Writing noise; noisy writing:
'The eyes no longer have to do their work'

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Abstract

The metaphors through which we model knowledge are not just rhetorical ornaments, but shaping principles which affect how we understand, value and deploy knowledge, and even why we conduct research. These metaphors affect how different topics of research are valorised, and how research is written up, stored and used. It is a cliché of cultural analysis and commentary that the age of print displaced the age of orality, privileging sight over sound. An epistemological model of the ear was replaced by that of the eye. The idea of the modern era as a regime of surveillance has enjoyed transdisciplinary authority through writers from Foucault to Mulvey.

I am arguing that scopism is to a great extent in the eye of the beholder. The experience, the creation, consumption, dissemination, and the record of culture, have been increasingly pervaded by the aural since the beginning of the 19th C, with a sudden, exponential after-burner jolt from the late 19th C. I am suggesting that ocularcentric thinking and discourse, which still enjoy academic and scholarly hegemony, might not be the most resonant way to explore cultural shifts which to a significant extent involved, and were experienced as, rising levels of noise. Perhaps it is useful to attempt to hear rather than read the record, and at the same time to attend to the way sound is represented.

Noise defines the sensory experience of urban modernity. And it also enters the written record of that experience more pervasively than our fixation on visual documentation might lead us to expect. As part of current research I am exploring the hypothesis that the literature of the nineteenth century discloses the city and its crowds as becoming less 'legible' and more 'audible'. Hearing is a key to understanding the modern city. The urbanisation of the modern world has also raised its volume and pluralised its voices, and at a rate far more rapid than any scribal hand could cope with.

Over the same period, the very act of recording experience and disseminating that record emerges from the silence of that secular scriptorium which was the schoolroom, the office, the study. Stenographic technology transformed the acoustics of scribal sites, its noise became the inescapable and constant reminder of the technologisation of knowledge. This related to gender politics: the scrivener was usually male, while the very word 'typist' meant female. Women with informational machine guns replaced the old male scribes with their silent weapons. Writing, that had been a silent regime that established ascendancy over sounded utterance, became a site of sound, and of emancipation.

This is a report on the current state of a project I have been working on for many years, and which has so far produced several 'work-in-progress' publications. There are also forthcoming pieces including most imminently a chapter in a Cambridge University Press publication, and there is a book in an advanced stage of discussion with another University Press in the UK.

This paper is a separate construction within the same framework of ideas as a paper which I delivered at a conference in Turku, Finland, in 2001, and which is now published as part of its proceedings (Johnson 2002). It will be necessary briefly to re-articulate that general framework here in order to contextualise the specific case studies sketched here.

In the most general terms, my interest is in the relationship between the way culture is theoretically modelled and how it is experienced; and the most succinct way that I can summarise that distinction is through the terms hermeneutics and phenomenology. What happens to our understanding of culture and cultural history if we try to inhabit it (imaginatively, in the case of the past), rather than try to read it as a text. We may begin to see the relevance of this question to this conference if I suggest that while 'reading' and 'text' are visual modellings of culture, sound provides a way of being immersed in a cultural field.

This enquiry has now developed into a hypothesis about a second Western renaissance, beginning around the late eighteenth century, but unrecognised as such because of its modality. In brief, I suggest that the 'first' Renaissance came to be conceived as primarily a visual phenomenon, and helped to consolidate the visual as the authoritative epistemological mode; the 'second' renaissance was acoustic, and as such, remains largely unregistered in an academic culture that remains ocularcentric. It sounds rather grandiose to hypothesise a historical moment in such terms. 'The Renaissance' remains a defining moment in the way we model Western history. How could there have been another that went unnoticed? Yet the term has an appropriateness, in that it means a rebirth of something.

By way of clarification, I therefore want to make some generalised comments about the first Renaissance, which of course itself exists in two forms: a set of historical and cultural events, and the later, retrospective discursive construction which became called The Renaissance.

