

Kevin Concannon, "Cut and Paste: Collage and the Art of Sound," [www.localmotives.com](http://www.localmotives.com): *netmagasin for samtidskunst og -kultur* (internet journal based in Norway), no. 2.0 (July/August 2000). Slightly revised republication of text originally published in 1990. (See below.)

"Cut and Paste: Collage and the Art of Sound," *UKS—Forum of Contemporary Art* (Oslo, Norway), no. 1/2 (1999). Slightly revised republication of text originally published in 1990. (See below.)

"Cut and Paste: Collage and the Art of Sound," *Sound By Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier, Art Metropole, Toronto (and Walter Phillips Gallery, Alberta), 1990.

Cited in: Dan Lander, "Radiocasting: Musings on Radio and Art," *eContact* 2.3 (September 1999) (electronic journal) (Montreal: Concordia University) accessed at: <http://cec.concordia.ca/econtact/Radiophonic/Radiocasting.htm> on 10 September 2004

Cited in: Piers Hugill, "Cinematics of the Voice: time and rhythm as montage in text-sound composition," *Pores: An Avant-Gardist Journal of Poetics Research*, issue 3 (electronic journal) (London: Contemporary Poetics Research Centre, Birckbeck College, 2003) accessed at: <http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/3/piers.html> on 10 September 2004

Cited in: "Kurt Schwitters," *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, accessed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt\\_Schwitters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Schwitters) on 10 September 2004

Cited in: Iain Matt and Jim Sosnin, "Sound Mapping: an assertion of place," a paper presented at *Interface '97*, accessed at <http://www.reverberant.com/SM/smpaper.html> on 10 September 2004

Cited in: "Kurt Schwitters," *WorldHistory.com*, accessed at: <http://www.worldhistory.com/wiki/K/Kurt-Schwitters.htm> on 10 September 2004

Assigned reading for: *Contemporary Music and Musical Discourse*, Hampshire College HACU 123  
Syllabus accessed at: <http://helios.hampshire.edu/~hacu123/reading.html#dj> on 10 September 2004

Assigned reading for: *Experimental Texts*, University of Plymouth (UK) FIAR 179  
Syllabus accessed at: <http://helios.hampshire.edu/~hacu123/> on 10 September 2004

Assigned reading for: *Digital, Sound, & Experimental Poetries Seminar*, SUNY Buffalo English 475  
Syllabus accessed at: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/syllabi/2001f/475-syllabus.html>

on 10 September 2004

Unauthorised electronic republication in: *JahSonic.com*, accessed at:  
<http://www.jahsonic.com/KevinConcannon.html>  
on 10 September 2004

Unauthorised electronic republication in: *UbuWeb.com*, accessed at:  
<http://www.ubu.com/papers/concannon.html>  
on 10 September 2004

Unauthorised electronic republication in: *Submunition.com*, accessed at:  
[http://www.submunition.com/mtype/archives/audio\\_music/cut\\_and\\_paste\\_collage\\_and\\_the\\_art\\_of\\_sound.html](http://www.submunition.com/mtype/archives/audio_music/cut_and_paste_collage_and_the_art_of_sound.html)  
on 10 September 2004

► UbuWeb | ► UbuWeb Papers

## CUT AND PASTE: COLLAGE AND THE ART OF SOUND

Kevin Concannon

from *Sound by Artists* (Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990)

Though ill-considered as an artistic medium, sound recordings have been produced by visual artists within a variety of contexts since the beginning of the twentieth century and are numerous. Artists and individual works discussed in the following pages have been selected with an ear toward their individual merits, as representative of more general formal and aesthetic currents and for their significance within the broader context of twentieth century art and popular culture.

Taking off from Walter Benjamin's assessment of gramophone records as enabling 'the original to meet the beholder halfway.'<sup>1</sup> I have traced my way to the contradictory notion of the recording as the 'original,' ill-suited for live 'reproduction,' through the application of an essentially formalist, and ultimately photographic, critical apparatus.

The very idea of an Audio Art implies a genre defined foremost by formalist concerns. The recordings discussed cover a broad spectrum, including poetry, music, text and drama. The foundation upon which my arguments for sound recordings as works of art are based, is the popular understanding of mechanically reproduced media as accurate transcriptions of reality. Both photography and sound recording developed, not within the fine arts community, but rather within popular culture. Their substantial popular histories are inextricably linked to their capacity to 'capture' that specific time and place and to transform it into a piece of documentary evidence, whether it be Matthew Brady's *Civil War* or RCA's Caruso concert.

Music, in fact, has been one of the more problematic aspects of this study. For many, the Audio Arts are merely an extension of the musical avant garde and, as euphemisms go,

only slightly less derogatory than 'experimental.' Many of the major advances in the Audio Arts have indeed been made by avant garde composers. [John Cage](#), in many ways, serves as a pivotal figure in this history. Having produced work in several media, he is nonetheless best known as a composer. One of Cage's best known pieces, consists of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence (4'33" 1952). Rather than attempt to draw that nebulous line between composers and sound artists, it will suffice to state that superficial distinctions, such as whether or not a particular individual works in a visual medium as well, or whether or not a particular individual has a record on the pop charts, will be held to a minimum. I have instead tried to focus on the medium of sound recording itself and the seeds of its practice as we know it.

