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"Collage With Jackhammer": James Reaney, the Art of Noises, and the Paraphonic Sound Collage

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Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise.
When we ignore it, it disturbs us.
When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.
John Cage, "The Future of Music: Credo" (1937)

On 16 January 1969, Canadian poet and playwright James Reaney paid a visit to a classroom of students where he performed excerpts from, and discussed the aesthetic sensibility of, his celebrated 1967 play *Colours in the Dark*. Reaney's classroom visit was recorded on reel-to-reel tape and has been digitized and preserved as part of the collection maintained by the University of Alberta (UA) partners in the SpokenWeb research network.[1] The location of the recorded event is not indicated on the audio object. The spine on the original reel-to-reel tape box indicates "POETRY READING: James Reaney" in type with a corresponding UA Department of English media catalogue number; the back of the box includes a handwritten note "DEPT OF ENGLISH POETRY READING" in block capitals, and "James Reaney Jan 16, 1969" in a scripted, different hand; a third set of box

1 To learn more about the SpokenWeb Project, visit spokenweb.ca.

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notes, again in a different hand, offers some broad topic areas indexed by tape counter numbers; a fourth hand, also in block letters, warns "NOISY TAPE. VOICE KEEPS LOSING MIKE." The recording itself also offers no clues as to the precise location or host instructor—Reaney acknowledges his host at the outset, but his articulation of the name is muffled. Nonetheless, the style and mode of delivery clearly suggests a guest classroom lecture in a university. Because two of the four forms of handwriting can be matched with other recordings known to be made at the University of Alberta, our presumption is that the recording was, indeed, conducted somewhere on campus, although it is possible the event was recorded elsewhere and this singular, master tape entered into the local collection by other, unknown means.

A landmark achievement by one of Canada's premier playwrights, Reaney's *Colours in the Dark* is a brilliant and unconventional play consisting of two acts, each containing twenty-one vignettes, that describe in shifting temporalities the progress of one man's life from birth to middle-age in rural southern Ontario, the geological time of central North America since the last ice age, and the narrative arc of the Bible. The play is cast with six actors that each fulfill more than a half-dozen roles alongside a four-person chorus and a cluster of children. Set on a minimalist stage backed by five projection screens displaying colours and images, the play was performed under the direction of John Hirsch first at the Stratford Festival and then, two years later, at Vancouver's Playhouse Theatre, directed by Timothy Bond. *Colours* hovers between the banality of its storyline (Reaney's 1969 published introductory note describes it as "a person growing up, leaving home, going to big cities, getting rather mixed up and then not coming home again, but making home and identity come to him wherever he is" [7]), a powerful mystical or fantastical quality that governs the mood and resolution of the performance, and a carefully executed visual and aural documentary method that draws from the archival records, landscapes, and soundscapes of southern Ontario communities and institutions. Interspersed throughout the lines of dialogue that animate the playful and ritualistic activity of the characters are a number of evocative poems performed variously by the actors in their multiple roles. In his retrospective assessment of the play, Alvin Lee summarizes its reception: "the public response to *Colours in the Dark* was very enthusiastic. The standing ovation for the author on opening night was followed by at least nine strongly favourable reviews, contrasted with one splenetic one in the usual Toronto column" (146). Whatever negative response it drew was no doubt partly motivated by its dynamic structure

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and playful irreverence—the same qualities that made *Colours* such a compelling experience for its audience.

The play's formal design draws on a long history of artistic practices of collage, montage, or bricolage; indeed, in describing Reaney's affinity to the surrealist moment, Gerald Parker, one of Reaney's preeminent commentators, notes that "Reaney also shares at times, in theory and practice, something of the surrealist enthusiasm for *bricolage*, a 'do-it-yourselfery' … that favours the relatively untutored *naif* 'artist' challenging the established cultural community with a more direct sense of 'play'" (11). *Colours*, as the logic of Reaney's classroom exemplars might also suggest, indeed emphasizes such sensibilities: the free spirit of collaborative and playful improvisation; a kind of dissonant energy common to the exuberance of rock music; and the radical juxtaposition of disparate fragments that characterizes artistic practices of collage across various media. During the fifty-minute class, Reaney's scope of reference is as broad as it is lively. In addition to reading a selection of poems from *Colours*, he shares with the students—while peppering the talk with references to Little Richard, the Beatles, and Janis Joplin—vinyl albums and analogue tape recordings, including excerpts from Carl Orff's *Music for Children*, Reaney's own collage production marking a decade of the CBC Radio program *Wednesday Night*, The Fugs performance of their "Swinburne Stomp," and the Nihilist Spasm Band's "Destroy the Nations" from their 1968 vinyl LP *No Record*. I'll return to these specific elements in a moment, but suffice it to say that the lecture is at once an explication of the formal and aesthetic mechanisms driving Reaney's *Colours in the Dark* and, at the same time, a performance in its own right of the logic of what I'll be calling here the "paraphonic" qualities of sound collage. On the stage, and in the classroom, Reaney deliberately juxtaposes the human voice with the noisiness of the world in a manner that seeks not only to disrupt the quiet somnolence of conventional poetic performance, but also to return the creative utterance to its dynamic, energized relation with (to sonify a famous phrase of William James) the booming, buzzing confusion of the world. It is fitting, then, that in the very moment of this classroom lecture, a kind of sonic serendipity played its own special role.

