

“Noise belongs to everyone” – interview with Vilho Koivisto, a noise musician

Janne Vanhanen

Aesthetics, University of Helsinki, ORCID: 0000-0001-7817-4578

***Abstract:** The interview with Vilho Koivisto, a Finnish noise music practitioner, explores topics related to noise vis-à-vis music, the practices of making, performing, recording as well as releasing and distributing noise, and the audience of noise music. In our conversation Koivisto reflects upon his own becoming aware of noise music and his acquiring of the skills needed to create, perform and publish noise, the contemporary noise music scene and relation between performer and the audience.*

***Keywords:** Noise music, sound, texture, chaos, structure, performing, publishing*

1. Introduction

In order to gain more insight into conceptual and practical aspects of noise in a musical context, I wanted to interview Vilho Koivisto, a Finnish noise music practitioner. Koivisto is not only a recording and performing artist, but he also runs the record label Satatuhatta with a catalogue of over 120 releases and, in addition, distributes other labels' output via mail order. All in all, Koivisto can be considered a major actor within the international noise music network. On 24th of January 2026 I took the journey to Kiiminki in Northern Finland, near the city of Oulu, to discuss topics related to noise music: Koivisto's own journey to appreciating noise, his practices of making and performing noise as well as publishing and distributing work. The recorded interview was conducted in Finnish and subsequently translated to English without omissions. I have included a few footnotes to explicate some details for the reader who is not well-versed in the noise music subculture.

2. Interview

JV: We are here at Vilho Koivisto's place to discuss practices and different aspects related to noise music. Present are Vilho, a well-known noise musician, best recognized through his solo project Aprapat. I am Janne Vanhanen, conducting the interview.

Let us begin with a very fundamental question: how and when did you become aware of noise music and started to be interested in it?

VK: A difficult question to start with! If I try to recall, my first, perhaps earliest memories of noise, or of noise in a musical context, are from sometime after the early 2000s. Having been on a musical journey of exploration all my life and always searching for new and more

interesting musical experiences, at some point you inevitably end up encountering noise music and experimental music. One of the first noise artists I remember hearing was probably Merzbow.¹ His music was relatively easily available and distributed through labels associated with heavy metal music. It might even have come via Boris.² I listened to Boris quite a lot, and they had many collaborations with Merzbow. One of my first proper encounters with noise was precisely the album Merzbow and Boris made together, although it cannot be straightforwardly categorized as noise. Sonic Youth was also heavily in rotation; they’ve been described as noise rock, and through them I encountered something that wasn’t yet pure noise – harsh noise – but where louder elements in music began to interest me.

JV: It seems to be a fairly common trajectory that noise is discovered through the outer edges of more “musical” music.

VK: Yes, very much through that route. When it comes to more direct noise, free jazz was perhaps the musical style that taught me to listen to sound texture and chaos. It opened the gates to the world of harsh noise. Of course, when you first listen to it, you don’t really get anything out of it and wonder how anyone can listen to this, but fairly quickly points of engagement begin to emerge through experimental music, free jazz, and free improvisation.

JV: You mentioned texture. Is that something you then find in harsh noise – this sense of the tactility of sound?

VK: Yes, the feel of sound is important. Perhaps as musical taste develops, the need for music to have a certain structure or formula – such as in pop music or so-called “normal” music – falls away. That is, the idea that music should follow specific patterns. And you’re always seeking surprise and something new. What interested me in sound was indeed texture: certain timbres or elements, whatever one might call them, that speak to you more and kind of tickle the ear canals. You end up liking those more than others. For example, the sound of an electric guitar. There are good sounds and then slightly worse ones – or not necessarily worse but sounds that don’t align as well with your own ear. Or more generally, how a record sounds, how it is mixed or mastered – you can grasp a certain kind of atmosphere that exists in the texture of sound as such. Perhaps these are matters of taste. Rather than relating to musical structures, they delve more into the quality of sound itself.

JV: Noise music is a somewhat paradoxical term in the sense that if music is understood – as in a dictionary definition – as organized sound, then in noise music sound itself is the central element. Of course, there has to be some kind of framework in which sound can appear at all, so order manifests itself in some form, but it is not the main point.

VK: Noise music is certainly music in the sense that it is recorded sound, but the nature of the work is somewhat different – it speaks in a different way. Chaos is also what is interesting about it.

