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# F(r)ee Road:
# An Artistic Research Audiovisual Project

**Kittiphan Janbuala***

## Abstract

This paper explains the author's artistic process in creating an audiovisual project with a social message called *F(r)ee Road*. The project is a game-based composition for one player in which the player controls a user-object and tries to avoid collisions. The work is founded on two concepts: glitch-art, an aesthetic of error used to create both visual and sound modifications; and data sonification, the conversion of data to non-speech sound. All processes were created by personal computers using Max, a software program created by Cycling 74. This work is a contribution to the blossoming field of sonification-based art.

## 1. Noise in Composition

> *Music marks time in this small circle and vainly tries to create a new variety of tones. We must break at all cost from this restrictive circle of pure sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds.*

—Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*[1]

Russolo's comment, penned in 1913, speaks to an important aesthetic turn in the history of what we call "classical music." The creative potentials of traditional, tonal models, reached its apex in the Romantic era with the works of composers such

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[1]   L. Russolo, *The Art of Noise*, trans. Robert Filliou (New York: Something else press, 1967), 6.

as Richard Wagner and Johannes Brahms. Composers of the next generation, such as Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, Igor Stravinsky, and Arnold Schoenberg, found ways to create musical meaning through new combinations of tones and sonic colours. Works by these great artists continue to influence composers today. Russolo, however, encouraged composers to go further still. He spoke to a borderless conception of musical creativity, wherein all sound can be musical content. In his opinion, modern composers should not restrict themselves merely to conventional instruments, but should instead embrace the larger infinite variety of all possible sounds.

Sounds in the real world exceed the frequency range of conventional musical instruments. For example, the pitches produced by a piano range from A0, the lowest key, to C8, the highest. This corresponds to the frequency range of 27.5 Hz to 4186 Hz.[2] Humans, however, are able to perceive sounds from a far wider range: about 20Hz to 20,000Hz. Russolo asks, why not break through the limits imposed by traditional instruments in order to find new modes of expression? Why not allow the infinite variety of sounds we hear daily in the real world into the composer's musical palate? The conventional palate previously open to composers (here I refer to pitched instruments only, as percussion instruments are a different matter) is much more narrow.

Russolo's aesthetic can be found not only in electronic music such as *musique concrète*, but also in the works of modern composers like Helmut Lachenmann, who developed novel sonic processes for compositions (see, for example, his *Pression* for solo cello). Today, it is widely recognized that Rossolo's aesthetic vision greatly expanded musical potential for modern composers.

## 2. Glitch, the Aesthetic of Failure

We are all familiar with glitches. They are especially ubiquitous on the internet. In technical domains such as electrical engineering, a glitch is defined as a "sudden, usually temporary malfunction or fault of the equipment."[3] Glitch artists

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2    C. R. Nave, "The Piano," http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/Music/pianof.html.
3    Oxford Dictionary of English, 2nd ed (2010), s.v. "Glitch."

exploit these technical errors to disfigure sources, such as the information coded in images, to create new meaningful outcomes.[4] Glitch art thus involves both material foundations and changes to the media, or to the processing of digital media.[5]

Glitch art developed following the advent of the camera. The camera can more faithfully reproduce reality than a painting can. Who needs a portrait painted when the camera can create a more "realistic" result? The camera spurred visual artists to move into new territories. Impressionism, cubism, and futurism, for example, developed in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in part, in response to the development of the camera. Pablo Picasso, for example, explores the human body through geometric forms, and Claude Monet used unique drawing techniques to capture the visual essence of a fleeting moment. These artists played with distortions of reality. Their work does not present direct representations. In the modern era, the representation of reality is no longer essential. In the 1960s and 70s, the artist Nam June Paik Not was one of the first artists to apply an aesthetic of glitches. In his work *Magnet TV,* for example, he placed a magnet over a TV to distort the original signal. Within the musical domain, glitch aesthetics have long played a significant role in electronic music.[6] From the 1990s onward, artists in various domains have applied the aesthetics of error to their creative work. Among the leading musicians to employ such techniques are the music group *Aphex Twin* and the  audiovisual artist Ryuji Ikeda. This aesthetic of error inspires me as well, and was the springboard for my current work. The basis of my composition aesthetic is the transformation of a given source into a new form.

## 3. Sound Generative through Sonification

*Sonification is the use of non-speech audio to convey information.*

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[4]   Rosa Menkman, *The Glitch Moment(um)* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), https://networkcultures.org/_uploads/NN%234_RosaMenkman.pdf.

[5]   Michael Betancourt, "Critical Glitches and Glitch Art," *HZ* 19 (July 2014), https://hz-journal.org/n19/betancourt.html.

[6]   Nick Prior, "Putting a Glitch in the Field: Bourdieu, Actor Network Theory and Contemporary Music," *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 3 (2008): 303.

