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To cite this article: Peter J. Woods (10 Nov 2023): The abject pleasures of militarised noise, Culture, Theory and Critique, DOI: [10.1080/14735784.2023.2265085](https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2023.2265085)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2023.2265085>



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Published online: 10 Nov 2023.



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The abject pleasures of militarised noise

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ABSTRACT

Since Luigi Russolo first published *The Art of Noise* in 1913, certain lineages of experimental musicians have iterated on the futurist's positioning of noise as militarised sound. But the deployment of noise within (ostensibly pleasurable) music sits in contrast to the role of sound within modern warfare, as nation states have produced and deployed sonic weaponry for decades. Drawing on this conceptual difference, I use this paper to explore the relationship between militarism and pleasure within contemporary noise music through Kristeva's conception of the abject. In doing so, I argue that the politics of noise music trade in the dual nature of abjection, producing a critique of militarism while simultaneously reinscribing its logics. To illustrate this contention, I examine two albums that engage militarism in distinct ways: Author & Punisher's *Beastland* and Eric Lunde's *LRAD: Compositions for the Long Range Acoustic Device*. Through this comparison, I reveal how noise and noise music can both produce a derealization of violence common to modern militarism (thus reinforcing structural violence) and produce new ways of engaging noise music's obfuscated critique of militarism through *jouissance* without absolving the genre of reinforcing military logics through music.

KEYWORDS

Noise; experimental music; abject; affect; sonic warfare

Introduction

Originally published in 1913, Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noise* not only set the stage for an ongoing fascination with noise as a musical technology but also created an ongoing 'pervasiveness of military origins and metaphors in electronic music technologies and practice' (Rodgers 2010, 8). In this manifesto, Russolo (1986) calls on composers to create new musical forms from all the extant sounds of the world (and not just narrowly defined 'musical' sounds) with a particular emphasis on 'the newest noises of modern war' and 'the orchestra of a great battle' (26) that align with the author's overt support of fascism. Building on this ideology, Russolo created musical compositions from noise and instruments that could replicate the sounds of warfare within performance venues, thus positioning his work as emergent from the sonic context of the battlefield. Russolo's legacy has proven incredibly influential within many facets of experimental

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music¹ despite his political leanings (Goodman 2009; Kahn 1999). Especially when considering subgenres like noise music² (a particularly caustic and dissonant subgenre that draws equally from industrial, punk, free jazz, the avant-garde and electronic music) (Atton 2011; Novak 2013; Woods 2020), it becomes clear that ‘a notion of sonic warfare lies at the heart of modern experimental music and takes us back to the apex of the sonic avant-garde’ (Goodman 2009, 6). Noise and experimental music sonically and metaphorically trade in the battlefield as an artistic construct and constantly reinvent the genre through a sense of militarism.

Considering how the aural elements of warfare have evolved over recent decades, noise and experimental musicians do not lack for new sonic material. While Daughtry (2015) argues that the sounds from the battlefield have become increasingly important to warfare since the invention of the explosive ordnance, the emergence of sonic weapons and sound-based military tactics in the 1990s (including the use of music as a weapon of torture) significantly heightened the role of sound in warfare (Cusick 2020; Vieira de Oliveira 2019). And while those in power have argued that sonic weapons present a more humane form of military conflict, as the Israeli government did in the 2005 bombing of Gaza (Goodman 2009), these weapons still hold the potential to cause serious physical harm to individuals (Vieira de Oliveira 2019). Additionally, governments have also developed new military tactics that employ sound as an overarching method of engaging in warfare. For example, the Shock and Awe combat strategy originally theorised by Ullman and Wade (1996) and used most famously by the US Government in the 2003 invasion of Iraq involves the overwhelming use of loud sounds and bright lights ‘to affect and dominate an adversary’s will both physically and psychologically’ (xxv). Beyond merely causing physical harm, this military ideology shows that sonic weaponry also targets the psychological well-being of those under attack.

On its surface, a comparison between noise music and sonic militarism produces a certain disjunct or divergence: if audiences in part listen to music for pleasure, then the use of sounds and sounding processes designed to cause physical and psychological damage would prove counterproductive. While this comparison remains overly broad, the provocation still invites a deeper exploration of the connection between pleasure, militarism and sound within the genre. In response, I use this paper to explore how noise music (and the use of noise itself as a musical gesture) both embodies military logics and creates an affect of pleasure through this embodiment. This exploration then connects to a broader examination into the politics of representing violence within music and how that representation may critique or reinforce military logics (and, as shown here, does so simultaneously). I begin by examining Thompson’s (2017) affective definition of noise through the lens of Kristeva’s (1982) notion of the abject. By defining noise through affect theory (a theoretical space in part initiated by Kristeva’s original writings on the abject) (Arya 2014), Thompson creates an opportunity

¹Here I use Gilmore’s (2014) ideological definition of experimental music, referring to any musical form that intentionally breaks from or refuses the tenets of the Western canon (rhythm, melody, repetitive structure etc.) as opposed to Nyman’s (1974) historically located definition.

