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Noise: towards a definition

Thomas Richard Riley

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts by Research in Composition

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERFIELD

June 2014

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the portfolio is available online at

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for a shortcut to a specific piece use

<http://tomrileycomposition.tumblr.com/post/90758634802/2-X>

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to explore the perceptual affects of noise on the relationship between performers, their instruments and listeners. The portfolio of compositions and accompanying thesis demonstrates the results of this treatment of sound and space, ideas coming from experiences of noise in other areas of life. Works were developed by experimenting with the relationship between performer and computer and by taking a hands-on approach to discovering sounds. My practice as an improviser, performer and hip hop producer also guided that approach. The findings of the work imply that noise can be perceived as a type of silence, as a frame for other textures and something that can be edited out of perception. It also shows noise, as random variation of other elements, can be used to create pieces that work towards affecting listeners perception of time.

Chapter 1

1.1

INFLUNCES AND AESTHETICS

"I cross out words so you will see them more: the fact they are obscured makes you want to read them" - Jean Michel Basquiat (1)

"The photograph itself doesn't interest me. I want only to capture a minute part of reality" - Henri Cartier-Bresson (2)

Noise is paradoxically a liberating and constricting idea to grapple with while composing music. The liberation comes from the freedom a concept with otherness and transgressive qualities can give a composer. The constriction comes when trying to justify if a certain method, form or sound is or is not noise.

Bob Freindman talks about the "importance of silence as a positive void (in the Eastern Religious Sense) rather than simply as a negative space". (3) If silence can be considered a positive void then I would consider noise to share this quality. Silence is noise as a concept, is a starting point for several of the compositions in the portfolio. Noise functions as a 'loud' (or present, or amplified) silence, a space in which other sound emerges from a void. Rather than any instrumental or vocal or other intended sounding that covers silence, the noise submerges the sound. Rather than a instrument being allowed to fully decay in amplitude until it is no longer perceivable, a noise-silence raises the level at which a sound becomes inseparable from other sounds, and the variations in this perceptual level between different listeners drives my use of noise, white noise in itself, across my compositions.

John Cage said, "There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot." (4) In the same way, when faced with a totality of noise the ear will find something to focus on within a density of sound.

Noise can be conceptual or representative. Antoine Beuger mentions that "the main attraction of making 'timeless noise' or 'the world' to be the matter of music is its infinity" (5). Noise here has a totality, and is only definable by opposition. If noise is the total then "the form of a specific music... is the way it cuts into this infinitely dense continuum" (5). This approach has been very liberating to discover. Having noise as an infinite concept works well with the silence is noise idea, as silence itself can be equally infinite. Pieces that I composed that feature instruments and white noise are literally adhering to Beuger's theory that music is a cut piece of infinity; the sounds cut through audibly then fall into the dense noise.

Other influences on my compositional use of noise come from my everyday life. While working on this portfolio I found employment in a nightclub in Leeds. The club specializes in house, drum 'n' bass, techno, dub and other forms of music that are played at extremely high volume levels. It wasn't the content of the music that influenced me; it was the way our hearing changes in a loud environment and new ways of looking at perception and defining audibility that it gave to me.

A massive influence in my work is the need to be practical. Most pieces with scores are open instrumentation, and I don't use complex notation, as I want to appeal to a wide range of performer abilities. Another influence on the practicality side is the medium of transmitting the compositions. While the masters' programme offered two concert hall performance opportunities I don't think it is the best venue for my noise music. Technologically there can be problems where different venues change the colour of a noise, but more fundamentally my pieces are often about different avenues of communication than the composer-performer-audience chain. The practical solution here is to use other mediums, particularly YouTube, to host my pieces, as it is more accessible, and it works with other themes about modern communication practices that influence my work.

