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'Sound art, radio art, and post-radio performance in Australia'

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In 1935 Raoul Hausmann, the dadaist writer, gave a recital of excerpts from his novel. It was a text overloaded with details, precisely described; lengthy revelations; a baroque richness in every sentence ... The acoustical emphasis, the foaming waterfall of words, anticipated a literature of phonograph records and of the radio - not yet accepted but in the making.

As Laszlo Moholy-Nagy suggests in Vision in Motion (1947), [1] one of the most significant literary developments of the twentieth century is the emergence of 'a literature of phonograph records and of radio'. At this point in the late 1980s, it is now possible to look back at the evolution of radio art, and at the same time, to look forward toward those more recent multi-media artforms deriving from radio art, and extending the potential of radio art into new, 'post-radio' realms.

What is 'radio-art'? Defined most simply, radio art might be identified as that creativity predominantly dependent upon radio technology for its conception, for its realization, and for its distribution. In its most pure form, radio art might be thought of as exclusively radiophonic materials orchestrated and disseminated by radiophonic technology. The East German composer George Katzer's Aide Memoire (1985), typifies many aspects of this genre. 2

As Katzer explains, Aide Mernoire - a composition processed in his own studio, and then mixed in its final form at the GDR Radio studios - is primarily composed of original radio recordings from the Nazi period in Germany between 1933-1945. Katzer characterizes his composition as:

a monstrous collage of phrases, slogans, march music, mass cries, all cut from original sound-documents of the Nazi period and put together to form 7 Nightmares, between which the sleeper can find no rest. 3

At first sight, Aide Mernoire seems the very archetype of radio art. It is produced in a radio studio, and its very materials are fragments of radio broadcasts. In a very real sense, this work could not exist without radio. At the same time though, Aide Memoire's texture is not exclusively radio phonic. Sometimes Katzer employs purely radiophonic materials, such as specific news items made by radio stations. On other occasions, his composition includes musical recordings and live speech which were certainly broadcast by radio, but which first existed live or on record, independently of radio. Aide Mernoire has something of this mixed status. It originates both from the composer's studio, and from the studios of GDR Radio, and it exists both as an L.P. record and as a master tape recorded by GDR.

My point then, is that contemporary composers and sound artists frequently work in quite a vast interdisciplinary sonic realm in which radio is just one potential source of material and distribution. To be sure, many conservative writers refuse to combine the signs and the sounds of their art by working for radio, for record, or for tape. As the American novelist William Burroughs reminds us,

Most serious writers refuse to make themselves available to the things that technology is doing Many of them are afraid of tape recorders and the idea of using any mechanical means for literary purposes seems to them some sort of a sacrilege.'

At the same time however, many of the more adventurous writers, composers, artists and 'performers' of the '80s have systematically made themselves extremely available to 'the things that technology is doing'. While composers like Katzer have made complex collages of radiophonic and recorded materials, 'text-sound' composers such as the American,

Charles Amirkhanian, have turned to television for their inspiration, re cording and re-recording its sound-tracks in new partially musical, partially literary, compositions for tape, records, and radio. Amirkhanian's composition Metropolis, San Francisco re-orchestrates the soundtracks of a Chinese television program broadcast in San Francisco, [5] transforming this raw material into something which might well be broadcast by radio as 'radio art'; which might appear on record or tape as 'sound poetry', 'audio art' or environmental 'soundscape'; or which might contribute to certain modes of partially live, partially pre-recorded 'performance art'.

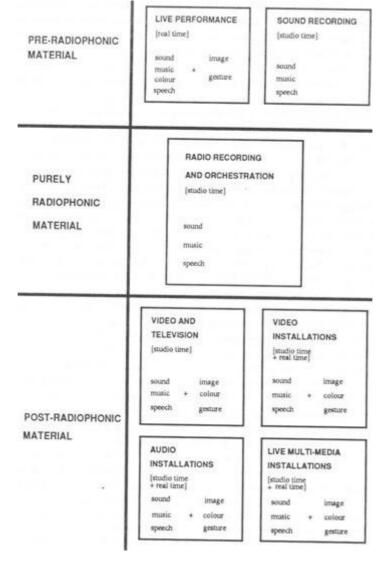
Given these differing creative and critical categories, it seems possible to conceive of radio art both as a pure art, or as part of a growing range of multi-media, hybrid art-forms. Three primary categories of 'sound' creativity come to mind. First, as a 'pre-radiophonic' genre, sound-art created in real time combines sound, music, speech, and image, colour and gesture. Second, as a 'purely radiophonic' genre, created in studio time, sound art orchestrates sound, music and speech in an art exclusively for the ears. Thirdly, as a hybrid, 'post-radiophonic' genre, sound art combines sound, music, speech, and image, colour and gesture in both real time and studio time in variously technological broadcasts, installations and performances. The differing sub-categories of these three genres may perhaps best be represented in the diagram on the following page.

The most significant developments within the contemporary multi media creativity that one might associate with radio art seem to be the ways in which innovations elaborated technologically, in 'studio time', become part of new modes of partially technological and partially live performance in 'real time'. In this respect, the present seems characterized by hybrid modes of 'post-radiophonic' creativity, such as video and television art; video installations involving spectator participation; audio installations involving spectator participation or movement; and the synthesis of video and audio installations in complex, live, multi-media installations.

At the same time, live performance, in real time, frequently attains considerable sophistication and conceptual transformation. Such, at least, is the general trend in Australia. While most Australian artists working within the general realms of sound art and audio art are fully aware of the creative potential of the new post-modern technologies, they often elect to work with live performance in 'real time'. Such work is perhaps best characterised as the exploration of new kinds of heightened narrative, or the attempt to tell stories in a new dynamic, live real-time rhetoric, influenced by earlier technological, studio time, experimentation.

As these remarks might suggest, it is difficult to locate many Australian examples of 'pure' radiophonic creativity. Nevertheless, the influence of radio has been quite crucial to the development of the new kinds of heightened, real-time sonic performance presently explored in Australia. Radio's general impact falls into three main categories:

- (i) as a source of technological mass communication
- (ii) as a source of technological innovation and creation
- (iii) as a source of conceptual revolution



In the first instance, as a source of mass communication, radio obviously makes existing sound art more accessible. Live performances from Sydney, for example, become available to listeners throughout Australia. Secondly, as a source of technological creativity, radio enables artists to extend their work in new ways, either individually or collectively. New modes of critical discussion (such as radiophonic panels with speakers from several cities) similarly come into being. In its third mode, as a source of conceptual revolution, radio and other forms of studio-based creativity precipitate new artistic aspirations within real-time performance, and prompt new modes of live art based upon practices first made possible by recording and broadcasting technology.

