35] Instead, precisely because Graham's ahistorical piece is but another underscore in the line of histories being told from a place of privilege and – ironically enough – in direct relation to the very capitalist modes of production Graham calls into question in his film, it is important to try one's hand at reversing this irony. Accordingly, the following section draws lessons from Eshun's reading of Graham's work applying them in an evaluation of Mattin's attempt to rattle the fences of noise rock music in order to address the social and economic structures of experimental music production. Through Graham's lens I will attempt an historical account of rock music to foreground its connection to noise and emphasise its relation with capitalist modes of production and to investigate Mattin's practice and critique of capitalism. If anything, Eshun's examination illustrates the very power of capitalist production in its ability to erase its coloured working class from our collective historical narrative.

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[34] Buchloh 1985, p. 220.
[35] Eshun gives an account of Graham's oversights on p. 7-10.

Rock My Religion: rock's commercial history

A bare chested Henry Rollins (1961-) throbs his torso back and forth, hard rhyming his body to inaudible riffs. After a few seconds the camera cuts to capture his head banging from one angle, and then another, and finally pulls out to reveal him as the lead singer of Black Flag, with the rest of his band on stage. The camera moves out further, exposing a slew of fans sardined in the first few rows of the concert, slamming their bodies into one another in time with Rollins. As Eshun points out, Graham's grainy film footage is obviously improvised, presumably taken by hand as evidenced in how he stitches these short scenes together — an editing motif that happens throughout the fifty-five minute video-essay. Roaring guitars match the visuals and come in only after fifteen seconds of silence. The film cuts again to reveal a black screen with white text scrolling upward and the story of the Puritans arrival to America begins.

According to Graham, the influential religious non-conformists brought a hard-work-ethic with them and established a theocracy, instilled with the belief that man is essentially evil and hard work was the only way to bypass their fate in hell. After this, Graham's film recounts the practices of the Shakers [or The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing] on an orange screen with white text — tracing their emigration from Manchester, England to New York in 1774 led by Anne Lee (1736-1784).[36] A cotton field worker since the age of fourteen, Lee founded the Shakers at the onset of the industrial revolution, after turning to religion to nurse the loss of four infants and to escape an unhappy marriage that she had been forced into. Lee is said to have developed strong religious convictions that included celibacy and the abandonment of marriage in pursuit of perfection in every aspect of life. The Shakers generally exercised self-denial and elated trance dances as a way of purging the devil. Graham sets Lee's tale against a visual backdrop that suggests a mechanising England: shots of a non-distinctive countryside merge with close ups of a large factory wheel — a token symbol of industrialisation. Lee's misfortune with children is also recalled in this scene as a voice over reads, "Ludities smashed machines in the interest of the workers; apocalyptic visions of Christ's Second Coming swept through the oppressed

[36] Transcription from film: https://vimeo.com/8796242, (08/01/2015).

proletariat."[37] It is in this setting that Ann Lee is said to have encountered the teaching of Christ's Second Coming and learned that this could be experienced through "a trance produced by the rhythmic recitation of biblical phrases. This trembling also cured the body of ills."[38]

Lee's story is "transhistorically"[39] connected to musician Patti Smith's (1946-) experience with factory work as a teenager and effectively – like the children of the industrial revolution two odd centuries before her – Smith's experience with labour at a young age. At 2'33", the film cuts to feature the Patti Smith Group performing *Piss Factory* (1974), a song that recalls her work at the "Dennis Mitchel Factory in Pitman, South New Jersey in the summer of 1964."[40] Orange letters run up the screen once again and read:

> *"16 and time to pay off.*
> *I get this job in a Piss Factory inspecting pipe.*
> *Fourty hours, $36 a week but it's a paycheck,*
> *Jack. It's so hot in here, hot like Sahara. I*
> *couldn't think for the heat. But these bitches are*
> *too lame to understand, too goddamn grateful to*
> *get this job to realize they're gettin' screwed up*
> *the ass."*[41]

Smith's lyrics are paired incongruously with the image on the screen, and her voice only enters once we've heard the first few bars of the song – much like the Black Flag performance is treated at the beginning of the film. Text often appears out of sync with what can be heard in the film. As Eshun infers, Graham's video-essay is an exercise in "scriptovisuality",[42] wherein the viewer is asked to watch, listen and "read the screen with two kinds of twin attention".[43] Nevertheless what is clear up to this point is Graham's connection of rock music to religious practice, and how these practiced beliefs in hard work inversely enable industrial production. Accordingly there is an implied critique of religion and industrial production alike by making religion synonymous with exploitative labour, thereby paving the way for a new religion that could possibly liberate the white working class from their poor living conditions.

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[37] Graham 2009, p. 92.
[38] *Ibidem*.
[39] Eshun uses this term to describe Graham's nonlinear approach to historical events in his films, linking protagonists that are in fact decades apart.
[40] Eshun 2012, p. 18.
[41] Graham 2009, p. 92.
[42] Eshun 2012, p. 10.
[43] *Ibidem*.

With a change of slides at 16'50'' the film cuts from scenes of the Shakers dancing in circles and in trance to rid themselves of sin to an iconic black and white headshot of Patti Smith and her voice refraining: "my belief in rock 'n roll gave me a strength that no religion could come close to"[44] – furthering Graham's agenda to connect rock with religion. Just as abruptly as Smith's proclamation enters, the film cuts to scenes of youth in a record store and quickly to a purple-screened teleprompter that reads:

> "…*rock is the first musical form to be totally commercial and consumer exploitative. It is largely produced by adults to exploit a large adolescent market whose consciousness it tries to manipulate through media. Modelling itself after Hollywood rock takes average teenagers and moulds them into charismatic rock stars with manufactured cults of personality. Ambiguously built into rock is a self-consciousness by the music and by the teenagers who listen to it that it is a commercialised form. Thus it is not taken totally seriously. The listener can discern in its ironies. Such as the song 'Johnny B Goode'.*"[45]

Next to substantiating Graham's agenda, this narration also marks the disappearance of religion from rock under capitalist production in the film. The Shaker dance is however maintained as a reference of redemption and is made synonymous with scenes of 1950s youth rock fandom and commercialisation. Young girls particularly are illustrated clapping and bobbing their heads frantically to Jerry Lee Lewis playing on the piano; and later at 21'30" to Elvis Presley; at 28'02" to Jimi Hendrix; with the introduction of the hippies at 35'40"; to an array of musicians including Patti Smith, Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix from 44'43" intermittently with scenes of the Black Flag concert throughout; and finally sonically with Jim Morrison's notorious 1969 Miami concert from 46'02" onwards. According to Graham, the Shaker dance becomes sexualised over time to cater to the consumerist teenager. This generation's task "is not to produce but to consume"[46] his voice over explains, substantiated by thrilling scenes of youth rocking out to their idols, throbbing their

[44] Patti Smith quoted at 16:50 min in *Rock My Religion*, https://vimeo.com/8796242 (08/01/2015).
[45] Transcription from the film, https://vimeo.com/8796242 (08/01/2015).
[46] Graham 2009, p. 102.

bodies in presumably the same way that the Shakers did before them. One is able to discern that with each rock decade that passes in Graham's genealogy, the dance of the teenagers is instigated by the desire to consume their rock idols. This consumerist instinct perversely mirrors the very seed of consumerist sin that the Shakers sought to rid themselves of by living reclusive and faith-laden lives.

Noise and the spectacle

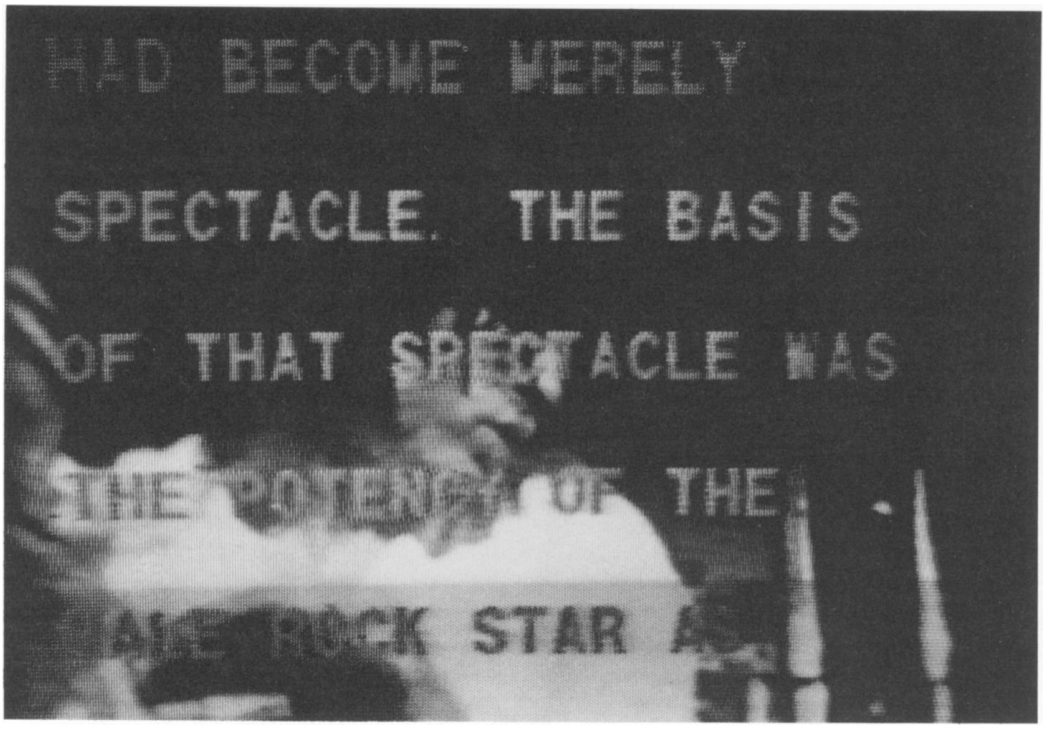

Fig.4. Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion*, 1982-84, screen shot of Jim Morrison (brief caption).

In Graham's narrative, rock music in the 1960s is utterly sexualised – "to rock 'n' roll is to have sex"[47] – and with that comes the "worshipping" of rock idols thereby replacing the figure of the divine in religion. The concert hall replaces the church furthering the consumer-driven capitalist programme; and the teenager's preoccupation with rock music is an escapist technique from the violent work ethic and values of their parents that produced the atomic bomb, the Vietnam War and belief in a nuclear family structure. Patti Smith's words return to explain this generation of teenagers' escapist self-indulgence:

> "*Fun, fun, fun. Maybe it won't last, but what do we care. My baby and I just want to have a good*

[47] Transcription at 20' in the film, https://vimeo.com/8796242 (08/01/2015).

time."[48]

Her lyrics appear in front of an orange background for a few seconds, distinguishing the 1950s from the 1960s, and introducing the reign of fandemonium. Eshun offers the perspectives of writers Judy and Fred Vermorel's (n/a) *Fandemonium* (1989) as well as anthropologist Edgar Morin's (1921-) *The Stars* (1960) to contextualise the fan mania – rock idol dichotomy in the guise of Situationist Guy Debord's notion of the "spectacle" presented in his *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Herein Debord, according to John Harris, argues that,

> "…having recast the idea of 'being into having', what [Debord] calls 'the present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy' has led to 'a generalised sliding from having into appearing, from which all actual 'having' must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function.'"[49]

In line with Karl Marx's (1818-1883) understanding of alienation, Debord stresses the alienation and commodification of almost everything in life as well as a condition whereby all products are rendered inauthentic. In this state, workers and consumers are used by commodities and made into passive subjects to contemplate the spectacle. Debord's notion was further popularised by the influential 1968 protests against capitalism, consumerism, and institutionalised values in France.

