# Releasing the Inner Idiot:
# Noise Music, Marginality and Madness

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**Abstract**

In the Lars Von Trier film, *Idioterne* (1998) a group of intelligent, middle-class, adults seek to confront the established social orders and 'uncreative' modes of thinking by pretending to be developmentally disabled, both in private and in public. By putting on the mask of the social 'Other', 'the idiots' are thought to engage in an act of genuine self-expression; the face of non-reason becomes the enlightened subject by seeing the world from outside the dominant social structures.

I would like to suggest that a similar project is at play within noise music; that noise practitioners too are, in part, releasing their 'inner idiot'. Using the concepts of abjection, the sublime and the Lacanian *Objet Petit a*, I will examine the ways in which noise can be conceived as the limits of signification; a sonic reflection of the space beyond reason. Subsequently, I will suggest that noise music encapsulates a symbol of the Other, that is, a symbol of noise, madness, the abject, the meaningless and so on in order to maintain the ontological paradox from which noise music's signification arises. However, as with 'the Idiots' rebellion against normative social structures, this symbol of Otherness is always relative to that which it opposes. Using Jacques Derrida's critique of Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilisation, I will thus argue that noise music's Otherness is always understood from within the positions of reason, music, meaning, convention and so on.

Finally, by analysing two musical exemplars; Dimanda Galás's aptly named 'Wild Women with Steaknives' and the work of Australian performance artist Justice Yeldham, I will examine the ways in which noise music puts on a 'mask of madness', which is created by and furthermore, enacts a violence towards that which it opposes.

## Releasing the Inner Idiot: Noise Music, Marginality and Madness

When I was writing the abstract for this paper, I came across an uncomfortable problem in trying to describe Lars Von Trier's film *Idioterne* (the Idiots 1998). The film is disquieting to say the least: the film follows Karen, who is introduced to us as a quiet, lonely individual, who encounters what appears to be a group of developmentally disabled adults in a restaurant. Unlike the other diners, Karen does not react with fear or irritation; rather she is willing to engage with the collective when certain members start to become restless in the restaurant. However, the developmentally disabled adults are in fact a group of bourgeois intellectuals who practise what is labelled 'spassing', both in private and in public, to purportedly challenge normative social structures and values within bourgeois, capitalist society. By partaking in 'spassing', the group see themselves as 'releasing their inner idiot' and thus engaging in an act of genuine self-expression. In taking on the position of the social 'other', moreover, the 'Idiot' is thought to become the enlightened subject; entering the realm of non-reason allows them to see the world from outside the confines of reasoned behaviour. While initially disgusted at their actions, Karen joins the collective. However, we later find out that for Karen, the 'spassing' is not merely a game to confront social structures; rather, it offers her an escape from a very painful reality. Towards the end of the film, we find out that Karen has just lost a child. Karen's genuine need for escapism means that she is the only member of the group able to push the game to its ultimate endpoint; of 'spassing' in front of those she knows and loves.

The issue I faced in writing this abstract was how to describe this 'spassing'. In the English translation, a variety of terms are used to describe their 'inner idiots', including 'retards' and 'spastics', all of which I was uncomfortable using; they appeared to me as derogatory and offensive. 'Handicapped', 'mentally unwell' and 'developmentally disabled' seemed inaccurate, uncomfortable or both. Seeking advice from friends working in medical and social care backgrounds, I was advised to find out what specific condition the group were imitating. However, this is never revealed.

This issue of terminology is not an example of the right-wing media's favourite charge of 'political correctness gone mad'. To me, this problem marks a failure of language to fully meet the other; it lies at the tip of my tongue, just beyond all descriptions I can offer. I am constantly plagued by the Lacanian question *Che vuoi?* – what does the other want from me? Will my words offend the other, or be seen to degrade the other? However, the Idiots' 'spassing' does not subvert, but rather is an act of self-subversion. The social other that is portrayed in *Idioterne* relies on a stereotype that is constructed within the boundaries of the rationalised self the group seek to escape; the collective do not mimic a specific learning disability, but rather, construct a 'mask' of the social other that society supposedly fears. This mask is inevitably defined within the constraints of the world that they wish to transgress: the world that lies beyond 'normalised' patterns of behaviour can only be imagined in relation to the very patterns of behaviour they are seen as oppositional or subversive to.

