

Tracing Noise: Writing In-Between Sound

by

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Bachelor of Music, University of Toronto, 2012

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Noise is noisy. Its multiple definitions cover one another in such a way as to generate what they seek to describe. My thesis tracks the ways in which noise can be understood historically and theoretically. I begin with the *Skandalkonzert* that took place in Vienna in 1913. I then extend this historical example into a theoretical reading of the noise of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, arguing that sound and noise are the unheard of his text, and that Derrida's thought allows us to hear sound studies differently. Writing on sound must listen to the noise of the motion of *différance*, acknowledge the failings, fading, and flailings of sonic discourse, and so keep in play the aporias that constitute the field of sound itself.

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Dedication

To Annie Moore, for being there, then being there more; without you this project (and much else) would be a shadow of what it is, and worsely edited.

Introduction: Positioning Noise

The problem with defining noise is noise. The difficulty of the definition is written into noise's very activity, which performs its definition by disturbing, interrupting, and exceeding limits. This erasure of defining limits in noise's very definition disturbs both the site of its operation and the site of its description. Noise is recursive and works in two vectors that originate from the same point: sound and interruption. The first vector of noise is that of a sound (or sounds) that disrupt; the second occurs once noise moves further from sound and enters the language of cybernetics as any interruption of a signal, sonic or otherwise. These two vectors—sound and interruption—extend back to noise's etymology, which is formed by a split between a sound or sounds and the classical Latin *nausea* or seasickness, which means upset or malaise in its most basic understanding. The disturbance of illness and sound that forms noise (un)folds in-between interrupting, exceeding, and disordering. Noise slips from the imaginary stricture of a fixed position; performing in its slippage, the process it seeks to conceptualize thereby materializes its meaning(s) through its (un)folding differences and deferrals. My thesis takes up these two vectors in two chapters, reading the meaning(s) of noise historically and theoretically. What is at stake is to re-enter the matter of sound into sonic discourse and to re-assess sound's importance in Derrida's work. This reading of noise resonates across disciplinary boundaries, tracing noise as a background that allows us to rethink materiality and materialization. While noise is not the only site on which to think this difference, its vectors can help to clarify and extend twentieth-century thought around mediation and being by making audible the problematics of materialization.

Noise and sound equally slip disciplinary limits. The terms abound in media studies—as in Caleb Kelly’s *Cracked Media: the Sound of Malfunction* (2009), Peter Krapp’s *Noise Channels: Glitch and Error in Digital Culture* (2011), and Mark Nunes’ edited collection *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures* (2012)—and appear in the work of media archaeologists such as Wolfgang Ernst’s *Digital Memory* (2013), Jussi Parikka’s *What is Media Archaeology?* (2012), and the collection Parikka edited with Erkki Huhtamo, titled *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (2011). Noise as a genre or effect of music (with the capacity to disrupt) is thought in Ray Brassier’s “Genre is Obsolete” (2007); Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond’s edited collection *Noise In and As Music* (2013); Michael Goddard, Benjamin Halligan, and Paul Hegarty’s *Reverberations* (2012); its sister collection *Resonances* (2013), edited by Michael Goddard, Benjamin Halligan, Nicola Spelman; David Novak’s *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation* (2013); and Paul Hegarty’s nearly canonical *Noise/Music: A History* (2007). More general histories of noise are written in studies such as Hillel Schwartz’s mammoth *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang & Beyond* (2011), while works like Alain Corbin in *Village Bells: Sound & Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside* (1998) offer a historical view of sound (and by extension noise) in a specific time and place; Garret Keizer’s *The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want: a Book about Noise* (2010) and George Prochnik’s *In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise* (2010) take a general approach to noise issues in daily urban life; Daniel Heller-Roazen’s *The Fifth Hammer: Pythagoras and the Disharmony of the World* (2011) reads the noise that escapes historical attempts to understand the natural world.¹

¹ Pythagoras is said to have discovered harmony when he came across five men hammering in a forge. Four of

Philosophically speaking, noise also figures in Michel Serres' texts *The Parasite* (1980) and *Genesis* (1995), and though this thesis doesn't address them directly, they nonetheless form the unheard background that frames the problematics I take up below. In order to frame my own definition of noise, I want to contrast two recent philosophical approaches to noise in Greg Haigne's *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise* (2013) and Francis Dyson's *Sounding New Media* (2009). Haigne treats noise as a philosophical topic, seeking to establish an operational taxonomy of noise. Defining noise as that which resists, subsists, coexists, persists, and obsists, he works towards a shared ontological commitment to noise's matter, although he departs by re-thinking ontology through Deleuze's Spinoza.² Noise, for Haigne, is "the trace and index of a relation that itself speaks of ontology [...] noise...is the trace of the virtual out of which all expressive forms come to be, the mark of an ontology which is necessarily relational" (13-14). He thereby critiques Francis Dyson's insistence on noise as immersive. Dyson points to noise as a frequent stand-in for vibration in new media theory, allowing it to fluctuate figuratively and literally between particle and wave, object and event, being and becoming. Defying representation, noise gestures towards the immersive, undifferentiated, multiplicitous associations that aurality provokes, without committing to

the five sounds were in harmony; the fifth hammer he rejected as discordant.

² Haigne's litany of noise reads in full:

"1 Noise *resists* – not (*necessarily*) politically but materially because it reconfigures matter in expression, conduction and conjugation.

2 Noise *subsists* – insofar as it relates the event to the field from which expression is drawn and thus subtends all being.

3 Noise *coexists* – as its ontology is only relational and does not come into being by itself but only as the by-product of expression.

4 Noise *persists* – because it cannot be reconfigured or recontained, cannot become thetic as it passes into expression, but remains indelibly noise."

5 Noise *obsists* – since it is fundamentally anathema to stasis and thus opposes all illusions of fixity, pulling form beyond itself through expression and bringing about the collapse of meaning" (23).

the (massive) representational and ontological ambiguities that aurality raises (Dyson 10-11). For Haigne, noise is immersive not because it is all-pervasive, but “because there is nothing outside of it and because it is in everything” (13). That is, noise is not immersive in the sense of being in everything without an outside because it is always already part of any relation, not a part of the points on either side of relation. However, Haigne’s noise threatens to inscribe itself with a sense of presence and pervasiveness that cannot support difference; if everything is noise, then noise is nothing and has lost the ability to form the difference that makes a difference. Haigne also takes issue with Dyson’s view of noise; he leans on the relational aspect of noise as that which allows us to speak of it as a quasi-material object/singular object, while, in the same relationality, Dyson finds grounds to position noise as an ineffable and impossible subject (Haigne 30 n.18). Noise in my study falls in-between the two. As I read it, noise is material (rather than quasi-material) but cannot coalesce into a singular object. As an effect of a relation, noise is solely an artefact of an event. My disagreement with Dyson is a minor distinction: noise is not ineffable as much as it is an attempt at definition that is also a process of failure due to the delay of differencing, which succeeds in articulating aspects while failing to represent any static sense of wholeness. As with any such attempt, some aspects are brought out while others are obscured by noise. While Haigne and Dyson’s studies offer lots of important ways into noise, I will focus on noise as it manifests in relation to, and on its role in, materialization.

First Vector: Sound

Considering sound (the first vector of noise) as it manifests in relation to music reveals noise as an historical and theoretical effect; any moment that decides what ought to be included or excluded can be understood to generate noise. Debates over this decision extend through music history in the nearly constant discussion of what constitutes dissonance versus consonance. In *Noise/Music: A History* (2007), Paul Hegarty considers how noise and music relate, and how we arrive at noise music as genre, while charting the ways in which, in the twentieth century, noise has become a musical resource to be included or excluded like any other. Noise in Hegarty's study is negative, a reaction followed by a negative response to sound, which can occur outside of cognition while still constituting a judgment because, as Hegarty reminds us, listening is not under our control. From his opening paragraph, Hegarty sets up the possibility of noise-as-disturbance for non-human hearers, while limiting his field to thinking noise for humans in the domain of music; noise, he claims, is "certainly for humans" (3).³ While my study seeks to expand noise outside of the domain of music and sound, it is important to address some of Hegarty's understanding of noise by comparison. Working adjacent to Hegarty's definition of noise, I will develop a matrix to deal with noise everywhere, focusing on its erasing and materializing tendencies while working away from noise understood as judgment. Where Hegarty is concerned with the way noise functions in and around music, I will expand noise through its second vector, outside of sound. Music, sound, and noise are not synonymous. My sense of sound is vibration or a complex of

³ Paul Hegarty draws attention to Michael Nyman's distinction in his *Experimental Music* between the avant-garde (the trajectory from the second Viennese school through Darmstadt and beyond) and experimental music (John Cage etc.) where the true avant-garde is engaged in practices that seek to undermine and dispute Western art music as a whole, and is therefore to be seen as experimental (11). My desire to think about sound and gain distance from music can be seen as related to an experimental approach to music because of the traction gained from this distance.

vibrations that has the potential to be heard, and which functions as mechanical energy (requiring a medium). Music, in contrast, is variably structured sound. Noise thought in a non-sonic sense always already feeds back into its historically audible vectors, and its sonic vector always already contains the more than auditory interruptions that gave it purchase in cybernetics. As Hegarty states, his book “does not cover all of the possibilities of noise in music” and, moreover, “there is no reason noise cannot be found everywhere” (x). I will pursue this provocation to find and expand noise everywhere in order to understand noise’s role in-between in mediation and materialization.

To “find” noise, however, can also be to make noise. Noise has been variably constituted through the music of the twentieth century, whether in the futurist machines of Luigi Russolo, the emancipation of dissonance in Schoenberg and the second Viennese school, the “silence” of John Cage, or the turn to the soundscape of R. Murray Schafer and acoustic ecology.⁴ The futurists focused on noise as the machines of war and industry that was the inevitable future, which should be taken into and accelerated by art.

Russolo’s *The Art of Noise* (1913), a publication contemporaneous with the *Skandalkonzert*—the focus of the second chapter—provides historical context for the ways in which the human ear became accustomed to the sounds of the industrial-urban landscape. Russolo also theorizes a new aesthetics of music composition that prescribes and predicts how electronics and technology would permit composition to break out of the limited circle of orchestral sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds. Throughout his career (±1932-1992), John Cage’s work repositioned sound under the framework of “letting the sounds be themselves” (qtd. Kahn 163). In writings such as

⁴ Many of these lines of noise in music have been tracked by Douglas Kahn, whose history and theory of sound in the arts in *Noise, Water, Meat* looks to the sounds of modernism and postmodernism, along with the technology that affords them, in the theatres of music and/or the gallery arts.

those contained in his pivotal collection *Silence* (1961) and works such as *4'33"* (1952), Cage opens the site of music to indeterminate sounds; as Douglas Kahn puts it, he “shift[s] the production of music from the site of utterance to that of audition” (158). Cage contributed to a shift in thinking about musical material, marking sound as the starting place rather than musically meaningful material.⁵ In the late 1960s, R. Murray Schafer similarly shifted attention to audition when he coined the term soundscape as the sonic equivalent to landscape, using it as a point around which to organize environmental efforts to preserve sounds and promote awareness of our acoustic environment. His *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977) details the domains of the “natural” and the shift from rural to urban in post-industrial soundscapes while treating techniques of notation, classification, perception, and morphology of soundscapes. Closing with a critique of tendencies in acoustic design, Schafer offers the starting point for what would become acoustic ecology as well as the related practice of soundscape composition. Each of these points offers different criteria for what is included or excluded, what counts as sound versus what is noise, illustrating noise in and as the effect of a relation. Each constructs a different history of noise that either looks back to the birth of the industrial revolution or to different ideas of nature, implicitly positioning noise as an effect of modernity.

⁵ It is important to note Kahn’s critique that Cage’s re-definition of musical material has its limits, which are not as open as they can appear at first glance. “[...] Cage reduces sounds to conform to his idea of selfhood. When he hears individual affect or social situation as an exercise in reduction, it is just as easy to hear their complexity. When he hears music everywhere, other phenomena go unheard. When he celebrates noise, he also promulgates noise abatement. When he speaks of silence, he also speaks of silencing” (163). So while Cage helped open music to sound he maintained specific identifications of nature and what is included and excluded from that as well as a specific conception of selfhood that determines what is and is not sound. Nonetheless, the work Cage did to remove extraneous meaning from sound, making sound sound, is an important precedent for the way in which noise is develops throughout this study.

However, noise is not an exceptional effect of modernity or of the twentieth century alone. Jacques Attali's now canonical *Noise* reads the development of music towards the end of the twentieth century, and his approach allows him to grasp the possible futures inscribed by music and thereby to anticipate historical developments. Attali finds a hinge between the promise of a new liberating mode of production and a dystopian possibility that mirrors this liberating potential. Fredric Jameson notes in his forward that the context of *Noise* is a return to history after its various denunciations by Althusser, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss, among others, which can be read as the renewal of a trajectory of historiography from Hegel, through Spengler or Auerbach, all the way to Foucault and the *Annales* school. This renewal does not seek to return to the totalizing images of history. Tracing this line of thought, we might hear one example of noise prior to the twentieth-century in the rulings of the Counter-Reformation Council of Trent formed in 1545. The task of the Council was to counter the Protestant Reformation by making the Catholic mass more intelligible to the masses. When the Council got around to music in 1562, it was decided that:

“The whole plan of singing in musical modes should be constituted not to give empty pleasure to the ear, but in such a way that the words be clearly understood by all, and thus the hearts of the listeners be drawn to desire of heavenly harmonies, in the contemplation of the joys of the blessed” (qtd. Taruskin 650).

Here music hinges on the intelligibility of the words, and whatever cannot be understood is excluded as noise, or dismissed as music for music's sake (“empty pleasure”). To resolve the question of intelligibility, a selection of masses was assembled and sung by

the Papal Chapel Choir on April 28, 1565 to test whether the words could be understood.⁶

This test serves as an example of how noise can be historically extended beyond modern, technologically-determined sites; music in this instance can be understood as a technology or a medium through which to present the mass (so long as its message was intelligible).

My first chapter will set out how noise and its definition(s) operate in a specific historical site. Any of the above historical points could have been the site of this study; however, the *Skandalkonzert* of Vienna in 1913 affords a rich example with multiple points of entry and accessible documentation. Arnold Schoenberg organized the concert, which featured his own music and that of his most prominent students, Anton Webern and Alban Berg, along with works by Gustav Mahler and Schoenberg's brother-in-law, Alexander von Zemlinsky. Schoenberg and the second Viennese school's new approach to musical organization was accompanied by a different way of approaching musical sound through means other than hierarchies of pitch such as colour. Both vectors of noise are audible in the concert, and the first chapter works between them to open an understanding of noise that develops in-between the two before being further developed in the second chapter, which traces the ways in which noise relates to writing in the process of materialization. My exploration of noise develops in contrast of the understandings collected under the two vectors, because it articulates sound in its material being and demonstrates the ways in which that being is interrupted, outside of sound, in the process of becoming material.

⁶ Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*, for example, conforms to what was deemed intelligible at the time. It's not clear whether *Missa Papae Marcelli* was included in this event. For more on the Council of Trent, start at Taruskin, 649-50.