The paraphonic sound collage

On first encountering the recording, the listener will notice the extraordinarily intrusive presence of a jackhammer located somewhere in the proximity of the classroom. While, as mentioned, it is not clear from the recording or its physical packaging where, precisely, the lecture took place,

the late 1960s were, of course, a busy time of construction and development on Canadian university campuses. One imagines the intrusion of such construction projects was not an unusual happenstance during this period. Regardless, the recording begins with student applause as Reaney gets things underway at the front of the classroom and discusses the two audio texts he had already shared with them as they entered and prior to the recording's beginning. As we begin to listen, the jackhammer operator is already busy at work, as this opening segment demonstrates: Clip #1: "Introduction," *James Reaney Reading, 1969*, 0:00–2:08.[2]

To make the recording more accessible, given its problematic noise to signal ratio, I'll provide a full transcript of those first two minutes:

> [Applause] Thanks very much [inaudible]. Um, I've already given you about a quarter of the readings on tape and gramophone. And, fortunately before the jackhammer started, the first thing I played was from Carl Orff's *Music for Children*, which, um, he starts with nursery rhymes and, um, lists of names that children recite—just the names of the kids on the street. And, uh, the usual, what used to be called in Canadian schools "choral reading"—absolutely horrible—he has made into, um, something much more spontaneous and delightful, and it's on that, that, uh, I feel a lot of, um, poetry could be based and has been based. Um, then the second thing I played on the tape recorder was from a, um, [clears throat] collage for radio. [Sounds of chalk on blackboard. Long pause.] The whole idea of collage is that you take little bits of sound and things you found in, um, anywhere, pieces and bits of tin foil, bits of old newspapers, um, a piece of plastic you found on the street. The principle is quite familiar now in painting. As a matter of fact, you could call this hour "Collage With Jackhammer." And you can do the same thing in sound. You got a musician and, and, somebody with a, um, sound effects.

Reaney's equanimity in this moment is astounding—most lecturers would be offput by the force of such overwhelming, machinic noise—one could well imagine canceling the lecture, especially one focused on attentive listening. Reaney, however, simply absorbs the intrusive jackhammer into

2 The Reaney recording is held in the University of Alberta's SpokenWeb collection and designated as SW147. This excerpt can be listened to here: https://ualberta.aviaryplatform.com/r/3ropr7nr1k. The timecodes cited refer to the position on the edited digital file held in the collection. Thanks to Susan Reaney, James Stewart Reaney, and Susan Wallace for permission to make this recording available and for their comments on the draft of this article.

the performance of his classroom delivery, adopting or adapting the sonic dissonance into the logic of a lesson already headed toward an appreciation of the affective tension and political force of jarring aural juxtaposition: the jackhammer provides an exemplary instance of sound collage, he demonstrates for the students, and thereby mobilizes the constitutive "cultural meaning of sound" that Karin Bijsterveld describes in relation to the history of machinic industrial noise (153). For Bijsterveld, the cultural meaning of sound, or the symbolic value of noise and shared presumptions about listening that shape our response to sonic violence, motivates the way we manage the impact of environmental noise. In the case of her analysis, industrial, machinic noise formulated historically and culturally as an index of successful enterprise and masculinity defers any legal or policy-driven response to the deafening damage of the modern factory. In Reaney's case, the deafening jackhammer is appropriated or enculturated as an element of performance in a manner that emulates a century-long series of experiments in sound that respond critically and creatively to the soundscape of modernity by engaging its noisiness.

In Reaney's case, the deafening jackhammer is appropriated or enculturated as an element of performance.

Various practices that might come under the heading of "sound collage" have a complex, extended history that in its variety and splendour sprawls far beyond the boundaries of this essay that is focused primarily on literary performance. I would, then, limit the review that follows to forms of sound collage that are specifically "paraphonic" or are those performances and recordings that include or feature human voices in the utterance of language, its phonetic components, or their non-semantic capacities in relation to each other, in relation to themselves (when differentiated and multiplied through technological means), and especially in relation to other human and non-human sounds. I'm using the term "paraphonic" here to mean, quite literally in etymological terms, "beside" the "voice," as opposed to the ancient and medieval musical term that designates a consonance or melodic progression of fourths and fifths, or the highly technical term that describes the management of multiple pitches with a single voice in synthesizer technologies. In setting aside purely instrumental or musical forms of collage, as well as field or other recordings that draw solely on natural or mechanical sound events, I'm limiting the range of sound collage under consideration here to a definition bounded by what Charles Bernstein has called the "audiotext" or the "audible acoustic text of the poem" (12) and what Jason Camlot defines as the "phonopoetic," that is, "the emergence and making (poesis) of literary speech sounds (phono) as they can be heard in early spoken recordings" (5) or a "a poetics of the sound-recorded performances of the literary" (7).