The Renaissance has come to us as a largely visual phenomenon. Its basic expressive paradigm is visually and spatially organised knowledge, primarily embodied in visual perspective in painting but also in architecture, urban and landscape design, the natural sciences. Similarly the ascendancy of print and innovations in logic, such as Ramism, present knowledge as something arranged in visual space. I am suggesting a second renaissance, dominated by an acoustic paradigm - a revival of sound as the bearer of significant knowledge, a 'neo-orality'. It has two major stages:

1. The emergence throughout the eighteenth century (in England) of the industrialised masses, constituting a threat to the existing order, which models those masses as 'noise'. The masses are a site of babble/babel, that is, disruption chaos, disorder, as opposed to a superior order embodied in print. The objective of the status quo is literally to silence the emergent order. It does so symbolically, by representing them as silent, or representing their 'voice' as discordant and meaningless noise. And it does so literally, as for example in the regimes of compulsory silence imposed upon 19th century factory workers. The urban industrial masses may be seen, but not heard.

2. The second phase is the development of sound technology from around 1877. This marks a return of sound to the information economy. It gives technological means to mass utterance. In the form of recording, and later radio and the microphone, it enables the voices of the masses, and the voices to the masses (such as Hitler's), to be actualised. This technology continues, even to the present, to be demonised or trivialised as in some way a vulgar, disruptive force in society. It carries less gravitas than print.

The 'second renaissance' is thus as much based on a new social formation (class) and material culture (but then aestheticised) as the First Renaissance. For purposes of rapid contextualisation, the difference between the two may be described as: ocularcentric (the First Renaissance) and acoustic (the second renaissance). Of course, matters are not that simple. Under an ocular regime, people still listen and make sounds, and under an acoustic one they still look and display. It is a matter of relative emphases in both social practice, but more, in the level of authority accorded each modality in discourses about social practice and its protocols.

The *schema* is further complicated by a point I made earlier: the difference between the First Renaissance as a set of historical events, and as a retrospective construction, which I will call the discourse of the Renaissance. Like all historiography, the latter will foreground events in a way that consolidates the power of those who have benefited by them (history is written by the victors). This is not to say that the 'discourse of the Renaissance' is a total strategic fiction. The 'discourse of the Renaissance' which emphasises the scopic character of the Renaissance, is broadly confirmed by surviving evidence. Such developments as the emergence of visual perspective and its actualisation in painting and architecture, and the spread of print, are as incontrovertible as any historical events can be. Furthermore, the most copious evidence of what went on in an era predating sound technology will inevitably be visual. It is something of a necessity, rather than exclusively a tactical choice, that the Renaissance was retrospectively 'seen' rather than 'heard'.

But I suggest that the later 'discourse of the Renaissance' increased the emphasis on the visual in a number of ways. Again, I can only sketch outlines here, but think of the privileging of visual forms in our conception of Art itself. Notwithstanding specialised scholarship, the Renaissance 'press kit' is dominated by the visual arts. We think of the Renaissance, and the names that spring out are primarily known as conspicuously visual artificers such as painters and sculptors - Michelangelo, Tiepolo, Da Vinci. Correspondingly there is literally an overlooking of the role of the acoustic in even the visual record of events. There is relatively little sense of the acoustics of Renaissance architecture, or the sonic dimensions of what has become the 'literary' record. Drama, poetry, prose, were all much more acoustically embodied and debated than we now recognise.

The example of *Hamlet* is instructive here, and I have written elsewhere at length about the way in which the play is transformed if we engage with it as an acoustic phenomenon rather than as the printed text which its status as 'literature' has primarily made it. In summary: if we think of the competing roles of sound and sight in Elizabethan drama, and of *Hamlet* in particular, we discover instructive tensions that help to answer that central question that could only puzzle a scopic culture: Why does he procrastinate? The short answer, if such a thing is possible, is because he is caught in a transitional space between two epistemologies, the visual and the aural. This key moment in the transition from orality to literacy presents a dilemma that his audience would have understood. It is notable, for example, that while a number of people see the Ghost which triggers the action, it is arguable that only Hamlet hears what it has to say, and must therefore ask himself what is he to believe? Is the basis of action, is knowledge, embedded in what is heard or in what is seen?