Second Vector: Interruption

The second vector of interruption or disruption is the means by which noise has come to operate outside of purely sonic dimensions, emerging in the discourses of information theory and cybernetics of the 1940s to the 1970s.⁷ In information theory, noise is figured in-between the opposition of order and disorder, signal versus noise, useful versus wasteful in communication systems. Noise in information theory can also be modeled after heat: energy that is lost or “wasted” through entropy in a thermodynamic system, as Bruce Clark shows (162). In communication systems, “the informatics entropy of the messages is a measure of message-probabilities relative to one of several vantage points” (Clark 162). These vantage points are the *source*, where one observes the ratio of actual selections to possible selections; the *channel*, which considers the ratio of signal to noise, or useful to wasteful information; and the *destination*, which is based on the ratio of surprise or improbability to expectation or probability. Norbert Wiener’s work on automated anti-aircraft guns during the second world extends this model of noise into what would become the new field of cybernetics, or the “study of messages, and in particular of the effective messages of control” (Wiener 8).⁸ In the opening of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida reads the concept of writing out of its traditional understanding as pictographic or ideographic inscription, and into contemporaneous work

⁷ Katherine Hayles has mapped the history of cybernetics while thinking its relation to theory in *How We Become Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*.

⁸ Against this negative model of noise as energy loss or entropy—a disruptive interference that causes the loss of information—Warren Weaver and Claude Shannon’s model would reinterpret noise as a positive force of productive ambiguity, laying the groundwork for later information theory. The case can rightly be made that this sense of noise as productive rather than disruptive can be found in Cage’s “let the sounds be themselves” or in Russolo’s music, which works with the futurist means of disruptive production. The difference between these senses and the new cybernetic sense lies in the cybernetic approach to noise as information within a system. What is gained from this approach to noise as always already part of a system is the ability to distance it from intrinsic value, and to understand the effects of various observer positions in colouring the noise, determining its effects as well as valuing their contributions.

in cybernetics or biology. These fields speak of writing and programming in relation to the most elementary processes of information within a living cell. In opening writing to these new scenes, Derrida cautions against reading cybernetics (or any other new area) without considering the history of that field's concepts, and positions his own work as a latent critique of cybernetics:

“If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts – including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory – which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must conserve the notion of writing, trace, *grammé* [written mark], or grapheme, until its own historico-metaphysical character is also exposed” (*Of Grammatology* 9).

Even if cybernetics can be rid of the metaphysical concepts that separate humans from machines, the field is left with the vestige of writing. These vestiges retain traces of their lineage in the same way noise retains its sonic sense, even in the silent systems of cybernetics. These seemingly vacated metaphysical concepts remain because they are written into each and every instance of writing through writing itself. Similarly, noise under cybernetics may gain a sense separate from sound as defined by information, but the concept retains its historical roots in sound through the echoes of its interruptions.⁹ The figure of noise I develop through Derrida in the second chapter belongs to both vectors because it develops in-between them; it could be said to be the noise of noise. I will feed the second vector of noise as information back onto the first vector of sonic disruption to show noise as the effect of any and all relations, because it is the effect of

⁹ In addition to remembering the field's conceptual history, the gains of cybernetics should not be cause to forget its military-historical roots. Cary Wolfe's work on the relation and similarities between Niklas Luhmann and Derrida's thought is especially interesting in light of cybernetics, and acts as a fulcrum towards my positioning of noise here. For example, see Wolfe, “Meaning as Event-Machine, or Systems Theory and ‘The Reconstruction of Deconstruction.’”

becoming material. I attempt to de-couple noise from human perception and judgement as something that takes place in and through mediation.

One precedent for the way in which I want to de-couple noise and sound from perception and judgement comes from Roland Barthes, who creates a way of writing about music that gives an alternative view of what language can be and do when attuned to the effects of noise. Barthes' *The Grain of the Voice* (1972) offers a new way of writing about music, which eschews its usual description by a listening subject using "the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective" (179). Avoiding the adjective and its predications and epithets, Barthes instead seeks "to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse... to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language" (180-81). Following Benveniste, language is for Barthes the only semiotic system capable of interpreting another semiotic system.¹⁰ The interpretation of music traditionally projects an imaginary that constitutes the subject who hears it, and this imaginary comes to language through the objective (Barthes 182). Barthes' displacement of the threshold between music and language focuses on vocal music—the site of encounter between language and voice—so that the grain of the voice can eradicate the temptation of a subjective ethos in the listener.

His method is to compare via a twofold opposition: the theoretical opposition of phenotext and genotext (borrowed from Kristeva), and a paradigmatic comparison of two singers (Charles Panzera and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau). As borrowed by Barthes, the phenotext is the mode that covers the "structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer's idiolect, the style of

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Barthes does mention feigned examples of self-interpretation in cases such as J.S. Bach's *The Art of Fugue*.

interpretation; in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, [...], which forms the tissue of cultural values” (182). The pheno-song is the familiar mode of criticism, which speaks to matters of taste, fashion, and the ideological judgements of a period such as subjectivity, expressivity, dramaticism, and personality of the artist. The geno-song concerns the volume of the singing and speaking voices: the space where significations germinate “from within language and in its very materiality” (qtd. Barthes 182). Free from the demands of communication, representation (of feelings), or expression, the geno-song is left at the apex of production, the threshold where the melody works at the language. Barthes compares the baritones Charles Panzera and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, finding Fischer-Dieskau an artist beyond reproach whose breathing occurs like shudders of passion and whose diction is dramatic, offering gestural support for an emotive mode of delivery. Yet Fischer-Dieskau never exceeds culture, and one only ever “hears the lungs, never the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose.” For Barthes, Fischer-Dieskau never reaches the *jouissance* of Panzera, whose art is found “in the letters, not all in the bellows (simple technical feature: you never heard him *breathe* but only divide up the phrase)” (183). Put another way, Barthes’ criticism of Fischer-Dieskau amounts to the singer pre-figuring or simulating feeling, adding a layer of mediation or interpretation on top interpretation without understanding.

For Barthes, the grain of the voice that ultimately separates the two artists is more than just timbre, for “the *significance* it opens cannot be better defined, indeed, than by the way friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message). The song must speak, must *write* – for

what is produced at the level of the geno-song is finally writing” (185). Barthes accords a theoretical value to the grain because it is individual yet not subjective; it listens to the individual relation between the bodies of listeners and those performing, a relation that is erotic in nature. The grain’s value comes in its alliance with Julia Kristeva’s *signifiance*, which shows how language undoes the speaking subject by positing a loss. A concept originally developed by Julia Kristeva in *Semiotiké: Recherches pour une semanalyse*, *signifiance* is not the same as signification, nor does it operate under the modality of signification that Barthes places on the plane of the product, of the enounced, of communication. *Signifiance* belongs to the plane of production, of enunciation, of symbolization (Barthes 10). Rather being of the domain of the work by which the subject might try to master the language, *signifiance* is the “radical work (leaving nothing intact) through which the subject explores – entering, not observing – how the language works and undoes him or her” (10). Without being able to be figured under communication, it instead places the subject (the writer, the reader) in the text as a loss or a disappearance. With the writing of language ‘undoing’ that radical work of *signifiance*, the process of undoing begins to sound like noise, with its palimpsestic or erasing possibilities.

Barthes’ concluding comparison between Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* and Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* also echoes with the double vector of noise. For Barthes, performances of Boris’ death cannot but be dramatic: this is the triumph of the phenotext, the smothering of *signifiance* under the soul as signified. On the contrary, “Mélisande dies *without any noise* (understanding the term in its cybernetic sense): nothing occurs to interfere with the signifier and there is thus no compulsion to redundancy; simply, the production of a music-language with the function of preventing the singer from being

expressive” (187). Of course, in the cybernetic sense of interruption or interference, this death without noise still has a noise in the sense I am working to bring out; that is, it can have a grain outside of expression and without the compulsion to redundancy gained through pre-figuration. The grain of the voice and the limit of music echo in the rustle of Barthes’ later works:

The rustle is the noise of what is working well... The rustle denotes a limit-noise, an impossible noise: the noise of what, if it functioned perfectly, would make no noise. To rustle is to make audible the very evaporation of sound; the blurred, the tenuous, the fluctuating are perceived as signs of a sonic *erasure*. (The Rustle of Language)

The rustle is what happens in-between the sounding of language or otherwise, making audible the process of materialization itself. The parallel trajectories of Barthes’ grain and rustle resonate with my figure of noise. The radical work of noise, in my context, is its undoing of a certain idea of materiality that all the while asserts the materiality of what has been erased.

Below, I will work with Derrida rather than with Barthes, because Derrida’s writing is framed by questions of the limits of ontology and the phenomenological tradition, putting his work in a more immediate position to address questions of the relation between experience and materiality. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida creates a theoretical matrix of writing which, in its writing, erases the written position of meaning as a fixed, singular point. Instead, he expands writing, and in doing so, amplifies the noise in all writing and in the production of meaning. *Écriture* will stand in to distinguish between writing in this expanded sense and the narrow. Sound provides a prime (but not exclusive) site on which to trace the unfolding of noise because, as I will show, the operations of both noise and sound are different trajectories from the same point,

revealing their inextricable relation. Noise is rarely named in Derrida's writings or in the secondary discourse that surrounds his texts; when it does appear, it does so in passing or in the margins. Yet his analyses of *différance* and the structure of the trace revolve around noise because his theory of writing, of *écriture*, thinks the relation between the elements that mediate different aspects of writing. Mediation necessitates thinking the noise in the midst of relation. Keeping silent about noise allows Derrida to use its workings to develop the concepts central of his theory while performing its effects in his writing. The method of deconstruction itself, it could be said, is a way of reading that amplifies the noise of a text into audibility, allowing it to undo itself. I will offer a reading of noise as a necessarily and always already marginal power, playing a central role in the force of *Of Grammatology*. Whenever he deals with the relation between trace and experience in *Of Grammatology*, or with the relation between sound in the world and sound being-heard, there is always some sound that remains "unheard" for Derrida. This "unheard" sound creates noise as an effect of the friction of experience, which is written on material sound in the world – noise is the rubbing or rustle between the writing and the written. Compared to a more explicitly sonorous text like *Glas*, *Of Grammatology* offers a way to think the mediation of world and experience by *écriture*, and this mediation is the best place to think noise while speaking directly to the matter of sound. *Glas* thinks about how a single text is not inscribed in writing, but is always written over by a past text as well as a future text that sounds its end: the *glas* or bell sounds the clanger at the end(s) of signification. Noise is absent in Derrida's grammatological thought because it cannot be a central term in that moment, as Derrida implicitly understands: to centre on noise would only re-organize the system, including what was on

the margins, disrupting its disruptive potential and excluding something else. There will always be noise. Indeed, by keeping noise in the margins, Derrida allows it to come through implicitly. Writing on Derrida's writing will open new margins, amplifying the noise of noise towards what can only be deferred to/for another time. As Derrida asks, "How to interpret ... the strange and unique property of a discourse that organizes the *economy* of its representation, the law of its proper weave, such that *its* outside is never its *outside*, never surprises it, such that the logic of the heteronomy still reasons from within the vault of its autism?" ("Tympan," xvi). Noise is woven through and figured by its limits, which determine the extent to which it can be represented. To represent its motion will force it to have moved; there will always be a noise of noise, an excess.

I will read noise in Derrida through the trace and its field of related concepts. Derrida develops the concept throughout *Of Grammatology* and continues in *Speech and Phenomena*, *Writing and Difference*, *Margins and Philosophy*, *Dissemination*, and "Feu la cendre," among others. *Of Grammatology* traces the trace, developing it into a core concept in his grammatological thought and beyond. Grammatology—the science of writing—never came to be *qua* science, yet it grounds Derrida's project(s) through its unleveling of grounds, opening the way for the contingent organization of meaning and systems.¹¹ As Francis Dyson puts it, the trace reveals and is revealed by the space or spacing of writing, be it the gap between letter on the page or the silence that differentiates (and constitutes) phonemes in speech (96). In sonic terms, the trace is what amplifies and is amplified by the space and spacing of sound, forming the limits through which noise is constituted. The trace's matter of space and its spacing of matter serve to

¹¹ Contingent here means less dependent on chance than existing if and only if.

amplify noise; as the matter in motion in the world is erased by experience, I will attempt to trace the noise of that erasure, not to hear the noise of erased materiality, but to attune to the absence of the palimpsest, the absent matter that grounds what is present to experience. Noise is the fiction of awareness. It is what we cannot be aware of through experience: the matter in the world that bleeds into experience of the world through its deposit in the trace.

I begin by laying out the historical conditions of logocentrism, the line of thought connecting speech and logos. I then take up sound studies scholars such as Douglas Kahn, Jonathan Sterne, and Viet Erlmann, who read Derrida's *écriture* in the narrow sense, dismissing his thought on the grounds that it turns from sound and speech in favour of writing. As I show, this is far from the case; sound is deeply implicated in Derrida's thought, and is explicitly a part of the structure of the trace that he theorizes. Kahn fears that "[the voice] was removed from the body where, following Derrida, it entered the realm of writing and the realm of the social, where one loses control of the voice because it no longer disappears" (8). But the voice does not disappear. Rather, it is erased.¹² That is, its disappearance is displaced in its erasure; it is erased but remains as a cinder. This term later replaces the trace for Derrida because, as with noise performing its definition, the cinder "does what it says" (*Cinders* 17). Like *différance*, its meaning is written into it with the silent phrase "*il y a là cendre*": "*Là* written with an accent grave: *là*, there, cinder there is, there is, there cinder" (3). Like *différance*, the accent is registered through the eye but remains inaudible to the ear, performing the hinge between the effaced material in the world and the material written: "To the ear, the definite article,

¹² Although Derrida's later writings on television have over determined the permanence of audio or video inscription. For example see his filmed interview *Echographies of Television* with Bernard Stiegler and Frances Dyson's critique in *Sounding New Media*, 102-103.

la risks effacing the place, and any mention or memory of the place, the adverb *là*...But read silently, it is the reverse: *là* effaces *la*, *la* effaces herself, himself, twice rather than once” (4). As it registers in my writing, the trace could be replaced with cinders, but I chose to maintain trace because the bulk of my argument focuses on *Of Grammatology* rather than *Cinders*. Contrasting the work of Jonathan Sterne with Derrida, I show the limits of basing a theory of sound on its exteriority while silencing the interiority of the listening subject, which maintains a “natural” bond between speech and presence – something Sterne works to distance himself from. From here I turn to explaining the erasure of experience and its importance for a theory of sound that can support materiality. Overall, I will read noise under a positive sign, or better, neutrally, because its judgement is decided through the positions that observe it, rather than being intrinsic to noise itself. What is at stake in my thesis is an interpretation of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* under the heading of noise, and how we account for and avow noise in our conceptualization of music(s).

