Mediation through Noise:

Experimental Music in China

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the MA degree in Chinese Studies

Author: Gabriele de Seta

Address: Kloosterpoort 189, 2312EM Leiden

Phone: 0031 634219929 / 0039 3295737043

E-mail: notsaved@hotmail.it

Major: Chinese Studies (MA)

Student ID: s1047639

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Cover picture: Li Jianhong playing solo at Yuyintang, 2009.

Acknowledgements and Conventions

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This essay uses the Hanyu Pinyin system of Romanization for Chinese words, names and phrases, except in instances when a preferred alternative spelling exists (for example, most Hong Kong and Taiwanese personal names). I provide the Chinese characters on the first mention of relevant terms. Characters for personal names, band names, names of events, websites and places are listed in the glossary.

In writing the essay, I relied on several interviews collected in diverse periods of fieldwork in Shanghai and Beijing between 2007 and 2010. All the direct and indirect quotes from these interviews are referenced in-text as (name, interview, year). Details about the interviews do not appear in the bibliography but are listed in a separate appendix.

Except when noted, all translations are mine. Since I am not conducting a detailed linguistic discourse analysis of the quoted sources, I have edited some English statements by non-English speakers in order to make them more readable.

Most of the pictures are retrieved through the Internet and copyrighted. When not specified, pictures are by the author.

Introduction: What are those eggs for?

There is no proper stage: in the center of the well-lighted room, a young man sits on a plastic chair, as most of the audience. His head is wrapped in a transparent plastic bag slowly filling with steam, his closed fists moving in jittery arcs and short rhythmic patterns above his knees. At his feet, under the flickering shadow of his ecstatic gestures, twelve eggs are arranged as two inverted triangles on newspaper pages lying open on the floor. A second musician stands behind the sitting man and rips newspapers apart, methodically but visibly enraged, his face masked by tight nylon stockings. Paper strips fall slowly on the floor, forming a soft heap. After a while, he moves around the chair, grabs the eggs on the floor and smashes them on the wood parquet one by one. He kneels, rubbing his masked face and his hands into raw egg, throwing other eggs around the hall. Then he starts to stagger in circle, touching the hair of audience members with his slimy hands, rubbing his face against theirs, heading back to the heap and flinging paper strips in the air. After ten minutes of asphyxia-driven trance, the sitting performer – Beijing-based musician Li Zenghui – opens his raised fists and lets two other eggs fall down to the ground. He lifts the plastic bag a little over his chin and spits raw egg out of his mouth, as if he was hatching it in his own steaming breath for the whole show. In the same moment Junky, the Shanghai-based artist who had been shredding newspapers, shuts down the playback device, plunging the room into silence, and leaves the hall with the nylon stockings still deforming his face into the grin of a bank robber.

What has been stolen, seemingly, is the causality of sound: an immobile and unchanging wall of distorted hum had been coming out of the stereo speakers during the whole performance, resonating in the empty hall as a inevitable sensory blockade. On the one hand, Li Zenghui seemed to control the distorted hum by waving the eggs hidden in his clenched fists, and his slow asphyxiation acted the constant wall of noise out visually. On the other hand, Junky repeated a physically and culturally noisy action that involved the refusal of information and the negation of the causality of sound.

Newspapers were destroyed and scattered around, but the action was completely immersed in the background noise and no perceivable sound could reach the audience. It was a concert in which noise and music, recorded and performed, visible and audible questioned one another.

Fig. 0.1 Li Zenghui and Junky's performance at the 0 Art Center in May 2010 (copyright Junky)

Li and Junky's performance during the Mini Midi Festival 2010 Shanghai Station is just one example of experimental music in China. I chose it as the opening example because it introduces the central theme of these pages: mediation through noise. I define mediation as a practice of negotiation between two agents through a medial object. Mediation operates through a medium to reconcile the extremes of material, historical, social, cultural or economical oppositions. I identify noise as the core concept around which the negotiating practices of experimental music in China are structured.

Mediation through noise is a strategy at play in many aspects of Li Zenghui and Junky's performance. First and foremost, the actions of the performers and the reproduced sounds question and contrast each other, but are not completely disconnected. Eggs and newspapers, as imaginary sources of the noise, mediate the disruption of the causality between live actions and recorded sounds, between the artists and their absent instruments. Secondly, the relationship between the performance and the mass media is also mediated through noise – a noisy action. The methodical destruction of newspapers silenced by the barrage of rumbling sounds embodies the artists' reaction to what they perceive as media brainwashing and information overload. Thirdly, the two musicians' masked faces bring noise at the level of identity. The masks challenge the identity of the performers, and yet mediate their position as disguised protagonists of the performance. Additionally, noise mediates the spaces of performance. Li Zenghui and Junky do not perform on a proper stage, and the eggs thrown around the room confront the idea of the venue as a hierarchic and constraining live space. Eggs and newspapers scattered around, together with the invasive actions of the musicians, challenge the mediation of the stage. The performance is noisy on many different levels, and on the whole aspires to defy established mediations through an ideal of immediacy. I will analyze this immediacy adapting Auslander's concept of 'liveness' to the circumstances under which Chinese experimental musicians and audiences form and perform a community.

I broadly define experimental music as music that transgresses conventional boundaries. Experimental music defies the conventions of time, harmony, narrative, instruments, identity and space, extending the definition of music to unorthodox paradigms of composition, performance and listening. Experimental music has dealt with these problematics on many occasions and in many places. Since ten years, the PRC has also added its voice into the mix. An experimental music scene has flourished in the Chinese underground culture in tandem with decade of profound social and economical change. Just as Li Zenghui and Junky with their eggs and newspapers, many other artists approach and perform experimental music as a way to challenge boundaries and defy established mediation. What are the strategies that Chinese experimental musicians employ to mediate through noise?

I will answer to this question throughout three chapters. The first chapter introduces experimental music in China and explains how it defies the concept of harmony, using noise as a central strategy in direct opposition to the mediation of the state. The second chapter focuses on the musicians' ways to employ noise against the mediation of conservatories and other official institutions, as well as against the established mediation of mass media. The third chapter extends the analysis to how experimental music struggles to resolve the relationship between live and mediatized. Through the constant mediatization of liveness and enlivenment of the mediatized, the experimental community favors the immediacy and intimacy of small-scale communions. At the same time, thriving on the Internet, it also experiments with a potentially boundless and thoroughly mediated form of online liveness. The noisy attrition between these two ideals of community sparkles new forms of interaction between musicians and audiences.

This essay is based on fieldwork conducted in Beijing and Shanghai between 2007 and 2010, but also on online sources, for virtual spaces are a fundamental component of the geography of experimental music in China. For example, a user of the online community Douban, in response to the picture of Li Zenghui and Junky shown above, posts a comment that summarizes the core question of this research in practical terms. He/She asks: What are those eggs for?

2010-05-06 20:56:11: 舔血蟻子 (viva la vida)

这些蛋蛋是干嘛用的呀~

Fig. 0.2 A Douban user comments to Figure 0.1, asking: «What are those eggs for?»

Chapter One: Underground Experiments

<div align="right">

The 30's was a laid-back melody

The 40's a tender threnody

The 50's had that vigorous feel

As all the nation smelted steel

The 60's sang "going down to the country"

The 70's model operas were revolutionary

The 80's was breakdance but that's not all

There was a fever for rock and roll

Still there's many songs to sing

What's the 90's gonna bring?[1]

</div>

And what about the 00's? De Kloet identifies a joint performance of NO, The Fly and Zi Yue in 1996 as the public birth of noise and underground in China (de Kloet 2010:43). The poet, sound artist and music critic Yan Jun sees the year 1997 as the moment when the new concept *dixia yaogun* 地下摇滚 'underground rock' gained currency (Groenewegen 2005:26). Groenewegen defines the relevant lexicon:

«The term underground 地下 is widely used in China, long before 1997. In China underground, together with several other terms, is one segment of the broad spectrum of cultural products. This spectrum positions cultural products in society, and reflects interpretation, valuation and consumption. Some of the related terms are mass 大众, popular 通俗/流行, people's 民间, (un)official (非)官方, (non)mainstream (非)主流, and avant-garde 先锋/前卫 culture. Many of these terms overlap, both with each other and with underground» (28).

Between the end of the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium, the Chinese underground was a thriving stratification of subcultures that shared a common environment of non-mainstream, unofficial production and dissemination, mapped

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[1] Xie Chengqiang, music and lyrics, *Jiushi niandai zenmeyang* ('What's the nineties gonna bring?'), Linda Jaivin, trans., in Jones (1992:9).

unto the variety of *dakou* 打口 'saw-cut' import records that flooded the alternative market during the decade before. After the first and second generation of rock artists influenced by the idea of social responsibility that Cui Jian calls *yaogun yishi* 摇滚意识 'rock consciousness' (Jones 1992:23, 115), the following third generation feasted on huge amounts of *dakou* records, widening its sensibilities and styles. Punk, metal, indie rock, no wave, hip hop and various other genres emerged as new voices of a modern and cosmopolitan generation (Croll 2006:229). Probably as a reaction to the appearance of rock in big festivals and mainstream media, Yan Jun defines the ideal behind the rebellious and marginal lifestyle of the *dakou* generation as *dixia jingshen* 地下精神 'underground spirit', opposing it to the rock consciousness, perceived as ossified and corrupted after the popular co-optation (Groenewegen 2005:26; de Kloet 2010:21). Many of the titles of his music critique and review books – from *Noises Inside* 内心的噪音 (2000) to *Under-underground* 地地下 (2002) and *Burning Noise* 燃烧的噪音(2004) – relate to a new idea of authenticity that describes a flourishing peripheral underground animated by sincere and passionate noises.

The cyclical genealogy of rebellion and cooptation is just one version of the story. Even if critics have considered Chinese rock distant from the spirit of the 1990s and corrupted by commercialism (de Kloet 2010:18-19), it was because the paradigms of authenticity shifted through the years, adapting to different aesthetics of rebellion. For the majority of Chinese rock music, the commercial did not quite displace the political (19). Commercialization just provided the musicians with a wider range of aesthetics. In the same way, in the first decade of the 2000s, the underground idea of authenticity brought the political into music in a noisier, sarcastic and absurdist fashion (de Kloet 2010:19, 50). I argue that experimental music carries this stance to the extreme, using noise as sabotage and chaos as confrontation in order to set up new forms of mediation.

