



A Letter From The Editor

Another summer is slowly meandering away. Soon those sun drenched, diaphanous, days that bestow an imperturbable spirit will fade into a kaleidoscope of rusty colored leaves, hoodies, and brightly colored school supplies, as mighty academia flexes its Bostonian muscle. The sounds of fall are already filling the streets as a contrapuntal chorus of "Heeeyyy!" can be heard around many a campus when friends squint and then recognize each other in their summer tans and relaxed demeanors. Around NEC the falling leaves will mix with the cacophony of sound waves falling out from Jordan Hall onto Gainsborough below. Other, more abstract sounds, may accompany those more melodious tunes, such as sounds of practice session frustrations as you and Shostakovich argue over that particular section *again*. Never fear. The next time you need a break, simply check out an informative, enlightening, and inspiring article or interview in Vox. We are here for you. Welcome, have a seat and a cup of tea.

Seriously, though, welcome to the first issue of Vox. For those of you who need a brush up lesson in Latin, my *The New College Latin and English Dictionary* defines Vox as "voice; sound, tone, cry, call; word (written or spoken); utterance, saying, expression; proverb; language; accent," and that's a pretty spot on description of us. The purpose of Vox as a student organization is to foster a greater sense of community within the NEC student body through promoting an environment where a heightened awareness of music in its context historically, philosophically, and stylistically, encourages discourse – gives voice – within the student body. Twice a semester we will provide a grab bag of articles (all contributed by your peers and colleagues) pertaining to music past and present as well as interviews with NEC alumni and faculty. Our Back to Bolivia section will provide quick tips and information pertaining to our libraries, Spaulding and Firestone (and yes, you read that correctly, the title Back to Bolivia pertains to an obscure bit of trivia only us library rats know). Various quotes like truffles for your contemplative pleasure will be provided. Look for concert, cd, and book reviews in future issues.

If you have any questions, ideas, comments, or reactions, to the articles or interviews, please feel free to contact us at vox_nec@yahoo.com. We'd love to hear from you. Who knows, we might even publish your reaction. So come on, tell Shostakovich you have to take a break, pull up a chair, put up your feet, and settle in with Vox. The kettle is on the boil.

My Body Became a Trombone: A Few Thoughts on the Music of Vinko Globokar

Yvonne Lee

At any moment, it seemed as if she would hyperventilate, lose her voice or bruise her chest. Her movements, her voice, and the intensity in her eyes were incredibly visceral. Her speech and singing was random, yet very articulate, interwoven with gasps, grunts and screeches, contrasted and accentuated by the pounding of her chest with her fist, the spinning of a ratchet over her head, the banging of a mallet on a woodblock, and the schizophrenic scribbling on the piece of paper on the table in front of her.

Situated on the table in front of him, were an array of pots, all turned upside down and varying in styles, consisting of different shapes, materials, and sizes. As his fingers made contact with the surfaces, both he and the pots began to speak, one voice gently percussive, varying in levels of pitch and reverberation, and the other voice softly in French. After a few moments of whispered counterpoint, the two languages lost their individuality and one became the echo of the other, each pot capturing a vowel of its French counterpart, creating dialogue made up of part-repartee and part-monologue.

Another soliloquy just ended, this time between a man and his trombone. As the performer stepped offstage, all the lights went out in the room. A spotlight illuminated a small area near the ceiling, keeping the performer out of view and revealing the bell of an alpine horn. Like a submarine periscope, the bell rotated in one direction and then another, producing sound effects and speaking in squawks and beeps. The alpine horn appeared sentient, acting as an extension of the performer or as an equal partner in the performance. A common theme found both in his performances and in his compositions is that "The world of music involves a range of activities - I try to embrace them all." Globokar blurs the line between performer and instrument, and visual and aural, and expresses his intentions within all physical dimensions of a performance.

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Anton Fig

Born in Cape Town, South Africa, Anton began playing drums at age four. After performing in numerous successful local rock bands he moved to Boston to further pursue his musical interests. His formal education included studies at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, studying both jazz and classical disciplines graduating with Honors in 1975. In 1976 he moved to New York where he began to establish a career as a freelance musician.

