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*Abstract:* Steve McCaffery describes sound poetry as a "new way to blow out candles" and "what sound poets do." In his brief survey of sound poetry, McCaffery describes the genealogy of sound poetry from its earliest formalized birth during Russian futurism (found in the experiments of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh) and builds his survey until North America, 1978. This essay considers the history of sound poetry, a history that has no history, but retains the avant-garde experimentalism of modernist poetics. By looking at sound poems by Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters; the sound-experiments of Diamanda Galás; performance in sound poetry; the influence of "primal therapy" (which emphasizes the therapeutic potential of the scream); and the theological tradition of glossolalia, I demonstrate how the noisiness and non-sense of sound poetry offers a variety of forms of political engagement against hegemonic uses of sound and silence. Sound poetry is notable in that it is loud—originally being called Lautgedichte or literally "loud poems"—and this brash noise opens up a heterotopic space of acoustic potential: of potential sonic engagement outside of normative chirps, whistles, vocalizations, glottal stops, fricatives, and speech. This "sonic engagement" is grounded in the new theoretical concept of what I call "arche-speech" or "arche-sound."

# Arche-speech and Sound Poetry

Sean Braune

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*The 'real' you get into poetry is*

*The 'real' of speech*[1]

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[1] bpNichol, *The Martyrology, Book Five*: chapter 3, no page number.

*The acoustic poem bypasses the cortex and addresses itself to the Central Nervous System.*[2]

Steve McCaffery describes sound poetry as a "new way to blow out candles" (*Sound* 18). He also calls it "what sound poets do" (18). In his brief survey of sound poetry, McCaffery describes the genealogy of sound poetry from its earliest formalized birth during Russian futurism (found in the experiments of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh) and builds his survey until North America, 1978.[3] Sound poetry has not studied "history" per se because, as McCaffery argues: "[sound poetry] has led to an open future, to a language without words and hence to a history without history" (18). McCaffery questions the possibility of ever writing a proper "history" of sound poetry; instead, the history of sound poetry is always being "invented" (18) due to the relation between language, meaning production, and history. Even though McCaffery claims there is no history of sound poetry, his essay offers one (and subsequent essays, such as "Voice in Extremis," extend this history); likewise other scholars and poets similarly historicize sound poetry. Dick Higgins breaks sound poetry into five "classes": "1 works in an invented language, 2 near-nonsense works[,] 3 phatic poems, 4 un-written-out poems, and 5 notated ones" (n.p.). Higgins furthermore taxonomizes sound poetry into three general types: "1 folk varieties, 2 onomatopoetic or mimetic pieces, and 3 nonsense poetries which trope their own languages" (n.p.). Richard Kostelanetz

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[2] Steve McCaffery, *Sound* 73.
[3] One of the best sources on sound poetry is the catalogue of the 11th International Sound Poetry Festival held in Toronto in 1978. The anthology is edited by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol.

suggests another history, mentioning many of the same poets that McCaffery mentions in "Sound Poetry: A Survey," while including a variety of artists not traditionally associated with sound poetry such as Arnold Schoenberg, Wassily Kandinsky, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Brion Gysin, and Bernard Hiedsieck alongside *Ketjak: The Ramayana Monkey Chant* in which Indonesian men repeatedly chant the syllable "tjak" to different tempos and sonic effects. Kostelanetz rejects the label of "sound poetry" in favour of the term "text-sound": "'Text-sound' is preferable to 'sound poetry'… because I can think of work whose form and texture is closer to *fiction* or even essays, as traditionally defined, than poetry" (15). In "Voice in Extremis," McCaffery defines "the twentieth-century sound poem, emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an uncompromising effort at abstraction, its primary goal being the liberation and promotion of the phonetic and subphonetic features of language to the state of a *materia prima* for creative, subversive endeavors" (162). At the very least, as Marinetti asserts, sound poetry is a sort of "lyrical intoxication" (qtd. in McCaffery "Voice," 163): an intoxication that permits the poet to occupy a shamanistic position as seer, visionary, or mystic in which non-meaning is conjured from the vast field of phonemic and graphemic potential.

This essay will consider the "invented history" of sound poetry by focusing on sound poetry (and sound in general), considering a wide variety of sonic forms. By looking at (listening to) sound poems by Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters; the sound-experiments of

Diamanda Galás; performance in sound poetry; the influence of "primal therapy" (which emphasizes the therapeutic potential of the scream); and the theological tradition of glossolalia, I will demonstrate how the noisiness and non-sense of sound poetry offers a variety of forms of political engagement against hegemonic uses of sound and silence. Sound poetry is notable in that it is loud—it was originally called *Lautgedichte* or literally "loud poems"—and this brash noise opens up a heterotopic space of acoustic potential: of potential sonic engagement outside of normative chirps, whistles, vocalizations, glottal stops, fricatives, and speech.

