Dissident dissonance:
Forging a visual arts practice informed by twentieth-century avant-garde music and associated DIY movements and subcultures.

Exegesis

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Abstract

This studio-based research project expands upon a practice led, studio framework for working across two disciplines: avant-garde music and visual art. Specifically, it focuses on the extent to which marginal and experimental musical practices and approaches can inform those of visual art. Aspects of avant-garde music have co-existed with avant-garde and post-avant-garde visual art in various contexts and manifestations over the last century, and this conjunction remains a fertile area within the expanding field of contemporary cultural practices. Musician-composers and visual artists have long attempted to represent the terrain of the other medium in productive forms of synaesthesia, for example, and in their shared exploration of the generative use of chance, the embrace of the everyday and 'low-brow', and the inclusion of found material. But of particular interest here is the investigation of how processes and concepts that are explored in experimental music, though generally absent in its conventional forms, can contribute to visual art practice.

The articulation of dissonance as the basis of my studio practice is a key feature of this. Dissonance here is explored as an aesthetic adjunct and as a liberating agent for the creation of work that resists classification and the academic frameworks that have delegitimised marginal musical practices while, at the same time, appropriating dissonance as an accepted characteristic of sound art and noise. The body of work produced as part of this research contributes to wider artistic engagement with dissonance in its sonic and visual forms. This work is a form of protest against rational conventions of dissonance, explores notions of the post-aesthetic and the oscillation between resolution and irresolution.

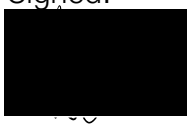
This differs from existing studies that seek complementary associations between experimental music and visual art. Rather, the inspiration for this research is the potential of dissonance to allow a poetic interplay in the spaces opened up by disharmony. Occupying these spaces is work created in a range of traditional media including painting, printmaking, video, and sculptural elements in combination with

artefacts of recorded sound presented in the material form of vinyl records, cassette tapes and speakers.

Declaration

I declare that: this exegesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.

Signed:



Marcin Kobylecki

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Introduction

Research Statement

This thesis investigates the creative potential of dissonance in bridging studio-based visual art practice and avant-garde music. It focuses on dissonance's dissident and poetic qualities rather than viewing it solely as a chaotic or abrasive sound phenomenon. The research argues that dissonance has been largely institutionalized, treated as a conceptual or technological pursuit in gallery and academic contexts, which has detached it from its emotional and expressive origins. This thesis intends to liberate dissonance from these boundaries, recontextualizing it within DIY practices and grassroots subcultures where it resonates as a form of cultural and aesthetic protest. By placing emphasis on both visual and aural forms of dissonance, the thesis challenges traditional academic and artistic hierarchies, aiming to construct an alternative artistic discourse around dissonance that is accessible, and culturally resonant within wider social contexts.

This research thesis enters the creative dialogue between studio-based visual art practice and avant-garde music. The thesis argues for musical dissonance to be liberated from belief in the hierarchy of standardised academic articulation, the push for technological and conceptual innovation and become a possible poetic, dissident entity outside of conventions observed in galleries and university practice. Of particular focus within the thesis are independent musicians, musical subcultures, DIY strategies and untrained musical expressions. The research is informed by the resonance evident in the relationships between current visual art and concurrent dissonant and marginal, experimental musical trajectories.[1]

[1] 'Experimental' here means adventurous, unconventional, or non-traditional.

Context

Dissonance can be defined as a combination of notes or tonalities which are unsettled, volatile and produce a sense of tension. The concept of harmony can be understood as a combination of notes which exudes a sense of consonance, accord, and is normally associated with a pleasing sensation. Within the scope of studio-based research, the focus on dissonance does not necessarily take the form of violent, audible cacophony or extreme abject noise both aural and visual however it does explore various degrees of distortion and saturation in music. The practice component of this research strives for the emancipation of dissonance from the established aesthetic of dissonance and noise.

Paul Hegarty states, noise cannot be invented as a synonym of dissonance even if dissonance manifests itself as noise[2]. My studio research attempts to rethink dissonance as (closer than previously thought) related to consonance and harmony, to utilise dissonant music to provide and suggest subject matter for visual art practice. This mode of practical enquiry stems from an interest in independent and avant-garde music such and it's connection to Visual Art and artists. Groups such as Swell Maps, Sonic Youth, and Throbbing Gristle are but a few examples of groups utilising dissonant and distorted sounds in confluence with traditional song structures. Of interest to this project is also the above musical act's affiliations with Visual Art, artists, and Art Schools. As a trained painter, and a long-time, untrained musician, I identify deeply with all that lies at the intersections between dissonant aspects of music and Visual Art. The focus of my research is on creating links and highlighting these overlaps through practical experimentation in the studio.

[2] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p.12

Knowledge Gap or Problem

Current literature on dissonance and noise often focuses on its conceptualization within academic or high-art environments, reducing it to a conceptual or technological phenomenon. This approach overlooks the subjective, poetic, embodied, and countercultural aspects of dissonance that make it valuable in grassroots contexts. The institutionalization of noise and dissonance in art risks neutralizing their disruptive potential, creating a gap in knowledge around how these elements function outside of academic frameworks. Moreover, there is limited research on how dissonance can be expressed visually in ways that resonate with its musical qualities and dissident roots.

How the Gap Will Be Addressed

This thesis addresses this gap by re-engaging with dissonance as a poetic, dissident force that thrives in DIY, unrefined forms. It asserts that dissonance, as a post-aesthetic, dissident force, can serve as a tool for re-engaging with artistic practices in ways that challenge both institutional and commercial imperatives. Through a practice-led methodology, the thesis critiques the mainstreaming of noise and dissonance and reclaims them as tools for cultural resistance. The research employs materials and practices associated with DIY subcultures, drawing on low-tech media and analogue formats to foster an aesthetic that is intentionally removed from institutional conventions. This approach emphasizes the poetic and socially resonant dimensions of dissonance and presents a framework for understanding dissonance as an intuitive, open-ended experience rather than a concept to be defined or limited by academia.

Literature Review/Background

The research is informed by theoretical works on sound, noise, and dissonance, including writings by Paul Hegarty, Greg Hainge, and Douglas Kahn. Hegarty's examination of noise as a counterpoint to societal norms is foundational, suggesting that dissonance can serve as an expressive, political force. Greg Hainge's discussions

around the aesthetic implications of noise in art and sound are equally significant, examining how noise can resist categorization within the confines of structured, institutionalized art forms. This thesis also builds on Jacques Attali's ideas on noise as a form of social protest, a sound that challenges normative structures and destabilizes power dynamics. Together, these theoretical frameworks position dissonance not simply as an abstract concept but as a critical aesthetic and cultural intervention that subverts expectations.

In addition to sound studies, this research draws on visual art theories and critiques of the neo-avant-garde. It critiques modern and postmodern trends in visual art that have sought to incorporate noise and dissonance yet often neutralize their subversive potential by situating them within elite or institutional contexts. By incorporating punk, no wave, and other alternative subcultures, the thesis aims to engage with a diverse array of dissonant practices that remain culturally resonant and meaningful outside of institutional frameworks. This research thus positions itself as part of a broader tradition that connects visual art and music through a shared interest in disrupting mainstream cultural narratives.

The Method

Through studio based, experimental approach, this research aims for a deeper understanding of dissonance and argues that it can be liberated from conventions which have become theorised and normalised by institutional and academic engagement. Therefore, the main body of the thesis functions is an aesthetic protest forms of rationalised dissonance found in institutional settings such as large museums and art academies. The relationship between references to sound and visual aspects of the work is often left ambiguous. It is however, rooted deeply in a post-aesthetic engagement with recognisable audio recording media such as cassette, vinyl, and CD-R, as well as in painting and installation. In my thesis, the above media formats will be presented in connection with and utilize DIY aesthetics. These play a vital role within the

studio, in manipulating formal elements of art and to emphasise a temporary nature and fragility of objects in connection with sonic elements.

Description of Material Practice

This research is heavily grounded in studio-based practices that explore the intersections of sound and image. As both a trained painter and an untrained musician, the researcher incorporates a range of analogue media, including vinyl records, cassette tapes, CD-Rs, and painting. The DIY ethos is a guiding principle, emphasizing experimentation over refinement and creating artefacts that do not fit neatly within conceptual innovation, academic rationales and to a certain extent refined aesthetics of gallery spaces. Works produced in the studio utilize various forms of visual dissonance - through materials like cardboard, ink, glitch video and etching plates - and employ found or appropriated objects to evoke an anti-institutional, countercultural identity. This practice which oscillates between trained and untrained skill, non-traditional and established methods, blurs distinctions between visual and sound-based media, engaging viewers, and listeners alike through a non-linear, raw aesthetic that speaks to the ephemeral nature of cultural subcultures and grassroots art forms.

The studio practice explores the ways dissonance can be made apparent visually, drawing on subcultural aesthetics that are often disregarded in traditional art forms. By contrasting visual harmony with dissonance, this research builds on dissonance as both a compositional choice and a political statement. It critiques the professionalization of noise and dissonance in academic and gallery contexts, aiming to recapture the authentic, anti-establishment qualities of dissonance through accessible, often lo-fi media.

My work attempts to break away from an aesthetic regime of dissonant conventions and bring about a meditative and poetic connection between dissonance and shared experience of auditory formats. Associate visual elements and gestures such as cover art, gig posters, illustrations, and paintings are to reflect various subcultures and identities, and are not designed to form a cogent argument or a rational/linear set of conceptual outcomes. To remain consistent with the spirit of DIY and creative

independence, it is vital to my research, that artefacts do not rely solely on established gallery context and can function outside of established conventions of dissonance within Visual Art. Various grass roots and independent music movements and subcultures such as e.g. Punk, No Wave, and various 1980's and 1990's movements (and to a certain extent Fluxus), provide beneficial research models. These offer practical clues for the utilisation of materials and integrating elements of DIY production aesthetic. In the studio my research which includes painting, printmaking, and music/sound production, navigates the confluence of sonic and visual aspects which lie outside of margins of established art convention. Importantly, the theoretical enquiry into the field of sound art and noise is a contextual accompaniment to the visual art activities undertaken in the studio. The dissident aspect of this lies, within a sense of poetic subversion of the above aspects of visual enquiry and is rooted in belief in the act of making, and or process of improvisation, rather than response to a conceptual brief or display of technological invention, which within the research is understood as conventional, regarding dissonance within Visual Art.

This *poetic* position on dissonance allows me the capacity to draw new connections and deeper engagement between above mentioned elements of various genres and to draw on ambiguities and emotional understanding. This contrasts with a rationalized and concept driven engagement with dissonance, which I argue has become a convention. My studio practice utilizes strategies of repetition, ambiguity, and appropriation amongst others to progress towards a deeper understanding from one which is allowed by rationalized forms of dissonance. This is achieved by bringing together musical, artistic, and social references within a studio-based practice. This I hope will achieve a broadening of the scope of meaning and connecting avant-garde music and visual art to a wider sense of social consciousness, beyond specific art world contexts.

Within this thesis, dissidence can be understood as active, deliberate challenges to conventions, policies, and doctrines, authoritative, institutional, social, or cultural. My studio based research will attempt to forge poetic connections between music, sound, and visual art. This will require the connections between sonic dissonance and visual elements to be re-imagined exclusively through making in the studio. This re-imagining

is necessary for my work to explore the gaps within current knowledge and place various modes of dissident and dissonant practice into areas of post-aesthetic conjunction. This is achieved by examining aesthetics and influence of non-art dissident phenomena such as marginal and locally driven underground rock music, Norwegian Death Metal, minimal Techno music and other forms of DIY music production and aesthetics stemming from the Punk and Post-Punk movements. Forging new connections between visual art and dissonance will require downplaying any past emphasis on conceptual framing of sound. Within the scope of this research this conceptual framing of sound is understood as convention and rationalisation of creative outcomes which has resulted in an academic anesthetisation of noise and dissonance within the audio-visual. My thesis claims that this subjugation of dissonance into the institution, inevitably leads to a centralisation of creative practice into established cultural forms. By utilising readily available means and materials such as lathe cut vinyl discs, home hi-fi equipment, modular synthesizers, guitar pedals, etching plates, watercolour, cardboard, and DIY aesthetic, the studio research aims to contest the subjugation of dissident by institutions and veneration of tangible and rational practices. This research attempts to differentiate itself from the former through a creating a body of work which explores poetics of dissonance and romantic notions of avant-garde the outcomes of which are predicated as much on mutual dissonance as on harmony. This is especially so because the artefacts oscillate between works that include sound and works that allude to sound. While my theoretical research, underpins my practice and thought processes, not all aspects of this research may be clearly evident within the works for all viewers.

The Outcome

Outcomes

The thesis presents dissonance as a powerful means of critique, advocating for a subjective, emotive, and culturally grounded approach to both sound and visual art. By producing artefacts that are non-linear, tactile, and open to interpretation, the research

positions dissonance as a mutable phenomenon capable of evoking personal and collective identities within art. This thesis rejects the tendency to categorize or rationalize dissonance, seeking instead to explore its poetic and ambiguous possibilities through experimental studio practice.

The outcomes of this thesis demonstrate that dissonance is not solely disruptive but can be an agent of cultural connection, engaging audiences on a personal level. By blending dissonant visual and sonic elements, the studio practice generates new insights into the cultural and emotional potential of dissonance, positioning it as a form of aesthetic and political resistance within visual art.

Thesis

The studio research attempts to forge new links, or re-imagine existing links, between the visual and auditory by examining avant-garde approaches to dissonance without explicit illustration of concept. Rather, the resulting artefacts explore dissonance as a post-aesthetic condition and have engaged with the field in a subjective and poetic manner through experimentation with various visual and musical structures including experimental electronics, dissonant guitar composition, record and cassette cover design, painting, etching and installation. The research also explores several format conventions and media restrictions, such as durational limitations of vinyl records, square formats of the record sleeve, the sonic limitations of cassette recordings in connection with monochromatic aspects of watercolour and oil painting on various non-traditional and traditional substrates. Artefacts in the body of work include both resolved and unresolved pieces to create a sense of visual dissonance. Harmony and rhythm structures within music/sound are utilised to create a sense, of tension between harmony and dissonance, distortion, and resolution. The wider, historical examination of the field of sound art proved to be counter-productive in a practical sense when attempting to create a worthwhile engagement with dissonance as a strategy to inform visual art. The practical component of my research has in fact illuminated the importance of structures such as rhythm and harmony as vital to representation of dissonance beyond its accepted avant-garde conventions.

In western music, dissonance signifies a combination of notes or intervals which are deemed unstable, which produce a sense of discord, tension and clashing. Miles Hoffman notes that the specific function of dissonance in tonal music is to provide tension, and that tension, in whatever degree it is established, is always resolved by a return to consonance.[3] In questioning the conventions of dissonance, an examination of dialectics of noise and dissonance may be useful. Theodor Adorno states that "…dissonance congeals into an indifferent material, indeed a new kind of immediacy, without memory trace of what it developed out of and therefore gutted and anonymous …".[4]. This *indifference* may be conducive to experimentation and breaking with learned musical tradition, however it may also mean that dissonance can become an effect - an element of continual innovative rationalisation within art, thus quickly becoming a conceptual, refined, aesthetic convention. According to W. Luke Windsor, the question of materiality in dissonant and atonal music; technology (electro acoustic, electronic music composition) stands at the centre of the tension between autonomy and social consciousness within art. The object of Adorno's critique may be 1950's serial music composers such as Pierre Boulez, and Karl Heinz Stockhausen. Their work may declare itself via the means of serial compositional strategy – the concept - its rationalised correctness rather than the balance between material and technique.[5]
My research provides a differing stance from concept driven practices in the field by its attempt to de-emphasise rationalisation through technological innovation of sound and dissonance in visual art. I aim to shift creative emphasis by presenting dissonant sounds within contexts of approachable and sometimes seductive sonic entities via familiar and available means.

