

The Art of Noise

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DEAR BALILLA PRATELLA, great Futurist musician,

In Rome, in the very crowded Teatro Costanzi while with my Futurist friends Marinetti, Boccioni, Carrà, Balla, Soffici, Papini, Cavocchioli, I listened to the orchestral execution of your forcible FUTURIST MUSIC, I conceived of a new art that only you can create: the Art of Noise, the logical consequence of your marvellous innovations.

In antiquity there was only silence. In the nineteenth century with the invention of the machine, Noise was born. Today, Noise triumphs and reigns supreme over the sensibility of men. For many centuries life occurred in silence, or, for the most part, mutely. The strongest noises that interrupted this silence were neither intense, nor prolonged, nor varied. In fact, except for exceptional telluric movements, hurricanes, tempests, avalanches, and cascades, nature is silent.

In this scarcity of *noise*, the first *sounds* which man was able to draw from a reed hole or from a stretched string astonished him as new and admirable things. *Sound* was attributed to God by primitive people; it was considered sacred and was reserved for the priests, whom it served by enriching their rites with mystery. Thus was born the concept of sound as something by itself, different from and independent of life. The result of this was music, a fantastic world superimposed upon reality, an inviolable and sacred world. It is easily understood how such a conception of music must, have necessarily slowed down its progress in comparison to the other arts. The Greeks with their mathematically systematic music theory of Pythagoras, according to which the use of only some consonant intervals were admitted, have greatly limited the field of music, thus rendering harmony, which they ignored, impossible.

In the Middle Ages musical art progressed through the development and modification of the Greek tetrachord system and through Gregorian chant and popular songs. But people still considered sound *in its unfolding in time*, a restricted conception that persisted for

several centuries and that we still find in the more complicated polyphonies of the Flemish counterpoint musicians. *Harmony* did not exist; the development of diverse parts was not subordinate to the harmony that these parts could produce together; the conception of these parts was horizontal, after all, not vertical. The desire, research, and taste for the simultaneous union of diverse sounds, in other words, for *harmony* (complete sound) came gradually, passing from the perfect assonant harmony with some dissonant passages, to the complicated and persistent dissonance that characterises contemporary music.

Musical art, first of all, looked for and obtained purity, limpidness, and sweetness of sound, then it amalgamated different sounds, occupying itself, however, with caressing the ear with suave harmonies. Today, musical art, complicating itself still more, searches for the amalgamation of sounds more dissonant, strange, and harsh to the ear. Thus, we are always getting closer to "noise-sound."

THIS EVOLUTION OF MUSIC IS PARALLELED BY THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE MACHINE, which collaborates with man everywhere. Today, the machine has created many varieties and a competition of noises, not only in the noisy atmosphere of the large cities but also in the country that, until yesterday, was normally silent, so that pure sound, in its monotony and exiguity, no longer arouses emotion.

To excite and exalt our sensibility, music has developed a more complex polyphony and a greater variety of instrumental timbres and colourings. It has researched more complicated successions of dissonant chords and has vaguely prepared for the creation of MUSICAL NOISE. This evolution toward "noise-sound" was not possible before today. Man's ear in the eighteenth century was not able to support the disharmonic intensity of certain chords produced by our orchestra (whose performers are three times as numerous); now our ears enjoy it, for they are already educated to modern life, which is full of various noises. Our ears, however, are not content with them and ask for more ample acoustic emotions.

On the other hand, musical sound is too limited in the qualitative variety of its timbres. The most complicated orchestra can be reduced to four or five classes of instruments different in timbre and sound: string instruments, brass instruments, woodwinds, and percussion. As a result, modern music struggles in this small circle, vainly trying to create new varieties of timbres.

IT IS NECESSARY TO BREAK THIS RESTRICTED CIRCLE OF PURE SOUNDS AND CONQUER THE INFINITE VARIETY OF "NOISE-SOUNDS."

Everyone knows, moreover, that each pure sound carries with it a tangle of foreknown and worn-out sensations that predispose the auditor to boredom in spite of the power of all the innovating musicians. We Futurists have all profoundly loved and enjoyed the harmonies of the great masters. Beethoven and Wagner have shaken our nerves and hearts for many years. Now we are satiated by them, and WE TAKE GREATER PLEASURE IN IDEALLY COMBINING THE NOISES OF TRAMS, EXPLOSIONS OF MOTORS, TRAINS, AND SHOUTING CROWDS THAN IN LISTENING AGAIN, FOR EXAMPLE, TO THE "EROICA" OR THE "PASTORALE."

We are unable to see the enormous display of force that a modern orchestra represents without feeling the most profound disillusionment with its weak acoustical results. Do you know of a more ridiculous spectacle than twenty men who persist in redoubling the mewing of a violin? All this will naturally make the music maniacs scream, which will perhaps arouse the sleepy atmosphere of the concert halls.

