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2.5×6 metres of space: Japanese music coffeehouses and experimental practices of listening

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Abstract

This article describes a specific history of technological mediation in the circulation of popular music by examining local practices of listening to recordings in Japanese kissaten (often shortened to kissa and meaning, loosely, 'coffeehouse'). In postwar music kissaten, Japanese listeners were socialised to recordings of foreign music through new modes of hyper-attentive listening. While jazz kissa (though famous as crucibles for radical pro-democracy politics and the explosion of modern urban cool in post-war Japanese cities) encouraged local listeners to develop musical appreciation through the stylistic classification of distant recorded sources, later experimental music kissa helped forge unique local performance scenes by disturbing received modes of generic classification in favour of 'Noise'. I recount the emergence of a genre called 'Noise' in the story of a 1970s Kyoto 'free' kissa Drugstore, whose countercultural clientele came to represent 'Noise' as a new musical style in its transnational circulation during the 1990s. This ethnographic history presents the music kissa as a complicated translocal site that articulates the cultural marginality of Japanese popular music reception in an uneven global production; but which also helps to develop virtuosic experimental practices of listening through which imported recordings are recontextualised, renamed and recreated.

Introduction

This paper is about the historical emergence of local practices of listening in post-war Japan, and the impact of reception on musical genre construction in the context of modern transnational circulation of recordings.¹ Social spaces for listening can refigure musical meaning in ways that fundamentally alter the spatial and temporal trajectories of recordings – modern music's primary vehicle – and consequently change the meaning of their contents. While listening is sometimes glossed as a passive consumption of media, here I present it as a distinctly virtuosic and creative practice of circulation. The techniques outlined here reveal global differences in the socio-political contexts of music listening. But these are differences that reach beyond the reductive reading of local reception as a transparent reflection of embattled cultural identities or as a practice of resistance to the incursions of mass media. As historical relations of exchange, practices of listening reinterpret and recontextualise musical genre in ways that complicate our notions of local music. Listening is not

the final link of a chain of musical transmission, but the very crucible of musical innovation.

Below I describe how listening itself lies at the core of creative production, both of musical sound and its social meaning. I begin by discussing the role of Japanese urban music-listening places [music *kissaten*] as a catalyst for the creation of local listening practices that helped redefine the meaning of foreign generic categories. The later extension of collective listening techniques into experimental sound-making practices are recounted in the second half of the paper through an ethnographic history of a specific gathering of listeners and musicians in 1970s Kyoto. The group's experimental listening helped produce a new genre called 'Noise', which transformed their connection to the transnational circulation of recordings and generated a substantial international fandom during the 1990s.

The relationship between reception and production in this case study reveals precedents for contemporary changes in the larger genre-making (and breaking) work of media circulation. Small-scale distributions and diversifying practices of media consumption (i.e. file sharing, desktop publishing, independent labels) have become further marked as representations of local culture in a global landscape of consolidating industrial networks. In this paper, I show how listeners' interpretations of recordings are as filled with interpretable meaning as the sonic objects themselves.² These meanings, too, are circulated and reproduced as local contexts of interpretation travel beyond local sites. Scattered groups of distant listeners redefine common media despite significant disparities between sites of knowledge, access and representation of global musical styles. Ethnographic descriptions of mediated listening can help us move popular music studies beyond an inadequate search for singular origins, which begins and ends the development of musical forms in isolated cultural circumstances. The emergence of new musical genres takes place in an ongoing cycle of multi-sited, multi-temporal interpretations, which must be situated within a global history of exchange.

As separate listening groups develop into 'counterpublics' (Warner 2004) that spin their own specific and idiosyncratic interpretations into public circulation, our models for musical meaning are forged as much in the 'noise' of these distant auditions as in the transmission of original musical sources. The ethnography of listening is not only a tool for comparing distinct local developments of music and modernity, but also for exposing the intricate threads of experience that weave them together. I will begin by unravelling part of the particularly complex fabric of sound woven by Japanese listeners in the post-war music 'coffeehouses' known as *kissa*.

Listening to the outside inside the *jazu-kissa*

It was after hours in Koenji, and we were wandering up a side alley, away from the light and noise of the main market road that leads away from the station. I was woozy after several drinks of strong Okinawan *sake* that musician Tabata Mitsuru and I had been drinking at an *uchiage*, the collective ritual gathering of musicians after a Noise *raibu* (a 'live' musical performance). 'I'm going to miss the last train', I complained, as we headed further into the darkness, away from the rumble of the last midnight trains heading back into central Tokyo. 'Don't worry about it', mumbled Tabata, pointing at a tall hedge that ran along the wall of a nearby house, 'I've slept back there a couple times when I missed the train . . . besides, we're almost there, and we can hang out and listen all night. Unless it's closed . . .'. We stopped before the door of what looked like

an abandoned storefront: its large window completely pasted over with record album jackets, their images so faded that only blurs of blue ink remained. Some peeled off the wall in shreds, like remnants of old wheat-pasted posters from some long-past, lost political campaign. The door, too, shed bits of old magazine pages as we swung it open to step inside. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could see that the interior walls and ceiling were the same, covered with faded images and torn posters behind shelves cluttered with junk and bottles of Jinro *shochu*, a Korean rice whiskey, marked with the names of the regulars by whom they were claimed. A shadowy figure stood behind the counter – really just a barrier formed by the piles of 7" records he was playing – as he bent down to replace the needle on the turntable. The dark, distorted 'psych' rock music of 1960s *angura* [underground] Japan blasted out into the room, and would fill it for the next five hours as we waited for the night to pass. Two tables were occupied, and the third was stacked to the ceiling with records, but a couple of stools jammed into the counter were free. Tabata shouted my name to the master, his name to me, pointed to one of the stools, grinned, and nodded his acceptance of the unspoken offer of drinks. We sat, and were absorbed in the music.

Over the course of my fieldwork in Japan, I found myself in places like Velvet more and more often, as my circle of interlocutors widened and I was introduced to these hidden spots for listening, for learning – the music *kissa* of urban Japan. While *kissa* is generally rendered in English as 'coffeehouse' or café, this translation is not entirely accurate. They are not quite cafés, but rather more insular establishments that serve more whiskey than coffee, and whose customers consume music recordings as much as beverages. Many *kissa* are first and foremost places of music appreciation, and although the tiny spaces rarely feature live musical performance, their character is more of a specialised secret than a general public meeting-place. This is especially true of the *jazu-kissa* and 'free' *kissa* I describe below, which exhibit a significantly more 'underground' ambience that marked these places as special listening sites for dedicated music fans. Even the earliest music-listening cafes in urban Japan were associated with radical social changes of modernity, and were symbolic of public controversy regarding the assimilation of foreign popular media and social practices.

Though cafés have been popular in Japan since the Meiji Restoration, *ongaku* [music] *kissaten* (later colloquially shortened to *kissa*) originated in the 1920s with *meikyoku kissaten*, within which customers listened to Western classical music accompanied by female hostesses (Takahashi 1994). Miriam Silverberg describes the growing public presence of the Japanese café waitress as a symbol of the nation's emerging relationship with Western models of modern metropolitan life.³ This shift was later musically marked by the introduction of American jazz, which slowly became the default music of urban *kissa*.⁴ By the mid-1930s there were 40,000 such cafés throughout the nation, packed with crowds of metropolitan youth whose new ideology was exemplified by the controversial jazz-age social figures of the *moga* ('modern girl'), and *mobo* ('modern boy') (Silverberg 1993, p. 125). As such, *kissaten* have long been marked sites for Japanese cosmopolitans to experience the nation's emergent modernity in a context that linked the unfamiliarity of foreign musical material to the early public encounter with sound reproduction technologies. Ideological connections between foreign media and social reform culminated in the post-war association of jazz with a democratic order, in the flood of foreign material that filled post-war Japanese cities immediately following the American occupation forces (Atkins 2001).

