Adamic Passions, Screams of Joy:
Language and Expression in Early 20th-Century Sound Poetry

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Abstract: Post-World War I Europe saw many radical changes in the arts, as Futurists demanded a music of industrial noises, Surrealists juxtaposed bizarre elements in dreamlike images, and Dadaists indifferently treated manufactured objects as sculpture. This revolutionary milieu also cultivated experimental poets, many of whom had forsaken language, seeking instead new forms of expression in cries, grunts, and nonsense vocals. François Dufrêne and Gil J. Wolman created lexicons of extreme vocal sounds--shrieks, howls, groans, exaggerated respiratory exercises, while Alexei Kruchenykh's zaum poetry was conceived as a "transrational language," which sought to bypass meaning in the hope of a more direct communication.

Stripping the conventions of modern language in search of a more immediate, elemental expression, early sound poetry has sympathetic resonances in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages." Rousseau considered modern language corrupted and incapable of complete and direct communication, nostalgically describing a pre/proto-linguistic state in which expression is in no way obstructed. To some sound poets, such a return to origins required the creation of new languages, to others, the rejection of language altogether. Both Rousseau's idealized proto-language and early sound poetry conceive expressions in which the divide between form (vocal utterance) and content (what Rousseau would call the "passions") is dramatically lessened.

This paper will demonstrate the philosophical union between the works of early sound poets (specifically that of the Russian Futurists and Ultra-Lettrists) and Rousseau's thinking on music and language, demonstrating the ways in which both reject reason and modern language in favor of a nostalgic desire for a linguistic tabula rasa.

Keywords: Language, Expression, Sound Poetry, 20th Century, Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages,* Zaum, (Russian) Futurism, Alexei Kruchenykh, Ultra-Lettrism, Modernism, Voice, François Dufrêne, Gil J. Wolman.

S tripping the conventions of modern language in search of a more direct, elemental expression, early twentieth-century sound poetry looked back to pre-linguistic humanity for models of unspoiled, more immediate utterances. To some sound poets, such a return to origins required the creation of new languages, to others, the rejection of language altogether. Using the shock of the past to defamiliarize the new begins not with the sound poets themselves, but is introduced into Western thinking in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages."[1] Rousseau considered modern language corrupted and incapable of complete communication of the most fundamental of human feeling what he referred to as the "passions" and nostalgically described a proto-linguistic state in which expression is without obstruction. Both Rousseau's idealized proto-language and early sound poetry functioned as incendiary cultural critiques, and both conceive expressions in which the divide between form (vocal utterance) and content (the "passions") is dramatically lessened.

Zaumny yazyk

[2] The earliest case of this search for primal poetic expression can be found in the zaum poetry of the Russian Futurists. "Zaum" (заумь), a neologism often translated as "transrational," "metalogical," or "beyonsense," was intended to be a new type of language,[3] bypassing meaning in the hopes of achieving

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[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," in *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*, trans. and ed. John T. Scott (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).

[2] Alexei Kruchenykh, "dyr bul shchyl," in *Russian Futurism: A History*, trans. Vladimir Markov (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 44.

Zaum	**Transliteration**
Дыр бул щыл убещщур скум вы со бу р л эз	dyr bul shchyl ubeshshchur skum vy so bu r l èz

Figure 1: Alexei Kruchenykh, "dyr bul shchyl" (in Cyrillic and Latin alphabets) [2]

a more direct, elemental communication. By subverting meaning, its practitioners (zaumniks) attempted a radical return to what they considered as a basis for an understanding of language namely, vocal sounds/ syllables. This return was enacted in order to re-harness language's creative potential and to provide an escape from rationality and logic.[4] This was achieved through various indeterminacy-producing dislocations occurring at several different linguistic levels:[5]

- Phonetic: presenting letters in groupings that don't form common morphemes (e.g., shkri nnkm uelx)

- Morphological: presenting common morphemes in new groupings of indeterminate meaning (e.g., inrip exself protion)

- Syntactic: presenting standard words in grammatically incorrect/distorted syntax (e.g., The beginning in word the was)[6]

Used together and in isolation, techniques such as these were employed in creating various unorthodox and linguistically abstract poetic expressions.