²Noise music, as I use the term here, represents an amorphous musical tradition that contains and overlaps with numerous subgenres including harsh noise, harsh noise wall, power electronics, death industrial, martial industrial and more (Graham 2023; Tau 2022). Although distinct, these subgenres connect through a shared interest in extremity within sound (volume/dynamic, duration, dissonance, etc.) and thematic content (e.g., violence, transgressive forms of sexuality) (Atton 2011; Bailey 2012).

to think through noise as a cultural and musical technology reliant on abjection. I then examine this connection in alignment with sound studies research into modern warfare. In doing so, I contend that noise music trades in the dual nature of the abject. On the one hand, the abject produces a sense of repulsion or disgust within the affected body. But on the other, the abject can produce a sense of *jouissance*, a pleasure that emerges in the momentary absence of the borders that define the self (a feeling specifically associated with sex, encountered in the moment of orgasm) (Kristeva 1982). Noise music can therefore produce a critique of militarism while simultaneously creating a sense of intrigue or pleasure via *jouissance* in militarised sound, thus reinforcing a foundational militarised logic.

To illustrate this contention, I conclude with a comparison of two albums that engage militarism in distinct ways. First, I explore Author & Punisher's *Beastland* (Shone 2018), an industrial album recorded with Tristan Shone's 'Drone Machines'. These large scale, industrial tools both aesthetically and mechanically rely on the kinds of technologies present within modern militarism and force Shone to exert large amounts of physical force to trigger synthesised instruments. However, the recognisable musical elements within the album (drum sounds, synth melodies, discernible vocals etc.) hide the industrialised nature of the instruments being used and reproduce what Butler (2009) and Mbembé (2003) describe as a derealization of violence common to modern militarism. Second, I critically examine Lunde's (2010) *LRAD: Compositions for the Long Range Acoustic Device*. In contrast to *Beastland*, this album presents a series of abstracted and synthesised noises designed to be played through a sonic weapon known as the long range acoustic device (LRAD). The album then moves beyond referencing the abjection of warfare to situating the music within abjecting technologies, producing an affective response (and complicated politic) that provides a foundation for both critiquing and drawing pleasure from militarism. This paper therefore productively complicates extant critiques of militarisation within the musical avant-garde, producing new ways of engaging noise music's obfuscated critique of militarism without absolving its politics of reinforcing military logics within music.

Object sonics

Although multiple definitions of the term exist, Thompson's (2017) affective formation of noise provides a valuable tool for exploring the connection between sonic warfare and noise music. This connection emerges through the reimagining of sonic warfare as an affective assault, one that 'reconfigure[s] the concept of victim to include ... all who are negatively affected by the pansensorial experience of combat' (Daughtry 2015, 20). An affective definition of noise can therefore provide a theoretical bridge to explore aural forms of warfare. To arrive at her definition, Thompson begins by proposing a non-anthropocentric definition of affect first proposed by Spinoza (1996) and later elaborated on by Deleuze (1978). According to these theorists, affect represents a kind of relationship, an interaction between bodies (human, animal, technological, sonic or otherwise) within which affecting bodies leave a trace on affected bodies, thus changing the affected entity in any number of ways. Thompson (2017) then uses this understanding of affect to elaborate on Serres' (2007) definition of noise (via the parasite). According to both authors, noise emerges when the milieu or medium that surrounds two

(affectively) relating bodies acts on their relationship and alters it in some way. Serres understands the milieu as an excluded third, an unseen or unheard actor that exerts itself through noise on the encompassed pair of relating bodies. A door slamming would make a noise, for instance, if it interrupts a conversation: the house, as the medium for the discussion, acts on the two relating bodies of the conversing people and rearranges the affective relationship between them all by drawing their attention towards the previously ignored building. Noise, defined in this way, has less to do with the intrinsic qualities of sound and much more to do with the role sound plays within affective systems (Thompson 2017).

