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## The Sounds of Japanese Noise: First Generation of Japanese Noise-Artists

Ana Maria Alarcon Jimenez  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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## THE SOUNDS OF JAPANESE NOISE: FIRST GENERATION OF JAPANESE NOISE-ARTISTS

By Ana María Alarcón Jiménez  
Department of Music

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Rembrandt Wolpert  
Department of Music

### Abstract:

*This article presents part of my research on a type of electronic music known as Japanese noise carried out for my Honors Thesis in Music, Creating Silence through Noise: an Aesthetic Approach to the Sounds of "Japanese noise". It introduces Japanese noise, its origins in the 1970s and 1980s, its musical influences, and the early distribution of its pieces. The first generation of Japanese noise artists and their perceptions of Tokyo are then discussed. Finally, the possibility is advanced of a correlation between such perceptions of the city and the sounds of Japanese noise.*

### Japanese noise:

Around the late 1970s and early 1980s a small group of young Japanese people started to experiment with the synthesis and recording of sound<sup>1</sup>. They were certainly not the first to do this in Japan; ever since the opening of the Electronic Music Studio at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1966 (Shimazu, 1994, p. 104), and the subsequent inauguration of other electronic music studios at universities throughout the country, these processes had been everyday fare. The novelty was that these young Japanese, pioneers of a music genre nowadays known as *Japanese noise* (or *Japa-noise*), were manipulating sounds from home. Moreover, by way of sound recording, processing, sequencing, and sound synthesis, they were organizing sounds and assembling them together to finally turn them into what they called "pure harsh noise".

The coining of the term "Japanese noise" has been attributed to the Japanese composer Akita Masami a.k.a. Merzbow who is said to have used it already in 1979 (Novak 1999a, p. 23, Caspari and Manzenreiter 2003, p. 64). Nowadays the term is used internationally. It groups together diverse Japanese soloists and bands whose music is directly associated with genres such as punk, metal, electronica, free-jazz, and pop, as I have been able to observe in some music stores in the Japanese cities of Tokyo, Hiroshima, Kyoto, and Ageo, as well as in Chicago, Denver, and New Orleans in the United States. The diversity of genres

currently embraced by the term Japanese noise can also be evidenced in Internet pages dedicated to it, such as <http://www.alchemy.cc/> (Alchemy Records) and <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/ER6G-ITU/index.htm> (Noisembryo: Guide to Noise World), among many others<sup>2</sup>.

Defining Japanese noise in clear and straightforward terms is not possible, as it has been used from 1979 onwards (Caspari and Manzenreiter, 2003, p. 64) either to avoid any other existing classification on the part of both artists and independent record labels or as a way to classify music that does not fit the parameters of classification already existent within music distribution networks (like Internet and music shops). However, I can say that, according to the primary and secondary sources I have been using for my research on Japanese noise, the majority of soloists/bands that have been classified since 1979 as Japanese noise play music which can be directly classified in at least one of the following genres: punk, rock, metal, pop, free-jazz, and electronica.

In spite of the present use of noise as an international taxonomy to indicate (outside Japan) either a music genre or a music style, the first generation of Japanese noise artists did not "see themselves as producing a distinctive format but as explorers searching for new sounds and ways of expression" (Caspari and Manzenreiter, 2003, p. 64). Japanese noise originated simultaneously but independently in the cities of Tokyo and Osaka. In the latter city, Japanese noise comprised predominantly punk and hardcore bands using electric guitar(s), voice, bass, and drums. In Tokyo, it consisted of solo projects, such as Merzbow, playing with cassette tapes, tape loops, distorted broken instruments (e.g. broken electric guitars), effect boxes, mixers, analogue synthesizers, contact microphones, and other inexpensive sound-machines. From now on in this paper I shall concentrate on the first generation of "Japanese noise made in Tokyo"; and I shall refer to it, indistinctively, as Japanese noise (or Japa-noise) or as first generation Japanese noise.