The music played in *kissa* became increasingly specialised in the subterranean environment of the post-war *jazu-kissa*.⁵ Although they shared with earlier music cafés a refined salon-like atmosphere of intellectual connoisseurship, *jazu-kissa* were less public and encouraged a more particular clientele drawn by the slightly hedonistic insularity of its dimly-lit, contemplative ambience. In the bohemian counterculture of the 1960s, the *jazu-kissa* became a symbolic meeting ground for the student *angura* ('underground') much like Greenwich Village folkhouses in New York City during the same period, where progressive politics and music tastes were interwoven. *Kissa* became crucibles for radical student life, hosting film screenings, lectures and meetings. On rare occasions, they transformed themselves into performance venues for live music ranging beyond jazz to rock and blues. But while a few *jazu-kissa* provided space for local performers, most focused exclusively on the consumption of media, and by the mid-1970s this had narrowed to a very specific set of imported jazz recordings.

The handful of Tokyo *jazu-kissa* that remain today often appear nostalgically unchanged from the post-war decades. The music ranges from early bebop to later 'out' jazz, the atmosphere is darkly poetic, and the format is still vinyl LP (almost exclusively imported releases by artists like Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Dave Brubeck, and also the 'free jazz' of John Coltrane and Albert Ayler). A substantial surcharge on drinks assures that the few seats in the tiny establishments are not occupied casually, but for serious listening only. Silence is often mandatory, as listeners sit in rapt appreciation over their blend coffees and whiskeys; a new sound heard on each visit, a new piece of the giant puzzle of style. *Jazu-kissa* like Shiramuren, a tiny shop crammed above a storefront in a run-down back alley in Shinjuku, still hold 'concerts' each Sunday afternoon as listeners fill the seven stools along the bar, silently sipping whiskey as free jazz blasts from enormous JBL monitor speakers a few feet above their heads.⁶ Such events epitomise the special kind of listening that emerged alongside the industrial distribution of imported recordings in post-war Japan, aspects of which would later be appropriated and altered in the experimental genre-breaking practices of Noise.

For Otomo Yoshihide, who became an influential experimental guitarist and turntablist, the local *jazu-kissa* was 'the ideal place to hang out and kill time while cutting class' in his hometown of Fukushima (Otomo 1995, p. 4). It had been opened by a young Tokyoite, a jazz fan who moved north after burning out on the political and social quagmires of the city's late 1960s countercultural scene. Meeting with this exile from the capital's bohemian underground and listening to records together daily 'opened a window into the cultural scene of Tokyo', where Otomo has spent his adult life (*ibid.*, p. 4). He describes a typical 1970s *jazu-kissa*:

2.5 by 6 meters of space. That and a pair of huge JBL or Altec speakers, a couple hundred jazz records and a bar counter were all that was necessary to open your basic *jazu-kissa* . . . Avant-garde jazz, manga [comic books], music and culture magazines, notebooks filled with the opinions of young leftists, concerts every one or two months, and 8 millimeter film shows. (*ibid.*)

The combination of extremely subcultural tastes and strictly maintained rules for listening made some *jazu-kissa* resemble counterculture *juku* [cram schools] for underground music, where social interaction was forbidden as records are played at an incredible volume. It was standard practice to play through one entire side of an LP at a time: the course of an evening's listening progressed in 20-minute 'lessons', one following another, which introduced neophytes to narratives of style within the history of the genre, and sharpened the aesthetic knowledge of experienced clients.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, foreign jazz records were not widely available in Japan outside of US Army bases, and the typical way to acquire them was to import them directly via international post, which was prohibitively expensive for individual fans.⁷ Listening collectively at a *jazu-kissa* was the only affordable way to become a knowledgeable fan of the latest music. Competitiveness in seeking out new and different records became a matter of survival for the *jazu-kissa* in Japanese cities, since whichever acquired the first copies of a recent release would draw the cutting-edge audience, who needed to hear the newest sounds as soon as possible. Acquiring a functional knowledge of the jazz genre meant keeping constantly abreast of new releases, which could be a formidable task when important recordings were released on small and independent labels. *Kissa* owners began to search out private sources for supply, and some began to write to dealers in the US, arranging for new releases to be shipped directly via airmail. These informal arrangements helped to build translocal US-Japan import networks of mail order and collection, that later developed into independent distribution routes based on this early exchange of recordings.

In addition, *kissa* represented the central means through which aspiring Japanese musicians could connect to the outer world of American jazz. Musicians would go to *kissa* in order to hear new and rare records, and sometimes even attempted to transcribe the solos as they listened, often for hours and hours on end. The price of the mandatory cup of coffee (or glass of whiskey), however, could be extremely expensive; listeners would stay for as long as possible, making the most out of their opportunity to audition a rare LP, which might well be their only chance. The atmosphere of some popular *jazu-kissa* approached that of a live but performerless concert, albeit one in which audience-performer interaction was non-existent. In the most hardcore *jazu-kissa*, silent listening quickly became standard practice. The careful, serious listenership of the *jazu-kissa* created a model for tightly focused, attentive Japanese audiences, who have been widely recognised for this praise-worthy quality by foreign musicians on overseas tours. But in the relatively small world of jazz fans in post-war Japan, live music performance, whether by local or foreign performers, was not the central condition of appreciation. The curatorship exercised over an exclusive repertoire of recordings by a particular *kissa* and its regular clientele could also be extremely influential in local understandings of music's meaning and value.

A single *kissaten* can exert a great amount of influence over the reception of a particular recording, and the opinion of its 'master' [*masutaa*] might make or break the local reputation of a foreign artist. The master usually owns and manages the *kissa*, and is often the sole employee, serving drinks, small snacks, and most importantly, controlling the selection of music for his clientele. *Kissaten* masters are widely regarded as the pinnacle of expertise in the styles of music featured in their establishments, and are often called upon by critics and reviewers to corroborate data. The authoritative character of the master is somewhat analogous to the position held by a teacher in Japanese society, and the behaviour of the clientele like that of students, who often develop loyal and exclusive relationships with a single *kissa* and its master.⁸ The kind of silent, attentive listening practised in music *kissa*, then, has some of the aura of a traditional music lesson, in which a student learns a hierarchical repertoire by hearing his teacher play and discuss each piece in turn.⁹

The social space of the *jazu-kissa* is also undoubtedly one of male privilege and prestige, which centralises expertise in the figure of the master: as the gendered term implies, masters are almost always male.¹⁰ Gender divisions are common to consumer uses of sound reproduction technology in Japan, and the discipline of listening

to recordings takes place within a masculine social hierarchy.¹¹ The master is considered in total command of his record collection and requests are rarely made, except by valued long-term customers. Further, the master's evaluations of specific recordings and opinions of a particular stylistic era or group of artists are widely reproduced among his clientele.¹² The underground authenticity of the *jazu-kissa*, then, is coded in this 'masterful' interpretation of musical genre. 'Jazz' is received here in a culturally relative and locally contingent context of subcultural fandom, based in the celebration of 'out' music that also reproduces very 'inside' local hierarchies of social control.

