16 In Search of Japanoise

Globalizing Underground Music

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In 1990, I had just returned from a year of teaching English in Japan, so I was surprised when I came back to college in Ohio and started to hear about "Japanese Noise Music." Some cut out the "music" idea altogether and called it all "Japanese Noise," and others just compressed it to "Japanoise." The name was supposed to identify a specific Japanese type of "Noise," which was already a pretty vague genre name. Some friends added that its top artists mostly came from the Kansai region and the cities Osaka and Kyoto where I'd been living. I'd run into some noisy punk rock and experimental music in little underground record stores and small clubs around Japan … but *Japanoise*? I had never heard of it until I was back in the United States, when the Boredoms' LP *Soul Discharge* found its way to the college radio station where I was a DJ, and tapped into the emerging independent music scene.

At the time, the flow of underground cassettes, CDs, and vinyl into the station was increasing on a daily level. But dropping the needle on *Soul Discharge* released the most spectacularly dissonant racket I'd ever heard, toggling through a spectrum of styles and sounds. Sometimes Boredoms sounded like a hardcore band, sometimes a random Dada cutup of popular culture: it was desperately heavy but also funny as hell. You couldn't possibly take it seriously, but, at the same time, it demanded your full attention. The two women on the cover had their faces obscured by ski masks, earmuffs, and 7″ records, and the title was scrawled in a kind of Graffiti Rock dayglo script. The names of the performers listed on the record jacket were equally bizarre: the drummer was called "Yoshimi P-we," the guitar player was "Yamamotor," one performer went by "God Mama," and the lead singer was simply called "Eye." Was this really from Japan? And was this noise really a new form of Japanese pop music?

The first track, "Bubblebop Shot," starts with someone squealing like a donkey. Then different voices explode into a chaotic mix of operatic singing; screams and moans in a reverb chamber; a gunshot; burble and blabble; a mockery of a Southern drawl. What language was this? Except for one repeated shout that was either "Fuck You" or "Thank You," it was unintelligible syllables and shouts, a stream of nonsensical, guttural scat. Although it may have been a small thing to hold onto, at least I knew it

was gibberish and not Japanese … but no translation was going to make sense of this.

I finally got to see Boredoms perform at the Kennel Club in San Francisco in 1993. Although the group had visited once before, a year earlier, this was their first tour since the U.S. release of *Soul Discharge*, and the hall was buzzing in anticipation. Walking calmly onto the stage, they seemed positively normal, setting up their gear, busily adjusting mic stands and drum equipment—just like a regular rock band, I thought—as the audience howled and cheered at them. Eye waved to the crowd and nodded distractedly; he climbed up on top of a speaker cabinet and surveyed the crowd. Drummer Yoshimi P-we adjusted her headset mic, and in a strange growling voice announced, "Hello! We are Boredoms! It's not a fucking joke! We come over the sea! And now … we rock you motherfucker!" Then she turned to the band: "*Iku yo*." (Let's go). Eye leapt into the air, wielding what looked like an electric field hockey stick, while Yoshimi leaned back from her drums and pierced the air with a scream like a riot whistle. The band smashed into a burst of cymbals and grinding chords, and from there it was pure chaos. Eye jammed the microphone into his mouth and staggered around the stage, head lolling; Yoshimi stood up on her drum throne, bleating and blasting on a trumpet; Yoshikawa was chanting alongside Eye and playing what appeared to be a pizza box; bassist Hila was a mass of hair and distortion on the left side of the stage. All of this made guitarist Yama-motor seem even stranger, as he stood to the side calmly picking out his solos with precision, dressed in a check shirt and baseball cap while everyone else stripped off their shirts and bounced between the amps, the ceiling, and the frenzied crowd. It was the best hardcore and the most psychedelic drum circle and the weirdest art rock I'd ever heard. It was a mass of transformative energy; Boredoms could take any music and turn it into ecstatic Noise.

If Boredoms can be considered as a representation of Japanese popular culture, they also exemplify the noisiness of that category. It is difficult to say what exactly is Japanese about them, and it is even more difficult to describe their music as "popular." Most Japanese would find it absurd if something like *Soul Discharge* should attain the emblematic global status of Japanese cultural forms like sushi, *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, or Zen meditation. At the same time, the overseas reception of Boredoms exhibits several core values associated with modern Japan in the global imagination throughout the twentieth century, ranging from its apparent incommensurability with so-called Western aesthetic values, to its postmodern mix of media influences and styles, to the cathartic expressions of violence and radical subjectivity associated with its postwar avant-garde (Miyoshi 1991; Ivy 1995; Iida 2001; Iwabuchi 2002; Allison 2006; Yoda and Harootunian 2006; Sakai 2008; Marotti 2013). Despite hewing uncomfortably close to an underground version of these historical Orientalisms—in which "Japan" appears equally unique and inscrutable—the cultural force of Boredoms is also a productive outcome of the contemporary distortions of transnational circulation.

