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Performing Arts Journal, Vol. 2, No. 3. (Winter, 1978), pp. 71-84.

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TEXT-SOUND ART:

A Survey

Richard Kostelanetz

[This is the final part of a two-part essay. The first section appeared in the Fall 1977 issue of PA]—Editors.]

IV

The key issue dividing North American text-sound practitioners from their European counterparts is the use of electronic machinery, for native text-sound art at its best is either more technological or less technological than European. In the first respect, the text-sound artist uses either multi-tracking, sound-looping and microscopic tape-editing to achieve audio tape effects that technically surpass European work. The principal figures here are Steve Reich, Charles Amirkhania, Glenn Gould, Charles Dodge, Jerome Rothenberg-Charles Morrow, John Giorno, and myself. The other strain of American text-sound artists consists of those who have largely avoided electronic machinery, except of course to record themselves in permanent form: John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, Norman Henry Pritchard, W. Bliem Kern, Bill Bissett, Emmett Williams, Charles Stein, Michael McClure, and the Four Horsemen, a Canadian group.

Steve Reich studied music composition with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud before using language to explore the compositional idea of modular variation. Essentially, a limited phrase, or module, whether musical or verbal, is repeated in a gradually changing way; and with overdubbing, a phrase played at one speed can interact with the same phrase played at another speed, sometimes producing a pulsating sound. Reich's earliest verbal work, *It's Gonna Rain*, was composed in San Francisco in January 1965. As the artist remarks on the record jacket, "The voice belongs to a young black Pentecostal preacher who called himself Brother Walter. I recorded him along with the pigeons one Sunday afternoon in Union Square in downtown San Francisco.

Later at home I started playing with tape loops of his voice and, by accident, discovered the process of letting two identical loops go gradually in and out of phase with each other." That is, the two loops begin in unison; but because of mechanical imprecision, they gradually move completely out of phase with each other and then progressively back into unison, the words in relation to each other creating their own serendipitous rhythms and melodies. The first part of this piece realizes an incantatory intensity without equal in audio language art, as the phrase "It's gonna rain" is repeated into a chorus of itself. At one point, for instance, while one track of the tape has the entire phrase, another has only a pulsing "rain"; at later points, "it's a" becomes a ground bass for the aural assemblage. All this repetition of a few words, needless to say, intensifies the invocatory meanings. At times, *It's Gonna Rain* sounds like the Indonesian monkey chant, except that Reich has used electronics to do the aural work of a hundred men; as machine-assisted art, his work exists only on audiotape or record.

The second part of this piece is less dense than the first, and the words are less comprehensible, especially as the language disintegrates into an obscure belching sound. Reich's other recorded text-sound piece, *Come Out* (1966), suffers from the same hysteria as *It's Gonna Rain*; the language disintegrates into a puzzling, sweeping sound that goes on too long. As Reich describes his compositional technique, "The phrase 'come out to show them' was recorded on both channels, first in unison and then with channel 2 slowly beginning to move ahead. As the phrase begins to shift, a gradually increasing reverberation is heard which slowly passed into a sort of canon or round. Eventually the two voices divide into four and then into eight." It is the first work, rather than this, which is Reich's text-sound masterpiece.

The earlier works of the San Francisco text-sound artist, Charles Amirkhanian, reflect Reich's influence. A musician who took his B.A. in literature, Amirkhanian steeped himself in both contemporary composition and high-quality tape recording as "Sound Sensitivity Information Director" (a.k.a., "Music") at KPFA, the Pacifica foundation radio station in Berkeley. In 1971, he produced *If In Is*, which he characterized as "an eleven-minute tape based on strong rhythmic patterns created through the repetition of three words (inini, bullpup, banjo) arranged in phrases on separate tape loops and played simultaneously on multiple tape machines." When the same words aurally coincide, a pulsing sound is produced, much as in Reich's modular art; and this pulse becomes a ground bass for continually varying aural-verbal relationships. A similar compositional technique informs *Just* (1972), which is the best individual piece on the record anthology *10 + 2: 12 American Text Sound Pieces* (1975).