1.2 ISSUES OF PERCEPTION

"Listening is representing any type of perception, the ways in which we react to the world which we have to create through the same perception in the first place. Listening is thus the means of observing perception. The sounds do not interest me; not as such. Sounds and auditory phenomena are mere objects to me, materials by means of which I can set into motion certain constellations of perception" – Peter Ablinger (6)

"Careful listening is more important than making sounds happen" – Alvin Lucier (7)

Listening to white noise raises many issues of perception. Similarly to the way the visual senses find fleeting patterns in television static, the ear sometimes perceives illusionary sounds within white noise. Morton Feldman said, "Sound is all our dreams of music. Noise is music's dreams of us." (8) This thought precedes Ablinger's use of noise as a way of observing listening. Indeed, Feldman continues, talking about the music of Edgar Varèse giving "this impression that the music is writing about mankind rather than being composed."

The variance between each person's perception is something that I use noise to explore. Salome Voegelin said, "Every sensory interaction relates back to us not the object/phenomenon perceived, but that object/phenomenon filtered, shaped and produced by the sense employed in its perception" (9). Physical, environmental and cultural pressures influence each person's filter; using noise especially challenges the cultural element. Noise would normally be something to avoid, but by using it in the same context as a silence would be used, to frame other sounds, the listener is forced to confront any cultural prejudices surrounding noise.

It is also worth pointing out that recent research has discovered that "ongoing variability in neural signaling is an intrinsic property of the brain. Often this variability is considered to be noise and ignored. However, an alternative view is that this variability is fundamental to perception and cognition" (10). The author elaborates that "noise may even be the carrier upon which our consciousness rides, in the same way that radio static is used to carry a radio station" (11). If internal noise is a key part of our perceptual process then observing noise externally allows us to learn more about our internal mechanisms.

1.3 MEDIUM AND FORMAT

“I try to imagine the sound of the world, the silences and sounds of this recording, and the noise of the playback equipment meeting without differentiation, indeed indistinguishably. Whatever differentiation there is moves within the narrow, utterly partial horizon of a world. Allowing this partial horizon to retain its relative insignificance is a most beautiful challenge” – Manfred Werder (12)

“Photography is nothing, its life that interests me” – Henri Cartier Bresson (2)

Recording technology has influenced my composition development since I first used a four-track cassette deck to record teenage angst guitar songs. The evolution of technology from tape to digital has also changed the relationship to noise. For early sound recorders noise was unavoidable, crackles emerging as a property of the acetate material that was recorded to directly from the microphone. While attempts would be made to minimize noise, it was taken as a given part of a recording. The invention of tape offered a more neutral, quiet, material to record onto and also allowed more editing. The process of recording became less audible. Tape hiss was eventually removed entirely with the advent of digital recording.

A composer who influenced my work with noise is Alvin Lucier, particularly his seminal work ‘I Am Sitting In A Room’ which exposed the recording process as part of the composition. Another similar piece is by Gary Hill. ‘Meditations 1986’ is a video of a loudspeaker that is slowly covered in sand. The process shares qualities with ‘I Am Sitting...’ in that it is a process that exposes and uses physical aspects of the technology as material.

Peter Ablinger also creates work that exposes methods of recording. A particular example is ‘Weiss/Weisslich 13 – Schallplatte / vinyl record (1995)’. This piece is a vinyl record that is pressed without sound. The creation of the object is part of the composition, and listening to the vinyl (played loudly, as the composer suggests) is listening to the physical medium itself.

John Cage’s ‘Winter Music’ also uses format as part of the composition, though this time the scoring medium rather than the recording medium. The composer used a plain piece of paper as the basis for the score. After an examination of the paper, Cage marked out any imperfections on the blank sheet then added staves to give the marks a context. The resulting piece makes the physical material audible, much like Lucier making the physical aspects of recording audible.

Chapter 2
PORTFOLIO COMMENTARY
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for a shortcut to a specific piece use
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(change the X to the piece/sub-chapter number)

2.1
Hello (voice and noise)

'Hello' was the first video piece recorded for the portfolio, and the first fully realized composition. It follows on from a demo piece called 'Red Stripe (voice and noise)' The decision to re-record the piece was based on the visuals of the 'Red Stripe' version being too crude (it was a close-up of a mouth recorded on a mobile phone, which was ultimately lost when a hard disc failed). Instead, 'Hello' is recorded using a laptop with a good quality webcam, though this also imposes its own aesthetic onto the piece. The framing of the video is similar to that of a webcam chat window, representing the theme of communication through Skype and similar video chat applications.

