

## Noise and Ethics: On Evan Parker and Alain Badiou

Marcel Cobussen

**Abstract** *This essay investigates the possible relationship between noise and ethics through the music of improvising musician Evan Parker and the 'post-post-structuralist' philosophy of Alain Badiou. According to Badiou, one of the most important features of an ethical attitude is the recognition of a void in a situation, that is, the attention for something that cannot be thought, felt, or experienced within a conventional system, something that always already escapes established and existing structures. This seems to bear some resemblance to the way French thinker Jacques Attali describes noise. According to Attali, noise interrupts and disconnects. It is an aggression against all sorts of code, against all kinds of order. Noise is an eventual break from the status quo or ordinary situation, which compels recognition of something new. Rethinking noise this way means that noise does not exist in and of itself, but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed. Noise is a void in a situation and can therefore be connected to Badiou's ideas about ethics. In a relative rather than an absolute sense, the improvised music of Evan Parker – and this essay especially draws attention to one of his projects, *Drawn Inward*, in which electronics and acoustical instruments meet and hold a dialogue – produces noise, precisely in and through improvisation; in many ways it disrupts musical conventions. The essay thus explores the space within the triangle noise–improvisation–ethics.*

I

Sometimes it is just indispensable, an inner urge you do not want to resist: to run to your CD collection and take out the one you absolutely need to hear at that moment. It happened to me today, and now I am listening for the fourth time this day to *Drawn Inward* by British saxophonist Evan Parker. It's a CD from 1999 and I've listened to it dozens of times before. At certain times, I am attracted by it. Fascinated. Drawn inward. My wife and daughter see me sitting in front of the loudspeakers; paralysed, astonished, sometimes with my mouth wide open. Pityingly, they shake their heads. According to them, Parker and Co. are only tinkering, fiddling around, producing trash. Noise.

What can be said? What can be told to them? How can my taste be legitimised and why is this CD played over and over again? How can my being

drawn inward to these sounds be explained? I am musically educated. I studied at a conservatory, so I could tell them something about themes and variations, repetitions and mirror forms, harmonies and other structural principles. The point is that this is not the way I am listening to (this) music. These are not what fascinate me primarily, not what arouses my fascination – though what does strike me is, of course, related to the sounds produced, the noise, if you like. It is the noise that affects me, that throws me off balance. But not (only) from an aesthetic point of view. No, that's not it. Maybe I can call it ethical. Ethics and noise. The ethics of noise. Let us try to say something with some necessary detours about Evan Parker's *Drawn Inward* and, through this music, about a possible connection between noise and ethics. Let us speak in the margins of music and/as noise, around noise-music, to let it speak, to let it say something it cannot perhaps say very clearly in its own language.

## II

Maybe Evan Parker's music can or even must be called noise. But what is noise? How can this often pejoratively-used term be defined? And is it also possible to see something positive in it?

Whether we define noise from an acoustic, a subjective or a communicative perspective (see Sangild 2002: online), one thing always comes to the forefront: noise is disruptive, distorting and disturbing. Noise is violent. It interrupts. It disconnects. It kills. It is subversive (see Attali 1985: 26). Noise is an aggression against all sorts of code, against all kinds of order, against what Alain Badiou calls 'the state of the situation' or the multiplicity of being-qua-being (Badiou 2002: ix). And if this situation is unable to normalise and repress noise, it can be destroyed and a subject's relation to it can be transformed. Noise is thus a possible source of mutation at work in or against every structuring code. This means that noise does not exist in itself, but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed (see Attali 1985: 26). Noise is not a new system, not a new category, but that which affects and infects any system, any order. Noise is an *event*, an eventual break from the status quo or ordinary situation, which compels a recognition of something new. Noise as event is beyond the law of situations, beyond instituted knowledges: it is a hazardous, unpredictable supplement. If a situation is composed by the codes circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of that situation (see Badiou 2002: 40–44 and 67–69).<sup>1</sup>

If we follow this line of thought with respect to Evan Parker, his 'noise-music' should not be considered a category or style, already known as 'free jazz', 'improvised music' or 'jazz-noise'. What makes his music noise is that it challenges already existing categories and musical codes.<sup>2</sup> Of course, it can

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<sup>1</sup>The word 'supplement' can be interpreted here as containing the double meaning that Derrida assigns to it. For Derrida, supplement means both replacement and addition, that which at once supplements and supplants (see Derrida 1976: 144–45).