In 1973, Amirkhanian developed a more characteristic way of text-sound working. Essentially, he takes recorded material and then cuts apart the tape in various ways, so that sentences or even words are broken in the middle, or the beginning of one sentence is spliced or overlaid in the middle of its predecessor, or key words are repeated in varying proximities to each other, or a single voice is multiplied into a duet or chorus of itself. On the *10 + 2* anthology is *Heavy Aspirations*

(1973), which is based on the musicologist Nicholas Slonimsky's lecture on "The Revolution in Twentieth Century Music." From a tape of the whole, Amirkhanian extracted Slonimsky's characteristic phrases and speech-patterns. These are aurally repeated, as the tape moves between doctored sound material and straight transcription, abruptly shifting from one kind of material to another, and from one rhythm to another. Amirkhanian even dwells on Slonimsky's reference to *Just* and "text-sound" art (which he defines as "words alone"). Though *Heavy Aspirations* is as mocking in detail as its title suggests, the whole is endearing (and appropriate as a 79th birthday present for its subject). Another tighter, better effort in this style is the autobiographical *Roussier (not Rouffier)* (1973), which ingeniously takes apart the simple phrase, "Charles Amirkhanian, a composer of Armenian extraction," against a background of his earlier text-sound pieces for four full minutes.

Both looping and overlaying come together in *Seatbelt, Seatbelt* (1973), Amirkhanian's single greatest piece, and perhaps the greatest single text-sound work ever produced in North America. It opens with a male voice regularly repeating the paired words of the title, and then varying the rhythm, as the voice is divided over two tracks and the sibilants become more emphatic. Then one voice repeats "seat" while another says "belt," each proceeding at its own rhythm. Then two different voices say "seatbelt" at different speeds as more voices enter, saying, in normal speaking voices, either "seat," "belt," or "seatbelt." Perhaps all five acknowledged performers are now speaking. Suddenly, the chorus shifts to "chung chung quack quack bone" in unison, and then to "cryptic cryptic quack quack" before dividing into two groups, one pair saying the first sequence, the second pair the second sequence. Arrangements like this continue for nearly fifteen minutes. At one point, all the voices say "quack" in different tempi, their rhythms sometimes coinciding; and the piece runs out with two voices saying "quack quack" at the same pace as the initial "seatbelt seatbelt." This piece is dense and witty and ingenious; it is utterly non-representational of anything except itself and, of course, the innovative powers of human imagination.

The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould created a minor masterpiece of text-sound tape editing in the course of something else—a radio documentary on people who live in Canada's northernmost territories. Entitled *The Idea of North* (1967) and commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, this program opens with a woman saying, "I was fascinated by the country as such. I flew north from Churchill . . ." Forty-five seconds later, a male voice enters, saying something different—less appreciative and more cynical about the Canadian north—while the first voice continues undistracted in its characteristic manner. Thirty seconds later, a second male voice enters, saying something yet different. There is perhaps a third male voice in this fugue, all of them articulating themes that are elaborated later in the documentary. The voices change in relative volume, so that one or another predominates at various times, as in a musical fugue; and then they appear to blend evenly into each other, so that one hears not individual expository lines but repetition of the key word "north." And

then all four voices slowly fade out, ending this tour-de-force. Gould produced a second text-sound fugue for a later radio documentary, *The Latecomers* (1969), which deals with Newfoundland; but perhaps because the voices enter too quickly on each other, and there is no key word to connect their talking together, this later example of "contrapuntal radio," as Gould calls it, sounds comparatively jumbled and pointless.

Charles Dodge has developed a singular text-sound art which others value highly, but I find immature. His forte is computer-assisted speech synthesis. The most useful description of his extraordinary compositional procedure appears, curiously, not on the single record of his own text-sound works, *Synthesized Speech Music* (1976), but in the notes to the Amirkhanian anthology:

The computer speech analysis/synthesis technique involves recording a voice speaking the message to be synthesized, digitizing (through an analogue-to-digital converter) the speech, mathematically analyzing the speech to determine its frequency content with time, and synthesizing the voice (speaking the same passage) from the results of the analysis. On synthesis, any of the components of the analysis (e.g., pitch, speech rate, loudness, formats) may be altered independently of the others. Thus, using synthetic speech (unlike manipulation of tape recording) one may change the speed of vocal articulation without changing the pitch contour of the voice (and vice versa).

