

Interactive Sonic Arts
Reading Response 1
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Having read Russolo several times at this point, and having just taken a sound studies course critiquing R. Murray Schafer, I found myself annoyed with a particular aspect of his manifesto - his conception of a preindustrial world as a silent, noiseless place. While he doesn't share Schafer's view of this as an idealized, pure, and aspirational point in time, it still rings false to me. In fact, Russolo states that noise was born "today", and then pages later goes on to cite the noises of thunder, wind, waterfall, and brook - all noises that surely must have existed prior to any sort of machinery. Of course, I also appreciate that Russolo and the Futurists find joy and life in noise, a stark contrast to Schafer, and that this appreciation for the wide ranging noises of the world potentially could not have come about without a relational shift that comes with being immersed in a mechanized world. But still - I'm bothered by this supposedly silent ancient world!

Additionally, as you put Cage and Russolo's noises in relation to each other, one thing I find interesting in their approaches are their relationship to control. It's interesting to contrast Cage's amplification and calling to attention of what already exists, as well as his aleatoric composition practices, to Russolo's desire to have complete control over noise. One is a giving up of control, a generative process also found in Cascone's glitch, and the other seeks to have "control of all the noises."

These two things - an imagined halcyon past and a desire for extreme control - are common rhetorical tools and aspects of fascist movements. Compound this with the Futurist connection to and support of Mussolini's Fascist Party, and I think my annoyance makes more sense. I don't mean to suggest that Russolo himself was a fascist - I don't know enough of his life to make that claim - or that his manifesto is inherently fascistic (or that it shouldn't be read or anything of that sort), but I do think it provides a potentially interesting and complicating context. There is undoubtedly an undercurrent of fascism, racism, etc. in certain parts of the noise and extreme music worlds - is it possible that there's a throughline for those kinds of thinking that extends back to one of the earliest noise practitioners?