

## Noise : Silence

Dr John Levack Drever

*We are in the noises of the world, we cannot close our door to their reception, and we evolve, rolling in this incalculable swell.*

(Serres 2007:126)

### Definition 1.

Unwanted sound: The Oxford English Dictionary contains references to noise as unwanted sound dating back as far as 1225.

*Truax, B. (1999) Handbook for Acoustic Ecology*

### Definition 2.

Unmusical sound: The 19th century physicist Hermann von Helmholtz employed the term 'noise' to describe sound composed of non-periodic vibrations (e.g. the rustling of leaves), by comparison with musical sounds, which consist of periodic vibrations. Noise is still used in this sense in expressions such as broad band noise (ventilation duct), narrow band noise (sibilance), white noise (all audible frequencies with equal intensity).

### Definition 3.

Any loud sound: In general usage today, noise often refers to particularly loud sounds. In this sense a noise abatement by-law prohibits certain loud sounds or establishes their permissible limits in decibels.

### Definition 4.

Disturbance in any communication system: In electronics and engineering, noise refers to any disturbances which do not represent part of the signal, such as static on a telephone or 'snow' on a television screen.

### Shannon and Weaver's *Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949)

Distinguishing between “semantic” and “engineering” noise, the model regards noise as “anything that makes the intended signal harder to decode accurately” (Fiske 1990:8).

### Richard M. Warren

Temporal Induction of Speech:  
Multiple Phonemic Restorations



## Carnival

“moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world.”

Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1941, 1965)

*Noise destroys and horrifies. But order and flat repetition are in the vicinity of death. Noise nourishes a new order. Organization, life, and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony. If there were only order, if we only heard perfect harmonies, our stupidity would soon fall down toward a dreamless sleep; if we were always surrounded by shivaree, we would lose our breath and our consistency, we would spread out among all the dancing atoms of the universe. We are; we live; we think on the fringe, in the probable fed by the unexpected...*

- Michel Serres *Le Parasite* (1980),

## Jacques Attali 's

*Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985)

Music as prophetic, prefiguring new social relations.

René van Peer, elaborating on Steven Feld's Research

“The Kaluli people from the Bosavi area in Papua New Guinea like to go to a waterfall to compose music... This is an outstandingly pragmatic approach to creating music. Waterfalls emit continually shifting sounds in a wide register. Not only is the effect hypnotizing, inducing an open and dreamlike frame of mind, the sounds themselves suggests all manner of rhythms and melodic lines to a receptive listener. In a manner of speaking, a waterfall embodies any and all conceivable music. The only thing composers need to do is let their fancy flow along, and take home what condenses in their ears.”  
(Peer 2002:10)

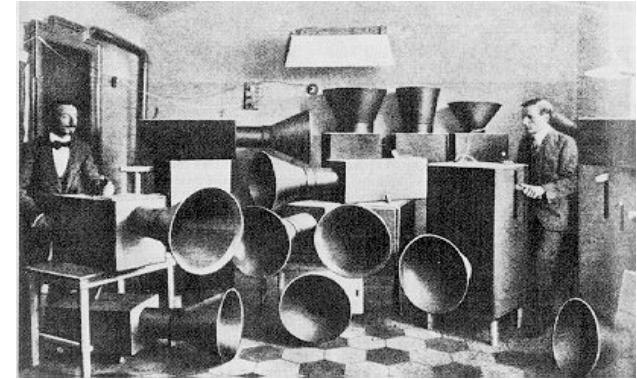
## Futurism

- *Art of Noises* (1913) Luigi Russolo

[www.unknown.nu/futurism/noises.html](http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/noises.html)

## Russolo's *intonarumori*

image form 1914



## *National Grid* (1996) Disinformation

- 50Hz 
- ***Audio Rorschach***
- Raudive
- Electronic Voice Phenomena

## *Broken Music* (1979) Milan Knizak



*Solo for Wounded CD (1995)*  
Yasunao Tone



*Minazo (2006)* Merzbow (Masami Akita)



*The Disintegration Loops*  
(2001) William Basinski



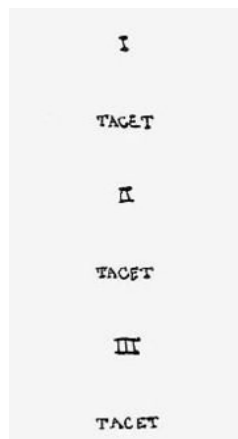
# Silence

## Guy Debord *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952)

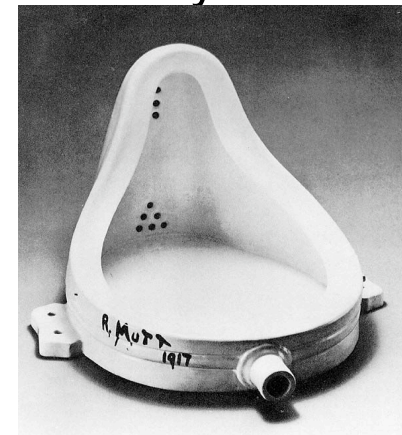
[http://www.ubu.com/film/debord\\_hurlements.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/debord_hurlements.html)



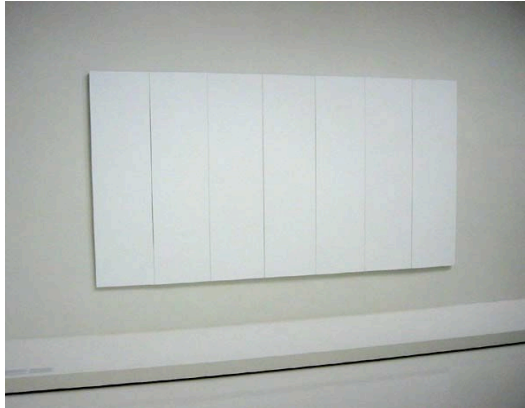
## 4'33" (1952) John Cage



## Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* (1917) "readymade"



Robert Rauschenberg  
*White Painting* (1951)



To Cage, silence had to be redefined if the concept was to remain viable. He recognized that there was no objective dichotomy between sound and silence, but only between the intent of hearing and that of diverting one's attention to sounds. "The essential meaning of silence is the giving up of intention," he said. This idea marks the most important turning point in his compositional philosophy. He redefined silence as simply the absence of intended sounds, or the turning off of our awareness.

Cage conversation with Michael John White (1982), in Kostelanetz 1988.

*Audience : Hearing* (2007)  
Gomme/Drever

V-1 Flying Bomb



*S(News)* (2003) Matt Rogalsky



*Die Grosse Stille*  
*(Into Great Silence)* (2005)  
Philip Gröning

*Le Pays des Sourds*  
(In The Land of the Deaf),  
1992 Nicolas Philibert

*Winter Diary* (1997)  
Murray Schafer