The master is also a host, and the art of creatively producing and shifting the mood with records is considered a consummate skill. Fukushima Tetsuo, owner of the famous Shibuya *jazu-kissa* Mary Jane, upon learning that I had been a student of composer Anthony Braxton, played Braxton records all night, dramatically relating the story of how he had put the famous 'free jazz' saxophonist at ease during his stay in Japan in the early 1970s:

Braxton came in. I knew immediately who he was, of course. He sat down and I got him a drink – I was playing some Sonny Rollins . . . I could tell he was uncomfortable with it, I could feel the tension from him – it was inappropriate music. (*chigau*, lit., 'It was wrong'). I ran behind the bar, crouched down by the record shelves, searching – no, not that one – what could it be? And then – hm, I wonder . . . I found it. Lennie Tristano. As the Rollins side ended, I brought it up slowly – this was it. His face changed; there was a relaxed feeling. Later, when he left, he told me he hadn't been comfortable in Japan until he came to this place.

Several aspects of Fukushima's story inform us of the cultural value of the link between emotional sensitivity and critical knowledge in the space of the music *kissa*. That he 'immediately knew' Braxton is presented as important, if natural; but the real demonstration of the master's mastery is represented by the ability to 'channel' the correct music for his guest. Even without direct communication, Fukushima's sensitivity, coupled with his skilful application of specific knowledge, allowed him to select a recording that provided his sensitive customer a contemplative listening space free from tension and transcendent both of cultural boundaries and rival musicians.

The special space for listening created in the *kissaten* could also be overwhelming: 'the darkness, the tremendous volume of the music, the motionlessly listening guest, and the frequently strict and authoritarian master . . . all added to the impression that one entered a very special, almost religious room, a completely different world' (Derschmidt 1998, p. 308). In a book of reminiscences of 1960s Tokyo *jazu-kissa*, Oshima Yu describes of entering a *kissa* in Kichijoji, a neighbourhood in West Tokyo that remains a centre for underground music:

I was seventeen, and I was shocked by the volume of the music. The huge speakers trembled, and even the chair I sat on trembled under the force of the sound waves . . . I saw a bearded guy listening with closed eyes, and some other men quietly reading their books. To me, that dark and smoky room seemed rather unhealthy. (Oshima 1989)¹³

The darkness of the space, the unhealthy obsession with music, the overwhelming volume, the intellectual detachment contrasted with the total enclosure of the space of audition, where one 'listened with closed eyes', trembling with intensity and power – all of these emphasise the shock of the music's newness, and stress the complete absorption in listening that is so highly valued among Japanese underground music fans.¹⁴

In these special places, the 'mediated liveness' of Japanese listening resonated with an aura of discovery and surprise. This crafted mode of audition continues to be

a factor in the reception of underground music recordings, since the success of avant-garde musical products often hinges upon the repeatability of the 'shock of the new'. A sense of extraordinary intensity is lovingly created in the music *kissa* of underground urban Japan; dark corners that provide a space of total and overwhelming difference from the everyday world. The promise of an alternative affective space of reception – in which the subjective experience of listening to a record feeds into an almost telepathic musical collectivity – was crucial for Japanese experimental musicians oriented towards a transnational market. In the decades to follow, the sense of sonic community created in *jazu-kissa* helped authorise the local interpretation of recordings as an independent listening culture, that was ultimately capable of its own original production of Noise in the global circulation of media.

Modern Japanese listening contexts and technological mediations of recorded sound

But how did the controlled, genre-focused audition of the *jazu-kissa* evolve into new conditions for listening, which created anti-generic models of fandom in later 'free' music *kissa*? Before I describe how experimental listening practices in a small Kyoto 'free' *kissa* contributed to the emergence of a performance style called Noise, I will contextualise this shift from generic to anti-generic modes within the historical conditions of modern Japanese media reception. As part of a global shift toward mass technological mediation of sound, the emphasis on recordings was not merely something that happened *to* Japan; something that made its listening 'modern'. Rather, the reception of recordings was itself a crucial ground for the staging of Japanese musical modernity. As recent ethnographic works have revealed, radical and often contradictory social transformations are joined with technologies of sound media in many different modern sites of listening.¹⁵ But recordings were particularly forceful in changing the public space of popular music in urban Japan. Japanese listeners were especially willing to substitute recordings for live music and argued early on for the superiority of records as an alternative to musical performance. Music *kissa* were central to a historical shift that privileged foreign recordings over live performance. The weight given to records may even have influenced the contemporary term for 'concert' used among popular music fans: a concert-goer attends a *raibu*, from the English word 'live', and small concert spaces have come to be called '*raibuhaisu*' [livehouses]. As the live performance of music was contrasted with the importation of foreign media, the 'liveness' of music performance itself became marked as exceptional in the reception of popular music. 'Live' music contrasted directly with experiences of music in *kissas* and discos that played only imported recordings. In other words, as foreign media became the accepted standard for sophisticated music appreciation, attending a local 'live' was marked as a specialised and uncommon way of listening to music as opposed to 'normal', mediated experiences of recordings.¹⁶

Of course, the mediation of musical experience through mechanical reproduction is a process that has been ubiquitous to modernity worldwide. But extreme attention to imported recordings as the central experience of music appreciation has been in evidence within Japanese listening communities from as early as the 1920s. It is at this point that we begin to see the crucial role of circulation in shaping the local interpretation of popular music. For the emerging bourgeois consumer, the introduction of recordings occurred at the same moment that Japan began to import and learn foreign music styles in earnest. In their recent article on record collecting in Japan,

Hosokawa Shuhei and Matsuoka Hideaki historicise the Japanese debate around recordings and authentic musical experience by comparing two between-the-wars-era music critics. While Otaguro Moto'o echoed foreign critics in disdaining the experience of listening to classical music recordings as superficial and 'canned', Nomura Araebisu suggested that noisy and distracting concert settings compromised the genuine listening experience, stating that a purer appreciation of 'sound itself' was afforded by home audition of records on a gramophone. Again, the argument was buttressed by Japan's lack of presence in the valued genre of music, and its listeners' distance from its centres of creative production. Like other Japanese classical music fans in 1931, Nomura could easily question whether 'it was really better to listen to a live performance of a mediocre Japanese violinist or a superb recording of a virtuoso like Fritz Kreisler' (Hosokawa and Matsuoka 2004, p. 154). Focusing on recordings, then, was a way to overcome the disjuncture between authentic sites of performance and their own sites of audition.

Jazu-kissa listening techniques emerged from the violent historical rupture of Japanese society's rapid absorption of foreign technology together with outside models of political and economic reform. The simultaneous growth of mass technology and a modern urban Japanese public was broken by war and the resultant poverty of defeat (Partner 1999). In the decades immediately following WWII, Japanese citizens were again urged to embrace technology, but as part of the nation's larger geo-political realignment with the United States.¹⁷ And while Japan began to occupy a powerful space in the manufacture of media technologies by the 1960s, its own products in the realm of popular culture remained heavily under-represented. Whether the genre was jazz or classical music, Japan was a nation that listened to sounds from outside. Through its contingent participation in the advance of an uneven geopolitical sphere, post-war Japanese were simultaneously underdeveloped as cultural producers, but were massively overdeveloped as consumers – as listeners.

Japanese encounters with recorded sound throughout the twentieth century, then, do not exist in isolation, but articulate a transnational historical change in public culture. They are part of a mass-cultural mediation of modern listening – marked by what Jonathan Sterne has termed 'audile techniques' – among the urban bourgeoisie worldwide with the introduction of sound reproduction technology (Sterne 2003).¹⁸ Sterne argues that modern listeners' critical aesthetic judgements about sound emerged from turn-of-the-century developments in medical science and communication technologies, specifically in the inventions of the stethoscope and the telegraph. Recordings carried information that represented sounds as immediate as one's own bodily functions, or as distant as a remote communiqué. But they also included noise – sounds that obfuscated the clean transmission of sonic meaning.