Their "Japaneseness" was formed at the edges of North American reception in the 1990s, at a moment when notions of "Cool Japan" flowed into global consciousness through the spread of Japanese animation, comics, toys, games, and videogames, which together seemed to constitute much of Japan's contemporary cultural milieu. These foreign receptions of Japanese culture exhibit their own form of agency, which feeds back into Japan's contemporary society, influencing social identities, aesthetic projects, and even national cultural and economic policies as a form of "soft power" generated through the global reception of popular media.[1]

All of these productive miscommunications reinforced the unstable cultural identification of Japanoise, which constantly obscured its own tracks even as its networks grew to represent a new transnational scene. Boredoms were certainly a very noisy band. Their cacophonous sounds seemed to fit perfectly into the empty space under "Noise" in the categories of my existing knowledge; I knew that there were other Japanese artists who did name their work as *Noizu* (using the English language loanword for Noise), and I presumed that Boredoms must be the archetype of the genre. I was surprised, then, to learn that Boredoms themselves didn't accept the name, but instead pointed to a number of other groups, such as Hijokaidan and Merzbow, which they identified as true Noise. I would eventually follow this trail back to Japan and into years of multi-sited ethnographic research, discovering a trans-Pacific world of "harsh" Noise that represented a fragmented hardcore listenership at the edges of a deeply marginalized media circulation (Novak 2013).[2]

Japanoise, then, did not emerge fully formed as a local "scene" with a specific narrative of stylistic origins and cultural styles and identities. Rather, the very notion of the genre was constructed outside of Japan; it then looped back to Japanese performers like Boredoms, who were typically more oriented towards overseas reception than local audiences. Rather than being an identifiable form or style of Japanese popular culture, Japanoise is part of a process of "cultural feedback" that generates its social and aesthetic force through a transnational exchange of media, which redefines Japanese culture in the context of its noisy global circulation.

Big in America

Boredoms quickly came to represent the sound of the Japanese underground in the 1990s, as "alternative music" became the catchphrase of a rapidly consolidating global music industry. The group was signed to Reprise, a U.S. division of Warner Brothers, for the release of *Pop Tatari*, and their older Japanese releases were reissued overseas on Warner Japan (WEA). Boredoms opened for Nirvana at the height of their major label exposure, playing the influential 1994 Lollapalooza tour for huge crowds of young concertgoers across the United States. Eye collaborated with Sonic Youth, Ween, and NYC "downtown" composer John Zorn, while Yoshimi P-we joined

members of Pussy Galore and Pavement to form Free Kitten. Meanwhile, other Japanese bands such as Ruins, Melt Banana, and Zeni Geva began to tour North America, inspiring even more attention to the idea of an emerging new musical style from Japan.

The concept of Japanoise might never have taken hold without the North American media flow that Boredoms achieved in the 1990s, via the retail boom in "alternative music" that made independent CDs available in national distribution networks. A sprawl of Boredoms side projects (e.g., Puzzle Punks, Grind Orchestra, Hanadensha, OOIOO, AOA, UFO or Die) popped up in record stores and radio stations, sometimes appearing to create a cross section of the Japanese underground in and of themselves.[3] Meanwhile, audiences struggled to keep up with Eye's rapid-fire name changes from Yamatsuka to Yamantaka to Yamataka to eYe and then EYƎ and the group itself from Boredoms to V∞redoms to Boadrum. All of this inspired further attention to the elusive character of Japanoise, which was so richly productive of brilliantly confusing images and sounds.

Before Boredoms appeared as if out of nowhere in the early 1990s, recordings by Merzbow, Hijokaidan, Incapacitants, C.C.C.C, Solmania, Masonna, Aube, MSBR, and The Geriogerigegege had already filtered into North American reception, beginning with mail exchange of cassettes and then with independent labels through mail order catalogues. College radio stations and independent record stores circulated releases from Osaka's Alchemy, Public Bath, and Japan Overseas, while fanzines like Mason Jones' *Ongaku Otaku* (Music Nerd, 1995–1998) or Matt Kaufman's *Exile Osaka* (1993–1998) informed fans of archetypal examples of Noise and helped them assemble a rudimentary map of its generic boundaries in Japan. North American tours, especially by Merzbow and Masonna in the mid-1990s, allowed select fans to experience Japanese Noise live and related legendary stories for those who had missed their chance. Within this sub-subculture of purified style, Boredoms were simultaneously the best known and least representative example of the emerging genre of "Japanoise," which itself became the central cultural archetype of a larger transnational network of "Noise."

