**αγία Σώτειρα /Σωτηράκι**

* **Αθηνά**
* **σταφύλια – αμπέλι**
* **σωτηρία (Βενετοί) από την τρικυμία**
* **καλοκαιρινή – φως (κεραμική + πηλός < Κοκκινιά)**

**+ Αγ. Γεώργιος (οδηγοί – αραμπατζήδες)**

**μεταμόρφωση**

**The Theory of Dirt**

Despite it becoming her most famous saying, the phrase “dirt is matter out of place” was not actually coined by Mary Douglas. Its exact origins are unclear, but the earliest known version appears in the record of an 1853 speech given to the Royal Agricultural Society by Lord Palmerston (who would later go on to be the fifth Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) (Fardon 2013). Nevertheless, “matter out of place” remains the quintessential Douglassian expression and is a keystone in both of her major efforts concerning dirt: *Purity and Danger* (1966)and the later essay “Pollution,” first published in the 1968 *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* and subsequently included in the anthology *Implicit Meanings* (Douglas 1975). What follows is a summary of her theorizing on dirt in these texts.

Dirt, as we know from the famous phrase, is “matter out of place,” a definition that, Douglas states, implies two important conditions: “a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order” (Douglas 1966: 44). To Douglas, “there is no such thing as absolute dirt” (idem: 2), and “no single item is dirty apart from [i.e. outside of] a particular system of classification in which it does not fit” (idem: vii). “Where there is dirt there is system” (idem: 44), because dirt is not an independent, objective attribute of something, but a “residual category [of things] rejected from our normal scheme of classifications” (idem: 45). It is a label for “all events which blur, smudge, contradict or otherwise confuse accepted classifications” (Douglas 1968: 50), and, importantly, it is a relative term – “what is clean in relation to one thing may be unclean in relation to another” (Douglas 1966: 10). Douglas illustrates these points with mundane examples: shoes, for instance, are not dirty in themselves, “but it is dirty to place them on the dining table” (idem: 44). Similarly, food is not necessarily dirty, “but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom” (idem: 37)*.* Neither is dirty in an absolute sense, but is considered so due to its out-of-place-ness. Whilst cooking utensils are dirty within the context of the bedroom, in the kitchen they are in the right place and hence – relatively speaking – clean. Dirtiness is less a property of things than it is a contextual label attributed to them.

Things may come to be “out of place” by being anomalous or ambiguous. Douglas defines an anomaly as any “element which does not fit a given set or series,” while ambiguity is a characteristic of something capable of two interpretations (idem: 47). In Douglas’ view, the categorization and organization (of objects, animals, senses, encounters, etc.) implicit in perception is, above all, an act of sense-making. Life, she suggests, is “inherently untidy” (idem: 5), and the separation and demarcation of experience into categories is an effort to “impose system” and make sense of the world (idem). Things that are anomalous or ambiguous are seen as dirty because they resist this kind of classification by not easily “fitting” into established categories. This directly threatens the perceptual (and inherently social) structure, and, as a consequence, anomalous and ambiguous things are often seen as disgusting, disruptive, and dangerous. However, these are not the only possible reactions; there is a “whole gradient on which laughter, revulsion and shock belong at different points and intensities” according to the type of transgression (idem: 47). What is consistent is that anomaly and ambiguity demand at least *some* kind of reaction because, as Douglas states, when we encounter them the underlying feeling is that “a system of values […] has been violated” (Douglas 1968: 50). In order to counter the discomfort inherent in such transgressions, they must in the first place be limited, and, when they do occur, “fixed,” leaving dirt tidied up and dissonance reduced. Processes to achieve these ends are what Douglas refers to as our “pollution behavior,” and they are deliberate, creative acts. Eliminating dirt, she states, “is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to reorganize the environment” (Douglas 1966: 2), and the aim of pollution behavior is to ensure “that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas” (Douglas 1968: 53). One of the principal ways in which this is achieved is through the exaggeration of difference. Douglas states that it is only by exaggerating the difference between “within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against” that a “semblance of order is created” (1966: 4), as exaggeration sharpens the boundaries between categories which may otherwise be hazy or indistinct.

