

The

OPEN SPACE

magazine

issue 1

spring 1999

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The

OPEN SPACE

magazine

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The OPEN SPACE magazine is a new periodical for people who need to explore or expand the limits of their expressive worlds, to extend or dissolve the boundaries among their expressive-language practices, to experiment with the forms or subjects of thinking or making or performing in the context of creative phenomena. We want to create a hospitable space for texts which, in one way or another, might feel somewhat marginal or invasive — or too "under construction" — for other, kindred magazines. The people we envisage as populating our contributing/editing/reading community are composers (in whatever medium), performers, historians, ethnologists, theorists, critics, philosophers, scholars and seekers of any kind who feel drawn to participate in this venture. We are hoping to get people to send us work reaching into such places as (a by no means exclusive list):

1. Creative responses to creative phenomena.
 2. Experiments with modes, issues, configurations of discourse and composition.
 3. Critical examinations of contemporary predicaments, problematics, presumptions, prescriptions, norms, phenomena, ...
 4. Visions/proposals
 5. Compositions and scores for composition or performance.
 6. Stories or studies in the domains of history, theory, ethnography, or other research, scholarship or experiential reportage.
 7. Reasoned advocacies, relevant autobiographies.
 8. Witness and communications from people who work as:
 - sound makers and sonic explorers: scouting the frontiers of organized sound, interested in psychoacoustic causes and effects/affects, working to escape the categorical restrictions of what cultural limitations have described as music or other art, documenting all of the above as doers and/or observers.
 - image makers, space makers and moving image designers: having a particular awareness of the optical space, finding or making spaces of significance, documenting the making of spaces with images (including virtual spaces and virtual images that inhabit non-virtual spaces).
 - event makers and event documentors: moving in and past the classic model of a "happening" into the nether regions of our cultural, pan-cultural, and ethnographic experiences.
 - thinkers and writers: wanting to explore and share ideas about these matters or anything else, beyond the frontiers of what has been accomodated elsewhere.
- We hope you will want to join this exchange.

— Benjamin Boretz and Mary Lee Roberts, Editors

OPEN SPACE also invites interested colleagues to work collaboratively to create and sustain an ongoing web-based publication/forum associated with The OPEN SPACE magazine. The online site is a context for publication of creative work, whether art or discourse or both, which may not fit into the conventional print format, by virtue of medium, subject, or form. We would like to provide opportunities to experiment in forms which are made available uniquely available in this kind of space: person-to-person work exchange; webcasting; text, audio, video, and graphics file exchanges; exhibitions; experimental community-building projects; etc.. For this enterprise we are seeking committed collaborators and contributors, especially people who want to help maintain such an online structure, and contribute to its formation and development. We plan to implement audio, video, graphics and text files on this site. Online publication started March 1, 1999; March 1, 1999; New contents will be posted on a continuing basis. If you send us your email address we will inform you regularly of current postings. The web address is:

<http://media1.moorhead.msus.edu/~osonline.html>

The OPEN SPACE WEB MAGAZINE is edited by Tildy Bayar, Benjamin Boretz, Julie Rae Miller, and Mary Lee Roberts. Inquiries and other communications should be emailed to opnspace@mhd1.moorhead.msus.edu

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February 10, 1958: How Do You Make Music Without Substance?

A transcription of Chapter 6 of *A Thousand Plateaus*
by
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

Tom Baker
1995

So the thing is, you already have. The important point is not that it already exists in the world, though it does. Anyway, you make it, you can't experience without making it. And it is waiting for you; it is an inevitable exercise and experimentation, already here the moment you undertake it, never here as long as you don't. It is in your hands, and you can make it or ruin it. It can be scary, and lead you to places you might rather not go. It is non-experience as well as experience. It is not an idea or concept but a process, a set of processes. You never reach completely music without substance, it is unreachable, it is not a thing, it is a limit. People ask, so what is this MwS?—But it is already everywhere, and you are already part of it, listening your way through what you hear. On it we create, live, seek a place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we hear. On February 10, 1958 Ornette Coleman declares war on the substance: *Something Else!*¹ Free Improvisation: incurring censorship and repression. They will not let you experiment in peace.

The MwS: it is already under way the moment the music has had enough of structures (substances) and wants to throw them off, or lose them. A long procession. *Silence*: the substances are destroyed, the damage has been done, nothing moves anymore. *Serialism*: the substance is continually under attack by outside forces, but is also restored by outside energies. *Minimalism*: waging its own active internal struggle against the substance, at the price of stasis. *Recording*: stockpiled substance at the price of true stasis. *Improvisation*: poorly understood in terms of noise; it is fundamentally a question of the MwS. It has its composer to make it internal, to sew it up; it hangs itself to stop the structures from working.

Why such a parade of -isms and industries, when MwS is also full of spontaneity, excitement, ecstasy, and dynamism? Why these examples, why must we start there? What happened? Were you cautious enough? As a rule immanent to experimentation: injections of caution. Many have been defeated in this pursuit. Is it really so subversive to be fed up with listening for the fundamental structure, sitting in a dark concert hall, having musical expectations realized or not, having musical expectations, searching for significant form? Why not listen to what and how you hear, find a place to sound, sound for your life, re-invent the concert hall, re-invent the concert, Experimentation. Where music analysis says "Stop, find the Umlinie," we should say instead, "Let's go further out,

¹ John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: The Harmolodic Life* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), p. 189.

Tom Baker

we haven't found MwS yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled the substance." Substitute Experimentation for interpretation. Find the music without substance. Find the music made up only of attributes, non-representable. Find out how to make it. It is where everything is played out.

Dear Improviser,

1) You may gather around you sounds, silences, and all that is in between, listen without sounding for ten to fifteen minutes, time enough to prepare the instruments; 2) Start with a sound warm-up, then a pause of several minutes; 3) You begin listening for a space that is calling for the sound you have in your head, you slowly begin to trust that sound, and begin to let it emanate from your instrument/body - Now you go on to the 4) ~~second phase~~ ~~the~~ ~~sound~~ ~~and~~ ~~prepare~~ ~~to~~ ~~move~~ ~~it~~ ~~around~~ ~~and~~ ~~to~~ ~~new~~ ~~places~~, you listen and prepare to find those places; 5) You make/move to the new sound; 6) You grow confident in the new sound, and increase the volume; 7) You repeat and listen to the sound, you Know the sound; 8) If you wish to intensify the moment you give yourself over to the sound(s) completely; 9) You lose yourself and listen to sounds, not too long for you have a concert to play soon and you need time to heal.

This is not a fable, it is a program: There is an essential difference between the theoretical interpretation of the art-work and the antitheoretical experimentation of the art-experience. Between the work, an interpretation that must itself be interpreted, and the experience. The MwS is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the art-work, and significances and subjectifications as a whole. Analysis does the opposite: it translates everything into an art-work. It royally botches the real, because it botches the MwS.

Something will happen. Something is already happening. But what comes to pass on the MwS is not exactly the same as how you make it. However, one is included in the other. Hence the two phases set forth in the preceding letter. Why two clearly distinguished phases, done in both cases - listening and sounding? One phase is for the fabrication of the MwS, the other to make something circulate on it or pass across it; similar procedures are nevertheless used in both phases, but they must be done over, done twice. What is certain is that the improviser has made herself a MwS under such conditions that the MwS can no longer be populated by anything but intensities of sound that appear chaotic, chaos waves. It is false to say that the improviser is looking for chaos but just as false to say that she is looking for ordered-art-work in a particularly suspensive or roundabout way. The improviser is looking for a type of MwS that only chaos can fill, or travel over, due to the very conditions under which that MwS was constituted. For each type of MwS, we must ask: 1) What type is it, how is it made, by what procedures and means (predetermining what will come to pass)? 2) What are its modes, what comes to pass, and with what variants and what surprises, what is unexpected and what expected? In short, there is a very special relation of synthesis and analysis between a given type of MwS and what happens on it: an a priori synthesis by which something will necessarily be produced in a given mode (but what it will be is not known) and an infinite analysis by which what is produced (passed) on the MwS is already part of that music's production, is already included in the music, is already on it. It is a very delicate experimentation since there must not be any stagnation of the modes or slippage in type: the improviser courts these ever-present dangers that empty her MwS's instead of filling them.

You can fail twice, but it is the same failure, the same danger. Once at the level of the production of the MwS and again at the level of what passes or does not pass across it. You think you have made yourself a good MwS, that you chose the right Place, Power, and Collectivity (there is always collectivity, even when you are alone), and then nothing passes, nothing sounds, or something prevents things from moving. In each case, we must define what comes to pass and what does not pass, what causes passage and prevents it.

February 10. 1958

Is not Ben Boretz's *If I am a Musical Thinker* the *Philosophy of Music* books of the MwS?² Experience: how needs are fulfilled or engaged in the transaction of musical activity; identity results from expression, and experience that realizes, in expression, the fulfillment of identity. Listening is the primal expressive act, it is primal composition. What we call a work of art is experientially existent only as an episode of expression. The problem of totality of experience becomes: *is there a totality of all MwS's* art-experience in identity and of all identities in experience. The uninterrupted continuum of MwS. MwS, immanence, immanent limit. MwS is the plane of consistency (the continuum of identity and expression) specific to experience (with experience defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be silence that empties it out or an objectification that fills it).

Every time experience is betrayed and uprooted from the plane of consistency, a composer is behind it. Facing north, the composer said:

Experiencing is consuming (how could one not consume what she experiences?). The composer carried out the first sacrifice, named commodity, and all the men and women of the north lined up behind him, crying in cadence, "Buy, Buy, it's the common law." Then, facing south, the composer linked experience to object; and not only will the object created silence experience for a moment but the process of creating it is already a way of interrupting it, of instantly dismissing it and unburdening oneself of it. Object as value: the composer carries out the second sacrifice, named stockpiling (collecting). Then, facing east, he exclaimed: "Immortality is impossible, but immortality is inscribed in experience as object. Its very impossibility is the Ideal, that is life." The composer carried out the third sacrifice, named genius (master, god), while the people of the east chanted: "Yes, we will follow you, perform you, idolize you, die with you." The composer did not turn to the west. He knew that in the west lay a plane of consistency, but he thought that the way was uninhabitable. But that is where experience and expression were lurking, west was the shortest route east, as well as to the other directions, rediscovered or deterritorialized.

Take the improviser: it is claimed that the improviser is after an art-object like everybody else, but can only get it through chaos. This is inaccurate; the improviser's misunderstood noise is the price she must pay, not to achieve art-object, but to untie the pseudobond between experience and object as an extrinsic measure. The art-object, **MUSIC**, is in no way something that can be attained only by a detour through chaos, it is something that must be delayed as long as possible because it interrupts the continuous process of creative experience. There is, in fact, a music that is immanent to the experience as though the experience were filled by itself and its contemplations, a music that implies no commodity or immortality and is not measured by **MUSIC** since it is what distributes intensities of sounds and prevents them from being suffused by history, theory, and analysis. In short, the improviser uses chaos as a way of constituting a music without substance and bringing forth a plane of consistency of experiential creativity. That there are other ways is beside the point; it is enough that some find this procedure suitable for them.

The plane of consistency, the continuum of creative impulse, the field of expression, all must be constructed. This can take place in very different formations with different types of musics without substance. They are constructed fragment by fragment, and the places, conditions, and techniques are irreducible to one another. The question, rather, is whether the pieces can fit together, and at what price. Inevitably, there will be monstrous cross-breeds. The plane of consistency would be the totality of all MwS's, a pure multiplicity of immanence, separate musics, all in a movement of generalized deterritorialization in which each person takes and makes what sounds she can, according to her tastes, and she will have succeeded in abstracting from a self, according to a politics or strategy successfully abstracted from a given formation, according to a given procedure abstracted from its origin.

We distinguish between: 1) MwS's, which are different types. 2) What happens on each type of MwS, in other words, the modes, the intensities that are produced, the sounds that pass. 3) The potential totality of all

² Benjamin Boretz, *If I am a Musical Thinker* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1985).

MwS's, the plane of consistency, the continuum of creative expression. There are a number of questions. Not only how to make MwS, and how to produce the corresponding sound intensities without which it would remain empty. But also how to reach the plane of consistency. How to sew up, cool down, and tie together all the MwS's. If this is possible to do, it is only by combining all the sounds produced on each MwS, by producing a continuum of all continuities, an immanence. Ornette Coleman uses the term human **music** "music that has the quality to preserve life."³ Human music is a piece of immanence. Every MwS is made up of human music. Every MwS is itself a human music in communication with other human musics on the plane of consistency.

We come to the gradual realization that the MwS is not at all the opposite of the substance. The substance is not its enemy. The enemy is the piece. MwS is opposed not to the substance but to the organization of the substance called the piece (**MUSIC**). ~~The music is the music. Alone it moves. And it never is. Pieces are the~~ ~~substance is not opposite to the~~ ~~substance, rather, MwS and its 'true substances,' which must be fabricated, are opposed to the piece, the formal organization of the substance.~~ The **MUSIC** is not at all the music, the MwS; rather, it is a stratum on the MwS, that imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences. The strata are bondage, principles, structures. We are continually stratified. But who is this we that is not me, for the composer no less than the art-work belongs to and depends on a stratum? Now we have the answer: The MwS is that reality where all the gestures that comprise **MUSIC** - and also a signification and a subject - occur. For the judgment of Consumers weighs upon and is exercised against the MwS; it is the MwS that undergoes it. It is in the MwS that the substances enter into the relations of composition called **MUSIC**. The MwS howls: "They've made me an art-object! They've wrongfully heard me! They've stolen my music!" The judgment of Consumers uproots it from its immanence and makes it an object, a signification, a subject. It is the MwS that is stratified. It swings between two poles, the surfaces of stratification into which it is recoiled, on which it submits to judgment, and the plane of consistency in which it unfurls and opens to experimentation. If MwS is a limit, if one is forever attaining it, it is because behind each stratum, encasted in it, there is always another stratum. A perpetual and violent combat between the continuum of expression, which frees the MwS, cutting across and dismantling all of the strata, and the surfaces of stratification that block it or make it recoil.

Let us consider the three great strata concerning us, in other words, the ones that most directly bind us: the art-work, signification, and subjectification. The substance of the art-work, the angle of significance and representation, and the point of subjectification or subjection. **MUSIC** will be objectified, it will be an art-work, it will reveal its form - otherwise it's just noise. It will be a signifier and signified, represented and representative - otherwise it's just sound. It will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement - otherwise it's just chaos. MwS opposes revealing form (I am not an art-work) as the plane of consistency, practices experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never represent!), and requires continual impulse as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, desubjectification). What does it mean to de-form, to cease to be **MUSIC**? How can we convey how easy it is, and the extent to which we do it every day? And how necessary caution is, the art of experimentation, since chaos is a danger. You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. Dismantling the **MUSIC** has never meant killing the composer, but rather opening the music to connections that presuppose an entire instrument measured with the craft of a luthier. Actually, dismantling the **MUSIC** is no more difficult than dismantling the other two strata, significance and subjectification. Significance clings to the sounds just as the **MUSIC** clings to the experience, and it is not easy to get rid of either. And how can we unhook the music from the points of subjectification that secure it, nail it down to reality. Tearing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means of exploration, tearing the unconscious away from significance and representation in order to make it a veritable production: this is assuredly no more or less difficult than tearing the experience away from the **MUSIC**. Caution is the art common to all three; if in dismantling the **MUSIC** there are times one courts chaos and noise, in slipping

³ John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: The Harmolodic Life* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), p. 136.

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away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination. Boretz carefully explains in *If I am a Musical Thinker*. "In order to annihilate sound; conversation can also annihilate its antecedent experience; thought can be an anechoic chamber for its objects; discourse can remove us from the scene of our attention altogether. So we need to think sensitively and introspectively and consciously - like expressive people - about our thought, our silence, our sound in music and talk; to compose intellectual-social behavior so that it actually strives to be shaped to do for us what we, primally, need it for. We cannot afford to deprive ourselves of our own expression by conventionalizing or institutionalizing our talk, or our thought, or our music; because it deprives us of what we most need from those outlets, what we lusted after in the first place so as to find ourselves energetically engaged, for life, with them."⁴

You have to keep enough of the **MUSIC** for it to re-form each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of representation and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata. You don't reach MwS, and its continuum of expression, by wildly destratifying. That is why we encountered the paradox of those -isms and industries at the very beginning: they had emptied themselves instead of thinking for a plane at which they could patiently and momentarily dismantle the organization of the substance we call the **MUSIC**. There are, in fact, several ways of botching the MwS: either one fails to produce it, or one produces it more or less, but nothing is produced on it, sounds do not pass or are blocked. This is because the MwS is always swinging between the surfaces that structure it and the plane that sets it free. If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the structure without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will fail, dragged toward catastrophe. Staying structured - organized, signified, subjected - is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the structures into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on the music heavier than ever. Here is how it should be done: Make your sounds on a structure, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow continuums here and there, try out sounds segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the structures that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous impulses for a MwS. First, see how the form is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper instrument within which we are held; gently play the instrument, making it pass over to the side of the field of expression. It is only there that MwS reveals itself for what it is: connection of experiences, continuums of intensities. You have constructed your own little orchestra, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective orchestras. Boretz describes a process of composing not what we hear, but that we may hear. The MwS is this process because it is necessarily a Place, necessarily a Plane, necessarily a Collectivity.

We still have not answered the question of why there are so many dangers, and so many necessary precautions. It is not enough to set up an abstract opposition between the strata and the MwS. For the MwS already exists in the strata as well as on the destratified plane of consistency, but in a totally different manner. Take the **MUSIC** as a stratum: there is indeed a MwS that opposes the organization of the substance we call the piece, but there is also a MwS of the piece that belongs to the stratum. No is each instant, each second, music is full of noise. The piece must resubmit itself to its rule or restratify it. Attali recognizes this noise and its dangerous relationship to power: "three strategic usages (zones) of music by power...In one of these zones, music is used and produced in the ritual in an attempt to make people forget general violence; in another, it is employed to make people believe in the harmony of the world, that there is order in exchange and legitimacy in commercial power; and finally, there is one in which it serves to silence a mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises. Make people Forget, make them Believe, Silence them. In

⁴ Benjamin Boretz, *If I am a Musical Thinker* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1985).

all three cases, music is a tool of power: of ritual power when it is a question of making people forget the fear of violence; of representative power when it is a question of making people believe in order and harmony; and of bureaucratic power when it is a question of silencing those who oppose it. Thus music localizes and specifies power, because it marks and regiments the rare noises that cultures, in their normalization of behavior, see fit to authorize. Music accounts for them. It makes them audible...Noise is power that destroys orders to structure a new order...Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power."⁵ This new order is the "other plane." An opposition to a plane of consistency or a field of expression. It is a tool for political and personal power. Noise is the cancer in music, and it can become the point of the music; become the "other plane." This "other plane" is full of MwS's that are emptied but powerful.

The MwS is never yours or mine. It is always a music. It is no more projective than it is regressive. It is an involution, but always a contemporary, creative involution. The substances distribute themselves on the MwS, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the **MUSIC**; forms become contingent, substances are no longer anything more than sound-intensities that are produced; flows, thresholds, and gradients. "A" pitch, "a" cadence, "a" crescendo: the indefinite article does not lack anything; it is not indeterminate or undifferentiated, but expresses the pure determination of intensity, intensive difference. The indefinite article is the conductor of experience. It is not at all a question of a fragmented, analyzed music, of substances and structures without the music (SwM). The MwS is exactly the opposite. There are not structures in the sense of fragments in relation to a lost unity, nor is there a return to the undifferentiated in relation to a differentiable totality. There is a distribution of sound-intensive principles of substance, with their positive indefinite articles, within a collectivity or multiplicity, inside an instrument, and according to sound-intensive connections operating the MwS. The error of analysis was to understand the MwS phenomena as regressions, projections, forms, in terms of an image of the music.

The MwS is experience; it is that which one experiences and by which one experiences. And not only because it is the plane of consistency or the field of expression. Even when it falls into the too-sudden destratification, or into the proliferation of a stratum of noise and power, it is still experience. Experiencing stretches that far: experiencing one's own annihilation, or experiencing the power to annihilate. There is experiencing whenever there is the constitution of a MwS under one relation or another. It is a problem not of ideology but of pure time. The test of experiencing: not denouncing false experiences, but distinguishing within experience between that which pertains to the construction of the field of expression and the plane of consistency. The plane of consistency is not simply that which is constituted by the sum of all the MwS's. There are things it rejects; the MwS chooses. Even within a MwS we must distinguish between what can be composed on the plane and what cannot. The field of expression is the totality of the full MwS's that have been selected. What is the nature of this totality? Is it musical? Or must we say that each MwS, from a basis in its own type, produces effects identical or analogous to the effects other MwS's produce from a basis in their types? Could what the listener/composer/improviser obtains also be obtained in a different fashion in the conditions of the plane, so it would even be possible to improvise without improvising, listen without listening, compose without composing? Or is it a question of a real passage of substances, an intensive continuum of all the MwS's? Doubtless, anything is possible. All I am saying is that the expression of identity, the continuity of the types, the totality of the MwS's, can be obtained on the plane of consistency and the field of expression only by means of an abstract instrument capable of covering and even creating it, by instruments capable of plugging into experience, of effectively taking charge of experience, of assuring their continuous connections and transversal tie-ins. Otherwise, the MwS's of the plane will remain separated by genus, marginalized, reduced to means of the fringe, while on the "other plane" the emptied or dangerous double will triumph.

⁵ Jaques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 19-20.

stretches that far: experiencing one's own annihilation, or experiencing the power to annihilate. There is experiencing whenever there is the constitution of a MwS **under one relation or another**. It is a problem not **of ideology but of pure time**. The test of experiencing: not denouncing false experiences, but distinguishing within experience between that which pertains to the construction of the field of expression **and the plane of consistency**. The plane of consistency is not simply that which is constituted **by the sum of all the MwS's**. There are things it rejects; the MwS chooses. Even within a MwS we must distinguish between what can be composed **on the plane and what cannot**. The field of expression is the totality of the full MwS's that have been selected. **What is the nature of this totality? Is it musical?** Or must we say that each MwS, from a basis in its own type, produces effects identical or analogous to the effects other MwS's produce **from a basis in their types?** Could what the listener/composer/improviser obtains also be obtained in a different fashion in the conditions of the plane, so it would even be possible to improvise without improvising, listen without listening, **compose without composing?** Or is it a question of a real passage of substances, an intensive **continuum of all the MwS's? Doubtless, anything is possible**. All I am saying is that the expression of identity, the continuity of the types, the totality of the MwS's, can be obtained on the plane of consistency and the field of expression only by means of an abstract instrument capable of covering and even creating it, by instruments capable of plugging into experience, of effectively taking charge of experience, of assuring their continuous connections **and transversal tie-ins**. Otherwise, the MwS's of the plane will remain separated by genus, marginalized, reduced to means of the fringe, while on the "other plane" the emptied or dangerous double will triumph.

Cut to the Radical of Orientation: TWIN NOTES ON *being in touch* in Gary Hill's [Videosomatic] Installation, *Cut Pipe*¹

George Quasha and Charles Stein

HEADNOTES:

When I was a child I had a recurrent dream from which I always awoke strained to the limit by extreme frustration: I could not get my hands all the way around a certain object, impossible to visualize as a whole and characterized by the desperate compulsion it engendered in me — *to enter it by encompassing it*. Night after night, during certain periods, I labored to know the contours of this vitally necessary but incommensurable something-somewhere by *reaching*. I both groped and kneaded the sinuous sensuous mass that like a mother's breast had no other side, yet commanded relentless embrace. This dream haunted my physical world, as though, merely by having been experienced, it rendered every object of desire ultimately inaccessible.

Many years later, by which time the dream was recurring barely once a year, the whole matter shifted, bumped, as it were, to another dimension: In a museum I spotted a glistening

FOOTNOTES:

¹ *Cut Pipe* (1992): Single-channel video/sound installation, comprising recorded media (e.g., VHS cassette, laserdisc, etc.), one 4-inch black-and-white video monitor modified to fit in an aluminum tube, one TV-projection lens, two aluminum cylinders, three 8-inch loudspeakers situated inside the cylinders, and one stereo amplifier. The present "writing piece" is the dialogical *further life** of an actual conversation among G. Quasha, C. Stein and G. Hill at the site of a *Cut Pipe* installation in the Long Beach Museum of Art in Long Beach, California in December of 1993. The conversation was recorded and a fragment of it used in a video-cassette catalogue for the exhibition under the title of *Gary Hill: Sites Recited*. The catalogue also included dialogues about other installations (*War Zones* [1980], *Primarily Speaking* [1981 & 1983], and *Learning Curve [still point]* [1993]) and was produced, directed, and edited by Carole Ann Klonarides, Media Arts Curator, in collaboration with Joe Leonardi, General Manager of the LBMA Video Annex, and Gary Hill. In addition to the dialogues, this 60 minute videotape involves excerpts from the exhibition and a portion of a live (unrehearsed) performance at the Museum comprising a complex of interactive media by George Quasha, Charles Stein, Gary Hill and guest artist Joan Jonas.

* "*Further life*" = here, a kind of extended footnote to a no longer accessible text; elsewhere, a modality by which a work lives beyond its own conception. (A term discussed in our "Tall Acts of Seeing," see Note 10 below.)

white object, perhaps a foot in diameter, that instantly brought me to my dream. Without hesitation I put my hands on it, pressed the cool white stone into my palms, let it move around inside my senses, and sensed, at long last, that in a manner of speaking I was getting a hold on the matter. Thanks to Hans Arp, author of the alabaster object, for the opening. Thereafter the dream did not recur.

By virtue of this forbidden act — touching the untouchable — I crossed the (as it turns out) permeable membrane² between public space and oneiric necessity, art and the going grammar of ontological possibilities, intimate engagement with a stone and the radical of orientation.³ With this four-dimensional embrace, I appear (to myself) to be *initiated into* the multiple dimensions of a sometimes self-contradictory or split personal reality woven together again, now, in the moment. With initiations such as this — performed by the likes of Hans Arp but occasioned equally by the preparation of our own inner life — a new kind of work is in the offing: a *work(ing)* that somehow emerges between an object in a museum and *ourselves*. We are dealing with an object that *in itself*, from the first moment of our encounter with it to our deepest meditation upon it, implicates us in the question equally of its and our own boundaries. How far do(es) (it) we go? Let's cross the line together, traveling in the present composition for two readings in virtual time:

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²We hasten to note, in the context of meditating Arp's sculpture or, in the case at hand, Gary Hill's mixed-media sculptural installation, that we find ourselves using language that transgresses strictly dualistic distinctions. Certain works of art attract *liminal language*. An obvious example here is *permeable membrane*; not so obvious is an innocent figure of speech like *it turns out*, implying a topological connection between "inside" and "outside" and even "self" and "other": an undivided condition underlying an apparent discontinuity or "split." "Notes," accordingly, may turn out to be as much "inside" the text as on the "outside" or "underside." Intra-active with the text, notes subvert the time-line in favor of ... (further reflection requested here). Far from being *cut off* from the body of the text, and despite the fact that a superscript *cuts into* the sentence, a footnote may be a fundamental source of orientation within, returning to a truth of the text not otherwise accessible in the forward rush of reading — as a voice speaking from within a pipe might reorient us within a room.

³*Radical of orientation*: Perhaps this points to the sense of the root of how we situate ourselves — *where* I am as it affects *who* I am. Installation works of Gary Hill like *Beacon (Two Versions of the Imaginary)*, *Tall Ships* and *Cut Pipe* draw upon the energy of passing from disorientation to orientation, of getting one's bearings in a radically open situation. Some viewers enjoy the intimacy of the dark areas that installations like *Tall Ships* leave open, just as some readers prefer to read the footnotes before the text.

⁴The sense of *virtual*, used several times below, is not directly related to the popular meaning of effective simulation in "virtual reality"; rather, it draws upon the other tendency of the root meaning as "power" ("Existing in the mind, especially as a product of the imagination" — *American Heritage Dictionary*) and, therefore, *possibility* — the *source* of what can manifest *between* appearances, that is, between the reified "facts" of the world. "Virtual time" transpires in the interstices, the "cut" between alternative versions of the real, and when it is intentionally participated (or "declared," see Note 12 below) it serves as a source of *further awareness*. (Cf.: "Virtual History [is] the study of holes in the historical, as Virtual Poetics begins by studying time-warps in the syntactical" — George Quasha, "Lognostic Gloss," *Word-Yum*, Metapoetics Press: New York, 1975.)

