

WRITING NOISE: THE MAZE AND THE DRONE¹

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An interest in the abstract qualities of noise has been one of the features of avantgardist artistic movements during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For artists, noise has been an instrument for creation, a context for investigation, an aesthetical horizon, or the artwork itself. In this essay, the production of noise in contemporary literature – both performatively and semantically; by repetition, acceleration or nonsense – is studied by resourcing to two recurrent archetypes of noise: the cosmic labyrinth and the drone. Working around noise allows writers to liberate language from its informational features while retaining many of its cybernetic qualities, opening new ways for ananthropic – yet technical – speculation, and enabling the reclamation of the teratogenic virtues of cosmic spells and incantations.

There's industrial music and noise music, but why is there not industrial writing and noise writing?

Kenneth Goldsmith

Sonic fictions are generative responses to produce a different truth than what is deemed thinkable.

Salomé Voegelin

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Writing Noise

In his 1913 manifesto *L'Arte dei Rumori*, the Italian futurist Luigi Russolo stated that the industrial revolution had increased our capacity to appreciate more complex sounds. For Russolo and the Futurists *rumore* was a new kind of sonic event that could help synchronizing humans with the modern environment. According to Joseph Nechvatal, Russolo might have actually been the first noise music artist, as he “found traditional melodic music confining and envisioned noise music as its future replacement.”²

By the end of the 1920s, many other artists working on diverse media and attempting to explore environments that hadn't yet been recognised as art were feeling the same way. Numerous texts related to the historical avantgarde, like those written by the Futurists and Dadaists and later by members of the Surrealist, Fluxus and Conceptualist movements, adopted – or sometimes recovered – styles and forms of expression previously discarded as “noise.” “Noise” plays both a structural (metasemic) role and performative (parasemic) role in most avant-gardist artworks: the specific acknowledgement of a “background, generic noise” underlying any semiotic endeavour is often mixed with the use of “specific noises” to insert “sounds of nonsense” in many sonic and textual works.³

In music, “noise” is often used to describe “varieties of avant-garde music and sound art that may use elements such as cacophony, dissonance, atonality, noise, indeterminacy, and repetition in their realization,”⁴ and, in a similarly broad sense, many modernist and avant-gardist textual practices could be

² Joseph Nechvatal, *Immersion Into Noise* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2011) 41.

³ Richard Elliott differentiates five “types of nonsense” in writing: “1 That which introduces altered logic even when ‘normal’ language is used. This would be the realm of Carroll and his followers or of Goonesque comedy. 2 That which stays within a ‘normal’ syntactic regime but introduces glitches and other disruptive strategies and plays with the logic of semantics. Modernist and postmodernist writers and musicians would be among the examples of this type. 3 That which emerges from altering syntax to create magic, confusion or truth. This would include cut-ups, permutations and other strategies that play with the logics of syntax. 4 That which borders on or overlaps with the absurd. This would include Beckettian drama and Dylanesque song-writing. 5 That which uses codes or terms only understood by specialists or insiders. This is only ‘nonsense’ for non-specialists or outsiders, what we might more commonly think of as gobbledygook or jargon. This includes hip language like jazz jive, hip-hop slang, subcultural terms, certain academic discourse and the BBC Shipping Forecast.” Richard Elliott, *The Sound of Nonsense* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) 12.

⁴ Nechvatal 39.

understood as “noise writing.”⁵ The idea of noise is essential to the aesthetics of authors such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot or William Burroughs⁶ and, in the twenty-first century, noise has become one of the central resources in the text-art of conceptual poets and post-digital experimentalists like Kenneth Goldsmith, Derek Beaulieu, Nick Montfort, Daniel Temkin, Amaranth Borsuk or Jake Reber, to name but a few.

The original idea of noise art is closely related to the new urban and mechanic sounds associated with the industrial revolution: for the Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists, noise is essentially “artificial sound,” a novel phenomenon appearing as consequence of the human concentration in megacities and the mechanisation of labour. Until World War II, noise appears as the sound of energetics – of energy breaking into work and unleashing an accelerationist force of physical deterritorialisation – until reaching its peak with the nuclear hyper-noise of the atomic bomb. Around mid-twentieth century, however, noise becomes cybernetic, attached to information and the media technologies; grounded in logic, physics and mathematics. Theories of noise developed from early evidence indicating that when any physical event was being recorded or transmitted, its reproduction carried a level of “undesired background,” and it later evolved from the need to differentiate automatically signal from non-signal when transmitting a message. In the classical communication-theory model, noise appears as the material from which information is constructed, as well as “the matter that information resists”:⁷ Grounded on this proposal of a binary, ambiguous, and often paradoxical nature of noise, human communication techniques (and contemporary reflections about the emergence of posthuman ways of communication)⁸ are expected to rely on content-dependent information-processing models which seem to require, if signals are to be clearly and steadily differentiated from everchanging non-semantic backgrounds, a metastable noise/meaning equilibrium. Salomé Voegelin writes that:

⁵ Elmar Holenstein, “Double Articulation in Writing,” *Writing in Focus*, ed. Florian Coulmas and Konrad Ehrlich (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1983) 49.

⁶ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

⁷ Claude E. Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” *Bell System Technical Journal*, 27.3 (1948): 379-423.

⁸ For a detailed critique of the several concepts of posthumanism see David Roden, *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (London: Routledge, 2014).

the semiotic and the phenomenological meet each other in the obscurity of this noisy voice. Back to back, they feel each other's weight and outline, and shape the desire to practice a signifying that meets occasionally and lights a sparkle in what are misunderstandings turned understandings for the expediency of a nominally illuminated visual communication. Noise cannot speak, but knows there is a fragile relationship between its experience and the system of communication and longs to practise that relationship. It taps into the dense ephemerality of subjective objectivity. It fragments its fragments that fragment it ever more. It reduces to open up, it expands to be more precise, and it disperses to hold back. In this way it practises a signifying practice that finds no signification but continually builds a bridge between the structure for the articulation of meaning and the process of its experience, on which eventually and tentatively such a meaning might be formulated in its own formlessness.⁹