—Gregory Kramer, "Auditory Display: Sonification, Audification and Auditory Interfaces."[7]

The above epithet is an early definition of sonification. Originally, sonification was not intended for artistic purposes. The main use was instead to convey scientific information, such as notifications and alarms. More recently, a comprehensive definition that references sonification's artistic potential was given by Liew and Lindborg,

> *Sonification is any technique that translates data into non-speech sound with a systematic, describable, and reproducible method, to reveal or facilitate communication, interpretation, or discovery of meaning that is latent in the data, having a practical, artistic, or scientific purpose.*[8]

The transformation of any type of data into sound can be sonification. It is up to the user to decide how to employ it. For artists, sonification provides yet another opening up of possibilities. The potential for creation is infinite.

Sonification can be accomplished through a variety of techniques—audification, iconic sonification, earcon, parameter mapping sonification, and model-based sonification to name a few—and new techniques and possibilities are always being developed. For *F(r)ee Road,* I used two techniques: audification and parameter mapping (see figure 1). Kramer defines audification as "the direct playback of data samples," ordered in time but allowing for direct transformations such as time compression.[9] One of the most well-known works using audification is Chris Hayward's *Listen to the Earth Sing*. In this work, Hayward implements direct

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[7]  Gregory Kramer, "Auditory Display: Sonification, Audification and Auditory Interfaces," in *Santa Fe Institute Studies in the Sciences of Complexity* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1994), 38.

[8]  Kongmeng Liew and PerMagnus Lindborg, "A Sonification of Cross-Cultural Differences in Happiness-Related Tweets," *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* 68, no. 1/2 (January 2020): 25.

[9]  Gregory Kramer, "An Introduction to Auditory Display," in *Auditory Display: Sonification, Audification and Auditory Interfaces*, edited by Gregory Kramer (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1994), xxvii.

sonification (audification) on seismic-data and displays the sounds as a result.[10] Parameter mapping is simply the mapping of any data onto any auditory parameters, such as pitch, dynamics, or rhythm. It is a common technique used in many fields of research and in the sonic arts.
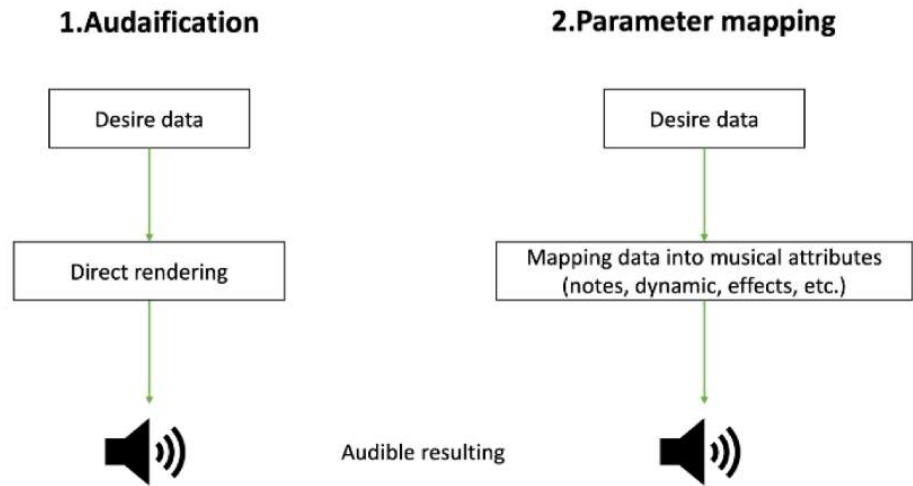


**Figure 1** Diagram of sound generation through sonification.

## 4. Compositional Process

The direct inspirations for the *F(r)ee Road* project was the work *Formula Minus One*, a multimedia composition for violin and video by Marko Ciciliani that incorporates videos of a Formula One car race.[11] The violinist interacts with live-electronics and live-video elements. Although my work and Ciciliani's share some similarities, the musical aesthetic of the two are different. *F(r)ee Road* also draws on the experimental music of Earle Brown, who composed what he called "mobile" music—music in which specific elements are fixed but the occurrences or the chances of various events changes from one performance to the next, dependent on chance events, such as wind blowing on a mobile.

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[10] Chris Hayward, "Listening to the Earth Sing," in *Auditory Display: Sonification, Audification and Auditory Interfaces*, edited by Gregory Kramer. *Santa Fe Institute Studies in the Sciences of Complexity* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1994), 377.

[11] Marko Ciciliani, *Formula Minus One*, performed by Barbara Lüneburg, 11 November 2015, video, 10:14 min., https://youtu.be/sIgPuD5dcts.

*F(r)ee Road* is scored for one performer. And this performer need not have any formal musical training as the only skill required is the ability to operate a laptop computer. All the programming processes for *F(r)ee Road* were written on *Max*, a software program created by Cycling 74. The computer acts as a hyper-musical sound generative device with sounds generated through the sonification procedures discussed above, based on data drawn from the live-video source. Below I discuss the three basic elements of the work: visual design, sound generative procedures, and composition rules.

First, the visual design. The object "car" is physically controlled by the player through the computer keyboard while various "obstacles" serve to prompt musical and visual events.

Secondly, the sound generative procedures. The visual design is converted into sounds through audification. Specifically, visual color data is translated into sounds (see figure 2). The outcomes of this process are unpredictable rhythmic events and an un-periodic waveform, which mostly produce noise. Additionally, parameter mapping sonification is applied to the car's movement. The object's location is mapped to two oscillators with frequency modulation that imitates the roar of an engine.