On Gary Hill's *Cut Pipe*

Enter the room: it's empty but for — what? Looks like cylinders — *pipe*, according to the title on the plaque by the door, *Cut Pipe*, a work of art by Gary Hill⁵, one pipe in two pieces directly facing each other end to end, one thing “cut” in two. A voice is coming from within (the pipe), as it were, reciting the site. We peer in on it and enter its space: we see a small loudspeaker positioned inside the pipe opening on one side of the facing pieces, and an image is moving over it. Look closer: the loudspeaker is an image of a loudspeaker *projected* (from the other “half” of the pipe) upon an actual loudspeaker (painted white), and two hands are moving over it exploringly; they are responding to the sounds coming out, words, *performative* of the situation at hand.

And such is the nature of the “situation” that there is no seeing and hearing this without being somehow inside it, joining it, extending it, perhaps even ... touching it. We are there (here), so to speak, for the purpose of *dialogical engagement*, by which we mean participation peculiar to the occasion, but also a wider process of dynamic conjunction⁶. And as we speak *the cut* enters definitively into our discourse in ways yet to be understood. For the moment we are engaging in a brief stenographic phenomenology of what is “inside” the room, narrowing in on it:

Ambiguous object(s): The pipe(s) almost fill(s) the room — a child could straddle the pipe like a robot boa. Despite the appearance of two, let's speak only of *it*: It fills, indeed it takes dominion in the room, like the famous jar in Wallace Stevens' poem⁷. Once inside the room, there's no place for distraction: you can only approach. It's shiny, straight, big, aluminum

⁵An artist with a complex identity (or complex of identities) in whose work media mix freely, it is possible to track him as sculptor, video artist, installation artist, more or less in that order of developmental self-description, with “video poet” as the implicit identity emerging within the work and in dialogue with the poetics of “non-video” poets (including the present writers, since about 1978). “Video” here (e.g., in “video poet”) addresses an *occasion* of language emergence, not an art category as such; accordingly, to allow for the emergence of poetics outside literary conventions, we elsewhere speak of “parapoetics.”

⁶The dialogical (alternatively, *dialogos*): the condition of *discourse in touch with itself* in which two or more voices act as aspects of a unified field of open intention, which intention is discovered as a function of their intra-activity. The sense of “dialogue” employed here continues some two decades of practice in which we have performed focused dialogues on particular issues, sometimes with specific artists/poets such as Gary Hill at the site of *Cut Pipe* in 1993; a number of these dialogical performances have been published, either as explicit or, like the present one, implicit dialogues. (The “I” in our piece is itself a dialogical and processual identity, rooted both in “real experience” outside the discourse and yet generated within it.) This sense of open discourse declares a commitment to listening (being in touch) that is essential to the poetic, where poetry is understood as speaking with listening — speaking (writing) that is “guided” by actual feedback from the listening-field, like music: A weave of sound in touch with itself. So you could say, for instance, that a dialogical piece at any given point has a speaker, although there are multiple voices active in or around it. Likewise there is an implied or actual “listener” engaging perhaps multiple ears. And the “other” of this speaker/listener is the reader, comprising any number of actual individuals. Somewhere between the speaker and the reader is the “virtual reader” — a function of the possibility of the text where a reader directly enters into the “dialogical state” of the speaker(s). This is an experiential “orientation,” we say, that bears upon the video installations of Gary Hill, which are in a related sense “dialogical” situations. Just as poetry is speaking with listening, dialogical videopoetics as practiced by Gary Hill is video with listening. Add to this: touching with listening — bodywork. Therefore: *videosomatics*: seeing through the body. The medium mediates body, speech, and mind.

⁷ Stevens' poem, “Anecdote of the Jar,” begins:

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.
...It took dominion everywhere....

See: *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Knopf: New York, 1954), p. 76.

(no plumber's pipe, this, nor misplaced conduit), but it *is* pipe. Store-bought. Unconnected to the usual context of pipes, but connected by wires to a wall socket. It's alive (a live wire), it *luminates*, it *resonates*, it *radiates* — creates *space* around it, inside it and, as it turns out, between it.

And it talks; if you listen closely you hear it talking to itself, and clearly it goes on with or without you in the room. Get closer: This object seems to want you to get *down on all fours*. [Am I back in my dream?] *The time has come* [it appears to say] *to be on ground level* [level ground?] *you've longed for since time immemorial, be beastly, snooping, sniffing, intent upon putting your nose in there, getting so close up you're inside*. The cut is in the middle, and the light you see is a moving image, and the image is a loudspeaker with two hands touching it — *doing what you want to do, touch it* — and moving sensuously across its surface, all the while a voice is saying:

**sounding an image signing a sound voicing thoughts between soundings
 locating the sound of my voice imaging my voice through an object giving
voice to an image ... I have my finger on my voice tangent to the skin put your
finger on it put your mind through it skin your thought graft your skin shed
your skin give your skin to me ... drumming your mind through the skin
 drumming the skin stretched through your mind**

What is it the site recites? It speaks in verbal nouns (sounding, signing, voicing, locating, imaging, giving, drumming), actions of hand and thought, a poem in the form of a list of expressions enacting and reduplicated by images happening on the loudspeaker as it is spoken. The recited words are *performative*: (their) saying is (their) doing is (their) beings⁸. Are they active? Are they passive? In what *voice* is the performative spoken? It does not refer to what it is not; it does not refer *to*; it confers *with*. With what? Hands on a sounding surface, a drum, sounding all the way over to the ear of the hearer, another drum. We cross a gap from speech to image and from image to what image confers: a pair of hands. The hands long to get inside the sound. The sound of the voice as vibration penetrates the hand and fingers in their probing. You seem to see the sound registered in the fingers. But the interior of the sounds, their meanings, cannot reach the hands in this manner, so the hands move with a *certain kind* of longing. Are they blind hands that despite their sensitive life can't quite know by feel the inner truth of what shakes inside them? Or a child's hands pressing a candy store window to get at the goods inside? Yet the hands *do* transmit the intelligence of their own probing gestures. They are handbodies, replete with the mind all bodies have, mindhands fully cognizant of the gap separating them from that other intelligence — words themselves, whose meanings invade and enfold those hands, refer to them and perform them — wordbodies made of sound and sound alone, yet longing to reach back to the substantial entities their very meanings portend.

Wordbodies sounding in handbodies projected across the gap of a cut pipe: Paratactic/tactile utterances, side-by-side sayings *handed over the speaker*, going nowhere but *here*.

⁸*Performative* is a term invented by the philosopher J.L. Austin to refer to utterances that literally perform the action of which they speak: e.g., I promise, I wish, I accuse, I name, etc. — actions performed in the very saying. Our point is that such verbal actions close the gap between word and meaning, but performative utterances can only do their work in the specific contexts that call them forth: *performative language is always site/occasion-specific and concrete*. In *Cut Pipe*, as in many other of Gary Hill's works, utterance and image inform each other in the very moment of the combined video and verbal gesture: the meaning of the image is given by the word, the meaning of the word is given by the image, and together an intimate and significant gesture is performed.

On Gary Hill's *Cut Pipe*

Neither active nor passive, but middle. *The middle voice*⁹. And who is speaking? The voice of the work's author? The voice belonging to the imaged hands? A voice that speaks for us or for the piece itself? The voice seems to come to us from a middle place between and among these possibilities as if from the very space we and the piece inhabit now together. It is the *middle voice of the middle identity*.

Here the *subject* is (partially? temporarily?) suppressed in favor of that middle identity who is the inhabitant of a site in which speaker and spoken to are the same — that is, nonseparable¹⁰. In here: every utterance is an outer surface of a resonating skin that already throbs with listening. And reaching into the space/pipe/cut, my hands identify with the imaged hands, as I too yearn to touch the sounds and their meanings. The voice speaks *to* but also *about* and *for* me. The hands and the voice speak together, and they are neither mine nor another's but share, as in *mudra*¹¹, a common utterance: Meeting me in the middle the imaged hands perform my gesture or, alternatively, I feel in my own hands the gesture and yearningful inquiry of the imaged hands I witness.

In *Cut Pipe*, the text with its voicing *yearns* and *declares* in the same *intonation*. It yearns for its own capacity to declare being. It yearns to rejoin the being it declares. But the being it declares is a yearning of hands in touch with the sound of a voice's intonation — its physical vibration, but also the feeling the voice-sound carries — so the voice and hands and sounds declare themselves, or declare a state of being that yearns for and accomplishes its own declaration in a singular, multidimensional performance¹².

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⁹A *middle voice* exists in Ancient Greek grammar in addition to the *active* and *passive* and is used regularly for reflexive expressions (instead of the reflexive pronouns in languages like French). Of interest to us here is a special use of the middle voice in poetry where grammatical *agency* operates in a way that is outside the active-passive duality: e.g., the invocation of muses. The opening line of Hesiod's *Theogony* might be rendered, "With the Helikonian Muses *let us begin* our music." But the Greek verb complex (*archometh' aeidein*) means something in between "Let us begin to sing" and "Let the singing be started up in us." The poet allows the activation of his art without asserting his own initiative but also without asserting that it is something merely happening to him. It is conducted by him, through him — performative.

¹⁰The child still stuck with the sting of the command *Speak only when spoken to* is liberated *in here*, where the distinction as cut is healed below the surface. Those who know Gary Hill's installations (*Learning Curve*, *Remarks on Color*, etc.) may sympathize with introducing the child's perspective. The issue of nonseparability is relevant to other works as well: *Tall Ships*, for instance, activates the virtual interaction between viewer and projected silent interlocutor and the eerie common ground that is inescapable among participants (tall ships) navigating in the dark. (See our "Tall Acts of Seeing" in the exhibition catalogue *Gary Hill*, edited by Dorine Mignot and published by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1993.)

¹¹The Sanskrit word *mudra* (seal, mystery) stands for the intentional and articulate hand gestures (perhaps most associated with East Indian classical dance, Buddhist art, etc.) that are performative of profound and complex states of mind — or, as it were, body-mind — not always "translatable" into specific words or concepts. Thus the sequence of mudra-like hand gestures in *Cut Pipe* are performative of the whole (re)cited text or, alternatively, of the yearning for return to the middle, represented here as (loud)speaker, the source of sound, the root of sound. (The sound equivalent of *mudra* is *mantra*, meaning something like root sound, deriving etymologically from "mind" [Indo-European *men*-]. Cf. our sense of "virtual" in Note 4 above. .)

¹²This is a somewhat special use of *declare*: To publicly affirm an intuited possibility with the intent of actualizing it in such a way that its virtuality (the reach of possibility) is not lost. What I declare is not simply frozen in static reification; rather, the source of my intuition which has given force to my declaration is lifted into manifestation and becomes an ongoing resource. What now becomes real remains resonant with its root possibility. A declaration is grounded in the recognition of what is intuited to already be the case.

Quite beyond any articulate expectations, there is something that wants to be said here in the cut space: *There is a nostalgia for the middle*. Hands longing, the Odysseus of the body¹³, home in on their object. “He has wandering hands.” What the hand *signs* the foot *notes* as the way (*down* is the way) back home. We are at large somewhere between.

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A phenomenology of the middle begins here with *the approach, the reach — the principle of organization as approaching over and over*, entering the room and reaching toward the piece, the cut: Experiencing the approach unto touch. Shooting the scene again (and again). Any approach has a legacy, its deputation on the next in line as well as its radial impact on the environment, with options ranging from intimacy to alienation. When we track it and recite it we create its discourse. (Running around and about, and back again, *discursus*.) Our mission here is to embody the cut and read out the consequences of its centripetal attraction. It is, as it were, a twin (trans)mission and can always be said otherwise: Nondefinitive re-encroachments on the possible center of focus implicate the structure of our dialogical intervention. What is it that keeps us going back for more?

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We long to read the space we share with the work in such a way that it *orient* us, help us find our way back to a place beyond the *disorientation* of initial encounter. We have been led — initiated — into an intimacy with the work almost in spite of ourselves: The work has invited us to cross a certain boundary; once we have crossed, are we who we were before? Or is it as someone once said: Before I was different, now I’m the same.

Orientation itself is a function of this intimacy. Faced with a series of cognitive incongruities, we discover a particular “negatively capable” condition that shakes orientation to the root. It refuses to tame the incongruities through overriding insight or recontextualization, but neither does it hold us in disorientation. Rather, we arrive at a stance that is radically informed by another species of *view*: *a perspective by transcongruity*¹⁴. Here the dichotomies,

¹³*Nostalgia* derives from Greek *nostos*, a return home — the goal of Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. Interestingly, a secondary meaning of the Greek as adjective is “succulent, nutritious,” the yield or outcome of a harvest; so “return” might imply not so much repetition as fulfillment. “Longing” and “yearning” define nostalgia and its pain of not being at home, but these English terms perhaps apply even more to the German *Sehnsucht*, a key term for German Romanticism in art and literature, and roughly equivalent to English *wistful*, a *wishful* yearning to return to something deeply sensed or intuitively calling — *wist* deriving from Indo-European *weid-*: wise, wit [rooted in the Anglo-Saxon verb for “to know”], view, vision, guide, idea, etc. Our point is: At the root of a *certain* longing is a knowing that is (re)directional, toward the radical of orientation, released in(to) the middle. The phenomenology of nostalgia/*Sehnsucht* is of course highly complex in itself, and the quality of longing in a given context makes all the difference — the mood, say, of the *Lento* in Beethoven’s last quartet vs. the *Liebestod* of *Tristan und Isolde*, and these as against any set of eyes in Rossetti and the other Pre-Raphaelites. Those who know Gary Hill’s work may detect various kinds of longing in different pieces: how, for instance, the central image of *Beacon* implies the light that leads the lost ships (Tall Ships?) home (again, Odysseus’ long voyage home); and the wave of *Learning Curve* and the implicit yearning of the surfer for being sustained in the sustaining wave, the Green Room (in the language of surfers) and its seemingly timeless “still point” (see next note).

And here’s the issue: Is the nostalgia in question an interminable deferral of a finally unattainable desire (the Romantic implication) or something quite different, the foretaste of a *state* (of awareness? of being?) to which a given work of art is a possible initiation?

¹⁴Here we abuse Kenneth Burke’s famous concept of “Perspective by Incongruity.” In our view the notion of *incongruity* is insufficiently inclusive, for in a transcongruous domain congruity and incongruity have equal rights.

On Gary Hill's *Cut Pipe*

contrasts, discontinuities — the multifarious “cuts” the work has metaphorically and literally effected in us — continue to do their divisive work; yet, without favoring congruity over incongruity, our own sense of balance recovers amidst apparent disorder. We do not in fact succeed in “going home again”: the ordinary nostalgia, the longing to heal the breach of experience by returning to a lost state of cognitive cohesion is not satisfied. But neither is what was most profoundly at stake in such nostalgia simply abandoned. Rather, we have found in our disorientation an opportunity to *cut to the radical of orientation*: to uncover and explore that function of intimacy in ourselves that is the source of any orientation whatsoever. We return to the middle.

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Middle of the room: (Loud)speaker as *orientation point*. The navel of the space. Center of the mandala. Voice as clay centering on the potter's wheel. In the middle of the middle is the *still point*.¹⁵ At dead center is the quick — that's the point.

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Intimacy is a function of the *state of the reach* — the infinitely modulated temporal dimension of touch. Consider the statement: “I reached the place in myself where what happened to me was a report on my state of being.” Or perhaps you could say: A revelation of my intention.

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Radically radial: Experienced organization (“ours,” “the world's”) can be oriented bilaterally or radially. Our two-handed world discriminates by division, separation. Touch as an (adult) act of the hand tends to discriminate, but it also (as the infant's natural tendency) can embrace and unite. Perhaps it only reinforces bilaterality up to the point where one surrenders to the *field of touching* and the natural discovery of radiality — organization from the center out, then from the periphery in. The hand *releases* into the radial awareness, from the palm to the fingertips, *fanning from the middle outward*. Then it rebounds. *Cut Pipe* is both bilateral and radial: it begins as a nominal *one* discriminated as two parts, then draws its participant into its *cut*, which, turning out to be a middle, *centers attention*, then *radiates it in the space*. Like a pale fire.

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Cut to the fit.
Fit to the cut.¹⁶

Neither is sufficient, neither suppressed. The transcongruous work orients us *to* reality in such a way that our very being is continuously creating a context for our presence *in* reality.

¹⁵“Still point” will be familiar to readers of T.S. Eliot's poem “Burnt Norton” (the first poem of *The Four Quartets*), section II: “at the still point, there the dance is,/But neither arrest nor movement....” This vision of suddenly realized timelessness (“To be conscious is not to be in time”) derives from Dante's vision of eternal stillness in the last canto of the *Paradiso*. Interestingly, “still point” is used as a technical term in Craniosacral Therapy, an offshoot of Osteopathy, for the act of causing a momentary suspension in the fundamental pulsation of the body (the “craniosacral rhythmical impulse”); the effect is to mobilize the system's inherent self-correcting abilities. The experience of the Still Point is “wholeness” (as in “health”) and engages inherent self-balancing. [This note is abbreviated from our piece “Tall Acts of Seeing,” concerning Gary Hill's *Tall Ships*, referenced in note 10 above.]

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There *is* more than one of us here. Yet there is only one voice at one time. Heard by many ears. *Received by minds*, plural, at one and the same time or at more than one time — the boundaries unclear: they no longer bound exclusive domains but define a territory, an event field. A *field of intra-activity*. In this field we are no longer *only oneself*. It is *intrinsically dialogical* — even when nothing is being said. The field is itself linguistic in that meaning is communicated at any given time without apparent cause or design, but here meaning does not derive from a known source with a clear intention to communicate meaning but issues as a *declaration of the field*. The fact of the cut, the entrance therein, the initiation, the *intrinsic touch*, the declaration. This is the weave of the text,¹⁷ that the underlying continuity is inescapable once the integrity of the field has been declared. The proof is: You can move freely within it guided by nothing but your awareness. You enjoy the collaboration of the others there even in their silence, as they walk within the declaration, through the passage of the cut, their hands in the mind feeling the contours of what is spoken. They are intra-active *within* the cut. Touching the untouchable. There is no not touching.

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The cut imparts awareness:¹⁸ A pipe connects. A cut divides. A conduit divided conducts no more. Yet the division or decision that makes a distinction, severing in reflection *this from that*, brings a further content into view. And the gap or cut at the end of a neuron — the famous *synapse* — occasions a leap across that gap. And leaping that gap or crossing that cut founds all cognition, conditions all consciousness. Now, in *Cut Pipe*, an image also crosses a gap. The

¹⁶In the '60s we used to play at bibliomancy with a Japanese-English dictionary, Kenkyusha, rumored to have been compiled by Zen monks: You put your question, opened the book and pointed. (The oracular equivalent of a point-and-shoot camera.) A certain friend of ours grew so fond of this dictionary and its always surprising responses that one evening she ventured to ask, "Do you love me, Kenkyusha?" The oracle pronounced: "*I am a book*."

Similarly, the name of Gary Hill's piece *Cut Pipe* seems intent upon putting a brake on the mere proliferation of its meanings. After all, the title just says "cut pipe," a metal tube cleft in two. Obviously it has not entirely deterred us here. On the principle that a thing, as it were, speaks its nature, we are perforce not unambivalent in performing its recital.

The title *Cut Pipe* and Kenkyusha's discouraging oracular response — aren't these twin instances of something like the Liar's Paradox turned on its ear? For the assertion becomes evidence of the very thing it explicitly denies. The voice that retards interpretation doubles as the spur of a reflective journey.

¹⁷*Weave*: The root sense of *text* (text, tissue, context, pretext, from Latin *texere*, to weave, fabricate) curiously parallels *tantra*, often defined as "continuity," and its etymology as "loom" (stretched, extended, therefore *continuous*).

¹⁸Isn't art like this: There is a boundary — a cut. It tells us what is *in* the work, and what is not. On one side — the work of art. On the other — the remainder of what is.

Now the cut ought not to occur *within* the work itself. For it is the boundary of the work that allows the typical illusion that the work "*is*" the world. The cut that severs the work *from* the world is repressed, and the world reappears by the magic of this repression, as its inner content. Now what if the cut itself is contained within the work? Is the illusion broken, the magic effaced? In many Modern (and Post-Modern) works, just this unmasking of the illusionary has motivated bringing the frame, the staging onto the scene of the work itself. But there are other possibilities — possibilities that, rather than disarming the magician, produce a magic and a disturbance of a far more radical potency.

If the act that distinguishes the work from the world occurs "inside" the work in a certain way, precisely our own location in relation to the work (and consequently to the world from which it is ordinarily distinguished) is disoriented. Where in the world is the work? Where is the cut? And where are we who witness this topological extravagance?

On Gary Hill's *Cut Pipe*

severed pipe interrupts in order to reveal. The break in the flow of electrons allows the stream to convey a message. A continuum is broken so that a new dimension might open on the scene.

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In the mathematician G. Spencer-Brown's fascinating "calculus of indications,"¹⁹ the act of making a distinction is taken as the founding act for the coming into being of any world whatsoever, whether that world be a discourse, a cosmos, or a context of perception. The way the *First Distinction* is enacted determines as well as inaugurates the character of the world to which it gives rise.²⁰

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A cut of meat. A kindest cut. The cut retains the character of the act that cuts it. The way you make the gesture of severance imparts the character of the act to the severed part. The artist's brush stroke, the stroke of a soldier, the imperious division of a map by god or king.

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Traces of an act, the trajectory of speaking, the weave of intentions, the fabric of location, the texture of experienced space and used time.

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The inside of the museum is not discontinuous with the world. To cut to the radical of orientation is to declare an ontological free zone wherein life and art are lived with the same immediacy. The view is an expanse of a single field: on one side, a *playground* (there is a children's museum named Please Touch) and, on the other side, a *charnel ground* (you are

¹⁹G. Spencer-Brown is the author of *Laws of Form* (E.P. Dutton, New York, 1979). First published in 1969, *Laws of Form* appears to be a work in the discourse of mathematical logic, yet it opens a path of thought of such scope and originality and is composed in such incisive language that it has stimulated, in us as well as others, intuitions well beyond its ostensible concerns. Indeed, it delivers abstract formulations intuitively applicable to the way in which works of art, subjects of philosophical or mathematical discourse, semiotic systems, ordinary languages, realms of religious or mystical speculation, culturally determined cosmologies, or states of everyday cognition come into being. The system is based on the subtle interdependence of acts of "distinction" and acts of "indication." An initial indication draws a distinction and divides a "space" into that region to which the indication is attached and all the rest of being. The singling out of distinct entities within that space is determined by the character of that initial act; thus what and how things are is never finally separable from that initiating "cut" — termed by Spencer-Brown, The First Distinction.

²⁰G. Spencer-Brown's "First Distinction" does not simply cleave a space that is already there, dividing it into, say, a left and a right, a this and a that; rather, it marks a space and distinguishes it from an unmarked space. Before the First Distinction has been made, you cannot say anything about what is there. There is neither a marked reality nor an unmarked, indeterminate reality. Nothing can be said about what is "primordial" — because in saying it one would be making the First Distinction. We say with G. Spencer-Brown that the first thing uttered is a Distinction. What precedes Distinction is not uttered. Here, there is no escaping the fact that everything in our discourse is the consequence of a *motivated* act whose metaphysics is finally *unenforceable* but for which, by the ethics of declaration, we are willing to take responsibility.

touched by suffering by virtue of being *here*). The famous *Klein Bottle*²¹ offers a model of our *nonseparation from life* in all its manifestations. There are no ultimately alien surfaces or politically nonresonant choices. We want to touch art because it touches us first. Once we are in touch with it we are nevermore out of touch with it. And when you touch a surface it is continuous with yourself and with itself. I like to be touched because it makes me aware that I am continuous with myself. So I touch back. I touch, therefore I am. I am touched, therefore you are.

The problem of museums — both the headache of the grim custodian committed to keeping our fingers off the art and our problem with the museum as a boundary between art and life — is not solved by the interdiction *Do Not Touch*. The deeper problem is not letting go in time. Perhaps in the *reach for the image* there can be a sort of “esoteric grip” on the space itself — something that grips without grasping, gets a grip on the ungraspable, takes hold without holding on.²²

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⇔ So it is I enter a room or a text and hear a voice coming from an unexpected source. But then, perhaps the real source is never accurately expected, because expectation and its prepatterning constitute an awareness that is inherently limited and limiting. Touch, like hearing, by its nature is “blind,” but then the way it “sees” subverts all expectation: Thus the videopoetics of touching a voice (speaking of being touched) delivers a subtle synesthetic shock. It precipitates a radical disorientation. But we say that it is only through disorientation and perplexity in the orientation process that we discover the radical of (re)orientation. And it is only when ordinary orientation has fallen away that the nostalgia for transcongruity can be satisfied. In the recital of its own severed site, the meaning of Gary Hill’s videosomatic installation is continuously reconfigured even as we pass through.

²¹*Klein Bottle*: “A one-sided topologic surface having no inside or outside, formed by inserting the small open end of a tapered tube through the side of the tube and making it contiguous with the larger open end. [After Felix Klein (1849-1925), German mathematician.]” (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

²²The Klein Bottle may be thought of metaphorically as a topological form in four dimensions whose nature as *continuous surface* is to house the space that shapes, allows, and houses it. The video artist and eco-activist Paul Ryan, an early associate of Gary Hill, has for many years meditated on variations of the Klein Bottle he calls “Klein forms.” Such forms have suggested to him a path of ecologically sensitive thought, for to model the relationship between thought and world, language and sense via Klein forms is by that very act to change the intuitive *context* of the way we think of the world, thus to change the world itself. It is to place the mind out in the territory, to reconnect intellect and touch, spirit and earth; to break the magnetic vise of all the bleak dichotomies and, by passing through a space that reconvenes beyond polarity, to heal the “cut” of thought.

Perhaps the dialogical process at its most reflective/reflexive itself moves toward the condition of the Klein form; for instance, one could imagine this footnote gaining a certain momentum and drawing such attention to itself that it fully subverted the text to which it is appended, so that by sheer domination of attention it became the text itself and the original text became an appendage. Such inversions could continue indefinitely, establishing a new textual homeostasis wherein the “interior” of footnote is continuous and intra-active with that of text and becomes the context of itself. It is as though the voice coming from within a pipe in the room defined the entire space surrounding it, just as certain indications come from dreams and spread through our work — e.g., the prototype for “esoteric grip” was delivered to us as “esogrip” transmitted from a dream by the artist Chie Hasegawa during the composition of this piece, arriving just in time.

So it is I enter a room or a text and hear a voice coming from an unexpected source [*return to text, please*] ⇔

On Gary Hill's *Cut Pipe*

sounding an image	signing a sound	voicing thoughts	between soundings	locating the sound of
my voice	imagining my voice through an object	giving voice to an image	between thoughts	
following an edge	unraveling speech from both beginnings and both ends	around extended		
periods of time	the time of my voice	tangent to my finger	my voice my finger	two points
in the mean	my skin its skin forming another skin	the skin of myself circulating with self-		
corrective pressure on its skin	forming a skin of space where i voice from	the skin is always forming and		
shedding itself	I have my finger on it moving it	I have my finger on my voice tracking it	thinking it	
within the skin	continuing a space of	playing the meaning	stretching the skin taut	
touching down	touching sound	touching image	touching touching	voicing
thoughts	between skins	drumming thoughts into a skin	driving the space	imagining the sound
hitting your skin	keeping the space taut	drumming your mind through the skin	circulating the space	
circulating the sound	grafting voices to the skin space	tracing our spiral in and out		
pulling the skin	pushing the skin	sending the skin to push the space to pull your skin taut	to touch	
your space	circulating the skin	I have my finger on my voice	tangent to the skin	put your
finger on it	put your mind through it	skin your thought	graft your skin	shed your
skin	give your skin to me	I want to put my finger on it	sign an image	imagining a sound forming a
skin space	drumming your mind through the skin	drumming the skin stretched through your mind	I	
want your mind	I want your mind for the skin space	another skin is pushing my voice	pulling my voice	
sounding the skin taut	forming a skin of space where i voice from	spacing thoughts under the skin		
pulling it taut	locating the space	imagining the distance between soundings	sounding the skin	
stretched between us	I want the skin	I want to spread the skin	I want to cover my voice with	
the skin steal the skin giving voice to the skin	cover the skin with the image of skin	space the sound		
ground the voice to the skin				

Notes on the collaboration: "Cut to The Radical of Orientation" originally appeared in *Public¹³: Touch in Contemporary Art* (Public Access, 1996, Toronto, edited by David Tomas). It is a recent product of a long collaboration involving Gary Hill, George Quasha and Charles Stein begun in the late 1970s in Barrytown, New York. Hill is a recent MacArthur Fellow whose work in video art and installation has been exhibited at major museums all over the world, with many solo exhibitions and retrospectives, including the Guggenheim, the Whitney, MOMA, and the Hirshhorn. Quasha is the author of several books of poetry including *Somapoetics*, *Giving the Lily Back Her Hands*, and the forthcoming *Ainu Dreams*. The ongoing Quasha/Stein collaboration with Hill includes sound poetry performance (e.g., *Tale Enclosure*, Hill's single-channel video) and various kinds of writing and live performances, the latter extending over twenty years of performance and 'dialogical' work between Quasha and Stein; this dialogue is expressed in their three recent books subtitled Gary Hill's *Projective Installations* [Numbers 1-3]: *Hand Heard/liminal objects*, *Tall Ships*, and *Viewer*. Stein is the author of a long-term project in poetry called *theforestforthetrees*, the most recent book of which is *The Hat Rack Tree* (1994). He plays Gregory Bateson in Hill's *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle?* Quasha contributed text and on-site development for Hill's installation *Disturbance (among the jars)* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, as well as "axial poems" as titles for several of Hill's pieces. The photo of *Cut Pipe* (1992), by Mark B. McLoughlin, Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

Conversation between musicians John Butcher and Wally Shoup
with Peter Monaghan, host of *Outside Jazz*, a radio show on KBCS 91.3FM, Seattle
June 1996

PM: Where does your playing come from and how did you arrive there?