Other research experiments with studio techniques have influenced the wider thinking behind this piece. After using side-chain compression to produce hip-hop instrumentals, I wanted to actualize this effect in the concert hall as a way of exposing sounds to the ear, though using acoustic instruments rather than different tracks across a mix.

Many of the pieces in the portfolio work in a concentrated area of thinking. The difference between a technique that works effectively on recorded material in the studio and how it translates in the concert hall is an area of unpredictability that gives rich, experimental, sonic results.

The piece was developed while working at a loud nightclub. Serving customers in a loud environment requires an amount of lip reading, a form of communication and a type of listening that I wanted to convey in a composition. The combination of earplugs, roaring bass and shouting voices is an unusual aural experience, but the voice is something the ear will always focus on over other sounds. In 'Hello', however, the voice is not heard; it instead ducks the volume level of a track of white noise.

Video was used in this composition as to enable an observer to lip read and mentally fill in the gap in the noise. By having the repeated spoken word be the same as the title the listener is given a clue as to what word they are trying to discern. The voice doesn't create any new sound it removes the existing sound, creating a contoured silence in the piece, with the silence/noise balance varying each time, depending on the exact pronunciation of the word.

The piece is hosted on YouTube, though it equally could be projected as part of a concert. The limitation that YouTube gives is an inability to control the listening environment. Ideally, 'Hello' would be listened to on a full range sound system at a considerable volume level. YouTube could mean viewers using laptop or mobile phone speakers. However, this is just another communication issue that integrates itself with the information theory view of noise being an interruption in a signal.

2.2

Kargi (Trio for 2011)

Kargi was written for Toon Callier and Jeroen Stevens of Ensemble Besides. Shortly after I was invited to expand the piece into a trio to include pianist Phillip Thomas. Being able to write for highly skilled musicians allowed me to utilize more different, advanced and extended techniques to explore noise than in most of my other pieces. Most of my pieces focus on accessibility, which is a consequence of my own playing ability and outlook. While I would often take a practical approach to experimentation, the piece for Ensemble Besides gave me the opportunity to demonstrate more abstract methods of noise definition.

The type of noise explored in Kargi was inspired by an illusion of self-motion calledvection, which is defined as "the sensation of movement of the body in space produced purely by visual stimulation". (13) This is commonly experienced in a train station when sat in a stationary train and observing an adjacent moving train. A person would expect the visual field to be static so instead feels the movement in themselves. This is similar to other illusions involving noise that I have explored in other works in the portfolio (chapter 2.1, 2.4).

Kargi takes the illusion of self-motion, but instead of using a changing visual reference the piece features multiple changing pulses. The illusion of motion is translated into an illusion of pulses speeding up and slowing down. The players are given individual pulse via headphones, with each player's pulse tempo changing slightly each beat as the result of an algorithm. The algorithm is set to follow the differently sized sections of the score, so the swaying pulse tempo corresponds with the rate of change in the harmony.

The on-stage image of three players isolated by headphones is a visual representation of the underlying theme of the piece. The individualisation and marked separation from their instruments caused by wearing headphones are efforts to present the performers as manual/factory workers. They are like workers operating a conveyor belt, the headphone pulse being the conveyor speed and the notes of the score the item that needs processing.

The definition of noise in Kargi is that noise, in this case a random-number generator, can be used as an input for a process that controls a parameter of the composition during the performance. The pulses with different tempi could have been through composed and programmed, but by using the random-number generator a unique result is produced at each performance. Noise presents itself as a rhythmic element rather than as a spectral/texture element, which is the previous way noise had been utilised in my work. The shift in attitude was influenced out of necessity in the attempt to represent thevection illusion.