As the primary product of the recording industry, music represents a substantial percentage of audio artworks. Regardless of what one chooses to call it, the influence of the recording medium itself has affected much of the 'music' recorded during our time, by rock musicians as well as 'experimental' or 'serious' composers and artists. When audio recording and play-back equipment came into general use, the very nature of being a composer or musician changed drastically. Composer Glenn Gould personifies this shift within the world of classical music, combining many takes of the same piece for the perfect (recorded) performance. Many recording artists are more competent with a recording studio than any traditional musical instrument. This trend has accelerated recently with the mass availability of digital processing and recording equipment. The genre of pop music currently known as til-han contemporary vividly demonstrates the shift in general use of the medium from 'accurate transcription of reality' to 'material for plastic manipulation.' Using pre-recorded discs of various beats and rhythm phrases, contemporary 'musicians' compose today's hip-hop, scratch and funk. Even within the realm of pop music there exists a demonstrable concern with the intrinsic qualities of the medium. The band Bonzo Goes To Washington achieved a modest commercial success

with Five Minutes, a dance record sculpted around a recording of Reagan's infamous slip up, 'My fellow Americans. I am pleased to tell you today that we have just passed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.' By processing the tape through a sampler, the President of the United States was transformed into a parody of the popular raving rap star, or vice-versa.

## Some History

As with photography, sound recording has developed consistently toward a refinement of its greatest perceived virtue: its ability to recreate, ever more accurately, an event displaced from its original time and place. Both media were created to preserve real-time reality and subsequently, both have been manipulated by artists to create realities that exist only as reproduction. Sound works by artists evolved largely out of the tradition of performance art. The early recordings of Futurists and Dada artists, that begin the brief and intermittent history of artists' records, along with still photographs and precious little film footage, provide the best documents that we have of their real-time work. To this day, performance artists use recordings as a way to disseminate and promote their work.

Numerous recordings of [Fillipo Marinetti](#), leader of the Futurists, have been preserved and are occasionally released on anthology LP's and audio cassette magazines.<sup>2</sup> Along with a few recordings by Kurt Schwitters, [Richard Huelsenbeck](#) and [Raoul Hausmann](#), these Marinetti pieces not only offer an aural glimpse of early performance art but pre-figure a lot of later work that only became possible with the wide availability of tape recorders and, more recently, digital audio sampling equipment.

While the tradition of sound poetry that developed from Marinetti's *words-in-freedom* and the Dada nonsense poetry of Hugo Ball and others is well known, both Marinetti and [Kurt Schwitters](#) became interested in manipulating sound with technology long before

manipulation became common practice. Marinetti composed five pieces for radio performance in the 1930S that prefigured experiments with *musique concrète* of fifteen years later. 'Splicing' together several distinct sounds such as water, fire and human voices, he created his radio sintesi.

The manifesto of the Futurist *Radiophonic Theatre* was published by Marinetti and Pino Masnata in October 1933. The manifesto begins with a self-aggrandizing litany of Futurism's past accomplishments presented as a report of the *Second National Congress of Futurism*. Among those goals advocated by the conference are the 'overcoming of earth with the intuition of the means discovered to realize the trip to the Moon' and the 'overcoming of patriotism with a more fervid patriotism transformed into authentic religion for the country warning the semites to identify themselves with their different countries if they don't wish to disappear.<sup>3</sup> While the former suggests the Futurists' faith in technology, the latter offers but one of many specific examples of their vile politics, certainly a major factor contributing to the scholarly neglect of Futurist work of this period.

At the point in this document when the issue of radio is brought up, the authors begin by citing the miracle of television and their anticipation of teletactilism and teletaste. While waiting, however, they would perfect the art of radio. Much of what is said reiterates the theories of Rudolf Arnheim and others, stating that their radio 'begins where theatre, cinema and narration end.' In addition to prescribing the use of noise, Marinetti's own *words-in-freedom* and simultaneous action that were the staples of Futurist performance, the manifesto proposes several other practices that were more specific to radio. Some of them were to be realized only much later:

Detection, amplification and transfiguration of vibrations given out by materials. As today we listen to the song of the forest or the sea, tomorrow

we will be seduced by the vibrations of a diamond or a flower.

This notion of the amplification of 'microscopic' audio phenomena has been realized more recently by such artists as Richard Lerman and Lief Brush. Both use modern microphones and electronics to 'blow up' tiny sounds, normally not heard by the human ear. Lerman, for example, uses piezo microphones to amplify the sounds of metal as activated by a blowtorch. Brush surgically implants miniature microphones into trees to make audible the sounds of trees growing. In both cases, the microphone is analogous to the microscope. While today such extreme amplification can be accomplished, in 1933 it would have been quite impossible; and their intuitive foresight on this point should be recognized as being as startling as their visions of lunar landings.

Other prescriptions in their manifesto that are more recently familiar include the 'utilization of interferences among radio stations and of the rising and fading of sounds' and the 'geometric limitation and building of silence.'

As best as I can determine, the actual practice of Futurist radio at this time was limited to presentations of live performances of Marinetti's plays and sound poems which were also recorded and pressed as phonograph records. Marinetti wrote five scores for radio *syntheses* that same year although they were not published until 1938. Three of these pieces dealt specifically with the 'limitation and construction of silence':

#### Silences Speaking to Each Other

- 15 seconds of pure silence
- Do re mi on flute
- 8 seconds of pure silence
- Do re mi on flute
- 29 seconds of pure silence
- So on piano

- Do on trumpet
- 40 seconds of pure silence
- Do on trumpet
- Wheh wheh wheh of baby boy
- 2 seconds of pure silence
- 1 minute of rrr of motor
- 2 seconds of pure silence
- Surprised Ooooooh of 2-year-old girl

### The Building of a Silence

1. Build a left wall with a drum roll (half a minute)
2. Build a right wall with a din, a downtown car / street car horn, voices and screeches (half a minute)
3. Build a floor with a gurgling of water in pipes (half a minute)
4. Build a ceiling terrace with chirp chirp chirp srschirp of sparrows and swallows (20 seconds)