<sup>2</sup>It should be very clear that the ideas presented on noise herein strongly argue against noise as a (new) musical style or category. Noise is precisely what escapes assimilation by pre-established categories and frames. Noise endlessly defers classifications.

be a fruitful and practical shortcut to label musical expressions and to unite certain common features under one denominator. In fact, noise can only come into existence and pass through these kinds of consolidated identities, namings, and divisions; it can only pass through the language of the situation. But what noise as described above indicates is a reference to a space before, between or beyond pre-established categories and pre-existing knowledge codes. Noise means exploring unknown areas in known systems, to expand their variables, to construct a continuum of variations. It is a deterritorialisation of any major musical language, '...bearing witness to the unlocalized presence of an indirect discourse at the heart of every statement' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 104). With Deleuze and Guattari, we could call noise a *minority*, a determination different from that of the constant and homogeneous, serving as a standard of measure. It is an *outsystem*, a potential, creative and created, becoming. Noise can be regarded as 'continuous variation, as an amplitude that continually oversteps the representative threshold of the majoritarian standard, by excess or default' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 106). It is the catastrophe inscribed in every order; in fact, there is no order that does not contain disorder within itself, no music that does not have noise at its fringes, no order that can exclude powers that pushes this order to its own limits.

The deterritorialising powers of noise are not only destructive, they are productive as well. They can transcend the old codes and recreate a system of differences on another level of organization, a new music as in the case of Evan Parker. 'Subversion in musical production opposes a new syntax to the existing syntax from the point of view of which it is noise', as Attali suggests (Attali 1985: 34). In that sense, free jazz and noise-music, as well as classical counterpoint, tonal harmony, twelve-tone serial music and electronic music have something in common: the principle of giving form to noise in accordance with changing syntactic structures (see Attali 1985: 9–10). All these musical categories were noise to previous codes and styles and yet became a new code in turn. Parker's noise is a becoming-music destroying old codes and (inevitably) installing new ones. But what makes it noise is precisely this endless movement of becoming, the space between departure and arrival. (Noise is noise before it becomes music, if it does.) And what makes it music is its constructive force, re-presenting, re-creating and re-forming already existing musical structures and frames. Hence, the problematical because paradoxical term, noise-music.

### III

In what sense can *Drawn Inward* be called a minority, a minor music, or part of an event in Badiou's terms? How does it act on already existing codes, musics, categories, situations? What are its destructive and simultaneously constructive powers? In other words, how should this noise-music be approached? How can one speak of it, with it, and to it? What I hear when listening to *Drawn Inward* is not only reducible and explainable in terms of chord progressions, soundscapes, timbres, rhythms and melodies, to name just a few of the musical parameters generally employed by musicological analysis. What brings me into contact with this music, what interests me (and