Theodor Adorno criticized serial music of the 1950's as a close amalgam of material and technique that results in apathy and aesthetic regression.[6] In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) he stated that: "…artistic spirit raises itself above what merely exists at the point where imagination does not capitulate to the mere existence of materials and

[3] M Hoffman 2005, 'Music's Missing Magic', *Wilson Quarterly,* vol. 29, no. 2, p. 14.
[4] T W Adorno 1970, 'Aesthetic Theory', Continuum, London, p. 15
[5] W Luke Windsor 2005, 'Autonomy and Mimesis' in Contemporary Music Review, *The Poetry of Reality, composing with recorded sound*, ed. K Norman, Taylor & Francis, UK, p.143
[6] Ibid. p. 143

technique…"[7] I strongly support this view, and in my work explore areas of resolution and irresolution and I endeavour to present the viewer with a felt, emotional and at times nostalgic experience which does magnify technical characteristics. This is attempted via the familiar and tactile elements such as vinyl, painting, works on paper, cardboard, and outdated technologies. My hope for the viewer is to forge an emotional connection with the work, that is intimate and in contrast to an experience of dissonance within the gallery, driven by technological innovation and theoretically tangible outcomes.

Engaging with practical methodologies from the fields of both visual art and music has illuminated the areas of overlap as well as the challenges of combining disciplines. This research was initially informed by a historical enquiry into avant-garde musical practices, some of which have been re-examined and re-modelled in the studio. Through a combination of historical and contemporary methods this studio-based research focused on creating poetic, and post aesthetic engagements with dissonance. The examination of various aesthetic manifestation of noise is brought about an intuitive methodology, reconciled by creating sensations which are unresolved in the realm of installation, video, painting and music production. For me these interconnections between avant-garde music and visual art are multifaceted, with rich possibilities for cross-media experimentation and interdisciplinary research.[8] At the heart of the project is an engagement with the romantic core of avant-garde, popular culture, counterculture within 20th century visual art, sound, and music. The rationale for focusing on transatlantic narratives is to narrow down the scope of research and create an emphasis on traditional avant-garde practices. The thesis rejects notions of technical proficiency and innovation within the axis of auditory and the visual. Nor does the studio practice aim to explicitly create outcomes based on technical advance. That is not to say that technology does not play a role within the project – on the contrary it is an

[7] T W Adorno 1970, '*Aesthetic Theory'*, Continuum, London, p. 38

[8] The distinction between neo-avant-garde and postmodern avant-garde can be found in Hal Foster's 'What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?' Foster claims that post-war culture in Europe and North America is swamped by 'neo's' and 'posts'. According to Foster, the myriad of repetitions and eclecticism are difficult to distinguish; however, repetition itself is a problem of the neo-avant-garde. Foster identifies the neo-avant-garde as a loose grouping of artists in the 1950s and 60s who reprised and revised the avant-garde processes of the 1910s and 20s such as collage, assemblage, the grid and the readymade and constructed sculpture. H Foster 1994, 'What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?' October, vol. 70, pp. 5–32.

essential component of studio experimentation and practical methodologies. The emphasis is, however, on technology's use in the service of an interrogation of dissonance and dissident practices within a nostalgic oeuvre of popular culture and its subgenres. My work attempts to displace an aesthetics of technical mastery and rational concept to explore aspects of dissonance that align more closely with romantic notions of avant-garde movements. Artistic methodologies of creating dissonant works which venerate innovation and feed into the established aesthetics of noise and are endorsed by academies and museums. These established, technology-based aspects of electronics and noise within avant-garde practice have in my view replaced imagination and a poetics of dissonance. My body of work attempts to re-instate this poetic engagement with dissonance.

The exegesis provides a context and examines several dissonant conventions associated with the above multidisciplinary engagement and acts as an accompanying document to studio practice. Further to this the exegesis cites Peter Burger's *Theory of the Avant Garde* (1974) which explores the critique of established systems and their associated ideologies as one of the defining criteria of the avant-garde. Renato Poggioli in *The Theory of the Avant Garde* (1981) echoes Burger's claims that a critique of avant-garde is not essentially liable to be a definitive and decisive condemnation of ideologies. Poggioli describes the avant-garde as a phenomenon contingent on states of mind and psychological landscapes, instinctual forces, and primal currents. Poggioli identifies avant-garde as a set of "…psychic seeds or roots…" which are difficult to supress. Works such as *Broken Speaker Symphony, Demagogue, Compound and Dissonant Salute* echo Poggioli's notions of the avant-garde and attempt to steer away from what I view as institutional pressure to subjugate sound practices involving noise and dissent into technologically rational outcomes. Poggioli flags ideologies which endeavour to rationalize forms, undercurrents, or metaphors into logical formulae. The author identifies the above phenomena as under attack of theoretical structures, which aim to solidify romantic and poetic impulses into theoretical strategies.[9]

[9] R Poggioli 1968, The theory of the avant-garde. Translated from the Italian by Gerald Fitzgerald., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. p. 25

It may be useful to articulate here what distinguishes sound art from experimental music. Nick Collins, Margaret Shedel and Scott Wilson identify sound art as linked to twentieth century experimental music. Collins et al. state that since the middle of the twentieth century, fine artists, more traditionally associated with painting or sculpture, have taken on work in the medium of sound as a possibility for their work; musicians, too, have found themselves working on installations for gallery settings as they have sought to escape the concert hall.

> … since the middle of the twentieth century, fine artists, more traditionally associated with painting or sculpture, have taken on work in the medium of sound as a possibility for their work; musicians, too, have found themselves working on installations for gallery settings as they have sought to escape the concert hall…" [10]

Collins et al. define sound art as an example of a broad crossover which is increasingly dependent on the pace of technological advancement. My studio practice endeavours to situate itself outside this current of technological change.

Of particular interest to this research, historical examples of the connections between vanguard musicians and contemporary artists, can be found in the activities of musicians both collectively and as individuals. Groups who have gained popular notoriety include obvious examples such as the Velvet Underground, Throbbing Gristle and Sonic Youth, to name a few, however of further interest are groups which existed further on the margins of traditional rock milieu such as Harry Pussy and Wolf Eyes. Relevant to my research concerns are practitioners who approach music with strategies synonymous with visual artists – abstraction, composition, tone, texture – yet straying away from traditional musical training and ideas. The facilitation of an interdisciplinary dialogue by the above artists (as well as others) is of interest to my research as they are reliant on the notion of DIY aesthetic, unresolved outcomes, and a leaning away from gallery towards the urban and suburban settings. Thus, it may be stated that this research differentiates itself from many contemporary attempts at hybrid practice in its focus on the possibilities of dissonance within the musical/artistic post-aesthetic

[10] Collins, N., Schedel, M., & Wilson, S. 2013. Sound art. In Electronic Music (Cambridge Introductions to Music, pp. 151-163). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

conjunction. The research focuses on dissonance as a means of deconstructing the binaries implicit in the harmonic–dissonant conventions. At times however the outcomes – as it the case of 12" vinyl works which present rhythm structures – need to utilise harmonic structures and pictorial principles to evade conventions of dissonance and abstraction synonymous with current sound/image practices coming from institutions. Studio investigations utilise technology but downplay its role as subject matter and the research attempts to create a dialogue by utilizing aural and visual dissonance as opposed to a consciously multidisciplinary, multilayered, and mechanically synesthetic engagement.

Combining image creation and music production in studio environments blends and blurs the roles visual artists perform within genre distinctions. And while the exegesis contains references to sound art, a specific focus on sound as a material that is not contextualized within a musical practice will not contribute to this research. Sound art in the pure sense of the term has a self-referential art-world specificity, so consequently, it will only feature in components of the research as a hybrid crossover within new music. My intention is to produce a varied body of artworks which articulate an aural/visual, post-aesthetic conjunction of dissonance. Within the research I acknowledge the blurred and problematic and often unsustainable affiliation between new music, technology, and sound art.

Concluding Remark

This thesis invites a re-evaluation of dissonance beyond the confines of academic or gallery settings, positioning it as a vehicle for cultural and aesthetic engagement that is simultaneously dissident and poetic. It proposes that dissonance can evoke rich, personal experiences and act as a form of social critique, affirming its relevance as a force that challenges conventions and opens new possibilities for artistic expression.

Synopsis of Chapters

The exegesis will outline a *state-of-the-art review* followed by a detailed methodology

divided into the 3 separate sections.

- Section 1: Examines historical and theoretical perspectives on noise and dissonance, analysing how these elements have been traditionally framed within avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements. This chapter references theorists such as Jacques Attali, Greg Hainge, and Douglas Kahn, situating dissonance within a broader aesthetic and political context.
- Section 2: Investigates the use of unconventional materials and subcultural aesthetics in creating dissonant works. It draws on avant-garde music, DIY movements, and alternative scenes, exploring the connections between musical dissonance and visual representation. This chapter also discusses the role of appropriation, repetition, and distortion as tools for creating visual dissonance.
- Section 3: Discusses the critical framework surrounding dissonant practice, with a focus on the researcher's studio methodology. It presents the artefacts produced and their connections to countercultural and subversive themes, emphasizing the poetic and non-linear aspects of dissonant practice.

In Section 1:1 the exegesis establishes various distinctions and modes of the avant-garde. Traditional avant-garde practices from Dada to Surrealism to neo avant-garde as well as postmodernism are outlined. Hal Foster's observations on the problems of the neo-avant-garde within the postmodern prove to be mostly problems of repetition and recycling.

In Section 1:2 the exegesis discusses the avant-garde in connection with music and sound. This historical outline establishes music's and sound's role within the avant-garde but also avant-gardist practices. Greg Hainge proposes Russolo's Art of Noises as a starting point for discussion of avant-garde sound/art and I use this as a beginning of for my discussion. This section also provides background for modernity's technological authority and influences on the strategies of avant-garde artists.

In Section 1:3 dissonance is considered as a vital ingredient in avant-garde sound practices. The following are views on dissonance resonate with aspects of my research

and will be explored further. Jacques Attali argued for a connection between noise and dissident political/cultural practices. Greg Hainge and Douglas Kahn focus on the binary of noise and silence by discussing two pivotal works by Luigi Russolo and John Cage. Avant-garde is also discussed as a confluence of visual art, sound and technology. Eric Tamm points out that, in one way or another, the image of technology is a central icon in contemporary culture, and that image has profoundly affected the way in which music is perceived, used and considered.

In Section 2 the exegesis identifies non-conventional use of instrumentation to produce dissonant audio and visual effects. It examines relevant research models from avant-garde music, DIY circles, and subcultures and alternative music scenes. The section identifies overlaps between artists and musicians working across what can broadly be identified as rock music and visual art.

Section 2:1 elaborates on dissonance and its bearing on visual aspects of auditory hybrids. Creative use of dissonance and noise is examined as a means of dissent against conventions. The connections between dissonant musical expression and its corresponding visual elements are argued to be connected to avant-garde traditions. Jacques Attali states:

> the very absence of meaning in pure noise or in the meaningless repetition of a message … frees the listener's imagination. … The presence of noise makes sense, makes meaning. It makes possible the creation of a new order on another level of organization, of a new code in another network.[11]

This thesis explores noise from the unintended uses of equipment and sound devices. Bataille's notion of excess provides a conceptual backdrop to the practice of guitar feedback as excess noise of technology and amplification. This exegesis examines the oeuvre of Christian Marclay, in particular noise both sonic and visual made by musical means and non-musical methodologies which result in works of visual art. Of particular interest is Marclay's use of vinyl records and DJing.

[11] J Attali 1985, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 28.

Section 2:2 examines the visual aspects of artists'/musicians' studio and performance practice. The aesthetic aspects of studio environments are explored as well as the connection between dissonant music, technology and the gestures of artists involved in creating dissonant auditory or visual works.

In section 3 the exegesis reviews the wider critical context of artefacts and practitioners to support the choice of dissonance as the primary avant-garde musical methodology informing my studio practice within this research. The function of technology within the arts has never been established explicitly or easily.[12]

[12] D Kahn 1999, *Noise, Water, Meat*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 15.

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New, deeper understanding resulting from studio-based research concludes that dissonance is flexible. It expands and contracts beyond its media confides and musical structures. One such example of this flexible entity, and abject, dissonant sonic by-product is guitar feedback and distortion. Creating feedback is synonymous with both conventional and experimental rock traditions, noise artists, drone, no wave bands and beyond into the1990's grunge era. Feedback is fabricated by magnetic guitar pick-ups and amplified speakers, which are symbiotically connected and often augmented by distortion devices. Of interest to the research is the challenge of controlling feedback. The dissonant nature of distortion and feedback can be seen as disruption and to a certain extent a protest against the commodification of music arguably and approximately until the mainstream ubiquity of Nirvana's *Nevermind* (1991). Of particular interest to my project is the dissonant effect of distortion and feedback in the music of, The Velvet Underground, Sonic Youth, Sunn O))) and Merzbow as well as Norwegian Black Metal groups such as Burzum. Distortion is defined as a change of form of electrical signal. Over-drive of audio signal, when its volume reaches audio levels above maximum capability or limit, resulting in sound "clipping" and an unwanted tone in signal. A square shape within a sine wave formation resulting in distortion. Can be used to create additional harmonic information and dissonant effects in sound. As an element of my studio practice, feedback and distortion provide an effective tool for research in creating a post-aesthetic engagement and impetus within a visual art practice.

Christian Marclay has explored this very notion of excess and surplus sounds transforming into noise. The artist has stated that the main concern of his work is how an image is expressive of sound and how sound can be expressed visually.[13] This provides a useful model for my studio investigations. In terms of excess, beyond well-known noise-inspired pieces such as Guitar Drag (1999), what is of particular interest here is Marclay's use of various media, music formats such as tape and vinyl. Marclay

[13] J Gonzalez 2005, 'Overture' in JA González, K Gordon & M Higgs, *Christian Marclay*, Phaidon, London; New York, p. 24.

often uses obsolete and modified instruments that highlight the fragility, malleability, and object-hood of musical media. Marclay's vinyl record pieces illuminate the disuse and disutility of records as objects and their descent into formlessness.[14] Marclay achieves this transformation of vinyl into a mutable medium by means of collage, fragmentation, and assemblage. The dissonant aspects of Marclay's experiments attempt to disrupt the temporal structure of traditional musical constructs such as beginning, middle and end, as well as the limitations of media and technology.[15] Given that Marclay's work provides some remarkable methodologies, didactic and useful research models, there exists a contradiction between the emancipatory and unifying nature of music and the rigidity and restriction of gallery-based conceptualism, which Marclay's oeuvre often displays. Marclay's interests in ritualistic aspects of live music extend to the private experience of listening. His strategy of re-animating vinyl's inanimate object-based agency and transforming it into an entity which facilitates an active experience of music, where the listener plays a role in the listening process, pre-dates DJing. Whilst in the context of this research Marclay's strategies are effective at first glance and do achieve his aims in a rewarding manner, they do so within a conceptual framework – which within my project I attempt to critique as I view the concept as an established norm.