Positioned within the context of music, Thompson (2017) suggests that noise, when used as a musical tool or gesture, replicates this same restructuring process. Within music, a sound gains its noisiness when it emerges from the techno-musical system (the web of technological and cultural bodies, practices and forces that construct the milieu of musical expression) and acts on the affective relations contained within them. These relations can exist between performers, listeners, technologies and non-tangible musical bodies in different arrangements, as long as the noise in question changes those relations in some way. Feedback from a microphone, the crackle of a vinyl record and the breaking of a guitar string all represent musical forms of noise because they embody the system acting on the relationships it both houses and enables (e.g. shifting the listener's attention away from the performer or music and towards the technologies that allow that music to occur). Noise music, as a genre, then intentionally uses these musical noises to create new work 'by foregrounding and extending the inevitable, transformative but often inaudible noise of the techno-musical system' (Thompson 2017, 167), again highlighting the role of the musical milieu in producing sonic forms of noise.

As I have argued previously, this understanding of noise also creates a productive alignment with Kristeva's notion of the abject (Woods 2020). According to Kristeva (1982), the abject represents a particular kind of affect, one that emerges in the interaction between an individual and something that sits outside of the symbolic order. While Kristeva generally defines the abject 'in distinctly phenomenological terms, associating the abject with all that is repulsive and fascinating about bodies' (Tyler 2009, 79), she also draws on Bataille's (1970) sociocultural use of the term that considers broader social structures. For both Kristeva and Bataille, the symbolic order defines itself in part by casting off certain elements: the human defines itself by defining the base materials it creates and casts off as not human (vomit or excrement, for instance) and society forms by defining certain bodies as not part of that collective (e.g. defining certain groups as sub-human or undesirable). The abject, as an affective response or relation, then emerges when those cast-off bodies re-encounter the order that cast them off initially. This affective response proves incredibly complex in terms of how individuals respond, often simultaneously producing a sense of repulsion or horror and intrigue, fascination or pleasure through *jouissance*. The abject also holds a revolutionary potential, providing a means to reimagine the self or society through its challenge to the borders that define these symbolic orders (Arya 2014; Bataille 1970).

For many artists, the challenge to extant borders produced by the abject serves as a source of inspiration. Using what Bataille (1985) describes as base materials and other kinds of abjecting representations, abject art aims to challenge conceptions of society and the self to create a new, hopefully more just, symbolic order by intentionally

producing the abject within the viewer as they encounter these works (Arya 2014; Creed 1986; Creed and Hoorn 2016). To draw on an example from noise music's history, live performances from the (almost entirely female) group Suckdog often involved the performers having sex, cutting themselves and bleeding on each other, and any number of other transgressive acts. Yet beyond the shock value these performances may produce, Ballet (2022) argues that Suckdog's performances 'challenged any form of status quo maintained by the contemporary patriarchal model and constituted a form of dissent' (20) against the symbolic order. By engaging the abject within this politicised, artistic space, Suckdog created the conditions necessary for individuals to reimagine a sense of the self and, by extension, the structures that define the social world.

Yet Foster (1996) argues that rather than challenging the symbolic order, transgressive forms of abject art can reinforce that border by conflating 'the operation "to abject" and the condition "to be abject"' (114). From a sociocultural perspective, Tyler (2009) contends that the act of *abjecting* the other from the social order represents an act of violence that undermines their subjectivity, but this positioning within the state of *abjection* imbues the other with the ability to leave a trace through the *abject* as a form of affect. Bataille (1970) goes even further, claiming that the revolutionary power of the abject comes precisely from the operation of abjection despite the inherent violence that produces this capability. Yet if pieces of abject art rely on the crossing of social taboos to generate meaning, then these works inherently reinforce the abjected status of what they represent by reinscribing the border they must transgress (Foster 1996; Thompson 2017). And if the artists making these works hope to use this artistic expression to challenge the social order, then the politics of these works become muddled as they both critique and reinscribe the social order in parallel. Kristeva (1982) herself also questions the use of the abject within artistic expression, asserting that this kind of engagement with the abject merely absolves the creator of having to face or deal with abjection. It then falls on artists to carefully consider the kinds of affective relations produced by the abject in relation to their work, as well as their relationship to the abjected other.

In drawing a connection between Kristeva and Thompson, I propose that noise in the context of music represents a certain kind of sonic abjection (Woods 2020). This happens in part because the process of creating music involves defining what sounds 'count' as part of the composition and then abjecting all other sounds outside of the symbolic (musical) order: a violin string vibrating is part of the music but the squeaky chair the musician sits on is abjected to the sonic milieu. Even in experimental music pieces that challenge musical borders, the composer still creates music by defining certain sounds as part of the music and others as not. John Cage's *4'33"*, for instance, specifically plays with this process by defining all incidental sounds within a concert hall or performance space as part of the music, expanding the borders of the symbolic order to be all encompassing (Hainge 2013). The musical noise described by Thompson, then, represents those sounds relegated to the background of the techno-musical milieu returning to the forefront and challenging the symbolic order of music. Noise, in this sense, embodies and produces a sonic version of the abject.