Some of the many recordings Anton has made include selections with Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger, Kiss, Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Gary Moore, Spider, Ace Frehley, Joan Armatrading, Rosanne Cash, Joe Cocker, John Phillips, Warren Zevon, Sebastian Bach and Paul Butterfield.

Anton is presently a member of the "CBS Orchestra" appearing nightly on 'Late Show with David Letterman' - a position he has held since 1986. During this tenure he has played with scores of great artists including Miles Davis, James Brown, Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Winwood, Bonnie Raitt and Tony Bennett.

The CBS Orchestra has backed a host of artists such as Stevie Wonder, Faith Hill, Little Richard and BB King at the closing ceremonies of the summer Olympic Games in Atlanta. They also backed Al Green, Gloria Estefan, In Sync and Eric Clapton for VH1's Save the Music concert at the White House. Most recently they were the backup band for the concert for New York City where they performed with David Bowie, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Buddy Guy, Macy Gray, and James Taylor.

Anton has also played live with Paul Simon, Booker and the MG's, The Thompson Twins at Live Aid, and played alongside Jim Keltner for Bob Dylan's 30th Anniversary concert celebration.

In 1996 Anton released a drum instructional video and book entitled "In the Groove" and "Late Night Drumming".

Anton has just completed his first solo record entitled "Figments". Produced and co-written by Fig, the record represents 3 years of work and includes singers and musicians Richie Havens, Brian Wilson, Ivan Neville, Sebastian Bach, Ace Frehley, Al Kooper, Chris Spedding, Donald 'Duck' Dunn, Blondie Chaplin, Paul Shaffer, Randy Brecker and Richard Bona.

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Globokar's compositions, *Second Thoughts* and *Toucher*, exemplify the ideal of embracing a wide range of activities in performance. In *Second Thoughts*, the singer's body is a direct extension of her voice just as the percussion instruments are direct extensions of her body. The visual and theatrical effect of psychosis and cunning created by writing on paper, or twirling the ratchet over her head, or the slamming of the mallet onto the woodblock are just as important as the sounds they produce. The visual component is not only a complement to the aural; it becomes a crucial and necessary part in expressing the content of music. In *Toucher*, Globokar, in addition to integrating the physical component into the performance, explores the mutual exclusivity between performer and instrument. The physical nature and visual look of speech and percussion appear independent, while the expressive nature and aural result of French and faux-French are much more correlated. The text for *Toucher* comes from a series of extracts from Bertolt Brecht's *The Life of Galileo*. Even though the excerpts chosen are not long enough to discern the exact meaning of the play, the dialogue and manner of speech between voice and percussion is enough to give the sensation of struggle and questioning. In preparing to play this piece, the performer must not only find instruments that literally speak as he does, he must find a way, aurally and visually to play them in a way to express the conflicting nature of the text. In both *Second Thoughts* and *Toucher*, Globokar utilizes the relationship of reliance and independence between performer and instruments, and unites visual and aural expression to broaden the possibility of musical monologue.

As a performer and as a composer, Globokar combines all aspects of performance into one experience, testing the boundaries of all the physical elements in order to express his intentions. In many of his works, his musical language parallels the ideals behind the piece, as in *Toucher*, where the musical language is perhaps as abstract as the topics in the play itself - religion versus science, philosophy versus history, or the conflicting nature of good and evil. As a parallel to Galileo's rejection of the Copernican idea of the Earth being the center of the universe, Globokar believes that "The function of music has changed, the tonal language has decayed in the last two centuries and there is no point in reviving it. There's no way back, today's world cannot be described with beautiful melodies." In Globokar's world, expression is paramount, and all means of expression in all possible combinations are explored; every aspect of performance, whether it be aural, visual, theatrical, or performer and instrument, can act together or in opposition to expand the dimension of possibility - pots speak French, alpine horns turn into periscopes, and bodies become trombones.