This procedure requires so much awesome technical competence that it is perhaps gratuitous to note that little of value comes from it. It is true that Dodge can create various voices, both male and female—a testament to his virtuosity, but they sound more like each other than anyone (or anything) else. In the background are non-vocal (or non-pseudo-vocal) pitched sounds that have the obvious aural defect of resembling the vocal ones, and the work at times suggests that Dodge is creating an alternative universe with a single, all-pervasive Dodgian aural style. Then, the voices sing on pitch some of the time, pushing Dodge's art into song; but these *singing* voices lack the charm (albeit likewise synthetic) of, say, Walter Carlos's Moog-generated chorus on *The Well-Tempered Synthesizer* (1970). Dodge draws his language from some trendy poems by Mark Strand, but since there is no perceptible relation between the language and the audio technique, the latter seems as arbitrary as Dodge's freely atonal pitches; and if there is a complementary system, nothing in the commentary suggests a key. Technological invention is so valuable in contemporary art that I am reluctant to dismiss Dodge's work completely, but since the technique itself is suggestive, I hope he knows how far he has to go.

A far more successful electronic text-sound adaptation of a poetic text is Charles Morrow's *Sound Work* (1968), which is based on "The Beadle's Testimony" in Jerome Rothenberg's *Poland/1931* (1974). Morrow, as "sound designer" (his own term), reorganized the one-page text so that all its words were grouped with each other—all "the's," all

“jewel’s,” all “wall’s,” and so forth were together. He invited Rothenberg to record these separate lists. Morrow then took the isolated words and spliced them back into the proper order of the original poem, producing, in effect, a tape of Rothenberg reading “The Beadle’s Testimony” in a stunning, emphatic style that would be impossible in live performance and probably inconceivable without the example of the tape. Both Rothenberg and Morrow have recently done Amerindian chanting which, to repeat my initial distinction, is not text-sound art but theatrical song.

My own work arose from an invitation to be guest-artist at WXXI-FM in Rochester, New York; and though I had not worked in a sound-studio before, I brought along some of my more experimental verbal texts. The medium, I discovered, lends itself to my truncated (or minimal) fictions, in part because radio is a much faster medium than live performances. For that reason, the same one-word paragraphs of, say, “Milestones in a Life” or “Plateaux,” which seemed terribly rushed in live performance, find a more appropriate temporal format on audiotape. For “Excelsior,” which is a dialogue between two single-word speakers, I used stereo distribution of my voice to enhance the aural experience.

With my own more elaborate experimental texts, the medium offered unforeseen possibilities. *Recyclings* (1974), for instance, is a non-syntactic prose piece composed from earlier essays of mine. Essentially, I took my own prose and subjected it to a reworking procedure that kept the language but destroyed the syntax. Each earlier essay of mine was reduced to a single page of new, recycled text. The first 64 pages (of 192) were published as a book which can be read vertically and diagonally just as feasibly as it can be read horizontally. To reproduce this visual experience aurally, I hit upon the technique of reading each page of *Recyclings* horizontally, then adding new voices that read the same text a few seconds behind. The result is a non-synchronous canon where words relate to each other in several directions simultaneously. (It also exists on videotape, where the imagery is visually suspended pairs of my lips.) A second non-syntactic text of mine, “The Declaration of Independence,” likewise employs an eight-track recording machine to create an amateur Presbyterian chorus of myself (amplified differently on each track), this time reading (or trying to read) the same text in ragged unison. Since the text is the historic Declaration of Independence read backwards, the ironies multiply as one hears familiar locutions reversed.

After tentative beginnings with a record on which he did not speak at all, *Raspberry & Pornographic Poem* (1967), John Giorno has become a consummate performer of his own texts. His technique, which has developed considerably in the past decade, consists of chopping apart a prose sentence, so that its words are repeated in different linear arrangements, with different line-breaks, and then duplicated in adjacent columns:

There is	There is
nothing	nothing
	there

there	There is nothing
There is nothing	there
there	There is nothing there
There is nothing there	