interest here should not be thought of in a purely cognitive sense but rather evoke the more literal meaning of the Latin word *inter-esse* meaning to be among or between things, to get inside the sounds in this case) is something that could be summarised by the term 'practice-based research'. I am referring to investigations that are taking place *in* the arts, *in* the practice of a particular art form, *in* music, for example.<sup>3</sup> To think in, through and by producing art, that is, the process of art production itself is investigative.<sup>4</sup> Knowledge is gained in the creative act.<sup>5</sup> What is crucial here is that reflection and theorising are done neither before nor after the work has been composed; rather, they are an inextricable part of the process of making. The creative practice does not begin with a predetermined set of questions or assumptions, but starts from particular situations being investigated. To find new relations between knowing and doing in this way is to go beyond theory, to work beyond established practices and outside of disciplinary protocols. In this 'other space' situated between the limits of theory and the limitations of practice, the research activity of the creative practitioner is, of course, not only to ask questions *about* the work as a theoretician, but to provide the basis from which to ask questions *through* the work (see Dallow 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> Claude Debussy termed the process '*penser musicalement*'.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps we could think of Heidegger as a trailblazer for these thoughts. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935), Heidegger discusses a painting by van Gogh in which a pair of peasant shoes is depicted. Heidegger's main point is that van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the pair is in truth. Following from this, he defines art as 'the happening of truth at work' (Heidegger 1971: 36). However, he warns against regarding this truth as *adequatio*, *homoiosis* or *veritas*, that is, in agreement with what is. Art is not an imitation or a depiction of reality. For Heidegger

It would be the worst self-deception to think that our description, as a subjective action, had first depicted everything thus and then projected it into the painting ... The work did not, as it might seem at first, serve merely for a better visualizing of what a piece of equipment [the peasant shoes] is. Rather, the equipmentality of equipment first genuinely arrives at its appearance through the work and only in the work. (Heidegger 1971: 36)

Following Heidegger, one could say that art produces some specific kind of knowledge. However, where Heidegger differs from the idea of practice-based research is that he sidelines the artist. For Heidegger Truth comes to the fore in the encounter with a work of art and this revelation takes place independently of the intentions of the artist.

<sup>5</sup> Knowledge should be taken here in the broadest sense: I am in no way aiming to restrict it to rationally organized and empirically verifiable data. In Kantian terms: it has as much to do with Reason (*Vernunft*) as with understanding (*Verstand*).

Perhaps there is no better art form in which to experience this practice-based research than improvised music.<sup>6</sup> Re-search is an almost intrinsic element of improvisation. Searching eagerly, the musician and his instrument enter into a relation where both are sometimes brought to or even beyond their physical limits (is the instrument an extension of the musician or is the musician an extension of the instrument?). Groping uncertainly, the musician and his instrument enter into a relation with other musicians, other instruments, trying to find their own space, their own place to speak and to contribute to the event; and if there are no other musicians or instruments, the musician will relate to other stimuli produced in and by the performance space, perhaps sounds produced by listeners, who are then becoming co-musicians, conversation partners. Reacting to the unfolding of the music, the musician and his instrument enter into a relation with already produced sounds, concretised musical ideas, present frames. All these cases contain an act of thinking during the act of doing. To listen to oneself and the other(s), to listen to the proceeding and developments of the music, to listen to the noises that direct the music to unknown areas. Not just to listen, however, but to really listen, for in truth to listen also means being able to adjust, to react, to reflect on what is taking place. The core of practice-based research is the reframing of events, experiences, ideas and problems in the light of information supplied by a practical and singular situation. Searching and re-searching: this is the artistic assignment in improvisation. Tacit rules and existing codes are re-investigated, re-form(ulat)ed, re-used and thereby abandoned, mutilated, deterritorialised (the elementary effect of iteration in the Derridean sense (see Derrida 1988: 76)) in the act of improvising. According to Attali, the only worthwhile researchers are the undisciplined ones, the ones who refuse to answer new questions using only pre-given tools (see Attali 1985: 133). Are these not the ones who make noise... who improvise... who rupture a situation?

#### IV

Real improvisation is violent: the stability of a situation is perpetually called into question. Real improvisation means appropriating the right to make noise. It is always already a form of noise.<sup>7</sup> And as such it can be called an event as well because both improvisation and event can be described as that which brings to pass 'something other' than the situation and instituted knowledges (see Badiou 2002: 76). To improvise means to invent new codes, to invent new codes instantly, that is, while playing and listening, realising that these new codes will never be permanent but only work as directives in the current

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<sup>6</sup>By putting it this way, I want to avoid the suggestion that practice-based research is limited to certain (contemporary) art forms. In every art form, including traditional ones, elements of practice-based research can be found: they just manifest themselves in different ways and in different places. In this sense, practice-based research could be called a singular event.