In this restricted sense, the text and its voiced delivery, phonopoesis, are essential to performance and recording contexts recognizable as moments of sound collage that stage the human voice in relation to other sounds, including competing voices as well as natural and machinic noises.[3] The paraphonic might, of course, include operatic, choral, and other musical performances—and those are most certainly important to Reaney's purview—but in the examples that I offer here "musicality" as such takes a back seat to the phonopoetic imperatives of literary and mixed-media performances that feature the human voice in its full range of semiotic and symbolic possibility.

Paraphony, under these terms, begins perhaps with Futurist and Dadaist practices of the 1920s. Indeed, such an inauguration is contemporaneous with the climax of what Steve McCaffery defines as the "second phase" of the history of sound poetry (1875–1928) that "manifested itself in several diverse and revolutionary investigations into language's nonsemantic, acoustic properties" (6) and in advance of the third phase as he describes it, which includes the growing ubiquity of analogue recording technologies that make it possible to prepare collaged audio elements either performed live or recorded for posterity.[4] From the perspective of a survey of sound poetry, McCaffery, whose own sound poetry performances with The Four Horsemen are markedly paraphonic in their own right, is correct in describing recording technology as the "gift of an external revolution" (10): the tape recorder, as he details, made possible practices that separate speech from voice, allowing the composer to exceed the limits of the human body: "tape liberates composition from the athletic sequentiality of the human body, pieces may be edited, cutting,

3 A further correlate here might be what Richard Kostelanetz calls "text-sound," which he delimits as follows:

> The art is text-sound, as distinct from text-print and text-seen, which is to say that texts must be sounded and thus heard to be "read" in contrast to those that must be printed and thus be seen. The art is text-sound, rather than sound-text, to acknowledge the initial presence of a text, which is subject to aural enhancements more typical of music. To be precise, it is by non-melodic auditory structures that language or verbal sounds are poetically charged with meanings or resonances they would not otherwise have. (14)

4 Douglas Kahn remarks on a similar periodization: "Some of the most provocative uses of sound occurred during the heyday of the avant-garde, primarily because artists were not hampered by the problems of technological realization. By the latter half of the 1920s, the arts were suddenly better equipped, due to an audiophonic-led revolution in communications technologies involving radio, sound film, microphony, amplification, and phonography" (10).

in effect, becomes the potential compositional basis in which time segments can be arranged and rearranged outside of real time performance" (10). Recording technologies, amongst their many affordances, allow the experience of increased vocal range, strange temporalities of acceleration and deceleration, and the deconstruction of the word at the level of its most fundamental phonetic components.

However, what McCaffery does not account for here—justifiably in the context of his narrowed focus on the human voice in a history of sound poetry—is the further possibility of collecting, editing, combining, and playing an exponentially increased range of human voices and non-human sounds set in radical juxtaposition with one another as a distinctive affordance of the tradition he is describing in its encounter with recording technologies. That specific ambition of the paraphonic might, nonetheless, also find its pre-history in the sonic experiments of the Dada movement, such as Tristan Tzara's simultaneous poem for voices "L'amiral Cherche Une Maison à Louer," which find its own precedent in the *Bruitist* work of Futurists such as Luigi Russolo and F. T. Marinetti. Russolo's "Art of Noises," as Douglas Kahn brilliantly recounts in his *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, had a tremendous impact on sound performance throughout the twentieth century, even while his achievements have often been misattributed to the invention of Marinetti and fellow Futurist Balilla Pratella. One thinks, in particular, of Russolo's 1913 "Risveglio Di Una Citta" ("Awakening of a City"), which bears its own uncanny similarity to the background noise of Reaney's lecture.[5] The claims of Russolo's 1913 manifesto "The Art of Noises" arise in part from his own inventions of "Intonarumori," experimental instruments designed specifically to create controlled, machinic noises but also in his insistence on the relation of such noises to the human experience and the human voice. "We find," Russolo exclaims, "far more enjoyment in the combination of the noises of trams, backfiring motors, carriages and bawling crowds" than conventional musical compositions:

> To convince ourselves of the amazing variety of noises, it is enough to think of the rumble of thunder, the whistle of the wind, the roar of a waterfall, the gurgling of a brook, the rustling of leaves, the clatter of a trotting horse as it draws into the distance, the lurching jolts of a cart on pavings, and of the generous, solemn, white breathing of a nocturnal city; of all

5 Listen to "Risveglio Di Una Citta": www.ubu.com/media/sound/musica_futurista/Musica_Futurista_2-01-Risveglio-Di-Una-Citta.mp3.