In this paper, I would like to argue that there is an analogous relationship at play within noise music; by harnessing the sonic other, noise music practitioners are also engaged in a process of 'releasing the inner idiot'. Firstly, I would like to explore the ways in which noise can be understood as subsisting at the limits of signification. I will then examine the ontological

paradox that is noise music and the interplay between its contradictory components. Drawing on Derrida's critique of Foucault's Madness and Civilisation I would like to suggest that, like the Idiots, noise music embodies a 'mask' of the other that both resists and conforms to that which it seeks to oppose. Finally, I would like to look at two artists, Diamanda Galás and Justice Yeldham, so to demonstrate the way in which noise music takes on a 'mask' of otherness.

**Noise as Sonic Effect**

At the edges of our everyday soundworld resides noise: suppressed, restrained, unheard. The law tries to protect me from it; it guards my sonic sovereignty and prevents it from damaging me. However, sometimes, noise escapes from its banished position. It invades, attacks, disrupts. It does not exist as a specific entity, a particular sound object; rather noise, in the empirical, is subjective. My music, my language, the sounds of my existence can be your noise, and vice versa. While noise may be defined in a specific context as, for example, 'an erratic, intermittent, or statistically random vibration' (Nattiez 1990, p. 45) to give an acoustic definition, or 'unwanted or harmful outdoor sound created by human activities' to give a legislative definition (DEFRA 2008), when these notions of noise are applied more generally they become problematic; can we truly say that noise is only produced by human activity? Do musical sounds, especially percussive sonorities, not also include 'intermitant or statistically random vibrations?' Defining noise in the empirical fails to grasp noise in more general, conceptual terms; there will always, inevitably, be excess, an exception. Equally, purely theoretical definitions of noise will inevitably be subject to exceptions. For example, in the work of R. Murray Schafer, the ideological positioning of noise as oppositional to silence/the rural/the past, fails to deal with the empirical examples of noise that contradict it, the difficult grey areas that cannot be accounted for by this conceptual paradigm. For instance, Schafer claims:

> 'In the past were muted sancturies where anyone suffering from sound fatigue could go into retirement for recomposure of the psyche…at one time stillness was a precious article in an unwritten code of human rights. Man had resevoirs of stillness in his life to restore the spiritual metabolism. Even in the hearts of cities there were dark, still churches and libraries, or the privacy of drawing room and bedroom. Outside the throb of cities, the countryside was accessible with its lulling whirr of natural sounds. There will still times too… We can comprehend this clearly only now that we have lost them.' (Schafer 1994, p. 254).

However, the recognition of silence as the marker of a 'better' time, in which the autonomous individual had both the freedom and the right to access quiet places becomes problematic when it faces socio-historical scrutiny. For example, Schafer's description of stillness or silence in previous epochs, as a 'precious article in an unwritten code of human rights' perhaps reflects the limitations of his ideological binarism of noise/silence, since it can be questioned for whom would this 'human right' be available? Many of the 'sancturies' to which Schafer refers would only be accessible to a wealthy minority. It would be unlikely that the tranquillity of the countryside would be accessible for those living in poverty in inner city areas, nor would they be likely to have access to the drawing room, a peaceful bedroom (which, one can only assume, is solely occupied), or the library. Moreover, the assumption that the countryside or the rural soundscape is noiseless, a recurring theme in Schafer's work, would also seem to be a problematic generalisation. One of my earliest memories of extreme noise was in the Italian countryside; my sister and I

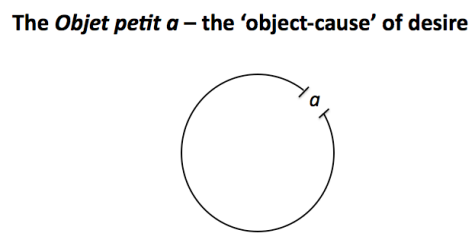


Figure 1.