### Battle of Rhythms

A cautious and patient slowness expressed by a tack tack tack of dripping water, first then killed by A flying arpeggioing elasticity of notes on the piano, first cut then killed by

- ringing of an electric bell, first cut then killed by
- silence of three minutes. first cut then killed by
- palpitation of key in lock, tah trum track, followed by

- silence of one minute <sup>4</sup>

In *Silences Speak to Each Other*, the emphasis on the segments of 'pure' silence seems fairly straightforward. The use of conventional orchestral instruments, something not in keeping with the rhetoric of Futurism, is apparently intended to provide a delimitation of the periods of silence in something of a figure / ground reversal. The use of 'concrete' sounds, non-musical sounds accurately transcribed onto records from life, better fulfill the Futurist program as set forth in manifestos such as Russolo's *Art of Noises*. For example, the motor and vehicle noises in the first two pieces are characteristic of the Futurist's glorification of the machine. While it would have been relatively easy to realize the first piece with the help of a few musical instruments, voices and theatre sound effects records that were plentiful at the time, the sculptural, three dimensional quality of *The Building of a Silence* would have been rather ineffective given the fact that stereo separation did not yet exist in either recording or broadcast media. A truly successful realization of the score would really require quadrophonic sound. In Daniele Lombardi's reconstruction of the piece on the Cramps Record *Musica Futurista* (1980), the left and right walls were created using stereo recording.

The one minute silence that concludes the third piece leaves the listener in doubt as to when the piece actually ends. The Lombardi reconstruction first came to my attention through an Austrian radio producer who mentioned that she had doubts about its suitability for airplay as silence is commonly considered as 'dead air' and frowned upon by radio regulators. Michael Kirby asserts that the nature of radio programming in the 1930s was much different than it is now, and at the time when Marinetti's scores were written, listeners were more likely to tune in for a specific program and less likely to be station scanning as is the general custom today.<sup>5</sup> John Cage would later become famous for his piece, *4'33"*, which consisted of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. Cage's silence, however, was not 'pure' and allowed for the ambient sounds of the concert hall.

Marinetti's silence, of course, could not have been 'pure' in any radio broadcast then or now unless white noise constitutes purity.

Marinetti and Masnata also called for 'fights of sounds and different distances, namely the spatial drama added to the temporal drama. If the spatial drama of which the manifesto speaks seems improbable in a sculptural sense, as the later score suggests, the *Drama of Distances* might fulfill a more literal interpretation:

#### Drama of Distances

- 11 seconds of a military march in Rome
- 11 seconds of a tango danced in Santos
- 11 seconds of Japanese religious music played in Tokyo
- 11 seconds of a lively country dance from around Varèse
- 11 seconds of a boxing match in New York
- 11 seconds of street noises in Milan
- 11 seconds of a Neapolitan song sung in the Cape Cabana Hotel in Rio de Janeiro

If *The Building of Silence* failed to create a physical sense of distance due to the technical limitations of the era, *Drama of Distances* would certainly have conveyed at least a referential sense of distance with its juxtaposition of easily identified sounds from specific places.

While it is unclear whether or not Marinetti ever realized these scores, Kurt Schwitters was among the first to approach sound recording as a plastic medium. Using sound film, Schwitters edited and collaged his nonsense poems after he recorded them and before he pressed them into records. Everett C. Frost cites Klaus Schönig's talk given at the International Congress on the Evolution of Broadcasting:

Klaus Schöning remarked that Kurt Schwitters was the first to experiment with such manipulations - even before there was audiotape. In the days when recordings were made on wax cylinders. Schwitters dubbed the recording onto film and edited the film into an audio collage."<sup>6</sup>

With the introduction of tape recording technology many years later, this idea of editing sound became more commonplace, no doubt taking its lead from cinematic technique.

The notion of collaging sounds from life to create music is most commonly associated with [Pierre Schaeffer](#), head of the Radiodiffusion broadcast studios in Paris, in the 1940s. It is to Schaeffer that the term *musique concrète* is attributed. Using his Paris broadcast studios, he began his experiments in 1942. In America, John Cage was the first to create a music concrete work. In the same year that he presented the notorious "4'33" (1952), he introduced his first piece composed specifically for magnetic tape. *Williams Mix* was constructed from a library of recorded sounds divided into six types: country sounds, city sounds, electronic or synthetic sounds, windproduced sounds (including songs), manually-produced sounds and small sounds requiring amplification to be heard with the others. The various sounds were played on eight discrete tracks of recording tape so that they overlapped. The score for the piece was determined using the *I Ching*, the ancient *Chinese Book of Changes* which Cage has used often throughout his career. The use of tape libraries and chance operations would later become common compositional techniques for experimental composers.

To some extent, Cage was influenced by Futurist and Dada art. He cites the work of Marinetti and Russolo in his early writings and he was a close friend to [Marcel Duchamp](#). The extended capabilities of new recording technology made possible the realization of most (largely) theoretical work proposed in the early part of the century. Artists were not, however, the only people to realize this. When Leopold Stokowski began broadcasting in

1929, he was astonished to discover that in addition to a carefully planned seating arrangement of his orchestra, certain instruments could be emphasized or buried with the use of the mixing console. Encouraged by his experience, in 1931 he proclaimed that 'the composer of the future will create his harmonies directly in tone by means of electrical-musical instruments which will record his idea exactly.'<sup>7</sup> Working in collaboration with Bell Laboratory, Stokowski, by the late 1930s, had created stereophonic recordings twenty-five years before stereo was introduced.