1.1 Beyond the Underground

«No more symphonies or string quartets with self-Orientalizing titles and pentatonic motifs. In fact, you won't hear one Chinese instrument here. The incredibly wide range of styles covers everything from plunderphonics, musique concrete, experimental electronics, ambient, sample collage, plug-in modulation, text-sound, sound poetry, mixer feedback improv, hardcore noise, radio art, political satire, to post-concrete recording art documenting a family karaoke scene. This is only the beginning of something unpredictable»

(Yao Dajuin, presentation of *China – The Sonic Avantgarde* compilation, 2003)

The turning point of the new phase I focus on, as both Groenewegen (2005:26) and Karkowski and Yan (2007) point out, can be situated between 2003 and 2004, when various events and releases signal the birth of a cohesive community. In July 2003, Yao Dajuin's Post Concrete label published *China – The Sonic Avantgarde*, a double-CD compilation that represents the first comprehensive collection of experimental music in China. The Sounding Beijing Festival organized by Yao Dajuin in late 2003 and the first edition of the 2pi Festival organized in Hangzhou by Li Jianhong are considered as the first breakthrough events for Chinese experimental musicians (Karkowski and Yan 2007). In 2004 the publishing platform Sub Jam, created by Yan Jun in 2001 and devoted to «publication, dissemination and organization in the fields of underground music, independent films and new literature» (Yan 2008), discontinues its operations. Born as an underground rock fanzine in 1998, Sub Jam became one of the first independent labels in China, releasing works of underground rock artists like Tongue, P.K. 14 and the experimental pioneer Wang Fan. Following the increasing differentiation of the underground scene into dynamic genres and subcultures, a small group of artists – including Wu Quan, Wang Fan and the electronic ambient duo FM3 – coalesced around the activities of Sub Jam and, together with Yan Jun, decided to channel their musical output through a new label more focused on abstract soundscapes, experimental ambient and sound art: the new label Kwanyin Records was born. Since 2004, Kwanyin produced records and organized events, including the weekly showcase Waterland Kwanyin and the Mini Midi 2010 Festival described in the introduction.

Fig. 1.1 The cover art of *China – The Sonic Avantgarde* compilation (copyright Post Concrete)

Seven years later, Chinese experimental music appears as the outcome of parallel efforts by many different labels, artists, collectives, venues, organizations and fanbases, each contributing with a personal voice to the construction of a shapeshifting community. Kwanyin, 2pi, Nojiji, ShaSha, Lona Records, Brainwave Communication, NoiseAsia, Doufu Records and other labels disseminate a wide array of sounds, from the spiritual ambient of Wang Fan or FM3 and the subdued improvisations of Dou Wei's countless ensembles to the corrosive squeals of Li Jianhong's guitar feedback and the nihilistic anti-musical noise of Torturing Nurse. Even if Yan Jun laments the disappearance of the underground scene saying that «There is no underground music in China anymore» (interview, 2009), these labels and artists definitely operate inside a cohesive underground community, with print runs of few hundred copies and intimate shows attended by few dozens of audience members. Moreover, the experimental community has become a fixture in the Chinese music scene. The *Encyclopedia of Chinese Rock 'n Roll* 中国摇滚手册 published in 2006 clearly perceives experimental music as separated from the rock scene (Li 2006). In

keeping with its rock orientation, the *Encyclopedia* only lists those experimental musicians who begun their career in underground rock bands at the beginning of the decade, and it doesn't include full-blown experimental acts such as Torturing Nurse, that have been active since 2004 and had already released more than ten records by 2006. Experimental music thus remains on the borders of the Chinese underground scene and is organized as a structure of small-scale units interacting and cooperating. Through alternative distribution and performance channels and Internet-based networking, the experimental music community reflects the heteroglossia, complexity and ambivalence of everyday life in contemporary China. Drawing on the extremization of underground music's noisy and absurdist aesthetics, it interweaves opposites and thus triggers the implosion of regimes of language and meaning (de Kloet 2010:200).

Andrew Jones famously compared Western rock to a flood, and Chinese rock to a knife pointed at social problems (Jones 1992:2). Developing this analogy, what would the amorphous and shapeshifting noises of these liminal experimental artists resemble? In other words, how do their experiments mediate between state, society and the individual? How are listeners and critics supposed to make sense of a variety of genres that appear to be engaged with a – sometimes peaceful,[2] sometimes violent – opposition to meaning and music industry?

1.2 Distorting (Social) Harmony

Experimental music in China is almost always completely instrumental and improvised, with no lyrics, rhythmic patterns or sequential structures. For a critic, the risk of textualizing music becomes somehow easier to avoid, being forced to analyze all the explicit and implicit content at the multiple levels of performance, production,

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[2] Steen (1998) links Buddhist elements in some rock songs to the appearance of a new phenomenon or style in Chinese music – a «sincere […] true to life, and self determined» (164) genre that he proposes to call Buddhist Rock. Even if also some experimental musicians use meditative sounds and samples or produce dilated and minimalist ambient soundscapes that might resemble Buddhist temple music, I do not see these elements as indicating the birth of a 'Chinese' variety of experimental music.

aesthetics and reception (Groenewegen 2005:5). What is common on all these levels, I argue, is a shared preference for noise. Noise as disorder, excess and disturbance, the unwanted other of music, is an important part of the confrontational toolbox of rock music (Hegarty 2010:4-5), an element that many Chinese experimental artists, members of the *dakou* generation, are quite accustomed with. With its fondness for free improvisation, loudness and unconventional sound sources (or the unconventional use of conventional instruments), experimental music engages with noise as a strategy of confrontation, freed from the rhythms and structures of rock. Even if today the word 'noise' itself defines a specific genre of extreme post-industrial electronic music, being noisy – employing noise as disruption, as musical negativity – is a common trait of many experimental artists, even when they are engaging with folk or rock, such as the tribal folk collective Ong or the improvised rock unit Mafeisan.

But noise it not a fixed ontological category. As Frith differentiates, «music is an ordered pattern of sounds in the midst of a vast range of more or less disorderly aurality. Music is marked out as different from noise; as our sense of noise changes, so does our sense of music» (Frith 1996:100). Noise and music are culturally and historically defined. What Torturing Nurse's shapeshifting wall of noise, VagusNerve's crackling electronics or Yan Jun's isolationist silences and throbbing bass frequencies have in common is their improvised nature and saturated distortions, that set them in opposition to the current idea of music as orderly and harmonic. For its lack of harmony, hooks and structures, experimental music is perceived as a physical weight of the noise impacting on the body of the listener. Baudrillard calls this kind of weight «the characteristic most deprived of meaning, the stupidest, the least cultural one» (1994:69). The fact that improvised and distorted sonic chaos fills up the aural field and drives out musicality, meaning and established mediations does not entail, anyhow, a nihilistic despairing of signification; it just defers the burden of signification to the kind of unrestrained and non-virtuosistic improvisation pioneered by free jazz. Improvisational noise, through its inbuilt transactions of power between performers and audience produces meaning, nonmeaning or many simultaneous meanings that destroy each other (40), paving the ground for new forms of mediation. Experimental

music requires the audience to come to terms with a different paradigm of listening to decode the interweaving of opposites and the impact of noise.

In Chinese thought, the idea of noise has similar connotations. Confucius warns against two dangerous kinds of music: the loud and jarring chaos on one side, the lewd and pleasing melody on the other; both are to avoid, since they disturb harmony (de Kloet 2010:180). From ancient Chinese philosophy to contemporary political thought, the ideal of *hexie* 和谐 'harmony and order' that a wise sovereign had to pursue to preserve wealth and stability has been constantly pitched against the fearful *luan* 乱, the state of chaos and disorder caused by hedonism, lack of virtue, moral corruption and disdain for traditional values. Traditionally, harmony was maintained through *li* 礼 rites and *yue* 乐 music, directly connecting social order with ritual and musical performance. In recent times, under Hu Jintao's presidency, *hexie shehui* 和谐社会 'harmonious society' and *hexie shijie* 和谐世界 'harmonious world' have become the defining national and foreign policy discourses of the Chinese Communist Party (Zheng 2007:1). Moreover the word *hexie*, intensively promoted and broadcasted by the government as a social ideal, underwent an ironical slippage of meaning: in Internet jargon and youth slang, being 'harmonized' (*bei hexie le* 被和谐了) means to be censored for disturbing social harmony. It is an ironic lexical appropriation given that in Chinese, as de Kloet points out, there was «no real equivalent for the word censorship» (2010:215). Even if not explicit, all the online content that is considered 'poisonous to the minds of people' – basically politics (defamation, sedition, subversion), sex (obscenity, indecency) and sensitive national issues – is in danger of 'harmonization' through deletion of content, user accounts or permanent interdiction from the service (183).

As an interplay of saturating distortion and transactional improvisation against harmonization, noise evidently relates with the lexicon of chaos and unruliness. It is not by chance that NOIShanghai, the staple monthly experimental live show in Shanghai is *nao Shanghai* 闹上海, and the Beijing-based label Nojiji is called *nao jiji* 闹唧唧. The character *nao* 闹 refers by aural association to a chaotic and lively (*renao* 热闹) environment. Noise as a musical genre is translated as *zaoyin* 噪音, and *zao* 噪 and

luan 乱 are common adjectives in experimental performance and record reviews. Thanks to the "least cultural" power of volume saturation and improvised noise, experimental music creates peripheral spaces that contrast the mass-mediated stimuli and imposed meanings of *hexie shehui*. It engages with chaos and noise through the freedom of improvisation, to drive out meaning through the mediation of unmeaning – even if bound to fail spectacularly, its ideal is a noise that cannot be harmonized. As such, experimental music is by no means pointed and sharp like a knife: its blunt and noisy formlessness infects spaces and interstices like Burroughs' words, virally. The contagion of noisiness spreads to Xie Chengqiang's song, voicing the sound of the new decade:

> What's the 00's gonna bring?
> sder+sder+PPP K+++ enxmanucocnemonzone[3]

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[3] Inspired by the absurdist song titles from D!O!D!O!D!'s album *Ghost Temple*.

Chapter Two: Inept Amateurs and Critical Machines

Who makes Chinese experimental music? I argue that experimental musicians are amateurs. In the following pages I first define the ideal of amateurship and identify the similarities of its role in experimental music and in folk music revivals. Secondly, I discuss how these amateur musicians structure their relationship with musical instruments. In the third part of this chapter I analyze how the ideal of amateurship is wielded as a critique of formal education. The fourth section deals with the critical visual and verbal aesthetics of experimental music and their function as a site of national and global negotiation.