Chapter 1: Noise in the Event

Alban Berg's *Fünf Orchesterlieder nach Ansichtskarten-Texten von Peter*

Altenberg Op. 4 is at the centre of one of the noisiest events in twentieth-century music history. Its premier performance on March 31st 1913 was interrupted by a riot, which gave the event its name: *Skandalkonzert*. The concert took place under the baton of Arnold Schoenberg, and featured Anton Webern's *Six Pieces for Large Orchestra Op. 6*, Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie* Op. 9, Alexander von Zemlinsky's *Five Orchestral Songs on Texts of Maeterlinck* (numbers 1, 2, 3 and 5 were performed), two of Berg's *Altenberg-Lieder*, and Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* — in that order.¹³ ¹⁴ Berg's piece is a setting of excerpts he drew from picture postcard poems by the Viennese bohemian poet Peter Altenberg (Richard Engländer); the original printing of the poems in Altenberg's *Neues Altes* (Berlin, 1912) features the text mingling with images on postcards.

At the site of the scandal, hissing first competed with applause in between movements of the Webern; then, once Schoenberg quieted the audience enough to continue, more rumblings occurred during Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie* Op. 9. The

¹³ There is disagreement in the scholarship as to which two songs were performed. Leibowitz (1948) claims it was the 2nd and 3rd movements, DeVoto (1967) claims the 2nd and 3rd, and Redlich (1970) claims the 1st and 2nd. Berg's letter to Schoenberg on January 9th, 1913 lists his preference for the longest and most interrelated movements (the 1st and 5th) while ranking the songs in difficulty. Taruskin (2010) draws on liner notes from Robert Craft's Columbia Masterworks MS 6103 (1959), which echo Leibowitz. When my discussion turns to the score, I focus on Berg's choice of the 1st and 5th songs. Even though it is unlikely these were the two performed at the concert (or during his lifetime), they provide a means to think some of the various ways noise operates in his score. In the later portion of this chapter, which considers the noise of the riot, the musical features that the audience found to be noisy are less important than the fact that they found any of it to be noise. The complexity of noise's operation in and around this site, especially in the audience's varied reactions, shows how noise escapes reduction to assigned identities or simple cause and effect models. Accounting for these complexities by thinking through other models is the goal of this thesis.

¹⁴ Taruskin reads the piece in relation to an early example of aggregate harmonies (see the twelve note chord that opens and closes the third movement) and as a historically significant event that remained (and to an extent remains) on the margins of history until well after Berg's death. In this way, the Altenberg Lieder can be said to be the noise of the history of fin de siècle aesthetics (Taruskin 193-97).

Maeterlinck songs of Zemlinsky quelled the audience for a time, until the Berg was performed, when the din became so great that Schoenberg stopped the performance, asking those who could not keep quiet to leave the hall. His plea went unmet and further fed the commotion until the concert was forced to stop before Mahler's piece could be performed. The events of the riot were enough to lead to court cases launched by Erhard Buschbeck, the president of the Akademischer Verband für Literatur und Musik, and Dr. Viktor Albert, a prominent Vienna physician. Buschbeck had struck Albert, who had verbally assaulted him, and the cases ended with each receiving fines of 100 kronen.¹⁵

When a situation is so enmeshed in music history that it is most commonly referenced simply as *Skandalkonzert*, what can be said about noise? Despite its etymological roots in the audible, my use of the term noise should be understood more broadly through the matrix of my introduction. The concert itself was no doubt noisy with the excessive interruptions and general disorder, and the piece contains elements that can be read as noise, given the density of material and the deployment of relatively new techniques; the public reaction after the fact is also noisy, with the concert becoming a public spectacle that generated many published responses, such as the caricature from the April 7th publication of *Die Sontags-Zeit* with the caption "The Next Viennese Schönberg Concert" (Fig. 1). Even the subsequent music historical discourse about the event has echoes of noise, as, for example, René Leibowitz (a student of Schoenberg) writes about the *Altenberg-Lieder* in an article in France in 1948, which plays a part in his larger project of importing the techniques of the second Viennese school to Paris

¹⁵ Buschbeck's fine was reduced to 20 kronen. See Berg to Schoenberg, 24 April, 1913 in *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*. 1st eds. Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey, and Donald Harris (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), fn.4 174.
Also: Berg to Schoenberg, 6 May, letter to Schoenberg, fn.1 175.

(Leibowitz, “Berg’s Five Orchestral Songs after Post-Card Texts”). The article plays up the new techniques used in the Berg as inciting the riot.



Figure 1: “The Next Viennese Schönberg Concert” in *Die Sonntags-Zeit* April 7th, 1913

An audience member hisses during Schoenberg’s *Kammersymphonie* Op. 9, which is functionally tonal (E major) and had been played in Vienna previously. In this instance we can see noise as *interruption*, something that is disrupting or obscuring a signal.¹⁶ In the second instance, we can identify noise as *excess* in the opening of Berg’s score, in which the dense orchestral layering obscures the reception of all active layers at any

¹⁶ An interruption for the sake of clarification: “signal” needs to be understood in its bare meaning of marking an entity with the possibility of reception rather than something which is fully received or present(ed) in its communication. To be clearer, signals signal but do not necessarily communicate; not all information presented is received. For example, the writing in this article is a signal, which will not fulfill full communication.

given time. Coupled with the overlay of conflicting rhythmic material on top of a section with near constant transformation (that lasts less than a minute), the density of the writing leads to an excess of information given in the score or in a performance, beyond what can be taken in by the listener. Thirdly, we can identify noise as *disorder* — the disorder of the riot or portions of the work — that I will tie to its most common usage: *distaste*, which leads to the force of my intervention in understanding noise. Judgment is bracketed and external to the threefold model I am thinking about, but is nonetheless important because so deeply connected to the common use of noise.

Noise in and around the concert therefore collects into at least three modes of operation: excess, interruption or disorder, and distaste (tangentially tied to disorder). But these modes of operation cannot be taken as separate because they constantly refer to, collapse into, and combine with each other. For instance, the opening of the Altenberg-Lieder could be deemed distasteful because it is in excess of audience tastes or interrupts what could be an otherwise pleasant concert experience. These modes of noise are folds because they make up a single entity yet exclude it from existing as in a singular constitution. These three modes thus form a threefold relationship that cannot be understood in terms of a static structure, but must be thought of as dynamic, because noise operates in ontological terms of *becoming* rather than *being*. That is, noise cannot exist as a static or single entity unto itself, but is always a part of a dynamic process of mediation between two or more entities. I do not mean to imply this threefold model is *the only* ontological structure of noise; rather, it is a provisional structure, formed from this specific site, from which this thesis sets out to think. Its reason for being is that it is a tentative ontological marker, built for the purposes of thinking about this specific site

instead of lasting beyond these thoughts, let alone beyond this site (deluding itself into universal description or application). I will treat each fold in relation to a portion of the architecture of the work, a listener's perception, and the historical situation of the performance to show that each folds into the others, never presenting a unified, singular object that can be identified as noise. In addition to the above ways noise appears in the concert, in the following chapter I will develop a sense of noise that comes out between folds: the material sound effaced in the event that engenders these other senses of noise.

Exceeding the Score: Network of Sound

The fold of noise as excess appears in the score of Berg's Op. 4 in the sheer density of active processes that obscure one another. In his 1967 dissertation on the Altenberg songs, Mark DeVoto analyzes the motives and motivic structures of the cycle while providing a brief history and a survey of extant materials. In the opening measure, he identifies six motives acting together in what he calls a "network of sound" that plays out through the first fourteen measures (*Alban Berg's Picture-Postcard Songs* 10). The first motive is found in the piccolo, glockenspiel, and first clarinet, and is echoed at the interval of an eighth note by the xylophone. This is elaborated in the first violins with a thirty-second note sextuplet figure. The other motives are the three note exchange between two muted trumpets, the flutes' flutter-tongued figure along with the pizzicato second violins, the ascending motive of the celesta that is fragmented in the harp, the repeated piano chord, and the second and third clarinet's diminution of the first motive (see score in appendix). In combination, these six motives feature every pitch class and nearly every interval class, all within the first bar. DeVoto's description of the working of the six motives in measures 1-14 as a "network of sounds" perfectly captures the

complexity of relations between the material at hand, a description I will retain to collect the mingling of related yet distinct signals in a network. Upon first listening, the motive played by the piccolo and the glockenspiel emerges as a distinct and very audible layer. However, the other layers work to obscure or problematize that clear order. As the figures repeat, the centrality of this motive is undermined by the shifting metric surface created by the layering of motives of different durations — what seems like a passage organized around the $5/8$ pattern of motive 1 quickly strains with the echo of the xylophone along with the other 5 motives and their respective durations, which would take $157 \frac{1}{2}$ measures to realign (DeVoto, 9). The effect creates a complex texture over the meter of $4/8$, which, if allowed to repeat, would eventually be perceived as ordered.

With so many active layers, repetition is required in order for order to be perceived. The emergence of order is upset by the start of processes designed to observe, defer, or disrupt the formation of order.¹⁷ As this passage plays out, the motives initiated in the opening are transformed upwards, while in m. 6 the second half of the violins enter, doubling the second and third clarinets in tremolo at the bridge. Here, noise is amplified by the process of doubling the clarinets with tremolo violins playing *sul ponticello* such that the harsh texture attracts the ear of the listener, distracting from the emergence of understanding the order of the six motives. Colour is being amplified into excess. The effect of having the second and thirds clarinets in dialogue — playing in the lower part of their middle register, at a *ppp* dynamic, doubled by the second violins, made prominent by the brightness of the *sul ponticello* yet obscured overall by the dynamic — is to create

¹⁷ To be clear, a process is a series of steps or actions (such as echoing or transformations); a motive is a specific pattern that can be subjected to processes; and a figure picks out the line of a motive that can be retained even after extreme transformation.

blurry wisps, which is enhanced by the rests that break up the motive.¹⁸ If the motive was constant, without the interruption of rests (or sub-clauses), it would be easier to assimilate or order. But the rests allow the motive to come into and out of prominence and order, especially when the violins enter with the sharper and more distinct colour of *sul ponticello*. The excess of colour is a fold of noise that interrupts the formation of order. The excess in this passage is similar to the xylophone echoing motive 1 found in the piccolo and glockenspiel at the rhythmic duration of an eighth-note; because the overall texture is not clear enough to hear the distinction between the two, what is active is not a rhythmic process, but rather a process of obscuring through colour. Additionally, the brightness of the piccolo and glockenspiel ensures that the xylophone blurs rather than becoming ordered in a clear canon. Yet another new signal is added to the network in m.9, when the violas enter with a new melody that is fragmentarily supported by other instruments, and in turn is transformed towards the climax that dispels the efforts of ordering. The process of obscuring is predicated on and produces noise. But it would be wrong to assume that noise only enters with the second violins or with the echo. Rather, noise is always already there; the violins only amplify it.

Rene Leibowitz characterizes this obscuring process as the most important aspect of the songs, because it carries the concept of variation to the most radical extreme (“Alban Berg’s Five Orchestral Songs” 7). This extreme is further amplified with the advent of twelve-tone composition, which joins variation to development.¹⁹ In

¹⁸ For more on orchestrating with the blending qualities of the clarinet, see Alfred Blatter, *Instrumentation and Orchestration* 107-109.

¹⁹ In Christoph Khittl’s article “The Other Altenberg Song Cycle: A Document of Viennese Fin-de-Siècle Aesthetics” he discusses Berg’s occupation of composing with models by connecting Berg’s process of metamorphosis, another way of marking variation or becoming, to Brahms and Mahler by looking at their influence as manifest in Berg’s early songs. He also discusses Schoenberg and Altenberg’s influence.

“Schoenberg and Progress,” Adorno sketches the shift in late Beethoven that places development at the centre of a piece rather than something that happens in the centre of a sonata. This development is later joined by the second Viennese school to variation, which renders variation dynamic, as Adorno puts it (Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* 46).²⁰ In his *Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* Adorno continues to think about variation:

"In the Altenberg Songs Berg's circumspection also transfers to the sonoral dimension the primacy of *becoming* over *being*. Colours are not just painted in as if pre-existent, they are developed; the process by which they are created becomes their justification" (63).

Adorno's point is in part ontological, to do with the nature of being or existence, where *becoming* marks existence in motion and changing over time, while *being* marks a static state outside of time.²¹ Adorno's point is also musical because the shift from static statement to dynamic variation and development is exemplified in these fourteen measures; just as becoming exists as a dynamic process, noise can only arise from a process of becoming.

But is noise an effect of these dynamic processes of variation, or is it immanent to them? The network of sounds serves as material upon which various processes act; these processes are located not in the motives themselves, but in their relation to one another within the network. The network of sound—the whole collection of material in mm. 1-

These early songs also on texts of Altenberg, he suggests, were subject to extreme metamorphosis, in the broadest sense, as models for Berg's Orchestral songs. Here it would be interesting to explore the layer of noise in metamorphosis between models. Berg's borrowing of material — both of his own and others — is also briefly addressed in DeVoto, “Alban Berg's Picture-Postcard Songs” 101.

²⁰ Later in the essay Adorno makes that point that by making variation a totality, an absolute, twelve tone composition repeated variation. Variation (becoming) cannot become a totality (being) because it then is no longer variation but what is. See Adorno, 50 and/or 80.

²¹ What is comes out here is Adorno's sustained critique of theorists who prioritize being over becoming in their ontology. The theorists unnamed here that are the focus of Adorno's critique are Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. These critiques can be found in: *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique* and *Negative Dialectics*. There are parallels to be found between Adorno and Derrida's work, especially in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*; however, space limits the possibility of accounting for noise in Adorno or making any systematic comparison with Derrida.

14—includes processes that arise from the relations between nodes of the network. The motives are mediums for Berg's processes. It is important to note the separation between noise as immanent to the material, and noise external to the material. In Berg, there is internal noise within the signal and external noise affected by the signal, noise in the piece and noise in the relation with the listener, but noise in either site does not collect into a thing in itself. Noise cannot exist as an isolated object; instead it arises as an artefact of a process of mediation between two or more entities. Noise dwells in a parasitic relation to a medium. In the first order, the medium is the motive; in the second order, the medium is the network of sound once it is activated in sounding.²²

Fittingly, noise's parasitic reliance on a medium is tied into the term's very etymology. The French word for parasite picks out three meanings: a biological parasite, a social parasite, and static as in the noise of a television or radio, which is lost in the English equivalent. Noise is literally always already within a signal because of its reliance on a medium. Any signal relies on a medium, which introduces noise in the difference between the signal itself and the medium that carries it. Noise arises in this difference because the signal received is always already implicated in its host medium. Think of sound, for example: as mechanical energy, it can only exist in relation to a host medium such as air or water. Again, this can be seen within the definition of the French word *hôte*, which contains both host and guest.²³ In the example of sound, the medium is both host and guest to the signal, and the signal is both host and guest to the sound. The

²² Before developing mediation, it is worth lingering a moment on the difference between mediation and relation. Relation denotes the way in which two concepts, objects, or people are connected. Mediation, on the other hand, evokes connectedness but through an other or involving an intermediate agency. In other words, mediation relies on a medium, a third party or other agent, to operate.

²³ Both the play within *hôte* and *parasite* are pointed out and developed in Michel Serres' *The Parasite*.

play between the two is more than simple word play as there is no distinguishable difference between sound as host or guest, which determines how any given instance of sounding is conceptualized (whether explicit or implicit).