The first generation of Japanese noise artists, such as Merzbow, Hijokaidan, Nakajima Akihumi, KK.Null, and Tano

Koji, were inclined towards the utilization of noise as a plastic material. By this I mean that they tended to employ noise as a block of sonic matter that could be molded, shaped, and given form through composition. This plasticity of noise was due in part to the type of audio technology available at the time (see Fig. 1) but in part also - and more importantly - to the training some of the noise artists had had in different fields of the arts. Merzbow, for instance, studied Painting and Art Theory at Tamagawa University; Nakajima Akihumi studied Industrial Design at the Kyoto University of Art. Both Merzbow and Nakajima still work in the fields they originally studied, and they both have explained that when working with sound they do not do so as music composers, but rather as a plastic artist and an industrial designer, respectively (Hargus, 1997; Sjögren, 2001). Furthermore, each of these artists has expressed his use of noise consistently with his particular artistic background: Merzbow has described it in terms of the "colorful inks of an illustrator" (Merzbow interviewed by Hargus (1997)); Nakajima, viewing it as an aspect of a given object, exploring such an object as something visual, tactile, and physical, as well as a sound-source, has stated: "I'm always interested in both the sound itself and the image from the source. I want to keep each release united with the sound-source as much as I possibly can." (Nakajima interviewed by Duguid (1998))



Figure 1: Two members of Fylkingen (a Swedish society for the promotion of new music and intermedia art) making a tape loop on a 1960s reel-to-reel machine<sup>3</sup>. Making a tape loop is a manual activity. Sound is treated as a physical thing (i.e. as tape) that can be cut/pasted and manipulated manually in many different ways.

**Influences:**

Both free jazz (from Japan and the USA) and German Krautrock (German rock from the 1970s)<sup>4</sup> were among the main influences on Japa-noise: with free jazz it had in common the experimentation with timbre, freedom of form and tempo, the emphasis on improvisation, and the thirst for innovation; and with German Krautrock it shared the do-it-yourself ethos (DYS), the use of commercial audio-equipment, the extended use of analog synthesis, and a deep interest for surrealism. However, whereas German Krautrock had been directly inspired by the

German electronic avant-garde, and very specially by the music experiments of Karlheinz Stockhausen (Scaruffi, 2002), Japanese noise remained completely disconnected from the Japanese electronic musicians who, since the 1950s, had been composing at university studios throughout Japan. (And this was so although Japa-noise artists were actually familiar with the music of Stockhausen (Fig. 2) and of other European composers such as Pierre Henry, Luc Ferrari, and Iannis Xenakis.)

Indeed, the first group of Japanese noisicians did not even have contact among themselves: they started playing with noise as separated individuals, experimenting with it for their own pleasure, while recording and distributing their own cassette-tapes from home.