Dyr bul shchyl

[3] Alexei Kruchenykh (1886 1968) was one of the most well-known and perhaps most radical of the zaumniks, and was the movement's most vocal theoretician. In 1913, Kruchenykh published *Pomada*, a

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[3] The term zaumny yazyk or "transrational language" was also used by some practitioners.

[4] Gerald Janecek, "Introduction," Explodity: An Evening of Transrational Sound Poetry, PennSound Website, Windows Audio File, http://writing.upenn.edu/ pennsound/x/Explodity.php (accessed June 18, 2012).

[5] The following are Janecek's analytical categories, and are not necessarily equivalent to the poets' conceptions of their methods. Janecek also includes what he calls the "suprasyntactic," which involves elements of absurdism or automatic writing. These latter elements are important, but are by no means unique to zaum. Gerald Janecek, *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1996), 4 5.

[6] These are not excerpts of actual zaum texts, but contrived examples to help illustrate these techniques to English-speaking readers. The third example is an excerpt from a poem by Brion Gysin, not a zaumnik, but an employer of techniques not unlike syntactic zaum. See Brion Gysin, "In the Beginning was the Word" (1981), UbuWeb website, Windows MP3 Audio File, http://www.ubu.com/sound/ gysin.html (accessed June 18, 2012).
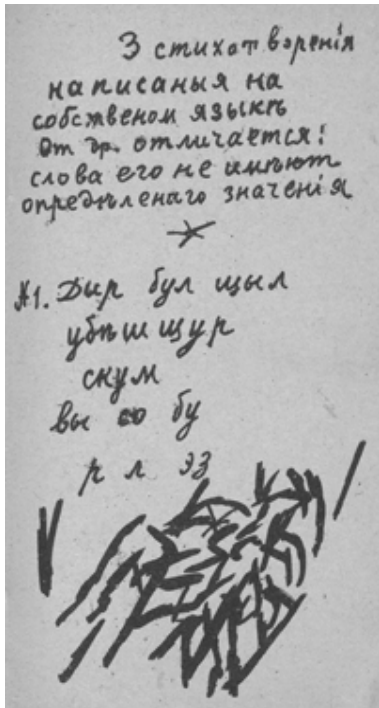
Figure 2: Kruchenykh, "dyr bul shchyl"
(with heading and illustration, as originally
published in Pomada, *1913)* [8]

collection of poems which contained the first self-identified piece of zaum poetry, "dyr bul shchyl." This brief work (shown in Figures 1 and 2), is the first in a suite of three poems that are described by their heading as "written in their own language," which is unique in that "its words do not have a definite meaning."[7]

[4] Employing linguistic irregularities at the phonetic and morphological level, the poem eludes any attempt at translation or interpretation, and has been characterized by Denis Mickiewicz as consisting of "pre-speech" or "*Ur-Russian*" word gestures.[9]

[5] While few of the poem's phonemes are discernibly of Russian origin, some can be seen as stems or prefixes of Russian words [10] reduced down from their standard morphological context.[11] The poem's highly-organized and syllabically symmetrical five-line structure exhibits a formal disassembly, moving from the first line's already phonetically reduced stems to the last line's restatement of these stems, reduced even further to a mere series of consonants.[12]

Euy

[6] Like all good radical modernists, Kruchenykh frequently outlined his methods and intentions in incendiary and provocative manifestos, and it is in these writings that the distinctiveness of the movement's philosophies is most clearly apparent. In *Declaration of the Word as Such*, published the same year as *Pomada*, the author details the views of the Russian Futurist poets, decrying the insufficiency of language to convey the most elemental of human expressions:

> THOUGHT AND SPEECH CANNOT KEEP UP WITH THE EMOTIONS OF SOMEONE IN A STATE OF INSPIRATION, therefore, the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), or a personal one (the creator is an individual), as well as in a language which does not

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[7] Janecek, *Zaum*, 53.

[8] Janecek, *Zaum*, 54.

[9] Janecek, *Zaum*, 52 57.