Relating this notion of the spectacle to fandemonium, Eshun writes:

> "According to Judy and Fred Vermorel, the 1950s is the era of the 'emergence of the Girl as a principle motive and motivator of fanhood'. Crucially the Girl has no 'particular gender'; what defines the Girl is the capacity to be 'excitable, vulnerable, a tremendous public body'. From the perspective of fandemonium, the white teenage boys at Minor Threat and Black Flag gigs are Girls, just as much as the Hendrix and Elvis fans are… The Vermorel's exaltation of the fan as an extricable body is indebted to The Stars (1957) Edgar Morin's pioneering anthropology of stardom. Morin analyses fandemonium as a condition of

[48] Graham 2009 p. 102.
[49] John Harris explains that Guy Debord predicted our distracted society, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/30/guy-debord-society-spectacle (23/01/2015).

> affective participation' that emerges from a 'complex[ity] of projections and identifications' excited by every 'spectacle'. According to him, our 'psychic participation' is at its most intense when 'we are purely spectators that is physically passive'. In this state, we live in the spectacle in an almost mystical fashion' by 'mentally integrating ourselves with the characters and the action (projection)' and 'mentally integrating them with ourselves (identification)'. To live in the spectacle is an almost mystical fashion: this is the definition of fandemonium".[50]

Fandemonium then serves to preserve the rock idol and their manufactured author status, and with that the affect of the spectacularised rock idol is also preserved. Reductively the behaviour of Mattin's audience at the *No Trend* festival has roots in Girl fandemonium in that, albeit at a niche level, they too were looking to consume their noise music heroes.[51] Mosh-pitting: "shit-throwing, toy guitar-playing, windshield-eating"[52] as the lastfm testimonial recalls – the festival goers lived vicariously through the bands on stage for that moment, much like the punk rock fans of Black Flag in Graham's film. Fandemonium is thus the very definition of spectacle and perhaps at its most intense the moment can be reversed once the passive observer is disturbed from their routine or disappointed. Furthermore, and in line with Graham's thesis, fandemonium serves to replace the role of religion. To this end Debord writes that "…the spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion",[53] which means, in this context, that the religious utopian experience that was reserved for the world beyond, is reconstructed within secular material life, and catapulted by the consumerist experience – in this case the rock concert experience. As Graham's film also infers, the lived spectacle state or fandemonium can be disrupted when the performer confronts his or her fans with their consumerism thereby unsettling the processes of "projection" and "identification" taking place. The fans may start to turn on their idol as a result (made evident in the moment that Mattin's audience turned on him, irritated by his silent performance).

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[50] Eshun 2012, p.87
[51] The full roster of the festival can be found on http://getlofi.com/no-trend-festival-2/ (03/01/2015).
[52] http://www.last.fm/group/NO+WAVE+-+NOISE+-+ARTROCK+-+etc/forum/18458/_/78772 (17/01/2015).
[53] Debord 2010, Point 20 in his thesis.

Graham's film references a moment comparable to Mattin's *No Trend* performance, namely the much recounted concert by The Doors at the Dinner Key Auditorium in 1969. The Doors front man Jim Morrison (1943—1971) exposed himself to his audience in protest of his manufactured sex symbol status — a persona that was propagated by the music industry and press to fast-track his stardom. With footage of the concert in the background, Graham's film narrates:

> "Morrison thought that rock was dead because it had become only spectacle. The basis of that spectacle was the potency of the phallicized rocker. What if he violated the taboo that prohibited exposure of the penis, but paradoxically made the electrified voice of the lead singer phallically potent? By exposing himself on stage… and thereby exposing the basis of the rock spectacle, Morrison wanted to expose the audiences corrupt desires."[54]

On a much smaller scale Mattin also ties to expose his audience to their own consumer corruption during his festival performance:

> "I stayed there holding the microphone without moving for 10 minutes. The microphone was recording all the stupid comments, all the heckling, the insults, and spit that the audience threw at me. After ten minutes I played the recorded file at ear splitting volume."[55]

Much like Morrison's contempt for his audience, Mattin's refusal to fulfil his role as a noise musician by confronting his audience with unexpected silence in that moment, arguably interrupted their thought patterns. Furthermore, at both concerts both musicians confront their audiences with the fallaciousness of their spectacularised idol images or author status, and with that their manufactured power. This is especially telling in Mattin's performances as he emulates a *Ramblas* statue and Lou Reed's pose on the cover of his fifth solo album — one of the earliest examples of noise music, *Metal Machine* (1975). Mattin's critique during his performance moment is thus triple thread in that he tries to perforate the historical background of rock idol status, attempts to unsettle the origins of noise through his ridicule of Reed and calls the audience out for their "passive" consumerist role. These are notably the points at stake in Mattin's

[54] Graham 2009, p. 111.
[55] Mattin 2011, p. 44

claim that his work "seeks to address the social and economic structures of experimental music production through live performance".[56]

Death of the Rock Idol: anarchic awakenings

Morrison's performance marks the end of a mystical association with rock 'n' roll in Graham's film. Whilst rock music is manufactured from its beginnings it also possesses self-consciousness within its commercialisation and was thus, according to Graham, never taken too seriously by its original teenage consumers. It nevertheless served as a viable path to escape the conservatisms of the teenagers' parents during the Richard Nixon administration (1969-1974) – replacing the bourgeois family structure and the dominant modes of thinking with alternative structures.

> "Hippies advocated love as a magic elixir that would unite heaven and hell; they didn't distinguish between love and sex, as both challenged bourgeois family definitions of son/daughter or mother/father".[57]

However, as the years pass, with the death of the rock idol, a more sober realisation settles in as Graham informs us, using Smith's experience once again:

> "the death of her idols of the '60s led Patti Smith to question rock and its religious contradictions. The rock club and rock concert performances are like a church, a sanctuary against the adult world. Mechanised, electric instruments unleash anarchic energies for the mass. The rock star stands in a sacrificial position against the regime of work; his sacrifice is his body and life."[58]

In the 1960s and 1970s, drugs forecast death. With this hard reality, and Morrison's metaphorical death in 1968, Graham argues that the "false Arcadia of the 1960s"[59] were left behind for the realities of urban violence in the 1970s. At this stage in the film, rock begins to incorporate violence and so the punk rock age is born. Unlike its preceding forms, punk rock had a more explicit political inclination, willing the political potential of

[56] http://www.mattin.org/recordings/biography.html (07/06/2013).
[57] Graham 2009, p. 105.
[58] Graham 1982-1984, 35'36"
[59] Graham 2009, 107.

the spectacle to be realised. Performers began to reckon with the power of their spectacular images, and in their representation of social change. In the film, Smith begins to speak on behalf of rock fans pinning them as a potential movement and in her words:

> "There's a lot of people who care about rock 'n' roll or just believe in … getting us all to a [point] where we have harmonious rhythm… These kids — these stigmas to God are going to rise up… "[60]

And at 50'20" Smith is featured again in a TV interview, at what seems to be the outskirts of a political rally, and asserts:

> "I think it's real important that we as Americans realise that we have a lot of violence inherent in us… as part of our culture, as part of our art, ya know like in the '50s, with great artists like Pollock and de Kooning, and now that war is over we should work to not to be ashamed to put violence in our art".[61]

And finally near the close of the film, at 52'00", Graham provides a summation of how rock's political agency is inserted into art, to crystallize if only for a moment when art and music had a shared agenda against market economies. This time, with yellow text on a black background, the voice over and the screen read:

> "The religion of the '50s teenager and the counterculture of the '60s was adopted by Pop artists who proposed an end of the religion of 'art for art's sake'. Patti took this one step further: rock as an art form that would come to encompass poetry, painting, and sculpture (the avant-garde) — as well as its own form of revolutionary politics. Warhol and other Pop artists had brought the art religion of arts for art's sake to an end. If art was only a business then rock expressed that transcendental, religious yearning for communal, non-market aesthetic feeling that official art denied. For a time during the '70s, rock culture became the religion of the avant-garde world".[62]

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[60] Transcription at 50'12" in the film, https://vimeo.com/8796242 (08/01/2015).
[61] Transcription at 35'17" in the film, https://vimeo.com/8796242 (08/01/2015).
[62] Graham 2009, p. 115.

Noise Music's Political Awakening

In light of noise music's political awakening, music professors Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (2004) highlight that with the 1970s came the large-scale availability of electronic music — a previously subversive and experimental genre — for a wider public and instruments such as the synthesizer became the norm in rock and dance music. In reaction to this normalization of electronic music, the 1970s also saw the rise of an "industrial" sound in Britain and across Europe where bands began to merge a punk rock attitude with performance art sensibilities. With this, the use of found objects (mostly industrial debris) emphasised certain cultural and political features of noise: noise as disturbance, distraction, and threat.[63] Furthermore, in an interview Glenn Branca explains the relation between No Wave[64] and conceptual art in the downtown New York scene:

> "I wanted to do a band that was coming from the art world sensibility [Theoretical Girls]. The Art world had kind of fossilized. The old people completely dominated, nothing new was allowed in, and we were all on the outside. The scene that would become No Wave wasn't called No Wave until maybe six months later after we started and it turned out that we didn't know that there were all these other bands that had similar ideas but they each had their own very different styles… What we were doing was really embraced by young artists we had come to New York. People like Robert Longo, Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman… One reason why we were successful and some of the other bands were successful was because all these artists liked us, it wasn't the CBGB's crowd. They just wanted to hear power pop… fake punk. It was bullshit what was going on at the time. We were these noise art bands who packed the fucking place and Hilly Chrystal who was the owner of the place hated us but because we made him a lot of money, he had to book us!"[65]

Mattin's noise practice finds its deepest roots in these

[63] Cox and Warner 2004, p. 357.
[64] A subculture of punk that rejected the radio friendly New Wave or a commercialised version of punk.
[65] Transcription from interview with Glenn Branca with The Drone, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEq57S094ro (15/01/2015)

moments. He is presumably well aware of his rock heritage and has consciously selected which tactics to retain within his practice, one of which is the deprecation of the his authorship —be it as a performer on stage or as author of the participatory performance —in favour of a collective awakening towards social change. True to its time rock music was especially politicised in the 1970s, with the Vietnam War raging until 1975. Mattin's practice picks up from the likes of Patti Smith, and more precisely Branca's description of the rise and ideals behind No Wave, in his pursuit of the political potential of music towards social change — wrestling with its capacity for alienation and fracturing consumerist patterns through his arterformances.[66]

The Rock Idol and the 'Death Of The Author'

Given that Mattin's performance at the *No Trend* festival emphasises his author status, it is well worth pointing to the legacy behind undermining this position, beyond that of rock history. That is, at his festival performance Mattin chose to remain on stage whilst recording the insults when he could have very well left or joined the audience to prove the same point. Mattin was perhaps well aware of the near impossibility of escaping his spectacular author status at that point but has nonetheless chosen this as his task, even if, at best, by failing better with each performance. Yet as literary critic Roland Barthes's seminal text *The Death of the Author* (1967) instantiates, there might be something to gain from surrendering the authorial position: that is, giving it up along with authorial intentions and biographical content in favour of the reader's insight and interpretation. In this way, according to Barthes "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a piece of writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; [because] a text's unity lies not in it's origin but destination"[67] — with the reader. Writing against the traditional academic criticism and literary history, Barthes postulates that "writing is the destruction of every vice, of every point of origin" and calls for a "writerly" space that is neutral, void of subjectivity, in which the reader actively participates in an infinite interpretation of the text. The upcoming

[66] So far, this paper has only discussed Mattin's noise practice, however the third chapter looks into Mattin's political pursuits in more detail, as well as his use of improvisation.
[67] Barthes 1967, p. 316.

chapters will explore the notion of subject-less-ness in greater detail.