**Figure 2** Custom sonification patch. The purpose of the patch is to extract color data for parameter mapping sonification and audification.

Thirdly, the composition rules. The composition is based on Brown's concept of mobile music discussed above. The basic condition for the composition is designed as follows: a collision between the car and an obstacle affects both the generative function and the visual modification (see figures 3 and 4). With these collisions, the aesthetic of malfunction, or glitch, is employed. Each collision between the user's object and the obstacle causes an abrupt, random change, such as a sudden enlargement of the obstacle-object (see figure 3), screen rotation, or a loss of control of the player's object.

The piece consists of 12 levels, each of which is one minute in length. The higher the level, the more obstacles there are, and the faster the car moves.
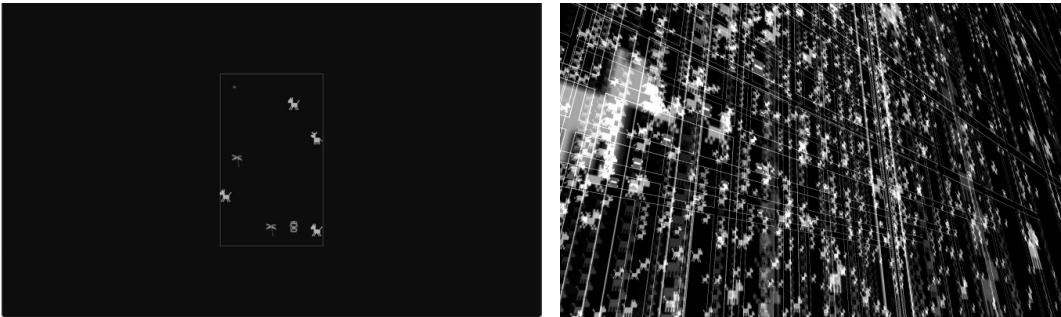


**Figure 3** Left: the original video output.
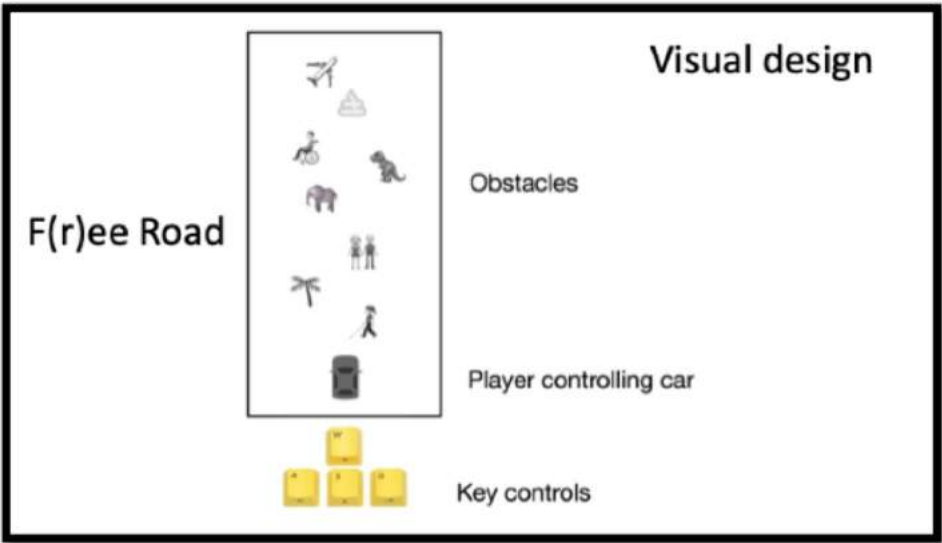Right: glitch-video after collision with an object.



**Figure 4** The video design and object-controlling design plan.

## 5. Social Significance

*F(r)ee Road* is designed to be purposefully tedious for listeners—at least at first. The piece is about a repetition of noisiness, and the visual elements are rather static. Yet, the tedium will fade as time passes and audiences reflect and discover the social message of the work. What is *F(r)ee Road*? It is a work of art that speaks to the problem of wealth inequality. The car object is a symbol of wealth and the performer is a stand-in for a wealthy individual that is allowed to crash into anything he or she likes without consequence, merely for the pleasure of generating sound events. Most audience members will discover the social meaning hidden in the work toward the end of the piece, if they haven't already, in the money-flying scene (see video 1).

In sum, "the road is for the rich" is the social meaning of the work. As noted by reporter Hannah Beech in a 2019 *New York Times* article, "in Thailand, one of the world's most unequal societies, even roads have a rigid hierarchy, with the poor far more likely to be killed in accidents than the well-off and well-connected."[12] In Thailand, as elsewhere, the wealthy often cause great difficulty for others, whom they may view as mere obstacles. It is a sad reality that the rich can often do as they please without consequence. Is there a cost paid for reckless actions? Is it free? Or does someone *else* have to pay a fee?