For the French philosopher Michel Serres, phenomena are actually both the cause and the consequence of noise. Every physical event produces noise, but no physical event could ever exist without a noisy background. Phenomenal manifestations can only happen by, at the same time, producing noise and by actively 'masking' it:

noise is not a phenomenon, all phenomena separate from it, figures on a ground [fond], as a light in the fog, as any message, cry, call, signal must each separate from the hubbub that fills the silence, just to be, to be perceived, sensed, known, exchanged. As soon as there is a phenomenon, it leaves noise, as soon as an appearance arises, it does so by masking the noise. Thus it is not phenomenology but being itself. It is set up in subjects as well as in objects, in hearing and in space itself, in observers and observed, it passes through the means and tools of observation, be they material or logical, be they channels that were constructed or languages, it is in both the in-itself and the for-itself, it crosses the oldest and surest divisions of philosophy, yet, noise is metaphysical. It is the complement of physics, in the broadest sense of the word.¹⁰

If the very fabric of reality feeds on the noise its possibility creates – if noise is, at the same time, reality itself and what's left of reality once perceived – the question

⁹ Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence* (London: Continuum, 2010) 75.

¹⁰ Michel Serres, "Noise," *SubStance*, 12.3 (1983): 48-60.

wouldn't be *if* noise – being a necessary condition and an unavoidable effect of every writing action – could be *written*, but actually *how* it could be read, questioning the idea of *reading* as a privileged consequence of (human) language, and opening new reading possibilities based on the neither random nor teleological manipulation of the meaning/noise ratio.

In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali further develops the idea of noise as both destroyer and creator of meaning:

A network can be destroyed by noises that attack and transform it, if the codes in place are unable to normalize and repress them. Although the new order is not contained in the structure of the old, it is nonetheless not a product of chance. It is created by the substitution of new differences for the old differences. Noise is the source of these mutations in the structuring codes. For despite the death it contains, noise carries order within itself; it carries new information. This may seem strange. But noise does in fact create a meaning: first, because the interruption of the message signifies the interdiction of the transmitted meaning, signifies censorship and rarity; and second, because the very absence of meaning in pure noise or in the meaningless repetition of the message, by unchannelling auditory sensations, frees the listener's imagination. The absence of meaning is in this case the presence of all meanings, absolute ambiguity, a construction outside meaning. The presence of noise makes sense, makes meaning. It makes possible the creation of a new order on another level of organization, of a new code in another network.¹¹

Noise continuously arrives from the future of communication, not just interfering with meaning but mostly with itself, plural by nature, continuously becoming a multitude of perceivable and imperceptible noises. Amy Ireland, following Serres and Nick Land, highlights a feedback cycle of two mutually interfering parasites/noises which might be in relation with the phenomenological duality observed in communication theory:

One that is an endlessly proliferating, generative, disorganised and unstable multiplicity and one that interrupts and interferes with this multiplicity by constraining it, and in doing so, maintains coherence in the reproduction of the conditions of its own possibility. One noise that is

¹¹ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 33.

hot, that races, disperses and transforms; and one that is cold, a noise composed of structured rigidity and immobile formalism. One noise that is devoid of relation, that is immediate, that *is* the site and one that mediates, is *para-site*, is born of a relation: the parasite that 'parasites the parasite'. For each, the other constitutes an interruption.¹²

A further third dimension of noise aesthetics is identified by Edmund Berger in his essay *Excess, Machine, Culture*:¹³ besides noncommunication and a catalyst for mutation, noise could be also understood as "otherwordly." "The first two of these dimensions," writes Berger,

are bound to the affective registers of dread and opening: it is the otherwordly that is so often a provocation of dread, the internal sensation produced when one encounters a great unknown before them. By detaching dread from the significations that come with it, we can realise a point in which dread need not be an invocation of death: pragmatically and experimentally exorcised, it can be coupled to opening, that is, mutation, the transformation from one state to another.¹⁴

"[Noise] music," Berger continues, "has assisted in detaching this absolute transgression from communication in order for its evolution and continuation," and quoting Attali, he concludes that "it is nourished on the death of codes."¹⁵

For Berger and other contemporary theorists, noise is the music of the chaosphere, the hum of inhuman desire assembling itself into contingent noise-machines, independently of human existence.

Beyond the framework of musical composition, Amy Ireland presents noise as a more general "ontology of the avant-garde" linked to the acknowledgment of inhuman forces present in many contemporary artistic projects: "This noisy

¹² Amy Ireland, "Noise: An Ontology of the Avant-Garde," *Aesthetics After Finitude*, ed. Baylee Brits, Prudence Gibson and Amy Ireland (Pahran, VIC: Re.Press, 2016) 224.

¹³ Edmund Berger, "Excess, Machine, Culture: Three Plateaus on Noise Aesthetics," *Deterritorial Investigations* (2014), <https://deterritorialinvestigations.wordpress.com/2014/05/09/excess-machine-culture-three-plateaus-on-noise-aesthetics/>, accessed 19 December 2019.

¹⁴ Edmund Berger, "Sound Hacking: Further Reflections on Noise and Non-communication," *Deterritorial Investigations* (2014), <https://deterritorialinvestigations.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/sound-hacking-further-reflections-on-noise-and-noncommunication/>, accessed 19 December 2019.

¹⁵ Attali 36.

drive to rupture and to race, to deform and disrupt, to collapse all boundaries between art and life, between life and machine – between the *reproduction-of-reproduction* and the *reproduction-of-production* (as a gesture towards the ultimate collapse between reproduction and production itself) belongs to the ‘inhuman will.’”¹⁶ Maybe the best example of departure from humanist orthosemics are metasemic processes in which the noise/meaning balance is significantly reorganised, opening the speculative possibility of some ‘alternative universal non-semantics’ that might develop into hypersemic loops beyond human understanding – not necessarily post-human in a chrono-technological sense, but pre- or para-human as well. For instance, labyrinthine processing-time, as somehow represented in David Lynch’s TV series *Twin Peaks* or in Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*, defies Shannon’s classical model by acknowledging the emergence of novel environmental noise/meaning imbalances working as manifestations of ‘occult’ processes in which ‘meaning’ spontaneously ‘de-generates’ into noise. J.P. Caron describes *Stalker*’s spacetime as presenting

a contrasting image in which there’s no topological stability in which to locate oneself, thus presenting something of a non-conceptualizable region for thought, and yet, that demands the expression of desire, not just desire itself. The expression of one’s own desire then demands one’s own conceptual self-navigation through the non-conceptualizable zone.¹⁷

In the current techno-cultural environment, the interaction among departure trajectories across networks (universal hyperproduction of meaning, together with the overexpansion of feed-forward metasemic ‘translations’) often results in a paradoxical reversion in the standard environmental noise/meaning ratio, leading to a discognitive, parasemic, and highly speculative semio-context where meaning functions as noise – as the parasite –, and it’s expected to be expressed and received as such in order to conceptually self-navigate non-conceptualizable zones.