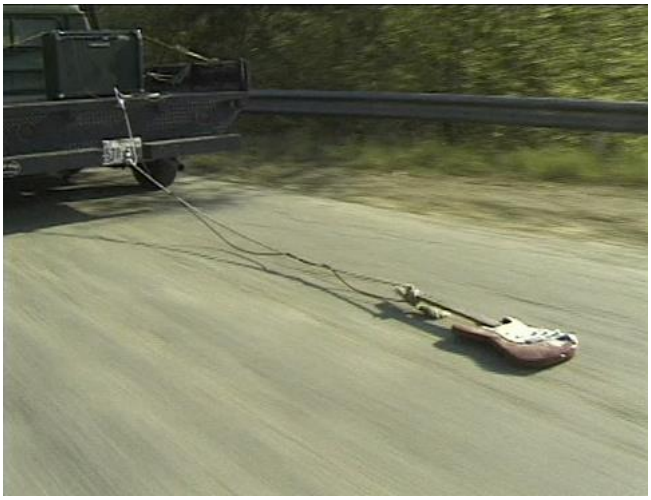


Figure 1: Christian Marclay, *Guitar Drag*, 1999, video still

[14] P Hegarty, 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 183.
[15] 'for Marclay, the record is not just being deviated from its original use; it comes from disuse (being discarded) and inutility (damage), and it will continue to descend into something formless. If such works are then put onto a CD, the process might be at a literal level, but the sounds will be a constant parody of the perfection attributed to CD's, a reminder of the hopelessness of attaining perfection.' Ibid, p. 182.

Christoph Cox points out that, 'in dissonance, atonality, and lack of resolution, musical modernism served as a force of resistance against the culture industry and the ideological enclosure of capitalism'.[16] Marclay's work exists firmly within gallery environments; however, it interrogates how we as consumers of sonic media become complicit in the erosion of its meaning.

Aside from noise, excess and undesired sounds, Marclay offers a useful research model in terms of ephemeral sonic events. According to Jennifer Gonzalez, these ephemera are grounded in material media objects (vinyl), which are transformed by the artist. Through various devices Marclay revives condensations and displacements common to the techniques of Surrealists (collage, assemblage) through the use of metaphor. Gonzalez points out that Marclay draws attention to the hum of the unconscious embedded in the harmonies and dissonances of everyday life.[17] Marclay's performances are in the lineage of artists/performers such as Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, Laurie Anderson and George Brecht. Punk was also important to Marclay, not in terms of its acceptance of noise and its art school origins, but because of its interest in raw energy and relationship with an audience.[18] One strategy of punk was to re-animate the excessive, the refused and the surplus as new, revitalized and re-energized artistic material, which broke with academic and expert traditions of modernism.

Marclay's use of vinyl records oeuvres provides valuable in providing possible models for research. Marclay's use of vinyl records and DJing both as models useful for my studio research however differ from the intention of my research. Caleb Kelly in *Cracked Media: sound of malfunction* (2009) described the influence of Fluxus, John Cage, Futurist noise and Marcel Duchamp on Marclay. His use of vinyl record as material takes in the crackle and noise inherent to the medium.[19] My approach to vinyl differs from Marclay's in that vinyl in my work is presented as an aesthetic object in its

[16] C Cox, 2010, 'Space, Time, and Sonic Utopia' in D Diedrichsen & C Ruhn (eds), *Utopia of Sound: Immediacy and Non-Simultaneity*, Akademie Der Bildene Kunste Wien, Vienna, p. 44.
[17] JA González, K Gordon & M Higgs, 2005, *Christian Marclay*, Phaidon, London; New York, p. 24.
[18] Ibid, p. 26.
[19] C Kelly, 2009, *Cracked Media: sound of malfunction*, MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 172

own right, without it necessarily commenting on its ontology. My interest in Marclay as a model for research omits what I view as his Duchampian and conceptual approach to sound and vinyl in particular. Kelly mentions Marclay's *Footsteps* (1989) as instrumental in drawing attention to aesthetic values of sound and noise in particular. Whilst I am aware that this aspect of Marclay's practice has caché, I find this approach to redefining vinyl to be formula driven and rationalised. My thesis aims to re-examine this rationalised and conceptual use of the medium and offer a much less cerebral experience. This achieved by engaging in subtle aesthetic shifts in line with nostalgia associated with the medium. Although Marclay himself states in Kelly's text, that his use of vinyl is against technological progress,[20] I find his vinyl work to be acutely self-conscious in its rationalised critique of the medium. This concept driven view of vinyl, within the context of my research is a limiting factor and an example of noise becoming a convention, a self-referential, art specific concept. On the other hand, the sound of vinyl noise in the work of German producer Jan Jelinek, provides a valuable research template. His second album *Loop-Finding-Jazz-Records* (2001) released on the Scape label combines the vinyl's limitations – noise with contrasting harmony and pulsing rhythmical structures.

Konrad Smoleński is an artist of interest to my research who, much like Christian Marclay and Marco Fusinato, works in installation and performance. Smoleński's works are characterized by a strong visual impact and a significant sonic component which is usually created through experimentation and audio-visual engagement. According to Karol Sienkiewicz, Smoleński focuses on the experience of sound and image, whilst exploring ways of engaging diverse media.[21] Of interest to my studio research is Smoleński's use of PA speakers, guitar amplifiers, microphones, and musical instruments. Also relevant to this research is Smoleński's use of performance and music associated aesthetic. This is often suggestive of underground and subcultural references, social change, and physical aspects of music. In fact, Smoleński titled his 2012 installation *The End of Radio* after an album by Shellac a Steve Albini fronted *math*

[20] C Kelly, 2009, *Cracked Media: sound of malfunction*, MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 177

[21] K Sienkiewicz, 2013, *Konrad Smolenski*, *Culture.pl*, viewed 18 July 2017, <http://culture.pl/en/artist/konrad-smolenski>.

rock noise rock band, famous for its abrasive, propulsive sound and use of industrial aluminium Travis Bean guitars. The use of the title is synonymous with the idea of reliance of music on listening. Whilst the microphones in Smoleński's *The End of Radio* emit sound rather than capture it, the work is a commentary on primary function of sound devices, rather than dissonant musical structures. Due to this, initially much of Smoleński's work seems to provide useful research models on the surface, as in it alludes to music subcultures. On a deeper reading and in the context of my research, the content of Smoleński's work drifts back towards established, institution-based subjugations of dissonant and dissident music. The artist seems rely on conceptual rationalisations of what is in essence an organic, physically, emotionally charged and intuitively performed music. To illustrate this further, *Oscillations* (2012) provides an incomplete model for my research as the work relies on the gallery context for its outcome - an oscilloscope which instead of sound waves, depicts movements of an audience member at a Fugazi concert. In the context of my research, Smoleński's work seems to trade on the primal energy of Shellac and Fugazi to represent it as concept. Of greater interest to my research, particularly the visual component is the work of painter Wilhelm Sasnal who has utilized a number of underground and independent music references in his painting the intuitive model of inclusion of Kim Gordon's (Sonic Youth) clothing as subject matter, Slayer's *South of Heaven* (1988).



Figure 2. Konrad Smoleński, *BNNT*, 2005–2011, audio-visual performance

The works of Melbourne-based artist Marco Fusinato provide a comprehensive model for this research. Especially relevant is Fusinato's incorporation of live performance in his oeuvre. Spectral Arrows was a performance first presented in Glasgow as part of Glasgow International in 2012 and in locally in Australia, at Buxton Contemporary in Melbourne in 2018. Spectral Arrows provides an excellent research model for this research as Fusinato utilizes electric guitar and sizeable amplification to present long-durational, dissonant, free improvisation during which he controls feedback, distortion, and drone at high volume. Fusinato performs the work live in the gallery, however its length, free structure, and the fact that the artist faces the wall rather than audience, critiques the notions of traditional music performance. Also, of interest to my research is "Spectral Arrows'" release as limited to 200 copies vinyl. Although the extremity of volume and the awe-inspiring guitar noise aspect of Fusinato's work plays a significant factor in confronting the viewer/listener, dissonance, feedback, and distortion in my research do not always function to overwhelm the audience. Whilst acknowledging the ardent and affecting saturation of Fusinato's sonic work, within the context of my research I remain critical of its code – dissonance as ferrous extremity. It is interesting to note that whether working with other musicians or performing solo works, Fusinato creates art historical links to and is inspired by Fluxus, artists such as John Cage, Cornelius Cardew and George Maciunas, conceptual art, and the history of European radical political groups of the late 1960s and 1970s such as the Red Army Faction, Kommune 1, Situationists International and Provo. Fusinato recontextualizes political radicalism with performance art in a duality with noise music.[22] Fusinato's work echoes strategies utilized by George Maciunas. It is also worth noting that, as a visual artist, Fusinato utilizes visual scores and event scores[23] as a way for the artist to further engage with potential overlaps in cultural production and radical modes of activity.[24]

[22] Samstag Museum 2012, *Samstag Alumni 2012: Marco Fusinato*, viewed 12 July 2017, <https://www.unisa.edu.au/Business-community/Samstag-Museum/Samstag-Scholarships/The-Samstag-alumni/2012/Marco-Fusinato/>.
[23] Visual scores and event scores are forms of musical notation which depart from conventional music notation. Cornelius Cardew, John Cage and David Tudor pioneered graphic and event scores which visually suggest an undetermined effect.
[24] Museum of Contemporary Art Australia n.d., *Marco Fusinato*, viewed 12 July 2017, <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/marco-fusinato/>.



Figure 3. Marco Fusinato, *Spectral Arrows*, 2012, performance, Glasgow International

New York rock band Sonic Youth provides one of the most comprehensive research models for this thesis in terms of theoretical focus, but also offers several valuable strategies for associated studio research. Of particular interest and relevance are various methodologies, with which Sonic Youth during their 30-year career, have incorporated ideas from the avant-garde, experimental music, noise, hard core, punk and underground rock music as well as visual art. Several useful ideas and processes emerge from examination of dissonance in connection with Sonic Youth's independent status and grass roots cultural engagement in 1980's New York - underground music and art scenes. Many of these philosophies and processes can be utilised practically in the studio. Although improvisation, duration, chance, and indeterminacy are not exclusive to Sonic Youth, the group has successfully combined these with popular music strategies. The connection between untrained musicianship and formal art school training of bassist Kim Gordon and guitarist Lee Ronaldo makes the group an excellent example of practice involving dissonance which, transgresses boundaries and confides of art institutions and dissonant conventions. This ability of Sonic Youth to contravene several distinctions, such as avant-garde music with its esoteric dissonant aesthetic but also popular commercial rock music is useful for my project. The groups exploration of dissonance in rock as well as their engagement with visual art, makes them a key source for this thesis.

Of interest to my project is Sonic Youth's engagement with dissonant musical practices but also the band's modus operandi of contrasting traditional, rock song formats with drone, atonality, and distortion. Thurston Moore and Lee Ronaldo's unconventional use of the guitar and reliance on atonality, dissonance, and distortion, serves as an effective model for my research. Sonic Youth's dissonant expressiveness, combined to a certain extent with popular music sensibilities and consonant harmonic information makes us aware of genre limits being explored. Visually, the guitar in Sonic Youth is a tool which becomes a means of physical interactions between band members but also a tool which is tested in terms of its physical and musical limits. The guitar in Sonic Youth is not venerated as traditional classical and vintage instrumentation and virtuosity of performance gives way to improvisation and experimentation. Thurston Moore and Lee Ronaldo utilise and invent their own drone focused open tunings and interrupt the significance of traditional guitar skills by introducing metal objects, vibrating drills, screwdrivers and drumsticks inserted between the frets and the strings of the guitar.

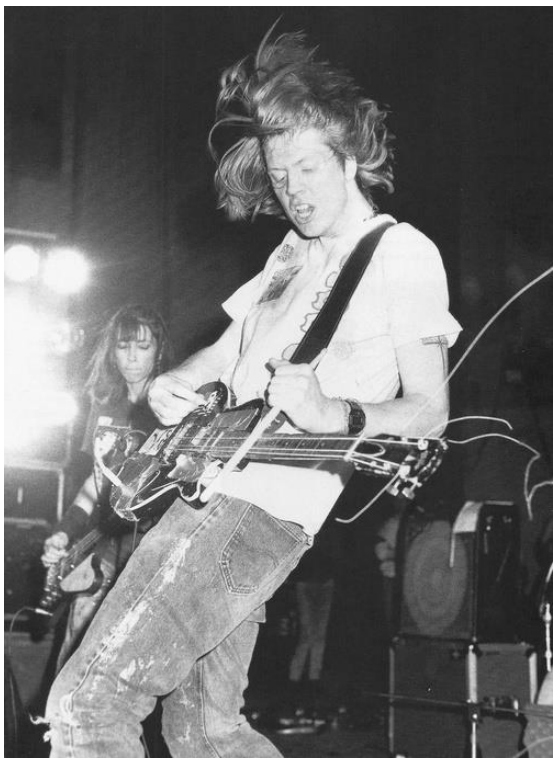


Figure 4. Sonic Youth, 1985, photographer unknown.

These "interventions" argue for emancipation from musical tradition and focus on

dissident properties and creative advantages of untrained musicianship. In line with avant-garde and post-aesthetic ideas, Sonic Youth favour chance, intuition, and improvisational techniques over skill and virtuosity. This supports ideas within my thesis and connects to afore mentioned musical manifesto of Jean Dubuffet who argued for legitimacy of untrained musicianship. Elizabeth Ann Lindau identifies the group as experienced improvisors who offered an alternative, post-aesthetic contrast to professional performances of new music[25]. They championed ideas of John Cage, Morton Feldman, and David Tudor. Lindau identifies Sonic Youth's album (under pseudonym of SYR4. *Goodbye 20th Century!* (1999) interprets John Cage's compositions chosen by percussionist William Wintant. In addition, it is the engagement of Sonic Youth with visual art which is of interest to the research. The band serves as a useful research model as its career encapsulates independent music scenes, grass roots subcultures, fanzines, and posters as well as connections to avant-garde music and visual artists such as Dan Graham and Christian Marclay with whom Sonic Youth collaborated in both galleries and non-gallery settings.



Figure 5. Sonic Youth, 2004, photographer unknown

[25] Elizabeth Ann Lindau, 2014 in *Goodbye 20th Century!: Sonic Youth Records John Cage's "Number Pieces"* pp. 15-38 (24 pages)

The dissident practices of the seminal industrial group Throbbing Gristle extended to taking readily available technology and using it for a completely different function than it was originally intended for. [26] Sound and musical proficiency as well as the characteristics of traditional instrumentation were not connected. If an instrument was a means of creating sound, then any object of audible potential could become an instrument. Throbbing Gristle employed non-traditional methods of feeding instrumentation through fuzz pedals and tape delays, using home-made synthesizers and samplers. "The Gristleiser" was constructed by Peter 'Sleazy' Christopherson out of six Walkmans attached to a keyboard, which triggered sound pre-recorded on to tapes, much like the modern sampler. Taking contemporary technology and bastardizing it, using it for purposes far from its intended function, also blurred the edges of performance art, music, and industrial noise. Throbbing Gristle dismissed the traditional paradigm of the band, embracing instead industrial and non-traditional methods of expression.