The compositional techniques of audification and parameter mapping sonification enabled me to realize my vision for *F(r)ee Road* as a socially conscious work of art. Sonification techniques continue to feature prominently in my composition aesthetic. So many possibilities of sonification remain to be explored by myself and others for artistic purposes. Armed with nothing more than a personal computer and a software program such as Max, composers can create sound art using any source data and any sounds found in the real world, or conjured in the composer's mind. *F(r)ee Road* is a contribution to the blossoming field of sonification-based art.

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[12]  Hannah Beech, "Thailand's Roads Are Deadly. Especially if You're Poor," New York Times, August 19, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/world/asia/thailand-inequality-road-fatalities.html.

**Video 1** Kittiphan Janbuala: *F(r)ee Road*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF6aX5GnMd0

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# An Embodied Musicology:
# Social, Political and Aesthetic Aspects
# and Implications of the Experience of Reggae Music
# in Areas of Indonesia and Thailand.

**Jonathan Day***

## Abstract

Some areas within the ASEAN region, specifically in Indonesia and Thailand, have thriving and multifaceted musical cultures based on reggae music and Rasta culture. While this adoption of a musical style originally from the Caribbean and with no immediately obvious links to the nations of the ASEAN region may seem surprising on its face, interviews with performers, a contextual analysis of their performances, and an examination of their contingent lifestyle and philosophy reveals significant synergies between the originators and ASEAN adherents of reggae music. Significantly, many ASEAN musicians who engage with reggae are not simply reproducing the 'parent' music as a simulacrum in a trite, formulaic manner, but are instead creating a sophisticated and embodied musicological critique with cultural relevance. The resulting music transcends the local and has global significance

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**Keywords:** South East Asian music, ASEAN reggae, postmodernism, reggae, rasta culture, musical activism, music and politics, Beaudrillard, simulacra theory, Indonesian popular music, Thai popular music, Sri Lankan popular music, Japanese popular music, British punk and post punk, musical rhizomes, intercultural penetration/germination, reconstructed memory, music as prophecy

Areas within the ASEAN region have within them a thriving and multifaceted culture based on reggae music and Rasta ideas. There are of course many borrowed or 'loaned' aspects of music in most cultures—whether occidental, oriental, global north or global south. The manner in which musical aspects spin and swirl around the globe, like coloured ink in water, is fascinating and beautiful. Even so, the occurrence of a popular musical form originally from the Caribbean and, to a lesser extent, areas in Africa is, at first glance, surprising. As one might expect, some of the ASEAN musical responses to reggae are trite and simulacral, essentially working for the tourist dollar. Much of the reggae music I have experienced in parts of the ASEAN region over the last twenty years has involved responses to, and echoes of, the works of Bob Marley and the Wailers. Sometimes I've heard very close musical echoes that nonetheless have a distinctiveness and interest that emerges from the change of language and adaptations to the local context. Alongside this, is the music of those ASEAN artists working with reggae and dub who go beyond the template supplied by Marley and others to produce new music that, though very much still within the world of western popular music, nonetheless offers intriguing and considered commentaries. This music, which provided the impetus for this paper, represents an 'embodied musicology'. The ASEAN artists under consideration here mashup, investigate and respond to a wide and eclectic range of source inspirations, in the most fascinating ways.[1] In particular, the once close relationship between punk, post punk and reggae music in the west is being revisited and revived now in the ASEAN region by these new experiments in roots and dub. This recontextualisation, this ripping out of the archive creates a new space for reggae music to breathe and become present in new compositions and arrangements made half a world away. Significantly, this is not an academic or intellectual exercise. The excitement evidenced by audiences hearing these echoes of familiar music is palpable and contagious. This vital and cutting-edge work has grown out of a musical journey sourced in Kingston, Nine Mile and Summertown, Jamaica; that travelled through expat and exile communities in London, Birmingham and Manchester and finally landed in the heat of bars and clubs in Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuta and other ASEAN cities. The surge of

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[1]  The easier access to music offered over recent years by online listening and watching platforms has certainly played a part in the creation of this music. The difficulty of seeing and hearing live concerts and physical artefacts in some areas is extreme.

creativity investigated here was facilitated by ASEAN musician's rejection of the ossifying, intractable and overwhelmingly commercial understandings of genre in the west, and a return to the creative plasma that informed the original 'scenes' in the first place.

To approach this very new music, we need first to look at the often-bizarre development of Rasta music in the ASEAN region, something I have observed and participated in over the last twenty-plus years. Although this certainly was not an intentional action on my part—I am not by any means a reggae musician—there seems to have been a commonality of intention that has acted magnetically between musicians within this scene and myself. My unwitting and unintended involvement began some years ago on a series of journeys, undertaken as part of my work at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire in the UK, in which I explored the musics and wider cultures of a number of islands. These somewhat haphazard and improvisational journeys resulted in many scored and devised compositions that are contemporary classical, jazz and zen in emphasis. Although I was not looking for reggae, I seemed to find it in most of the places I visited.