John Butcher: I think improvising is actually something nearly all musicians do right from the first time they pick up an instrument, but the way people who now call themselves improvisors work is obviously in the context of a history of improvised music. When you're learning your instrument, you're encouraged to view the music out there around you as real music, and you copy that music, according to your own enthusiasms. Which is what I did when I started playing. My enthusiasms at the time were largely jazz with also a strong interest in 20th century composed orchestral and chamber music. All the time I was trying to play jazz, copying people I enjoyed—I knew it was a second-hand thing for me. It was a cross between a make-believe thing and a kind of studentship. Although I enjoyed doing it, it didn't contain enough opportunities for my own artistic input. At that time in England, it was a pretty exciting time — this was the mid '70s — you could go out to hear a jazz concert, and often on the bill, you'd get musicians like Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, Tony Oxley, musicians who had come from jazz and had made an incredible break from it. So you were exposed to it if you were interested in jazz at that time. Then it ceased. The two things have compartmentalized, with different audiences now, in England. But I used to hear these things and I was fascinated by it, but still pursuing my own course of jazz improvisation, so it was always there in the background. And then as you get more confident artistically, I realized that with free improvisation, you could start bringing in all the other areas of musical activity that I was interested in, into the kind of perhaps jazz energy, jazz ideas of development, jazz ideas of personal expression, but with so much else as well. And particularly as a European, I found that very important.

PM. Wally, you've talked to me about growing up in the South and feeling that same sense of some isolation from the traditions, as well, even though jazz is an American tradition. You were able to take an objective look at all the different traditions and figure out what you wanted to keep.

Wally Shoup: Growing up, I actually was listening and attracted to more basic, not quite so advanced music, blues and R&B and black-oriented pop music of the '50s and '60s. By the time I opened up to jazz, in the late '60s, a lot of boundaries were getting broken down, from free jazz and jazz-rock fusion. A lot of experimentation was going on. So I was kind of naive, and I was pretty open to all that, and I didn't have an axe to grind about how it didn't sound proper according to the jazz canon at the time. But it was very "jazz-oriented." You had horns and you had a strong syncopated pulse. And then somewhere around that time I was also getting opened up to the ideas of John Cage and electronic music and aleatory music, and it was just all a big feast for my ears. Somewhere around that time, the early '70s, I heard freely improvised music from England — and some of the Dutch and German

improvisation, but that always sounded more American to me; the German improvisors still sounded very much American or influenced by black jazz, much more than the stuff I heard coming out of England which was a brand-new-sounding music to me. It didn't swing in a normal kind of way. It had a sharp glancing movement. I wanted to follow its movement as I was listening and eventually it really spurred my imagination on to want to pick up an instrument, and just see if I could get a sense of how this music fit together and moved, without really knowing enough... I wanted to take advantage of my ignorance.

PM: John, how does that point Wally made strike you, about the difference between the English and the European scene at the time Derek Bailey and so on were really making their mark? Was the English scene perhaps more informed by something other than American music – European concert music, or by English music hall, or whatever?

John Butcher: There's probably two sides to that, because a lot of the innovations were actually made by a very small number of people. This was in England and Germany and Holland. So it's very difficult to generalize, because very often it was just the strength of character of just a few individuals who influenced a general feeling that was in the air at the time, and brought other people within their sphere. I think the English scene was very much a reaction against jazz, and some of those early musicians hated anybody connecting their music to jazz. Others saw it as a development of jazz, because it was like, perhaps, a development from Albert Ayler, things like this. I think what characterized English music partly was the desire to remove the soloist from the music, and to a large extent this was brought about by the percussionist John Stevens. His own interests were moving that way and he was an incredible proselytizer for getting people to take up his ideas. Some of the early recordings he did with Derek Bailey and Evan Parker, you can hear them slowly taking many of the traditional, recognizable elements of music out of the music and seeing what's left. But they weren't throwing the baby away with the bath water. They wanted to keep the energy of the interaction, but by removing all the clichés of the way it was viewed that it happened in jazz. John Stevens was actually a phenomenally knowledgeable jazz fan and a lifelong jazz enthusiast. But he realized that to make creative sense, at that time, you had to develop new models. I'm probably biased, but I do kind of think that the English scene actually made a more radical break from previous musics than the other scenes which did follow more on from the American free-jazz tradition.

PM: It's interesting that you place John Stevens as centrally as you do. What's your sense of that, Wally? Is he perceived here as centrally as John is placing him, or have we looked here more to Derek Bailey and Evan Parker, most particularly?

Wally Shoup: I remember the John Stevens recordings were at the time as significant as any of the others. I remember feeling at the time, I had a kind of intuition, that the drummers, Tony Oxley, John Stevens, Paul Lovens, Paul Lytton, the ones who had liberated themselves from time-keeping chores, were really allowing a new kind of music. Not only by the way they were playing "arhythmically," and not feeling constrained to be always on the meter and on the pulse, but also that they had become central in the concept of the music, that there was a true equality going on, and you could hear it in the playing. A more radical group music emerged. I remember listening to John Stevens, those recordings he did with Trevor Watts, and what I liked so much about them was the way they tended to keep an incredible tension for a long time, without a lot of release. It was a new slant on the typical jazz thing

of tension and release, where you know when that's coming, and that makes you an aficionado. They were finding ways of keeping the music very, very intense and concentrated without doing that, which I thought was remarkable. I understand Stevens was pretty doctrinaire. But, at least as I listen to it, it was at the service of freeing up the music, not to become another form of dogma.

PM: Obviously in the early days there was antagonism towards any of the jazz clichés, and really any of the jazz signifiers, almost. You couldn't even comfortably hint at jazz and get away with it, from what we read. What effect did that have and, as it has evolved over the years, how has it played out, with respect to melody, harmony...?

John Butcher: I think amongst a lot of people of my generation, there's a feeling that in a way the battles have been won, those fought in the mid '60s and early '70s, and there's not the pressing need to go over that ground again, to make the point. I think those breaks had to happen to kick something new into existence, but as always, things can start coming back in again, transformed, looked at from a different angle, viewed in the light of the new understanding that one gained from working in completely abstract ways. When I came to seriously playing group improvisations with people, I consciously tried to avoid anything almost that referred to saxophone music, and developed a lot of useful techniques and ideas, both for the actual music making and the ways of making music. But again that was something I had to go through. What everybody does, they reinvent their own little bit of the wheel, many years after the events where the breaks have been made. But I'm happy now to bring other elements in. I wouldn't want to make overt jazz references. But I do find it a little too perverse to ignore the lyrical possibilities of the saxophone. I actually like that sound.

PM: The general take on free improv early on, from the jazz community, was a not particularly generous one, around questions of craft. Clearly with players like you and Wally, one can hardly overlook the enormous care that has gone into craft. It's not necessarily the same craft that a jazz sax player would have any more. Nonetheless, it's almost like a composite of some of the sounds that most jazz sax players will maybe venture occasionally for effect, but without necessarily developing them into a vocab.

John Butcher: Yeah. In a way, looking for instrumental possibilities is something that's been going on in Western music for the last 60 years, and has always been an intrinsic part of a lot of other music around the world. So, the reason it often dominates in improvised music is quite an interesting question. Part of it is, it's often looked at negatively as a response of trying not to do things. But fortunately I think it's evolved more into a case of bringing more into the music. You're actually adding to musical possibilities through including slightly more abstruse instrumental techniques. I think the reason this comes about is that, particularly with group playing, if you seriously try and improvise in a group with people, freely, even if you're a complete novice at it, immediately afterwards, if you've got any feel for it, you're going to be struck by a vast number of questions about what you're doing. Why did I do this? Why did I do that? Why did this response sound dreadful, and very often, this response sounded dreadful because what I was doing had no connection to the other musicians. I was trying to impose a bit of another kind of music on what they were doing. So, in my case, a lot of my early improvising experience was with string players, and strings have such a world of internal sounds, and these were players, some of them, with quite extensive new-music

backgrounds. They've just got such a phenomenal vocabulary, that to improvise saxophone with them, using the full body of the instrument would sound like an elephant crushing their music. And I had to develop what was for me a new approach. Improvisation is very often a practical problem of dealing with situations. And a mistake that some people make is, I think, through focusing on the instrument too much. I'd like people when I'm playing not to be too concerned with the fact that it's a saxophone. What it is, is a tool that I'm making decisions on. It's a little different playing solo, but certainly in a group context, I want those decisions to have as flexible an outcome as possible, for a lot of different contexts. I've been very influenced by electronic music, and you can attempt to do work like that with a saxophone with cutting between sounds, breaking down the linear approach of the saxophone, breaking down its soloistic approaches. So sometimes instrumental focus is a little too fetishistic. People get into, How do you do this? How do you do that? It's more a case that one's set oneself a limitation of a particular piece of hardware, and you're trying to apply musical and creative thinking to that, appropriate to the situations you're in.

Wally Shoup: When I first heard the Music Improvisation Company, it excited my imagination. It wasn't so much, "What a great saxophone player!" or "What a great drummer!" It'd be more like, "What on earth is going on? What are these sounds suggesting to me?" Because sometimes they would not be suggesting what I call this kind of slalom approach to playing music where it feels like an instrumentalist is moving through a slalom of chord changes or this, that, and the other. A lot of times it would suggest to my imagination some sort of submicroscopic cellular activity that was going on. Because it was not making references to music in the normal sense of, "Oh, he's playing a fifth here." It would sound more like a door squeaking or something. But I liked the way it excited my imagination. Decisions being made and being made very quickly and very intuitively, and they were coming from players who had quite a bank of sounds in their arsenal, and not just a fairly limited number of sounds that, say, just referred to musical history. They were obviously playing textural sounds that sounded like sound effects, that sounded like electronic music, that sounded like any number of things. My imagination could really roam free, because some of the music was moving in such a staccato, quick way that it was almost going faster than I could process, so my imagination would kick in and come up almost with an interesting scenario that this music might be a soundtrack for, surrealistic usually in nature. It was very liberating. It was as if there were a whole new set of possibilities that also had that edgy intensity that good free jazz had.

PM: *In the U.S., there is much more of a jazz tradition to escape or to somehow avoid being pinned down by. In England, is there the same concentration on or awareness of individual voice? Or is there a sense that maybe there's a sort of a school of free improv almost?*

John Butcher: Well, again, you can count on the fingers of some would say one hand, some would say two hands, the early instigators of the music in England.

[A Mr. Joe ice-cream truck passes, broadcasting a distended Scott Joplin tune.]

You see, this is what happens to jazz after 70 years....So let's get back to the question. I've lost it, actually.

PM: *Yeah, I have too. You did point out earlier that it really was a few people doing it, and I guess one of the upshots of that might be a question about how you survive as a working*

musician there, doing this kind of music. It always strikes us from the U.S. that European players have far greater state support, say, and are able to work fairly well.

John Butcher: That's not really true in England, unfortunately. But at least until recently places like Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Holland had quite a lot of working opportunities, and those English players who do make much money at it make it all there, and a tiny little bit in England. So, it's a very peripatetic experience for many performers, which I think sometimes has had a detrimental effect on the music, looked at historically – the fact that to make a living, musicians have had to go out and do so much traveling can lead to a tendency of just reworking old ground rather than having the opportunities that other musicians might have to accept a bursary, taking time to actually reflect and develop the music. This can also be a positive thing, because it means what developments do occur tend to happen in the work situation, rather than abstractly through commissions. I guess in a sense, that's one of the things it still has in common with jazz – the way it works is you go out on the road and do a string of gigs.

PM: *How do you see improv developing?*

John Butcher: There is a lot of electronic development happening, in things like turntable musicians coming and working in improvised contexts, particularly from Japan. Otomo Yoshihide and people like that. And the kind of noise music that's come partly from rock is mixing up a lot with aspects of the improvised music scene. My personal hope is that more of the developments will come out of a sense of the history of the music. I mean that sounds terribly conservative and custodial. I hope it's not like that. But I think there's still a shocking, critical neglect, and lack of critical analysis of the history of the music. It's been very encouraging to hear about your radio program out here, which digs into it so much, and seems to know a lot about the European scene. There is no program in England that deals in any regular sense with improvisation. Maybe one of the jazz programs will stick on one record a week, and there's the odd chance for a live session here and there, but there's no real informed comment on it, and I think that if that backdrop happened more, there could be some very interesting developments, because, in the way it would prompt younger musicians to come in and not just reinvent the wheel, but push on to something of their own.

PM: *Isn't it the case here, Wally, that there's really a division between a sort of academic modern composition and free improv?*

Wally Shoup: There's always been a struggle going on, not just in overcoming music orthodoxy, but also in overcoming the me-first, star-creating system of our whole socio-political framework in America. Improvisation has always struggled against that, to provide a true alternative to it. That's always been a problem with this form. How are we going to evaluate it if we can't evaluate it in terms of sales numbers, and in terms of whether it fits into some history-of-music thing. Because it's constantly recreating its own criteria, but aware, like John said, of its history. There are definitely ways other musics can take the discoveries of improvised music and use them, and appropriate them, and put them in new commercial contexts. I mean, the Boredoms and some of these rock groups definitely are taking a lot of elements of noise, and I wouldn't be surprised to see some John Butcher samples show up in some of their stuff. But I tend to think that the revolution in this music was a rhythmic revolution, this feeling that you could liberate music from a strong, stated heart-beat pulse and still create vital music. I haven't seen a big breakthrough in the sense

that any music that gets too far away from a feeling that you can count it, or tap your foot to it, or dance to it, is ever going to have too much commercial potential. The excitement, however, of a really good improvised performance, being there and hearing it and being in the middle of it, is just still so vital and so real.

PM: After John's performance the other night, you pointed out that there were some jazz players in the audience, and that he really has something to tell them about his instrument, about things that don't normally find their way into jazz. Perhaps, John, you can explain just what it is you do that is "extra-jazz" from a technical standpoint.

John Butcher: Well, perhaps there's two sides to this. One is group playing and one is solo playing. And in a sense the solo playing is a little closer to jazz than my group playing. But I like to break away from the kind of continuous flow that's inherent in the saxophone and the linear, again inherent, nature of it. One key to this, is perhaps the way a string player, a violinist for instance, can work with a line and introduce double-stoppings into a line, which don't necessarily stop momentum, they just stop the kind of slightly facile thing you can get on saxophone of just whizzing up and down the saxophone. The equivalent to double-stopping is really playing multiphonics on the saxophone, which is getting more than one note to sound at the same time. I did quite a lot of work in looking into these, and you can use them in a melodic sense, because some of them have a quite diatonic basis or they're based around a pedal with intervals above that, and they can be incorporated into the more mellifluous aspects of saxophone playing. Other ones are much harsher sounds, and you're approaching areas perhaps of electronic music, and you can get close to sounds of maybe distorted guitar, feedback kinds of sounds. And once you start experimenting with those you're naturally led into different ways of hearing the music you're playing. Again, a tendency of the saxophone is... Well I'll put it this way, the tendency of the saxophone is for everything to have a breath length. And you can get into this, get trapped into this rhythm of breathing. You can make the decision to use that, and that could be great, or you can make the decision to break away from that. And if you try to do that as a saxophonist, go against the natural inclinations of breathing, it opens up whole new worlds of possibilities for you to analyze. Another thing is, again, the saxophone has a tendency for all the notes to run together. And a thing I've always enjoyed in jazz in particular is the wonderful articulation of brass instruments, the wonderful way a trumpet player can just play one note, and the interesting thing in that is really how he starts that note, the attack on the note, and it's something that can get neglected on a saxophone. People attack the beginning of a phrase, but they won't maintain the nature of... this idea of attacking notes throughout a phrase. All those kind of ingredients could be viewed as effects, and that's a danger, and something I actively dislike in improvised music, when you hear people who you think are just presenting you with a series of effects. So that the challenge is to try to incorporate them into a language and a vocabulary and something that will communicate meaning to an audience, and has the possibility of the emotional strengths that music has, and the possibility of the intellectual strengths that other areas of music have.

PM: It struck me that you've incorporated into a vocabulary all of those sounds that could be considered the marginal sounds of the saxophone. The expected sounds of the saxophone are those that just happen to have been incorporated into another vocabulary. And that I guess is the difference, isn't it, between effects, and a coherent way of playing the instrument?

John Butcher: Undoubtedly, and the drive for making new discoveries, I think, has to come from some view of the music before that. You're forced into these discoveries through wanting to communicate something, or wanting to be able to work in certain areas with certain people. There's a little bit of top-down influence – you make a discovery and that'll prompt your imagination into how you can use it. And perhaps in the earlier days that dominates more, but that's a very unsatisfactory way to work for very long. There's a trio I work with, with a guitarist, John Russell, and a violinist, Phil Durrant, which had a release recently, and a guy reviewed it, and said we were operating in the areas of European composers like Helmut Lachenmann. I don't know... He's probably not known at all over here. But he's a composer in his 50s who I've actually only recently heard, who works almost solely with what he terms the areas of the instrument which have been hidden in Western music, such as key clicks, breath sounds, and so forth. And I actually find his music rather dry. But, in response to your question – it's curious, that he comes really from the second Viennese school, and music that has happened after that, and he takes an extremely intellectual approach to it. He notates with absolute precision which key you've got to click, what fingerings you have for each breath sound you make. For the piano pieces, you run your nail a glissando over... not so the keys sounds, but just so you hear the keys click between the keys, and it's which ones you've got to do it on, and for how long and what tempo in between them... I was curious that this critic would make this connection. In a way, that trio that I work with, I hadn't viewed it like that. I think our musical concerns are quite conventional, although there are ingredients that we put into it that are perhaps not so common. But there is something in the air, and there has been for 30 years, and, about... In my worst nightmares I think we could be entering the age of the end of the instrument as we've known it. And I think that perhaps musicians like myself are the tail-end of conventional instrumental playing. I hope not, and in more optimistic days I hope it's a bit of a revitalization. But most of the music people consume now, unless it's just reworkings of past music, is electronically produced, sampler based. Even if they're listening to the human voice, that voice has gone through a vast number of processes in the recording studio before it's put out for human consumption. The whole thrust of most people's music consumption is away from acoustic music making. Making music with acoustic instruments is in a dilemma, and part of improvised music has been to address that dilemma. And as I say the optimistic side is it's a revitalization of keeping the human in music, and there's this little dark person behind me saying "Well, maybe this really is the tail-end."

Wally Shoup: Well, or it can feel, I'm sure, that all the possibilities have been explored, and then maybe somebody comes up with something about this big and that's worth another ten years. I've played over the years with a number of ensembles with electronic instruments and samplers and I sometimes feel that unless I can get something out of the saxophone that I haven't gotten before I'm going to sound like something from the 19th century and they're playing in the 21st century. Hopefully that has made me a better player or to have a wider vocabulary, but at the same time I also know as a player that there's something physical involved in playing an instrument where you use your breath and your lips and your fingers and there's more of a total physical involvement with the instrument. A lot of times with the saxophone it's not quite as apparent because you don't see what's going on in the throat and the cavity and the tonguing, etc., etc. But there's a lot going on, and a lot of refinement that can be continually worked on that I think is a physical as well as a sonic challenge that

keeps me intrigued with the instrument. And I think, again, in real time, in real space, when you're in the room with an acoustic instrument and someone that can play it, I think there's really something there that is ineffable and hard to translate later back even into any recording. And I think we all know that.

John Butcher: I hope that's what's going to keep this music alive. It's one of the few areas where you truly experience a live performance. Most people don't listen to music like that and if they do go to a concert, it's reproducing something that they can hear almost as adequately at home on CD, or in some cases, better. And it's really one of the few areas where you get an experience which won't be repeated, and puts you in contact with other people experiencing. It's a mutual experience from the audience's point of view, and you're close to the physicality of the making of it. You can see why it's happening. You can hear it unfold. You can hear the reasons for it.

PM: As Wally said the other night, you can see the spit fly.

Wally Shoup: Well, one thing that freely improvised music does incorporate, ideally, is an in-the-moment immediacy. When John played, the other night, there was something going on in the alley, I'm not quite sure what it was. It was either a recording or someone was practicing their opera singing, or something...

John Butcher: Some strange opera singing, wasn't there?

Wally Shoup: ...and, John to his credit, and in keeping with improvised music, instead of that being, like "No, oh god, this is going to ruin a performance," it was more like, "I'll incorporate this into the performance for a short period of time." And we're all going to be in on that, the audience as much as the player. Because John wasn't prepared for that. I think there's something about freely improvised music above and beyond the actual making of it, that I've always felt is a good kind of a mental attitude to take towards living in the late 20th century... [...] You have to get a kind of a good intuitive feel for when something is resolving, when it is not, when have we reached a climax, when have we not. All these things are I think part of the repertoire, so to speak, of freely improvised music in the more non-musical senses, in the way John mentioned earlier. His instrument is a tool for decision-making. That sounds kind of arcane – because you're going, "I like to listen to music, I don't like to hear people making decisions..." – but in fact, when the decisions are being made right in front of you, and they're sonically interesting, I think you're getting a musical experience and you're also getting a sort of metamusical experience that I think is sort of liberating for the mind, and also goes counter a little bit to this feeling you get in our country that people sit around and calculate what you need, what you want, and then they give it to you, and lo and behold, you respond, most people will respond, and you feel like you're constantly being manipulated by some greater mind or something that knows exactly what's going to push your buttons.

PM: That immediacy, though, is the element of live jazz that can sometimes save it from the formulaic, market-driven, market-designed nature...

John Butcher: Sure, yeah.

PM: ... the difference between a recording of a mainstream band, even, and their live performance can be quite staggering, when you just hear what is dared by the musicians on

a jazz stage, and how much of it is really sound that is hard to imagine being recorded ever, even if they're playing a standard ...

Wally Shoup: Well that's part of jazz history. When you think of jazz in the best sense of the word, you really... It's the sound of surprise, of being right in the middle of something, that's getting created right then and there. That's definitely part of the legacy of jazz history. I would imagine the whole age of recording etc. etc. has changed so much of everything, including jazz and including improvisation to a degree, and you always run into the dilemma that once you record an improvisation and play it back, it's no longer improvised. Improvising is a sort of extreme of saying, "No, the appropriation world, the world of recording, is not going to take this from us. This cannot be taken from us, and this cannot be repeated totally." I think there's a kind of stubbornness involved, and I think that's why maybe it came from England to a certain degree, too.

John Butcher: There are certainly a few stubborn characters around over there...

* * * * *

*The London-based soprano and tenor saxophonist, **John Butcher**, has emerged, over the last 20 years, as one of the most advanced and compelling practitioners of non-idiomatic, freely improvised music. He has collaborated with most of the other leading British and European figures in that realm of music.*

Butcher honed his saxophone skills while playing in jazz bands and performing for theater and dance companies. At the same time, he studied physics at university, en route to a doctorate in the early 1980s.

In the years following, he began, he says, a process of discarding most of what the saxophone had been expected to do in jazz settings, and then replacing it with his own discoveries and formulations of new and older techniques and sounds.

The accompanying discography makes clear how broad his musical experience has been, and how central to developments in European and American free music. Several recordings are with ongoing groups. His shorter-term or occasional collaborations have been with a who's who of the field: Derek Bailey's Company; Fred van Hove's t'nonet; King Übü Orchestri; Gräwe's GrubenKlangOrchester; Radu Malfatti's Ohrkiste; Steve Beresford's Orchestra, and Werner Dafeldecker's Polweschel; Günter Christmann; Fred Frith; Larry Ochs; Zeena Parkins; Reggie Workman...

Increasingly, in recent years, Butcher has made his presence felt in North America while visiting to perform solo or with a wide range of improvisors. At festivals, he has appeared with European players including the now Chicago-based German pianist Georg Gräwe, bassist Barry Guy, percussionist Raymond Strid, reed players Mats Gustafsson and Luc Houtkamp, and percussionist Gert Jans Prins. He also appeared with percussionist Gino Robair in San Francisco, cellist Matt Turner in Milwaukee, and cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm, trombonist/guitarist Jeb Bishop and violinist Terri Kapsalis in Chicago.

At home, John Butcher also is an organiser of SoundArt, a three-day British festival of composition and improvisation, and he operates the forward-looking Acta Records label.

***Wally Shoup** is a Seattle-based alto saxophone improviser whose most recent recording is Project W (Apraxia, 1994) with the trio of the same name.*

DISCOGRAPHY

Fonetiks (Bead, 1984)

Duos on tenor and soprano saxophones, and amplified soprano saxophone, with Chris Burn on piano, percussion, and trumpet.

Conceits (Acta, 1987)

With a still-extant trio formed in 1984 with two string players, acoustic guitarist John Russell and violinist Phil Durrant.

Embers live (Acta, 1988)

Improvisations by Butcher and Burn with flutist Jim Denley and cellist Marcio Mattos.

News from the shed (Acta, 1989)

The Butcher-Russell-Durrant trio augmented, from 1988, by percussionist Paul Lovens and trombonist Radu Malfatti.

Cultural baggage (Acta, 1989)

Chris Burn's Ensemble, formed in 1984, for free and structured improvising. Jim Denley, flute; John Butcher, tenor and soprano saxophones; Stevie Wishart, violin and hurdy gurdy; Phil Durrant, violin; Marcio Mattos, cello; John Russell, acoustic guitar; Chris Burn, piano; Matt Hutchinson, synthesizer and electronics.

Thirteen friendly numbers (Acta, 1991)

Solo and multitracked saxophone pieces.

Concert moves (Random Acoustics, 1992)

The Butcher/Durrant/Russell trio.

Spellings (Random Acoustics, 1992)

By Frisque Concordance, a quartet Butcher formed in 1991 with bassist Hans Schneider, pianist Georg Gräwe, and drummer Martin Blume.

Flavours, fragments (ITM Classics, 1992)

Pianist Georg Gräwe's powerful gang of outsiders, GrubenKlangOrchester, with Dorothea Schuerch and Phil Minton, voice; Robert Dick, flute; Michael Moore, clarinet; Frank Gratkowski, bass clarinet; John Butcher, soprano saxophone; Horst Grabosch, trumpet, Melvyn Poore, tuba; Radu Malfatti, trombone; Phil Wachsmann, violin; Ernst Reijseger, cello; Achim Kraemer, drums; Marcio Mattos, cello; Achim Kraemer, drums; and Georg Gräwe, piano.

Ohrkiste (ITM Classics, 1992)

Radu Malfatti's Ohrkiste, in which Butcher appeared with some outstanding British and European instrumentalists: Wolfgang Fuchs, bass clarinet; Peter van Bergen, clarinet, bass clarinet; Reiner Winterschladen, trumpet; Martin Mayes, horn; Radu Malfatti, trombone; Melvyn Poore, tuba; Phil Wachsmann, violin; Karri Koivukoski, viola; Alfred Zimmerlin, cello; Wolfgang Guttler, bass; Fred Van Hove, piano; John Russell, guitar.

Respiritus (Incus, 1994)

With vocalist Vanessa Mackness with whom he began performing during Derek Bailey's 1990 London Company week.

Conversation with John Butcher and Wally Shoup

A new distance (Acta, 1994)

Live recordings from 1993 of the last John Stevens' Spontaneous Music Ensemble, then a trio with guitarist Roger Smith and Butcher, who had joined in 1992, appearing with the drummer/leader.

A Slightly Uppgunned Selection (Tomorrow's Classics, 1995)

With Chris Burn and two Czech players: electronics gadgeter Martin Klapper, and Jindrich Biskup on improvised percussion.

London and Cologne Saxophone Solos (Rastascan, 1994-96)

Live solo recordings plus one piece for improvisation plus multitracked saxophone on tape.

Two concerts (FMP, 1995)

Phil Minton, voice; John Butcher, tenor and soprano saxophones.

Trio playing (Incus, 1995)

Butcher with the great guitar innovator Derek Bailey and the tuba player Orren Marshall.