Along with the difference between signal and medium is a deferral of presence due to sound's reliance on time in both experience and existence.²⁴ When we evoke music, we construct an a priori mental object that is seemingly without noise because the medium's specificity is, to some degree, disavowed or forgotten, as is its temporality. Even the most delicate representation of music is nothing but that: a representation. In the introduction I gestured towards Nicholas Luhmann's frequent refrain that only communication communicates by saying only signals signal.²⁵ The important point here is that the only perfect communication of information is within the system of communication itself, not its relation to humans. Communication is a process of information exchange that is mediated and thereby engenders excess information that interrupts clear transmission. In the example of music, we are not in that system, yet it is often evoked as though we are in constructions of music that assume the complete transmission of what is written in the score to what is performed, or imagine that all the information performed is fully received by an audience. Once music is actualized, the noise suppressed by that theoretical construction must be heard. What is at stake is how we account for and avow that noise in our conceptualization of musics.

²⁴ To differ and defer that is being played out here is central to Jacques Derrida's work in the trio of 1968 texts: *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Speech and Phenomena*. Cary Wolf's "Meaning as Event-Machine," is also in the distance because in it he argues for the relation between Derrida and Luhmann, with the latter's system theory as the reconstruction of the former's deconstruction.

²⁵ Niklas Luhmann, "How Can the Mind Participate in Communication?" In *Materialities of Communication*, eds. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford University Press, 1988), 173.

Interrupting Organicism: New Means & Noise

At this point in my reading, excess has begun to slip into interruption (the second fold), because the excess that obscures also interrupts, rupturing the fantasy of a noiseless signal. A brief refrain: the piece offers a signal formed by a network of sound, which is in turn made up of layers of signals that are individual parts as well as a whole. The excess within the work as network happens in the relation between motives that are processes in excess while being excessive. Noise is both the product and the production of individual processes and motives within the network. These excesses interrupt the emergence of unity, deferring it until the closure of the work. Here we have uncovered (at least) two strata of noise: noise within the network of sound, and noise in between the network of sound and the listener. Each of these sites exhibits the threefold model of excess, interruption, and distaste/disorder. All of these signals rely on a medium, which is always already noisy – nothing escapes the mediation of *écriture*. Noise accounts for the impossibility of receiving this signal in full within any given encounter, due in part to the excess of information that interrupts the creation of order or sense (meaning) from signal.

The new instrumental techniques Berg uses in the songs interrupt listening by drawing attention as well as, in Schoenberg's view, interrupting their organic growth. The songs are Berg's first composition distanced (however marginally) from Schoenberg's watchful eye, and we can see an interruption in his development as a composer in his teacher's reaction to the songs and Berg's defence of them. The impetus to compose the songs came in early 1912 while Berg was working on Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, finishing a piano score of Mahler's VIIIth Symphony, and recovering, along

with his wife, from illness.²⁶ Schoenberg wrote of his surprise that Berg was not composing, suggesting that he “[w]rite a few songs, at least. It’s a good idea to let poetry lead one back into music. After that: something for orchestra.”²⁷ Combining Schoenberg’s suggestion of a few songs and something for orchestra, Berg worked on the *Altenberg-Lieder* until their completion in the fall of 1912. On the 7th of January 1913, Schoenberg asked Berg for the score and piano reduction of a couple of movements for a concert in March. Berg responded quickly and Schoenberg received the score by the 13th of January. The next day Schoenberg sent Berg his first impression:

“I don’t know the things very well yet (time!!), but they seem (at first glance) remarkably well and beautifully orchestrated. I find some things disturbing at first; namely the rather too obvious desire to use new means. Perhaps I’ll come to understand the organic interrelationship between these means and the requirements of expression. But right now it troubles me. — On the other hand I already have a clear impression of a number of passages, which I definitely like. We shall see”
(Berg to Schoenberg, 14 January 1913,143).

At this point Schoenberg had composed and premiered the *Five Pieces for Orchestra* op. 16 and *Pierrot Lunaire* op. 21, both of which deploy techniques that just as easily fall under “new means.”²⁸ Berg was evidently familiar with both of these pieces, and they are likely some of the works he has in mind in his response to Schoenberg:

“It hasn’t been very long since I first began to hear the sounds of the orchestra with real understanding, and to understand scores. And because it was always the newest compositions, since in recent years I have scarcely held a score of Wagner, let alone the classics in my hand

²⁶ Berg was responsible for preparing a reduction, editing the performance materials, overseeing the rehearsals, as well as writing a long guide to the work. See his letter to Schoenberg January 11, 1912.

²⁷ In full: “Why aren’t you composing anything! You shouldn’t let your talent rest for so long. Write a few songs, at least. It’s a good idea to let poetry lead one back into music. After that: something for orchestra.” Schoenberg to Berg 13 January 1912, 65.

²⁸ Leibowitz in his article points to Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* op. 17, which was completed in 1909 but not premiered until 1924; however, a letter from Berg to Schoenberg (27 January 1923, 322) about Universal Editions’ publication of a piano reduction of *Erwartung* makes it sound as though he is coming to the piece for the first time.

(surely a great mistake!), I'm more receptive to the new sounds created by precisely these new means, hear them everywhere, even where it might be possible without them, and thus I employ them because I don't know anything else!" (Berg to Schoenberg, 17 January 1913, 144.)

Both Schoenberg's critique and Berg's response invoke the concept of organicism.

Schoenberg is not immediately convinced of the natural growth of these new techniques from Berg's material, and Berg asserts that he felt them and they came naturally as he composed. Without disturbing the roots of organicism in their aesthetics, we can think about how the difference between Schoenberg and Berg reflects noise as interruption.

Adorno assesses their differences as follows:

"Berg's music may be compared to something that unfolds like a plant. Its scheme is that of the organism, while with Schoenberg the organic substance is fixed dialectically from the outset by the structural motive" (qtd. Ashby 226n.46).

Taking the difference as marked by Adorno, interruption operates differently because their compositional systems are differently constituted, and therefore the threshold of fidelity will be different.²⁹ Adorno distinguishes Berg's music as evolving through variably connected moments, while Schoenberg remains faithful to a hierarchy in his approach; there is a higher degree of control extorted by highly structured material. This is not to say that Berg's local material does not connect to his structures, only that it is less readily apparent, less top down, less of a goal, which allows for a more momentary approach to form in the sense later developed in Adorno's "*Vers une musique informelle*" (269-322).

With a background such as the *Skandalkonzert*, interruption must also be thought in terms of the disruption of the concert by noise. Witnesses such as J.B. Foerster and

²⁹ Adorno wrote this in 1931, with their twelve-tone works in mind; however, the distinction he makes carries over to their pre-twelve-tone works.

Leibowitz's later reflection identified instrumental noises as sparking the riot.³⁰ Forester remarks in reference to Webern that "His compositions are 'impressions' only a few measures long, in which the orchestra often comes forth with very peculiar sounds, sounds which make listeners ask if it is possible to produce such noises from sound-apparatus specifically designed to produce music..." (qtd. in DeVoto, "Alban Berg's Picture Postcard Songs" 120). With Webern's similar use of "new means," we find the audience reacting to these noises, but there is more than that to the riot. Later in his account, Foerster mentions the defiance in Berg's title, likely referring to the prominence of Altenberg, a somewhat controversial figure in Vienna at the time. Berg's ironic setting of "Did you see the forest after the thunderstorm?! Everything is quiet, twinkles, and is more beautiful than before. See, woman, you too need thunderstorms!" in the first song was met with laughter.³¹ The second song, "[...] introduced by an indescribably dissonant piling-up of sounds by the full weight of the whole orchestra, became the signal for an outcry." Here Foerster connects the noise of the music to the full eruption of the riot from which the concert would not recover. The Akademischer Verband was also unable to recover from the aftereffects of the scandal and their membership dwindled until they disbanded in April 1914.³²

In Egon Wellesz's eyewitness account, he mentions that a group of people (including operetta-composers) who saw themselves aloof from modern music came with the express intent of disrupting the concert. It was with this group of people that many of

³⁰ To quote Leibowitz: "To tell the truth it was unavoidable that such a work should rouse the opposition to a state of frenzy at the time. For, in its very essence, Berg's Op. 4 is a 'scandalous' work." Leibowitz, "Alban Berg's Five Orchestral Songs" 126.

³¹ From DeVoto, "Alban Berg's Picture Postcard Songs," 118. The account was reprinted in the special Schoenberg issue of *Musikblätter des Anbruch*, September 1934, 321-323. Siglind Bruhn discusses Berg's use of irony in his setting of the text in her article "Symbolism and Self-Quotation in Berg's Picture Postcard Songs," 164-167.

³² B-SCh fn.2 of the letter from Berg to Schoenberg of April 3, 1913, 166.

Schoenberg's students and followers were fighting.³³ In terms of precedents for the riot in Vienna, there was another at Franz Schreker's *Das Spielwerk und die Prinzessin*, which premiered simultaneously and sparked a riot due to its extravagant staging by the court opera director Hans Gregor as much as in reaction to the work itself.³⁴ Karl Kraus criticizes the aftereffects of the riot in an article in *Die Fackel* in May 8, 1913. In relation to the drawn-out scandal surrounding the concert in the press, he says it had little to do with new music, but instead with how and when to express a negative response. Kraus goes on to berate the Viennese press for having sunk so low.³⁵

Like noise itself, the reasons for the riot and subsequent scandal are complex and folded between the interrupting excess of the music, different tastes, and another sort of noise for the performers: their poor performance due to a lack of lead time and insufficient rehearsals. Foerster mentions that at the loud laughter of the audience in the second song, the singer's voice cracked with a slip of intonation.³⁶ After a long struggle to find a singer, they settled on the tenor Alfred Boruttau, who began learning the songs in the middle of March. When discussing the choice of Alfred Boruttau over soprano Margarete Bum, who sang the Zemlinsky, Berg says, "He is also very experienced when it comes to singing with orchestra and wouldn't get flustered easily in case of disturbances in the audience, which might not be the case with Bum!"³⁷ Clearly both Berg and Schoenberg had thought about the potential for audience unrest, but instead of being mitigated by Boruttau's experience, that potential was exacerbated by a lack of rehearsal time. Schoenberg's initial offer to program Berg's songs indicated the limited

³³ DeVoto, "Alban Berg's Picture Postcard Songs," 116.

³⁴ Berg — Schoenberg correspondence p.166 n.3

³⁵ *Fackel* XV / 374-375 (May 8, 1913) 24-25. Cited in n.3 p. 171 B-Sch

³⁶ DeVoto, "Alban Berg's Picture Postcard Songs," 120.

³⁷ Berg to Schoenberg, 11 March 1913, 163.

rehearsal time: “But it must require at most half a rehearsal? Or perhaps the Akademischer Verband will grant an additional one.”³⁸ Whatever the actual time allotted for rehearsal, it was not enough for such difficult repertoire. Schoenberg admitted as much with regard to a later performance of his chamber symphony, an easier piece than Berg’s *lieder*: “Scherchen [the conductor] had 5 rehearsals, causing me to realize that it was tantamount to suicide when I did it with 2.”³⁹

In Berg, the interruption of “new means” includes the instrumental techniques *col legno battuto* (striking the strings with the wood of the bow) found in m. 25 of the opening movement, harmonic glissandos, timpani glissandos, or even the tremolo *sul ponticello* discussed above. Not without historical precedent, these techniques are nonetheless striking and interrupt attention, drawing focus away from other nodes of the network. Interruption plays a role in deferring the collection of moments into the coherence of whole structures; by interrupting the organic flow of material, noise in the structure becomes apparent. H.P. Redlich makes a similar point to Schoenberg about the noise of these noises in relation to the whole: “[there is] a paradoxical situation of composition in which the sonic apparatus stands in an inverse relation with the temporal dimension and formal design of the music.”⁴⁰ Moments of excessive noise erupt, interrupting the emergence of order and obscuring the relation between the parts and the

³⁸ “Do you have 1-2 fairly short (fairly easy?) orchestra songs for mezzo soprano? I may do them in the *Akademischer Verband* orchestra concert if it’s on 30 March. For on that day Frau Freund would participate (for free!). The program would include: Webern’s Orchestra Pieces, your Orchestra Songs, Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder*, my Chamber Symphony. [...] Have copies of the orchestra songs prepared right away if you can (piano reductions for Frau Freund and me and full score for me). Likewise: parts, as soon as possible. But it must require at most half a rehearsal? Or perhaps the Akademischer Verband will grant an additional one.” Schoenberg to Berg 7 January 1913, 140.

³⁹ Schoenberg to Berg 9 May 1913, 177.

⁴⁰ H.F. Redlich, Alban Berg. *Versuch finer Würdigung*, (Vienna: Universal Editions, 1957), p. 76. Translation from Ashby, “Sing the Aphoristic Text: Berg’s Altenberg Lieder,” fn.50 226.

whole. What is occurring in these songs is in fact disorder becoming order.⁴¹

Disrupting Order: Noise and Fidelity

Disorder, the third fold of the model, is connected to distaste, an external judgment predicated on experience. Why group disorder with distaste? To answer this, I want to think a bit more about Egon Wellesz's eyewitness account of the concert. He recalls that, in his trial testimony, Dr. Albert went so far as to describe the effect of the music as "for a certain section of the public, so nerve-racking, and therefore so harmful for the nervous system, that many who were present already showed signs of severe attacks of neurosis."⁴² It is not clear whether Dr. Albert is trying to exonerate himself or to condemn his attacker, Erhard Buschbeck (remember both were fined), but what emerges in his account is that only certain members of the audience found the music distasteful. Here the subjective quality of distaste is at the fore, which I group with disorder because we can think of noise as disorder or chaos opposed to order. As the reversal of taste, distaste is the disordering of what one finds to be pleasurable or desirable, what fits in the order of one's pleasure principle. While distaste is external to my model, it is also a continuation of its effects.

Disorder emerges in contrast to order as its negation and vice versa. At the crux of this difference is a threshold acting as a limit that, once crossed, makes the decision.

Fidelity is the threshold crossed by a signal, which turns it into the excess and/or

⁴¹ There is an interesting parallel here to Iannis Xenakis' thesis defence where Michel Serres makes an argument about Xenakis' music and ordering from disorder. After a long exchange, Serres says, "So, the answer can now be given; it is perfectly general. You know that all the questions which have just been asked revolve around the problem: Can order be established from noise? Well, your music was the first to discover this." Xenakis, Iannis. *Arts-Sciences: Alloys*. (New York: Pendragon Pr, 1994), 78.

⁴² Quoted in Egon Wellesz's eyewitness account. DeVoto, "Alban Berg's Picture Postcard Songs," 116.

interruption of order. It thus becomes the threshold that marks noise, which is disorder. Fidelity, in this sense, does not rely on judgment and is therefore found within the threefold model of excess, interruption, and disorder, rather than as a related yet external factor (such as distaste). To think about the degree of clarity of a relation (fidelity) and how or through what the relations between entities are carried out (mediation) is crucial to any understanding of noise, which forces an excess of relations interrupting order. Mediation and fidelity thus go hand in hand.