In scoring Kargi a grid structure of pitches was used. The grids can be traversed in a multitude of different ways. Allied with the shifting tempi this means each performance of the piece is a unique representation of a limited set of variables. The score has elements of a computer program, a set of instructions to follow, rather than a score that represents the intended sonic result or exacting physical inputs. The contrast between this strict algorithmic approach to composition and the performance on acoustic instruments alludes to the struggles between nature and technology in the wider world.

2.3

Video Format Noise (Three Movements)

Experimentation is a great tool that has been utilized across several of the compositions in the portfolio. Its less documented cousin is the accidental discovery. Technology is central to our modern working and creative lives, so as a composer working with technology the possibilities arise to integrate the everyday into musical work. Recording a video with a mobile phone camera at a concert is a modern habit that rankles many people. The argument against it is that the sound quality of the video will be poor, as well as being off putting to other members of the audience.

Knowing all of this, when I attended Jay Z/Kanye West live in London in November 2011 I still chose to record a video as a memento of the occasion. What was not expected was that the mobile phone (Blackberry 9360) encoder would process the sound in the video and the resulting file would resemble a piece of noise music. How it technically happened according to the exact format encoder is unclear, but it seems that the sound pressure levels in the arena were too high for the phone microphone to convert into sensible digital data. The waveform 'clipped', exceeding the limit of zero many times, and the result veers between a complex set of square waves and the clearer sounds that resemble the sound in the arena. The listening experience is about the contrast between the digital distortion and the moments of clarity. Though, without the noise the frame them, the moments of clarity would be uninteresting.

After discovering the distorted clip I decided to use it as part of a composition. From the initial accidental distortion I set out to intentionally record videos in environments that would cause the digital artifacts. I also wanted a contrast, a quiet interpretation of noise versus clarity.

The second movement was recorded in Huddersfield outside the post office. I had hoped to capture the white noise of a street sweeper covering the songs of a busker playing an accordion. However, something unexpected happened with the technology that was being used – the phone memory card ran out of space. The second movement was supposed to be a longer, quieter version of the frenetic first movement, but accident meant it would instead be a short relief. I accepted this result as another accidental discover, and in any case the moment would have passed in the time it would take to free up space on the memory card.

For the third movement the recording took place in Rock City Club in Nottingham. The intention was to record in a loud environment and coax more distortion out of the smartphone's encoder. The result is very different to the first movement, and while still containing digital distortions they lack the frenetic quality and instead the

distortion seems more controlled. This is likely because the venue was just not loud enough to drive the encoder to unpredictable distortion. Again, this was accepted an accidental result stemming from the uncertain way the phone was distorting the videos. When I have previously used technology I have understood the process, especially when using patches that I had programmed myself on MaxMSP. Using an unpredictable technology puts me in the same position as one of the performers of my pieces. The workings of the technology are no of concern, just how to utilize them to get satisfying results.

2.4

Seen and not seen (duo and noise)

This piece was written for Alice Teyessier (flute) and Jonathan Hepfer (percussion). Electronic white noise compliments the duo. 'Seen and not seen' shares qualities with an earlier demo piece I wrote for piano and sine tone, in that it explores the limits of hearing and aural perception, in particular the ability to distinguish a sound above a drone. This threshold will vary between people and over the length of a piece a listener's threshold itself will change as they become more engaged or as their ear begins to tire.

A theme throughout the piece is inversion. The noise fills the space and becomes the silence. The percussion part uses delicate movements that translate through a laptop into decreases in the noise volume. The physical percussion movement becomes a removal of sound, which is the opposite of what an audience member (and performer) expects. The flute part is deliberately notated to push the performer toward unstable sounds, which are only heard when the percussion part decreases the electronic noise volume. That changes the relationship between the performers. They are separated; similarly to the affect headphones have in Kargi. Isolation is itself a consequence of noise, the noise that is defined as an interruption of a signal, the signal being the communication between the players.