Mouthfull of Ecstasy (Victo, 1996)

Phil Minton Quartet where the astounding vocalist is joined by Butcher, pianist Veryan Weston, and percussionist Roger Turner to perform pieces that include texts from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

Suite for B... City (FMP, 1996)

t'Nonet Fred Van Hove, another all-star pan-European aggregation, led by the veteran Belgian progressive pianist

Navigations (Acta, 1997)

With Chris Burn's now-11-piece Ensemble. Jim Denley, flutes; John Butcher, tenor/soprano saxophones; Rhodri Davis, harp; Stevie Wishart, violin and hurdy gurdy; Phil Durrant, violin; Marcio Mattos, cello, double bass; John Russell, acoustic guitar; Chris Burn, piano; Matthew Hutchinson, synthesizer and electronics; Axel Dörner, trumpet; Mark Wastell, cello.

John Butcher / Phil Durrant (Wobbly Rail, 1998)

With electronics alterations and improvisations by Durrant.

[For an excellent source of information on John Butcher, including a detailed discography, see:
http://www.shef.ac.uk/misc/rec/ps/public_html/public_html/efi/mbutcher.html]

—Peter Monaghan

As I Understand It: Group Psychology (Felix Guattari) and Technological Isolation (Electro-Acoustic Composition and the Unabomber)

Mary Lee A. Roberts

I started thinking about groups seriously when I read the piece in the *New York Times* about Ted Kaczynski, the alleged Unabomber. The article I am referring to is entitled, "The Tortured Genius of Theodore Kaczynski"¹. Much of the text is an interview with Ted's brother David. Perhaps it was David Kaczynski's description of Ted's life of isolation - a life spanning from a lonely but brilliant career as a student and mathematician to his anti-technology idealism and extremely isolated existence in the Montana mountains - that made me wonder about how people find groups to live with. About this same time, in my life, I was just about finished with a study of Felix Guattari and Toni Negri's book *Communists Like Us*. I was knocked out by the contrast of Ted Kaczynski's lifestyle with Guattari's easy assumption that most people want to be in groups (communal environments). As I understand Guattari, most people do better, at least psychologically, when they live and share their lives in group settings. With further reading (I started Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) I found even more evidence that Guattari takes it for granted that people are not psychologically cut out to handle isolation at all. *The Unabomber Manifesto: Industrial Society & Its Future*, penned by "FC" (the supposed Unabomber) and alleged to have been written by Ted Kaczynski, is an antithesis to Guattari's communal ideas. The *Manifesto* is a testimonial to certain types of isolation and anti-group idealism. Like Guattari, the Unabomber makes claims about human psychology, but in the opposite direction from communism. The Unabomber sets up an argument that most people need isolation from government and that technology is the most oppressive tie to government: "he opposes technology because it makes small groups dependent on large organizations". As I understand it, the Unabomber claims that technology is the oppressive tie to group (or at least communal, large group, and/or governmental) control.

Well, with all of this under my belt I started to reflect about the life of a person who composes music on a computer. Like Guattari and the Unabomber, I started making claims. I made claims to myself about the isolation a computer composer lives in - hours spent alone working at a terminal. Then I visualized a type of computer composing which allows for great companionship on, say, the World Wide Web - chances for group interaction that could not happen unless technology allowed such a wide scope for communications. In order to understand why a computer composer may want to choose to use technology as an inroad to communal environments; or turning in the opposite direction, and with a self enclosed digital sonic world, choose to work at music in a solo act; I turned to the extremes of Felix Guattari (big communalism) and the Unabomber (the alleged Ted Kaczynski and/or "FC" the Unabomber group(s) - big isolationist(s)) to search for an understanding.

Let's start out with Guattari since his reputation may be a bit shinier (he didn't, to my knowledge, kill anybody). *Communists Like Us*, co-written with Toni Negri, is a kind of neo-communal piece about how the type of communism devised by the authors allows for total individual autonomy: "the collective potential is realized only when the singular is free".² Guattari and Negri, like the Unabomber, are against all present states of government. "Communitarian projects" are always destroyed by powerful capitalist government. Workers must strive for a meaningful group setting so that the horrors of meaningless labor can be dismantled. Somehow Guattari and Negri have devised a psychology that allows for autonomy within a group. This is a more complex way of thinking than that of the Unabomber because, as I have noted,

¹ Robert D. McFadden, "The Tortured Genius of Theodore Kaczynski," *New York Times* 26 May 1996.

² Felix Guattari and Toni Negri, *Communists Like Us*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1990, 17.

the Unabomber can only imagine autonomy in isolation (at least for himself) or semi-isolation.³ The *Unabomber Manifesto* perpetuates a general disdain for what he/she/they call “leftist” styles of thinking. These “leftist” styles include feminist groups, gay rights groups, animal rights groups, and whatever else the Unabomber call(s) the politically correct factions - groups of people that don’t encourage sexist, racist, or homophobic modes of behavior or speech. The Unabomber finds the “leftists” to be too confining in their attitudes; especially when the so called PC-leftist people speak out against the use of words like “chick” (which may refer to a female person), or concerning the spanking of children - which the Unabomber can imagine finding cause for - but the so called PC-leftist factions don’t allow for. Once again, Guattari and Negri have a much more complex view of autonomy. They visualize a type of autonomy that doesn’t feel inhibited by groups but is encouraged by groups. Here’s what they say:

“What is at stake here then is a functional multicentrism capable, on the one hand, of articulating the different dimensions of social intellection, and on the other hand of actively neutralizing the destructive power of capitalist arrangements. This is the first positive characteristic of the new revolutionary subjectivity. Its cooperative, plural, anti-centrist, anti-corporatist, anti-racist, anti-sexist dimensions further the productive capacities of the singularities.”⁵

Guattari and Negri stress that the singular (the individual person) begins the revolution leading to a communist lifestyle not in connection to an ideology, but first with herself/himself realizing the scope of what the world allows for as “real”. “Real” means a dedication to a respect for where each individual is in their comprehension of the world. This type of thinking allows for all types of groups to co-exist including the group type thinking of an individual who lives entirely alone. An individual, as I understand Guattari, will encounter only despair if she/he can only experience total isolation living alone or in a group. The actual physical living situation may be irrelevant.

I feel at this point in this paper that I need to take a detour away from Guattari (and Negri) and the Unabomber and relate to you (the reader or listener) a story about an incident that happened to me today (9.5.96). Here it is: I have a colleague who I find very interesting because he is so passionate, vocal, and all around militant about his ideas. The guy likes guns, hunting (killing animals), and Republicans (or at least non-Democrat-types). I, currently being in pursuit of a pacifist (in regard to humans and animals) lifestyle, have little in common with him, though I found that because he cherishes being in the wilderness (while in pursuit of animals) he and I at least have a common thread which is the love of wild places. So we talk about wild places. Since I am a computer composer and the resident computer-head where I work, he asked me if I would explain to him the World Wide Web on his prized new computer which our institution plopped in his office recently. He wanted to know what Netscape could do for him. I explained that he could use a search engine to look up any topic that he needed information about. He wanted to look at Web pages concerning firearms, particularly Remington arms. So we found some Remington arms. I was beginning to feel a bit weird about *not* feeling weird about doing a bit of research on Remington arms. Now I understand Guattari and Negri’s point that: “repression is first and foremost the eradication and perversion of the singular.”⁶

OK, onward with the Unabomber and Guattari and computer composers.

There are some Guattari-with-Deleuze topics that I need to discuss beside the case of the Unabomber. Moving on to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: like I said, I read this book after *Communists Like Us*. The premise of *Anti-Oedipus* is Guattari and Deleuze’s theory that Oedipus complex styles of thinking/being disallow for personal freedom. As I understand it, the Oedipus Complex (“the holy family: daddy-mommy-me”) defines a type of power, certainly a hierarchy, that is infinitely oppressive especially when used to explain psychological states of being. Guattari and Deleuze include the Church, School, Nation, and Party in the terrorizing unit of hierarchy that Family defines. Any group that is governed by a hierarchy and not created by its members to have a specific linear mode of operations is Oedipal and therefore fascist. Michel Foucault’s take on Guattari and Deleuze’s anti-oedipusness is that their thinking is a type of plunging away of the sewage that clogs our brains - this sewage being “the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us”⁸. The Unabomber, in contrast, bases his/her/their whole

³ Though the Unabomber, as I understand it, allows for and encourages family units and discourages governmental intrusion on the family unit.

⁴ See the Unabomber Manifesto starting on paragraph 6.

⁵ Guattari and Negri, 107-108.

⁶ Guattari and Negri, 142.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) xv.

⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, xiii.

As I Understand It

philosophy of anti-technology on a theory that all people need to fulfill what he/she/they specify as the “power process” - that being a so called biological need for humans to seek power. The Unabomber describes the power process as being made up of four elements: goals, effort, attainment of goal, and autonomy¹⁰. Without power, the Unabomber thinks that people (especially the so called “leftists”) live lives of frustration: goals cannot be attained; effort cannot be directed toward meaningful projects¹¹; attainment of goals can only happen under the auspices of some type of power; and autonomy is, as I understand it, only available when power is asserted.

Guattari and Deleuze believe in a psychological/therapeutic process of short-circuiting power/fascism. Power or lack thereof is not a characteristic of specific situations (for example, a lifestyle with technology or a lifestyle without technology). Instead, lack of power is a state of mind, a way of looking at the world, a way of being real. Here is the therapy toward anti-power (a key to group living, as I understand it): it is a type of ego-loss where an individual finds herself/himself in a state of desire that need not rely on the accompaniment of pleasure, instead, what happens is the individual joins the world (a collective) without a stake in pleasure-seeking but with a stake in the “flow” or works of the group. It seems that when pleasure-seeking gets involved the singular needs power over collections of singulars and fascism is the outcome. Where schizophrenia comes in here is that Guattari and Deleuze use the schizophrenic as a model of a person who can experience desire without pleasure (the masochist). The schizophrenic is described as: “nothing but bands of intensity, potential, thresholds, and gradients. A harrowing, emotionally overwhelming experience, which brings the schizo as close as possible to matter, to a burning living center of matter.”¹² Maybe this type of experience is what the Unabomber has found with elemental survival activities. Maybe this is what composers (electro-acoustic or otherwise) feel when a composition is coming together. I theorize that this experience in living can only exist when a delicate and unique-to-the-individual relationship to groups has formed in the singular. The singular has found a peace with groups either by finding a way to be in groups, or as I understand Guattari: even when alone, the singular has the relationship to the group even if the group does not exist. This is group consciousness and it is vital to the “flow” that Guattari and Deleuze are always referring to. Guattari and Deleuze think that the psychological state of group “flow” can happen when the individual is not at the center - when group desire, not singular pleasure-seeking - propels the individual into the “flow”. “This subject itself is not at the center ... but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states through which it passes.”¹³

Let’s get back to the computer-composer subject now that there may be some relevance to a connection of that subject to learning computer languages and the group “flow”. I need to tell an interesting computer-composer story. Here it is: I know a computer composer who is dedicated to learning the most she can about computer languages and network administration. Like the guy I wrote about in the last story (remember the hunter/nature lover?) this woman has a type of concentration, a militancy, that I admire. It seems that she is a computer-scientist-”flow”-person when it comes to the desire end of things (not much pleasure in punching out code). She has a unique concentration mode and I equate her concentration to a group “flow” type state of being. She is dedicated to being in a group ”flow” by putting her art out into the world. Her unique concentration as an individual programmer/composer finds a “flow” because of her relationship to being non-centered in a group (the group being her listeners and the people she serves as a network administrator). Because of technology this computer composer can put her music (as digitized sound) into the music listening community (the Web) and not be centered (the Web seemingly has no center). Because of technology this composer can short circuit the anti-group -”flow”/centered-isolationist-power-process that can be defined as the traditional/all-sit-in-your-seat-politely-facing-the-stage concert tradition.

I can download the composer I am talking about’s music while in my de-centered house. This may be how I choose to do my group ”flow”, and technology makes it available. And there is something about the psychology of the intangible way computer files appear to me. Desire is production in a group: downloading sound files; compiling someone’s software; pulling things onto my computer from the world. This group ”flow” is a production I do by myself in anti-isolation.

⁹ See paragraph 33 in the Unabomber Manifesto.

¹⁰ Unabomber Manifesto, paragraph 33.

¹¹ It’s important to note that the Unabomber sanctifies only certain types of activities, especially those that have something to do with the most elemental modes of survival like food gathering, child bearing, and shelter making. All other activities are considered surrogate to survival activities and are artificial. I gather that all art making is superficial to what we are all supposed to be doing. Sports seem to be out too.

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, 19.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, 20.

“Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing...”¹⁴

It has definitely been Guattari who has made a powerful connection between groups, individual-in-a-group situations, and desire. Production of desire is a social act. Not all of this is clear to me, definitely, but it does seem clear that desire leading to “flow” has to be connected with autonomous individuals interacting in a non-centered group.¹⁵ Paul Lansky has an interesting way of understanding the changing group strata that are emerging out of the computer/composer combination. In his piece, “When Machines Make Music” Paul Lansky starts out with: “Let me now redesign the performer-composer-listener network to more accurately reflect the social consequences of using machines.”¹⁶ Paul Lansky suggests that a fundamental change has happened in how we listen to music, and that we have already accepted the new places where music can now “live”. He suggests adding “nodes”, or as I understand it, places or realms where music can be shared by groups and where music can comfortably live. The first “node” is called a “sound-giver” - a person who makes a gift of a composition on tape, or maybe a gift of a compact disk, to a community. The idea is to recognize a sound gift as an object that does not carry the weight of ownership.¹⁷ After all, the sound on the tape may not belong to anyone or it may have its origin in an individual other than the giver. The “sound-giver” is an individual who has a desire to put sound into a group through technological means. It seems that the essence of the technological means can dismantle the “power process” (at least to a certain extent) so that desire for sound sharing in a group is uninhibited by isolating pleasures. One of Paul Lansky’s stories about a “sound-giver” is very beautiful, here it is:

“When I was visiting the California Institute of the Arts, one of my students there gave me a tape of the most wonderful moving white noise bands. It turned out to be US Interstate 5 late at night. He had simply parked part of his musical view of the world on this tape and wanted to share it. It certainly changed my world-view--a highway would never sound the same!”¹⁸

Paul Lansky’s second “node” is the “instrument builder”. He brings up examples of software (music making instruments) and music making languages (Csound and Cmix to name a few) and makes the claim that the environment that the software and/or language(s) creates lends a certain flavor to the music that was composed with the software and/or language(s). This is obvious to anyone who has worked with these types of “instruments”. Paul Lansky says that “musical systems now become ways to listen, perform, and compose through the mind of another.”¹⁹ The individual can simultaneously be an instrument builder, a composer, a computer language and software user, a performer, and an audience. Here is a possibility for a very non-obvious but vital group that can exist inside the individual’s experience - the group that forms from roles that normally would have to be isolated - one role for each individual. The “wearing of many hats” through technological means can be a type of group interaction within the individual computer composer. Perhaps if Guattari were still alive he might recognize these groups that live inside of a technologically minded individual as a new breed of communal living.

The last point that I want to discuss is an elaboration on the experience of an individual, who with the aid of technology, can listen/compose through the mind of another (the “sound-giver”). Paul Lansky mentioned the artist who makes tape recordings to give to a community of listeners. These listeners may in turn re-contextualize (through technological means) the sound on the tape into their own compositions.²⁰ Whatever happens to the taped sound, it gets taken to another place, taken to another context to be heard and composed with.

¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, 26.

¹⁵ I need to reiterate the connection between the role that technology plays in providing easy access to digital compositions in a non-hierarchical mode. Even exchanging tapes with a friend helps to dismantle the hierarchical isolating-“power process” of the concert hall. See Brad Garton’s fine article in *Array* Vol. 14, no.1, Winter 1994 entitled “Why I Hate Concerts”. He really nails the concert experience to the realm of dinosauric iso-hierarchical tortures.

¹⁶ Paul Lansky, “When Machines Make Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* 28.2 (1990): 106.

¹⁷ I can imagine how Guattari might have described sound ownership: the hierarchy of “it’s mine” that takes over when the giving fulfills a type of weird masturbatory pleasure for the giver.

¹⁸ Paul Lansky, 107.

¹⁹ Paul Lansky, 108.

²⁰ I always feel like listening is an act of composition. Me being conscious of sound is composing a context for sound to live in my head.

As I Understand It

Sometimes, as a listener/composer, I get taken to groups in places by sounds. The sound, to me, can be stationary and I must meet the sound and the groups that it is associated with where it (the sound) lives. Here is the last story of this paper: Just last week I noticed one of my colleagues had a James Taylor LP in his office. The moment I saw the LP I was forced by desire to put my head back in time and into groups out of my ancient history (grade school in the early 1970s - listening to AM radio with my sisters; then I was in the mid-1980s in Los Angeles zipping around with my friend in her convertible VW Bug while listening to a James Taylor tape). I was so inspired that I went out and bought a CD of James Taylor's greatest hits (all the time thankful that CD technology has kept 70s pop songs alive). "Sweet Baby James" took me to an interesting place while I was preparing dinner one night. I normally live (singularly/alone) in Fargo, North Dakota; but I was instantly in a group (a trip with a friend) in New England when James Taylor's guitar twanged out a sound that made his:

"Now the first of December was covered with snow.
So was the turnpike from Stockbridge to Boston.
Though the Berkshires seemed dreamlike on account of that frostin'.
With ten miles behind me and ten thousand more to go...ooo...ooo...oh."²¹

put me right there, back in those familiar wild places.

²¹ James Taylor, "Sweet Baby James," rec. December 1969, James Taylor, Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1976.

“Life Can Never Be Too Disorienting” (Guy Debord): Tracing the Situationists as Radical Lifestyle Improvisers, With Suggested Applications for Music Improvisers

Mary Lee A. Roberts

Introduction to a Situationist-Style Everyday Life

If I were to try to think about Situationists in a reductive yet heuristic way I would have to think that this is a group of people who manage to infuse every moment in their lives with self-made creation. I imagine that many folks have not had much contact with Situationist thought or action: the Situationist writings up until recently have been unavailable or hard to find and Situationists instinctively did not demand publicity or notoriety. Consequently, I will begin here with a broad-scope view of Situationism.

Guy Debord, probably one of the most remembered of the core group of French Situationists, anti-spectacle film maker and writer of the quintessential Situationist theory book *The Society of the Spectacle*, committed suicide in 1994. Raoul Vaneigem, another one of the France Situationist group, wrote the other masterpiece of Situationist thought: *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Vaneigem has been interested in lifestyle improvisation and has produced especially lucid writings regarding the sacrifices of the wage-slave worker/consumer. Ken Knabb, who has lived his Situationist-inspired life of study in Berkeley California, made some important English translations of French language Situationist literature¹. Knabb is often neglected in contemporary Situationist documentation probably because he has been all over the map with his interests and writings: he has been a particularly anti-slave to any set doctrine — typically the free-wheeling American.

All Situationists agree that the struggle is against spectatorship. Through intense, serious, critical thinking and writing Situationists have realized that participation in our lives has been denied by: waged work, survival², consumption (which keeps us enslaved to wage-work), and alienation from meaningful life; alienated from our own creative intuitions, alienated by commodified relationships with the people around us, alienated from our creative intuitions when we spend our lives watching the spectacle of ourselves playing out roles demanded by contemporary civilization. The hole of despair gets deeper and deeper and the task of creeping out seems only to be facilitated by: our creations — acts of personal art designed to subvert the spectacle — serious play; and critical thinking concerning our everyday life — making the changes and critically looking at the changes so that we move ahead as art—makers dedicated to our art.³ In August 1964

¹ See *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981).

² Even Neo-Primitivists like John Zerzan, people who are familiar with the Situationists and use their language, agree that the free-time allotted to pre-civilized humans was more abundant and at least less spectacular and more participatory than the technology-infused modern lifestyles. See John Zerzan *Future Primitive* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia/Anarchy, 1994).

³ This is where the Debord phrase “Life can never be too disorienting” is especially cogent - this idea for a situation is used to purposefully create disorientation so that critical thinking is automatically engaged.

the Situationist journal, *Internationale Situationiste*, (volume # 9) published an article: “Questionnaire” where Situationists gave unusually straightforward answers to such basic questions as, “What does the word “Situationist” mean?” The reply by the Situationists to their own question was, “It [Situationism] denotes an activity that aims at making situations, as opposed to passively *recognizing* them... We [the Situationists] replace existential passivity with the construction of moments of life, and doubt with playful affirmation... Since the individual is defined by his situation, he wants the power to create situations worthy of his desires.”⁴

The spectacle includes these elements, all designed to alienate the individual from her everyday life:

— The spectator is essential: each individual’s life is spectacularized to the point that she can only participate in her life as an observer. Spectators live their lives as if they were watching themselves on television. What is supposed to be real is looked at from the outside in. As Debord claimed, “My dears, adventure is dead”⁵ as long as a person is in the role of a spectator.

— Spectacle makers claim a certain type of superiority to other activity makers; spectacles have to be hierarchically ranked in order to achieve the status of a worthy activity in a commodified world. Division and alienation are essential to the spectacle.

— Life is distanced from the experiencer; the spectacle has to be unattainably glamorous to catch our attention.

— The availability for participation is dictated by the distancing created by the spectacle and the participator’s ability to consume the spectacle.⁶

Interlude

As I think of music makers: the person down the hall who plays the piano for the bare sonic pleasure of hearing her music; the saxophone player who is in a small room — little splats of sound coming out of his horn: pop, poot, bop, pop, etcetera, and over and over; here is engagement. A group of musicians; each individual has an ear pointing down toward their instrument and the other ear is pointing up to catch the broadcast of the blend of waveforms — careful sound making, searching for a point of communication, then a crash, then a point of interception — the only way to describe this group—hearing is to imagine how keenly people might listen to each other, if everyone only whispered. There is not much to understand except that the meaning is in the making of sound. As an observer I can try to creep into these sound—making—spaces but only as a joiner; there isn’t much room for outsiders here, there is nothing to be heard in a casual way, the sound is too serious, too demanding. Even when I’m eavesdropping on the pianist down the hallway I have to stop my activity and join in hers.

I think of George Eliot: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with

⁴ “Questionnaire”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 138.

⁵ Guy Debord, “Critique of Separation”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 37.

⁶ Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture; The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10.

stupidity.”⁷

The Dérive — to Drift

The dérive as described by Guy Debord is: “drifting ... a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances”⁸ — usually outlined as long periods of improvised activity. An example of a typical Situationist-style dérive could be a day-long tour of a neighborhood in a city with an improvisationally derived map for guidance. Nothing aimless here — there is a particularly strenuous Situationist-style attitude which demands a dedication to disorientation coupled with a constant awareness of what Debord called “psychogeographical relief”⁹ or the psychological impact of surrounding structures.¹⁰ Usual and familiar motives for choosing directions whether it be for sound making, route taking, or any other activity that could be classified as a dérive are purposely eschewed. Knowledge of possibilities is let go — the purpose of rigorously not allowing for a purpose other than art-making is engaged¹¹. Here another level of spectacle-dispelling begins. I have discussed the outside-looking-in spectator: the person who cannot experience her life unless she watches through the lens of allowable social activities. With the dérive the spectator idea is peeled, the rind is removed, the idea of the fruit is turned inside out to expose the seeds, and the seeds show us that up to now (to paraphrase Marx), we have not been able to see anything around us that is not in our own image; everything is the reflection of ourselves. The world is constantly spectating us.

Of importance to a dérive inspired activity is serious play, serious game-making. I am reminded of the seriously playful music-making band called the Goleta Anarchist Music Ensemble (with a handy acronym of GAME). This group was dedicated to structured improvisations. Even though GAME’s mode of organization was fairly predictable: meet and agree on a music making activity and structure, make the music, have a discussion of the music-making event, start all over again; this group worked well in an unlimited space-time continuum. Like dérive participants, the Goleta Anarchist Music Ensemble had no idea of qualitative depth or quantitative time. The creation of lifestyles in the reflection of Situationist thought is similar to GAME’s construction, though Situationists may mention that they are opposed to all past ideas and memories of games. Situationists may stress the importance of starting a dérive at a point of anti-memory, probably to help accentuate their ideas on revolutionary non-hierarchical procedures.¹² As I remember, the Goleta Anarchist Music Ensemble never remembered to remember; looking forward was so crucial, so inherently sewn into their structures that memory was forgotten. For Guy Debord the dérive was a practice session for day-to-day living, “the revolution of everyday life ... will create the conditions in which the present dominates the past and the creative aspects of life always predominate over the repetitive.”¹³

⁷ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*. (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd.), 194.

⁸ Guy Debord, “Theory of Dérive”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 50.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Though the Situationists did not specifically apply the frameworks of the dérive to activities other than moving through ambiances, I theorize that the dérive and its accompanying ideas of non-hierarchical psycho-social behavior can provide an interesting template for creating improvisational settings for art-making.

¹¹ “In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.” Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 50.

¹² “Our first task is to enable people to stop identifying with their surroundings and with model patterns of behavior.” Attila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem, “Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 66.

¹³ Guy Debord, “Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 75.

The *dérive* inspired activity has two important features: first, the *dérive* would likely not occur in a closed-off space; and secondly, the *dérive* itself cannot be ideologized. These two features enable the anti-spectacle, a type of situation. Spectators demand that events have some predictability; events have to happen in a certain location and be limited to a certain time constraint. Spectators demand that events be announced, located, and all activities must to be closed-off, otherwise how could actions be consumed? Since art-spectacles must have a set agenda to inform spectators: for example, a *Happening* in the classical sense, has to have a program or at least an idea behind it that is announced; this idea/ideology serves the purpose of drawing spectators to the event. Even when spectators in the classical *Happening* are allowed to participate in the activities, there are still ideologies that must be followed so that the event can remain defined and closed-off. The *Happening* itself relies on the concept that all its participants need to look into the event, be outside looking in, rather than truly inside the event, rather than unselfconsciously included in some way. The Situationists diffused any possibility of spectatorship in their activities by disallowing any identifiable hierarchies to be formed in and around their groups. With no one in charge a *dérive* was rigorously constructed as a cooperative effort. Either everyone participated from the ground up or the event was a failure. All “stars” were rejected by the Situationist International. On the other end of the consumer spectrum, the Situationists did not allow for disciples either. Executants/disciples demand certitudes, transform real problems into dogmas, and revolt against their reductively demanded certitudes.¹⁴ Typical of Situationist-style socialization was their need for free association, no bonds, no visible power hierarchies. The fallout of linear group art-making was what was to become a strange exercise in exclusionary practices.

Interlude

To dérive is to participate in an improvisational activity in an open-ended environment while making directional choices that are influenced by “psychogeographical variations”¹⁵ coming from the encountered surroundings.

This is what we set out to try and develop: a dérive inspired music improvisation group. We met every Wednesday morning to work on structured sound improvisations. Everyone who was around our community was invited. Nobody was excluded. I was surprised that after all these years of doing this sort of music-making that I still had a super basic lesson to learn. Though I am reminded that our community, a university, like all universities, has implicit built-in hierarchies that cancel out most opportunities for truly anti-hierarchical improvisational settings.

The problem wasn’t an obvious Situationist-style, two-way, hierarchy at first. The person who was unable to hear the group interaction because she was playing her own self-contained music all the time messed up the works quite a bit. Any psychogeographical translated-to-psycho-musical landmarks were almost unidentifiable in our chaos. What were we to do? At times it was difficult and almost impossible to have any group hearing at all. If we were to tell her that she can’t play her self-contained music throughout our improvisations then we would have defeated our purpose of non-hierarchy. But she was aggressively laying a trip on us, wiping us out with her hierarchy and turning what we had hoped would be a dérive-like trip through music ambiances into a defensive collective

¹⁴ “Countersituationist Campaign in Various Countries”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 113.

¹⁵ Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 50.

aggression pitted against her. Week after week we were gritting our teeth. Other members of the group tried to de-assemble her oblivious contributions by creating guerrilla-style sonic attacks against her sounds. The temptation for warfare was almost intolerable. There was no getting through to her. It was an unfortunate scene, we all suffered, including, and especially, her. Finally, like most hierarchical situations, the time confines of the semester demanded that our group de-assemble for a holiday.