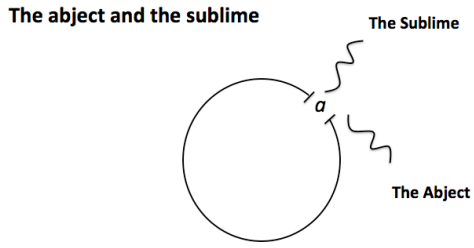


Figure 2.

had to shout to one another because of the intense volume of the cicadas. Nature is not always silent, and industry is not always deafening. When faced with empirical exceptions, the idiological grounding and limitations of Schafer's paradigm becomes apparent.

Noise can therefore be understood as that which is produced by the slippage, the gap between the empirical, the specific sound object and the abstract, the conceptual, the ideal. However, as a means of avoiding futile attempts to pin noise down in the empirical, or reverting to the relativist endpoint of 'noise is anything to anyone', I would argue that it is more fruitful to understand noise in relation to Aguyard and Torgue's notion of the 'sonic effect', which seeks to exemplify the experience of everyday sounds.[1] Noise, I would argue, is that which brings into visibility borders; be it the borders of the self, space or signification. To illustrate this, I would like to consider noise in relation to the Lacanian concept of the *objet petit a*, the abject and the sublime.

The *objet petit a*, the object of the little other, changes throughout the work of Jacques Lacan, and is gradually implicated in a mature theory of desire in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1970). The object of the little other exists as the 'object-cause' of desire; it is an unknowable and unattainable something that is hidden from us by the other that formulates an endpoint or a blockage in the cycle of desire that cannot be overcome (Figure 1). It is that which has been lost, or left behind in the acquisition of language, or, in Lacanian terms, the introduction of the symbolic order. As the outside of signification, the object of the little other cannot be experienced in itself; however, as the subject gets close to it, they may experience the affective manifestations of the breakdown of the symbolic; the abject and the sublime.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Julia Kristeva describes the abject as: 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.' (Kristeva 1982, p. 4) The abject makes apparent the borders of the symbolic; it 'draws me toward a place where meaning collapses.' (Kristeva 1982, p. 2) The abject may exist as the corpse, or as bodily fluids, blood, vomit, semen; those substances that confuse the internal/external relations of the self. As the invasion of the pre-symbolic into the realm of signification, the abject is met with fear, horror and repulsion; it is to be cast out, expelled as improper. However, while the abject exposes the fragility of the borders of the self, it also defines them; by casting out the abject, by refusing to recognise it as 'something', 'I' assert myself, what I am, what I stand for and what I am opposed to. In other words, the abject is what 'I' am not, it is a 'something' that I cannot recognise as a 'thing' within my world. Subsequently: 'the abject and abjection are safeguards. They are the primers of my culture.' (Kristeva 1982, p. 2)

While the abject can be understood as formulating a downward spiral from the

object of the little other, the sublime can be seen to form an upward spiral from this point (Figure 2).

In its Kantian definition, the sublime is contrasted to the beautiful; while the beautiful arises out of an object's formal attributes, the feeling of the sublime occurs in relation to that which transcends the boundaries of form and thus evokes a feeling of limitlessness.[2] As Shaw states:

> 'In broad terms, whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, then we resort to the feeling of the sublime. As such, the sublime marks the limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits.' (Shaw 2006, p. 2)

The subject in the face of the sublime is thus gripped with a tension between a consciousness of limits and the potential for the deconstruction of those limits.

What do these concepts mean in relation to noise as sonic effect? I would like to suggest that noise occupies an analogous position to the object of the little other and its manifestations as the abject and the sublime, insomuch as it is that which does not fit within the dominant structural matrix and thus draws attention to the limits of our understanding. Noise exposes the fragility of the world we construct for ourselves by making audible the potentiality for that which lies beyond it. As Hegarty states:

> 'Noise is that which was excluded as that which is threatening – the exclusion is not just one enacted by music, but by the development of systems and structures of meaning. Noise is that which remains the outside of these systems.' (Hegarty 2001, pp. 193-200)

Noise, like the abject and the sublime, marks the breakdown of signification within the symbolic. As with my experience in trying to describe the actions of the Idiots, noise is that which I fail to find a proper name for; it lies beyond the grasp of signification, of conceptual recognition as anything but noise.

