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Remissions of Disturbances Aesthetics

Abstract

In my text, I attempted to compile a list of artistic works, movements, concepts and inter-
pretations in the field of bruitism, failure, error, glitch construction as well as deconstruc-
tion, especially in art. I presented an outline of a theory that describes mainly three types
of noises. I aimed at presenting to what extent they are used and how they intertwine.
Also, I indicated a wide field of manifestation of human activity, both social and technolog-
ical at the same time. It is a city resembling an organism with its institutional derivations.
I listed two such sectors, namely, advertising and politics. It is on their basis that one can
experience with their whole body an increasing quarrel, disturbances and intersecting
trajectories of advertising content.

In this paper I intend to continue with the investigations gathered in a book
titled "The aesthetics of disturbances" written in Polish in 2010. It was
a publication of doctoral thesis prepared under the title "O szumach. Wielość
praktyk wykorzystujących szum w twórczości artystycznej a ich odbiór este-
tyczny" ["On noises. The numerosity of practices applying noise in artistic
creativity and its aesthetical reception"] in 2007. This kind of subject is very
close to my artistic path of research and is connected with the artistic envi-
ronment which I am involved in, and which is a subject under my scrutiny.

My aim is to propagate ideas, theory and nomenclature presented in the
book. Furthermore, I would like to develop proper semantics and to point
out new fields where the notion of noise is applicable. Besides, it will be
worth making a few steps further because of the revision of sources as well
as finding other interesting dissertations.

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1. In search of the optimal category in aesthetics

While trying to obtain a proper answer to contemporary art as a series of certain questions, one could find it difficult to apply a specific kind of dictionary. Which key terms should be qualified as relevant? Which categories might be found more precise than others? There are proposals of notions from different perspectives, which involve and embrace intermingled fields of both spontaneous and analytic practices within contemporaneity.

Noise is an element of communication, which is permanently present as a correlation of information. Similarly, it could be described in terms of mathematics and acoustics, in relation to text, music and image analysis. There are many kinds of noises but in short I would like to name three of color: white, colorful and pink, and three of subject: epistemical, structural and probabilistic.

In the Polish language there is a strict division between a measure of quantity in knowledge, density of structure, probability and physical experience of hearing loud phenomena. There are two clearly opposed terms ("szum" and "hałas") but in the English repertoire of categories it lacks such clarity and it needs navigating between clusters of family similarities. It includes, on the one hand, disturbances, errors, glitches and failures, and on the other, peaks of volume, throbs, shouts, bursts. The former series belongs to description of communication process. In opposition to it, the latter is derived from conscious hearing and maneuvers of performers. What I have in mind especially are musical acts such as free improvisation, contemporary dance choreography and expressive voice modulation in theatre spectacles taking place on a stage.

Noise in the second sense is a state of audial environment and causes uncomfortable emotions, feelings, and at the highest level, pain. Nonetheless, even with the enumerated qualities the noise could cure and play a role of weapon against immaterial forces (Lichota 2016, 82-88). There are many examples of musical activity where the two aspects of noise meet. The list of groups and composers is long and encompasses the *no wave* style with Swans, Sonic Youth, Buthole Surfers, *grind core* with Napalm Death and Brutal Truth, Japanese *noise* scene with Merzbow, Tetsuo Furudate. In Poland this kind of artistic activity was undertaken at the Alt+F4 festival in 1990s with Zbigniew Karkowski, Robert Piotrowicz, Jacek Staniszewski, Anna Zaradny and projects such as Viön&Mem. In a rather lighter and brighter form not causing obvious discomfort or extreme experience, the aesthetics is continued by Arszyn, Emiter, Zenial, Aleph.

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Aside from all presented theory, one should consider other key terms: disturbance, error and glitch or even trash (Kane 2019). The first one is a phenomenon which appears between the sender and the receiver or source and destination in a framework of communication model. If it is a symbol or a sign route of exchange, then it needs to be named semiotic, otherwise, in relation to signal exchanges from a source to its destination, there is a cybernetic level of analysis. I have taken a notion of disturbance as an apt metaphor to classify the whole field of my investigation.