[10] For example, "dyr" from dyra ("full of holes"); vy ("you"); so ("with"); "bul" could refer to the root of the tartar verb "to become." (Janecek, *Zaum*, 57 58). Indeed, many have analyzed the work as sharing phonetic or prosodic characteristics with Turkish or Japanese languages (Nilsson, 1979), among others. Though Kruchenykh himself said the tiny piece contained within itself "more of the Russian spirit than Pushkin's entire œuvre." Craig Dworkin, "To Destroy Language," *Textual Practice* 18, no. 2 (2004): 185 197.

[11] Boris Arvatov, "Language Creation," *Lef* 2 (1923): 79 91, quoted in Dworkin, "To Destroy Language," 191.

[12] Janecek, *Zaum*, 61 62.

have any definite meaning (not frozen). Common language binds, free language allows for fuller expression.[13]

[7] Here, Kruchenykh depicts the "common language," in which words have a definite meaning, as cold and rigid ("frozen"), contrasted to the freedom allowed in a transrational language (*zaumny yazyk*). By not being tied down to meaning, the transrational language does not inhibit the emotions of the inspired. It is also important to note that it is emotions that are expressed freely in a beyonsense language, not thoughts — it is thought that conspires with common language to restrain emotions. What the poet seeks to communicate is further back, more abstract than thought. Kruchenykh continues,

> WORDS DIE, THE WORLD IS ETERNALLY YOUNG. The artist has seen the world in a new way and like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names. The lily is beautiful, but the word 'lily' has been soiled and raped. Therefore, I call the lily, 'euy' (*еуы*) — the original purity is reestablished.[14]

[8] The author details a type of lexical entropy: words die — they lose freshness and impact over time, becoming mechanical and reflexive. This is described as an abuse and a grotesquerie, in the case of the word "lily," it has been "soiled and raped." Kruchenykh's solution is a return to the Adamic language, the language of the first man naming things as he is introduced to them.[15] This return to origins, via the act of creative naming, is illustrated with the author's renaming of the lily "euy." Gerald Janecek points out that the word "euy," (pronounced "ehooee"[16]) while phonotactically illegal in Russian, resembles a lily graphically when written in cyrillic letters, while outlining the shape of the flower in its vocal articulation. Thus this return to the Adamic language is a return to a more "mimetic and iconic" lexicon.[17]

Passions and Reason

[9] It is with the above ideas that one can begin to see what is shared between the zaumniks' thinking and that of Rousseau; indeed, the trope of a disconnected, overly rational modern culture in need of a corrective look to the past is first introduced into Western thought by Rousseau. In his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1781), Rousseau outlines a theoretical history of the evolution of language, taking into account a range of factors from geography and climate to the development of agriculture and the control of fire. Rousseau concludes that language did not grow out of humanity's common needs but instead from something he calls the "passions." The passions, while never explicitly defined in the essay, are described as something deep-rooted, elemental to the human, but on a separate, higher plane from instinct. The author refers to them as the "moral needs," and lists "love, hatred, pity and anger" among

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[13] Alexei Kruchenykh, "Declaration of the Word as Such," in *Russian Futurism through its Manifestoes, 1912–1928*, ed. Anna Lawton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), quoted in Janecek, *Zaum*, 78.

[14] Ibid., 79.

[15] Due to the fact that several contemporary Russian thinkers were theorizing that the Garden of Eden was located somewhere in Russia, and that, therefore, the Russians were in fact the Ur-people, this return to the Adamic language betrays the more Slavophile tendencies of the zaumniks. Tim Carter, conversation with author, Buffalo, NY, March 3, 2012.

[16] Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 121.

[17] Janecek, *Zaum*, 79.

their possible manifestations, saying that the passions are what is required to "move a young heart [or] repulse an unjust aggressor."[18] The passions are seated at the root of the human psyche, and it is they that motivate humanity to "endeavor to make themselves understood," thus leading to the first languages.[19] The passions are therefore visceral but not instinctive, primordial but not barbaric, unsophisticated but not uncivilized.