Sound poetry remains a highly contestable aesthetic (and I argue, political) practice because text-sound appears at first to be an immaterial and entirely abstract endeavour. Johanna Drucker insists that, "sound poetry consists of a presencing, a bringing into being in a spatial and temporal location of the performance" (132). For this very reason "[v]isual poetry and sound poetry also share the quality of being untranslatable… because of their emphatic insistence on the bond between material form and performance" (Drucker 132). Therefore, is sound poetry material or immaterial? Does the written text exist as material? In what ways is the text related to its performance? What is the difference between sound poetry and music? Dick Higgins goes so far as to assert: "One thing that sound poetry is not is music" (n.p.). Contra Higgins, Bob Cobbing describes the goal of sound poetry in the following way: "We are in a position to claim a poetry which is musical and abstract; but however hard we try

to do so can we escape our intellect? In the poetry of pure sound, yes" (*Sound* 39). Even though Nancy Perloff does not cite or refer to Higgins's "taxonomy," she implicitly situates her essay "Sound Poetry and the Musical Avant-Garde" in response to Higgins's claim when she argues that "sound poetry and music developed from similar origins" (97), namely the sonic. However, the sonic relationship between sound poetry and music can be highlighted in the notion of what I call arche-speech. The difference between sound poetry and music is typically political. What I mean by this is that music is typically assigned a privileged position as "music" in relation to a subject position imbued with the power to name music *as music*. "Music" is therefore a central and organizing hegemonic form of aurality while sound poetry typically occupies the margins of the sonic. Speech itself is not only spoken, but can also be a speech—an oration, lecture, or sermon—and oftentimes in the poetic avant-garde, sound poetry is performed in front of an audience. In his contribution to Marjorie Perloff's and Craig Dworkin's anthology *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*, McCaffery writes that sound poetry is the "sonic version of collage" (119). A sound poem is an interstitial point—an intersection of multiple voices, messages, and Babelian babble. In this paper I will describe what arche-speech is and how it contributes a particularly political framing to sound poetry, specifically considered as the musical within the political.

I derive arche-speech from Jacques Derrida's notion of "arche-writing," which he defines in *Of Grammatology*:

> An arche-writing whose necessity and new concept I wish to
> indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only
> because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of
> writing. The latter could not have imposed itself historically except
> by the dissimulation of the arche-writing, by the desire for a
> *speech displacing its other* and its double and working to reduce
> its difference. (56, emphasis added)

Derrida asserts that writing precedes speech as a virtual proto-text
written prior to communication (an arche-writing), situating speech as
a form of recitation. However, what is the sonic equivalent of arche-
writing? Arche-writing is necessarily silent: it is unwritten in the
strictest sense and its silence permits the emergence of sounded
speech (or recitation). Assuming arche-writing can be brought into
the sonic realm, then the question that should be asked is: in what
ways does arche-speech contribute to the hegemonic ways that
sound, silence, and noise are conceptualized? Essentially, what I am
suggesting here is the formulation of a feedback loop in theory: in
theorizing an *arche* of writing, Derrida posits an originary moment of
unwritten and yet material communication. Any arche is only
theorizable on the basis of its own cause creating a chain of arches
that extend, like turtles, all the way down. To that end, if speech is
formulated on the basis of an arche-writing then writing must be
formulated after an earlier instance of arche-speech. In *The Sound of
Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*, Jacques Roubaud coins a term, the
"wRitten," that he defines as a useful middle ground between speech

and arche-writing: "the wRitten form (*wRitten*: a term coined out of necessity for this purpose; orally the homonym of written) and the aural form (aural: holds the same homonymic relation with oral as wRitten does with written)" (19). The wRitten is an undecidable combinatory concept existing in between arche-writing and speech. Roubaud attempts to name a spoken writing or a written sound. Similarly, arche-speech attempts to theorize a spoken written.

"Arche" (from the Greek *arkhe*, "primitive") emphasizes a *telos* of the evolution of the spoken form of communication from early orature (or what has been called "orature") to what can be considered language. What comes before language? Is it the semiotic? The semiotic itself is a study of how signs come to mean or signify, but the pre-symbolic, pre-linguistic, or what McCaffery calls the "protosemantic" resists sign systems and the localization of meaning. If arche-speech is not language (as in the example of the sound poem) then in what ways does it signify as nonsense? Graphemes and phonemes typically signify attached meanings, welcoming scholarly interpretation; however, sound poetry denies traditional forms of interpretation because it destabilizes, in relation to its Dadaist and futurist roots, established meanings. While it may be true that sound poetry could be most fruitfully studied in its own "space" of non-meaning, the subsequent interpretation would be similarly nonsensical, requiring a different engagement.

Dick Higgins asserts in his taxonomy that "[s]ome of the things that sound poetry has not yet become are intermedial" (n.p.). I reject

Higgins's claim here and insist that sound poetry is necessarily intermedial. "Sound poetry" in the strict sense does not exist. The written text that a sound poet reads is a visual poem or occasion for a vocal interpretation of a graphic representation. Performing a piece like McCaffery's *Carnival* is absurd (and of course McCaffery does indeed perform it in bombastic and absurdist fashion):[4] in visual poetry (visual poetry and sound poetry coterminously emerge) a particular method of reading must be agreed upon at the outset in order to rule out the countless ways that the text could be read. The "sound poem" is an entirely entropic and performed act: a sound poem exists for a moment and then disappears forever. The written record of a sound poem is not a sound poem, but a score or a visual poem. Sound poetry is intermedial because "sound poetry" as a practice only exists at the interstitial point of many other aesthetic practices that primarily include writing and performing. Sound poetry emerges out of writing and performing, but contains no intrinsic materiality; hence, sound poetry exists as an intermedium.