Giorno turned to electronic technology for a single capability—echoing—so that he need not say the left-hand column (it could be electronically reproduced as a faint replica of his initial voice), thereby increasing the potential for after-sound analogous to the “after-image” of the visual arts. The principal development in his text-sound artistry has primarily been a complication in the echoing. In his sides of the two-record *John Giorno/William Burroughs* (1975), Giorno developed a double echo that could be varied in quality, becoming more reverberant (and re-echoed) at times and more distorted at other times. The double echo increases not only Giorno’s self-replication, which appears to interest him, but also the audiographic impact of his statements. All this technique notwithstanding, Giorno’s work is built not upon isolated words but upon whole phrases; it depends for coherence not upon sound but syntax, semantics, and prose narrative—all the traditional baggage—to evoke his macabre vision. Indeed, his recent collaboration with Burroughs becomes an implicit acknowledgment of the literary origins of Giorno’s sensibility. To be precise, this is not text-sound art at all, but inventively amplified poetry (which is thus more acceptable to “poetry” circles); and that recognition perhaps explains why genuine text-sound work is so sparsely represented in his anthologies.

Other Americans making electronic text-sound art include Alvin Lucier, whose *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1970) begins with him reading a 100-word prose statement which is recorded on tape. The recorded version is then played in the same space in which the original statement was made and recorded on tape at one remove from the initial live statement. This procedure of broadcasting and re-recording is continued through several generations, as feedback progressively obliterates the text that paradoxically becomes less audible. It becomes, thanks to repetition, more familiar. Francis Schwartz’s *Score-Painting for Julio Cortazar* (1974) is a bi-lingual visualization of an allusive visual text that overdubs the author’s voice, saying various things at various speeds, about his subject.

V

John Cage, one of the key figures in non-electronic American text-sound art, has curiously also been a pioneer in electronic music, with tape compositions dating back to his *Williams Mix* of the early fifties. His text-sound works have consisted largely of his rather formal, unemphatic readings of his own mostly non-syntactic texts. Whereas several earlier Cage pieces incorporated spoken language, such as the funny narratives of *Indeterminacy* (1958), or the aleatory words that happened to be on the twelve radios in *Imaginary Landscape IV* (1952), Cage began in the seventies to make works composed exclusively of language; and these turned out to be as structurally non-climactic and non-hierarchical

as his musical work. *Mureau* (1970), the first in this series, is based upon Henry David Thoreau's remarks about music, which Cage then scrambles, via *I Ching* processes, into a mix of syllables, words and phrases. The result is a verbal pastiche in which one can perceive references to music and nature (and thus to Thoreau's characteristic vocabulary).

Cage has since progressed, as he always does, to a yet more severe language mix that he calls *Empty Words*. This might best be characterized as a progressive reduction of material from Thoreau. Cage's own typically technical description is useful here: "Part II: A mix of words, syllables, and letters obtained by subjecting the *Journal* of Henry David Thoreau to a series of *I Ching* chance operations. Pt. I includes phrases. Pt. III omits words. IV omits sentences, phrases, words and syllables; includes only letters and silences."

The live performance of part IV that I heard Cage do in New York (Spring 1975), could be characterized as the most extreme presentation of its kind. Whereas most text-sound art is much faster than spoken language, this was much, much slower. Indeed, the smallest phonetic fragments, succinctly spoken by Cage, were separated by multi-second silences. Musically, the piece seems an extreme extension of Anton Webern or Morton Feldman. More precisely, it is a kind of inferential art whose impact depends upon the audience's contextual awareness of the work's origins and purposes.

Though initially known as a poet, Jackson Mac Low studied music composition with John Cage in the late fifties and even composed the accompanying music to the 1960 Living Theater production of his play, *The Marrying Maiden*. Much of Mac Low's live text-sound art reflects Cage's aesthetic influence, particularly in allowing his performers spontaneous choices within pre-defined constraints. Most of his live pieces are "simultaneities," which is his term for performances that involve more than one voice. In the sub-set of pieces he calls "Matched Asymmetries" (since 1960), several performers are given a multi-part text and asked to read the verbal material at a pace and volume of their own choice, each of them reading the available parts in a preassigned order different from the others. Ideally, the performers should generate individual rhythms and articulations, as well as interacting inventively with each other. An example of this sub-set is the "Young Turtle Asymmetries," which was published as both a record and a text in the eighth issue of *Aspen* (1969). Here the aural experience is primarily that of five voices repeating the same words and elongated letter-sounds at different timbres and times. The verbal material is then subjected to an aleatory process that Mac Low calls "through acrostic chance generation." In another sub-set of scores that he calls "Numbered Asymmetries," each of the performers has a completely different text, and the auditory experience is more unrelievedly chaotic.