<sup>7</sup>If improvisation is considered this way, it could indeed imply that a lot of jazz does not in fact contain improvisational noise because it is just producing versions of pre-established codes in the form of licks and imitated patterns.

situation. Rather than an exchange of coded messages, improvisation is a creation where the aleatory then rejoins order (see Attali 1985: 143). Improvisation is thus always connected to the singular, improvisation is a singular process.

## V

Noise, improvisation and practice-based research are related, brought together and bound together in an exciting triangle. That's what I hear in Evan Parker's project; that's what draws me inward to this sound world.

Let us elaborate upon just one aspect of the noise *Drawn Inward* produces. The seven-strong ensemble is divided almost evenly between 'traditional' instrumentalists and players of electronic equipment. Far more than simply thickening the texture, the electronics are actively engaged in the musical dialogue and conflate the human with the artificial, deconstructing the opposition. The electronic musicians are free to choose either to process sounds as they arrive and improvise with and from them – as do the other instrumentalists – or else to process sounds that have already been sampled. This is to say that sounds can be taken from any or all of the other performers (including sounds already transformed) and processed or manipulated further either singly or in combination. Sections of what a particular player performs can thus be transformed continuously. Indeed the performance as a whole can be sampled and used as raw material for further transformations and development, the results then being fed back into the collective pool of sounds. In short, the electronic musicians are not only reacting to the others: they create, they improvise, they play like the others.

Although the strategies vary throughout *Drawn Inward*, the distinction between what is electronic and acoustic, live and processed, machine-made and human-made is constantly blurred – as is the difference between composition and improvisation. This is music in which the composer becomes improviser, the improviser becomes electronics technician and the technician becomes composer in the literal sense of the word. (In Latin, *com-ponere* means to put (sounds) together.) In this sense, *Drawn Inward* is noise, noise to prevailing categories and definitions. It deconstructs fixed identities, and traverses the 'either-or' logic.

## VI

What I hear in *Drawn Inward*<sup>8</sup> and what fascinates me is the way in which this mode of working seems to expose the musicians' instant thinking to the kind of scrutiny which otherwise seems impossible to achieve, a 'savoir-faire' as Michel de Certeau describes it in his *Practice of Everyday Life* (see De Certeau

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<sup>8</sup>Is this really what I hear? Is this really what one can hear in this music? Well, yes. I want to open a space where there is more to hear than 'mere' melodies, rhythms, harmonies, etc. I want to draw attention to 'something else' that is at work in a musical text perhaps outside of the more prevalent ways to write about music, to listen in such a way that disturbs conventional listening practices and the instituted languages used to transmit a listening experience, to listen in such a way as to create some noise.

1988: 75). This coincidence of knowing and doing comes into being in and by a process, the process of improvising, the process of improvisation as an event that invents its rule of deliberation at the same time as it invents itself.<sup>9</sup> That is, there seems to be no fixed preconceived plan, no given transcendent norm in the name of which the musicians are supposed to play. One could say that there is here no absolute, stable and definitive order of truth, no objectification of the truth, no Truth; there is not One Truth at work in Evan Parker's music. On the contrary, the truth present in his work escapes every objectification, every stabilisation, every fixation. It is singular in its location and occasion, evading precisely the domination of the situation. Its procedure can begin only with some sort of break from the ordinary situation in which it takes place. This 'other' truth is innovation *en acte* (see Badiou 2002: ix). It starts with an upheaval and leads to something new, something that is unforeseen in the order of creation (see Badiou 2001: online). Better yet, the truth *is* the new.