When it comes to reading, noise/signal balance could be disrupted in several ways. The most commonly used conceptual literature techniques, such as asemic writing, erasure, glitch, esoteric programming languages¹⁸ and other non-narrative

¹⁶ Ireland, “Noise: An Ontology of the Avant-Garde” 225.

¹⁷ J.P. Caron, “On the Transcendental Aesthetics of Time-Stretching,” *Sustain/ Decay: A Philosophical Investigation of Drone Music and Mysticism*, ed. Owen Coggins and James Harris (St Louis, MO: Void Front Press, 2017) 128.

¹⁸ Daniel Temkin, “Language Without Code: Intentionally Unusable, Uncomputable, or Conceptual Programming Languages,” *Journal of Science and Technology of the Arts*, 9.3 (2017): 83-91.

literary resources allow noise to be visually written in a way in which meaning is 'infected' by the 'background' noise emerging to the writing surface. Yet also in some experimental narrative procedures meaning is displaced, pushed to the background, and transformed into a vibratory chaos that resurfaces in the work as perceivable noise, in an endless process of threatening reality. In "Technodrome," Reza Negarestani explains how "Japanese meaning" becomes "English noise" in the work of cyberpunk writer Kenji Siratori:

all exclusively Japanese stylistic movements bleed into the English language, infesting it with Japanese slang-style, an unremitting and impossible to be appropriated pandemonium of sounds, syntactic structures and flows of words. For Siratori's neuro/cyber-punk projects, this transition from Japanese – as a radically different language – to English is essentially similar to translating a violent and fully Japanese videogame (including its machine codes, bugs, and repetitive architectures) to literature, the English literature.¹⁹

Writers such as Pierre Guyotat, Kenji Siratori, Blake Butler, Gary Shipley, Johannes Göransson, Mike Kitchell, Sean Kilpatrick, Darby Larson, Joyelle McSweeney, Louis Armand, Leslie Scalapino, Jan Ramjerdi, John Trefry, Rauan Klassnik and Michael McAloran write against the reduction of language inside any given epistemic framework. "Text as and architecture (even a progressive one)," writes Negarestani, "is an egocentric disease which should not be purged but bombarded, stormed and infested by new enraged plagues, it should be turned into a xeno-bacterial hive out of which and autophagic text is born."²⁰

The Architectonic Labyrinth

In a famous Borges short story, a Babylonian king orders his architects and sorcerers to build a maze "so confused and so subtle that the most prudent men would not venture to enter it, and those who did would lose their way."²¹ Inspired by the mythological labyrinth Daedalus is supposed to have constructed for king Minos, the Borgesian Babylonian one is also an internally

¹⁹ Reza Negarestani, "Technodrome," in Kenji Siratori, *Guerrilla Sex Generation* (Chitose: Artists eBooks, 2010) 178.

²⁰ Negarestani 180.

²¹ Jorge Luis Borges, "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths," *The Aleph and Other Stories*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2000) 263.

complex, quasi fractal architectonic structure deployed within precisely defined outside limits – in short, it's a spatially determined meaning-machine game. No matter how intricate and folded, how many corridors, stairs and levels it may have, how many times “all its parts are repeated” to the point that “any place is another place,”²² spatial labyrinths – even those made of impossible architectures' oneiric scaffolds – are teleologically designed to seduce the stroller into finding very specific ways inside and out: their infinite doors “are open night and day to men and to animals as well,” says the Minotaur²³ – maybe unconsciously sexualizing the maze and channelling his dwelling as a material metaphor of his own zoophilic conception. Architectonic labyrinths – real, virtual or fictional, static or dynamic – are rational, computational, algorithmic entities; they are made from reason, calculation and technology – commissioned by wicked royalty, planned by wise men – and meant to be solved by means of reason, calculation and technology. Architectonic labyrinths are house-games in which the subjects want to stay where they were but specific environmental conditions force them to move on, “dissipations [...] of energy excessive to that required for (absorbed by) the work of being human.”²⁴ You might win or lose, or even bore yourself to death inside – ““Would you believe it, Ariadne?” said Theseus. ‘The Minotaur scarcely defended himself’”²⁵ – but their solutions are still in-formational and pre-determined. If the internal complexity of the labyrinth increases (as it happens, for instance, with electronic networks), the computational requirements to find its solution increase accordingly, yet the average noise/information ratio remains often unchanged. The more intricate and convoluted they become, the more information they contain – and the more ‘excess of energy’ they demand.

We might consider that this first labyrinth in Borges' tale may actually be the entire king's city: Babel itself, the recurrent labyrinthine symbol of extremely uncanny, entangled-with-the-body complexity that was unbearable for the nomad tribes which developed the monotheist idea. Babylon is the filthy prostitute's nest as well as the place of semiotic impossibility where innumerable languages are spoken and multifarious gods are worshiped; the crowded, abominable, dangerous, tempting megalopolis of Antiquity – a monster-nurturing swamp where life thrives in all its abject multiplicity: “‘Grotesque,’ of course, in the sense of ‘holey’ – wholly speckled and shot through with holes, gratuitously,

²² Jorge Luis Borges, “The House of Asterion,” *The Aleph and Other Stories* 51.

²³ Borges, “The House of Asterion” 52.

²⁴ Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011) 289.

²⁵ Borges, “The House of Asterion” 52.