Figure 6. Throbbing Gristle, *Roland Promo Shot*, 1973, photographer unknown

Psychic TV and Throbbing Gristle are examples of artists/musicians who utilize dissonant investigations in sound and interrogate musical platforms. They provide significant research models for my studio investigations by quoting the audio-fabric of

[26] Pyromania Arts Foundation 2016, 'A BBC STUDIO TV-TALK – From Genesis P_Orridge's lost UK-archives', *YouTube*, 17 October, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-gaOtVjvN8>.

their society and aesthetically radicalise music as well as connect dissonance with traditional band formats. These dissident practices utilize, noise and industrial experimentation as material. Slovenian group Laibach and the German group Einsturzende Neubauten critique totalitarianism and utilise industrial noise and dissonant forms of music as agents of dissident expression. The Slovenian group Laibach also critiques the communist political structure's claim of ownership over culture. Totalitarian regimes offer a particularly depersonalized context that intensifies the dissonant atonality of 'post-humanist', electronically enhanced industrial clamour.



Figure 7. Einsturzende Neubauten, *Live in Göteborg*, Sweden, 1984

Simple Forces by Hinterding provides a useful yet incomplete model for my studio research. In my view *Simple Forces* connects with magnetic aspects of the electric guitar and has been useful in informing *Dead Air* however my approach differs in as much I am interested in dissonance as a result of investigation into music and its overlap with visual art as opposed to a scientific and conceptual approach which searches for aesthetic manifestations of new and unexplored circuits. Hinterding's work also differs from my research in that the artist strives for interaction and total immersion. This is what I view as one of the established conventions of dissonance in sound works

which my research attempts to critique. My studio research explores existing circuits – analogue oscillators, electric guitar pick-ups and hi-fi equipment. In my view Hinterding's sonic output has a pleasing ambient sound synonymous with a number of musicians who do not claim to explore concepts other than musical notions of harmony and dissonance.

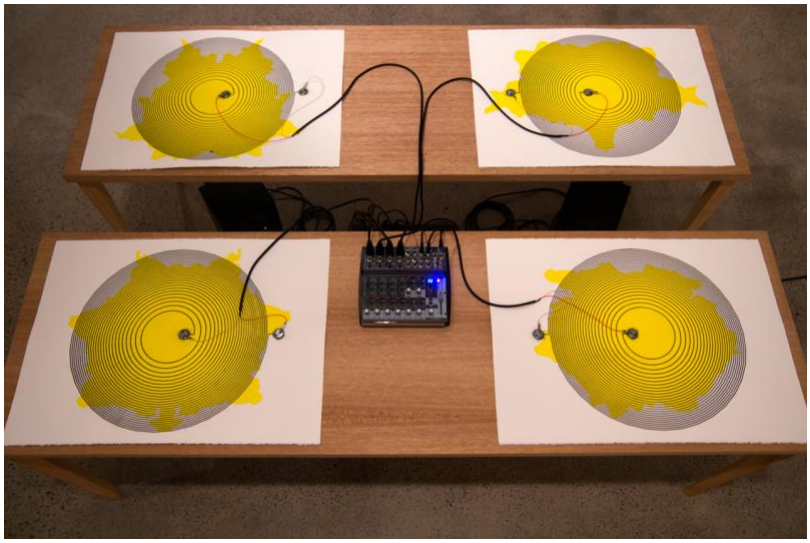


Figure 8. Joyce Hinterding, *Simple Forces*, 2013, graphite, paper, electronic circuitry, audio mixer

Methodology

Within the context of this creative research, the synthesis of dissonance, underground music, and visual art, forms a dynamic juncture that pushes the boundaries of conventional paradigms of sonic dissonance in Visual Art. This studio-based methodology delves into the field of sonic and visual exploration, informed by relevant key figures such as Sonic Youth, John Cage, Pierre Boulez, David Tudor, Karlheinz Stockhausen Throbbing Gristle and Martin Kippenberger. By examining their methodologies and contributions to gallery practice and underground music scenes, this research aims to identify relevant and useful models for studio-based investigations which deepen the understanding within the realms of dissonance.

Section 1: Avant-garde industry – historical and critical account of the development of avant-garde music, sound, and visual art conjunctions

Douglas Kahn states that sound saturated the arts of the twentieth century and its importance becomes evident if we hear past the presumptions of mute visuality within art history.[27] My research critiques the ever increasing need to include and music in its dissonant form as a convention within visual art practice.

1:1 Avant-garde distinctions

In a wider context, avant-garde (as a modernist term) is associated with radical thought and action, political activism, and self-criticism. My research attempts to focus on these aspects of avant-garde, which may lie outside of a Visual Art context, but which can inform studio work. According to Peter Burger, it may be arbitrary to nail down, define and be precise about avant-garde without providing a historical context.[28] In my project, the quintessence of avant-garde's meaning (as tied to autonomous aesthetic production as per modernist tradition) is tested and examined through several ambiguities and left turns. Burger's theory of avant-garde is relevant to my concerns as my project attempts

[27] D Kahn 1999, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 2.
[28] P Burger 2010, *Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of "Theory of the Avant-Garde*, New Literary History, vol. 41, no. 4, p. 669

to offer a critique of institution and "institutional" dissonance and connect with a wider cultural practice, in life outside of Visual Art contexts.[29] Laura Hindmarsh describes avant-garde as a modernist tradition with its own mythology. Its meaning validates the artist as a heroic individual with a direct access to primordial truths and the ability to bring down regimes and bourgeois tastes. Historically, political intentions of avant-garde movements were to destroy the institution of autonomous art to reconnect art and life.[30]

When Gunter Berghaus describes avant-garde as a term that is applied to political and aesthetic domains, he denotes it as a practice of assaulting traditional authorities and cultural institutions. According to Berghaus, traditionally the avant-garde in the arts propagated a radical break with preceding formulae of artistic production and promoted creativity as part of a wider cultural-political revolution.[31]

1:2 Avant-garde music within wider cultural dialogue

The previous section discussed avant-garde as political and social phenomenon which proposed to generate institutional critique and connect creative investigations with wider cultural practices. This section will discuss avant-garde tendencies in dissonant music.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes avant-garde as new and experimental ideas and methods in art, music, or literature; also, as a group of artists, musicians or writers working with new and experimental ideas and methods. In music the term is synonymous with modernist negation of the importance of tonality and/or harmony. In music the term signifies unexplored combinations of genres, styles, and techniques. To illustrate the avant-garde's interest in music as a component of multidisciplinary strategies, we can look to movements such as Dada, Futurism and Fluxus and examine various historical case studies which offer valid research strategies. Matthew

[29] Ibid.
[30] L Hindmarsh 2016, *After the Neo-Avant-Garde: Institutional Critique in the Works of Ai Weiwei*, http://www.web.uwa.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1321706/Laura_Hindmarsh_on_Ai_Wei_Wef
[31] G Berghaus 2005, *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 14.

Greenbaum names avant-garde visual art techniques such as automatism and collage as becoming a pervasive influence on twentieth-century music, especially on mid-century avant-garde composers such as Edgard Varèse, John Cage and Morton Feldman.[32] Douglas Kahn supports this view by stating that avant-garde was a means of emancipation for music, away from traditional pillars which venerated vintage instrumentation and historical traditions. He identifies musicalized sound as existing within a wider technical framework with connections it to other modes of cultural dialog.[33] Kahn's theory to an extent supports DIY strategies for studio practice within my research. Whilst instruments such as the electric guitar and modular synthesizer are now considered as relatively predictable (if not vintage in a classical sense) their uses can be reimagined and become unconventional. Within my studio practice the use of the guitar attempts to break from established classical traditions of trained musicianship and connect with alternative cultural dialogues by their dissonant virtue.

1:3 Avant-garde dissonance

The previous section identified avant-garde music and its links to modernist visual art strategies. This section will focus in more detail on the connection of avant-garde and dissonance in music.

The first influential exponent of dissonant music is Arnold Schönberg. Miles Hoffman stated that Arnold Schönberg declared himself to be the liberator of dissonance from being a steppingstone to achieving consonance within a tonal spectrum. Hoffman identifies Schonberg as purposely avoiding consonance within 12-tone works. Of interest to mt research are the composers' dissonant strategies and how they informed informed Wassily Kandinsky's abstract painting. According to Peter Vergo, Kandinsky was interested in Schönberg's theories on harmony and dissonance and their possible use within abstraction. Vergo emphasizes that Kandinsky evidently toyed with the notion that Schönberg's justifications for his increasing use of unresolved dissonances in his

[32] M Greenbaum, 'From Revolutionary to Normative: A Secret History of Dada and Surrealism in American Music', *NewMusicBox*, 10 July, viewed 12 January 2018, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org>.
[33] D Kahn 2003, 'The Sound of Music' in M Bull & L Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Berg, Oxford, p. 78.

music of this period, might offer a model for abstract painting.[34] Sandra Naumann supports the above by contending that Kandinsky envisioned a spiritual and abstract art based on tone and colour, dissonance and harmony.[35] More widely, Schönberg can be seen as influential in creating avant-garde musical movements which included avant-garde composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez in Europe, and John Cage in the United States.



Figure 9. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition 8*, 1923, oil on canvas

In this research project, dissonance is explored through various media and degrees of dissonance. The very connection between dissonant music and avant-garde within the research is fluid and reflexive. Atonality, noise, distortion and drone appear in varying intensities in connection with visual components and often may be suggestive of dissonance rather than be overtly and extremely dissonant in a conventional sense. At times what is dissonant is not clearly visible or audible; however, the confluent disciplines such as machine-processed sound and associated visual components create dissonant outcomes.

Continuing from the modernist movements mentioned in Section 1:3, the avant-garde's

[34] P Vergo 1985, 'Review of *Arnold Schoenberg – Wassily Kandinsky, Letters, Pictures and Documents* by Jelena Hahl-Koch, John C. Crawford, Arnold Schoenberg, Wassily Kandinsky', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 127, no. 982, p. 49.

[35] S Naumann 2011, 'The Expanded Image: On the Musicalization of the Visual Arts in the Twentieth Century' in D Daniels & S Naumann (eds), *See This Sound: Audiovisuology 2: Essays. Histories and Theories of Audiovisual Media and Art,* Academy of Visual Art, Leipzig, p. 72.

modus operandi was to reinstate raw sound into the musical field.[36] The inclusion of raw sound as equal to musical notation in composition can be observed in the music of Cage, Varèse and Stockhausen as well as Pierre Schaeffer and Musique Concrete. Of particular interest within this research is the connection between avant-garde musician such as Le Monte Young and the Velvet Underground as the later provides a significant model for dissonant connection between avant-garde music and early rock and roll music as well as its connection to Andy Warhol, visual art and DIY. Greg Hainge identifies Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* manifesto of 1913 as an obvious starting point for industrial noises and sounds to enter music. He also identifies that major avant-garde music protagonists such as Stravinsky, Cowell and Varèse were highly influenced by Russolo's call for sounds to be included in music.[37]

Through its connection to modernity's technological authority, the integration of sound into experimental art and later into the art gallery paradigm was inevitable. According to Kahn, transgressive properties of sound (when used as raw material) in artistic practice solidified the connection of noises with the avant-garde. He points out the role of technology as the active agent in the selection and manipulation of sounds to render them a suitable musical material.[38] Kahn highlights that the avant-garde's transgression of the 'line' between sound and music is central to its very existence. Sound offered the avant-garde raw material in order to reinvigorate music's physicality as much as the readymade offered the same for concept-driven avant-garde visual art.[39]

Dissonance is often a result of non-traditional use of instrumentation. Introduction of noise as music are synonymous with early-twentieth-century modernism and avant-garde. These modernist models provide examples of historical dialogue between visual art and music and reveal systems relevant to this research. In section 2, Alan Licht examines French painter Jean Dubuffet's methods of creating dissonant musical effects as a means of connecting visual art and sound.

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[36] D Kahn 2003, 'The Sound of Music' in M Bull & L Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Berg, Oxford, p. 77.
[37] G Hainge 2013, *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise*, Bloomsbury, New York, p. 37.
[38] D Kahn 1999, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 69.
[39] ibid, p. 69.

Section 2: Dissonance and dissidents

Section 1 set out a historical outline of the avant-garde and its influence on audio and visual hybridity. This section will examine contemporary audio-visual practices relevant to this research. The section will focus on dissonance as a significant component of the research in the context of contemporary art practice.

Many of the artefacts this exegesis accompanies have been created with strategies that Paul Hegarty describes as misuse, reissue or abuse of instruments, machinery, contexts, and practices.[40] Dissonant methods such as harmonic distortion and atonality can provide suitable models for research, not only to enhance a sense of tension, but also to provide methodologies for experimentation in fabricating dialogues between image and sound.

2:1 Dissonance and the visual

As discussed earlier, dissonance has a historical significance in avant-garde music and connections to modernist visual art. Relevant to my research, non-traditional use of instrumentation and the introduction of noise as music are synonymous with early twentieth-century avant-garde experimentation.

> With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men. – Jacques Attali[41]

Alan Licht describes Jean Dubuffet's methods of transferring the Art Brut aesthetic into musical composition by utilizing instruments in a way that obtains new sounds from them. Licht draws attention to the results as 'early examples of modulated cacophony'.[42] Licht also maintains that 'Dubuffet's experiments set a precedent for non-musician visual artists creating "noise" music'.[43]

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[40] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 181.
[41] ibid, p. 18.
[42] A Licht 2007*, Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories*, Rizzoli, New York, p. 143.
[43] Ibid, p. 143.

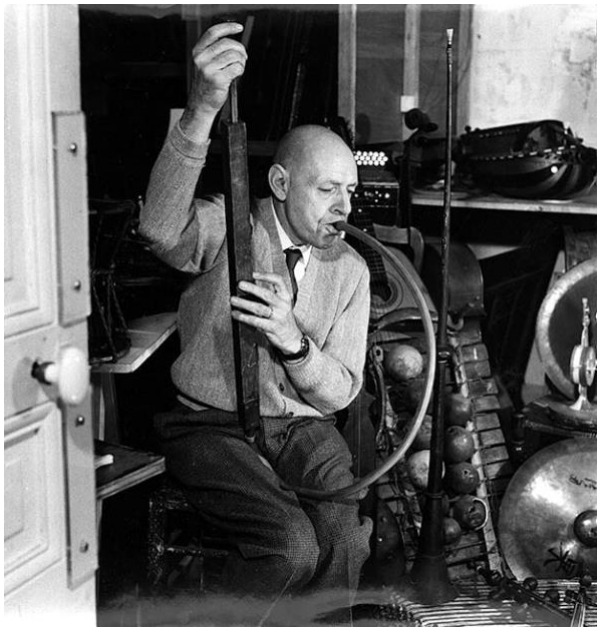


Figure 10. Jean Dubuffet, Paris 1961, photographer unknown

As discussed earlier, invention of amplification led to increase of dissonance and noise in within musical practices. They can be observed in distortion, guitar feedback and self-oscillating sound sources. According to Paul Hegarty, electricity threatened the purity and authenticity of human expression and lessened the need for technical proficiency by masking inadequacies.[44] As a musician without formal musical training, the unresolved use of binary opposites – harmony/dissonance – was one of the strategies in my studio practice as it examined a dichotomy between harmony/dissonance and allowed me to utilize my "raw" musical skills to create a sense of emancipation from both musical and to a lesser extent visual art traditions .