Once transgressions have occurred, they can be dealt with in a number of ways. Breaches of pollution rules may be “punished by political decree, sometimes by attack on the transgressor, and sometimes by grave or trivial sanctions” (Douglas 1968: 53), and additionally the simple act of labelling something “dirt” plays an important role, as the inherent negativity of the term serves to publicly condemn the contradiction or confusion of cherished classifications that has caused it. This has the effect of clearly outlining what is expected and acceptable and what is not. As Douglas writes: “when something is classified firmly as anomalous [or ambiguous], the outline of the set of which it is not a member is clarified” (Douglas 1966: 47). In other words, labelling something “out of place” (and therefore dirty) simultaneously establishes what would be “in place” (and therefore clean). In Douglas’ example of shoes on the dining table, for instance, calling the situation dirty reinforces the idea that, usually, shoes are *not* placed on the dining table, and it is hoped that the act of labelling such behavior “dirty” will cause the offender to recognize the out-of-place-ness of their action and “fix” the transgression by revising the placement of the shoes.

Of course, what is “out of place” to one person may not necessarily be so to another. Dirt exists only “in the eye of the beholder” (Douglas 1996: 2), and what is classified as dirt varies between groups and individuals. Although dirt can be consistently defined as “that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained” (Douglas 1968: 50), what constitutes a “pattern” or what is considered a *desirable* pattern has no such consistency. Whereas the “sorting” of perception (and experience) into categories is a human universal, their boundaries are entirely a matter of culture. Indeed, pollution behaviors form a central part of what we mean when we speak of “culture,” as dirt, by definition, invokes the wider structure of which it is not a part. Additionally, due to their important role in reinforcing and maintaining the social order (i.e. outlining what is and isn’t acceptable behavior), pollution rules take on a deeply symbolic role, and dirt, according to Douglas, carries a “symbolic load” (Douglas 1996: 4). The labels “clean” and “dirty” can be mapped on to more overtly moral ones such as “pure/impure” and “sacred/profane,” and pollution beliefs are used “in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status” (idem: 3). To be “clean” is to be good, to agree to cherished classifications, and to uphold the social order and accepted ways of being. By contrast, to be “dirty” is to be bad, to disregard convention, to confuse or ignore classifications and have different and unacceptable ways of being. Dirt, far more than just “matter out of place,” is indicative of an entire moral system.

**A Theory of Noise**

Having established the basics of Douglas’ theory of dirt, in this section we begin applying them to noise. Our methodology here is essentially very simple and is roughly akin to striking out the word “dirt” and replacing it with “noise” to see if Douglas’ aphorisms retain their sense. Even the most significant of Douglas’ ideas about dirt are drawn from the initial premise that it is “matter out of place,” and so it follows that if noise is truly “sound out of place,” then Douglas’ other remarks will translate. Drawing on examples from everyday life and contemporary sound studies scholarship (including, for example, texts on the Reggae sound system session, Victorian soundscapes, sound in the contemporary slums and favelas of Delhi and Rio de Janeiro, and noise music), we explore some of the intricacies of the noise-dirt analogy. We examine the implications of the definition “sound out of place” before looking at the concepts of anomalous sounds and ambiguous sounds. We then look at sonic transgressions and how they are negotiated before finally moving on to consider whether or not noise, like dirt, can be said to carry a culturally significant “symbolic load.” By testing Douglas’ anthropological ideas against sound studies research in this way, we hope to highlight the synergies between these two discursive fields and emphasize both the potential and the value produced through their integration.

Sound out of place

Just as with dirt, defining noise as “sound out of place” implies two important general conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Noise, under this definition, is the by-product of “a systematic classification and ordering of sounds,” and there is therefore no such thing as “absolute noise” because no sound is noisy outside of the particular classificatory system in which it does not fit. Sounds are not noisy in themselves, but can become noise if they occur in a place where they are not supposed to be. The opposite can also be said to be true: any sound occurring in its appropriate place is, by definition, not noise. “Noisiness” is not an inherent quality of sounds, but a label attached to them. As in Douglas’ writing, these ideas can be illustrated with everyday examples. Shouting, for instance, is not necessarily a “noisy” thing to do, but to shout in a library is generally considered noisy because it is classified as a silent (or quiet) space. The sound generated by shouting – and the behavior itself – is “out of place” within the context of a library, and is thus considered “noise.” In a different context, however, (perhaps a football match) shouting would be “in place” and would most likely meet with approval as an expression of engagement and enthusiasm. Importantly, just as “dirtiness” and “cleanliness” are relative, so too are “noisiness” and “quietness,” and “what is quiet in relation to one thing may be noisy in relation to another.” A library is quiet when compared to a football match but would be noisy compared to an anechoic chamber.