> the noises made by wild and domestic animals, and of all those that can be made by the mouth of man without resorting to speaking or singing. ("The Art of Noises" np)

In keeping with the Futurists' captivation by the rush of the modern machine, Russolo's experimentation with and advocacy for machinic noise, alongside an expanded repertoire of human vocalizations, was unfailingly celebratory. As for "L'amiral Cherche Une Maison à Louer," Hugo Ball understood the paraphonic to be specifically a matter of critical juxtaposition:

> The "simultaneous poem" has to do with the value of the voice. The human organ represents the soul, the individuality in its wanderings with its demonic companions. The noises represent the background—the inarticulate, the disastrous, the decisive. The poem tries to elucidate the fact that man is swallowed up in the mechanistic process. In a typically compressed way it shows the conflict of the *vox humana* with a world that threatens, ensnares, and destroys it, a world whose rhythm and noise are ineluctable. (57)

With its collage structure of multiple voices, drums, whistles, and other sonic effects, "L'amiral" provides perhaps the most on-point representation of early experiments in the paraphonic collage and a sensibility that is echoed in Reaney's own classroom examples.[6]

It's not possible in the space of this short article to provide a comprehensive history of the paraphonic in sound collage, but allow me to offer a few more illustrative examples before returning to Reaney's classroom lecture. Important contributions to this genealogy would have to include the Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven, whose sound poetry assemblages offer, according to Gammel and Zelazo, "the promise of a new corporeal language" (257):

> Throughout the Baroness's oeuvre, her own body is the primary material of her poetics: adorning it, as she does in handmade creations of detritus and found matter, she replicates and extends that praxis acoustically and aurally in her sound poems. By collaging sound bites from her environment—jingles, advertisements, and interrupted strings of conversation, the Baroness links her body to the world around her. (261)

6 Listen to "L'amiral Cherche Une Maison à Louer": www.ubu.com/sound/tzara.html.

As a transposition of the Dada aesthetic to the early twentieth-century New York scene and, in particular, as an expression of radical collage that specifically invokes the intersection of class and gender, the Baroness' sound poems hold an important place in this history. However, the transpositional force of her performance work is also indexical of a shift in performance practice that would bring the paraphonic to the centre of the stage. As Gregory Battcock observes,

> By the end of World War II performance had clearly emerged as a medium unto itself, and its influence spread rapidly. Bauhaus-inspired performance took place in the late 1940s at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In 1952 John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor, and Merce Cunningham—all of whom were at the college—helped produce the now-legendary *Untitled Event*, a collage of film, improvised "noise music," dance, and poetry that became the prototypical Happening. (25)

That particular history reaches one of its peaks, I would contend, in John Cage's *Roaratorio* and his stagings of the *Musicircus* and in the Fluxus happenings of the 1960s and 70s, including, in particular, the performance poetics of Jackson Mac Low, his "simultaneities" and "gathas" being primary examples.[7]

In parallel to this trajectory of performed paraphony, developments in the composition and production of sound that engage recording technologies to create collage-like effects play an equally vital role. Consider, for example, Walter Ruttmann's 1930 *Wochenende*. Commissioned by the Berlin Radio Hour, this eleven minute "film without pictures" took advantage of the longer play time of film stock to capture a typical family ending its work week and heading off for a relaxing weekend together. When first played in public, the audience was faced with a black screen only and confronted by an early version of paraphonic sound collage that

7 For more on Cage's *Roaratorio*, see my own extended discussion of his method in "Silent Texts and Empty Words: Structure and Intention in the Writings of John Cage." More recent examples, among countless possibilities, might include Jordan Abel's loop-station performance of his *Place of Scraps*, Susan Howe's recordings with composer and musician David Grubbs such as *Thiefth*, their sonic realization of Howe's poetic collage techniques in *Singularities*, and Oana Avasilichioaei's performance of "Operator" from her transliterary experimentation in *Eight Track*. I'd also point to the Energy Emergency Repair Kit project produced by Jesse Beier and the Speculative Energy Futures research consortium. The audio recording "Patches" that accompanies the E.E.R.K. situates the human voice in relation to the noisiness of climate crisis.

makes starkly evident the edited montage of sound necessary to any filmic audio track.[8] As Kahn notes, in observing the great flexibility of cinema for experiments in sound composition, when "the principles of montage were applied within the context of asynchronous sound film, sound—once it was no longer tied directly to visual images, speech, and story—was able to exist in a more complex relationship with them. In turn, once sound was no longer tied to cinema, a radical form of sound and radio art was implied" (11). Certainly, Ruttmann's innovations serve as an early example of Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrete*—consider "Étude aux Chemins de Fer," his 1948 composition consisting only of train sounds—but also set a precedent for what would become the vast catalogue of experimentation and innovation in the sonic discipline of radio art.[9] A prime example might be "Inventions for Radio" by Barry Bermange and Delia Derbyshire. Their 1964 collaboration "The Dreams" offers an assemblage, across forty-four minutes of composition, that features individual voices describing their own dreams against a track of evocative electronic sounds. This paraphonic collage of interviews, with looping and recurring tracks, captures thematically in five movements conventional morphemic elements of the dreamscape: running away, falling, landscape, underwater, and colour.[10] At this point, we arrive in the immediate vicinity of Reaney's own radio experiments with CBC that find their paraphonic analogues in theatrical productions such as *Colours in the Dark*.

