

unsound

towards a representation of 'other' music

If *Broken Music*, the exhibition of artists' recordworks staged at this Gallery last year, confirmed Jacques Attali's observation that "the sound object has become artifice, independent of the listener and composer"¹ *unsound*, through its specific mode of auditory channeling (headphones), may reflect literally his assertion that "each spectator has a solitary relation with a material object; the consumption of music is individualised, a simulacrum of ritual sacrifice, a blind spectacle."²

unsound is an asymmetrical survey of recent Australian and international experimental music/soundworks which aims to introduce to both a student and general audience, a variety of music and sound de-/constructions, perspectives and frames of reference.³

Post-/industrial music, electronic music, *musique concrete*, improvised music, voice, *poesie sonore*/text-sound poetry, audio collages, sampling and cut-ups, radio art, broken music. These ambivalent zones of differentiation constitute the generally invisible (unseen) and inaudible (unheard) 'other' of contemporary western music, which is situated beyond both the commercial market systems of popular music and the modernist musical *avant-garde* of state-financed academies (where 'serious' post serialists conflict with 'unserious' experimentalists).⁴

Yet to suggest that many of the practitioners are 'simply' marginalised is to belie their implicit ideological imperatives (self-production and distribution; technical and/or cultural opposition, intervention, transgression) and the concomitant aesthetic and formal diversities. Further, such marginalisation has not precluded frequent convergences and transmutations of multiple stylistic codes e.g. the 'mass avant-gardism' of Laurie Anderson.

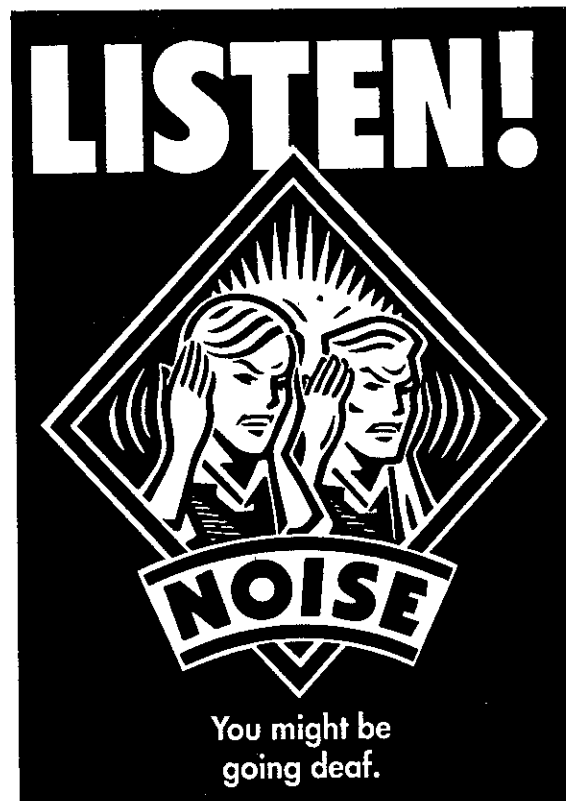
It is not, however, within the scope of this exhibition and brief introductory text to proffer either a problematical linear history of experimental sound practices, or a description of their synchronic complexities.⁵ Consider the following random possibilities:

Karlheinz Stockhausen, Kraftwerk, Afrika Bambaataa - three points on a line?; despite the cultural amateurishness which dominated much of Italian musical Futurism on a theoretical and programmatic level, the impact of numerous manifestos - notably Russolo's *The Art of Noises* and Marinetti's *Destruction of Syntax/Words in Freedom*, both 1913 - can be traced through to many of the present soundworks; Alvin Lucier's treatment of natural radio frequency emissions in the ionosphere; Luc Ferrari's mapping of Algerian sonic terrains; cybernetic voices, mutant speech, looped phonemes; *Plunderphonics*, John Oswald's audio piracy as compositional prerogative, a non-hierarchical musical archaeology which antagonises copyright morality (the political economy of noise); more than a distractional technique, the cut-up (pause button or razor-blade virtuosity) demands a dexterity of listening to decode the ironic and subversive resonances provoked by the continuity of disjunctions; groove-lock to Non's (Boyd Rice) multi-speed/multi-axis black hole noise;...

Alessio Cavallaro: Curator

"...the opinion that Beethoven is comprehensible and Schoenberg incomprehensible is an objective deception. The general public, totally cut-off from the production of new music, is alienated by the outward characteristics of such music.... The dissonances which horrify them testify to their own conditions; for that reason alone do they find them unbearable..." Theodor Adorno⁶; "[Throbbing Gristle] always brought real cruelty to their staged representations of inhumanity. They piled horror on horror, matched brutal noise with brutal image. No filters here to reduce them..." Biba Kopf.⁷

"What was so fascinating about tape possibility was that a second, which we had always thought was a relatively short space of time, became fifteen inches. It became something quite long that could be cut-up" John Cage.⁸



"We now live in a hyper-modern world where panic noise (the electronic soundtrack of TV... white sounds in all the 'futureshops') appears as a kind of affective hologram providing a veneer of coherency for the reality of an imploding culture...music/vibration as servomechanism enters directly into the postmodern body and passes through it without a trace, leaving only an altered energy state.... Never seen but equally never shut out, music as panic vibrations secretes through the body of the social." Panic Music⁹

Graphic taken from the *Noise Management at Work* materials produced by Worksafe Australia

¹ J. Attali *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985 p36

² *ibid.*, p32

³ With very few exceptions, most theorists of music and aurality undermine their own immediate critical relevance by writing with little or no

knowledge of the current developments or complex displacements within music culture. Almost invariably, references are reduced to 'genres' (experimental) and generic icons (John Cage).

⁴ It should be noted that some of the most significant developments in new music practices emerged from within media studios and universities - often sites of new technologies e.g. *musique concrete* at Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française in 1948 (Pierre Schaeffer); electronic music at Cologne Radio, NWDR, 1950 (Herbert Eimert)

⁵ It is hoped that the suggested reading list, and copies of album cover notes and articles which accompany most of the cassettes in this exhibition will be useful in detailing certain theoretical and historical specificities.

⁶ T. Adorno *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948) trans. A. G. Mitchell and W. V. Bloomster, London, Sheed and Ward, 1973 p9

⁷ B. Kopf: *Baccilus Culture* in C. Neal *Tape Delay* Middlesex, SAF Publishing, 1987 p11

⁸ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz *Conversing with Cage* New York, Limelight Editions, 1988 p164

⁹ A. Kroker, M. Kroker, D. Cook *Panic Encyclopaedia: the definitive guide to the postmodern scene* Hampshire, MacMillan Education Ltd 1989 pp155-156