[10] For Rousseau, because these early, passion-inspired languages grew from a need to communicate the deepest sentiments, they must have been figurative, poetic, and even musical, claiming that,

> [V]erses, songs, and speech have a common origin. [...] Poetry and music [were] born along with language; or rather, all this was nothing but language itself.[20]

Earlier he states,

> Figurative language was the first to arise, proper meaning was found last. [...] At first, only poetry was spoken. Only long afterwards did anyone take it into his head to reason.[21]

[11] Reason is here described as an after-effect, a late-comer on the scene,[22] and the author continually describes it as one that is in conflict with the passions that initiated the entire linguistic experiment. Reason is responsible for the systematization of language, for its segregation into the discrete realms of poetry, music, and language proper:

> The study of philosophy and the progress of reason, having perfected grammar, deprived language of that lively and passionate tone which had at first made it so tuneful.[23]

[12] Thus, Rousseau sees modern language as degenerated, a shell of its former expressive glory, no longer able to effectively communicate the passions, nor the sentiments they inspire. He writes nostalgically, romanticizing the theoretical early languages, imagining their tones, sounds, and limitless expressive potential, and longing not for a state of primitive naiveté, but for that privileged moment when humanity first articulated its most essential moral desires.

The Figurative and the Adamic

[13] The overlap between Rousseau and Kruchenykh is significant. While the zaumniks never cited Rousseau as a source for their approach, the many points of intersection between the two reveal the resilience of this trope in Western thinking. Both employ a scrutiny and reappraisal of language   its origins and current state   as an avenue toward social and cultural critique.

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[18] Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," 294.

[19] Ibid., 314.

[20] Ibid., 318.

[21] Ibid., 294.

[22] "Poetry was discovered before prose; this had to be so, since the passions spoke before reason," Ibid., 318.

[23] Ibid., 329.

[14] Thus, there are remarkable parallels between Modernist and (Counter-) Enlightenment praxis. Both Rousseau and Kruchenykh see reason as responsible for the degradation of language in its modern state. Kruchenykh declared that words "die" as they become rationalized and automatized, describing a language with definite meaning as "frozen." Rousseau, using similar imagery, maintains that,

> as enlightenment extends, language […] becomes more precise and less passionate; it substitutes ideas for feelings, it no longer speaks to the heart but to reason. As a result, […] language becomes more exact and clearer, but more drawn out, more muted and *colder*.[24]

Kruchenykh regards thought itself as stifling expression, and in one essay, claims,

> the word has been shackled […] by its subordination to rational thought. […We] provided a free language, transrational and universal. Previous poets arrived at the word through rational thought, we arrived at unmediated comprehension through the word.[25]

[15] Kruchenykh condemned those poets (specifically, the Russian Symbolists that the Futurists reacted so strongly against) who, in his opinion, attained their expression only via calculated, reasoned deliberation. The zaumniks, he asserts, first conceive new words of indefinite meaning (transrational), which then lead them to "unmediated comprehension." In *Declaration of the Word as Such*, he affirms that "INTRODUCING NEW WORDS, I bring about a new content WHERE EVERYTHING begins to slip."[26] In other words, content is predicated on form. Unlike the Futurist poets in Italy (Marinetti, et al.), new words are not required to express the new realities of the industrialized world, but instead, being of initially indeterminate meaning, mystically produce new realities themselves.[27] In the same way, form precedes meaning in Rousseau's early figurative language: "Proper meaning was found last. Things were not called by their true name until they were seen in their genuine form."[28] For both Kruchenykh and Rousseau, the truest form of communication is an uninhibited, even spontaneous utterance; meaning is secondary, to be gathered up and sorted out only after the initial expressive outburst.