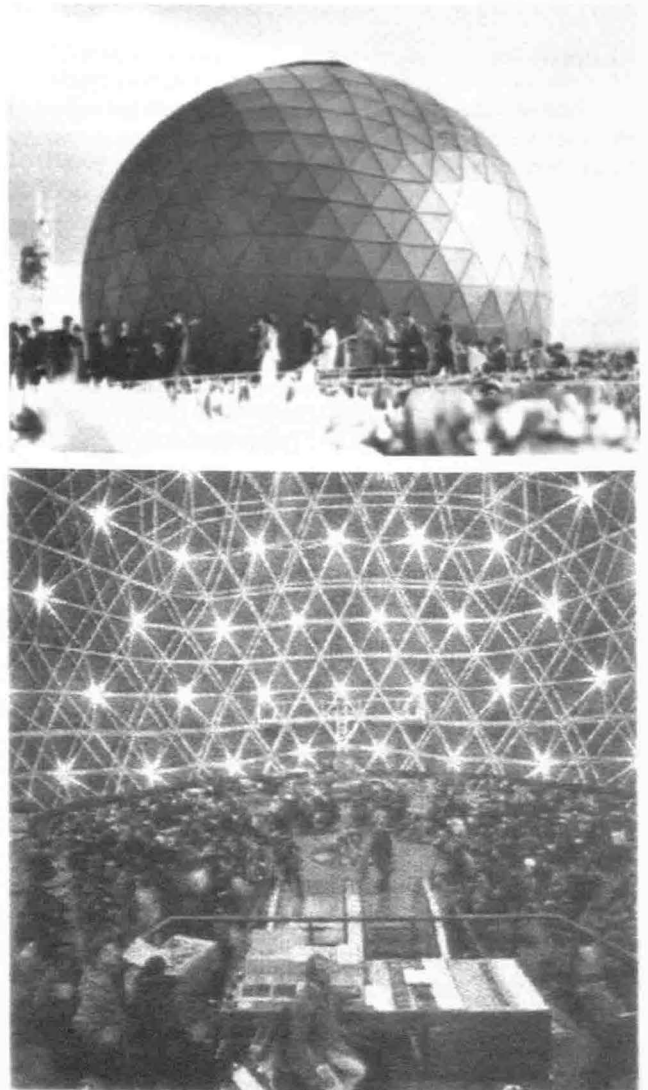


Figure 2: Evidence of Karlheinz Stockhausen's presence in Japan: This special concert hall based on Stockhausen ideas was built by Germany for the 1970 World Expo in Osaka, Japan. For 180 days music by different German composers was played through an innovative surround-sound system<sup>5</sup>.

### Japanese noise: early distribution:

Japanese noise started, then, as a homemade sonic experiment. It remained like that until the end of the second half of the 1980s when Japa-noise artists began to perform for audiences constituted of more people than merely themselves. What motivated the change, or why was it synchronic? These are questions to which answers are still blurred. Nevertheless, a partial explanation can be found in the wide acceptance of Merzbow's sound-works by numerous Russian, Western European, and USA underground music circles after he successfully toured these regions in 1988, 1989, and 1990, respectively. Nakajima Akihumi has confirmed this in a recent interview:

I think [that] since the mid 80s Japanese noise music became popular because of the many appearances by Merzbow or Hijokaidan who were already using noise on record. At the time, any foreigners were surprised that it [Japa-noise] was so loud and noisy. (Nakajima interviewed by Sjögren (2001))

Merzbow's international success attracted the attention of other Japanese artists and musicians who were working at the time on similar or related sound-pieces on their own, for themselves. And so noisicians were finally able to set up communication channels through which they started to meet, to listen to each other's sonic experiments, to collaborate, and to play together.

During the first half of the 1980s when Japanese noise was still in a cocoon state, the distribution of the tapes where most of the noise-works were recorded was practically null. A major exception to this collective introversion was Merzbow who found himself participating for several years in an international chain of mail art:

When I started Merzbow the idea was to make cheap cassettes which could also be fetish objects. I recorded them very cheaply and then packaged them with pornography. I got very involved in the mail art network which included home tapers like Maurizio Bianchi, Jupiter Larser [sic] of Haters, and Trax of Italy. (Merzbow interviewed by Hensley (2006)).

Merzbow's first artistic interchanges, carried out by means of the postal service, were significant in different ways. First of all, I see the connections Merzbow established through this process of art-posting as essential for his later touring success; Merzbow mail exchanges thus played an important role in the "coming out" of noise. Second, the use of postal services for the distribution of noise-tapes was perpetrated over time, although the mail network was later replaced by the Internet. According to Caspari and Manzenreiter, the channels chosen for the circulation of Japa-noise (i.e. the postal services and then the Internet) gave the genre an anti-commercial outlook, and played an important role in transforming Japanese noise from "subculture

to cyberculture" (Caspari and Manzenreiter, 2003). Last, Merzbow's utilization of pornography in conjunction with his noise-tapes was (and it still is) misinterpreted outside Japan. In due course, Japanese noise has come to be wrongly linked with a type of commercial, sexual imagery that has nothing to do with the Japa-noise artists' intention. From my perspective, this false association has resulted from the contrast between the normality of most Japanese noise artists and the deviant, violent, extravagant individuals they have been expected to be by those outside Japan (see Fig. 3).