But I want to move on to the next question that my schematic model raises. That is, why does the 'discourse of the Renaissance' (which significantly postdates the events themselves), exaggerate the visual and neglect the acoustic in its subject? I repeat that the ascendancy of the visual is in part a 'fact' of the Renaissance. But its later exaggeration is perhaps the outcome of two dynamics. First, it is the outcome of itself. That is, the ascendant visual epistemology then becomes the platform from which the past is viewed. That in turn will tend to foreground the visual orientation of the past, like a feedback loop.

There is a further hypothesis here, however. The scopic regime wishes to reinforce itself against an emergent new order which threatens that regime. That new order is embodied in industrialised modernity and its masses, whose threatening power is expressed in actuality and metaphorically as noise. The illiterate lower orders chatter, mutter, murmur. The mob produces babble, din, cacophony. As noise overwhelms urban industrialised society, the power blocs become increasingly fixated on the instrument of their own epistemic authority - the visual, and print in particular - and increasingly suspicious or dismissive of a culture of noise.

Thus far, contextualisation. Now to detail.

The metaphors through which we model knowledge are not just rhetorical ornaments, but shaping principles which affect how we understand, value and deploy knowledge, and even why we conduct research. These metaphors affect how different topics of research are valorised, and how research is written up, stored and used. It is now something of a commonplace that the dominant way

of modelling post-Renaissance epistemology and culture was scopic.

Francis Bacon was a leader in what we would now call communication theory and the debates about epistemology. From his work in the early seventeenth century he became a pivotal figure in the emerging scientific revolution. He began the Preface to *The Great Instauration*: by declaring that

> I ... dwelling purely and constantly among the facts of nature, withdraw my intellect from them no further than may suffice to let the images and rays of natural objects meet in a point, as they do in the sense of vision.

(Bacon 1620: 13).

In the late twentieth century Fredric Jameson began *The Political Unconscious*:

> This book will argue the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts. It conceives of the political perspective as ... the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.

(Jameson 1981: 17).

Both writers are working from an episteme in crisis, in liminal intellectual environments. Bacon is pushing through the envelope of deductive scholasticism, while Jameson is part of a larger interrogation of modernism. Each is immersed in his own version of a revolution in communications technology which is associated with debate about the nature of language and the politics of culture. Yet each is also within the space he questions, linked by a historical logic which runs from the onset of the modern era to its problematisation: ocularcentrism. An over-arching tradition linking the Renaissance and the postmodern is disclosed in this instance in the unquestioned reliance on visual metaphors as a way of conceptualising knowledge: images, rays, vision, perspectives, horizons.

This is an epistemology grounded in secular versions of silent monastic detachment. It is 'clerical' in several senses: sustained by the secularisation and spread of literacy, and by the metaphor from ecclesiastical learning of the scholar as 'visionary'. Bacon and Jameson instinctively draw on the same visual models for intellectual activity, a mode which survives the historical ruptures separating a founder of empirical science from one of the eminent commentators on postmodernism.

Visuality pervades accounts of this epoch. The rise of 'perspective' in draftsmanship and painting is the construction of the world not as we know it to be, but as we see it. Attitudes to the body shift to a visual orientation, its dismemberment for purposes of 'inspection' becoming institutionalised with the rise of 'anatomies' from the Renaissance. Of course, the body has always been ritually dismembered, but prior to

that, primarily for religious or legal reasons of punishment and the symbolic display of the rule of god and law. The anatomy theatre - note the word 'theatre' - locates the body as a secular object that can only be understood through the 'knowing' eye, which, in a scientific spirit, displaces all other moral and ethical responsibilities.

This 'visualisation' of knowledge and its link with power, has remained deeply embedded in a range of cultural discourses from Michel Foucault on mechanisms of punishment and control, to Laura Mulvey on on film.I have taken this up elsewhere (Johnson 2002).