> What you hear is revealed as electrically driven movements of air; sound is materialized and becomes other to the expressing body. Music is now evidently prosthetic, mediated through machinery, and this shakes the belief in the centeredness, intention, and authenticity of musical creation.[45]

Paul Hegarty claims that feedback has a secondary dimension; that of unwanted waste, and that it exists in the zone of surplus and of the excessive. It is the by-product of

[44] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 59.
[45] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 59.

machinery being pushed beyond its limits.[46] Historically at times intentional damage is done to the guitar amplifier's internal speaker cone in order to produce feedback as can be observed in the music of the Scottish band The Jesus and the Mary Chain. Whilst these limits pertain especially to amplification, the electric guitar, amplifier and effect devices such as pedals are the elements within the project which are used to create feedback. From a practitioner's point of view feedback consists of actions or misuse which exceed the limits of machinery's design. Feedback can be viewed as synonymous with avant-garde rock music, outside of traditional skill and virtuosity. I view this practice as essentially experimental. Jacques Attali argues that noise is an attack on established forms of meaning, but one that brings something new: 'despite the death it contains, noise carries order within itself; it carries new information'[47]. George Bataille's notion of excess could be utilized as a possible framework to view the practice of feedback. In the *Accursed Share* (1949) Bataille states that "…a surplus must be dissipated through deficit operations. The final dissipation cannot carry out the movement that animates terrestrial energy…"[48] this may be viewed as surplus energy transformed into spectacle or sacrifice in a manner which threatens the very system it created. In my practical investigation this may signify a sacrifice of purity of sound. Distortion as well as dissonance within my research functions in a parallel mode to Bataille's notion of excess. This is a useful connection within a dialectic of noise as it sacrifices harmony in favour of critique and rebellion. Apropos Bataille's notion of excess, of interest to my studio practice are ways in which visual artists interrogate noise in a surplus economy of visual and audio signals.

One of the strategies utilized in research, this was the production of very limited editions of vinyl records as well as cassette tapes. The vinyl works, provide the viewer with an outright, clear relationship between sound and visual media. In the context of my research however, the vinyl works however provide a multilayered opportunity for a conversation between the visual and the auditory by subtly shifting and displacing the traditional meanings of the format. This was achieved through production of individual

[46] ibid, p. 59.
[47] J Attali 1985, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 33.
[48] G Bataille 1949, *Accursed Share:* An Essay on General Economy Vol. 1, Zone Books, New York, p. 22

pressings, one-off compositions, and individual one-off cover art. This intimate experience within a traditional format shifts the conventional relationship between audience and work as these vinyl artefacts are not mass produced.



Figure 11. Christian Marclay, *Recycled Records*, 1983, collaged vinyl records, 10" diameter

2:2 Machine noise

Section 2:2 will examine relevant uses and missuses of technology within practices that offer useful research models for studio investigations. Within my project, technology and dissonance are framed as artistic tools for a post-aesthetic engagement – my focus is on miss use or rather than means of innovation. This section will explore in more detail, the technological aspects of dissonance and distortion within this project.

Paul Hegarty writes extensively on technology and sound/music or noise and its dependence on machines. He explicates the central link between modernism, electronics, tape collages, and scientific and medical machines as the dominating factor in shaping artistic genres. According to Hegarty the machine is part of humanity's alienation; however, he acknowledges the paradox of dwelling within an alienated state.[49] Although this paradox is more relevant to the post-industrial musician, the inherent visual aspects of transgressions into performance art (Einsturzende Neubauten, Throbbing Gristle and Sonic Youth) are relevant to this thesis.

[49] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 114.

Paul Hegarty makes a useful and clear link between machines and noise. Hegarty claims that machine noise and dissonance are a means of production that further alienate and disassociate humanity from the process of life. He makes this link by examining Baudrillard's concept of the symbolic exchange in relation to Throbbing Gristle (the refuse or debris of industry). Throbbing Gristle's potent – via indirect parody sans satire – critique of capitalist technological excess is based on utilizing rejected technology, thus making music highly visual by using unorthodox instruments. This echoes Bataille's notion of excess as stated previously and need for ritual dissipation through spectacle. Marcel Duchamp is also at the forefront of this reconceptualization of ordinary objects in the same way as sound emancipated from its industrial source in Futurism, Dada and musique concrète has the possibility of becoming musical as readymade sounds.[50] What sets music (even made by technological means) apart from Duchamp and conceptual art, is its non-rational Dionysian aspects. In the context of this research this connects to the physical and emotional aspects of distortion and dissonance within various subcultures and DIY musical expressions. A case in point is the work of Michael Snow whose compositions are often vast collages of foreign radio broadcasts, static bursts, and abstract electronic sounds, all 'played' with the radio surfing the shortwave frequencies (2 to 30 MHz).[51] Nick Prior asserts that 'the history of music bulges with cases that point to the unpredictable, productive and unstoppable, referring to a slippage between prescriptions encoded into the machine and the unforeseen uses that these technologies end up affording through breakdown, error and misuse.'[52]

[50] Ibid, p. 112.
[51] Ubuweb.com 2018, 'Michael Snow', *UbuWeb: Sound*, viewed 29 May 2018, <http://www.ubuweb.com/sound/snow.html>.
[52] N Prior 2008, Putting a Glitch in the Field: Bourdieu, Actor Network Theory and Contemporary Music. Cultural Sociology, 2(3), p. 314.



Figure 12. Christian Marclay, *Ghost (I Don't Live Today)*, 1985, video, 5 mins

Hegarty explicates music's technological proliferation by bringing to the surface the complexities of hearing and listening to sound as electrically produced movements of air. Sound in this instance is materialized and becomes 'the other' to the biological lived body. Hegarty claims that sound is a prosthetic, emancipatory experience ripped away from the centralized intent and authenticity of musical expression.[53] My practical investigations in the studio attempt to produce this emancipatory experience by offering dissonance in confluence with visual aspects which offer elements of recognisable harmony – sonically and visually - painting on cardboard and individual record sleeves in conjunction with harmonic and rhythmical structures. These elements are paradoxically necessary in my project in order to offer a critique of concept driven subjugation of dissident practices of artists such as Konrad Smoleński and Haroon Mirza.

2:3 Visual scores and events

[53] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 114.

As discussed in Section 2:2 visual aspects of audio-driven practices take various forms, especially within gallery space. My research explores a gap in artefacts and practices that become defined as disciplines and established within academic and gallery settings. My research argues that gaining a deeper understanding of practices within subterranean cultures which utilise DIY production values, distortion and noise can inform a new sense of perception of dissonance as a convention and inform a worthwhile intuitive engagement with making. In my studio research, music and sound creation are combined with dissonant visual effects – achieved by painting, printmaking and use of various traditional methods and non-traditional materials related (in various degrees) to auditory experiments. This section reengages with methods avant-garde sound practices and seminal practitioners such as John Cage David Tudor and Pierre Boulez. Visual score is examined as useful method in possibility of bridging sound and the visual. As a trained figurative painter, my interest in deepening an understanding of visual scores has ramifications for practice.

Visual score can take various forms. In this research visual scores can become collections of hardware, audio components, tape machines, wires, leads or LED lights. Electronic music and electroacoustic artists' can have visual interest and at times in this research, can be likened to a score in terms of its colour-encoded function as well as tactility and gesture. This can be observed most obviously in a modular synthesizer, where multi-coloured patch leads link the modules and therefore create a visual musical score. David Tudor's *Circuit Scores*, and *Rainforest IV* 1973, which provide a useful model for this research with their visuality, and graphic translations of electronic sound inspired by the diagrammatic aesthetic of instruments and devices.

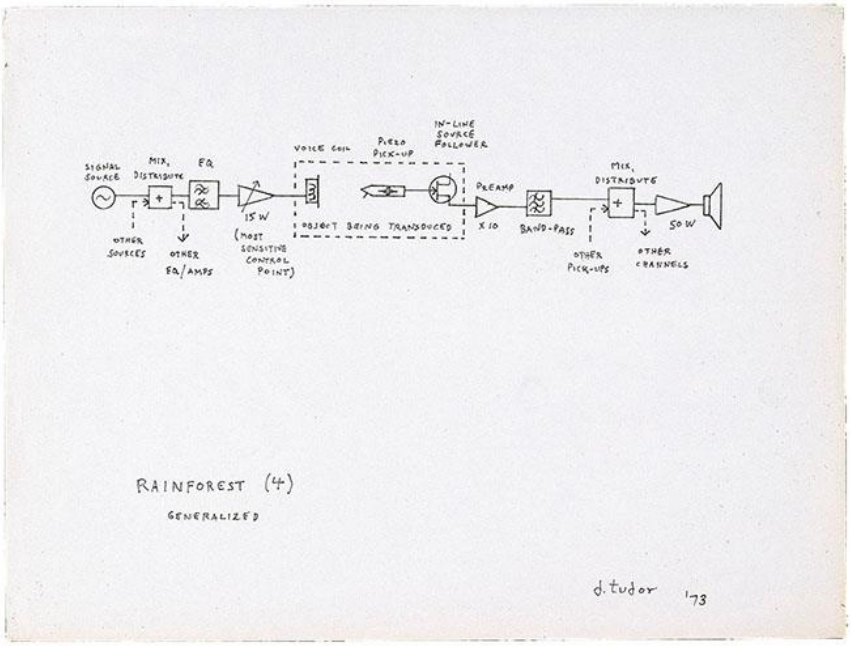


Figure 13. David Tudor, *Rainforest IV, Schematic*, 1973

In connection with the visuality of the non-conventional music score, automation has allowed a number of, artists and composers to further blur the lines between genre distinctions of the musical and visual media. During the 1950s machines became the focus of wider interests when corporate consultant John Diebold coined the phrase *automation* in his book of the same name[54]. Automation has been widely used throughout my studio investigation as a research strategy. Programming and sequencing of oscillator noise, dissonant passages of drone have been organised through the use of step sequencers, and samplers. This strategy has been instrumental in presenting dissonance in conjunction with repetition and harmony which adds an element of seduction and provide a point of engagement for the viewer.

[54]J Diebold, 1955, 'Automation', *Textile Research Journal*, 25(7), pp. 635–640.



Figure 14. John Cage, David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, Carolyn Brown, Merce Cunningham, Barbara Dilley in *Variations V,* 1965, Walker Art Centre

To extend the scope of visual compositional systems, Karl Heinz Stockhausen's concept of intuitive music follows (or initiates) a practice of playing from a non-traditional graphic score. Intuitive music is a form of musical improvisation based on instant creation in which fixed principles or rules may or may not have been given. It is a type of process music where, instead of a traditional music score, verbal or graphic instructions and ideas are provided to the performers. Free music, as it is also known, has some similarity to free jazz; however, the rules of tonality and musical scale and so on differ. Stockhausen's scores for intuitive music are simple yet profound. Stockhausen's view on infinite space and time has a bearing on free music, as individual players are asked to play in time with their intuition and identify the brain as a computer that is subordinate to other rhythms. His instructions include:

- Play a vibration to the rhythm of your heart.
- Play a vibration to the rhythm of your intuition.
- Play a vibration to the rhythm of your thinking.
- Play a vibration to the rhythm of the universe.
- Leave enough space between the vibrations.

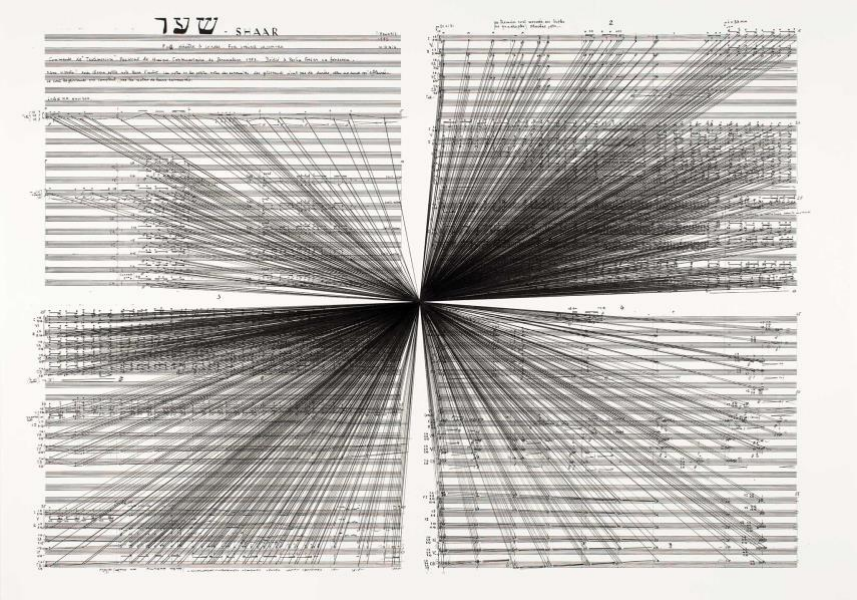


Figure 15. Marco Fusinato, *Mass Black Implosion (Shaar, Iannis Xenakis),* 2012, ink on archival facsimile of score; framed. Part one of five parts.

This research identifies graphic, visual scores as a significant component of audio research as well as a substantial strategy for creating visual artefacts. In my studio-based research, the degree to which visual scores become figurative paintings or etching works or other artefact, is dependent on intuitive engagement in the studio. In this research, the visual aspects recording studio and its associated technologies promulgate an audio-visual aesthetic, which may serve as a replacement for the written score. The position of faders and LED lights as well as the abject pattern of cables offers an electronic *mise-en-scéne* within the gallery space. The configuration of cables in creating a patch on a modular synthesizer and experimentation with sound becomes a visual score within my research. A technological aesthetic has become widely used in visual reference to sound and to signify music and its visuality more broadly in pop culture. Within the white theatrical arena of the contemporary space, studio technology gains a fetish-like aura of a readymade and the three dimensionality of a sculptural form.

2:4 Duration, chance, and improvisation

In section 2:3, electronic and audio equipment were identified as having visual properties similar to visual scores. In various research models discussed earlier, musical instrumentation and equipment in gallery settings can become graphic and sculptural. If the above are considered a visual score, strategies such as chance, duration and improvisation can be effective in providing structure to sonic research in the studio. This section will examine compositional strategies utilized by avant-garde composers. The Oxford English Dictionary defines indeterminacy as a concept or a result which is not exactly known, established, or defined. In the case of music, the term refers to composition chosen by chance, or in which performance is not precisely specified. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the nuanced interplay between dissonance, underground music, and visual art, this methodology section will examine a research framework useful in the studio. Directed by the avant-garde spirit of experimentation, my approach examines of duration, chance, and improvisation.

> Chance is more than beauty, but beauty derives its sparkle from chance. – George Bataille[55]

Chance and duration as compositional methodologies were championed by composers John Cage and Karl Heinz Stockhausen (*Klavierstück X1,* 1952) these methods are useful in placing limitations on studio experimentation. In a 1965 interview with Dorothy Seckler, Robert Rauschenberg admitted that the unplanned and the unexpected require limitations in order to exist. Chance can be a reliable methodology for creating unpredictable hybrid effects in installation and video. In this research chance can inform visual experimentation in the studio such as mark-making which benefits from unexpected results. In reference to John Cage's works, and their possible effect on abstraction in painting, Rauschenberg observed that time is more conducive to chance operations than painting, because when viewing painting one is instantly familiar with size, composition, and layout.[56] In the studio, when creating gestural mark- making, chance and duration can play role in displacing the familiarity Rauschenberg may be

[55] G Bataille 2010, 'Chance 1944' in Margaret Iversen (ed.), *Chance: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, p. 32.
[56] R Rauschenberg 2010, in M Iversen (ed.), *Chance*, Whitechapel Gallery, London.

referring to.