Additionally, the simultaneous sense of repulsion and pleasure within the abject also emerges from noise and noise music as well. When listening to noise, Jones (2016) explains that 'euphoria, pain, and joy often come close to one another, and at times it's possible that they inhabit the same space' (239), a polysemic response that mirrors

the abject as a form of affect. Even in those examples where authors allude to the soothing or meditative nature of listening to an overwhelming or repetitive noise, this feeling fundamentally relies on the ability of noise as a musical gesture to allow for a dissolution of the self within sound (Blenkarn 2020; Hegarty 2018; Snaza 2016), thus mirroring the pleasure derived from *jouissance* via losing of one's identity in the face of the abject. Noise can therefore simultaneously draw a certain pleasure out of the listener, one intrinsically linked to the abject and the repulsion it produces, through *jouissance*.

The militarism of noise music

This affective rendering of noise as sonic abjection creates a means to develop a deeper understanding of the pleasure noise musicians and audiences derive from the sounds of sonic warfare. However, most sound studies texts exploring militarism define noise outside of affect in one of two ways. First, noise represents loud, disorienting, and unexpected sounds (Cusick 2020; Daughtry 2015; Vieira de Oliveira 2019), a definition that explicitly focuses on the physical and sonic qualities of sound. Second, scholars have also drawn from the line of work that grew out of Shannon's (1949) rendering of noise within communication by claiming that noise exists as an inherent and unavoidable obstacle to the transfer of information (Goodman 2009; Kromhout 2011). Although this research remains valuable, these definitions only attend to a small portion of noise's ontology and fail to account for the broader social politics of reintegrating or reclaiming noise within cultural contexts (James 2014).

Exploring Thompson's (2017) rendering of noise within Goodman's (2009) affective positioning of sonic warfare, however, does produce a theoretical connection that can illuminate the interrelations of sonic militarism. Returning to Serres's (2007) original conception of the parasitic noise thus raises an important question: what serves as the milieu for militaristic noise? Here, Daughtry's (2015) notion of the belliphonic provides an answer. According to the author, the belliphonic represents 'the spectrum of sounds produced by armed combat' (3), both in terms of the sounds that come from military weaponry and the materials that emerge from the battlefield's aftermath. Taken together, this collection of sounds (ranging from the explosions produced by artillery to the roar of vehicles surveying the battlefield) represent the soundscape of war. Daughtry (2015) goes on to argue that 'the belliphonic is a fundamental dimension of wartime experience, and learning to contend with it is a daunting and ever-present challenge faced by service members and civilians alike' (4-5). Much like the use of noise as a musical technology, the use of noise in sonic warfare involves the intentional drawing out of pre-existing sound from within the belliphonic (as a techno-sonic milieu) to disrupt the affective practice of those that inhabit this space. More than just creating loud, disruptive sounds or interfering with communication, the noise of militarism represents an affective relation, an intentional use of sound to leave damaging traces on those that can hear and feel those vibrations (Goodman, 2009).

Yet this framing of the belliphonic and focus on sonic warfare only within the context of the battlefield does not represent the full sonic milieu of militarism. As Sykes (2018) argues, a narrow framing of what counts as war that focuses on physical combat or direct military actions leads to 'the exclusion of many uses of sound and listening that would emerge as integral to war if one were to adopt the broader notion of "wartime violence"' (37). In response, Sykes (2018) proposes a shift away from the belliphonic and towards

the bleakhous as the theorising lens to understand the sonic milieu of militarism, one that recognises the shifting significance of sounds produced by militarism itself. Within the drawn out bleakhous, a framing that not only incorporates the momentary violence of battle but includes the extended temporal space of ongoing, objective violence that endures beyond specific military actions, war drastically resignifies the sounds of everyday civilian life to the point where these sounds become part of the wartime milieu as warfare normalises the sounds of military technologies (guns, tanks, bombs, planes etc.) into the background (Sykes 2018). The milieu of the bleakhous, one produced through war, then engulfs the sounds of the everyday by redrawing the affective relations of those within militarised contexts. Like Scarry's (1985) description of how torture resignifies everyday objects, these newly determined relationships extend the violence of war by imbuing normally banal sounds with the capacity for harm. The logics and practices of militarism spill into civilian contexts defined as separate from militarised spaces through the everyday policing of citizens as well. In his analysis of the police's use of sound bombs to combat *Pancãdoes*, or Brazilian street parties that involve car stereos loudly playing *bailes funk*, Vieira de Oliveira (2019) argues that the use of sound bombs by police represents 'a direct confrontation between musical noise and military noise in order to enforce quietness' (199) over racialized bodies. Despite existing outside of a 'warzone,' military logics seep into this confrontation and further reveal the blurring of the boundary between military and civilian spaces that exist within the bleakhous.