Dick Higgins credits Coleridge with the first use of intermedia, but Higgins uses intermedia "to describe art works being produced which lie conceptually between two or more established media or traditional art disciplines" (*Sound* 65). Brian M. Reed asks in *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*: "What is the medium of poetry?" His answer is that "[p]oets, as they experiment with transmediation,

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[4] Here is a link to a Youtube video that features McCaffery performing an excerpt of *Carnival* in Glasgow. Please note the wonderful absurdity and virtuosity of McCaffery's delivery.

serially bring to light each medium's textures, contours, and inner logic" (284). The avant-garde has never cleanly fitted into any easy delineations or aesthetic categories. Many avant-garde artists work in several mediums at once: as poets, musicians, painters, writers, etc. Therefore, a sound poet is never strictly a sound poet, but a concrete poet as well, who incorporates the visual within the sonic. Artistic mediums bleed into an intermedium where "with familiarity each intermedium becomes a new medium, and that new intermedia can therefore be said to exist between the old ones" (Higgins, *Sound* 65). I agree with Higgins when he claims that "[i]t is therefore nonsense to speak of a 'concrete poetry' movement, a 'happenings' movement, etc. Rather the intermedia appear whenever a movement involves innovative formal thinking of any kind" (65).

When reading about the intermedium it is difficult not to be tempted by McLuhan's famous phrase "the medium is the message" (*Understanding* 7), and re-write the term in relation to Higgins's intermedium. Maybe the "intermedium is the medium is the message" or "the medium is the intermedium," or because both medium and intermedia are present in any work of art, "intermedia is the message." The last option effectively describes how any art form borrows from earlier forms and adapts those innovations within an anxiety of influence. Film, for example, (re)uses several art forms: writing (script), drawing (storyboarding), drama (acting), music (composition), collage (editing); literature borrows from earlier

conventions of writing, and the avant-garde attempts to coalesce these various forms into an intermedia totality.

The "advance guard" breaks new ground and clears the path for the soldiers/poets laying in wait. The project of the avant-garde is best thought of in the contemporary arena as an aesthetic battleground in which various practices are melded together as intermedia. However, as McCaffery suggests, "[t]here is always this element of arche-composition present: the piece process shaped differently each time by the particular energy gestalt created by the combined audience-performer dynamic" (33). Here, McCaffery speaks about the encounter between performer and spectator within sound poetry, but arche-composition is present in all forms of intermedia because one medium invokes a past or contemporaneous medium and adapts elements to form a new set of conventions. If Derrida's arche-writing is added to this conceptual palette then it could be argued that a *text is written by the arche-writing* and the arche-writing itself, prior to being written, has the energy potential of arche-speech. Once sound poetry is recorded (on tape during the 60s), is it still sound poetry? It may still be sound poetry, but it is *no longer arche-speech*. Such a record should be thought of as the attempted textualization of arche-speech or, as McCaffery similarly avers, "tape is none other than writing" (*Sound* 35). For this reason, McCaffery and his sound poetry group, The Four Horsemen, prefer "the pure acoustic, eschewal of microphones, of electroacoustic treatment of any kind… Audiopoetry: the poetry of technologically treated voice, is fundamentally a

graphicism; it is concerned with the scripted sign, with an actual activity of writing" (35). Audiopoetry lacks the performative immediacy of sound poetry: audiopoetry is the technologization of an embodied and organic process of vocal projection. McCaffery writes that "[v]oice is a polis of mouth, lips, teeth, tongue, tonsils, palate, breath, rhythm, timbre, and sound; less a component than a production of a materiopneumatic assemblage of interacting bone, liquid, cartilage, and tissue" ("Voice" 161). The human voice is a democratic model of interacting parts and is the complex organic emergence of mammalian performance. McCaffery quite rightly points out that "[i]t could be said that what sound poetry achieved, up to the era of the tape recorder, was a full-scale revisioning of the word as a desired destination when purified of its cultural bondage to meaning" ("Voice" 171). Arche-speech is a political activity because it is a practice that resists the hegemonic meaning-systems of linguistic norms. Grammar, punctuation, and syntax are resisted in favour of the presentation of the variety of possible sounds that exist apart from normative communication.