A third kind of Mac Low score is the "Vocabulary," which is a non-centered diffuse visual field containing words composed exclusively from the particular letters in a subject's name (e.g., "Sharon Belle Mattlin," "Peter Innisfree Moore"). To declaim these, Mac Low customarily recruits a motley chorus, whose members are instructed to say spon-

taneously whatever words from the score they wish, at whatever volume and whatever durations, with whatever pauses. A fourth related strain is the "Gatha," which is a collection of related words densely written on graph paper, one letter to a square, in a single direction (i.e., vertical, horizontal, or diagonal). Performers are instructed to read the letters in a geometrical path, which may be horizontal, vertical and diagonal, thus producing letter-sounds, phonemes, syllables, words and neologisms. Again, the aural experience is that of occasional repetition and general cacaphony. A fifth kind of live piece is the "Word Event," where the performers improvise on a single, multi-syllabic word, like "environmentally." They are instructed to take this word apart, uttering letters or phonemes and then words drawn from the letters of the initial word (e.g., ellen, ten, leer, tee, toe, nelly, etc.). From such limited material, Mac Low and his collaborators have been known to spin pieces lasting over one-half hour. He sometimes performs a simultaneity against a background tape of a previous performance (or two or three). Mac Low's best text-sound pieces, however, are not the live ones to which he devotes more of his attention, but his fewer primarily electronic works.

Most of these were realized during 1973-74, when Mac Low had access to the New York University Composers' Workshop. For *Threnody for Sylvia Plath* (1973), he took tapes of Paul Blackburn, Diane Wakoski, Sonia Sanchez, Gregory Corso and Tom Weatherly reading their own poems. Using a battery of tape machines, he fed selections from these tapes simultaneously into a single second-generation mono tape. Sections from this initial Mac Low tape were then fed non-synchronously into both tracks of a stereo tape (the third generation). Thus, while passages from the live reading were repeated, they related to each other in continuously different ways. Here, too, the aural experience is that of repetition within chaos, and the most memorable sections mix Diane Wakoski and Sonia Sanchez in an inadvertent duet.

In "Counterpoint for Candy Cohen" (1973) Mac Low explores tape-technique possibilities even further. A single announcement of two-dozen words, spoken by a concert emcee named Candy Cohen, is repeated with irregular pauses to make an initial tape which is then transferred continuously, one channel at a time, onto a four-track tape, which thus has four separate channels of non-synchronous repetition of the initial verbal material. (All the close echoing at this generation is reminiscent of *Giorno*.) Then, this tape is itself transferred continuously onto each track of a two-track machine, which then has eight different tracks of the same repeated announcement. Then, this tape is transferred onto each track of the initial four-track machine which thus produces a tape with 32 tracks of sound. This fourth-generation is two-tracked into 64 tracks, which is then four-tracked into 256 tracks. As the final piece incorporates all stages in the incremental process, what we hear is the progressive complication of the initial material (two-dozen words and a pause) through several distinct generations into a verbally incomprehensible, but rhythmically pulsing chorus. The experience is extraordinary, and it is perhaps the culmination of Mac Low's interest in non-synchronous repetition.

The major device of Norman Henry Pritchard's pioneering text-sound art is repetition of the same phrase, so that something other than the original phrase results. In the only conveniently available recorded example, "Gyre's Galax" (1967), the phrase "above beneath" is rapidly repeated with varying pauses between each line. (The reader repeating these words rapidly to himself will get a faint sense of the effect.) The same device informs "Visitary," which appears in Pritchard's principal collection, *The Matrix Poems: 1960-70* (1970). One part of this poem reads as follows:

Dewinged wings
Dewinged wings
wings dewinged
Dewinged wings
wings dewinged
wings dewinged
dewinged wings

Lamentably, Pritchard ceased active publishing around 1971, and his work has not been included in any of the surveys, recordings or exhibitions of language art.