There is, however, a problem with what I have just suggested. Contra to Hegarty's claim that noise is the outside of the systems of signification; my recognition of sound as noise marks precisely its existence within the conceptual. For me to identify sound as meaningless noise means that it exists inside the structures of signification; it is instilled with signification, albeit as sound out of place, as extraneous, incomprehensible. Noise does not exist beyond the borders of signification, but rather, makes these borders apparent, as the limits of our understanding. Moreover, when my neighbour's music disturbs me, I may simultaneously identify the sound's signification as music for another, yet I may also experience it as music's other, noise. In these instances, noise makes audible the threat of the other to the borders of my territory, the space that I define as my own. For noise always comes from the other. When I create sound, it does not exist as unwanted sound for me; rather, it is only unwanted for the others share my sonic environment with. I will now consider the way in which noise, as the threat of the other, exists within noise music.

## Noise music and the mask of the sonic other

With the growing use of dissonant and non-musical sonorities within compositional practice over the course of the twentieth century, the notion of noise music has emerged. Generally speaking, noise music utilises abrasive sounds that tend to be associated with rhetoric of rebellion, violence, shock or newness. In its extremes, it may seek to emulate the sonically abject (for example, the marriage of the socially

abject and the sonically abject in the work of *Throbbing Gristle*) or the sonically sublime (for instance, Cage's aesthetic understanding of the musical sphere as limitless). Noise music may include the sounds of technological malfunction, such as feedback, glitch, distortion, static. It may include dissonance, cacophony, extremes of pitch, sub-bass. However, despite its common usage as such, it cannot be clearly defined as a genre; like noise itself, it is a messy concept, the borders of which are ambiguous. Noise music can be the avant-garde, it can be experimentalism, it can be sound art, it can be no wave, noise rock, punk, electronica and so on. Subsequently, when I refer to noise music, I am speaking broadly about music that I understand to harness this aestheticisation of noise. I intend to include in this description, but also reach beyond, what is typically recognised as the noise music 'scene', 'genre' or 'canon'.

Ontologically speaking, noise music is a paradox; music and noise exist as mutually definable yet mutually exclusive categories of sonic phenomena. If sound is to succeed as music, then it must fail as noise. Likewise, if sound is to succeed as noise, then it must fail as music. Subsequently, in order for noise music to gain signification as such, part of it must fail; it must remain recognisable as outside or 'other' to the realm of music, in order to maintain this inherent contradiction. The noise of noise music, however, does not exist as noise proper; rather, it is an aesthetic idea of noise, which is framed within, and gains signification from an alternative context. As Douglas Kahn highlights in relation to the Modernist scream, in its 'natural habitat', the scream 'is thought to be an irrepressible expression, instantaneously understood through unmediated communication.' (Kahn 2001, p. 4). However, the scream in its literary, theatrical or musical habitats takes on alterative meaning; 'does anybody rush to the stage to lend assistance?' (Kahn 2001, p. 4) The same can be said for the noise of noise music; in its 'natural habitat', noise is the threat of the other, which makes visible the borders of self, space and signification. However, within an artistic context, noise takes on alternative, aesthetic signification as the 'non-musical' other. We can thus understand the noise of noise music as a 'mask' of the sonic other.