The A.B.C. program Surface Tension, broadcast every Saturday after noon until its recent demise, consistently documented new forms of Australian and international sound art. A typical program played recordings of a Swiss alpine horn, from the studios of French radio, and recordings documenting live 'sound art' performances from the Performance Space gallery in Sydney. One of the most interesting of these performances was a narrative entitled Terrier by Allan Vizents, a 'new Australian' born in California, who first worked with the Perth collective Media Space (combining photographic, graphic, recorded and written work), and then moved to Sydney, where he directed Performance Space until his untimely death in 1987. Vizents' poem Terrier typifies his extremely imaginative mature narrative performances, and in the process, offers memorable verbal realization to Franz Marc's aspiration to 'paint the existence of a dog as Picasso paints the existence of a cubic shape'. 6

Vizents achieves this evocation of the feelings and thoughts of a dog by combining two levels of narrative. At its most fanciful, semantic level, his poem dramatizes the musings of a terrier, in a poetic variant of the kind of fictional 'magic realism' elaborated by Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass. At its most literal, mimetic level, Vizents' performance counterpoints and punctuates this text with a recording of a dog panting (creating something of the same effect explored by Beckett in his play That Time, in which the three narratives of his protagonist are similarly counterpointed by the sound of 'audible, slow and regular' breath). [7] Commencing with the marvellously direct assertion: I'm a dog so I bark', this narrative begins:

I'm a dog so I bark. I can bite you bet, sure, bite and shake. I like the chair by the window in the afternoon. I lay there and look at the lace patterns on the window. It goes straight in, circles and stars inside. There is a tear in the flyscreen. I don't mind that either. The chair is smelly, my chair, dog chair. When a cloud passes

by, I open one eye and feel the cool change go straight in.

I am a spy, being spy is dogness ... [8]

One has to imagine the sound of a panting dog between the conclusion of the poem's first section (with the words 'go straight in'), and the beginning of its subsequent section (with the announcement I am a spy'). One also has to imagine the strange conjunction of Vizents' Californian intonation, asserting 'I'm a dog', and his poem's subtle delineation of the details of Australian suburban existence: the inconvenience of 'a tear in the flyscreen', and the welcome relief offered by the breeze, as one senses a 'cool change'. Vizents' Terrier typifies what one might think of as 'post-radiophonic' work, offering a highly individual synthesis of live and recorded narrative in a fusion of real time and studio time, generated by sound, speech and gesture.

Significantly, Vizents' mature work derives from a succession of earlier technological experiments documented upon the audio-cassettes distributed by the Media-Space group, such as 'sound-drawings', made by moving a microphone around objects of furniture;9 collective verbal and instrumental improvisations; 10 and relatively simple permutational poems reminiscent of Brion Gysin's pioneering work in this genre. 11 Like many of the sound artists in Australia, Vizents initially seems to have explored the potential of his creativity in relative isolation. Indeed, at one of the first substantial festivals of Australian audio art, held at the ANZART exhibition in Hobart, in 1983, [12] Vizents admitted that he had never previously presented his work in public in live performance, and had only distributed it in cassette form.

In the following years, Vizents developed his own extremely individual - and extremely sophisticated - performance style, until he finally reached the point at which he preferred to minimize the technological accompaniment and equipment that had initially given birth to the verbal distortions in his poetry. In the course of an interview of 1984, shortly before a performance of his work, Vizents characteristically remarked:

I've performed with pre-recorded tapes, but over the past few months I've gradually eliminated them. In fact I've tried to get the sound system turned down to the barest minimum tonight so there won't be so much interference with the quality of voice. 13

Some two years later, at the beginning of one of his last readings, Vizents triumphantly informed his audience that his technological equipment was not working, adding that this was not really a serious problem, since his performances did not really depend upon the technological accompaniment of the pre-recorded tapes with which he had planned to counterpoint and, as it were, expand and extend his work. As a radio broadcast of one of his subsequent performances demonstrated, Vizents' use of pre-re corded tapes and live declamation generated beautifully orchestrated comic monologues, in which the pre-recorded tape added supplementary comments - almost footnotes - to Vizents' primary, real-time, declamation.

But as Vizents' mature performances demonstrated, his work had reached the point at which meticulously timed, live improvisation virtually eclipsed the impact of pre-recorded montage. While his real-time performance lacked the quantitative advantage of multi-layered narrative, its 'quality of voice' (to quote Vizents' phrase), attained a remarkable sonic virtuosity, with all the excitement and surprise of live, spontaneous theatricality, 'inventing words and mucking the language up, in a sense, so that it doesn't follow the strict rules of grammar'. 14

At its most coherent extreme, Vizents' experiments with grammar lead to highly amusing colloquial narratives, full of impatient repetitions and abbreviations, such as I'm Busy a wonderful satire of the Australian suburban ritual of lovingly repairing decrepit automobiles. Commencing with another of Vizents' splendidly abrupt assertions, this poem announces:

I'm going to explain this real simple, I'm busy. I'm really busy with this car here, I'm dirty, greasy, grease under the fingernails, greasy hands, greasy pants, greasy shoes, and I can't come in the house right now, and I can't answer the phone cause I'm busy and I won't be answering the phone when any granny calls or any mum or dad or Dave, that kind of stuff, cause I'm busy ...' 5

At its least coherent extreme, Vizents' work abandons normal language, and enters a realm of frantic nonsensical improvisation, such as the following lines from Fill It: a poem satirising the administrative conventions requiring one to fill forms up in triplicate. 16 Rapidly escalating into absurd abstraction, the first six lines of this poem propose:

Fill it out in triplicate would'ya? Fill it out in triplicate would'ya? Fillit out in triplicate would'ya? Fill it up in triple it wichya? Fill it up en tripleit wichya? Fill erup en tipleit wichya?

By line nine, the poem's initial imperative transmutes into the bizarre request: 'Fositup in tripple whenchya?, while lines fourteen and fifteen contort this phrase into the still stranger supplication:

Fillit upside over in tripple tripple tripple Woutjah?