Arche-speech is erased during its recording, becoming an archetext or what McCaffery calls "audiopoetry." This does not mean that there is no trace left of arche-speech in the recorded graphicism of the sound performance. On the contrary, the remnants of arche-speech can be retroactively sited as a trace of the original performance. I would like to distinguish between two forms in the sonic performance of poetry: (a) arche-speech is sound poetry unaffected by technological

recording, and (b) sound poetry is that which can be recorded because it has been technologically transferred into a graphicism (or writing). In metaphysical terms, arche-speech is the transcendental instance of sound poetry. Herman Damen understands sound poetry in relation to verbosony and verbophony: verbosony is the "vocalized morphemic elements aligned, configurated and concatenated with each other" (*Sound* 13), and verbophony is the "electronic treatment of voice" (*Sound* 13). In the context of sound poetry verbosony corresponds to arche-speech and verbophony corresponds to the technologization and recording of arche-speech. McCaffery points out that for Jakobson voice "is preoriginary to speech, the protoplasmic paraphernalia out of which speech emerges via sonic selection and gained only at the price of substantial vocal impoverishment" ("Voice" 172). Speech and writing are the results of normalizing systems that effectively constrain the plenitude of possible meanings (even those meanings contained in non-meaning) within a sieve of either embodied limitation (speech that has moved through voice) or communicational sense. The *homo sacer* of speech would be a sound poet.

Analyzing arche-writing in relation to *parole* and *langue* interrogates how speech can be separated from arche-speech. The distinction between the two is in their use of an originary category: for example, in terms of arche-speech the repeated references in the catalogue of the 11th Annual Sound Poetry Festival should be noted as to their "archaic" elements, embracing a pre-linguistic *arche* as an essential

aspect of sound poetry. Charlie Morrow discusses the séance and "vision music" in relation to sound poetry (26); Bob Cobbing writes how "[sound poetry] is a recapturing of a more primitive form of language, before communication by expressive sounds became stereotyped into words, when the voice was richer in vibrations, more mightily physical" (39); Henri Chopin says that sound poetry "is song, dance, game, step, colour, line" (48); and Jerome Rothenberg discusses sound poetry in relation to Jewish chants, specifically the Mishnah (53). Luigi Russolo argues in "The Art of Noises" that, "[a]ncient life was all silence. In the 19th Century, with the invention of machines, Noise was born… [I]f we overlook the exceptional movements of the earth's crust, hurricanes, storms, avalanches, and waterfalls, nature is silent" (10). Despite the considerable "overlooking" that Russolo asks for (how can we overlook all those aspects of nature to find silence?) and ignoring the politically problematic claims of Cobbing and Morrow that sound poetry is a primitive invocation, the function of a theoretical arche situates sound as something existent. Sound exists as something ethereal or abstract—it quite literally cannot be touched or grasped. What is it about silence and sound poetry that entices critics to invoke primitivism and séances in a sloppy and perhaps racist historicism? Arche-speech is speech that is protosemantic and asignificant to the construction and soundings of speech itself. In arche-speech, the medium must say something about the way that non-meaning is deployed through an intermedium that either denies or harasses the

spectator. Even in nonsense, there is an implicit meaning, even if that meaning is unpleasant.

## Verbophonic Arche-speech in Futurism and Dadaism

By considering two sound poems, Raoul Hausmann's "FMSBW" and Kurt Schwitters's "Ursonate," I hope to demonstrate how a form that claims to always resist meaning occasionally embraces clear lines of influence, therefore including something meaningful. Schwitters's poem is an appropriation and elongation of Hausmann's "FMSBW" and the "Ursonate" has become its own aesthetic artifact, attracting various performances and interpretations over the years. The recent memorizations and performances by Jaap Blonk and Christian Bök have demonstrated the variety of possibilities offered by vocal performances of Schwitters's sound poem. In 1994 the visual artist Jack Ox also completed a complex visual work depicting the "Ursonate" as a visualization of sonic cues on a gallery wall.

The original version of Hausmann's "FMSBW" is a sound poem made in the tradition of Hugo Ball's "verse ohne werte" (verse without words) or "Lautgedichte." McCaffery translates *Lautgedichte* as "sound poem," but I think this translates Ball's German without its political implications: as I mentioned earlier *Lautgedichte* can also mean "Loud poem" or "Loud poems." *Laut* literally means "loud": that is to say, noise, and while "sound" is one aspect of this, the original term for sound poetry as *Lautgedichte* emphasizes the dissonant and

disruptive aspects of sound. Jacques Attali argues in "Noise and Politics" that "[l]istening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political. More than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies" (7). Sound poetry, in the Dadaist tradition, is then *noise poetry*, or *loud poetry*. Considering the relation between European avant-garde literatures and Marxism, the idea of *Laut* as a form of initiatory revolt or rebellion—at the very least the sonic seed that can start a revolution—links the *Laut* to what is politically disruptive, potentially producing change or the death of hegemonic norms (even if these norms are only grammatical or sonic).

