

The Sound of Music

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arte mimetica?

concealment mimetic
non mimetic
in mimetic

All in all, art should get a sound thrashing.
Richard Huelsenbeck

Artistic activity involving sound has intensified recently. This can be attributed to a number of factors, not the least of which is a perception among those artists bent on discovery that the tenured art forms have long exhausted their respective periods of major discovery while a corresponding period is upon us—or impending—for the arts of sound. While others speak once again of endgame, here it's a season opener.

This phenomenon of a perceived field of artistic possibility within the tradition of the avant-garde appears to contradict the well-rehearsed historical scenario that states that the avant-garde of the first third of the century held the key artistic assumptions and strategies of what was to follow: post-WWII activities being relegated to little more than varieties of historical repetition. This scenario is, in fact, persuasive in a vast number of cases, and it is not necessarily restricted to art. Postmodernism itself has been described in part as an incursion of the avant-garde into mass culture; the early avant-garde may even claim Derrida's elaboration of collage.¹ But this scenario is not persuasive when it comes to sound, for the simple reason that the arts of sound during the early avant-garde lacked fundamental areas of development—a stunted past resulting from an assortment of inhibitions, both institutional and discursive, both externally imposed and self-imposed. If we are presently interested in attempts at departure, or at least in attempts at forwarding a compelling complication, we must face the problem that the sources of inhibition are still operative and have, in fact, been joined by others. Assumptions etched deeply into commonsense must be questioned and steps for a generative project on new turf must be taken.

The following will present what I, and other artists with whom I have spoken, understand to be the primary source of inhibition: the equation of an artistic practice of sound with music. We will call this the musical conceit. It's a powerful, tenacious discursive impediment which has long bridled artistic possibility, an impediment whose only positive feature is, from our vantage point, totally self-serving: the delay of the potential for discovery to the present day. It can be traced theoretically to the reductive features of any act of aural apperception and of the disposition of music to the total range of possible sound. Daniel Charles has mentioned these while observing various "concealments" in the

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musical practices of post-war theoretical composers. He cites contemporary philosopher Don Ihde who says that, for lack of earlids, at any one moment we can only exert psychological and not physiological control over the entirety of aural occurrence. This psychological control "is my attention and its selectivity. But this very selectivity is both what reveals something about sounds to me and at the same time conceals other aspects of sound."² For Charles, common approaches to music, especially conventional practices of notation and predominant systems of organizing musical material, necessarily repeat this process of revelation and concealment. Their consistent privileging of the latter, however, belies a project of authoritarian, "calculative" control. Charles' observations, however, are restricted to music, and thereby echo music's own delimiting efforts exerted upon the expanse of aural occurrence.

There exists a concealment not contained to musical practice which operates where musical practice borders other possible artistic practices of sound. It is cast in terms of the most pronounced feature of the musical conceit—the demarcation between mimetic and non-mimetic aspects of sound. The separation may fulfill all the rules of common sense. It is nevertheless arbitrary and becomes increasingly arbitrary as contemporary pressures mount. There are many ways beside music to conceive of and organize sound. There should be others still which cross the demarcation between mimetic and non-mimetic sound with impunity. Restrictions on this mobility distort the fields of possible artistic practices not only between music and an art of sound, but also across an art(s) of sound itself, because musical imperatives are imposed across sounds which have nothing intrinsically musical about them. Imposition doesn't stop at art. It is a very common practice to extend music as a trope to the totality of sound.

Russolo and the Music of Noise

The tradition of the mimetic/non-mimetic demarcation runs deep. There has been, of course, a role played by the real and self-consigned limitations of the capacity of music technology (instruments) for aural imitation, although plausible techniques for an art of mimetic sound have always existed. However, rationale for inactivity clearly cannot be sought among such limitations after the late 19th century development of phonography, the technology proper for aural imitation, for mimetic sound. Around the same time, the increasing din of mechanization (the first phonograph was basically a sensitive metal lath) and what Henri Lefebvre calls the "breakdown of referentials"³ emphasized the self-same mimetic and social characteristics of sound. The trajectory of aural "mimeticization" culminated during the 1920s, when phonography was joined by radio and sound film to irretrievably code instances of sound across the whole range of "natural" sounds, noise, speech, and music.