Such permutations are not new, but the virtuosity of Vizents' intonation and the precision of his timing are extremely unusual, as George Katzer remarked, while discussing a recording of this poem at the Graz Radiokunst symposium-17 Vizents' masterly mature performances seem the consequence of two main influences: his own earlier creative experiments in the recording studio, and the more general, conceptual impact of exposure to the work of other artists at festivals, on records and tapes, and via radio programs such as Surface Tension. Whereas European and American sound poetry and performance frequently tend towards abstraction and a certain universal quality, Vizents' texts typify the relatively specific, satirical impulse in a great deal of Australian sound art.

The general consequence of this humorous, satirical impulse in Australian sound art is its surprisingly accessible public quality. One of the greatest problems for most Australian poets is the initial task of success fully introducing innovative sound art and performance to a wider audience than their immediate circle of friends. The gradual development and acceptance of Australian sound art seems to follow a fairly predictable series of initiatives:

- live readings
- taped work
- taped anthologies
- festivals and critical forums
- radio documentation of festivals on public or subscriber stations
- radio features on individual artists
- video documentation on individual artists

The existence of both public radio stations, and alternative, subscriber stations, offers two distinct kinds of radio broadcasting. On the one hand, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's national radio programs have occasionally given substantial attention to individual poets, and in programs such as Surface Tension and its successor, The Listening Room, the A.B.C. has offered listeners a wide array of national and international variants of sound art and radio art. On the other hand, subscriber radios, such as Brisbane's 4ZZZ, have increasingly supplemented their usual selection of rock and new wave music with examples of different kinds of sonic and verbal performance, particularly the work collected on the many L.P. anthologies published by the New York poet, John Giorno. 18 Gradually, then, through live readings, rare tape cassettes, occasional multi media festivals, and a variety of radio programs, sound art has become increasingly familiar to Australian audiences.

As the Californian poet, Larry Wendt, acknowledges in a recent letter of December 1988, purist concepts of sound art or of radio art seem very much a thing of the past. 19

Sound poetry has perhaps died out as a specific area of working or perhaps it's not called that any more by new people working in that area.

Yet as Wendt very significantly adds, if the concepts of radio art, of sound art or of sound poetry now seem a little old-fashioned, the different practices designated by these terms are still remarkably healthy:

Actually, there is probably more electro-acoustic literature and language art being done now than ever before. It's often just called something else. One doesn't hear the words 'sound poet' as much, or even less 'text-sound composer' any more - only us die-hards still speak in those terms.

Finally, discussing his own work in the field, Wendt relates:

Last year, I formed a 'band' with another technician at San Jose State ... and we did a concert of

'post-industrial music' ... The campus radio station went nuts over it and will play anything now that we give them over the radio ...1 always thought that one had to die to Rain that kind of recognition. All that I needed to do was call it by a different name as some kind of experimental rock 'n' roll ... These are strange days indeed.

Wendt's letter very interestingly testifies to the ways in which popular forms of radio broadcasting - in this instance, a university rock 'n' roll station - have both re-defined certain experimental art practices, and ex tended their audiences, by associating them with more accessible categories, such as 'post-industrial' music. In something of the same way, concepts like 'sound sculpture', 'sound installations' and 'video installations' have allowed different kinds of 'sound art' to find more widespread exhibition, and more significantly still, to be created for more widespread exhibition. Significantly, Ed Tomney, an American composer who also contributed a work to the Graz Radiokunst festival, describes his exhibit at the festival - a piece entitled Whispering Elms - in terms of its flexible format in time and space. Discussing this work in a letter of October 1988, Tomney writes:

The piece is a work-in-progress, meaning it can be subject to changes and additions through two means. First, as a multi-track recording, voices and sounds can be added to the pre-existing first hour, so that groupings of sounds can be made dense or sparse. Second, new material can be added to the first hour, so that the piece expands in linear form as new material is added ... The reasoning behind this formula is that this work is often presented in different mediums, and is not intended to be any one specific duration of time ... Different sections of the material can be used in specific situations. 20

At present, Australian sound work - or at least, sound work by many of the most interesting experimental Australian poets - neither approximates to rock n' roll, nor to the kind of open-ended technological audio-installation created by Tomney. What Australian sound work does do, however, is to explore a range of predominantly narrative genres modifying and satirising verbal and social conventions. Somewhat as Allan Vizents plays with colloquialisms and cliches of administrative jargon, the Melbourne poet and composer Chris Mann wages war on received diction and grammar particularly English diction and grammar - in the attempt to generate an authentically Australian discourse.

Language, then, is very much Chris Mann's primary concern, particularly the social and the ideological consequences of different verbal conventions. Whereas Larry Wendt's work may lend itself to redefinition in terms of music, and whereas Ed Tomney's compositions seem to explore the open-ended, variable composition encouraged by Cage, interweaving sound and sense in what one might think of as some sort of sonic 'mobile', Mann's work appears to be hr more committed to concrete social contexts. Such, at least, is Mann's aspiration. Discussing his work in an interview of 1983, Mann explained:

Yarns, intonation-games, skip-rope songs, jokes, nonsense words ...1 think that's the tradition that we slot into. I think it's a popular culture. I don't think it's a bourgeois culture. I don't think it's an art culture. There's a whole tradition particularly in Melbourne ... of dealing with language as an issue. It's like the role of the Grammarians in the French Revolution and the role of the Proletcult in the Russian Revolution. 21

Mann tries to deal with language as a popular social issue by inventing, or at least, by refining, a quintessentially colloquial form of Australian diction in narratives performed at maximum speed. In this way, Mann aspires to evade English literary traditions, and to reveal or revive a more democratic, more authentic, antipodean utterance. Mann's performance often take the form of somewhat whimsical monologues, rather like John Cage's anecdotal lectures. But whereas Cage's subject matter tends to lead his autobiographical stories towards more general meditations upon the nature of order, chance, composition and art, Mann's texts focus upon questions of linguistics and philosophy before breaking into idiosyncratic semi-phonetic colloquialisms reminiscent of Joycian wordplay in Finnegan's Wake. The following extract from Mann's monologue commencing SCRATCH SCRATCH) gives some indication of the inventive ways in which he mixes polemical overstatement with semantic compression and distortion. 22