[16] Common to both Kruchenykh and Rousseau is the idea of returning to origins, of finding the solution to the problem of expression in the past. This is especially potent when one considers their relative historical/philosophical contexts. Looking backward while writing during the French Enlightenment, Rousseau deliberately goes against the grain of his contemporaries and the prevailing progressive view of history. And while it may, on the surface, seem counter-intuitive for a Futurist such as Kruchenykh to turn to sources in the distant past, it is, in fact, a trait common to most Modernist approaches: exploiting the traumatizing effects of thrusting the past onto the present.[29] Perhaps the most immediately apparent overlap is the Primitivism inherent in the Russian nationalist works of Stravinsky,

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[24] Ibid., 296 (emphasis added). Later he adds, "All lettered languages […] change character and lose force as they gain clarity, […] in order to make a language *cold* and monotonous in no time, one has only to establish academies among the people that speaks it." (303-4, emphasis added).

[25] Kruchenykh, "New Ways of the Word: The Language of the Future, Death to Symbolism," 1913, quoted in Janecek, *Zaum*, 89.

[26] Kruchenykh, quoted in Janecek, *Zaum*, 80. The "everything" that begins to slip is mystically defined as "the conventions of time, space, etc…"

[27] Janecek, *Zaum*, 78-80.

[28] Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," 294.

[29] James Currie, conversation with author, Buffalo, NY, March 22, 2012.

the immediacy and intensity of *The Rite of Spring* being the musical equivalent of an uninhibited Adamic language. But the goal of creating a direct, unhindered communication is perhaps more akin to Expressionism, whose practitioners sought to render the deepest subconscious realms of the psyche, using the most extreme means to convey primal emotional states. Rather than tearing down the past in order to make way for the future (à la the Italian Futurists), the zaumniks sought to tear down the present in order to confront the newness of the future in the manner in which the earliest humans interacted with their age, hence the emphasis on the return to the Adamic language, and on interacting with the world in the manner of humanity at its infancy.[30] Rousseau mythologized a proto-language that was poetic and musical, whose sounds would be closely united to the content they referenced:

> One would sing [this language] rather than speak it. Most of its root words would be imitative sounds, either of the accent of the passions, or of the effect of perceptible objects. Onomatopoeia would constantly make itself felt.[31]

[17] This is a fitting description of a zaum-ist Adamic language. In the case of calling the lily "euy," Kruchenykh's act of naming is an act of mimesis, a sound imitating a perceptible object. "Euy" is a miniature vocal melody, and melody, according to Rousseau "indicates the contours and figures"[32] of the passions that inspire it.

Form and Content

[18] Both zaum and Rousseau's proto-language, therefore, demonstrate a union between form and content. Content can determine form, as in the case of "euy," or content is predicated upon form, as in the quasi-mystical sense of new words creating new realities. For the zaumniks, the word was of primary importance ("the word is broader than thought"[33]), and Kruchenykh, in particular, seemed as concerned with freeing the word as he was with freeing the artist or language itself. Yet a potentially greater union between form and content was achieved by later sound poets who abandoned even the word as a unit, going back beyond the basic elements of language to the inherently physical foundations of speech itself.[34]

Crirhythmes and Megapnèumes

[19] The goal of Isidore Isou's Lettrist movement, a group of radical poets and other artists working in Paris just after the second World War, was to liberate the letter from the word.[35] The Lettrists sought to break the word down into its smallest constituent components letters and to build from these

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[30] Kruchenykh did declare, however, in standard Futurist lingo, "In our art we already have the first experiments of the language of the future." ("New Ways of the Word," quoted in Janecek, *Zaum*, 89).

[31] Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," 296.

[32] Ibid., 320.

[33] Kruchenykh, "New Ways of the Word," quoted in Janecek, *Zaum*, 89.

[34] Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 275.

[35] Ibid, 248.

particles a "new lexicon for vocal performance."[36] Deliberately controversial, Isou had bold claims about the revolutionary nature of this approach, despite the fact that very similar things had been done decades earlier in phonetic zaum and Dada poetry. In the early 1950s, the poet François Dufrêne left Isou's movement to pursue a genuinely radical approach that he dubbed "Ultra-Lettrism."