Anomaly and ambiguity

If noise is “sound out of place,” then sounds, like dirt, come to be “out of place” primarily by being anomalous or ambiguous. What might this mean? Translating Douglas’ definition, an anomalous sound is one “which does not fit a given set or series.” This does little conceptually other than reinforce the idea that sounds are considered noise if they are “out of place.” By not fitting a given set or series, anomalous sounds are by definition “out of place” and are therefore considered noise. Again, just as with dirt, when a sound is classified as anomalous, “the outline of the set of which it is not a part is clarified.” The shout in the library is noise because it is an anomaly, and classifying it as such reinforces the fact that the expected state is quietude.

While applying anomaly to sound effectively tells us what we already know, the concept of an “ambiguous sound” is altogether more interesting. Again following Douglas’ definition, ambiguous sounds are those that are “capable of two (or more) interpretations.” Consider a cold caller heard over the telephone whose voice sounds at times “male” and others “female.” Despite having no bearing on the content of what is said, the ambiguity of the sound demands attention and often provokes a desire to “know” the “true” sex of the caller. Confronted by ambiguity, there is a human need to categorize. It is also possible to think of other examples of ambiguous sounds that provoke a related but slightly different response. The call of a fox, for example, is uncannily like the shriek of young woman or child. Even when one is familiar with the fox’s call, it can still be disconcerting. Anybody who has ever generated a noticeable “fart sound” in a public place by sitting on a leather chair will know that the ambiguity over the origin of the sound makes for an interesting social experience, and, just as Douglas states, revulsion is not the only possible reaction. In a Doctor’s surgery, shock and embarrassment would likely be the response, whereas a quasi-fart in a primary school would likely generate howls of laughter.

What connects the above cases is that they are examples of sounds capable of provoking two auditory interpretations. It is possible, however, for sounds to be ambiguous in other ways. Henriques (2003) has implied that a kind of sensory ambiguity is a crucial factor in both the perceived danger and almost mystical lure of extremely loud[[1]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524" \l "374532) music. He writes about reggae/dancehall “sound system sessions” taking place in Jamaica, informal outdoor concerts where competing “sound systems” (made up of DJs, MCs, and producers) vie for the affection of gathered crowds in a continual game of one-upmanship. While for the audience the session is first and foremost a street party, to the sound systems it is a volume-based status game where high wattage amplifiers and giant speaker stacks are king. Describing the sound system session, Henriques uses a series of strong and seemingly contradictory adjectives: the music is “hard, excessive and extreme.” Through its volume it becomes a “physical force” with its own “weight and mass” (Henriques 2003: 451), and yet at the same time the sound is also “soft and embracing,” and attending the session is an “enveloping” and “immersive” experience (idem). Because of the volume of the music, it is no longer purely an aural phenomenon; sound becomes a physical force that penetrates and invades the body: “it’s not just heard in the ears, but felt over the entire surface of the skin […] the bass line beats on your chest, vibrating the flesh, playing on the bone and resonating the genitals” (idem: 452).

In Purity and Danger, Douglas illustrates the concept of ambiguity by summarizing Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay on stickiness (1943). Something that is sticky or viscous, she writes, “repels in its own right, as a primary experience,” as it calls into question the hitherto established categories of liquid and solid (Douglas 1966: 47). The viscous is unstable, and “clings like a leech” (idem); it “attacks the boundary between [oneself] and it” (idem). Touching a “normal” liquid is a different sensory experience because one remains solid, whereas “to touch stickiness is to risk diluting [oneself] into viscosity” (idem.). The ultra-loud sound system sessions of Jamaica operate on a similar logic: the enormity of the speaker systems means that the music is not only heard as a sound but felt as a touch, and it is clear from Henriques’ description of the intense vibration that conventional bodily boundaries become blurred. However, rather than repelling (as with viscosity), ambiguity in this case generates an intense and almost hypnotic pleasure. This is not entirely surprising; as we have already established, encounters with ambiguity can generate a wide range of reactions, and there is a long history of deliberate exposure to transgression and ambiguous states as part of pollution rituals and other ceremonies (Burke 1978; Douglas 1966; Marriott 1966; Turner 1964).