Shall we enter together, as Futurists, into one of these hospitals for anaemic sounds. See here: the first bar that reaches our ears is boring from being heard already and gives us a foretaste of the boredom of the bar that will follow. In this way, we sip from bar to bar two or three kinds of undiluted boredom while always waiting for the extraordinary sensation that never comes. Meanwhile, we see a repugnant mixture being formed by the monotony of sensations and by the stupid religious emotions of the Buddhist-like listeners who are intoxicated by the thousandth repetition of their ecstasy, which is more or less snobbish and learned. Away! Let's leave, since we can no longer restrain our desire finally to create a new musical reality with an ample distribution of sonorous musical slaps, altogether skipping the violins, pianos, contrabasses, and moaning organs. Let's leave!

Some will argue that noise is only loud and unpleasant to the ear. It seems useless to me to enumerate all the tenuous and delicate noises that give pleasant acoustic sensations.

To convince you then of the surprising variety of noises, it is enough to think of the roar of thunder, the hissing of the wind, the thunder of a waterfall, the gurgle of a brook, the rustle of leaves, a horse's trot that fades away, the shaky starts of a carriage on the pavement, and the ample, solemn, and white respiration of a city at night, all the noises made by wild and domestic animals and all those that man's mouth can make without talking or singing.

Let's walk through a large modern capital with our ear more attentive than our eye and find pleasure in distinguishing between the gurglings of water, air, and gas inside metallic pipes, the grumbling of motors that breathe and pulse with an indisputable animality, the throbbing of valves, the rising and falling of pistons, the screeching of mechanical saws, the jumping of trams on their rails, the cracking of whips, the waving of awnings and flags. We shall amuse ourselves by ideally orchestrating together the rattle of a store's rolling shutters, banging doors, the hubbub and patter of the crowds, the different rackets of the railroad stations, of the textile mills, of the printers, of the electrical plants, and of the subways.

Nor must we forget the very new noises of modern warfare. Recently the poet Marinetti, in one of his letters from the Bulgarian trenches at Adrianople, described to me the orchestra of a great battle using marvellous *parole in libertà*:

Every five seconds siege cannons disembowel space by a chord TAM-TUUUMB mutiny of 500 echoes to gore it mince it scatter it to infinity. In the centre of these crushed TAM-TUUUMBS width 50 kilometres square jump explosions fissures fists rapid-fire batteries Violence ferocity regularity this grave bass scans the strange very very agitated crowds high notes of the battle Fury breathlessness ears eyes nostrils open! Beware! Strength! what joy to see to hear to smell everything everything taratatata of the machine gunners to shriek breathlessly under bits slaps traak-traak lashes pic-pac-pam-tumb bizarre leaps to 200 meters high by rifle shots. Below below at the bottom of the orchestra pools to whip buffalo spurs trucks pluft platt horses rearing up flic flac zing zing sciaaaack hilarious whinnies iiiiii pattering tinkling 3 Bulgarian battalions marching crooc-craaac (*very slowly*) Sciumi Maritza or Karvavena crooc-craaac officer's shouts striking like copper plates against each other pan from here paack from there cing BUUUM cing ciak (*quickly*) ciaciacia ciaiaak over here there there all around above look out for your head ciaack beautiful! flames flames flames flames flames

flames leap from forts over there behind that river Sciukri Pasha communicates by telephone to 27 forts in Turkish in German hello! Ibraim! Rudolf! hello! hello! actors roles echoes prompters scenery of smoke forests applause odors of hay mire dung 1 can no longer feel my frozen feet odor of saltpeter rotten odor Timpani flutes clarinets are everywhere low high birds twitter beatitude share cip-cip-cip breeze greenness herds don-dandon-din neeee Orchestra Madmen are hitting orchestra professors they very beaten play play great crashing noises not erasing stressing cutting off tiny noises very tiny fragments of echoes in the wide theatre 300 kilometers square rivers Maritza Tundzha stretched out Rhodope Mountains standing highground boxes logges 20,000 shrapnel flailing about exploding very white handkerchiefs full of gold TUM-TUMB 20,000 grenades outstretched pulling very black hairs bursting ZANG-TUMB-TUMB-ZANG-TUMB-TUUUMB the orchestra of warfare noise enjoys itself under a note of silence hanging in the sky above spherical golden balloons that oversee the shots

WE WANT TO SCORE AND REGULATE HARMONICALLY AND RHYTHMICALLY THESE EXTREMELY VARIED NOISES. In scoring the noises, we shall not subtract all the movements and irregular vibrations of tempo and intensity from them, but, on the contrary, we shall give a position and tone to the most dominant and the strongest of these vibrations. Noise, in fact, is different from sound only in that the vibrations that produce it are confused and irregular in tempo and intensity. EVERY NOISE HAS A TONE, SOMETIMES EVEN A CHORD, THAT DOMINATES OVER THE WHOLE OF ITS IRREGULAR VIBRATIONS. Now, the existence of this predominant characteristic tone gives us the practical possibility of scoring noises, that is to say, of giving to a noise not only one tone but a certain variety of tones without losing its characteristic - in other words, the timbre that distinguishes it. Thus certain noises obtained through a rotating movement can give us a complete ascending or descending chromatic scale by speeding up or slowing down the movement.