JV: What about the next step, when you began to think that you could also create something like this yourself? How did that start?

VK: When you go deep enough down the noise rabbit hole... Of course, I had always been interested in making music and had had some projects earlier, but when you start thinking about how this [noise music] is made and become extremely interested in how you could do it yourself – because you spend so much time with it, listening to it and becoming more and more invested – then naturally you start to think that you might try making something yourself someday. I had actually made experimental music earlier as well, but not noise as such. I do remember that

¹ Probably the most well-known name in noise music, Merzbow is the project of Japanese artist Masami Akita. He has released experimental music and noise music under the Merzbow moniker since 1979, accumulating a vast discography of several hundred releases.

² Boris is a Japanese drone and doom metal band formed in the early 1990s.

as a very small child I recorded a lot with cassette players and banged around making different sounds, so in that sense there was already an interest in different kinds of sounds back then.

As noise records started to accumulate and began to take on a larger role in my musical activity, after probably about a year of turning the idea over in my head that I should start, I came across a four-track tape recorder in absolutely pristine condition at a flea market. I thought, I'll buy this and now I'll start making noise. I looked up some basics, read a lot of zines, and asked friends and acquaintances where one might begin. After a few months, maybe half a year, of experimenting on my own, recording, and beginning to find a sound I liked, I thought that this could perhaps be released in some form.

JV: If one thinks of noise as a musical genre, the listener–creator ratio is probably quite different from that in many other kinds of music.

VK: It's probably the case that about 80 percent of listeners also make noise themselves. Maybe not quite that many, but a great many people are at least interested in how it is made. There really isn't another musical style like it, where the relationship is so strong. Those who only listen are in the minority. I would almost dare to claim that this is the case.

JV: In addition to making noise, you also began to engage in publishing activities, which have grown quite extensive – your Satatuhatta³ record label's catalogue already contains well over one hundred releases. At what point did it occur to you that you could also start releasing noise?

VK: The idea had been simmering for a very long time that I wanted my own record label and to start releasing records at some point. As a committed music listener and record collector, it had always been in the back of my mind that I'd like to release things myself as well, but how and what kind of releases... With noise, the threshold was perhaps lower. It also played a role that the first release emerged almost naturally, when Veikko⁴ and I recorded the first *The New Boyfriends* cassette. There was no initial plan to self-release it or release it at all, but we liked it, and I thought that if ever there was a right moment to start a label, this was it. We set it up and made an edition of 50 copies. I had to ask around about where cassettes could be produced, and it turned out there was a cassette duplication plant right here in Finland. That's how it started, and the publishing activity really took off from there. The next few releases were my own solo project, and I think the second *Boyfriends* cassette came out around then, and after that the *Moozzhead*⁵ cassette, which is when I started releasing music by other artists as well. That really pulled me in. Once you start releasing things, the threshold for making contacts in the noise world drops significantly, because through trading recordings you suddenly get access to a lot more things to listen to.

JV: And at that point your understanding of the whole field probably deepens as well. In noise especially, but also in other subcultures, small-scale publishers are the factor that creates the network in which things operate and through which information circulates.

VK: Exactly. And it was precisely that hands-on aspect – the fact that the releases were quite DIY and small in scale – that interested me. That you don't immediately have to invest in some big release and then worry about where to distribute it and end up standing there with hundreds of records that don't move out of the closet anywhere. You start small, and in that way it has gradually expanded little by little.

JV: Probably quite naturally, through new contacts?

3 The Finnish word "satatuhatta" means "one hundred thousand" in English.

4 In addition to being a member of *The New Boyfriends*, Veikko Rajanen also releases noise music under the monikers *Mogao* and *The Rätty*.

5 A harsh noise project of Oskari Mertalo, who self-released a couple of cassettes in late 1990s and, after one release in 2015, returned to the scene in 2020 with the *Satatuhatta* cassette discussed above and many other subsequent releases.

VK: Contacts increased, interest increased, and print runs grew along with that. At some point, though, I ran into the situation where I was doing a lot of trading with other labels, and I started accumulating multiple copies of the same release. It was no longer enough just to have my own listening copy. That’s when the distro [distribution], the record shop side of things, started quite naturally. That was sort of the second leap, after which everything really began to branch out. Extremely interesting tinkering.

JV: “Branching out” really is a good word – organic expansion.

VK: Yes. There was no original intention as such; it just carried me along.