This mask of otherness, however, is always understood from within the confines of that which it opposes. (Figure 3) The external is always defined from the position of the internal, madness from the position of reason, the other from the position of self. In the same way that reason must be the face that lies behind the purportedly transgressive activities of the Idiots, in order for their actions to gain signification, a musical base or context must lie behind the mask of the sonic other, in order for the contradiction of noise music to be maintained. To further develop this understanding of the relationship between the otherness of noise music and the structures it exists within, I would now like to briefly consider the critique of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* as outlined in Derrida's *Cogito and the History of Madness.*

In *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault seeks to uncover the 'lost truth' of madness, which 'by a strange act of force' was reduced to silence in the classical age of reason. (Foucault 2008, p. 35) In this epoch, Foucault understands madness, as the face of unreason, to be cut off and exiled from reason. This exclusion was performed by the institutions that confined the mad, alongside other social others, such as the poor. In the nineteenth century, the

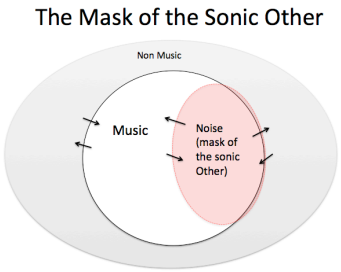


Figure 3.

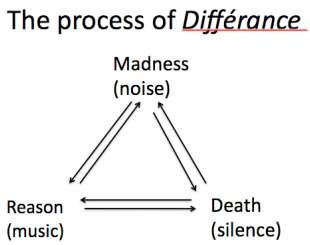


Figure 4.

voice of unreason is further muffled, as madness becomes mental illness and is subsequently rationalised in the language and concepts of medicine and psychology. The history of madness for Foucault is thus an archaeology of silence; madness is 'a language without words' or 'a language that speaks by itself, without speaker or interlocutor' (Derrida 2002, p. 40).

Foucault seeks to give voice to that which is suppressed or hidden within society as madness. However, for Derrida, this is the 'greatest merit but also the very infeasibility of the book.' He states:

> 'In writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted…to write a history of madness itself. Itself. Of madness itself. That is, by letting madness speak for itself. Foucault wanted madness to be the subject of his book in every sense of the word: its theme and its first person narrator, its author, madness speaking about itself…that is, madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, the language of psychiatry on madness.' (Derrida 2002, p. 39)

To write a history of madness from the position of unreason is, Derrida argues, an impossibility, since the concept of history is inherently rational. In documenting madness, the archaeology of silence, Foucault drags madness into the realm of reason, of language and of concept. Derrida states:

> 'The misfortune of the mad, the interminable misfortune of their silence, is that their best spokesmen are those who betray them best; which is to say that when one attempts to convey their silence itself, one has already passed over to the side of the enemy, the side of order, even if one fights against order from within it, putting its origin into question.' (Derrida 2002, p. 42)

The notion of a history of unreason is thus a paradox; to conceive madness in such a manner is to understand it from within the confines of reason. Moreover, Derrida recognises madness as that which is inextricably bound to an economy, or structure 'whose irreducible originality must be respected.' (Derrida 2002, p. 51) For Derrida, madness, reason and death are involved in a process of différance; they differ and thus constantly defer signification to one another. In other words, the categories of reason and unreason are mutually definable; one cannot exist without reference to the other. To conceptualise reason is to also to conceptualise what it is not, what it opposes.

Derrida does seem to concede to Foucault's claim that a history of madness exists as an archaeology of silence; for Derrida, madness is 'what by existence cannot be said.'(Derrida 2002, p. 42) However, there is a difference, I would argue, between remaining unsaid and being silent. To be sure, the soundscape of the asylum was certainly not silent; As Dolly McKinnon argues:

> 'During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while clothing and uniforms visually differentiated members of the asylum community, sound was also used to define and differentiate the sane from the insane…the mad both articulated their condition, and were defined by others, through interpretive hearing. Madness was both audible and visible. Patient's sounds and gestures defined their 'otherness'.' (MacKinnon 2003, p. 75)

