

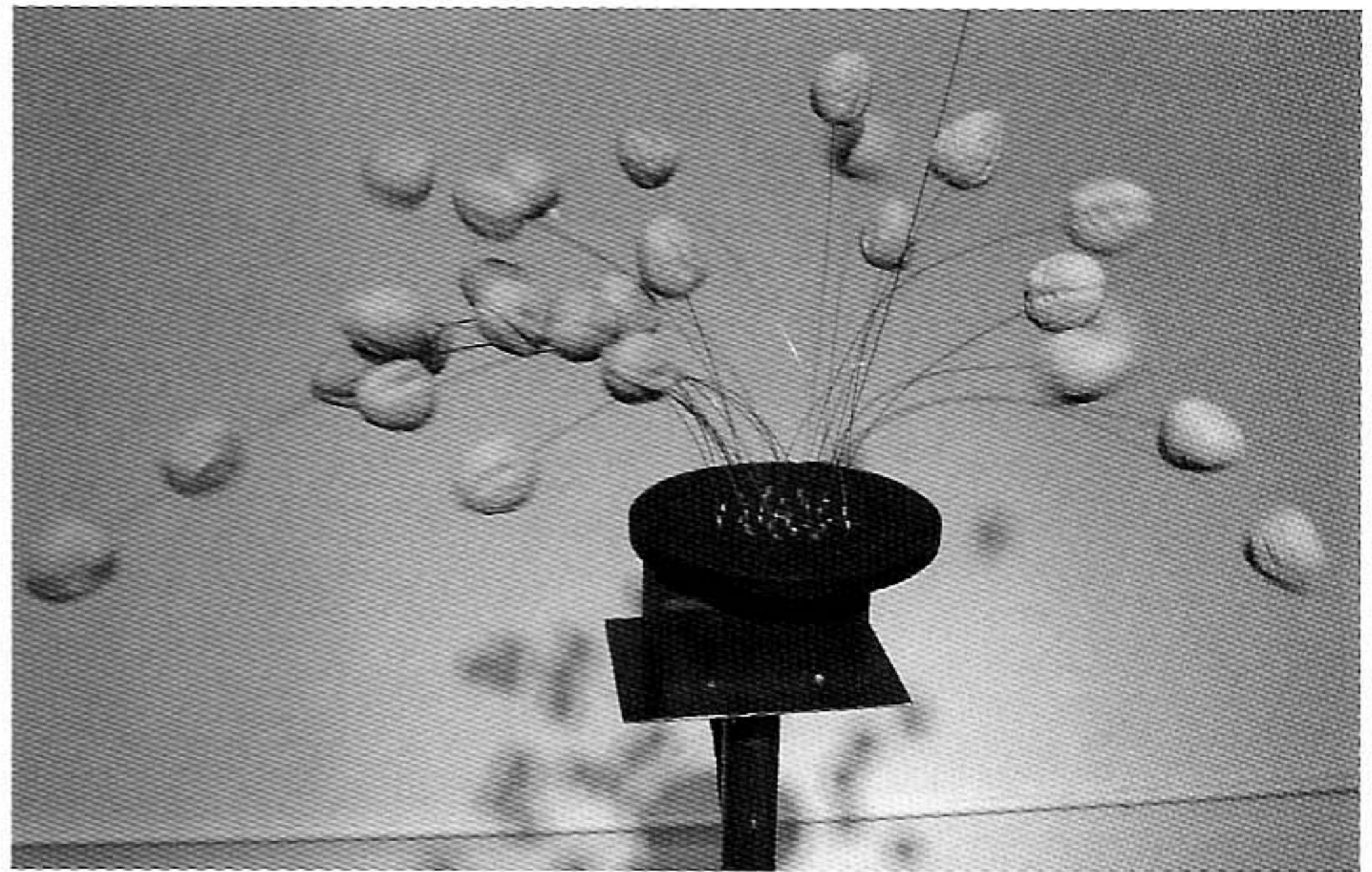
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

By Phillip Auslander

L'OBJET SONORE (*Eyedrum Art and Music Gallery, January 18—February 21, 2003*) is cacophonous: typewriters clack, walnuts knock into each other, guitar strings chime, water drips, metal clangs. These noisy objects engage and address us as makers of sound and listeners, not just as viewers. John Mallia's installation *Transcriptions* includes several typewriters on which participants may write, record typing sounds, and sign a guestbook with an amplified pencil. By amplifying the sound produced by old writing technologies, Mallia points out that the process of writing is as much auditory as it is visual—while we may think of the product of writing as visual symbols on a page, the process of creating those symbols has a soundtrack.