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As an aside, when Mattin includes his audience in his festival performance he does not escape the issues he renders in his texts, i.e. in particular, *Noise versus Conceptual Art* where he strives to minimise his authorial role. Inversely, and however unintentionally, by producing and publishing his rendition of the performance in *Noise versus Conceptual Art* Mattin engages in self-representation, underscoring himself as the primary author of the performance, as he recalls the event from his own perspective with no documentation to support or challenge his argument. That is to say that before we can unpack the issue of authorship in Mattin's work, he has already inscribed the materials we have available to us.

Barthes's concerns undoubtedly resonate with Mattin, and are evident in how he troubles the performer-audience relation in favour of a "death of the author" in concert situations such as the one described. Arguably Mattin is after a similar condition of subject-less-ness in his noise situations and goes on to assume this state as a precondition for his concerts, encouraging his audience and/or fellow performers to collaborate in a situation where no hierarchies exist. This desire seems to follow Barthes's underlying provocation that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author".[68] Yet what are the implications of accepting subject-less-ness as an ideal condition for collaboration, who takes up the responsibility? And is a dead author always a good thing? The coming chapters will explore these questions

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Chapter Conclusion

Entangled in Graham's commercial history of rock music is also a history of a white working class during industrialisation. Graham marks the Shakers and later Patti Smith, during her adolescence, as representations for exploitative labour in modernism. Rock would then serve to escape this reality. Notably Eshun – by way of Buchloh, Lesage and Wudke – points out that Grahams fails to account for the disenfranchised black working class in his rock genealogy and that this omission in turn helps to establish his argument that rock music is built upon a

[68] Barthes 1967, p. 311.

subversive white working class. Mattin on the other hand is not so much a marginalised individual and much like Morrison near the end of his rock career in Graham's history, has chosen to position himself within the capitalist system in order to critique it at the margins of noise and improvisation. Whilst Graham worked at a corrective history that would include his rock peers to the art historical record, Mattin's concern lies more with the political potential of the genre, much like Patti Smith's political concerns in the 1970's as reflected in Graham's film.

The chapter primarily sought to establish what is at stake in Mattin's performance practice when he attempts to escape his authorial status. It addressed this question by providing the history behind noise rock according to Dan Graham's film, drawing parallels with the noise characteristics appropriated by Mattin and thereby a legacy behind self-alienation (as a lesson in reversed or shared authorship) and the social historical context which created the spectacle of the star/fan relationship. To this end the chapter determined that this legacy could be understood within Guy Debord's paradigm of the spectacle in that it identifies the rock idol's conflict with his or her manufactured, commercial persona and the consumption of this persona by his or her audience. In this context, Morrison's controversial Miami performance is a transhistorical prelude to Mattin's festival performance. Both performers' refusal to do what is expected of them (i.e. not performing to their respective audiences) were attempts at rupturing their spectacular images. With this refusal they were also critiquing the consumption of their idol statuses. Morrison sought to liberate himself from his sex symbol image and break the audience out of their "passive" consumerist role with a critique of the spectacle society at large. Mattin transhistorically reinstated Morrison's critique of the rock idol or authorial hierarchy by mimicking a noise music idol Lou Reed and with that, he aims to unsettle the history of noise music, or in his words, pushes against its boundary.

As we have seen, Mattin's efforts to "cut up" his authorship are grounded in rock history's own quest to undo the very mode of commercialisation at its foundation — as evidenced in its escape of suburban life, narrated in Graham's record. We see that this characteristic of rock bears similarities to the ways in which Getxo Sound, which Mattin came up on, also attempts to exit the neoliberal value system embedded in the industrial and affluent town where it was born. Graham historically highlights the

origins of these phenomena, with the construction of spectacular rock idols made during the capitalist production of the 1950s in America. An attempt at rectifying the spectacular within rock music or “false arcadia” (in Graham’s terms) begins as early as with the birth of the rock idol in Graham’s film and is later made evident by Jim Morrison’s exposure of his fallaciousness persona. Mattin’s agenda is most comparable to that of Patti Smith in this context, as they both have an extroverted political ambition: to realise the potential of rock, and noise in Mattin’s case, beyond the scope of their authorship and towards social change.

Mattin’s attempts to stifle his position as the performer and author in order to disrupt the spectacle within his concert settings is thus part of a long traditions in rock music. Ultimately however, what is at stake in Mattin’s interrogation of the space between the performer and audience in the name of challenging the author status is a struggle to equally distribute the power relations that are at play in his concerts. Accordingly the coming chapter will unpack the notion of power in greater detail — tracing the term back to Michel Foucault and its use by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

CHAPTER TWO

"Who is John Cage?"

Having established that Mattin's struggle with his author status (in Chapter One) is ultimately about power relations, the second chapter will veer away from Mattin's physical practice to analyse its conceptual operations, weighing it up against the following question: is it possible for an author to escape their own status? Accordingly, the following chapter will explore the dynamics of social power more elaborately, as understood by Michel Foucault and later built upon by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Furthermore the chapter will take from John Cage's life-long project concerning silence and chance operations, and with the aid of art historian Branden Joseph, I will begin to explore the implied complexities of power in Post-Cagean aesthetics through a case study of the Theatre of Eternal Music (ToEM): an experimental drone music group operating in the mid-1960s. By doing so I hope to further lay the ground in which to root Mattin's concern for his author status, particularly his accusation that John Cage was supposedly unable to open himself up as an author.

Everything Is Dangerous: power relations from Foucault to Deleuze & Guattari

At the core of Mattin's quest to address the socio-economic structures of noise – explored primarily through performer-audience relations – lies an epistemological argument concerning power. As editor Colin Gordin (n/a) notes in his introduction to the third volume of Foucault's essential works published by New Press, Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* [1975] brought Nietzsche to the aid of Marx; what *Capital* [1867] had done for the study of relations of production, Foucault's text proposes to do for relations of power – duly recognizing, of course, the profoundly material interconnection of the two factors"[69]. What Gordin means to point out is that following Nietzsche's interrogation of truth; Foucault's primary concern was an investigation of "the politics of truth."[70] Foucault sought to interrogate what society has come to accept as knowledge was instead in favour of a heterogeneous kind of knowledge that is multi-layered with

[69] Gordon in Foucault 2001, p. 14.
[70] *Ibidem*, p. 17.

various perspectives thereby also acknowledging the structures of power at play behind its construction or what Foucault calls “power-knowledge”. Moreover from the 1970s, Foucault began to focus on power and in his words:

> “An analysis [that] simply involves investigating where and how, between whom, between what points, according to what processes, and with what effects, power is applied… Second indication of choice: the relations, the set of relations, or rather, the set of procedures whose role is to establish, maintain, and transform mechanisms of power, are not ‘self-generating’ or ‘self subsistent’; they are not founded on themselves. Power is not founded on itself or generated by itself… Third, the analysis of these power relations may, of course, open out onto or initiate something like the overall analysis of a society. The analysis of mechanisms of power may also join up with the history of economic transformations…”[71]

Inasmuch as Marx’s theories on capital helped explain the dynamics of assembly lines in capitalist production systems, Foucault sought to flesh out the constructions and mechanisms of power, revealing that power is not foundational but constructed and can therefore be used as a framework to analyse society. The mechanisms and functions of power in this instance can be summed up in three categories: sovereign, disciplinary, and control. Foucault places sovereignty primarily in the Middle Ages from, seventeenth to the eighteenth century; the second category, disciplinary power, within a modern system that establishes itself in the eighteenth century; and control as the third category is set within contemporary society. In this chronology sovereignty relies on punishment and its corrective affect where, for example, public executions in the Middle Ages were designed to intimidate the citizens watching into obedience. In the same system petty crime could be “corrected” with severe punishment whereby the perpetrator (servant or house guest) was inconsequential, instead the deed was placed at the centre of the punishment as to lessen the probability of re-occurrence, and thus a security system was ensured. Similarly the disciplinary regime relies on security in that once an individual lands in prison one tries to

[71] *Ibidem*, p. 16-17.

correct the offence "according to the risk of relapse"[72] — the measures taken here are preventative. Control then is concerned with mechanisms of security and with, for instance, the rehabilitation of the prisoner into society after their incarceration or the surveillance of citizens with the belief that monitoring prevents the possibility of incarceration. Foucault's genealogy is set in succession wherein the disciplinary age replaces the sovereign and control, the disciplinary, but eventually these all come together in a complex web whereby the so-called dominant characteristic changes, while covering a system that remains largely intact.

In 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' (1992) Deleuze builds on Foucault's categorisation but profiles it in a clear hierarchical, almost cartoon-like sequence, as he elaborates:

> "[1.] Societies of sovereignty, the goal and functions of which were something quite different (to tax rather than to organize production, to rule on death rather than to administer life) … [2.] In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory… [3.] In the societies of control, on the other hand, what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a password, while on the other hand disciplinary societies are regulated by watchwords (as much from the point of view of integration as from that of resistance)… "[73]

Key to Deleuze's analysis is how exponentially abstracted the disciplines of power can become and with that how detached from the lines of production they are, with control being the most complex level. His argument further establishes a general crisis ongoing since WWII. This crisis relates to all institutional environments or "environments of enclosure" including the family, hospital, prison, factory and so on and is such that the society of control maintains its power by inciting cycles of reforms on the institutional environments (or what Foucault termed change of the dominant characteristic).[74] Societies of control are thereby also in a process of replacing disciplinary societies exemplified by our technological age. The society of control regulates itself with codes and passwords, replacing the number and

[72] *Ibidem*, p. 22.
[73] Deleuze 2002, p. 3.
[74] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

signatures of the disciplinary age, according to Deleuze. Therein also lies the mutation of capitalism as it becomes highly abstracted and distances itself from the factory as it leans more toward the accumulation of stocks. "This is no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed. Thus is essentially dispersive, and the factory has given way to the corporation."[75] Moreover, and for the purpose of my argument, Deleuze raises questions of resistance when he posits:

> "One of the most important questions will concern the ineptitude of the unions: tied to the whole of their history of struggle against the disciplines or within the spaces of enclosure, will they be able to adapt themselves or will they give way to new forms of resistance against the societies of control?"[76]

As the current global state of financial crisis ensues, next to unions, we are each cast as agents of the regimes. It remains up to us, as engagers of art, and our ability to self-organise, through unions in Deleuze's case, but perhaps also through the forms of resistance conceived of within artistic practice, and in this instance particularly, through subversive music practices.

The Pursuit of Anti-Harmonic Structures

Fig. 5. John Cage, *Empty Words*, 1973. Some spectators disturbing the performance after climbing up on stage (brief caption).

[75] *Ibidem*, p. 5.
[76] Deleuze, 2002, p. 7.

Mattin's troubled relationship with authorship is further clarified when juxtaposed with the practice of John Cage. Mattin ultimately establishes this relationship when he cautions against Cage's legacy as a composter and his composition tactics, particularly his investigation around silence and the notion of indeterminacy or chance operations. As Mattin notes:

> "Cage left intact the role of the composer and of music. Therefore the role of the composer, in this case Cage, becomes the figure. Cage really does not care what relations happen in his piece. Therefore Cage is expanding the notion of what music can be but he is not putting into question the role of music in society".[77]

Here Mattin registers Cage's supposed inability to move past his authorship. Mattin also points out that the Cagean notion of "liberation" is too abstract and nonspecific, resulting in a supposed absence of control that refuses to reflect on the *mechanisms* of control that are still embedded in its parameters. If, for instance, audience members had started to make noisy guitar music or read a fascist manifesto during *4'33"* (1952), Cage would not have been pleased. The following section attempts to unpack Mattin's claims against Cage's approach, in order to investigate the theoretical components that lie behind it.