Every manifestation of our life is accompanied by noise. Noise is, therefore, familiar to our ear and has the power to recall us immediately to life. Whereas sound, foreign to life, always musical, a thing by itself, an occasional element that is not necessary, has come by now to strike our ears no more than an overly familiar face does our eye. Noise, instead, coming confusedly and irregularly from the irregular confusion of our life, is never totally revealed to us and keeps innumerable surprises for us. We

are certain, therefore, that in choosing, co-ordinating, and dominating all noises, we are enriching mankind with a new unsuspected voluptuousness. Although the characteristic of noise is to bring us brutally back to life, THE ART OF NOISE MUST NOT LIMIT ITSELF TO IMITATIVE REPRODUCTION. It will draw most of its emotive power from the special acoustical enjoyment that the inspired artist will get from combining the noises.

Here are six "families of noises" of the Futurist orchestra that we shall soon achieve mechanically:

1. Roars Thunders Explosions Bursts Crashes Booms
2. Whistles Hisses Puffs
3. Whispers Murmurs Grumbles Buzzes Bubblings
4. Screeches Creaks Rustles Hums Crackles Rubs
5. Percussion noises using: metal, wood, skin, rock, terra-cotta, etc.
6. Voices of animals and humans: Shouts, Shrieks, Moans, Yells, Howls, Laughs, Groans, Sobs.

In this list we have included the most characteristic of fundamental noises; the others are only associations and combinations of these. THE RHYTHMIC MOVEMENTS OF A NOISE ARE INFINITE. A PREDOMINANT RHYTHM ALWAYS EXISTS, AS DOES A TONE, but around them numerous other secondary rhythms are equally perceptible.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Futurist musicians must always enlarge and enrich the field of sounds more. That is, they must respond to the need of our sensibilities. In fact, we notice that in the contemporary composers of genius there is a tendency toward the most complicated dissonances. They always move away from pure sound toward "noisesound." This need and this tendency can only be satisfied by *joining and substituting noises to and for musical sounds.*

2. Futurist musicians must replace the limited variety of timbres of the instruments that the orchestra possesses today with an infinite variety of timbres of noises, reproduced with proper mechanisms.
3. It is necessary for the musician's sensibility, liberated from the easy and traditional rhythms, to find in noises the means to increase and renew itself, since each noise offers the union of the most diverse rhythms as well as its dominant one.
4. Every noise possesses among its irregular vibrations A PREDOMINANT GENERAL TONE. This will be easy to obtain by constructing instruments that imitate a variety of sufficiently wide tones, semitones, and quarter-tones. This variety of tones will not deprive each noise of its characteristic timbre, but rather increase its texture or range.
5. The practical difficulties presented by the construction of these instruments are not grave. When we have found the mechanical principles that produce a certain noise, we shall be able to change the tone, regulating it by the same general laws of acoustics. For example, we shall speed up or slow down the velocity if the instrument has a rotating movement, or increase or decrease the size or the tension of the sound-making parts if the instrument does not have a rotating movement.
6. The new orchestra will obtain the most complete and the newest sonic emotions, not by means of a succession of noises that imitate life, but by means of a fantastic association of these various timbres and rhythms. Therefore, every instrument must offer the possibility of changing pitch and must have a more or less large range of extension.
7. The variety of noises is infinite. If today we perhaps possess a thousand diverse machines and we are able to distinguish a thousand diverse noises, tomorrow, with the multiplication of new machines, we shall be able to distinguish ten, twenty, or THIRTY-THOUSAND DIVERSE NOISES, NOT BY SIMPLE IMITATION BUT BY COMBINATION ACCORDING TO OUR IMAGINATION.

8. We, therefore, invite young musicians of genius and audacity to observe all noises with continual attention in order to understand their various rhythms, their principal and secondary tones. Then, by comparing the various timbres of the noises and timbres of sounds, they will convince themselves that the first are more numerous than the second. This will not only give them comprehension of, but also a taste and passion for, noise. Our multiplied sensibility, after being conquered by Futurist eyes, will finally have Futurist ears. Thus motors and machines of our industrial cities will one day be skilfully tuned in order to make every factory an intoxicated orchestra of noises.

Dear Pratella, I submit to your Futurist genius these new ideas of mine, inviting you to discuss them. I am not a musician; I, therefore, do not have acoustic predilections or works to defend. I am a Futurist painter who projects beyond himself on a much-loved art his own wish to renew everything. That is why, being bolder than if I were a professional musician, unpreoccupied by my apparent incompetence and convinced that audacity has all rights and all possibilities, I have been able to perceive by intuition the great renovation of music through the Art of Noise.