

Sympathetic Resonance | Sarah Jones

Sympathetic strings are choirs of auxiliary strings built into certain instruments. They do not need to be played directly, instead responding “with a silvery halo” to the vibrations produced by playing the main strings. These harmonic relations, known as sympathetic resonance, grow stronger the more alike the vibratory motions of the strings are. Like breeds like. Vibrations moving through the aether, not randomly but harmonically, multiples of integers borne of one another exceeding their material beginnings.

Sympathetic vibrations hum at the intersection of any exploration into Futurism where art, science and spirituality frequently trade halos. Art. Science. The Occult. Closed silver circles that momentarily defy solidity and slip together into unbreakable chains like those impossibly interconnected magicians’ rings. Art. Science. The Occult - slippery fields of questionable discoveries, failed (?) experiments and incalculable risk. “After” Modernism, in the gloom of Einstein’s formidable shadow, ‘H’istory works at a new retroactive illusion - Newton stripped of alchemy in the name of physics, Pythagoras reduced to right angled triangles in the wake of the harmony of the spheres. Russolo, Futurist agitator, as spirit obsessed, regressive recluse.

But noise travels unexpectedly. Even where light no longer bleeds, or cannot be shone, the voices of the dead can be heard. The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, (LIGO) is an experiment - it is a fantastic axis, a most spectacular right-angle triangle - and it is listening to the collision of blackholes. Where we are unable to adjust our telescopic vision to the ultimate dark art; where we are blind, we can only listen. LIGO eavesdrops on the long dead, calling dark voices forth, LIGO hears blackholes collide, listens to the Earth’s oceans, a dog barking, a lawn mower on Saturday, the Brooker highway. The most mundane sounds are caught up in a séance of universal scale as the past is captured in the present.

La morte mi troverà vivo is the silver ringing of a decade’s research. Auxillary to the collective ecstasy of the howling Intonarumori that started what Ward has coined as a “sonic séance”, *La morte mi troverà vivo* is a silvery halo that spans a cylindrical plinth with a diameter of over two meters. The plinth is the only physical object in an otherwise empty gallery space and is an invitation to sit and to listen. Sit. Listen. What you can hear might be sympathetic resonance, collected likenesses from ten years of reading and recording. What you can hear might be the pushing of numbers into dimensionality to describe a universe, cut seven ways, by seven waves. It might be the voice of the dead, the harmony of spheres, the call of the universe. It might be the Brooker highway.

The Intonarumori is present. Sit inside its cavernous hollow, look through the silver-lined black hole as you would look out from the insides of the caves of Matera. *La morte mi*

troverà vivo invites you to understand the fullness of emptiness. The black hole holding the weight of the world, the Intonarumori hurling vibration, the universe bursting with harmony, the gallery pregnant with sympathetic resonance.

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Instrumental Logic and the Science of the Occult | Dr Danielle Kirby

Around the same time as the Italian futurists were doing their thing and Russolo's Art of Noise got written, Freud, Jung, and Reich were claiming the psyche from the domain of priests. Edison was done introducing the lightbulb and had turned his attention to spiritualist immersion, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were schisming all over their great synthesis. These various endeavours all shared a passionate investment in enlightenment subjects while sustaining the romantic dream of rich, thick worlds both intangible and significant. In terms of the modern west, it was a moment that balanced the confidence and the excitement of the new with the eternal seduction of the ineffable.

The instrumental logics at play when an atheist fucks around with the universe have a very particular flavour, and tend to find a comfortable home within the frame of rationality. In this context, the very act of inquiry becomes bounded and thus to a degree secure. You can't really get away from the fact that, if you seek to speak to the dead, there is an inherent risk that you might, in fact, manage to speak with the dead. But belief and fear can be bracketed precisely because one experiments. The allusion to scientific method protects the occultist from both the vastness of mystical realms and the likeliness of failure, while still holding open the possibility of success. The long dark past of humans not speaking with the dead loses its weight: conceivably, just possibly, maybe this time, someone will speak back.

If there's one thing that occultists tend to do well, it's to hover between essentialism and scepticism. For a bunch who tend to think they're unassailable in their psychological protections, they are strangely vulnerable to the seduction of the mystical. But occultism

seeks to be the practice, even the science, of the intangible. Protected from the sincere naivety that religionists are often accused of, they can yet still claim insight into the universe in a way rationalists will never be able to. There is a testable proposition, an underpinning logic of process and purpose that permits an experiment. And it is this thread of the logic itself that allows its pragmatic use for spiritual purpose, and separates the magician from the believer: no matter how rarefied the symbol is from its source of meaning, that connection creates a rope the spiritual explorer can use to pull themselves back to shore.

Take the numerology here – Why numerology? Well, it's partially functional: if you can't take your *intonarumori* with you to Italy, then what do you do? You translate: concept into symbol, symbol into numbers, and numbers can then inform whatever is needed. The encoded meaning is still meaning, and holds whatever valence was there still. But it's not just functional. Numerology is a thing. It has been a thing long before the broadsheets got a hold of astrology for Sunday morning fodder, and it'll remain a thing well after newspapers lose their market share. John Dee spent quality time in the 16th century pointing out that numbers are the building blocks of the universe, alongside his empire building hobbies. Of course, he had a fair chunk of cabbalist thought to lean on, which has got to be helpful. But using numbers to understand the universe has weight, it has meaning, it has tradition.