Vinko Globokar was born in Aderny, France on July 7, 1934 to Yugoslavian immigrants. He moved to Ljubljana, Slovenia when he was thirteen, where he lived until the age of twenty-one. In Ljubljana, he was exposed to jazz and to popular Slovene music through the composer and conductor Bojan Adamič. Globokar then moved back to France where he attended the Paris Conservatoire on a scholarship and studied trombone under Professor Andre Lafoss. He also studied composition and conducting with Rene Leibowitz and studied with Luciano Berio. Globokar has premiered trombone works by Luciano Berio, Mauricio Kagel, Karlheinz Stockhausen, René Leibowitz, Louis Andriessen and Toru Takemitsu, just to name a few. As a conductor, he has worked with such European orchestras as the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Radio France, Radio Helsinki, Radio Ljubljana, and the Philharmonic orchestras from Warsaw and Jerusalem. He taught at the Musikhochschule in Cologne, in Florence with the Orchestra Giovanile Italiana and was the director at the IRCAM institute in the department of Instrumental and Vocal Research. He now resides in Berlin.

Anton continues to be an in demand studio and live musician and is currently recording and composing for numerous projects.

For this issue, Vox had the pleasure of conducting an interview with NEC alum, Anton Fig.

Vox: Why did you choose NEC?

AF: I was living in South Africa and had heard of Berklee and Juilliard but I had a friend who attended NEC and he told me that it was the best school and they had just started a jazz department so I applied. For some inexplicable reason I was accepted - into the classical department

Vox: What experience, class, or professor, if any, opened up and changed the way you thought about music and approached music?

AF: Many teachers changed my thinking. Not in the least Mr. Halperin who taught Humanities and made me read great books which really helped me have more than 'tunnel vision' in life. George Russell who taught me to think beyond the norm and play his incredible music. I played with him at Carnegie Hall with the great late Tony Williams and other incredible NY musicians while still a student. I will always be grateful for that opportunity. The late great Jaki Byard who wrote beautiful big band music and directed it with such gusto - and for buying me a trapcase when I was a penniless student. And of course Vic Firth - who besides being a great timpani player and teacher made me realize the benefits of good hard work ethics. He demanded results from results from his students

Vox: If you could find a worm hole to travel back in time and talk to yourself as an NEC student, what advice would you give yourself knowing what you know now?

AF: I probably would have a little more confidence in myself and take some more drumkit lessons - but otherwise I don't think I'd change much.

Vox: What did you imagine you would be doing now when you were an NEC student? Was it anything like what you are doing, or did you imagine something quite different?

AF: I would watch the Tonight show with Carson and never once did I imagine I would have a gig like that. I thought I had much more chance of being in a big rock band

Vox: Did you have any fears entering the professional world after leaving NEC? Did you find those fears to be needless now that you have hindsight?

AF: I have to say that the professional world was very different from the conservatory - at least in my case. Perhaps in an orchestra setting it would be more similar - but for me moving to NY was a completely different world. NEC gave me a good grounding in music and I had listened to a lot before I moved to a professional setting so that was really good for me but the parameters were quite different. However this something you have to constantly evaluate and adapt to as times change.

Vox: How did you come to be a member of the CBS Orchestra?

AF: I had played around town and on records a lot and one night Paul came to check me out at a gig as their regular drummer [Steve Jordan] was going away with Neil Young for a while. I subbed for a few weeks and then a short while after that Paul told me that Steve was leaving the show and that he liked the way I had substituted for him - so he offered me the gig. A combination of skill, luck and the right place at the right time.

Vox: "Popular" Music styles are constantly evolving and morphing. Every week on The Late Show With David Letterman there are guest bands, so over the years you have had the rare opportunity to watch a constant parade of bands and musicians come through. What has struck you the most over the years regarding stylistic changes, innovations, or re-inventions?

AF: Probably playing with loops and pre-recorded tracks. In the old days we just played and that always sounds refreshing to me. Although the pre-recorded stuff gives a certain amount of reliability, it does not have the same danger excitement and interplay - in my opinion.

Vox: In conclusion, to re-phrase a question from James Lipton's final questions on TV's Inside The Actor's Studio, what would you like to do if you were not a musician?

AF: Probably be a drummer.

Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony: A product of politics and progress

Andrew Wickesburg

With many artists, the motivations for particular compositions are often times unclear. However, in the case of Paul Hindemith, much of the motivation for his *Mathis der Maler* symphony came from a single yet highly motivating source: Hindemith's relationship with the Nazi party and musical establishment. Hindemith's critics within the party pointed to irreverence, parody, and dissonance in his previous compositions. Others within the party took issues with Hindemith's Jewish family and friends. Despite these obstacles, there was also sentiment within the Nazi party that Hindemith, Germany's most prominent composer of new music, could become the Third Reich's compositional face to the world.

When dealing with the motivation for a composition, it is important to first define what musical elements suggest outside influences had any effect on the composition. In the case of the Hindemith's symphony *Mathis der Maler*, the primary musical element that suggests outside motivation is the establishment of what David Neumeyer describes in his book *The Music of Paul Hindemith* as "a fully achieved synthesis of technique and style." What is this "fully achieved synthesis of style and technique"? In his *Craft of Musical Composition*, Hindemith describes a portion of the opening movement of the *Mathis* symphony:

Groups of central tones are chordally related in order to achieve a thoroughly quiet, softly extended tonal foundation, despite all the activity of individual segments.

Neumeyer supplements this with the observation that within the aforementioned passage, Hindemith achieves a "characteristic blending of dramatic quality (tension), tonal hierarchy, and timbre." These tonal structures mentioned by Hindemith combine with a stricter adherence to seemingly Romantic concepts of form and harmony to provide Neumeyer's synthesis.

Hindemith had given the Nazis many reasons to disregard his stature as the most prominent contemporary German composer. The party was the dominating force behind all aspects of German life, even before the party's official election in 1933. Hindemith's music and career during this pre-election period put him at odds with many in the Nazi party, most prominently Hitler himself. However, the group primarily in charge of musical activities during the composition of the *Mathis* symphony was the Kampfbund, which had been founded in 1928.

In *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany*, Alan E Steinweis states that the Kampfbund had been founded with “the aim of broadening the [Nazi] movement’s appeal among artists and among the educated middle class.” According to Steinweis:

The Kampfbund’s founders regarded its mission as one of *völkisch* consciousness raising. It was to ‘defend the value of the German essence’ in the ‘midst of present day cultural decadence’ by promoting every ‘authentically native expression of German cultural life. Through lectures and publications, it would promote the work and thought of ‘important’ Germans who had been ‘silenced’ by the ‘forces of decay.’

Steinweis concludes that the Nazis “intended for the Kampfbund to function as a kind of back door for the reluctant bourgeoisie.

”It is a fairly direct procedure to connect the *Mathis* symphony to the Kampfbund’s ideals. Alan Steinweis contends that the subject of Matthias Grünewald links directly to the idea of “promoting the work of important Germans who had been silenced by the forces of decay.” Grünewald’s altarpiece originated in an era considered to be “historic halcyon years” by the Nazis. The titles of the symphony movements correspond to three of the panels on the altarpiece, *Engelkonzert* (angel concert), *Grablegung* (The laying of Christ in the Grave), and *Die Versuchung des Heiligen Antonius* (temptation of St. Anthony). The last panel is the largest of the three, and its description in *Gardner’s Art Throughout the Ages* is particularly compelling:

Indeed, Saint Anthony’s legend encompassed his role as both vengeful dispenser of justice (by inflicting disease) and benevolent healer. The artist enhanced the impact of this altarpiece by effectively using color. He intensified the contrasts of horror and hope by subtle tones and soft harmonies playing off against shocking dissonances of color.

The direct connection from symphony to altarpiece also suggests an attempt to relate the work to an undeniably ‘German’ masterpiece, putting Hindemith on more favorable political ground.

A second connection to Kampfbund ideals occurs in Hindemith’s use of quotation. The first most prominent quoted material is the well known German tune “Es sungen drei Engel ein süäes Gesang.” Siglind Bruhn describes the settings as undeniably chorale inspired, using unison trombones for the first statement before timbral variation begins with the tune appearing also in a grouping of clarinets, bassoons, and horns, then in the full orchestra. Hindemith went to the trouble of indicating instances of quotation in his score for *Mathis*, making it obvious that these traditional melodies were included in his work.