This tension between the notions of the belliphonic and the bleakhous reveal the role of noise (and abjection) in defining the boundaries of militarism, one that noise musicians draw on within their composition practices. In defining the sonic landscape of war as the belliphonic, one that only considers the sounds emanating from the battlefield, Daughtry (2015) frames militarism as something that happens elsewhere, in a distant place separated from the everyday life of civilians. The enunciation of the belliphonic then furthers (or, at the very least, relies on) 'the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjugated to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living-dead' (Mbembé 2003, 39–40) and positions militaristic violence as something that only affects othered populations (Butler 2009). Defining the belliphonic then occurs through the abjection of populations through a particular designation of militarism with the associated sounds of war following suit. Russolo and the artists he inspired draw on this abjection in their use of military sonics. As Kahn (1999) attests, Russolo overwhelmingly relied on the use of militarised sound to produce 'an auditive negotiation between music and war' (59) within his work, enacting a creative politic by challenging audiences to face an abjected reality and transgressing the defined border of the symbolic order through sound. The gesture fails if militarised sound is not abjected, so Russolo and similar artists therefore must rely on this abjection to create their work.

Importantly, the futurists engaged this musical gesture not as a distanced critique of war but as an endorsement of their immediate sociopolitical context. Stemming from his embrace of fascism, Russolo wanted to challenge the border between militarised and civilian spaces that he directly faced, to challenge previous valorisations of tranquillity or civility by inviting the historical progression towards endless combat into the artistic milieu and thus the everyday (Goodman 2009; Kahn 1999). Contemporary noise music, while still relying on the aesthetics of warfare, presents a much more ambiguous

relationship to militarism that relies on the inherent inscrutability of noise described by Hainge (2005). While Russolo repeatedly and publicly promoted fascism through his writing, music and actions (eventually joining the military during World War I), large swaths of modern noise music intentionally produce an ambiguous relationship to military conflict that purposefully evades generating a critique or endorsement of this form of violence (Stevenson 2016; Wallis 2016). Noise musicians regularly contend that the use of violent imagery and sound within their work serves the purpose of holding up a mirror to society to provoke a confrontational engagement with a militarised and violent reality that often goes ignored (Blenkarn 2020; Woods 2018). The work of American-Lebanese artist Koufar, for instance, employs the sounds of warfare as a means to surface the entirety of the sociopolitical web that sits at the heart of the Lebanese civil war in his album *Lebanon for Lebanese* (Woods 2020). In doing so, the abjected violence within armed conflict returns to the symbolic order of civilian contexts via noise and, if successful, produces the abject within the listener.

In the case of Russolo and Koufar, however, both artists draw on the military conflicts that directly impacted their lives, representing forms of violence they personally experienced on the battlefield and in the bleakhouse, respectively. But the politics of representing violence unconnected from ones lived experience, an approach taken by many within noise music, prove more complicated. Using the belliphonic to challenge the abjecting nature of militarism again raises the critique that abject art often reinforces both the practices and violent logics behind abjection (Foster 1996; Tyler 2009) or, more specifically, the ubiquitous logics of militarism. Noise music in particular produces the operation of abjection by failing to attend to the political implications of producing this music within specific sociocultural contexts and overemphasising instances of heightened physical or subjective violence over others (Woods 2018). Noise artists might hope to pose a challenge through the incorporation of the belliphonic as an artistic gesture, but using militarised sound within music does not challenge militarisation or military logics themselves, just the separation between civilian and military contexts.

Kromhout's (2011) analysis of industrial/proto-noise group Throbbing Gristle exemplifies this approach. While the group often employed visual and sonic imagery directly related to war (famously donning Nazi-inspired outfits during live performances), they approached the bleakhouse of militarism from an extended and broadened perspective to include the governmental practice of purposefully distorting information for military gain, both in theatres of war and civilian contexts. By mimicking this logic of distortion through their approach to various media technologies, the group creates music out of an 'implicit background noise, which Throbbing Gristle makes explicit, and which stands at the centre of their relation towards and use of violent strategies, their "total war"' (Kromhout 2011, 31). Although the approach to generating noise used by Throbbing Gristle shifts away from the abjected space of the belliphonic (and also incorporates a host of outsider texts and philosophies, ranging from occultist Aleister Crowley to author William Burroughs), their work still aims to challenge militarism and the everyday objective violence that serves as an overarching social frame. Yet the work of Throbbing Gristle still relies on the existence and reproduction of this frame within their music and their performances, creating representations of militarism that they can then transgress. The group therefore enacts the political dilemma at the heart of this essay: although the antiauthoritarian message still emerges, it only does so as the group embodies these

affective logics in relation to the audience and the broader sociocultural context, an issue that extends throughout the history of noise music and electronic music's avant-garde (Rodgers 2010; Woods 2019).