1. CHOMSKY WAS AN EARLY NATO SET UP 2. CREDIT IS DISTRACTION FORMALISED. ALL I KNOW ABOUT MORGENBESSER IS THE ONE THAT GOES THAT THERE WAS THIS LADY PHILOSOPHER ADDRESSING A BUNCH OF PHILOSOPHERS ON THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ARTIFICIAL AND NATURAL LANGUAGES & SHE WAS GOING ON THAT ALL THE LANGUAGES SHE KNEW - WHETHER ARTIFICIAL OR NATURAL LANGUAGES - THAT IN ALL THESE LANGUAGES A DOUBLE NEGATIVE ALWAYS MEANS A POSITIVE BUT THAT SHE KNEW OF NO LANGUAGE EITHER NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL WHERE A DOUBLE POSITIVE MEANT ANYTHING BUT A POSITIVE, WHEREUPON MORGENBESSER IS HEARD TO PIPE UP FROM THE BACK, YEAH YEAH TAKE THE MEAT AND WITH VEGETABLES STUFF IN TH STOMACH OF MEAT AND BOIL. MILKS ALSO USED. A GENITIVE RIFE LL GIVE YOU WIND OF

JACKETING POTS ALL TOO BLOODY GREEN T STONE BUT I KNEW A BLOKE THAT SWEARS BEFORE THE WEEL HE PUT A DENT IN THIS HERE DAM & THAT'S WHERE THE HANDLE TO SWING Y FUCKIN SPIT COME FROM.

Mann's utterance clearly deploys several quite distinct levels of discourse. On the one hand, it exploits cryptic, epigrammatic witticisms, such as 'Chomsky was an early NATO setup', or 'Credit is distraction formalised'. At a more coherent level, it employs sustained anecdote, such as 'the one that goes that there was this lady philosopher'. But as the concluding lines of this extract demonstrate, Mann's performances also frequently erupt into abbreviated slang, colloquialisms and obscenities verging upon quite inaccessible nonsense language. These experiments have prompted quite varied responses. Cage, for example, comments: 'I think of Chris Mann's work as being fresh and a new direction in poetry', 23 remarking elsewhere: 1t is very striking. Congratulations. I would also like to know how you wrote this text.

Cage's comments upon the fresh and striking quality of Mann's work obviously emphasize its formal and ludic originality. As Allan Vizents similarly comments, in an interview of 1986, Mann's texts and performances are inimitable:

He's ... refined a style, an approach, and a method of constructing language, that is highly ... idiosyncratic ... only Chris Mann could have developed that kind of text. 25

But Vizents is also more critical of the ideological implications of Mann's writing, insofar as Mann claims that he is not so much creating art, as problematising language and national identity. Vizents disputes, this claim, on the grounds that there is no obvious or explicit political impact in Mann's utterance. One could perceive Mann's work as some sort of revolutionary demonstration of the desirability of an Australian grammar. But one might equally well consider Mann's readings to be highly amusing, highly versatile and highly subjective forms of verbal play. Considering some of these questions in the same interview, Vizents observed:

Is his idiosyncratic language working? Or is it just entertainment? Does it carry any meaning beyond that sense of play ... And on another level, is it reflecting extreme nationalism that says, my language is particularly Australian - that's what makes it good, valid, and a valid form to work on? ... Sometimes he'll say Australian grammar reflects a far better or a far more interventionist politic than American grammar. I wonder if that's right? 26

One detects a certain irony here. Vizents himself has described his work as an attempt to modify conventional grammar, and to generate what he calls 'messed-up grammar' in order to 'reveal the ironies in the way in which we look at the world and the way in which we perceive the world'. Like Mann's texts, his work reflects upon the Australian cultural environment, and, as it were, upon the Australian linguistic environment. Unlike Mann, however, Vizents seems happy to combine notions of the aesthetic and the social, the idiosyncratic and the public. While Mann has argued against 'private language', 27 Vizents seems far more interested in the exploration of the individual sensibility. Praising the work of another Melbourne poet, the Polish-born writer and artist Ania Walwicz, Vizents comments:

She puts forward a kind of exploratory-of-her-own-consciousness kind of image. And it seems that she's committed toward that working on herself. And I appreciate that. It's tough work. It's hard work. 28

Ania Walwicz describes the evolution of her poetry and performances in terms of her childhood memories of listening to poetry being read in a foreign language:

I suppose my first perception in my childhood of poetry was my father who used to know a lot of poetry by heart - a lot of German poetry - and he used to say it to me, and then he would translate it. So the way I encountered poetry as such, was just sound and also sound in a foreign language. 29

Walwicz's own poems have something of this mysterious quality. As she explains, they attempt to register a dream-like sensibility:

I'm not specially writing in a sort of distorted manner on purpose. It's more the language of the subconscious thought, or the language of inner thinking, not the conscious literal language.

Like Allan Vizents and Chris Mann, Walwicz seems primarily concerned to explore alternatives to conventional grammar and 'conscious literal language'. While the general thematic and emotive tone of her work varies considerably on occasion, ranging from impassioned evocations of re morse to 'sensual perceptions of gratification', 30 Walwicz's performances are most frequently characterised by a sense of subdued intensity, conveyed without compromise either to exaggeration or simplification. In other words, whereas certain American performance artists, such as Diamanda Galas,

have transformed sonic histrionics into an artform, while others, such as Laurie Anderson, have captivated audiences with consciously accessible confessional anecdotes, 3l Walwicz works between these two poles, elucidating and accentuating the sound value of her text by the modulation of the tonal range of her voice, and gesturing towards emotion and confession in her own terms, rather than opting to make them perfectly explicit.

Paradoxically, this kind of seemingly private aesthetic can have surprisingly public impact. Pondering upon this possibility with reference to the way in which his own poems are 'completely personal, absolutely 100% subjective', the American poet John Giorno explains:

When it works, it's like the subjectivity becomes the objectivity. It becomes the subjectivity of the audience, so it's what the audience wants to hear ... So it's not subjective in the sense that it's just me - it's everyone in the audience, and it becomes completely objective. 32

In much the same way, Ania Walwicz reports that her own highly subjective texts seem to overlap with her readers' experience, in the sense that they provoke the same evocative intonation when read aloud by others. Discussing a series of ten 'colour' poems, 'each dealing with a particular level of feeling or being', and each written to 'enact that particular state of feeling within me' in terms of a 'particular form of tone', Walwicz recounts:

I asked other people to read my work to see how it would turn out whether I was just projecting the sound value onto it. I asked them to read it without formally having heard it read by me. And in actual fact they did slot into a form of reading which I actually do myself.