In other words, non-Japanese audiences of Japa-noise<sup>7</sup> have expected the harshness, roughness, and shrillness that characterize the first generation of sound-works to materialize into objects. Hence, the early pornographic collages and later bondage images utilized by Merzbow with his noise-releases have been trapped in the midst of these assumptions. Both pornography and bondage pictures have been put randomly on the covers of different Japa-noise releases issued outside Japan, without knowledge of the images employed, and lacking any connection between the images and the sounds they are supposed to portray. Merzbow, a plastic artist aware of the weight and importance of images, has referred to this attitude:

All bondage pictures I use are taken by myself. I know who the models are (...). I know the exact meaning of these pictures. This is very different from people using (...) images from Japanese magazines. I know that there are many bondage images associated with Merzbow releases. But many of these releases use stupid images without my permission. (...) I don't like the easy idea of using images without the knowledge of the image itself. So it's meaningless to create ideology by using pornography without the correct knowledge of the image itself. (Merzbow interviewed by Hensley (2006)).

わたしの  
CINCILY FICK LIFE  
菜食生活



Figure 3: Front cover of Akita Masami's vegetarian cookbook *My Vegetarian Life*. A kind way of living for me, the animals, and the earth. Both Akita's vegetarianism and his active participation in animal rights movements (he is an activist of *peta*) contrast with the deviant images that people fit him into, due to the intensity of the sound of his noise-works.

### Japanese noise, volume, and performance:

When Japa-noise went “on stage” around the mid 1980s, it did so with sound volume - a volume so loud that in the bars hosting Japanese noise performances, no conversation could have been held, no polite *sumimasen*<sup>8</sup> heard by the waitresses and waiters. The sound-works were played so loudly that they imposed a vow of silence upon their listeners, almost all Japanese noise artists themselves at that time. To date, I have been unable to locate any particular accounts of whether Japanese noise artists had difficulties finding performance spaces due to this loud volume, or of whether their performances had to be adapted in order to comply with the anti-noise and vibration pollution regulations effective in Tokyo since the 1970s<sup>9</sup>. However, a comment by Merzbow confirming that “in the early days (. . .) people thought that the music [Merzbow’s] was just too difficult and loud” but “now [1999] grindcore and techno people come to see Merzbow,” and therefore, “(. . .) we [Merzbow and his collaborators] have been getting more places allowing a performance than ever before” (Hensley, 2006), could perhaps indicate that at least until 1999, finding a venue for playing Japa-noise inland was a difficult task for Japanese noise artists.

Perhaps the performance of Japanese noise in high volume has not only been a matter associated with the aesthetics of Japanese noise itself, but it may also be a resource through which Japanese noise artists have attempted to keep their noise-pieces out of the reach of the curious and the many. Kyoto-based noise artist Nakajima Akihumi (N), interviewed in 2001 by Klas Sjögren (S), has said in this respect:

S. When I first heard your music it felt like a fierce blow to the stomach. Have people ever been physically sick while you were performing harsh noise?

N. Yes maybe. . . probably me too (laughs). I got the same feelings when I first listened to noise music. I was fascinated by the noise because I never had had such an experience before and so I think that’s one of the most interesting points of noise.

S. The physical pain?

N. Yes. It also has pain or fear, but after listening to a very harsh sound you get a very comfortable silence. After listening to noise any small sound gets interesting.