In another path of general semantic tree introduced as a multigraph of permanent, pervasive sense of noise there are: error, glitch, damage and failure. In all of them one is dealing with a sort of loss, which could be dialectically elevated to obtain a value of composition and appreciation comparable to a piece of art. The glitch style is a poetics of music composition where hits, punctuations and scratches as an output of cut and paste technique, soundwave manipulation or plundrophonics are found. Japan is famous for Ryoi Ikeda, while Pan Sonic are famous in Europe. As for glitch, it could be not only heard but also seen.

Some theoreticians and practitioners use quite different names to discern the same qualities. As an epitome let it serve *data bending* or *data moshing* and *circuit bending*, which perfectly exemplify redirection of knowledge to hardware and software manipulation. Similarly, glitch and data bending are in use in the description of sound, image and video pixelization, interlacing, cracking, stripping into pieces and remaking them. This kind of activity is mainly based on using raw data, chosen software and cut and paste of code in free choice strategies (Mitchell 1998, 166-167). It could bring effects but in the same way there is a high probability that one might face failure. Besides, there are plug-ins and add-ons, implemented features in commercial tools, which play the same role with the reliability that can be attributed to the above-mentioned tools. Furthermore, on the whole, the error tracking process could be described as an algorithm and run in such environments as Processing and Pure Data (Shifmann 2008).

There is a little difference between an unnoticed crack, mechanical or electronic damage caused by an accident or mistake and data moshing oriented practices. On the side of the spectators taking part in a performance results could be undecidably similar. On the side where we are dealing with an access to the source and preparation of the error and its arrangement, the situation seems obvious. There are two clearly distinct, separate behaviors, without common context situations.

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There is one more noticeable conjunction between the two fields. On the one side, one deals with contemporary digital strategies, which are looking for glitches, crakcs, errors, lacks of sharpness and effects of incongruence, on the other side video art, avant-garde film and experimental music based on tape manipulation techniques. On the other side, video artists especially equipped with digital tools fullfil parallel results, and Malcolm Le Grice could be a prior example of such comparison (Meigh-Andrews 2008, 317-318).

In film we face a phenomenon called *found-footage*. It is a certain treatment of finished, closed and appreciated artistic forms ready to be projected or found in the dustbin or in archive. In music, a term in frequent use is a collage, which is semantically broader. Found-footage refers to cut and paste logic with mixing different film sources in a vast horizon from official propaganda through documentary to narrative pieces. Bruce Conner with his "Report" and "Mea Culpa" is one of very famous artists, who stems from this kind of production.

In relation to this activity I prefer to use a category of "epistemic noise", which describes a situation where a spectator is confronted with the plurality of messages derived from fragments of communication acts. In confrontation with such immense, truncated structure a receiver of a film form is forced to synthesize audiovisual flow personally, individually and partially at once. In Internet based art works where a data basis played a crucial role there is a resemblance of such effort because of fragmented, portioned, unformed sequences of experience (Jelewska 2015).

To obtain a proper insight into the realm of music on the basis of the presence of noise we should introduce the notion of collage. The last category is suitable to many endeavors undertaken by the second avantgarde movement and is still in reservoir of critical tools. One of the pioneer of collage in music is John Cage with his "Rozart Mix". This piece is classified as a work which inherits the contemporary music in disguise because of its borderlike nature. At this point, it is worth referring to cubism, which violates the pure, painting form by sticking to canvas the elements of everyday life and dadaist photomontages comprise of cut newspapers. Between them one should place intermedia compositions with both collage logic and epistemic noise character of experience. For such reason, it is worth referring to "Merz" by Kurt Schwitters, combine paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, performances of Mercy Cunnigam and syncretic actions of Andrzej Matuszewski.