JV: Thinking about the early days of the Satatuhatta label – perhaps also in relation to the nature of noise itself – I noticed that when Satatuhatta releases started appearing, there was still a strong influence from the early-2000s Finnish power electronics⁶ style. It felt like Satatuhatta stood apart from that, and that this was at least one factor contributing to a shift toward focusing more on sound itself, on a more abstract, sound-oriented form of noise and on exploring sound textures. Do you agree that something like this kind of development took place?

VK: Yes, very much so – especially over the last five or six years. I’ve noticed new projects popping up like mushrooms after rain, and they rely on something other than just transgression, which noise musicians used to emphasize much more strongly. Of course, you can’t say that every production was like that, but like you mentioned – what dominated in the early 2000s and earlier decades – did play a bigger role. When I listened to a lot of noise earlier on, I used to wonder why there always had to be a certain kind of imagery, certain kinds of black-and-white covers. It was somehow tied to the genre. I found that odd, because I personally experienced noise as a more colorful and even joyful kind of music. There are so many more elements in the sound itself than in extra-musical aspects. My own approach naturally came from my personal preferences and interests. I wanted to make releases that reflected my own tastes. Both styles have their strengths, of course, but at some point, there was a bit of saturation and fatigue.

JV: Maybe there was a sort of latent demand for this [new kind of noise]. As you said, you can think of noise history as having two main strands. If you look at the history of typical Japanese noise, there’s a focus on sound texture or sheer sound pressure as a way of producing effects. On the other hand, there’s the line that comes from Whitehouse or even earlier from Throbbing Gristle, where you position yourself antagonistically toward “normal” culture or the mainstream.

VK: Yeah, and they’re extremely effective projects and still really good in their own context. But when later projects come along where the imagery and the sound don’t really correlate, or when the music becomes familiar enough that you begin to expect it – it becomes predictable. And that applies to pretty much anything.

JV: Desensitization. If you rely only on feedback and screaming, at some point its impact starts to fade.

VK: I don’t know how a very colorful or cheerful theme would even fit with Whitehouse... Although their later records were a bit more colorful, of course.

JV: Right, different priorities. What I was thinking about is that if you try to characterize noise as sound, it’s precisely the abundance of detail – the feeling that it’s not fully under the listener’s control and that it overflows your senses because of the multiplicity of textures. Noise based on that might withstand repeated listening better than the sharper, clearer Whitehouse-

⁶ Power electronics is a style derived from late 1970s industrial music originators such as Throbbing Gristle and SPK that utilizes imagery and themes of oppressive power in an ambiguously critical, yet somewhat celebratory manner. Perhaps the first power electronics act is Whitehouse, formed in 1980, that took the shock tactics of industrial music to new level with themes of genocide, sadism, abuse *et cetera*. In Finland, Mikko Aspa’s project Grunt and his record label Freak Animal, as well as Pasi Markkula’s Bizarre Uproar (and later his label Filth & Violence) were major proponents of the Finnish noise scene from mid-1990s onward.

type method. When information comes in excess, that's where something emerges that art philosophy would call the sublime: an experience that feels overwhelming, that you can't fully grasp. That's where the appeal of noise-as-sound seems to lie.

VK: Yes. In a certain kind of harsh noise, the flood of information is so dense that you always pick out slightly different things. The listening volume also matters a lot. At a low volume it can sound very different than when listened to very loudly, and each listen can sound different because it's so amorphous and yet still has a certain core. Your state of mind can also influence it. If it's pure chaos, the senses try to form structures that may not be findable – or may not even exist. You hear it differently depending on your own preferences, like all music. Of course you need to train your “noise ear” as well, to learn how to enjoy it – how to pick out and find things you like.

JV: When we talk about the listener's control over sound, I'm also thinking about it from the maker's perspective. You have experience with that. What's your relationship to sound material when making noise music? Is everything under your control, or are you aiming for a situation where the sound slightly gets out of hand?

VK: The best situation is when you're balancing on the edge – when things are about to get out of hand, but you can still somehow keep them under control. That's the most dangerous and at the same time the most fertile situation – both as a creator and as a listener. For the creator it might be terrifying, but for the listener it's ideal. That edge where it might fail – or might just rise to a higher level. As a creator I want to be in control; full improvisation would be horrifying to me. With Aprapat, I'd say I know what I'm doing about 70–80 percent of the time, and there's a small margin for improvisation even in live situations – the set is given room to live. With The New Boyfriends it's almost the opposite: it's nearly completely improvised. It's a bit like jazz – you agree on themes and return to them now and then, but otherwise it's entirely improvised.