S. So pain is good?

N. (Laughs) Yes, pain is good afterwards.

Although some people would agree that pain may not be the best possible experience one can go through by listening to Japanese noise, it is definitely an important aspect of Japanese noise performances. Both volume and pain can make Japa-noise performances into very physical events. They can induce Japanese noise audiences to simultaneously hear and feel the sounds of Japanese noise, as these sounds vibrate in tandem throughout

people’s bodies and ears. Merzbow’s descriptions of noise as something erotic, intimate, and unconscious (Hargus, 1997; Hensley, 2006) are connected with this volume-induced physicality. Loudly played noise is erotic in that it touches the body, its vibrations are in permanent contact with people’s skin. Loudly played noise is intimate in that it induces audiences to be silent, quietly immersed in themselves. Finally, loud noise is unconscious in that it runs unaware, free of form and pitch, causing pain to some and getting others into trance states (Hensley, 2006).

### Japanese noise artists perceptions of Tokyo:

It does not take too long to write it down: Japanese noise artists have thought poorly of Tokyo. Their perception, I believe, echoes the voices of many other Japanese for whom Tokyo is just space, not place, for whom Tokyo is a point of encounter in permanent transition. Referring to Kobayashi Hideo’s essay *Kokyoo o ushinatta bungaku* “Literature of the lost home”, Seiji Lippit has touched upon this point, saying that “[Tokyo] serves not as a repository of accumulated memories - the necessary condition for a home to function as such - but only as an ever shifting marker of disassociation from the past” (Lippit, 2002, p. 3). More specifically, Japanese noise artists have characterized Tokyo as one of the more crowded and noisier cities in the world. This latter aspect, Tokyo’s noise, has been mentioned by both Merzbow and Nakajima Akihumi for influencing the sounds of their own Japa-noise-works. In an interview with Chad Hensley (H)<sup>10</sup>, Merzbow (M) has observed:

H: How has growing up in Japan affected your Noise creation?

M: Sometimes, I would like to kill the much too noisy Japanese by my own Noise. The effects of Japanese culture are too much noise everywhere. I want to make silence by my Noise. Maybe that is a fascist way of using sound (Hensley, 2006, interview conducted in 1999).

Moreover, Merzbow, interviewed by David Novak, has added:

M: I think that Japan, especially Tokyo, is not beautiful. Very ugly, no beauty. Western cities have more tradition. But Tokyo is just ugly, out of control. People still don’t care about destruction (Novak, 1999b, p. 28).

Nakajima Akihumi (N), interviewed by Klas Sjögren (S), has commented in a similar direction:

S: Do you think that the development of this Noise wave from Japan has a connection with Japan as a country or Japanese people. . . that the music has been so hard and noisy?

N: Japanese culture is very different from European or American culture. As you know Japan is very small

but very modern and contemporary. Tokyo is the most crowded and busy city in the world and always noisy. There are the noisy sounds from the streets or from between the buildings. In some ways part of our lives are always noisy (Sjögren, 2001).

And, Nakajima Akihumi (N) interviewed earlier by Brian Duguid (D) had also said:

N: Noise music is a kind of music from the city. It's always as noisy as any modern city, although not as much as Tokyo or Osaka (Duguid, 1998).

On several occasions, in different interviews posted on electronic popular-magazines and other e-spaces on the Internet, Japanese noise artists have denied that their music has any relation whatsoever with Japanese music. (In reality they are usually asked if their music has connections with Japanese traditional music, and the traditional bit of the expression really infuriates them: it is incomprehensible to them.) Furthermore, with the exception of Nakajima Akihumi who has stated that he feels "something in common with these other artists [Japanese noise artists], as we make similar sounds, even though the methods and concepts we use are different from each other" (Nakajima interviewed by Duguid (1998)), several Japanese noisicians have repeatedly refused to be classified as such (i.e. as Japanese noise artists), asserting that they just do their music independently; and this is in spite of their own frequent allusions to a "first and second generation of Japanese noise". However, as we have just read, both Merzbow and Nakajima have conceded that if anything **Japanese** has actually influenced their sonic-making it is, generally speaking, the loudness of Japan, and more precisely, the noisiness of Tokyo.