In fact, while some have argued that reggae is uniquely subversive and dangerous (Davis and Simon 1977; see also Chang and Chen 1998), it seems logical that any genre played loud enough has the power to become ambiguous and generate a powerful attraction. The “chest rattle” caused by deep notes played on a high-capacity speaker system is a ubiquitous feature of the modern concert, and our predilection for music to be very loud can perhaps be explained by reference to its sensory ambiguity. Of course, listening to music at lower volumes (where it is mostly[[2]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524" \l "374533) an auditory sensation) is still enjoyable, and so our attraction to ambiguous, high-volume, multi-sensory “tactile” sound does not serve to explain our enjoyment of music in general. Nevertheless, ambiguity is a useful concept in exploring, for instance, the draw of very loud music and its use in concerts and other musical contexts that can be regarded as public rituals.

A final aspect of ambiguity worth considering briefly is its propensity to be felt as dangerous. Douglas explains that because ambiguous things and ambiguous behavior threaten the perceptual and social order, they are generally to be feared and admonished. Once again, this idea translates directly to sound and is well illustrated by the Jamaican example. Despite being intensely enjoyed by those who attend, sound system sessions are controversial and condemned in wider Jamaican society. Newspaper columnists write of the dangers of attending the sound system session and warn that even those who do not attend may suffer the ill effects of its noise. Stress, loss of sleep, cardiovascular problems, and even damage to foetuses are cited as potential health risks[[3]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524#374534), and while there is no doubt that sustained exposure to loud sound can have a negative health effect (Passchier-Vermeer and Passchier 2000), it is interesting to note the extent to which sound system culture is rejected as medically dangerous.

Douglas describes how ritual pollution behaviors have often been explained by “medical materialism” (i.e. the idea that there is an underlying medical or “scientific” reason for certain acts, objects, and substances being classified as dirty – that they are likely to induce sickness, for instance). While Douglas recognizes that medical materialism may well play a part in some acts of classification, she argues that it does not fully account for the intricacy and elaboration found in the wider system of classification. We see an interesting parallel here, in that the same can be said of noise. Thus, rather than being seen as purely medically dangerous, sound system culture is seen as socially dangerous, constituting the basis for a considerable “moral panic” (Thompson 1998) in Jamaica. The DJs and promoters associated with sound systems are castigated in the press for “polluting the environment” and “denigrating women and children” with their “regular doses of lewd, vulgar, misogynistic content”[[4]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524#374535), while those who attend are described as deviant and out of control (Henriques 2003: 455). The lyrics of songs played are felt to promote only violence and “slackness,” and the sound system session as a whole is considered “entirely and absolutely excessive” (idem). It is not just the loud music that is “out of place,” ambiguous, noisy, and dangerous; the associated culture is too.

Negotiating transgressions

Because sonic transgressions pose a clear threat to order, action must be taken: they must be dealt with, tidied up and “fixed.” In a general sense this is often achieved by the simple act of labelling something “noise.” Just as with “dirt,” publicly calling something noise (or “noisy”) implicitly condemns it and, crucially, shores up the boundaries of whichever cherished classifications have been confused or ignored. Not only does this minimize the socially disruptive effects of noise (by reasserting the expected order), but it can also put an end to the transgressive behavior itself. For example, to return to the idea of a shout in a library, asking the offender to “keep the noise down” condemns their behavior by labelling it “noise” and at the same time clearly signals to others that shouting in a library is a transgression to be avoided, whilst also reinforcing the idea that the library is classified as a quiet space. Through labelling it is hoped that the noisy person will recognize their transgression and modify their behavior. This is a direct parallel of the earlier example of encouraging someone to take his or her shoes off the kitchen table.