The futurist F.T. Marinetti calls "sound poetry" "*parole in liberta*" (*Sound* 17) or "liberated speech" and this coinage combined with the revolutionary suggestion of *Lautgedichte* works in tandem to situate and define sound poetry as a practice that is not only aesthetically protosemantic, but also politically engaged. In his sound poem "Dune," Marinetti explores the ways in which a sound poem is scored or presented, allowing future performers the breadth (and breath) of interpretation dependent on the differences in word-size, shape, and font presented in the score. The practice of scoring a sound poem interrelates concrete poetry and sound poetry: combining both text and arche-speech. Michael Basinski writes in *CORE*:

> When I 'read' a visual poem, regardless of form, my first concern
> is the poem's performability, which is to sing: does the visuality

or graphic word manipulation lend itself to aural interpretation. Visual aspects are visual aids to aurality. A function of visuality is performance. (13)

The relation between such seemingly disparate "academic" categories—concrete poetry, sound poetry, etc.—lose the categorical and discursive play that avant-garde poets work towards: both visual poetry and sound poetry are complementary parts of a whole, working together within intermedia. Basinski goes on to say that "[a] visual poem should be interpreted as a literary score and therefore produce or provide an aural image" (13). Using Higgins's intermedia as a starting place and incorporating archetext and arche-speech as conceptual separations synonymous to *parole* and *langue*, a new understanding of experimentation in the avant-garde begins to emerge.

In *Brick*, Darren Wershler and Christian Bök suggest that the very idea of the "avant-garde" is a fad movement or notion that is very much dead in the present world. Bök suggests the term "*outré garde*" (109), evoking the ways in which avant-garde art becomes rapidly reinscribed by hegemonic discourses as capitalist advertisements or lines of products. Wershler jokingly suggests "*avant grad*" (109), satirizing the ways in which avant-garde art tends to proliferate within the "ivory tower" of academia where a small community of nutty and left-leaning hipsters experiment with aesthetic forms. The "advance graduates" of the avant grad situate textual experimentation as a scholarly endeavour and, because of the limited financial support

available to experimental artists, avant-gardists must supplement their limited incomes with academic positions. However, older forms of the avant-garde were associated with revolution, or, at the very least, with social and aesthetic incitation. Even if neoconservatism (in the West) is considered the new *ancien régime* it retains within it the multiplicity of a dominant economic force, that of capitalism, which holds sway over the political. Perhaps a new phase of sound poetry, with a renewed emphasis on the *Laut*, in Ball's original coinage, can be enough of a destabilizing force in terms of the non-meaningful and protosemantic to question oppressive discursive (and sonic) structures of modernity.

Schwitters claims Hausmann's sound poem "FMSBW" appears in the following way:[5]

> F M S B W T C U
> P G G F
> M Ü (qtd. in Schwitters 234)

Schwitters insists that the poem "was originally nothing more than a type sample for a selection of fonts" (234), but Hausmann re-imagines this "selection of fonts" as a vocal performance piece, later becoming the dominant theme of the "Ursonate":

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[5] The original Hausmann piece reads: "fmsbwtözäu / pggiv-_?mü" (qtd. in Schaffner 157).

Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu,

pögiff,

kwii Ee. (52)

The dominant appearance of "Fümms" invokes the thunderous beginning of say, a Beethoven masterpiece: a *Laut* phoneme and a sound that can be interpreted into different forms of performative intonation and emphasis. Relating sound poetry to Lyotard's reading of Wittgenstein's "language games" in *The Postmodern Condition* situates the word/sound of "Fümms" as a performative type of language. Sound poetry is essentially performative because it is separate from symbolic meaning. A Lacanian reading of sound poetry would place Schwitters's "Ursonate" within or very near the Real and Imaginary, distancing the word from the Symbolic; this claim suggests that sound poetry exists in contradistinction to the Symbolic. One of the key revolutionary aspects of sound poetry is that the Symbolic, being the psychic order that keeps Law and social decorum organized, cannot incorporate the *verse ohne worte* that sound poetry is, and for this reason sound poetry undermines a Symbolic construction of both hermeneutics and reality. The surrealists would assuredly claim sound poetry as a part of the Imaginary, but the dadaists, and myself, would insist that sound poetry is of the Real because it cannot be incorporated into any sign system or readymade critical schema.

## The Performative and the Aural

Schwitters's "Ursonate" has inspired performative interpretations of the piece: Bök's reading of it, for example, is fast, confrontational, bombastic, atonal, screeching, screaming, and vocally challenging, whereas Blonk's version is more welcoming, akin to sitting in at "story time" with wide-eyed schoolchildren present. These interpretations each create different experiential spaces for the listener/spectator and symbolize different relations to time and arche-speech. Dave Dyment writes of the influence of the avant-garde musical/sonic movement Fluxus and its relation to contemporary pop music: the relation between Fluxus and sound poetry extends to include the atonality of invented languages, or abstract uses of sound in experimental branches of "popular music." For example, to historicize invented language in a history of music, one cannot ignore glossolalia and its relation to religious ritual. Glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues," is originally thought to be indicative of a prophet's relation to God, momentarily existing as a vessel for the Word. In contemporary culture, glossolalia has taken on a negative connotation within films such as William Friedkins's *The Exorcist* in which Regan becomes possessed by a demon (or the Devil) and occasionally speaks in an invented bricolage of several languages. What is the mystifying aspect of glossolalia? Is it that all meaning is broken down into a protosemantic babble (or babel) of the believer—submitting religious experience as a category of sonic aporia and noise? Jacques Attali writes in *Noise* that:

Thus in most cultures, the theme of noise, its audition and endowment with form, lies at the origin of the religious idea. Before the world there was Chaos, the void and background noise. In the Old Testament, man does not hear noise until after the original sin, and the first noises he hears are the footsteps of God. (27)