We should state that in the recently mentioned works a double or triple play of opposite processes is inhibited. There in artistic creation, where multitude of possibilities appear simultaneously or consecutively, we are faced

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with epistemic noise, but very often its emergence has a reverse side of structural noise. The second is present in destruction, annihilation, deconstruction and rewriting of borders and laws of exhibition and productivity. Sometimes alongside these opposite and complementary forces underlying art the third drive appears. It arises when in an artistic act there are aspects of choice programmable by artist or a user. This kind of noise, which is called probabilistic, is obvious and trivially induced by data basis, net art based on generative mechanisms or randomness. We can find it in aleatoric forms, in Oulipo (Bénabou 2006; Queneau 2005) algoritmic litterature and in experimental music, for example in "The Book of Changes" by John Cage (Strzelec 2014, 209-210).

Another field where epistemic noise becomes an active and irresistible force of experience is *op art*. The extraordinary aspect of presence of such works lay in opposition, a struggle between appearance and interpretation. On the one hand, we perceive a form of shapes and color, which is done because of human sensual apparatus contravened into certain extends. On the other hand, on the basis of one's knowledge of illusion, paradoxes of vision, afterimages, we do not trust the represented content. In confrontation with a piece of art representing op-art, the spectator starts to play on both sides between the brain molding sensitive data and the mind criticizing the depiction on the basis of what is known about illusion and human perception.

We may consider a set of effects definitive to this genre through an oeuvre of Julian Stańczak. What is often included in his paintings is a deep contrast of color and between foreground and background as in "Constant Return I" (1965). It brings a hallucinatory strength to build an illusion of detaching the content from a surface partially. Smooth lines are brilliant and space intervals are minute, which causes a vibrant structure which creates the third dimension by illusion. As in other works of art in "Brim Two" (1972), there are presented qualities which induce illusory movement of composed structure, their vibration and subtraction because of contrast. It is described as a geometrical ambiguity (Châtelet 1995). The artist engages a series of oppositions on the basis of color, shape and location. The color tones which are chosen are often fluorescent, pink, velvet, yellow or black and white.

There are many indexed and described, static and dynamic patterns which have the ability to deceive human perception but its jurisdiction is contrived into geographical and cultural borders. Optical illusions and paradoxes are not universal in all extent. It is worth noticing that some of them are parallel to the object of interest in the field of experimental, avantgarde

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film. Especially in a movement of structural film with such figures as Paul Sharits and Józef Robakowski can we find the occupation of intensifying participant experience. This is concentrated on afterimages, treatment of camera, cadre and usage of still images. In the piece titled „Film", by a Polish artist, we face an epistemic struggle induced by illusion of color and with scratch effects for both audio and video.

Let us put it in question whether literature has been delayed during decades of contemporaneity in practicing noise. It could be rewritten in categories of experimentation and novelty, discovering and both merging the borders of disciplines, genres with vast horizons of taste. What is in visual arts a strategy of broadening of form embodied in collages, intermedia and multimedia as literature has its impact on the level of montage equipped with possibilities of attaching and integrating allogenic content, symbols.

An eruption of reconfiguration in expectations addressed to literary forms has started with a few spontaneous eccentrics such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Witkacy and reached its peak with Witold Gombrowicz, Alain Robe-Grilliet and Ronald Sukenick. All of them blur their characters, loose a chain of events intentionally gathered in a whole in a reader's imagination. It goes towards unillusionistic effects, questioning reality (Budrecki 1984). We need to add to these qualities metaartistic, selfreferential, decontructive attitude of an instance, which we expect to be a teller of a story. To some extent such bordeline annihhilations of preoccupied, sedentary hierarchies of values, are a revelation of mingling and migrating. Graphics, score, sketch, script, drama, poetry, tale, play and scenario could touch here together, aspiring to absolute art (Goodman 1969, 177-201). Nonetheless, none above-mentioned produced literary artifacts have a privilege of being it since the reader's imagination creates that object.