But it didn't matter how widespread intensively mimetic sound became, artistic practices of phonography and mimetic sound refused to materialize. When attempts were made, or should have been made, we find a "musical silencing" at work. It occurs when the very instant sound enters the avant-garde: Luigi Russolo's "art of noise." From the way he conceived his artistic raw material at a molecular level to the reception of his work by others, notions of music suppressed a truly radical art of sound. His inaugural manifest of 1913, while showing signs of struggle against the microtonal musical concealments of the reigning Italian Futurist composer, Francesco Balilla Pratella, demonstrated a deep-seated tension on the question of whether the art of noise should be an independent art or whether it should be dependent upon music. Because he resolved it unproblematically within the project of a "great renovation of music" it remained a source of continual difficulty.

One difficulty cropped up immediately. Russolo placed the art of noise at the culmination of the historical trajectory of music. Music, he said, was born in ancient times of a separation from the world of sound, detached throughout the ages from the momentum of life and stagnant while culture

progressed. Music attempted to recuperate this separation, and the accompanying irrelevance, by claiming a fatuous transcendent power, from which heights is directed and policed a "fantasy superimposed on reality." However, the noise from the "growing multiplicity of machines," the sounds of modernism, of the city and warfare, no longer allowed such superimposition, but instead, Russolo insisted, mandated the very type of connection with life denied since the origins of music. Yet, once he embraced these sounds, he refused the very mimetic aspects which connected them in so many ways with situations in daily life. Despite his argument for an approach to sound that, to his mind, had never existed, no supersession or departure took place, no space for an artistic practice with any degree of autonomy was attempted, the culmination of the trajectory of music was to remain musical. At its root a noise's signature was to be timbral *only*. . . physical, areferential; the way in which he saw in noise a verticality of indeterminant harmonic complexity served at once as a representation for the intertextuality and interpenetration of "life" and as its surrogate. Furthermore, his ideas for an "art of noise" were supported by his idea of art in general. Art was of the emotions and mimesis has no business in the depths of the psyche where those emotions traversed. Also, the artist alone was to be in control of the artistic material. Imitation, though, reminds people of their own encounters with the world and these mnemonic representations, multifarious and transient bits of material that they are, are out of composer's control.

The "intonarumori," the instruments Russolo built to play his art of noise, were also contradictory. For having ostensibly been produced as an artistic response to modernism's encroachment of motors and metals, their core design drew not from contemporary technology but from the technology of traditional musical instruments: the drum, hurdy-gurdy, lion's roar, etc. Because none survived, what the Intonarumori sounded like is a matter of speculation. Ear witness accounts of concerts and demonstrations, however, do repeat the same split on the question of imitation and music. Russolo acknowledged that the Intonarumori were quite capable of "misleading," i.e., of producing sounds of an identifiable nature. He consequently sought methods to avoid this from occurring and rationale to allay fears that it might occur. Other individuals who commented on the Intonarumori and the art of noise asserted, for the most part, an intractability of imitation. Consequently they understood the art of noise to be incommensurate with music, or, since music was understood as the sole art of sound, incommensurate with the requisites for any art. It was dismissed as a vulgar case of sound effects or put to work in the degraded task of providing sound effects. Russolo long persevered with attacks of this sort. However, after many years he internalized the opinion that the nature of his art was, in fact, imitative. In the 1920s he designed instruments explicitly capable of "misleading," culminating in the Russolophone, a keyboard instrument so capable of imitation it was used to accompany silent films. In this respect, he had arrived at an instrument which served the function occupied already by sound effects organs. And along with the sound effects organs it was rendered obsolete by sound film. If Russolo's art of noise had been conceived and carried out while taking into account all aspects of worldly sound, instead of forcing sounds into the reductive mold of music, the return of the repressed mimesis would not have taken the trivialized form of sound effects. Neither would his art have been so easily savaged by the new technology of sound film. If he had integrated mimesis into the very material of his art, the art of noise would have been an art.