I had always thought that the exclusionary practices of the Situationists amounted to somewhat arbitrary excuses for attacking certain individuals, almost to the point of espousing an ideology for how they created relationships. It wasn't until recently that I realized exactly what the Situationists were trying to do by being exclusionary and non-hierarchical at the same time. I could never make the strict social constructs that the Situationists made, it is just not in me to be that brutal, I'd rather sit and take the abuse handed out to me for being hierarchical. But I do understand what rigorous non-discipleship is all about now.¹⁶

Detournement — A Cross-Synthesis Between Divert and Subvert

The detournement is a technique for improvising radical pieces of work, used by Situationists mainly for propagandizing, where two or more art expressions (for example: a music expression and a print expression, or a film expression and a print expression) are synthesized into a revolutionary configuration resulting in a film, book, even a musical recording.¹⁷ The Situationist International group led the way in theorizing about plagiarization while continuously performing subversions via improvisations on already extant spectacles. Some of the detournement-style subversions originated in negating the already negative images provided by Surrealists and their milieu. In his article: “Methods of Detournement”, Debord mentions that Duchamp’s already negate-afying mustache on the *Mona Lisa* is “pretty much old hat” by now. Debord goes on to say that simple negation is boring and shows no evidence of rigorous and radical critique of the present state of Western Culture which is boringly obsessed with personal property. I think that Debord was clearly dedicated to propagandizing his idea of non-hierarchy when he described the effect of detourned images, “The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used.”¹⁸

It is not unusual that a detourned image would couple the most polarized expressions that can be plagiarized. Debord’s theory of negation was elemental to his anti-spectacle views. Negation (and perhaps

¹⁶ In Ken Knabb’s autobiographical “Confessions of a Mild-Mannered Enemy of the State”, he tells stories of extreme and disruptive calls for “breaks” or mandatory exclusions of individuals from a group. Here is a story he tells concerning a particular series of breaks initiated by some associates of his: “They too had gone through a traumatic period that had eventually led them [Ken Knabb’s associates] to question the sort of hostility and delirium that had frequently accompanied breaks in the situ [Situationist] milieu, and had initiated some degree of reconciliation with some of the people they had previously broken with. This did not mean that they were resigned to settling back into the usual superficial social relations.”

See Ken Knabb, “Confessions of a Mild-Mannered Enemy of the State”, *Public Secrets*, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1997), 136.

¹⁷ Classically, a Situationist-style detournement might be: a cartoon with the text bubbles white-ed out and a radical anti-spectacle message inserted, or Debord’s movie *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973) based on his book of the same title where he (Debord) uses voice-overs (the texts taken from his book) combined with excerpts from familiar feature films like: *Johnny Guitar*, *Potemkin*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

See Ken Knabb’s preview of *The Society of the Spectacle* in, “On Debord’s film “The Society of the Spectacle””, *Public Secrets*, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1997), 376.

Also of note is the Anti-Authoritarian Anonymous’s book *Adventures in Subversion: Flyers and Posers, 1981 - 85* published by Oh! Press, San Francisco. This book was assembled by Dan Todd and John Zerzan and presents some classic examples of print detournement.

¹⁸ Guy Debord, Gil J. Wolman, “Methods of Detournement”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 138.

the negation of the negative) in terms of detournement is communicated in the language of the spectacle by playfully subverting the spectacularized elements themselves. The polarized components provide a time warp for consumption where the usual and familiar psychology of consumption from the outside in meets a kind of speed bump, so to speak; all of a sudden, because of the unexpected effect of the combined polarized images (or sounds, or whatever), an engagement in consciousness is started — the observer becomes a participant in the subversion. Disorientation helps to deny memory, helps to engage us (maybe with some panic thrown in there), and helps to put us in to the thick of participation.

Detournement and its association to the subordination of language is an obvious discombobulator of unilateral messages, the style of communication preferred by spectacle makers. Rather than de-valuing the artifact (as most popular art does), the detournement can re-value, it can provide a play area for interpretation, a time-space for improvised activity.

Interlude — my feeble offering — an improvised detournement

When I started thinking about this paper my first inclination was to make a detournement and skip the paper; pass by the theory and go straight for the artifact. But there is a problem here: if I make a detournement and an improvised one at that, and I show this thing, this detournement, to someone, how do I present the detournement in a non-spectacular way? Can detournement ever be non-spectacular? I remember that detournement is a kind of playing. I struggle here ...

I think of Debord's “Methods of Detournement”¹⁹, I remember these things:

— If the distortion of the polarized elements is simple and direct — people have an idea of the elements already, the elements are familiar — the detournement will be the most effective.

*— Rational thinking is not always so effective. The straightforward approach is too steeped in hierarchical culture and is easily consumed in a time efficient way from the outside in.²⁰ I've got to get that “speed bump” effect - the time element is important. The constraints of the spectacle, especially on time, is the first thing that's got to go. Like with the *dérive* the un-limiting of time is so important. I've got to try to offer a piece of re-claimed time back to the people that may experience my detournement. Or at least I hope.*

Here goes:

¹⁹ Ibid.: 10.

²⁰ “Detournement is less effective the more it approaches a rational reply.” Ibid.

"Life Can Never Be Too Disorienting"

Go out. Way, way out.

And get there without having to experience the "there" or any "there" along the way.

Your Suburban Assault Vehicle (SAV) can provide the comfort needed to sufficiently spectacularize the entire terra firma.

Make a smooth transition from your office to the inside of a Suburban Assault Vehicle (SAV).



Look, we all need a break from the local scene routine.

The Ultradetournement and Everyday Life, Re-Claiming Time

Because of the spectacle and its permanence in our everyday lives we exist in a sphere of specialization. In order to proliferate the society of the spectacle experts convince us that their commodities demand our special attention. Our lives are constantly bombarded by the commands of those specialists who supposedly have the authority to instruct us how to be in our own existence. The ultradetournement, as termed by the Situationists²¹, is a tendency to use operational detournement-like activities in everyday social life: passwords, disguises, anything in the “spheres of play”²². The ultradetournement as improvised modes of communication: signals or signs that may be secret to me and the people I improvise with (and subversive to specialists), may draw me closer to the passion for creation in everyday life.²³ The language of unspectacularized play and festivals has to be secret — outsiders who may want to observe must be left in confusion, they must be denied access. The personal, the private, and the grassroots levels can be the only unspectacularized spheres. Once the coast is clear and the channel of ultradetourned communication has been established, I feel comfortable to come out for serious play. I am reminded that I need companionship, I think of George Eliot again: “Our passions do not live apart in locked chambers, but, dressed in their small wardrobe of notions, bring their provisions to a common table and mess together, feeding out of the common store according to their appetite.”²⁴

The quality of everyday day life is the critical issue here. I fight against the life with no room for improvisation; the life that is dictated to me by cultural demands for career/work and other social structures; a life that is supposedly only lived while on vacation, or the few hours I am allotted after I am done working my job. Improvisation, games, festivals, all are important revolutionary activities that I can use to derail incumbency and repetition: the trappings of the obligation to produce. To ultradetourn: to develop secret communications with playmates, communications that can set the stage for activities that cannot be de-limited by time constraints, activities that are inherently improvisational, situations for unlimited creativity; this is the re-claiming of my everyday life. It is time and its appropriation that sits at the crux of the revolution of everyday life; without the ability to improvise with my time, my life is not my own. I am reminded of Ben Boretz’s revolutionary words:

“...Do I have to tell you about the spiritual cannibalism of the culture, our culture, which has been bombarding us with ultrasensory overstimulation aiming to reprocess us into fulltime consumption machines, stealing above all from us our time (not an inch of time without an imprint of message), and even our very *sense* of time (to be measured in lengths of no more than one message unit each) under the guise of entertainment, and even of ‘art’, commoditizing the eternal, hyping the primal? Our time is the *sine qua non* of our identity. We need to take extreme measures to reclaim it for ourselves and each other.”²⁵

²¹ “Detournement as Negation and Prelude”, *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 56.

²² Ibid.

²³ See Raoul Vaneigem, “The decline and fall of work”, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, (Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983), 52.

²⁴ George Eliot. *Middlemarch*. (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1994), 166.

“Life Can Never Be Too Disorienting”

The individual’s motivations, gestures, activities, they are her own. She does not have to live in separation from her life, she does not have to live her life from the out-side in. She does not have to be alienated from her desires. She can call her time her own; her life stems from an inside-to-out self-made creation.

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²⁵ Benjamin Boretz. in *Being About Music*. (Red Hook NY: Open Space, 1999). This is part of a 1985 text “On Thinking About Various Issues Induced by the Problem of Discovering That One is Not a ‘Composer’, and That the Space Which One Inhabits Musically is not ‘America’”.

Composing and the Sense of Self

John Rahn

We may deplore, in theory, a sense of self, treat it as the seat of nausea, a trail of slime on the ground of our existential career, or dress it in double-knits, or deny the possibility of its existence or the possibility of the existence of any "subject" which would be its necessary precondition, or OM it out of itself to reach a clear plateau. Nevertheless we act, and each act is both the basis of the construction of our self by others (from "outside") and adds its increment of memory and passion to the sense we have of our self. Just as our actions contribute to the sense of self, the sense of self contributes to our choices, our actions.

Games

Whole regimes of actions are simply subordinate to rules of the game being played. One who decides to be a really good squash player must follow that discipline, eat right, exercise in certain ways, practice the moves, and on the court, follow the logic of squash tactics. There may be some inflection of the actual play by the player's self, the physical peculiarities (tall, short, fast, slow, young, old, etc) and mental dispositions (daredevil, cautious), but most of the play is selfless. No matter who is playing, certain sequences of moves and strategic thinking are right, if you have the ability to carry them out. Even the deceptions are mostly impersonal: as you prepare to hit the ball, your opponent knows which shot is the most likely because it is the best choice for you, and knows also that you may choose a different shot if you sense that it may take your opponent by surprise or off balance.

By "game" I mean any definable domain of actions with its own internal logic. Making money is such a game. One who has decided to make money must, like the squash player, fall under the discipline of that game. It does not matter how much the player wants to make money, except to keep the player in the game and well disciplined. Certain moves and strategies will work and others will not, irrespective of personal desires and sense of self. The classic "con games" exploit undisciplined and ignorant desire for money. The trick is to play a game your opponent does not know; the mark has the same desire for money you do, but is unaware of the game being played. In both making money and squash, one player wins what the other loses. They have entirely unambiguous goals which involve maximizing one's share of a finite resource.

No doubt many people would like to make money, or even to be a good squash player, but not all of them choose to play the game, or to devote themselves to playing it well. They may have physical or mental limitations which would prevent their being competitive in a given game. The goal of the game or the scene of the game may conflict with another game which they play passionately, as when a Christian monastic renounces the world. Some people try to play a number of games simultaneously: the successful businesswoman who is a good squash player. The choice of which games to play depends basically on one's sense of self. Circumstances play a part both in forming the sense of self and in determining the games one plays. The scion of a very rich family will grow up accustomed to financial dealings, will learn the game as part of learning to be a person, and will also have access to the information and capital to play that game. This does not determine that she will play that game, but it smooths the road to it.

A person chooses to play a game not only because of the desirability of the result of the game — many games have only a formal result, like chess — but according to the pleasure the person finds during the actual playing of the game, a pleasure in the real-time working-out of the rules of the game and in the circumstances attendant on playing the game. Sailboat racing and sport car racing have very different sorts of venues for otherwise similar games. If you like the water and sailing, race sailboats; if you like autos and great speed and noise, race cars, and so on. There are also secondary effects: the star football player will make a lot of money and break bones, the chess champion will be revered in the world of chess.

Music, Games, and Friendship

So why would anyone choose to play the art game, the art-music-composing game? There is initially the pleasure of making music, any kind of music. This is an especially pleasurable game. There is a sensual pleasure in it as well as an abstract pleasure in the rules of the game. Like any intensely played game, it takes you out of yourself. In the case of music, this Dionysiac evacuation has the peculiar appeal of simultaneously unbinding and constructing the sense of self. Music is not a zero-sum game, but depends on cooperation among players, so that when one player wins all players win; such positive cooperation can be very appealing in itself. Music is a pleasurable activity producing pleasure in other people. It is not appropriative, like sex. If I enjoy playing music with you, I am undisturbed by the prospect of your playing music with many other people. When I play (perform) a piece of music, it becomes mine only in that I construct it in the performance, but it remains freely available for construction by others. When I have composed a piece of music, it is both mine and not mine, with cultural and subcultural and individual variations in the kind and degree of possession.

Unlike a painting, a composition is not a possessible physical object. It is not collectible and cannot be hoarded. Though a melomaniac or discophile may possess and hoard a great library of recordings of music, the possession is in principle not exclusive so as to deny possession of the music by others. When I sing a tune it is mine but also yours. You can simply listen to it and you can sing it whenever you want. To create a piece of music is (usually) to make a nonphysical mold, a pattern that can be replicated in material, sensual form. It is a prototype of the “intellectual property” for which legal mechanisms such as copyright are still being re-invented. For a physical object, possession is presumptive ownership and is exclusive; but a pattern only becomes intellectual property by its potential for possession by others, and ownership is determined by origination rather than by possession. In spite of the music industry and the emerging legalities of the information age, making music is essentially an amiable and a generous act.

Consider friendship. Two friends enjoy one another's company and conversation. A friendship is deliberately constructed as well as spontaneous. There are limits to the relationship; transgressing these usually harms or destroys the friendship. Each friend is reticent in certain ways and refrains from certain behaviors, such as presumption or domineering. Friends are careful of each other. Friendship is not a good game, in that there is no firm set of rules for it. The logic connecting actions within a friendship is tenuous and adaptive. The relationship is always personal. Friendship is like music in its amiable, generous, pleasurable, constructive, and cooperative nature, but it is nothing but cooperation. Friendship is an intricate cat's-cradle of connections between two selves. Each friend plays his self against the other, tests the pushes and pulls of the relationship against his sense of self, refines his sense of self through the relationship.

Music, on the other hand, is definitely a game. The pleasure in the real-time working-out of its rules is the major pleasure of music. The sensuous effects do exist: sound is like touch, it is a kind of touch. Some complexes of sounds are caressing. However, the sensuous effect of the material sound does not in itself constitute the music. Sound becomes music when it is perceived as

arranged. Sound is a material framework on which to hang patterns, organization, evolving structures, abstract relationships. Sound which is heard as music is a jungle-gym for the mind's faculty of abstract organization. The marriage of a kind of broadcast touch with abstract function is at the heart of music's peculiarity and appeal.

There is a third component in the experience of music which is like friendship. This is what makes music important, more than a mere pleasure. The intimacy of the structures built in an experience of music entwines the music with the self. The temporality of this intimate experience is an analog to one's life in general. One lives one's life in the music. The sensuous structures evolve as they do in life, carrying one's self along with them. Since the person experiencing the music collaborates in constructing the music (on the basis of the material sounds provided by replication of the pattern provided by the music's originator), a dialog ensues which negotiates the construction of one's sense of self, of alternate selves, freeing the imagination of self, pulling us out of our ruts, opening up a space and a depth and a future for our selves. The originating pattern serves as our friend. If that friend is wise and good, the relationship can be ennobling. It helps us to make friends with ourselves.

Three Levels of Game

Who would not choose to be a composer, if that means creating pleasurable sensuous abstract structures lived out in time as our friend, our mentor? The game of composing music is one of the grand games. It is a meta-meta-game in that each piece of music is itself a game whose rules are asserted if not invented by the composer. To choose to be a composer is to play the composing game. The next level of creative act is choosing or constructing a given set of rules, a syntax, a style, a genre. At the third level, the composition or game-instance is composed (like a particular game of chess as opposed to the Game of Chess).

The distinction between the game and the game-instance is a logical rather than a causal or temporal distinction. Often the rules of the game are to some degree constructed and refined interactively during the process of composition, as the composer gets further along in working on it and as the piece gets more complete. The construction of the rules of the game and the composition of this instance of the game are in such cases interdependent. The individual composition calls for and receives the rules under which it constructs itself; or (to put it another way) the particulars of the composition arrange themselves "naturally" into patterns, following the composer's humanly inevitable tendency to repeat and vary. But just as earlier moments in a piece of music, earlier in piece-time, motivate later ones regardless of the temporal order of their creation, the rules of the game remain general and abstract in principle even when they come into existence as part of a process of composition of a particular piece of music, and though they may never find another avatar, another instance, they could.

The act of composing is not just arranging abstract patterns, like a kaleidoscope. The abstract activity is essential but not sufficient. The composer must give some thought, direct some intuition, toward the person in the music, the basis of the "friend" that the listener will construct. The composition of the friend is not explicit, not "Now I am going to compose a friend in the music." In any case, the "friend" in the music is just a metaphor for what actually takes place, for the musical side of the dialogic reconstruction of the self of the listener through interaction with the music. The person in the music is in the structures of the music, for the substance of the music is nothing but its structures. The friend in the music is a quality in the structures that facilitates the potential of the music for interaction with the listener's self.

Composing is then really like giving birth, or raising a child, or teaching. To compose is to help create another, to make up a set of rules and a sensuous living-out of them which will enable

another person to complete the image of the friend which, in turn, acts as a trellis for the other person to grow on. Composing is also virtuosity and display and craftsmanship, so that the games and persons so constructed will be attractive, useful, and fun, brilliant, challenging, wonderful.

Schoenberg and Cage

How can a music find newness and vitality within itself to avoid stagnation? The twentieth-century is (was) a century of innovation devoted to addressing this problem in almost as many ways as there have been significant composers. Two figures stand out as representative: Schoenberg for syntactical innovation, and Cage for cultural innovation. Both founded traditions whose elements pervade the contemporary musical scene.

Without Schoenberg's by-its-bootstraps re-invention and universal expansion of harmonic materials, music had nowhere to go: the walls of tonality loomed high on every side. After Schoenberg, the theory of harmony has become truly universal, and every harmonic world is a choice. John Cage, though he studied music with Schoenberg, followed the tradition of Dada and took it to full flower. The musical and personal eccentricity of a Satie became with Cage an attempt at living a life and producing a music both of which were exemplary of his somewhat uneasy blend of Zen buddhism, Taoism, anarchism and social justice, and Dada. Cage endowed musical composition with an explicit ethical dimension and invented a new cultural and social role for it. Following "in his steps" [1] are the performance artists, free improvisors, and alternative culture musicians for whom making music and living life are ethical statements, each constructed in harmony with the other. *Compose Yourself (A Manual for the Young* [2] is J. K. Randall's title: The alternative culture of free improvisation, music free from the proscenium, from the audience/composer duality, from the authority of the composer, from the monumentality of the composition, and perhaps from the ego if not the self.

Neither of these composers neglected the other side. Schoenberg also felt the need to invent a new musical society for musical performances, and Cage also expanded music's universe by opening it to non-intention, chance, the sonorous found object, the environment, sound which before Cage few bothered to perceive as musical. Schoenberg's aesthetic remained one of expression in a dark, Freudian world of universal cultural angst, a post-Romantic aesthetic in that it assumes that the artist can find the universal in himself and by expressing it, bring it to light for everyone. It is absolutely non-egotistical but is expressly a self-involved aesthetic, disciplined by an idealism and a tortured Atlas-like effort to bear the world for others. Schoenberg lives in the world of the masterwork, the compelling universal artifact that is stamped with the identity of its author. Schoenberg would be a rather heavy father were it not for his unremitting search for a radicality that subverts the authority that rules the search. Cage worked hard at constructing his compositions, building structures with an assiduity and attention to detail that defies the popular conception of his work. In a sense, Cage left nothing to chance. His stated program was to free composition from intention, but he could never realize this. It was always his music, his intention, his 4'33" of piano silence, his frame, his directing authority behind every anarchistic statement. When you catch a butterfly and let it go free, that is your choice, you had that power. With Schoenberg, it is the family (the abstract, Freudian family) that provides the interpersonal relations behind the music; with Cage, it is the lover: choice not chance, cherishing by freeing.

The Composer's Self

The composer is of course also a listener and a performer (if only projectively, in imagination), and in these capacities enjoys the same relationship to music that other people do.

What about the composer as composer? There is no doubt that the composer's sense of self is bound up with the music the composer creates (I am using "composer" here as a category for music creation that includes improvisation and any other mode of creation). The relation of the music to the sense of self varies enormously in degree and kind in different musical cultures.

Behold: Mozart, Babbitt, or Glass working industriously, writing a musical score that narrowly defines the sonic outcome within a traditional scene of staged musical performance before a defined and passive musical audience. In this case, a masterwork is possible. The reception of the music is conditioned to expect that the music be infused with the musical person of its composer. Phillip Glass's musical style is like a trademark, assuring a certain quality (it tastes like Coke) and authenticating the experience by the stamp of the master. We read program notes about Beethoven, his cranky deafness and passion, about Wagner's domestic arrangements and political maneuverings, about Janacek's advanced age or Mozart's tender age at the time of the composition, and so on. Such personal information about the composer would be relevant to the reception of the music of that composer only in a tradition that strives to understand the music as an extension of a person, of its single originating creator. The intimate personal relations that listeners have to the music induces a cult of the personality of the composer. The mighty music of Beethoven is heard as mighty Beethoven himself. The feeling of personal connection, the "friend in the music," becomes the person of the composer-as-manifested-in-the-music.

This is not without its effect on the composers themselves, perhaps especially after the cult of composer-personality was well developed (by the mid 1800s): Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner. Stravinsky's aristocratic recoil from romanticism and expression only founded a more enigmatic but still intensely intriguing cult of his personality. Finally with Cage (and Warhol) we begin to play with the cult of the personality, accepting its inevitability in this tradition, while the Randall/Boretz culture and its many cousins attempt to construct alternate traditions with music but no composer, no audience.

Monumentality

At its extreme, the cult of the composer's personality motivates people to play the composing game as a way of extending (or maintaining) the domain of their ego, as a "power trip" to dominate and impress with your personality the malleable hordes, to colonize them with your self, to frank them, or to seduce them, as an avoidance of interpersonal negotiation by a socially sanctioned but at bottom infantile universal assertion of self. The composer as prick. The music composed from such motivations may actually be compelling — this is the point of this powerful motivation. Composition as manipulation, which ultimately tries to enslave other people, or to deny the existence of other people, to kill them. The fantasy of a musical composition that consists of machine-gunning the audience is almost as old as the machine gun itself, and was common during periods such as Dada and the 1960s: egotism disguised as nihilism, the quasi-erotic power of death as the ultimate manipulation. Another fantasy: the audience wired into their chairs, virtual reality controlling their every sensation and thought, controlling their selves, substituting the composer's artifact for the very self of each member of the audience. The total art-work. Possession.

Some flavor of the extension of self, its expansion and monumentality, is built into the overall tradition of Western art from its inception and accounts for much of the character of this art. "Exegi monumentum aere perennius," wrote Quintus Horatius Flaccus in the epilog to his three books of Odes: "I have completed a monument that will last longer than bronzes." [3] Even in 24 B.C., the sentiment was already conventional: art endures and is a monument to its creator. If you go to the classical section of the Louvre you will see a forest of Roman busts: marble selves upthrust

like magma, congealed extrusions of ego, simulacra of the person through the face, superficial immortality through representation in art. The sculptors may be anonymous here but it was the aristocratic patrons who paid them, who bought out the artist's share of the immortality of art, an art which was just as enduring as marble or bronze then, but now is on the Internet. Horace claimed his share directly as poet: "Non omnis moriar" (Not all of me shall die).

Immortality

Not only can an idea, an art-work, last longer than a material edifice, but an art-work embodies the self of the artist in a way that a mere public work (Ozymandias, the charitable Foundation named meticulously and conspicuously after the persons donating the funds) cannot. Even children are a more remote kind of immortality, since they are they and not you. The desire to perpetuate one's self — especially as one's age advances — is based of course on the fear of death, but also and more objectively, on the feeling that each individual person, particularly oneself, is a valuable and unique accomplishment in living, the result of daily struggle that admirably transcends that struggle, something it would be a shame to lose by death. This is by no means a universal presumption, but it underlies Western culture.

One of the fascinating contradictions in Cage's work is the construction of a monumental opus whose premisses include the abolition of intention in art and the disciplined whittling-down of the sense of self. One cannot simultaneously be a Zen monk and a "great artist," logically, but actually, it seems that one can try. "I have nothing to say and I am saying it." [4] "When going from nothing towards something, we have all the European history of music and art we remember and there we can see that this is well done but the other is not. So-and-so contributed this and that and criteria. But now we are going from something towards nothing, and there is no way of saying success or failure since all things have equally their Buddha nature." [5] Without being an artist, one still can do art. The act of making the art proceeds from an enlightened, self-less nature. You erase the paper, leaving it blank. The blank paper is then the ground of your action. Your art may be figured, but you are not there, you are blank. The art is a monument to non-self, and there is no "I" to invest in the art so that it (the "I") shall not all die. Art, like Mallarmé's lace, "abolishes itself," as under its influence the distinction between art and life disappears, leaving life in an artistic condition. Art and the self both become increasingly irrelevant categories as the Zen discipline proceeds and the universe becomes transparent. This, too, is a kind of immortality.

The Tertium Quid and Lift-off

I have just been talking about the composer investing the composer's self in the music the insertion of one's self into others to dominate and control them and to intensify and aggrandize the composer's sense of self. Yet earlier I said that to compose is not to assert one's self, but to assert another. When a composer's self is invested in an art-work, it is necessarily fictionalized. The rules of the game provide constraints which can never entirely conform to the life outside the game, the self of the composer. Even for a composer who tries simply to put herself into the music, to "express" herself, hoping perhaps for a monument or for immortality, the character of the music can never be the character of the person. This is the saving grace of art. Most people — people who do not suffer from certain psychological afflictions— do not enjoy being invaded and taken over by another person, manipulated and dominated by the immediate and inescapable presence of another. They may enjoy a simulacrum of this sensation in play. The rules of the game provide a playing field that distances both the artist and the audience from one another, and the characters

who meet on the playing field are both fictional, a fictional composer and a fictional listener, both made up within the game.

However, the person of the composer is not the only side of the “tertium quid,” the third ingredient of musical art, the aesthetic mediator between the composer and the listener which earlier was called the “friend in the music.” A composer while composing must pay attention to the sensuous effects, to the rules of the game, to the temporal dynamics and drama of the playing-out of this instance of the game, and also to this tertium quid. It is not necessarily the character of the composer, but it is necessarily an overall quality or character of the whole piece of music, the aesthetic or feel of the music. A composer can follow the rules (whatever they are), composing note after note, but the result will be only an exercise unless an aesthetic sense of the whole emerges. It is this sense of the whole that guides the composer during composition. The emerging sense of the whole, as it were the self of the piece of music, interacts with the self of the composer during the composition of the piece but one is not identifiable with the other. The sense of the whole piece of music is built not only of relations within the music and between the music and the composer, but includes also that piece of music's place in the world, its context both artistically and socially. Identity is both coherence and frame, the one reinforcing the other.

When a piece of music takes on a life of its own, when its aesthetic identity emerges as a force in its own definition and persists, we have lift-off. The piece of music becomes weightless, buoyant; one no longer has to hold it up, since it upholds itself. It gains an autonomy and an independence from the conditions under which it is formed, from the context and rules of the game, and from the person of the composer. It is born as an aesthetic entity.

How to Achieve Lift-Off

Since lift-off is the establishment of an independently existing entity, the first requirement for the composer is receptivity, an openness and perceptive sensitivity so that the composer may understand the tentative beginnings of the infant entity, its potential character. It does not matter when these beginnings stir, or with what degree of intention by the composer. The composer may even be the caricature of “Mozart,” a grinning, drooling, intentionless idiot scrawling note after note on the music paper (or “while seated one day at the organ”[6]), but unless this idiot can perceive what is taking shape and contribute (however witlessly) to its ongoing formation, assist at its birth, nothing will form and there will be no lift-off. At the other extreme, a composer may spend much creative time in a “pre-compositional” phase which is really compositional, prior to writing down notes or making sounds but concerned with making the rules of the game, the syntax of the piece-to-be, so that the aesthetic idea of the piece which is also taking shape at this time will be possible in its musical flesh.

Such receptivity is not possible if the composer is blinded by a preoccupation with the technical machinery of the composing, or by an engorged and hyperpresent sense of self. This is not to say that egomaniacs cannot be good composers; the counterexamples are all too numerous. The sense of total control afforded by the composing process would predispose composition to invasion by egomaniacs even in the absence of monumentality and immortality. Composition is the egomaniac's chance to open to otherness without losing control to another person. The megalomaniac egomaniac composer creates a world out of himself, complete with others, but the others are the compositions that are his own creation, even though lifted-off into independent existence. Moreover, the composer can edit a composition, revising its emerging nature to fit the needs of the composer. This is something one usually cannot do with other people. The totalizing, overwhelming, engorged sense of self of the egomaniac composer feeds on the dependency of its compositions and on its extended power over other people (the cult of personality, monumentality). Yet even such a fat sense of self must remain open to the otherness of the

emerging composition and ultimately has to encourage its independence, because the existence of the art work is not an extension of the existence of the artist, in spite of monumentality; if it were, there could be no monumentality. Monumentality depends on this paradox, that I continue to exist in something other than I.