The choice of Matthias Grünewald and his work was not one to which Hindemith arrived entirely by himself. It was suggested to him by his publisher Willy Strecker, who was more politically savvy. It seems that even the allegedly apolitical Hindemith was aware that the musical climate in Germany was not receptive to the kind of opera that he had written in the early 1920s:

To judge by what I now see happening in musical and theatrical affairs, all the key jobs will shortly be occupied by rigidly national types. Next spring, by which time the first difficulties should have been got over, the prospects for an opera by Penzolt and myself should be very good, though maybe not for this particular text. . . . But all the same, caution is called for.

His publisher’s awareness stemmed from a very different, more practical consideration; by mid-1933, he was losing royalties due

due to the prohibition of performances of works by “bolshevist Russian Jews” such as Stravinsky, whose works he published. In April of 1933, Strecker wrote to Hindemith: “You yourself are to fifty percent condemned as a cultural bolshevist on account of your earlier works.” Many of Hindemith’s early works fit the label of “cultural bolshevism,” as his compositional record in the Weimar era was one of producing works designed to shock and arouse his audiences. According to Skelton, “his efforts were directed solely towards breaking down *musical* complacency . . . his main concern was always with the people who played music or who were able to listen to it with true understanding.”

While Hindemith had no direct Jewish relations, his wife was half-Jewish on her father’s side. Steinweis asserts that this was largely ignored by the Nazis, as “many prominent musicians, including Richard Strauss, the president of the Reichsmusikkammer, had family connections with Jews.” This amnesty did not, however, apply to less important members of Hindemith’s family. According to Michael Kater, Hindemith’s Brother-in-law Hans Flesch had been deprived of his position at the Berlin radio, and Hindemith had been previously accused of “Jewish protection” for his close relationship with Flesch.

While there were many who criticized Hindemith for his avant-garde compositions and associations, Michael Kater points to “currents that actually favored some sort of an accommodation between the composer and the regime.” Much of this positive current was due to Hindemith’s work with the school in Plön. Hindemith’s composition *Plöner Musiktag*, along with others that he dubbed *Gebrauchsmusik*, had several points of merits to the Nazis. Skelton best describes the intent of *Gebrauchsmusik*: “Its importance lies . . . in its recognition of music as a social activity. Of course this aspect of music has never been entirely neglected, . . . but it was Hindemith’s purpose to demonstrate what composers before the nineteenth century already knew -that this type of composition is not beneath the dignity of even the greatest.” These sentiments of social music and art’s involvement in the lives of everyday citizens would have appealed to the Nazi’s goals of developing a strong sense of German culture and community.

The most important product of the relationship between Hindemith and the educational authorities of the Third Reich was the setting of the foundations for what was to become *The Craft of Musical Composition*. What Hindemith hoped to achieve with his writing was to provide both a framework for interpreting modern music, and guidelines for teaching composition beyond imitation of the teacher’s style. Neumeyer maintains that Hindemith accomplished this through reversal of “the priorities of traditional harmony and melody: where chromatic tones and chords had been understood as special cases (by embellishment or alteration) which could be referred or reduced to underlying diatonic patterns, he understood the diatonic as a special case of the fully chromatic.” His method provides an alternative to Schoenberg’s twelve tone method, relying on the strength of intervallic tension and release, producing almost 19th century tonal progressions.

Examples of Hindemith’s new method of theoretical thinking were not the only things the *Mathis* symphony contained. The symphony’s direct relationship to the opera infuses autobiographical connotations many scholars believe to be built into the storyline of the opera’s protagonist, Matthias Grünewald. In a 1933 letter to his brother Ludwig, Willy Strecker recounted a meeting he had with Hindemith regarding the *Mathis* subject, stating “Our evening together was most impressive, and it was so characteristic of Hindemith the way he constantly –and almost shyly- tried to conceal the human connections with his own personality, dragging in irrelevant historical happenings to hide the essential point.” Because so much of the music from the opera appears unaltered in the symphony, it is impossible to deny

that much of the sentiment behind the opera appears in the symphony, making the symphony an opening salvo in Hindemith’s statement of his political position.