The Intervening Years

Another significant state of affairs was encountered with cubism, especially in the difference between analytic and synthetic cubism. Analytic cubism's dissolution of representation was performed under the sign of music. Music provided a model for aspirations toward nonreferentiality and as a system of relationality per se simultaneity, for instance, was child's play for music. If there had

been a practice of sound based upon analytic cubism, in other words, it would have been indiscernible from music. Synthetic cubism was a different matter altogether. Its incorporation of actual objects would have led to a practice of sound substantially different than music, one which may have been inaugurated with the ballet *Parade* had the proposed use of mimetic sound not been excluded and diminished. We may ask, in fact, with each instance of collage in painting, sculpture, photography, and literature during the early avant-garde, where was the corresponding practice of sound? Remembering that what was, and is, fancied as musical collage is basically quodlibetical, i.e., an organization of other musical material, whereas collage implies artifacts foreign to the substratum.

The spread of radio, electrical advances in phonography, and optical sound film in the 1920s encouraged a rash of speculative activity directed toward an art of sound unhampered by musical discourse. It was at this time, after all, that the full range of sound—speech, music, sound/noise, and the quotidian sound of the media encompassing them all—became socially audible. During the Weimar Republic Weill, Brecht, and Arnheim argued for radio's artistic prospects and in 1933 Pino Masnata and F. T. Marinetti penned their "La Radia" manifesto. Ventures in avant-garde film sound maintained the musical conceit inherited from the "visual music" of earlier films and from the synaesthesia of colored light organs. In the late 30s some individuals imagined a music cast from sound effects files and libraries of optical sound film. But, as Carlos Chavez observed in 1937, nothing had been done to exploit the new possibilities, an observation with some lasting power.⁴

The irrepressible incursion of societal sound after the war, especially sound of television and the burgeoning capitalist spectacle, required that musical theoreticians and theoretical musicians make explicit arguments for what did and what did not constitute raw material for music. It is in the period writings of such people as Milton Babbitt and Pierre Boulez that one finds, as one would expect, the most disciplinary of proclamations, a scientism set awkwardly against surmounting social and artistic pressures. However, they never made pretense for dealing with anything else but received notions of music; they never laid claim to dealing with sound in an extensive manner (the sounds they dealt with were "civilization").

However, pretense was made with *musique concrète*. Pierre Schaeffer's "acousmatics," i.e., his introduction of phonographic sound only to rid it of its associative traits, coupled with his general conformance to received musical modes of organization, has consequently had a more stifling influence. Like the others, he wanted nothing more but to make music, yet the inhibitions in his original formulations have led individuals to this day to glibly subsume artistic uses of phonographic material under *musique concrète*. The nature of the influence carries on from the same conservative impulse which compelled him, for instance, to design his solfeggio-like structures and other musically derived technicisms: here a musical concealment is indulged long before questions of sound, and thus musical conceit arise.

Sound as Cagean Music

The most influential maintenance of the musical conceit during the post-war period is to be found in the aesthetic program of John Cage. Despite his work's being the most serious and sustained challenge to musical thinking of recent times, not to mention areas outside the bounds of musical practice, when it comes to an art of sound Cage's thought has had a limiting effect. It would not be that major of a concern if he did not profess, as he has done consistently, to be dealing with sound per se. His faithfulness to the musical conceit does not merely affect operations outside his own work, it contradicts some of his most central socio-aesthetic precepts.

It is an irony of Cage, whose name shares the same breath as postmodernism, that the unitary principle practiced to maintain the demarcation between mimetic and nonmimetic sound is more

characteristic of modernism. He bridges modernism and postmodernism, in this respect, as his career has bridged the war years, from its beginnings during the mid-30s to its manifest influence beginning in the early 50s. In a 1942 statement, presaging Schaeffer, he sought to deny the character of the sounds made available by phonography and optical sound film by keeping "their expressive rather than representational qualities in mind."⁵

He put this into action in 1952 with *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* and *Williams Mix*. The former employs the sound of any 42 phonograph records and was, according to Cage, "the first piece of music for magnetic tape made in this country."⁶ *Williams Mix* was composed as part of Louis and Bebe Barron's "Music für Magnetic Tape" project in New York, to which Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, David Tudor, and Christian Wolff also contributed. *Williams Mix* was a dense agglomeration of minute sound fragments from very divergent sources.⁷

The score is written for tape travelling at 15 inches per second. Each page lasts 1-1/3 seconds, and the whole score (192 pages) lasts a fraction over 4-1/4 minutes. The materials employed fall into six categories [A (city sounds), B (country sounds), C (electronic sounds), D (manually produced sounds, including the literature of music), E (wind-produced sounds, including singing), and F (small sounds requiring amplification to be heard with the others)]. Some 500–600 sounds were recorded by Louis and Bebe Barron; the eight tapes were assembled over a 9-month period by Earle Brown, David Tudor, and myself.