Each of these artists has responded differently to their common perception of the city in terms of noise. To begin with, Merzbow's response has been explicit. His artistic intention has focused on canceling out the outer-noises of Tokyo with his own noise, in a way like portable-music-player users have tended to turn up the volume of their devices to drown out external environmental noise (e.g. street noise, unwanted music played in public spaces, annoying conversations...). Conversely, Nakajima Akihumi's response has been implicit. Unlike Merzbow, Nakajima's perception of Tokyo has not prompted him to take a tangible artistic action; neither has it taken him through a specific artistic path. Nonetheless, Nakajima's discernment of the soundscape<sup>11</sup> of Tokyo as noise is latently present in his sound-works, and I believe it has influenced his overall artistic creation in terms of style, directing it (the style) towards Japanese noise.

The above interviews with Merzbow and Nakajima Akihumi are the only sources I have been able to find in which Japanese noise artists have concretely mentioned their personal perceptions of Japan and/or Tokyo. In spite of this apparent informative gap, I nevertheless think that it can be safely stated that the majority of Japanese noise artists - first generation - have thought of Tokyo as a noisy, busy, crowded city. This claim may be further

supported by the data on noise in Tokyo and on protest and legislation concerning noise and vibration pollution in that city which I present and analyze in another paper (Alarcón Jiménez, 2006b). And while, with the exception of Merzbow and Nakajima Akihumi, we may not be able to know the particular responses of Japanese noise artists to their impressions of Tokyo's noise, we can infer that such impressions are not only present in these artists' sound-works but are also correlated with their characterization as (the first generation of) Japanese noise.

#### In conclusion (Dreaming noise):

Somehow, the sounds of the neighborhood seem changed. What had resembled the rippled hissing of late-night TV static, this morning sounds like a thousand pipe organs in massed unison, all pulled as per a master score, now in chorus, now a capella, creating a great symphony. Countless buildings visible from my balcony are resonating, perhaps with a melody unique to each. (Shimada, 2002, p. 431)

The quote above is the closing paragraph of Japanese writer Shimada Masahiko's short story, "Desert Dolphin". The context in which this quote appears, and its meaning in the story, are as follows: an angel who ten years before was condemned to live on earth meets, coincidentally, a younger angel who has just fallen down from heaven. The experienced angel invites the newcomer to spend the night at his place (an apartment in Tokyo) in order to teach him and give him advice on how to live on earth. On their way to the apartment at night, the fallen angels walk together through the streets of Tokyo. Suddenly, the experienced angel, also the narrator of the story, comments:

Outside, the sound of bottles smashing, the whirr of taxis racing in low gear along narrow streets, the chorus of electronic beeps pouring from a video arcade, the laughter of a group of pub-crawlers, everyone making noise, everyone a street urchin making sounds nobody cares to listen to...

And then this exchange develops:

'Noisy place, isn't it, the world?'

'Not necessarily. It was pretty much the same in Heaven.'

'I wonder. Surely Heaven has a better sense of harmony, nothing near the random racket of Earth.'

'My ears must be deceiving me. These earthly sounds of yours are like beautiful chords.'

'The din of the streets a beautiful chord? He must be hearing the sounds of earth with his heavenly apparatus intact, because in such ears even noise sounds like harmony' (Shimada, 2002, p. 420).