‘grotto’ed.”²⁶ To its nomad contemporaries, Babel might have looked like a Skynet-like intelligent war machine arriving from the future. However, the labyrinth is actually life itself: a garden of innumerable but pre-determined paths through which elemental particles, atoms, molecules, fluids and electrical currents must go some ways and not another. Architectonic labyrinths are viral in nature, they are the worm’s foot(less)print. Although virality is often confused with an unconstrained expansionist drive, the expansion of viruses, being inexorable parasites, is limited by their need to keep hosting species thriving and individual hosts alive at least during the time needed for the virus to reproduce itself – their strategies of redundancy are, then, framed by the ambient noise produced by their host’s society. Viruses, like labyrinths, while could cause in some cases the sudden death of the individual, promote in fact survival – or, at least, the prolonged agony of the species they parasitise. Space labyrinths allow time to be folded and expanded; the time invested in its construction is, once finished, at the disposal of its inhabitants, producing duration – liveable time – as an excrescence of form. Space labyrinths are wombs: they twist and sculpt matter preventing it from going straight to dissolution and disintegration, determining a set of precise, sequential actions that maintain death in the outside of their liminal walls. Following the way out would mean, then, simultaneously being born and start dying, yet in the classic thought this would not matter much: the world of the dead was just a mirror labyrinth – the underworld was thriving with dead life. When entering it you might need to abandon all hope, but better take your cognitive apparatus of choice with you: Ariadne’s thread, Virgil’s poetry, Allah’s inspiration, Orpheus’ lyre, Navidson’s camera...

During the visit of an Arab king to his court – Borges continues – the king of Babylon invited him to enter the maze: he initially feels lost, but then he prays to God for help and manages to get out. Back with his malevolent host, the Arab king explains that he has another labyrinth in his land and, Allah willing, he would have the opportunity to show it to him someday. Borges states that the Babylonian king’s perfidious intention was “to mock the simplicity of his guest,”²⁷ yet we might well conceive that he could have been weaponizing/testing him, trying to ascertain how much of a ‘civilised man’ he was, the way scientists use mazes to know how human a rat is.

²⁶ Dan Mellamphy, “Kaligraphy,” *Serial Killing: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Edia Connole and Gary J. Shipley (London: Schism Press, 2015) 144.

²⁷ Borges, “The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths” 263.

The Cosmic Labyrinth

In Borges' story, the Arab monarch feels outraged. He is a proud man. He returns to his land and declares war to the Babylonians until he finally captures their king. After three days of riding through the desert, the Arab reminds the Babylonian that he went through his labyrinth once and now he will show him his: the desert, a cosmic maze with "no stairways to climb, nor door to force, nor wearying galleries to wander through, nor walls to impede thy passage."²⁸ Traditional interpretations of the story understand that is the Arab king who wins the two labyrinths game, however, there's little doubt the Babylonian has done better: he'd managed to follow all the rules to their last consequence, to be alive in life and dead in death. He'd been able to blend his body with both the abject complexity of his own megalopolis and with the de-composed chaos of the desert. He turned first filth and then sand with the same royal impassiveness. Maybe the Minotaur scarcely defended himself because he knew that staying inside was the only way to win the game: "To confront or accept death [...] is to realise a mode of being that can delight and revel in the play of the gods. To accept one's mortality is to be able to act superfluously, to let go, to be able to sing, dance and shout."²⁹

Differently from architectonic ones, there's no way out of cosmic labyrinths – or, what amounts to the same, all ways are ways out. They're heterostatic (the body wants to change accordingly but specific environmental conditions force it to stay as it is). "We are in the midst of a strange world," – writes Dylan Trigg – "shadowless and standardised in its appearance. Accustomed to sensing itself through place, in this world the body finds itself partially divested of its powers. Now, tremendous effort is required to maintain existential security and spatial orientation. Within the low hum of the human body, a strain begins to appear."³⁰

Life is based on repetition. Not exact repetition, but *successful* repetition. Non-rhythmic repetition. Not semantic repetition, but the unexpected, thrilling, eerie repetition of noise: an ongoing "semantic apocalypse." "Semantic apocalypse" is R. Scott Bakker's theoretical posthumanist extrapolation from the orthosemic humanist assumption that "we are neurologically wired for meaning."³¹

²⁸ Borges, "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths" 263.

²⁹ David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000) 145.

³⁰ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012) 148.

³¹ R. Scott Bakker, "Crash Space," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 39 (2015): 186-204.

In Bakker's terms, the constructivist chance of selectively re-wiring/re-programming individual human brains could result in the fragmentation of "our shared neurophysiology" in a way the "sharing imperative" would become "a matter of coincidence." Baker's hypothesis assumes meaning to be a production of ('natural' or 'artificial') 'brain programming,' so, in Bakker terms, apocalypse would happen when the labyrinth's structure collapses.

However, another way to understand the semantic apocalypse is not as resulting from the manipulation of individual brains as single information processors that might (or might not) share meaning afterwards, but as the consequence of a paradoxical reversal in the environmental, ecopoetic behaviour of expanded templex networks developing in a labyrinthine framework. Spatial labyrinth structures would, then, keep the semantic apocalypse running. Writing about a theory of extinction, Claire Colebrook states that:

If we think of the experimental passage to extinction as thought – if we imagine thinking as a variation that takes place from function but essentially risks all function – then thinking of life as mindful requires thinking of mind as intrinsically destructive. Thought occurs, when relations between terms are destructive, when there is a not knowing or misprision. Life occurs not with ongoing self-sameness but with an experimental variation that could be construed as risk, except that risk implies betting, strategy or even the venturing of some being, whereas it is only after variation that one might refer ex post facto to a mutation that is interpreted as good for some being or some environmental fit. And this is also why environment (like climate in its narrow meteorological sense) is not such a helpful term, given the notion of surrounding or envioning – as though beings varied to fit a world. Extinction – as thought experiment – destroys such notions; there is just variation that is not variation of any being. So if extinction is thought experiment, it is because the process of extinction is a variation without a given end determined in advance; thinking possesses an annihilating power.³²

A cosmic labyrinth is a collapse of architecture: walls, stairs and doors grinded down to a seemingly flat surface of sand and rocks in a landscape of non-rhythmic repetition, alienation and radical contingency. In a cosmic labyrinth all meaning is noise. Apocalypse (revelation) is not ongoing anymore, but has

³² Claire Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction*, vol. 1 (London: Open Humanities Press, 2014) 27.