JV: Since this came up, I haven't seen The New Boyfriends live, only some video recordings. How much control do you have on stage? It looks like someone might get hurt when scrap metal is flying around, there's a concrete mixer going and you're shoveling metal junk with a pitchfork.

VK: It is under control, and it has to be. Of course the risk factor increases when there's that kind of chaos, but the situation is very carefully thought out in advance and safety comes first, basically. So it's not total chaos, even if it looks like it – and of course it partly is, and when you get swept up in it and it takes over, then sure, you let loose. But even if the stage is full of junk, every piece of metal and every element has been tested individually. Everything has a function – it's not junk for the sake of junk; every piece has its own sound. More is more, and that's how different sounds emerge. Especially in recording situations, but also live. It is a kind of throwing-around, but your senses have to stay alert. The worst situations have actually been when junk starts rolling off the stage and flying back onto it [thrown by the audience]. That's something you can't control yourself. There have been a few really scary moments. When we played at Flow Festival,⁷ I nearly panicked mid-set because the smoke machine pumped out so much smoke that you couldn't see anything. We had to stumble around blindly and throw around metal junk, which led to a few dangerous situations – but luckily the organizers noticed themselves that it wasn't wise to add more smoke into the mayhem. But nothing has actually happened yet. It's like any construction site: safety first.

JV: A very good principle in that situation. Thinking about Aprapat – have the live

⁷ Flow Festival in Helsinki is one of the biggest music festivals in Finland, thus placing The New Boyfriends' performance there in 2023 undoubtedly among the highest profile noise concerts even internationally. A link to video recording of the concert can be found in The New Boyfriends: *Live and Dangerous 3* CD release (SATATUHATTA-111, 2025). An audience video recording from a smaller scale event at 2024 Narraus festival in Pori, Finland, is available at <https://youtu.be/00kbHpncCck?si=7Klbr5NWtxF7C54t>

performances evolved or changed over time?

VK: Definitely. For a long time I thought I wouldn't even do live performances with Aprapat, because I couldn't figure out how to translate the process into a live context. Recorded Aprapat and live Aprapat were almost like two different things. There was a three-year break in recording, and live performance took on a bigger role. Maybe in the future the live side will start feeding back into the recording side. I got a lot of help with recording and with thinking about the project as a whole – how to look at it and at my own work. Playing live is incredibly educational. I more or less got the technical setup together in one go for the first gig, and it hasn't changed that much since – some elements have been added. There was also a lot of scrap metal stuff in Aprapat, and I thought about how to bring that to the stage, but luckily, I have The New Boyfriends where I can throw junk around, so I don't want to bring that same thing into the solo project. The solo work functions more through tape manipulations, although there's always a bit of a physical element present, and I've been bringing that in more. It's constantly evolving, and you're always coming up with new things that might work better. Experimental music in general is always searching for new perspectives on how to develop, so that it doesn't just repeat itself.

JV: I remember a visually striking element at the *Viimaa ja villasukkia* concert in Lahti, where you were pouring crushed glass.⁸

VK: Yeah, there was a big tub of crushed glass. Glass is one of my favorite elements in general, and it's been used a lot in noise. There's really no finer sound. The way particles, glass granules and shards, sound when you handle them – you can influence the sound a great deal – whether you rub the shards against something, what size they are, and so on. There are an enormous number of different possibilities. What I've been using at recent shows is a metal trough into which I pour crushed glass. I thought for a long time about what else I could do also in terms of visual appearance, because live solo noise is otherwise quite restrained. This made it possible to create a certain visual impact, plus a sound source that is something other than pre-recorded material. The process is more or less the same as how I record for releases as well.

JV: When performing – what is your relationship to the audience? Do you react to or take into account the kind of atmosphere there is on the audience's side?

VK: Not very much. I don't even dare to look at the audience! I have a bit of stage fright, and performing is always slightly tense. I just focus on my own thing. Sometimes I might glance up. You do sense the atmosphere in a live situation, but it takes quite a lot of concentration to keep your focus on what you're doing, so that your thoughts don't start wandering too much.