In the 1980s, "Noise" was already widely in use as a general term in punk and hardcore music circles, but new confusions between the overlapping terms of "Noise," "Noise Music," and "noisy music" helped create a space for imagining Japanese participation in a global underground network. "Noise" had been a loose but inclusive metageneric term for "experimental," "industrial," "hardcore," or otherwise non-musical sounds that were too noisy to be absorbed into a commercial mainstream or to be recognized as a distinct genre. It was a name for everything on the margins of musical product: recordings with no consumer market, sounds that could never be confused with any kind of normal music, performances that pushed the boundaries of entertainment or art. But the sudden appearance of Japanoise seemed to represent a more particular and discrete form of Noise from even further beyond the fringe. Japanese recordings were differentiated from local "Noise Music"

by the term "Japanese Noise Music" and finally the neologism "Japanoise." In the independent media networks of the 1990s, Noise was now something that "came from Japan." The invention of the term "Japanoise" also helped support the belief that the distant "Japanese Noise scene" was bigger, more popular, and more definitive of this extreme style.

Ironically, the deep strangeness that made Boredoms so appealing to overseas listeners also made it practically impossible for their music to be circulated within Japan. For one, the group was located in Osaka, outside of the hyper-centralized Japanese media industry in Tokyo. Without any significant independent media network to circulate their recordings to retail locations, distribution was limited to mail order and direct face-to-face sales. Without a major label contract and professional management, it was practically impossible for an artist or group to get recordings into stores or to be covered by televisual or print media. Another factor was the radically confrontational performance style adopted by some underground groups. Eye's duo Hanatarashi ("Snotnose," also spelled Hanatarash) only managed to play a handful of shows in the mid-1980s before they were banned from most clubs (Figure 16.1). During one performance, Eye cut his leg open with a chainsaw and terrorized the audience with flying chunks of metal. In the most infamous episode, Eye destroyed a Tokyo club by driving an abandoned backhoe though the space, smashing the stage, running into walls, and chasing the crowd out of the room.

Stories of these shows quickly became canonical in illustrating the extreme character of Japanoise for those in the know, and photos were circulated in underground magazines in Japan and in the United States for years (and decades later on the Internet). But at the time, the destructive nature of these events effectively eliminated all future performance opportunities for these bands in Japan—at least for a few years, until American bands came to Japan and invited Hanatarashi and Boredoms to open for their concerts. Yet while these conditions made it difficult to establish a local fan base, they also motivated Japanese groups to establish a foreign audience by sending recordings overseas, essentially forcing them further underground until they broke into America as a new wave of Japanoise.

Japanoise appeared to be a unique local style of music from a particular place and time, with representative musicians, sounds, and a body of recordings that could be collected under the name. But the genre could really only have been formed in this disconnected history of circulation between Japan and the United States, in the distant exchanges of a pre-Internet mediascape at the end of the twentieth century. The features of this particular distribution of global popular media in the 1990s—at a moment in which Japanese recordings were newly available to U.S. audiences, while information about the musicians and their social context was much less accessible—resulted in a trans-Pacific network of musicians and listeners who were joined by aesthetic sensibilities but fragmented by lack of knowledge and intercultural dialogue.

Figure 16.1 Hanatarashi's first performance, Shibuya La Mama, Tokyo, March 20, 1985.
Source: Courtesy of Gin Satoh.

Through the flow of extreme recordings from different Japanese groups (many of which, as I've mentioned, were primarily offshoots of Boredoms), it was easy for North American fans to imagine Boredoms as springing forth from a cohesive, politically transgressive, and locally resistant community in Osaka—essentially, the Japanese version of a familiar punk or hardcore DIY scene in the United States. But it was more accurate that groups like Boredoms had few opportunities to perform live and did not necessarily know the other representatives of Japanoise with whom they were associated. Instead, they poured their sounds into cassettes and CDs like messages in bottles and sent them across the Pacific, where they were received as unintelligible, but fascinating, objects of a distant Japanese scene.