While composing the piece it felt obvious that the noise was taking on a representational quality. The performers, highly trained and professional, overwhelmed by sound whilst their instruments are notated and configured to work against their desire to be heard. The noise plays the role of the mass society, Adorno's culture industry, the totality of social media culture with its deluge of opinion and information. Performers are the ordinary person, struggling to be heard, oppressed and dispossessed of their voice to fight back.

Getting this across to the listener is not an intention of the composition. Beyond the title there is nothing in the score that alludes to this representation. Its primary function is as an example of the perceptual phenomena that allows us to discern slight singular sounds within walls of noise.

In its form 'Seen and not seen' borrows the grid-score from 'Kargi', so whatever sounds with the electronic part will be varied each time. The two parts are not synchronized in timing, so there may be long stretches when the flute goes completely unheard. Uncertainty in form allows for many possible successful performances. Using the grid score also prevents me from intentionally setting impossibilities for the performers.

Digital technology is controlled by the analogue instrument, which brings its own challenge for the performer. The score could either show how the actions on the instrument or what the desired affect is to be on the electronic/tape part. The fidelity become motion and sonic change when using this method will struggle to reach the direct translation accomplished when using a midi-controller or similar, but this uncertainty is a rich area of exploration and interest during the performance of this composition.

2.5

'I Am' (YouTube Auto-Caption Piece)

This piece is the result of a series of different uploads recorded directly to YouTube. A great feature offered by the site is the automatic transcription for subtitles, which is designed to increase accessibility. It isn't 100% accurate, often far from it, especially with certain accents such as my own Northern English voice. This piece uses the computing power of YouTube's servers in a creative fashion. The text is a short set of eight affirmations, basic phrases used in cognitive behavioral therapy, which were given to me by a friend after he found that they boosted his self-esteem. This text was then processed by something that has an affect on self-esteem on many people in the 21st century - social networks and Internet communications (14).

The process in the piece works transparently. The first video is of the composer reading the eight motivational statements, which are then transcribed automatically. That automatic transcription is then read verbatim without correcting the obvious errors into a second video. This video is then automatically transcribed - the third video is a recording of that transcription. This process was carried out until YouTube stopped transcribing the videos due to limits on individual accounts. In this instance, the limit was five videos. The goal of this process is to find the balancing point, when YouTube transcribes exactly what is said, but only because the text had been modified and words altered towards what YouTube's algorithms are biased to recognize.

The piece exposes the flaws and noise as uncertainty within the computing. What is heard is a signal distorted by the recognition of the predictive audio transcription. The language of my voice is reduced to phonetics and to the nuances of its timbre, which are then defined by being compared to a larger database of common words and their pronunciation. A massive database and complex algorithm becomes clearly audible material.

Digital communication and social media are the tools that made this piece possible, but they are also the inspiration behind the piece. Communication breakdowns and misinterpretations of meanings can be a downside when using online communications. The original speech is distorted and loses its original context. Some words start to repeat across videos of the verse. In theory, if this process could continue indefinitely, it would reach a stage where the spoken word is recognized perfectly every time and there would be no change between iterations. However, this theory is looking at in from a technical point of view, the human element means that pronunciation will differ and the computer will keep trying to codify the many variations in speech.

The decision on if this piece needed to be presented alongside the visual element was quite an easy one. The visuals, in this case, the composer's unshaven face sat on a

sofa inside a house on a sunny afternoon, aren't part of the aesthetic in the same way as the visual for 'Hello (voice and noise)' became an important part of that composition. The visuals are a byproduct of using YouTube for the audio transcription. Technically, it was also difficult to fit the several YouTube clips into one single clip and retain the essential subtitles. Speech is the important feature, and once the distraction of the visual is removed more focused listening to the text is enabled, and the repetitions and close variations between verses become more apparent.