When the *Mathis* symphony premiered on March twelfth, 1934, Michael Kater states that it was received with almost universal acclaim, “even by that considerable number of Nazi critics fond of polemicizing against Hindemith at the time.” The most telling statement describing Hindemith’s intents for *Mathis* came from Willy Strecker:

Hindemith is clearly conscious that he must write in a more popular way, and he believes that he can do it . . . Since Fürtwängler badly wants something new by Hindemith for a concert at the beginning of December and his ensuing tour, Hindemith wants to give him these pieces in the form of a suite, thereby demonstrating that a composer can write in a decent modern way and still remain popular.

It is significant that the work premiered as a symphony. Hindemith’s catalogue of works prior to *Mathis*, printed in Geoffrey Skelton’s biography, contained several large works for orchestra. None were given the label symphony. That label binds the work tightly to the German symphonic canon, which the Nazis would have found very desirable.

Hindemith’s political position was insecure but stable, due to the conflict between the reputation his earlier works had earned and his efforts towards education and the broadening of German cultural accessibility. He was in a possibly favorable position for advancement in the ranks of the Nazi musical establishment; but was also under personal pressure due to his association with prominent Jewish musicians and the persecution of his distant Jewish relatives. With the *Mathis* symphony, Hindemith deliberately created a work that both satisfied the cultural prejudices of the Kampfbund, and the musical conservatism of Nazi critics. What is perhaps most interesting about the *Mathis* event is that Hindemith continued to write in a similar style even after he had emigrated from Germany. Many of his works from this *Mathis* period remain in the standard repertoire today, including *Symphonic Metamorphoses on a Theme by Weber* (1943), *Trauermusik* (1936), *Der Schwanendreher* (1935), and *Ludus Tonalis* (1942). It is a significant fact that the previously mentioned works of 1935-6 anticipate the first publication of *Craft* while the works of 1942-3 surround the English language release of *Craft*. It is important to note that the *Mathis* symphony also provided a highly publicized opportunity to demonstrate a new system for describing and writing music. Thus the *Mathis* symphony gave Hindemith a means of resolving his circumstances by promoting himself both technically and politically.

Back To Bolivia : Library Tips

- Access major databases from home (NEW GROVE MUSIC – supply all 13 digits from your NEC ID barcode); (RILM, RIPM and RISM – username: necedu, password: first 5 digits from you NEC ID barcode).
- Use “MY ACCOUNT” on the library homepage to renew your books and scores; request items from another library; put a hold on NEC materials already checked out (directions available at Spaulding circulation desk)
- Did you know Isabella Stewart Gardner attended Jordan Hall’s inaugural concert in 1903? Did you know admission to her museum, where her private art collection is on display, is only \$2 per person when using the museum passes available at the Spaulding circulation desk?

Michael Gardiner

The 2005 Buyer's Guide issue of Guitar World Magazine (which showcases the year's newest products, including guitars, amps, effects, software etc.) explicitly redesigns the catalogue as pornography. Adult star Jenna Jameson graces the cover of this issue which includes a full color pinup centerfold, and a CD-rom containing video footage of the Jameson photo shoot, as well as sample recordings of some of the new 2005 equipment. The tracks of the included CD that specifically interest me are the recordings of three 'distortion' effect pedals (used to modify the guitar's tone color by complicating the wave form and adding overtones that do not reinforce a single fundamental). The names of these three effects are as follows;

1. The American Woman Overdrive Pedal
2. The Double Muff Distortion Pedal
3. The Tone Bone Hot British Tube Drive Pedal

Needless to say, these titles maintain the pornographic trope developed by the layout designers. But why, out of all the effect pedals previewed in Guitar World, are only the distortion pedals given such explicitly sexual titles?