What constitutes fidelity in the work? Thinking back to Adorno's point about colour in Berg he arrives at a means of constituting fidelity in terms of justification:

"In the Altenberg Songs Berg's circumspection also transfers to the sonoral dimension the primacy of *becoming* over *being*. Colours are not just painted in as if pre-existent, they are developed; the process by which they are created becomes their justification."⁴³

If the processes of the work are its justification, it codes its rules or means of operation through becoming. With justification comes the limit of fidelity. The thresholds of fidelity, which can either be maintained or crossed, are immanent in the work. In the opening passage (mm.1-14) the operation of the network of sounds sets the precedent for order and disorder. The processes of variation through obscuring and the excessive amplification of colour create disorder. These processes establish how order will be avoided, which simultaneously constitutes fidelity by setting up what order and disorder are defined against.

Likewise, disorder in the piece manifests through its ordering because of noise. We can think about unity — a sort of order — and disorder by considering the passacaglia form of song V along with some of the material it shares with the first song.

⁴³ Adorno, *Berg*, 63.

DeVoto's analysis focuses on the ties between song I and V due to their structural and motivic ties, going so far as to analyze them side by side before doing the middle three. The first and fifth songs are made up of a multiplicity of motives, while the middle songs focus on single motives.⁴⁴ Within their network of sounds, songs I and V share a five note chord progression and a twelve note pitch set with the same ordering that is used to make two different melodies, one in each song.⁴⁵ The shared chord progression is found in the opening climax m. 15 of the first song (*fff*), while in the fifth, it appears *pp* at the close. Architectural features such as these serve to create unity or order within the structure, which is obscured on the surface level by noise. Order is created in the last song through the frequent reference to tonality than the others along with its form, a passacaglia. Rather than taking a single theme as a baroque passacaglia would, the movement uses five themes — two of which are drawn from previous movements, one from the third song, and one from the first — and plays them out over nine variations of approximately five bars each. The piece ends with a high degree of order, but does this unify the work as a whole?

To answer this we can return to Adorno, who says of the final movement:

“This fixed form [the passacaglia of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*], which Schoenberg and Berg chose freely, induces in both composition and texture more cohesive, less disintegrated, indeed, more familiar design. That is the source of that unifying force, ever the goal of new music, which is fundamentally open-ended. Though the problem of closure can never be completely solved, it can nowhere be ignored.”⁴⁶

The unifying force, which Adorno identifies as the goal of new music, does come in a

⁴⁴ See DeVoto, “Alban Berg's Picture Postcard Songs,” 66.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 60-65. Elaborates the interrelations between songs as well as making connections to Berg's later works such as *Lulu*. For connections with his later works also see: Douglas Jarman, “Alban Berg: The Origins of a Method.” *Music Analysis* 6, no. 3 (October 1, 1987): 273-88.

⁴⁶ Adorno, *Berg*, 64.

sense in the end through the ordering of the form and the less complex relations in the network of sound. But the problem of closure, which is a form of ordering, can never be completely solved. To draw on another quote of Adorno:

“By contrast [in comparison to Schreker’s work], Berg’s compositional approach and overall technique exhibit, at least in his earlier works, a decided tendency toward the dissociative, extending even to his instrumentation. His sound, like his motivic-thematic organization, yearns to return to its component elements. Planned disorganization becomes organization; such clear-cut intention transforms those eighteen instrumental bars into something other than the chaos they initially appeared to be.”⁴⁷

Adorno’s point – that planned disorganization becomes organization in the Altenberg lieder – also cuts the other way. Even the ordered passacaglia, which in this situation is most predicated on unity, is not without noise because of its parasitic attachment to its medium of sound. With the always-open question of closure, unity is always already disrupted by the noise within any structure that relies on a medium, whether it is sound, form, motive, or otherwise. By thinking noise as wholly separate, as something that enters or as something external, we miss the noise within the network. At the end of the passage above, Adorno ties the disintegration of the chaos of the first eighteen bars into something other than what they appear to be, but he does not name them as unified. This ‘something other’ — not chaos or disorder but neither order nor unity — is what I have worked to bring out: noise. In the end of the Berg unity is achieved, but not without noise.

Through the Altenberg Lieder and the historical site of the *Skandalkonzert*, I have shown how noise cannot be reduced to a singular definition. Instead, it operates in a dynamic threefold model of excess, interruption, and disorder. Just as unity dissolves, so

⁴⁷ Ibid, 65.

does any clear demarcation of any one fold of the three. A bare signal without noise is the fantasy of analysis, which can only be created in a theoretically a priori space. Before actual sounding, constructed spaces outside of experience are always vacuums; yet sound cannot exist in a vacuum because it would be without medium, which has vanished in our theoretical space of perfect fidelity. If the desire for a vanishing mediation is actualized, we are left without the signal we also desire: to think of music without noise is to think of music without sound.

Chapter 2: Noise in Theory – Tracing Noise

Part I: Phonophobic Being – Limits of Presence and Mediation of Limits

What then can be said of the noise that makes music sound – the noise of the mediation of matter and experience? From the site of the *Skandalkonzert*'s exceeding, interrupting, or disordering folds comes the ability to think noise under both its sonic vector as well as in its cybernetic vector of interruption in a system not necessarily based in sound. These folds and vectors open the way for tracking what is in-between them: the noise of noise, the noise of materialization that is the goal of this study. Jacques Derrida's expansion of writing in *Of Grammatology* provides the means to think writing as the mediator between matter and experience. Through a reading of Derrida's work, I will open my understanding of noise and provide a new background to Jonathan Sterne's thought. Sterne's *The Audible Past* thinks about the ways in which sound, as heard, is historically contingent on social conditioning. By critiquing Sterne's grounding distinction of the interior and exterior of sound, I hope to provide a background for what remains unheard: sound in the world. By distancing sound from human hearing, I will speculate on a means of acknowledging its inaccessible absence—an absence that nonetheless shapes what is heard—by attuning to noise.

Sense of Sense: Sound Presence

From the very first pages of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida positions his concept of writing as exceeding and comprehending that of language. Writing is expanded to mean not only physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription, but also the totality of what makes inscription possible beyond the signifying face, the signifying face

itself.⁴⁸ This expanded concept describes the contrary movement of language itself, which, in its “origin [...] conceals and erases itself in its own production” (*Of Grammatology* 7). With the conceptual shift to *écriture*, a palimpsestic field emerges; the traditional logic of the sign is overwhelmed by erasure, opening the field to play. This chapter will explore the erasing potential of the logic of the sign along with the element of the trace. The first section will compare Derrida’s account of phonocentrism in *Of Grammatology* and what Jonathan Sterne deems the “audio-visual litany” to show the similarities between their thought on the grounds of presence. I will show how Derrida’s *écriture* is a better support than Sterne’s reliance on the distinction between interiority and exteriority, because it opens the way for noise and while providing a new background for Sterne without going against his founding commitments. I will read noise out of Derrida’s writing through its operation of erasing while materializing, in order to highlight the importance of sound in his thought, and the implication of this line of thought in sound.

Of Grammatology opens with a critique of presence by tracing the connection between voice and presence in the sign through its historical trajectory. This connection forms the basis of phonocentrism and of logocentrism more broadly, in which sound plays a primary role: the essence of the *phonè* is the assumption of immediate proximity between the meaning of the voice and the thought of the logos. The meaning received by the logos speaks to and composes it. The classical version of logocentrism is found in Aristotle’s conception of the sign, where spoken words (*ta en tē phonè*) are the symbols of mental experience (*pathēmata tes psychēs*) and written words are symbols of spoken

⁴⁸ Here Derrida’s use of the “signifying face” shows his debt to Emmanuel Levinas in the formation of the *trace* and *écriture*. Unfortunately, I cannot go into the role of sound in his trace, although the sonic dimensions of Levinas’ trace and broader thought have potential for future work.

words because the voice is the producer of first symbols and has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind (qtd. *Of Grammatology* 11). The meaning received by the logos speaks to and composes it. In this way, between being and mind (or things and feelings), Aristotle posits a relationship of translation or natural signification. The natural feelings and expression of the mind are marked by the voice as the closest to the signified, whether taken as sense or thing, establishing a relationship of conventional symbolization.⁴⁹ The *phonè* or voice, as primary symbol, positions the meaning of being as presence. From Aristotle to Heidegger, the act of hearing (understanding) oneself speak is how the subject affects itself and relates to itself. Sound and voice are thus at the centre of being in the epoch of logocentrism. Seeing the binary between writing and speech without listening to the noise Derrida is amplifying, Jonathan Sterne reads Derrida as using his position to “argue for the visual side of the audiovisual litany—an emphasis on vision, writing, difference, and absence. Deconstruction inverts, inhabits, and reanimates the sound/vision binary, privileging writing over speech” (17).⁵⁰ Reading Derrida as a simple inversion of the binary of writing over sound, while grafting vision over sound as metonymic stand-ins, Sterne misses the force of his work.⁵¹ Derrida listens to the various thinkers he engages with through *Of Grammatology* and amplifies

⁴⁹ As Derrida points out, in *De interpretatione* Aristotle oscillates between signified as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing.

⁵⁰ Sound studies scholar Veit Erlmann in *Reason and Resonance* (18-20) also misreads Derrida’s goal as that of inversion.

⁵¹ The sensory turn is a part of a larger shift in humanities scholarship to historicize the dominant role of visual metaphors and ways of knowing along with how these ground Western thought. A seminal casting of this history and the ways in which it has shifted in the 20th century is Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Sound studies attempts to think how other senses can problematize visual ways of knowing and metaphors. An overview of key works in the field of sound studies is *The Sound Studies Reader* edited by Jonathan Sterne, *Key Words in Sound* edited by David Novak, *The Auditory Culture Reader* edited by Michael Bull and Les Back, or *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* edited by Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijstervelds.

the noise in the margins of their projects, with the goal of critiquing the ground of metaphysics or any other system that posits an immobile point whose meaning is immediately present. I will show how attending to the expansion of *écriture* instead problematizes the very structure that supports the apparent elevation of writing over sound. It thereby amplifies the background of Sterne's project by silently acknowledging sound in the world: sound that is not constituted by its hearer or a subject, but as erased material that supports sound heard. Put another way, the noise of Sterne's project is sound in the world—actual material sound—which he has bracketed in favour of treating the social conditioning of sound. By attuning to the limits Derrida writes, we can maintain the gains of Sterne's theory of sound, which accounts strongly for the social conditioning of sound as experienced, while maintaining a reminder of what is not present but grounds what is experienced (that is also not present but an illusion of presence).

Sterne “begins by positing sound, hearing, and listening as historical problems rather than as constants” (21-22) in order to re-describe sound without reverting to an interior subjectivity (or logocentric) theory that threatens to speak to sound in all times and places. In order to posit sound as a problem, Sterne must also consider the relationships between hearing and seeing, technological reproduction and sensory orientation, original and copy, as well as presence and absence in communication. He collects a series of constitutive oppositions between sound/vision in what he terms the audiovisual litany:

- hearing is spherical, vision is directional;
- hearing immerses its subject, vision offers a perspective;

- sounds come to us, but vision travels to its object;
- hearing is concerned with interiors, vision is concerned with surfaces;
- hearing involves physical contact with the outside world, vision requires distance from it;
- hearing places us inside an event, seeing gives us a perspective on the event;
- hearing tends towards subjectivity, vision tends toward objectivity;
- hearing brings us into the living world, sight moves us toward atrophy and death;
- hearing is about affect, vision is about intellect;
- hearing is a primarily temporal sense, vision is a primarily spatial sense;
- hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, vision is a sense that removes us from it (15).⁵²

For Sterne, this litany is ideological in the oldest sense, because it operates within the pre-Christian distinction between spirit and letter, denigrating vision as a fallen sense that takes us out of the world while also holding it as redemptive (the light of reason).⁵³

⁵² Sterne's sources for the litany are as follow:

“This list is most clearly elaborated in Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981). See also Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 30 – 72; Attali, *Noise*; Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception*; Marshall McLuhan and Edmund Carpenter, ‘Acoustic Space’ in *Explorations in Communication: An Anthology*, ed. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon, 1960); Rick Altman ‘The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound,’ in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992); John Shepard, *Music as a Social Text* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1984); Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963); and *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections of Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), esp. 1 – 29; and Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic Culture of Early-Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3 – 29.”

Sterne further develops the intellectual history behind the litany, as it appears in the Toronto School, in his article “Theology and Sound: A Critique of Orality.”

⁵³ For more on the spirit letter distinction see: Susan Handelman *Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*

Thinkers who work out from this litany position the senses as something that history takes place between, rather than as points through which to enter history. The reduction to an ontology or epistemology predicated on a single sense blocks other sensory ways of knowing, while positioning that sense as a constant. It therefore disregards the context of a situation because it imports the limits of the sensory framing, along with a specific way of knowing. In his introduction, Sterne critiques views of sound that fall under various versions of phonocentrism and attempts to distance himself from Derrida, asking:

[r]ather than inverting the audiovisual litany, why not re-describe sound? Since this book is not bound by Christian doctrine, there is no law — divine or otherwise — requiring us to assume the interiority of sound and the connection between sound, subjective self-presence, and intersubjective experience. [...] If history exists within the senses as well as between them, then we need not begin a history of sound with an assertion of the transhistorical dimensions of sound. (18)

Sterne reads Derrida as merely “inverting” the litany rather than re-describing sound. Sterne also works to distance himself from antiquated historical methodologies that ground or found transhistorical and transcultural concepts to do with sound, concepts that can be said to speak for everyone’s experience in all times and places, which attempt to articulate the *exterior of all* from the *interior of one*. For Sterne:

The history of sound is at different moments strangely silent, [...] and always contextual. This is because that elusive inside world of sound – the sonorous, the auditory, the heard, the very density of sonic experience – emerges and becomes perceptible only through its exteriors. (13)

His consideration of epistemic issues of experience forces a split in his work between interior and exterior—a distinction or decision which, following Derrida, must implode, and to which Sterne attempts to hold. For Sterne, the interior collects the limits and impossibilities of recovering what it is like to experience from documents, objects, and

other traces that form the exteriority of sound history, which, he asserts “[...] is nothing but exteriorities” (*Audible Past* 19). We know there was an audible past distinct from our own, but what it was like to experience that sound at that time will be forever unknowable. To shift his study into the exteriors of sound, Sterne defines sound as what is heard. The historical precedence of this definition comes from German physiologist Johannes Müller (1801-58), who writes, “without the organ of hearing with its vital endowments, there would be no such thing as sound in the world, but merely vibrations” (qtd. Baly, *Elements of Physiology* 714). From here Sterne marks his position that “[s]ounds are defined as that class of vibrations perceived — and, in a more exact sense, sympathetically produced — by the functioning ear when they travel through a medium that can convey changes in pressure (such as air)” (*Audible Past* 11). Sterne reveals a choice operating at the point of his decision between sounds as a class of vibration that *might* be heard or that *is* heard — either way, hearing is what makes a vibration into a sound.