The following lines from Red - an 'angry' monologue from this series - gives some idea of the partially private, partially public, qualities of these poems:

kill cow hang butcher am angry hot head big ideas stronger know what bloody mary hates me look what fell over hurt knee what to do bright colour put bandage around don't want to see now look bag big things kills wife redhead in my house is jealous so jealous tulip is loud apple is ok dwarf is nasty peaked hat knife in gut was murderer eats children ...33

As Ania Walwicz remarked, while participating on a radio forum simultaneously recorded in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, her work encompasses a variety of genres and motivations:

Not everything I have written was meant to be read . . . But then, of course, I never saw myself in any particular category, and didn't set out to produce complete sound poetry. If that was so, I could put out tapes instead of writing it. But in my case, I do want the literary part of it to exist, so that people can read it.

Questioned during the same forum about the overlap between her literary and non-literary work, Walwicz agreed that both fields explored similar subject matter:

My work in the visual arts is neo-expressionist, and this form of writing deals with that as well. I'm dealing with that autobiographical notation and enactment of inner feeling and being, and in my performances I've dealt with the same aims. So all of my work is under the same heading, using my own life.

Like most of her fellow sound artists in Australia, Ania Walwicz's work fluctuates between 'pre-radiophonic' compositions, radio art and 'post radio' performance. The latter category is best exemplified by Voices, a piece for 'four speakers, speaking to one another', presented at the Sound works festival at the 1986 Sydney Biennale. 34

Voices was first recorded and orchestrated in a recording studio, before taking its final shape as a predominantly live performance during which Walwicz lies on the stage, listening to the four voices issuing from the four surrounding speakers. Walwicz explains:

I wanted to portray an inner state in which you heard all these different voices ... In my case it was dealing with a particular personal situation, my mother's death, my reaction, and the feeling of it, which was all sorts of thoughts: my mother's voice, my father's voice, my sister's voice and mine. I recorded this in Adelaide in a studio, distorting my voice, using different voices and creating different personae.

While certain 'text-sound' composers, such as the American poet Charles Amirkhanian, prefer to work directly with recording tape, Walwicz specifies that Voices 'was first notated on paper', rather than being 'immediately produced as sound'. Amirkhanian, by contrast, insists that he is 'particularly uninterested in producing scores ... for printed media', adding that his text-sound compositions 'are finally done while listening to the sounds on tape and are not

pre-composed'.35 Amirkhanian's approach seems to lead to an increasingly abstract and increasingly musical aesthetic. Although Walwicz also describes Voices as 'a sort of musical composition', observing that she was aware of 'which voice would go on top of which', and of 'which would pause', her work seems predominantly literary and textual, rather than moving into abstract, musical forms. Asked whether she planned to make any further experiments in the recording studio, Walwicz tellingly replied:

I would like to do more recording, experimenting with different things I could do with my own voice - not so much using musical instruments but using overlay of my own voice and seeing what could happen with that.

Jas Duke, another Melbourne poet associated with sound and performance poetry, similarly recounts that he first became interested in the sonic quality of poetry while listening to his father reciting verses:

My father as an enthusiast for eighteenth century didactic poetry. He liked people like Gray and Samuel Johnson - he really loved reading out aloud, no matter what the circumstances ... he really loved pounding that out ... It wasn't the didactic side that impressed me ... it was the whole sound quality of it. 36

Duke's own poems range from the more or less abstract Sound Poem to more didactic satirical meditations such as Five Years in Primary School and Our Traditions of Government. The latter two poems end on a neo-Brechtian interrogative note, prodding the reader's or the listener's conscience with such questions as:

Well that was my early education What do you think I learned?

or:

and I reckon that's a tradition worth reviving What do you think? 37

Duke's sound poems are also frequently political in tone, inasmuch as they reiterate lines such as 'I remember the war in Vietnam', or single words such as 'Stalin'. The text for Stalin begins by quoting Stalin's ambition to 'rout out the counter-revolutionary scum ... and lead the toiling masses to a Better Life', and then notes:

Just repeat the word STALIN until you fall down exhausted. Try to convey both the terror and the mediocrity and the self-confidence. You're dealing with a species of evil spirit. Try to remember that. 34

As Duke explains in his preface to DADA (another single word 'repeated in a series of set sequences'), his sound poems have something of the quality of a jazz improvisation played on the voice - 'Like playing a saxophone without the saxophone'. 39 In this respect, Duke's performances depend very much upon his live, highly dramatic presence, rather than upon more anonymous technological presentation. Duke's instructions for Sound Poem inform the reader:

This really is a performance piece and needs a living breathing person rather than a disembodied voice. Walk onto the stage ... bent forward, hands grasped behind your back. Face the audience and take an exaggeratedly deep breath. Say "The next one is a sound poem called SOUND POEM" or something similar. 40

Not content with mere sequential repetition on this occasion, Duke's text advises the performer to accompany their reading with the following gestures and contortions:

Repeat the words SOUND POEM giving the OUND-sound full value. Gradually get faster and louder and when you're going full blast stick the fingers of both hands into your mouth. Talk round your fingers and try to maintain the sound at the same speed and loudness as you were using before. Tear at your lips and use your fingers to pull your mouth open. Try to put your whole hand (or hands) inside your mouth ... All the while keep shouting SOUND POEM. When you - or the audience have had enough take your hands out of your mouth and say the words SOUND POEM a few more times, dropping your level of sound down to normal speech. Then stop.

Duke's own performances obey these instructions with the utmost fidelity, to the delight of his audiences. Reflecting upon his career, he reminisces:

I started off as a sort of stand-up comedian, I guess. I read to very rough audiences in pubs and public places,

and just to survive I had to inject a fair amount of humour into the act. I didn't start among technological people, I suppose. I worked out a way of doing it just with my vocal chords alone ... I do the performance first, and then I notate it afterwards. It's actually worked out on the night, in front of the audience, with sweat running off me, and sweat running off them.

As becomes evident, Duke favours live, real time performance, and considers the sense of communion shared by the simultaneously sweating poet and audience to be an essential aspect of sound performance. Not surprisingly, he criticises the dramatic limitations of purely sonic, technological presentation.