What is less frequently noted, however, is that Bacon and his contemporaries also gave great attention to aural epistemology, which he recognised as less mediated cognitively. Among those who have drawn attention to this is Bruce Smith, who cites the following passage from Bacon's Sylva Sylvarum of 1626:

> The Cause is, for that the Objects of the Eare, do affect the Spirits (immediately) most with Pleasure and Offence. We see, there is no Colour that affecteth the Eye much with Displeasure: There be Sights, that are Horrible, because they excite the Memory of Things that are Odious, or Fearfull; But the same Things Painted doe little affect, by a Participation, or Impulsion of the Body, of the Object. So is Sound alone, that doth immediately, and incorporeally, affect most.

(cited Smith 1999: 105)

Bacon channelled this acoustic interest into a number of other conduits to culture, including speech protocols. While, as I have suggested, he centralised vision in his modelling of the pursuit of scientific knowledge, he placed sound and speech in positions of primacy in the sensorium for social intercourse, beginning his essay "Of Negotiating":

> It is generally better to deal by speech than by letter ... Letters are good when a man would draw an answer by letter back again, or when it may serve for a man's justification afterwards to produce his own letter ... To deal in person is good.

(Bacon 1985: 203)

This 'division of responsibility' of the visual and the aural in itself is an instructive disclosure of the competing claims of two ways of knowing during this period. In the essay "Of Discourse" Bacon indicated that in dealing 'by speech', he meant a civilised transaction as sensitively wrought as a courtly dance:

> The honourablest part of talk is to give the occasion, and again to moderate and pass to someone else, for then a man leads the dance. It is good, in discourse and speech of conversation, to vary and intermingle speech of the present occasion with arguments, tales with

reasons, asking of questions with telling of opinions, and jest with earnest.

> ...

> Let him be sure to leave other men their turns to speak. Nay, if there be any that would reign and take up all the time, let him find means to take them off and to bring others on, as musicians use to do with those that dance too long galliards.

> ...

> Discretion of speech is more than eloquence, and to speak agreeably to him with whom we deal is more than to speak in good words and good order. A good continued speech, without a good speech of interlocution, shows slowness; and a good reply or second speech, without a good settled speech, showeth shallowness and weakness.

(Bacon 1985: 203).

These citations from Bacon raise several points.

First, he is writing in a more 'oratorical' era. As such scholars as Walter Ong have argued, the transition from orality to textuality was at a more even balance than would be the case over subsequent centuries (Ong 1982: 117-138). Elocution and other forms of 'vocal staging', were matters of great importance in Elizabethan conduct books, education, theatre (think of the players' scene in Hamlet). Rhetoric was still central in the school curriculum, although the changing balance between speech and print was reflected in the atrophying of the three oratorical components of the discipline: memory, delivery and gesture, as reflected in the work of Melanchthon and his English followers like Dudley Fenner.

Second, Bacon is distinguishing two levels of discourse. The visual processing of information is the model for scientific knowledge; the aural mode is the basis for everyday social intercourse. The first would attain authority in a society increasingly equating significant knowledge with scientific methodologies. That authority continues to prevail in the current scopic paradigm in cultural studies. At the same time the second, what might be called the oral modality, obviously survives in an unbroken tradition, but occluded in an era which tended to equate 'civilisation' with scientific, rather than rather than with 'civil' behaviour. Because the visual regime situates itself at a cultural apex, it creates a self-perpetuating loop. Because it is the most authoritative mode of knowing, it becomes the mode of studying the 'knowing': that is, the model for the analysis of culture.

The critique of scopism is well developed, but largely locked within its ideology. Academic scholarship, nurtured in a print-centred tradition, continues subliminally to privilege visual information, and 'reads' even non-visual phenomena as 'texts', using visual tropes. There is relatively little discussion of the role of sound as an experienced component of culture and the way it is authoritatively represented. Sound, as the bearer of significant meaning, is thus among the neglected portals of knowledge. In Australia, for example, there is no enforced compulsory deposit system for sound recordings as there is for print. At a conference in England in 2001, Andy Linehan from the British Library National Sound Archive (BLNSA) informed me that this is also the case in Britain. He also reported that music researchers using the BLNSA will spend hours scanning *New Musical Express* for interviews with musicians, yet completely overlook sound broadcast holdings. 'The printed word,' he said, 'still seems to have a hold on most researchers'. Cultural gestures have to establish their aesthetic value and significance at the court of the mind and the eye. That which is not visual, and which is also intensely corporeal, has relatively little space in aesthetic discourse, even while it has an intense presence in social practice, as what we smell, touch, taste and hear. Academic and other authorised discourses about our culture (eg, arts policy and funding) continue to characterise it as scopic.[i]

