Reflections about the social determinants of art and design: noise music in Latin America and Asia

Abstract

The paper is based on the author's experience performing noise or experimental music in Latin America, East and South East Asia. In this paper, the author reflects on some social determinants of art and design. Dimensions such as technology, territory, identity, social characteristics and social acceptance are discussed. Additional topics such as class, gender, politics are covered. The author concludes that these do not shape the practice of noise music, they are also elements which provide frameworks on which artists and designer built.

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Reflexiones sobre los determinantes sociales del arte y del diseño: Música de ruido en América Latina y Asia

Resumen

Este artículo está basado en la experiencia del autor dando interpretaciones de música de ruido (*noise music*) o de experimentación en América Latina, Asia del Oriente y del Sur-Oriente. En el artículo, el autor reflexiona acerca de algunas determinaciones sociales del arte y del diseño como el territorio, la identidad, las características sociales y la aceptación social. Clase, género y política son otros temas discutidos. El autor concluye que la dichas dimensiones no dan forma a la música de ruido, ellas ofrecen un lienzo sobre el cual los artistas y diseñadores pueden construir.

58

This paper is about art and design and how they relate to larger social, political, economic and cultural dynamics. It is extensively based on my own experience performing sound art in several Latin American, South East and East Asian countries since 1998. I have been performing "noise music", sometimes also described as "experimental music" and often associated with sound art. The kind of noise or experimental music I am performing is a musical genre related to electronic ambient music, to an iconoclast genre of music called industrial music and to the more academic genre of electroacoustic music (Hegarty, 2006; Van Nort, 2006; Demers, 2010; Atton, 2011). Since 2005, I have also been accompanying many of my performances with videos I have created.

This paper is also based on my experience as a sociologist, researching various cultural, political and historical dimensions about the "developing world" and "emerging countries". Since 2001, I have spent a great time reflecting and researching about and in the said regions.

If this article somewhat attempts to reconcile both "careers" or trajectories that have otherwise been also hermetic to each other and worked almost totally independently, I share some reflections about my practice rather than presenting sociological findings. I do not pretend these reflections can be extended further than the context in which I had the observations that led me to think in such ways. In fact, they bring more questions than they provide answers. This paper is not based on literature review or theoretical discussions.

The reflections in this paper are first addressed to artists and designers and then, to social scholars. For artists and designers, this paper might help placing their own experience in a more general portrait and reflect on aspects they might not have envisaged otherwise. For scholars, this paper might help getting general information to build on, to explore new questions or to use this account in possible comparisons across regions or cultural activities. This paper does not propose a reflection on the

59

aesthetics of noise or experimental music and its associated visual design. Papers about the aesthetics of music are plentiful. This one would like to contribute to forging paths of sociological reflections. For which there is a dire need.

If this paper is about Latin America, South East and East Asia, it does not mean that social determinants are not an important dimension elsewhere. If it is not the case in Northern America or Western Europe then, it is neither the case in Latin America, South East and East Asia.[1] This paper is not only on how my experiences in the said regions compare to that in Northern America or Western Europe. Rather, the paper is about how, as Belgian performer living in Canada, my experiences can be examined with some sociological imagination. This paper also sees the scenes of Latin America, South East and East Asia, not as a comparison supporting the understanding of scenes elsewhere, but as having dynamics that must be highlighted for themselves.

This article starts with general methodological and introductory remarks. Then, I reflect on five major social determinants: technology, territory, identity, social characteristics and social acceptance. Concluding this article, I will attempt to synthesize my reflections and think about the future of noise music.

60

The social determinants of art and design

Much of the history of art emphasizes the predominant role of the artist as the sole creator of the artwork. Many art historians have focused their accounts on the "artist" – often emphasizing their "geniuses" – as a unit of analysis independent of any influences other than art movements (De la Fuente, 2007). But the "unconditional celebrations of the glories of the great masterpieces" does not make a great analytical

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[1] There are a lot of migrations and connections between Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia. These connections come with lots of mutual influence. It is therefore perhaps hard to see they are different worlds or cultures hermetic to each other.

tool (Hennion & Grenier, 2000, p. 342). Social sciences have a wealth of reflections on the study of art and how it relates to larger social dynamics or structures.