Paraphony and *Colours in the Dark*

Reaney's own prior experiments with radio collage, created in collaboration with composer John Beckwith, such as *Twelve Letters to a Small Town* (it's Stratford, Ontario) and *Message to Winnipeg*, effectively create sonic environments comparable to those he brings to the stage. Reaney's own estimation of this formal practice draws on recognizable collage techniques of his modernist predecessors. "Paul Klee's *Magic Squares*," Reaney writes of *Colours*, "each square either a slight variation on or contrast to its neighbouring square, is really the design behind the play" ("Colours in the Dark" 142). Here, the formal logic Klee put to work in compositions such as *Architecture* (1923) or *May Picture* (1925) is transposed into the sonic articulations of Reaney's collage techniques. And, indeed, as Reaney's choice of classroom examples suggest, making sounds and listening to them in

8 Listen to Wochenende: www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfGdlajO2EQ.

9 Listen to "Etude aux Chemins de Fer": www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9pOq8u6-bA.

10 Listen to "The Dreams": www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdJS5PU1Ztw.

relation to each other—particularly through modes of contrast—is absolutely central to his pedagogical and dramaturgical practices. As Parker demonstrates in an earlier essay titled "'The key word … is 'listen': James Reaney's 'sonic environment,'" Reaney draws on "the immense potential in the theater of sound" (2) through instrumentation, vocal gesture, recorded sound, and the actors' manipulation of props, objects, and the qualities of their own bodies and the theatrical space. Parker traces a trajectory in which Reaney's attention to the sonic environment develops over the first decade of his career as a playwright:

> Although some of the most interesting and theatrically structured manifestations of the sonic environment are evident in his plays following the establishment of his Listener's Workshop in the loft of an old Legion Hall in London, Ontario, 1968, Reaney's plays from *The Sun and the Moon* (1960) through to *Colours in the Dark* (1967) increasingly display what Cage calls "attention to the activity of sounds." (2)

That attention is at once both representational and abstracted in the production of sound in relation to images and action:

> *Colours in the Dark* provides an intricate interweaving of visual and auditory patterns and, once again, the sounds are all created by the actors in their several individual and choric roles. There are instruments such as the piano, drum, fiddle, bagpipe, parlor organ and toy trumpets; there are such sound-makers as the slapstick, megaphone, whips and tambourines; then there are all the sounds made by the actors as they whisper, whistle, stamp their feet, rustle, scream and sing. (8)

While this description seems to echo Russolo's catalogue of sounds in the "Art of Noises" manifesto, Reaney's "polylingual theater" (Parker 9) is also conducted in the orbit of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, on the one hand, and the sound compositions of Murray Schafer, John Cage, bpNichol, and Carl Orff, on the other.

It's worth emphasizing that Reaney is as much a poet as a playwright, and his incorporation of poetic verse into the theatricality of *Colours in the Dark* (and also of his classroom performance under consideration here) suggests an alternative to Charles Bernstein's characterization of the late twentieth-century poetry reading on the basis of its essential "lack of spectacle, drama, and dynamic range, as exemplified especially in a certain minimal—anti-expressivist—mode of reading" (10). Poetry, Bernstein

contends, "cannot, and need not, compete with music in terms of acoustic complexity or rhythmic force, or with theater in terms of spectacle. What is unique, and in its own way exhilarating, about the performance of poetry is that it does what it does within the limits of language alone" (11). Bernstein is most certainly correct in his description of the "concave acoustic space" and the affective experience of the low-tech, monotone, solo voice that characterizes much of late twentieth-century literary performance. However, it is precisely Reaney's challenge to that measured monologism that opens the doors to the very playful exuberance (that is, complexity, theatricality, and, I would add, excessive and dynamic contextuality) of the paraphonic as a convex, rather than concave, acoustic space. Bernstein nods briefly in the direction of "a multivocality that foregrounds the dialogic dimension of poetry" (15), invoking the "exhilarating example" of Hannah Weiner's performance of *Clairvoyant Journal*, only to turn away, in that instance, from the dialogic to a consideration of the polymetrical tensions between the written and performed text. Yet it is, precisely, examples such as Weiner's 1974 text to which I would point as exemplars of paraphonic sound collage contemporary with Reaney's own practice.[11]

It is precisely Reaney's challenge to that measured monologism that opens the doors to the very playful exuberance of the paraphonic.

Such examples suggest an antithetical tradition of the paraphonic sound collage, as performed or recorded, in tension with the celebrated and canonical expressions of the monologic, lyrical, or merely solo human voice. That said, after decades of deconstructive and psychoanalytic theory as well as the profound experimentations of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, there is no sense in which we might understand that lonely voice to be in any way present to itself, to be other than inherently multiple and self-differentiating. That is, the functional or categorical difference of the paraphonic is not a matter of theoretical distinction but is, rather, formally determined. And, certainly, this cannot be simply a matter of distinction between theatrical and poetic performance—as Reaney's own practice demonstrates, the boundaries are too porous to admit of that—and so what these examples suggest is a tradition of intermedial performance across different registers that is anything but "within the limits of language alone."