Moreover, I would like to suggest that noise could be understood as the sonic emulation of madness in Derrida's economy of reason, madness and death. Reason exists as a realm of language, the conceptual and the meaningful, while noise is that which exists on the cusp of reason, as that which is incomprehensible, inexplicable; that which is to be excluded. The realm of silence, as Jacques Attali highlights in his thesis *Noise: The Political Economy of Music, is that of death alone*. (Attali 2003, p. 3) Noise, as a reflection of that which may be beyond the symbolic, is thus part of and inextricably bound to the realm of the symbolic. It cannot be cut away from reason, from meaningful sound, since this is what defines it as such. Noise music thus makes apparent the economy of noise, meaningful sound and silence, in which the aesthetic ideal of noise and the purportedly consecrated notion of the musical are constantly engaged in a process of différance; by being placed in opposition to one another, they both differ and defer to one another. (Figure 4) The noise in noise music can thus be understood as an act of self-subversion; in the same way that the Idiots rely on a stereotype of the social other that is constructed from by the rational self in order for their actions to gain signification, noise in noise music only gains signification through its proximity to the musical.[3] I would now like to consider the ways in which noise music can be seen to construct a 'mask' of otherness, of unreason, in relation to two musical exemplars.

The vocalist and performance artist Diamanda Galás is not a name typically associated with the noise music 'canon', however much of her music can certainly be described as containing noise-sounds. At her most virtuosic, Galás's use of extreme vocal techniques; screams, shrieks, grunts, growls, multiphonics, and exaggerated vibrato create the effect of noise; her words are often incomprehensible, there is often no traceable melody, no clear structure. Galás appears to construct a mask of a madwoman; she stages the rantings of a woman possessed, her voice full of blistering, female rage (McClary 2002, p. 32). In doing so, the boundaries between the reason of the performative context and unreason become blurred as Galás's voice offers us a glimpse into the sonic realm that may lie beyond signification.

The mask of madness that Galás takes on is apparent in the aptly named, 'Wild Women with Steak Knives' (subtitled 'Homicidal Love Song for Solo Scream'). Galás' extreme vocal techniques, alongside her use of technological manipulation allow her to take on the voice of multiple others within the body of the self. Throughout the track, Galás's voice changes between the singular and multiple. The other voices that she embodies may have their pitch altered; at one point one of Galás' voices is lowered so that it is no longer recognizable as female. Similarly, the use of panning and delay creates a contrast of spacing, which is frequently contested through the introduction and conclusion of the different voices that blend into or take over from one another. Subsequently, the relationship between the voice of the self and the other becomes problematic; it is always Galás's voice but the use of technological effects, alongside her virtuosic techniques means that at times the voice is masked; it is no longer recognizable as Galás but becomes multiple and competing others.

The comprehensibility of Galás's voice also reflects a staged shift between reason and unreason. At many points, Galás's words are incomprehensible; they are empty of literal signification, nonsensical, merely existing as a textural feature. At one point, Galás becomes comprehensible, taking on a solo chant. However, this descends into incomprehensibility once again, with Galás's multiple voices whispering, gibbering and ranting hysterically; swallowing the voice of reason. Eventually, all language breaks down; what is left is Galás's screams and wailing, with her vocal sounds at times emulating vomiting or suffocation. It is as if Galás is staging an expulsion of the self as an intolerable, abject other. It would seem strange to suggest that listening to Galás's extreme vocal style is a source of pleasure; rather, as with the abject, it would seem to encourage a mixture of horror combined with fascination. Moreover, as David Schwarz highlights, in Galás's voice, the abject and the sublime can turn into one another; disgust at her voice, its repulsive sonority, can turn into a reflection of the limitlessness, of music beyond music. (Schwarz 1997, p. 163)

Justice Yeldham, an alias of the Australian performance artist Lucas Abela, also blurs the boundaries between reason and unreason in his work. Yeldham creates his sonic experiments using oscillators and distortion pedals attached to microphones and sheets of glass. At times, Yeldham will amplify the sounds of himself eating the glass, smashing the glass on himself, or cutting himself with it. The notion of abjection is again at play here; watching someone eat glass is repulsive, an incomprehensible act of violence towards the self. It can also be read as a breaking down of the moral; to take pleasure, entertainment or interest in an act of violence towards the other would seem perverse. Yet Yeldham's work is a spectacle, his performances are based around the physical and the bodily. It is a process of (literally) embedding the object other, that is, the glass and the recording equipment, within the body of the self, by, for instance, consuming the glass. Yeldham's performances can thus be understood to make visible the boundaries of the ethical, which are both defined by, and disobeyed by, Yeldham's actions.