The Person and the Piece

Not all egomaniacs are composers, and not all composers are egomaniacs. People with weak egos may be drawn to composition for the same reasons that appeal to the egomaniac: control, lack of resistance, opportunity to build a self outside of self, and of course the glory of it all. Even people with quite normal personalities manage to compose. Composers may be nice or nasty, social or asocial, selfish or idealistic, religious or non-religious, moral or amoral. Not all of these differences find their representations in the music produced. The distancing effect provided by the playing field and the game, and the subsequent lift-off of the artifact into an independently existing entity, provide a filtering on the raw human personality of the composer. As the composer finds herself filtered and refracted by composing, nice and nasty etc. do not translate very well into the change of context. Someone who is mean and nasty in her everyday dealings with people may compose a piece of music which is light, airy, warm, delicate, and pleasing, and someone who is gentle and thoughtful of other people's feelings in real life may, in a piece of music, compose out a kind of wrenching aggression appropriate to a Viking berserker. This does not mean that the nice composer turns nasty or the mean composer becomes gentle. The integration that rules the personality remains unchanged, or very little changed, by the act of composing a piece of music that "expresses" qualities oppositional to those of the integration.

Composing is not a therapy that changes the composer. However, composing does allow the composer to play with himself, to develop aspects of his personality that remain on the sidelines in real life, inactive because they do not contribute much to the integrated agenda. At a given time during process of the composition of a piece of music engaged in lifting-off, some latent complex of qualities may be exactly right for it. The complex of qualities settles into the emergent piece of music and turns itself on, marrying into the other qualities of the music and, given a responsibility it never gets a chance at in the composer's life, actively works at the life of the piece of music. The very existence of the piece of music depends on it. In the music, the relations within the complex of qualities reach a stage of development never before seen in the personality of the composer. The quality of the matured relational complex of qualities as a whole then both forms the essence of the piece of music, the basis for its lift-off, and is subsequently available to the composer and to others through the music.

So although composing is not therapy in the sense that the act of "expressing" aspects of the composer's personality not normally expressed in life somehow purges them or rationalizes them, the resulting piece of music may be healing or at least helpful for both the composer and anyone else who experiences it, in that the matured relational complex in the music is available as a model even for those people who have not developed such a complex in real life. It may help to short-circuit the process of discovering what kind of thing one needs in one's life now, where one needs to go.

During and After Composition: Intimacy

A composer has very different relations with a piece of music while composing it than she does when it is complete. Once the music has lifted off and is an independent entity in the world, a composer may even feel shy around it. The intimacy of the act of composition, when the composer and the composition are glued together surface to surface, lingers on as an embarrassment. The

completed composition is both more and less than it was during the process of its creation. The composer remembers the former intimacy during the concert, and it feels as if the other members of the audience are sharing this intimacy, also glued to the composer's intimate surfaces, too close for comfort. The composer knows this is not true, but the feeling remains. The music is actually now not part of the composer, not even attached to the composer. The audience is experiencing a third thing which is neither the composer nor the member of the audience, but is the piece of music. Each member of the audience is constructing an experience of this music which is unique. The music-for-Daryl is not the music-for-Jane. The music which the composer experiences as a member of the audience is very different from the music the composer experienced during the process of composition, and it may be similar to but is non-identical to any music that anyone else experiences. However, the mode of this experience is intimate, for everyone. Each member of the audience appropriates the music. As a listener, I experience the music as my own, and while I am experiencing it, it is me.

Because the experience is intimate and intense, the listeners may defend themselves against an upsetting piece of music with the intemperate vigor of righteous indignation. One's sense of self, one's dignity, has been assailed somehow, snuck up on and attacked, seduced, overwhelmed; or there would have been some danger of this, but vigilance and hostility fought it off. The music was unworthy. One may be glad to yield to a seducer so long as one's sense of self is flattered or enhanced, and so long as the seducer is not unworthy of one's love. To give love to or to receive it from something one cannot respect belittles one's self and shames it. The more the music demands of the listener, the more respectable that music must be. A music that is openly trivial and glories in this (or appears to) may be experienced as a mere toy, a bauble, a bright ephemeral plaything of no importance. Who can be indignant at such music? It offers no threat to one's sense of self beyond its mere unassuming existence. Only a curmudgeon would be upset at its very triviality. By presenting an appearance of no pretensions, it insulates itself against hostile reactions while preserving its attractiveness as a toy. Yet it is enjoyed, picked up and bought. Its personal but generic value mimics the exchange value of the currency it is exchanged for.

A composer risks such indignation when the music aspires to worthiness: it is this aspiration that renders it vulnerable to indignation. Indignation reaches the composer unfiltered by the normal terms of polite discourse or humane conversation. It is expressed without tact because the audience is not in touch with the composer. The audience knows the composer (presumably) only as mediated by the composition. For a listener, the composer is a "media" person rather than a real person. Unlike most media persons, however, the composer is exposed through the medium of composition in her most intimate folds. The situation is extreme: violent reactions to heightened intimacy. The composer may be badly hurt unless she develops a "belle indifférence." True, the composer-in-the-piece is not the person who is the composer, and the person-in-the-piece has detached from the person-in-the-world, but the embarrassing remembrance remains. And after all, the composer made this piece of music.

The completed composition is also part of the composer's sense of self, in the same way that any accomplishment lies under the integration that oversees future actions. The integration may be partial at any moment: for these immediate purposes, I do not take into account *x*, *y*, and *z*. My graduate degrees are mostly irrelevant to my choosing to learn to windsurf. Am I the person that composed that music now? I may have to exclude some former composition in order to compose a particular newer composition, though the excluded music lurks underneath this repudiation. Having composed his Fifth Symphony, Beethoven was changed as a person not only for his future music but in his daily life, to some extent. The judgments and reactions of others play a part (I'd like you to meet Beethoven, you've heard his Fifth Symphony?), but even in their absence Beethoven

knows that he is the person who composed the Fifth Symphony, that the process of composing it changed him, and that the fact of its existence as an independent entity is a reference point for his sense of self.

Janus

A sense of self is a dilemma. On the one hand, it is inevitable. Every act and perception contributes to memory. The memories of past actions and perceptions are part of the context of each new act or perception, so that the memory of a new action includes this context. Thus an act is remembered as part of an ongoing developing context which is unified spatio-temporally in the world line of the person. Old contexts are folded into new ones. Memory is not a simple recording process, so that new contexts partially determine old ones, redetermine them in the light of the present. It is impossible not to be aware of this process. This awareness is the sense of self.

On the other hand, too much attention to this sense of self is otiose and vitiates action. During action itself, as opposed to moments of contemplation, any attention to the sense of self is too much. An action needs transparency. Self is an opaque body interposing itself between the moment and the act. Self is too much present. It is the only thing that can be present in the location of origination of action, but any presence there is too much. Action is attention elsewhere.

This is the self I left behind me, the posterior face of self, a reified life, Hamlet's self. Composing is nothing but action. A monumental self will kill this action. But there is also an anterior face of self. At the moment of action, I must choose in the context of what is going on at that time. The present context includes the past. The self, as memory of complexly folded contexts of past life, is present as part of the environment of action. It is not in the place of the origin of action, where it would get in the way of action. Without its presence as part of the conditions under which choice takes place, our acts would not be properly human. The self tempers reactions to "outside stimuli" so that we do not merely ping-pong our way through life. Its presence in our life helps us to bind time into each act so that more complex acts are possible, acts that are wholes. Because of our selves, we can build our contexts like works of art, and we can build a work of art like a life.[7]

Notes

1. Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (1896). This all-time world-wide best-selling novel (second only to the Bible), never copyrighted and translated into at least twenty-one languages, brought the Christian ethic to everyday life and action for millions of people and formed movements such as the social activist tradition in Methodism. Before you do anything, ask "What would Jesus do?"
2. J. K. Randall, *Compose Yourself (A Manual for the Young)*. *Meta-Variations: Studies in the Foundations of Musical Thought/Compose Yourself (A Manual for the Young)*, by Benjamin Boretz and J. K. Randall, Open Space (r.d. 2, Box 45e, Red Hook, New York 12571, USA), 1995. Randall and Boretz have been working out and thinking out alternative musical cultures since the 1970s, and have influenced many musicians and composers in their milieu (geographically, Princeton University and Bard College in the United States).
3. Horace, *Carminum Liber III, XXX*, in *Horace, Odes and Epodes*, ed. Paul Shorey. New York: Benj. H. Sanborn & Co, 1919. Mr. Shorey's notes list the following "similar utterances of ancient poets": Sappho, fragment 32; Propertius 4.1.55; Ovid Amores 1.15.41; Met. 15. 871 sqq.; Phaedr. Epil. bk. 4; Martial, 7.84.7.
4. John Cage, Lecture on Nothing, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1939), p. 109.
5. John Cage, Lecture on Something, *Silence* p. 143.
6. From a famous Victorian poem by Adelaide Anne Proctor:

While seated one day at the Organ,
I was weary and ill at ease,
And my fingers wandered idly
Over the noisy Keys.

I do not know what I was playing,

John Rahn

Or what I was dreaming then;
But I struck one chord of music,
Like the sound of a great Amen.

It flooded the crimson twilight
Like the close of an Angel's Psalm,
And it lay on my fevered spirit
With a touch of infinite calm.

It quieted pain and sorrow,
Like love overcoming strife;
It seemed the harmonious echo
From our discordant life.

It linked all perplexed meanings
Into one perfect peace,
And trembled away in silence
As if it were loth to cease.

I have sought but I seek it vainly,
That one lost chord divine,
Which came from the soul of the Organ,
And entered into mine.

It may be that Death's bright angel
Will speak in that chord again, —
It may be that only in Heaven
I shall hear that grand Amen.

7. With essential differences; for one thing, a work of art is a finished whole, which a life cannot ever be. The temporality of life and art is explored in my "Repetition," *Contemporary Music Review* 7 (1993) 49-58.

Epistemological occasions: During and after a walk with Ben

Arthur Margolin

Dear Ben,

I've been wanting to get back to you with a few thoughts concerning some of the issues we discussed during your last visit here in the Fall, particularly regarding the conceptual and empirical incoherence that would presumably attend any attempt to communicate non-verbal experience — such as, most pertinently, music — in language. As I recall, during our walk by the water, I was telling you about how I thought it might interesting to apply some ideas from music theory, and from writing about music (I think we were talking in the context of Jim's "how music goes") to psychotherapy research, in order to capture the texture and continuity of psychotherapy session (which is typically "analyzed" in research much like old fashioned harmony analysis — according to how it instantiates categories from a manual). Up to that point I imagined that I had just been articulating some basic, and uncontroversial, assumptions as a foundation for the discussion to follow, and so I was a little taken aback by your response: that language could not "capture" how music goes — that language portrays non-verbal experience in a way that fundamentally transforms it, imposing language-specific characteristics upon it. You then went on to say more specifically in what ways non-verbal experience and language were incommensurable. Since I felt at the time that I understood the point you were making, it's been fascinating to me that I've had difficulty recollecting exactly, or paraphrasing, what you said. At first I thought this was simply a failure of memory. Yet, as I further ruminate upon it, what you stated as "given" about our experience of music and language, strikes me perhaps as itself a particular way of experiencing each. So, as I try to remember, or to paraphrase, a candidate general proposition, I keep coming up with various possibilities (e.g., that the entire sense of a piece is present at each moment, as an irreducible "instant") yet none of them has a truly "universal" feel (and so are dismissed as candidates).

What I do remember quite vividly is that I found myself in a state of vague disagreement with what you were saying. From one perspective the issue of the relation between music and language which purports in some sense to be about it, is so complex, that any position with respect to it is bound to leave out, or over-emphasize, or completely misframe, things, of whatever degree of centrality, that another might feel to be important. But I was also struck by a more immediate paradox: you, a virtuoso formulator, and communicator, of musical sense, were saying that the sense of music could not be communicated. Furthermore, I couldn't see any reason not to apply your position to any non-verbal experience, or, in fact, to any thought, at all (what you were saying seemed to imply that an experience arises within and is forever enmeshed within a particular sense-realm within a particular mind, and the meaning it has therein cannot be communicated). So I was wondering if your position might imply that the position you were maintaining couldn't be communicated (presuming it could even be formulated).

As I've said, such is the complexity of these issues, that any particular proposition potentially carries a host of unstated, and probably contestable, assumptions along with

it. When we talk about difficulties of communicating our sense of things, are we saying that's because of the impossibility of ever confirming that what's going on in my mind and what's going on in your mind are one and the same. But even to formulate it thus sounds strange, since it's hard to imagine what it might mean to conduct such a confirmation. And it's anyway hard to imagine that's what we mean by "communication." Proceeding along this path, we might find ourselves entailed in the "mind-body" problem, speculating about "equivalent" brain states, hardly a rewarding perspective.

It's also implausible that what we mean by "capturing" the sense of music in language is creating some language, the experience of which replicates in the reader, or hearer, the experience of listening to the music that the language is "about." Of course, if it did that, we wouldn't need it; and anyway, if two objects induce "the same" experience they might be operationally, and thus experientially, indistinguishable.

So it seems to me that two issues that are inextricably bound in practice might be strategically distinguished for the sake of exploration. One is the "relationship" between music and language — two independent experiential realms, each of which creates meaning within itself, presumably in different ways. The other is what it means for a person to "communicate" his or her sense of something, music, thoughts, to another.

These are deep issues, and I can't claim to have anything like well-developed and coherent ideas with respect to them. Just some thoughts about where I might want to begin exploring.

The first issue — "intra-mental" connections. Consider that language may function as a common meta-language for diverse non-linguistic experience. The "formulation" (a place-holder — see next parenthesis) of an experience of music in language, creates a map (or a translation, or a induces a resonance, or a transfer— perhaps not generalizable, see below) of that experience within the mind-language network, and this operation, with respect to this pan-experiential meta-domain, is one way that seemingly context-bound experiences can connect up with and influence each other. (Language is not context bound, although, of course, it can function that way too.) In this way we can (learn to) exercise some degree of conscious control over how that experience shapes other experiences, musical and non-musical. Otherwise, individual experiences might be like isolated and distant south pacific islands; what gets carried from one to the other is dependent on trade winds and ocean currents, over the mental analogues of which I don't have much control. With respect to what might be meant by "formulation": this is probably a) many different things; b) an irreducible relation. I want to think some more about this: when we say that some language has "captured" the sense of some music, what do mean by that? Well, not replicating. To say, "translating into" I admit lends no general clarification. So I'd want to explore the possibility that the specific "feel" of the way in which some language relates to some music is a mental connection which may itself not be verbalizable, or verbalizable apart from some instances thereof in a particular context.

This gets me to issue number two — "inter-mental" connections. Consider how we might view interactions among people who are discussing a shared experience. A bottom-up approach posits communicators, media of communication, and the kinds of things that can be communicated therein. A top-down approach would treat the interaction more along the lines of how we might think about a given experience of music — i.e., we acknowledge that we don't know in advance what set of entities are involved, and what their properties and potencies are, apart from a sense of what's going on, within this occasion, between these people. (So the observer's analysis and the participants' analysis will probably generate different ontologies.)

Note that when we describe a piece of music from a top-down perspective, we do in fact countenance the existence of a set of objects as indwelling within that context, probably uniquely. Similarly, when we formulate who and what was involved in an occasion of talk, are we really prepared to countenance the reality of those objects for that

Arthur Margolin

occasion? This would mean that some fundamental categories, like personhood, discourse, communication, experience, are critically context-dependent. Consider some examples: we listen to a piece together; you say something about it. I say: that's it! that's the way it sounded. Does this retroactively ratify the existence of an object external to us that we both listened to. Are we prepared to believe in the existence of that object, for that occasion. Or do we say "it was as if." (What's the difference between the "as if" locution, and the "thus it is so" perspective with respect to serial ontological commitments, and consequent experience?). Or if my response to you was — no way it sounded like that to me! Does this imply a framework which includes a common sound source, but otherwise unshared mentalistic constructions thereof? This is a significantly different ontology, as well as epistemology, relative to the first example. Is one perspective or approach correct, in general? I don't know. But I wonder about the utility a philosophy that is not specifically of a particular context of interaction. (Although one could imagine that a truly context-dependent sense of self-identity could, under certain construals and implementations, be somewhat unhealthy.)

So let me get back to my sense of my vague disagreement with the point concerning the non-communicability of non-verbal experience that you were making (or that I took or mistook you to be making — a bow to the aforementioned complexity) during our walk. I see now that it wasn't so much that I disagreed with your assertion in particular, but more that it didn't leave open the possibility that on some occasion one might want to say that that's exactly what happened, in some sense — that language did wholly and breathtakingly communicate the experience, which now exists fully platonized, and endorsed as such, by the participants. So I suppose your point seemed to be a nearly context-free philosophical assertion, of which, as I tried to say, I'm a little suspicious.

Well Ben, as always, your comments stimulated, and rewarded, reflection. It's going to be particularly interesting now to re-read your "language, as a music" and Jim's "intimacy, a polemic," because I think I'm just scratching the surface of some things you guys were exploring in considerable depth some years ago. It's also been fascinating for me to think about these issues while engaged in research within a biomedical framework, in which there are some very strongly enforced assumptions about "shared" experience that run along very different lines (more on that another time).

So, please regard these bits and pieces of mentation as a way of continuing our long-standing conversation at the juncture of music and philosophy. Which means that, above all, I look forward to your reply.

Fondly,
Art

Music, as a Music

a multitext in seven fragments

Benjamin Boretz

Prologue

I want to make a text without a voice, no voice of its own, just a text to say something transparently, to say a saying that leaves no residue of the sound of itself but only of the sense it wants to make, forgoing a voice to give a voice to what it says, to what it cares about: to music — or, rather, to music's anomalous double.

I

[Part I of *Black /Noise III*, a video/sound/language piece; words from *1000 Plateaux* (Deleuze & Guattari); computer-generated sounds; images mostly of artworks]

II

If music is what you hear it as, does that “as” imply the invariant presence of a metalinguistic partner within the experienced text of the music-experiential space?

Or, is it possible that music is not like verbal language, but that — like verbal language — it is an input/output behavior acquired transactionally, mimetically, not through other language systems — that is, not theoretically: which is to say, could it be a functionally discrete psycho-ontological space — in that sense, — a language, rather than a subspecies of some other, or some super-language — an expressing/thinking/behaving mode not learned through the agency of (the content or the sense of) a prior psycho-ontological space, of a prior, supervening other language — like, say, verbal language? Could music, in such a possible worldview, be, in formal terms, an experiential ‘primitive’ rather than a derivative or a construct of the senses of previously ontologized sense-bearing experiential subsystems? If to be linguistic is to have a purely psychological identity created from a selective biased ‘reading’ of sensory input of a certain type — and thus to be ‘a language’ is independent of such issues as reference, syntax, coherence, logic, meaning, structure, entityhood — if its manifestations can come and go like thunderstorms (where do they start? where do they end?) — isn't it easy to think that music is some kind of linguistic phenomenon — linguistic like a thunderstorm when you shudder not from some realistic physical terror but from the spooky intuition that it's an intentional expression of some superhumanly powerful hidden presence — and that you could characterize music in the weak way of words as something which behaves simultaneously as a materially sensible phenomenon and as a purposeful intentional utterance, and ontologizes somewhere between the two? Musical entities are understandable as temporal-phenomenal things, but isn't ‘music’ in its holistically active form, like language in its total-systematic configurations, a learned disposition to shape sound-time input and to create shaped sound-time output in terms of a certain intuitive mode of ontologizing sound-time qualities?

A less dualistic story of music and language might propose that an initial experience of self-produced sounds, resonating back to articulate and dimensionalize the world of the infant sounder, specializes out at some life-point toward a more explicitly referential-systemic branch, and a more exclusively expressive branch. It might even make sense to think of these two stories as co-operational — the first as a story of observable development from the observation point of the quality-types available in the intersubjective world,

the second as a possible story of the internal-world experience of self-development, of groping for, grasping, and ultimately being shaped in, the terms of those external-world ready-mades: 'language', and 'music'.

These stories may seem plausible, even sort of banal. But I perceive that they also imply something fairly sticky: that it's perhaps possible to have a single-valued single-consciousness experience of music, without the invariant simultaneity of a meta-text. In other words, music can be not necessarily what you hear it as, but, radically and unviolably, what you hear as it. If this sounds like primal-experience sentimentality, propaganda for a return to the primitive, then it's implying an idealism which I don't share. You could possibly epitheticalize what I am thinking of as a move toward a 'quasi-primal' state of mind: in that I imagine a single-consciousness music experience as an experienced quality of total consciousness — a totalized foreground of awareness — but localized to single experienced episodes, not as any 'reality' of consciousness as a whole. In fact, there is a derivative intuition possibly implicit here, that consciousness itself may not be best theorized as 'a whole'. Nor is an 'innocent ear' imagined, or even desired, by my stories: what I'm thinking is of that experience you yourself have had, at some time in your past, when you and some music ran together and got mutually blown away, transfigured for all time: in that episode, that music (or that unnamable thing that it was) constituted your entire consciousness: you were that music, that unrolling sound — or, better, there was no you, or that music, what there was was just that that/you unrolling: what 'transcendence' might mean, non-ideologically: there's no foreground/middleground/background polyvocality, just some holistic is, some unspaced happens.. An episode where everything else in your historical world-past is not expunged, or even dysfunctionalized, just obliterated from the foreground of consciousness in the unary moment, and not linked to it in any determinate, literal, analyzable way. I think you have had this experience, at least once — else why would you be a musician now?

What I want to suggest about this kind of music experience is that it might plausibly be consequent on, and ultimately ontologized with respect to, a series of previous life-events speaking exclusively in the suigeneric language of music. 'Suigeneric' does not signify 'isolated', or even insulated, just relatively discrete in the total cosmology of consciousness. Floating independently within the global consciousness-bubble along with, in some loosely determinate relative configuration, everything else in your momentary mind-world. Of course the interdependence of everything is not in doubt, but it probably isn't designable in any one intracoherent language; although everything has to do with everything, and everything is affected by everything, not everything is intercommensurable with everything.

How would music discourses even happen in the mythic world of such a fantasy? Of course they would (probably). That much impact on people's consciousnesses is going to engender urgencies which ultimately, inevitably, are going to demand verbal processing. At the fading point of intense experience, discourse is a way to feed off of vivid experience, to try to hold on to it, to have it beyond its live-action-time, to maybe re-position it (and maybe yourself) so as to be able to re-experience it, perhaps to fix it as a permanent renewable asset of consciousness. And relevant discourse happens in any expressive-linguistic mode: poetry, mathematics, acoustics, physics, psycho-science, socio-science, anthropology, medicine, metaphysics, theology, analogy, metaphor, musical composition, graphic art — even music theory: people's discourse needs to assume the images of their obsessions; and meaningful music stories will get told in every mode of telling.

The question for music then is not really about discourse; it is about how discourse is situated in the constellations of musicking behavior. Music alone, in its single-consciousness mode, can't satisfy the intense urges toward interpersonal transactions which, in a variety of guises, come down to the creation and enforcement of social hierarchies, the production of selves as focal authorized or dramatized personae, co-optive assertions of conceptual proprietorship — the whole armory of means of person-by-person control. Whatever its inexplicit inner psychic temperament, music is categorically — if not always purposely —

anarchistic. Even less than thunderstorms can it convincingly hegemonize all by itself — thunderstorms too need a priest to supply the metalinguistic interpretative text which enforces their supernatural politicization. And you can easily see how the politics of musical meaning reflect pre-emptively from the qualities of metamusical discourses, which tell us what music is, and what it is like — something which a discourse about single-consciousness music experience can't do — and wouldn't wish to do. So musics acquire meanings, many meanings. many different kinds of meanings, meanings some of which are mutually incommunicado, and others of which are mutually incompatible, entirely by way of discourse, and its ear-training output of double-consciousness, discourse-driven, music listening. Post-discursive single-consciousness ear-training, deprogramming the double-text habit, retrieving consciousness toward the capacity for unary transcendence. pursues different music-expressive aspirations; perhaps coincidentally, it reinforces the implicit anarchism in music, leading away from the hegemonizing institutional orbit, verbally enabled and implemented interpersonal control. (Don't tell me I'm talking Dionysian and Appolonian here: those are serious verbal-cooptive meta-levers, totally subversive of unlabeled experience.) But even if someone, however momentarily, succeeds in resisting the tide of meta-conscious double-texting, their self-empowerment is hazardous: unplugging yourself from the security of socially well-ordered referents, you're drifting dangerously toward expressive decontextualization and aesthetic disorientation; and the consequences of widespread musical self-determination for coherent music socialization, or professional music education, would obviously be radically destabilizing, even totally disabling. My own personal mode of resistance, apart from strenuous ear training in the form of explicitly focused real-time music making, has been to radically immerse discourse in music, to saturate it with my own music-sense and voice, to enfold it within music by making it be music. Trying for a not-music-ontologizing discourse to coinhabit the expressive space with a not-discourse-ontologized music. This produces, for me, very gratifying results; whether they have any bearing on the questions of discourse as a tool for — rather than just another subject of — music learning, thinking about music, conveying understanding or insight or theory or opinion, is less certain. So I have no claims to make about such texts, or such a way of making texts, and certainly no idea that I know how other people should address these issues in their own lives; except that I think, if they're musically interested people, they might want to work it out for themselves. What I do have are some thoughts about the etiologies and interconnections of some things I've noticed recently, which you may or may not regard, as I do, as alarming.

III

[Part II of Black /Noise III]

IV

Music fills me full of things to say, which I can not have a way to say; I am, ineluctably, completely, ... on my own: alone with music.

And yet, and perhaps even consequently, it's possible that music, in our culture, is drowning, may even already have drowned, in saying, in discourse; that musics as musics have become virtually unrecoverable except as illustrators of saying, as contentless placeholders used as soundless referents in deluges of program notes, pre-concert lectures, newspaper reviews, pedagogies, a whole headful of philosophical and theoretical and political and critical expressions identifying themselves in the name of music. Could it be that the seductive, imaginative, thoughtful, creative, intricate, acute, profound qualities of

critical thinking simply become the entire residual experiential content of ‘music’ in our world; and, shorn of their music-determining power, would the texts of discourse simply be vacuous? And would music, leached beyond metaphor and model, dredged back up out of the morass of discourse, come up blank, faceless, voiceless, meaningless?. Deprived of linguistic explication, music, in a verbal world, really doesn’t signify anything; it doesn’t even signify nothing. Beyond metaphor, without representation, bereft of discourse, then, is there still, can there still be, something to call ‘music’? Is anything ‘musical’ left over after the metalinguistic attributions to music of all its qualities are deleted, or transcended? Can music be significant, even if it doesn’t signify anything? Another way to ask: is there some other dimension, some other type, of human reality outside of verbal-linguistic reality, but within the verbal-hegemonic world, where the single-experiential double of what is called ‘music’ has its own identity? Of course — within verbal reality, there are non-linguistic entities and phenomena: raw sounds, for example. So beyond metaphor and representation and discourse music could still be ontologized as just sound; and maybe this has been the outpost of valiant efforts — like John Cage’s valiant efforts — to rescue the aesthetic value of pure sound in our ears. But if it’s part of music’s identity as a phenomenon to be cognized as *human-intentional*, like a shout, or a petroglyph, and not just as some incidental physical-sensory object or phenomenon (whatever the serious independent energy of that kind of aesthetic surface), then it’s got to be some kind of utterance, in some kind of language: it has to *mean*; that’s intuitive. And maybe that’s what has made it plausible, given the overwhelming plurality of people’s experiences and cognitions in this culture, to think that music must mean *something*, in order to be, as they feel it to be, *meaningful* — namely, that it must be a kind of language, in the same sense that verbal language is language. So what discourse is desired to do, and is read as doing, whether it’s theoretical or metaphorical in style, is ascribe meanings to music, essentially transferring meanings it specifies into the ontological space of music itself. Read this way, theoretical discourse is not descriptive, or analytical, and so-called metaphorical discourse is not metaphorical; rather they are directly, aggressively *ascriptive*: they transfer into music itself the very characteristics and functions of representation and metaphor they attribute to it. So verbal configurations like ‘scale-degree chord numbers’, ‘Sonata form’, ‘Schenker-level’, ‘Fibonacci series’ ‘combinatorial set structure’, ‘masterpiece’ do not, in their most pervasive applications, function to represent musical phenomena; nor do metaphors like ‘violence’, ‘crystallization’, ‘loneliness’, in their most pervasive usages, function to describe anything necessarily in music; most of the time, it seems that music is being conscripted to stand for them. In both cases, the theoretical and the metaphorical, what happens is a reversal of what you might call the ‘descriptive relation’: rather than the words ‘I-chord’ or ‘repetition’ being used to represent something which is in music prior to their application, what happens, by the alchemy of discursive application, of ontological transference, is that something in music is caused to be, and to represent, the I-chord or the repetition: some moment of music becomes a I-chord moment, some moment of music becomes a repetition moment, some music becomes a repetition-structure, it’s cognized, perceived, experienced, ontologized as such, reduced to being that. So, too, can Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony be caused to be ontologized as a metaphor for violence, rather than the discursive word ‘violence’ being ontologized as a metaphor for it. When this happens, if this is what happens, music becomes its own exterior theory, its own analytic model, its own distancing metaphor: it reduces to a surrogate for verbal language, an encrypted language-code, a relatively vague and feeble and inexplicit form of representation. And, given their essential inexplicitness as representation, all musics are radically neutral, absolutely unresistant, fully compliant in any sense you care to require of them to become any ascription or analysis, any mode of ontologization, you decide to impose upon them, in your own perception, or in the perceptions of anyone who uses your discourse that way. If I try to imagine extra-textually how Beethoven’s music is violent, I’m unsure how to project it explicitly onto other experience: it’s not like watching a video of an episode of violence; and I can’t determine whether to image the violence as being inflicted on a man, woman, child, — Beethoven, me — or by “a bloody fist upon a splintered table”, as Adrienne Rich’s story goes. Discourses, stories, and theories,

unlike music, are highly explicit and as powerfully determinate within the realm of verbal-language reality as music is indeterminate within that realm. So the ontological transference between text and music goes only one way: you can cause the theoretical construct, or the metaphorical image, to be heard in the music, but you can't really read the music out of the discursive text, so long as it's still perceived as *discursive*. The looming spectre of music, sustained intact behind the impenetrable ontological barrier, can enliven the text expansively; that is intrinsic to the referential-experiential character that inheres in language. But the invasion of the text into the perceptual space of music, because music is quintessentially non-referential, is radically reductive, and deadly. Music can literally become language, but only by losing the musical; language too can literally become music, but only in an impoverished way that also loses reference, the essence of what is linguistic.