If labelling is a first step in negotiating transgressions, further approaches, according to Douglas, include “political decree,” “attacks on transgressors,” and “grave or trivial sanctions” (1975: 111). A keep quiet sign on the wall of the library might be considered an example of the first of these, and it is possible to find others more obviously and conventionally “political.” The [1997 Noise Abatement Act](http://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Noise%20Abatement%20Act.pdf) of Jamaica, for instance, takes a legislative approach to tidying up sonic transgressions. Introduced as a direct response to the growing popularity of sound system sessions (Henriques 2003), the [Act](http://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Noise%20Abatement%20Act.pdf) aims to regulate the practice and puts direct limits on the places where loud music can be enjoyed:

[No person shall] operate, or permit or cause to be operated, any loudspeaker, microphone or any other device for the amplification of sound, in such a manner that the sound is audible beyond a distance of one hundred metres from the source of the sound and is reasonably capable of causing annoyance to persons in the vicinity. (1997 Noise Abatement Act: 3)

The [Act](http://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Noise%20Abatement%20Act.pdf" \t "_blank) also states that sounds occurring between 12am and 6am and those heard in the proximity of hospitals, nursing homes, infirmaries, hotels, guesthouses, and private homes, “shall be presumed to cause annoyance to persons in that vicinity” (idem: 4, emphasis added). Even if the majority of the residents of a particular area attended a sound system session, if it took place close to almost any kind of building, it would be illegal and could be shut down on the basis that it is a sonic nuisance. The language of the Act leaves it wide open to interpretation, and the odds are stacked strongly in favor of sonic and social order. Of course, as always, laws need a deterrent, and the grave or trivial sanctions that Douglas states we can expect to find are evident in equal measure. Those breaking the [Noise Abatement Act](http://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Noise%20Abatement%20Act.pdf) will, in the first instance, be subject to a monetary fine, while the punishment for subsequent offences increase in severity, culminating in a final sentence of twelve months imprisonment. “Attacks on transgressors” are likewise in evidence, with Jamaican newspapers featuring editorials lambasting those who break noise abatement laws and calling for stronger enforcement of the [Act](http://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Noise%20Abatement%20Act.pdf)[[5]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524#374537).

Editorials can also be considered evidence for Douglas’ assertion that transgressions are negotiated through the exaggeration of difference. As specified in Purity and Danger, this point can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it can be understood as the exaggeration of the difference between categories in order to make them seem more distinct than they are. Calling a library “silent” is an example of this: libraries are obviously not totally silent (there are printer noises, footsteps, etc.), but classifying them as such exaggerates the difference between them and other spaces and so keeps the classificatory system both simple and intact. Secondly, Douglas’ statement can be understood as the exaggeration of differences between those who transgress and those who do not (from the perspective of one group), in order to reduce the cognitive dissonance caused by equally rational people operating under a different set of rules.

To the journalists and worried letter-writers in Jamaican newspapers, those who attend sound system sessions are using a different classificatory system: night-time is not “quiet time” but “party time,” and loud does not equal “bad” but “good.” This creates friction, and if transgressions cannot be “tidied up” by political decree, grave or trivial sanctions, or attacks on transgressors, then an exaggeration of the differences between the groups can at least “explain away” the fact that notionally similar people have entirely different attitudes. Thus, those who consider the sound system session “noise” distance themselves from those who don’t by calling them “excessive” and “immodest” and casting them as members of an immoral, hyper-sexual underclass far removed from the Jamaican mainstream (Henriques 2003: 455).

Importantly, while clashes in Jamaica over sound system culture illustrate these points nicely, it is by no means an isolated or exceptional example, and similar attempts to “tidy up” noise can be found elsewhere. The United Kingdom, for instance, has its own noise laws (laid out in the [1996 Noise Act](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/37/pdfs/ukpga_19960037_en.pdf)), the breaking of which may lead to similarly grave or trivial sanctions (e.g. ASBOs, imprisonment, petty fines, the confiscation of stereo equipment), and a quick internet search reveals that the phrase “attacks on transgressors” can sometimes take on a decidedly literal meaning[[6]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524#374538),[[7]](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374524#374539).