[20] The Ultra-Lettrists had no interest in rescuing or reclaiming letters, words, or even language. Instead, they bypassed the entire hierarchy for the pure physicality of the voice. Consisting of shrieks, howls, groans, and grunts, Dufrêne's "crirhythmes" were pieces of extreme somatic intensity, utilizing every available vocal or buccal sound.[37] The poet never used any fixed score or text, often improvising his works, which regularly involved some electro-acoustic component. In fact, the wide use of tape and electronic techniques in sound poetry begins with Dufrêne,[38] who would often superimpose these vocal experimentations on tape, creating a polyphonic chorus of cries and moans.

[21] Gil J. Wolman, a colleague of Dufrêne and also a Lettrist turned Ultra-Lettrist, had his own vocabulary of extreme bodily sounds. Christening his works "megapnèumes" ("super-inhalations"), Wolman explored the expressive potential of the human respiratory system, creating pieces that centered screams, moans, and grumbles on the rhythm of the diaphragm and the element of breath.[39] Like Dufrêne, Wolman sometimes manipulated these exaggerated respiratory exercises on tape, adding reverb and delay effects, thus expanding and extending his sonorities.

[22] The use of tape and the implementation of technology did not hinder the powerfully primal nature of the Ultra-Lettrist approach. Unlike the zaumniks, Dufrêne and Wolman wrote little in the way of manifestos or stark artistic declarations.[40] Whether or not it was the poets' intention to invoke the primordial sounds of pre-linguistic humanity, this was the overwhelming response of many who heard their work. As the British sound poet Bob Cobbing remarked,

> One thinks of primitive song on hearing François Dufrêne. His crirhythmes employ the utmost variety of utterances, extended cries, shrieks, ululations, purrs, yarrs, yaups and cluckings, the apparently uncontrollable controlled into a spontaneously shaped performance. [...He traveled] back where poetry and music began [...] back beyond the word, beyond the alphabet to direct vocal outpourings which completely unified form and content.[41]

[23] This return to the primitive, for Cobbing, represented "the growth of the body to its full physical powers again as part of the body, the body as language."[42] Music journalist Greil Marcus described

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[36] Julian Cowley, "The Limits of Language: Textual Apocalypse: Merz, Lettrism, Sound Poetry," in *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music*, ed. Rob Young (New York: Continuum, 2002), 199.

[37] Steve McCaffery, "Sound Poetry A Survey," in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, ed. Steve McCaffery and Barrie Philip Nichol (Toronto: Underwich Editions, 1978). http://www.ubu.com/papers/mccaffery.html (accessed June 18, 2012).

[38] Larry Wendt, "Sound Poetry: I. History of Electro-Acoustic Approaches II. Connections to Advanced Electronic Technologies," *Leonardo* 18, no. 1 (1985): 11 23.

[39] Marcus, *Lipstick Trace*, 277.

[40] At least that this writer has been able to find.

[41] Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer, *Concerning Concrete Poetry* (London: Writers Forum, 1978), quoted in Cowley, "The Limits of Language," 199.

[42] Bob Cobbing, "Some Statements on Sound Poetry," in *Sound Poetry*. www.ubu.com/papers/cobbing.html (accessed June 18, 2012).

Wolman's work as "a pre-phonetic explosion," suggesting that Wolman "has become a primeval Homo erectus on the verge of discovering speech but he remains unready to recognize it," and that "the possibility that the human species could have gone on without language is inescapable."[43] There were no invented words here, no attempts to approximate language in its early stages, but instead the concrete characteristics of what humanity's pre-linguistic state must have sounded like. If Kruchenykh was invoking the language of the first man naming things as he first encounters them, then the Ultra-Lettrists summoned the sound of humanity first encountering its own voice.

Screams of Joy and Anguish

[24] And yet in bypassing language, they still do not bypass Rousseau. Though Rousseau's ideal state is not pre-linguistic but proto-linguistic, the primitive utterances of Wolman and Dufrêne embody several characteristics of Rousseau's theoretical first languages, the most obvious of which is most likely the sound itself. For the most part, the Ultra-Lettrists' vocal projections are unarticulated   if one were to transcribe them into a written language, one would have to use a majority of vowels. This is exactly how Rousseau describes the sound of the earliest languages:

> Simple sounds issue naturally from the throat, the mouth is naturally more or less open. [...] In all languages the most lively exclamations are unarticulated; cries and groans are simple voices. [...] As natural voices are unarticulated, words would have few articulations; a few interposed consonants eliminating the hiatus between the vowels would suffice to make them flowing and easy to pronounce. In contrast, its sounds would be quite varied, and the diversity of accents would multiply these same voices.[44]

[25] Not only do crirhythmes and megapnèumes realize Rousseau's description in vocal articulation, but also in the broad diversity of sounds they employ. It is not just cries and groans but sniffling, lip-smacks, choking sounds, kissing noises, whistles, falsetto, and glissandi that populate the landscape of their pieces, indeed a "diversity of accents."