Pritchard's student, W. Bliem Kern, a visual poet as well as a text-sound artist, tends to do aural renditions of his visual texts. His printed text ranges from rather "straight" poetry, which is undistinguished, to visual texts of words and letters in page-space to poems that mix familiar with unfamiliar words, the former becoming semantic touchstones for the latter.

psom enu how ek anu
time was prom
enu how ek anu time was
prom enu how ek anu
time was

And yet other poems are entirely in a fictitious language that Kern calls "Ooloo." Whereas most text-sound work is temporally static, Kern's pieces often have an underlying narrative progression. This becomes more pronounced in his long poem, "Dream to Live," which narrates in words, phrases and phonemes the end of an affair. In the cassette tape accompanying his only book, the piece is movingly read through various kinds of material; and I would classify the piece as "fiction" more than a poem and, as text-sound fiction, an exemplification of its kind.

Kern's texts are written to be performed; for whereas most text-sound artists want to create autonomous linguistic structures, Kern's avowed purpose is the communication of personal feeling. "In writing," he declared in a 1973 manifesto not included in his book, "i am exploring the oral world of non-linear phenomena, the inner speech, the dialogues with myself as a child before i am also concerned with feelings and translating the visual into the verbal."

Bill Bissett is a Canadian poet who taped his visually idiosyncratic texts for a record that accompanies his book, *Awake in th Red Desert!*

(1968). His principal technique is emphatically repeating a single phrase, like that of the title, which remains as it is, rather than, as in Pritchard and Kern, becoming something else. Too many pieces on this record have musical instruments that are unnecessary, if not detrimental; for the record is as widely uneven, and as critically challenging, as Bissett's motley books. One of the most suggestive texts in the book is "o a b a," which closes:

sheisa sheisa sheayisa heisasheisa saheis sasheisaheisa sheisa
cumisa cumisa th heart isa cumisa isa cumisa cumisa heisa shes

However, in his record, Bissett imposes a rhythm on the words, rather than letting them suggest their own rhythm; and the result sounds inept and unconsidered. In another work, the phrase "supremely massage" is variously repeated as a ground bass, while a lead voice reads an erotic prose text. Perhaps the most wholly successful audio poem is the simplest, which opens:

it be it so be so
it so be so it so
be so it so be so

And this, unlike other Bissett, is as perfect on the record as it is in the book.

Emmett Williams is, like Bissett, a various and inventive experimentalist; but unlike Bissett, he works sparingly, producing only a few works in each direction he pursues. The best text-sound piece is "Duet," which appears both in his *Selected Shorter Poems* (1975) and on the initial *Dial-a-Poem* record (1972). It opens with every second line in boldface type,

art of my dark
arrow of my marrow
butter of my abutter
bode of my abode
cope of my scope
curry of my scurry

becoming a sequence of sweetly archaic internal rhymes that ends:

ye of my aye
y of my my
zip zap zoff of my o zip of zap of zoff
zim zam zoom of my o zim o zam o zoom

The third anthology record from Giorno Poetry Systems, *Biting off the Tongue of a Corpse* (1975), closes with a gem by Charles Stein, "A Seen Poem," which opens:

rage judge raga
mad judge rage

a mad judge rages
a raga rides

a raga judges
a rug
a jug

It evokes several internal rhymes within a few words and is, needless to say, delightfully comic.

Another older poet who publishes texts that he also declaims is Michael McClure; the works collected in *Ghost Tantras* (1969) tend to mix syntactically conventional phrases with guttural sounds.

The Four Horsemen consist of four Canadians of independent literary reputation who came together in early 1970 to jam, much as freelance jazz-men do. Bp Nichol, perhaps the most prominent, has published works in several styles, both avant-garde and "trad," as he calls it. Steve McCaffery is a younger writer, London-born, who also collaborates with Nichol in a criticism-combine called The Toronto Research Group. Paul Dutton and Rafael Barreto-Rivera I know only from the record; the latter speaks English with an audible Spanish accent. Their initial text-sound works were collected on a record called *Canadada*, which is undated. The best piece here is a fugue, entitled "Allegro 108," which opens, "Ben den hen ken len men pen ken fen men yet," with one voice chanting alone on a single note. Then a second voice enters, chanting non-synchronously at first but then in unison with the initial voice, as a third voice enters, chanting separately at first, as before, but then in unison, as the fourth voice enters. The piece develops a steady emphatic rhythm, as the voices are clearly accustomed to working with each other. I take "Allegro 108" to be the most persuasive example of the possibilities of leaderless text-sound collaboration.