JV: And of course, when you have a technical setup like that, you also have to keep it under control somehow.

VK: You really have to listen very carefully. Monitor speakers play a crucial role in being able to hear what you're actually doing – so that you're not playing blindly.

JV: And noise gigs can take place in very different kinds of venues. I've seen Aprapat myself in many different spaces. That affects how close the audience is to the performer, and so on – what you can even do there.

VK: Yes, absolutely. There are a lot of small, intimate spaces where people are standing right next to the table. They're watching at arm's length what's being done with the equipment. Of course they can also be further away, but generally these are intimate spaces. It's quite nice that they're places you don't often encounter elsewhere.

JV: That's probably one reason why noise performances can get by with relatively small setups, since most acts are one-person configurations. You don't need a proper stage like with a

⁸ The concert with a six-artist lineup was held on 22nd of February 2025 in Vaahterasali, Lahti, Finland. The Finnish language concert title *Viimaa ja villasukkia* translates as “icy winds and woollen socks”.

band.

VK: Yeah – just enough tables! This classic...

JV: ...noise table!

VK: Exactly. We were somewhere – maybe in Norway – where they had reserved a huge amount of time for changing setups between sets, maybe even half an hour. We just said: reserve three tables for us, and that's it – five minutes and we're done. In a place like that they hadn't even considered that this is how it works.⁹

JV: That kind of efficiency has probably been refined in noise circles...

VK: ...maximized efficiency.

JV: Based on this, it probably hasn't occurred to you to adopt a transgressive relationship to the audience in performance, which has been one possible strategy in the history of noise. Things like Hanatarash driving a bulldozer through a venue wall, or Einstürzende Neubauten at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, drilling into the floor and cutting railings to pieces with angle grinders.¹⁰ You don't have that kind of tendency to physically engage with the venue or the audience?

VK: No, not really – and I probably wouldn't have the courage in that situation either. That kind of audience engagement has long been a practice in noise, and especially in power electronics. It's partly artificial and also an expected stylistic device. I don't know... When I'm in the audience, I just want to enjoy the performance and not participate in it in any way. From that perspective, it would be insanely annoying if you suddenly had to participate or were forced into it. I also think about my own performances from the audience's point of view – what I myself would want as a listener. Those Hanatarash things are of course interesting as a topic, but especially with The New Boyfriends I explain very carefully to the venue what kind of mess is coming. I don't want to cause unnecessary trouble for anyone. I often bring my own vacuum cleaners and clean the venue afterward.

JV: A ritual of its own. As a side note, in contemporary theater in the previous decade – the 2010s – audience participation was something of a trend. You sat there in the audience feeling slightly tense.

VK: It's a horrible feeling. I've been to performances like that too, but on average the noise listener is a shy, delicate person, so you can't really get people like that to participate in situations like that. It becomes a bit like coercion.

JV: One thing that makes noise music interesting is that it's difficult to define it very strictly on a conceptual level, because it has so many dimensions – and the concept of noise itself is broad. In Finnish, noise is translated as *häily* or *melu*. The former is a term from acoustics: in *häily* there is no periodic vibration that could be assigned a value, such as a specific musical note. *Melu*, on the other hand, relates to reception – it has the dimension of being disturbing. Noise in an artistic or musical context seems to contain both elements, at least in the sense that it uses sound that is not easy to notate and that can only really be grasped by listening. On the other hand, there is also the aspect of disturbance. What do you think – does noise have to include a disturbing element, or something that isn't easily absorbed in reception? If it doesn't have that, does it cease to be noise?

⁹ The “noise table” custom discussed here takes the form of one table per performer, who prepares the necessary setup – audio connections between sound sources, contact microphones, effects pedals and such – well before the start of the performance. In that way switching between performers can be handled quickly.

¹⁰ Hanatarash, a Japanese noise project started by Yamantaka Eye and Mitsuru Tabata, became infamous due to their often dangerous live performances. The bulldozer incident happened in 1985 at a Tokyo club Toritsu Kasei Super Loft. Einstürzende Neubauten – a German industrial band – performed and sparked a near-riot at the ICA in 1984. Description of the Hanatarash performance can be found at <https://disciplinemag.com/features/hanatarash-bulldozer-gig-photo-gallery/> and account of the Einstürzende Neubauten ICA concert at <https://www.electronicssound.co.uk/features/time-machine/einsturzende-neubauten/>

VK: It doesn't cease to be. In principle, noise music is music. For someone, radio playlist rock can be horrible noise if it's disturbing to them. In that case it is noise or an awful racket. As you say, it basically relates to something unpleasant, but that terminology... Noise: *häly* or *melu*... Noise is perfectly fine! Rock music is rock and pop is pop – rock isn't *kivimusiikki*.¹¹ It depends a lot on the listener how it's experienced. If it's experienced as noise, as disturbing racket, then that's what it is – but almost everyone who enjoys noise listens to it as music. It can even function as calming background music, in a way.