I think one of the least impressive things of new music or electronic music is the actual lack of visual impact in the performance. The performer's sitting at a control desk, madly twiddling knobs, and even though the sounds might be tremendous, the actual visual impact of the performance is nil. I'd rather have Paganini playing his violin or Elvis Presley and his guitar, or something like that. I think the visual part of a performance is quite important.

Duke concedes that his own eccentric appearance and mannerisms probably account for his enthusiasm for visual modes of performance, and finally admits that he too might be tempted by technology, were he offered the opportunity.

The fact that I am a slightly bizarre looking character, I suppose, with a bald head and a big beard and a big belly - that sort of adds to the performance, I think. Also, I tend to dress in a casual, rough way. I'm pretending to be unsophisticated, when I'm not: it has all this actor's deception type of thing. But I suppose if someone were to come along and say: 'I've got this terrific studio, and it will be all at your services'', I could become a technologist. I'd have to go back to school, I suppose, and learn the A.B.C. of technology. I'm not really against it as such.

Duke's comments typify two recurrent dilemmas of the contemporary sound artist: a sense of reservation regarding the validity of technological performance, and a sense of frustration regarding the inaccessibility of technological hardware. Firstly, as Duke remarks, even when advanced technology allows the artist to twiddle knobs in real-time, such performance has very limited visual impact when compared with more conventional modes of physical stage presence. Nevertheless, one might well retort that real-time technological performance involving the live manipulation of sound, does introduce a new, somewhat minimal, sense of drama, as one learns to focus upon the movements of the artist's hands and face, rather than awaiting more familiar, melodramatic movement.

Considered in a rather different context, in terms of Jean Baudrillard's meditations upon the 'ecstasy of communication', the realm of scenic pleasure might be said to mutate into 'pure fascination'. Baudrillard rather ambiguously associates this state with positive 'original' sensations, and with a seemingly negative 'new form of schizophrenia' precipitated by vertiginous awareness of the 'perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks'. 41 Obviously, real-time technological performance need not necessarily produce this 'foul promiscuity of all things'. 42 Baudrillard's supposition wallows in wild exaggeration: even theorists sometimes just want to have fun. All the same, as Baudrillard notes in one of his more sober paragraphs, technology may introduce substantial changes both to art and to our responses to performance. In this respect, one might partially share his hypothesis that:

Pleasure is no longer that of the scenic or aesthetic manifestation (seductio) but that of pure fascination, aleatory and psychotropic (subductio). This does not necessarily imply a negative judgement, since the forms of pleasure and perception undoubtedly undergo a profound and original mutation ... In applying our old criteria and the reflexes of a "scenic" sensibility, we run the risk of misconstruing the irruption of this new ecstatic and obscene form in our sensorial sphere. 43

Baudrillard himself misconstrues the difficulty of evaluating such new mutations of 'scenic' performance. As Duke observes, new kinds of technological performance may often easily be evaluated as inconsequential displays of 'tremendous talent and no content'. 44 In his turn, Larry Wendt offers much the same verdict with regard to the new conservatism and the new commercialism in American electro-acoustic music:

In a way I suppose electro-acoustic music has become a bankrupt art form as a result of this commercial intrusion - the 'low-road' stuff though more accessible has become increasingly moronic, while the 'highroad' stuff remains difficult to obtain on recordings and often too interested in justifying its existence through excessively academic posturings. There seems to be very little in terms of exploring wildernesses or wild experimentalism in the field. 45

While Wendt and Duke have reservations about many recent developments in technological performance, they clearly

acknowledge the possibility of positive creativity. Duke admits that given the opportunity he could 'become a technologist', while Wendt, a veteran 'technologist', reports that he has recently invented a new portable digital signal processing system permitting unprecedented 'flexibility at processing sounds' in live performance.' 46 Baudrillard's compulsion to equate such innovations with a 'new form of schizophrenia' merely obscures analysis of innovative sound art

Duke's second generalisation becomes particularly pertinent here. Whereas he acknowledges that he has never had access to radiophonic technology, and concedes that he would be willing 'to go back to school ... and learn the A.B.C. of technology', Baudrillard converts his initial confusion before the plurality of FM radio stations into the traumatic revelation of 'the negative ecstasy of radio', bewailing - or perhaps, celebrating - the discovery that 'I am no longer capable of knowing what I want'. 47 While most experimental sound artists seldom ever know precisely what they want, a great many such artists are well aware that they want to know more about radiophonic technology. The recent collaborations between the Sydney sound poet, Amanda Stewart and the Melbourne composer, Warren Burt, typify the ways in which Australian sound artists have increasingly explored the potential of radio.

Presented in a staccato mixture of declamation, cry, splutter and song, Amanda Stewart's poems focus primarily upon political and ideological issues. It Becomes: July 1981 typifies many aspects of her art. Intermingling parodic cliche, fragmented colloquialisms and direct reference to politicians and world disaster, this poem - or performance score - begins:

IT'S OUTRAGEOUS.
I MEAN
WITH ALL THIS WITH ALL THIS I MEAN
IT'S ALL THIS. O. IT'S
JUST DISGUSTING. IT'S IT'S IT'S
IT IS IT IS IT IS
OFF THE AIR/INCREDIBLE/OFF/HORRIFIC/TYPICAL/
I MEAN IT'S AMAZING IT'S
THATCHERFRAZERRAEGUNRIGHTWINGWARWEDDINGREBELLION 48

As these lines suggest, Amanda Stewart's poetry - and this poem in particular - employ a highly evocative rhetoric resounding with thread bare hyperbole such as 'I mean it's amazing'. Amanda Stewart comments:

The voice in the poem is urgently trying to understand and oppose the processes that cause 'IT' to be. But all the voice can do is intone cliches of IT', shouting staccato adjectives and high speed blocks of nouns until it finally breaks into an IT' incantation. Ironically, the voice makes IT BECOME again through ITself. Its sense of subjectivity, ITself', is still determined by the rhetoric of 'IT'. 49

Syncopating and satirising banal conversational generalities with explosive, highly subjective, declamation, her live performances convey much the same intensity as Lichtenstein's and van Hoddis's sharply focussed expressionist lyrics without ever describing the kind of specific detail catalogued by these poets. Collaboration - a nine piece radiophonic suite made in collaboration with Warren Burt in 1987- highlights Stewart's powerful diction by amplifying the sonic potential of her early poems with a number of different kinds of technological accompaniment.