As such, the artistic truth of *Drawn Inward* can be regarded as a positive investigation of possibilities through and within the realisation of the music itself. Exploring possibilities, searching and re-searching them, testing and tasting them, turning them inside out and around while playing, while entering the musical conversation, without pre-conceived plans, pre-digested codes, pre-established outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps we could describe it as an exposure to an event. According to Badiou, every singular truth has its origin in an event. The event is the retroactive coming-to-be of truths. In other words, there is an essential link between the development of a truth and that element of rupture that is an event.<sup>11</sup> Truths retroactively establish that an event has occurred. What is the relation between an event and a situation? An event takes place *in* a situation (in this sense it is immanent), but it is not *of* that situation. The situation is the site where both events and truths are realised, but they are indiscernible by the state of the situation. A situation is thus a necessary 'condition' for an event to appear, but a transformation cannot occur within the terms of a situation, from the situation's own ability to change. One could say that Badiou's definition of truth is the happening of something new, something outside the realm of objectively specified knowledges, of positive identities and differences, of clearly established interests, of the dominant logic of the situation.<sup>12</sup> And if we agree that there is a relation between an event and noise, then noise

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<sup>9</sup> Badiou 2002: 117.

<sup>10</sup> It is not the case that situations are fundamentally open to transformation. They are forced in that direction by certain subjects that operate against its normative tendencies', writes Sam Gillespie in an essay on Badiou's concept of truth (Gillespie 2003: 14).

<sup>11</sup> Badiou 2002: 122.

<sup>12</sup> By now it should be clear that Badiou is not offering a propositional or correspondence-based model where truth is determined by the adequation of a statement to a state of affairs. In this sense, his ideas on truth resemble those of Heidegger when the latter proposes to exchange the Latin *veritas* for the Greek *aletheia* (Heidegger 1992). Truth is true not because it is supported or negated by an external criterion, but because it is.  
cf. Gillespie 2003: 7–9.

is connected to truth in the way Badiou conceives of it. There is truth in noise, or, through noise truth comes into existence.

## VII

What is happening in *Drawn Inward*? How can this music be 'read'? I experience it as the exposure to an event. In order for improvised music to be successful, the musicians should open themselves; they should surrender.<sup>13</sup> None of the musicians knows the truth; no one can decree how it is to be known; they are unknowing of what it is since the truth itself depends on its own production. The truth production is beyond anticipation, beyond active raising. As Badiou says, 'The actors themselves are seized by something of which they no longer know if they are its actors or vehicles, or what it carries away' (Badiou 2002: 125). Even though Badiou's remark here refers to political events, it could equally be applied to the process of improvisation. The musicians get a process going, they propose a musical idea, provoke a reaction, they try to achieve a good contribution relying on their experience, talent, musical sense, technical abilities, etc. The musicians are actors, but act in such a way that they are targeted by, carried away by and struck by the event. The eventual dimension, though always dependent upon actions of certain subjects, is well beyond what any one person might have thought possible, yet everyone is caught up in it. '*It happens*'. Musicians can practice, surround themselves with kindred spirits and brilliant co-musicians, create an inspiring atmosphere, but they never know if, how, and when *it* will happen. An intangible moment. *It* happened for example at a Miles Davis concert at the North Sea Jazz Festival in The Hague, the Netherlands. Miles, ill, on the wane, played in an uninspired manner, weakly, perfunctorily. And then, suddenly, unexpectedly ... one note of his (amplified) trumpet ... so poignant, so apt, so, so, so ... true! A shiver went through the audience. For this note they had come and everybody knew it (including the band members). An eventual dimension beyond the will of an individual. In excess of himself. Badiou:

The some-one thus caught up in what attests that he belongs to the truth-process as one of its foundation-points is simultaneously himself, nothing other than himself, a multiple singularity recognizable among all others, and in excess of himself, because the uncertain

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<sup>13</sup> What have I come to mean by surrender as of now? Seminally I mean by it cognitive love: whatever other meanings it may have flow from it. Among them are total involvement, suspension of received notions, pertinence of everything, identification, and risk of being hurt. To surrender means to take as fully, to meet as immediately as possible whatever the occasion may be. It means *not* to select, *not* to believe that one can know quickly what one's experience means, hence what is to be understood and acted on: thus it means *not* to suppose that one can do justice to the experience with one's received notions, with one's received feeling and thinking, even with the received *structure* of that feeling and thinking: it means to meet, whatever it be, as much as possible in its originariness, its itself-ness. (Wolff 1976: 20)

course of fidelity passes through him, transfixes his singular body and inscribes him, from within time, in an instant of eternity. (Badiou 2002: 45)

Carried away to unknown places by unknown forces. *Unheimlich*.