Within the 'total war' described by Kromhout (2011), a theoretical connection exists to what Kahn (1999) describes as all-sound, or an all-encompassing sonic totality that Hegarty (2018) finds in the 'militant harsh noise wall' subgenre of noise music: 'all sound itself was conditioned by the ever-expanding machinations of imperialist exploits, mass culture, global militarism, scientific incursions, ideas of an infinite nature, the other world of spiritism, communications technologies, and the like' (Kahn 1999, 9). This creates the conditions needed to find pleasure within sonic warfare. In allowing the border between the self and other to dissolve through noise (Snaza 2016), noise music creates a context where the *jouissance* associated with the abject, one inherently connected to the violence of defining the symbolic order (Ziarek 2005), can emerge. Yet the self remains intact through this encounter, producing 'a *jouissance* in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant' (Kristeva 1982, 9). In turn, this engagement with *jouissance* creates the conditions necessary to generate pleasure *from* sonic warfare but not necessarily *in* sonic warfare. Rather than deriving pleasure from the violence associated with sonic warfare, the pleasure associated with a sense of *jouissance* emerges from the abject. And the abject, Kristeva (1982) argues, originates within the self and not the object (or, in this case, sound) that inspires this form of affect. Returning to Thompson's (2017) theorisation of noise, the shift in affective relation produced by the noise of noise music (in this case, drawing sounds out of the milieu of the belliphonic or bleakhouse) does not represent a shift in the affective relationship between the self and war but a shift in the relationship with oneself. Military sonics can therefore generate the kind of critique described by Kromhout (2011), one that reveals the militarised logics of the everyday, while simultaneously reasserting the borders of the symbolic order artists hope to challenge, thus allowing the broader culture to absorb this noisy critique (Smith 2005). And within this complicated cultural politic, the pleasure generated from the abject in response to sonic warfare remains.

Unearthing the militarised sonics of Author & Punisher and Eric Lunde

Still, the practices of noise musicians remain far from monolithic and the particular nuances of how these musicians engage noise can shift the politics of this practice greatly (James 2014; Thompson 2017). For instance, while some noise/industrial artists like Maurizio Bianchi merely reference the atrocities of war in abstracted ways (Cooke 2016), others more directly engage with militarism and embrace military logics. The martial industrial genre, for instance, defines itself through the use of military sonics such as 'military marches, battle noises or war-oriented speeches' (Shekhovtsov 2009, 441). Similarly, specific groups within noise music, such as power electronics outfits Brethren and Terre Blanche, unambiguously advocate for fascism and racial violence (Candey 2016). But even outside of these extreme cases and within the much more common and ambiguous approach to militarism employed by noise musicians, differences still exist in the relationships between music and militarism from artist to artist. To illustrate this contention, I conclude with a comparison of two albums: Author &

Punisher's *Beastland* (Shone 2018) and Eric Lunde's *LRAD: Compositions for The Long Range Acoustic Device* (Lunde 2010). I chose these albums because neither outwardly promote fascist ideologies or militaristic violence (with *Beastland* clearly critiquing these concepts), yet they still hold contrasting relationships with military logics and its processes of abjection. I highlight how these albums engage sonic militarism (and the sense of pleasure generated by the abject from these sounds) in different ways while simultaneously critiquing and reinforcing military logics in parallel.

Author & Punisher's *Beastland*

To truly understand the music of Author & Punisher, an understanding of how Tristan Shone, the band's only member, creates this music proves vital. Building on his career as an engineer, Shone constructed a collection of 'drone machines' out of heavy duty industrial equipment (Paul 2022), reminiscent of both military technologies and the industrial equipment that followed from military initiatives. As instruments, the drone machines serve as controllers for various drum machines and synthesisers, with Shone exerting significant physical force to activate sounds that normally would only involve pressing a button. In doing so, the creation of Author & Punisher's music physically mirrors the often-unrelenting aural aesthetics of the project. On *Beastland*, among his other albums, Shone creates a form of industrial music that draws inspiration from proto-noise groups like Throbbing Gristle but leans more heavily into the pounding rhythmic and simple melodic elements of this influential group (similar to contemporary industrial bands like Godflesh, Ministry or Nine Inch Nails). Still, the use of noise remains. On top of *Beastland's* machine-like rhythmic backdrop, one that mirrors the rhythms of sonic warfare described by Goodman (2009), Shone constructs a wall of synthesised drones and distorted vocals that approach the total sound dynamic structure described by Hegarty (2018; 2021) in his description of noise music.