11 Bernstein, of course, has much insight to offer about Weiner elsewhere, and his discussions and collaborative performance of her poems are available on PennSound. *Clairvoyant Journal* was originally published in 1978 by Angel Hair Books; that same year New Wilderness Audiographics released, on cassette tape, a stunning performance of the poems by Regina Beck, Sharon Mattlin, Peggy De Coursey, and Hannah Weiner. Listen to that version here: media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Weiner/Weiner-Hannah_ClairvoyantJnl_3-74.mp3. Patrick Durgan's important edition of *Clairvoyant Journal* is based on Weiner's original typescript and was published in 2014 by Bat editions.

What I would contend is that such an antithetical tradition is worthy of attention as a performative inscription of the paraphonic that emphatically enfolds the listening audience in a system of non-positive relations that return such listeners … to what? What does it mean to perform or to teach or to listen attentively to the paraphonic? How might such attention alter our approach to the audiotextual and the phonopoetic? What are the hallmarks of such a method, and how do they bear on our understanding of the production of meaning and value in the recorded performance of poetry?

Reaney in the classroom

One way to answer such questions is to foreground the audio-textual genre of the Reaney recording as *classroom instruction* and, more specifically, as a pedagogy of what he would call the "play box." If the simultaneous poem, as Dada poet Richard Huelsenbeck describes it, "teaches a sense of the merry-go-round of all things" (quoted in Kahn 432), then such a sensibility is very much in keeping with Reaney's own description of *Colours in the Dark* as a kind of play box—a container filled with random toys, relics, documents, and heirlooms that describe the admixture of a life lived—and thereby produces an experience of performance "designed to give you that mosaic—that all-things-happening-at-the-same-time-galaxy-higgledy-piggledy feeling that rummaging through a play box can give you" (7). Reaney's classroom lecture might well be an *inadvertent* example of the art of noises as far as the jackhammer goes, but the principle of simultaneity he gestures to in his introduction to the play ("all-things-happening-at-the-same-time"), and his welcoming response to the jackhammer's accompaniment, suggests an awareness of the possibilities of paraphony afforded by durational media and performance. That is, while the visual arts might offer Reaney a convenient point of orientation around the practice of bricolage for the students in his presence (his description of collage technique sounds very much like that of Kurt Schwitters material practice of visual collage and his *merz gedichte*), the intersection of both synchronic and diachronic elements in the paraphonic sound collage make possible an experience of simultaneity that is unique to the performance and recording context. Reaney's auditory examples in the classroom are telling in this regard and, in some sense, echo the repetition, industriousness, and cacophony of the jackhammer outside.

The Carl Orff pieces with which he begins the lesson aren't a matter of record, but one might presume (given Reaney's description) that he played the first three tracks of the adapted English version of volume 1 of

Orff and Gunild Keetman's *Music for Children*, first developed from 1930 to 1935 and reworked from 1950 to 1954. Those tracks, "Cuckoo, Where Are You?," "Pat-A-Cake," and "Meena, Deena," allow Reaney to introduce into his lecture the spirit of play so prevalent in his theatrical and poetic works. Furthermore, the children's ritualistic and successive chanting of names in "Meena Deena" emphasizes both the polyvocality of paraphonic collage and the mundane logic of incorporating "just the names of kids on the street" into the composition of the piece—an audible comparator to "bits of tin foil, bits of old newspapers, um, a piece of plastic you found on the street." It's worth noting that some of that spirit, as well as some of the text, of *Colours* derives from the four plays for children Reaney wrote between 1963 and 1967: *Apple Butter*, *Names and Nicknames*, *Geography Match*, and *Ignoramus*. As the playwright's son, James Stewart Reaney, remarks in 2018:

> Many of the child actors in Dad's plays are like players in the works for children's orchestra written by Carl Orff. In Orff … the interplay of simple elements achieves a final complexity that the children would not have accomplished without full cooperation with each other and the director. A similar procedure is followed in these plays for children. A certain world has been created for these child actors illuminated by continual games, chance, improvisational catalogs, and useful character types. ("I Was So Much Older Then")

One might presume, then, that Reaney's decision to share the work of Carl Orff with the students serves the purpose of introducing not only playfulness into the classroom environment but also the fundamental point that the juxtaposition of simple elements leads to "a final complexity" derived from collaboration and multiplicity.

Reaney's second example is his own sound collage of moments from the CBC's program *Wednesday Night* (from 1947 to 1976, rebranded in the 1970's as "Sunday Night" and "Tuesday Night" before cancellation), a weekly three-hour program known for its innovative approach to programming and radio production design. I've been unable to locate a copy of the recording, but Reaney notes the following for the class, having played a sample:

> What I tried to do in that tape was give an impression of all the things that CBC *Wednesday Night* had done or not done for the country in the last 10 years. It was sort of a birthday

> card for it. It was a commissioned thing. And so a lot of you came in just as we were doing a comedy bit. We used various kinds of laughter together. You know: "ho, ho, ho." A selection or singers, and so on. We tried to give it the whole business. And just before that was a terrific part, that we won't be able to play, in which we took the various screams in tragedy [Reaney screams] and a large tortured or erotic scream [Reaney screams again, laughter follows], which they do far better than I can. And I put all those together, and you know what, it works. It's very much like a *Laugh-In* thing, which is a collage: it's great, and you don't get them all at the same time, and you do get fill, and in fact you don't get some of the things, until years later.