JV: Yes, at least at lower sound levels – even harsh noise is almost like white noise.

VK: Exactly, it blends into the background. And even very basic sounds that occur naturally – factory sounds or construction sites – are, in principle, not monotonous, but they can be very calming.

JV: And your own attitude plays a big role.

VK: It plays a role in absolutely everything – how you experience it and how you want to listen to it.

JV: When you focus on something, you start finding more and more details in it. As you've said, listening to noise is in a way a learned skill. Probably a large part of those who encounter noise music for the first time wonder what there is to get out of it. It's an interesting question how the people who become interested in noise are selected and end up getting involved. I don't know if there's necessarily a clear answer, but a fairly broad engagement with music probably provides a foundation for it.

VK: I don't know anyone who immediately likes noise as music in itself. Of course there are probably many people who are drawn to the imagery and the intensity. Coming from heavy metal, for example, you might be looking for those themes – “wow, this is extreme stuff” – and listen thinking “this is good, this is how it should be.” From the academic side, people come in through texture or through the concept of music itself. You can enter that world from many directions. And something that's very present in contemporary noise is the social factor, the live side – that is, there are many people who don't really concentrate on releases at all, but do a lot of live performances. That too is one factor that branches out from other marginal music scenes. I was surprised when there was some noise festival in Denmark last year: I only recognized one or two names among the performers, and there were dozens of artists on the lineup. The threshold for doing it is very low, and the live aspect emphasizes that. There are many ways of getting into the scene. And of course there's also the record-collector aspect.

JV: The sheer number of releases really is remarkable. And this is of course connected to the subcultural aspect – that the threshold for publishing is lower when releases are made independently or at least on a grassroots level.

VK: The threshold is low. There are noise artists who have been active for decades, who are in a way big names, but who are not really in a stronger position than a newcomer. For example, a major artist might release a great record on a big label and not necessarily sell that much or be talked about, while some completely unknown name releases a self-produced cassette run of ten copies, and everyone is in a panic: “Where can I get this?” If it's praised, everyone wants it. Noise can interest anyone – it just has to be good. That's really the only factor. What's emphasized is uniqueness. It's abstract sound, but you can still recognize the creator by their own sound. That's the most important thing in noise – not repeating the same formula or trying to imitate anyone. Maybe like in all music. I don't really separate noise from other music in principle, even though there are of course small cultural nuances. All noise enthusiasts just want to hear more and more

11 One literal translation of rock music would be *kivimusiikki* i.e. “stone music” in Finnish.

sounds.

JV: To wrap up, we could still think about this: when we talked about performing as Aprapat and developing as an artist... You probably adopt certain practices and learn them, and from those a kind of foundation or routine is formed, on top of which you can then develop something new again. But what about as a publisher? That requires quite a lot of discipline to make the process work efficiently. What kind of learning process has that been for you?

VK: A continuous learning process. I started from scratch, and every release has taught new lessons. I want to do things myself. I want to have control. I want to do as much as possible by hand. I want to do the layout myself. The covers always feature the artists' own artwork unless they want me to do it. I had to learn image-editing software from the ground up. Then there's making and duplicating cassettes – of course I'd always messed around with tapes, but when I had a few done at duplication plants, there were always some bad copies mixed in, which started to annoy me immensely. I realized that you can get much better results when you do it all by yourself. Your skill with tape decks and duplicating tapes also develops over time, and you want to improve more and more in that respect too. I've set up various decks, and now I have a pretty good setup that allows me to make cassette releases myself with a fairly low threshold. Of course it's very time-consuming. It requires a lot of care and, as you said, discipline to keep everything under control. And the work doesn't end when you've finished a run of a hundred tapes and sent artist copies – when orders start coming in, that's when you really need discipline to get the releases shipped all over the world as quickly as possible. I'm a record collector myself and order a lot of records, so I want them to arrive as quickly as possible. It's very hard for me to understand situations where you place an order and then the items just hang around somewhere for weeks and weeks without being shipped, because in principle they should be on the way at least the next day. Of course I can't quite manage that myself, but I do try to get packages out within a few days at most. This requires quite a lot of scheduling, because if the process starts to lag, the pile of undone tasks just grows and grows, and it becomes difficult to catch up.