### **The Influence of Recording Technology on Popular Music**

By the mid-1960s popular musicians began to exploit the sophisticated technology of the recording studio. This phenomenon prompted the Beatles to announce that they were retiring from touring because it was impossible to 'reproduce' their recorded music live. On their *White Album*, the track *Revolution Number Nine* introduced musique concrète to a wide audience. This track instigated the 'Paul is dead' rumour. As the attorney F. Lee Bailey demonstrated on a special television program dedicated to a discussion of this rumour, when played backwards on a turn-table the phrase 'number nine ... number nine,' repeated throughout the piece, became 'turn me on deadman.' Other artists began to use pre-recorded tapes both in the studio and in the live concert context. Holger Czukay (one of the founding members of the German rock group Can) worked extensively with *musique concrète* and has produced several albums that were very influential with contemporary musicians such as David Byrne and Brian Eno.

In addition to the use of prepared tapes, by the 1970s rock bands began to perform live using technology that had previously been limited to the recording studio. Brian Eno, as a member of the art-rock band Roxy Music, began playing synthesizers and treating other instruments with electronic filters during live performances. In his subsequent solo studio

recordings, Eno adopted chance techniques of composition in addition to his extreme manipulation and collaging of sound. He has acknowledged the influence of Cage specifically in relation to his tape music and chance operations. Along with painter Peter Schmidt, he created *Oblique Strategies* (1975), a set of cards with instructions and suggestions that may be applied to a variety of creative activities. While recording in the studio, he would place the cards face down around the room. When confronted with a creative problem, one or several cards could be consulted for inspiration and direction.

Over 100 cards offered a variety of suggestions:

- Give way to your worst impulse
- Emphasize the flaws
- Use 'unqualified' people
- The most important thing is the thing most easily forgotten

Eno employs these *Oblique Strategies* in the creation of his own audio and video work and on recordings that he produces for other bands. His influence is best known through his work with popular recording artists Talking Heads, including their recording of Hugo Ball's *I Zimbra*, the most obvious example of the Futurist/Dada legacy as manifested in pop music. Talking Heads member David Byrne has commented:

I remember hearing an old recording of Kurt Schwitter's *Ur Sonata* when I was in school. It struck me as very musical, very rhythmic ... (almost funky) ... very funny and very entertaining. It was one of the first times I had heard the musicality of 'language' made so explicit. It didn't matter that it was a made up language.

Later I read that a very similar thing was happening in Russia at about the same time ... they were performing elaborate stage productions in a 'nonsense' language. *Alice in Wonderland* had already been published.

Gertrude Stein wrote *The Making of Americans* at the same time, in another city. Although not nonsense ... her writing sometimes made the perceptual and thinking processes explicit in a way that could seem irrational ... yet musical.

There seemed to be an enthusiasm in the air ... an excitement about the possibility of creating a new language ... or re-ordering the existing language to meet new ends.

I have always been fascinated with manipulating or juxtaposing irrational elements in a formal, almost 'logical' manner. It seems to me that this is the way things are.

Using Hugo Ball's text for *I Zimbra* was Brian Eno's suggestion. I felt it was the perfect solution to the quandary we had gotten ourselves into: how do we have a 'chant-like' vocal that doesn't place undue emphasis on the lyric content. We continued to use 'found' vocals over rhythmic beds on *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* ... We hoped to emphasize the emotive force of the voice(s) as represented only by their *sound* and *texture*. For us, the emotion came across strongly ... there was no need to understand in a logical or narrative manner what the words were about ... the intense emotion carried by the quality of the voice, the melody, the rhythms, and the relationship of the vocal to the music (in two pieces we used almost the same bit of found vocal ... against different music ... and the effect was completely different). For us it was not only a good 'idea,' but an emotional experience.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-1970s, it seemed that art schools were producing more rock artists than painters or sculptors. Talking Heads was formed when its original members were students

at the Rhode Island School of Design. John Lennon had been an art student before hitting it big with the Beatles. When he and Fluxus artist Yoko Ono made 'happenings' together in the late 1960s - their sleep-in for peace, for example - the love-affair between art and rock began to flourish. Bands like The Art of Noise, Cabaret Voltaire and Bauhaus had emerged by the early 1980s, taking their names, and to varying extents their creative sensibilities, from a Russolo manifesto, a Dada nightclub, and a German art school respectively. The Art of Noise recorded their first records for the *Zang Tumb Tumb* label, the name of which is the title for Marinetti's most famous sound poem of which two recordings exist (1924 and 1935). The Art of Noise's first hit, *Close to the Edit*, begins with the sound of an automobile engine starting, used as a percussive element. Today it's sometimes hard to distinguish between the artists and the pop stars. Looking through the bins of a local record store can be like flipping through a history of twentieth century art.

The collage sensibility has been appropriated by recording artists of all sensibilities. In the 1950s, Buchanan and Goodman predicted the postmodern fever of the 1980s with their hit, *The Flying Saucer*, in which they pieced together bits of hits such as *I Hear You Knockin* and *Earth Angel* with segues of newscaster patter about platters from outer space. They even released a novelty Christmas record called *Santa and the Satellite* using the same formula. As with many of the contemporary collage platters, Buchanan and Goodman soon found themselves facing lawsuits for copyright infringement. A current example of this problem concerns a piece by Steinski and the Mass Media that cannot be sold commercially due to the legal complications involved with the appropriated bits, but was included free with *New Music Express* (February 1987). *The Motorcade Sped On* begins with Ed McMahon's famous introduction, 'Here's Johnny,' is followed by John Kennedy's 'Ask not what your country can do for you ...' rap, and is mixed with Walter Cronkite's 1963 coverage of the JFK assassination, all anchored by a funk beat.