Neither, it is important to add, are the above ways of dealing with sonic transgressions confined to a particular moment in time. In his book Victorian Soundscapes, John Picker gives an excellent account of similar noise conflicts in nineteenth-century London. The city is described as a sonically dense, cacophonous place where “clanging bells, cracking whips, clattering carriages, clamoring hawkers […] roaring crowds, [and] barking dogs” all fill the air. The worst of sonic offenders, however, are the street musicians, itinerant performers collectively known as “organ grinders” playing drums, banjos, fiddles, and hand-organs for money (Picker 2003: 42). To the “brain workers” of the city’s emergent professional class, organ grinders were a considerable sonic nuisance, the “hoarse bray” of their instruments an affront to – and transgression of – the preferred sonic order (idem: 47). Once again, one group can be seen to exaggerate the differences between itself and the (perceived) offenders in a bid to negotiate transgression: professionals dismissed organ grinders not just as an underclass but as sub-human altogether, and editorials from the era typically characterized them as beastly invaders. In mocking Punch cartoons they are drawn as swarthy, simian figures, and one particularly ebullient commentator likened them to “baboons escaped from the Zoological Gardens” before stating that no Londoner should “sally forth to business without first spiking, or hanging, or shooting one of the howlers of the streets” (idem: 52).

Despite appearances, such attempts to deal with transgression should, for Douglas, be seen primarily as positive efforts to reorganize the sonic environment rather than negative efforts to eliminate noise altogether. By restricting (or attempting to restrict) certain types of sounds, those in Victorian London (and contemporary Jamaica) aimed to ensure that the order of “external physical events” (i.e. sounds) conformed to a particular “structure of ideas.” Namely, the idea that sounds from outside the home should not intrude into it and that privacy and silence are concomitant.

The symbolic load

As well as demonstrating that approaches to dealing with sonic transgression are consistent over time, the Victorian example is also particularly useful for illustrating the point that noise, like dirt, is symbolic. Nineteenth-century London was a place where dirt, noise, excrement, violence, and crime were close to the senses “of all who ventured beyond their front doors” (Calder 1977: 15), and the home, therefore, played an important role as a sanctum where one could “escape urban realities and attain a degree of separateness” from the exterior world (Picker 2003: 44). However, whilst dirt, excrement, violence, and crime can all be “shut out” both literally and figuratively by the closing of a door, noise has the unique power to penetrate, and so its prevention and exclusion is of the utmost importance if the illusion of separation is to remain.

To the home-owning professional classes, noise symbolized the general dirt, decay, and disorder of the outside world as well as the limited extent of one’s authority over it. Controlling it was therefore crucial, both as an act of distinction – i.e. demonstrating that you could afford to live in a place that is not “contaminated” by noise – and also as a symbolic gesture of detachment from the realities of the world. In campaigning for silence, those in the middle classes sought to define themselves and their position in society, and their actions can be considered part of a “continuing struggle between refinement and vulgarity” (Bailey 1998: 31). Debates about noise were less a matter of “quiet vs. loud” than they were one of “civilization vs. barbarism” (Bijsterveld 2003).

In fact, questions of noise are rarely actually about “loudness,” just as, as Douglas states, questions of dirt are rarely actually about pathogenicity or a concern for hygiene. Tripta Chandola illustrates this point nicely in her work on the sonic encounters between classes in Delhi. She describes how, despite the fact that both slum dwellers and the middle classes emit ostensibly similar sounds into the environment, it is only those emanating from the lower end of the social spectrum that come to be heard as “noise” (2012). Both groups listen to music, for instance, but music heard from the slum by nearby residents of middle class apartment blocks is not “music” but “crude, badly-amplified noise.” However, the same middle class residents judge their own music to be acceptable, well-amplified, and simply “music” (idem.).

What Chandola’s example illustrates is that “noise” “is an issue less of tone or decibel than [one] of social temperaments [and] class background” (Schwartz 2004: 51) and, looking back over the previous examples, noise and class are clearly linked. In Jamaica, the sound system session is a predominantly working class affair, while in Victorian London organ grinders were most often immigrants from Continental Europe. In each case, “noisiness” is a quality attributed to a lower social group by a higher one, and debates about noise are used as proxies for discourses unsuitable for the public sphere. The organ grinder debate, for instance, can be seen as one of thinly veiled racism, where cries about the influx of the “half-monkey, half-dirt” street musician symbolize concerns over rapid immigration and the increasing fragility of the middle class (Picker 2003). The Jamaican example expresses a similar sentiment, where “middle-classness” itself is felt to be under attack not only from loud music, but also equally “loud” working-class culture (Henriques 2003), and in Delhi, the distaste for noise amongst the middle classes represents a generalized distaste for slum-dwellers and slum life (Chandola 2012). In each case, “noise” is a hitching-post to which other debates are tied and serves as a symbolic surrogate for the darker issues of class, race, and social hierarchy.