Discussing this collaborative venture in an interview of 1988, Warren Burt began by stressing its radiophonic quality:

Amanda's pieces in Collaboration were indeed meant for live performance over the years. But here it's not live performance, it's radio, which is a whole other thing. We were making a radio piece with her voice. 50

Burt describes his own contribution to this collaboration as the attempt 'to use her voice, and extract a music from it, which then accompanies it', adding:

Hopefully, I'm not obliterating the music of her voice, but am In fact accentuating it, accompanying it, and doing what any good setter-of texts will do throughout music history, which is to bring out other aspects of the word through the setting one gives to it.

In the case of It Becomes, Burt used a sampler to synchronize Stewart's live reading of the poem with pre-recorded readings of its lines, following a 'logic' of sequence and pitch. He explains:

Here we recorded each line of the poem as a separate sample. Each of the sixteen lines of the poem goes across the keyboard. Then Amanda reads the poem, and the pitch of her voice ... extracted lines from the

poem to accompany her. So the higher she speaks, the later is the line which accompanies her. If she speaks very high, then line sixteen is played by the machine. If she speaks very low, line one is played ... You could hear many more than two lines simultaneously. Once a line's triggered off it will play for quite a while ... So you could get a number of voices happening - a number of Amanda voices.

While he acknowledged that these voices might appear confusing Burt argues that It Becomes is well suited to such sonic amplification:

Because we know the text we can follow it through, and hear very clearly what is live voice and what is accompaniment. Other people would have difficulty doing that, and that's fine, because of the nature of the poem. It Becomes is so chancy and incantatory that having other lines from other parts of the poem actually makes structural sense.

Confirming Burt's conclusion, Amanda Stewart writes:

This solo voice poem is so tautological and self-consuming in its structure that it was quite appropriate to have IT accompany ITself in this way. In the original live performance there's a certain hysteria flexing inside its military rhythm. Our collaboration gives its ridiculous incantations more emphasis and dimension. But more importantly, bringing the solo voice poem to radio in this way not only extended its original structure, but also opened the piece to new conceptual areas, making it a new radiophonic entity.

Other sections of Collaboration include two improvisations: Improv I and Improv 2. Once again, Burt extended live performance by recording and recycling fragments of earlier readings. Recalling that he first asked Amanda Stewart to 'improvise funny non-verbal vocal sounds', Burt continues:

While she did that, I had the microphone going all the time, and whenever I heard a sound I liked, I sampled it into the sampler, and ended up with seventeen little short vocal sounds ... I then arranged the keyboard of the sampler in such a way that each three chromatic pitches had a different Amanda sound on it. Over the course of a four octave keyboard I had seventeen sounds available. So that C, C sharp and D might be such and such a sound at three different pitches, and so on. And then I said, 'Why don't I improvise on this keyboard while you improvise against it'?

In her turn, Amanda Stewart enthusiastically relates:

I was really excited about this part of our collaboration. I've always used extended vocal techniques in my poems, but usually in relation to how words mean and break apart. This particular radiophonic technique enabled a fast, immediate exchange of a number of different vocal sounds in improvisation, allowing us to explore a huge range of interrelationships, often simultaneously. The vocal sounds might be heard as phonemes or half words, expressionist grunts or musical materials. But what's important is that oppositions like those between language/ music, machine/human, subject/object, break down, making other understandings more imperative. I'm still understanding the implications of using this type of radiophonic vocabulary.

Not all responses to these collaborations were favourable. Burt notes:

A lot of Amanda's feminist/politico friends were unhappy with the piece - not only because she dared to work with a male, and dared to use technology, but mainly because there was music in it that they couldn't find politically useable.

While these responses typify the highly politicized perspective of many Australian poets, Burt's own reactions to the collaboration have much more in common with the more formal explorations of the interface between speech and music in the work of American composers such as Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich, Alvin Lucier and Robert Ashley. Considering Collaboration aesthetically, Burt drew attention to the ways in which its successive sections add various kinds of 'corona of sound' to live declamation, and create an overlap between real time and pre-recorded performance. For example, referring to the twin tracks of the improvisation, he comments

There are moments when its obvious that one is a machine thing being played, and the other is a live human being. But there are other moments when it blurs ... Those moments are actually very nice.

As Burt also very significantly remarks, the most important consequence of these collaborations are their general conceptual challenges, rather than minor generic distinctions between music and poetry, or between live and

technological tonality- Pondering upon the apparent simplicity of the sampler, and upon its more substantial creative challenges to the poet and the composer, he memorably concludes:

This is something significantly new, but I don't think it's a huge disjunction with the equipment we've had in the past. All the sampler enables us to do, is to do things that could have been done with magnetic tape and razor-blade, but which can now be done much more easily, in real time. And that ease, and that real-timeness, then present a whole new set of conceptual problems.

These crucial 'conceptual problems' simultaneously invoke new forms of radio-art, created for and by radio technology, and new forms of live - or partially live - performance, predicated upon radiophonic technology. Envisaging both of these options, Burt anticipates that his next collaboration with Amanda Stewart 'will be a piece specifically conceived for the medium we're working with'. At the same time, he also contemplates the possible use of sampler recordings in live, real time performances, during which 'I may sit there at the keyboard . .. while Amanda improvises against it'. Poets, composers, performance artists and 'sound artists' of all kinds are constantly extending the assumptions of their art in this way, fluctuating between real time and studio time creativity.

As the American composer Philip Glass remarks, contemporary technology permits innumerable multi-media effects that 'we couldn't have produced ... five years ago'. 51 The technological innovations of the nineties will doubtless introduce further aesthetic innovations in live performance, radio art, and 'post-radiophonic' performances and installations, as these new genres 'go beyond the contrast' between their specific potential, and 'find the higher laws of an alliance', 52 within the new creativity that Moholy-Nagy might now annunciate as:

a literature of phonograph records, recording-tape and samplers; of radio, film, television, video and computers; of live and partially pre-recorded multi-media performances and installations - not yet accepted but in the making.