## The Influence of Pop Music on Fine Art

A lot of visual artists who had seen their former classmates abandon their paintbrushes and chisels for the pop life thought they could have it both ways. As it turned out, they could. In 1967 Andy Warhol brought the 'total artwork' into the rock and roll era with his *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, a psychedelic spectacle that featured a light show and The Velvet Underground. Originally presented in the nightclub that he ran briefly, the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* went on the road. *The Velvet Underground and Nico* produced by Andy Warhol was released by Verve records that year and featured cover art by Warhol.

Meanwhile, in the world of 'serious' music, Steve Reich had begun his tape recorder experiments in 1965. *It's Gonna Rain* featured the voice of Brother Walter, a Pentecostal preacher whom Reich recorded on the streets of San Francisco. Reich created two identical tape loops of the preacher's sermon about the end of the world. The loops are played simultaneously and allowed to gradually shift out of phase with one another creating, as Reich calls it, 'a controlled chaos.' Brian Eno, among others, has cited Reich as an inspiration for his own work with tape loops.

Throughout the 1960s, [Brion Gysin](#) and [William S. Burroughs](#) worked with tape recorders and scissors to create audio cut-ups. Burroughs cites the early Dada experiments of Tristan Tzara and others as influences on his tape recorder experiments along with the writing method of Gysin. Burroughs later came to exert a tremendous influence on rock musicians of the 1970s. Artists ranging from Patti Smith to David Bowie have acknowledged him as a source for their own work. The industrial band Throbbing Gristle released a collection of Burrough's *cut-ups* on their Industrial Records Label. The album was entitled *Nothing Here Now But The Recordings (1959-1980)*, (1981).

By the 1970s, performance art had experienced a tremendous growth. Laurie Anderson's

first performance in 1972, *Automotive*, took place in Rochester, Vermont. It was a concert of automobile horns inspired, says the artist, by the local custom of blowing horns instead of applauding at local concerts. While its inspiration was apparently more contemporary, the piece reflects the aesthetic of Futurist performance in its use of 'noise.' Another precedent would be the *Concert of the Factory Whistle* (1922), in Baku, USSR.

By 1974 Anderson had begun to use pre-recorded elements in her performances. For *Duets on Ice* she wore ice skates embedded in blocks of ice. A hidden tape recorder played songs that she accompanied on violin. When the ice melted, the performance ended. Different performances featured cowboy songs and classical pieces by other performers who became unknowing 'collaborators.' In 1975 she invented her tape-bow violin, for which she wrote *Ethics is the Esthetics of the Few-ture (Lenin)*, and *Song for Juanita*. Lengths of magnetic tape with spoken texts on them replaced the horsehair of the violin bow; to the bridge of the violin, she attached a tape recorder play-back head wired to an amplifier. By moving the tape (bow) against the play-back head at different points along the tape, and by reversing the direction of tape travel, she manipulated the text. *Song for Juanita* is a particularly clever work. From the word Jaunita, she created a 'triangular translation.' As Anderson explains:

The first syllable Juan- or *one-* reverses as no, producing a rhythmic no-one-no-one; the last syllable *-ta* is variously ellided with *-an* to produce *ata-nta ata nta* (anata).

This song was performed in Paris, September 1977 and simultaneously translated into French. That is: no-per-one-sonne-etc.<sup>9</sup> The Paris performance thus incorporated French, English and Spanish variations of the word Juanita or no-one. The English version appears on *Airwaves* anthology, published by One Ten Records in 1977.

The tape-bow violin works are not really songs in the popular sense. They are language pieces that extend the cut-up verse of the Dada and Futurist poets in a way that is much more sophisticated both semantically and technologically.<sup>10</sup> However, that same year, Anderson created several pop-style records for her Jukebox installation. One of the songs, *It's Not the Bullet (A Reggae Tune for Chris Burden)*, was issued in a small edition. The title and the lyrics refer to Burden's performance, *Shoot* (1971), in which a marksman, standing five steps away, accidentally shot the artist in the arm. According to Janet Kardon, Anderson had originally intended to release the *Jukebox* songs as an album but decided against it being not fully satisfied with them.<sup>11</sup>

Anderson's songs surfaced on two records in 1977: *New Music for Electronic and Recorded Media* and *Airwaves*. The former featured the works of women electronic composers including Annea Lockwood, Pauline Oliveros and Megan Roberts; the latter included work by conceptual, performance and visual artists such as [Vito Acconci](#), Terry Fox, Jacki Apple, Meredith Monk and Richard Nonas. In 1981, Anderson's single *O Superman* reached number two on the British pop charts and she signed a record deal with Warner Brothers. The record had originally been released on the One Ten label. Concurrent with Anderson's successful cross-over from performance art venues to the pop charts, performance artists surfaced on several anthologies of recorded works by artists.

*Revolutions Per Minute: The Art Record* was issued by the Ronald Feldman Gallery in 1982. Chris Burden contributed a poem, [The Atomic Alphabet](#); other artists' contributions consist of spoken texts and documentary recordings of lectures and interviews. Les Levine contributed a country and western tune. Hannah Wilke's *Stand Up* is a feminist anthem. David Smyth orchestrated three typewriters for his piece, *Typewriter in D*.

Another important compilation, *Live To Air: artists' sound works*, was edited by Bill

Furlong and Michael Archer and published by Audio Arts in 1982. Included on these three cassette tapes are works by 45 artists categorized under the following headings: Rock Idioms, Images and Narrative, Technological and Audial Space, and Urban Reference. This diverse and international collection featured artists such as Art & Language, Clive Robertson, Arleen Schloss, David Cunningham, Helen Chadwick and Stuart Brisley. Making reference to the space that the soundworks in this compilation occupy, Bill Furlong states in his introduction:

In many respects this audial / technological 'space' is parallel to the physical space of a gallery, yet extends it through the potential of widespread dissemination inherent in the multiple production of cassettes and through broadcasting.<sup>12</sup>

In 1983, *High Performance* magazine issued its issue No. 23 as a two-album set, featuring songs by performance artists. Editor Linda Frye Burnham is represented with a blues song Downtown Blues. Jo Harvey Allen's *Penitentiary of Jealousy* would sound at home in a truck stopjukebox. Intermedia artist and radio producer Jacki Apple layers her own spoken text over music to create a poetic portrait of Idaho. She considers the recording studio and its technological instruments to be compositional tools.