Some works address in less sanguine terms our dual status as those who both produce noise and are subjected to it. Interacting with Will Eccleston's wall installation *Green*, you can play an electric guitar while watching yourself on video. The piece certainly evokes the conjunction of music and television in our media culture, but the green-tinted street lamp over your head and the green cast of the cathode tubes on which you see your own image suggest surveillance more than celebrity. The beaten-up guitar is suspended in an uncomfortable position in front of a windowpane of filthy, broken glass, with an amplifier's electronic guts visible behind it. Kevin Jacques' *Co Co: Cube of Constant Observation* also operates at the intersection of sound and surveillance. One at a time, participants may insert their heads into a cube of soundproof foam within which one can hear sounds that are transmitted to the protected, private space of the cube. Whereas Eccleston's installation evokes social surveillance of illicit sound production, Jacques' sculpture uses sound to provide a haven from surveillance.

While the polished surfaces and indicator lights of high tech are rarely to be seen in the exhibition, bricolage and traditional craftsmanship are everywhere in evidence. Well-made wooden cases contain Chantelle Minarcine's untitled Rube Goldberg contraptions



Catherine Bechard and Sabin Hudon, *Undertones* series: 'Nuts,' 2001, padouk, maple, nuts, steel, brass, cogwheels, electronic circuit, moteur pas, piezo, motion detector, amplifier, speaker, microphone, steel base, 2 feet by 9 inches by 9 inches (courtesy Adam Overton).

that emit the amplified noise of tormented springs. Xan Deeb's equally elaborate *Hydration Calculator* is a three-dimensional wall collage of found objects whose scientific-sounding title belies its presence as a wild and messy thing from which red water surges uncontrollably into a collector on the floor. *Discombobulator II*, Charlie Smith's large, pleasingly rough-hewn metal sculpture, which invites the spectator to make loud noises by manipulating it, looks as if it could have been fabricated at Vulcan's forge.

The way we often fetishize natural sound (as when we purchase nature recordings) is humorously represented in Catherine Bechard and Sabin Hudon's *Undertones: Canned Wind*, a sculpture that produces a faint, wind-like sound in a tin can by means of an elaborate and distinctly home-made looking device somewhat reminiscent of the inner works of a music box, a mechanical version of the seashell in which one can hear waves. Marshall Avett's *Tidal Pool*, a sculptural installation of sea creatures fashioned out of vinyl records resting on a pool of CDs, plays means of reproducing sound against the language of visual reproduction in the representation of a specific natural site.

Whereas Bechard/Hudon and Avett investigate the production and reproduction of natural sound, several artists enable normally silent natural objects and processes to produce sound autonomously. In Xavier Charles' *Vibrating Surfaces*, natural and found objects dance to low frequency tones on the surface of exposed audio speakers rein-

forced with tape. Seashells, pebbles, and leaves do not make sound in their usual natural contexts; but propelled across surfaces that are sound systems and dance floors in one, they become noisy celebrants. Walnuts become rowdy neighbors jostling one another to produce percussive effects in Bechard and Hudon's *Nuts*, a sculpture in which walnuts at the ends of thin metal feelers mounted on a jerry-rigged microphone stand, sway and chatter in response to the viewer's presence. Douglas Repetto's electronic installation *Crash and Bloom* simulates an invisible and silent biological cycle in which populations develop, become too prosperous for their environment, and crash. Repetto makes an invisible and silent process perceivable through a network of feedback triggering nodes that maps the process in light and sound. While conceptually satisfying, the piece is visually and sonically somewhat bland, especially considering the high drama of the natural process it recreates.

Repetto's is the only piece in the exhibition that produces the blips and beeps associated with high tech; the rest derive their sounds from low, sometimes positively obsolete, technologies. In an ambivalent gesture toward contemporary technology, the CD players that actually produce the sounds for some of the pieces are hidden. The exhibition is thus fundamentally nostalgic: it is a portal through which the analog soundscape of the industrial world is allowed to seep back into the digital soundscape of the post-industrial world.