Continuing to delimit the exterior, Sterne focuses on the social condition(ing) of sound through listening as a directed and learned activity: a definite cultural practice. Listening requires hearing but is not reducible to it. Nor is hearing a natural experience unmediated by culture. Here Sterne points to Marx’s emphasis on the importance of sensory history: “[b]efore the senses are real, palpable, concrete, or available for contemplation, they are already affected and effected through the particular historical conditions that also give rise to the subject who possesses them” (5). Writing with Marx’s historical conditions in mind, Sterne traverses the in-between point, separating the history of sound from the phenomenon of sound itself. While he recognizes the tensions in the

latent distinction between culture and nature evoked by this difference, his naïve grounding distinction between exterior and interior—and the related parsing of nature/culture—that ultimately limits his theory of sound and history. To avoid rehashing the clichés of the litany, Sterne borrows a phrase from Michel Chion, and seeks to “disengage sound thinking [...] from its naturalistic rut” (qtd. Sterne 14). In doing so, Sterne seeks not to limit what we can become through a trans-historical/cultural frame.⁵⁴ What Sterne fails to realize is that the concepts he uses are deeply rutted in naturalistic thought. To work otherwise, to work around, would be to go against their history. The distinction between nature and culture permeates the introduction; Sterne considers nature as the implied opposite to history, modernity, and sound technology. By thinking about the nature of sound and hearing, he positions histories of sound and the phenomenon of sound in general as always occupying a blurred space in-between nature and culture, where culture is taken as what changes over time while nature is permanent, timeless, and unchanging. Sterne joins Michael Taussig in critiquing this binary as offering a thin view of nature, a straw figure for social constructivist arguments. Yet a few pages later, nature appears connected to static or unchanging transhistorical concepts while he works to track the dynamic shifts of sound as a socio-cultural phenomena (10-11).⁵⁵ The difference Sterne assumes between nature and culture, and between inside and outside, is constituted by an untenable limit, as Derrida’s work shows.

⁵⁴ As Sterne points out “As it [the audio-visual litany] appears in Ong’s eschatology or Schafer’s ideal society, the audiovisual litany carries with it assertions about what we necessarily are, and, by extension, it is an argument about the limits of what we can become.” Sterne 2003, 345.”

⁵⁵ Michel Taussig’s argument is much more complex, *Mimesis and Alterity* vi-xviii

Inside and Outside Experience: Collapse of Limits

Derrida demonstrates the limits between the outside and the inside in his section titles: “The Outside and the Inside” comes ahead of “The Outside ~~Is~~ the Inside.” Here the French homophones *is* (est) and *and* (et) perform the force of his critique of the firm distinction between outside and inside—or, to use the language of Sterne, the interior and exterior—by blurring the limit that divides them, showing their mutual implication or co-constitution. Derrida reads the relation between interior and exterior out from Saussure’s signifier/signified, where the signifier denotes the exterior and the signified is of interior intelligibility. In Saussure’s theory of the sign, there is a natural bond of sense and the senses (the signifier mediating the signified and, by extension, the logos). As Saussure says, this natural bond is the only true bond: the bond of sound (qtd. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 35). Writing in relation to this bond is an artificial exteriority; as Plato argues in the *Phaedrus*, it is an artful technique intruding on the inside by forcing the entry of the outside from within. The limits of the natural bond and the interior-external distinction are not statically set, but break apart in their very constitution: “Above all, in considering the audible as the *natural* milieu within which language must *naturally* fragment and articulate its instituted signs, thus exercising its arbitrariness, this explanation excludes the very moment that affirms it” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 42). The arbitrariness of the sign does not leave the choice of signifier to the speaker. The signifier is not decided in reference to a possible trace. There is no signified before the mediation of the signifier, no signified without medial noise. In addition, there is no natural attachment of the signifier to the signified in reality. This draws into question not the attachment nor meaning, but rather the idea of naturalness itself. The absence of another possible trace, “another transcendental present,” “another here-and-now,” or

“another origin of the world appearing as such” leaves open the question of metaphysics itself, but also describes the force of the arbitrariness of the sign, the possibility of oppositions such as nature/culture – the meanings arising only after the possibility of the trace (47).⁵⁶ The absence of another possible trace from which a signified can gain meaning, through the seemingly unmediated metaphor, forecloses the possibility of fidelity without noise because mediation will always already differ and defer without transcending history.

⁵⁶ Giorgio Agamben critiques Derrida’s of thinking he has surpassed metaphysics when, for Agamben, he had simply brought the fundamental problems of metaphysics to light. “If metaphysics is that reflection that places the voice as origin, it is also true that this voice is, from the beginning, conceived as removed, as Voice. To identify the horizon of metaphysics simply in that supremacy of the *phonè* and then to believe in one’s power to overcome this horizon through the *gramma*, is to conceive of metaphysics without coexistent negativity. Metaphysics is always already grammatology and this is *fundamentology* in the sense that the *gramma* (or the Voice) functions as the negative ontological foundation.” Agamben, *Language and Death* 39. Emphasis in original. Originally cited in Dyson, *Sounding New Media* 97. Dyson speculates that it is this difference between voice and Voice, between the ideality and materiality of the voice that led Derrida to turn his attention to audiophony in latter writings. (Dyson, 97). The resonances between Derrida’s work and that of Agamben can be traced throughout Agamben’s writing and in select moments in Derrida such as his last lecture *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Kevin Attell has written about Agamben’s engagement with Derrida in *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (2015).

Another interesting and important critique to consider is gestured at by Frances Dyson in *Sounding New Media*, where she points to Derrida’s silence when it comes to the Aristotelian distinction between *phōnē* and *lexis*. In an article, François Lyotard points to Aristotle’s distinction between *phōnē* as “the voice as timbre” and *lexis* “the articulated voice,” suggesting the difference between the two comes down to noise – the sounds of the body, of timbre, and grain, which interrupt meaningful speech. Connecting the Greek derivation in the word *legein*, which Heidegger interprets as the “letting-lie-before” of logos to avoid the consequence of aurality, which she takes up earlier in her text. *Lexis* is also akin to the Latin *legere* to recount, say, or speak. The force of her critique is that “by conflating sound and voice in this way and absorbing both within the silence of *écriture* and the trace, Derrida’s deconstruction is always veering towards the inner and silent voice of metaphysics – the Husserlian voice he critiques in *Speech and Phenomena*.” Dyson *Sounding New Media*, 97. Lyotard, “Voices of a Voice” 130.

While raising important points, both of these critiques variably misconstrue the expansion of *archi-écriture* that encompasses in the trace both speech and writing and unsettles the very structure supporting the distinction Agamben makes between *gramma* and *phōnē*. With *gramma* being that which is drawn and written, again *phōnē* and *gramma* function as metonymic stand-ins for the opposition between vision and sound. This is not to say that this wholly absolves these criticisms but that they will have to be deferred.

Also worth noting is Stephen Crocker’s interesting comparison between noise in Michel Serres and the exception in Agamben, see: “Noises and Exceptions: Pure Mediality in Serres and Agamben.”

Derrida uses unmotivated as a metonymic stand-in for Saussure's arbitrariness because it removes the arbitrariness of arbitrary meaning while maintaining the de-naturalization of economies of signification: the de-naturalization of a signified before the signifier. Breaking the natural bond between sound and meaning, the unmotivated trace requires a synthesis within what is not it as its use is other than what it is. "The trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of the entity [étant], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present starting from the occulted movement of the trace. The trace must be thought before the entity" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 47). Here, Derrida is not repeating the theological because the theological is a moment, the moment or point of the transcendental signified, in the total movement of the trace. The shift from being to becoming is crucial because it marks the trace as a process, as a movement of temporalization rather than being as the fixity of a point of presence, the transcendental signified that occurs outside of time in pure or an unmediated absolute. The force of the importance of sound, rather than its subjugation, comes to the fore in this setting: "The immotivation of the trace ought now to be understood as an operation and not as a state, as an active movement, a demotivation, and not as a given structure" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 51). This momentary break looks beyond the re-writing through Saussure towards the end point of the beginning of Derrida's writing – where grammatology is realized as a vast field, including but not exclusive to writing in and before speech. Derrida's shift from being, a static point, to becoming, a movement with time, is written on a palimpsest of sound – sound in the world is always already erased in the writing of experience. The tradition of sound-as-presence is erased, and what remains is the dynamic temporal and spatializing

aspect of sound. While not exclusive to sound, sound offers a site through which to see the erasing materiality central to materialization. Derrida's *écriture* works to write the open, shifting limits that see the break between sound being-heard and sound in the world bleeding together, effecting noise.

Derrida's critique of logocentrism establishes a base for the distinction between sound in the world and sound heard by showing the limits of presence, while Sterne's critique of the audiovisual litany shows how sound heard is conditioned and sets the position for a new background not decided by his own opposition or limit between interior / exterior. Derrida uses the structure of hearing itself via the tympanic membrane to think about the limit, and in this structure the untenability of Sterne's grounding opposition between exterior and interior can be heard. In "Tympan," Derrida uses hearing and sound to delimit the limits of the limit. Talking and playing with the figure of the tympanic membrane of the inner ear, Derrida writes in resonance with the right hand of the text (Michel Leiris' *Biggeres*), creating his first polyphonic text, a practice he would further develop in "Feu la cindre" and *Glas*, among others. "To tympanize – philosophy" may be to amplify its noise, to think "being at its limit:" a phrase that forms neither a proposition nor a discourse, yet contains enough to engender almost all the sentences in the book (Derrida x). In Derrida's tympanizing—his thinking of philosophical being at its limit—and his sonic motifs, the key role of sound in his thought becomes audible:

The *proprius* [Latin, own or individual and particular] presupposed in all discourses on economy, sexuality, language, semantics, rhetoric, etc., repercusses its absolute limit only in sonorous representation. Such, at least, is the most insistent hypothesis of this book. A quasi-organizing role is granted, therefore, to the motif of sonic vibration (the Hegelian *Erzittern*) as to the motif of the proximity of the meaning of Being in speech (Heideggerian *Nähe* and *Ereignis*). ("Tympan" xix)

The proper of Being, being its *own other* as well as *the other proper to Being*, hinges on proximity, hearing oneself speak or auto-affection.⁵⁷ The resounding of the absolute limit of the proper comes through sonorous representation. To *re*-percuss is to resonate, to vibrate sympathetically, amplifying the matter of sound – to resonate is a form of noise, a reminder of the material world grounding experience. Sound strikes the absolute limit, the limit that forms the meaning of Being in the event (*Ereignis*) and the sense of proximity (*Nähe*), whose sonic formation in Heidegger will be taken up in the following section. Sound mediates the limits between proper Being and the other. The other of sound is noise: the sound in the margins of the limit; the unheard sound in the world, which is erased in the writing of hearing. Noise, in this sense, is the other side of the limit constituting Being and is mediated by the Tympanum, which regulates the limit between the interior and exterior. Noise, in the sense of unheard sound in the world, is that which mediates sound heard. It is by looking at the mediation of *écriture*, the mediation of mediation, that Derrida's work can be seen as an amplifier of the matter of noise.⁵⁸ With the collapse of the limits supporting centricisms, suddenly the break between sound heard and sound in the world is untenable because one is always already a part of the other.

⁵⁷ Probing the limit at the heart of philosophy, the limit where *Being* is understood as that which is proper: *Le propre*, to own or proper – Derrida uses this throughout *Margins of Philosophy* and elsewhere to hinge between its *own other* and *the other proper to Being*. “If Being is in effect a process of reappropriation, the ‘question of Being’ of a new type can never be percussed without being measured against the absolutely coextensive question of the proper” (xix).

⁵⁸ Viet Erlmann critiques Derrida's “Tympan” on the grounds of what he sees as an anatomical mistake, which he sees as a symptom of deconstruction's apparent need to be “resonance-proof” (19-20). Yet on my hearing, deconstruction in fact works with and through resonance. Writing without resonance would be to write under the heading of immediate, unmediated communication. As it will become clear, resonance, which Erlmann values for its upsetting of static positioning, is the metonymic core of *Of Grammatology* because it can stand in for the unheard sound or sound in the world, which allows for the drift of the supplement and the displacement of *différance*. The resonance of erasing matter in the writing of experience traces sound; deconstruction is the amplifier that attunes to the sound that cannot be heard, a sympathetic amplification of sound's materiality and noise.

Sterne's grounding slips away with the collapse of the firm limit separating the interior from the exterior. In order to retain the important developments he has made on the formation of audible techniques his work needs a new ground, one that acknowledges what is not there, the erased sound in the world and its noise.

Mediation of Mediation: Writing Between World and Experience

Noise is neither an object unto itself nor a quality, but the mediating third point in a relation. In this way, it occupies an environment and moves with the spacing of the trace to fill in the margins, to fill into the in-between. Contrasting Derrida's theory of the trace with Hegel's account of mediation will show how noise as a mediator upsets traditional approaches to mediation or dialectics. Derrida's, Sterne's, and Hegel's understandings of mediation mark the difference in the ways they are able to think noise, setting the limits of noise in their theories. While Sterne does not address Hegel's writings on sound, Derrida's engagement with Hegel offers another stance on interior/exterior and the corresponding theory of mediation implicit in his theory of sound; Derrida also offers a way to problematize Sterne's theory of history based on exteriority. I will trace how Sterne approaches the medium of sound and mediation in sound reproduction, illustrating how a theory of sound that embraces deconstruction can extend Sterne's thought into the matter of sound while still supporting his important work in tracing the development of audible techniques.

The medium of sound for Sterne precedes the technology of sound media, and he argues for an understanding of medium that embraces the plasticity and "the malleability of form itself" (182). Here the medium through which mediation occurs is social, "a recurring set of contingent social relations and social practices (...) a medium is therefore the social basis that allows a set of technologies to stand out as a unified thing with

clearly defined functions” (182).⁵⁹ If for Sterne the medium of mediation is social, it follows that the mediation itself is limited to the cultural in his study, and that mediation as a cultural problem is only one way of describing sound reproduction (a limitation of which he is aware). Sterne describes the medium of sound reproduction “as an apparatus, network – a whole set of relations, practices, people, and technologies,” and the possibility of reproduction emerges from the character and connectedness of the medium (225). As Sterne and others have shown, theories of sound recording that think of reproduced sounds as mediations of live sound are often accompanied by a desire for vanishing mediation: the fetishistic desire for a medium that erases itself in the reproduction, leaving no loss of fidelity, no difference in the status of being between original and copy. Beyond theories of sound, the desire for a technologically-mediated yet perfect fidelity between an original sound and its copy is audible throughout the history of reproduction technology, whether in Edison’s desire to speak to the dead or Victor Records’ famous advertisements, or in more the recent development of noise reduction software.⁶⁰ Sterne shows that when the goal of listening is transparency, the fact of reproduction is instrumentalized and ignored (or fetishized) in order to uphold a relation between original-copy that posits an impossible presence or proximity. He tracks

⁵⁹ Sterne points to Lukacs’ notion of reification as a good description of this sort of media history.