Citing the growing number of performance artists who write and perform songs, editor Burnham states that:

From talking to each of these artists, I have found that commercial success is among their goals, but not at the cost of compromise.<sup>13</sup>

At least one of the contributing artists, Terry Allen, had met with some success in the business when his *New Delhi Freight Train* was recorded by the rock group Little Feat in 1979. Allen recorded the song himself on his 1979 album *Lubbock (on everything)* (Fate

Records). Like many of his tunes, *New Delhi Freight Train* is a pretty straightforward country and western song. A few poke fun at the art world. *Truckload of Art* is about an accident:

Yeah a truckload of art  
Is burning on the highway  
Precious objects are scattered  
All over the ground  
And it's a terrible sight  
If a person were to see it  
But there weren't nobody around

Following a long tradition of records as after-the-fact documentation of performance (that begins chronologically with Marinetti's recordings of his sound poems), *The Uproar Tapes: Volume One* (Island Records, 1986) preserves works by Eric Bogosian, Ann Magnuson, David Cale, Ethyl Eichelberger, Richard Prince and [Karen Finley](#). All of these works were created for a live performance context. Ann Magnuson's piece, *Made for Radio*, stands out in that it is more than just a straight documentation of a live performance. For the recording Magnuson presents three of her radio-identified chat-acters: Tiffany LaFox, talk show hostess / porn queen; Sister Alice Tully Hall, radio evangelist; and pop singer Fallopia, protégé of Prince. The three characters are separated by the sound of a radio tuner scanning the airwaves, thus incorporating the 'interference between radio stations' that Marinetti suggested in his *La Radia* manifesto and that has been used in commercial work for years.

*Artsounds Collection* (Phillips / Polygram records, 1986) was produced by Jeff and Juanita

Gordon and contains songs, readings and interviews by and with artists. As with the earlier *Revolutions Per Minute*, this set was issued in two versions; standard editions including a poster and a deluxe limited edition with signed and numbered artist's prints. Highlights of Artsounds Collection include a Larry Rivers jazz track, a Jonathan Borofsky song with electronic score and a song by Michael Cotton and Prairie Prince of the rock band The Tubes. The decade of the 'cross-over artist' has apparently come full circle.

Many other visual artists have made records. Yves Klein issued a record in 1959, *Concert of Vacuum*, which contained no sound at all, reinforcing his concept of the 'void.'<sup>14</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, a few recordings of sound sculptures were made to document that work; conceptual artists also employed phonograph records for documentary purposes during this period.<sup>15</sup> Fluxus artist Yoko Ono has made several records in collaboration with John Lennon and solo recordings prior to and since Lennon's death. Her own recorded work has evolved from Fluxus performance (performing in a burlap sack, screaming with the Plastic Ono Band on *Live Peace in Toronto, 1969*, for example) to more commercial rock records such as the 1985 *Starpeace*, that contains hard-rock and conventional ballads. Painter and musician A.R. Penck has recorded several albums of improvised jazz in recent years.

Artist Jonathan Borofsky has been using audio in his multimedia installations since 1983. In 1982 he began noticing that the sound energy that occurred naturally in his exhibitions gave the installations a special character. At the time, the energy emanated from the ping-pong tables that he frequently included in his shows - or more precisely from the gallery visitors playing ping-pong - and from the enormous mechanized sculptures of *Hammering Men*. The whining of the *Hammering Men's* motors and the gasps and cries of the ping-pong players sparked Borofsky's interest in sound as yet another element of his multi-media installations. He soon began collaborating on sound works with New York musician, painter and filmmaker Ed Tomney.

A carnival-like atmosphere characterizes Borofsky's exhibitions. Paintings sing, sculptures sing and *Sounds of the World* resound throughout, catalogued one after the other on tape. Another tape-music piece that appears in Borofsky's shows, *Music-for Numbers, Computer and Voice (Reggie)*, was issued in cassette format by Reach Out International Records in 1987 (ROIR A-149) as *Opus for Voice, Movements 1, 2, 3*. under the name *The Radical Songbirds of Islam* (Borofsky and Tomney). The piece is based on Borofsky's counting. He began counting from zero in 1969 and is up to over 3 million now. Tomney designed a computer program to translate the numbers that Borofsky sporadically gives him into a score constructed from a library of tones sung by Borofsky and stored on audiotape. The aleatory nature of the piece suggests the influence of composers ranging from Eno to Cage and the numbered balls of Duchamp, with which he composed his *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even. Erratum Musical*.<sup>16</sup>

A more recent cassette of Borofsky / Tomney music, with the working title *Two Dogs in Your Helmet*, combines a selection of real events, treated and re-configured into a new formal framework. They use both analogue (tape) and digital (micro-chip) samples of recorded sounds citing a distinct difference between the quality of reproduction, to weave together everything from guitar tracks to the sound of spilling pebbles:

It's rather like making a drawing or painting with which you start with no specific idea other than to begin to have fun with the brush or the colour and to just let it happen.<sup>17</sup>

The pieces range from collages of Voices to 'Instrumental' tracks such as *Lou, Level Ran* in which the sounds of jet engines and people yelling are panned across the stereo spectrum. This piece was inspired by the bombing of Tripoli. *For Hope in Chinese Means Forever* a cheery melody is constructed with the sampled sounds of someone blowing into

a bottle. In *We*, the only track that uses a first person narrative, the singers, Borofsky / Tomney, are the 'dogs on the block.' They 'see you leave and see you come home again.' Gurgling water is the only readily identified sound other than voices and much of the song's considerable charm lies in the instrumentation, that tugs at one's curiosity for an explanation. There's enough of the familiar and alien to create a world that is equally intriguing both sensually and intellectually. Using recorded sounds, distorted and manipulated with electronics, Borofsky and Tomney tread the thin line between 'accurate transcriptions of reality' and invention.