What is distortion? In simplest terms, it's an intended disturbance of signal and as such related to noise. What then constitutes noise? Information theory lends a definition that I find useful both conceptually and practically; information equals pattern (this could be as concrete as a periodic wave pattern in acoustics, or as obtuse as the pattern that renders an idea intelligible) and noise is what interferes with or distorts that pattern. Thus, the hiss over a telephone line that disturbs or interferes with the purity of signal would be one kind of noise (acoustic) as would a severe distraction, such as an explosion in a ninth grade biology classroom. In both of these examples something interferes with the process of intended communication (assuming such singularities can be isolated).

Guitarist Ray Davies of the Kinks is often credited as having invented 'distortion' (as guitarists conceive of it) in early rock music. He would physically cut the speaker cones of his guitar amplifiers so that they buzzed, thus giving birth to the much cherished 'fuzz tone.' Similarly, Jimi Hendrix also made famous the use of feedback caused when the magnetic coils of a guitar pickup attract and magnify the output of an amplifier (instead of the vibrations of the guitar's strings, their intended object) resulting in uncontrollable sonic responses. But one might add that feedback is also a response to a situation and an incorporation of that response into the system of delineation. As a musician, when an uncontrollable technology interrupts your traditional method of performing, as an artist, you are asked to respond in new ways. A relinquishing of control to an (at the time) unstable circuitry fosters unique and volatile relationships with the technologies of artistic production (electronic or not). Artists have used distortion to intentionally (and recursively) alter their intended communications, changing the nature of instruments and the way they are played.

Many of the musicians who have adopted this sonic instability in their music and have often described it as akin to the desires, drives and movements of the unconscious. The Japanese 'noise artist' Merzbow (Masami Akita) has developed the concept of noise as a representation of the unconscious in sound, based initially on surrealist notions that everything is erotic and theories of fetish and bondage (subjects on which he has extensively published). Merzbow distributed his early music as sonic fetish material through the mail, mimicking circulation techniques of underground pornography. This music, in its initial stages relied upon mixer feedback, distortion pedals, homemade electronics, and ring modulators. He is quoted as saying 'my idea was to create something anti, but representing the brutal

spirit of rock music' (see Latartara, sapaan.com). Merzbow's tools and music reflect something of a hybrid of Hendrix and Stockhausen in terms of both texture and stochastic structure and marks a fascinating transference of sonic-sexual-technical approaches in music from America to Asia.

Despite the interesting transference, one must ask why such a singular interpretation? Can noise only equal sexual desire? It's a bit of a ridiculous notion. A drummer's ride, crash and hi-hat cymbals (none of which create periodic wave forms and hence are a kind of acoustic noise) are sexual in their content? A dense orchestral tutti is a signifier of the libido function? The soft pads of a spring rainfall are so many dirty little secrets? America falls asleep with the aid of noise machines, which sound like peaceful waterfalls, whispering autumn leaves, or distant crashing waves, and aside from their relationship to the bedroom I see no other sexual connotations. For me, this is the danger of semiotics and art; if noise must be interpreted we would do well to posit a number of models to fit an array of contexts.

For example, let us take a phonetic model. The pure jewel-like vowel sounds of language (the international phonetic alphabet classifies 20 of them), so carefully scrutinized and treasured by vocalists, are surrounded, articulated, and given a context by some 25 consonant (noise) sounds; the stop plosives, nasals, fricatives, lateral, glides, and combination consonants are an integral part of any utterance. The noise of language is precisely what renders it intelligible (and for those who propose a linguistic model for music, it asks how one deals with attack noise, breath noise, bow noise, percussion sounds, etc. in addition to the often over emphasized pitch materials).

What other models could be posited? Noise as light?