JV: Time management.

VK: Time management – and efficiency. Finding those little shortcuts that make the process more and more efficient. But there's no magic tool that would make the work really fast – your evenings and weekends still go into packing orders. This also affects my own recording work, in that there's less and less time available for it. But it's enjoyable work; otherwise I wouldn't be doing it.

JV: Good that it doesn't feel like a burden.

VK: No, not at all! What would be nicer than tinkering with these releases – cassettes, CDs, and vinyl records. I'd be doing that anyway.

JV: Finally, I'd like to ask a fairly broad question. Do you have any thoughts about the current state or position of noise? It has clearly risen in popularity, and performances and releases are appearing at least at the same pace as during some earlier “golden ages” of noise. Is there something you would expect or hope for – either in terms of content or ways of working – that there could be more of?

VK: It's hard to say what there could be. Noise is probably bigger now than it has ever been. It feels like things are happening everywhere, and there are many people interested in noise. If anything, since it feels easy to start a noise project – and it is easy – you might hope that people would take a bit of time to search for their own voice. The pace of releases is great – it's fantastic that there are more and more releases, and what could be better than records – but maybe to reflect a bit... I can't really speak on behalf of anyone else about what they should do, but perhaps not to think of noise in extra-musical terms – “noise for the sake of making noise” –

but, like in all art, to bring your own unique contribution. Especially new artists should try to find their own voice and sound that genuinely interests them. It's easy to let a distortion pedal buzz and call it noise, but what makes it stand out from the mass is your own sound, your own preferences. That's something you could sit down with and take time to find. Although, I don't know – this can also tip over into overthinking, and then some of the very best things might never happen. Many classics were just thrown together without really knowing what was being done, and they sound absolutely fucking great.

JV: At least then you're not playing it safe – you're taking risks – but there's also the risk of failure.

VK: You have to take risks! Also in publishing policy. But right now the situation is really pleasant from the listener's and noise enthusiast's point of view. There's a lot of material, a lot of live gigs, a lot of releases, new artists constantly emerging, and older artists reviving their activity – so what's not to like? It doesn't need to go anywhere else. Just more noise for people to hear. More crossover gigs and more noise into the mainstream. There's no need to listen in isolated trenches. Noise really does belong to everyone.

JV: And you could also think that this allows the sharing of surprise and a sense of newness again, when it's not only the scene insiders who already know everything.

VK: That's important – exposure to new things as well.

JV: This has been a very positive perspective, so let's end on that note, without any complaints at the end, because as you said, the situation is currently very active, with new artists emerging and older ones producing great material.

VK: Yes. And one more thing: when new artists emerge, what I've noticed in recent years is that the material is already very mature. There's a lot of noise listening behind it; people know what they want to sound like. You're honestly taken aback by how good it can be – records that would be considered absolute classics if they had been released in the 1990s are now coming out as demos.

JV: So the field is alive and well – renewing itself, and the foundations are solid. Okay, let's end here. Thank you!

VK: Thank you!

3. Commentary

Is noise music *music*? Noise and music as terms seem to be opposed in many cases – noise as unstructured sound,¹² unwanted or interfering disturbance versus music as the art of arranging sounds in time in order to produce an aesthetically valuable experience. Yet, from the perspective of production and reception, noise music can well be considered as one genre of music, since it shares the medium, content and practices with other musical genres. There are artists making noise music, playing it in a live concert setting, making and publishing audio records. This point of view comes up convincingly in Vilho Koivisto's interview, and it is true that noise has many affinities with other forms of experimental music and subcultural genres such as ambient, electronic music, extreme metal, hardcore punk, industrial *et cetera*, all characterized by DIY approach to making and distributing music, arranging performances and spreading information.