For the listener equipped with the framing discourse, the collapse of such a web of sound will barter, like much other music, in representation in and of itself; it may even represent "music" just as the prized ineffability of music will, at the very least, represent ineffability. In this respect, *Williams Mix* is to representation what 4'33" is to proximal acoustic experience. However, any associations of the sounds—perhaps with their source—were displaced to a play a sole role of noise. Like Russolo, noise was at once Cage's ticket to the world and his foil against musical convention. For both, noise was the elastic separation needed to realize a renovation of music.⁸ ("Noise" has no ultimate meaning short of physical pain and damage. But then, what is stunning?) Once Cage claimed that any sound, any noise, was to be accepted for delectation or deliberation—"as is"—especially as it occurred in situ, outside a musical venue, its prior transgressive function was sapped. Noise had become instrumental. Its prior function was simply replaced by another inhibition, one which had existed before but was even less thinkable than noise, that of the mimetic demarcation. For Cage, reference is the new noise.

Cage understands silence to be inextricable with the world of sound. 4'33", although it is known as the "silent piece," concerned an explicit reversal along these lines, but not in the globalized, quotidian sense of all silence and all sound. Instead, he silenced the music to musicalize sound! A piece like *Williams Mix* makes all sounds available for musical utterance whereas 4'33" extends musical apperception to any sound whether it was uttered musically or not. Such a performance can take place outside an institutional venue and occur any time, any place. It's simply a matter of attunement.⁹ "If you want to know the truth of the matter, the music I prefer, even to my own or anybody else's, is what we are hearing if we are just quiet."¹⁰ But the character of this attunement, because it is enacted within the terms of musical reception, requires that sounds be stripped of their semantic content, at the minimum. Although they may, as a last resort, be left unhampered to stand as periodic affirmations of indeterminacy, this signals no departure. The implicit directive to maintain an attunement against the incursion of mimetic sound, referentiality, meaning, sociality, etc., narrows an individual's relationship to the sonic/semiotic object. In attempting to neutralize the object by making it musical, the individual is, as a consequence, naturalized, resulting in a rather despairing vision of human subjectivity, let alone the potential for radical subjectivity.

Cage is willing to extend music as a trope to all sound. In the same moment as the author-

ship of an indeterminant composition by Cage can be problematized, we can also only hope that, when a person under the suggestion of Cage listens "omniattentively" with "happy new ears" to aural reality separate from a discrete composition, any residual authorship associated with Cage himself is jettisoned. The question of his authorship, however, doesn't really matter. Any suggestion under the sign of music will necessarily aestheticize, enculturate, and generally barter in aspects contributing to the social constitution of subjectivity to which authorship belongs. This degree of anthropomorphism is very much against Cage's stated desires. To argue that it does not impose a socio-cultural figure, to argue that any representation is not historical, to appeal to the fancied naturalization of all sound by music, is to exacerbate what is denied by making it surreptitious. The way this contributes to legitimate normative and imperial attitudes runs counter to ecology and social ecology, despite the fact, or perhaps central to the fact, that Cage equates music and ecology: "Music, as I conceive it, is ecological. You could go further and say that 'it is ecology'" (original emphasis).¹¹

He shares with many others this willingness to cast very far the web of music. R. Murray Schafer, for instance, has baldly stated: "Today all sounds belong to a continuous field of possibilities lying *within the comprehensive dominion of music*" (original emphasis).¹² But no willingness is shown to recognize the symbolic violence committed. When, after all, was the last time you heard the word "dominion"?