already happened and we walk across an extinct world. Every step you take is different, yet the same. Cosmic labyrinths cannot be solved, even with the help of technological aides superimposing grids on space such as maps of GPS. Cosmic labyrinths – the desert, the Arctic ice, the ocean, the outer space... – are time-mazes, not space-mazes. You don't get out: you get *through*. Once you're in you've already surrendered, you're dead and alive at the same time; you need to know how to navigate alongside death to go ahead. As Lendl Barcelos writes about radioactive zones of alienation,

[n]uclear radiation and decay do not wait for you to be ready for them. On the contrary, the nuclear capitalizes on your vulnerable, porous body and works you to death. You begin to decompose, and all your energy is depleted. No matter how open you are to the nuclear sonic, it opens you still further: a positive feedback loop.³³

Upon entering a cosmic labyrinth, the already-dead body of your Siamese twin is revealed and it will accompany you to the end like a time-bomb:

Violet cannot, after all, have death in common with her sister, for she is forced by the circumstances of her illness to drag Daisy [her already dead Siamese twin] along with herself, for four entire days [...] as an unsignifiable excess. Violet is incapable of escaping Daisy's virulent death, she is forced to carry the weight of death around with her at every moment.³⁴

Death is you as much as it's with you, like noise, materialised from the future.

For, to go on, you should look "at the infinite absence of time,"³⁵ you should listen to the infinite absence of meaning. While architectonic labyrinths are made from information, cosmic ones are unmade by *un-formation*, by sub-organisational patterns.³⁶ You can't find your way out: you just can drone yourself further down "into the labyrinthine mess which is the underworld."³⁷

³³ Lendl Barcelos, "The Nuclear Sonic: Listening to Millennial Matter," *Aesthetics After Finitude* 72.

³⁴ Mark Horvath, *Darkening Places: Essays on Excess* (St Louis, MO: Void Front Press, 2017) 76.

³⁵ Mark Horvath and Adam Lovasz, "Summoning the Black Flame: Trepaneringsritualen's Music and Absolute Emptiness," *Sustain/Decay* 153.

³⁶ Ccru, *Writings 1997-2003* (London: Time Spiral Press, 2015) 285.

³⁷ Horvath and Lovasz 154.

We must remember that deserts are cemeteries of ancient seas. They are in fact mineral jungles, thriving with a great variety of unnoticed life-forms. Comparing two different environmental sound recordings in the Chernobyl exclusion zone – Jakob Kierkegaard’s *4 Rooms* and Peter Cusack’s *Sounds From Dangerous Places* –, Barcelos explains how in *4 Rooms* the listener is lead to believe that the exclusion zone is a complete desolate postapocalyptic area, while in Peter Cusack’s work, “the presence of a living, albeit devastated, ecosystem is constant”:

Thus, when listening to the field recordings made by Cusack of the zone of exclusion, we are asked us to attend to the devastating precarious condition that the people who are forced to remain there continually face. Rather than portray an emptied ‘elemental time’ well beyond the human, Cusack zooms in to the scale of the everyday nuclear sonic: a slow decay. Fatally irradiated, it is after the end of the world, yet you – as someone who is safely listening to the zone of exclusion – know not to abandon the sense that this audio signals an apocalypse in process.³⁸

Considering another form of the cosmic labyrinth, the black hole, Dylan Trigg says:

On an aesthetic and cultural level, the phenomenon of the black hole occupies a central role in its signification of the ‘dark entity’ at the heart of space and time. Beyond this darkness, the language of black holes tends to refer to what is beyond representation, formless, nameless, other, unknowable, abject, primal, and, above all, *traumatic*. In each of those terms, there is a tension between the black hole and subjectivity. As pure negativity, the language of the black holes is a void carved within the depth of presence, the trace of which is evident only as the absence where something once was [...]. Consuming everything in its field of force, the black hole entertains the paradox of a horizon within the universe, a sudden departure from space and time, in which ‘things’ cease to be. Yet the black hole cannot be reduced to ‘nothingness.’ The void is not simply the absence of being. Through it, things become otherwise. Not a dearth of activity, but an active, dynamic life force in its own right intersecting the invisible laws of the universe. Into this maelstrom of phenomenality, borders collapse, inviting the possibility of the repressed or dormant component of experience to come unbound.³⁹

³⁸ Barcelos 80.

³⁹ Trigg 234.

The problem posed by cosmic labyrinths is not a rational one: learning to navigate across transparent topological space/time requires a completely different and specific set of skills beyond computation. You can't get out of a cosmic labyrinth by the means of philosophy. A non-philosophy is required. "Non-philosophy" writes Bogna M. Konior,

in its attempt to protect humans from philosophy, insists on naïve empiricism, minimalism, and under-determination. It is a scientific practice in that it is behavioural and open to uncertain processes that can only be determined-in-the-last-instance. Unlike philosophy, which puts the human in the black box of the dark night and fills him with qualities, it requires that the human must remain determined only in-the-last-instance.⁴⁰

How would it be a writing in which the human remains determined only in-the-last-instance? Some of the most significant forms of current experimental narrative allow combining continuity with non-linear, contingent, last-instance determination. "Non-linearity is not discontinuity," – explains J.P. Caron – "which is a rupture of continuity, such that one can have linear elements that are not contiguous to each other, but is anything that is outside the succession, organizing discourse without being implicated in time."⁴¹

In the post-digital, post-natural and posthuman paradigm of the current stage of the Anthropocene, "literary drones" are used as a tool to discover "alternative" desires that emerge both in the chaosphere and in the empirical manifestation of complex mediatization processes. Instead of negotiating meaning or showing nostalgia for a lost metaphysical order, drone texts acknowledge the complexity of the void, signalling the unavoidable and continuous decay of what was once considered a stable human environment. Instead, they work upon "a horizontal space of vision wherein the time of sound and the sound of time are revealed as images of each other."⁴² Noise usually happens at the easily-dismissed molecular levels of communication – where

⁴⁰ Bogna M. Konior, "Quantic Night vs Dark Night of the Soul: Darkness and the Subject in St. John of the Cross and Francois Laruelle," paper delivered at the European Philosophy Forum, London, 2016.

⁴¹ Caron 133.