What, then, distinguishes noise music as a particular category? Here a perspective relevant to somaesthetics can be glimpsed. Noise music, like any other music, is intentionally produced organized sound – even though in noise music the level of organization may often be nearly

12 Experimental musician Bruce Russell (2009, 23) refers to “an area between other forms of music where all of the ‘rules’ which hold them apart cease to apply. All musics bleed into this Empty Quarter, some exist more within, and some more without, its bounds. i) Being beyond ‘music’, it is noise. ii) Being beyond ‘rules’, it is free.”

non-existent and the method chaotic. But, in my estimation, what is distinct to noise music is the challenge it presents to the anticipatory structure through which music is customarily recognized and enjoyed. In his influential theory of anticipation, musicologist Leonard B. Meyer argues in *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956) that musical pleasure arises from the play of expectation: listeners internalize stylistic norms as anticipatory habits, and emotion is generated when those expectations are delayed, fulfilled, or violated. Music moves us because it shapes and manipulates our predictions in time, creating tension and release through the confirmation or disruption of what we have learned to expect.

Renowned Norwegian experimental noise musician Lasse Marhaug describes the noise/music relation succinctly: “Noise is about the sound itself, and how you structure that sound is what defines it as music” (Marhaug 2013, 129). In noise music, the element of noise – the presence of sound-in-itself – is highlighted. Also the musical structure tends to be obscured or overwhelmed by the material presence of complex and/or loud sound, shifting the reception from intellectual anticipation to affective, bodily experience in the present moment. This would align noise music with somaesthetic considerations where aesthetic experience is understood as fundamentally grounded in the lived, sensing body’s immediacy rather than in cerebral contemplation. In the case of noise as a source of aesthetic experience, it is exactly the sublime overflow or overload of the senses that produces, in Koivisto’s words, “the best situation ... when you’re balancing on the edge – when things are about to get out of hand, but you can still somehow keep them under control. That’s the most dangerous and at the same time the most fertile situation.”

Thus, even though with noise music one encounters a common process of getting acquainted with the art form to understand and appreciate it – a process that Koivisto describes in the interview – the pleasure derived from noise would still be fundamentally immediate and affective. The noise sub-genre of harsh noise wall (HNW) turns this here-and-now temporality of sound’s presence to the maximum: artists such as The Rita (Sam McInlay), Vomir (Romain Perrot) or Richard Ramirez produce monolithic, unchanging sound “walls” of static noise. In HNW sound is pushed beyond representation of forms into pure material presence, evidently tactile one, due to the high sound pressure literally pushing against the audience. There is no narrative progression, only duration, intensity, and immersion. However, focusing on this sound monolith reveals the layers of different frequencies that compose the wall-like constant timbre, making the aesthetic experience similar to contemplating drone music, or in a different medium, a minimalist sculpture or color field painting where being present in the actual moment is key.

Drawn from the above paragraphs, I suggest that what is at stake in noise music is sound pushed beyond representation into pure material presence. *Embodied sound*. Embodied as meaning both sound revealed as vibratory force pushing air and our bodies as the receivers of that material movement. Sound pressure forces the audience and the performers to confront their thresholds of comfort. Awareness of the body as a space of connection and reception is increased and the model of passive listening is being challenged. *Complex sound*. Complex as chaotic, non-standard frequencies interacting to create previously unheard timbres and bringing about new kinds of affects.

Some scholars seek to position noise in an antagonistic relation to music in order for noise to remain noise, a kind of music’s adversary (see e.g. Hegarty 2022). Yet, if we take heed of at least some noise musicians, such as Koivisto and Marhaug above, noise for them seems intertwined with music in terms of medium (sounds, more or less noisy), practices (playing, recording, distributing) and appreciation (aesthetic pleasure). The view of Koivisto and Marhaug (and many others) is inclusive: we encounter sound-as-noise in every musical structure and structure-as-

music in the noisiest sonic manifestation. In my interpretation, it is this potential emergence of noise in every auditory context that Koivisto means by stating that noise really belongs to everyone.

References

Hegarty, P. (2022). “Noise Not Music.” In *Noise as a Constructive Element in Music: Theoretical and Music-Analytical Perspectives*, edited by Mark Delaere. Routledge.

Marhaug, L. (2013). “Lasse Marhaug.” In *Noise in and as Music*, edited by Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond. University of Huddersfield Press.

Meyer, L. B. (1956). *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. University of Chicago Press.

Russell, B. (2009). “What is Free? – A free noise manifesto.” In *Left-handed blows: Writing on sound 1993–2009*.