My argument is that scopism is largely in the eye of the beholder. The experience, the creation, consumption, dissemination, and the record of culture, have been increasingly pervaded by the aural since the late eighteenth century, with a sudden, exponential after-burner jolt from the late nineteenth century. That jolt can be dated from the emergence of acoustic information technologies, as in the development of the sound recording in the 1870s. But the technology of the pre-electric sound recording had been available since well before then. Its development was therefore not delayed for technological reasons, but because the social demand had not reached critical mass. The changes which brought it into being included the rise of industrialised urban societies and their information economies, as well as the physical conditions which raised the consciousness of sound.

As J. Murray Schafer's benchmark study, *The Tuning of the World* indicated, the texture of experience has significantly altered with the rise of the industrial city, producing a denser semiotic and sensory environment, most notably in the auditory field. Indeed, in 1998, the World Health Organisation regarded noise as one of only two exponentially increasing environmental threats (the other is allergies), for which no solution seems possible. At the end of the twentieth century, a Report by the Commission of the European Communities estimated the current annual cost of damage caused by environmental noise in the European Union at between EUR 13 billion and 38 billion (MacNevin 2000: 4). However, in a contest between an authoritative academic and institutionalised model of culture, and everyday cultural experience, the former will show a quite perverse and Quixotic obduracy. We continue to be informed by mainstream cultural theorists that we live in a scopic society, even while our social experience has become characterised by a 'renaissance' of the aural/oral.

Noise defines the sensory experience of urban modernity. And it also enters the 'silent' written record of that experience more pervasively than our fixation on visual documentation might lead us to expect. As part of current research I am exploring the hypothesis that the literature of the nineteenth century discloses the city and its crowds as becoming less 'legible' and more 'audible'. Hearing is a key to understanding the modern city. The urbanisation of the modern world has also raised its volume and pluralised its voices, and at a rate far more rapid than any scribal hand could cope with. Thus, the almost simultaneous invention of both the typewriter and the sound recording, for both of which the technological means had long existed; it is equally relevant to the bureaucratic information explosion that the original function of the sound recording was, like the typewriter, stenographic. I will return to this as part of an attempt to show how sound has returned not only to culture, but even to the apparent silences of writing and the written text.

I have sounded out some of these ideas in some detail in relation to a writer who has been given prominence in the standard histories of the literary representation of the changing role of the city in the modern era. William Wordsworth is central to the historiography of English Romanticism, and the stereotypical nature poet. I have outlined the basis of an argument that his work gives us a prefiguration of that moral panic at the collapse of received and authorised order which we think of as the conservative response to twentieth century mass culture. And, as with that response, it can be largely configured as a confrontation between a visual and an acoustic order. The urban masses do not invade the public domain with music or meaningful information; they make noise. Overwhelmed by the rise of urban modernity, Wordsworth 'de-aestheticises' its sounds; or perhaps we could say he 'anaesthetises' it as art. The demotic music of the city becomes noise, and Wordsworth finds his 'music' in the sounds of nature: the noise of the pre-urban rural landscape becomes music. As the great unwashed project their voices and sounds into the public space they become mere noise. Wordsworth has resituated urban music as pandemonium, a perversion of nature and a violation

of art. Overwhelmed by the acoustic flood of the masses, he retires to a 'natural' order, which of course is also assigned a certain social order in which the great artist and thinker accords his own sensibilities considerable privilege. And it is a silent order, an escape from a society flooded with the noise of urbanisation and the industrial revolution.[ii]

I want to finish by suggesting how the technology of this convergence restores the link between sound and information, its storage and decryption. The obvious examples are sound recordings and radio waves, but I want to take a piece of information technology less obviously related to noise: the typewriter. One of my most important points of departure for this discussion is the work of German writer Friedrich Kittler, whose work is only recently coming into English translation.[iii] He is primarily interested in the increase in the rate of information processing. I am leading his arguments in a slightly different direction, however, towards the proposition that, following a period during which the acquisition and transmission of knowledge had been conducted under a regime of silence, sound and information have become reunited. Furthermore, this has been accompanied by major shifts in the politics of culture - the relations of cultural power.