The Alchemy of Cultural Feedback

This is not to say that a local underground history of Noise cannot be found in Kansai; on the contrary, Kyoto and Osaka both housed a large number of influential performers through the 1980s and 1990s. The infamous group Hijokaidan, for example, formed around 1978 in a small hangout space called Drugstore near Doshisha University in Kyoto. Students and experimental music fans would gather to listen to rare imported records of strange electronic, psychedelic, and punk music—European and American recordings of underground rock, punk, and free jazz by groups like Can, the Los Angeles

Free Music Society, Albert Ayler, The Velvet Underground, Butthole Surfers, and so forth—all of which they called "Noise" (*Noizu*) to mark its perverse character and distance from "normal" music. Their choice of the English language loanword *Noizu* for the emerging style reflected their assignation of its origins to an international context, rather than a particular local Japanese setting.

Eventually, Hiroshige Jojo and some other Drugstore fans decided to make Noise for themselves as Hijokaidan, beginning with improvised sounds and collaborations with poets and dancers at Drugstore, and moving on to radically confrontational performances that featured acts like urinating on stage and throwing fish guts and *natto* (fermented soybeans) at the audience; like Hanatarashi, they were quickly banned from most local clubs. In order to continue producing Noise, guitarist Hiroshige Jojo started an independent label called Alchemy Records in 1983. "I decided to release all of the strange music from Kansai," Hiroshige said, "and distribute it everywhere. I was into the idea of alchemy [*renkinjutsu*]: that you could make money from junk. Our sound is junk, but we can record it, release CDs, and make money" (quoted in Novak 2013: 112).

Even if the label barely broke even over the next three decades, Alchemy put out hundreds of Noise recordings that defined Japanoise for overseas listeners, including the first two Hanatarashi LPs and other projects by Boredoms members. While a handful of Alchemy issues were passed around the Kansai scene, the majority sold via mail order to North American and European listeners, who discovered the label through experimental music magazines and independent distribution companies like Public Bath and Japan Overseas. While Alchemy Records were sold as expensive and rare imports in the United States, this only increased their appeal as "hard-to-get" underground music, and solidified the reputation of the distant Japanoise scene.

In important ways, then, the cultural object of Japanoise did not just "come from" Japan, but was created and perpetuated in the feedback of transnational circulation. And even as these channels enabled the increasing flow of Noise to other places in the world, they amplified the miscommunications, distortions, and delays that have become structural conditions in the global representation of Japanese popular culture. If objects of foreign culture must be translated in order to become meaningful elsewhere, Japanoise was instead subjected to a process of "untranslation" that generated new meanings outside of any original context. In these formative channels of circulation, the imagined differences of Japanese culture were projected onto Japanoise, sustained in North American receptions, and expanded in secondary Japanese identifications with this new cultural object.

Despite the fact that Japan possesses a robust popular culture industry and boasts one of the most powerful export economies in the world, its media exchange with the United States has been surprisingly unbalanced. Most popular music in Japan sounds very much like Western pop music and some artists (e.g., Matsuda Seiko, Utada Hikaru) have even gone as far as to record

albums entirely in English to court overseas fans. But while American popular culture is deeply integrated into everyday knowledge in Japan, the sounds of "J-pop" have not done the same in the United States; Americans can rarely identify more than a handful of Japanese musicians of any genre. As scholars such as Taylor Atkins (2001), Ian Condry (2006), Jennifer Matsue (2009), and Marvin Sterling (2010) have described, Japan boasts jazz, hip-hop, hardcore punk, and dancehall reggae scenes that are among the largest in the world, but Japanese artists in these genres have rarely been received as authentic producers, and are sometimes disregarded outright. Beyond considering Japanese popular music as inauthentic and unoriginal, Americans sometimes disparage Japanese audiences as clueless and out-of-touch for their unorthodox preferences. When an American musician or band becomes "big in Japan"—for example, surf group The Ventures has remained enduringly popular for many decades—this Japanese reception often implies that their value has diminished at home; their popularity, it seems, must result from some sort of distortion, springing from the lopsided feedback of an unreciprocated media circulation.