⁴² Nicola Masciandaro, "Hideous Vociferations: On Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and the Sound of Time," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, Tempe, 2017.

randomness and unpredictability are accepted as rule –, while meaning should be constructed at the molar levels of organisation. Drones, however, are noise aggregates functioning at the molar level: molar agglomerates of noise like un-forming grey holes functioning as revolving doors:

An intensive continuum, emissions of particles-signs, and conjunctions of flow. This is the immanent, virtual structuration or 'diagram' that potentiates the erection of the system of strata. The intensive continuum is the energetic flatline, with its capacity for intensive spikes; particles-signs are latent units of content and expression (articulating both forms and substances) prior to their distinction as such on the strata by the Ecumenic face of the abstract machines and their attached machinic assemblages; the flows are separated out and channelled into various strata as their territorialisations and relative deterritorialisations or reterritorialisations.⁴³

One of the classical strategies to produce meaning holes at the molar level is redundancy: not the repetition of a word, a simple sound or a short sentence, but the recursive returning of extensive and complex paragraphs, narrative or not, to the point that their original meaning is lost and they work in the text as a part of a pure emotional landscape beyond understanding, in a diagrammatic mode – which “does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.”⁴⁴ “Where the signifier ‘represents’ the signified” – J. Crane writes – “the diagram ‘experiments’ with reality [...]. In fact, the less the diagram resembles the subject superficially, the more it reveals about the real relations between terms, allowing us to distinguish between the contingent order of terms and the real order of relations.”⁴⁵

As Amy Ireland explains:

Affirming an occulted Outside from within is meaningless unless affirmation also functions as invocation – and all good demonologists

⁴³ Amy Ireland, “The Revolving Door and The Straight Labyrinth: An Introduction to Occult Time,” *Vast Abrupt* (2018), <https://vastabrupt.com/2018/02/02/the-revolving-door-and-the-straight-labyrinth-part-0/>, accessed 19 December 2019.

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 142.

⁴⁵ J. Crane, “Introduction to Diagrammatics,” *Abominableized* (2018), <https://abominableized.wordpress.com/2018/01/17/the-journey-begins/>, accessed 19 January 2018.

know that invocation requires a diagram. As well as modelling cyberpositive modernity's unfolding from the inside and foreshadowing its fate from the outside, the spiral has a third, recursive function. It auto-invokes. Because negentropy engineers its own temporality – an “intensive transition to a new numeracy” marking “a change in nature” – anastrophic modernism commands a nonlinear relationship between cause and effect, riding the convergent wave generated by its own assembly “back” to the present to install the conditions that will have been necessary for its emergence. Hyperstition – the production of cause from effect – becomes the *modus operandi* of such an agenda. Encoding the cues for the future-it-arrives-from into the present-it-infiltrates requires an arsenal of occultural tactics – robust conceptual impregnation, clandestine memetic direction, proliferation of carriers, calculated obfuscation, the implantation of cognitive primers, and so on. The Human Security System seeks to repress anastrophic insurgency by enforcing chronology, but in doing so, inadvertently provides cover for its enemy. In this way, the future, operating under chronological camouflage, stealthily invokes the conditions required for its own truth.⁴⁶

Many diagrammatic writing procedures involve the creation of redundant narrative, graphic and sonic structures – “drones” – specifically designed to insert noise into fiction. The idea of group together those several writing strategies – from Darby Larson's and Jan Ramjerdi's recurrent narrative subroutines and Jason Hrivnak's use of deconstructed survey questions to the more abstract image/text deployments by Kenji Siratori and Mike Kitchell – under the name of “drone writing” is analogically derived from drone music, of which Joanna Demers writes:

[Drone] excels in creating and maintaining tension [...]. It aestheticizes doom, opening a door onto once and future catastrophes, those that are imminent and those that, once believed to be imminent, are now detours in a past that turned out otherwise [...]. Drone music's paucity of activity or events such as cadences, solos, figuration, or expressive gestures shakes off conventional musical interpretation, yet also exists as a music of afterness, that which resounds after machines and chatter have died off. Drone music is a music for when the markers of time such as clocks,

⁴⁶ Amy Ireland, “The Poememenon: Form as Occult Technology,” *Urbanomic Documents* (2017), <https://www.urbanomic.com/document/poememenon/>, accessed 19 December 2019.

metronomes, alarms have stopped. It is an acoustic foundation from which other sounds emerged, and to which all sounds will eventually return. Just as apocalypse is an ending, drone music often taxes listeners' sense of time and duration, as well as space and distance.⁴⁷

There are many examples of writing techniques designed to produce emotional effects from using narrative iteration and redundancy. Commenting on Kathy Acker's writing technique for *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac*, Chris Kraus says that:

In each of *Nymphomaniac*'s six sections, Acker composes a few pages of text collaged from her diaries and fragments of porn novels. And then she repeats, and repeats and repeats them, like a fugue in the minimalist compositions of John Cage or Steve Reich or Terry Riley. It could be, as some scholarship has it, that repetition signals a "radical break from a dominant culture," that "defining oneself against a system inevitably will reproduce some qualities of the system." It could be, as Acker later explained in a 1989 interview with Ellen Friedman, that her work interrogates *what the reader remember[s] when you repeat something over and over again*.⁴⁸

Actually, repetition does not only affect to the memory of what's repeated, but it modifies the reader's perception of the text and the story. Besides redundancy, other, more complex strategies might be used for "droning" a text. Christopher Higgs composed *One* as a kind of double-blind experiment:

What you are about to read is the product of a collaborative experiment: what if one writer (Vanessa Place) wrote a narrative composed entirely by the interior landscape of a character while another writer (Blake Butler) wrote a narrative composed entirely from the exterior landscape of a character, neither writer communicating with the other until both writers gave their finished product to another writer (Christopher Higgs, Me) who would then assemble the two narratives together to form one unified piece?⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Joanna Demers, *Drone and Apocalypse: An Exhibit Catalog for the End of the World* (London: Zero Books, 2015) 6, 9.

⁴⁸ Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker: A Biography* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017) 111.

⁴⁹ Vanessa Place, Blake Butler and Christopher Higgs, *One* (New York: Roof Books, 2012) 7.