*Unheimlich*. Uncanny. Not at home. The word occurred to me while listening to the third track of *Drawn Inward* entitled 'Travel in the Homeland', starring percussion player Paul Lytton. At first, the title appeared to me not very challenging: touring on native soil always has something familiar, something reliable. But 'to travel' also means to be in transit. It can also be connected to tourism, to be on the way, for example, to visit unknown places. Travelling somehow appeals to becoming a stranger, even (or perhaps exactly) in one's homeland. To travel around in the homeland can yield many new perspectives on supposed well-known places, events, people. What once was so familiar suddenly becomes odd with unexpected sides and unanticipated aspects. To travel, to be in transit, means to go from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the old to the new, from the past to the future, from the canny to the uncanny. And this can imply that the traveller does not know where he will end up; one acknowledges that the unknown is always already at work in the known, the event part of the situation, noise present in structure. The territory becomes a lost homeland and the musician a wanderer or exile pursuing a deterritorialising vector.

The voyage given musical expression here has no familiar point of departure. At least not for me. It goes from the uncanny to the uncanny. What is described in the CD-booklet as a 'detailed and intricate' percussion performance by Lytton is from the start traversed by electronic sound manipulations that veil to a large extent the 'original' sounds of the percussion instruments. Cut off from their source from the very beginning, the processed sounds wander around in their uncanny homeland. The sounds, transformed by Lytton's own use of live electronics as well as the contribution of the other sound processors, challenge the musician to travel through his homeland (the homeland of percussive sounds) as a stranger, to leave his house, to leave that familiar place of dwelling, to leave his *ethos* – which must encompass also the manner in which one relates to oneself and to others (see Derrida 2001: 16). In fact, by playing, by starting the music, Lytton is already in transit. Immediately. Searching and re-searching. The musical process can be considered as a research process, a process that in its performance makes the quest transparently, the quest as quest, without a clearly defined and preconceived goal. And yes, ultimately it results in a fixed musical work with a beginning, an end, a title, a recording, a review, an evaluation. The process coagulates, falls silent, is interrupted. Only a reminder, no matter how valuable, remains.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>In the 1970s, improviser Cornelius Cardew wrote that

documents such as tape-recordings of improvisation are essentially empty, as they preserve chiefly the form that something took and give at best an indistinct hint as to the feeling and cannot of course convey any sense of time and place. (Cited in the CD-booklet of *Drawn Inward*)

## VIII

We already touched on it, came across it by travelling with the music through unknown areas: *ethos*. A short step to ethics. But how can noise and improvisation be related to ethics? How ethical is *Drawn Inward*? Or, to proceed more slowly, how can ethics be connected to Badiou's truth processes? What is ethics?

Acting ethically means doing the good thing, doing the right thing. But right according to what? What is The Good? Not an easy question to answer. Because, for example, the search for a universal and eternal Good has come to grief. There is no generally acknowledged agreement on what the Good is. For Badiou,

The unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, the disappearance or extreme fragility of emancipatory politics, the multiplication of "ethnic" conflicts, and the universality of unbridled competition show that there can be no body of self-evident principles capable of cementing a global consensus. (Badiou 2002: 10)

Or, to put it another way, what is good in certain circumstances can be (come) evil in others: good and evil change places according to the circumstances. This means that we cannot know in advance what is good and what is bad. There is no natural definition possible, no rule, no law, no formal imperative. It always comes down to particular situations: singularity. There can be no ethics in general, but only *an ethic* relative to a particular situation, an ethic of singular truths.<sup>15</sup> Outside truth procedures, there are only moral norms and customs as regulated by the state of the situation. Ethics, as Badiou refers to it, is the labour that brings some truths into the world, it does not aim to submit the world to the abstract rule of Laws (Badiou 2002: 28). It does not say what my duty is, simply that I should do my duty, that I act in the service of the good without defining it conclusively.