2.1 Amateur Pioneers

Many experimental musicians have played in rock bands or composed electronic music. Li Jianhong published his solo experimental debut in 2004. The album was the turning point of a career beginning in 1999 with the art-rock band Second Skin (Li 2006:76-7) and continued in 2003 with the noise rock duo D!O!D!O!D!. Junky, now half of Torturing Nurse, was the drummer of no-wave/noise rock band Junkyard, active between 2000 and 2004 (Li 2006:156-7). Zhou Pei (also known as Ronez and Radiocore Blowjob) started making electronic music in 1999, and still names rock and psychedelic music as the primary influences on his experimental works: «In fact I rarely listen to noise stuff from other people, I most often listen to rock music and some psychedelic/weird stuff» (interview, 2009). Wang Fan, one of the first Chinese experimental musicians, played commercial music, rock, alternative rock and electronic music before beginning to experiment with noise and ambient soundscapes (Yan 2002:20).

The musicians coming from underground rock, punk or electronic music often motivate their experimental production as a move beyond rock and as a search for true flexibility and freedom. The improviser and composer Dou Wei frames this issue

as a question of authenticity: «there is no good or bad music, there is only true 真 music and false 假 music» (Anonymous 2010). Even when experimental artists acknowledge their connection with the rock discourse, they still see rock musicians as creatively constrained by scales, rhythms and displays of virtuosity. «Of course noise comes from hardcore [English in original] and free improvisation, but it feels even more free» (interview with Junky, 2009).

Other performers, including Yan Jun and Wu Quan, have had a literary, visual art or design education and approach experimental music without formal musical training or prior experience in making music. Experimental music offers them relatively easy access to the stage, thus expanding their artistic or literary interests to include performance and sound. Yan Jun explains: «In 2004, I started doing field recordings and sampling […] and creating [music]. I've listened to a lot of music, but I don't have any basic musical education, so there is nothing else [i.e. no established format or official institution] influencing what I do» (interview, 2009). Also these multidisciplinary artists mobilize experimental music for the exploration of a new kind of authenticity: «After that trip to Europe I was very excited. When I came back to Beijing I started to organize more small-scale concerts, but I realized we didn't want to schedule our performances after rock shows anymore. I thought that we needed a space that belonged to us, a more pure atmosphere» (Yan Jun, in Josh 2010).

Chinese conservatories do not have curricula in experimental improvisation or noise music yet, and it is rare to meet classically trained professional musicians at noise performances. Karkowski and Yan recognize that Chinese academic art music «experienced a stable existence, relatively speaking, and is today integrated into contemporary music worldwide in terms of styles and cultural network» (Karkowski and Yan 2007). They define experimental music in opposition to the academic avant-garde, as a non-academic "way of starting from scratch", and stress this independence from universities and conservatories as a fundamental trait of experimental music since its first pioneers: «Wang Fan left the rock scene in Lanzhou and moved to Beijing, where he created arguably China's first real experimental music work […] at that time he knew basically nothing about experimental and avant-garde music and traditions: he just invented what he wanted» (*ibid.*). Experimental performers stress their non-

academic background as part of the paradigm of authenticity, and what I noticed is that the Chinese experimental community can be described as a predominantly amateur scene because most of the musicians are not professionals in the sense of having received formal training. Even the few artists that manage to make a living out of experimental music (and could be called professionals in light of their sheer learn-on-the-job experience) retain an ideological and aesthetical approach to music making and performance that is deeply informed by the amateur ideal.

Frederick Lau defines the word 'amateur' as a code word describing a performer who is untrained and not hired by the government (Lau 2008:25). Even if Lau is talking about the post-1949 shift in the categories of professional and amateur musicians performing Chinese folk traditions (23-7), I find this category fitting to experimental musicians. Most of experimental musicians perform and create music in their spare time, rarely making a living out of the small income they get from shows and record sales. Additionally, there are similarities between the Chinese experimental music scene and the amateur community of traditional teahouse folk ensembles. In the West, folk music revivals are characterized by the ideals of amateurship and thorough refusal of stardom, the creation of an underground market that critiques quotidian commerce (Frith 1996:40), an ideal of collective authenticity, and a constant attempt to deny the separation between audience and performer (41). Similar ideals also characterize the Chinese folk revivals of amateur (*yeyu* 业余 'outside of the industry, non-professional') societies and ensembles (Jones 1995:81). These communities regard amateurship as the source of style, and refuse commercialization and professionalization, regarding them as a loss of authenticity (Thrasher 2004:607, Jones 1995:82). To some extent, these ideals of folk authenticity also inform the Chinese experimental community, and become a part of the research for the "pure feeling" or "pure freedom" mentioned above. Wu Quan notices: «if we say that the Midi festival and other similar events in China bear some resemblance with traditional temple fairs, then the Mini Midi resembles a more pure temple festival» (interview, 2009).

2.2 Reconfiguring Instruments

«It is hardly possible to consider the enormous mobilization of energy that a modern orchestra requires without concluding that the acoustic results are pitiful. Is there anything more ridiculous in the world than twenty men slaving to increase the plaintive meowing of violins?»

(Luigi Russolo 1913, in Bailey 2009:30)

20th century technology blurred the boundaries of noise and music (Frith 1996:100). The digital age has revolutionized the interaction between humans and their tools (Bailey 2009:31). In 2007, Torturing Nurse member Xu Cheng's room in Shanghai was filled with stacks of second-hand guitar combo amplifiers, effect stompboxes, mixers, solid state or MiniDisk recorders, old personal computers, radios, piles of records and dangling audio cables. Once connected to power strips and turned on, the cascading feed of microphones, sound inputs and processors blasted out morphing barrages of noise that could easily compete with the clanging soundscape of the nearest construction site. The multiple channels of effect and feedback loops were interlinked and cascaded in a web of machinery in which sound inputs, interferences and background noise would coalesce and interact like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome (2004:13), a map with multiple entryways (14) in which and the distinction between 'productive' and 'reproductive' instruments (Frith 1996:233) becomes irrelevant.

Experimental improviser Maimai plays his prepared guitar as a node of a more complex network of instruments. The pickups of the semi-acoustic guitar do not only capture the sounds produced by the picking of the strings, but also reverberations and percussions of the hollow body, interferences from metal objects and also the amplified guitar sound itself, that runs through guitar pickups and amplifier speakers, piling up in a high-pitched feedback loop (called Larsen effect). «Form thus becomes an *assemblage*, growth an accumulation of things that have piled-up in the time-space of the piece» (Nyman 1999:30, emphasis added). Maimai's guitar is at the same time a source and a receiver, it produces and captivates sound, interacting with the amplifier, the effect chain and other objects as equally important nodes of the assemblage.

During a 2007 performance of Torturing Nurse at the 696 Live Bar in Shanghai, Junky used a flower-shaped electric guitar through fuzz distortions and delays that

compressed its output into screeching and dynamic bursts of white noise. He first violently strummed and pitch-bended the strings in an atonal improvisation, trying to get the shrillest Larsen effect out of the amplifiers. Then he started to hit the neck, the strings and the body with his hands, eventually smashing the instrument on the stage, while the wall of distorted sounds crumbled down layer by layer, together with the body of the guitar. In other performances, found objects and consumer electronics become instruments alongside the guitar and other traditional instruments and are similarly used in unexpected ways. String or wind instruments become percussions and vice-versa, as their orthodox sound is pushed in unconventional directions and transfigured, exploring the potential range of outputs of the instrument up to its material destruction. The destruction of instruments on stage came to be established as a rock ritual at the climax of concerts by rock stars like Pete Townshend, Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain. In experimental music, destruction of the instrument harks back to the shock value of the rock ritual and mocks this ritual at the same time. The instrument is not destroyed to top off and terminate a virtuoso performance but as a constitutive moment of the ongoing production and manipulation of sound. Experimental musicians engage in material destruction as just one of the possible uses of the instrument.

Even the construction site with which noise competes in loudness can become part of the instrument. *In Ruins*, a 3'' CD-R released in 2006 in 33 copies by ShaSha records, contains a live recording of Torturing Nurse playing in (and with) the rubble and wreckage of demolition grounds with no amplification and no effects, apart from the natural echo provided by the abandoned and dilapidated setting. The mass produced instrument – be it a guitar, a walkman, a metal bar or a demolished concrete – loses its predestined usage and is reterritorialized in a network of sound processing units. The whole instrument-network «loses the finality proper to it and becomes something else altogether: a polyfunctional nucleus, and ensemble of "black boxes" with multiple inputs-outputs, the locus of convection and destructuration» (Baudrillard 1981:78).

These assemblages of often quite colorful effect boxes, reterritorialized instruments and creeping cables question the limits of the instrument but also the

position of the musician. The experimental musician is both a network engineer and a performer, dealing with cascading controls and unpredictable outputs. Once the rhizomic map is set up, the musician only needs to push switches and move slides in real time reaction to the produced sounds, struggling against the assemblage, trying to trace the map and failing at it (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:14-15). In his paper "Technology's Attitude Toward the Chinese: Synthesizers, Music Software and Turntables in Contemporary Beijing" (2004), Basile Zimmermann points to the inbuilt presets of electronic instruments, claiming that rather than promoting creativity, they «constrain the activities of their Chinese users» (2) into patterns predetermined by the Western engineers that designed the hardware or software. Although Zimmermann's analysis of the impact of Western technology on Chinese music is thought-provoking,[4] my own fieldwork on the practice of experimental music yields different results. Experimental artists prove to be particularly creative in re-appropriating and re-inventing instruments, pushing them in directions not anticipated by their designers. Yan Jun uses a mixer not to adjust sounds from external inputs but as a sound source in itself, short-circuiting inputs and outputs. The noise rock band Mafeisan transforms samplers into multilayered loop stations, piling up their inbuilt effects to raise a wall of saturated industrial rumble while playing a lap guitar as a percussive instrument through an insanely loud distortion. While presets inevitably constrain the boundaries of any technical object, at the same time experimental music is predicated on the creative effort of pushing boundaries and challenging technical constraints.

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[4] See also Zimmermann (2006) for a more in-depth analysis of the topic.