In their technologically assisted audition, professionalised listeners began to interpret sound as a kind of message that conjoined individual sound experiences in a multi-sited transmission of an original source. Audile techniques became abstracted tools for evaluating sound based in the authenticity of 'fidelity' to that original, which was idealised in hyper-attentive audition, and attention to focused critical listening.¹⁹ In mediated reproduction of sound, determining the 'fidelity' of a recording means distinguishing categorisable 'signal' from meaningless 'noise'. In Japanese *jazu-kissa*, 'fidelity' was a collective 'signal' of the authentic boundaries of a foreign performance genre. As the generic message of 'jazz' was interpreted and shaped in Japan through listening to recordings, the *kissa*'s special modes of attentive audition simultaneously produced a genre-destablising 'Noise'.

In this context of classificatory listening, what could it mean to label a musical sound or style as 'Noise?' The classification of noise against music was an early observation of acoustic science introduced in Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone* (1877). But Helmholtz described 'noise' simply as a *kind of sound* – as non-periodic waveforms as opposed to the periodic waves of musical tones. The category of 'noises' was exemplified by the sounds of splashing water, and the whistling of wind (Helmholtz 1954, p. 7). Noise only came to be perceived as extraneous or unwanted sound when it began to exist simultaneously with signal – in early communication and sound reproduction technologies, as a kind of 'static' that interrupted meaningful transmission. As separated listeners bent over telephone receivers and gramophone horns to hear distant messages, 'noise' moved from a natural order of sound to an unclassifiable disturbance of reception. In the increasingly global distribution of sound media, to listen to a sonic transmission was to clarify and isolate the meaning of its signal to an interpretable range of sounds – on the most basic level, recordings make genre the shared message of musical circulation.

But to receive a coherent message accurately, modern listeners also had to learn to attend to genre's obscuring opposite – the noise of local interpretation. As I describe in the concluding sections of this paper, through experimental modes of audition, noise became both a disruption of 'imported' musical categories and a 'local' genre of music in its own right. Beginning in the early 1980s and reaching a transnational audience as an independent 'underground' music in the 1990s, Noise is one of the few popular music genres appreciated worldwide that is strongly associated with Japanese origins. Loosely defined, Noise is a kind of experimental popular music often affiliated with extreme forms of rock, which and is regularly performed in venues that feature hard rock and punk music. But Noise also exhibits features of many other genres: it is socially and sonically connected with free jazz and 'improv', electronic music, and contemporary 'new music', all of which form a generalised popular vanguard covered by the term 'experimental music'.²⁰

In the second half of this paper I touch on the wilful chaos of Noise in a specific ethnographic site; in the story of Drugstore, a tiny short-lived Kyoto listening space that specialised in experimental music. Like 'experimental music' itself, both the sounds and ideas of Noise highlight the discursive binaries of musical genre. Genre names identify categories of musical style and specific sonic features, but also ideological approaches to music-making and these may or may not result in similar sounding musical products. Noise plays with the looseness inherent in genre categories. It gathers the fringes from a variety of different musics, detaches the most extreme stylistic examples and places them in a new category outside their former generic location. Noise challenges genre because its very existence depends on the deliberate obfuscation of musical categories – despite the fact that by being named, it is nevertheless also operative as a genre. 'Noise', in essence, operates as an anti-generic genre defined by its opposition to 'Music', whose emergence challenges the imbalanced cultural authenticities in the transnational circulation of popular music.²¹

But Noise partakes in a debate about the place of music that is much larger than the boundaries of any single 'scene'. The Japanese listeners I speak with below describe an early local history of Noise; but like other 'experimental musics', its boundaries proliferate in miscommunications and confusions; re-namings and erasures; dislocation, difference and mystery. Drugstore's experiments with listening disrupt the hegemonic narratives of originality in the multi-sited reception of popular

music, and recontextualise the role of culture, place, and generic belonging in the construction of local music.²²

Experimental listening and Drugstore: making Noise in Kyoto's 'free' music *kissa*

In Japan's major cities during the 1970s, music *kissaten* developed to serve a diverse variety of popular genres, especially rock and experimental music. Influenced by the growing *angura* [underground] theatre groups and university *zenkyotoo*²³ cooperatives that flourished in Japanese urban bohemian and student life, informal *kissa* sprang up spontaneously alongside alternative performance and art spaces. Like their counterparts in Europe and North America, the emphasis in the Japanese *angura* scenes was on action, self-definition, free expression, and personal independence.²⁴ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, some *jazu-kissa* housed a stream of radical student organisations, avant-garde jazz performances, film screenings, and underground theatre groups. But as listening in *jazu-kissa* continued to articulate disinterest in local activity in favour of remote fandom, many listeners moved away from these increasingly nostalgic modes of reception as the activist counterculture became more diffuse in the 1970s.

Experimental 'free' [*furii*] *kissa*, while still based in listening to records, became crucial sites for participatory creation and the growth of performance networks.²⁵ As the new 'free' *kissa* became productive centres, *jazu-kissa* gradually grew more codified within historically oriented listening. As several scholars of Japanese jazz have noted, by the 1980s *jazu-kissa* had slowly become musical museums, locked in memorialised grooves of collection and recollection.²⁶ On the other hand, the free *kissa* so significantly unravelled the *jazu-kissa* model that they might not be described as *kissa* at all; indeed, some more closely resembled art spaces or social collectives. But as my interlocutors reveal, the newer 'free' spaces also drew substantially upon methods developed in the *jazu-kissa*, continuing their techniques of listening and collection while expanding them to new purposes.

In these looser experimental spaces (where talking was encouraged), bands were formed, concerts were planned, and sometimes, impromptu performances were enacted. Women established a much greater presence, and the role of the master was diffused as management duties were spread amongst a volunteer staff. Merging the spontaneous creativity of do-it-yourself underground theatre, art, and film production with the deeply engaged listening practices of *jazu-kissa* allowed an active performance scene to be crafted from a pre-existing space of intense fandom. While *jazu-kissa* listeners focused on the interpretation of a distant original signal, experimental music listeners tuned into their own Noise.

Throughout my fieldwork on Noise in Kansai over a period of five years from 1998 to 2003, my interlocutors regularly referred back to one tiny yet incredibly influential Kyoto 'free music' *kissa* called Drugstore, where many of the present cohort of Noise performers met for the first time.²⁷ Despite the fact that Drugstore only existed for a few years, operated on an almost random schedule, and had a maximum capacity of less than twenty, it maintains a mythical status in the memory of Kansai's Noise practitioners. A tiny room with no heat in winter and few amenities, the space was located at the western corner of the city in Nishijin, an old *kimono*-manufacturing district where rent was cheap. Almost all of the musicians who would later come to define the Kansai Noise scene – and eventually to represent its sounds internationally

– met frequently at Drugstore to share their rare LPs, experiment with electronic sound and film equipment, and discuss music. The usual genre of choice was experimental *purogure* [progressive] rock, largely electronic and ambient groups from Germany and Britain (such as Guru Guru, Neu, Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream). However, Drugstore’s selection was eclectic and was not limited to *purogure*, but included any *henna* [strange] recording available, including punk rock, electronic music, and free improvisation from Europe. The ‘strangeness’ of experimental music *kissa* didn’t end with the selection of strange music, but surfaced in new techniques for listening in which recordings were looped, played at different speeds, and sometimes mixed together in a sonic collage. In Drugstore, one didn’t listen to ‘experimental music’ *per se*; rather, one listened experimentally.