One example of an art of sound conceived under a Cagean musical conceit is that of the well-publicized work of Bill Fontana, in particular, the recent coordinated radiophonic project *Satellite Soundbridge Between San Francisco and Köln* linking the sound sculptures *Sound Sculptures Through the Golden Gate and Metropolis Köln*.¹³ I'll say at the outset that the celebration these works have received appears to be attributable to a displaced admiration of a formidable technological apparatus mobilized for the goal of artistic purposes, not attributable to artistic purposes themselves. They would have run less risk of being mundane and might have been better equipped with the technology had he not abided by the imposition of musical ideas on the aural environments.

Fontana promotes the typical musical trope. "We are surrounded by music." Per his activities in Köln: "It was my intention to temporarily turn the urban landscape of Köln into a musical sculpture."¹⁴ In his work the associative characteristics of sounds are invoked and then led to labor under the sign of (Cagean) "music." The application of music to a "portrait" of a city has a history and, like Fontana's Köln, it is a German city: Walter Ruttmann's 1927 cross-section film, "Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City." Ruttmann's film disregarded things left untouched by the surface inspection of the camera. It opted instead for "optical music," formally submerging the social workings of the city, especially through its use of "rhythmic montage." As Siegfried Kracauer wrote in 1928: "This symphony fails to point out anything, because it does not uncover a single significant context."¹⁵ There was actually a greater depopulation of Fontana's Köln than there was of Ruttmann's Berlin. Social sounds were aestheticized and the discursive sounds which did exist were diminished, e.g., the sounds of pedestrians in Köln were miked from beneath a manhole cover, in the same manner the cars crossing the Golden Gate bridge were miked from below. It was accompanied, in the San Francisco area as well, with a pervasively uncritical sense of the social factors involved in representations of "nature."

Weil outside the influence of Cage, or any theoretical composer for that matter, the musical conceit is strongest in the realm of recent developments of digital sampling instruments. It's no surprise that discourse is structured into technology, but here it's exacerbated probably as a result of its falling into lockstep with the economic imperatives of the music of mass culture. Over the last several years, the technological fruits of industry can be witnessed at a glance in trade and popular magazines. As their subtext, and in intermittent articles and comments, these fruits have been equated with an opening up of artistic possibility as well. But what has occurred may be better described as an implosive outpouring, a concentration of what already exists.

This is most evident when it comes to the very idea of instrument. Sampling keyboards and other interactive configurations may condense a number of instruments to one location, expedite the utterance of certain sounds, deploy whole families of sound not previously available for interaction, etc. But this has been done almost entirely for the replication of existing musical instruments and within accepted musical vocabularies, while the basis of sampling in the properties of phonography, especially displacement, suggests a new non-musical conception of instrument.¹⁶ Briefly, the locus of sounds in a conventional musical instrument, say, a violin, is congruent with the physical locus of the instrument itself (very much along the lines of speech, of the metaphysics of presence). When a violin is played, sound originates at the physical site, at the site of wood, metal, fiber. Phonographic sound originates elsewhere and lacks a significant congruence with the digital sampler itself. The "instrument" instead can be conceived as some type of configuration, a locus, selected through a theoretically unlimited mobility, separated out from the full range of sound. An instrument's locus—i.e., in the most compelling way, the instrument itself—would no longer be physical, present, but semi-otic.¹⁷ This would be furthered by the fact that the very statuses of a locus and of loci would themselves be the products of a negotiated, ever shifting mobility.

Although it will be the purpose of another essay to propose bases of sampler design better adaptable to composition with this new idea of instrument, it can be said that an important element will be the development of capacities for aural writing. There are many other areas of development, both technological and compositional, such that the whole project is a rather ambitious and protracted one. It has to be stated outright, however, that adequate technology already exists and that the main work now is compositional, artistic, and conceptual.¹⁸ Hopefully, we will soon enjoy centers which explore the unique compositional possibilities presented by these instruments, in the way electronic and computer music studios cropped up some three decades ago, so that the work can get under way.