Other North Americans doing interesting live text-sound work include Armand Schwerner, whose great long poem, *The Tablets* (1967 to the present), incorporates a multitude of techniques, both traditional and advanced, typically including both word-imagery and text-sound; Toby Lurie, whose prose statements make sentimental appeals; Ernest Robson, who has developed a sophisticated method for notating vocal techniques in his syntactically conventional texts; Geoffrey Cook, whose "Jabberwocky" is a modest gem; Beth Anderson, whose "If I Were a Poet" sensitively exploits repetition of choice phrases; Henry Rasof, who prefers a non-syllabic poetry closer to the European example; Peter Harleman, who produced the periodical record *Out Loud*; A.F. Caldiero, a powerful performer of vocables both pitched and unpitched; Lawrence Weiner, a well-known conceptual artist who has done records of gerunds in two languages; Dick Higgins, whose "Glasslass" exploits the sibilants that others try to avoid; and Larry Wendt, who creates long, ambitious pieces that I find less interesting than the remarkable prose notes accompanying them.

Of course, text-sound is an open art. There are many roads to be explored, many virgins to be seduced, many alternatives to be re-thought, many combinations to be discovered. I suspect as well that there are many more North Americans working independently, unaware not only

of what their colleagues are doing, but also of how their own works might be "distributed." In a situation like this, a newcomer could become (and be considered) a major artist quite rapidly. Also, whereas sophisticated Europeans tend to regard text-sound as a familiar form, with an established canon of prominent practitioners, it is open terrain in America; and this perhaps accounts for why American work is already more varied than European.

VI

Text-sound art, it is clear, is interesting and consequential—it is a distinct artistic category, with a small army of practitioners; but the greatest threat to its survival—not to speak of its development—is, simply, its unavailability. If the reader of this essay wanted to hear Amirkhanian's *Seatbelt, Seatbelt*, for example, the only way he could satisfy his or her curiosity (or challenge my critical judgment) would be to write Amirkhanian himself, asking the artist for a copy; and if he wrote back that he was reluctant to go through the rigamarole of getting the master from a safe storing place, and then lining up two machines for a dubbing (and that he wanted fifty dollars for the tape copy), no one could blame him. Copying audiotapes is neither as easy nor as cheap as copying manuscripts. One reason why the work of Tony Gnazzo is not discussed in this essay is that Gnazzo wrote that he was, not unreasonably, tired of making copies, even for likely supporters, such as myself.

What is needed at the beginning, of course, are selective anthologies, not only to make everyone aware of what is being done, but also to prompt current practitioners to move onto something else. For another thing, it might force artists to make individual pieces more various; too much work so far is based upon a single audio idea, which is introduced at the beginning and then sustained to the piece's conclusion.

Except for the ones mentioned earlier, there are no more anthologies of North American work. Some text-sound art has appeared in the periodical *Black Box* and on the *Giorno Poetry Systems* records, but no one subscribing to either of these publications can expect a steady stream of text-sound gems. (The former's publisher has announced a cassette periodical devoted exclusively to experimental work, but nothing has yet appeared.) In Europe, the government-funded radio stations take responsibility for the creation and programming of text-sound work; but here, no public radio station, aside from WXXI-FM in Rochester, has supported the art, while literature directors of National Public Radio have never been interested. I have myself written to the larger record companies proposing to edit and introduce a text-sound record; but none of them has accepted my offer. One possible route for American work would involve public funding, but here the new, intermediumistic art becomes a round peg, unable to fit the square holes of funding agencies. Since the program director of NEA's literature department cannot accept visual poetry as "literature," there is no reason to believe he will be any more accepting of sound poetry; and music departments are often reluctant to accept text-sound art as "music composition."

Until records and various printed materials become readily available, North American text-sound will remain a private art that will have public existence only in second-hand forms, such as this essay; and that unavailability becomes, to be frank, an example of de facto censorship that is no longer tolerable.

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CODE: * = text ✓ = record or audiotape # = videotape

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