On one journey, I went to Indonesia to see and record traditional Balinese Kechak and Barong performances. In Kuta where I was staying, reggae was unavoidable in the bars. Kuta is a coastal resort town, frequented predominantly by Australians, for whom it is an exotic but not too distant holiday destination. The famous Indonesian surf and the very particular and beautiful local visual and aural cultures have brought in tourists, traders and colonisers for centuries. This has stimulated a great deal of development in real estate and the service industry. One aspect of this development is a local culture that has developed around the needs of migrant, displaced and disaffected people from other areas within Indonesia. I met people who had come to Kuta in search of an escape from powerful lifestyle expectations in strongly religious and traditional social settings elsewhere in the country. The transient character of these migrants seemed to be reflected in their choice of music—often evidencing idealised dreams of other worlds beyond their shores. Due to the very high exit visa cost for Indonesian nationals at the time, these dreams were, for most, impossible to achieve.

Wandering the town, I was surprised to see so many reggae bands. Given the affluent white clientele, and the surf culture of Kuta, this perhaps should not have been so unexpected. Many of the bands emphasised a good night out. An example is *Mushroom Squad*.[2]

These bands certainly had ersatz and derivative aspects. Freddy Marley (not his real name) for example, despite singing in Indonesian, highlights something of this, as does his song about a tourist girl in the Gili islands, a popular traveller destination near to Bali.[3] Despite its ersatz nature, it has sincerity.

Ras Muhamad from Jakarta foregrounds this seriousness much more, spitting out Indonesian 'toasting'[4] with real passion and sophistication. He is someone working with purpose, and his music is certainly something more than tourist pleasing, good time covers.[5]

The overlay of serious intention on often clichéd music was powerfully evidenced for me in a Kuta bar by a man who went by the name Toulouse who had travelled from Sumatra following a half-articulated dream. He accompanied his high wavering voice with a finely picked guitar as he sang a love song by Tracy Chapman. His belief and passion redeemed the song for me, after its excoriation by a corporate western boy band. Simple songs for him and his friends represented something recognisable and ancient—music as a repository of hope, describing a land of better, a dream they were trying to sing into reality.

My interest deepened during a visit to Sri Lanka. I spent a few days in the charming if ramshackle shoreline strip development of Unawatuna. A beach bar there carried, unselfconsciously, portraits of Lakshmi, the Indian Goddess of domestic good fortune, and Bob Marley next to each other and alongside a small shrine to Buddha and Ganesh.

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[2]  "Kuta Bali," Mushroom Squad https://www.reverbnation.com/mushroomreggae/song/13093935-kuta-bali

[3]  "Mushroom," Fredimarley, https://www.reverbnation.com/fredimarley/song/12738025-mushroom-by-fredi-kayaman

[4]  A speaking over music, having some synergies with rap.

[5]  See, for example, "Lion Roar," Ras Muhamad. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8sra6sc2AM

**Image 1** *Beach Café, Unawatuna*, collection of the author, used by permission.

This syncretic approach to faith—and the quite easy adoption of new faces into the pantheon is no new thing. On another occasion I travelled in a Tuktuk taxi celebrating both Christ and Buddha, again unselfconsciously.



**Image 2** *Eastern Coast Road*, collection of the author, used by permission.

The Hindu pantheon is renowned for its flexibility. William Dalrymple in his *Life of St. Thomas* (Dalrymple, 2001, n p) makes a good case for the passage of the Christian St. Thomas into the belief system of Southern India. In light of this, the celebration of Bob Marley is not so surprising.

To the north of Unawatuna in the high Sri Lankan mountains is the town of Nuwara Eliya, reached by snaking mountain railway. It was formerly a colonial summer capital. The climate is fresh throughout the year and the tea-plantation-covered mountains are verdant and tranquil. Leaving the train, I talked with some men selling crafts at the station. They were interested to see that I carried an instrument,

and we arranged to meet to play some music together. I quickly realized that the musicians I'd met mostly played reggae and that their culture centred around singer and guitarist Rohantha Dissanayake.



**Image 3** *Kingston – Rohantha's house,* collection of the author, used by permission.

After meeting and playing at my lodgings, I went out to Rohantha's house. His railings were painted in red, black and gold, and he wore a Fair Isle jumper that also had those colours. His house was called 'Kingston' and his band, and car, 'Wailing Exodus' reflecting Bob Marley band name and the title of one of his albums.



**Image 4** *Wailing Exodus' Band Car* – collection of the author, used by permission.

I played music with them, and drummed on their percussion, made from a tea chest and discarded hospital x–ray film. Tin plates nailed onto broomsticks served as cymbals. What struck me most was how committed and serious they were about living the life they had extrapolated from the reggae songs, with a focus on compassion,

community, equality, environmental awareness and responsibility. This faith was exemplified by a particular incident: I gave Rohantha a spare electronic tuner I had on me for his guitar. The following day he was enthusing about Jah, and quoted the gift as an example of divine provision: he said he had expressed a need in prayer the week before and here Jah had supplied what he needed. Rohantha has since become much more widely known, playing widely in the Middle East, Germany, Japan and in Sri Lanka, on television, at festivals, concerts and often in hotels. In an interview for Sri Lankan television, he shared his ideas on the appeal of Reggae in Sri Lanka.[6] He feels that people have always liked the music, but took a considerable time to develop an understanding of it. At the music's heart, he argues, is a 'reggae feeling,' something he believes is partially a result of the tropical climate that Sri Lanka shares with Jamaica. He also identifies the notion of an 'island vibe;' that there is something in reggae music that especially works for island dwellers.