2. For what reason do people make noise?

We took a short but a concise journey within the contemporary art with an aim to gather different kinds, genres, artists and pieces being a proper representation of a set which consists of noise probes and samples. I put stress on this term because it has the broadest family of meanings and uses. It is also a base because of its logical necessity in a theory of communication. My role in reframing the theory on the aesthetic, axiological and cultural ground is to replace its position from margin, edge, insect and parasite position to the screen of perception, to the sore eye of the stage where one's sensorium is working together. My division taken into the notion brings a possibility

to gather such a vast scenario of contemporary art evolution that it is not a false assumption to say that noise is a general subject, concealed but revealed, unconscious but reminded.

Interesting questions have been raised during my elaborations of facts, artifacts and correlated values upon them. For what reason do people make noise? Why do they use it as a tool of axiological and symbolical exchange? How could one understand the act where power and strength, even violence, destroys the integrity of a work of art, and brings one to a point where annihilation meets creation? Would anybody expect one or many ideologies from behind a surface where noise is a regent and reigns on its territory (Gracyk 1996, 209)?

For many reasons we should say that noise has a potential to emancipate, and using it moves one toward such a value as freedom. The proofs to that opinion are discernible through analyzing an existence of borderlines in arts and in society. First of all, there is a need to talk about a fact that initially noise is something which is outside the music. Some theorists prefer to establish a change in dodecaphonism of Vienna artists such as Schönberg, Webern and Berg (Attali 2002). Others would move a source of innovation and a beginning of revolutionary thoughts in music and art to futurism with Russolo, Pratella and Marinetti (Kahn 2001).

With these avantgarde movements, the shape of outstanding conception on composition started to change instantaneously. To emancipate and to break free from constraints means here an absorption of non-European scales, instruments, techniques of playing and sets of musicians, as well as invention of graphical scores and incorporation of generative based sounds. At the peak of this process we have a possibility of creating musical pieces from all sounds which can happen and might be amplified, recorded and post-produced within technical apparatus. The equipment consists of generators, mixers, filters, synthesizers, stereos and other digital devices.

There are two basic an interpretational axes which could be useful in understanding of the gathered problems and questions incorporated in this paper. The first is derived from a very long lasting opposition between life and death, creation and annihilation or devastation. For some reasons, people see in them extreme differences, but there are other arguments which should help one to become conscious that life and death, creation and annihilation are to some extent reversible. They are a verse and reverse in one movement of values appearing, propagating. We should say that there is no possibility to designing something without demolishing it or disobeying some other thing. Additionally, in a backward direction, destruction and

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taking back the very existence of something is a ground for the distribution of values, their birth and dispersion. The famous figure, a deity from the Hindu pantheon, which correlates with this kind of reflection is Siva Nataradza (Hegel 2006, 367-368).

The second important interpretational axis is attached to a key term entangled with knowledge and wisdom. A basis for this aspect is a polarity between conquering sources of information and experiencing something which could barely be translated into bits, theory, concepts. A great work gathering prejudices and misconceptions about ecstasy, violence, scapegoat, experiences on the extreme conditions could be underlined with a sentence that language and calculus is not exchangeable with certain kind of situations (Bataille 2002). This problem arises probably within mysticism and many religious ecstatic movements across the world where more is reached through active, physical approach than through text or thought itself.

As far as noise generated by mankind is considered, the above mentioned bipolarity is accomplished mainly in what cannot be uttered, and it moves in the direction from order to disorder, from a preoccupied and clearly preconceived framework to a disrupted, chaotic, crippling state. What is striking in such process is the layer responsible for values retention. On the border of what can be uttered or expressed communicatively through speech, approaching entropy and beyond the human reasoning other aspects of human experience come to the forefront. We can talk about shivering, trembling, being intoxicated, high or subjugated into a role of a victim, slave. In intimate occurrences there are a few more states striving for sense, an unbearable need for ground, a lack of maturity, dissipative collection of nodes.

