

**CONCLUSION:
BREAKING THE INNER
FOURTH WALL**

If Brecht wanted to break the fourth wall—the imaginary wall between actors and audience which keeps the latter, as observers, from realising that they are active members of the theatrical experience trying to make sense of what is going on—I am instead interested in breaking the inner fourth wall:¹ the self-perception that we as individuals are stable selves and the belief that we are already subjects with agency. Breaking this inner fourth wall implies exposing the performance of self as a historically specific and social reifying process. But doing so also opens us up to unknowns that we may not be ready to explore.

In a time when noise and unpredictability are radically undermining core Enlightenment values such as autonomy, reason, agency, and freedom, we seem to prefer to accept ideological prisons constructed out of bad totalities over confronting this noise head-on. However, the current intellectual landscape is a claustrophobic one, a spectral objectivity without exit in which an overarching narrative cocoons us negatively in an impotent present haunted by a catastrophic future. Examples of this outlook would be Mark Fisher's 'capitalist realism', which takes as its maxim Žižek and Jameson's dictum that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism', the notion that capitalism has taken over all aspects of life without remainder through a process of real subsumption, or some of the current discussions on Planetaryity, the Anthropocene, and Globality. To believe that there is no outside to capitalism or that capitalism is total is to negate all things and practices that are not yet valorised, quantified, or comprehended. Negating or obviating these generates a conceptual idealisation along with its fulfilment, simply because one cannot deal with noise that is not yet understood.

1. Thanks to Lisa Rosendahl for suggesting this expression while describing my practice.

However, there is also potentiality in noise. We still need living noise to be explored, but in order to do this we first need to understand how we are already embedded in and constituted through different forms of noise—from the mental noise that we usually take to be ‘personal’ to general noise in regard to our limited knowledge. Facing noise and uncertainty means exposing processes of reification, understanding them, and transforming them, all in the knowledge that our tools are limited, distorted, and probably inadequate. This is why it is necessary to constantly turn these tools inside out, to externalise them in order to get a better grasp of reification. If we had a granular view of the reifying processes, as in a microscope with a temporal dimension that made it possible to identify all the elements happening in practice, then we would be able to much better discern and understand its effects. For this we need far more precise concepts that can deal with the reifying dynamic. We pretend to understand the whirlwind that we are in, standing still surrounded by these ideological inner walls, believing that they will keep us safe. But these walls are not going to protect us, and will be destroyed by changing material conditions. Better that we dismantle them rather than see them taken away from us, producing resentment, confusion, and desperation in the process. To break the inner fourth wall means to open up the mental state of noise to general noise, and to understand its connections and consequences.

We have seen how the complex interrelation between alienation from above and alienation from below produces a phantom subjectivity: we as individuals take for granted two different forms of transparency based in two different processes of reification (value production and selfhood), but these produce further noise that we don’t seem to want to acknowledge. The reifications arising from spectral objectivity and phantom

subjectivity produce a condensation of selfhood, a personification that tries at all costs to avoid exhibiting its porous, fragile, and unstable character. This self condensed from the two forms of alienation in its liberal form is no longer able to hold together, because the material and historical conditions that made it possible are disappearing. It is not surprising that we see increasing problems with mental health, with disintegrating interiorities that cannot manage to keep up the appearance of maintaining the inner fourth wall.

To break the inner fourth wall means being open to reconsidering what the subject/object relationship is, in a world full of noise. In this book, through the conceptual lens of alienation, I have developed the theory of social dissonance, which concerns the contemporary problematic of the conflation of the individual with the self and the self with the subject. Out of this conflation there emerges a discrepancy between how we understand ourselves—with the notion of the individual being increasingly reinforced—and the way that we are socially determined by capitalism—through technologies and ideologies that have made the classic idea of the subject as bearer of an originary freedom or of a capacity for self-determination increasingly difficult to reconcile with the actuality of social conditions. In the process, I aimed to expose the illusory qualities of selfhood and the problematic belief in the individual as a juridical notion implying inalienable rights. The political stakes of this research lie in exploring the difficulty of coming together—a symptom of ongoing fragmentation—a difficulty which in turn directs us toward the barriers we confront in the apprehension and transformation of things at the structural level.