"Who is John Cage"[78] is a statement made by musician and ToEM member La Monte Young (1935-) attesting to the upheaval all modern musicians had to undergo to surpass Cage in the quest to break the wall of harmony in Western music.[79] Cage's success in unravelling the Western harmonic scale with his chance operations was also due to identification of the individual components in sound so as to detach them from their traditional illustrative or pre-established meanings. With this strategy Cage went against the grain of his European contemporaries (most notably German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007) and French composer Pierre Boulez (1925-), who pursued an integrally serial aesthetic that required all aspects or parameters of a composition to be interrelated.[80]

Young's ironic question also points to the legacy of Cage who is amongst the most comprehensively documented artists in the twentieth century – with a vast

[77] Mattin 2013, p. 1.
[78] Young in Joseph 2008, p. 84.
[79] Joseph 2008, p. 77.
[80] *Ibidem*.

accumulation of manuscripts, self-authored texts, music, letters, and art. Cage was a composer, music theorist, writer and artist and is considered one of the leading avant-gardists of the twentieth century, often credited as the single most important figure for experimental music of the era.[81] Having pioneered indeterminacy or chance composition as an approach – which recognises all informal sounds, or the sounds that exist outside the formal composition as a part of it – Cage established his body of work, incorporating silence as a chief principle. Cage's understanding of silence is acutely summed by a trip to an anechoic chamber at Harvard in 1951 brought on this breakthrough. When inside the silent room Cage describes that he heard two sounds, one high and one low. An engineer would go on to explain that the high sound was his nervous system in operation and the low was his circulation. From his visit Cage drew the conclusion that there could be no such thing as genuine silence. More fundamentally it meant that conceptually, sound would always exceed the intention of the composer as well as the listener.

Cage's notion of silence and chance operations make up the core of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the production an aesthetic plane of imminence. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari inscribe Cage as the "first and most perfectly" one who installs the "plane of immanence" through his concept of silence.[82] Herein Cage is less concerned with the traditional way of composing whereby sounds are understood through regulation, strung into harmonic structures and are ultimately the core subject. Instead Cage focussed on sounds in themselves, in their modulation and disarticulation whereby listening becomes an all-inclusive exercise, harmonious structures are secondary and emerge subsequent from sonic material rather that from instrumental restraint. With this attitude to composition the limits of structures are tested and replaced by an organisational plane where mutation and disarticulation can take place.[83] However as Mattin points out and Joseph ultimately concedes, there are limits to Cagean imminence and all-inclusiveness in that it does not recognise the mechanisms of control within the plane, most evident in the author – audience power dynamic that is maintained. Additionally, art historian Branden Joseph (n/a) points out five major implications of Cage's aesthetic, the first of which also

[81] Young in Joseph 2002, p. 242.
[82] 82 Joseph 2008, p. 58.
[83] 83 Young 2002, p. 245.

concerns the production of aesthetic immanence. With this, Joseph follows Deleuze and Guattari, referring to Cage's long-term goal over two decades to disarticulate all transcendent connections between sounds, or more specifically, between two components of sound. The culminate example of this endeavour is perhaps Cage's *Empty Words* (1974): a three-hour performance involving Cage sitting at a lectern and reading passages from the author Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). As if in song, Cage draws out every syllable, moment of silence, and vocal modulation in an attempt to "demilitarize language",[84] or free it from its intended use, and as an exercise against syntax. As to what inspired the work, Cage says:

> "Reading Thoreau, I noticed that he looked the way that modern painters looked and that he listened that way that modern composers listen, or that electronic composers listen… to everything. You don't just listen to things that are major and minor but you listen! Every single sound is interesting... We can say that language has sentences, that it has phrases (we won't agree of course on what a phrase is but I would say that a phrase is a part of a sentence that does not give a complete idea). After phrases we have words, after words we have syllables, after syllables we have letters. When we have those five different things and you have the permutations of them being separated or combined in paraphrases: in triplets or in quartets or all five together, you have... something like 27 different possibilities and things to do with language. As you know I work with chance operations... and when I have 27 different things to do I have to stop and think which one of the 27 things am I doing... Empty Words comes from [this and]... what was interesting to me was to make the English language less understandable because when it is understandable, people control one another and poetry disappears… Syntax – which is what makes things understandable – is the arrangement of [an] army. So what we are doing when we are making language less understandable, [is] we are demilitarising it so that we can do our living!"[85]

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[84] Cage on "Empty Words" and the demilitarization of language, in a radio interview, August 8, 1974: https://archive.org/details/Cage_interview_and_performance_Empty_words_August_1974_A002A (12/07/2013).
[85] *Ibidem*.

Cage's "demilitarization of language" can ultimately be explained as an attempt to free language from its institutional or disciplinary purpose in the Foucault-Deleuzian delineation. In other words Cage's plane of immanence can be understood as a subversive practice with a concern for liberty against mechanisms of "control". The disarticulation, or perhaps even *détournement*, of words in the performance is thus a direct attempt at unlearning the disciplinary mechanisms of power encoded within language. To succeed at this is to be free from them. "Joseph [further] observes Cage came to understand aesthetic form as a particular technique of power, as "a moment in micro politics".[86] Yet in the end Cage fails to recognize the regimes of control at play in his immanent plane.

According Mattin, Cage's demilitarised plane is politically vapid. In his article, 'Cage as a Cage: Towards Conceptual Improvisation' (2011), he argues that *Empty Words* cannot achieve freedom because of Cage's response to how Cage's disassociation with his audience and, in the case of *Empty Words*, his reaction to how his performance was met. When Cage performed *Empty Words* for a group of Italian communist students at Teatro Lirico, Milan in 1977, they initially met him with encouragement, shouting support at each utterance. Shortly thereafter however, discomfort set in as the students grew impatient and the performance finally escalated into a riot. In a subsequent interview, Cage reflected on the student's revolt, saying that "the whole activity was not only useless but it was also destructive. I was destroying something for them, and they were destroying something for me. The thing that made [a] large part of the public interruption so ugly was that it was full of self-expression".[87]

To this end Mattin argues that when Cage's immanent plane or chance operation meets political consequence, i.e. the students in riot, he becomes more authoritarian and by championing individual sounds, Cage's method is related to a brand of individualism that also refutes improvisation. In an article Mattin explains:

> "The work of John Cage is very interesting for us with regards to the criticism of improvisation. Cage saw improvisation as an act of self-expression since the improviser would not really achieve anything

[86] Joseph in de Bruyn 2008, p. 166.
[87] Transcribed from Cage on "Empty Words" and the demilitarization of language, in a radio interview, August 8, 1974: https://archive.org/details/Cage_interview_and_performance_Empty_words_August_1974_A002A (12/07/2013).

> unexpected due to his memory and habits (which we agree with to a certain extent). However, Cage was not receptive to the unexpected himself. He did not want to accept the noise that some of his concerts produced… Once we get real improvisation with political consequences then we get the authoritarian Cage defining what is ugly and what is beautiful (of course his readings of Thoreau were beautiful but the shouts of the students were ugly). If this is the character of Cage's anarchism, then this is certainly an elitist and academic one. His chance operations, a combination of an extreme form of serialism and Duchampian indifference, might have produced some interesting breakthroughs in music within the modernist tradition, but Cage also presents a politically debilitating position as he obscures the differing relations extant between different structures of sounds and their meanings. The kind of isolationism that Cage wanted to enforce by considering each sound totally independent from every other, could represent a type of individualism – and a bland form of anarchism – which is both extremely liberal and ahistorical."[88]

With this, Mattin suggests that Cage's effort to allow for the singularity of sounds is at odds with its public presentation exemplified by Cage's concert hall performance. Mattin also deduces that the Cagean plane of immanence is out of touch with the reality of its politics. This may very well be the case but one would also do well to remember that the Cagean project is not centred in a macro-politics as Mattin suggests. In other words, Cage's critical strategy is not socio-economically specific, nor does it necessarily intend this as an end game and to that end Cage verifies:

> "To make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and 'traditions' of art. The sounds enter the time-space centred within themselves, unimpeded by service to any abstraction, their 360 degrees of circumference free for an infinite play of interpenetration."[89]

The essence of Mattin's noise practice on the other hand understands improvisation, like Cage, to be all-inclusive where sound is concerned. However, beyond this, Mattin

[88] Mattin 2013, p. 76.
[89] Joseph 2008, p. 59.

accepts unwarranted emotional reactions from audiences and is thereby more politically inclined that Cage, according to Mattin's own analysis. He could in this instance argue that his *No Trend* performance is more successful than Cage's *Empty Words* – insofar as this can be measured – in that Mattin accepted his antagonistic audience whereas Cage reflectively resists this type of highly subjective form of expression. Anything goes for Mattin.

Despite their common interest in freeing themselves from the disciplinary regimes, Mattin and Cage's approaches are ultimately different in kind. Cage's concern lies with the disarticulation of sounds whilst Mattin seems to be concerned with the political potential of this disarticulation, evident in his emphasis on Cage's interaction with his Italian student audience. Arguably then to discount Cage's performance as a lesser form of anarchism is to merely concede to the micro-political level that he operates on. Joseph points out in his analysis of Cage's immanent plane that Cage also sought to resolve his sovereign power therein by putting his listeners to contact with random noises: "the indeterminate work of Cage not only envelops them into the 'outside; of the random event of noise, but also frees the audience 'for an infinite play of interpenetration'".[90] Cage's plane could therefore be regarded as faulty in that he does not consider that power cuts through the plane itself. And I would argue that the same could be said about Mattin, wherein, in a best-case scenario his performance might manage to dismantle power relations in a performative setting, however the question remains what becomes of this this subsequent state? How might this liberated state be applied to politics at large and social change?[91] Even in a best-case scenario, the power dynamics between performers and audience remain largely intact and what is ultimately accomplished is a new pattern of power. Mattin can never free himself from being the instigator of this arrangement and remains a self aware the author of his situation.

[90] Joseph in de Bruyn 2008, p. 166.
[91] The final chapter will explore this question in greater detail.

Power Relations within The Theatre of Eternal Music

Fig. 6. Fred W. McDaarrah, *The Theatre of Eternal Music* at the New York Filmmakers' Cinematheque, 1965. Left to right: Tony Conrad, La Mont Young, Marian Zazeela, and John Cale. Photo by Fred McDarrah.

A compelling case can be made concerning the complexity of power relations in a case study of one of the most epic conflicts about authorship in modern experimental music, namely that of Theatre of Eternal Music (ToEM), a drone musical group whose primary concern was the making of "eternal" or permanent music. ToEM went through multiple configurations but its core members central to this case are: artist Marian Zazeela (1940-); experimental filmmaker, composer and mathematician Tony Conrad (1940-);[92] renowned avant-gardist and minimalist composer La Monte Young (1935-);[93] and musician, composer, singer-song writer and record producer John Cale (1942-).[94]

As Branden Joseph outlines in his *Beyond the Dream Syndicate* (2008):

[92] Tony Conrad is considered to be one of the pioneers of minimalist and drone music and is credited for birthing the concept of "eternal music".
[93] La Monte Young is often credited as the initiator for ToEM and as the first minimalist composer.
[94] John Cale is perhaps best known as a founding member of the experimental and legendary American rock band, The Velvet Underground (1964-1973). Other ToEM members cited by Joseph in his book include: poet and drummer of the early Velvet Underground Angus MacLise; composer David Rosenboom; trombonist, vocalist and composer Garrett List; composer and multi wind instrumentalist Jon Gibso (who also performed in multiple configurations along with La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Phillip Glass and Merce Cunningham); composer and trumpeter Jon Hassell, composer and saxophonist Lee Konitz; minimalist composer and performer Terry Jennings; and composer Terry Riley who is credited as the principal instigator of the minimalist/repetitive music genre.