**Image 5** *Rohnatha Dissanayake on Sri Lankan television,* Youtube screen grab, creative commons licence.

We can interrogate this trans cultural appeal that he mentions further, and find a finessed and foundational relationship based on particular musical and philosophical aspects of roots reggae and the way these relate to persistent human themes. I have written elsewhere about the ways in which cultural, imaginative and conceptual transmissions occurs through DNA, drawing on epigenetics and the work of Carl Jung, Konrad Lorenz,

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6    Pulse.Ik, "Colombo Hippie Market," YouTube video, 13:58, Mar 31, 2017, https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=EvzHrNPC_t4

Andrew Samuels and Anthony Stevens (Day, 2008 and http://www.pgvim.ac.th/sym/ Files/Proceedings_2017.pdf, pp 56-68). It is sufficient here to say that certain musical forms, and their associated numinous and contingent contextulisations, are transmitted genetically and can be accessed with a degree of intention through deep listening.

Certain music experienced at certain times allows us to walk/swim/wallow in a place that carries the wisdom, solidity and reliability of generations. Being there, outside our constructed and regular, socially received and mediated experience of time and space, can be restorative, centring and inspiring.

Aspects of reggae are built on just this kind of deep cognitive experience. The music was conceived as the heart cry of people dispossessed and forcefully relocated; there is in this music a longing for an intuited personal and ancestral past. At the heart of much roots reggae music is a memory/imagination of a home land. In Welsh this has a name: *hiraeth* the longing for the once known but now irretrievably lost home. This longing has clear international currency.[7] Rasta ideas reflect a desire for escape from a bad place, called 'Babylon', to a better place. This powerfully speaks to concerns found within the ASEAN region. The roots Rasta destination Zion has the characteristics of this idealised place.[8] Song in Rasta, as in so many faiths, is a mystical conduit to the 'world' of the lost dream, a tangible-ish, palpable-ish realisation of the longed for transcendent.

Attempts made by rastas to find Zion as an actual, real place have met with mixed success. Walford 'Poko' Tyson of the British reggae band *Misty in Roots* says,

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[7]  Although a full account of Rastafarianism is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting here that the religion developed as a response to colonial oppression, widespread corruption, and grinding poverty. An essential aspect is the doctrine of re-patriation, preached most notably by Marcus Garvey, who intended to offer passage back to Africa on his Black Star shipping line.

[8]  Heilie Selassie (Ras Tafari was his pre-coronation name), is seen as embodiment of Christ and as the latest in an unbroken line of Kings stretching back to Solomon. I have heard Bongo Herman, master drummer and percussionist from Bob Marley's band and many others, describe their experience of the miraculous arrival of Selassie in Jamaica, recalling that lightning struck the road in front of him. Rita Marley, Bob's wife, also recalls seeing on that same day the stigmata in his hands. He is for some a flawless, incorruptible, divine figure. See MacDonald, 2012, no pagination.

*Our focus has always been on taking the music back to Africa and it was never easy. I'm pleased we did it. As a roots band it was what we believed in, but now it's time to go to America… (Cartwright, 2002: n p)*

His enthusiasm for Africa as Zion appears to have been tempered by experience. Misty in Roots similarly modified 'Babylon' to 'Babylon behaviour' rather than seeing Babylon as a particular place.

Similarly, two rasta members of renowned punk-folk-reggae band *Edward the Second* who I interviewed, also journeyed to Africa. They returned to England having experienced some disappointment. Bassist Tee Carthy has since returned however, and is now working to make living in Ethiopia a reality for rastas.[9] Thus 'Babylon' can be understood as a description of a lamentable social and political situation, something that many around the world can easily identify with. Significantly, Bob Marley made no reference to the specific location of Zion, though his interest and passion for Africa were clear. [10]

I think this consciously global view in Marley's work is characteristic and deliberate. He was criticised for singing in English rather than patois as a bow to commercial pressures and potential sales, under the influence of his sometime producer and label boss Chris Blackwell.[11] That may well be, but it is also arguable that he wanted to communicate as widely as he could, understanding that the call and desire for home, the desire for a better world, sits deeply across cultures and individuals. Marley toured with singer songwriter Bruce Springsteen who said, "nobody wins unless everybody

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[9]  As Carolyn Cooper (Emeritus Professor, University of West Indies) commented recently at the Reggae Innovation conference in Kingston, which I attended, this is made more complex by the view of many Ethiopians that Hailie Selassie was an oppressor, who spoke a different and elitist language. This linguistic class division also exists in some of the areas in the Asean region that I visited.