Some scholars have argued that political and economic institutions determine art. Art would be at the image of the material conditions of society. It is the case of Marxist or Gramscian studies of the art (Goldman, 1964; Jameson, 1974; Nelson & Grossberg, 1988). In a capitalist, male-dominated, Western-centered world, the art worlds are shaped and are reproducing dynamics of domination. Art is never the expression of a single person, rather it is the outcome of a group of people who have a limited understanding of how their production is being produced and determined by social, political and economic institutions and ideologies. Some other scholars have argued that art acts as an autonomous field of activity, shaped by its own history and codes. The systemic-functionalist approach recognizes that art and artists are part of a larger system, but it theorizes that the art system is only motivated by its own internal rules and is not permeable to external influences (Luhmann, 2000). Sociologists such as Howard S. Becker have extensively stressed the importance of understanding art as a social world – or a complex organization – made of series of interaction between different professional groups and publics (Becker, 1982). In this perspective, the social organization does not determine art. Rather, art is being defined through a complex social process in which agency, understandings, misunderstandings, expectations and interpretations contribute to making an artwork. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has attempted to reconcile agency and social structure (Bourdieu, 1993). In his work, Bourdieu shows how art acts as a system in which certain rules dictate artistic behaviour, social acceptability and desirability. This is, in part, linked with economic, social and political structures. But Bourdieu also shows how artists and curators are able to "navigate" in the art world according to their own social position with certain flexibility.

61

From my own experience, I gather that we, artists, very often overlook dimensions that give shape to our practices. I contend that art and design must not only be

understood according to their own internal rules and history. They are not only fabricated through a supposed "evolution" of aesthetics moved only by research, creativity and innovative ideas. The relation between art and design depends not only on creativity and experimentation. I have often met artists and designers that do not realize – or realize all too well – that their practice is in strong relation with the economic and political conditions of their country.

This paper is about these social determinants; about social dimensions external to aesthetics that have an influence on how art and design are being performed, received and marketed. I have learned from my experience that the larger, social, political, cultural and economic contexts are important but not the only determining factors conditioning the practice of art and design. But they should be considered and be given more attention. Art and design have a great dependence on material and social conditions but I do not want to suggest that material and social contexts are the sole determinant factors of our practices.

If I talk about "context" here, I am very conscious that using "context" – as a concept – suggests an influence external, almost environmental. However, I do not think culture, economics, politics and other social dimensions I am calling here "context" are inherently foreign to each other and just a backdrop. Art and design do not exist in isolation of culture, economics and politics. They are part of it and each "context" intersects, belongs or influence the others in various ways, some of which will be presented in this paper.

The empirical grounds for my reflections

For the past decade, autoethnographical accounts in social sciences have increasingly been used by researchers to reflect on their own life experiences or on how they engage in social settings (Anderson, 2010; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). If this

paper is closely related to my own experience, this paper is not really a reflection on myself as a social actor or a consideration of how my position intersects with various social dynamics. Rather, it is an invitation to enter the various noise music scenes as I have experienced them. It is an invitation to share what I have learned, what I reflect on, what I understand, and how I cope with my "careers" (Ellis, 2004, p. 46). However, writing this article has allowed me to learn about myself and raise my own awareness of the "relationship between [my] personal, lived experiences with the wider social structures and forces, thus actively developing and engaging [my] sociological imagination" (Cook, 2014, p. 269).

In almost twenty years, I have performed and gave workshops in 22 countries. In some countries, I have performed several times and in some others, only once or twice. A list of countries in which I have performed runs the risk of looking like a dry list of bragged achievements. Rather, the following list should be taken as an element of methodology allowing the reader to sense on which possible experiences my reflections are based. In Latin America, I have performed in (alphabetical order): Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. In East and South East Asia (hereafter Asia), I have performed in (alphabetical order): Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam. In these countries, I have performed in a variety of venues: from bars, art galleries, stores, to theaters and universities. For reasons of comparability, I will only share reflections about my experience in "emerging countries" or in countries associated with the "developing world".

63

Because of my personal and sociological curiosities, when possible, I used the performances or the workshops I gave to exchange experiences, ideas and opinions with other artists, with organizers and with members of the audience. This results in possibly hundreds of hours of informal interviews and observations. These hours of interviews and observations do not, of course, meet the expectations of formality of social science research. My interpretation does not rely on transcribed

information, but rather on accumulated reflections. However, regardless of how I have decided to interpret them, these interviews and participatory observations are arguably a rich series of experiences and constitute, without a doubt relevant material for reflection.

In my performances, I have found that the noise music scenes are often larger in Latin America and Asia than they are in Canada or Belgium. Often, more events are organized, more artists are performing and events are attended by a larger public. However, it should be noted that several Latin American and South East Asian countries do not have a proper noise or experimental music scene. Some have no accounted active musician or event organiser. For instance, in Latin America, I have never encountered information about possible noise music activities taking place in countries such as Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua or Paraguay, to name only but a few.