Drugstore was established in 1977 as a ‘free space’, not an official business but a *kanpa* [short for *kanpanya*; ‘campaign’] shop, maintained by donations from customer-members, so that it did not require an ordinary business licence. The workers were all volunteers, many of whom were students at nearby universities such as Doshisha and Kyoto University. Over time, the collective atmosphere led the clientele to form a tight-knit social circle that engendered a number of performance groups, some short-lived, and others that would form the basis of a long-term music community. Hiroshige Jojo, a founding member of *Hijokaidan* [Emergency Stairway], assembled the band through friendships he made at Drugstore after becoming a regular customer and eventually a staff member:

They played all kinds of stuff – progressive rock, experimental music, free jazz – but really loud. You could project films, or bring in your own records to play for your friends. I met all of the members of my first band Daigoretsu [Fifth Column], Mikawa [Toshiji], Nakajima [Akifumi], Ishibashi [Syojiro] . . . and that’s where I met Hide and we formed Ultra Bidé.²⁸

Fujiwara ‘Bidé’ Hide, leader of the influential early Noise band Ultra Bidé, first came across Drugstore while he was still in high school, slowly discovering experimental rock through imported records. Fujiwara’s hunt for records led him throughout the city of Kyoto, and eventually to Drugstore.

There was really only one small import record store. Jeugia, in Fuji-Daimaru department store at the corner of Shijo and Teramachi – I bought a lot of German rock, Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart. It was pretty easy to get those records, but then I started getting into music that was harder to find, and there was no information, no fanzines back then. I’d read the liner notes; Pink Floyd had a gig with Soft Machine. ‘Hm. Who’s Soft Machine?’ Then go look for *that* record. When I found Drugstore, they had *all* the records like that – and it was all college students and older people, and some ‘cool’ guys . . . I was like, ‘wow!’ I was totally into it. That turned me into a real maniac [*maniakku*].²⁹

Fujiwara was Drugstore’s youngest and most outgoing customer, and enthusiastically threw himself into the space as a second home, trading records with fellow customers, and making connections throughout the city. Ishibashi Syojiro, currently one of Kansai’s main independent music promoters and owner of experimental label F.M.N Sound Factory, was an occasional staff member at Drugstore when Fujiwara began to suggest that the *kissa* should host a *raibu* [‘live’ music performance], mixed in with the usual listening evenings:

One day Bidé said, ‘let’s do a *raibu* here!’ so we set it up for him. But I think only about 12 people could fit inside once the group was set up, so it was really just us [the staff and musicians]. We would have solo saxophone stuff, free jazz, or electronic stuff – we couldn’t do a band really, with drums or anything like that. Most of the time the customers didn’t really care about what we were doing or anything. You know, no one would come just to hear us. We would just do sessions whenever we felt like it.

Ishibashi told of one evening when the group based an experimental performance around a *nabe* meal, a hotpot dish in Japanese home cooking that evokes an intimate space of collective sociality. A *nabe* is cooked bit by bit by diners who gather around the boiling pot in a circle, slowly adding seafood, *mochi* [ricecakes], vegetables, and noodles and removing each piece when cooked. In this case, electronic music gear was attached to the hotpot, triggered by the actions of the diners as they ate to create a *denshi nabe* [electric, or in this sense, electronic, hotpot]:

One night we came in and wired up our *nabe* pot to some synthesizers, so when you touched anything in the pot, it would set off sounds. Like, contact mics were put inside, just at the edge of feedback, so when you touched the food inside the pot – Whaaaaaa!!! There were all these sounds going off all the time from the synthesizers as people added things to the *nabe*. Actually, thinking back on it now, it was pretty dangerous! That was *our* version of *sokkyo ongaku* [improvised music].

Eventually, these haphazard experiments would crystallise in a more deliberate public performance style that harnessed the electronic accidents of consumer electronic music devices to make ‘Noise’. But in these initial stages, haphazard performance sessions remained loosely blended with listening, circling around a small group of the most interested customers who cultivated their creative sociality in events like the *denshi nabe*. Mikawa Toshiji, Hiroshige Jojo, Hiroshige Junko (who married Jojo after having met him in Drugstore), and others in the core group of patrons began forming ensembles to perform in other spaces in Kyoto and Osaka, often bringing experimental actors and *butoh* dancers they had met in the space out on stage as well. The group maintained Drugstore’s amateurish, improvisational spirit in performance, appearing without fixed instrumentation or compositions – sometimes without even practising in advance – and employing a changing cast of performers and concert sites.

For example, Hiroshige Jojo describes an early gathering called Daigoretsu [Fifth Column] (the immediate predecessor to his famed Noise band Hijokaidan [Emergency Stairway]) as a ‘secret team’ that did not perform publicly, but assembled together (‘like ninjas’) to create something – anything, something different every time – then disperse.

Daigoretsu wasn’t a *group*, really – more of a space, or something . . . hm, was it a group after all? We had 10 or 12 members, and we played almost every day, but with no organization – just ‘Hi. Let’s play something’. It was pure improvisation, but not just music. Any kind of action was okay. We would just play percussion, or make noise, or read poetry, or make a magazine – it was a very strange group. We had no live performances. It was just for us, just ‘at home’. It was like a strange mythical team. I decided to play Noise, like we played in Daigoretsu sometimes – but *all* the time.

In addition to experimental gatherings like Daigoretsu, the Drugstore clan began also to experiment with re-naming the sounds they appreciated.

While the name *Noizu* or ‘Noise’, then, ultimately came to refer to a specific performance genre, the term was first developed in listening sessions at Drugstore. Before becoming a description for their own sounds, ‘Noise’ was an assignation for off-the-map sounds: *henna* [‘strange’] records, so extreme-sounding that they escaped generic categories of music. According to Ishibashi, the term was introduced by Hijokaidan member Mikawa Toshiji, who always referred to his favourite strange records as ‘Noise’ regardless of their original generic context.

It was Mikawa, really, who started using the term ‘Noise’ to talk about all the *henna* records he was bringing into Drugstore. Whatever he liked, Whitehouse, Stockhausen, Nihilist Spasm

Band; all of that was 'Noise'. So then Hijokaidan started and of course they were 'Noise', too. So actually, they were influenced by some other noisy stuff, but Noise as a category was started by Hijokaidan, and then they started Alchemy [Hiroshige's label, begun in 1980].

As a catch-all designation for difficult, hard-to-get recordings, but also a specific reference to the group's creative output, 'Noise' gathered uncategoryisable sounds and located them in the ears of a single group of listeners. Drugstore's listeners gathered recordings from the margins of genres that had been named and organised elsewhere, and junked the previous categories to rename these sounds as 'Noise'. Before the group had ever even made Noise in performance, then, the sounds of Noise had been selected, remixed and explored in listening.

'Something with no message': Alchemy and the distribution of Noise

Drugstore's experimental listening stood as a deliberate rejection of the *jazu-kissa*'s cultivation of expertise through genre repertoires and the connoisseurship of historical narratives. And, as if to emphasise the transience and mutability of their listenership, the physical sites of experimental *kissa* were often temporary and so could not become long-term icons of historical fan communities. Ishibashi insisted that in spite of its importance, Drugstore 'was just a space . . . not like a *jazu-kissa* with a special history of the music, and sort of, how it was built bit by bit, and how it eventually became something. It [the music at Drugstore] didn't *become* anything, it just stayed *strange*'. To 'stay strange' required subverting the genre-oriented, archival listening of the *jazu-kissa*, but also demanded the creation of new sounds. The Drugstore group began to add their own Noise to the experimental blends of their record collections: Hiroshige's label, Alchemy Records, was introduced in the mid-1980s and has since continued to be a defining outlet for Noise.