The book was written at a moment when democracy is showing signs of clear and irreconcilable contradictions—namely, the progressive co-optation of its historical forms by

economic interests. At the same time, we are left without any clear idea of any future for alternative ways of being together. This has resulted in a right-wing backlash in which ideas that were thought to be buried—ideas of ossified ethnic identity and the militarised national state—have made a merciless return. My point of entry into this complex of factors was the experimental music scenes of noise and improvisation, whose relevance as a research object lies in their exemplary status as shining beacons of the general weakness in our understanding of freedom as a starting point of the political. In improvisation, the notion of freedom has been taken to be related to the expression of the self, often in collective environments. Improvisation attempted to break with previous norms of musicmaking, without acknowledging the norms to which freedom is subject, or that the self is a form of mystification. Noise has historically dealt in transgression and alienation, but their effects are temporally limited and today seem exhausted.

There is a common element in these practices which I have attacked: the phenomenological approach to sound, which presupposes ownership of experience. Hence I have attempted to bring about a historical awareness of alienation through the incorporation of contemporary empirical analysis into the philosophical development of this category. In doing so I sought to map out new approaches for dealing with alienation that rely neither on the reactionary romantic discourse of de-alienation nor the overly optimistic approach of accelerationist currents. It is here that I developed proposals for the negative critical potential of 'noise' beyond the phenomenological connotations of the term; not only for aesthetic purposes, but also for the exploration of social dissonance: understanding the interrelation between how we understand ourselves and what we could be, and the mystification that is produced between the

gaps in these understandings. The exploration of alienation in different registers has helped us to understand the different levels at which we are determined: *alienation from above* and *alienation from below*.

There is a complex interrelation between these two, and our ability to grasp them is limited. The concept of alienation forces us to ask: What it is that is being alienated? What is producing it? And what can be done about it? In doing so, the discourse presented here connects directly with modern critical theories of subjectivity i.e. theories of the subject that question the theological tutelage of agency and freedom through the embrace of modern scientific developments. In doing so we encounter what Freud called the three 'narcissistic wounds':

Copernicus had demonstrated that the earth is not the centre of the universe; Darwin, that the human being is a product of natural selection, emerging through the same blind material processes as every other creature; finally, psychoanalysis was to undermine our impression that we are masters of our own consciousness and destiny—unconscious processes beyond our perception and control steer our relation to the world and to ourselves.²

Marx supplemented these with yet another 'wound' by explicating the intricacies of the capitalist mode of production, which produces mystification in its attempt to colonise all aspects of reality, from the environment to our subjectivity.

The wounds incurred by Marxism, Darwinism, and psychoanalysis are then drastically broadened by current neuroscientific research carried out by thinkers such as Thomas Metzinger,

2. R. Mackay, 'Introduction: Three Figures of Contingency', in R. Mackay (ed.), *The Medium of Contingency* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2015), 1–10: 2–3.

which detail the illusionary qualities of selfhood. It is imperative to deal with these new disenchantments as a way to gain agency, i.e. an ability to understand the rules that we are subject to, and thus to be able to act upon them and change them, and through such action to become non-narcissistic subjects. As we have said: there is no freedom in a normative vacuum. The belief in unmediated expression and unalienated life is a form of fetishism that needs to be eradicated. Accepting alienation as a constitutive part of subjectivity reminds us of the constant wounds that we will have to confront.

The *Social Dissonance* score deals with these narcissistic wounds, digging into them like crows feasting on the corpses of neoliberal bodies, however alive they might seem to be.

THE SCORE

Listen carefully.

The audience is your instrument, play it in order to practically understand how we are generally instrumentalised.

Prepare the audience with concepts, questions and movements as a way to explore the dissonance that exists between the individual narcissism that capitalism promotes and our social capacity; between how we conceive ourselves as free individuals with agency and the way that we are socially determined by capitalist relations, technology and ideology.

Reflect on the I/We relation while defining social dissonance.

Help the collective subject to emerge.