2.3 Ineptness against Education

«Playing analogue synthesizers is now a mark of authenticity, where it was once a sign of alienation [...]
Now it is the image of a technician hunched over a computer terminal that is problematic – but that, like
the image of the synth player, can and will change»

(Andrew Goodwin 1990, in Auslander 2008:83)

Experimental musicians «actively confront the human relationship with our steadily accumulating masses of consumer electronics. That relationship is, as it has always been, fraught with tension» (Bailey 2010:8). Witnessing an experimental performance «recalls something that had somehow been lost: instruments are machines» (Hegarty 2010:27), and the «awareness of technology as relational helps to see that no particular music or sound machine can claim superiority. [...] As noise oriented technologies persist, there is a gradual move away from ideas of musical competence being only about capacity to play instruments» (*ibid*.). In China as well, formal musical training as conceived in conservatories stresses virtuosity and proficiency as fundamental skills of professional performers (Schimmelpenninck and Kouwenhoven 1993:82). By contrast, experimental musicians do not seek to excel within the limits of the received uses of musical instruments. They direct their energy at challenging the boundaries of proficiency, virtuosism, idealization of the instrument and hierarchy of the live setting. Yan Jun describes the first Chinese experimental efforts in terms of trial-and-error processes involving machines: «In the mid-90s people did a lot of experimental stuff, but it was not really experimental music, they just wanted to apply interesting intuitions over rock rhythms to make songs sound weirder. But later, people like Li Jianhong and Wang Fan started to use some machines to make noise music in the proper sense of the term» (Josh 2010).

Experimental music frees the performer from the requirements of formal musical education. This is not to say that experimental musicians are inept or unable to handle instruments. They draw on different skills, such as familiarity with the consumer electronics, audio editing software and digital media that often compose the instrument rhizome. Thanks to the abstraction of interfaces, switches and displays,

they gather a practical knowledge about sound generation through trial-and-error pragmatics instead of engaging in theoretical studies. Additional competences are retrieved socially, as opinions, tips and tutorials on message boards and video sharing websites, often in parallel with the acquisition of second-hand instruments and the establishing of contacts in the community. When Hegarty states that «ineptitude remains a strong, fundamentally noisy anti-cultural statement, and, pleasingly, comes in many forms […] as there are many notes, so ineptness is an opening of sound» (Hegarty 2010:89) he is describing the preference for a different kind of skills evident in punk, industrial and experimental music. In China, the lack of formal education is at the same time a factor that accounts for the musician's involvement in experimental music and a source of his experimentation. Ineptitude is not the lack of ability but a mobilized negativity, an active response to what many experimental musicians perceive as an overemphasis on education continuously advertised in daily life and emphasized in the family, the preference for a different kind of skills: pragmatic, self-taught, socially shared.

On his 2004 CD *RTV-702* Li Jianhong manipulates, processes and distorts four tracks of TV output to the point of resembling anything but a television broadcast. As such, the album finds in extreme saturation and fuzzy crackles and hisses an ironic commentary on the assault of televised information and mass advertisement. The title of the album still acknowledges television as the technical object used as a source material for the compositions, but the forty-six minutes of squeaking signals and empty bass rumbles that compose the tracks clearly challenge the boundaries of the manipulated object. At the same time, the source of sound is not a canonical instrument but a signal receiver, a non-performative machine used as a musical device. As an assertion of do-it-yourself (hereafter DIY) pragmatics and confrontational dialogue with the musician's tools, experimental records directly relate with the musician's and audience's commonly perceived feeling of oppression under the demands of education, employing irony and material criticality to provide a highly conscious social commentary.

2.4 Noisy Aesthetics

«Something that is really important for us, coming from the East [of Germany], is that we do not inscribe political meaning into the label. Basically, while we were growing up, everything was inscribed with meaning. This is also where these minimalist ideas come from: to prevent it from delivering pre-existing information – in the worst case you would say propaganda – or delivering any kind of existing opinion about the thing and what it is»

(Carsten Nicolai, in Bailey 2010:170)

The tools of experimental musicians transform themselves and challenge formal education. How does this reconfiguration play out in visual and verbal aesthetics? At the level of imagery, song and album titles, and band names, visual and verbal aesthetic seem to confirm the impression that Chinese experimental musicians make a point of straightforwardly eschewing any inscription of meaning. But is this completely true? I argue that this has less to do with self-censorship and aloofness from social problems, and that experimentation on aesthetics is employed as an oppositional strategy against mass media and propaganda. An analysis of these aesthetics reveals the practical ways in which experimental music re-mediates and thus re-appropriates established meaning systems through appropriation, saturation and distortion of popular themes.

Fig. 2.1 NOIShanghai XXXVI flyer (copyright NOIShanghai)

Experimental musicians may engage with all the themes that are excluded from popular music «in order to prevent the distortion of popular tastes» (Jones 1992:48). Sexual, morbid, violent and nihilistic images abound in the names, cover arts, song titles and flyers of acts such as Torturing Nurse, Radiocore Blowjob, Rice 屎 Corpse[5] and Ultracocker Shocking. A thorough analysis reveals that these labels and images at the same time appropriate and ridicule the mainstream and official media. In this way, they suggest that the mainstream and official media themselves fuel curiosity into precisely those scandalous subjects that according to them distort popular taste. Experimental aesthetics deal with excluded themes and also ridicule overexposed ones. Some NOIShanghai flyers are straightforward pornographic images in highly contrasted colors, others present ironical takes on news items such as the Shanghai Expo, the North-Korean leader Kim Jong-Il or Internet celebrity Sister Feng. Even if shock tactics may be seen as the most base human strategy, these examples prove that

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[5] Rice 屎 Corpse is a pun on the character *shi* 屎 'shit, excrement'. The components of the character, *shi* 尸 and *mi* 米 mean, respectively, 'corpse' and 'rice'.

experimental musicians are nevertheless capable of addressing socially relevant issues in a way rarely heard in Chinese music, and even in China in general. Just like the distorted and atonal sounds that challenge the audience during experimental performances, these visual aesthetics retort the force of propaganda and the flood of trash news items against themselves. «All kinds of strange society news and life stories make me feel very noisy», said Zhou Pei (interview, 2009).

The flyer of NOIShanghai XXXVIII frames the line-up of the performers and other relevant information inside a poorly composed collage of pictures of Sister Feng, a freak Internet phenomenon that emerged with a series of publicity stunts in late 2009 and rapidly became a meme (Ogreenworld 2010). The sequence of photos, already virally infesting Internet message-boards and social network sites, forms a puzzling background that bears no relation with the music or live performance it advertises. By letting an overexposed story invade its aesthetics and replicating it to the point of nausea, NOIShanghai critiques the economy of reproduction, media exposure and desire through its most noticeable examples.
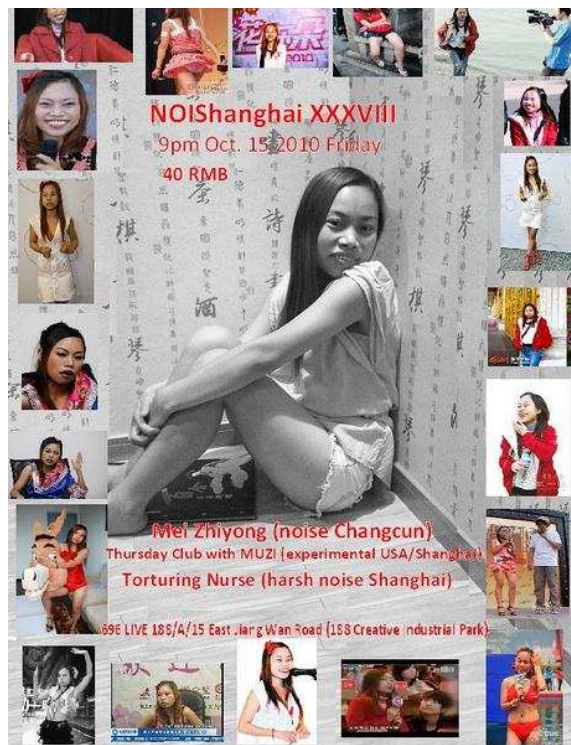

Fig 2.2 NOIShanghai XXXVIII flyer (copyright NOIShanghai)

The visual and verbal aesthetics of the experimental music scene are a fertile ground for Internet memes and news stories. Still what is at stake, on a practical level, is a constant negotiation with media tolerance (Jones 1992:46) in a nation where the media and the Interned are pervasively censored. Experimental music is strongly rooted in and dependent from virtual spaces, and most of the social networks and blogging platforms used for its dissemination and promotion have content control mechanisms, ready to 'harmonize' unwanted content.
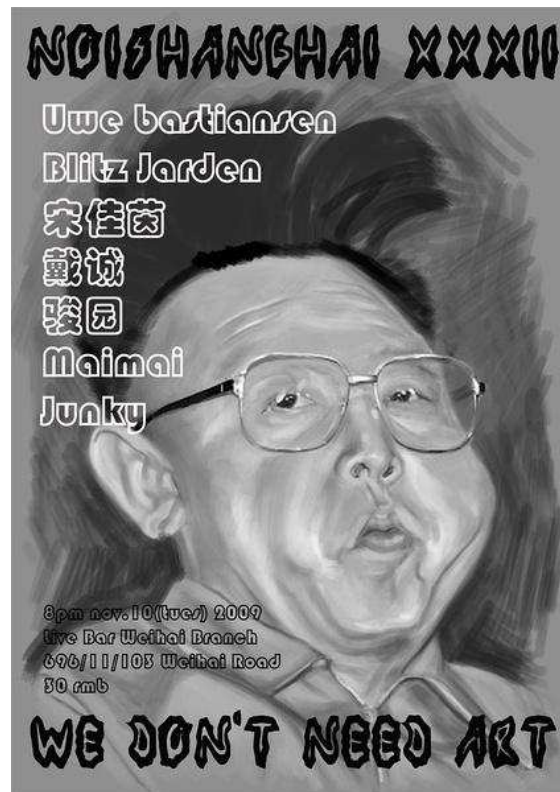

Fig. 2.3 NOIShanghai XXXII flyer (copyright NOIShanghai)

In this regard, a striking phenomenon is the packaging of records designed by Western labels. Western music labels regularly publish and distribute albums of Chinese experimental artists. These labels often design the artwork and decide the title of the record with little interaction or feedback from the artists, who merely provide the audio tracks. The resulting products reveal interesting issues about trans-cultural perception and investment of meaning. In 2010, the Virginia-based label Mind Flare Media published Torturing Nurse's *Il Comunismo Doveva Morire* ('Communism should

have died'). The record is packaged with an artwork depicting silhouette portraits of Russian and Chinese communist leaders with skull faces, framed by the band name written in a sinified latin alphabet. The inlay and the CD feature similar defaced communist imagery.