Yeldham's performances seem to echo Foucault's comments on the animality of madness in the age of confinement:

> 'The animal solidity of madness, and that density it borrows from the blind world of beasts, inured the madman to hunger, heat, cold and pain. It was common knowledge until the end of the eighteenth century the insane could support the miseries of existence indefinitely.' (Foucault 2008, p. 69)

The noise Yeldham creates is the sonic reflection of the endurance of pain; it marks the breakdown of human existence. Moreover, both Galás and Yeldham's performative states can be understood to emulate the notion of madness-as-spectacle. In the same epoch in which madness was associated with animality and confinement, madness was also, at times, a spectacle; those condemned as mad were, for a fee, exhibited as a source of intrigue or entertainment:

> 'It was doubtless a very old custom of the Middle Ages to display the insane. In certain of the Narrtürmer in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe the madmen chained within…the strange fact is that this custom did not disappear once the doors of the asylums closed, but that on the contrary, it then developed, assuming in Paris and London almost an institutional character. As late as 1815…the hospital of Bethlehem exhibited lunatics for a penny, every Sunday. Now the annual revenue from these exhibitions amounted to almost four hundred pounds; which suggests the astonishingly high number of 96,000 visits a year.' (Foucault 2008, p. 64)[4]

The otherness of noise music seems to enter onto a similar stage; that which threatens to subvert or challenge is exhibited as the new, the radical, or the fascinating within noise music. Like in horror or psychological films, the supposedly subversive becomes the spectacle; we derive enjoyment or Jouissance (pleasure taken to the level of pain) in experiencing that which we find uncomfortable or threatening.

**Conclusion**

In the same way that Lars Von Trier's 'Idiots' employ a mask of the social other as a means of drawing attention to, or rebelling against normative social behaviours, noise music harnesses a mask of the sonic other; an aesthetic reflection of that which may lie at the borders of the self, space and signification. However, while this mask of otherness may be thought to subvert or challenge normative modes of being, it is inextricably bound to that which it seeks to oppose; it does not subvert but rather, exists as an act of self-subversion. Noise and madness cannot be thought of as escaping reason; rather they are defined within its confines. Noise may be thought to threaten or subvert the borders of music; to be sure it is often associated with a rhetoric regarding the new, the radical or the challenging. However, it would seem that noise in fact exists as a marker of these boundaries; it highlights to us our limits. Moreover, the noise that noise music embodies is inevitably defined by its proximity to the musical; if it fails to maintain its musicality then it just becomes noise. Likewise, if it becomes fully appropriated as music, then it fails as noise.

The noise of noise music can thus be conceptualized as a 'mask' of otherness; of non-meaning, nonsense, the non-musical. As can be seen with Galás and Yeldham, this mask can be an act of staged madness, or unreason, within the confines of the musical, the performative; in short, reason. In doing so, noise music blurs the boundaries between reason and non-reason, music and non-music, meaning and non-meaning, while also performing a violence towards the others it embodies; the violence of noise against music, of madness against convention, of the abject against the self.

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[1] Augoyard and Torgue propose the notion of sonic effect as the middle ground, or intermediary level, between Pierre Schaeffer's concept of the sound object with R. Murray Schafer's concept of the soundscape. I would argue that the concept of the sonic effect allows us to change the focus of the question

[2] Kant states: 'The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness.' (Kant 2007, §23)

[3] Simon Reynolds speaks of the 'subversive fallacy' in noise music, arguing that noise only overthrows or transgresses 'the power structures in your own head.' The fictitious enemy, the face of reason, of consecrated musical values moreover, is unlikely to occupy the same space in which noisemaking occurs. (Reynolds 2006, pp. 55-58)

[4] For Foucault, the age of the asylum, the age of reason marks the elevation of madness 'to spectacle above the silence of the asylums and becoming public scandal for the general delight. Unreason was hidden in the silence of the houses of confinement but madness continued to be on the stage of the world – with more commotion than ever.' (Foucault 2008, p. 65)