What is it that creates the sublime rapture and spectacle of a religious ritual that includes glossolalia? Perhaps, the relation is between the prophetic and madness. Sten Hanson writes that:

The sound poem appears to me as a homecoming for poetry, a return to its source close to the spoken word, the rhythm and atmosphere of language and body, their rites and sorcery, everything that centuries of written verse have replaced with metaphors and advanced constructions. The sound poem is perhaps also a way back to contact with a larger public such as transmitted the tradition of poetry in ancient times. (*Sound* 47)

Similarly, the intention of glossolalic incantation during sacred rituals is to create a community centered around the rhythms and meters of a chant. The perceptive practices of an audience can either legitimate or delegitimate the chant. Previously, in an earlier "acoustic culture," McLuhan writes that "until writing was invented, man lived in acoustic space: boundless, directionless, horizonless, in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition" (*Massage* 48). In this world of pre-writing, glossolalia was not indicative of mental instability as it is in modern visual culture, but rather, transcendence. Perhaps

this is where the antagonistic function of sound poetry arises: its ability to offend, confuse, and occasionally inspire, derives from an earlier sonic tradition of glossolalia. Jerome Rothenberg sees the sound poet as a shaman, as a figure hearkening back to a primitive culture, or what can be called a "glossolalic tradition": "The act of the shaman—& his poetry—is like a public act of madness" (*Sound* 53). Rothenberg conflates both strains in the glossolalic/sound poetic tradition and emphasizes both its sublime aspects (as sacred) and its abject aspects (as madness). Glossolalia shares with what Derrida calls, in relation to Artaud's theatre of cruelty, "glossopoeia" which:

> is neither an imitative language nor a creation of names, takes us back to the borderline of the moment when the word has not yet been born, when articulation is no longer a shout but not yet discourse, when repetition is *almost* impossible, and along with it, language in general: the separation of concept and sound, of signified and signifier, of the pneumatical and the grammatical, the freedom of translation and tradition. (*Writing* 240)

Glossopoeia, according to Derrida, "lays bare the word's sonority, intonation, intensity—the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen, that is, the aspect of oppressed gesture which remains in all speech" (*Writing* 240). Glossopoeia is articulated within Artaud's own sound poetic experiments in the theatre of cruelty: Artaud creates a space of arche-speech—a space where one can be done with the "judgment of god" and speak in an

arche-speech that folds the normal and the abnormal together in an undecidable performance of non-meaning.

When Dave Dyment contextualizes the influence of Fluxus on modern musical practices he ignores or omits the relation to sound poetries. Dyment instead historicizes the atonal tradition of Laurie Anderson, Pete Townsend, The Velvet Underground, John Lennon, Yoko Ono, The Flaming Lips, and briefly, Diamanda Galás.[6] In my opinion, Galás represents the most direct lineage to sound poetry: her performances and sonic experiments raise awareness of gay rights, the AIDS epidemic, and the Armenian genocide. In the process the most startling object of resistance in this cultural critique is the power of her four-octave vocal range. One of the best examples of her range is "This is the Law of the Plague" from *Plague Mass*. In this song that uses borrowed text from Leviticus, Psalms 22, 58, 59, and text by Galás herself, Galás captures the demonic associations of the glossolalic tradition: she begins by speaking softly overtop a foreboding drum-centered death knell in the background, occasionally building to screaming at an ear-shattering pitch and then speaking into an effect-laden microphone that transforms her voice into a wall-of-sound of reverberation and spoken tongues. The piece is unsettling, surprising, and in the tradition of both glossolalia and *Lautgedichte*; it is a sonic piece that captures the pain, depression, and death of the devastating personal and cultural impact of AIDS. Galás's vocals can be contrasted to say, Lisa Gerrard's from both her

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[6] See: Dyment, "Shrieks, Drones and Destruction: How Fluxus Altered the Face of Pop Music [Without Anyone Noticing]." Web.

solo work and her work in Dead Can Dance. Gerrard uses a less demonic interpretation of glossolalia to create soundscapes with her own multi-octave range. Even popular music has imparted some influence from sound poetry in screamcore, punk, prog rock, or in bands such as the Deftones (consider, Rodleen Getsic's addition to the song "Knife Prty" from *White Pony*), the scat singing of Ella Fitzgerald in songs such as "Lady be Good," or even the vocal melisma of Maynard James Keenan, lead singer of the prog rock band Tool. The tradition of sound poetry, specifically its atonal *Laut* strain can be seen in moments of either melismatic vocal lines or vibrato experiments. As Paul G. Collier-Weidenhoff writes:

> In music, a solitary note is an illusion. One note consists of a series of expanding tones. The integrity (or unity) of this note is maintained by the motion of vibration from tone to tone. Motion, then, is the primary characteristic that creates the illusion of a solitary note. (*CORE* 38)

 The illusion of a solitary note (or of a unified meaning) is one aspect of an arche-speech that is occasionally employed in various categories of music to emphasize either the aporic or confrontational aspects of sonic experimentation.