The Exception: Vertov

It is true that in the pre-WWII avant-garde neither an art of mimetic sound nor a phonographically based art of sound was developed, and that those who were in the best position to do so (as well as the general discursive milieu) suffered from musical conceit. This does not mean that a fairly clear intent was left undeveloped, nor that no one escaped music. We can find this, to my knowledge, we can only find this in the activities of the Russian Dziga Vertov, best known as a revolutionary filmmaker in the company of Eisenstein, Shub, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, etc. In fact, he did not set out to become a filmmaker but, instead, had attempted around 1916, after gaining a background in writing and music, what would now be called audio art. As a boy Vertov wrote energetically in many genres and when he reached age 16 he entered conservatory for three years to study violin, piano, and music theory. In 1916, while attending the Psychoneurological Institute in Petrograd, he was introduced to some of the major players of the Russian avant-garde, including Brik, Rodchenko, and Mayakovsky. The combination of a background of writing and music, amidst the adventurous imperatives of the avant-garde, "turned into an enthusiasm for editing shorthand records [stenographs] and gramophone recordings. Into a special interest in the possibility of documentary sound recording. Into experiments in recording, with words and letters, the noise of a waterfall, the sounds of a lumbermill, etc., a 'Laboratory of Hearing.'"¹⁹

Towards the end of 1916, Vertov attempted to realize his Laboratory with a 1900 or 1910 model Pathephone wax disc recorder:

I had the original idea of the need to enlarge our ability to organize sound, to listen not only to singing or violins, the usual repertoire of gramophone disks, but to transcend the limits of ordinary

music. I decided that the concept of sound included all the audible world. As part of my experiments, I set out to record a sawmill.²⁰

It's assumed he became frustrated with the poor sound quality. Indeed, he spoke of his transition to film in terms of an inadequacy of phonographic technology. In his recollection, upon . . .

. . . returning from a train station, there lingered in my ears the signs and rumble of the departing train . . . someone's swearing . . . a kiss . . . someone's exclamation . . . laughter, a whistle, voices, the ringing of the station's bell, the puffing of the locomotive . . . whispers, cries, farewells . . . And thoughts while walking: I must get a piece of equipment that won't describe, but will record, photograph these sounds. Otherwise, it's impossible to organize, edit them. They rush past, like time. But the movie camera perhaps? Record the visible . . . Organize not the audible, but the visible world. Perhaps that's the way out?²¹

In this respect, the famed "Kino-Eye," the fetish of much post-WWII avant-garde film, seems to have been the result of a frustrated ear. An inability to "phonograph sounds," in Edison's words, and in the later sense of optical film sound of "sound photography" and "sound camera," resulted in a desire to "photograph these sounds." The deficiency of the technology cannot be equated with poor sound quality; since the creation of phonography, determinations of sound quality have been creatures of the moment. The deficiency comes about in relation to Vertov's montage organization of the recorded material. Without the electrical recording and amplification that was to become available in the 1920s, he would have been unable to re-record without serious generational loss.

He did not wait until proper sound film technology to begin realizing his ideas of sound. From the moment he began filmmaking until "Enthusiasm" (1931), his first sound film, he attempted to keep sound incipient, to prepare for the inevitable advent of sound in Russian film even before sound came to American film. He introduced "Implied sound" into his films, argued theoretically concerning sound, championed an expanded concept of radio, and argued against the dogma inhibiting relationships between sound and image set forth by Eisenstein ("A Statement") and others. He also argued against the "theory of caterwauling." In 1929, while Vertov embarked upon "enthusiasm," the film critic Ippolit Sokolov wrote in "On the Possibilities of Sound Cinema" that the natural world of sound was not conducive to recording.²² The outdoors and the remote, the sounds of work, industry, celebration, public gatherings, etc., i.e., a large part of the domain of documentary, were not "audiogenic."

"Agitational and scientific films will be produced not in the lap of nature, not in the noise of the streets, but within the soundproof walls of the film studio, where no outside sound can penetrate. The sound movie camera will least of all film 'life caught unawares.' The unorganized and accidental sounds of our streets and buildings would become a genuine cacophony, a literally caterwauling concert."²³

Vertov understood Sokolov's "theory of caterwauling" to be "anti-newsreel," i.e., very much within the mold of formalist critics who preferred only actors and acting upon the screen—in the vernacular: played films. Vertov also understood it as symptomatic of an exclusivist conceit derived from music: "Everything which is not 'sharp' or 'flat,' in a word, everything which does not 'doremifasolize' was unconditionally labeled 'cacophony.'"²⁴