The belief among overseas fans that Noise is largely a Kansai-based music is primarily due to Hiroshige's success with Alchemy. Ironically, though, the label's Osaka location was (and remains) a barrier to distribution within Japan. In Japan, Osaka is viewed as a mercantile city, with a rough, salt-of-the-earth population that is known for hard work a unique local dialect, an explosive sense of humour, and excessive eating and drinking. Though the second-largest city in Japan, Osaka's creative output is barely represented in national media, consisting of rustic *manzai* comedians and little else. The Drugstore group's production of their own 'Noise' resulted in a sudden and problematic assignation of locality. Being stamped with the 'Kansai' label often meant ruin for a local act in need of national distribution, since most media companies were based in the capital. Hiroshige explains:

I started Alchemy because I just kept seeing Noise artists quit because they couldn't get a record released. Kansai is strange, because almost all the media is in Tokyo, and Osaka is just not considered a place for culture. In Kansai, we can do new things, really good things, but it's just impossible to become a success.

But the only way to release Kansai acts was to start a label in Kansai, which then became further marked as local, and hindered Tokyo-based national distribution.

Like Drugstore, Alchemy was paradoxically hyper-local and global at the same time, while bypassing national trends. Its exclusive sonic focus came from a marginal regional group. But this, catalysed by the eclectic inclusivity of their extremist tastes, Alchemy leapt beyond Tokyo, beyond Japan, to energise a transnational circle of listeners seeking to mutate, merge, and recontextualise music. Noise became a new

but deliberately unmangeable generic category, in which they included themselves and the re-collected sounds they were beginning to make.

Alchemy decided to release all of the strange music from Kansai, and distribute it all over. I was into the idea of alchemy [*renkinjitsu*]: that you could make money from junk.³⁰ Our sound is junk, but we can record it, release cds, and make money. That's alchemy . . . something that's not even art, something with no message. That's also alchemy . . . the feeling we get from our junk.

While they actually made very little money out of their 'junk', the staff of Alchemy soon began to export recordings overseas during the 1990s 'boom' in transnational independent distribution. In its US importation, Alchemy's mix of Kansai 'Noise' was conflated with other records by other experimental Japanese artists – and all of their releases were subsequently renamed 'Noise music' then 'Japanoise' by North American listeners. Experimental musicians in North America and Europe began using the name to describe their own creations; many others who had chosen independently to use the descriptor 'Noise' for their work were swept into a new relationship with the emerging genre and its local Japanese authorship. As the sounds of Noise circulated overseas, they were revised to serve other, newly local creative purposes. But in most ears, Noise reverberated as 'Japan', just as the sounds of bebop had reverberated as 'America' in the classic *jazu-kissa*.

While Hiroshige does not always claim for Alchemy the status of a definitive original 'Noise', he points to an important divergence between American and Japanese listeners in approaching the basic idea. The Japanese artists developed their work through creative interpretation of disparate recordings usually classified in a broad array of different genres. They renamed these as 'Noise', and then placed their own work within the company of the records they gathered from the fringes. But Americans learned about Noise by hearing Japanese records whose contents were already named as 'Noise'. Hiroshige claims that American Noisicians did not alter the trajectory of outside narratives of musical genre through experimental listening, but instead attempted to align their work with 'Noise music' coming from Japan.

Our experience was totally different. We heard a lot of different kinds of music, we learned a lot from records, and we didn't know about something called 'Noise'. But after the 1980s, they [Americans] knew about 'Noise' from us. We didn't know about Noise music, so we made the first Noise music. If you know that there is such a thing as 'Noise' when you're making it, well – that's a different thing, isn't it?³¹

Noise had become a universal anti-music, but its new circulation was dislocated from its creative modes of listening, and its genre-defying alchemy was lost in translation. Noise eventually doubled back from its overseas reception in a 'reverse importation' [*gyaku-yunyu*] in which new listeners collected foreign 'imports' together with local 'indies' in a search for affinities beyond local, national, or cultural identity. But in Kyoto decades earlier, the name bubbled out of a very different feedback loop of audition: one that took the form of an alchemical circle of sounds and listeners, gathered around the *nabe* pot in an unheated room in winter.

Escaping 'authentic' listening

I have highlighted the story of Drugstore here in order to stress the creative reinterpretation of popular music's genre conventions within local contexts of listening, and the impact of experimental reception in the context of global media circulation.

Japan's music *kissa* outline two different trajectories of listening, which can range from conservative sound-preserving institutions to genre-destabilising experimental practices. While both *jazu-* and 'free' *kissa* share some similar listening techniques, they interact differently with a media distribution that ties musical authenticity to delocalised recordings. Drugstore's expansive experimentalism fostered obscurity in a conflation of diverse marginal styles, while *jazu-kissa* whittled their singular collections down to perfectly contained and delineated generic repertoires. While *jazu-kissa* did not begin as socially conservative institutions, the desire to hear signal in a global media circulation left out local noise, leading inexorably towards a generic purism that forever linked the exclusive sounds within their walls to a distant museumised 'jazz'.

On the other hand, in its rupture of genre and deliberate elision of cultural origin, Noise challenges the agenda – and questions the very possibility – of intercultural translation and the transmission of socio-musical meaning. *Jazu-kissa*, as Taylor E. Atkins points out in *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan*, were less places to socialise than places to be 'socialised, evangelised, and indoctrinated into the mental discipline of jazz appreciation, and to a deeper understanding of the music's message and spirit' (Atkins 2001, p. 4). But this complex, mediated socialisation is never limited to a single generic message. Late in his historical survey, Atkins suggests that the experimentalist Japanese performers of the 1970s ultimately capitulated in their last-ditch effort to produce an original native form of jazz. But if the generic message is 'jazz' – even if that 'jazz' is 'free' – could the transmission ever be 'authentically' localised to Japan? Or must both 'Japan' and 'jazz' be destabilised, and transformed, and obscured in Noise to become locally authentic?

The very nature of mediated communication is at stake in these questions. When a distant listening public is socialised, exposed to, or otherwise receives the message of musical style, which cultural experiences carry over whole from the 'original' context, and which are transformed and adapted to 'local' conditions? If a modern circulation is created somehow in listening, which of its 'messages' should be heard as the primary 'original' – the music recording, the sociality of the listening practices, the reproduction of historical or generic categories, or the interpretation of individual listeners? As Japanese listening shifted 'jazz' over time from an American to an international to a transcultural terrain, *kissa* helped to generate receptions as multi-layered and complex as Japan's ambivalent post-war embrace of internationalism [*kokusaika*]. And as the divergence between *jazu-* and 'free' *kissa* shows, a listenership mediated by recordings creates specialised practices of appreciation and appropriation that deeply affect the 'original' messages of musical genre. Genres, like records, do not rest in one site, but refract into multiple and successive transfigurations of musical meaning. Experimental performers, then, could no more be satisfied with 'jazz' as the apex of musical identity than they could be content with 'authenticity' as the organising principle of their public culture.

On the other hand, by their nature, experiments (whether social or musical) will never produce a lasting authenticity. Experimental musics like Noise are balanced on a tipping point, beyond which anti-generic positions become solidified and finally emerge themselves as constructs of genre. In circulation, the authenticity of experimental 'newness' becomes as fraught as the conservative nostalgic modes of the *jazu-kissa*. As Hiroshige points out in the case of Alchemy's Noise, the delicate balance of artistic intent can easily be overcome by the power of distant interpretation.³² Transitory sites like the short-lived Drugstore, then, are crucial for unpacking

the affective discourse of local cosmopolitan music listeners. When Drugstore closed in the early 1980s, it had only been open a few years, operating with a loose schedule and a varied clientele. While it served as a focal point for one important group's explorations, this place should not be seen as the ultimate site of origin for Noise. Noise coalesced into a genre through transnational channels of distribution that conflate and confuse music, musicians, and listeners from a diversity of places and times.