Reaney's point here is not only to illustrate the disparate juxtapositions that characterize collage in audible form but also to draw a parallel from popular performance culture (the wildly popular program *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* aired on NBC from 1968 to 1973) as outward-turning gesture that marks the ubiquity of the formal technique in an accessible manner. And before he proceeds to the reading of his own poems, Reaney will deliberately accentuate the convex space of his own performance.

In many ways, Reaney's playing of The Fugs' "Swinburne Stomp" is the centrepiece of the lecture. The Fugs, an underground, "avant-noise" rock band formed in the Lower East Side of New York City in 1964, released their first album on Folkways Records titled *The Village Fugs Sing Ballads of Contemporary Protest, Point of Views, and General Dissatisfaction* in 1965, which was then re-released in 1966 by ESP-Disk as *The Fugs First Album*. Track 4, "Swinburne Stomp," is credited to band leader and poet Ed Sanders, with co-authorship afforded to nineteenth-century decadent poet Algernon Charles Swinburne who, perhaps, finds the disruptive potential of his verse most fully realized in the Fugs's appropriation of the chorus from his "Atalanta in Calydon."[12] Reaney's decision to share this track with the class is intended to destabilize the students' received understanding of the demeanor and habitus of poetry:

> Now you can imagine how that used to be read, by an I.O.D.E. lady on a platform. Most people's reactions to that is that they're desecrating a beautiful poem. I think probably Swinberg would approve, um Swinburne, would approve—I'm getting him mixed up with Ginsberg. It's very dithyrambic.

12 Listen to "Swinburne Stomp": www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykdn49CrcPI.

> They're not out for a beautiful reading; they're out to punch you in mouth with the poem, and that might be a good thing. I don't know. You tend to get the feeling in public school and in high school that poetry is always beautiful and it's never read at the top of your voice. It's uh sort of a "hush hush" affair. Well, then these kids go home and the things they listen to on their radio are, say, Little Richard who screams, most of his song is just a scream, and uh, that's much more exciting than Dick, Jane, and Puff. Where there's no screaming at all. No one's allowed to scream. So the, I think somehow or other, the poetry has got to catch up to that.

To suggest the poem is "dithyrambic" returns the poetic to the realm of a kind of Dionysian excess and poetry itself to a wild, impassioned, communal space of unfettered expression and creation. Its counterpoint, in Reaney's estimation, is the somber and poised reading of a poetic address to the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire. As for the slip, conflating Swinburne and Ginsberg into "Swinberg," is a telling patronymic collage text in itself that invokes a counter-cultural sensibility that is central to Reaney's presentation. Reaney's citation of The Fugs, then, is a gesture of recovery, re-routing the poetic tradition away from the IODE performance standard and instead through the Dadaist simultaneous poem, Russolo's art of noises, and protest movements of the 1960s. With wild abandon, the kazoo, slide whistle, a loosely stringed instrument, maracas and various percussive tools, guttural vocalizations, screams, and yodeling cut across the declamations of the principal lyrics, which themselves are subject to Sander's highly parodic emphasis on the prosodic form of the lines. As cultural historian Daniel Kane notes:

> [T]he Fugs transformation of poetry into noise can be understood as a way to connect Swinburne to a burgeoning counterculture intention on celebrating sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. If the formal metrics of Swinburne's poem are a simulation and enactment of order, then the Fugs' tearing apart that order through literal dissonances can be read metaphorically as taking Swinburne out of the classroom and textbook and onto the streets. (32–33)

Reaney, by this point, has set the stage for his own poetic performance: he has introduced the students to the formal logic of collage, descending from the light and air of childlike play, through the screams and laughter

of popular mania, and into the depths of political force and social disruption that paraphony affords.

But here the lesson takes a surprising turn. Reaney proceeds to read a number of the poems that appear in *Colours in the Dark*, and he does so in a manner that is, as he himself notes, deliberately low key, even demur in its quiet monologism—much in the mode of Bernstein's "minimal—anti-expressivist—mode of reading" (12). Reaney introduces the first of these poems, "The Sundogs," noting that it "was originally written just as a lyric … But eventually it got incorporated into a play called *Colours in the Dark*, that was put on two summers ago at Stratford, using this collage technique." The poem is at once innocent and childlike, while also quite violent in its images of elemental destruction. Reaney notes that the delivery of the poem at Stratford was unnerving, even nightmarish, for the audience, more so because of the actors' costuming than the poem itself: [Clip #2: "The Sun Dogs" *James Reaney Reading, 1969* 10:57–12:33].[13] Perhaps what is most remarkable about Reaney's delivery of "The Sundogs" is its radical departure from the noisiness of his preceding examples. Not only has the jackhammer, by this point, taken its cue and ceased its pounding in the background, but Reaney's own gentle, matter-of-fact reading of the poem seems at odds with the exuberance and cacophony to which he first drew the students' attention. Yet, perhaps, that contrast is precisely the point, as he suggests:

> Now I learned a lot about reading that poem from watching, listening to actors read it. Um, the old way of reading is where you don't give it quite so much *pow*. Um, and it can be given a lot more pow, of course, than that. You get into this very tenuous feel which is between acting something and reading it, and actually most of the time I prefer the reading business where you cool it down and you aren't, you know, trying to put it across the way Janis Joplin does. Um, you simply let it speak for itself. Which the actors did very skillfully in that play—they didn't ham it up. Um, this merges over into playwriting which I got quite interested in. But I found quite often that read pages of my plays are better than acted versions. That is, you get this alienation thing that Brecht talks about in which the more amateur the actor and the less able he is able to put it across, the better it is because then the audience is asked to

13 This excerpt can be listened to here: https://ualberta.aviaryplatform.com/r/3ropr7nr1k. The timecodes cited refer to the position on the edited digital file held in the collection.

> do something. Whereas when you have Bette Davis up there doing it all for you, you come away with, you know, sometimes a cheated feeling that you would like to have been able to do more of it yourself. That's the fashion right now, anyway.

In offering the poem as performed to the listener's discretion, Reaney is inviting his audience members into a collaborative space of play and the production of shared meanings and values. This is necessarily an open and improvisational space over which the poem itself—and its performer—exerts no particular, hierarchized influence. Indeed, the disruption of that hierarchy through the contrasting elements of paraphonic collage is precisely the point.

Reaney goes on to read a wide selection from the poems as they appear in *Colours in the Dark*, including excerpts from transcribed historical documents, his own "The Royal Visit" and other compositions, a traditional children's "baiting" poem, the theme song to the 1930s *Little Orphan Annie* radio broadcast, and James McIntyre's "Ode on the Mammoth Cheese"—and always in that same gentle and deliberately reserved voice. But before concluding the class with an additional pair of poems, he returns his listeners to one more moment of exemplary abandon. Reaney plays for the class, on vinyl, "Destroy the Nations," the opening track of the Nihilist Spasm Band's 1968 album *No Record*—a sample taken from Reaney's own London, Ontario, artistic milieu. NSB was formed in 1965 as a free improvisation group that in its "art of noises" traces its roots to Dadaist creative practice. As Reaney himself explains, the band uses homemade or altered instruments played in a responsive and innovative manner unrestrained by tempo, time signature, or tuning: [Clip #3: "Nihilist Spasm Band," *James Reaney Reading, 1969*, 24:52–27:30].[14] Here's a transcription of Reaney's introduction to NSB:

> The, uh, the whole thing behind this. I have a friend in London, Ontario called Greg Curnoe who made that disastrous mural for the airport of Montreal that had LBJ on it murdering Vietnamese children. They made him take half of it down. Um, he's um, an artist who is very communal and his groups of other artists and just people around him. It's sort of the idea of a renaissance studio speeded up. A bit. And one of the things they started doing, I think inspired by Michael Snow's jazz ensemble band in Toronto, was a jazz ensemble with home-

14 This excerpt can be listened to here: https://ualberta.aviaryplatform.com/r/3ropr7nr1k. The timecodes cited refer to the position on the edited digital file held in the collection.

> made instruments. And, then, they didn't like jazz very much. They were more fond of rock, but it went beyond rock considerably. The homemade instruments are kazoos, electronically amplified kazoos, electronically amplified homemade guitars. Beautiful art objects—they sell for about five-thousand bucks each on the New York market. I'm sure. And an electronic violin, drums of course, and so on. And then, the whole idea is that they simply play together and listen to each other. Um. It gets, there's no preparation for it. It's just completely free improvisation. If you've heard Alex Albert Ayler, the jazz saxophonist, he's moving towards this, but he's not quite up to it yet. And, uh, I won't take it off, before I'm ready too, no matter how you may scream. [Sample of NSB follows.]

I've cited above only a brief section of the NSB track played by Reaney, but he allows it to go on for an astounding six minutes before we hear the needle lift from the album. Reaney pauses, and simply says, "I'd like to read two poems about birds for contrast."

Reaney's decision to play an extended segment of the Nihilist Spasm Band's recorded performance of "Destroy the Nations"—especially in its effect as an example of raw, unadulterated political noise that is very much of its moment—before returning to a lyrical treatment of birds—suggests something quite deliberate about his intentions here. One way to understand Reaney's decision to read in the manner he does—creating that unexpressive, concave space to which Bernstein alerts us—and then enlarge that space and render it convex, or outward turning, is to appreciate that doing so allows him to situate the poem as performed in relation to the noise all around him, all around his audience, all around us, his listeners, here and now. That is, the poetic performance is not intended to bear the weight of dramatic affect in and of itself; rather, the performance is deliberately extricated from its rarefied setting and paraphonically returned to its proper environment and the habitus of his audience. Removed from isolation and set in relation to a world of pop culture chatter and screams, industrial noise and the sonic jumble of streetscapes—indeed, in relation to the pounding of the inevitable jackhammer—the performed poem is reduced to a single, elemental scrap in the paraphonic sound collage that is the decentred human voice in the greater world of its entanglements.

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