Kittler identifies the earliest patent for a version of a typewriter in 1714, followed by numerous experiments over the next century and a half. It was originally conceived as an aid for the blind, but this minority could not build the 'critical mass' for it to be economically feasible. That critical mass was provided by a demographically and technologically driven information explosion. The growth in urban commerce and bureaucracy proliferated information, and technology increased the rate of its circulation. The invention of Morse code in 1840 (incidentally, in the Ramistic tradition of what became the binary coding of information), transmitted information not only over large distances, but at unprecedented speed. No scribal hand could keep up with such developments in information technology, but a typewriter could - in 1985 a typing speed of 773 letters/minute was recorded over a period of 30 minutes. Like so many, if not all, revolutions in such technology, it was at first regarded by the guardians of cultural value with some suspicion. The first literary MS submitted as typescript was *Tom Sawyer*, accompanied by a letter from Mark Twain asking that this fact not be disclosed.

Kittler discusses some of these responses, noting for example that in *Parmenides* Heidegger talks about the dictaphone and the typewriter. This is a telling symmetry: the technologised voice transcribed through the technologised hand. Most of what little discussion has been conducted on the cultural significance of the typewriter however has been on the gender re-orientation of the information processing labour force. In the late nineteenth century, the word 'typewriter' denoted not only the machine, but also a female typist. Kittler cites census statistics that indicate an extraordinary gender shift in stenography. In 1870, only 4.5% of stenographers and typists in the US were women. By 1930, the figure was 95.6%

Prior to the invention of the typewriter, in Europe, women would be taught to read, but for the most part, they could only read what men had written down. In general, women were not professionally required to write and the teaching of writing to women was erratic. Accordingly their handwriting was notoriously uneven, ungrammatical and illegible. At the same time, there was an enormous pool of unemployed women - that is, women excluded from the economy, and in particular the information economy. As Kittler argues, the typewriter transformed this situation.

My own interest here takes these data into my research into the relationship between the aural and textual regimes. Kittler reports that in 1882 Nietzsche bought his first typewriter, for the reason it was originally conceived: he was nearly blind. After a week he declared, 'The eyes no longer have to do their work'. In fact because of the physical design of these early typewriters, it was not until Underwood's design in 1892, that the typist could see the script appearing on the paper. That is, the typewriter immediately destabilised the dominant position of the visual in a print culture.

I am interested in a complementary aspect of this technology that has received no explicit attention: the fact that the typewriter made noise. I mentioned the stenographic functions of the sound recording and the typewriter. They were intended to replace the (usually male) scrivener, the scribe, the secretary. Both technologies enter society through a masculine space, but which is also one of relative silence, the modern equivalent of the scriptorium where 'silence is golden'. A useful study in connection with this, and as a companion piece to the Cocteau play mentioned below, is a short story by Herman Melville, called "Bartleby, the Scrivener". That detailed comparative study is for another place, but the direction it will take can be briefly signalled. Bartleby is a scrivener who comes to work for a law firm. A significant feature of the workspace is its silence. All that can be heard normally is the scrape of pen on paper. The most valued employee, around sixty years old, has one flaw. His work in the mornings is exemplary, but it is hinted that he tipples at lunch. It is not this in itself that is held against him, however, but the change it produces in his workplace conduct. The afternoon brought with it occasional blots on the page,

... but some days he went further and was rather noisy. ... He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up, and leaned over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner ... (Melville 1987: 15).

There is much in this tale to flesh out the arguments here, particularly Bartleby's unexplained decision not to carry out certain tasks, because he 'prefers not to' - the chief puzzle of the narrative. The point here, however, is the regime of silence that accompanies the processing of knowledge and information.