As the story continues, the angels arrive at the apartment, and they talk, sharing their life stories. Late at night, before falling asleep, the experienced angel confesses to the other that



he wished heaven would come down to earth. The story finishes as this angel wakes up the next morning feeling something strange, something different, and it is then that he says: "Somehow, the sounds of the neighborhood seem changed. . ." (Shimada, 2002, p. 431)

With my understanding "music" as something that "is rather a paradigm of a culture in a historical context; a complex signal, gratifying to the hearer for cultural reasons" (Picken, 1999, p. 9), the story above illustrates, for me, the sense and aesthetic direction of Japanese noise. To begin with, the way in which the Japanese noise artists relate to the soundscape of Tokyo before and after turning its sounds into their own sonic pieces is similar to the way in which the experienced fallen angel relates to the sounds of this same city before and after falling asleep. All of them, the angel and the Japanese noise artists, have a feeling of dislike towards the noises and the crowds of Tokyo. But they are all able to transform these sounds in such a way that the final sonic outcome is aesthetically enriching. In the middle of Shimada's story, the experienced angel comments to the newcomer that "music, and dreaming, are the ties that bind Heaven and Earth" (Shimada, 2002, p. 422). Amazingly enough, this statement fits perfectly to exemplify the paths followed by the Japanese noise artists, on the one hand, and by the angel, on the other, towards hearing the unwanted noises of a city as beautified noise. For, just as the angel dreams and wakes up hearing the sounds of earth as if he were in heaven, the Japanese noise artists capture, transform, and organize the "din of the streets" (Shimada, 2002, p. 420) of Tokyo, by making music with them, by turning them into their own noise.

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I am deeply indebted to Dr. Elizabeth J. Markham and Dr. Rembrandt F. Wolpert for their invaluable help and precious advice. They have been extremely supportive in the writing and editing of both this article and my Honors Thesis in Music, *Creating silence through noise: an aesthetic approach to the sounds of "Japanese noise"*. I would also like to thank Dr. Wolpert and Dr. Markham for all their encouragement for the presentation of my paper, "Making silence through noise: the soundscape of the Tokyo of the 1970s", at the conference *Music in the Public Sphere*, May 12-13, 2006, University of California, Los Angeles (ucla). A third aspect of my thesis that indirectly supports this paper involves music analysis of selected Japanese works. This work was carried out (during summer-study abroad) under the supervision of Dr. Leigh Landy at DeMontford University, Leicester, England, and at CCMIX, Paris, France. I wish to thank all involved, especially Dr. Landy.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>In a conference paper (Alarcón Jiménez, 2006b), also drawn from my Honors Thesis, I suggest that the emergence of the phenomenon of Japanese noise at this time should be considered in the light of the strong, and even violent, public protest against (and governmental legislative reaction to) noise and

vibration pollution in a rapidly developing Tokyo.

<sup>2</sup>The analytical and careful reading of Japanese noise CD covers, interviews with noise artists on the Internet, artists' web-pages, Internet web-pages (specially those of record labels), concert pamphlets, related articles, and David Novak's (1999b) dissertation on Japanese noise, together with personal visits to music stores in both Japan and the United States, have led me to conclude that the process by which an artist's music becomes classified as Japanese noise usually takes place through one or more of the three following steps: (1) the artists themselves categorize their music as Japanese noise (Merzbow, CCCC, Boredomes, Melt Banana, and Hijokaidan), (2) the artists record with a label which has depicted itself as a noise label (i.e. Japanese labels Alchemy, MSBR), (3) when a Japanese artist's music can not be classified in any of the genres already established by popular music distributors on the Internet and/or CD shops, the music gets classified as Japanese noise in so far as it is both composed and performed by Japanese people, and as long as the timbre material of the music has something unusual or "noisy" in comparison with regular popular music standards (Cybo Matto, Ryoji Ikeda, and Otomo Yoshide).

<sup>3</sup><http://home.swipnet.se/sonoloco12/fylkingenevents/loop.html>

<sup>4</sup>Term taken from Ulrich D. Einbrodt's "Space, Mysticism, Romantic Sequencing, and the Widening of Form in German Krautrock during the 70s". It includes bands like Amon Düel, Can New!, Guru-Guru, Kraftwerk, Cluster, Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra, Faust, and Popol Vuh. (Einbrodt, 2001)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/stockhausen-im-kugelauditorium>

<sup>6</sup>The name should read Larsen.