George Brecht asserts that the first explicit use of chance in art occurred around 1911 with Wassily Kandinsky's use of chance based on automatism and improvisation. Dadaists as well as Surrealists developed various applications of chance to access the unconscious as a pool from which to gather imagery which they claimed free from biases, social custom, and other artificial restrictions on intellectual freedom.[57] Brecht goes further in asserting the importance and utilitarian aspects of chance in art making as freeing the artist from biases imposed by personality, culture, and history. For some practitioners, chance offered a critique of the regulatory and discursive cultural "regimes". Brecht states that the methods of chance and randomness can be applied to the selection and arrangements of sounds by the composer and allow the artist to become open ended and embrace all of nature.[58] This methodology is extremely useful to my research. Having looked at Sonic Youth as a primary research model, the improvisation in my practical research is a very effective strategy in composition and creating dissonant sound. It also plays a role in choice of images to interpret in painting but also in the choice of materials chosen as supports for album cover art.

Daniel Belgrad states that the proliferation of the corporate-liberal system through advertising and mass media[59] gave a rise to spontaneity within the arts rooted in alternative metaphysics.[60] My thesis argues that this impulsiveness in combination with formulaic dissonance have become contrived and a convention, which relies on constant technical innovation and rationalisation through concept. My interest in musical subcultures and DIY modes, in the context of this research is centred around liberation from academic, institutional and commercial pressures.

In response to commercial and political regimes, Theodor Adorno's view of spontaneity in jazz supports Belgrad's link between chance, spontaneity and its subjugation to

[57] G Brecht 2010, 'Chance Imagery' in M Iversen (ed.), *Chance*, Whitechapel Gallery, London.
[58] Ibid, p. 43.
[59] J Smith 1998, 'The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America: Daniel Belgrad', *Boston Review*, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 62.
[60] Ibid, p. 5.

liberal capitalism. Whilst initially Adorno dismissed jazz as brandishing a veneer of authenticity with only a promise of avant-garde ideals, he later admitted that, despite attempts by the culture industry to pre-package jazz, it did reclaim a sense of primitive expression in line with modern visual art. According to Adorno, Jazz accomplished a new consciousness associated with primitive expression and alignment with visual art. This view supports my examination of acts such as Sonic Youth and Einsturzende Neubauten in highlighting the importance of expressive performance and improvisation, offering musicians and audiences a direct access to subjectivity.[61] The link between free jazz and John Cage may provide further evidence between disarticulation of musical constructs in abstraction and improvisation.

Branden W Joseph states:

> Cage sought to disarticulate any and all abstract or transcendent connections between sounds or between sound components like frequency, amplitude, timbre, or duration. Beginning with investigations of chance, Cage worked to detach sound from pre-established meaning and composition from continuity or structure, whether harmonic, atonal, or the supposedly neutral time structure.[62]

In a 1992 interview Cage summarized the role chance operations played in his experiments:

> I separated the various harmonic voices from each other, soprano, alto, tenor and bass, and found the active points within harmony by chance operation. Sound would begin and reach the first active point and then a silence would begin. The tones would thus be separated by silence. The results were images of centres of activity moving in all directions. This powerful image is the notion of Buddhistic creation.[63]

Cage's *Musicircus* (1967–current), a multimedia presentation, employs various visual, sonorous, performative and theatre conventions. *Musicircus*' operations showcase harmony and dissonance as incidental and totally dependent on chance. The chance systems in place downplay harmony and focus on rhythm, resulting in a different outcome each time the piece is performed. John Lewis points out that *Musicircus*

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[61] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 42.
[62] BW Joseph 2007, 'The Tower and the Line: Toward a Genealogy of Minimalism', *Grey Room*, vol. 1, p. 58.
[63] J Cage 2012, '22708 Types', *You Tube*, viewed 29 November 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm-r0X9lqms>.

> is a very structured kind of anarchy. The assembled musicians – some static, some wandering – each have more than a dozen pieces of prepared music. They decide what, when and where to play by throwing dice or tossing coins. They may move among us, close enough for us to smell, gawp at and photograph, but they do not interact: instead, they perform like automata.[64]

Chance determination as a model can be generated by using recording technologies such as magnetic tape and sampling. Cage deemed that recordings of a work have 'no more value than a postcard'[65]; however, various systems can be combined with video and other visual elements by using recording technology, in particular, sampling, looping and tape experiments such as tape cut-ups.[66]



Figure 16. John Cage, *Musicircus,* 1972

In addition to chance, durational aspects of avant-garde music and sound have a direct bearing on this research. Philip Alperson claims that in music tonal relationships have a temporal order. He emphasizes this claim by recounting Kant's notion that music is an art of time, not the art of time.[67] Duration as a strategy in musical composition has over the past half century provided methodologies for hybrid visual art. For example, John Cage's 4'33" (1952) was purely a time-based composition. In 4'33" all musical

[64] J Lewis 2012, 'John Cage's Musicircus – Review', *The Guardian*, 5 March, viewed 28 March 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/mar/04/john-cage-musicircus-review-eno>.
[65] M Nyman 1974, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Schirmer Books, New York, p. 9.
[66] Douglas Kahn 2003, 'Sound of Music' in M Bull & L Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Berg, Oxford, p. 85.
[67] P Alperson 1980, 'Musical Time and Music as an Art of Time', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 38, no. 4, p. 16.

conventions such as rhythm and harmony are dispensed with, apart from one – duration. Pianist David Tudor's performance (Cage did not perform the piece) of 4'33" became theatrical and therefore visual. Michael Nyman contends that, '…as the audience's attention shifted from listening to something that wasn't really there, to watching something that was (Tudor's restrained actions) they must have realized that it was equally senseless to try and separate hearing from seeing…'.[68]

According to Jennie Gottschalk, Cage's *4'33* is a valid test case for a number of experimental strategies which are relevant to this research. The first is indeterminacy – the presence of unintentional sounds. Cage does not determine what sounds occur. Next is change – placing attention on the entire body of the concert hall – context and site. Third is experience – what transpires in the place and time of the performance and what happens in the minds of the audience. The fourth strategy is non-subjectivity – no instructions are given to performers or audience on how to approach the event. The fifth is research – asking the simple question of what sounds will occur. The answer is unique to each performance.[69]

Christoph Cox examines the historical notion of utopia as a set of conjunctions between space and time, reality and fiction.[70] The focus is on temporal and spatial aspects of avant-garde music and art. Cox bases his text around events and works which utilize indeterminacy, duration and chance operations. Cox points to a number of useful models that employ technology to determine duration: Cage's Imaginary Landscape #4 (1951), which uses 12 radios as a tool for indeterminate composition, and the experimental practice of Pierre Schaeffer who produced early examples of musique concrète which rely on natural and industrial sounds divorced from their source by recording, sampling and looping.

Duration, a compositional methodology championed by Cage and Stockhausen was employed by Laurie Anderson in a performance, *Duets on Ice* (1974–1975), a work also

[68] M Nyman 1974, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Schirmer Books, New York, p. 60.
[69] J Gottschalk 2016, *Experimental Music Since 1970*, Bloomsbury, New York, p. 5.
[70] C Cox 2010, 'Space, Time, and Sonic Utopia', in D Diedrichsen & C Ruhn (eds), *Utopia of Sound: Immediacy and Non-Simultaneity*, Akademie Der Bildene Kunste Wien, Vienna, p. 44.

seen at the 2013 Adelaide Festival. In music notation duration is an indicator of how long a note lasts. It is usually measured in terms of beats; therefore, it can refer to rhythm structures. The term also signifies the length of a vibration of a musical note, or the length of a piece or performance. *Duets on Ice* provides a methodology of working with non-musical found objects, and looped, pre-existing music. As the music is played back, its duration is determined by the time it takes for ice to melt from underneath ice-skates worn by Anderson.[71] This piece influenced a number of artefacts within my studio research which rely on durational methods. The Wire Drum CD-Rs are a case in point. The synthesized rhythm patterns build and last for the length of a CD-R, which is 80 minutes. The associated imagery transferred onto the recordable compact disk is an intaglio print. The print however is not determined by duration but by the rhythmical dynamics of sound and the associated gestures transferred onto a tin plate.



Figure 17. Laurie Anderson, *Duets on Ice*, 1974

As with Eno's Discreet Music, a number of artefacts within my studio practice rely on temporal limitations. The durational limitations of various audio formats – vinyl record, cassette, magnetic tape and CD-R – were utilized as durational limits. These durational limits became compositional tools within my research. Tape speed in the *Blood Makes Fantastic Plastic* cassette determined the length of the composition. The mechanical

[71] R Goldberg 2000, *Laurie Anderson*, Thames and Hudson, London, p. 53.

dissonance and excess background noise such as tape hiss and clicks became compositional elements.

Section 3: Techno-logical

3:1 The studio and devices: the role of technology as a compositional tool.

Previous sections identified several relevant strategies for practical research informed by dissonant musical practices, subcultures, DIY and independent practitioners. The section pulled together research significant theoretical threads associated with visual art and avant-garde leanings. Having looked at noise and dissonance in association with machines and sonic devices as tools and visual stimuli – visual scores, the next chapter will focus more closely on the relationship between technology and visual art with this research. Whilst this thesis acknowledges the role of technology in visual art, especially aspects in fields which involve sound, it argues for a departure from on technology as a means to an end – a tool exclusively for innovation in audio visual aspects of gallery and studio practice.

Technology plays a significant role within the history of sound and experimental music. Douglas Kahn proposes that the technological involvement in sound and music practices can be divided into three tropes: vibration, inscription and transmission.[72] From Russolo's mechanical noises to the electroacoustic compositions of Boulez and Stockhausen, technology in sound creation and recording is both politicized and mutated to maintain its ground-breaking, transcendent and autonomous nature.

In this research, Technology has been instrumental in making possible distortion, noise, sound and dissonance into musical investigations. Paul Hegarty identifies that technology has been vital to all developments in the history of noise and noise music through electricity and electronics. Hegarty states that technology has offered a means of expanding and exploring the world of cultured sound.[73]

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[72] Ibid, p. 16.
[73] P Hegarty 2013, *Noise/Music*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, p. 23.

In connection with the inherent visuality of audio devices, studio environments and instrumentation, technological aspects of this research are explored as components of avant-garde composition and noise. William Furlong identifies that in the 1970s European artists began enjoying the same access to recording technology as their American counterparts. According to Furlong, as mixed-media courses began to be introduced, art schools and artists began purchasing tape recorders and synthesizers along with video and film equipment, and sound began to play an integral role in performance, mixed-media and installation work.[74] In other words, technology provided artists with an independence and control over the technological acoustic space. This was done through an engagement with recording technology and the recording process. Furlong's overview conveys a number of points that are relevant to this research, for example the extent to which such experimentation paid scant regard to conventional musical structures or skill. Much of the work created for this research resulted from experimental engagement with recording technology, taking advantage of collage, montage, overdubbing, reconstruction, and juxtaposing with the digital through chance or repetitive structures. It is necessary (for the purposes of and in support of the studio-based practical research) to point out that the externalization of this new artistic control over the technological space was possible through media such as vinyl records, cassettes, CDs and broadcasting.

In connection with recording technologies, various media such as vinyl, cassette and CD-R become vehicles for visual expression of dissonance. One artefact resulting from my studio-based research titled *Automenon*, echoes Furlong's analysis of the recording studio as a space for experimentation. A recording studio was utilized as a tool for collaging and looping sound rather than for capturing the idiosyncrasies of 'live' performance. The work features nine vinyl records in sleeves. Each sleeve features an individual intaglio print.

Paul Hegarty identifies that the technology of the recording studio plays a large part in

[74] W Furlong 2003, 'Sound in Recent Art' in C Kelly (ed.), *Sound: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, p. 70.

the commodification of 'authentic' experience. Progressing beyond what Hegarty claims is Cagean avant-gardism and the musicalization of noises, recording studio technology is situated in excess to humanity's instinctual musicality. For Brian Eno, technology (especially the recording studio) is linked to the development of compositional techniques. His processes are contingent on the studio environment, magnetic tape characteristics and various modes of synthesis, yet paradoxically, Eno has been critical of the physical shortcomings of early synthesis as unable to express human experience.[75] Within this research "humanity" within the experience of sound is important and ability of the work to engage the viewer/listener away from a pure art reflexive viewpoint which this thesis argues has made dissonance within visual art conventional and predictable.

As previously stated, a particular concern of the research centres on technology and its misuse or alternative, untrained operations. The utilization of discarded, obsolete, instruments with accidental purposes, is born out of necessity rather than a consummate musical choice led by virtuosity. This can be observed in Sonic Youth's use of guitar, in particular the Fender Jazzmaster. These technologies within this research as connected to recording and playback modes, discarded hi-fi equipment and speakers, loops, edits as well as inspiration drawn from failed designs, resurrected and utilized by peripheral cultural structures.

3:2 Technology and the audio-visual

The previous section identified how the research utilised technology in creating dissonant audio effects within research and how these informed visual components. The

[75] In 1981 Eno 'complained that synthesizers lacked "a sound that is idiosyncratic enough to be interesting." … It is difficult to match electronically, for instance, the subtlety and complexity of an acoustic piano tone colour, which is slightly different for every note of the keyboard. … In spite of the low premium he places on the manual craft of musicianship, he wishes synthesizer designers would exercise more imagination in coming up with ways for enhancing the physical player-instrument interface, for instance with pedals, touch-sensitive keyboards, joysticks, control wheels.' Since this comment many synthesizer designers have enhanced player/instrument interface – the Eurorack format modular synthesizer being a case in point. Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Colour of Sound*, Da Capo Press, New York, p. 71.

section proposed that technology with the research was not the focus rather a compositional tool which permeated a poetic engagement with independent music impulses, underground subcultures, and a DIY spirit. This section will discuss how the research approached technology and attempted to create a poetic approach to audio-visual aspects in the studio.

Alan Licht points out the necessity to include a default technological focus on inter-media and sound artists who were neither musicians nor filmmakers but who worked in sound and visual art and turned to video.[76] Licht states that, for artists interested in sound, turning to video was synonymous with separating sound and music from the concert setting. Similarly, single-channel video made it possible for the moving image to separate from theatre settings. Bill Viola also notes that physically speaking the physics of a broadcast are a type of drone. Licht adds that drones and repetitions began to be utilized in sound works and installations at a similar time as video art.[77] In the context of this thesis the historical examination and consideration of selected works by Nam June Paik, Bill Viola, Bruce Nauman, Tony Ousler, Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley provides the link between visual and aural practice and its reliance on technology. Although video has been explored within the studio environment and in collaboration with audio-visual technician Joe Fuchsen. The sound triggered interruptions and glitch-based effects to RGB signal on video, yielded results which seemed conventional and did not provide a worthwhile avenue for a major work within the thesis. In the installation Dead Air however a small video screen became an effective component in imbuing the work with a sense of nostalgia through its use of outdated monitor and looped DVD content.

This research relied on technology in the production of sound and visual artefacts; however, it is made largely invisible in the artefacts themselves. This research utilized technology as a process rather than an outcome. Outdated and analogue technology was combined with new recording and sound-processing technologies. In an ongoing artefact titled *Blood Plastic*, which involves performance and video glitch, outdated LED screens were used in combination with a sampler and a digitally controlled analogue

[76] A Licht 2007, *Sound Art*, Rizzoli, New York, p. 204.
[77] Ibid, p. 205.

synthesizer. The sound-reactive video components developed in collaboration with Joe Fuchsen produce what is considered unwanted and undesired visual noise and glitch elements. These in combination with synthesizer noise and glitch sounds result in an immersive work which is often performed outside of the gallery space.