In connecting with an American audience as a new and unique creative object of Japanese popular culture, Boredoms represented an anomaly in the historical course of transnational flows between modern Japan and the U.S. media market. This is not to say that Boredoms makes any particular sense as a "crossover" success from one culture to another; far from it, the group was never fully rooted in Japan in the first place. Rather, their overseas reception was generated in part by the misalignments of their transnational distribution, making them appear central to a Japanese cultural zeitgeist when their development was actually much slower and more fragmented. Foreign audiences historicized the group through their recordings, which appeared out of order and out of context, as U.S. reissues typically trailed behind Japanese releases, often by years. For example, Boredoms' earlier albums *Anal by Anal* and *The Stooges Craze in Osorezan* (*Osorezan no Stooges kyo*) were released in 1986 and 1988 in Japan on Trans and Selfish Records, but not issued in the United States until 1994 on Reprise, and then with a redesigned cover and under the new major label title *Onanie Bomb Meets the Sex Pistols*, which effectively reordered the group's catalogue for overseas listeners. For the U.S. release of *Soul Discharge*, some tracks were removed and replaced with Eye's unreleased solo recordings; later albums were released in special Japan-only editions, which became rare collectors' items in the overseas market. But despite—or even, perhaps, due to—these gaps and disjunctures, Boredoms *did* eventually become generative of a long-term transnational audience, as each side reached out to the other to discover "the real Noise scene."

Japanese media receptions are often characterized by the phenomenon of "*gyaku-yunyu*," or "reverse importation," through which Japanese artists become validated at home after gaining status on a foreign stage (exemplified by, for example, nightly broadcast news segments dedicated to Japanese baseball players in the American Major League). For example, Boredoms were almost completely unknown in Japan until they were asked to open

for American indie stars like Sonic Youth and Caroliner Rainbow on their Japan tours in the early 1990s. As Japanese audiences heard the American groups praise the band and had a chance to see them appear live in large venues, Boredoms finally became local heroes. Over the next few years, a mini-media flurry buzzed around the group as emblems of the growing "alternative music" scene in Japan, with Eye and Yoshimi appearing in fashion magazines and briefly as television hosts, and watched hordes of college students at Boredoms shows storm the merchandise booth to clean out the entire stock of t-shirts in minutes. Eye became a popular club DJ, spinning cut-up samples and beats as DJ光光光 (*Pika Pika Pika*, meaning "flash" or "bling"); guitarist Yamamoto Seiichi toured with Rashinban and Omoide Hatoba and opened the now-iconic hardcore and punk club Bears in downtown Osaka; Yoshimi started the all-female group OOIOO, and bassist Hila created psychedelic sounds as Hanadensha (Flower Train), both of which had releases on WEA Japan; the band scored Miike Takashi's controversial 2001 film *Ichi the Killer* (*Koroshiya 1*); and American experimental rock stars The Flaming Lips narrated an imaginary tale of Yoshimi saving the world on their breakthrough album *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* (Flaming Lips, 2002). All of these projects reinforced Boredoms as the symbolic center of the Japanese underground and the heart of Japanoise, even as their circulation came to represent a scene unto itself.

Spiraling In and Out of Circulation

Naturally—or at least in the tidal nature of media cycles—this sudden flow of recognition ebbed. By the early 2000s, Boredoms had lost their major label connections, changed their names and their lineup many times, broke up, reformed, and shifted back into indie publishing. But over the years, the group firmly established a hardcore international fan base that continued to discover their recordings, tell their stories, and book them at mega-festivals (such as the Fuji Rock Festival and All Tomorrow's Parties) well into the 2000s and 2010s. As one of the most enduring underground acts in the world and a central node in a global network of musicians and listeners, Boredoms can still suddenly draw together new circulations in their rare overseas appearances.

In 2007, Boredoms traveled to Brooklyn, New York, to perform *77 Boadrum* (Figure 16.2), a free outdoor concert in Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, beginning precisely at 7:07 PM on July 7, 2007, and ending 77 minutes later. Spread across the lawn at the bank of the East River beneath the Manhattan Bridge were 77 drum sets, arranged in a large spiral pattern; at the center was a raised stage where Yoshimi and newer Boredoms members Tatekawa Yojiro and Muneomi Senju sat behind drums facing Eye, who stood before a 7-necked guitar-like structure called "The Sevener." Within the enormous spiral of drum sets spinning out from the stage were the other 74 performers, drawn from underground bands across North America, including members of Gang Gang Dance, Lightning Bolt, Dymaxion, Oneida, No Neck Blues

Figure 16.2 *77 Boadrum.*
Source: Courtesy of Jason Nocito.

Band, and many others. Hundreds of listeners crowded around the spiral, while many more watched above from atop the Brooklyn Bridge. This was less a concert than a cosmic event, a gathering of the tribes, a conference of drummers playing out the noise of a transnational network to become, as Eye wrote in the program notes (2007), "a giant instrument, one living creature. The 77 *Boadrum* will coil like a snake and transform to become a great dragon!"