«We [the label] made the artwork for the album, actually, Torturing Nurse had no part in it. They're all based on old Soviet and CCP propaganda. I tried to find a classic one for the front, the CD has two famous images of Lenin and Mao from pins once manufactured in both countries, and the back and inside of the insert was based on a poster (back image, famous Motherland poster) and a pamphlet (Chinese one, not too well known, but the imagery was similar). Then, of course, I took the time to redo them for the overall idea of the album. The skulls under the CD are, of course, from Pol Pot's reign of terror. Thought it tied it together nicely. The band received 50 CDs that they distributed and sold there, but they sold out of them REAL quick. Because of the imagery, we didn't take the risk of selling it there, so the CDs have been sold in the US, Europe, Australia, and tons of other places» (interview with Mind Flare Media, 2011).

The label's narrative of distribution reveals a somewhat stereotyped and overblown idea about the censorship in China. Mind Flare Media decided not to take the risk of selling the records directly to the Chinese audience, but still managed to send fifty copies to the band, quite a big amount of records that according to the label were sold out in no-time. Torturing Nurse had no role in the design of the artwork nor in titling the record, and the imagery and the title chosen by the American label do not bear any direct relation to the 73 minutes long harsh noise track featured on the CD. Instead, the red, yellow, black and white cocktail of Soviet, CCP and Khmer imagery is more evidently related to Torturing Nurse's Chineseness and to a straightforward use of shock value.

Fig. 2.4 *Il Comunismo Doveva Morire* artworks and packaging (copyright Mind Flare Media)

Similarly *Eerie*, published in 2007 by the German label Indie-ziert, displays a picture of two (Chinese?) soldiers marching in line, saturated in a China-red hue. The noise improvisations contained in both records have no reference whatsoever to communist sounds or military samples, as it would be easy to expect from the cover of an industrial noise album, but images and titles are enough to connote the music. In *Eerie*'s case, not even the apparently random song titles "Jubilation", "Ys", "None Of", but just the cover art is enough to parasitically illustrate the music (Barthes 1977:25), to the extent that a reviewer projects his idea about the band's feelings, through the cover image, onto the music: «these tracks rather seem to be bound within a conception, rage against government of the country and militarism» (Zmei Gorinich 2008). Paraphrasing Barthes, the image loads the music, «burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination» (Barthes 1977:26).
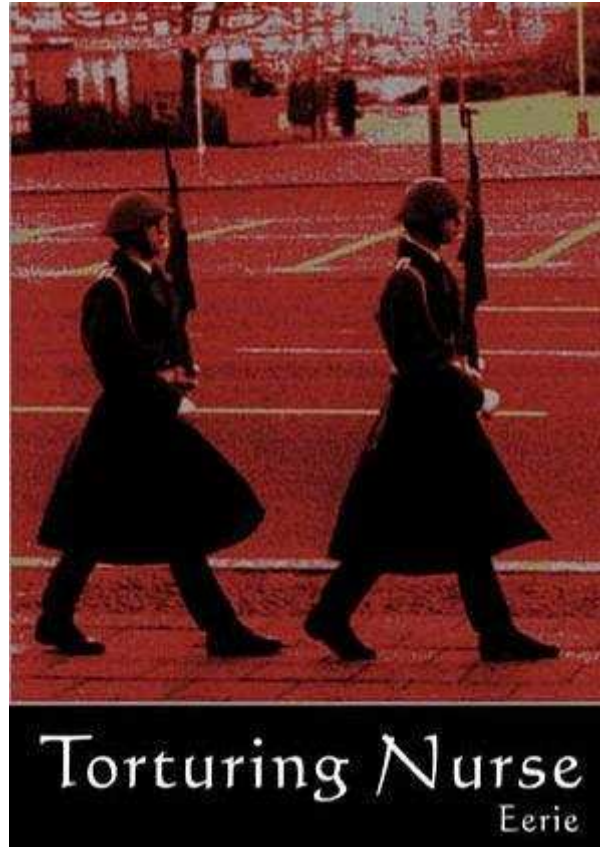
Fig. 2.5 *Eerie* cover art (copyright Indie-ziert)

Western labels are part of the community network and contribute to the musician's work by adding their own vision of what the music should represent and convey. In many cases, the visual aesthetics that Western labels choose for Chinese experimental records cater to a Western audience, who perceive China's information control as a rather one-dimensional phenomenon, and who are interested in the voices of rebellion of Chinese underground communities channeled in an immediate and evident oppositional aesthetic. Talking about the *Comunismo* CD, one Italian reviewer gives Torturing Nurse the «Nobel Prize for Courage for the title and the cover art depicting the fathers of socialism as skeletons» (Prevignano 2010, translation by the author). But Torturing Nurse had no role in designing the cover art, neither did they author the CD title that, written in Italian and distorted in an exoticizing sinified font, is probably obscure to most of the Chinese audience.

In spite of the abstractness with which experimental sounds complicate the application of visual and verbal significations, these frameworks still manage to

mediate and thus inform the process of distribution, listening and evaluation. Another review of *Comunismo* states that «Torturing Nurse have released a sturdy album of unconditional harsh noise as their tribute to the ruined dream of Karl Marx and the filthy dictators who make it a nightmare for such a huge chunk of the world's human population» (Wormfood 2010). What these reviews take for granted is that the artworks, the titles and the music form an cohesive whole designed by the musicians, while in fact I showed how different actors entrust several layers of simultaneous and unrelated meaning upon records during their process of assemblage.

Experimentation on visual and verbal aesthetics is a key ground of both national and global negotiation. The artworks created by the artists for records and concert flyers reveal the negotiations between experimental musicians, media and censorship within China. The inclusion of foreign actors, such as the Western labels that release works of Chinese experimental musicians, shows that cross-cultural networks of assemblage may be multifaceted to the point where they become self-contradictory, and that meanings are also mediated by the discourses of local media and the desires of local audiences.

Chapter Three: Places of Emergence

Live in Nanjing 南京现场, released on CD by Li Jianhong's 2pi Records in 2006, is a solid experimental record and a fairly popular release amongst the Chinese experimental audience. According to the listening statistics of Douban, China's largest user review website, more than one hundred users listened to this record and more than sixty rated it, with a mean score of 7.9.[6] For experimental music records, usually published in limited editions of few hundred copies and distributed through non-mainstream markets, reaching an audience of one hundred Douban users is already an impressive feat. Recorded during an improvised show by Li Jianhong, Huang Jin, Ji Mu and Li Tieqiao, *Live in Nanjing* is a perfect example of the oxymoronic concept of 'live recording' that characterizes contemporary developments of the idea of liveness (Auslander 2008:60). *Xianchang* 现场, the Chinese term for 'live', is also used to refer to the scene of an accident or an incident; taken separately, the two characters describe a place 场 of emergence 现. Linguistically, liveness defines an ideal moment of presence and the scene of a noteworthy event. Also in China, audiences and critics alike often idealize live venues as the true loci of performance, spontaneous action and immediate feeling (Frith 1996:207, Yan 2002:117).

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[6] Launched in March 2005, Douban 豆瓣 ('bean segment') is one of the major Internet communities in China, serving as a book, movie and music review database, social network and discussion board (Ho 2007). Users can rate movies, books and records on a five-star scale, and the mean of their ratings determines a decimal score visible to everyone.

Fig. 3.1 The cover art of *Live in Nanjing* (copyright 2pi)

As a live recording captured and published on CD, *Live in Nanjing* is the ideal introduction to this chapter, which deals with live performance, the dissemination of recordings, and the community that emerges through the reciprocal synergy of the two. The production of records and performance documentation is central to the practice of experimental music. In the production and exchange of these materials, experimental musicians rely on DIY and low fidelity (hereafter lo-fi) strategies, effectively creating an underground and relatively independent or autonomous market. I refer to recordings and other performance documentation as mediatized cultural objects. I use 'mediatization', not to be confused with the more general 'mediation', as a specific term that describes the process through which performance is reproduced and disseminated on the media (Auslander 2008:4). Liveness and mediatization are already in a very close relationship through recordings. Moreover, they further encroach on each other through the entity that Auslander has deliberately left at the margins of his inspiring work: the Internet. Appearing simultaneously with the

widespread availability of Internet access[7], experimental music in China offers ample opportunity to explore how communities emerge and develop in a decentered fashion through the web. The social nature of liveness is especially clear on the Internet, where it thrives on the countless ways to mediatize live performance and, conversely, to enliven the media. Popular music, even when it is «unpopular popular» as experimental music, is mainly driven by community and communal use value (Frith 1996:20, 12-3) and a community, the social environment in which music is given meaning and value, develops in the flow of continuous exchange between real and virtual spaces and performances. Audience discussions during live shows, listening to records, recommending downloads, commenting reviews all generate community, performed by audiences and musicians together.

I argue that experimental music in China is a perfect case study to examine the interactions and crossovers between shows and records, and the ways in which the peculiar features of experimental music challenge the relationship between the live and the mediatized. This chapter begins with a description of the spaces of live performance and their mediatization, focusing on the different levels of criticality that challenge mediatization itself (3.1 and 3.2). Secondly, it inverts the terms and analyzes how and why experimental music retreats in private and intimate spaces (3.3) and how these are reflected in the virtual spaces of media and enlivened through the creation of communities (3.4 and 3.5).

3.1 Experimental Teahouses

«This is not a composition. It's a place where things are»

(Cage 1973:95)

Live shows and records are linked to the spaces where they are performed to the extent that they help redefining and constructing them. As in other parts of the

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[7] According to the *26th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China* by CNNIC, the number of Internet users in China doubled between 2004 and 2007 (from 94 to 210 million), and doubled again between 2007 and 2010, reaching 420 million users (CNNIC 2010:12).

world, also in China experimental shows take place in the spaces painstakingly opened up by the rock music of the past twenty years. Dance clubs and discos rarely host experimental music, while small indie rock venues and huge live houses usually do.

Fig 3.2 Venues that hosted experimental shows in Shanghai between 2009 and 2011:
1) MAO Livehouse (since 2011) **2)** MAO Livehouse (until 2011) **3)** Yuyintang **4)** 696 Live **5)** 696 Live Bar.
The city center is highlighted in red (copyright Google Maps)

In Shanghai, concert series such as NOIShanghai and R.E.S.O.[8] take place in small venues like Yuyintang 育音堂 or 696 Live 696 现场. Bigger events, such as yearly festivals and other shows featuring nation-wide and even international performers might find their way to more up-scale locations such as the MAO Livehouse. Most of the venues are scattered in the metropolitan outskirts. While the MAO Livehouse had

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[8] R.E.S.O. (Reconstructing the Experimental Soundscape of Ourselves) is the improvisation show organized in Shanghai by Maimai.

moved to a more central location in 2011, the smaller clubs and bars keep orbiting near Shanghai's city ring (Zhongshan Yi lu), close to residential districts, shopping areas and universities.