> "[T]he first Theatre of Eternal Music in which Young and Conrad performed together was so named in February 1965 and continued until the summer of 1966… Shortly before Conrad joined him, Young, who already had an impressive jazz and avant-garde pedigree, had been improvising a sort of blues, alternating with Terry Jennings [1940-1981] and Angus MacLise [1938-1979], and Billy Linich [1040-] (later to become, in the ensemble around Andy Warhol [1928-1987] and the Velvet Underground, Billy Name). At a series of concerts at the 10-4 Gallery in July and August, 1962, Young, Zazeela, MacLise, and Linich performed an improvisatory amalgam of jazz and Indian music, producing an ecstatic din lasting for hours: Linich strumming guitar, Maclise polyrhythmically beating hand drums, Zazeela intoning a voice drone (occasionally) joined by Linich, and Young, in the middle of it all, executing lightning — fast permutations on a soprano saxophone in a style partially inspired by the contemporary soprano sax playing of John Coltrane."[95]

As Tony Conrad recalls, "[t]he music was formless, expostulatory, meandering, vaguely modal, arrhythmic, and very unusual",[96] all of which compelled him to join the group. ToEM characteristically made use of discordant sustained notes, loud amplification and feedback. They are also known for the duration of their musical pieces with no clear beginning or end. The lengthiest, *Dream House* performance took pace at Harrison Street Gallery in New York and lasted uninterrupted for six years, from 1979 to 1985.[97] Likewise, the drone piece *The Tortoise Recalling the Drone of the Holy Numbers as They Were Revealed in the Dreams of the Whirlwind and the Obsidian Gong, Illuminated by the Sawmill, the Green Saw tooth Ocelot and the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer* is an example of how their quest for eternity spilled over into their song titles. The group however was short lived and first disbanded in 1966 following a conflict over the ownership of the group's music. Young revived the group again however in 1969 with Conrad, Zazeela and other new members. However conflicts in the group continued due to ongoing differences between Conrad and Young over the nature and meaning of their earlier collaborations in the

[95] Joseph 2008, p. 26.
[96] *Ibidem*, p. 27.
[97] Grubbs 2009, p. 10.

band.

A principle of any collective practice is presumably to encourage shared ownership of commonly generated materials whereby any knowledge (or musical advancement in the case of ToEM), is equally credited amongst its contributors. However, a brief account of one of the primary musical properties at stake between Tony Conrad and La Monte Young under ToEM elucidates the complexity of such an ideal. After playing in ToEM for some time, Young changed his style and began to adopt "just intonation": a means of tuning to simple mathematical ratios without doctoring the necessary equal-tempered-Western scale, hegemonic since the time of Bach".[98] As the mathematician in the group, Conrad was the most fluent in this method. Simply put "just intonation" challenges harmony. Young and Cale's musical training contributed to the group's subsequent development of the new tuning… and "[o]nce all members of the group began producing sustained tones… discussions and decisions had to be made on which notes or tones to sustain. On account of his prior experience and personal taste, Young did not want to perform the major third… to which, up to that time in fact Conrad had been somewhat partial. When Young suggested the flat 'blues' seventh, Conrad assimilated it to and performed the seventh harmonic… ".[99]

I will leave it to music scholars to dissect the mathematical implications involved with change to the group's harmonic structure but for the purpose of this argument — and at the core of Joseph's argument — it is vital to grasp that the group replaced the major third, choosing to sustain the seventh, which subsequently provided a viable means of breaking the dominant Western harmonic scale and thereby the institutional regime of music.

> "For Young it provided a basis on which to elaborate and build the strategy of minimal reduction and temporal expansion he had explored for *Trio for Strings* (1958). For Conrad, it promised a system of alternate tuning that was in a sense more rational and better justified than the relatively equal-tempered scales of [composers] Edgar Varèse [1883-1965] and Alois Hába [1893-1973] that had previously attracted his attention".[100]

[98] Joseph 2008, p. 29
[99] Joseph 2008, p.30
[100] *Ibidem.*

At the height of their experimentation ToEM collected numerous recordings featuring the so-called "harmonic seventh". Until ToEM, John Cage's all-inclusive approach to sound was the foremost, since "unlike harmonic structures could allow the inclusion of any sound, whether pitched — or as in noise or percussion music — pitchless".[101] ToEM on the other hand relied on the mathematical precision of "just intonation". Upon mutual agreement the tape recordings that captured this harmonic seventh were stored at Young's apartment where the group often rehearsed. These tapes were not released for decades due to Conrad (and Cale's) rejection of the claim that Young is the sole author of the group's aesthetic. Conceding to Young as the sole author (from Conrad and Cale's perspective) had a double-edged effect, as it would not only perpetuate an historical narrative that does not credit them or the group in the rendering of ToEM aesthetic, evident in the fact that La Monte Young and not Conrad is largely credited as the father of minimalist music;[102] additionally, a concession by Conrad and Cale would also require the rest of the group to give up their musical singularities or personal contributions — near impossible to decipher in this complex collaboration. As Tony Conrad reflects in a 2009 interview David Grubbs published in *Frieze*:

> "I… was also digging deeply into the questions that had arisen because of a controversy that had gradually expanded between John Cale and me on one side, and La Monte Young and his supporters on the other, which centred philosophically on the question of cultural integrity and permanence — that is, the question of whether there is such a thing as 'eternal music', or even 'eternal' anything, contingency being the issue… the substratum of my current interests, and those that have held my attention most over the last few decades has to do with the way in which the historical record can become the narrative."[103]

In a different instance Joseph brings attention to the method of appropriation in Conrad's practice and particularly in his *100 Mind of the World* (1980) performance:

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[101] *Ibidem*, p. 31
[102] Joseph lists art historical monographs and vicissitudes of biography of Young including Wim Merten's *American Minimal Music*, Keith Potter's *Four Musical Minimalists* focusing La Mont Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Phillip Glass as examples of an incomplete historisicization of minimal music.
[103] Conrad in Grubbs 2009, p 3.

> "An attempt to claim for Western piano music not only a diversity of styles and tropes, but also facets of music's social and cultural contexts, and it might be seen as a sort of counterpoint to the increasingly mystical framework surrounding Young's *Well-Tuned Piano*. Whereas Young, for instance, claimed that when playing the partially improvised *The Well-Tuned Piano* he opened himself up to higher powers that channelled him, Conrad, in the *100 Songs* section of *Music and the Mind of the World'* (1980) subjected himself to a litany of insults recorded by himself and filmmaker Beth B – instigating an equal, but more evident and contestatory power relation in the performance".[104]

Here, Conrad was wilfully appropriating methods he claimed challenged the author position (by subjecting himself to insult). As summed up by musician and writer David Grubbs (1967-) in *Always at the End*, "[Conrad] and John Cale took the side of contingency, materialism, and cultural and historical specificity, and La Monte Young and his supporters the side of performance, 'the eternal' and that which transcends culture and history".[105] In other words, whilst ToEM may have very well surpassed Cage in the race to break the Western harmonic scale with Young leading in protecting the notion of "the eternal", and thereby the disciplinary method of "just intonation" created during ToEM. Conrad on the other hand became much more concerned with disrupting historicisation of the group. Much like the tension between Cage and Mattin, either position is caught in a network of power albeit at different levels. Returning back to Cage's practice and its concern with liberation from disciplinary power by way of the plane of imminence; Young's quest for "the eternal" or transcendence using "just intonation" potentially liberates the listener from the sovereign regime but the mathematical rigour of "just intonation" limits it to the disciplinary regime Cage sought to free himself from. In the end, Tony Conrad is more concerned with a freedom from both levels.

In this vein art historian Eric De Bruyn's (n/a) review of Joseph's *Beyond the Dream Syndicate* summarises:

> "A recurrent pattern appears, wherein certain practitioners are considered to remain closer to the Cagean impulse of immanence versus others, like Young,

[104] Joseph 2008, p. 44-45.
[105] Grubbs 2009, p. 3.

> who drift back into a more transcendental (or disciplinary) position. Each successive moment of *Passing Through*, Cage produces a different situation, which is neither contained within a previous moment, nor, for that matter, internally consistent. Indeed, the constant theme of Joseph's analysis is that each artistic attempt to counter the techniques of power, effectively opens up a new dimension of conflict: "as against any clear-cut separation of repression and freedom, power and desire are inextricably intertwined, not opposed, but inherently ambivalent, caught up in different assemblages and made to move toward different ends and different goals."[106]

Thus, the break between La Monte Young (and Marian Zazeela) and Tony Conrad (and John Cale) does not only float vainly as a feud on a surface of mine-and-his but is an instance where "we are not just dealing with difference of opinion but with opinions that are different in kind, situating themselves on opposite sides of a whole series of interrelated questions of authorship, history of the institution, and, ultimately, power".[107] As such and as if to level history out, Joseph applies a corrective method by filling in Conrad's historical contribution to the minimalist music discourse as an exercise in "minor history"[108] and to further correct a "historian's history"[109] that has dubbed La Monte Young's accomplishments as the sole advancements of the minimalist tradition.

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Chapter Conclusion

Central to Mattin's desire to rid himself of commodifying practices is the question of authorship. Accordingly he holds conceptual artists to account, naming Cage as the primary instigator whereby his supposed short-sightedness where authorship is concerned speaks is not political. To this end, the preceding chapter attempted to establish a

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[106] Joseph 2008, p. 142.
[107] Joseph 2008, p. 37.
[108] This philosophical concept is used by Deleuze and Guattari to criticise in the concept of majority.
[109] This philosophical term is used by Foucault to describe essentially histories that are told to the benefit of the victors as they often control the narrative. In 'Nietzche, Geneology, History' (1971), he elaborates: "The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself. Once the historical sense is mastered by a suprahistorical perspective, metaphysics can bend it to its own purpose, and, by aligning it to the demands of objective science, it can impose its own Egyptianism", p.87.

theoretical narrative behind Mattin's analysis by way of identifying and contextualising post-Cagean aesthetics further situating Mattin within a post-noise music continuum. Furthermore, the history of power struggles — understood through the Foucault-Deleuzean project — came into play in the race between musicians to perforate Western harmonic music wall. Mattin's work is situated here, driven by his desire to push the boundaries of noise and improvisation, in pursuit of its political potential power.

The chapter went on to establish the near impossibility of escaping authorship, especially when we consider its immersion in constructions of power. In the examples outlined, power exists predominantly within the disciplinary regime and is complexly woven together to the degree that one may very well escape one formulation only to find oneself in a new plane of control. Cage versus Mattin, and Cage versus ToEM are emblematic cases of this complexity, where the players try in vein to free themselves from different kinds of power. In this construction it is difficult to discern whose quest is more righteous. More successful attempts at freedom from institutional regimes can be found in Joseph's project, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*: a minor history and an attempt at correcting our "historian's history" that has places La Monte Young as the leading figure in ToEM. The book constructs Tony Conrad's role herein.