In the context of my practice several models of research are applicable. These are of interest in terms of my use and critique of technology as employed in the practice of creating dissonant musical components in visual art practice. The work of Bill Viola and David Tudor reinforce the links between visual and auditory practices in technological contexts. Tudor's practice of feeding electronic sound into inanimate objects in order to create object resonance invited audiences to spatially and visually experience a sonorous environment, connecting sculptural, installation and auditory (compositional, technological) elements.[78] Tudor's work is of interest in terms of engagement with the visual post-aesthetic aspects of musical and recording equipment. For example the visual aspects of modular synthesizer patching used in many of sonic elements within my work is suggestive of visual scores as the colourful patch leads connecting modules of synthesizer can be seen as a representation of sound.

Apropos magnetic guitar pick-ups and distortion, electromagnetism has been explored in the arts via the use of media which emanates sound as a result of an electromagnetic signal. According to Douglas Kahn, the work of Joyce Hinterding harks back to the notion of the natural radio[79] and utilizes the immaterial energy of natural telecommunication and residual phenomena. [80]

3:3 Technology, sound, appropriation

[78] ibid, p. 148.
[79] 'Natural Radio is the VLF radio emissions that originate terrestrially from lightning and within the earth's magnetosphere through interaction with the Sun. Most of these radio signals, sferics, tweaks, whistlers, chorus and others, occur within the range of human hearing, and can be heard with simple receivers as described on this site.' *Natural Radio Lab* 2018, viewed 7 March 2018, <http://naturalradiolab.com/>.
[80] D Kahn 2013, Earth sound earth signal energies and earth magnitude in the arts, University of California Press, Berkeley. P. 244.

Above section discussed audio-visual aspects of the thesis and identified research models which critically examined relevant research models. This section will explore visual art informed by appropriation of sound and music in connection with dissonance - both aural and visual.

In addition, and sometimes in opposition to institutional and established avant-garde sound practices, the vanguard aspects of popular culture especially punk movement provide interesting research models which provide a romantic and poetic engagement with sound in the gallery. A key figure in the timeline of the progression was Malcolm McLaren. McLaren's work is not exclusively defined by using sound or visuals, but extends into other cultural areas such as fashion, promotion, and curation. This although incomplete provides a research model for practice which straddles both gallery and popular culture environments. His involvement in cementing the widely known aesthetic of punk and his management of musical acts such as the Sex Pistols echoes Andy Warhol's involvement in multidisciplinary work with the Velvet Underground. This bringing together of cultural phenomena under one umbrella – punk – may be seen as echoing Attali's theory on capitalism and its ownership of culture. McLaren's use of an American punk aesthetic in combination with a very English obsession with fashion and uniform provided a cultural hybridity, in line with pop art, rather than avant-gardism and the experimentation of Cage. It is interesting to note McLaren's *Only Shallow* (2009), 21 short films appropriated from soft porn, re-edited and slowed down, then set to pop music. The images and music are estranged from their sources, revealing aspects of visual disconnect and resulting in a dissonant effect. Appropriation of images, be they moving or still, can produce visually dissonant and atonal effects when the images are taken out of their previous context. Scale and colour may also play a role in creating dissonant effects from appropriated images.

An example relevant to this research is Martin Kippenberger's musical output, records and record covers. Sung pieces such *Yuppi Du* and Kippenberger's cover of Joseph Beuys' *Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee* are forms of musical appropriation by an artist. Alan Licht states that, on closer inspection, several parallels can be detected between Kippenberger's releases and his approaches to painting and other media. He continues to support the notion of appropriation creating a dissonant effect by analysing

Kippenberger's treatment of the above-mentioned Beuys piece. Licht states that Kippenberger sticks close to Beuys' vocal delivery but adds techno-disco backings, a madcap tribute/subversion of Beuys' famous statement 'Every person is an artist' ('Every artist is also a person').[81] Of interest to my research are also Kippenberger's involvement in groups such as Red Krayola, and his financial involvement in the Berlin punk venue SO36, in Kreuzberg.



Figure 18. Malcolm McLaren, *Only Shallow*, 2009, video loop

Kippenberger's appropriation provided a relevant model within my research, and it had (indirect) influence on a series of three paintings, record sleeves and associated sound component on three 12" vinyl disks in a work titled *Compound*. The images in the painted works (and consequently record sleeves) were appropriated from American Express, Bankcard, Eftpos, Mastercard and Visa designs. These designs were cut up and reorganized to create abstract images. Although the hues and paint application in the paintings echo modernist geometric abstraction, the images do not create conventional pictorial elements; they rather take on a subtly dissonant effect. These works also echo Jacques Attali's book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* in which he examines the connection between the economy and musical fields.

[81] A Licht 2011, 'Martin Kippenberger's *Musik 1979–1995*', *Artforum*, vol. 49, no. 5, viewed 1 March 2018, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201101/martin-kippenberger-s-musik-1979-1995-27037>.



Figure 19. Martin Kippenberger, *Greatest Hits, Yuppi Du/Bang, Musik* 1979 – 1995, recordings

In addition to the imperfection of machine noise as a musical structure, serialism in combination with electronic music has been used to generate alternative methods of composition. Edgard Varèse began exploring the effects of recorded sounds played backwards in his orchestral work Integrales (1924–25). According to Paul Griffiths, in 'Poeme Electronique (1958) Varèse could work directly with his material as would a painter or a sculptor and compose the very sounds of his piece'.[82]

[82] P Griffiths 1978, *A Concise History of Avant-Garde Music: From Debussy to Boulez*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 57.

Serialism, appropriation and repetition provided useful research models in creating *Demagogue*, an artefact consisting of 12 watercolour portraits featuring an appropriated high school photo portrait of the former leader of the Branch Davidian cult, David Koresh. The repetition of these gestural paintings in varying monochromatic hues forms a booklet accompanying a vinyl record. The audio component features repetitive structures of minimalist techno music associated with illegal venues and warehouses.

In the "Discussion of Artefacts" section, I discuss into the specific techniques employed in the studio environment and resulting artefacts. I will outline the steps taken to translate the above conceptual and theoretical foundations into tangible, creative outcomes that embody the essence of dissonance within the realms of underground music, DIY processes and Visual Art. Through this methodology, I endeavour to contribute to the evolving conversation surrounding the avant-garde, acknowledging the transformative power of dissonance as a catalyst for new knowledge, deeper understanding, and emotional connection.

New Studies: Discussion of Artefacts presented in the exhibition:

My practical investigations attempted to unsettle the connection between audio technology and the visual component of the work by utilising violent repetitive gestural mark making. In *Automenon*, the sequencing of audio events, sounds and noise relied on repetition and chance. Traditional musical and artistic skills became redundant. The

visual aspects of a work titled *Automenon* consist of vinyl disk sleeves. The methodology for creating the cover images was informed by the audio methodology. The images were made using the intaglio method of tin plate etching; however, this method did not rely on traditional artistic skill. Rather skill was involved in the technical aspects such as acid bath etching and printing press operation. These processes could be seen as automations of visual media. In terms of image creation (drawings), traditional artistic skills were partially utilized. Tin plates were violently marked with Besser blocks, nails, screws, using feet or dragging the plate on a bitumen surface as a kind of erasure. These etching methods created a dynamic violent irregularity, in order to create a sense of visual noise and dissonance. These mark making methods although intended as a visual score, in combination with the sequenced sound functioned as micro scores for instances of dissonant and mechanical sounds within the rhythmical composition. To create a cacophonous sound illustration of the printed image on the sleeve would have proved too predictable and following a convention of dissonance. Musical structures such as pitch and harmony were downplayed or disregarded. The durational aspects of the audio component were determined by the length of time allowed on a 12" vinyl disc played at 45 rpm. Although audio in *Automenon* retains several rhythmic elements, it is crudely automated, allowing chance and improvisation to become gestural. The work retains aspects of research model provided by Sonic Youth and Throbbing Gristle with elements which allow the audience to recognise rhythmic structure. Sound collages (made on a modular synthesizer) as well as loops are not fixed to a musical tonality; therefore, sound pieces remain dissonant, even atonal in certain sections. Listenability within the musical structure was important to the sonic element of the work. This aspect within this thesis is viewed as a departure from dissonant conventions and supports previous view of dissonance as co-dependent with consonance.

Broken Speaker Symphony is an installation-based artefact within my research, which includes various technological and visual components. *Broken Speaker Symphony* echoes the dissident practices of Norwegian black metal artists from the 1990s and 2000s. Dissonant aspects of the genre include utilizing low-fidelity recording methods such as fast-food drive-through operator headset microphones and four-track tape

recorders. Although such Burzum's *Burzum* (1992) and *Filosofem* (1996) was intended to be recorded with the lowest possible fidelity sound with no name brand amateur equipment to create a natural and pure sound and to protest against professionalism of rock music. This makes *Burzum* all the more disturbing. The effect is surprisingly musical, ambient and harmonic, aside from Vareg Vikerne's distorted vocals, Burzum offers a surprising amount of musicality not just nefarious noise[83]. *Broken Speaker Symphony* features nearly life-size figure watercolour paintings, executed on open cardboard boxes sourced from supermarket recycling bins. These echo the low-fidelity aspect of Black Metal recordings. The combination of large figures and commercial cardboard created a dissonant effect as the utilitarian aspects of the open cardboard were at odds with the classical mode of figure painting. Installed within this work were several malfunctioning speakers and amplifiers which played looped elements of sound composed on a modular synthesizer. *Broken Speaker Symphony* is a piece which is intended to function as a silent work or feature sound. The silent version on display in this exhibition, suggests sound rather than emit it. Although a number of compositions sometimes featured in the piece, technical aspects of exhibition space played a factor in the works final guise.

[83] Vikernes V, "A Burzum Story: Part VI - The Music "….,viewed 1 March 2018, https://www.burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story06.shtml



Figure 20. Marcin Kobylecki, *Automenon*, 2017, Etching, 12-inch Vinyl Discs



Figure 21. Marcin Kobylecki, *Blood Makes Fantastic Plastic, Wire Drum,* 2014 - 18, cassettes, CDR's



Figure 22. Marcin Kobylecki, *Broken Speaker Symphony*, 2014, watercolour on cardboard, stereo components, sound

Dead Air, 2016, explores dissonance, noise, and surplus sound within the notion of the made and unmade. The work is not a quintessential sound work, rather a work which evokes sound and comments on the technical mastery and correctness of conventional audio-visual works. The elements within the installation are comprised of a number of unfinished guitar bodies with loosely installed electronic components. The guitar aspect of the piece echo Christian Marclay's *Guitar Drag* (1999) and critiques pieces such as Celeste Boursier Mougenot's *The Curve* (2010). The guitar bodies are inspired by Sonic Youth's mode negating the guitar as an object of fetishization. Complementing the sculptural and sound components is a looped, analogue glitch video work displayed on a small vintage monitor. The partially completed guitar bodies are placed on the floor and connected with speaker wire to a guitar cable which is plugged into a loop pedal and a guitar amplifier. There is no attempt at actual "plugging in" the guitars, rather the guitar pick-ups are hardwired directly to one main input which is looped through a Boss RC-20 loop pedal. The loop which emanates from a guitar amplifier consists mainly of static hum, percussive sounds of the guitar jack being taken in and out of the main pedal input and sound of other activity attributed to the setup of equipment and installation process. The omni-present static hum of electricity coming from the combination of magnetic guitar pick-ups and a valve amplifier, highlights the promise, tension, and romance of the anticipatory moment right before an actual note is played. *Dead Air* although complete as an artwork, remains permanently unfinished as an act and will never be resolved. Rather than follow a specific academic research model referencing past art works, it echoes experimental musical works such as Neil Young's *Arc* (1991) and Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music* (1975). The video component of the Dead Air originates from a process of interrupting an analogue video signal, via a number of video mixing devices and RGB channel manipulation. In addition to the sound and video components, Dead Air features a number of small portraits. These works depict a selection of guitarists who died tragically such as Ozzy Osbourne's guitarist Andy Rhodes, Slayer's Jeff Hanneman and Allman Brothers' Duane Allman. The paintings, which are executed on commercial cardboard in watercolour, represent only the hair of the musicians. Hair is the iconic, often recognisable, and vital component of musical identities. The painted works purposely leave out the facial features of the musicians in order to disrupt the convention of the traditional portrait. The title Dead Air

is also a play on words dead hair reflecting the imagery in the paintings. The piece also contains video component which was made in collaboration with video synthesis technician and artist Joe Fuchsen. This video was also presented in various live performance settings and utilised video technology for its surplus and unwanted visual noise such as glitch and video noise. The musical and sound component of the work also examines dissonance resulting from technology utilized in non-conventional ways. The technological excess and unwanted by-product of manipulation of both visual synthesis and audio-subtractive synthesis is magnified.



Figure 23. Marcin Kobylecki, *Dead Air*, 2016 watercolour on cardboard

Cathedral is a series of paintings which corresponds to a series of vinyl discs and associated sound/music. *Cathedral* examines the notion of dissonance and brutalist architecture as related to the concrete and desolate locums of DYI concerts and warehouse rave culture. This work follows an interest in the dissident practices of Scandinavian extreme metal genres, in particular the practices of church burning in Norway. *Cathedral* is a visual representation of the sonic, dissonant aspects of brutalist spaces of worship. These concrete laden spaces of worship represent my personal artistic politics and a fascination with cultural practices manifested in dissent outside of

academic sources. The vinyl discs and their content correspond to the imagery by employing improvised electronic sound pieces created on various analogue equipment such as the *Vermona* DRM MK3 drum synthesizer. These music pieces are constructed from investigations into electronic rhythms generated by raw electrical voltage signals as well as digitally sequenced dissonant events. Cathedral endeavours to move beyond academy based dissonant conventions and consider experimentation and electronics in connection to dance music rhythms and noise as part of a personal and immersive act of interacting with sound, music and a visual artefact in a form of vinyl record. The thread within the thesis endeavours to engage with poetic phenomena which encapsulate popular media and traditional painting practices.

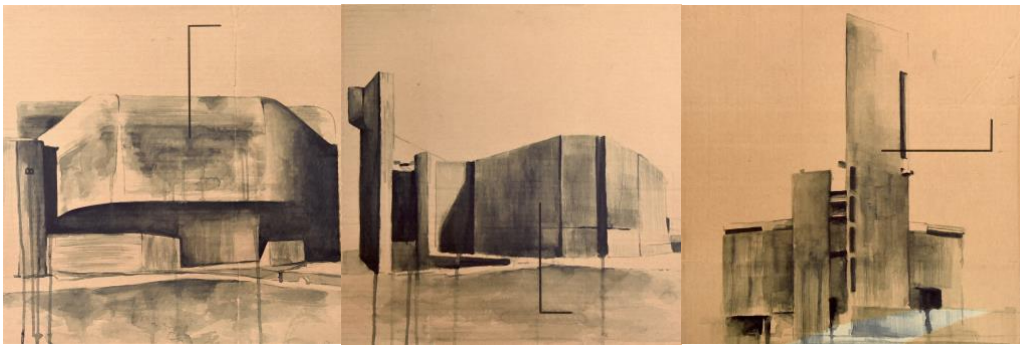


Figure 24. Marcin Kobylecki, *Cathedral,* 2018, watercolour on cardboard, 12" 45 rpm vinyl

Vinyl works such as *Cathedral, Concorde and Demagogue* aim to challenge conventions of categorisation, especially generated by academic and conceptual engagements with dissonance. These conventions are reliant on didactic and conceptual use of noise, electronic use of equipment and media within a gallery space. In these pieces dissonance should not be mistaken merely for noise itself, rather it should be viewed as counterpoint to harmonic or rhythmic structure – a consonance. The dissonance within the gallery has become a convention through its inclination for the conceptual and the Duchampian use of sound as material. The directness and recognisable format of vinyl aims to place the work in a post-aesthetic framework away from reliance on the context and aura of the gallery as the piece of vinyl can be taken home and utilised in DJ mix or as a seductive hand-made object. The vinyl works aim to

remain as artworks in a record store or loungeroom of a listener. In this sense the practical component of the thesis aims to reclaim media and materials such as cardboard, watercolour and vinyl away from gallery's gravitational pull towards the aestheticized experience of sound and music. The thesis aims to put forward an oscillation between the aesthetic and post-aesthetic.