In total, I have spent over three years in Latin America and Asia. I have to acknowledge that I have a privileged position both as an observer and an actor. I have very few travel impediments. I am a national of a country (Belgium and now Canada) for which citizens are required no visas to travel in Latin America and very few visas for Asia. Additionally, my work as a tenured professor at a Canadian university specializing in development studies provides me with enough opportunities and financial resources to travel. This means, as I have noticed throughout the years, that I often get to know more about the scenes in neighbouring countries than nationals of Latin American or Asian countries I visit. I have, on many occasions, gotten more questions and curiosity about the scenes of neighbouring countries than I could actually answer.

Noise as scenes, as music and as art

Before carrying on my reflections on the social determinants, I would like to introduce more preliminary remarks.

In my experience, the noise or experimental music scenes in Latin America, South East and East Asia share some common traits. These common traits somewhat differ from scenes in Western Europe and North America. I define a "scene" as the conjunction of the acts of performing, organizing, attending and supporting music. A scene recognizes styles and achievements in terms that are their own. Within these boundaries, only performers and music deemed to be appropriate can circulate. A scene is usually loosely defined by a specific genre of music and specifics way to market and distribute the music. If they seem to be auto-referential, scenes are not hermetic to each other; they are often intersecting. Codes and attitudes may be shared by different scenes; venues and organizers often work across loose scene boundaries. In this paper I prefer to talk about "scenes" than "scene" in order to reflect the differences I have perceived.

Some traits I have highlighted about the noise scenes in Latin America and Asia may, or not, totally reflect the reality of every country in the regions. I realize very well that every country or society has its own specific history, social, political and economic context. But this paper tries to transcend national specificities. Personal examples are shared here only to support my reflections. And it should be more about what I learned from them that sharing miscellaneous trivia. Therefore, I voluntarily made very few mentions of specific countries. I wanted to keep the examples as little as possible representative of a single given situation. Additionally, for reasons of confidentiality, I have left people, cities and countries anonymous.

This paper announces art and design in its title. But, in fact, it is heavily biased towards sound art or noise and experimental music. Whether or not these practices

65

can be considered art or music can be argued. If music is generally accepted as an artistic practice and an art scene, the scene I belong to does not always claim its direct relationship with music. Noise music is not necessarily based on scores, on usual structures or notes. And, but for a few exceptions, it is not performed with instruments taught in music academies. Noise music performances consist sometimes in very short or very long live sets. Noise music is usually played at high volume. Using high or low frequencies, it is intended to create states of discomfort. However, as it resembles its organization, I argue that it belongs to the field of music. There are concerts of noise music in places where music is performed and, there are recordings, usually on CD and or digital releases. Noise music is a genre with a long history that parallels both music and sound art. Contemporary noise music dates from the early 1980's. In the beginning, most artists were located in Western Europe and North America. The history of noise music often follows that of underground music genres such as industrial and techno music where independent channels of production and distribution are very strong. Additionally, noise music, when performed digitally is using, for the most part, the software for music composition and performances that are popular in other electronic music genres. When performed analogically, noise music uses some of the equipment familiar to rock musicians such as mixers, guitar pedal effects and guitar amplifiers.

66

I tend to believe that noise or experimental music also belongs to the field of contemporary arts, especially to the field of performing arts. The vast majority of noise performers perform solo, they compose their own sound and the performance is sometimes the result of a scenography. Reflections by noise performers about sound design and compositions usually refer to the history of art and sound art practices. Some do refer to the history of performance arts. For this reason, I will indistinctly use "musician", "artist" and "performer" throughout this paper.

This paper claims to discuss design. It does so because I consider myself a visual designer and because I have had many interactions with visual designers in the

context of my performances and workshops. I have very few encounters and interactions with industrial designers and I do not claim to talk for them. In my experience, in the past few years, interactions between noise and experimental musicians and designers have increased. A few of us now design visuals for our performances. Most, performances that include a visual aspect are building on the collaboration between a noise performer and a visual designer.

Now that I have expressed these few preliminary remarks, let me reflect on five major social determinants of noise or experimental music: technology, territory, identity, social characteristics and social acceptance.

Reflection 1: Technology

The first reflection I would like to propose on social determinants is the relationship between noise music and technology. It is perhaps the most obvious possible determinant. Here, I take technology as a possible material factor determining artistic practices. Noise music is performed using computer software, synthesizers, modified instruments and various digital and analog effect processing units. And one can say that there is no music without technology. But the relationship goes further.