The typewriter brought with it not only women, but noise. It transformed the gendering of information storage and confidentiality - the 'secret-ary'. Women use modern technology as a weapon to invade places of 'men's secret business'. This has been documented. What has not been noted is that the weapon is acoustic: the noise of that technology. The image of a 'weapon' may seem fanciful, and certainly embodies a hypothesis to be investigated. So finally, consider the possibilities of a couple of case studies, also flagged by Kittler in a slightly different connection.

Jean Cocteau wrote a play in 1941, called *The Typewriter*. It is about a detective trying to track down a woman who has been terrorising the community with anonymous typewritten letters, signed 'the typewriter'. He is fascinated by the fact that whenever the letter 'm' appears, it is a capital; unaware that it is a woman, he asks, 'Can't you picture him, typing away and firing off these capital "m's" like a Maniac at a Machine-gun".[iv] Finally the perpetrator confesses:

But I writhed in malice against this whole town with its fake piety – its bogus respectability and its false charity. And I ran my head blindly against the whole egoistical, avaricious, invincible bourgeois pack of them. … So I chose the filthiest, most despicable of human weapons to beat them with – a typewriter.
(Cocteau 1947: 33)

In light of the comments I made earlier about the assault on the established order by the acoustic renaissance, it is significant that her target is bourgeois society. I wish to pursue another point here, however. Kittler makes the link between the typewriter and machine gun a matter of speed. I would add technological noise - the rapid, intermittent stacatto which they share, and which infiltrates the rhythm of modern literature. The typewriter transformed the acoustics of scribal sites, its noise became the inescapable and constant reminder of the technologisation of knowledge. Women with informational machine guns replaced the old male scribes with their silent weapons. The sonic connection between military and keyboard technology and its use against the social order is also made by other writers, such as thriller writer Jeffrey Deaver, in *The Blue Nowhere*. A nerdish hacker, Jamie Turner, is working at his keyboard: "Like muted machine-gun fire, the sound of his keying filled the small room" (Deaver 2001: 35). Writing had been a silent regime that established ascendancy over sounded utterance. The typewriter and keyboard restored sound to letters - and a technological sound at that. It is notable how many descriptions of modern offices in literature and film up to the 1980s, foreground typewriter noise as the primary metonym of the work it produced. I add a point made in conversation with me by David Horn of the Institute of Popular Music in Liverpool in this connection: that a cliché formulation of typewriter noise is also a cliché of inconsequential women's conversation: chatter.

I conclude this overview with a suggestive anecdote. I proposed a relationship between the noise of the writing machine and the manner of poetry it produces. I have made the point in the past that one of the influences on the disrupted rhythms of modernist poetry was the sound of technology. Australian poetry written at the outset of the first world war still has the ballad rhythm of the horse. By war's end, the metre and rhythm resembled the disrupted staccato of the machine gun. But we can go back to the nineteenth century to find this convergence of technologised sound and the literary process:

Again, Kittler retrieves the following information in his overview of the history of the typewriter. He cites Nietzsche's words, 'Our writing tools are also working our thoughts', which provide a context for an anecdote regarding one of the great exponents of the nineteenth century novel. Henry James was also a convert to the typewriter in both its senses, since apart from buying a Remington, he hired Theodora Bosanquet to do the typing for him. In her account of Henry James at work (1924), she recalled that at one point the usual Remington was temporarily replaced by an Oliver while under repair for two weeks. The Oliver has a different acoustic profile, a deader and quieter machine. During this time he dictated to it "with evident discomfort, and he found it almost impossibly disconcerting to speak to something that made no responsive sound at all" (Kittler 1999: 216)..

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[i] See further Johnson 2002, 706-708.

[ii] See further Johnson 2002, 710-711.

[iii] I wish to give particular emphasise my indebtedness to Kittler's work for the following factual data on the cultural impact of the typewriter; see Kittler 1999: 183-263.

[iv] Kittler's quotations diverge in detail from mine, as he is quoting from a different text. Mine are from Jean Cocteau *The Typewriter: A Play in Three Acts*. Trans. Ronald Duncan (Denis Dobson, London, 1947). This quotation from Cocteau 1947: 33.