Haunted Houses

Deeply influenced by Borges, Lovecraft, and conceptual graphic novels, Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*⁵⁰ remains one of the most extraordinary narrative depictions of a dynamic architectonic maze. The house in Danielewski's book hides an endless labyrinth that manifests itself in the plot, the narrative structure, and the awesome graphic design of the text. This multi-layered maze is explored in parallel by Navidson – filmmaker and owner of the house – and the reader, who will remain trapped into the graphic spiderweb until the last words. At the end, it's Navidson's wife, Karen, who rescues him from the darkness maze, but knowing from the inception that we're reading the recount of Navidson's filmed record of his exploration of the house, we should have expected him – or at least his camera – to find an exit. The house's labyrinth allows, like the Borgesian Babylonian one, occult ways in and out.

Reading Blake Butler's *There Is No Year* is, however, a radically different experience. Also developing around a family and a house, Butler's novel depicts a cosmic maze in which there's no way in or out – “the center's center has no name,” writes Butler.⁵¹ Both the pages' gradation of grey shades and the illustrations – mostly dark, abstract grainy photographs – remind us of the aesthetic framework commonly associated to industrial/drone music. Butler's novels are, in fact, among the most extraordinary examples of what could be defined as drone writing. In Butler's texts language is not a virus; fiction is the virus. Language is infected by fiction and it reacts anaphylactically, producing an excessive reaction that consumes language itself. However, language wins sometimes, chaotically spreading the remains of a story in vertical time – a time that is “continuous without strong linear implications.”⁵² Drone fiction is the revenge of background noise, the dark tide flooding meaning with un-form.

Vertical time is expressed through *There Is No Year* not by literal repetition of words and phrases, but by continuous, haunting, oneiric variations and developments of the same theme for more than four hundred pages: A family comes to a new home and finds a copy-family there – and then, the whole story unfolds in the air like music, filling the narrative space with alien time. “That music never ceases, even when the music's over,” writes Eugene Thacker;⁵³ and, as Nicola Masciandaro explains:

⁵⁰ Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000).

⁵¹ Blake Butler, *There Is No Year* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011) 401.

⁵² Caron 133.

⁵³ Eugene Thacker, “Day of Wrath,” *Glossator*, 6 (2012): 89.

In turn, the futural ranging of fear's sense [...] is thoroughly tied up with the vibrational suspense of sound, the tensioning of time between the fear of sound and the sound of fear, bump-in-the-night and scream, siren and bomb, the pre-audible violence of bad vibes, and so forth – the whole sphere of fear's noise prophesying its future. "Our music foretells our future," says Attali. To begin with, because it is always/never over.⁵⁴

In his recent essay *Omnicide*, Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh compares the sea and desert archetypes in what could be a wonderful definition of current drone-writing practices intermingling accelerationist and alienist poetics:

The sea or the desert. In language, we could see this as the difference between using repetition and nonsense: the first technique (a subduing of mind) is a path of degeneration, deterioration, and dissolution wherein the incessant saying of the same thing over and over eventually forges a heavy, strangling chain (like the dragon devouring its own tail); the second technique (a driving out of mind) is a path of the rattled, the aghast, and the thunderstruck, wherein the speaking of unlike meaningless exclamations leads one to insensibility and self-muttering (like the hyena laughing to itself). The sinkhole and the loose thread. Either way we approach an essential raggedness.

But what if the narrator does both? That is, what if he repeats nonsense with the strictest compulsive circling, both abusing and overextending rational energies, and thereby making consciousness choke on itself (saturation) while also dragging it into the place it cannot go (confusion)?⁵⁵

Danielewski and Butler present us two very different versions of a haunted space: in *House of Leaves*, the labyrinth is clearly an outside within the inside of the house; it shows an impossible geometry but it's still geometric, technological, it could be logically – if not rationally – navigated, even if not fully mapped. In *There Is No Year*, logical navigation is excluded: there is literally no place – no *logos* – to go because, once inside it, the same idea of place becomes unthinkable. Like blindsight patients, you can only proceed through the house automatically, emotionally, only by not perceiving what's in there, only by not knowing that

⁵⁴ Masciandaro n.p.

⁵⁵ Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh, *Omnicide: Mania, Fatality and the Future-In-Delirium* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2019) 340-41.

your consciousness cannot access your action/perception loops. The copy family must be, at the same time, acknowledged and ignored:

When the family came to live inside the new house, they'd found another family already there. An exact copy of their family – a copy father, mother and son. The copy family members stood each in a room alone unblinking. The copy family would not speak when spoken into – though they had heartbeats, they were breathing. Their copy eyes were wet and stretched with strain. Their copy skin felt like our skin. Their copy hearts beat at their chests.⁵⁶

But whatever you think you're doing, you, and the objects surrounding you, are behaving their own way. Differently from Danielewski's labyrinth, Butler's house is simultaneously haunted and not, with the copy family and the living house doing their diagrammatic non-performances like the persistent vibration of drones:

The hair along the mother's arms was singing. She closed her eyes and swallowed in the sound. Then, just as quick again, there was no sounding. Silence – or something so loud or strong out there was nothing to be heard. The house as still as any.

In another room, a room without the family, an indentation grew into one wall – a new pucker wide enough to fit a wire hanger, a pinkie finger, something lean – a rip someone could breathe through – a hole for seeing out or seeing in. The home went on in this condition.⁵⁷

The recent book by Mike Kitchell *In the Desert of Mute Squares*,⁵⁸ allows some influence from both Danielewski and Butler. *The Desert of Mute Squares* is the droned version – with abstract graphics functioning as pure diagrams, marking the noisy outside of the texts – of a cosmic labyrinth, negatives of houses and people in a desert's negative. "Negative" – in the linguistic, graphic and photographic sense – is actually one of the main themes of Kitchell's book: a collection of diagrammatic "negatives" set to liberate and re-frame the Mallarméan "event" – "the words enduring only as their space, this space shines in pure stellar

⁵⁶ Butler 7.

⁵⁷ Butler 131, 137.

⁵⁸ Mike Kitchell, *In the Desert of Mute Squares* (Lawrence, KS: Inside the Castle, 2018).

brilliance”⁵⁹ – that could only happen, iteration excluded, as eternal recursion on the deep surface of a cosmic labyrinth:

No colors. No shapes. No forms. No plants. No rocks. No sex. No ennui. No desperation. No absence. No architecture. No grass. No bodies of water. No blankness. No talk of memory. No cardinal directions. No men or women. No sweat. No bodies. No weather. No numbers. No narrative attempt. No maps. No attempt at the emptiness. No emotional manipulation. No emotional manipulation. Only the event. No displaced desire. No pyramids. No tombs. No cubes. No pigs or snakes. No god. No fur. No prayer. No darkness. No light.