⁶⁰ The ad shows a Jack Russell terrier with its head cocked listening to a phonograph of his deceased master’s voice. Sterne perfectly sums up the lines of thought around fidelity of sound reproduction in relation to a the Victor Talking Machine Company’s 1924 ad campaign for the Orthophonic Victrola: “As a product of forty years of fidelity rhetoric, the ad series brings together several key elements...: the narrative of technical progress; the belief in the transparency of reproduced sound; the desire for pure tone; and the equivalence of live and recorded music” (275). For more on the “His Master’s Voice” campaign, see Sterne 301-3 or 306-7.

An example of recent developments in noise reduction software is that samples a quiet portion of the track where the unwanted background noise is present then reverses the polarity or phrase and uses that to cancel out that band of noise in the rest of the track. It is the co-existence of the promise of “noiseless digital audio,” which affords features such as noise canceling, with the large group of listeners preferring old analogue vacuum-tube technology for its warmer more “present” sound. John Mowitt collects this tension nicely when he points out: “The fetish of noise reduction has gone hand in hand with the aggressive marketing of distortion boosters and other less obvious instrumental sources of noise” (qtd. Sterne, 277).

the evolution of the audible techniques for transparency—the ability to distinguish the sound-of from the sound-by the medium—linking them to the social training of experience, which Sterne shows is always intensely social (259). How can we hear the other side of this social conditioning, not in order to negate Sterne’s work but to ground the sound of the social on sound in the world? However socio-cultural Sterne’s method and object, *The Audible Past* is still written against—in the sense of up against rather than necessarily contra—theories of sound recording and re-production. That is, external sociality is written up against the noise of the externals of sound. Put another way, by grounding sound on the exterior form through social conditioning of sound-heard, Sterne has lost the grounding *sound* heard. In contrast, the structure of the trace is the formation of form, which audibly supports the malleable form that Sterne requires or seeks.

Sterne is at his most audibly Derridean when he puts forward his argument about sound’s reproduction, which is not based on a causal relation between original and copy. Instead, the original sound embedded in the recording bears a causal relationship to the reproduction, “but only because the original is itself an artefact of the process of reproduction” (219). Sterne argues that any account of mediation “ontologizes” sound reproduction too quickly because any variably Platonist theory relying on the original / copy distinction “will most likely bracket the question of what constitutes the originality itself. In emphasizing the products of reproduction, it effaces the process” (219).⁶¹ His use of “ontologizes” collects two points: first, the understandable desire to move away from a static understanding of being, which has repeatedly been shown to be unsupportive of sound (among other things); and second, an attempt to distance himself

⁶¹ The theory in the background of Sterne’s argument against mediation in favour of process is Deleuze’s reversal of Platonism in “Plato and the Simulacrum.” Unfortunately, my limited scope prevents me from contrasting this essay of Deleuze with Derrida’s system.

from theory in general. Sterne's view of the problem of the original versus copy draws on Benjamin's argument in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" to illustrate his concept of *aura*, which is constructed retroactively and is an artefact of reproducibility rather than a remainder of self-presence: "In fact, reproduction does not really separate copies from originals but instead results in the creation of a distinctive form of originality: the possibility of reproduction transforms the practice of production" (320). In the end of Benjamin's reading of cinema, nature as immediate reality disappears, leaving reproduction to highlight the very possibility of "reality having an immediate self-presence in the first place: authenticity and presence become issues only when there is something to which we can compare them" (220). What Sterne gains from Benjamin is that with reproduction comes not a copy of an original but a new form of original and a transformation of production. This calls into question the presence of the original because it is only when compared to another, a copy, that the original gains its sense of presence. In this way Sterne is able to put aside the matter of the original and copy in order to focus on the social mediation of sound.

In a Hegelian theory of relation, the whole progresses in the form of a dialectic, where mediation (*vermittlung*) is the unification of two terms by a third. To think of becoming in a Hegelian sense is to think of the motion between immediate and mediation: "The 'I,' or becoming—in general, this mediation, on account of its simple nature, is just immediacy in the process of becoming, and is the immediate itself" (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 11). The immediate (*unmittelbar*) and immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit*) are both direct and are unrelated to other things, being expressed only in intuition by terms in the domain of the Absolute, which Hegel notes is "essentially a

result” (11). Mediation (*Vermittlung*), mediated (*vermitteln*), and mediate (*mittelbar*) are the indirect terms of becoming, and are related to other things. Where mediation is complex, relational, or developed, the immediate is simple, given, and/or initial. Even the terms themselves—mediation and immediacy—require mediation in their relation to one another, leading Hegel to his distinction that nothing is purely mediated or purely immediate, but both at once.⁶²

In contrast to Hegelian theories of becoming as development towards futurity, Derrida’s trace is always already mediated by writing, undoing the possibility of pure immediacy through a different relation to temporality. The trace refers to an absolute past because its motion, its *différance*, forces an understanding of the past that is not a modified presence but instead holds a passive relationship to the future. Noise is the very effect of the process of becoming that problematizes theories of presence because it disrupts the possibility of full fidelity to an Absolute presence or immediacy; noise is the mediating third, causing difference as well as deferral. Without the *grammè* (written mark), interiority – what seems like the most familiar thing in the world – would not appear. The *grammè* inscribes a sense of presence through the temporalization of its becoming while positioning the non-presence of the other. The presence-absence of the trace is what allows for play, and carries in that seeming aporia all the problematics through which Derrida wrote.

Derrida draws on a section of Hegel’s *The Philosophy of Fine Art* for an example of the privilege and idealization of sound in Western metaphysics. In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel theorizes sound as:

⁶² For a fuller discussion of mediation and immediacy in Hegel, see Inwood 183.

This ideal motion, in which through the sound what is as it were the simple subjectivity (*Subjektivität*), the soul of the material thing expresses itself, the ear receives also in a theoretical (*theoretisch*) way, just as the eye shape and colour, thus allowing the interiority of the object to become interiority itself (...) (*Lectures on Fine Art* 15-16).

The ear, on the contrary, perceives (*vernimmt*) the result of that interior vibration of material substance without placing itself in a practical relation toward the objects, a result by means of which it is no longer the material form [*Gestalt*] in its repose, but the first, more ideal activity of the soul itself which is manifested (*zum Vorschein kommt*). (341)

For Derrida, Hegel's treatment of sound in general is *a fortiori* valid for the *phonè* of the voice, through which the listening subject hears (understands) its own speech and thus affects itself and is related to itself in the element of ideality (*Of Grammatology* 13). As has been shown through Aristotle and will be approached again with Heidegger, the *phonè* of hearing-oneself-speak is indissociable from the process of ideality of meaning, because as the listening subject understands himself or herself they also affect their self. In Hegel's account of sounding, the interior vibration of the material substance of sound is perceived (*vernimmt*) without a practical relation to the object. Instead of the material form (*Gestalt*), the ideal activity of the soul is manifested in the act of hearing. This presencing of the soul in hearing is contrasted with vision, where the interior of the object becomes interiority itself. Hearing and sound are privileged in the process of idealization through their making present the concept itself and the self-presence of the listening subject.

By establishing the roots of phonocentrism, Derrida shows writing's historical role as the mediation of mediation, in which writing is secondary and speech is idealized

as presence in the ontotheological tradition (which joins Christian creationism with the concepts of the Greek philosophical tradition). Drawing out the close distinction of signifier as what is sensible and signified as what is intelligible, Derrida historicizes the sensible and the intelligible (along with what follows from this distinction) as being metaphysical in its totality. No matter how far semiological or linguistic science holds itself from metaphysics, the distinction between signifier and signified—the basic structure of the sign—cannot be made without simultaneously evoking the difference between the sensible and the intelligible. Moreover, in order for a signified to “take place” in its intelligibility, before its “fall” or expulsion into the exteriority of the sensible, it must make reference to a pure intelligibility or an absolute logos from which it is unmediated. Derrida again re-affirms his method not as a rejection of these ideas, but as a demonstration of their operation and historical conditions to show that the exteriority of the signifier is the exteriority of writing, and that there is no linguistic sign before writing. With Derrida’s *écriture* comes the re-thinking of the trace of writing as the mediating factor between world and experience—from in-between these two terms comes the noise of mediation.

Part II: Tracing Erasing of Matter – Noise and Experience

Erasing Experience in *Écriture*: Tracing the Trace

Sound acts as a limit case because of its heightened temporal ephemerality: a non-exclusive site through which to think about matter in the world and matter in experience. Derrida draws on sound unheard as a refrain in *Of Grammatology* to bring out the difference between matter in experience and world or event, with unheard acting as a reminder of what is written over and no longer there. This section will show how the absence of unheard sound and its role in materialization engenders noise. I will take up

the difference between unheard in Heidegger and Derrida to show how Derrida's work supports absent material sound, first by tracking the temporality of the trace as it puts writing in motion, along with noise, and second, by how writing under-erasure divides while inscribing matter in the writing of experience.

There is a moment in the trajectory of *Of Grammatology* where the trace becomes audibly distinct from a mark because it contains within it the delay that, when joined with difference, forms *différance*. Here is where noise opens, between the signifier and the signified as the reminder of what in the world is erased through writing. Derrida arranges the temporality of the trace as:

The reassuring evidence within which Western tradition had to organize itself and must continue to live would therefore be as follows: the order of the signified is never contemporary, is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of a breath – from the order of the signifier. And the sign must be the unity of a heterogeneity, since the signified (sense or thing, noeme or reality) is not in itself a signifier, a *trace*; in any case is not constituted in its sense by its relationship with a possible trace (18).

Given the delay posited by the signified in its mediation of the signifier—that is, the mediation of mediation—the sign cannot be unified because it is comprised of parts of different orders. The signifier, the material trace, mediates the signified; the signified is not itself material insofar as it is always already mediated by the signifier. The limits of a trace are not formed in relation to a possible trace because the intelligible sense of the trace is constituted by a possible signified rather than a possible signifier. The intelligibility of the sensible does not gain its sense through another sensible. The split between sense and the sensible is mediated by writing and forces the sign to remain a collection of two sides rather than a unified signifying face – the sensible signifier is the

mediator between the logos and the material world. In this way, *écriture* is the mediation of mediation, the mediation of the component elements of the sign and between signs and receivers, which are both points of mediation subject to noise. The intelligible signified is delayed by its mediation and left to simulate the immediacy of presence by recourse to a pure intelligibility or absolute logos, in relation to which it is unmediated. The signifier does not revert to a primary position over the signified because, in doing so, it would break the logic it seeks to invert. The thought of putting the signifying signifier ahead of a signified blocks the signified and would split the possibility of the sign at the limit that constitutes the system of the conceptualization of the sign (324 n.9). Left as a heterogeneity, the sign is always dispersed temporally and its essence is left at presence because the formal essence of the signified is presence, which, due to its proximity to the logos as phonè, privileges presence. Derrida cedes that one cannot simply get around the sign as presence, except by challenging the form of the question “what is...?”, which is the basis for metaphysics itself. Challenging the structuring of metaphysics in this way would simply feign a step outside, which in its writing would merely restructure the conditions of metaphysics rather than exhausting the concepts themselves from within.

The temporality of the trace is also illustrated by *la brisure* (the hinge), which denotes difference and articulation for Derrida, collecting in French the senses marked by hinge, joint, and break in English. An important feature of the trace is the vector of spacing – a word that captures its occupation of both space and time, which appears in the unity of an experience. The question of time here hinges between the lived time of phenomenology and the time of the world. With the internal time-consciousness of transcendental phenomenology forced to “live a time that is an accomplice of the time of

the world,” Derrida suggests that perhaps the rupture between consciousness (be it internal or external) and the “world” is not possible (67). Even in the subtlest form of the phenomenological reduction, “it is in a certain ‘unheard’ sense, then, that speech is in the world, rooted in that passivity which metaphysics calls sensibility in general” (67). Here the “unheard” steps in, reminding us of the absence of sound-in-the-world as heard in experience. Theories of sound need to mind the break between sound in the world and sound as heard, because hearing at once erases the material sound in the world while materializing the material sound heard, always already formed by the trace. With the spacing aspect of the trace (which captures the becoming-space of time and becoming-time of space), the operation of sound-as-trace—sound traced—is positioned as “always unperceived, the nonpresent, and nonconscious” (68). It is this presence-absence of trace that allows for play, and carries in that seeming aporia all the oppositions that limit and allow for the passage of arche-writing. In contrast to Hegelian theories of becoming as futurity, the trace refers to an absolute past because in its motion, in its *différance*, it forces an understanding of the past that is not a modified presence but instead a passivity with a relationship to the future. “Only a positive infinity can lift the trace, ‘sublimate’ it” (71).⁶³ In this way, Derrida’s trace under *écriture* remains hinged between the nonpresence material palimpsest it is written on and the written experience. The limit that is traversed by the hinge is the spacing of noise, the spot and moment where the two sides of the trace rub up against each other to create noise in their mediated relation.

⁶³ Derrida chooses *la relève* from the verb *relever* (to lift up or to relay or relieve) to translate Hegel’s *Aufheben* or *Aufhebung*. In this way he can preserve the sense of negation with conservation of the original. For more, see Alan Bass’ note in *Margins of Philosophy*, 19 tn.23.

Absent Matter: Unheard in Heidegger and Derrida

The difference between Heidegger and Derrida comes out in their writing of being.⁶⁴ For Heidegger, being is written in the proximity between voice and logos, whereas Derrida acknowledges what remains after the erasure of experience, writing between the slipping limit that separates sensibility and intelligibility. Heidegger maintains logocentrism when he ties the voice to the logos in “Thought obeying the Voice of Being,” which is the difference between the sign (*signans*) and the meaning (*signatum*) (qtd. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 20). The voice also plays an important role in *Gewissen* [conscience], which Heidegger elaborates in *Being and Time*.⁶⁵ Derrida summarizes Heidegger’s voice of conscience as:

The voice is *heard* (understood) –that undoubtedly is what is called conscience—closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier: pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow from outside of itself, in the world or in ‘reality,’ any accessory signifier, and substance of expression foreign to its own spontaneity. (20)

Derrida’s unheard gains context in the heard of Heidegger because what is unheard is what supports the heard, noise. Silence plays a crucial role in *Being and Time* because it suggests the possibility of experiencing authentic being and comes to represent Being itself. Frances Dyson summarizes the role of sound in Heidegger as “institut[ing] silence

⁶⁴ Derrida gets to Heidegger through Nietzsche who serves as an amplifier of noise in Heidegger. Derrida attends to Nietzsche’s “liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified, in whatever sense that is understood” (19). Rather than writing Nietzsche contra the transcendental signified, or the continued tradition supporting Heidegger and that which the Heideggerian project supports, Derrida writes Nietzsche through the Heideggerian reading, which “has written that writing – and first of all his own – is not originally subordinate to the logos and to truth” (19). Put another way, Nietzsche is used as an amplifier of the noise of the onto-theological system. Derrida’s amplifier works to “accentuate the ‘naïveté’ of a breakthrough which cannot attempt to step outside of metaphysics,” thereby bringing forward or amplifying the noise in Heidegger’s Nietzsche (19).