Of course, these examples presume a single classificatory system of sound when we know this not to be the case: just as dirt is seen only “in the eye of the beholder,” noise is heard only “in the ear of the beholder.” To the sound system operators, organ grinders, and music listeners, their sounds are not “noise” but legitimate sources of enjoyment or income, and the label “noise” is rejected. Alternatively, noise as an attribute may be actively embraced (by those accused of it) as a form of resistance. To the disenfranchised, downtrodden, and silenced, noise is a way to be heard and can be an effective tactic used to exercise a “politics of presence” (Oosterbaan 2009). Noise is at once “marginalized sound and [the] sound of power and resistance” (Chandola 2012: 402) that, like dirt, is used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status.

 Martijn Oosterbaan demonstrates this point well in his piece on the sonic battles of the favela in Rio de Janeiro (2009). He describes how different social groups use highly amplified music as a weapon in the fight for “sonic supremacy.” The drug traficanteś of the favela play extremely loud funk music to verify their power and “challenge the police and […] other drug gangs in Rio de Janeiro” (2009: 88). Their music is in turn opposed by religious evangélicos, who link funk music to prostitution, drug abuse, and violence and counter it by projecting their own equally loud gospel music into the favela soundscape. These groups, then, each embrace the productive power of noise, using amplified music to assert their presence in the favela.

 In a similar example, Seb Roberts argues that the production and performance of noise music in present-day Japan can be considered an instance of noise being used as a tool for resistance (2013: 111). In the face of the “sonic totalitarianism” of the Japanese city, in which individuals are subject to an “unending siege of [aural] instruction and intimidation,” the act of “playing” noise music becomes a “reclamation of autonomy within acoustic space” (idem.). Indeed, the genre(s) of noise music more generally can be considered a particularly instructive example of individuals and groups embracing the category of noise and using it as a productive force.

 Noise music can be understood to play on and subvert the existing noise/music binary in what Marie Thompson refers to as a “poetics of transgression” (2017: vi). From the earliest experiments to more recent examples, noise music artists have found purpose in opposing themselves to established and conventional ideas of music (Hegarty 2007). They have embraced and celebrated what Goddard, Halligan, and Hegarty refer to as the tendency for departures from previous systems of sonic norms to be perceived as “ugly and rebarbative noise” (2012: 2). It is perhaps not surprising that the reaction to such departures has sometimes been strong; Hegarty notes that the first public performance of noise music in 1914 was met with “uproar,” to which the performers responded by “launching themselves into the crowd [and] beating up the dissenters” (2007: 12). Nonetheless, noise, like dirt, can act as a “powerful pole of attraction” and “provides new forms of pleasure, not least of which are the pleasures of transgression and subversion” (Goddard et al 2012: 1). There are clear links here to other rituals of inversion and reversal, where enjoyment, excitement, and release are gained from stylized rejections of and challenges to the dominant social order.

Nevertheless, whether accepted or rejected in specific instances, what noise symbolizes in the wider discourse remains roughly the same: it is disorder, rebellion, instability, and contravention of the expected (or dominant) order. Like dirt, noise carries a symbolic load, and the labels “quiet” and “loud” can be mapped on to more overtly moral ones such as “pure/impure” and “sacred/profane” or, as we have already seen, “civilized/barbarous” and “classy/classless.” Noise, class, and status form a nexus where to speak of one is to invoke all three, and it is unclear where the boundaries between them begin or end. In short, to be quiet is to be good, to agree to cherished classifications, to uphold the sonic and social order and to follow accepted ways of being. To be noisy is to be bad, to disregard convention, and to confuse or ignore classifications and have different and unacceptable ways of being. Noise, far more than just “sound out of place,” is indicative of an entire moral system.