In creating music with his drone machines, Author & Punisher could very easily fall into the kind of ambiguous critique within noise music described by Stevenson (2016), amplifying and reinscribing a sense of militarism through this visual and physical representation without an explicit denouncement or endorsement of this ideology. The album cover, which features an image of a person wearing a gas mask, contributes to this potential by failing to divulge a political affiliation in either direction. But the anti-fascist themes that exist within the lyrics of this album, and across his entire catalogue (Shone 2020), reframe these gestures and artifacts. On the track 'Apparition,' for instance, Shone (2018) condemns the violent leaders who push war onto civilians when he sings, 'The race for the backward/Power in the wrong few/The fumes from the world war/The clouds in the room'. This quote also links the actions of those in power to the violence endured by civilians, as the fumes of the world war become the clouds in the rooms of the bleakhouse. The repeated references to Beckett's (1979) *A Piece of Monologue*, a play about a man on the verge of death looking back on all that he has lost, also reads as a critique of a social order based on institutional violence and ecological destruction. *Beastland*, in this sense, is about military logics, with Shone challenging them through performance, visual and sonic aesthetics and lyrical content.

Yet this challenge to the ubiquity of militarism on *Beastland* exists in parallel with a deployment of military logics and noise. As both Foster (1996) and Tyler (2009) argue,

the use of abjected materials or bodies within contemporary artforms does not fully challenge the operation of abjection but instead reinscribes this process. In reference to Shone, the particulars of his drone machines allude to this reinscription. While the machines themselves are visually reminiscent of military technologies, the sounds controlled by them do not share this same aesthetic connection. Moreover, the sounds made by these machines do not exist on the album at all: while the drone machines trigger various drum machines and synthesisers to make sounds, these machines do not themselves make any noises that appear on the recordings. Shone therefore abjects the sounds of these machines to the sonic milieu, pushing them to the background and allowing the symbolic order of this music to stay intact. Although other noisy sounds do appear on the recordings (e.g. distorted vocals and dissonant synthesisers), Shone deploys them within highly controlled applications, producing a sense of dissonance while stripping them of their inherent noisiness (Hainge 2013). And while the repetitive rhythmic nature of the album does draw from what Goodman (2009) describes as the rhythm of sonic warfare, replicating the aural qualities of bombs dropping or feet marching, this remains normalised within the context of Western popular music without attending to the resignification of sound that occurs within Sykes (2018) bleakhouse. In this sense, the logics and lived reality of militarism remain reinforced through the abjection of noise, with Shone alluding to the violence of sonic warfare without audiences having to confront that violence. The pleasure generated from the album, then, sits outside of its relation to and critique of militarism, allowing for the further abjection of military violence described by Butler (2009) and Mbembé (2003) to occur alongside the anti-militaristic stance that Shone produces.

Eric Lunde's LRAD: Compositions for the Long Range Acoustic Device

While *Beastland* actively suppresses militaristic noise, the compositional approach taken by Eric Lunde on *LRAD: Compositions for The Long Range Acoustic Device* embodies a different approach. Where Author & Punisher relies on rhythm, melody, and repetitive structure as a support for dissonant and distorted sonic elements, Lunde actively undermines these elements of Western music in favour of abstract compositions dominated by electronic feedback and discordant synth drones. In moments where recognisable rhythms or spoken text begin to emerge, Lunde quickly undermines this familiarity by allowing these elements to feed into themselves and sink into the shrill feedback that dominates the album, producing the unpredictable dynamic shifts and polyrhythms that Goodman (2009) recognises as a potential tool in challenging the militaristic logics of sonic warfare. In a reference to the belliphonic, Lunde begins the third track on the album with a field recording of what sounds like artillery shells being shot off amid a gathered crowd, but again these sounds become overtly distorted within a few minutes and a high frequency squall once again takes over. Any pleasure generated from this album then comes from the abject, from within the listener as they experience the jouissance of dissolving oneself within this wall of high-pitched noise.