The discussion raised by this piece would be to question if it is poetry or music. The language starts off with meaning, but is processed by the way it sounds and the context is eroded away. It is an attempt to look at language as a sound that doesn't signify meaning, and non-English speakers could find the concept easier to grasp, as they would be able to focus exclusively on the sound without the distraction of meaning. Adorno states, "Music without any signification, the mere phenomenological coherence of the tones, would resemble an acoustical kaleidoscope. As absolute signification, on the other hand, it would cease to be music and pass, falsely, into language." (15) The sounds are not absolute significations from after the first verse, which is only language as input to the transcription process. The repetitions are about focusing on the speech as sound, and as the transcription process tries to codify the speech, the similarities phonetically across verses.

2.6

Test Tones

This piece is a recording of a 45rpm record that contains a test tone. The recording is made of four layers of this vinyl and was recorded onto a four-track cassette deck before being transferred to digital. Deciding to record onto tape was a result of wanting to add a further patina on the piece from the choice the format, how that affects sound, and also to prevent any exact synchronization of the vinyl layers. The lack of synchronization exposes the recording, elucidating both the process of recording and the imperfections in the source material.

What I hoped to achieve was for the test tone to become a new background, a pseudo-silence, much like the function of noise in earlier pieces. Above this test tone drone are crackles and clips from the imperfections on the record. The record was found of a mixed lot of 45s purchased cheaply from a local market. Accordingly, it isn't in the perfect condition that a test tone vinyl purchased from new would arrive in. Finding such a record among a mixed lot is part of the appeal of record collecting, and one of the accidental discoveries that form a part of my constant ongoing compositional process.

Before converting the piece from the cassette deck to digital there had to be a choice between mixing the four tracks in mono or stereo. While mono is truer to the source, as the vinyl is in mono, the stereo version makes the differences in the layers and the slight differences in spin between the layers of vinyl richer and more apparent.

2.7

Rare Elvis (Lover Doll)

Rare Elvis is a vinyl record that is played much slower than its designed speed of 33rpm. The exact speed is uncertain as the turntable was modified to achieve this result, but it can be estimate to be varying between 12 and 17 rpm. The genre that was first to utilize slowed vinyl was hip-hop, with a variant called “Chopped and Screwed” which was popularized by DJ Screw of Houston, Texas (16). Slowing down the Southern hip-hop records added extra bass and elongated the already drawled out vocals. However, when other genres of music are slowed down, especially ones where acoustic instruments are used, sounds become unstable, harmonies become wider, and any crackle and scratch on the record is more pronounced.

After modifying the turntable I was able to create many slowed down recordings, but the reason that I have chosen to submit only Rare Elvis (Wooden Doll) as part of the portfolio is because of the perceptual issues it raises. Through the intense crackling (the record was from a house clearance, purchased as a bulk lot and came without a sleeve), the unearthed, low-quality turntable and other layers of noise, the brain focuses on understanding the voice in the song. The noise is persistent, but with a focused listen one can filter it out and focus on the texture of Presley’s voice.

2.8

Tubular Tubular Tubular Bells

This piece is another exploration of format and making format as audible as part of a composition. Upon realizing that I had Mike Oldfield’s Tubular Bells on both cassette and CD I wanted to compare the two to see if there was any difference sound wise. I decided to take it further by buying a vinyl version of the record online. The tradition way of comparing sources would be to use the A/B method, but compositionally I wanted to layer them to see if there would be a way of discerning the differences while played simultaneously. As it happened, each version played at a slightly different speed. This is a result of a few unexpected variations; the age of the cassette tape (which actually snapped during the transfer to digital) and a potential configuration problem with the turntable. Unlike the previous piece that explored layered formats the different tracks have their first notes synchronized. This was because I wanted the differences between CD, tape and vinyl to be apparent as the piece developed rather than being noticeable at the start. The piece uses random discovery to create a slow, gradual loss of synchronization, and the compositional process was to layer the formats and then not to alter them. The piece would have been equally as successful if the three formats had remained perfectly synchronized throughout the final recording.