### Aural/Scriptural Poetics and the Primal Scream

Arche-speech is not limited to Western examples of poetry, religion, and music. The branch of Shinto known as Kototama (meaning "the

souls of words" [Gleason 7]) deals with the generative power of vocalized sounds. Kototama sounds are, in essence, glossolalic, but they manifest both as non-meaning (sonic) and also as meaning in that the sounds have the power to evoke creation—such as the creation of the world. In a collection of aphorisms and calligraphy by Morihei Ueshiba (the founder of Aikido and one of the foremost martial artists of the twentieth century), John Stevens explains the significance of Ueshiba's work on the Kototama: "From the seed-symbol su, in the center, the sounds of creation emerge in a circular pattern: u-u-u-u-yu-mu. Extending out from the center are the sounds of existence: a-o-u-e-i (top to bottom)" (108). Ueshiba's interpretation of Kototama comes from his interactions with Onisaburo Deguchi and the Omoto-Kyo sect of Shinto. The calligraphy that Stevens describes intends to pictorially depict the birth of the universe according to the Omoto-Kyo. Both Eastern and Western sonic traditions emphasize the generative significance of words and letters, situating the idea of root sounds (or arche-speech) as nonsensical, but nonetheless productive. Ueshiba's calligraphy of the Kototama can be read in relation to Schwitters's "Ursonate" by considering the moments of refrain that Schwitters returns to: "Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu, / pögiff, / kwii Ee" (52). The "mu" of Ueshiba's calligraphy can be related to Hausmann's own "M Ü" (Schwitters 234), and the "Fü" of Schwitters. Refrains are important in the understanding of any conceptualization of the sonic. Deleuze and Guattari write, regarding the refrain that:

The motif of the refrain may be anxiety, fear, joy, love, work, walking, territory … but the refrain itself is the content of music. We are not at all saying that the refrain is the origin of music, or that music begins with it. It is not really known when music begins. The refrain is rather a means of preventing music, warding it off, or forgoing it. But music exists because the refrain exists also, because music takes up the refrain, lays hold of it as a content in a form of expression, because it forms a block with it in order to take it somewhere else. (*A Thousand* 300)

The refrain is thus a glossolalic or glossopoeic patterning of phonemes into a particular configuration. Refrains are not material objects, but rather, abstract repetitions such as anxiety, fear, joy, or love structured as acoustic or sonic. The refrain is a patterning of arche-speech that orders acoustic phonemes into a repetitive order.

What is the value of such sonic vocalizations? All *parole* is sound: meaningful speech is a contingently agreed upon relation of signifier to signified. Sound poetry is the liberation of the signifier from any signified or referent. However, there is added complexity when performance is incorporated into a hermeneutic of sound poetry. The German avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter, for example, was present at one of Schwitters's performances and writes this of the experience (the performance took place in a house with an audience made up of retired generals and Prussian nobility):

Schwitters stood on the podium, drew himself up to his full six feet plus, and began to perform the Ursonate, complete with

hisses, roars and crowings, before an audience who had no experience whatever of anything modern. At first they were completely baffled, but after a couple minutes the shock began to wear off. For another five minutes, protest was held in check by the respect due Frau Kiepenhauer's house. But this restraint served only to increase the inner tension. I watched delightedly as two generals in front of me pursed their lips as hard as they could to stop themselves laughing. Their faces, above their upright collars, turned first red, then slightly bluish. And then they lost control. They burst out laughing, and the whole audience, freed from the pressure that had been building up inside them, exploded in an orgy of laughter. The dignified old ladies, the stiff generals, shrieked with laughter, gasped for breath, slapped their thighs, choked themselves. Kurtchen was not in the least bit put off by this. He turned up the volume of his enormous voice to Force Ten and simply swamped the storm of laughter in the audience, so that the latter seemed almost to be an accompaniment to the Ursonate. … The hurricane blew itself out as rapidly as it had arisen. Schwitters spoke the rest of his Ursonate without further interruption. The result was fantastic. The same generals, the same rich ladies, who had previously laughed until they cried, now came to Schwitters, again with tears in their eyes, almost stuttering with admiration and gratitude. Something had been opened up within them, something they had never expected to feel: a great joy. (qtd. in Schwitters xxi)

Richter's depiction of the performance is epic; however, its language of praise regarding Schwitters's performance darkly prefigures the bold and mesmerizing German performer who would eventually become Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler. Schwitters, in his performance of the "Ursonate" uses his "enormous voice" and "full six feet plus" height to enrapt the audience. The dramatically epic and almost mythopoetic depiction Richter conjures of Schwitters is nearly as mythopoetic as the visual depiction Leni Riefenstahl presents of Hitler in *Triumph des Willens*. *Triumph of the Will* is a propaganda film that presents Hitler-as-icon both visually and sonically. Aside from his Austro-Bavarian dialect, Hitler's voice retains the scratchiness scored into it from exposure to mustard gas during WWI. When Hitler vocalizes with as much vitriol and "passion" (aggression) as a Shakespearean thespian, the words matter little. Hitler may as well have been performing a sound poem or the "Ursonate" at the Nuremberg rallies for the trajectory of his performance—that would begin rather calmly before becoming gradually louder until the climax of bombast and shouting—could have been easily rendered through a presentation of non-meaningful sound poetry. Incidentally, this is exactly what happens during an episode of Monty Python's Flying Circus, in the episode called "The Naked Ant," where John Cleese (as Hitler) satirically delivers a Hitler speech in a protosemantic, shouting, sound poetic performance to an unimpressed (and rather small) crowd of English onlookers. My point here is that sound poetry illustrates the multifaceted function of meaning: meaning is never fixed to simply one register; i.e. meaning is not predicated on the