Vertov considered the true refutation of Sokolov's "theory of caterwauling" to be *enthusiasm* itself. There was nothing do-re-mi in the "setting of din and clanging, amidst fire and iron, among factory workshops vibrating from the sound."²⁵ Vertov "penetrated into mines deep beneath the earth," much like Nadar in the catacombs, and rode atop "the roofs of speeding trains" lugging twenty-seven hundred pounds of recording equipment, developed specifically for the film, and "for the first time in history recorded, in documentary fashion, the basic sounds of an industrial region (the sound of mines, factories, trains, etc.)."²⁶

Vertov may have rejected Sokolov's music-like exclusivity but he didn't reject music, nor could he with a conservatory schooling. He often referred to his role in filmmaking, not as director, but as composer.²⁷ He called "Enthusiasm" a "symphony of noises," and the film's second name, under which it was known in Russia, is "Symphony of the Donbas." "Symphonie" as a figure is, in one of the many aurally reflexive moments of the film, extended to signal the "harmonic" organization of the activities of the 5-Year Plan in the Don Basin Region, and its parallel in the structure and process of the film itself. In a note sent to Vertov from London (Nov. 1931), Charlie Chaplin wrote: "Never had I known that these mechanical sounds could be arranged to sound so beautiful, I regard it as one of the most exhilarating symphonies I have heard. Mr. Dziga Vertov is a musician . . ." ²⁸

Vertov invoked musical metaphor without the reduction, regularization, or aestheticization it had come to impose in general cultural discourse, because the metaphor had to interact within a documentary context that Vertov called an "enthusiasm of facts" and a literary process wherein sounds themselves were scripted (prior to the visuals, no less, as was the case with "Enthusiasm").²⁹

We can only feebly speculate what a Vertov audio art, an autonomous practice of recorded sound, would have sounded like, since his art of sound was caught up in relationships with visual images. Seth Feldman says it's possible to infer on what a Radiopravda production would have sounded like by sonically animating the titles and implied sounds in "Kinopravda no. 23." But what about a pre-Revolutionary work, still caught in the Cubo-Futurist exuberance of the twenty-year-old in St. Petersburg? And how might this have developed after October, through the 1920s, or past the Stalinist anti-formalism of the 1930s? The legacy that we have received from him is the way he approached the new artistic possibilities of sound in a non-dogmatic, pan-disciplinary way, away from the full weight of the musical conceit, along "the line of maximum resistance" as he called it. He asked of his audience that any of the difficulties they might encounter be perceived in the proper context, not as "a shortcoming, but as a serious, long-range experiment."³⁰ If we take his experiment in the terms in which he cast it in his youth, or in what Arnheim called "blind-hearing," then we realize that the long-range experiment is still before us.

Notes

1. "Given that the collage in general is the most characteristic mode of composition in the modernist arts and that Derrida is the first to develop fully a theory (epithymics) that conceptualizes this mode, it is fair to say that Derrida's grammatology is to the collage what Aristotle's poetics were to Greek tragedy." Gregory L. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 59.
2. Don Ihde, *Existential Technics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983). Cited in Daniel Charles, "Music and Technology Today," in Rend Berger and Lloyd Eby, eds., *Art and Technology* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1986).
3. Henri Lefebvre pegs the "breakdown of referentials" somewhere around 1905–1910, when, under the influence of science, technology, and social changes, "the sense of hearing acquired a greater aptitude for interpreting visual perceptions and the sense of sight for interpreting auditive ones, so that they signify each other reciprocally," and "objects, in practice, become signs, and signs objects." Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984), pp. 110–127.
4. Carlos Chavez, *Towards a New Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937).
5. John Cage, "For More New Sounds" (May–June 1942), in: Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 66.
6. John Cage, "[On Earlier Pieces]," in Kostelanetz, p. 130.
7. John Cage, "[Williams Mix]," in Kostelanetz, pp. 109–111.
8. He's also willing to musicalize language. This, in particular, is a practical consequence of adhering to the musical conceit. The demarcation of mimetic and non-mimetic sounds results in a notable schism between what are considered proper sites for artistic and discursive activity (a schism reminiscent of the one in Ad Reinhardt between his black endgame paintings and cartoon critiques—the main difference is, of course, that Reinhardt was a self-described creature of art institutions whereas Cage breaks into daily life). The musicalization of language passes across this schism in one direction only; there is no reciprocation. See also the related schism between the naive content of Cage's "electrical utopia" and the sophisticated method of his "systemic approach,"

as reported by Kathleen Woodward in her "Art and Technics," in: Kathleen Woodward, ed., *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1980). Contrary to Woodward, my comments here note that a certain lack of sophistication exists as well in his systemic approach.