Only the event.

Only the event.

Only the event.

Only the event.⁶⁰

The desert is full of drones – in a Shakespearian mode of magic – and noise induces a kinetomaniac behaviour which keeps us going through the cosmic labyrinth: for a truly accelerationist poetics, it wouldn’t be enough the socio-political acknowledgement of potential exits derived from the deterritorialising forces of techno-capitalism and their positive feedback loops, because, together with deterritorialisation, the decoupling of many elements in the symbolic order – implying a total rupture with the too-human teleomancy of petty singularities and new but predictable spaces of emotion and reason – should be equally taken into account. While the spatiotemporal acceleration of ongoing cybernetic logic would keep most logical links among ever faster moving elements, producing loopholes to not understandable yet recognizable aesthetico-logical realms, the decoupling effect would liberate all entities from the bonding forces which have been acting as foundations of the physical, social, biological and technological environments, liberating free energy like a series of nuclear explosions. In aesthetics, no exits are ever considered: there’s no way out from the cosmic

⁵⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 236.

⁶⁰ Kitchell 168.

labyrinth; only the continuation of scavenging through the expansion of a reverse-haunted, radically abstract, alien space/time. Matter disintegrates, but not into nothingness: the noise aesthetic is not dystopic, but dys-entropic, not anticipating new orders but riding the energy waves produced in the annihilation of all bonds – or “a single abstract Wave at the intersection of all concrete forms”⁶¹ –, opening up a metaplastic universe (full of entities which are not only *hyperplastic* – able to transform themselves into anything existent –, but metaplastic – able to morph into anything non-existent) such as in Mike Corrao’s *Gut Text*, an abstract sketch of vectors indicating how to draw a set of infra-thin Borgesians labyrinths: “nn materialized and incapable of escape. The rhizome of my making, nn locked into strata. The full body of pages and pages of girth. Wide and alive.”⁶²

In John Trefry’s *Apparitions of the Living*⁶³ – where the title itself implies a reversal of the archetypal haunting logic – the narrative space becomes a zone/space inhabited by human and non-human elements constantly performing themselves into transitory drone assemblages which “set traps within permutations, to corner someone in the supposed tension between the actual occurrence and the virtual almost,”⁶⁴ asking “what does it mean to turn aspects of the self once considered irreplaceable over the marketplace of infinite interchangeability?”⁶⁵ – the space becomes one in which the performative monotony of routine daily chores could only be disrupted by the continuously extraordinary, the book developing into an astonishing encyclopaedia of mirages (perceptual traps). Noise writing shares the features Mohaghegh attributes to the Pied Piper and the siren’s song archetypes – “this flute-playing is itself the sound of an anti-minaret, an acoustic slinging-elsewhere, a music box designed to project listeners far from all sovereigns, homelands, and temples, into epileptic fugue-states whose origins are not psychogenic”⁶⁶ – while exposing the embracement of alienation implicit in practices of directionless, not-feedbacking and not-feedforwarding loops such as procrastination and perfectionism⁶⁷ – perversions which intoxicate deterritorialisation processes preventing the return of linear-like avant-gardisms. For Mohaghegh, “the procrastinator constantly delays

⁶¹ See Amy Ireland, “Alien Rhythms” (p. 71 in this volume).

⁶² Mike Corrao, *Gut Text* (Minneapolis, MN: 11:11 Press, 2019) n.p.

⁶³ John Trefry, *Apparitions of the Living* (Lawrence, KS: Inside the Castle, 2019).

⁶⁴ Mohaghegh 244.

⁶⁵ Mohaghegh 235.

⁶⁶ Mohaghegh 239.

⁶⁷ Mohaghegh 242.

gestures in order to avoid the event, while the perfectionist negates and repeats gestures in order to idealize the event; but in the second instance (manic obsession), both figures appropriate slowness in order to savour their doomed world.”⁶⁸ As forms of neither positive nor negative repetition – alien wandering within cybernetic acceleration –, noise practices acknowledge a “decadent animism: the presumption that all things possess life and thus the will to movement, but that, correlatively, they too are caught in the descendent game of mortal dissipation,”⁶⁹ while opposing and resisting the political/mediatic sonic warfare:

It is true that both parties enlist sonic armaments that range from clandestine to excessive bandwidths, but whereas one seeks corrective, overbearing systems, the others seeks only destinies of soft extrication. The politicization of sonic war relies upon droning audio samples and inaudible devices of totalitarian uniformity; the kinetomaniacal accentuation of sonic war lends itself to euphoric lightness, laughter, hysterical susceptibility, contagious influence, and vanguardism. Such is the crucial difference between ideology and mystique.⁷⁰

Dys-entropy is one of the major features of noise zones. Amy Ireland, writing about Arkady and Boris Strugatsky’s *Roadside Picnic*,⁷¹ explains:

the zone reverses entropy, reanimating the dead buried long ago in an ancient cemetery that has since become part of its territory, and offers an inexhaustible power supply in the perpetual motion machines or “spacell batteries” the stalkers retrieve from the debris to sell to the military and unscrupulous local entrepreneurs. “[T]he spacells violate the first principle of thermodynamics, and the corpses, the second; that’s the only difference.” It yields up impossible objects – like *Roadside Picnic*’s “black sparks.”⁷²

“Yet perhaps,” continues Ireland, “the most unsettling feature of the Zone, the event site, Area X, and the Shimmer, is that they are *expanding* – their alien rhythms

⁶⁸ Mohaghegh 243.

⁶⁹ Mohaghegh 154.

⁷⁰ Mohaghegh 241.

⁷¹ Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, trans. Olena Bormanshenko (London: Gollancz, 2012).

⁷² Ireland, “Alien Rhythms” (p. 68 in this volume).

comprising not only a new logic of space, time and objects, but an inhuman logic of reproduction.”⁷³

The inhuman expansiveness of xeno-reproductive noise – as opposed to the “correct” living being’s self-replication mechanisms and the simplicity of death – is what actually haunts the late-avantgarde written houses.

⁷³ Ireland, “Alien Rhythms” (p. 69 in this volume).