Consider a discourse like Susan McClary's remarkable provocative analysis of a patch of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which speaks of "one of the most horrifyingly violent episodes in the history of music." Where does that get its vividness, its cutting edge? If you apply it directly into the music, it develops an enormous polemical energy, by ascribing to Beethoven's music a reductive character, which it can then be heard to have: namely, Beethoven's music becomes a metaphor for "one of the most horrifyingly violent episodes in the history of music". On the other hand, if Beethoven's music remains external, a looming spectre, its image invoked as an abstract signifier internal to Susan McClary's word-drama, it contributes to that drama in a particular way; the drama, rather than the music, acquires an intense expressive edge. The looming spectre of Beethoven's piece would then be in Susan McClary's text like other insightfully distorted reflections of reality are in works of literature: the mandrake root in a John Donne poem, the town of Balbec in a Proust novel, the trial of Socrates in a Plato dialogue. Then the direction of reference is inward; the forms of the poem, the novel, the dialogue are the realities they create with these referential images, the dramas they ontologize around the looming spectres they invoke: no practiced reader allows them to ontologize the looming reality-spectres themselves (think of "Gloucester, Gloucester"). The cliché about Sigmund Freud's naïveté or intransigence as a contemplator of expressive phenomena was that he converted "art into text" — this is said derisively, or at least critically. But such a reverse ontologization, the transference of the identity of a text into the identity of a music, is virtually the norm of our world of musical discourse, theory, criticism, description, pedagogy.

Why do discourse, theory, and pedagogy take such an apparently perverse turn? Why does the 'truth' of ascription, according to either the pre-postmodern intellectual paradigm of physics, or the post-postmodern intellectual paradigm of law, seem a more plausible reading of musical discourse, by so many of its makers and users, than the creative imagery of description, of self-defining responsive intellectual drama — why is it counterintuitive to musical practitioners to read musical discourse more like poetry, say, than like mathematics or geology? Why is discourse read as if it was seeking to be true, rather than just expressive, interesting, engaging, creative, imaginative? You probably wouldn't read John Cage's ideas about music as 'true' or 'false', or Jim Randall's evocations of Tchaikovsky as 'authoritative' or 'persuasive', however enthusiastically or negatively you responded to them. So why does this attribution seem to correspond with the rhetoric — mostly borrowed from the physical, cognitive, and social sciences — which music discourse commonly adopts? One reason, as I've suggested, is in the yearning to quantify, and justify, the intuition of 'meaning' received from music: it's not a tree, it's not an earthquake, it's an utterance, someone's musical utterance. And perhaps there is the fear that music, in the way we care about it experientially, would vanish, would be experientially neutralized — nullified — in the absence of representation-ascriptive discourse. I'll leave that issue for later. But another reason, more important in that it explains the persistence of the use of discourse and theory and story-telling about music in its ascriptive form, is that only if the discursive transaction flows in the direction discourse → music can actions in the verbal-linguistic world be objectified, can they be made usable to control, institutionalize, hierarchize, authorize their thought — empower

themselves interpersonally with respect to music in music's presence as a tangible field of political-social interaction in the verbal-linguistic world. In the nonverbal-linguistic world such facts just don't exist; they are verbal facts, symbolic facts: language, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, is symbolic power, at least in some of its most egregious usages. If music is not forced to represent, it remains self-determinate, non-negotiable as material for social empowerment, for institutional capital, for hierarchization of experts and practitioners, for the verification of historical and scholarly accuracy, for the enforcement of ideologies, for the whole business of and around music in the 'real world'. Non-ascriptive description looks but doesn't touch — like poetry, it is appreciable but inapplicable. And — I'm repeating myself — any discourse can be received as either ascriptive or non-ascriptive, can be read either way, used either way: it can be regarded as a valuable access to someone's vivid ideas and visions, read as someone's internally self-formed verbal-intellectual drama, rather than as an objectified prescription, instruction, or proposal for application. But given the strength of ingrained habits of music-intellectual behavior, and the social order of the music-intellectual world, it is possible that such non-ascriptiveness can only be effectively achieved by discourse framed in a blatantly non-referential dialect, unusable as representational attribution, and non-verbal at least in the sense that poetry is nonverbal, that it creates an at most neoverbal, neolingistic reality.*

Remember the other question, the epistemic rather than the political one: how can we theorize a nonverbal, a musical 'reality', as opposed to a verbal 'truth'? And what, in such a reality, might the referent of 'meaning' be? Speaking of the larger class of linguistic phenomena, encompassing language as well as music, I've said: "to be: is: to mean". That's in *Language, as a music*. A music is not a tree, or an earthquake, right, but it's also not a story, a fact, an opinion, a structure. Metaphorically, music is said to be, and can be, any of these things; but except in the most extravagantly abstract fantasies, such semiosis is never literal or exact or rigorous, but always looks across an unfathomable analogical gap. Cognition, nonverbally, does not entail recognition, or representation. Seemingly basic musical 'facts' such as repetition, chords, melodies, parametric geographies, etc., are really only verbal 'facts', primally opaque to music, but radically reductive to it if they're ontologically transferred into music as representational 'musical facts'. But since intersubjectivity is supposed to be restricted to the symbolic-linguistic, and since cognitivity is supposed to depend on intersubjectivity, how is it possible to identify in interpersonal space a linguistic but nonverbal 'music reality'? Obviously, not within verbal discourse: that would be circular. But think about this: if a musician can perform, in an intersubjectively sharable form, in an interpersonally accessible space, an 'interpretive' realization of her interior 'hearing' — her mental 'experience' — of some existing 'music', that performance — the aspect of that performance which is cognized as its 'interpretive' aspect — could be literally understandable as a *discourse*, nonverbal, nontranslatable, non-paraphrasable (except by an equally 'creative', non-objectifiable piece of materialized mental behavior), suigeneric as an exteriorization of a subjective state, like the literal documentation of a 'thought' as it is experienced internally within the thinker. If this is intuitive, it is evidence, outside the inaccessible confines of inner experience, of the potential determinacy of nonverbal, 'subjective' experience, which, mostly, like thoughts, is perfectly intersubjective in principle but just not sharable by any known means of exteriorization. Perhaps this just sounds like a pitch for 'contextuality'; but actually, I'm suggesting that 'contextuality', supposedly a liberating music-ontological revolution, is really just another verbal-reality hook, another mode of representation reductively ascribable to music, something that, like its complementary twin 'indeterminacy', inheres in the domain of discourse rather than in the ontology of music.

I want to go a little further: Is 'understanding' music really what people are after in seeking to receive or produce it? Is it perhaps something else, some way of thinking and expressing almost ontologically required to be opaque to the category of 'understanding'? You could suppose, in fact, that precisely insofar as people value music, they value its liberation from the linguistic orders of 'truth', value its intense 'virtuality', value it precisely insofar as it offers an experience of reality without reductive imagery, representation or

definition. And since language is perforce opaque to nonverbal reality, can only parse truth and the laws of logic and science, anything which purports to be music-explanatory discourse is predestined to fall short of its music-explanatory aspirations, because of its essential indeterminacy with respect to the experiential ontology of perceived music — at minimum in the Wittgensteinian sense in which the logicized rational reconstruction of cognition actually occupies a cognitive territory incoherent with that which it wishes to explicate. In consequence, ‘truth’-claiming language about music has the effect — as I’ve said — of transporting music into its domain, verbalizing it, and de-ontologizing it as music, converting it into the linguistically true rather than the musically real. Translated into pedagogy, this transferent activity has the effect of converting music hearing into symbolic name-representation, and an instant translation of sound into language, in the interior of the perceptual transaction itself. Why is this so often the preferred path of metamusical behavior, in its theory and its pedagogy? If one thread of music theory has its antique origins in the investigation of the mathematical properties of physical resonating bodies, another — the one which comes down as pedagogy — appears to have had its origins in tactics for the training of singers, a methodology to enable them to learn to reproduce complex polyphonic music by various mnemonic devices, without having to understand, cognize, or experience it as music. People were being trained to produce musical experiences for others, not to have them themselves. The residue of these histories is observable even now, even with the intense sophistication of contemporary musical theory and its teaching methodologies; that residue persists not so much in intention or even in method, or content, as in the underlying continuity of the subject matter of music as a school study. Perhaps that has something to do with the sociologist Howard Becker’s observation that of all institutions in our culture, musical institutions are the most resistant to deviancy or innovation. I don’t need to demonize teaching or discourse to suggest that their purposes, histories, and effects need to be carefully studied and clearly re-theorized in order to assure ourselves that what is practiced in these areas is to the benefit of music as a medium of expressive art and a form of creative thought.

If things merely *are*, they don’t *act*: they are not, at least not directly and literally, instruments of power through coercion, conviction, or manipulation. Hitler may have invented himself by using Wagner’s music, but Wagner’s music did not invent Hitler. Long ago, in *Meta-Variations*, I proposed that all theories are self-fulfilling, that no theory could tell you *if* something was 12-tone, or in C major. What a theory did was provide a vocabulary and a perspective from which you could investigate what that piece could possibly be *as something* 12-tone, or in C major. However removed that “as” was from “truth”, it’s still too close for me now, because I perceive that the musical part of music is never the sort of thing that could possibly *be* 12-tone, or in C major, or lonely, or violent. Nor is it “just music” either, in some undifferentiated sense. In its own language, it’s fully specific, just not specifiable; fully meaningful, just not translatable; fully existent, just not representational.

V

[Part III of Black /Noise III]

VI

A music musically ‘real’ but verbally indeterminate — or at least verbally neutral — susceptible to infinite experiential variety and unlimited creative response, but opaque to judgment; a discourse expressive and committed but removed from the territory of truth or authority; a pedagogy intensely holistic but non-abstract and untestable, are all subversive to the existing social order of musical things. They cannot be controlled or institutionalized without being transformed into their negations. They threaten to materialize a world of acts which are expressive and rational but not manipulative or usable as criteria of judgment. Can

Music, as a Music

our world stand to have any even so insignificant a stratum of it running around loose like this? The experience of music ontologized as a music may resonate deeply with the experience of life; and although most experience of life may itself be deeply linguistic, that particular resonance of life in music is deepest, and most radically dangerous, when you know and value that music resembles anything else in your life, anything in your extra-musical experience, just not *literally* — but *musically*.

I can imagine reimagining music as the residue, even the antithesis, rather than as the avatar, of semiosis, offering a holistic, suigeneric, uninhibitedly hedonistic psychedelia impervious to predications from outside its self-determined introstruction. I perceive verbal discourse as poetry, hardly less estimable because its actual provenience may be ontological creativity rather than paraphrastic explication. To be ‘creative’ in this sense is to be understood as making new things — ‘neolanguage’ in the case of poetry, which is in this sense as ‘non-verbal’ an artform as is music; ‘neosound’ in the case of music in composition, performance, or audition — rather than just rearranging things that already exist for clarity’s sake, without, supposedly, changing what they are thereby. Music, received as music, might still be — would almost certainly be bound to be — enriched and suffused by everything else in your life, your history, your world, just in no foregrounded, obtrusive, double-imaged, definable, describable way, being itself unspecifiable in its transcendent metamorphosis of ‘sounds’ into ‘a sound’. As music, music has to be its own interior discourse, its own, only, fully concrete metalanguage.

VII

[Part IVs of Black /Noise III]

Fargo, N.D., November 1998/March 1999

* “...before all distinctions between form and content, between signifier and signified, even before the division between utterance and the uttered, there is the unqualified Saying, the glory of a “narrative voice” that speaks clearly, without ever being obscured by the opacity or the enigma or the terrible horror of what it communicates.” (Maurice Blanchot, “After the Fact”, translated by Paul Auster, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, edited by George Quasha. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1999.)

Enacting Process: Cage, Zen Buddhism, and Indeterminacy

Mark D. Nelson

Charles: But if nothing imposes itself, we could say anything at all. . . .

Cage: It is that 'anything at all' which allows access to what I call the *openness*. To the process. To the circus situation.

Charles: And according to you, we *are* in that situation or process. What you aspire to you basically already have.

Cage: . . . [I]t's true that we are in process. Only, we have forgotten it.¹

Charles: So music, then, seems to you to be the best way of making explicit this process of gaining access to being, this movement of 'openness' which we can't name without distorting it. . . .²

Quickened by a radical, Zen-Buddhism-informed aesthetic, consistently displaying remarkable notational innovation, and target of their composer's caustic, disparaging assessments, John Cage's compositions of the early- and mid-1950s reveal the churnings of a turbulent, fecund, and unflinching mind. Early in his career, Cage had embraced the traditional notion that art should "imitate Nature in her manner of operation";³ the self-criticism, and concomitant stylistic metamorphosis, which mark his activity of the 1950s reveal his maturing realization that a music which would be truly commensurate with Nature would have to evince Nature's intrinsic

¹ John Cage, *For the Birds* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), p. 148.

² Daniel Charles, in Cage, *For the Birds*, p. 151.

³ "I have for many years accepted, and I still do, the doctrine about Art, . . . that the function of Art is to imitate Nature in her manner of operation." John Cage, "Happy New Ears!" in *A Year From Monday* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 31.

impermanence and dynamism. The evolution of the composer's thought and style through the 1950s -- from the *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* and *Music of Changes*, through *Music for Piano*, *Williams Mix*, and the time-length pieces, to *Fontana Mix*, *Cartridge Music*, and *Variations I and II* -- is grounded in a push towards greater mimetic fluency, towards what Cage dubbed 'process'. *Variations II* marks an apex of this impetus: with this work, Cage believed that he had composed an ego-immune music which simultaneously revealed and enacted Nature's fundamentally supple workings.

Mining and Evoking Natural Flux

Cage's retrospective criticisms of *Music of Changes*, a seminal work completed in 1951, reflect his gathering desire to evoke through music the interdependent Zen concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction. In the course of his studies of Zen Buddhism with Daisetz T. Suzuki in the early 1950s, Cage had adopted the Buddhist cosmological perspective from which all things in the universe are viewed as effecting a concurrent volatile interplay; he had also absorbed the corollary belief that each of Nature's ephemeral manifestations occupies a central position in this infinitely complex matrix of interconnections.

He [Suzuki] then spoke of two qualities: unimpededness and interpenetration. Now this unimpededness is seeing that in all of space each thing and each human being is at the center and furthermore that each one being at the center is the most honored one of all.

Interpenetration means that each one of these most honored ones of all is moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time or what the space. So that when one says that there is no cause and effect, what is meant is that there are an incalculable infinity of causes and effects, that in fact each and every thing in all of time and space is related to each and every other thing in all of time and space.⁴

Assimilating this view into his artistic creed, he assigned himself the task of inducing performers and listeners to apprehend and till their own centers. Ideally, his releasing of sonic activity into the universal web -- or, more precisely, his revealing the sonic behaviors of that web -- would enable intermediaries and witnesses to join it.

Sounds should be honored rather than enslaved. I've come to think [in this way] because of my study of Buddhism, which teaches that every creature, whether sentient (such as animals) or nonsentient (such as stones and air), is the Buddha. Each being is at the center of the universe, and creation is a multiplicity of centers.⁵ (emphasis added)

⁴ John Cage, "Composition as Process III. Communication," in *Silence* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), pp. 46-47.

⁵ John Cage, in Joseph H. Mazo, "John Cage Quietly Speaks His Piece," *Bergen Sunday Record*, March 13, 1983; in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1991), p. 232.

And then this doctrine of nonobstruction means that I don't wish to impose my feelings on other people. Therefore, the use of chance operations, indeterminacy, etc., the nonerection of patterns, of either ideas or feelings on my part, in order to leave those other centers free to be the centers.⁶ (emphasis added)

Upon considering the pianist's role in a performance of *Music of Changes*, Cage realized that the work's score -- a "blueprint" whose strictures the performer/contractor was required to heed -- demanded that the pianist neglect his or her center. The composer used a colorful and sobering analogy to convey his dismay at having forced the performer to execute a pre-set externally-imposed design.

That the *Music of Changes* was composed by means of chance operations identifies the composer with no matter what eventuality. But that its notation is in all respects determinate does not permit the performer any such identification: his work is specifically laid out before him. He is therefore not able to perform from his own center but must identify himself insofar as possible with the center of the work as written. The *Music of Changes* is an object more inhuman than human, since chance operations brought it into being. The fact that these things that constitute it, though only sounds, have come together to control a human being, the performer, gives the work the alarming aspect of a Frankenstein monster. This situation is of course characteristic of Western music, the masterpieces of which are its most frightening examples, which when concerned with humane communication only move over from Frankenstein monster to Dictator.⁷ (emphasis added)

As this last statement suggests, 'monstrous' unsavory fettering of the performer was coupled with another compromising feature of *Music of Changes*: the work reified, and hence misrepresented, Nature. An exactly notated score, it specified a precise set of actions which would produce a single, pre-determined sonic continuity. It was, then, an "object" whose defining characteristics were well-established before a performance ever took place; a performer of these pieces was forced to act much like "a contractor, who, following an architect's blueprint, constructs a building."⁸ Such objectification squarely contravened Cage's avowed wish to evoke, reveal, and conjure the inherently dynamic interplay of Natural phenomena. Zen Buddhism holds that unimpeded interpenetration suffuses an intrinsically mutable world; Cage embraced Zen's conception of the universe as a teeming creative process rather than a stable cornucopia of diverse substances.

⁶ John Cage, in Irving Sandler, "Recorded Interview with John Cage (May 6, 1966);" in Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage*, p. 211.

⁷ John Cage, "Composition as Process II. Indeterminacy," in *Silence*, p. 36.

⁸ Cage, "Composition as Process II. Indeterminacy," p. 36.

You say: the real, the world as it is. But it is not, it becomes! It moves, it changes! It doesn't wait for us to change. . . . It is more mobile than you can imagine. You are getting closer to this reality when you say as it "presents itself"; that means that it is not there, existing as an object.

The world, the real is not an object. It is a process.⁹ (emphasis added)

Quintessentially Cageian was the hope and affirmation that, in illuminating and joining this process, his music could function as a vehicle towards enlightenment: ideally optimizing pliancy, it would bring performers, listeners, and its composer towards a preconceptual immersion in the 'divine' environment, Nature's ineffable, suffusive, fundamentally dynamic activity.

The purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.¹⁰

What is a quiet mind? . . . What are divine influences? . . . We learned from Oriental thought that those divine influences are, in fact, the environment in which we are.¹¹

What we hope for is the experience of that which is.

But 'what is' is not necessarily the stable, the immutable. . . . 'What is' does not depend on us, we depend on it. And we have to draw nearer to it. And unfortunately for logic, everything we understand under that rubric 'logic' represents such a simplification with regard to the event and what really happens, that we must learn to keep away from it. The function of art at the present time is to preserve us from all the logical minimizations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the flux of events. To draw us nearer to the process which is the world we live in.¹² (emphasis added)

A music which would model universal activity -- which, shunning 'logical minimizations', would promote "the opening up of everything that is possible and to everything that is possible"¹³ -- would necessarily strive not to reify Mind's ephemeral contours but rather to enact purposeless microcosmic processes.

In 1956, Cage abandoned an ambitious composing project which he had launched three years earlier. A new synthetic technique had anchored the project: melding elements of the chart-dependent methods underlying *Music of Changes* with the paper-imperfections techniques devised for *Music for Piano*, his elaborate new notations for *34'46.776" for a Pianist*, *31'57.9864" for a Pianist*, *26'1.1499" for a String Player*, and *27'10.554" for a Percussionist* both expanded the scope

⁹ Cage, *For the Birds*, p. 80.

¹⁰ John Cage, "An Autobiographical Statement," in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: Writer* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), p. 239.

¹¹ John Cage, "[Memoir]," in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: An Anthology* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), p. 77.

¹² Cage, *For the Birds*, pp. 80-81.

¹³ Cage, *For the Birds*, p. 147.

of the sound universe mined by each score and substantially diminished the operation of the composer's ego in the composition process.¹⁴ However, Cage subsequently acknowledged that his new scores imposed upon performers stern obligations reminiscent of *Music of Changes*' unholy rigors.

I asked [Paul Zukofsky] what he thought was lacking in strictness about the piece I wrote in the fifties for a string player that is graphic [*26'1.1499" for a String Player*], and for some reason he thought that that was suggestive of spontaneity. Whereas nothing could be more strict than graphic notation, since you could take a ruler, as I took to write it, and find out exactly what was to be played. In fact, that notation is so strict, that I felt that I was putting the performer in a strait jacket. It was that tendency, which is exhibited also in the *Music of Changes*, that was one of the things that led me toward greater indeterminacy, leaving freedom to the performer.¹⁵

Thus vexed by the inhuman, inflexible features of these scores, Cage set out to develop a notation which could plausibly and responsibly be read in myriad ways. Such a notation would be "indeterminate": rather than determining a single specific continuity of sounds, it would facilitate a gleaning of any number of diverse, taste-free sound streams from the 'totality of possibilities.' The composer retained and adapted paper imperfections as an important foundation of his newly evolving notational methods, and challenged himself to find a strategy for interpreting these purposelessly deposited etchings which was rigorously free of any 'knowing actions' -- any operations tinged by his taste/ego -- which would perforce compromise Nature's unimpeded efflorescence. His mesostic on "notation" intimates both his pious esteem for paper imperfections as a fruitful, Natural source and his dedication to the honoring and preserving of that source's non-intentional essence.

turning the paper
into
a space of Time
imperfections in the paper upon which
The
music is written
the music is there before
it is written

¹⁴ For detailed discussion of the methods employed by Cage to compose the time-length compositions, see James Pritchett, "The Development of Chance Techniques in the Music of John Cage, 1950-1956," Diss. New York University 1988, pp. 237-301; and James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 95-104. For discussion of the aesthetic implications of these methods, see Mark D. Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Mind: the Zen Buddhist Roots of John Cage's Early Chance-Determined and Indeterminate Compositions," Diss. Princeton University 1995, pp. 294-323.

¹⁵ Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, "An interview with John Cage [1975]", *New York Arts Journal* I, No. 1, May 1976; in Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage*, p. 91.

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composition
is Only making
iT
cleAr
That that
Is the case
finding Out
a simple relation

between paper and music
hOw
To
reAd
iT
Independently
Of
oNe's **thoughts**¹⁶

After making several transitional experiments, Cage hit upon an elegantly imaginative and hyper-flexible scheme: by

- (a) transcribing, or simulating, paper imperfections on sheets of transparent plastic and suggesting that these be construed as representing sonic (or theatrical, or verbal) events, and
- (b) devising simple supplementary graphic materials to be used in determining the specific properties of those events,

he could assemble a set of tools with which anyone could create a program of action. Such tools in no sense prejudiced the shape or outcome of those actions; their disciplined use by responsible executants would also minimize or preclude the influence of the executants' taste on the outcome. In summarizing the particulars of *Variations I*, Cage declared that, with this non-prescriptive notation amenable to innumerable ego-free interpretations, he had (at last) created a music truly coincident with Nature.

Sounds, as we know, have frequency, amplitude, duration, timbre, and in a composition, an order of succession. Five lines representing these five characteristics may be drawn in India ink upon transparent plastic squares. Upon another such square a point may be inscribed. Placing the square with the lines over the square with the point, a determination may be made as to the physical nature of a sound and its place within a determined program simply by dropping a perpendicular from the point to the line and measuring according to any method of measurement. . . . These squares are square so that they may be used in any position with respect to one another. This describes the situation obtaining in a recent composition, *Variations [I]* . . . In this situation, the universe within which the action is to take place is not

¹⁶ John Cage, "Composition in Retrospect" in *X* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 136

preconceived. Furthermore, as we know, sounds are events in a field of possibilities, not only at the discrete points conventions have favored. The notation of *Variations* departs from music and imitates the physical reality.¹⁷ (emphasis added)

The flexibility of such a score, the impermanence of any of its realizations, and the optimally purposeless and experimental nature of all realizations further evoke the flux of natural process.

I have become interested not in relationships -- though I see that things interpenetrate -- but I think they interpenetrate more richly, more abundantly, when I don't establish any relationship. So one of the first things I've done, which it seems to me is what nature has done, too, is not to make a fixed score. When I have three sounds, I don't think that one must come first, and then the next, and then the other, but that they can go together in any way, and that's exactly what happens to the birds and the automobiles and so on. At any rate that freedom from a fixed relation introduces me to the sounds of my environment.¹⁸

Performers of these "indeterminate" graphic scores are invited to create a number of distinct parts and then to perform from these simultaneously, with no effort to coordinate individual activities. Such a non-synchronous multilayered process is, again, illustrative of reality.

[T]hose [composers] who have accepted the sounds they do not intend . . . now realize that the score, the requiring that many parts be played in a particular togetherness, is not an accurate representation of how things are. These now compose parts but not scores, and the parts may be combined in any unthought ways. This means that each performance of such a piece of music is unique, as interesting to its composer as to others listening. [-- Each comprises an experimental action. --] It is easy to see again the parallel with nature, for even with leaves of the same tree, no two are exactly alike.¹⁹

Unlike their predecessors, then, Cage's indeterminate scores were not comparable to architectural blueprints, and performers of the new works no longer assumed the role of building contractor. Rather, Cage likened his new music-composition tool kits to cameras, and he regarded performers as photographers who determined both the general direction in which the camera might be aimed and the time at which its shutter might be released.

Geometrical means employing spatial superimpositions at variance with the ultimate performance in time may be used. . . . In this latter case, the composer resembles the maker of a camera who allows someone else to take the picture.²⁰

¹⁷ John Cage, "Composition as Process I. Changes," in *Silence*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Cage, in Don Finegan et al., "Choosing Abundance/Things To Do," *North American Review* 6, nos. 3 & 4 (Fall and Winter 1969); in Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage*, p. 228.

¹⁹ John Cage, "Experimental Music," in *Silence*, p. 11.

²⁰ Cage, "Experimental Music," pp. 10-11.

"The function of the performer in the case of [Feldman's] *Intersection 3*" -- like that of the performer of *Variations*, *Fontana Mix*, and *Cartridge Music* -- "is that of a photographer who on obtaining a camera uses it to take a picture. The composition permits an infinite number of these. . . ." ²¹ That such a camera may function as a disciplining mystical interface, a tool providing 'access to being,' is strongly implied by Cage in an excerpt from his set of mesostics on "indeterminacy":

not to supply

a particular photograph
but to think
of materials that would
make
it
possible
for
someone else
to make his
own
A
Camera
it was necessary

for David Tudor
something
a puzzle that he would
solve
Taking
as a beginning

what was impossible to measure
and then returning what he could to Mystery ²²

As this excerpt suggests, Cage envisioned David Tudor as the principal wielder of these new 'cameras'. It is important to pause here and consider briefly the huge influence exerted by Tudor on Cage in the 1950's.

"The Tudor Factor" ²³

It would be difficult to overstate the admiring awe with which Tudor was regarded by his colleagues John Cage, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff. He evinced extraordinary technical prowess, acute intellectual dexterity, and a selfless, probing meticulousness in addressing performance problems posed by these composers' new work. His various feats led the composers to conclude that he could meet the most daunting technical challenges; his unassailable fastidiousness in preparing performances of their idiosyncratically notated scores earned him their abiding and implicit trust. Commenting on his relationship with Tudor, Cage observed,

²¹ Cage, "Composition as Process II. Indeterminacy," p. 36.

²² Cage, "Composition i Retrospect", pp. 138-139 (bold-face added).