To follow the global reception of popular music ethnographically, music's far-flung interpretive practices must remain in the same frame as local historical narratives. The role of listening within the production and classification of music recalls John Blacking's emphasis on creative listening as the core facility of human music-making. Blacking argues that 'a perception of sonic order must be in the mind before it emerges as music', making external, structured listening the crucial action of musical creation, whether or not that sonic order is ultimately enacted by the listener themselves (Blacking 1973, p. 10). Against the argument that musicians alone occupy the space of musical creation, Blacking shows that listeners too create musically when they distinguish patterns of sound, and that learning to listen is both a vital social activity and the cognitive basis of an interactive music culture. The interrelationship between genre, circulation, and place is only truly audible when we tune into the experience of listening as it resounds – and noisily re-sounds – in many different ears at once.

Endnotes

1. I would like to thank several fellow scholars, colleagues and friends who helped with the development and editing of this paper. Suzuki Yoshiyuki, Eckhardt Derschmidt and Otomo Yoshihide helped me gather materials and bear down on the complex space of the *jazu-kissa* in Tokyo. Ishibashi Syojiro and Tabata Mitsuru helped me expand my approaches to Kansai's experimental music *kissa*, and Kelly Churko, Nakagawa Kohei and Fukushima Tetsuo guided my ears to some important listening excursions. I am also grateful for generous readings and comments by Ana Maria Ochoa, Marilyn Ivy, Mike Molasky, Anne McKnight, and an anonymous reader of this journal.
2. Many ethnomusicological books and articles have recently addressed the importance of local reception as a defining feature of popular music's social realisation, (for example, Waxer 2002; Crafts/Cavicchi/Keil 1993; Shank 1994; Fox 2004; among others). Ethnomusicological research on music listening groups is an important articulation of the global interdisciplinary project of cultural reception studies, which over the past two decades has included important contributions from Sociology (Bourdieu 1984), Anthropology (Dickey 1993; Abu-Lughod 1995; Morley and Robins 1995), and Cultural Studies (Radway 1984; Ang 1985, 1991; Negus 1991; Hall 1997) in an ongoing scholarly odyssey that has expanded from localised research models to larger inquiries about representation and cultural agency in the globalisation of media.
3. The *jokyuu*, as Silverberg describes, was a kind of erotic hostess (but not a prostitute) whose role in creating a sexualised public space metaphorised the contestation of sexuality with the radical cultural transformations of early modern Japan (Silverberg 1998). However, despite the increasing public role of women in cafes, whether as servers or customers, listening to recordings remained a male-coded pleasure in *jazu-kissa*. As *jazu-kissa* became more conservative in the 1970s and 1980s, the increased participation of women as listeners experimental and 'free' *kissa* in helped differentiated the later countercultural goals of social justice and 'alternative' internationalisation with the earlier embrace of democratic modernity in jazz.
4. See Taylor Atkins' excellent history *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* for a detailed discussion of the 1930's 'Jazz Age' in Japan.
5. Most Japanese writing on *jazu-kissa* fixes its historical centre in the 1960s, and much of the existing literature consists of anecdotal memorialising by representatives of this generational moment (*Adoribu-hen* 1989 and Soejima 2002, among others).
6. The institutional strictness of silent listening in *jazu-kissa* is legendary. Atkins cites a sign listing the 'house rules' of one Shibuya *kissa*: 'Welcome. This is a powerful listening space. Please "dig" your jazz. We ask that you observe silence while the music is playing' (Atkins 2001, p. 4).
7. A similar cost differential between imported and domestic media influenced film's reception

- in Japan. Japanese theatres often increased entrance fees for imported films to cover the higher rental costs, a move that gave American film a higher prestige but limited its audience (Freiberg 1987).
8. Compounding the exclusivity of the relationship between a customer and a particular *kissa* is the 'bottle keep' system, where a large sum is paid for a personal bottle of liquor, which is then marked with the customer's name and kept behind the bar. This makes the relationship between customer and master more homey and comfortable, eliminating the need for the awkward direct exchange of money, and allowing the customer to treat his friends without openly paying for their drinks.
 9. Japanese instrumental learning is traditionally organised within hierarchical 'guilds' called *iemoto*, which maintain a historical lineage of forms and styles through oral transmission in a familial organisational structure. As Linda Fujie notes, the social conditions of the *iemoto* system 'not only transmit knowledge; they also control quality', regulating the number of individuals licensed to perform, teach, or otherwise represent their music in society at large (Fujie 1996, p. 386).
 10. There are specific precedents for gendered modes of listening in Japanese modernity. Inoue Miyako describes how women's vocal character and language use have been monitored, contained and marginalised by male practices of listening that reduced the sounds of progressive female speech styles – and modern female sociality more generally – to non-referential 'unpleasant' sounds (Inoue 2003). Gender differentiation in listening appears to break differently along different generic (and anti-generic) lines. Compared to post-war *jazu-kissa*, female participation expanded exponentially in later 'free' *kissa* where women often became active performers, and women have a distinct social presence as listeners at experimental music events in Japan. But during their 1960s heyday, *jazu-kissa* were centres of bohemian progressivism on all fronts, and so were briefly aligned to some extent with nascent feminist politics in spite of their ultimately male-dominated social frame. There have been several famous *jazu-kissas* run by couples, one or two female musicians, and women have occasionally (though rarely in the authoritative and authorial role of masters) become famous and influential participants in Japanese jazz circles.
 11. Keightly (1996) contains a useful comparative discussion of gender roles in home audio equipment consumption in post-war US domestic space.
 12. The elevated aura of the master, whose taste and knowledge embody a fetishised, almost magical relationship with his records, is well captured by Bill Minor's remembrance of Hashimoto Tsuneo, *masutaa* of Nagoya *kissa* Jazz Aster, 'standing directly in front of a rack of LPs encased in transparent plastic covers, the room's light – reflected on them – producing the effect of some sort of flickering, glistening halo surrounding his head' (Minor 2004, p. 239).
 13. This passage is cited in a slightly different translation in Derschmidt (p. 308). Oshima's reminiscence is drawn from a collected volume featuring several authors nostalgically memorialising their student days spent in endless listening sessions in *jazu-kissa* (Adoribu-hen 1989). The *obi* [belt-cover] of the book describes the contents with the following sentimentally self-deprecating blurb, which can only be understood as a generational invocation of *sempai-kohai* context (literally 'senior-junior'; || a reciprocal social institution of elder-younger power relations and mentorship), meant to mark the ownership of subcultural jazz cool: 'To the young jazz fans: We, the retreat middle aged members of the baby-boom generation [*dankai no sedai*], want you to know that in the past there were days in our youth when we were excited by going to *jazu-kissa*'. The reaction to this generational curation of jazz was surely a motivating factor in the later move towards experimental genres among younger artists. As experimentalist Tori Kudo – who visits *jazu-kissa* frequently enough to think about having his grave marked 'Tori Kudo: He loved coffee-shops' – remarks, 'all the current critics have become totally middle-aged, and it feels like they're just enjoying some communication while waiting for their lives to end'.
 14. The special sense of atmosphere created by this focused audition is noted positively by touring musicians, who describe Japanese audiences as appropriately 'serious' listeners. Although this silence can just as often be read as 'too serious' by some, the aura of openness and attentiveness in Japanese audiences encourages foreign artists to return regularly.
 15. The introduction of new forms of technological mediation continually alters quotidian listening and created cultural change in many modern societies. For example, Hirshkind (2004) describes changing practices of 'ethical listening' to cassette-recorded sermons in contemporary Egypt in relation to nationalist constructions of a modern public sphere, while Weidman (2003) details the privileging of phonographic listening in South India as an emergent standard of authentic musical 'fidelity' that changed learning and performance practices of twentieth-century Karnatic music. See also Manuel (1993) on the impact of cassette media in South Asia, and Frith (1992) on Western 'industrial' contexts for mediated listening, and much of the literature cited in Footnote 18 below.
 16. The Japanese conflation of recordings and live music is perhaps most transparently exemplified in the widespread listener/performer music practice of *karaoke*. *Karaoke* performers sing along to recordings of popular songs, often in a secluded but public setting such as a rented room, where televised images further mediate the vocalist's performance. Rey Chow notes that

