

## Panel introduction: The Art of Noise after Futurism

When the Futurist Luigi Russolo published his manifesto *The Art of Noises* in 1913 he created a sensibility towards a new sonic universe and an idea of noise(s) as music, which resonated beyond the calamity of the great wars.

The manifesto along with Russolo's music gave birth to new ideas of the expression of a modern world through music. According to Russolo, the human ear had adapted to a new landscape of sounds associated with an industrialized world. He put forth a conception in his manifesto of a former world veiled in silence as opposed to a modern world where musical sounds could be dissonant or atonal as in some contemporary music, but also the actual sounds of machines.

This new music was to be more an imitation of the world than a traditional music composed of harmony and beauty as in the Kantian notion of the sublime. In accordance with his Futurist sentiments he also strongly opposed the institutionalized approach to musical training and opened the doors for skilled amateurs to create a music of their own.

There is little doubt that the resonance of the manifesto inspired many of the musical innovators of the 20th century. Pierre Schaeffer and his *musique concrète*, John Cage and his chance music together with La Monte Young's drone experiments bear witness of a Futurist heritage.

Our aim is to trace the heritage and influence of the noise manifesto and the succeeding avant-garde movements in subsequent sound art and research. In the following case studies for instance we will explore the industrial music and culture as well as the experimental German rock music of the 1970s and thereafter focus on noises in recent sound art and scientific noise research.

# Industrial music

Nicolas Felix Kauffmann

"These people are the wreckers of civilisation", this were the words of Tory MP Nicholas Fairbairn, in the *Daily Mail* (19 October 1976). He was talking about Chris Carter, Peter Christopherson, Genesis P-Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti who worked together under the group names of COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle (TG). Whatever they did to deserve this fantastic exclamation is the subject of this paper.

COUM started as a band in 1969 playing improvised free music influenced in part by the book 'Silence' by John Cage. COUM played wild and chaotic sets in and around the city of Hull in the UK but soon the musical side of COUM was suspended and COUM evolved into a moniker for Genesis P-Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti to make performance art.

With this work going up until the infamous exhibition Prostitution at the ICA in London in October 1976 which instigated Fairbairn's exclamation.

Meanwhile Throbbing Gristle, the band consisting of Chris Carter, Peter Christopherson, Genesis P-Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti, had been formed in 1975 and played at the opening of the exhibition.

With the formation of TG, COUM gradually faded out its activities and with TG a new more outbound strategy embracing the popular cultural ways of marketing and communicating with their audience came into existence. This brings to mind Burroughs' idea of language as a virus in a society that is a network of control mechanisms where the only ways out involved taking the language apart re-establishing it and harnessing it to be used as an inoculation or as a weapon. This insistence of retextualising as a means to transform not necessarily into something monadic and great but a new form of showing opposites as being less opposite than first thought of. This can be found in TG's music as well as the Burroughsian strategy of intervening in society with noise by way of distorting the linear communication used by institutions. In TG's music it is through playing tapes at the wrong speed cutting up and recombining sound material as well physical matter.

With these ideals TG created their label Industrial Records(IR) as their base of operations and with that naming a whole new 'genre' industrial music. Mail art and correspondence with other artists was as much part of Industrial Records as was the vast amount of releases put out through the offices of IR

By transforming the artistic avant-gardism of COUM into a still transgressive expression with extreme music, using the whole spectre of electronic instruments available in the form of synths and self-made electronic devices plus appropriating found sound and text. With these tools in hand they offered a social criticism through subversion and deconstruction of a musical language.

The Futurists have proclaimed that it is the music of the future that can be not only part of the industrial society but also represent the industrial society. It seems that it is only from the 1970's and on there is a music that fits; Industrial music.

Historizing this form of reconstruction of reality, as Burroughs might have called it, will hopefully give a perspective on Industrial music's importance as an avant-garde. Furthermore I will try and show the links to historical avant-gardes such as the Art Brut movement and link it to the ideas formulated by Luigi Russolo in his manifesto *The Art Of Noises*.