Especially in contemporaneity, where there is a propensity of new media and communication values in human environment, these translations, equations, transductions between forging and freezing, fruiting and polluting, composing and decomposition, fertile and barren states are active, strong and proliferated. Their useful power is untouched by common virtual machines which give the users and abusers at the same time some extraordinary tools to reverse all structural, culturally embossed binary codes. Experience appears as some kind of redemption or equilibristic tax on these conversions. It all happens on the base of economy of signs where some disbeliefs are transformed into frustration, which has its reverse of permanent ecstasy.

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3. The attempt to reach beyond the field of art

My analysis goes further into some aspects, sectors of contemporary culture. Until this point of switch I introduced a framework of theory juxtapositioned with artistic practice and axiological interpretation. I have tried to broaden and surplus a collection which was made before (Bromboszcz 2010). Since the publication of this dissertation I have taken into consideration an actual interest in data bending, bugs, cracks and malware in programming environments. What must be underlined are two remarkable interpretational axes, which have been here written anew. What has not been discussed yet is the endeavor which reaches beyond the field of art and is partially or illusorily freed from aesthetic prejudices.

In my opinion, certain operations on noise, its manifestation, can be referred to the organism that is the city itself. It would be an outcome worth campaigning to siege over contemporaneity with pre-scripted algorithms of bending, glitching, found-footaging. It aspires to be truism that the city is a playground of noises where the role of advertising and broadcast is strikingly obvious. The public space planners, urban designers, cultural studies figures, politicians are formatted by the market conditions of media circulation to measure audiovisual pollution, meme propagations, the viral spread of advertising. The presence of billboards, city lights, cinemas, advertisements at bus stops, corporate logos and trademarks is different but similar in producing experimental noise source effects for residents and for each other.

We may look at the public space as an arena of political propaganda, clashes of different opinions especially within the borders of politics and advertising. The city is an excellent example of the multidirectional struggle between economic forces and the market of ideas against consumers. In this current tide we are able to engage into fight for law to city managing. The city as a dynamic organism is also a growing capital through reaching transactions of lands, taxes and citizens are capable to organizing liberation front (Harvey 2012). This movement can be likened to a revolution but at the moment we should be careful about a notion of class and effects of emancipation.

The city as an arena of noises derived from different sources took its shape because of political debate, which is in its own arena. In this case we should consider a field where groups of different beliefs collide. There is a question whether a process of differentiating the public opinion in public debate is lacking truth. We can find proponents of such kind of view

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(Sepczyńska 2015). I may only pose a question without giving an answer. It is commonly known that the political negotiations of aims and values lead to dissent, a performative game in the place of trustworthy unity of beauty and good. While analyzing facts of political change, one faces a phenomenon of opposite interpretations and evaluations given by people from different parties. Some of them are hateful in nature and do not hint any dialogical tools.

At the end of this short excursion through different areas of city and its proper social realities, which I call atoms or sectors, we should focus our interest on advertising. It is an interesting and influential kind of symbolic exchange. In the context of noise propagating and its measure it is noticeable that every piece of advertising has its own rules of appearing, its own figures and gestures. They could be compared to possible worlds. Any billboards, city lights, posters might be interpreted as a door with the message sent to the recipient. It is an invitation without wait. This kind of simultaneity pro-vokes trembling, and to avoid its overdose partially because a danger of viral consequences, we could limit it by ecology, both urban and of senses (Barry 2010, 187).

Culture is a scene of the struggle where different tastes, opinions, ideas meet together and fight for users. Some theoreticians suppose that a popular culture is a construct of needs, goods and values in circulation. This process is deeply entangled with the so-called relations of power. Human culture expresses its structure in daily acts of appearance, shopping, choosing from menu, etc. (Fiske 2010, 21). The sedimentation of these acts give a frame-work of custom behavior, which might not be satisfactory to everyone. In such kind of situation a noise making in opposition to currently accepted norms is a strategical tool in the way of liberation or even revolution. This could be useful and can be introduced at once on religious, market and mili-tary levels (Ackerman 1996, 11).

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