Yet this allusion to the belliphonic via the field recording and the destruction of communication through the dissolution of media, similar to the process described by Kromhout (2011), provide only a slight alignment to militarism. Lunde heightens this connection

through his positioning of the album in relation to the long range acoustic device (LRAD), one of many sonic weapons designed by the US Government and used for military operations around the world (Cusick 2020). The title of the album, for instance, indicates a shift away from the approach taken by Author & Punisher by describing the album as compositions *for* the LRAD as opposed to compositions *with* the LRAD: Lunde does not use this weapon to create compositions but designs them to be heard through this device. Additionally, the liner notes state that the music was ‘designed for environmental/social deployment, the listener is encouraged to use enclosed samples in recording maneuvers’ and makes a request of ‘military personnel: if you by any chance are allowed to use these samples with an actual LRAD system, please document and send on to [the artist] immediately’. This subtle gesture produces a different positioning of the audience in relation to the abject, shifting from what Foster (1996) describes as the operation ‘to abject’ to the condition ‘to be abject’. Rather than drawing out the noise of militarism from the belliphonic or bleakhouse to further abject warfare logics, Lunde embeds these sounds within militarism’s ubiquitous and immediate presence. By framing the music within and as sonic weaponry itself, Lunde in a sense holds the listener within the ongoing machinations of sonic warfare. In doing, Lunde also opens the possibility of the kinds of counter-military tactics described by Vieira de Oliveira (2019): if used for social deployment, the listener can counter sonic warfare within civilian and military contexts. In doing so, Lunde creates the opportunity to experience the *jouissance* of noise while also constructing a tool to challenge the abjecting practice of sonic warfare.

While this reading of Lunde’s work produces an opportunity for the kinds of critical praxis many within music’s experimental fringe hope to embody, one in which audiences have to confront military violence in an embodied way instead of as a distanced critique, the complicated politics of noise music described throughout this paper emerge here as well. Although the gesture Lunde provides towards the LRAD situates the work within the technological milieu of the military industrial complex, this positioning still remains abstracted. Lunde may have composed the work to be played through an LRAD, perhaps drawing on specific frequencies to heighten the aural and physical affects of the sonic weapon, but the fact that Lunde distributed the CD through his own record label means that most people buying and listening to the album will more than likely treat it like any other musical recording and only play the album on their stereo. This level of distance from militarism creates a barrier to experiencing the abject and what Bataille (1970) sees as its revolutionary potential: by only suggesting the gesture of playing the music through an LRAD or in counter-military operations without providing a means to do so, Lunde produces an abstracted representation of the violence embedded within military technologies without actually engaging those technologies or the sense of abjection that an encounter with them can produce. To this end, the political complexity of challenging militarism through the redeployment of military logics and technologies partly obfuscates the critique emerging from this work. While the thematics of both Lunde and Shone still hold, with the artists creating differently embodied critiques of military logics, the political challenges related to employing representations of violence to those disconnected from that violence remain. The critique cannot be separated from the reinscription of what the artists hope to combat through this representation.

Conclusion

In tracing the line from Russolo to modern avant-garde music practices, Kahn (1999) encapsulates the complicated politics of noise music's anti-authoritarian tendencies:

Russolo's noise was returned to extramusical significance as it was embraced by the left-leaning avant-garde, despite the fact that what inspired him most was to be found in the all-sound and transgressiveness of military combat, especially as they aligned with the profascist sensibilities of Italian Futurism. (10)

Although noise music does not exist as a political monoculture, with some openly embracing fascist and violent ideologies, the exploration of militarised sound and military logics to create music and find pleasure contradicts the politics of many within this musical community. While those noise artists that hope to forward a fascist ideology may intentionally use the belliphonic to promote violence or further engrain a sense of militarism within the audience, this end goal remains far from the norm. Instead, many artists hope to challenge this ubiquitous social logic and state of objective violence. Yet they often produce a critique and reinforce this abjecting state simultaneously through the inclusion of those sounds relegated to the milieu of the bleakhouse. The abjected nature of these sounds and bodies used to create noise music cannot exist without the violence that produced this abjection. In this sense, artists may engage the revolutionary potential of the abject described by Bataille (1970) within affective relationships to the audience but fail to do the work of challenging structures of violence, including military logics. And while employing the bellephonic within noise music or elsewhere may hold value, it still embodies a specific politic in need of contention and further exploration.

Through this paper, I present a theoretical space to attend to this contradiction, recognising the *jouissance* of noise as emergent from the abject to produce a new listening outside of the Futurist's foundational embrace of militarism. But, as Thompson (2017) argues, the politics of noise remain undetermined. The approaches taken by Author & Punisher and Eric Lunde show that using the noise of militarism as a musical gesture both reinscribes and challenges sonic warfare simultaneously. And the pleasure that audiences and artists seek within this noise and its relation to military logics needs careful attention. How pleasure via *jouissance* contributes to these politics and the role it plays in challenging and realigning affective relationships holds just as much importance as the stated or explicit thematics explored by the artists. The possibilities of what noise does in response to our ongoing total war remain both emergent and unbounded, but within this space exists the potential for a praxis that simultaneously embraces, challenges and realigns militarised pleasure.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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