There remains something to be said about authors that are involved in their own historical record, however indirectly. How can a practitioner avoid self-mythologising in the process of troubling discourse at large if that is in fact the aim? And when speaking for or in defence of an under-represented people, how does the author of that project avoid recreating the pre-existing framework she or he seeks to replace? Indeed, when it comes to Mattin's project, who are these under-represented people ignored in noise and improvisation, and how are they represented by him? The third chapter will address these questions by way of investigating Mattin's self-proclaimed "social studio": a term which replaced "concert" in his move towards the gallery space as a site for presentation, in search of methods against pervasive commodification in noise and improvisation practice.

CHAPTER THREE

The social studio

In the present chapter I will move on from a largely modernist discussion thus far to place Mattin's practice within a contemporary context and to focus on the inter-subjective space between performer and audience as a primary medium. To do this, the chapter will investigate the term "social studio" through two performances by Mattin – namely the *Noise and Capitalism* book launch at the Dutch Art Institution (DAI) MFA in Arnhem, the Netherlands in 2012, and the *Noise & Capitalism Exhibition as Concert* project realised at Centre d'Art Contemporain (CAC) Brétigny in 2010. The discussion begins with a conversation between art historians Claire Bishop and Grant Kester concerning participatory practices in art, and will include points made by contemporary philosopher Ray Brassier against the ocular-centric condition of aesthetics.

Art critic Nicholas Bourriaud (1965-) defines *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) as "a set of artistic practices which take as theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."[110] Picking up on Bourriaud's term, art historian Claire Bishop, states that, art historically, relational aesthetics inherently relied on audience participation, which brought on a so-called "social turn"[111] by creating a move towards community-oriented projects. In his 'Idioms and Idiots' (2010) text, however, Mattin explicitly shuns the relational aesthetic tradition on the basis that it exploits the audience by using them to complete an art project. In response Mattin calls for an approach at the fringes of this type of practice, and highlights the subsequent issues of labour distribution within participatory performances. To this end he asks the following questions: "to what extent is it possible to use the parameters that define the spectacle [in performance] (i.e. the divisions between audience, performer, stage, expectations) as material for improvisation?"[112] In other words, Mattin questions to what degree it might be possible to improvise with power relations in a

[110] Bourriard 1998 in http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/onlineresources/glossary/r/relationalaesthetics (10/09/15).
[111] Bishop 2006, p. 178.
[112] Mattin 2010, p. 49.

collaborative situation, or specifically to him, within his noise concerts.

Following this line of thought, this final chapter attends to issues concerning the potential of inter-subjective space (between performer and audience) that Mattin has dubbed a site of political agency. I will consider power relations within this space and the role of the audience and participants as framed by Bishop and Kester's debate regarding the role of aesthetics in participatory art practice. This will lead a discussion on the realm of noise and improvisation practice. Building on the previous chapter's exploration of power regimes within performance practices of Mattin, Cage and ToEM, the chapter will question whether Mattin's collaborators (people with an equally vested interest in Mattin's project) have a greater stake in his noise concerts than the participants. In other words, I will investigate how responsibility is distributed.

All involved, feel strange

> "I am interested in looking at concerts as situations in which different people are involved, and even if hierarchies are established by default (the performer getting attention and being paid, the audience paying for bringing their "quality taste" and being quiet and respectful), these aspects should be questioned, dealt with, twisted, deformed and contradicted. This should be done by creating intense atmospheres in which all involved feel strange: in which they do not have clearly defined roles to fall into; where they are part of something which does not necessarily need to be pleasant… [P]laying a concert at the 2006 Earthquake, at the Tonic in New York… it became obvious that everyone present was part of the situation, everybody was playing the concert, all of us were audience and performers at the same time and this did not give a sense of freedom but a sense of responsibility"[113]

The above statement by Mattin is taken from an interview with addlimb – a collective based in Serbia concerned with the theoretical potentials of contemporary improvisation – and it is here that Mattin identifies the functional purpose of his concerts using the term "social studio", thus raising the issue of responsibility in a group

[113] Mattin, 2012, p67 - 69.

dynamic when performing. According to him, within a "social studio", hierarchical roles can be challenged once responsibility is equally felt. The inducer of this shared responsibility in Mattin's description above is an earthquake indices this response. Yet what happens in less dramatic circumstances?

The Social Studio: A Brief History

In the guise of contemporary institutional critique and conceptual practice, Mattin's "social studio" can be aligned with the notion of experimental laboratory. In her article *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* Claire Bishop explains the experimental laboratory as a re-conceptualisation of the white cube model wherein the curatorial ethos manifests bare walls in an unadorned space – further whitening the white cube – or has an improvised relation to it. She links this new tendency to art historian Lewis Kachur's (1954) concept of "ideological exhibitions" in the historical tradition of the avant-garde, examples of which include, the first *International Dada Fair* in Berlin in 1920, that took on the traditional exhibition model of the art salon and added a twist: plastering the walls of the Dr. Otto Burchard Gallery in photomontage and posters, the favoured mediums of the Dadaists. Another one of Kachur's examples of "ideological exhibitions" is the 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* [International Surrealist Exhibition], organised by Andrè Breton at Galérie Beaux-Arts, Paris in 1938. The exhibition boasted works by the likes of Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), Hans Arp (1886-1976), Max Ernst (1891-1976), Paul Klee (1879-1940), Man Ray (1890-1976), André Masson (1896-1987), Joan Miró (1896-1987), Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Pierre Roy (1880-1950), Salvador Dali (1904-1989) and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Beside the Surrealist preoccupation with blurring the lines between the conscious and subconscious, the exhibition strove to challenge notions of taste and provoked new ways of approaching installation. "Up until then art had been shown primarily in white-walled rooms. Breton and Eluard wanted to up the ante and make the rooms reflect the paintings."[114] From experimental lab to the "social studio", common amongst the three preceding scenarios, albeit varying in details, is their subversion of exhibition norms using the exhibition space as a tool

[114] https://westernidea.wordpress.com/tag/paris/ (2/02/2015)

instead of a neutral hosting structure. In all three cases artworks overwhelm the hosting space – transferring a room into a surrealist painting or improvising the instruments of a space to meet the needs of each event.

The "social studio" can also be explained in terms of the discourse around "New Institutionalism". The term is credited to curator, writer and critic Nina Möntmann (1969-) in her publication *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations* (2006). Möntmann's discourse derives from the social sciences and was popularised in the European curatorial sector as a classifier for practice that is concerned with the transformation of art institutions from within.[115] Furthermore, theorists like Brian Holmes (n/a) explain the emergence of the museum as a "proactive laboratory of social evolution"[116] in direct relation to the decline of the social welfare state in Europe. Bishop links a "social turn" to the failure of communism in the 1990s and warns that despite their good intensions there is danger in following artistic models of social change as one may fall into the trap of reproducing the very same systems one is fighting against in the first place[117]. For example, if the museum or gallery space starts to operate like a social centre, we run the risk of reproducing conventions for role-play or prescribed participation in the wider socio-political context of an ineffective democracy.

Noise and Capitalism

Fig.7 Mattin and collaborators during *Noise and Capitalism Exhibition as Concert*, 2011 (brief caption).

The *Noise and Capitalism Exhibition as Concert* project at CAC Brétigny is based on a publication of the same title, edited by Mattin and writer Antony Isles. The concert exhibition aimed to act out the book's content or ideals

[115] Möntmann 2006, p. 30.
[116] *Ibidem.*
[117] Bishop 2006, p. 180

and transform the CAC exhibition space into a continuous improvised concert. For two months, a vast number of participants and guests were brought together to explore noise and improvisation in social and political terms. Together, Mattin and Isles relayed the following questions:

> "Can the practice of noise and improvisation help us in any way to understand or even counter the level of commodification that our lives have reached under the capitalist mode of production? Can we use noise as a form of praxis going beyond established audience / performer relationships? Can we push self-reflexivity to the point of positive feedback?" [118]

The programme was a mixture of intensities resulting in partially formal and mostly improvised presentations influenced by real time production and reception. The formats of exhibition and concert were thus collapsed onto one another and the concept of noise was hammered out as not to accept its ideals at face value. As part of his performance artist Diego Chamy (1978-) interrogated the noise genre as a result of being confused about his invitation (he in not a noise musician nor musician). Chamsy asked Mattin to respond to quotes from noise musician Zbigniew Karkowski who was scheduled to play after him. Mattin proceeded to disagree with all of the quotes not knowing that they in fact came from Karkowski, thereby undermining the idea of a shared understanding of noise. The programme also consisted of several performances led by different artists and musicians such as an *Idioms and Idiots* performance with Ray Brassier, Jean-Luc Guionnet (1966-) and Mattin;[119] a *ZAJ Concert for 30 or 60 Voices* with performance artist Esther Ferrer (1937-) of the radical performance art group Zaj; *32 Sans titre* [23 notes] with musician Loïc Blairon (1978-); *Brutalized Aesthetics* with musician and researcher Mattieu Saladin (1978-); and *Object of Thought* with Mattin, whereby a group was invited to CAC for a week to improvise together with the intention of focussing on the material conditions of the exhibition space, budget, time, and instruments. It is from this group that some conclusions on responsibility can be drawn out.

The weeklong project included guests, the CAC staff, and a budget of 3,000 Euros. Flights and accommodation were

[118] Mattin 2010, press release: http://www.mattin.org/noisecapitalism-exhibition.html (12/08/2013).
[119] Described in the previous chapter.

covered for the guests and the division of the budget was left to the group to decide. Mattin explained the workshop gathering in conversation:

> " Nobody wanted to get paid from the budget because they didn't feel like they had to prepare for the workshop… It was funny because people almost refused to speak of the 3,000 Euros. I mean we could have had dinner or done something but the proposals were always to do something crazy like to build a tunnel from CAC Brétigny to reach the school across…. At the end, we decided that we would save the money up for another meeting… but it's two years later and we still haven't managed."[120]

Whilst Mattin's collaborators were cornered to take responsibility for 3,000 Euros their responsibility was limited to a conceptual degree and at propositional state. One could argue that regardless of how "crazy" the tunnel idea was, in this improvised context given their funds, time and capacity, a symbolic gesture was perhaps the only possible conclusion. Notably the capacity of these collaborators also determined the quality of production in the improvised situations. The tunnel idea may have been more plausible if, for instance, specialists were approached but the integrity of their attempts to connect to the school across rested on the playful nature of the problem, which in turn also points to a limitation in improvisation. That is whilst the group moved the instruments and the stage from the CAC gallery space outside to address the school across, inviting the students to partake in the performance, I would argue that this performance structure does not escapes itself in that it is more concerned with its own structural intricacies (the definition of noise and improvisation) to the comparable privatising institute. The school can be set up against the art institution and whilst there was interaction between the two: what chance of political subversion is there if indeed the aim is to undo capitalism by way of fighting off modes of commodification?

Antagonistic Pluralism: the subversive fallacy and the aesthetics of noise

Artforum has a record of a popular conflict between art historians Claire Bishop and Grant Kester, and captures them at opposite ends where participatory social art

[120] Skype interview with Mattin 2012.

practice is concerned. Bishop, in her essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', argues in favour of autonomous art practices. She argues that sacrificing artistic authorship in the name of truer collaboration and an "ethical turn" would block the possibility for conceptual development in art practice.[121] Her argument was first published in the February 2006 issue of *Artform* along with a rebuttal by Kester who conversely favours authorial modesty wher participatory art is concerend. He argues that in order for artists to begin an equal dialogue with their participants, they must first overcome their privileged position. This Bishop-Kester dichotomy provides a useful foundation for examining collaborative and participatory art practices, whereby either side may function as a prerequisite for a successful collaboration.