Together with the inherited and shared spaces, many aspects of the organization and performing conventions of experimental music in China reiterate rock conventions: relatively cheap tickets (around 20 to 50 RMB), the equally shared revenue, the organizing band or the famous guest band playing as headliner, the merchandise corner, socialization around the bar counter and so on.

Although experimental music borrows performing spaces and conventions from rock, the folk discourse introduced in Chapter Two also influences experimental music in a tangible way, up to setting it in opposition to the rock ideal of liveness and creating a different kind of community. During a show on the 29th May 2010, the glitch sound artist Wang Changcun tweaks sounds sitting behind his laptop near the bar counter and the mixing desk of 696 Live. He's a focused figure seemingly retreating from its clichéd on-stage position. It is common to see experimental musicians break the spatial hierarchy and play offstage or hunched on tables at the same level as the audience, producing confrontational sounds from a less confrontational position. Additionally, in experimental music, extemporaneous jam sessions usually draw on shared frameworks that are reinterpreted in the same way as folk standards are performed during folk shows. At the end of a show at Yuyintang on 28th September 2009, the Polish sound artist Zbigniew Karkowski agreed to perform a final jam with Torturing Nurse members (not scheduled to perform on that evening) without the need of any prior arrangement. Just by drawing on shared shorthands and conventions, the trio coaxed a ten-minute wall of noise sounding as a balanced mix of the artists' usual performances. Finally, even if not as open as an open microphone event, experimental shows are relatively accessible to aspiring performers. Yu Yiyi, an experimental musician from Guangzhou, manages to get billed in Beijing for his first show simply by putting some sound samples on Douban and networking with fellow experimenters (interview, 2011). Similarly to folk teahouses, willing experimental musicians can take part in the shows by manifesting the will of being part of the community and conforming to the tacit agreements of the aforementioned standards.

Imitative learning, informal stage/audience configurations, performing standards that grant immediate and non-rehearsed participation and relatively fluid border between musicians and audience all bring experimental shows close to the folk performances by teahouses ensembles around China.[9] Live performance of Chinese experimental music also partakes of the elements of folk authenticity introduced in Chapter Two. That a contemporary, highly mediatized musical scene replicates many of the characteristics of folk traditions is perhaps not surprising. This is also the case in other parts of the world, when the media opens new paths for forming and maintaining communities. As Trevor J. Blank writes in the introduction to *Digital Folklore*: «from the earliest moments of the modern Internet's existence, folklore was a central component of the domain» (Blank 2009:2).

3.2 Live Experiments Mediatized

The spaces I discussed above do not just host live performances, but enable the continuous leakage of the abstract ideal of liveness into mediatization (Auslander 2008:24). Moreover, most of this happens through the enveloping framework of the Internet. This section illustrates how the process of mediatization encompasses both the stage and the audience, involving different levels of the performance. I distinguish between three levels of mediatization: (1) the apparatus of live reproduction, (2) the performance aesthetics, and (3) the audience.

Reproduction

The apparatus of reproduction in the live setting is perhaps the most evident aspect of mediatization (Auslander 2008:27). It disconnects the sound from its immediate source and environment and projects it into the venue through microphones, mixing, amplification and large speakers. Amplification is standard practice in most if not all of contemporary music (Frith 1996:239). In popular music the presence of amplification apparatus is often hidden to create intimacy with the artists.

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[9] Frank Kouwenhoven's lectures about Chinese folk traditions, Spring 2011.

In rock music the devices occasionally become instruments that fully participate in the performance through the enhancement of their limitations, hisses and feedbacks. Experimental music goes one step further by purposefully emphasizing this aspect of mediatization: amplifiers, mixers, microphones, cables and inappropriate sound sources are all co-opted as instruments themselves. For the audience, most of the novelty and the appeal of experimental live shows lie in shifting the attention from the physical gesture to the aural performativity (Stuart 2003:63) inspecting how media-related artifacts are thrown in the mix and rendered aurally unrecognizable.

Fig 3.3 Xu Cheng's glove-oscillator (copyright Torturing Nurse)

In a series of live shows throughout 2010, Torturing Nurse's Xu Cheng performed thirty-minute long plateaus of churning harsh noise using a single oscillator dissected and rebuilt in the shape of a glove. In the glove, controls and switches were soldered as contact pins on each finger. Touching materials and parts of the stage with the dismembered effect box implanted on his hand produced disjointed and disorderly output signals then distorted through an overdriven guitar amplifier. This is just one salient example of the reconfiguration of the apparatus of reproduction characteristic of experimental music. An oscillator, usually employed as a filtering device or as a

wave generator for synthesizers, becomes an instrument in itself. Moreover, its input system transcends the human-machine relationship and involves both hand motions and contact with stage parts as elements of the assemblage. Finally, the technical object of amplification becomes the resonating body of the instrument itself.

More generally, the silhouette of people hunched over cable-laden tables rummaging with electronic devices, common at experimental concerts, underscores how this kind of music is perfectly conscious of the inescapably mediated nature of liveness and less interested in pursuing the 'real' live behind the amplification. Networks of cascading instruments and live equipment form an instrument-rhizome that effectively plays the sound of mediation itself. Sometimes, as in many of Yan Jun's recent (2009-2011) performances, it is the very core of a venue's amplification system – mixer, cables and speakers – which is used as the sound source, self-feeding through its own function of amplifying. At other times, the instrument is composed of the appliances through which the media are usually experienced: radio receivers, television (as in *RTV-702*), laptops, MP3 players, recorders, loudspeakers, or even Junky's newspapers. This kind of mediatization of live practices harks back to Benjamin's intuition concerning that 19th century advancements in technology in which «one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps» (Benjamin 1968:174) and invests it with industrial music's commentary on mass media. The sound is partially disconnected from the musician's control and enriched by the immediacy of consumer electronics. The performance of the media-objects serves as an ironic commentary about both sides of cultural economy: representation and repetition, the live and the recorded (Attali 1985:41). Experimental music critiques mass mediatization through extreme mediatization and idealized intimacy through extreme intimacy between performer and audience.

Performance Aesthetics

In the second chapter I argued that in experimental music visual and verbal aesthetics give voice to unpopular and excluded themes. Here I submit that also the aesthetics of performances liberate suppressed or unwelcome cultural forms. This engagement is a second kind of mediatization of performance, and it operates in at

least two different ways. First, it presents a critique of the mainstream and official media. Secondly, it re-mediates specific themes by including them in a different media discourse, that of the subculture.

During a performance of Torturing Nurse at NOIShanghai X in August 2007, in the 696 Live Bar, the duo unleashed their trademark sonic wreckage on stage while Dr. Dildo and Jia Die, occasional members of Torturing Nurse's shifting line-up, performed a sadomasochistic bondage and domination (hereafter BDSM) scene on a rickety table placed offstage. Dr. Dildo was dressed as a nurse (in line with the mythology of the band) and poured hot wax on a kneeling Jia Die, who was nude except for a red rope bondage.

Fig 3.4 Torturing Nurse performance at NOIShanghai X

This performance elicits discussions about the use of female nudity in the numerically male-dominated experimental music scene, as well as on masochism as a form of protest against the control of the body, which is a common strategy in experimental music shows since its advent. But what I want to draw attention to here is that the choice of acting a BDSM performance is a reaction to the fascination-yet-

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exclusion of pornography in the media discourse, in ways similar to the cover artworks and concert flyers I discussed above. The Chinese government regularly cracks down on pornographic Internet content, yet sexual content occupies a large space in the World Wide Web and in 2006 China was the first-ranked country in terms of online pornography global industry revenues (Ropelato 2006). On the one hand, Torturing Nurse's performance evokes the fascination with pornography on Internet and in mass culture, effectively comparing the mass media to the extreme event of a BDSM scene invading the live stage. On the other, the performance mocks the repression of BDSM and pornography in the media discourse offering it a stage under the fleeting and artistic rubric of an experimental concert. The two aspects of the critique are not clear-cut, and the absence of any explicit explanation leaves possibilities open. I argue that Torturing Nurse are neither endorsing neither mocking BDSM as a practice. Their performance at the 696 Live Bar plays on a theme that is both overexposed and suppressed at different levels of the media discourse.

Ultimately, the tension between censorship and proliferation fuels the production of underground performances and publications. Especially the fleeting nature of the performance renders it suitable as a 'place of emergence' outside of and in opposition to 'harmonization'. Censorship is then a productive cultural force (de Kloet 2010:189), and might appear to produce reactions at the performance level while suppressing recordings and published materials. Online content is filtered, Torturing Nurse performances are not. But performance is not a completely safe heaven, and its fleeting nature does not prevent control and harmonization. On the 9th of May 2011 in Tongzhou, Beijing, performance artist Cheng Li was taken away by policemen and sentenced to one year of re-education through labor for participating in obscene sexual acts during his performance *Artwhore* (Fauna 2011).

The re-mediation of themes into the media discourse of the subculture works through emulation and legitimation. Torturing Nurse consciously and straightforwardly emulate mediated performances and conventions. Merzbow and Hijokaidan are two Japanese acts that Torturing Nurse frequently acknowledge as an important influence on their work (Junky, interview, 2009). Both of these Japanese acts experimented with

similarly sexually charged elements in their aesthetics and performances.[10] Audio recordings, pictures, live clips on video streaming websites, reviews translated from Japanese or English across message boards – these documents of the Japanese industrial artists' performances during the eighties and nineties act as a silent media source behind Torturing Nurse's performance at NOIShanghai X, both musically and visually. The common use of nudity in most performance art in China (Berghuis 2007:70) as an appeal to the most fundamental and immediate inter-subjectivity might be another close referent, a mediatized one, again, for performance art inevitably circulates as documentation (Auslander 2008:31). After the show, the audience reception validates the transfiguration of the performers back into the media discourse of the community. A reviewer comments: «There were more people there for this event than I had ever experienced […] Torturing Nurse. BDSM. Hot wax. 2 girls. Japanese rope bondage. Need I say more?» (Bivouacmusic 2007). The two terms of the equation, Japanese rope bondage as a cultural trope and Torturing Nurse as a noise band become enshrined in the same mythology of the experimental community that informed their performance, completing the cycle of mediatized performance aesthetics.