It will also be relevant to view TG's oeuvre in the perspective of Poggioli's ideas of the differing avant-garde attitudes.

What was TG's strategies made up of? And what gave them their inspirations?

## **Third Reich'N'Roll: The Faust approach to sound**

*Mikkel Petersen*

Since the ending of the Second World War and the fall of the Third Reich the Germans have been marked by a sense of collective responsibility for the actions of the Nazi Party. The generation born during or shortly after the war felt a need to make up for or seek clarification about their country's Fascist past. This manifested itself politically in the 60's and musically largely in the 70's and onward. In the period 1969-75 a number of bands sought to combine the electronic elements of the German avant-garde music with the energy of rock'n'roll music, by doing so they hoped to create a new unique German sound that was more than just an imitation of the American and British bands, this sound is usually referred to as "krautrock". This approach resulted in groups with backgrounds in the music academies like Kraftwerk, Kluster/Cluster and Can which were all important in the development of modern electronica.

A slightly more anarchistic approach, both organisationally and sonically was the group Faust, assembled by music journalist Uwe Nettlebeck who wanted to create "the electronic Beatles". The group approach owes a lot to the avant-garde way of thinking when it comes to music, live performance, and cover art. This paper will look at how the Futurist manifesto "The art of noises" and the ideas it inspired can be found in the groups work in the period 1970-73, how they differ from other experimental rock of this period, both in Germany and internationally and to which extent Faust can be classified as avant-garde.

## Not noise but clairaudence

Rasmus Cleve Christensen

Even though Luigi Russolo with his 1913 manifesto *L'arte dei Rumori* is by many considered the father of noise music, I want to emphasize that he called his music--and the music he wanted contemporary music to evolve into--a music or an art of noises, *sounds*, not simply a noise music. The Italian plural "rumori" translates into both noise or sounds while the singular "rumora" refers simply to a sound (but a sound can be a noise). This can seem cantankerous, but consider the difference in meaning that the use of this word in English causes. If we for instance define noise as a series or combination of ongoing disturbing sounds but allow noise as a singular noun (a noise) to be any sudden or loud sound that a person or thing makes, it opens up to a new understanding of Russolo's ideas about incorporating noises into music. Because that is what he wanted: to produce noises in a musical context that would represent the modern industrialized world with its many noises coming from machines and other technology. But at the same time, these noises were to fuse and create a more abstract soundscape that was more than the sum of its elements. In this way, Russolo's music was more a music of noises than a noise music per se.

I wish to demonstrate with this paper that most of these ideas are present in a lot of recent sound art that deal with field recording and incorporation of noises, and not so much in the noise music descending from the Futurist movement and other avant-garde experiments.

What we today refer to as noise music has a complex history. While having obvious traces of the Futurist and Dadaist music as well as early 20<sup>th</sup> century composers such as Erik Satie or Claude Debussy, the most noticeable influences come perhaps from the European and American avant-gardes of the 1950s and 60s where also electronic music plays a distinct role in musical composition. You might even talk of a post-John Cage noise continuum within experimental music as a kind of discourse which most noise music of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was produced within. Theorists such as Paul Hegarty argue that some of Cage's work with its incidental sounds represents perfectly the tension between desirable and undesirable sound that according to Hegarty is one of the main characteristics of noise music.

But the sonic universe of this music is mainly synthetic and explores a parallel world of sound that is produced mainly through experiments with electronics or extreme amplification and distortion of electrical instruments. It is equally as fascinated or occupied with technology but stands in great contrast to Russolo's idea of representing the world he was living in by reproducing the sounds it created.

I want to bring attention to a different branch of music or sound art of today that incorporates the ideas of Russolo in a much more accurate way than the music that calls itself and is called noise music.