words one uses, or only the intonation of the performance, but in a highly complicated collision between the two (and likely other physical, spatial, environmental, sociocultural, and discursive structures) that combine to produce the complex system of meaning-production. Sound poetry is an example of the non-meaningful in meaning, and the meaning of the non-meaningful.

For Bob Cobbing, sound poetry is "the return to the primitive, to incantation and ritual, to the coming together again of music and poetry, the amalgamation with movement and dance, the growth of the voice to its full physical powers again as part of the body, the body as language" (*Sound* 40). Charlie Morrow, on the other hand, sees sound poetry as offering the chance to become a shamanic force in a socio-acoustic ritual centered around the communal breathing of performer and audience: "Breath chant: a group can follow and duplicate, in unison and chorus, the breathing of one person" (*Sound* 27). There is something *arche* in sound poetry—hence arche-speech— and there is something *arche* in both Schwitters's performances and Hitler's speeches. This "something" is certainly pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic, and protosemantic in nature—it is very *arche*.

The logic of Bob Cobbing and Charlie Morrow is the same kind of thinking that is encountered in the fringe therapy of Arthur Janov, popularized in the late 1960s, known as "Primal Therapy." In the history of sound poetry, Janov's therapy shares many similarities with François Dufrêne's *cri-rhythmes:* hysterical rhythmic cries. Bob Cobbing says that *cri-rhythmes*: "employ the utmost variety of

utterances, extended cries, shrieks, ululations, purrs, yarrs, yaups, and cluckings; the apparently uncontrollable controlled into a spontaneously shaped performance" (qtd. in Kostelanetz 19-20). McCaffery asks, regarding Dufrêne's *cri-rhythmes*: "does the human cry mark an unmediated presence or trace a physiological outlay?" ("Voice" 172). Dufrêne's *cri-rhythmes* are aggressive vocal events that may point to an "unmediated presence," but at the very least, they signal a very *Laut* sound poem. Arthur Janov transforms *cri-rhythmes* into a therapeutic model. Janov mentions his initial experience with the "primal scream" here:

Some years ago I heard something that was going to change the course of my professional life and the lives of my patients. What I heard was an eerie scream welling up from the depths of a young man lying on the floor during a therapy session. I can liken it only to what one might hear from a person about to be murdered. (qtd. in Janov 3)

This moment was, for Janov, revelatory—it inspired him to create a therapeutic discipline dedicated to the expression of such arche-speech. McCaffery writes, regarding Dufrêne's *cri-rhythmes*, that "[s]uch is the voice without phonemic regulation, a becoming animal again, a willful en-fans, an enveloping in animal of *homo loquens*" ("Voice" 174). The unmediated presence of the primal scream is a *homo sacer* of the *homo loquens*—banished outside the city gates.

Why then is arche-speech, in the various forms that I have outlined in this essay, regularly excluded from popular discourse? Arche-speech

stands antagonistically against hegemonic forms of discourse and structures of knowledge. Arche-speech stands in contrast to social decorum and etiquette, or as Janov writes: "Illness is often a silent scream. The cure is to give it voice" (282). To put this in the language of psychoanalysis, Janov creates a therapy that conceives of the symptom as a sort of choking or silencing sensation in the throat: the symptom is a catalogue of unspoken trauma and affect—primal therapy gives this choking silence vocal actualization. Human discourse and mediums of communication are heavily reliant on the transmission and interpretation of meaning: arche-speech is antagonistic to communicational mediums and sign systems.

Janov's therapy finds support in the countercultural communities of America, sound poetry finds its poets in the avant-gardisms of modernism and postmodernism, and other forms of arche-speech (such as the branches of Fluxus and the performances of Diamanda Galás) find their places at the fringes of musical culture. Even the example of the Kototama is a fringe branch of traditional Shinto. However, even though arche-speech finds its articulations at the fringes of society, it is not easily ignored, quite the contrary, arche-speech is culturally influential because it is *Laut*.

This essay was partially a written "history" of sound poetry, analyzing the theoretical possibilities of "arche-speech" in order to argue that sound poetry is more needed than ever in the contemporary political and cultural scene. Sound poetry has not gone away by any means (as the performances of Bök and Blonk indicate); however, the sound

poetry "heyday" of the 1960s and 1970s (found in the popularity of The Four Horsemen in the Toronto scene) has certainly passed. Sound poetry is an essential aspect of a larger poetic tradition: one that should not be ignored by contemporary poets and should be practiced to augment and enrich the aural and oral possibilities of the next phase of the literary avant-garde. ◎

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