Firstly, to understand the history of social practices Bishop, albeit hesitantly, marks the early 1990s as an escalating point for this tendency. The fall of

> "communism deprived the Left of the last vestiges of the revolution that had once linked political and aesthetic radicalism. Many artists now make no distinction between their work inside and outside the gallery… and have turned to social collaboration as an extension of their conceptual or sculptural practice… [they use] social situations to produce de-materialized anti market, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life".[122]

Furthermore, Bishop argues that whilst these practices de-fragment a society divided by the repressive instruments of capitalism in the first place, they are successively received as important artistic gestures by the (Leftist) political task. With this argument Bishop also resurrects the notorious question around the function of art. And whilst she is in favour of art's contribution to social change she is not in support of the operation of artistic practices in politics and as a result criticises a so-called "ethical turn": a criterion employed to explain the spectrum of "believers (activists who reject aesthetic questions as synonymous with cultural hierarchy and the market)" and so-called "nonbelievers (aesthetes who reject social work in art as marginal, misguided and lacking in artistic interest."[123] According to Bishop's definition, the "ethical turn" considers both ends of the spectrum but

[121] Bishop 2006, p. 181.
[122] Bishop 2006, p. 179.
[123] Bishop 2006, p. 180.

trapezes towards the "believers'" end out of guilt. In response to their guilt, Bishop argues that it is better to scrutinise participatory practice under the lens of art criticism in order to curb premature enthusiasm that aligns artistic practice with direct social change and as a way of avoiding an ethical decree. Bishop's argument further expands to consider the role of institutions and she calls to account the gatekeepers of this guilt-ridden position, naming Swedish curator Maria Lind as the primary publicist. Lind famously declared that she is no longer interested in the object but rather artists who introduce performance into the space of the gallery. [124] Bishop's position plants itself firmly against Lind's curatorial revival and she argues that we should disavow this type of fallacious ethical application as it devalues aesthetics by juxtaposing good with bad models of collaboration.[125] As she herself notes, Bishop's perspective recalls French philosopher Jacques Rancière (1940-) observation that the denigration of aesthetics ignores the system of art, as we understand in the West.

> " The aesthetic regime of art inaugurated by Friedrich Schiller [1759-1805] and the Romantics still operative to this day, is predicated precisely on a confusion between art's autonomy (its position at one remove from instrumental rationality) and heteronomy (its blurring of art and life)".[126]

That is, for Bishop to denounce the aesthetic perspective in favour of concrete solutions (often the position of community art) is to miss the point entirely since art's contradictory position to social change resembles Rancière's argument that the merit of the aesthetic is its ability to think in contradiction and thus think politically. "For Rancière the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative promise".[127] Bishop's appropriation of Rancière therefore also establishes a relationship between politics and aesthetics in that a political state is defined as a contradictory state of being.

In his article 'Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art' (2005), Grant Kester favours authorial penitence in direct relation to the profit market system, and argues that it generates its own

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[124] Lind in Möntmann 2006, p. 35.
[125] Lind in Bishop 2006, p. 284.
[126] Bishop 2006, p. 183.
[127] *Ididem*.

schisms between class and economic status. Kester takes issue with several points in Bishop's article including her complaint about the stand off between "aesthetes" and "activists". He argues that her position is muddled by authorial promotion since it necessitates the voice of the critic. For Kester, Bishop's view belittles artists and limits their ethical choice to align with social movements or political struggles, putting artists in a position where they are

> "inevitably consigned to decorating floats for the annual May Day parade. Without the detachment and autonomy of conventional art to insulate them, [artists] are doomed to 'represent', in the most naive and facile manner possible, a given political issue or constituency."[128]

Instead, Kester promotes a dialogical perspective whereby the "the various participants exchange insights and observations. It may be spoken or written, or may involve some form of physical or conceptual collaboration".[129] Furthermore, Kester roots his dialogical standpoint in the ideals derived from the evolution of the avant-garde. By the early twentieth century, there was consensus amongst the artists and critics that the role of the avant-garde was to rigorously challenge rational discourse.

> "This tendency is based on the assumption that the shared discursive systems on which we rely on for our knowledge of the world (linguistic, visual, etc.) are dangerously abstract and violently objectifying… Avant-garde artists of various stripes believed that Western society (especially the urban, middle class) had begun to view the world in a violently objectifying manner associated with the growing authority of positivistic science and the profit driven logic of the marketplace".[130]

Art's role was then to shock society out of perceptual complacency to see the world anew. In turn Kester also calls for a prolongation of this aesthetic experience so that it no longer occurs instantly or contained in the art moment. He further argues that the artists favoured by Bishop rely on shock value like the example of Santiago Sierra's *Line Tattooed on Six Paid People* (1999). In the work, Sierra paid six unemployed men from Havana, Cuba,

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[128] Kester 2006, p. 185.
[129] Kester 2005, p. 2.
[130] *Ibidem*.

thirty dollars in exchange for being tattooed. Kester instead believes in a kind of prolongation of this perceptual shock through the durational processes of exchanges that consider identities, stereotypical images and other injustices. Whilst I tend to sympathise more with Kester's propagation of dialogical processes, I would argue that he misunderstands Bishop in that she does not omit exchange processes or minorities from the aesthetic experience. To my understanding, Bishop in fact favours this type of durational experience but argues that at some point after the artistic project comes to an end, the social situations constructed by the artist need to be surrendered over to policy makers. Or, to channel political theorist Chantal Mouffe's vocabulary, the political should eventually surrender to politics to allow for policy change so at some point someone like Mattin and his noise aesthetic, needs to generate something concrete for policy makers. The question thus remains: is either position possible? Especially within Mattin's practice as he looks to debunk all systems. Moreover how can one ensure they don't recreate the very same system they were trying to improve?

At this juncture, it is interesting to bring in a third position to the debate, as Mattin does in his texts: that of Ray Brassier, a contemporary philosopher and frequent contributor to Mattin's noise and improvisation concerts such as *Idioms and Idiots* (2010) with electronic/acoustic music improviser and composer Jean Luc Guionnet (1966-), and percussionist Seijiro Murayama (1957-). The performance took place in three fifteen-minute slots and each performer was restricted to playing in only two of the three slots, thereby inviting the possibility of fifteen minutes of silence or "chance operation" in Cagean terms.[131] In an interview, 'Against the Aesthetics of Noise', published in *nY* in 2009, Brassier extends on the

[131] Mattin's audio recording of the performance recounts the gathering of the audience; shuffling feet, murmurs, coughs and whispers that gradually escalate into a violent plucking of guitar strings by Brassier, as if in protest of melody. In the background, computer feedback tumbles, disrupts and disturbs whilst drum sneers mimic white noise. This process eventually dies down into stark silence. The second slot follows with violence. A grotesque gothic cry shrieks unexpectedly into the microphone at such great intensity we can hear the voice crackling. Some guitar fiddling continues and is accompanied by intervals of deep hums, before droning sounds interject. The slots of silence eventually emerge, soothing the violent sounds down into a minimalist temperament, but at this point, we can also hear a restless audience who is listening in anxiety, waiting for the next horrific scream. Minimalist tones and heavy breathing continue to tease and then finally, a recorded and contorted version of the scream returns towards the end of the second slot and not again until the middle of the third slot, each time with more malice, masculine fury and growling in the midst of drum rolls, plucks, pings and gaps of torturous silence.

ocular-centric condition of aesthetics in art, juxtaposing the aesthetic experience to noise with the provocation that aesthetics is contaminated by ideas of experience. He explains:

> "[This] is not to dismiss art's relevance for philosophy – far from it – but merely to express reservations about the kind of philosophical aestheticism which seems to want to hold up 'aesthetic experience' as a new sort of cognitive paradigm wherein the Modern (post-Cartesian) 'rift' between knowing and feeling would be overcome. In this regard, I would say that there can be no 'aesthetics of noise', because noise as I understand it would be the destitution of the aesthetic, specifically in its post Kantian, transcendental register. Noise exacerbates the rift between knowing and feeling by splitting experience, forcing conception against sensation."[132]

According to Brassier, freedom from power structures in this instance can be found once one cuts and dices the aesthetic disciplinary experience that maintains the binary of conception and sensation. This is also synonymous with Mattin's quest to "cut up" the author or his argument against Cage in his supposed inability to. In other words when we consider the notion of autonomy in Rancière's "aesthetic regime of art" (autonomy and heteronomy), Brassier suggests that a second level of splitting should take place to secure the independence of one's knowing from one's thinking through a disarticulation of the conceptualisation of knowledge (in the mind) from sensation. He argues that this condition is induced by noise practice, which is ultimately interested in the prospect of the experience-less of subjects or "nemocentricism" (a term coined by neurophilosopher Thomas Metzinger),[133] whereby the objectification of an experience results in a self-less subject that regards themselves to be "no-one" and to exist "no-where"[134] and as such in a state of negative freedom or a state that we can understand before Kant-Foucauldian epistemological constructions about the subject within power regimes. Brassier also argues that this state perpetuates interesting results in the pursuit of a communist subject.

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[132] Brassier, 'Transitzone/ Against and Aesthetics of Noise', excerpt form an interview, 2009: http://www.ny-web.be/transitzone/against-aesthetics-noise.html (14/08/2013).
[133] Metzinger in Mattin 2009, p. 56
[134] Brassier, 'Transitzone/ Against and Aesthetics of Noise', p. 5, 2009: http://www.ny-web.be/transitzone/against-aesthetics-noise.html (14/08/2013).

Accordingly Mattin's pursuit of subject-less-ness in his mission to redistribute labour equally in a performance follows Brassier's argument in that he too precludes noise as a vehicle to reach a subject-less state. For both, th idealistic person who is not invested in capitalising on their role (in a noise performance) is perhaps less prone to commodification or closer to Brassier's "communist subject".[135]

Noise and Capitalism: Zombies at DAI

Figure 8. Mattin and Anthony Ils, *Noise and Capitalism, House of Language* constructed with furniture at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI), Arnhem, 2012. Photo courtesy of DAI.

With these positions in mind, I now turn to recall a performative book launch presentation of *Noise & Capitalism: Funeral & Zombification*, which took place with Mattin and Anthony Iles at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI) MFA programme in January 2012. As part of their book launch series, the evening served as a metaphorical funeral for the book *Noise and Capitalism* represented at DAI after being published for a couple of years. In Mattin and Iles's own words, *Noise and Capitalism* is

> "a collection of essays by various musicians, academics, activists that reflects on the artist-audience binary, specifically how 'noise,' 'improvised' or 'free' music offers resistance and tensions that may, at worst, provide instruments for

[135] *Ibidem*.

> capitalism but also, at best, point to modes of 'subject-less-ness'."[136]

The evening tethered the book's contents to the notion of a zombie in resurrection, bringing them back to life in a workshop format together with an audience to question the potential relevance of the publication years later. The book launch began very subtlety, as the students scuffled around to find seats in the lecture room. A noise track called 'Going Fragile' recorded by Mattin and trombonist Radu Malfatti in 2005 played under the radar of the room's noise level. In and amongst the chatter, claps, drone like-growls, pitchy squeals intermixed with long pauses confused and agitated the room. Neither speaker introduced the noise track. Instead, they waited for the room to settle in mutual agreement that we could start. As a co-organiser of the event, I briefly introduced the evening's agenda and spoke in tandem (or contradiction) with the track, over its pitchy whisper and the presentation resumed as an improvised concert. Arms stretched dead straight, hands dropped to hang loose, Iles acted out zombie impersonations as he walked to and fro across the room passing the beamer light to cast zombie shadows. As if to mimic the erratic nature of the noise track at the beginning, Mattin and Iles took turns moving around the room: standing in the middle, at the back, they mimicked a lecture style presentation that revealed the book's contents, its shared back stories, and accounts of other occasions where the book had been presented. When at opposite ends of the room, Mattin and Iles intervened in each other's narratives, interrupting one another to correct or clarify a point, asking the other to chime in when a detail was lost to them. Hesitation and pockets of silence (when either one was thinking) were left and some prolonged as if to elevate and suspend the evident tension. The active nature of the presentation thus induced a situation of active listening and before the audience knew it, they also chimed in to interrupt the banter, moved around the room to improve their viewing or simply left the space to pick up a beer or go to the toilet.