Live performance of experimental music is then thoroughly mediatized: in the technical apparatus of reproduction, in the critical aesthetics, and even in the 'immediate mediation' of nudity and downstage performing. The media coverage, even if limited to underground media outlets, first informs the performance, then makes it part of a restricted public space claimed by the community for itself.

Audience Feedback

A third level of mediatization is the audience, which may easily be overlooked when it comes to value judgments, hermeneutics and social dynamics. The audience amplifies the performance in various ways, as a fundamental actor in the mediatized experience of liveness. This process usually begins on social network sites or through instant messaging applications with the announcement of the concert, and shifts to

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[10] For a short history of rope bondage in Japanese art and its influence on Merzbow see Bailey 2009:71.

other, smaller screens during the performance itself. The wavering luminous squares of digital cameras and smartphones inevitably pop up in front of each performer and preserve his actions in their aftermath. The documents that are thus created eternalize the show through the same channels through which it was advertised. This process happens visually, through photos and videos, but also linguistically, in reviews and discussions, and more importantly, musically: audience members, show organizers and musicians alike often record live performances to upload them as digital releases or to print and distribute them as CDs or tapes.

The ideal of liveness calls for spaces where live performance is inevitably mediatized on different levels: technology, genealogy, community. Experimental music purposefully employs the noisiness at all these levels of mediatization as a provocative tactic of criticality against the mass media. Performances and recordings, the actual and the virtual, amplify each other, creating community. And community is the hinge around which the two revolve: once the live is thoroughly mediatized, it is the turn of the mediatized information to become enlivened again. *Live in Nanjing* existed as a specific live occurrence, was recorded by the musicians and became a record that fixates the performance in a media entity that, as it goes, is bought or downloaded by the community of listeners. The next sections follow the other half of the cyclical process that links liveness and mediatization.

3.3 The Retreat into Intimacy

While Torturing Nurse carry on their experiments, their microblog constantly feature announcements of live shows and newly released records. They have recorded, mixed and mastered hundreds of compositions in Xu Cheng's bedroom. In fact, for experimental music the word 'studio' usually denotes private spaces such as the bedroom, rather than the sound laboratories of musique concrete or rock productions. This development predicates upon the relative cheapness of high quality technology, the lo-fi aesthetics of experimental music and the networking opportunities enabled by the World Wide Web.

This displacement also has a cultural significance, as it reflects the DIY ideology and can be genealogically related to underground happenings such as Nikita Alexeyev's APT-ART in Russia, when «some of the best places to see underground art in the capital from the 1960s to the 1980s were the city's private apartments and studios» (Eveleigh 2005). But stressing these links too easily reiterates the clichéd representation of experimental musicians as oppressed artists that are forced to hide their sonic revolution in bedrooms and garages. Instead, even when the location might seem relatively intimate, the shows are often framed in larger public events that have substantial media coverage and audience. Even if small-scale events are inscribed in an oppositional ideal of subcultural guerrilla that caters to the audience a fascinating and romantic of underground art, I believe that the preference for small spaces is foremost part of larger trend towards a more intimate and private appreciation of music.

The *galixiu* 咖喱秀 "homeshows" (a pun on 咖喱 'curry' and 家里 'home', both pronounced *gali* in Wu dialect) organized by the Get It Louder festival in 2007, are described on the Get It Louder website as "a guerrilla tactic of small-groupish alternative culture", but the genealogy of the term reveals a slightly different story. According to the homeshows manifesto:

> «At the turn of the century, Chinese sound art pioneers Li Jianhong, Ji Mu and friends couldn't find an appropriate location to perform in Hangzhou (excessive noise causes damage to the sound system). To overcome the dilemma, they began performing at the convenience of their own or friends' homes» (Get It Louder 2007)

The retreat into domestic spaces seems to be also a question of convenience and lack of available venues, partially dressed in a mythology of subcultural guerrilla, of a community excluded for its loudness, dangerous for sound systems. Additionally, it is only the reintegration into a big event, in this case Get It Louder, that has «put the idea to large-scale action» (*ibid*.).
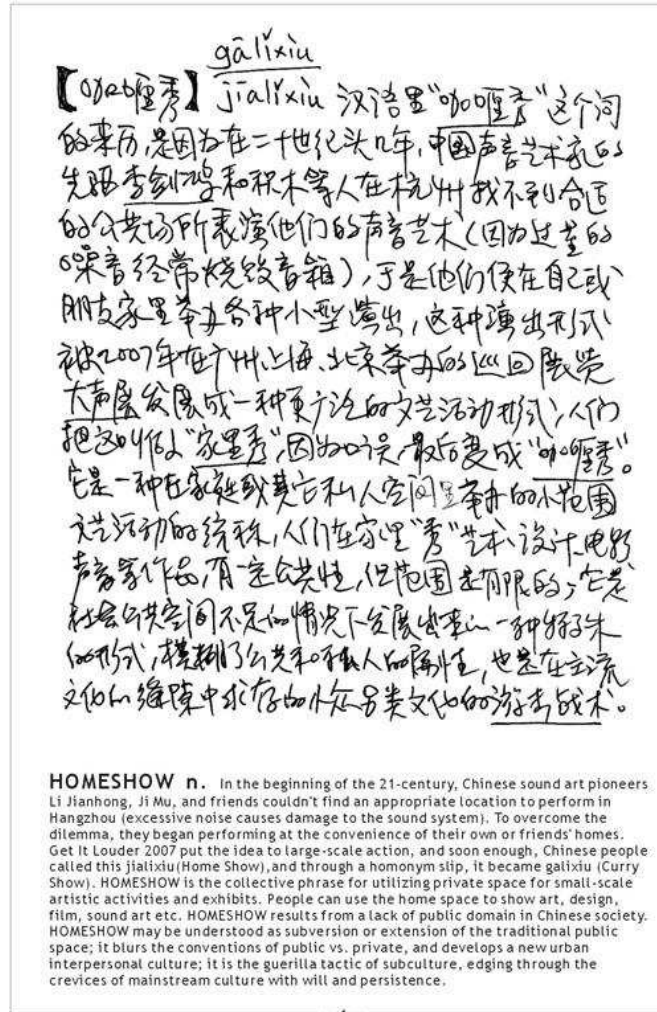
Fig. 3.5 Definition of 'homeshow' from the Get It Louder 2007 website

I argue that more than active repression and censorship it was the absence of a supporting community and an active market for experimental music that had confined it into private spaces. In the same private spaces where it was born, experimental music founded its ideals of authenticity, intimacy, self-learning, lo-fi aesthetics and the critical play on mass media significations. The community that develops around experimental music defines itself as small-scale, small-groupish *xiaozhong* 小众 'small masses', the ideal antonym of *dazhong* 大众 'big masses' or 'the masses, mainstream'. Frith comments that in contemporary music

«there is, in fact, less and less sense of music being "appropriate" to certain times and spaces [...] at the same time, music has become entirely mobile [...] the second aspect of this is the sheer quantity of music that is now around [...] music is now the everyday. [...] A third point is

that the musical experience has been individualized» (Frith 1996:236-7, emphasis in the original).

Radical improvements in technologies, unprecedented dissemination of music (first through *dakou* tapes and CDs, then through the Internet) and the individualization of musical experience all fit a long-term trend of privatization (Frith 1996:237). After the concert hall, the domestic piano, the boombox, the Walkman and Discman came the laptop computer, the Internet connection and the MP3 player. These last developments have defined the privatization of music in the first years of the 21st Century, including the Chinese experimental scene. Experimental music validates a genealogy of homeshows and underground happenings because these configurations are more suitable to the ontology of intimacy upon which the 'small-mass' community is brought together.

The pragmatic reasons and the oppositional aesthetics that motivate the retreat into intimacy are partially in contrast in terms of authenticity, and generate contradictory statements by the performers themselves. Yan Jun, speaking of his future plans, says: «Next year I will do a small tour in Beijing. I will perform in audience homes. We'll perform in such a peculiar setting trying to create a special environment. I'm sure I can play for anyone, no matter his background. [...] With less audience, but a high-quality one, one can obtain a better reaction, a better communication» (Josh 2010). Experimental music appears in search of a compromise between pragmatism and authenticity, between playing "for everyone" and the preference for "high quality" small-scale audiences.

3.4 The Other Side of the Bedroom

The reterritorialized 'home studios' are a direct consequence of the popularization of user-friendly and accessible hardware and software, and grant users a creative potential and an unheard-of autonomy (Hegarty 2010:188). Private rooms function as nodes in a continuum of downloading, listening, sharing, promoting, participating, recording, producing, mixing and uploading that weave the communal

production of experimental music. The private spaces of experimental music are not limited to the actual rooms. In an age when music is stored and retrieved mainly in digital supports (Frith 1996:227), as the Internet «has become a logical new distribution medium» (Cascone 2002:396), virtual spaces are the other side of the bedroom, its fourth dimension. Online spaces are not only the site of dissemination of recordings and documentation, but also platforms where these media are enlivened by their audiences and consumers. Just to name a few websites, Douban, Sina Weibo, Blogbus, Fanfou, MySpace, Youku, Tudou, Vimeo, Taobao all provide streaming, advertising, blogging, uploading and e-commerce services that experimental musicians regularly use, visiting them way more frequently and widely than actual live performance spaces. Each musician's bedroom is virtually mirrored in a Douban Xiaozhan 豆瓣小站 'Douban Station' or a Sina Weibo 新郎微博 microblog where music sample streams, pictures, videos, biographical information, upcoming shows present the artist to the online community. Dealing with reterritorialized bedrooms functioning as live venues and social networks websites employed as their virtual doubles, an ethnology of online spaces becomes essential to understand the dynamics of experimental music.

3.5 Communal Performances

Records are not passively consumed but enlivened by the community that develops around them. Similarly, producing an album is a way of participating in communities of musicians, experts and listeners. Live shows are mediatized even before they actually take place through flyers, hearsay and promotion through social network sites and microblogs. Taking Douban as an example, live happenings can be virtually attended in advance through buttons that offer the options to select 'I want to attend' 我要参加 and 'I'm interested in' 我感兴趣 the event. Similarly, records and other documents are digitalized and become nodes of a constellation of virtual performances. The mediatized live completes its journey from the actual spaces to the virtual spaces where a new kind of liveness accrues around the documents of

performance.

Fig. 3.6 Event page on Douban, with the 'I am interested/I want to attend' buttons on the right side.