In short, Badiou's ethics combines three resources, three exhortations. The first is one of discernment. It is the recognition of the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of a situation. The void is the normally inaccessible access to the pure inconsistent being of a situation, never identified or located. Access to this void can become possible in the wake of an event; in other words, an event exposes the void of a situation (see Hallward 2003: 65). Doing the Good means being open for 'something to happen' instead of being satisfied with 'what there is'. The Good is the internal norm of a prolonged disorganisation. The second exhortation calls upon courage: keep going! Do not betray a truth; do not give up any possible encounter with a void; do not relapse into the known of a situation (Badiou calls this betrayal) at the expense of a leap into the unknown. To keep going, then, presumes the ability

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<sup>15</sup> Emphasising singularities does not mean that Badiou rejects universalism. On the contrary, he insists on the rigorous universality of truth although he specifies that this should be understood as a singular conception of the universal. Badiou stresses that a truth is the only thing that is for all. Any singular truth is therefore necessarily generic.

to identify and resist the various forms of corruption or exhaustion that can beset a fidelity to truth. The third exhortation is directed towards moderation: to imbue a truth with total power is to bring to bear upon the world a disaster. As Badiou warns,

Every absolutization of the power of a truth organizes an Evil. The Good is Good only to the extent that it does not aspire to render the world good. Its sole being lies in the situated advent of a singular truth. (Badiou 2002: 85)

Badiou summarises this idea in what he calls 'the Unnameable'. Recognition of the unnameable ensures that a truth can never be total or definitive, can never be reincorporated into the realm of knowledge and objectivity. Evil is the effort to name the unnameable, to specify and fill out what is a void, to impose an absolute, definitive order of truth (see Hallward 2003: 259 and 262).

## IX

What is good, The Good, in improvisation? In Parker's project? In this music that can be called experimental jazz? As stated earlier, according to Badiou, such a thing can never be decided in advance. It is not possible to derive concrete norms one must follow in a specific situation from ethics itself – which means that the subject has to assume the responsibility of 'translating' the abstract injunctions of ethics into a series of concrete obligations, the subject's own contingent act of performatively assuming an ethic.

But is this formal indeterminacy not comparable to what is happening in improvised music? In it, there are no concrete rules one has to follow, no duties governed by purely a priori principles. That is to say, the rules are invented during the improvisation, during the interaction with other musicians, other instruments, other stimuli, and they are only valid for the duration of the piece; they are immanent. Each improvisation in *Drawn Inward* is an adventure with an uncertain outcome, leaving a territory, leaping into an abyss. How will the melody sound? Is there a melody at all? What will be its speed, its rhythm, its timbre? How will the sounds be transformed, transected and transmitted by the electronic equipment? And how will it affect the musician(s) who started the sound processing? Will they comply, for example by imitating the preceding step, by supporting it with a harmony or a rhythm, by enriching it with a counter-melody? Will they be silent because the present(ed) sounds are self-sufficient? Or will they encroach on the results so far by starting a new melody very different from the previous one? Will they break the organic development abruptly? Will they create noise to the already existing noise that an improvisation is? Will it deterritorialise upon deterritorialisation itself? These are questions for the audience, but first for the participating musicians themselves.

'Travel in the Homeland'. Could that be a metaphor for the attention to the event in a situation? Every event has to pass through a situation: no deterritorialisation without a territory. Of course, the musicians at work at *Drawn Inward* operate within the framework of a musical language that is usually

associated with (free) jazz. But simultaneously there is a clear moment of artistic creativity where past experience and a knowledge of rules do not suffice to predict or produce the results; that is, where forms are arranged at the edge of a void. Both musicians and audience are drawn in a void. Starting from my auditory experiences, this can be perceived most explicitly through the contributions of the musicians who manipulate the sounds by means of electronic processing.