[10]  David Aarons, "Songs about Zion: The Impact of 'Repatriation Reggae' on the Rastafari Repatriation Movement to Ethiopia" in MS, paper presented at UWI conference, February 15, 2019 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPDNus8zCpU

[11]  Joseph T. Farquharson "Language Use in Jamaican Reggae Music and its Implications for the Concept of Diglossia" in MS, paper presented at UWI conference, February 15, 2019 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPDNus8zCpU

wins".[12] It is this kind of Rastafarianism, extrapolated from the songs of Bob Marley and his collaborators, that I have seen echoes of in the ASEAN region.

The belief in the possibility of positive change and the longing for a better world are powerful expressions of a global strophe. Musician Manu Chau spoke to the global power of Marley's music when he said in interview with Nigel Williamson,

> *The more I travelled, the more I realised there is only one 'world music' artist. Everywhere you go people respect Bob Marley. He is my teacher in simplicity…*
>
> *(Williamson, 2002, p. 31)*

Jack Healy, a president of Amnesty International, similarly noted, "Everywhere that I go today, Bob Marley is the symbol of freedom." (Steffans, 2001, no pagination).

Another globalised aspect that enhances reggae's widespread appeal is the fascinating and often surprising way in which it mixes elements of other musical styles. Reggae's genesis is syncretic from the start, mixing Jamaican traditional drumming with modern pop sensibilities. Jamaican Producer Byron Lee points out that many major reggae artists knew American pop intimately, as they started as 'tribute' bands.

> *The Blues Busters were simulating Sam and Dave, Jimmy Cliff was simulating Otis Redding, Bob Marley and the Wailers were a take-off of Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions… when acts came on to do shows they'd have to sing copy versions of songs by the act they were simulating as an introduction, only then, when they'd got the applause for that, could they do original material.*
>
> *(Bradley, 2002, p. 41)*

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[12] Donal O'Keeffe, the Avondhu, April 13, 2016 https://avondhupress.ie/nobody-wins-unless-everybody-wins-springsteens-championing-lgbt-rights-no-surprise/

Lloyd Bradley notes that "Southern US radio stations could be received in Jamaica, 90 miles away. American soul acts toured Jamaica extensively." (Bradley, 2002, p. 40). Similarly, Bunny Wailer says of his band,

> *...when we went down to three members, The Impressions were our choice (of influence). They were really impressive in their style and the Wailers had a similar kind of harmonic style, so we kinda got linked with Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions in that respect.*
>
> *(Bradley, 2002, p. 84)*

Anand Prahlad's description of a visit to the Ethiopian church on Maxfield Avenue in Kingston extends this notion of hybridisation:

> *I noted what sounded to the ear of an outsider as strangely discordant. During several parts of the service, the clergy was singing/chanting in a vocal style derived from Northern Africa; the choir was singing in a style that was more akin to Baptist or Revivalist; the drumming accompanying the singing was Rasta Nyabinghi style; the congregation was singing in a style like the Baptist church back in Virginia…all simultaneously*
>
> *(Prahlad, 2001, p. 52)*

Reggae thus combines aspects of musical modernity with memories of a lost and dreamed of culture, adding a dream of restitution. The reggae of Bob Marley at the same time rejects all that is greed-driven, environmentally careless, oppressive and exploitative.[13] It particularly speaks of the injustices of capitalism and its associated hierarchies. This is not surprising given that the Atlantic Slave Trade was the foundation of so many Western economies.

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[13]    In the main, roots reggae also rejects party politics though it does berate politicians for their corruption:

> *When I and I put politics together from ancient times, it means people's parasite. Poli means people and tics is a parasite so when you put it together it's people's parasite and I and I is aware of the fact that these guys are parasites, so we try to distance ourselves from them. That's why we aren't into politics per se (Romeo in Bradley, 2001, p. 68)*

*The most intelligent people is the poorest people. Yes, the thief them rich, pure robbers and thieves, rich! The intelligent and innocent are poor, are crumbled and get brutalised. Daily.*

*(Marley in White, 1992, p. 35)*

Alan Lewens says that

*Marley became the leader of a musical assault that for a while made reggae the most influential music on the planet. He became more than a reggae star or a rock star. Like Nelson Mandela, his mere name became a byword for a critique of the way the world was run.*

*(Lewens, 2001, p. 135)*

Like the dispossessed in Jamaica, some of the young people of Thailand or Indonesia dream of a homecoming. This involves an embracing and bettering of the culture in which they find themselves. In many cases this is a necessity, as working in their home culture is their only option due to financial and legal constraints. Reggae offers a road map of behaviours and ideas that can facilitate positive change. Rasta, and especially the roots reggae of Bob Marley, filter aspects of culture, approving of some, whilst vehemently rejecting others. The songs are moral and ethical exhortations. "I don't care who the man is. My right is my right. It's my life…all I have is my life." (Marley, 2001, no pagination)

In the ASEAN region, traditions based on Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism exercise heavy social control. The Rasta preached in Bob Marley's songs is a cipher for a particular kind of freedom that is both social and personal. This is appealing to those who are disenamoured with their societies' traditional forms but do not want to simply turn to the corruption and dissolution of capitalist and neo-liberal epicurean and nihilist lifestyles.