Field recording is the practice of taking microphones and recording equipment outside the studio and recording the sounds of "the real world" in the most direct least manipulated way. Mobile recording equipment has been improving continuously since the 1950s and today microphones are available that can pick up even the smallest vibrations. One fairly new type of microphone, the contact microphone consists of an ultrathin plate of ceramics and can thereby pick up vibrations going through solid objects. This is now the technological foundation for a whole group of sound artist that base their work on the field recording technique.

A number of field recorders specialize in recording the sound of inert matter; most prominently perhaps Japanese artist Toshiya Tsunoda. Unlike new age recording artists of the 1970s who put out meditative albums with the sound of the ocean or birds singing, Tsunoda uses his microphones to reveal and offer his listener a trip

into a whole universe of sounds we have never heard before, because we haven't been able to. Most of his recordings deal with the sounds of modern technological objects such as pipes, wires or vessels.

In his recordings the sounds of vibrating surfaces or air travelling through the insides of pipes come together and borders on musical composition in an ambient repetitive manner. It is as if he digs beneath the surface and listens more carefully to the many beautiful details that are overlooked (or –listened) in post-industrial society.

You could call this phenomenon *clairaudient field recording*. It deals with sounds that are not present in the world as it is sensed by human perception. The recording device becomes clairaudient in the way that it presents an extra-sensory perception of this world and thereby represents a world of sounds “hidden” from the human ear. But Tsunoda and his Japanese colleagues are far from alone on this.

Something similar is the case when for example German sound artist Christina Kubisch takes you on one of her electrical city walks where you hear the hums, buzzes, drones and squeals of electromagnetic impulses from the city's many ATMs, alarms, neon signs etc. through special designed headphones that she hands out to people who wish to take part in her walks.

This paper will explore how the clairaudient approach to field recording and sound art matches or expands the Futurist idea of a music of noises that will broaden our horizon and give us a new vocabulary of sounds. And at the same time to what extent especially the work of Tsunoda full fills the concept of a mixture of recognizable sounds that rise to something more abstract and become the new kind of music that Russolo wished to create in his 1913 vision thereby bringing his legacy all the way up to today.

# A scientific approach to noise and sound

*Anna Borcharding*

Futurist, Luigi Russolo, put forth the idea of incorporating noise into music as a way of introducing the ear to a new world of sounds. Examples of these sounds are listed in his manifesto, *The Art of Noises*. Artists seeking to further the futurist spirit in a continuation of Russolo's manifest have pursued the idea of industrial sounds as bearing aesthetic qualities.

Rather than merely investigating the aesthetic aspects of noise within an artistic framework, I intend to consider the impact of noise in art, society and science. In theory covering these fields distinctions have been made between noise and sound. However, an interesting contrast emerges when this division is made within a scientific frame, completely removed from artistic practice. A juxtaposition arises when considering the perception of noise from within opposing fields, and this is what I seek to explore further.

It is of peculiar interest to consider the evaluation of noise (as a contrast to sound) and noise abatement created by The Norwegian government's Environmental Department (Miljødepartementet) in collaboration with The NPRA (The Norwegian Public Roads Administration). These departments have defined noise as "unwanted sound", as opposed to Russolo and his succeders who value noise and see it as a positive -rather than harmful, element. The NPRA subsequently continues to describe noise as being of a subjective nature, and therefore being unmeasurable. It seems rather strange that a phenomenon labelled subjective and impossible to measure forms the pillar of research for the NPRA, especially considering that the protective tool itself is entitled a «*noise screen*» -not «*sound screen*».

Through a confrontational process of deconstruction, I aim to employ the ideas conveyed in Russolo's manifesto as contrasts to the noise abatement prosecuted by the Norwegian government as well as the supposed threat of noise pollution to society. Where the futurists sought to provide society with a new and enriching aesthetic experience through an exposure to new sounds, the state now seeks to remove what they label as "harmful noise". What is at stake here is the individual's autonomous right to choose whether or not to be subjected to noise and the significance of context in relation to defining whether or not something is "noise" or "sound."