## X

In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre reasons that art and ethics (he calls it morality) have something in common. In both cases, he asserts, it is impossible to determine *a priori* what it is that should be done.<sup>16</sup> In both cases, it is a matter of creativity and inventiveness. In both cases, it is all about responsibility, about making choices, about being entrenched in one's own singularity at the moment of decision. Yet creativity, inventiveness and responsibility imply and refer to a very specific kind of duty. It is a duty *not* to act out of duty. Or, to rephrase this a little and to connect it to music once more, the duty to make noise means to denounce, refute and transcend, at the same time, all duty, all responsibility and every Law.<sup>17</sup> It calls for a betrayal of everything that manifests itself within pre-conceived structures, existing rules, pre-established orders. The duty that has to be neglected is the duty to stay and act within the well-known framework of a situation. Not guided nor controlled by knowledge. Such, in fact, is the paradoxical condition of every artistic and ethical decision: it cannot be deduced from a form of knowledge of which it would simply be the effect, conclusion or explication. In this sense, it can also be called irresponsible because it is guided neither by reason nor by an ethics justifiable before some universal set of laws: it could not be derived from a *concept* of responsibility (see Derrida 1995: 61 and 77).

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<sup>16</sup> With regard to ethics, Sartre discusses the choice one of his students had to make during the Second World War: either to avenge his brother, who was killed by the Nazis, by joining the resistance abroad or stay with his desperate mother and support her. 'If values are uncertain, if they are still too abstract to determine the particular, concrete case under consideration, nothing remains but to trust in our instincts', Sartre writes (Sartre 1989: 83). No rule of general morality can show one what one ought to do. With regard to art, he states that there are no aesthetic values *a priori*. There are only values that will appear in due course in the coherence of the picture, in the relation between the will to create and the finished work.

<sup>17</sup> In my opinion, or to my way of reading, there is a strong connection between Badiou and Derrida's ideas on ethics. Although Badiou rejects the Derridean (and Levinasian) concept of alterity in saying that respect for the other is hard to maintain when the other does not respect you, and although Badiou reproaches Derrida for lapsing into a quasi-religious concept of Otherness (perhaps misreading Derrida in this respect), there still are many similarities recognisable between both philosophies. In the context of this paragraph, the most important resemblance is the singular character of the ethical attitude.

## XI

'The Good in artistic action is the invention of new forms that convey the meaning of the world', Badiou emphasises in an interview (Badiou 2001: online). This invention of new forms should be understood as an immanent break. 'Immanent' because a truth proceeds *within* the situation and nowhere else – there is no heaven of truths; 'break' because what enables the truth-process – the event – means nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation (see Badiou 2002: 42–43).

Noise as the invention of something new is such an immanent break. If we define the term noise neither on the basis of some absolute acoustic qualities nor as a demarcated musical category but only as that which can be experienced in relation to some sounds (or music), as that which escapes the territory and territorialisation of those sounds, then noise can be regarded as the manifestation of the unnameable. Noise means going against the grain; it is a site of resistance. It forces knowledges, that is, it violates established and circulating knowledges. As such it is unnameable, not in itself, but according to the dominant language of or in a situation.

Seeking out the unnameable, permanently resisting, going against the current: this requires of a musician an enduring alertness, a continuous (musical) thinking in order to exceed his knowledge, his achievements, his own being: how will I link the things I know in a consistent fashion via the effects of being seized by the not-known? According to Badiou, this is the only question in the ethic of truths (see Badiou 2002: 50). It is a matter of showing how the space of the possible is larger than the one we are assigned – that something else is possible, but not that everything is possible (see Badiou 2002: 115). I think that the musicians at work on *Drawn Inward* tried to propose a few possibilities. Through music. Only attainable through music.

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