Ambient noise has a familiar optical analogue: daylight in the atmosphere. We can see and photograph outdoor objects because they scatter, reflect and otherwise modify the light in the air. Likewise, noise that permeates the ocean acts as a kind of "acoustic daylight." Recent experiments have shown that we can indeed create images of underwater objects by using ambient noise as a source of illumination.' (Michael J. Buckingham, John R. Potter and Chad L. Epifanio, Scientific American, 1996)

So noise, on the one hand could be heard as a kind of light (indeed the physics of the two are much the same), yet noise also has the ability to mask or cover up sounds as well, as with our white noise sleeping machine, which covers any individual sound with its pall of cloudiness allowing freedom from distraction and the onset of a much sought after repose. As a composer who works with computer samples, this model creates an interesting correlation with a photographic use of light. For example, I tend to hear distortion-enhanced sonic artifacts in the high registers as a kind of over exposure. Perhaps a bleached out symphony come over a short-wave radio from afar. A low register completely obliterated by small, low quality speakers, crackles and pops of interference as disfiguring pock marks on the intended classical surface, leaks at the boundaries of other stations' bandwidth; one shifts the antenna in hopes of regaining the singular continuity of the individual work. As so often is the case in photography, instead of seeing the object we see instead our mode of seeing. The play of light. It enhances, but sometimes over-enhances the object to the point of corruption, disfiguration. It enhances and obscures. A watched watching that, for me begs the question, what constitutes a listened listening? Noise offers such a possibility. We don't hear the musical object broadcast over the radio but rather its interference.

Using both these notions of light and cloudiness (obscuring, or covering function) I come to a new reading of Merzbow's textures.

Although Merzbow himself develops a sexual metaphor in the description of his music, for me it opens onto other possibilities. Jun'ichiro Tanazaki, in his book *In Praise of Shadows* describes the properties of jade and the reason for its appeal according to a Japanese sensibility. He writes;

That strange lump of stone with its faintly muddy light, like the crystalized air of the centuries, melting dimly, dully back, deeper and deeper... We much prefer the impure varieties of crystal with opaque veins crossing their depths... Of course this sheen of antiquity of which we hear so much is in fact the glow of grime. In both Chinese and Japanese, the words denoting this glow describe a polish that comes of being touched over and over again, a sheen produced over long years of handling-which is to say grime. If indeed elegance is frigid it can as well be described as filthy... (pg. 11)

He concludes by juxtaposing a Western aesthetic with an Eastern one 'Westerners attempt to expose every speck of grime and eradicate it, while we Asians carefully preserve and even idealize it.'

Tanazaki's notion of Western eradication of dirt brings me back to the notion of a listened listening vis a vis our neurotic quest for 'clean' and 'pristine' recording quality. Our recording engineers strive to remove any trace of the recording process in the final product. These erasures include room noise and recording hiss caused by the voltage hum of equipment. Furthermore, they create an artificial stereo field through the panning of elements and the use of compression/normalization (which reduces the loud sounds and increases the soft ones) and equalization to give each element its own territory in the final mix. If these steps were not taken what would result is often called a 'muddy' mix. What would we be left with if all these elements were not removed? Given Tanazaki's statements I see Merzbow's aesthetic as such a burgeoning possible world. Noise as jade. An economy of grime that calls into question our arbitrarily derived notions of what recorded media should sound like. To return to the Guitar World buyer's guide CD, this is why it sounds so tame and processed to my ears. Ironically, all the grit has been systematically removed despite the fact that the tracks feature distortion pedals. The sound has been physically suppressed/repressed.

Early rock musicians were deliberately misusing their equipment for functions not intended, hence the out-of-controlness of the music's sound was in a direct relationship with the unstable means of its production. In 2005, things are quite different. Amplifiers are intended to feedback, we have digital equipment to accurately control degrees of distortion. In short the creation of sonic abandon has become a specialized field for manufacturers, technicians and advertisers alike. No longer do we have spectral intensities and activation of extreme limits; in their place we find only their faint simulacra. Commodification of rock music is in a one to one ratio with the physical suppression of sound. The libidinal intensities (if one concedes to the model) once contained in the sound itself have been surgically extracted, redistributed and resold in the form of the pornographic image that now accompanies the sound as a form of packaging. But is this not a familiar occurrence for us? Take for example the mass distribution of food that takes place in American super markets; the nutrients are extracted from the food itself, replaced with preservatives so it can be easily stored, shipped, and consumed on the large scale. Finally these extracted nutrients sold to us again in the form of so many dietary supplements. Forgive me for being so jaded...

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