9. Music through attunement is one step back from Russolo's intervention proposed in his first Manifesto. "We shall amuse ourselves by orchestrating in our minds the noise of the metal shutters of store windows, the slamming of doors . . ."
10. "Conversation with John Cage" in Kostelanetz, p. 12.
11. John Cage in conversation with Daniel Charles, in: *For the Birds* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), p. 229.
12. R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1977), p. 5. Both Cage and Schafer, it should be pointed out, derive a good amount of their globalizing impulse and normative sweep from McLuhan.
13. Bill Fontana, *Acustica International, Klangskulpturen/Sound Sculptures: Metropolis Köln, Through the Golden Gate, Satelliten-Ohr-Brücke / Satellite-Soundbridge Köln-San Francisco*. Catalogue for Köln: Westdeutscher Rundfunk and Museum Ludwig and San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art and American Public Radio, May–June 1987. The sounds were gathered from the surrounding areas, dominated by "natural" sounds from physical (e.g., river water) and animal (e.g., zoo, offshore wildlife) sources, mechanical sounds (e.g., expansion joints in bridge), and non-discursive human sounds (pedestrian sounds). These were presented under a Duchamp-inspired ploy of "found objects," without very much alteration, and were organized along simple lines of simultaneity. In the iconography of the work, the Köln Cathedral and the Golden Gate Bridge functioned, in their respective areas, as architectural loci, symbolic antennae, around and within which sounds were gathered and distributed. They also functioned as fixed sites, monuments and monumental scale, sculptural solidity in the absence of any provided by the displaced aurality. Other reductive operations at work, besides the musical conceit proper, include: the status of "sculpture" applied to communicative and social processes, the naturalization of urban realities through the figure of "landscape," the artworld rhetorical currency of "sound object" without the institutional and discursive critiques originally attendant upon Duchamp's usage, exhuming the cubist/orphic notion of "simultaneity" to dignify basically mundane contemporary experiences of telephonic or radiophonic displacement or "relocation," the modernist media arts idea of a technology's proper perceptual object, psycho-acoustics as the scientific surrogate for the socio-cultural aspect of sound, etc.
14. Fontana, p. 31.
15. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 188.
16. See my "An Instrument for X Sample," *Ear Magazine* (June 1987), for some opening remarks. Not too ironically, some of my comments were compromised by the unsolicited interventions of the "tech page" editor.
17. It's important not to confuse this with pastiche, which is something of an abandoned statistical sampling method over a broad range of (usually media) aural environments, accompanied by a belief that something of import can be accomplished through simple quotation. Pastiche is a conceptually impoverished means of response to the mimetic aspects of sound, a musicalization of sorts which no doubt has found succor in the musical conceit. Pastiche could even be understood as a surrogate for the type of instrument proposed here.
18. We can mention in this respect the Dyaxis system from Integrated Media Systems in San Carlos, California.
19. Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 40.
20. Dziga Vertov, "Speech of 5 April 1935," cited in Seth Feldman, *Evolution of Style in the Early Work of Dziga Vertov* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), p. 13. For an astute comparison to Russolo's work, a source which influenced Vertov, refer to Feldman's comments, pp. 12–15.
21. Feldman, p. 40, my emphasis.
22. Vertov, p. 112 fn.
23. Quoted in Herbert Marshall, *Masters of Soviet Cinema* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 81.
24. "First Steps," Vertov, p. 114.
25. "Let's Discuss Ukrainfilm's First Sound Film: 'Symphony of the Donbas,'" Vertov, p. 109.
26. Vertov, p. 109.
27. Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier Books, 1960), p. 177.
28. "From Notebooks, Diaries," Vertov, p. 170.
29. Cf. "Sound March," Vertov, pp. 289–293, and Michelson's comments on p. 327.
30. Vertov, p. 112. For a valuable analysis see Lucy Fischer, "Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye," in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, eds., *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 247–264.