Jack Goldstein, known for his paintings of astral phenomena based on photographs, is another contemporary artist who makes records using sounds of the world. He made three series of them between 1976 and 1979 that were compiled from existing sound effects records and in some cases minimally altered. The first of the three suites of records were made in a seven-inch 45 rpm format on coloured vinyl. The titles and the vinyl colours reflected the sound effects contained on the records. *The Dying Wind* was pressed on clear vinyl, suggesting the ephemeral quality of the wind. The third series was pressed on ten-inch discs (a non-standard format) of black vinyl with different coloured labels on each side. On one record the white label side contained the sound of an airplane landing, while the opposite, silver label side preserved the sounds of dropping bombs whistling to their destination but never making contact. Many of these records emphasize the 'framing' of sound in a manner analogous to photographic recording. The 'view' from the plane as the bombs drop is contrasted with the 'view' from the ground as the plane lands. In *The Lost Ocean Liner* from the first series, one side contains a 'close-up' of water lapping, while the other contains the 'distant' sounds of foghorns.

### **The Record as Secular Icon**

The increasing importance of records within popular culture has undoubtedly contributed to the interest that they have held for modern artists. They are, indeed, icons of the twentieth century, representing the pop stars that are worshipped. This is particularly true for the current generation of young artists so overtly influenced by the media.

At the beginning of the century, too, there was a considerable interest in records, if not fetishization of them. As early as 1925, artists developed an interest in records as objects. In 1922, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy advocated the use of phonograph records for purposes of production as well as reproduction.<sup>18</sup> By this he meant that rather than simply using records to transcribe audio material from the 'real' world, they be manipulated manually to produce original as well as mimetic sounds. The following year, Moholy-Nagy elaborated on this proposal suggesting that conventional records be examined to determine what types of grooves make what types of sounds so that a phonetic groove-script alphabet could be established:

Since the grooves on the mechanically produced record are microscopic in size, we shall first have to devise a method for reducing by technological means down to the normal size of a present-day record any large-scale groove-script record that can be conveniently worked by hand. It would be desirable to make a photograph of a present-day (reproductive) record and to make a photo-cliché or photo-engraving of the photograph by a zincographical or galvanoplastical process. Should such a record prove to be just more or less playable, the basis for subsequent work along these lines will be established.<sup>19</sup>

By 1963, Czechoslovakian artist Milan Knizak had realized direct manipulation of records, but not quite as Moholy-Nagy had intended. Knizak created his *Destroyed Music* series by altering popular records: scratching, burning, cutting, gluing and applying adhesive tape

to them. Some scratches created endless loops, with the stylus remaining stuck in one damaged groove. Other objects were reassembled from broken pieces of several different records. Knizak considers this work to be musical composition. They were intended to be played.

The idea of damaging records was manifested in a number of other works at this time, and continues today. New York artist Christian Marclay employs some of these same techniques to create his altered discs, but with more specific intention. In terms of the resulting sound. In his performances, Marclay spins up to eight altered records simultaneously on individual turn-tables. He composes with several piles of records that he prepares and sorts in advance, thus knowing from what pile to select a disc for a desired effect at any time during the performance. The individual records are notated with stickers that identify specific passages and are sometimes applied to create loops. He drops the needle on to the record after the first of two stickers and when it hits the second it jumps back to the first and repeats. Sometimes the records are played at non-standard speeds. In other records, he drills additional centre holes (off-axis), creating a wobbly effect. His *Record Without a Cover* is a recording of one of these performances.

The studio performance is pressed onto one side of the disc. On the other, embossed lettering instructs the owner not to store the record in a protective sleeve. The scratches that result from handling enhance the quality of the sound and make each copy unique.

Marclay also makes unique objects. Cutting intricate patterns out of several records with a jeweller's saw, he then glues the different pieces back together to construct a collaged disc. His *Dialogue LP with Two Profiles*, for example, fuses two profiles of faces cut from black vinyl spoken word discs onto an orange musical disc. As the record spins, music plays until the needle pops at the splice and a voice speaks when the needle passes over the black vinyl figure. The cycle then repeats, resulting in a conversation between the two figures. Other pieces use geometric designs and discs with different content. The

splices in all of these records create pops that become rhythmic elements of the total piece.

San Francisco performer Boyd Rice comes out of the punk movement of the late 1970s. Since 1977 he has released several altered recordings. Early pieces were made on tape, splicing pieces of different recordings together. One consists of every recording of Lesley Gore singing the word 'cry.' Later records utilized off-axis holes and instructed the listener to play 'at any speed.' Still other records include several sound-tracks of endless loops pressed deliberately into the record that endlessly repeat short sound effects. Listeners are encouraged to listen to these closed grooves as songs.

Boston composer Roger Miller (not the country and western singer) emerged from the new wave band, Mission of Burma. His *Pop Record* is an acetate pressing (used for test pressings of commercial records and not a stable enough process to withstand more than a few plays before deteriorating) on which he assembled the scratchy sounds from in-between songs of his favourite records. As the record of these 'pops' is played, new pops are quickly created. A protective cover becomes irrelevant because playing it actually destroys it. It is certainly not a pop record in the generally held sense of that term. As extreme as Miller's brand of pop seems to us today, it has its precedence in Marinetti's use of radio static in 1933.