67

Over the years, I have discussed with artists performing with computer software for which getting the software was a challenge. Software are very expensive to purchase. This is especially true when translated into the economic reality of most Latin American or Asian incomes. Getting the software through dark or grey channels is not always an easy option. Pirated versions are not necessarily available; files are too large to download on a slow and unreliable internet connection. I have met a few artists who do not have an internet connection at home and only rely on their smartphone to access the internet. In Asia, one artist who had legally purchased a software from a European company explained to me that he had to

place a call in Europe to reset the maximum number of attempted downloads because his connection kept dropping over the few nights he had left his internet browser download the musical software package. Over the phone, he had to argue with the employee of the company who would not believe the connection in that country was so bad that he could not download the file; a reality that had not been considered by the European company.

During one of my stays in South East Asia, I have personally been confronted with the difficulty of replacing a malfunctioning MIDI controller, a device essential to my live performances. The controller was not available in the country I stayed in for several weeks. The distributor did not have the model I preferred and the international online purchase was not available for most of the region. I had to wait to be in a country where the model was distributed. In order to get exactly the device I wanted, I was fortunate enough to have a stop-over in that country. What I felt necessary – but in fact, it was just a personal preference – was made possible by my international mobility. When talking to fellow artists, they explained to me that they have to do with what is available, not with what they wish they had.

By listening to the audio output, the trained ears of a noise musician can usually tell you something about the technological process allowing the music to be created. It cannot be argued that noise or experimental music is not determined, at least to some extend, by technology. With the examples and reflections in this section I wanted to highlight a few dimensions of the technological determinants of noise music. Technology is a determining factor in the outcome of music but there are ways to get around the determination. The practice of noise or experimental musicians is not totally limited to the technological conditions which might, for Latin America and Asia reveal to be a challenge in ways different than it is elsewhere.

Reflection 2: Territory

A second reflection I would like to have about the possible social and material determinants of the practice of art are the relations between noise music and with territory or with spatial occupation. I take spatial occupation as a possible material or social determinant where art practices are, in part, shaped by the social appropriation of territory. The territory of noise music includes where music is being performed and marketed but also where artists live and gather. Not only noise music needs space to be performed, but this space must be located in areas accessible to the public by public transportation or through easy access (walk, bicycle, car, etc.).

For that reason, almost all venues I have performed at are placed in an urban environment. I would like to think that what holds true for noise music also holds true for other forms of contemporary performances and arts. It seems that the emergence of middle class enclaves and protected neighbourhoods often outside historical centers – where in many capitals, violence and poverty make circulation at night time difficult – as helped fostering a public and an interest for live noise performances. Often these places also have art, design and music stores that can market noise music. This is important to create a scene, even at times where most noise outputs are available digitally. But these territorial enclaves are not the only desirable model. I have also performed in venues in neighbourhoods, very often centrally located, undergoing processes of revitalization. But this comes at a cost. In the long run, noise music cannot only depend on venues where rent is not controlled and going continuously upward. Noise and experimental music can hardly help cultural centers, stores, cafés and art venues survive through hikes in costs of operation. It therefore seems to me there is a great dependence between noise music and territory. This dependence is, I think, a social determinant of art and design.

69

If it is true for arts venues, it is also true, to some extend for locations where artists gather and live. However, in a few countries, I have met artists who were living in

isolation of a local scene, outside of the major urban centers where art is usually been shown. They perform on a very few occasions, mostly outside their place of living. They keep informed and connected with the scene thanks to the internet; which has largely influenced their artistic practice by making it possible to get updates. Territory, or the distance with a materially grounded scene, is for them a great determinant of their practice based mainly on recorded material.

The territory of noise or experimental music has a political dimension. If posters or flyers can confront the social status quo, the content of the performances is rarely political; the music is, most of the time, instrumental, having no lyrics. However, the spatial occupation often is. The occupation of industrial buildings or locations in disenfranchised neighbourhoods is not only the result of the availability of cheap rent; it is also apolitical act. It is challenging the political economy of territory in ways, possibly less revealing than taking the streets as a political contestation. The spatial occupation of noise music is political because it is critical of the distribution of power and resources.

In this section, I have attempted to show that territory is a particular challenge for art and design in Latin America and Asia. If, territory or spatial occupation does not totally determine the feasibility of art and design, it certainly has an influence on it. It influences how noise music is being performed and marketed and how a scene lives and survives.