The presentation ended with a so-called *House of Language*: a makeshift structure built with furniture from the room. Iles and Mattin continued the presentation from under the balancing act of furniture. *House of Language* is a tactic that the performers customised for *Noise and*

[136] Mattin , 2012, press release

C*apitalism* presentations, and is often presented with other contributors to the book. For this concept, the furniture or materials of the room can be improvised into a makeshift shelter to take refuge under or behind in the event that the performers feel vulnerable or threatened by an audience. The sharing of past fragile moments in and around the book thus served as entry points for the audience who inevitably huddled casually around in the nooks and crannies of the *House of Language*, taking turns to ask questions about the publication, share their scepticism and — inevitably in an art academy setting — pose detailed questions about respective (art) practices of the performers. By emphasising uncertainty, insecurity or vulnerability, underscored by stories of how the book was ill-received at times, the presenters opened up a dialogical plane of exchange in Kester's language. This established a set of conditions wherein the performers and audience could consider the material implications of the book (i.e. what it means to disseminate this contents in a book form). The material conditions of the space were also literally brought into question when the furniture was turned upside down and used unconventionally for a *House of Language*. Furthermore, Mattin and Isles worked to level their authorial positions as presenters. When the audience poked holes in their presentation and publication, Mattin and Isles met their criticisms with further scrutiny of the larger disciplinary infrastructure at play — the art academy they were working within. Finally, in the same way how the noise track snuck in at the beginning of the event, there was no clear beginning or order to the presentation, which resulted in an alert audience.

Insofar as success can be measured in book launches, an aesthetic reading of the event would render it both successful and ineffective. Through Bishop's lens, the event might find merit in the aesthetic moment that was produced and the perceptual shock produced — if the whole presentation would be regarded as a performance. Her perspective might find value in the fact that although nothing concrete came of the event, the moment of exchange was fruitful in that both the students and performers walked away with critical feedback. Furthermore, one could argue that the student audience was sufficiently unhinged by Mattin and Isles's provocations to the degree that they began to consider their own authorial positions and responsibilities as practitioners. And in the best-case scenario, Mattin and Iles gained feedback for future workshops and for the book's sequel.

Kester on the other hand might find fault with the fact that nothing tangible came out of the book launch, despite all the exchange that occurred. That is, no subsequent policy changes to the academy were motioned, despite the effort Mattin and Iles put into challenging the art students to rethink their authorial positions as artists and to interrogate the infrastructure of the institution. This is not to say that either Bishop or Kester would presume such drastic developments possible from such a short meeting, indeed both endorse longevity as an important part of participatory art practice. My simplified deduction however brings to light an interesting contradiction in their unpacking of social art practices. Both privilege by-products or results (even if all one takes away is one's own enlightenment) in performance practices that are presumably anti-commodity by nature.

Ray Brassier underscores that noise practice aligned with negative freedom proposes a potential third (anti-)aesthetic reading of the event. One that attempts to derail the very same infrastructure it finds itself in to forego value judgement. That is to say that a successful or unsuccessful rendering of the event is not necessarily the concern of the nihilistic condition of noise, according to Brassier. Perhaps there would be no real way of perceiving this negative space created since it surpasses mode as of knowing by seeing and feeling. Noise in this instance is less concerned with its by-products (as apposed to the scenarios by Bishop and Kester) and aims rather to destroy the materials that produce it in the first place. This intension can at least be seen in Mattin and Iles's presentation style when they interrogation the structures of the traditional book launch and when they evade the contents of the book to disorient audience and blur the division between the performers and audience, bringing into question the material conditions of the book object and the architecture of the space.

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Chapter Conclusion

Outside of the music scene, Mattin's projects often take place in the context of an art gallery, wherein his concerts rely on the audience's (in)ability to recognise his concepts. That is the audience almost always takes part in his improvised settings or collaborate as fellow improvisers. Herein a distinction should be made as

responsibility falls on collaborators (as stakeholders) and less on the participants who's subjectivities are nevertheless taken into account by Mattin. His ultimate goal with the "social studio" then is to realise a shared sense of responsibility in the group dynamic he sets up, whereby the accumulated labour in the inter-subjective space is somehow equally distributed between the performers and the general audience. Responsibility falls short in both scenarios pointing to a limit in improvisation.

Despite being at on opposite ends, Bishop and Kester positions meet where the author or artist is concerned. Both position the artist as the essential mediator in collaborative practice. For Bishop, negotiation towards a conceptual framework is founded on a perceptual shock or provocation out of complacency, which is ultimately put forth by the artist. She shuns any deviation from the aesthetic. Kester's tamer "dialogical aesthetic" requires the artist to follow an almost ethnographic logic whereby the social insertion and context from which the one who speaks is considered before she or he embarks in a dialogue with the community they are addressing. Where Bishop values abstraction, i.e. perceptual shock, Kester values concreteness, favouring artists that employ duration in their aesthetic experience to question fixed identities, stereotypical images, and so on. Conclusively both Bishop and Kester's authorial conditions prove to be effective as they assume that someone take responsibility in the group dynamic or the "social studio". Brassier's perspective however annihilates aesthetics all together on the basis that they are rooted in ways of knowing which nemocentrism looks to debunk. This in affect would be the ultimate state of anarchy, which is Mattin's.

Finally, Ray Brassier's scepticism of the aesthetic experience in favour of noise practice opens up an interesting discussion around the aesthetics of noise where responsibility in freedom is concerned. From this standpoint it could be asked if responsibility towards others is at all possible within a subversive state? It can be argued that freedom, as the by-product of a successful improvised noise concert is not productive for any kind of social change in that it is necessarily self-reflexive under nemocentric conditions. On the other hand once the performers or collaborators in Mattin's "social studio" take responsibility for one another's "playing" hierarchies are born or at least an acceptance of various specialised knowledge's, if the concert is to move past an aesthetic gesture. Hierarchy is thus never fully

negotiated away in Mattin's concerns but replaced with new patterns of disciplinary power.

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CONCLUSION

Does He Cut it?

The paper categorically addressed whether it is possible to escape authorship whereby chapter one's inquiry into the stakes at play when Mattin attempts to escape his author status led to an investigation of regimes of power in chapter two. Herein an analogy demonstrating the complexity of such a quest was made with the case of ToEM. Authorship is but at the surface of the ToEM tapes, with a major third and sustain seventh tone, the heart of the group's conflict lies in different understandings how they should go down on the historical record. In other words, my research question developed from what is at stake in Mattin's attempt to subvert authorship to whether his artistic practice can subvert regimes of power as mapped out by Foucault and Deleuze. As the chapter advanced it became apparent that freedom, be it from language (Cage) or just intonation (ToEM), or one's authorial position by way of improvisation, does not escape power. Indeed the more specialised the various artists became the more they aligned themselves with transcendental methods, Mattin proving no exception. Whilst he begins to name some of the mechanisms of control in his concerts or social studios, his position as a paid instigator for the gatherings for instance, Mattin fails to recognise that his hierarchical position does not diminish. Finally, the third chapter investigated whether the social studio could offer different insights to the inescapable regimes of power. To do so, the paper looked as different notions of aesthetics where social practice is concerned, comparing Bishop and Kester's variations of the "social turn" to the subversive noise aesthetic (with its abstract focus on subject-less-ness as introduced by Brassier). Herein we concluded that the mission to disarticulate the self is comparable to Cage's demilitarisation of language and is thereby subject to similar critique. Power regimes also course through the sonic transcendental plane. If anything, Brassier's notion brings to light the importance of developing an aesthetic that considers the sonic dimension of artistic practice in that his argument puts noise music above any visual artistic encounter when it comes to subverting structures of power.

Mattin's subversive practices are but of a rock tradition, established since the onset of the genre when the front-man was conscience of his manufactured position, as Graham reasons in *Rock My Religion*. By calling Cage to

account where authorship is concerned, Mattin is engaging in his long standing rock tradition, which also speaks to this inadvertent submission to power regimes in the Foucault-Deleuze conception of the term. In then end and much like his radical predecessors, Mattin ultimately does not come to terms with that fact that power structures surge through his recording, concerts and social studio sessions alike, the same way that Cage failed to recognize this attribute in his immanent plane; preoccupied instead with the disarticulations of sounds in the quest to break the Western Harmonic wall.

Through the process of examining Mattin's work t became evident that he is yet to succeed in improving very thing that he critiques. His Lou Reed informed performance, for example, embodies his complex relation to the noise scene. Whilst he is conscious of not repeating its stereotypes, summed most wittingly by him as: "ear splitting volume, dissonance, shock effect, aggressive often misogynist lyrics or introverted-not-giving-a-fuck-attitudes performed ego-maniacally without criticality, his performances often conclude with him at the center, arguably repeating much of the same criticisms in his rant. Years later his social leaning practice largely takes place within the confines of art centers and therby replies on the institution's ability to acquaint the otherwise marginalized people to his art practice. That is, whilst his concerts or social studios are successful reflexive exercises, they do little to tease out and address the characteristics of the capitalist logic he is hard bent on challenging be it patriarchy, class struggle, racism or gender bias. And if the name of his game is to go beyond sublime experience, he might like to consider the possibility of including reflections of the places of privilege that he and his participants speak from: male, wealthy, white or otherwise. Furthermore, within Mattin's so-called dialogical plane he fails to deal concretely with minorities — which we can broadly define, as he does, as those who exist outside of the white male dominated realm of noise music. Contrary to his ideal for example, most of his invited guests at CAC were white males and this imbalance holds particular weight in Mattin's practice since his collaborators heavily inform the collaboration process. Herein also lies the potential limit of Mattin's improvised noise concerts in that there is a tension between improvisation (concerned with the unlearning or the disarticulation of things) and the knowledge production, which he seeks to garner as he struggles to exit the anarchic border of noise. Simply put

he is in danger of reproducing the very same structure he tries to escape.

Mattin identifies his 2006 performance at *Tonic* during an earthquake as one of his more successful ones in that, together they achieved a sense of freedom through improvising cooperatively and in sync with the same urgency, which then translated into a shared sense of responsibility. This contingent sense of freedom is then also limited to a gallery-going and noise-informed crowd, which begs the question of what would happen if Mattin improvised outside of these conditions? Mattin's exclusivity also makes clear that "minor histories" would be increasingly more difficult to conjure up in a subject-less disposition, which privileges the separation of idioms in practice. Whilst reproducing the power systems that created inequality, a subject-less state is in danger of forgoing the politics of those who exist on the fringes of society, those that are in need of minor histories and corrective histories.

Despite this list of Mattin's shortcomings as an artist particularly in the near impossibility of the task he has set up for himself, his optimistic intentions to exist at and to mobilise the peripheries of music remain admirable. That is to say that the artist is aware that improvisation and noise cannot bring about innovation —and in his case social change —in and of themselves but is content to work with their fragile moments in his pursuit of a so-called subject-less state of being that could hold cues for how one might overturn the neoliberal brand of democracy we exist in. Since the crux of his intensions seem to rest on his collaborations he might do well to open his practice up further to address those that exist outside of noise rock continuum. Indeed to practice politics according to his terms.

List of Illustrations

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