Notes

- 1. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Vision in Motion (New York: Theobald, 1947), p.351.
- 2. George Katzer, Aide Memoire (London: Recommended Records, 1985). Katzer presented this work at the 'With The Eyes Shut' Radio Art Symposium held at the Steirischer Herbst 1988, Graz, Austria, from 6-8 October.
- 3. George Katzer, 'Aide Memoire', notes in booklet enclosed within the record cited above. Unpaginated.
- 4. William Burroughs, 'The Art of Fiction', interview with Conrad Knickerbocker, Paris Review, No35 (Fall 1965), p.24.
- 5. Charles Amirkhanian presented Metropolis, San Francisco at the 'Soundworks' Festival, The Performance Space, Sydney, 9th May, 1986.
- 6. Franz Marc, 'How Does a Horse See the World?', translated from Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen by Ernest Mundt and Peter Selz, collected in Herschel B. Chipp (ed.), Theories of Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p.179.
- 7. Samuel Beckett, That Time (1976), collected in Shorter Plays (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p.228.
- 8. Allan Vizents, Terrier, in Non-Parables: Performance Texts 1982-1986, forthcoming.
- 9. Allan Vizents, Wood Chair, Couch, Upholstered Chair and other sound drawings appear on the Media Space Cassette Furniture (Perth: 6-7-82).
- 10. Allan Vizents' collective improvisations Poor Australia and Grand America appear on an untitled Media Space Cassette (Perth: 14-3-82).
- 11. Brion Gysin's permutated poems are documented in William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, The Third Mind (London: John Calder, 1979), and are recorded among other places in Revue-Disque OU (Paris), Nos 23-24, 1965.
- 12. See my article 'The Voice of Barthes and the Possibilities of Sound Poetry', a discussion of the general implications of the ANZART 1983 Festival of Sound and Audio Art, in the ANZART Hobart, Supplement of Island Magazine (Hobart), No.16, 1983, pp.10-14.

- 13. Allan Vizents, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Eyeline (Brisbane), No.2, August 1987, p.21.
- 14. Ibid.
- 15. Allan Vizents, I'm Busy, Non-Parables (forthcoming).
- 16. Allan Vizents, Fill It, ibid. 17. George Katzer, discussion with Nicholas Zurbrugg, Graz, 7 October, 1988.
- 18. See for example, Life is a Killer (New York: Giorno Poetry Systems, 1982).
- 19. Larry Wendt, letter to Nicholas Zurbrugg, 18 December, 1988.
- 20. Ed Tomney, letter to Nicholas Zurbrugg, 20 October, 1988.
- 21. Chris Mann, interviewed by Roberta Bonnin during ABC radio feature on the ANZART Festival of Sound and Audio Art, broadcast 25 July, 1983.
- 22. Chris Mann, extract from SCRATCH SCRATCH), collected in Pi O (ed.), off the Record (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), p.105.
- 23. John Cage, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Eyeline (Brisbane), No.1, May 1987, p.6.
- 24. John Cage, quoted in off the Record (see footnote 22), p.104.
- 25. Allan Vizents, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, 'A Conversation with Allen', Praxis M (Perth), No.16 (1987), p.10.
- 26. Allan Vizents, Eyeline interview (see footnote 13), p.21.
- 27. Chris Mann's comments during symposia at the 1986 'Soundworks' Festival repeatedly stressed that 'there ain't no such thing as private language' and that poetry should have a public function.
- 28. Allan Vizents, Praxis M interview (see footnote 25), p.11.
- 29. Ania Walwicz, comments from an ABC radio symposium on sound poetry, chaired by Amanda Stewart (Sydney), with Jas Duke and Ania Walwicz (Melbourne) and Nicholas Zurbrugg (Brisbane). Except where indicated, all subsequent statements by Ania Walwicz are from this program, broadcast on 14 February, 1987.
- 30. Ania Walwicz, letter to Nicholas Zurbrugg, 24 February, 1989.
- 31. See Diamanda Galas, The Divine Punishment (London: Mute, 1986) and Laurie Anderson, United States Live (New York: Warner Bros, 1984).
- 32. John Giorno, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, New York, 25 August, 1982.
- 33. Ania Walwicz, Red, Boat (Sydney: Angus and Robertson), forthcoming.
- 34. Ania Walwicz's program notes for Voices describe the 'text for performance' as 'musical notation' for 'an overlay and overlapping of sound', Soundworks program (Sydney: The Performance Space, 1986), unpaginated.
- 35. Charles Amirkhanian, untitled statement, Stereo Headphones (Kersey), No.5 (Winter 1972), p.35.
- 36. Jas Duke, statement made during ABC sound poetry symposium (see footnote 29). Unless otherwise indicated, all of Duke's statements about his work and performance in general are quoted from this program.
- 37. Jas Duke, final lines of Five Years in Primary School and of Our Traditions of Government, collected in Poems of War and Peace (Melbourne: Collective Effort Press, 1988), pp.22 and 89.
- 38. Jas Duke, Stalin, introductory notes, ibid., p.127.
- 39. Jas Duke, Dada: a sound poem, introductory notes, ibid.
- 40. Jas Duke, Sound Poem, introductory notes, ibid., p.133.

- 41. Jean Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze (New York: Semiotext(e), 1987), p.27.
- 42. Ibid.
- 43. Ibid., pp.27-8.
- 44. Jas Duke, general comment on commercial new music, made during ABC sound poetry symposium (see footnote 29).
- 45. Larry Wendt, letter of 18 December, 1988.
- 46. Wendt writes: 'I have been working here with Daniel Kelley ... From his designs, I have built a system which is portable enough to take around to performances. Unlike my previous systems, this device has a sound quality which is in some cases better than a lot of commercial devices on the market. It also gives me a flexibility at processing sounds which I have never had access to before', ibid.
- 47. Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication, p.25.
- 48. Amanda Stewart, It Becomes: July 1981, collected in Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn (eds), The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), p.260.
- 49. Amanda Stewart, letter to Nicholas Zurbrugg, 28 February, 1989. AU other statement come from this letter.
- 50. Warren Burt, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Brisbane,19 August,1988. AU of Burt's statements regarding his collaborations with Amanda Stewart are taken from this interview.
- 51. Philip Glass, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Eyeline (Brisbane), No.7, December 1988, p.10. Glass refers to technological effect produced in his recent 'music-theatre' collaboration, 1000 Airplanes on the Roof.
- 52. Karlheinz Stockhausen formulates this distinction in the conclusion to his article on 'Electronic and Instrumental Music', trans. Ruth Hein, collected in Charles E. McLelland & Steven P. Scher (eds), Postwar German Culture (New York: Dutton, 1974), p.369.



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