The collective roar of 77 *Boadrum* was almost nothing like the stylistic free-for-all of *Soul Discharge*. It reflected the group's slow shift over two decades, transforming their early abrasive, jagged hardcore attacks into a psychedelic sonic ritual. Standing at the center, Eye conducted the sounds around the spiral, the noise traveling around the circuit of drummers and eventually building into a visceral, primal beat. In the words of Unwound's Sara Lund (Drummer #67):

> [T]he cymbal washes gradually rolled out from the center, the WHUSH-HHHHH getting louder and louder. Then, the single hit on the toms started as the cymbal wash reached the tail of the spiral. As the tom hits made their way through the drummers, the WHUSHHHH got quieter as the whoomp WHOOMP WHOOMP of the toms grew louder and louder until finally all 77 of us were hitting our toms in unison. The ground shook and tears sprang to my eyes as I was completely overcome

> with emotion. My breath was caught in my throat and the corners of my mouth were grabbing at my ears.
>
> (Lund 2007)

Part of what made this moment so powerful was its materialization—if only for a particular group of people in a singular point in space and time—of a long-dreamed and hard-won community, built and maintained through the confusions of distance and separation. That, and the recognition that this scene was only temporary, and necessarily so: this world of sound could only continue to exist by feeding back into circulation, dissipating into stories, recordings, and images.

77 *Boadrum* became a legendary event almost overnight, as photos and YouTube clips of the performance circulated to fans around the world; eventually two different films, (both directed by Kawaguchi Jun) were released on DVD, on Thrill Jockey in the United States (2010) and Commons in Japan (2008). Following 77 *Boadrum*, Boredoms did four more numerological performances on 08/08/08, 09/09/09, 10/10/10, and 11/11/11, each in a different location. *88 Boadrum* was held at the La Brea Tar Pits at 8:08 in Los Angeles, while a satellite performance featuring 88 different drummers took place at 8:08 in Brooklyn; Boadrums 9 and 10 stripped down to a core group of 9 and 10 drummers in Manhattan and Melbourne, respectively, and *111 Boadrum* gathered another huge spiral of 111 drummers in Byron Bay, Australia.

Over three decades, Boredoms emerged, submerged, and re-emerged, each time taking a different shape and reflecting a different angle in the obscure narratives of Japanoise. Whether or not they were ever really representative of Japanoise—or whether there ever really could (or should) be a definitive archetype of its elusive form—is another question. In its essence, Japanoise is less a genre of music than a process of global imagination that conjoins different actors separated by space, time, language, and culture. But this feedback also questioned the meaning of cultural origins, undermining the nature of things that might be called "Japanese popular culture," and what it might mean for a globally circulating form to "come from" a particular cultural location. Even as Japanoise loosened the links between musical genres and local scenes, its networks began to create a new transcultural project of radical sonic aesthetics. If "Noise" can become "Music," what do we mean by "Culture," or for that matter, "Japan?"

Japanoise moves in this way, as a force of circulation, materializing through distortions and delays over time. It spiraled into being through alternating cycles of realization and confusion, appearing and then disappearing again. It was something that could easily be named, and yet remained hard to define; that never ceased to move and change; that continued to transform, even to the point of losing its own form. The elusive movements of Boredoms across the transnational mediascape of the 1990s left a breadcrumb trail into an underground imaginary. Japanoise disappears and reemerges in different forms

in different places; it is perpetuated across online networks and momentarily flashes into being in spectacular once-in-a-lifetime events. The listener backs into its presence, stumbling across thresholds of recognition that suddenly flip into consciousness, like a microphone slowly approaches a speaker, and a feedback loop springs into being. It was the emergence of this feedback—and the possibility of an incomprehensible, incommensurable world of sound—that became so compelling in the global, and ongoing, search for Japanoise.

Notes

1 One exemplary model is the notion of "gross national cool" proposed by American reporter Douglas McGray (2002) and subsequently adopted by Japanese governmental and trade organizations as a way to describe the instrumentalization of Japan's popular media to influence global perceptions of its culture industry.
2 For more information, see *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation* book website at www.japanoise.com.
3 The short list of Boredoms-related side projects includes Audio Sports, Dendoba, Destroy 2, Concrete Octopus, Free Kitten, Noise Ramones, and many others. A complete discography would take up several pages, as Dave Watson has demonstrated on his exhaustive Boredoms website *Sore Diamonds*. Available at http://eyevocal.ottawa-anime.org/boredoms/boreside.htm.