Demagogue is a set of watercolour works and a corresponding vinyl disc, exploring the romantic, the religious and the dissident in connection with popular iconography. The works on display appropriate the high school photo of the Branch Davidian Sect leader David Koresh. The watercolours aim to communicate a sense of nostalgia and innocence whilst reminding the viewer of the repetitious nature of iconography especially in connection with popular music. The repetition within the works echoes the repetitive nature of music – serialism, techno and the repetition of live performance. David Koresh utilised music, especially heavy metal to connect with followers and worshipers and the burning of the sect's Waco compound has similarities to church burnings conducted by Black Metal musicians in Norway. The musical works presented on the associated vinyl discs are electronic and rely on metronomic rhythms which suggest a sense of hypnotic ritual. The combination of imagery and sound in *Demagogue*, at a surface aims to present a coherent structure as the vinyl disc and its artwork contain dissonant yet organised (via rhythm) sounds. In combination, the electronic music on the discs connects with the repeated monochromatic watercolours - the vinyl discs subtly place the familiarity of the object at odds with its content. This is an intended dissonance – the work gently slips in and out of categorisation and the disparate elements of the piece provide a poetic grey area and aim to engage the viewer with a dissonant, fluid set of meanings which never reach resolution. *Wild at Heart* 2015, is a watercolour painting originally made for a sleeve of a 10" vinyl disc based. The work was based on backstage footage of Stevie Nicks rehearsing a song of the same name in an unnamed venue in 1981. The vocal harmonies of Nicks and another singer are at odds with the dissonant and distorted sound of the recording. Unfinished aspect of the painting echoes the low-fidelity aspects of the VHS footage and the noisy recording which includes background sounds of the theatre dressing room. Wild At Heart cover on the 10" vinyl is composed of looped piano and low register drum

pulse. The vinyl could not be included in the exhibition however the recording was included via a SoundCloud link.

Concorde is a suite of paintings and 7inch clear vinyl discs, which aims to explore the previously mentioned unresolved nature of dissonance through 8 corresponding sound works. The imagery in the paintings and on the 7" record labels of the *Concorde* connect to the ideas of burning of symbols such as medieval stave churches in Norway. The Concorde ended its flying service as its final flight burst in flames. In this instance the Concorde becomes a nostalgic symbol of modernity's utopia and an icon of inter-Atlantic luxury and capital excess. The 7" vinyl works contain a number of noise and drone-based sound works which build subtly and do not resolve. The clear vinyl discs aim to function as transparent vessels for transmitting sound which comes from improvisational engagement with a modular synthesizer. Texture and volume play a role in presenting sonic dissonance but also offer a visually dissonant effect through the unlikely combination of soft colours, resolved paint application and noisy juxtaposed by the raw electrical sound of the modular synthesizer. Concorde echoes Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Helicopter String Quartet* (1993) as well as traditional quadriptych format of painting.



Figure 25. Marcin Kobylecki, Marcin Kobylecki, *Concorde*, 2018, Four Clear Vinyl 7" Singles

Compound is a set of three paintings exploring visual representations of audio sampling processes. The work was initially inspired by Jacques Attali text, Noise: *The Political Economy of Music* (1985) as well as the vinyl works of Martin Kippenberger. On the surface the triptych is a series of modernist abstract oil paintings, however the forms within the work originate from collages of cut up credit cards such as Mastercard and Visa. This strategy of representing capitalist iconography is inspired by the practice of sampling, *Plundertonics* and sound collage. This work also is loosely influenced by the subversive strategies of Slovenian group Leibach and German band Die Tödlische Doris. It also echoes the cover art of Throbbing Gristle's 20 *Jazz Greats* (1979). This work although seemingly traditional in its formalist aesthetic, showcases the use of deconstructed symbols of blatantly commercial entities provides a subtly dissonant effect to the harmonious of colour and shape. The series of paintings challenges what I view as the current aesthetics of dissonance as somehow noisy, scratchy and industrial. This work strives to challenge those now established conventions of dissonance – especially gallery-based noise and sound practices – and return dissonance to a poetic, grey area. This series of works further underlines the thesis' attempt break with what I view as increasingly generic aesthetics of noise and dissent within the academy and gallery system. Whilst this is a stance of personal politics, I believe the alienation of the aesthetics of noise from the wider social context are of general concern within the thesis. This is in line with Peter Burger's view that social relevance is dependent on the interpreter's personal politics. The piece strives to demonstrates the influence of musical strategies such as sampling, sound collage, and the inevitable commerce of music by turning them into "tasteful" abstractions. In this context, Peter Burger makes a useful claim in observing the disassociation of art from the praxis of life. Burger states that after DADA the avant-garde artists sought to reinstate art back into a socially relevant realm[84]. In this thesis the artefacts aim to place the dissident and dissonant back into the praxis of life and offer a sense of visual seduction. Compound as a series of paintings represents dissonance as a modernist avant-garde in Greenbergian sense rather than the technological media focused academic dissonance. The intention here is to represented dissent as visually subtle and contemplative.

[84] P Burger 1984, The Theory of the Avant-Garde. University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota. p.75



Figure 26. Marcin Kobylecki, *Compound*, 2017 oil on canvas

The Dissonant Salute and *Blood Makes Fantastic Plastic* continue the trajectory of critique of the aesthetics of dissonance and dissent as presented by academic and gallery-based practices, especially in sound and music infused art works. The fluid state of dissonance is depicted here by the delicate watery application of watercolour in juxtaposition with the blunt confrontation of the middle finger. The subtly executed watercolours depicting raised middle digits echo the romanticism and iconography of the "rude finger" gesture as seen in iconic photographs of Johnny Cash, Kurt Cobain and Lemmy from Motorhead. As with *Compound* this criticism is designed to provide a subtle, humorous, and romantic version of dissidence and the ease with which pop artists utilise it as opposed to the theorised versions of academy-based practice. The dissonance is presented here in the form of juxtaposition - watercolour painting, against the image of the "rude finger". Peter Burger, in *Theory of Avant Garde* (1984), describes this notion of critique not as a judgement that harshly sets one's own views against the untruth of ideology but rather as a production of cognitions.[85] Dissonant Salute is an attempt at understanding my own political and artistic position in the context of aesthetics of academy and gallery-based dissonance and dissent.

[85] ibid. p. 22



Figure 27. Marcin Kobylecki, *Dissonant Salute*, 2014 watercolour on paper, cassette, stamp, box, foam

Further documentation, images, and sound can be found at: http://www.bloodplastic.com/

Results

The outcomes of studio-based investigations have further highlighted dynamic aspects of dissonance which resist conventions. Neither the theoretical frameworks imposed by standardised academic language, nor the hierarchies enforced by the institutional, objective appraisals of creative research, seem to aid with a deeper understanding of dissonance. Studio-based investigations showed that the reflexive and fluid nature of dissonance seems to resist our desire to identify it as extreme or cacophonous or obvious. In fact, the work undertaken during the candidature has indicated that use of dissonance to challenge conventions within arts cannot successfully do so without the use of harmony and rhythm. What is considered - via standardised language - to be purely dissonant becomes conventional and superfluous to gaining a deep emotional understanding of dissonance, purely because it exists in a vacuum without harmony. The research deepened my understanding that the amalgamation of dissonant, music and visual art within underground contexts, is aided by a DIY, post aesthetic engagement, specifically through productions of small runs of vinyl records, CDR's record covers and paintings. These artefacts are platforms and media to provide a unique and subjective sensory experience that by design transcends conventional

boundaries. By displaying obvious dissonance within academic and gallery contexts even though it may take form of extreme noise or cacophony, conventions seem to be reinforced. The analysis of studio-based investigations, delves into the results and processes of this interdisciplinary endeavour, examining how guitars and synthesizers in combination with painting and printmaking, contribute to the creation of an immersive artistic landscape. This landscape is poetic and digressive. if dissonant nature of the music forms the backbone of this artistic, studio-based experiment, creating what on the surface appears to be identifiable formats such as CD or Vinyl record covers, adds to the tension and ultimately the dissonance. The improvisational nature of the music-making process, which explores dissonant elements, leads to spontaneous processes within the studio. The dissonance in the results of this spontaneity were not always instantly apparent rather woven into the fabric of what on the surface appeared as recognisable and familiar. Record covers, traditionally viewed as marketing tools, take on a new meaning in this context. They become artifacts but also documents of experimentation, and evidence of search for the existence of margins with which I could impose on my own understanding of what conventions of dissonance mean in the research.

The outcomes of research have resulted in recognisable artifacts, yet ones which do not fit comfortably within in gallery contexts, nor do they function as polished products with commercial aspirations or possibilities for record stores. These paintings, vinyl records, recorded works and video pieces are at odds in any context they could normally be associated with. Within the works themselves, dissonance reveals itself in many ways not easily categorised. The post aesthetic engagement with dissonance has resulted in some instances to be opposite to extreme distortion or noise. This interdisciplinary approach not only challenges the norms and conventions within individual artistic realms as described in previous sections but also blurs the lines between them, creating a space where dissonance thrives as a catalyst for innovation and artistic evolution. This thriving within my research at times needed to scale back notions of noise to critique the increasing acceptance intensity of cacophony and noise.

Conclusion

The thesis provided a contribution in form of a significant body of work, in a comprehensive exhibition, which included a variety of original artefacts in a range of media. The studio-based, practice led enquiry investigated gaps within existing academic research and drew comparisons to relevant models of enquiry within visual art, avant-garde music and associated subcultures and involving DIY production ethos. The exegesis explored several relevant research models and referenced theory, practitioners, artists, and musicians who investigate dissonance within an area of underground and avant-garde music and associated subcultures. This exegesis has provided a wider historical context and scope within which the studio-based creative research operated. It has also outlined a set of limiting parameters which aided in the maintenance of a critical focus throughout the studio research. In addition, the practical aspects of the thesis have been explicated not only through the filter of dissonant sound practices but through their connection with visual dissonance.

The artefacts within the thesis display varying degrees of dissonance. The artefacts in this research provide an original contribution to knowledge as it is a result of a subjective, personal artistic practice, employing a variety of artist mediated processes and artist led experiments in the studio. It is the very legitimacy of original individual studio practice in offering post-aesthetic alternatives to various established aesthetic forms of noise and dissonance within both visual and sonorous artefacts. The research has examined a number of strategies and models for research from the field, however it has not utilised, nor has it illustrated any past theory or practice. This thesis offers a poetic, subjective engagement with dissonance within a theoretical context. In fact, this practice-based thesis critiques the theoretical approach to creative engagement with dissonance and noise and the prevalence of technological innovation in current visual art practices. Dissonance is fluid, often evading coherent, uniform outcomes. Although in this research dissonance may not always constitute noise or abrasiveness; volume or extreme sound/visual environments – it provides a counterpoint to harmony both in sound and visual media. Noise, as Jacques Attali identifies, offers disorder which runs opposite to the world, whilst music gives birth to power and its opposite: subversion.

Attali goes further by labelling music and organization of sounds a tool for consolidation of totality.[86] On the contrary, as a result of studio practice, this thesis presents dissonance as fragmented, uncategorized – a challenge to articulation. Dissonance in this research is presented as complex conjunctions between two forms of expression – a mechanical wedding of the sonic (dissonant) with various visual media. The visual media include painting, printmaking, vinyl record cover art, CD-Rs, cassette tapes, video and installation. This mechanical mutability is presented overtly in some artefacts; however, it also served as a methodology for studio experimentation without being perversely exposed and displayed.

Noise and dissonance have an ability to permeate constructs both physical and conceptual. They offer sets of liberating structures which seep into studio-based creative enquiry. Dissonance transcends the avant-garde, and the institution. It is omni-present in the post-technological society. In combination with visual art disciplines such as painting, printmaking, video, or installation it must exist within limitations of listening as well as visual formats, vinyl discs or cassettes with their associated cover art.

This exegesis has examined the validity of practices from the avant-garde within the current audio-visual landscape. These practices include duration, chance, visual scores, event scores, unconventional use of instrumentation and unintended uses of technology. The question this thesis seeks to answer is centred around the echoes of the traditional avant-garde. Do they still reverberate with profound significance? Contemporary artists such as Konrad Smoleński and Haroon Mirza, who utilize perversely dissonant elements in their work, appear on the surface to display avant-gardism and trade on subcultures and aspects of underground music. This modus operandi is an exercise in manufacturing self-reflexive conventions which transform aesthetic innovation into an investigation of institutional discourse. Smoleński and Mirza transform the language of rebellion into ideology. Boris Groys and Charles Russell state that the fundamental ideas of the avant-garde – activism, antagonism and teleology – have been lost in contemporary visual art. They have morphed into the dynamics of

[86] J Attali 1985, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 18.

subjectivity in culture and innovation within the epitomes of ruling powers.[87]

This exegesis has outlined technology's vital role in dissonant and dissident practices, which characterized the avant-garde throughout modernity and beyond. On the other hand, this exegesis has claimed that the institutional and academic subjugation of technology has led to its ultimate separation from the avant-garde. Technology and music or sound in the context of contemporary practice are becoming fetishized, utilized as a sacred wonder of innovation which audiences are led to witness. This research downplays the scientific approach to technology in music as a component of contemporary art. The research attempts to be informed by avant-garde traditions which utilize accessible as well as complex technologies. In this research, however, technologies were in the employ of non-traditional, dissonant methods – such as feedback, glitch, chance and duration.

These strategies amongst others allow for the creation of dissonance in the studio. Technology as part of practical creative research is widespread; however, in this research it was not elevated beyond its 'means to an end' status. Several artefacts such as Christian Marclay's *Guitar Drag* (1999) and Nam June Paik's *Beatles Electronique* (1966-69) provided useful research models in showcasing creative strategies which utilize technology in the spirit of the avant-garde – dissonance, and operating objects beyond the scope of their intended design and purpose. This research utilized technology in order to better understand dissonance and create glitch sounds, noise, drones, low fidelity, recording of environmental sounds, wear and disintegration of magnetic tape. These strategies formed compositional structures. These structures were then transferred to visual media in varying degrees. The electronic methods of bringing imperfections to the forefront and divorcing sounds away from their source and utilizing them as rhythm structures provided a useful model for this studio-based research.

[87] C Russell 1982, 'Subversion and Legitimation: The Avant-Garde in Postmodern Culture', *Chicago Review*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 54–59.

The studio-led research consolidated technological approaches to sound making and musical strategies with visual components within the format of individual and unique vinyl, cassette and CD-R works. These objects reflect durational aspects of avant-garde composition such as self-imposed limitations, for example the maximum duration of time allowed by the format. Visual aspects of the works in the exhibition were also predetermined by strict limits of space allowed by the sleeve or cover art format; however, in some instances this size limitation was expanded into booklet and boxset forms. This strategy allowed for an intimate relationship between artist and viewer/listener and downplayed the academic subordination of technology in the age of the demise of the traditional avant-garde.

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