It is in this way that reggae music, in the areas discussed here, allows an embracing of contemporary global culture without buying into its associated rampant greed, materialism and oppression. The choice of Rasta and reggae culture is an

informed and conditional embracing of the new. It does not reject modernity, but does object to those aspects of it that are unpalatable and unacceptable.[14]

The contemporary Rastas I have met and played with in some countries within the ASEAN region are counter cultural advocates, kicking against social norms and modes that they see as repressive. The dress codes, speech and other aspects of Rasta culture represent a recognisable counter cultural position in both their home societies and in the wider world. In many ways, Rastas in these places represent and reflect a belief and hope about the way a contemporary society could and should be; a hope that is elsewhere often fatigued and at worst exhausted. The ASEAN Rastas I spoke with dream of a better world.

All of this would, however, belong only to the discourses of religion, sociology and sub-culture were it not for the continuingly stimulating *melange* of music that emerges alongside these ideas. I've seen truly fascinating work in the ASEAN region and in East Asia more widely. Perhaps principal within these experiences are developments within Thailand.

Thai history and Thailand's social situation are very different from Jamaica's. Jamaica was also a long-time British colony, which practised extensive slavery. The memory of forced migrations, resettlement and slavery powerfully inform Jamaican culture. Rob Partridge, director of press for Island Records from 1977 to 1990, says:

> *The days of slavery are a recent folk memory on the island. They have permeated the very essence of Jamaica's culture, from the plantations of the mid-19th century to the popular music of our own times. Although slavery was abolished in 1834, the Africans and their descendants developed their own culture with half remembered African traditions mingled with the customs of the British.*
> *(Partridge, 1992, p. 7)*

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[14] An intriguing affirmation of these ideas is the current diversification of Rasta culture, with emphases on *iTal* eating, a kind of vegan cuisine and approach, and the adoption of Yoga into Rasta lifestyles. *Jah 9* is a popular singer in the New Wave of Roots reggae and has been a yoga teacher for 10 years.

Thai musicians certainly also challenge and counter hegemonic and oppressive forces but not in the same way as countries with a colonial history, or those based on the heritage of criminal slavery.[15] Thai musicians are still very much concerned with oppression, but with those based on historically class-based hierarchies and contemporary wealth-based stratification, overwritten by a top-down cultural imperialism.

Bangkok has in recent years been a notably revolutionary place. Musicians I have watched and interviewed are creating fascinating hybrid works through the choosing of revolutionary aspects of a range of western musical forms, since these offer similar opportunities for social critique and the possibility of liberation.



**Image 6** *Sticky Rice gig flyer,* Youtube screen grab, creative commons licence.

One such collective is *The Sticky Rice*, fronted by Dr Dapookster. The band combine deep dub reggae with melodies reminiscent of post punk bands like the *Smiths*, the *Police* or the *Cure*. 'Prog rock' keyboard solos reminiscent of *ELP*'s Keith Emerson or Rick Wakeman from *Yes* blend with experimental moments that recall composer Robert Wyatt. These Thai musicians have found aspects of Western pop music that oppose and stand in conflict with mainstream politics and social norms, aspects that represent freedom and the inevitability of change. Whether these aspects are taken from music that is consistent in terms of genre or period is less of an issue.

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15  Thailand does have one brush with slavery: the Japanese treatment of prisoners of war in Thailand during World War 2.

This 'picnicking' at the table of global music is profoundly post-modern but, in marked contrast with much creative output sitting under that umbrella, is also conceptually and politically serious and, because of that, riveting. Rasta is clearly Dapookster's root position. I interviewed him and have no doubt that he is sincere and sophisticated in his understanding of his *credo*. Rasta is the lifestyle and belief system that inspires their mission. For him and others, therefore, dub reggae is the musical anchor and the centre from which their experiments radiate. The manner in which they then radiate outwards stylistically – catching, sympathetically citing and exploring all manner of references – is a joyful thing to witness. Seeing *The Sticky Rice* for the first time and watching and hearing them throw an array of fragments into the air and then weld them into an unpredictable yet cohesive and joyful whole felt like a revelation. Their music essentially is an embodied musicology. At the time, I had forgotten that all the music they were referencing originally shared the same natal conditions: it was all spawned in the same political and social circumstance at the same time. The sense of revolution in Robert Wyatt's *Soft Machine* or the *Cure* is similar to that in Marley, despite the radically different ways in which it is expressed. Bringing them together in the way that Sticky Rice does reminds me again something I once knew but had forgotten.



**Image 7** *Sticky Rice at the Alchemist,* collection of the author, used by permission.

Bob Marley had a stated desire to bring people and music together "Black and White, uptown and downtown", as his girlfriend Cindy Breakspear expressed it in Kevin Macdonald's documentary.[16] Through their multitudinous refractions, repurposings and reinterpretations of specific musical moments—through catching ideas, sounds, words and melodies and throwing them out in a polychrome spray—

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[16] "Marley," directed by Kevin Madonald, 2012.

Rasta musicians in the ASEAN region continue to realise this coming together in new ways that could not have been foreseen, anticipated or predicted. Through their work Marley's legacy lives on, and the future for this music continues to be vital and exciting. Had Bob Marley lived to see it I cannot believe he would be anything other than deeply delighted.

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