Russolo had a deeply occult bent, and the kinds of systems of sound he was playing around with were magical acts as much as experiments in aesthetics. Subtle bodies, multiple levels of existence, correspondences, and a drive towards universality were pretty commonly known, thanks to Blavatsky's Theosophy. Contemporary intelligentsia tends to assume that anything mystical or magical is at best naïve or worst insane, and so we cast that shadow backwards in time. But it wasn't like that. The futurists, indeed many in that era, accorded the occult sciences a similar stature to material studies. Weaving together maps of the universe and guidelines for interfacing better with it were part of the broader mission of the time, and Russolo's *Art of Noise* was a means to bridge the spiritworld: a conjuring in which noise was spiritualised, and thus the dead called.¹

Vibration, for so many occultists both then and now, is the whole of the thing. Sound and light are particular manifestations of universal energy, which is only ever really specific frequencies, that can both reflect concept and create stuff. Get it right, and lead becomes gold. Get it right, and a portal opens.

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La morte mi troverà vivo | Mat Ward

La morte mi troverà vivo translates into English as *In death you will find me alive*. It is a quote from Luigi Russolo, the Italian Futurist and pioneer of Noise Art.

¹ Chessa, L. 2012. *Luigi Russolo, Futurist: Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult* Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press. Pp 71.

Whilst Futurism has always been regarded as a brutish embodiment of Modernism's embrace of materialism, Russolo's underlying focus was always the spiritual. He saw, in the industrialised world of early 20th Century Europe, the possibility that technology could be a vehicle for humankind to transcend their earthly preoccupations and embrace the metaphysical.

In the years leading up to WW1 the Futurists were loudly proclaiming a revolution that dismissed all forms of acceptable culture in favour of a new approach to life - one that encompassed technology, dynamism and science. Russolo's practice shifted from painting to the exploration of modern noise. Fascinated by the sounds of industry and the rapid urbanisation of Milano he wrote his most famous Manifesto - *L'arte dei Rumori (The Art of Noise)*. The Manifesto is, on the surface, an aggressive denunciation of turn-of-the-century musical practices and claims a new musical aesthetic that truly reflects the modern age is desperately needed. Through an examination of music history he proposes that the evolution of music is directly related to the proliferation of technology and that the orchestra was a relic of the past which simply could not produce the sounds required for a truly contemporary music.

His solution was to built his own orchestra of machines called *Intonarumori* (noise intoners). These fearsome instruments were toured around Italy to the disdain and bemusement of the general public. Music halls broke out into fist fights between the players and the audience much to the delight of the Futurists who saw no issue with violence as part of their revolution.

Russolo, however, had more than destruction on his mind. He believed his new instruments were capable of creating an acoustic environment where both musicians and the audience could transcend reality and engage with the supernatural. Through the ritual of turning raw noise into intoned sound (via the *Intonarumori*) Russolo believed a trance like state could be evoked where communication with the spirit world could unfold.

La morte mi troverà vivo is the latest chapter in my near decade long research of Russolo, his music, writing and quest for a deeper spiritual connection between the world of the living and that which may lie beyond.

This fascination started in 2012 when commissioned to produce a performance celebrating the 100th anniversary of the publishing of *L'arte dei Rumori*. It was, fittingly, a noisy affair featuring 12 performers, 6 re-constructed *Intonarumori*, a percussion section made of sheet metal and power tools, scissor lifts and an audience armed with noise making devices. It was 'noise as revolution', 'noise as dissent' and 'noise as pleasure' - everything I thought (at the time) that Russolo was interested in. But something else happened over the five nights of performance: I have played hundreds of gigs in my life in all kinds of environments but had never experienced the sheer trance-like and other-worldly atmosphere these machines created. This was something different from the euphoria commonly associated with the extreme volume, camaraderie and intoxication of large scale musical events - it felt like the air inside me was being changed through noise. Aggressive as the sound was it created an inner peace that took me away from my immediate concrete reality into a space that was less defined but more elemental. The sound reminded me of ritual and ceremony and even the sacred - things I had never associated with Futurism or Russolo. This feeling of being transported by noise led me to question whether the written history of Futurism was missing a major part of its *raison d'être*.

My early research was a series of dead ends. Historians had reduced Russolo's biography to that of an artist who briefly caught the attention of the music/art world with his novel but ultimately one-dimensional instruments. He toured Europe to some acclaim before World War 1 but after the war his career was continually dogged by mishaps and poverty. In his later years he returned to Italy and went back to painting and wrote extensively about spirituality. Modernist critique has labelled this chapter of his life as regressive and never drawn a link between his work with noise and his later writings.

I continued to build and play *Intonarumori* and examine *L'arte dei Rumori* and Russolo's other writing. The influence of the occult loomed large in phrases such as 'noise has the power to bring us back to life' and 'every manifestation of life is accompanied by noise'. Finally after 2 years of obsessive research I found a breakthrough publication.

Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts and The Occult, written by Dr. Luciano Chessa, drew a direct link between Russolo's entire art practice and his interest in spirituality. Chessa explained in detail how Russolo proposed communicating with the dead through using his *Intonarumori* to 'spiritualize' noise which would open up portals to other dimensions of existence. These ideas paralleled my experiences with the *Intonarumori* and proposed a very different concept of Futurism from the modernist canon. The Futurists are shown to be obsessed with not just the latest scientific theories of the day (in particular Einstein's theoretical physics and Röntgen's invention of the X-ray machine) but equally so with esoteric practices such as clairvoyancy, sun staring, numerology, aura reading and alchemy. All things, they claimed, vibrate with energy which can be spiritualised to reveal the true essence of life. The overarching goal of Futurism was less about destroying culture than re-creating reality through spiritualisation.

Noise is often defined as intrusive and disruptive. *La morte mi troverà vivo* explores how it has cohesive properties - attributes that allow us to connect with the world, ourselves and (maybe) beyond. Noise is omnipresent, it is a continuous background and because of this it has an unregistered familiarity and an affect on our emotions - it can sooth, agitate, make us nostalgic or fearful. Russolo used noise as a raw material to conduct his occult experiments; much like an alchemist he would craft the raw noise of his *Intonarumori* through the various levers, cranks and motors that formed their 'engine' to produce what he called 'spiritualised' noise. This was a cyclic process between the musicians and the noise; with the spiritualised noise inspiring the musicians to continue until a trance like environment was created - a place where the spirits could enter the room and communicate with the players and vice versa. I envision Russolo's performances as sonic seances - events somewhere between that of a clairvoyant speaking in ancient tongues trying to conjure the dead and a mass ritual where crowds chant and perform ceremonies to awaken the spirits.

During a research trip to Italy in July 2019 I sat at Russolo's graveside with the aim of communicating with the spirit world using noise - I couldn't bring my *Intonarumori* to perform some kind of occult ritual in a public cemetery so I investigated ways a conversation could manifest using the esoteric practices that the Futurists explored. It started by playing Russolo a series of noise pieces I composed for him. These included works for *Intonarumori*, works composed using the urban noises recorded outside his Milano studio and from his childhood home in Portogruaro. I saw this as my 'calling' to the spirit of Russolo in much the same way as a medium may try to evoke spirits through chanting or song. I then recorded the noise surrounding his graveside.

For Russolo the key to spiritualising noise was mediation - the alchemical work of transforming the base into something higher. So as Russolo mediated noise with his *Intonarumori* I mediated the noise of the captured sound from his grave via a self-devised system of occult number theory. This methodology was developed from experimentation and research into esoteric practices that focused on decoding raw information to reveal deeper layers of meaning. In particular I drew upon Pythagorean philosophy as Pythagoras was both a source of inspiration and angst for the Futurists. As the founder of Western music theory and the first person to discover the mathematical relationship between the vibration of a noise and its pitch Pythagoras both connected the worlds of music and science and simultaneously created boundaries that restricted music's possibilities for centuries. For Pythagoras the language of the universe was numerical.

Pythagorean Numerology in the modern age is dismissed as nothing more than a pseudo-science but its influence on the mystic arts, the occult and even religious philosophy is without doubt. The assigning of numbers to letters is an occult method of harnessing and channelling the energy and vibrations of language into its essence, in turn revealing a distilled truth. There are clear parallels with alchemy here as well as the concept of spiritualisation via mediation.

The number theory provided me with a set of instructions to mediate the raw noise of the field recording resulting in what I describe as a poetic imagining of Russolo's response to my 'calling'. The act of removing myself from any decision making in the process and outcome of the piece altered my role from that of a creator to that of a vessel or medium.

The resulting piece is very different to any sound work I have previously produced that utilised durational, atmospheric and pitch manipulation. These mixing techniques usually result in a work containing a cold haunted atmosphere with elongated sounds, twisted harmonics and odd overtones. This piece has a more human quality to it, rather than electronic it sounds organic. It has harmony and a tonal centre. It felt spiritual and it felt like communication.

Over the next few weeks I continued to experiment with this new methodology. I visited ancient places like the Grotta dei Pipistrelli in Matera and sites of occult importance such as the Siena Cathedral where the mythical figure of Hermes Trismegistus is presented in mosaic form. I took field recordings and composed music as a 'calling' to the spirits and listened to their imagined responses as the numbers dictated. Over 90 minutes *La morte mi troverà vivo* moves back and forth between the call and the response. It includes the piece written for *Intonarumori* that I played at Russolo's grave. I view the work as both a threnody for Russolo and an exploration of his theories, passions and experiments.

La morte mi troverà vivo is aesthetically a long way from the brash and celebratory work of 2012 but has its roots in those initial performances where out of the exuberant cacophony materialised a hint of something more ethereal. Something that suggested there was more to noise than confrontation, and that maybe it is a rich language all of its own that accompanies and speaks to us, and allows us to listen to worlds we weren't aware existed.

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