Live in Nanjing is first of all recorded as a live show. The title stresses its liveness and the specificity of its occurrence in time. The wild interaction between fuzzy guitar, improvised epileptic drumming, wordless screaming, electronics and alto sax shrieks is framed in four untitled compositions that are named in the liner notes as "Live Recording" 现场记录 1, 2, 3 and 4. The songs are furthermore framed as live events with the inclusion of the audio recording of the final moments of the show, during which sax player Li Tieqiao presents the musicians to the cheering audience in the background. However, once published, the technical media becomes a relatively fixed cultural entity circulating in different digital forms. Moreover, the record is registered in databases, linked to other releases by similar musicians, disseminated through microblogs and included into virtual libraries.

Fig. 3.7 Record page on Douban with the five-star rating system

With this dispersion and refraction, the record effectively creates a community. A Douban user clicking on the 'I want to listen' 想听 button on the *Live in Nanjing* album page instantly obtains the CD showing up listed in his virtual library of records, together with related resources as reviews and download links. Having obtained the record, the same user is invited – through the paired 'I'm listening' 在听 and 'I've listened' 听过 buttons – to rate the album on a five-star basis. Once rated, the virtual CD is enshrined in the library of the user profile, paired with his vote and his impressions, directly linked to the musician's homepage, pictures and videos. At the same time, the listener becomes included in a list of other users that listened and rated the same record. Each of these passages built around the simulacrum of a record is broadcasted live to all the friends of the user, in the form "[Username] is listening to *Live In Nanjing* ([number] stars)", launching back the whole process into a livefeed-based communal process of listening and sharing judgments that Auslander, following Couldry, calls 'online liveness' and 'group liveness' (Auslander 2008:61).

Fig. 3.8 The livefeed of an anonymous Douban user listening and rating *Live in Nanjing*

Frith comments that «the problem for the record industry is that its best means of communication with its consumers are mediated: sounds reach us through radio, film, and television; stars reach us through newspapers, magazines, and video» (Frith 1996:61). Given that the record industry obviously deals with commodified information, what Frith laments is not the mediated nature of the communication between industry and customers, but the top-down nature of promotion and evaluation. Experimental music in China shows how even in a burgeoning capitalist economy the Internet enables a record industry that leaves much of the mediatization process to its consumer. Consequently, these communities do not share strict codes of symbolic resources as clothing, hairstyle or behavior as many subcultures that were flowering during the past decades. Not because they don't need them, but because they display their symbolic resources on the spaces where the community gathers primarily: discussion boards, social networks and microblogs. Avatars, usernames and Internet jargon take the place of safety pins, mohawks and leather jackets.

Many musicians, even when relatively satisfied about their popularity and working conditions, identify the Internet as the most important source of information and as a platform for further dissemination of their creations. «I download much of the music I listen to, mostly using Soulseek or FTP servers» (Junky, interview, 2009); «You can go on online stores as Forced Exposure or Boomkat, but sometimes shipped packages "get lost" at the customs, or are charged with unpredictable custom fees. So I mostly rely on download» (Yan Jun, interview, 2009). Talking about the scope of the market of Chinese experimental music, Wu Quan explains «of course we are interested in expanding internationally, but this needs time and dialogue, and people that organize it. I'm not good at foreign languages, I can only speak Chinese». Answering to

the same question, also Yan Jun recognizes that «the main problem is the language barrier, but now young people are better and better at English» (interviews, 2009). At a national level, the Chinese experimental community thrives online and successfully transposes DIY tactics into virtual spaces. Yan and Wu voice a common opinion in the community, that the new 'born digital' generations of post-80s and post-90s youth will overcome language barriers and integrate with the transnational community of experimental music.

Conclusion: Not Quite the End

In 2009, Six years after *China – The Experimental Underground*, the Belgian record label Sub Rosa published *An Anthology of Chinese Experimental Music 1992-2008*. The four-CD compilation collects examples of more than fifteen years of experimental music from Mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. The title of this collection pushes the appearance of experimental music back to 1992, and its release validates the cohesiveness of the community for the Western audience, playing the same role that the compilation published in 2003 by Post Concrete played for the Chinese audience. In a twist of irony, putting side by side musicians from different countries and decades, it is the record that performs the community of 'Chinese Experimental Music'. Chinese experimental musicians are strengthening their connection to the international community. Some, like Yan Jun or Dickson Dee, often tour Europe and the United States, collaborating with international musicians and artists. Others rarely perform outside of China, but are still well connected to international record labels and distributors. Wang Changcun releases a full length CD on Sub Rosa, Li Jianhong has CDs and vinyl LPs published by American and Japanese labels, and more than one hundred Torturing Nurse releases swarm underground noise distributions all over the world. NOIShanghai and other gigs regularly host international musicians, promoting cooperation and exchange.

Experimental music proliferates and achieves international recognition, thriving at the fringes of the Chinese underground and independent music scene. It continues to experiment on boundaries, meaning systems and mediation, keeping its critical edge sharp, noisy, challenging and sometimes disturbing. The activities of these amateur musicians, artists or artisans, audience or accomplices are enabled by a constant experimentation with forming intimate and boundless communities around moments of liveness. This fluid kind of liveness encompasses the interlinked spaces of live venues, bedrooms, social networks and online communities. It is in these spaces that experimental musicians conceive, negotiate and disseminate their challenges to

harmony and harmonization, education and virtuosity, mass mediation and liveness. In the first chapter I showed how all these negotiations have in common mediation through noise as a strategy of disruption and criticality. Noise is not ontologically good or bad, but it emerges as the natural opposition to harmony as a social ideal. In the second chapter I identified the ideal of amateurship as a pervasive element of authenticity in experimental music in China. Experimental musicians promote amateurship as a 'fresh start' against instrumental virtuosity and formal musical education. Ineptness and noisy aesthetics are employed to critique and oppose mass media and their embedded meaning systems. The third chapter followed the cyclical process of mediatization of live shows and enlivenment of media entities. Through the continue mediation between actual performance and the documents of performance, I showed how a community forms around different forms of liveness. To reconcile the boundless interaction of the Internet with the intimate liveness of homeshows and bedrooms, experimental music has to rely on temporary and contradictory forms of communion. Its appearance sounds like a fleeting noisescape fraught with productive tensions.

The last day of the Mini Midi 2010 Shanghai Station ends at seven restaurant tables joined together. In late evening, most of the audience and musicians sit together, eating, drinking and laughing, the instruments and the audio equipment piled up against one wall, the kitchen closing in few minutes. After four days of touring, artists and spectators look like old friends having lunch together after a long time. Someone jokes, passing to Junky a dish of scrambled eggs. Yan Jun pays the bill for everyone with the revenue of the festival. Someone has had too much rice wine. There was no way of joining this improvised dinner through Douban, yet the pictures will be posted and shared online the morning after.

Appendix I: Chinese Glossary

0 Art Center	零时艺术中心
2pi Festival	第二层皮音乐节
2pi Records	第二层皮唱片
696 Live	696 现场
696 Live Bar	696 现场酒吧
Blogbus	博客大巴
Cheng Li	成力
Chinese Communist Party	中国共产党
Dakou	打口
Dixia jingshen	地下精神
Dixia yaogun	地下摇滚
Dou Wei	窦唯
Douban	豆瓣
Douban Station	豆瓣小站
Doufu Records	豆腐唱片
Experimental Music	实验音乐
Fanfou	饭否
FM3	FM 三
Get It Louder Festival	大声展
Hexie	和谐
Hexie shehui	和谐社会
Hexie shijie	和谐世界
Homeshow	咖喱秀
Hu Jintao	胡锦涛
Huang Jin	黄锦
Industrial Music	工业音乐
Ji Mu	积木
Kwanyin Records	观音唱片
Li Jianhong	李剑鸿
Li Tieqiao	李铁桥
Li Zenghui	李增辉
Live	现场
Mafeisan	麻沸散

Maimai	卖卖
Mainstream	主流
Mini Midi Festival 2010 Shanghai Station	迷你迷笛 2010 上海站
NO	NO 乐队
Noise	噪音
NoiseAsia	亚洲传声
NOIShanghai	闹上海
Nojiji	闹唧唧唱片
Ong	唵
Post Concrete	后具象
Punk	朋克
Second Skin	第二层皮
Shanghai Expo	上海世博会
ShaSha Records	莎莎唱片
Sina Weibo	新浪微博
Sister Feng	凤姐
Small-groupish	小众
Sounding Beijing Festival	北京声纳
Sub Jam	撒把芥末
Taobao	淘宝网
The Fly	苍蝇乐队
Tongue	舌头
Tongzhou	通州
Tudou	土豆网
VagusNerve	迷走神经
Wang Changcun	王长存
Wang Fan	王凡
Waterland Kwanyin	水陆观音
Wu Quan	武权
Xie Chengqiang	解承强
Xu Cheng	徐称
Xuhui District	徐汇区
Yan Jun	颜峻
Yao Dajuin	姚大鈞
Yaogun yishi	摇滚意识
Yeyu	业余
Youku	优酷

Yu Yiyi	余益裔
Yuyintang	育音堂
Zhongshan Yi Lu	中山一路
Zhou Pei	周沛
Zi Yue	子曰乐队

Appendix II: Interviews

Musicians

1. Junky, male, Shanghai-based. Noise musician, former member of Junkyard, plays in Torturing Nurse and as Ultracocker Shocking. Chinese spoken August 2007, Chinese written April 2009, Chinese spoken in October 2009, more meetings in 2010.

2. Wu Quan, male, Beijing-based. Multimedia artist, released on Kwanyin, collaborated with FM3, Yan Jun and Wang Fan. Chinese written, February 2009.

3. Yan Jun, male, Beijing-based. Sound artist, writer, organizer. Chinese written March 2009, Chinese spoken June 2010.

4. Yu Yiyi, male, Guangzhou-based. Experimental artist. Chinese spoken, May 2011.

5. Zhou Pei, male, Guilin-based. Plays as Ronez and Radiocore Blowjob. Chinese and English written, April 2009.

Industry

1. Mind Flare Media, U.S.-based DIY label, founded in 2010. English written, May 2011.

Appendix III: Discography

D!O!D!O!D! (2005). *Ghost Temple*, 2pi 010CD.

Li Jianhong (2004), *RTV-702*, 2pi 006CD.

Li Jianhong, Huang Jin, Ji Mu and Li Tieqiao (2006), *Live in Nanjing*, 2pi 011CD.

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