⁶⁵ The citation in Heidegger is *Was ist Metaphysik*, 46. Also see Heidegger’s analysis of voice in *Sein und Zeit* pp. 267f.

by eliminating noise: first from hearing (because what we ‘first’ hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon), and from language (which Heidegger defines as authentic only insofar as it is not contaminated by the noise of the ‘they’ (*Gerede*)) in order to retrieve the experience of authentic being” (85).⁶⁶ With the impossibility of hearing sound, Heidegger over-determines his point that sound always already comes into the world through language, performing what Derrida has shown with the creation of presence through the auto-affection of the subject. What is at stake is the elimination of the mediating role of sound, which opens a seemingly direct line of communication with the logos due to Heidegger’s effacement of sound as negation rather than the erasure that, for Derrida, retains a remainder.

Heidegger grafts sound into the center of his system with attunement or *Stimmung*, which he again negates in *Dasein*, being-there, as that through which human existence is always already in the world. But like noise in signification, what is attuned to is unheard because Heidegger rhetorically excludes sound from the hearing of attunement. Being more concerned with a “state-of-mind” (*Befindlichkeit*), Dyson shows how Heidegger’s development of attunement departs from being in the world because it seeks to forge “a direct, unmediated relationship between *Dasein*, self-knowledge, and authentic being” (86). When Heidegger works to reinstate being in the world with *Stimmung*, he does so without unmeaning sound in order to retain the operation of logos that he had established prior. Attunement, as Dyson points out, “can only be activated through a relationship with a tuneable entity, and this inevitably involves [Heidegger] in

⁶⁶ *Gerede* splits into another sense of noise as social interruption in the form of rumor, idle talk, or hearsay..

the materiality of sound and voice” (88). This way, Heidegger restructures hearing to eliminate the possible connection to mood and the audible voice:

Hearkening is itself phenomenally more primordial than what the psychologist ‘initially’ defines as hearing, the sensing of tones and the perception of sound. Hearkening, too, has the mode of being of a hearing that understands. ‘Initially’ we never hear noises and complexes of sound, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire. (*Being and Time* 158 [163])⁶⁷

Hearkening (*Horchen*) replaces hearing because of its proximity to understanding with the mediation of sound, but the fact that we *initially* hear the sound of wagon wheels and motorcycles instead of complex noises is “phenomenal proof that Dasein, as being-in-the-world, always already maintains itself *together with* innerworldly things at hand and initially not at all with ‘sensations’ whose chaos would first have to be formed to provide the springboard from which the subject jumps off finally to land in a ‘world’” (158/164). For Heidegger, hearkening or proper hearing then is the paradox of hearing without sound, a hearing wholly proximate with the logos that presupposes it and is presupposed by it. Sound in itself may be meaningless, but there is meaning in its meaninglessness. Heidegger’s efforts to desonorize sound in his aural metaphors, leaving it without material grounding in the world a part from *Dasein*, continue in later works such as *What Is Called Thinking*, where he warns that “In order to hear the pure resonance of a mere

⁶⁷ Joan Stambaugh’s translation switches between translating *Wagen* as wagon and car. It is worth noticing that Heidegger’s litany of sounds we hear are those of “nature” while his example of noises are motorized icons of modernity such as cars or motorcycles. Akin to Adorno complaining in *Aesthetic Theory* of airplanes disturbing his walks in the forest, what is actually being disturbed is a cultural construction of calm. As Paul Hegarty points out in regards to Adorno, what is being interrupted is “precisely that acculturated form of nature that forgets, endlessly, its acculturatedness (8). Ideas about nature are always already inscribed by culture and attempts to separate one from the other play out in a manner akin to Sterne and Heidegger’s efforts to, in the case of Sterne think sound as external, while still being constituted by internal hearing, or in the case of Heidegger, to think sound as internal without external sound in the world.

sound, we must first remove ourselves from the sphere where speech meets with understanding” (qtd. Dyson 90). Here, as in *Being and Time*, sound in itself is there, but the problem lies in Heidegger’s separation between sound in itself, sound in the world, and the logos. Heidegger neglects the mediation of “unmeaning sound” and in his effort to vacate its role in his system, he leaves open the space for Derrida to write *différance* out of his noise, the excluded margins of his system.

What is unheard in Heidegger is what is heard under erasure in Derrida, proving the palimpsest on which *écriture* writes: sound in the world that is always already unheard because of erasure. *Écriture* is written on the palimpsest of the signifier, the erased slate with lingering remainders; sound in ‘reality’ is already erased yet always there in its absence. Derrida’s *écriture* cannot be written without noise—be it the noise of speech, writing, or otherwise—because the erasure of the sound in the world is precisely that which cannot be heard, but what allows for what is written and heard. It is the sound unheard and noise to which we must be attuned, but with full awareness of the failure of attunement and the impossibility of hearing. In the process of failing and the undertaking of impossibilities lies the possibility of inscribing new margins, new noise(s) that operate without the disadvantages of central positions of power. Yet this move is less a moving through or towards the inert futility of failure, but rather a move through the midst or medium: to amplify the margins through the middle.

Derrida needs sound to the extent to which both writing (in the narrow sense) and speech (read: vision/sound) fall apart as discrete entities because the trace is the origin of sense in general, rather than originating in sense. As soon as these words have been issued they are under erasure, for there can be no absolute origin. As Derrida immediately

reminds us, there is no absolute origin of sense in general. Derrida uses sound to erase the difference between the appearing and the appearance: “The unheard difference between the appearing and the appearance [*l'apparaissant et l'apparaître*] (between the ‘world’ and ‘lived experience’) is the condition of all other differences, of all other traces, and *it is already a trace*” (*Of Grammatology* 65).⁶⁸ The difference between world and lived experience is the condition of all other differences, *and is already a trace*.

Those who hear in Derrida the elevation of writing over sound fail to hear this question: “is there a sense in establishing a ‘natural’ hierarchy between the sound-imprint and the visual (graphic) imprint?” (*Of Grammatology* 65). His answer shows the trace as *a fortiori* anterior to the distinction between regions of sensibility. Coming before sound as much as light, there can be no hierarchy between the two. The graphic image is not seen and the acoustic image is not heard: “The difference between the full unities of the voice remains unheard. And, the difference in the body of the inscription is also invisible” (*Of Grammatology* 65). The confusion over Derrida’s deconstruction of the binary rather than simply an inversion of it stems from his method of writing through various thinkers; in this case, the separation of the sound image that many read as Derrida’s dismissal of sound over writing is a point in the process of his writing through Saussure.

Absent *Écriture*: Writing the Matter of Sound *Sous Rature*

The structure of the trace has dimensions of the unheard; when Derrida writes, he is attempting to “think that writing is at the same time more exterior to speech, not being

⁶⁸ Here Derrida is using *l'apparaissant et l'apparaître* that literally translated means appearing and to appear, to draw on the difference between the present participle and its infinitive to mark the matter in the world and the matter heard.

literal transl = "the 'to appear'", so "appearing and to appear". it's a difference bet. gerundive (present participle) and infinitive.”

its ‘image’ or its ‘symbol,’ and more interior to speech, which *already in its self a writing*” (*Of Grammatology*, 46). The *graphie* or unit of a possible graphic system implies the *instituted* trace, which is the possibility common to all systems of signification. The instituted trace “cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears *as* such and thus permits a certain liberty of variation among the full terms” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 46-7). By separating the trace from the *graphie* of the classical system described as logocentrism, he borrows the trace to show the movement of writing on both sides of *différance* as well as experience and matter, fully acknowledging that borrowing can never be as effective as producing pure or absolute concepts. Derrida’s method moves from a static system (as he is implicitly read by many sound theories) to a dynamic system as/or process, with the avowed failings that come from borrowed tools. In doing so, in proceeding in the writing of the trace and in writing under erasure, Derrida begins the amplification of noise.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak clarifies the difference between Derrida’s and Heidegger’s writing *sous rature* as decided by presence; for Derrida, erasure “is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of experience” (Spivak xvii). Here, experience itself is figured under erasure, not contradicted or put outside of Derrida’s system, but instead continuing to operate with its limits exposed. Sound too, in the sense of sound in the world, is left under erasure: it is there, but can neither be addressed directly nor ignored completely, because its substance is necessary for *archi-écriture*. Experience in general and sound in this specific site is the palimpsest on which the trace is written (though of course the

same can be said of a visual si(gh)t(e)). This erasure is written into the very word *différance*; much like noise, *différance* performs its meaning not as a concept but as a process.⁶⁹ With the written addition of the *a*, which is unheard in French, Derrida collects *to differ* and *defer* while performing the erasure that insists that “one can always act as if it made no difference” (“Différance” 3). More, the *a* escapes not only hearing but vision as well, which suggests that *différance*, in its erasure, “must be permitted to refer to an order which no longer belongs to sensibility. But neither can it belong to intelligibility [...]” Instead, *différance* is located “*between* speech and writing, and beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two” (“Différance” 5). In the lecture where Derrida develops these differences, translator Alan Bass notes that Derrida leverages his critique of a tenable distinction between sensible and intelligible through the “objectivity of *theōrein* or understanding” (Différance 5); *theōrein*, the Greek origin of theory, literally means “to look at,” and Derrida uses *entendement* for understanding, the noun form of *entendre* (to hear). Derrida therefore undoes intelligibility from within with its implication within sensibility, undoing the firm limit between interior and exterior.

Similar to his method of reading Nietzsche through the ontotheological system of Heidegger, Derrida amplifies the noise in Saussure’s thesis of difference as the source of linguistic value. This thesis quickly leads to Saussure’s theory excluding the very thing that allows him to exclude writing: sound and its natural bond with meaning, taken up earlier alongside Sterne. The exclusion of phonetic matter happens through its reduction as a “secondary thing” or “substance to be put to use” (qtd. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

⁶⁹ But as Christopher Norris notes in *Derrida*, *différance* may have started as a process, a non-concept but since its entry into the discourse of philosophy and theory it has inevitably become a concept.

53).⁷⁰ Derrida, in one of his clearest statements, argues, “that oral language already belongs to this writing” (*Of Grammatology* 55). Again we see Derrida not so much going beyond Saussure as following or extending, as is the case with all his interlocutors. Like Sterne, Derrida works to de-emphasize sound from a privileged position of a pure interiority that would allow for the immediate presence of sense. If there is any lingering doubt of the importance of de-privileged sound, Derrida’s reminder remains: “It is clear that if the phonic substance lost its privilege, it was not to the advantage of the graphic substance, which lends itself to the same substitutions” (*Of Grammatology* 60).⁷¹ Derrida positions the arche-trace as beginning with the neutralization of the substance of the writing – be it phonic or graphic—through Hjelmslev’s work after Saussure. The element of substance, what is sensible, appears only through what gives them form. The originary trace, or *différance*, is the formation of form (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 63). The substance of the trace, the material trace, is at once erased in the movement of difference. To erase leaves no retention of temporal experience, no retaining the other as the other in the same, and without this lack, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. The erasure of substance by the movement of difference founds the difference between sensible and intelligible needed in any writing on sound. Writing concepts under

⁷⁰ Derrida is working out from the passage of Saussure: “The linguistic signifier [...] is not (in essence) phonic but incorporeal – constituted not by its material substance but the differences that separates its sound-image from all others” (qtd Derrida, 53).

⁷¹ Derrida’s critique of Hjelmslev hinges on, to use Hjelmslev’s words, his scheme of scheme or simply play of language, which depends on language as a form and that the linguistic function and unit or glosseme excludes the substance of expression (material substance) and also the substance of the content (immaterial content). With the form/substance distinction standing in for Saussure’s signifier/signified, Hjelmslev critiques the natural bond between sound and sense. For Derrida, it is that Hjelmslev does not move beyond a popular concept of writing, which would re-introduce sound as a means of writing, that causes Derrida to write arche-writing.

Put another way, Derrida feeds Hjelmslev’s theory of play back onto itself to amplify the noise of play from local play to the play of form itself – thus allowing for the form and substance of non-graphic expression to be the object of arche-writing.

erasure forms the pathway through which a track can be left in a text. This track acts short-of and beyond transcendental criticism by working through, amplifying noise as it functions through the erasure of concepts (61). Put another way, only by writing on a palimpsest can sound studies have sound, or musicology music – but writing on a surface always already erased by noise is the only way to have a discourse figured by and figuring sound.⁷² Writing *sous rature* forms the formal opposition between sound-heard or sound-being-heard and sound in the world, and this erasure, amplified by Derrida, is the expansion of noise: to erase, to disrupt, while forming the distinction between matter/form itself (*hylè/morphé*). This is what writing on sound needs: to be able to acknowledge the formation of the difference between matter and form, the noise of the motion of *différance*, and so to acknowledge the failings, fading, and flailings of sonic discourse, keeping in play the aporias that constitute the field of sound itself.

⁷² Flailings should be taken as a verb without object: to wave or swing or cause to wave or swing wildly.

Conclusion: Noise Matters

The force of the my thesis is that the agency of noise comes from matter itself, from its tracing (spacing over time) rather than from experience. By expanding on ways of understanding noise that are not contingent on judgement or on the listening subject, I attempt to gain distance from the human and to take into account the agency of matter. My aim is not to think matter or experience outside of the human, but to better account of the complexity of matter. Derrida's work shows the agency of noise by deconstructing itself in its own writing (already material). Noise is always an effect of mediation rather than an object or phenomenon unto itself and serves as a reminder of what is always already written over by experience. Derrida's method of dealing with other writers is to find their noise, to find the background of their text; by amplifying that background; he brings their noise into the foreground, writing a new order.

In the introduction, I have shown how noise is positioned in media studies, philosophy, musicology, and music practice to clarify my understanding of noise as departing from two vectors: audible noise, and noise as interruption out of sound. My first chapter collects ways of understanding noise in and around the 1913 *Skandalkonzert* in order to show the folds of noise, and the subtly different ways it operates separately from distaste. This sets the stage to feed these two vectors and the subsequent folding back onto themselves, in order to expand noise into the site of mediation between writing. Through this work, I hope to have reappraised Derrida's value for sound studies and opened new entries into Derrida's work through sound. There is a slowness enacted by attuning to an absence, the politics of which I would like to bring out in future work.

Beyond the disciplinary stakes of my argument, what is equally stake is a rather personal need to redeem the matter of music for myself. The argument that all music and sound are ephemeral often smuggles in the assumption that therefore they do not exist outside of an idea. Yet arguments about sound as a uniquely ephemeral phenomenon confuse sound's eventual nature with the nature of experience in general. Rather, all experience is ephemeral; sound only decays quicker. Similarly, all experience is written as an unfolding event over time. From these problematics—which have, at times, become tractionless traps to block thought or creation—I have tried to develop a sense of noise that lets me position material sound as existing of its own accord, without being contingent on being heard. This leaves open the complexity of material agency without attempting recourse to an accessible outside. There is no outside experience, yet there is an absent material world whose impact is felt at times through the noise of the writing experience on the palimpsest of that material world.

Attempting to think this figure of noise in my thesis has affected my practice as a composer; I have composed situations that seek to amplify the noise latent in found or borrowed musical material. I created a structure that wrote out of the subject by heightening the degree of indeterminacy, forced expression from borrowed material through austere repetition, and used a recorded version of a song as a palimpsest for a remembered amplification of its latent noise. Rather than working in such a way as to alter the material itself, I have tried to create structures—or backgrounds—for or against which the noise of the material can come to the fore.

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