Reflection 3: Identity

The third reflection I would like to propose on the social determinants is the relationship between noise music and identity. I take identity here as a dimension of the cultural context, a possible determinant of art practices. I understand identity as all the cultural markers, traits, history that gives one a feeling of belonging to

a social group. It can be for instance, defined in relation to a language, a way to speak it, a religion or a lack of thereof. Identity is fluid; it is not set once and for all. It is complex, and constantly been transformed. Elements contributing to identity are feelings of belonging to a social class, a sexual practice and a religion or the absence of it. Culinary and artistic preferences also contribute to one's identity.

In noise or experimental music, I have found few direct relations between identity and artistic production. This is probably because noise music mostly refers to history specific to the genre. That is to say, performers use the history of noise music as a loose structure on which to build. For instance, when they are consciously, or not, referring to past performances or releases that have influenced them. In the process of becoming a noise musician, one listens and discovers past and current practices belonging to the genre. The history of Western Europe and North America has influenced noise music so much that it can probably be stated to be a reaction on the history of industrial cities of the said regions.[2] It seems however that many Latin American and Asian artists relate to such history or stories for which markers can be perceived to be specific to Western Europe and North America. The images of industrialization, pollution and related violence are talking to them in ways that give sense to their social reality. But, I have encountered very few noticeable musical practices attempting to integrate identities that would endeavour beyond an interpretative soundtrack for the industrial cities of Europe and North America.[3]

71

In one Asian country, I have encountered noise musicians that have integrated Buddhist chanting. They have successfully taken noise music into new paths. In the history of noise music one finds examples of samplings from Asian, Arabic or Indigenous "chanting" or so-called "traditional music". But this is done not as a

[2] Visual designers associated with the noise music scenes seem to have a different approach. Visual design often integrates elements relevant to markers of social identity not necessarily specific to the context of the emergence of noise or experimental music.
[3] Another factor to consider is the availability of inexpensive plane travels. Fairly recently, inexpensive low cost airlines have made it easier to travel particularly in Asia and in some Latin American countries. It certainly has an influence on how noise musicians from the region can travel more extensively and how the local noise scenes are interacting with each other. Additionally, it makes it easier for foreign performers to reach destinations that were, until recently, out of the regular international travel maps.

wish to incorporate one's identity in the music. Rather, those are rather stereotypical examples of orientalism or exoticism where a culture is deemed so different than one's own and that the traits of the other culture are exaggerated to make them appear like they are totally different. In the case of Buddhist "chanting", artists wished to bring a defining element of what they felt is their own culture into noise music. They are building a corpus of work for other artists to refer.

In one Latin American country, I have personally witnessed a blunt refusal by a famous European foundation to allow a noise musician to contract performers from the Andes to perform with him. The director of the foundation deemed it to be too "ethnic" for the contemporary art venue. In this latter example, the racism towards indigenous peoples, a phenomenon I have witnessed in cities of the Andes that have a powerful mestizo elite provided a determining factor on the integration of markers of identity into noise music. Had this event taken place at another venue, the indigenous artists could have been able to perform, but no remuneration would have been offered. Another venue, having much less resources to contract the musicians, would have made the collaboration difficult. In this example, I believe there is a strong relationship between identity, economic factors and the realization of aesthetical proposals.

Art and design are embedded at the global level. This means that they are conditioned, at least to some extend, by global cultural changes and economic conditions. The global circulation of ideas and people are great contributors to identity. Noise or experimental music depends a lot on global networks and the circulation therein. This might exists in ways a bit different in Latin America than in Asia. Latin America shares, for the most part, a common language that allows for an easier circulation of information.[4] English or Chinese does not serve as an international language throughout all of Asia. In recent years I have noticed

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an emerging dimension of identity. Countries of Latin America and Asia where economic adversity, social and political violence was rife have seen great numbers of artists migrating to other neighbouring countries or to North America and Western Europe. In those countries that have now achieved a certain state of social, political and economic stability, artists born outside the country or those born to expatriates parents are moving to the country to which they feel they belong. For some, there is a feeling of belonging to the country because they have maintained a close relationship with the culture and identity. For others, especially those born outside the country, it is one way of finding or forging their identity. Those "repatriates" – and foreigners who have decided to call these countries their home – are visible in the noise scenes. Very often, participating in the noise scenes is one way for them to rebuild, to discover or to create a new identity.

If identity is an important social determinant of popular music in Latin America and Asia, the case of noise music reveals other dynamics. It is hard not to conclude there are interactions between identity and art. It certainly has an influence, sometimes visible only in aesthetical terms. The examples I have chosen reveal how identity is multiple and fluid. Noise music can help enhance one's feeling of pertaining to an identity. Its practice can help one's identity construction.