2.9

Lines (Trio)

Lines (Trio) is the only piece in the portfolio to lack a recording. It is also the only graphic score, and as the graphic is very analogous to the intended sound this isn’t as detrimental as it would be for a piece that used more complex notation. The score came from hand on experimentation when composing ‘Seen and not seen’. That score was written using Adobe Illustrator, which I chose because of its strength when drawing many layers of curved lines. The lines were originally instructions for the

flute, but when isolated from the other layers of the score they took on a meaning of their own. After some modification the lines became a three-movement piece, which doesn't feature any noise, but the unpredictable nature of its composition lends it a serendipitous quality.

2.10

Found: Cassette

The final piece I created for the portfolio is entirely conceptual. Walking around in Leeds around the time when a lot of people are moving house I came across a cassette tape on the floor. This was very out of the ordinary as tapes are not common objects in 2013. An initial impulse was to listen to the tape and use that as found material. However, a larger thought came about not listening to the tape – the contents of the tape could be anything, a near infinite possibility, an abstract infinity that share many qualities with noise. Finding the tape and not listening to it conceptualizes this infinite aspect of noise in a physical object.

2.11

My First Composition (2014)

This piece is a recording of two music boxes. They used to belong to my Oma (Grandmother) and one of my earliest musical memories, maybe one of my earliest memories of any kind, was pulling the strings on both of them at once. The cacophonous noise was pleasurable to me as a young child, and it was only upon inheriting the objects that I linked this youthful action to my current compositional practice. It also demonstrates how ones perception of noise changes over a lifetime. As a trained musician the two boxes played simultaneously no longer sound noisy and cacophonous. My hearing divides the two melodies and they become perceivable objects, not just noise. Another pleasing aspect of this piece is the way the music boxes themselves have aged. The metal pins corrode slightly over time altering the exact pitches. The way the format becomes audible is similar to the 'Test Tones' vinyl piece and the 'Video Format Noise' piece in the portfolio.

Chapter 3

3.1

CLOSING REMARKS

“Although the characteristic of noise is that to remind us brutally of life, the Art Of Noises should not limit itself to imitative reproduction. It will achieve its greatest emotional power in acoustical enjoyment itself” – Luigi Russolo (17)

Through my experimentations with noise and technology the main thing I have gained is the realization that any categorization or meaning of a piece is carried out by the listener not the composer. This allowed me to work with personal, political ideas that noise analogously represents, but without having those ideologies overpower and become part of the experience of listening to the piece. The only clue as to if a particular piece carries any meaning beyond the sound is by its title. ‘Seen and not seen’ is about oppression of communication, while ‘Video Format Noise’ is a nonrepresentational work.

Attempting to define noise, even as a replacement for silence, leads to meanings spiraling inwardly. As Alec Hall states that “[noise pieces] could offer some form of differing and empowering contributions, or else an experiential aspect for the audience that they could contextualize sociologically or philosophically as something noisy” (18). As a composer, noise is a good starting point for processing and changing of materials. If the end result isn’t perceived as noise that isn’t a result of a failure during the compositional process, it’s a result of taking the initial ideas around noise in new directions.

In the future I hope that noise will become another compositional tool to use in many contexts, rather than as an obvious feature within a piece. As technology evolves I am interested in how that changes communication between people. The signal-noise ratio of Internet communications will only continue to rise as we publish more content online. Being heard within this noise is the new challenge for artists, but finding a way to work within and as part of this continuing technological change is my artistic aim for the future.

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APPENDIX

Text generated in I Am (YouTube Auto-Caption Poetry)

I am confident
I am motivated
I am capable
I am educated
I am clever
I am brave
I am in control
I'm the boss

aren't competent
hi mo to touch it
marketable
and educators
and color
and bread
under control
planted lots

armpits continents
hi more accept it
marketable
cunt educated
call up
and brac
under control
plot what

armpits continents
hi more dept
mod
cramped had
co-op
and work
under control
clocks what

armpit continent
had mal dept
market
cramped had
co-opted
can't where
committee control
clocks what

armpit continent
have mile
market
corrupt correct
co-opted
prompted where
mickey control
clocks what

armpit continent
car mind
market
corrupt correct
croft
prompted where
mickey control
clocks what