<sup>7</sup>For sound-examples, see <http://www.steinklang-records.at/koji-tano.html>

<sup>8</sup>"Excuse me" or "I am sorry". In Japan this word is usually used by customers of Japanese bars and restaurants to call the attention of waitresses or waiters.

<sup>9</sup>I address these regulations in detail in another paper (Alarcón Jiménez, 2006b).

<sup>10</sup>This interview is source of inspiration for the title of my Honors thesis (Alarcón Jiménez, 2006a).

<sup>11</sup>"Soundscape" has been defined by Raymond Murray Schafer as "the sonic environment" (Schafer, 1977, p. 247)

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### Faculty comments:

Dr. Rembrandt Wolpert, Ms. Alarcón Jiménez's mentor had the following comments about his student's work:

Ana Maria's study of the powerful and perhaps even shocking electronic music phenomenon of *Japanese noise* (also *Japa-noise*) for her Honors Thesis in what I know as Systematic Musicology has taken me along - over at least two years - on one of the most innovative, imaginative, and surprising paths in my (now longish) career of supervising undergraduate debuts in research. This article, on the genesis of *noise* and the aesthetics of the pioneer Tokyo-based *noisicians*, draws from her thesis *Creating silence through noise: an aesthetic approach to "Japanese noise"*, and reflects one of the three integrated aspects of her investigation. She lays out here her argument that Japa-noise artists' perceptions of the noisiness of the city (Tokyo) are canceled out, or transformed, through their making of their own aesthetically enriching *noise*. It is probably useful to state that, in her full study, this proposition is etched out against the background of the Japanese relationship to nature and the environment, manifest in the arts as a particular aesthetic, and is sized up and contextualized alongside a consideration of public outcry and government legislation during the 70s and 80s over noise and vibration pollution in a Tokyo under construction as it was then. And the third, technical prop to the thesis is a visual-imagery-based

musical analysis of representative *Japa-noise* works that aims, by attempting to represent in temporal and acoustic space the visual metaphor and plasticity of form articulated by the noise composers themselves, to support her position that their *noise*, explicitly or implicitly, relates to the noisiness of the city.

Embedded in Japanese aesthetics (disturbed by noise and vibration), then, this study of what is often characterized as chaotic and unstructured, named by the artists themselves as "pure harsh music", and typically finds its followers internationally in underground music scenes, is of remarkable refinement and breadth. Ana Maria has worked through scholarly literature on East Asian concepts of sounds and soundscapes beginning with a Chinese dictionary of the first century CE, on through aesthetic treatises on Japanese *Noh* drama, studies of Japanese architecture, town planning, and gardening, government white papers and statistics on noise and vibration pollution, ecological approaches to music perception and musical meaning, and out onto the streets and into the CD shops of modern Japan and the Americas in order to build her carefully painted, carefully worded picture of *Japanese noise*. She has a long-standing interest in composing electronic music herself, experience which let her spend profitable summer-abroad research on her thesis-analysis of Japa-noise in the electronic music studios of the *Music, Technology and Innovation Research Centre* at De Montfort University, UK (with my colleague Dr. Leigh Landy) and, as well, at the *Centre de creation musicale Iannis Xenakis* (CCMIX), Paris (as participant in a Summer School).

I am delighted with the approach, openness, and originality of Ana Maria's study, and consider myself qualified to appreciate what it means to write an excellent, first piece of research in a foreign language. That a second paper drawn from the thesis *Making silence through noise: the soundscape of the Tokyo of the 1970s* was accepted for *Music and the Public Sphere: A Conference Presented by Echo: a Music-Centered Journal*, May 12 and 13, 2006, Los Angeles, CA, is just a first stage in recognition for this particular work, and only a first stage too in what I anticipate will be very fine academic career.