Reflection 4: Social characteristics

73

This paper is not a sociological survey. It does not attempt to measure or describe accurately any social characteristics of the noise or experimental music scenes in Latin America and Asia. Few factors, such as social class, gender, ethnicity and political inclinations are notoriously difficult to survey. If this is not a survey I will however attempt to reflect on the social determinants of noise music as they relate to factors such as class, gender, ethnicity and political inclinations. I can only account for my own experience, which is limited and is just a very partial observation. This

section first presents some observations about the social characteristics of the noise scene. Then, I will reflect on how this might be a social determination.

From meeting performers, organizers and the concertgoers, I feel that there is a sense of belonging to the middle class. However, the task of circumscribing or defining the middle class in Latin America and Asia is a very difficult one. And, in sociological terms, it does not make total sense to use criteria available for North American and Western European social stratification where the concept of middle class is already largely challenged. Regardless of how you call this group or if you wish to call it a class, I have found that most members of the scene do in fact come from a relatively well-off background. But their artistic practice does not allow them to maintain this economic status. But very often, I found that noise music does not make one's social status "descend". This is especially true in societies where status is defined more in terms of social recognition and prestige rather than criteria of actual personal or familial income. Sometimes I have found that participation in a noise scene is a way to affirm the involvement or a sense of belonging to a social group benefiting from economic growth.

Very few artists and designers I have met are female. There is, however great discrepancies between countries. In some countries, females are almost totally absent; in some, their presence is very visible but yet they remain a minority. Additionally, from my discussions, I have to say that the presence of the gay, lesbian and transgender "community" is not much felt. I have met only but a few members of the scene who publicly identify with the LGBT community. Which is perhaps, according to my experience, lower than other arts scenes. However, I have to say that it does not seem to me that the scenes, but only for few exceptions, are strongly built on images of masculinity. The masculinity of noise music in aesthetical proposals and social attitude should however be further explored. Sometimes it is about the visual appropriation of pornography, sometimes in the form of poses and attitudes generally associated with dominant males. It should be questioned how

74

noise and experimental music are contributing to perpetuate models of masculinity and see how Western European and North American models are confronted with masculinities in Latin America and Asia which may be expressed with different modalities.

In my experience, I have encountered noise and experimental musicians coming mostly from, what I perceived to be, economically dominant groups, but groups that do not necessarily belong to ethnic majorities. For instance, musicians with Chinese background are particularly visible in many Asian countries where they are a minority social group. Mestizos or musicians with European backgrounds are also particularly visible in most Latin American countries I have performed in. However, in the countries in which they make an important proportion, this probably has an impact on the viability of the scenes. Musicians network through similar socio-economic backgrounds; the latter are often highly correlated with ethnicity. One can hypothesize that disposable income from members of the network helps supporting the scenes through performance assistance and the purchase of music and derived goods (for instance t-shirts and stickers). This is also the case of many expatriates from Europe, North America or from other Latin American or Asian countries. In some countries, expatriate musicians, organizers and concert-goers make a great majority of the public and the artists, in some, they are very marginal.

75

Over the years, I have had many political discussions. My sense is that the noise scenes are predominantly left-leaning, very often critical or cynical of the political institutions. However, in my experience, the scenes are not associated with social movements or political parties. It should be stressed here that the definition of left politics is very Western centered; it corresponds probably more to the reality of politics in Latin America than it does in Asia. Very few musicians belong to social movements in the traditional sense; they do not claim to be part of political parties. Very often, but not necessarily always, they are close to left-leaning political oppositions movements in their respective countries. This left-leaning

political position is expressed in different ways. That is, they are very critical of the economic and industrial elites, even for those who belong to the said social groups. They often share their wish to have a better redistribution of wealth. Many artists of Latin America and Asia I met have shared personal details about their experience as a witness or as an actor of social discrimination and the effects of poverty that, according to them, could be alleviated by better policies. I have also met a substantial number of anarchists or people with a family background in social activism with histories of political persecution and exile. In one Asian country, one of my performances had to be cancelled only a few days prior. A big demonstration criticizing the powerful one-party government had led to many people being imprisoned, including vocal members of the local noise scene. Understandably, the organizers deemed inappropriate to hold the event while people where in jail. If members of the noise music scenes do not participate in organized politics, there is a sense of transgression, a sense of proposing aesthetics that challenge established conceptions of music. This may, for many be the only readily available form of political action that does not have more serious implications such as political persecution and imprisonment.