The ideas in the air at the beginning of the century are still very much present in the work of many contemporary artists. Performance artists still use records to preserve their work. Pop artists have realized and extended the notion of concrete composition that Marinetti and his contemporaries began. In the streets of Baku, the cabarets of Zurich and Berlin and the auditoriums of Paris and Milan, artists of the early twentieth century turned music, as it had once been known, on its head. Speech became abstract and music became concrete. And today a generation of art students has seized that once

sacred and magical phonograph record and profaned it to the point that the line between the fine art and popular practice of record-making is as tenuous as the grooves of Miller's record.

## Notes

1 Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' (1936) in *Illuminations*, edited and translated with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969). Benjamin briefly discusses phonograph records in this context and even writes about Marinetti and the Futurist aesthetic in his epilogue. While he does not discuss Marinetti's sound works, or any specific works, he characterizes Futurist work as fascist. 'All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war.'

2. Many original recordings of Marinetti are in the Historical Recordings Collection at Yale University's Sterling Library. Marinetti's papers are also at Yale in the Beinecke Library. His sound poem *Zang Tumb Tumb*, which was recorded in 1924 and again in 1935, is contained on several anthologies. The two major sources for the material are: *Futurism* (1978), EMI Italiana, Milan, 3 C 065-17982 / A; and *Musica Futurista* (1980), Cramps Records Collana Multipla, 5206 308 / 2, edited by Daniele Lombardi.

3. F.T. Marinetti and Pino Masnata, 'La Radia' translated from *Teoria e Im-ellzione Futurista*, Barbara Poggi and Douglas Kahn, trans. (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1968), pp. 176-i80.

4. The translations of the sintesi are from the liner notes of *Musica Futurista*.

5. In a telephone conversation on 28 March 1988, Kirby also suggested that regardless of radio conventions of the time, Marinetti's political clout might have permitted him the

indulgence of broadcasting these pieces. I have not personally been able to determine whether these pieces were ever broadcast or not. In Michael Kirby and Victoria Nes Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986). the matter is left unclear. It is, however, one of the few texts that deal with Futurist radio at all.

6. I have not been able to locate any primary sources to support the claim that Schwitters used this dubbing process. The information comes from Everett C. Frost's 'Why Sound Art Works,' *The Draina Review*, volume 31, number 4 (T 116), Winter 1987, MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 109-124. Klaus Schöning's talk was given at the *International Congress on the Evolution of Broadcasting*, October 1986, at Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec. Klaus Schöning's remarked that Kurt Schwitters was the first to experiment with such manipulations - even before there was audiotape. In the days when recordings were made on wax cylinders, Schwitters dubbed the recording onto film and edited the film into an audio collage.

7. Quoted in Evan Eisenberg's *The Recording Angel. - Explorations in Phonography* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1987), P. 151.

8. David Byrne, 'Notes for On The Wall / In the Air M.I.T.' (1984), provided to the author for the exhibition *On the Wall / On the Air: Artists Make Noise, Hayden Corridor Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, December 15, 1984 - January 27, 1985*. Excerpts of this statement were originally published in the exhibition brochure (Committee on the Visual Arts, 1984).

9. Laurie Anderson liner notes for *Airwaves* (New York: One Ten Records. 1977).

10. Though the Beatles have always maintained that their cryptic message on 'Revolution Number 9' was unintentional, supposedly hidden messages were 'revealed' in dozens of popular records by disc jockeys across the globe soon after. Thus the idea of backward

messages (to which Anderson's idea is formally related) has been in the air for a decade.

In 1985, they received major attention again when Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Centre attempted to impose censorship on records that contained 'satanic messages.'

11. Janet Kardon, 'Laurie Anderson: A Synthesistic Journey' Laurie Anderson: Worksfont 1969-1983, catalogue (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art. 1983). p. 18.

12. Bill Furlong, introduction to *Live To Air: artists' sound works*, *Audio Arts Magazine*, Volume 5, No's 3 & 4, London. 1982.

13. Linda Frye Burnham, liner notes for *High Performance: The Record* (Los Angeles: High Performance Records, 1983).

14. This differs in intention from Cage's 4'33". Cage has stated that the ambient noise of the concert hall was part of this work. Klein intended a total silence - a void.

15. Sound sculptors such as Harry Partch, Harry Bertoia and Jean Tinguely have released their own recordings. Others appear on anthologies. Conceptual artists on record include Lawrence Weiner, Bernar Venet and Jan Dibbets. For further information on these and other recordings see Germano Celent's *The Record as Artwork: From Futurism to Conceptual Art*, exhibition catalogue (Fort Worth: The Fort Worth Museum of Art, 1977).

16. Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*. Erratum Musical is a system f a composition. It is described by Petr Kotik in the liner n of Multhipla Record's *The Entisical Work* (1976):

It requires:

1. a funnel
2. a toy train with open cars (without locomotive)
3. ball, to be put into the funnel

Each ball bears a number which represents one note of a chosen instrument. The balls fall through the funnel into the cars as they pass underneath. Then, the balls are taken out of the cars and the numbers are transformed into notes (each number representing one note).

17. This and other comments attributed to Borofsky are from a telephone interview in July 1986. *Two Dogs in Your Helmut* was originally scheduled to be released at that time.

18. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 'Production-Re production,' *DeStijl*, number 7, 1922, pp. 97-101. Translated and reprinted in Krisztina Passuth's *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

19. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 'New Form in Music. Potentialities of the Phonograph.' *Der Sturin*, number 14, Berlin, July 1923. Translated and reprinted in Passuth, *ibid.*

[▶ top](#)