[26] Such a wide variety of sounds has a great deal of expressive potential, something of which Dufrêne was well aware. In discussing Wolman's work, he once remarked,

> It's the breath that creates the poem: rhythm and scream, the scream until now inexpressed in poetry; scream of joy, of love, of anguish, of horror, of hate, but scream.[45]

[27] (Again the connection to Expressionism is clear, with the scream being the quintessential Expressionistic gesture.)[46] The spectrum of emotion ranging from joy and love to anguish, horror and hate seems to be the embodiment of Rousseau's passions, which, remember, are manifested as "love,

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[43] Marcus, *Lipstick Trace*, 275 7.

[44] Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," 295 6.

[45] François Dufrêne quoted in liner notes to Gil J. Wolman, "La Mémoire" (Ou 33, 1967) UbuWeb website, Windows Audio File, www.ubu.com/sound/ wolman.html (accessed June 18, 2012).

[46] Currie, conversation with author.

hatred, pity and anger."[47] If Rousseau is correct, and it is "passion [that] makes all the vocal organs speak,"[48] one can only assume that the sound of such speech would be Wolman's screams of love or anguish.

[28] Rousseau claims that language not only proceeds from the passions, but that it expresses the passions in a most clear and understandable manner. Rousseauian communication is direct and uninhibited because of the aforementioned union between form and content. A spontaneous exclamation is easily understood, since it is simply the product of the emotion that triggered it. In the same way, there is something immediately affecting on a primal level about the Ultra-Lettrists' work. The howls and shrieks of a crirhythme can be deeply disconcerting, as we are evolutionarily designed to respond to the human voice, and to be sensitive to its subtleties. When Dufrêne screams, we feel threatened; when Wolman chokes, we feel anxious; when they exclaim in jubilance, as if the simple pleasure of playing with their voices provides the most satisfying of contentments, we share in their joy. It is not merely the sounds themselves that are causing these responses, but our own human empathy. As Rousseau says:

> The sounds of a melody do not act on us solely as sounds, but as signs of our affections, of our feelings; it is in this way that they excite in us the emotions they express and the image of which we recognize in them.[49]

Conclusion

[29] Whether in the intense vocal exclamations of Dufrêne and Wolman, or in Kruchenykh's meaning-indeterminate zaum, early twentieth-century sound poetry often displays a Rousseauian longing for a linguistic tabula rasa. While the ideas manifest themselves in strikingly different manners, the consistent philosophies of forgetting the present in favor of the past, of embracing spontaneity and rejecting reason, and of creating an expression of unified form and content, prevail in both zaum and Ultra-Lettrism. The twentieth century's early sound poets in concert with Rousseau in the late eighteenth century center their work around a deep desire for and embodiment of the earliest and most expressive of human language.

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[47] Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," 294.

[48] Ibid., 318.

[49] Ibid., 323.

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About the Author:

Ethan Hayden was born in Poughkeepsie, NY, but raised primarily in the North Texas area. In 2008, he graduated from the University of North Texas magna cum laude with B.M.s in Composition and Theory, and recently received his M.A. in composition from the University at Buffalo. His principal composition teachers include David Bithell, Andrew May, Joseph Klein, Jeffrey Stadelman and Cort Lippe. Still at UB, Ethan is currently a Ph.D. Candidate, in the process of completing his dissertation. Also active as an experimental vocalist, Ethan regular performs with Babel Vocal Ensemble and with Wooden Cities, a Buffalo-based new music/improvisation ensemble.