A criticism I have heard on many occasions from within and outside the scenes is their lack of social representation or representativeness. That is the scenes do not reflect the social diversity of the society in which they are active. As stated above, I cannot account for the discrepancies between social characteristics of the actors of the noise scene and the societies in which they are embedded. Which interest do the noise scenes represent? The question can be asked. Artists and designers are never a group fully representative of society. It is hard for me to conclude that noise music is being performed by a given social class and that the scenes participate to the reinforcement of the privileges of a class. Noise musicians have, perhaps, characteristics different than the imagined society to which they belong. They are probably just defined as a group based on their artistic activity rather than being a group defined by cohesive social, economic, ethnic or political traits.

How does that relate to the social determinants of art and design in "emerging countries"? I tend to believe that, in yet to be explored ways, it has an influence on how it is practiced, performed and advertised more than it is in aesthetical terms. Amongst possible factors, I believe that the criticism of its lack of social representativeness may act as an influence of practice. The social representativeness of noise music can turn into a challenge. But so can the social representativeness of contemporary art and certain forms of popular music. So I do not believe it is specific to noise or experimental. More than the actual possible social representativeness of the noise or experimental music, I think, it is the discourse about its lack of representativeness that acts as a possible determination of how scenes interact with the rest of society. Either, actors of the noise music scenes wish to be more inclusive, or they reject or try to ignore the criticism. The challenge is therefore probably as much as how to be more inclusive as how to answer this criticism.

Reflection 5: Social acceptance

If social representativeness might be a challenge, so is social acceptance of art, regardless of the country. But it may seem, at least from the point of view of a Belgian sociologist working in Canada, that social acceptance is a greater challenge in Latin America and Asia than it is at home.

77

In many cases, I have found that noise performers advertise alternative lifestyles. They do not seek wide social acceptance or conformance with a consumerist society. The lifestyle promoted by these performers questions the economic vision of the arts in which it should generate income and profits. In that sense, noise music is very often barely viable. Only very few artists I have met actually live solely thanks to their art. Many work in various positions, often not directly linked with art. To survive, the noise music scene needs, at times, to be opportunistic. It uses opportunities offered under different forms. It does not mean that it is backing down

on its, more often than not, extreme aesthetics. In order to allow noise music to be performed, musicians are sometimes participating in events that would otherwise seem contradictory with their values. Sometimes it means, that to survive, you have to take the funds where they are. In an Asian country, I participated in an event organized as a cover-up scheme for money laundering for an organized criminal group. The event took place in newly built complex with a strip-club that also acted as a venue for playing dice, several restaurants, a massage parlour and hotels that rents rooms by the hour. The complex was just being inaugurated. The event I participated in gathered other noise and electronic musicians. We performed under the sound of dice playing and the dancing of strippers. It had been organized by a marketing associate of the group that was the girlfriend of a prominent noise musician of that country. The event was a simple scheme to justify spending and account "extra" entrance fees to launder money in the strip-club I performed.

Besides alternative lifestyles advertised by noise music, there are other challenges for its social acceptance. A caricatured position would think that art and design are efforts and money diverted from a larger, more important, social cause. In fact, one can criticize art and design for being dimensions of lesser importance when society has other problems to solve. The criticism can be particularly acute when resources are felt – at least by Western Europeans and North American critics –better invested in the construction or reconstruction of the nation. This is a challenge I encountered, especially when discussing my performances once outside of Latin America and Asia. But, it does not seem to be too much of a challenge in fact in Latin America and Asia where I found that even during the most difficult times of socio-political violence, art and design remained active. However, some exceptions prevail. In some countries where academic electroacoustic music, a genre sometimes associated with noise music, started only a few years after Western Europe or North America, music experimenting with noise totally disappeared only to be reintroduced much later when stronger scenes in neighbouring countries spilled over. In any case, in the discussions I have had with artists, it seems that they

are aware that art or design could be felt a vanity during times of social political violence or economic crises. But they have told me how much it is part of normal daily activities for them and they could see no other way. They contend that this perception is a non-issue. Art, they say, should not be measured in terms of its usefulness.

Social acceptance poses other challenges. I have performed in a few post-communist and communist countries where the official discourse is condemning "bourgeois art", under which category noise or experimental music most likely fall. In one Asian country I had to meet with a Communist party official before a performance happening at an official venue. For that performance I was given the equivalent of almost a one-month salary of a blue-collar worker. No questions were asked as to whether or not I was fulfilling the necessary visa conditions to get a paid activity in the country. During the meeting, it appeared that the party official was actually friend with a "local" noise musician and contemporary artist and was very open to noise music, as long as it did not cross borders of party politics. And it happens that, for the most part, noise music is instrumental. In practice, the official criticism of noise music happens in the form of censorship and barriers for performances on the base of the social critical potential of such art. But, in another Asian country I have been told that noise or experimental music fall under a category that is not necessarily under the scrutiny of government watchdogs. Forms necessary for organizing concerts have to be sent to an official bureau, but only if there are lyrics to be sung. This official criticism is not based on its larger social acceptable dimension. It is not based on it being a bourgeois art form, rather, it is based on its potential to criticize the governmental structure. But the scenes being relatively confidential, I have rarely experienced censorship.