- while the mediation of the *karaoke* machine 'liberates' the singer from the objective requirements of musical skill, the crux of *karaoke* is the presence of a live voice representing a performance of individualised listenership. When enacting an original *karaoke* performance, 'one is literally performing as a listener, with all the "defects" that a performer is not supposed to have' (Chow 1993). Charles Keil describes *karaoke* as a 'mediated-but-live' experience in which the efforts and expressions of the individual are highlighted, not absorbed by the recording when the singer sings along with a pre-recorded tape (Keil 1994). Noting that Japanese have fluidly assimilated electronic media into their everyday lives, he suggests that modern Japan has developed a special cultural adaptation to mediated music, where mechanical processes of music reproduction are 'humanised', or 'personalised'.
17. Immediately following the end of the war, US forces issued orders for four million radio sets, and by 1948 Japanese factories were already producing a volume of 800,000 radios per year for the domestic market (Nakayama 1999, p. 29). The rapid re-introduction of radio in post-war Japan was abetted by occupation demands that the Japanese populace receive 'educational' broadcasts that carried information about the nation's reconstruction efforts and also American popular music. The eventual miniaturisation of transistor technology in the decade following the occupation allowed Japan to begin major exports of radios in the 1960s, triggering the 'economic miracle' (managed through imbalanced trade agreements with the US) that brought the nation to an economic par with the Western industrial sector.
 18. Sterne's insights contribute to recent studies of technological mediations and social listening practices, which include Green and Porcello (2005), Erlmann (2004), Lysloff and Gay (2003), Thompson (2003), Meintjes (2003) and Taylor (2001).
 19. Audiophile fetishism of 'fidelity' reveals a deeply ambivalent but richly productive relationship between consumers and industrial production. As Mark Perlman points out, audiophile 'tweaking' of stereo equipment helps to return authority to the individual listener by appropriating mass technologies in service of personally embodied experiences of music (Perlman 2003; in Lysloff and Gay 2003).
 20. Some literature describes 'experimental music' as a specifically American post-war period of largely academic composition, spearheaded by the work of John Cage, that responded to European 'avant-garde' modernism (Nyman 1974). In this paper, however, I will discuss 'experimental music' and 'avant-garde' aesthetics in their broader contemporary uses in popular music, which do not necessarily refer to this history. While Noise draws upon and sometimes partakes in these existing modes of categorisation, my use of 'experimental music' here does not refer to a historical lineage of styles, works and composers, but to a discourse of 'experimentalism' that appropriates a variety of generic, historical, and aesthetic narratives of music.
 21. Space prohibits a closer description of the complex and multi-layered genre discourses of Noise. Novak (2006) offers a detailed ethnographic and historical exploration of Noise, both in Japan and in the contexts of its transnational circulation.
 22. While Noise is an extremely diverse genre both sonically and culturally – it is widely practised in North America, Europe, and also cosmopolitan Latin America and mainland East Asia, its most famous proponents have been Japanese, especially during the 1990s when the neologism 'Japanoise' came into use as a generic reference.
 23. *Zenkyootoo*, or 'all campus joint struggle committees', are horizontal participatory student government organisations created to address the specific concerns of student groups. In the wake of the violent anti-imperialist student protest events of the early 1960s, *zenkyooto* were formed in part to allow a more diverse and spontaneous forum for student political activity in the face of the stricter and rapidly factionalising *zengakuren*, a national federation of student-self government organisations, similar to SDS on contemporary US campuses, which had close ties with the Communist Party (Steinhoff 1984). The looser *zenkyootoo*, on the other hand, displayed a less formal organisation and a more fluid membership, and were less explicitly political, organising public musical and theatrical events as well as occasionally mobilising political actions.
 24. The *angura* moment of late 1960s and 1970s Japan was productive of influential aesthetic movements and lasting stylistic innovations in several different areas of popular culture, centred in Tokyo's Shinjuku district and exemplified by the underground theatre of Terayama Shuji and the Tokyo Kid Brothers troupe; the new performance/dance style of Ankoku Butoh; the experimental films of Iimura Takahiko, Matsumoto Toshio, and the Image Forum collective; the art movements of Gutai and High Red Center; and the 'free' music of Takayanagi Masayuki, Abe Kaoru, Kosugi Takehisa, Haino Keiji and others, all of which were often presented together in multi-media events that conjoined socio-political and aesthetic goals. See Goodman (1999) for an interesting introduction to the poster artwork of *angura* theatre, Munroe (1994) on post-war avant-garde art, and Klein (1988) on Butoh performance.
 25. *Furii* or 'free' music in this context sprang from, but was quickly negotiated away from its most immediate derivation, from the 1960s African-American countercultural music 'free jazz'. Although there has been an active 'free jazz' scene in Japan – Soejima (2002) attempts a detailed history – 'free' here implies a broader freedom

- from all existing idiomatic musical structures, and was concurrently employed in generic constructions such as 'free rock', and 'free improvisation' (Bailey 1996). The Japanese context of 'free jazz' is part of a larger transnational movement towards decontextualisation and erasure in historical narratives of improvisation – see Lewis (2004) – in which both Japanese 'free' music and 'jazz' take part.
26. See Murai (2002) and Derschmidt (1998) for further commentary on the *jazu-kissa*'s decline into traditionalism in the 1980s and 1990s, and Molasky (2005) for a rebuttal of the nostalgic mythos that accrues to histories of 1960s *jazu-kissa*. However, some Japanese critics continue to argue for the potential of 'jazz' as a flexible source of innovation, despite the recent encroachment of totalising genre histories. Soejima Teruto argues that 'free jazz' should not be seen as the last sub-genre in a historical line and that 'genuine jazz has no goal. It's music that keeps changing, permanently' (Soejima 2002, p. 77).
 27. Including Jojo and Junko Hiroshige, for whom Drugstore served as the backdrop both for the friendship leading to their marriage and for the founding of their important Noise group Hijokaidan.
 28. This and all other quotations without direct citations that appear in this article are drawn from the author's personal interviews with the interlocutors, which are further contextualised in Novak (2006).
 29. The word *maniakku* is borrowed from English and is commonly used to refer to an obsessive fan. *Maniakku* is slightly more forgiving than the related Japanese term *otaku*, which translates as 'geek' or 'junkie', and often bears a darker connotation of antisocial fetishism. The co-existence of the English and Japanese terms to describe two different states of fandom in a single media consumption reflects a split in popular cultural identity in Japan, in which media is classified into native and foreign contexts of origin (e.g. *yogaku* as a term for all foreign music; *hogaku* for Japanese).
 30. In discussing the idea of 'alchemy', Hiroshige uses the Japanese term *renkinjitsu* for the magical process of transforming objects from one state to another, while the label name is rendered in English.
 31. This phrase could be alternately translated as 'that's sort of wrong, isn't it?'
 32. Hiroshige ironically references the impact of collector fetishism in Noise in Hijokaidan's 1999 release *Noise from Trading Cards*, whose cover features a photo of Hiroshige in his other business, a baseball trading card shop. The title suggests an 'alchemical' relationship between two kinds of consumer 'junk', as the profits from Hiroshige's successful card shop fund the perennial losses of the Alchemy record label.

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