Social acceptance can also be a challenge in terms of acceptance of its aesthetical proposals by funding sources or by venues. I have felt that when music is being performed in the context of subsidized events, organizers are being suspicious of

the critical of dimensions. Not because there is a direct threat, but because of the history of funding organizations and supporting individuals pulling out of events where criticism of local politics is present. In Latin America, I have personally been expelled from a bar five minutes into my concert after the angry manager realized that my electronic music was not in fact techno music. "Sácate de aquí (get out of here)" did he shout. The manager thought that noise music would scare off its patrons. Even though most of the public of the bar came specifically for the event. The organizers had failed to tell the manager of the venue more about the genre. This was the first concert of the kind in that town. The initial venue, an official cultural center had pulled out after local politics was involved. The bar was the only replacement venue in town that would accept electronic music to be performed.

Most forms of art have to deal with problems of legitimacy and social acceptance. I have attempted to show, with a few examples, how can this be a social determinant for art and design in Latin America and Asia. I do not think that noise music has to be "useful" or should be measured in terms of its social usefulness. I certainly do not think it should conform to criteria of usefulness. Those criteria are ideological and reveal certain worldviews. Unfortunately, very often, social movements I relate to, define use of time and validity of action in relation to social activism with a restrictive understanding of activism which often excludes art performances.

The future of noise music in Latin America and Asia

With my previous reflection, I have attempted to show how noise music is been conditioned or determined by factors others than its own history and aesthetics. I have tried to explain how social, political, cultural, economic and technological factors influence noise music, its composition and performances, and how it is experienced and marketed. Noise and experimental music are conditioned by technology, space, class, gender, politics, lifestyles, identity, culture and social

representativeness. As I have tried to show, they are important but not determining factors. But they interact with these factors. They do it in ways that both integrate the social elements and built practices to appropriate material, social and cultural context.

In conclusion, This paper is more than just about noise music. It is a general framework for artists or designers to think about the context, or the determinants for their practices. This paper argues that the understanding of social determinants provides oneself a framework to liberate from material and social contexts as determinants. It advocates for seeing them as canvases on which to built practices. Using the different dimensions exposed in this paper, one can ask what is the future for noise music in Latin America, South East and East Asia. Sociologists are usually very cautious to predict the future. There are many dimensions to account for. But also, society is not a machine or an organism, nor does it work in ways predictable by simple formulas. I will not attempt to make any precise prediction, rather, I will try to synthesize both my sociological imagination and my experience as a performer and link them with the dimensions I proposed in this paper.

The future of noise music depends, of course, on the creativity and innovation of its performers. It also depends on the boldness of organizers and labels as well as the loyalty of the concert-goers and fans. But, as I have attempted to show in this paper, the future of noise music depends on what I have called social determinants.

81

Noise music will probably be affected by technological changes. However, many noise musicians have stayed loyal to their practices regardless of changes in technology. The technological changes to affect noise music will probably be more felt in various aspects of its distribution and marketing. Noise music depends greatly on space that it is made available or space that is taken by members of its scenes. It is possible that the noise scenes will continue to participate in the appropriation of space by artists and art venues. In that sense, it will contribute to

transforming space rather than just being defined by territorial dynamics. It is very possible that considering the size of the noise scenes in Latin America and Asia, that the integration of identities in noise and experimental music will transform the current practices. If is also possible that there will be an increasing number of aesthetical proposals to reinterpret the scene's roots on Europe and North America and go beyond this narrow focus. It is hard to predict how the noise scenes will react to dimensions such as gender that are more visible in contemporary performances than they were a few years ago. It is possible that women and the LGBT "community" will be more active and will find other ways to express and live noise music. Considering the current growth of inequalities and the general political background of the members of the noise scenes, it is very possible that it will increasingly be more vocal against the sensed economic conditions. This will be expressed in political terms, possibly by challenging the political system. But on the other hand, it is very possible that noise music will be more socially accepted. Politics do not evolve, they transform – that is to say they do not go into a given direction. It is therefore difficult to predict if the censorship or the political acceptance of noise music will ease.

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83

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