²³ This title is borrowed from John Holzaepfel's similarly entitled, unpublished paper. Much of the contents of Holzaepfel's paper are included in his Ph.D. dissertation, "David Tudor and the Performance of American Experimental Music, 1950-1959," Diss. City University of New York, 1994.

There was never any conversation. . . . Nor did I consult with him about what he could do, or what he couldn't do -- none of that. One assumed he could do everything. In fact, hearing him perform was proof.²⁴

Wolff has commented:

[T]he whole question of being able to *trust* the performer, at a very basic level, was an issue. And of course, with David there was no question. There was not only no question, but you'd sort of be looking forward to see what he had thought to do with the material you had given him. . . .²⁵

Brown concurred:

[You must realize] how much we *trusted* David to always be doing things properly and correctly and right. And we had a feeling that we could perhaps present him with scores and possibilities.²⁶

Both Wolff's and Brown's comments intimate that, beyond his technical wizardry and the scrupulousness with which he followed performance instructions, Tudor could be counted on to uncover marvelous and unanticipated sonic ramifications of these scores. His performances changed composers' minds about their own music; his precise and imaginative decipherings of the new notations produced revelatory results. Marveled Feldman,

I go to the concert and hear a miracle. . . . Meeting David enabled me to hear and see possibilities I never dreamed of.²⁷

And Cage, responding to a question concerning lessons he had learned from Tudor, noted,

Well, [I learned] just about everything. And my music is what I learned.²⁸ (emphasis added)

Tudor's "virtuosity of mind,"²⁹ coupled with his extraordinary technical facility, not only awed but intimidated his comrades: he inadvertently goaded Brown, Wolff, Feldman and Cage to develop procedures and create scores which would actually challenge and interest him. Observed Brown,

I think we all felt that about David -- that we were *boring* him. "What can we do next that he *can't do*?" I think we all felt he had a low threshold of boredom; he just

²⁴ John Holzaepfel, "David Tudor and the Performance of American Experimental Music, 1950-1959," Diss. City University of New York, 1994, p. 47.

²⁵ Christian Wolff, in John Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" paper delivered at the April 1990 meeting of The Sonneck Society, Hammong Virginia, p. 14.

²⁶ Earle Brown, in Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 13.

²⁷ Morton Feldman, in Holzaepfel, "David Tudor and the Performance of American Experimental Music, 1950-1959," p. 48.

²⁸ John Cage, in Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 16.

²⁹ Holzaepfel, "David Tudor and the Performance of American Experimental Music, 1950-1959," p. 45.

breezed through these pieces, then seemed to ask, "What next? Give me something *really* to do."³⁰

Early in the relationship among these five men, Tudor demonstrated an affinity and a knack for puzzle-solving; particularly impressive to the composers, this skill informed Tudor's ingenious proddings of them. In effect, the four composers' indeterminate scores were designed as "virtuoso puzzles"³¹ with which Tudor, applying his phenomenal talents in pursuit of solutions, might unleash his patented, mysterious 'miracles'.

His interest in puzzles invited the whole thing of indeterminacy. And so what you had to do was to make a situation that would interest *him*. That was the role he played.³²

Cage has been unmistakably emphatic in ascribing to Tudor the generative sparks of Cage's investigations of indeterminacy. Responding to a question regarding his indeterminate scores, he stated, "David is responsible for those pieces."³³ Variations II, he observed, is "a piece entirely due to [Tudor's] presence on earth."³⁴ And in summarizing his work of 1952-67, the composer remarked,

Without close association with David Tudor, the pianist, my recent work, that of the past fifteen years, would be unthinkable.³⁵

Still further, Cage once followed an acknowledgement of Tudor's having provided primary inspiration with an assertion that his music needed no other performers besides Tudor.

Q: Wasn't there a point, say in the late fifties, where the actual look of the music that you were writing [-- the indeterminate scores --] made performances difficult?

C: . . . No. Those were all written for David Tudor.

Q: And you had very little concern beyond David Tudor? . . .

C: If you knew David Tudor, and worked with him as I did over a long period of time (I would say we worked closely together for between fifteen and twenty years), . . . [H]e was, as Busotti said, "a musical instrument." And when Busotti wrote a piece for him, he didn't say for piano, he said for David Tudor, meaning him as an instrument. . . . [H]e was such an extraordinary musician that if you were near him, and even now if you're near him, you don't need anything else. The world is immense through him, has no limits, has only inviting horizons.³⁶ (emphasis added)

³⁰ Earle Brown, in Holzaepfel, "David Tudor and the Performance of American Experimental Music, 1950-1959," p. 45.

³¹ Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 22.

³² Cage, in Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 14.

³³ Cage, in Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 22.

³⁴ Cage, in Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 22.

³⁵ John Cage, quoted in Edward Downes, "Atlas Eclipticalis with *Winter Music* (Electronic Version) -- John Cage"; in Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: An Anthology*, p. 143.

³⁶ Cage, in William Duckworth, "Anything I Say Will Be Misunderstood: An Interview with John Cage," in Richard

Tudor enjoyed such deferential respect because in Cage's estimation his meticulously prepared performances mined Nature -- they realized just the sort of intention-free processes identified by Cage as the goal of his own Zen-informed music practice. Tudor's puzzle-solving devotions bespoke an abiding acceptance of a self-mortifying discipline:

[Tudor's working methods were] remarkably selfless, in an almost mystical sense. I mean, he just really erased himself; he just *did* what had to be done. . . . He chose to *do* things, of course, that were extraordinary and unusual and not at all business-as-usual. But having done that, he just went about them without any fuss or bother, very directly.³⁷

By consequence, his performances allowed a dynamic, mystical process to unfurl. His success in converting the known (the scores' tools, and measurements taken therewith) into the unknown (Nothing's processes) is insinuated at least twice in the Cageian literature. We have already seen the mesostic on "indeterminacy":

it was necessar**Y**
for da**V**id tudor
someth**I**ng
a puzzle that he would
sol**V**E
 Taking
 as a b**E**ginning
what was impossible to measur**E**
and then returning what he could to **M**ystery³⁸

And Daniel Charles confirms the consonance of Tudor's activity with Cage's avowed goals as follows:

The way David Tudor reduces the known to the unknown, that is, the causal to the indeterminate, is in no way paradoxical; it prolongs what you are trying to do yourself.³⁹

In short, Cage esteemed David Tudor as a prodigious, revelatory interpreter of his music. Tudor suggested unforeseen possibilities and disclosed unanticipated facets; he applied a selfless, imaginative diligence in solving Cage's abstruse notational puzzles; he guilelessly embraced, and seemed to prove the merits of, the aesthetics of non-intention. While one might be tempted to investigate more precisely the nature of Tudor's Mind-educing strategies, it seems more urgent here to consider the thorny questions raised by Tudor's rarefied status as prompter and designated performer of Cage's indeterminate scores. Such elevated position doesn't seem to square with an

Fleming and William Duckworth, eds., *John Cage at Seventy-five* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), pp. 26-27.

³⁷ Wolff, in Holzaepfel, "New Perspectives on the History of the 'New York School,'" p. 16.

³⁸ Cage, "Composition in Retrospect," pp. 138-139 (bold-face added).

³⁹ Daniel Charles, in Cage, *For the Birds*, p. 129.

aesthetic sunnily promoting both a "waking up to the very life we're living"⁴⁰ and the notion that everyone can and should cultivate self-altering artistic activity. It appears that all of Cage's indeterminate scores were designed for David Tudor; do these pieces fall exclusively within Tudor's phenomenal ken? Is virtuosity comparable to Tudor's a prerequisite for constructive engagement with these scores, and hence for an awakening to Presence? Is 'access to being' limited to the exceptionally talented few? Don't Cage's paeans to Tudor betray an elitism at variance with the composer's, and Zen Buddhism's, non-judgmental, egalitarian optimism?

Cage is not wholly consistent on this subject, but various pieces of evidence indicate that, as enthralled as he was by Tudor's performances of his music, he believed that any performer who understood the responsibility attending indeterminacy's apparent freedoms could reap the mind-changing benefits of his work. In a short statement on his new experimental scores, he observed in 1960,

Emptiness of purpose does not imply contempt for society, rather assumes that each person whether he knows it or not is noble, is able to experience gifts with generosity.⁴¹

"Experimental Music: Doctrine," a spirited, quasi-pedantic (and periodically humorous) discourse on the fundamentally intention-free and purposeless character of Cage's new work, concludes with the following hypothetical exchange between "an uncompromising teacher and an unenlightened student":

QUESTION: Then what is the purpose of this "experimental" music?

ANSWER: No purposes. Sounds. . . .

QUESTION: . . . But is this *music*?

ANSWER: Ah! you like sounds after all when they are made up of vowels and consonants. You are slow-witted, for you have never brought your mind to the location of urgency. Do you need me or someone else to hold you up? Why don't you realize as I do that nothing is accomplished by writing, playing, or listening to music? Otherwise, deaf as a doornail, you will never be able to hear anything, even what's well within earshot.

QUESTION: But seriously, if this is what music is, I could write [or, presumably, perform] it as well as you.

ANSWER: Have I said anything that would lead you to think I thought you were stupid?⁴² (emphasis added)

In the following interview excerpt, Cage repudiates the notion that special skills are required before one may intuit the process suffusing existence.

⁴⁰ Cage, "Experimental Music," p. 12.

⁴¹ Cage, "Form Is a Language," in Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: An Anthology*, p. 135.

⁴² John Cage, "Experimental Music: Doctrine," in *Silence*, p. 17.

Cage: I don't teach. So it makes it difficult. It obliges people to do what I think is finally important, and that is to work from their own centers. This is what I keep writing about.

Duckworth: But unless you're dealing with extraordinary people, their own centers aren't well enough defined to understand how to work from them.

Cage: But Bill, I think they are. I don't believe in education. I don't believe in things being explained or understood. I believe in things that are inexplicable.⁴³ (emphasis added)

With the foregoing series of observations, Cage implicitly affirms a central Zen Buddhist tenet: Human beings are already complete. "Everything *is* Buddha nature. . . . Buddha nature is just another name for human nature, our true human nature."⁴⁴ Awakening to these facts entails both an intimate awareness of one's ever-metamorphosing environment and the thorough acceptance of all the warts and talents and quirks that comprise one's impermanent self. If we stanch our acquisitive desires for different personal characteristics and circumstances, we may become intuitively familiar with the process which nourishes us. Pema Chödrön, a nun in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, begins her gently hortatory book, *Start Where You Are*, as follows:

We already have everything we need. There is no need for self-improvement. . . . [A]ll the time our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are. We are one blink of an eye away from being fully awake.

. . . From this perspective we don't need to change: you can feel as wretched as you like, and you're still a good candidate for enlightenment. You can feel like the world's most hopeless basket case, but that feeling is your wealth, not something to be thrown out or improved upon. There's a richness to all of the smelly stuff that we so dislike and so little desire. The delightful things . . . -- these also are our wealth.⁴⁵

From the early 1950's on, Cage devoted himself to creating a music which would not be "an escape from life, but rather [would be] an introduction to it".⁴⁶

For all intents and purposes the goal of music . . . [is] that art and our involvement in it will somehow introduce us to the very life that we are living. . . .⁴⁷

Such a music is designed to assist those engaged with it in tapping the unique 'wealth' that lies latent within everyone.

David Tudor's performances of Cage's music may thus be viewed as exemplary but not definitive. The intense rigor with which Tudor prepared his performances affords a model of self-

⁴³ Duckworth, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1970), p. 48.

⁴⁵ Pema Chödrön, *Start Where You Are* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994), p. 3.

⁴⁶ John Cage, in Stanley Kauffmann, moderator, "The Changing Audience for the Changing Arts/Panel," in *The Arts: Planning for Change* (New York: Associated Councils of the Arts, 1966); in Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing With Cage*, p. 211.

⁴⁷ John Cage, "Two Statements On Ives," in *A Year From Monday*, p. 42.

disciplining acceptance; but the outcomes of Tudor's having evinced such acceptance reflect his own unique skills and are perhaps better regarded as genuine rather than 'extraordinary'. Cage implies that all performers are potentially capable of harnessing their talents and making Process-illuminating discoveries comparable to those made by Tudor; it is the discovery-making process, not a specific result of such a process, which is of essential importance.

When it's clear that the person who is realizing the work is doing his work not only in the spirit of the composition, but in such a way as to free him from his choices, then I think it makes no difference what the results are, because we're not really interested in results. Results are like deaths. What we're interested in is things going on, and changing, not in their being fixed.⁴⁸

* * *

To recapitulate, there are at least three ways in which fixed, chance-determined scores can foster acute perceptual attentiveness. (1) Responsible performance of such works entails an unwavering commitment to the execution of alogically ordered tasks. Accepting the discipline of such an assignment requires that the performer cultivate a preconceptual vigilance, a moment-to-moment readiness to perform meaningless events, which impedes invocations of logic or taste. (2) In encouraging performers to find solutions to new technical problems, these scores advance mental agility and expand the range of performance possibilities. (3) The 'circus situations' effected by simultaneous performances of these works defy and diffuse logic, and encourage observers and participants to find non-discursive ways to monitor experience. All three of these factors focus upon the breaking of conceptualizing habits in order to promote greater mental agility when one engages life's dynamic flow; such agility optimally approximates, or joins, that flow. Cage and Zen ask one to attend to what is present, not to what one wants to be present; "Beware of losing what isn't in your head," Cage exhorts.⁴⁹ Man's deep-seated habit of categorizing and inferring relationships among the objects of experience necessarily removes one from that experience; however, one may become intimate with one's experience, and with the process which bolsters it, by supplanting illusion-sustaining intellection with insight-securing perception.

In evoking natural process, Cage believed that he was bringing listeners, performers, and himself closer to an intuitive understanding of the mystical dynamic of life; in mining Nature, he strove to induce a non-cogitative fathoming of Mind. *Variations II*, an apotheosis of his indeterminate scores, comprises a bias-free drafting tool wielded by Nature; when interpreted with appropriate care, the tracings of these tools specify programs of actions which, as microcosmic processes, may serve to enfold the user in the fluid macrocosmic order. Ideally, the interpreter's involvement with these tracings will be neither static nor predictable: the discipline they exact diminish thought-impediments to the characteristic fluency of process. Manifesting "non-knowledge of something that has not yet happened" in the course of realizing experimental actions, the

⁴⁸ Cage, in Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, "An Interview with John Cage [1975]," p. 102.

⁴⁹ John Cage, "Rhythm Etc.," in *A Year From Monday*, p. 132.

performer may quietly plunge into the process which Cage's tools are designed to conjure. Cage acknowledged, however, that the habit-breaking effects of his works could be transient: the human predilection for imposing order on experience is sufficiently strong to convert an unknown process into a familiar object. He simply counseled that one be mindful of such a shift, and that one view it as a signal to rejuvenate and refocus one's search for process-educing activity.

Reynolds: You have spoken of the attractions of making processes as opposed to the making of objects, with, for example, beginnings and middles and ends. It seems as though certain processes result in situations that are so strongly characterized as to take on a kind of "eventness" or "objectness." . . .

Do you feel that processes sometimes result in objectlike situations?

Cage: What you say about a process giving the impression of becoming an object is true, and it's that that keeps the world, so to speak, going. That's why we go on to the next process, because we notice where the [previous] process gave the impression of becoming an object. That's why we get ideas as we go along doing our work -- to which we're committed -- that may lead to a greater freedom in the next one.⁵⁰

This last statement seems an apposite motto for John Cage's creative activity in the 1950's.

⁵⁰ "John Cage and Roger Reynolds: A Conversation," *Musical Quarterly* 45 (1979), pp. 583-584.

DOWN...DOWN...DOWN...

Bill Brooks and Steve Key
have a rambling amicable discussion about many things,
including history, composition and the dangers of concert music.

1. In the same room

SK: This—if it ends up that the machine didn't work and...Well, we just had a conversation. Which is fine.

BB: Of course.

SK: Given my expertise with machines, that's altogether possible, Bill. If you want to move around, fine, if you want to talk, not talk...Anything is OK. If we actually come up with something I'll transcribe it and send you a copy, and you can...and then...I would take out embarrassing parts, or...

BB: Well I'm not sure that's such a good idea! I really like the...You know...Cage...I forget which book it is now...has those interviews about Ives, in which he...the transcription...He invented little symbols for 'ums' and 'ers'...and there's no effort made to correct the syntax or make the sentences complete.

SK: But I mean...at some point you bring up a friend or I bring up a friend—

BB: Oh! I see!

SK: I bring up somebody and you say "Well, he's really an asshole!" or you know...and then you decide that maybe it's not so productive to include that...then that's ok...

BB: Fine...fine...

(pause)

SK: What do you want to talk about?

BB: I...um...As I said, I am at your disposal.

SK: Ok. (laughs) Ooooooh...well, we never start off this artificially. That's the weird thing. And this is only the second time you and I have talked face to face in fifteen years...Remember when I proposed this?...I thought maybe it would turn out that I'd have to be in a different room in the house...on the telephone.

BB: Yes. We discussed that possibility.

SK: Because the telephone works well for me, Bill.

BB: Also, when a person makes a telephone call, there's a...an agenda...and an immediate purpose.

SK: My purpose is usually...um...hmmm...I want to complain about something.

BB: And there's an incentive for efficiency because it costs money.

SK: Yeah.

BB: Mhmm. (laughs) Well, for consistency's sake, you could start out by complaining.

SK: I have nothing to complain about today! I do have some questions. I mean...I know that...I've heard you talk about administration...being an administrator in a University program. And that brought up...That brought up something that I was interested in...hmmmm...I remember that Joe Hannan told me that you advised him very strongly to leave the University...if he wanted to become a composer...Do you remember the advice you gave him?

BB: Yeah...I don't know what...I remember giving him...advice...I don't remember it being that strong, but I remember giving him that advice.

SK: Why? And...well, that was fifteen years ago...Have things changed? Would you still give the same advice to a young composer?

BB: I don't give that advice to everybody. I gave it to Joe because Joe is who Joe is; I wouldn't necessarily have given that advice to other students I've had or people I've known.

SK: So what is it about Joe that made him---are you saying there's something about him that made the University not a productive place in which to develop as a composer?

BB: Yeah. Um...It seemed to me that Joe was not a syntactically oriented composer...in the sense of wanting to work with a received syntax. He didn't want to—

SK: Is that what the University does? It gives you a received syntax?

BB: Yeah. And you have to deal with it. You may not...you can reject it, but then you pay a price within the institution.

SK: Tell me about this syntax. Where does it come from...what does it mean, what does it do? There! Three perfect questions. We're raging along.

BB: All right...it...where it...hmmmm. Maybe what I should say is that the University asks that you endorse a received syntax. Because you are put in the position of teaching classes in analysis, in history, in theory or something. And in order to do those, you are encouraged, at a minimum—and maybe required—to generate a syllabus, generate a focus for the course. Make decisions about what is and is not pertinent, what is and is not to be included.

SK: This is after you've gone through the whole program and you've become a professor.

BB: Yeah. But at any stage. Because once...at least once you get to graduate level, because nearly everybody at graduate level is going to wind up teaching one way or another...In most programs there's a fair amount of latitude...I mean you have reasonable...You're induced to begin to make those decisions. It's not usually...nailed down that precisely, what you're going to do.

SK: Are you saying that this syntax is just the Western tradition? Or are you saying it's a particular syntax of the profession that you're dealing with? A kind of syntax found among University composers.

BB: Well...

SK: And if so—here's a jump cut!—could there be a general similarity among the syntaxes of all the composition teachers of all Universities? This is something Ken Gaburo and I talked about and I think he would say the answer to that is "yes".

2. Inclusion and exclusion

BB: Yeah...I think there is a similarity. Um...the similarity isn't necessarily a surface similarity, but it has to do with—although there are surface similarities as well, probably—I think it has to do with this business of inclusion and exclusion. The course structure at Universities is set up in a way which only permits—because of time and because of all the things that go along with compartmentalized study...You have to make a decision about what is going to be excluded. That's the fundamental collection of decisions that are made.

SK: Mmmm.

BB: And once you do that, whatever remains as being included is somehow sanctified by having passed through that sieve. And the very act of drawing that kind of distinction—I'm going to exclude this and I'm going to include that—that orients a faculty member or a teaching assistant or whoever it is who's in that classroom situation—orients the person to continue that mode of thinking with respect to the material that remains.

SK: So tell me...what is it that remains? Tell me about—

BB: Well, a collection of pieces, for example. You're going to teach a course, and you can only deal with "X" number of pieces of repertory. It's an analysis course; in a course in analysis—common practice stuff—I don't care...it doesn't matter what that is. And so—

SK: When you advised Joe Hannan...How would you have put it?

BB: I don't know. I said...

SK: To not be in a situation of received syntax.

BB: Yeah.

SK: I'm still wondering what you mean by this—a syntax that's

Down....Down....Down....

received.

BB: The syntax that's— what I'm arguing is that the syntax that's received—

SK: I'm assuming...oh— go ahead—

BB: ...has to do with inclusion and exclusion. It's a series of sieves, a series of filters, sieves.

SK: A syntax of sieves.

BB: Mhmm.

SK: So it's not a style—

BB: No, no. Not a style as such.

SK: But it is a style! To a certain extent. "All University composers..."

BB: Yeah. I mean it will result in...in...(looks off)...certain stylistic consistencies—I think.

SK: It can be subverted, though, right?

BB: Yeah...I think it probably can. But it's not...um...You have to work hard, think of ways around it. I...I don't...I don't feel like I've dealt very successfully with that. The best that I've been able to do is to...dump the sieving process, as it were...(laughs)...into the hands of the students. That is, you go into the first class and you say, ok, we're supposed to deal with analysis of common practice music. Clearly, we cannot deal with all of the music. Therefore some sort of criterion is going to have to be applied to determine which pieces are actually going to be looked at in fifteen weeks. You—the students—either tell me what the pieces are, or tell me what the criteria are. Either way, I'm happy. I'll be happy to work with you...um...If you say "What are the pieces?"—I've done this—if you say "What are the pieces?", the chances are the students will name pieces that they know.

SK: Mhmm.

BB: And that...and often, if there are performers in the class, pieces which they've played. That has some real practical advantages, because then there's a...a...corporeal (smiles) domain that you can address, you know.

"What happens when you play this piece?" "What are the..." You're not dealing with recordings necessarily—scores—you can deal with the physical presentation and hear it. And on the other hand you also have pieces that carry lots of baggage with them into the course. The person who's performing them has already learned whole bunches of things about this piece, which may or may not be...uh...useful to the other people, may in fact skew them in a particular direction that they'd rather not be skewed. The person bringing the piece in is in the position of taking a person's head—another person's head—another student's head—and saying "Look! Look at this!" You know?

SK: Mhmm.

BB: "Look at that!" So that's the weakness, that's the loss. If you just ask for criteria, then some very interesting things can result, but of course you have no idea what you're going to wind up with, in terms of pieces. Criteria. I've only done that once or twice, and usually the end result of that has been that the students don't want to deal with the notion of criteria; they'd rather specify the pieces, and the criteria disintegrate very quickly into lists of pieces. Um...and nobody has yet proposed what I had kind of hoped somebody would propose, which was a system of chance operations...

SK: For the choice of pieces?

BB: Yeah. For the choice of pieces, for example.

SK: Would a chance...would a sieve based on chance lead to a better...

somehow a better educational exp—

BB: I don't know about better; it'd be different. It would be different...and it—

SK: You obviously want that. You want it to be different.

BB: It has the...Well, it has the advantage...A sieve based on acts of chance would have the advantage of...making it hard to make any kind of claim on behalf of the pieces that remain. That is...um...if you try to extend that methodology to the piece itself, then your analysis of the piece would also be conducted using chance techniques.

SK: So give me an example of a chance system that you could use to put together a list of pieces from say the period of common practice.

BB: Well, you...how would I do that?

SK: Go to the card catalog...

BB: Well, you have to decide what the common practice is, so first of all we'd decide on some dates. Um...1760 to...1830—right?—for lack of a better collection of dates...um...Then you choose a number between one and seventeen—however many volumes in Grove's Dictionary of Music there are...

SK: Mmhhh.

BB: Um...choose a page within that volume. Turn the page, keep turning successive entries until you come to a composer who wrote music during that period. And then using whatever bibliographic tools are available for that composer, choose a work...That would be a way to do it. I'm not sure that's a perfect way to do it; there's already a sieve there, because you're already dealing with people who've made Grove's Dictionary. But, all in all, it's pretty good...I mean, that's a pretty big dictionary.

SK: Right.

BB: I don't worry too much about that...But the point is, if you do it that way...the advantage of...Look at the other way. If you do it the other way, I mean, you say, "Ok, well, the important composers were..."

SK: Right...

BB: "The important composers were—Mozart and Haydn; and the important pieces were...among...from those..." So that at every level you're establishing some sort of importance thing. Even if your notion of what constitutes importance is well thought through, even if it's not just a kind of "This is the stuff that everybody thinks is important"...

SK: Wait a minute—

BB: Wait a minute—let me finish. So then—

SK: I'm writing down the word "importance" here—

BB: Yeah...I don't care what that means. If you're wondering what that means, I don't care what that means.

SK: I'm gonna ask...but go ahead, finish.

BB: For the purposes of this story, it doesn't matter...Then you've got this body of materials, you know, in an analysis class. Now my point is that you've already predisposed the way you're going to look at those pieces. That is, the first question that would occur to a person in that situation is "Well, what's important about...in these pieces? What are the important events in these pieces?" So the analysis is conditioned by the method by which you've chosen the repertory. And that's what I mean by received syntax. The syntax has to do with drawing those kinds of distinctions, those inclusive/exclusive distinctions from the point of view of academic...uh...suitability, or appropriateness or whatever—whatever that means. It doesn't even matter what the criteria are as long as the criteria are there. Then that criterion becomes kind of nested in itself, in successive levels of work.

SK: Does it really matter what kind of technique is used to build the sieve? I...I..Isn't...how do I say this? Isn't the fact of the sieve itself the reason why academic...academic music is so removed from actually functioning...

BB: Yes.

SK: ...in the world?

BB: Yes. I agree...That's—

SK: So wouldn't the question that an administrator would have to deal with most effectively be "How do I remove any or all of these sieves?" Or the habit of the sieves? It may be that simply uncovering these processes and effectively enabling awareness of them constitutes the teaching of composition, in a trans-musical sense.

BB: Yeah. Or, the other...Why I say administration is like composition, is because I've...I've sort of given up doing that. And what I try to...I mean...I don't know how to do that, I should say. And so what instead I try to do, to the extent that I can, is to set up sieves which work in...in...uh...in friction with each other. Discomfort with each other. The thing...the kick that I'm on right now, especially at Illinois...is...is an old one. It's interdisciplinary work. That if you get enough people coming into a single environment from sufficiently radically different backgrounds, the chances are that people will not be able to agree on whatever these criteria are that you want to use. And then, if you can use that in various ways...I mean, you can have a good hefty semester-long argument about who's right—which of course there's no answer to—but the argument itself is valid. Or you can bang these up against each other in various layers. "Look, you do this part of the process, and you do that part of the process...Let's see what comes out." What will come out will be a collection—hopefully—will be a collection of pieces—if we're talking about that, still that, uh,

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example—which nobody's happy with. (laughs) But that already is a step forward. That's sort of in the nature of collaboration.

SK: In what sense is it a step forward?

BB: Because now it's hard to apply that...again, it's hard to...you haven't get a single...a single value system, a single logic. And you can't therefore apply that logic to the piece in question, again sticking with the analysis model. We have this collection of pieces now, which have been arrived at in one way or another by sort of incompatible sieves, for lack of a better term. What are we going to do with them?

SK: Hmm.

BB: We're not going to pick one of these things and apply it to these pieces. And sometimes people are going to be...feel like—what—the argument that's being applied is totally improper. At least there's the possibility there that you'll be forced to confront something quite startling and completely outside your...intended experience.

SK: Is the drive at the University, though, toward a monolithic syntax? And so...is this in a sense just a reaction to that tendency?

BB: I don't know. I...see...it seems to me that the University ought not to...there's no reason why a University has to have a drive towards a monolithic syntax, except insofar as it reflects the...the...uh...the administrative structure and the functioning of the society in which it's embedded...the society—

SK: But the University is supposed to uncover what's important—what's going to endure, right?

BB: No, I don't think that's what a University should do.

SK: That's what the University does. Or tries to do.

BB: That's right.

SK: What it often ends up doing is working with what is most boring. Perhaps rather than what's most enduring. Or perhaps the University is a cultural sieve that turns what's most enduring into boring. Or maybe what's most boring is what ends up enduring!

BB: Well, the University tells us what's most consistent. It proves to us consistencies which we don't care about...(pause)...I don't care about. If the University would model its—really and truly model—this is my latest kick—really and truly model its administrative structure along the lines of complex collaborative arrangements, rather than along the lines of the solitary scholar—the paradigm for the University still...For a thousand years it's been the solitary scholar...um...That's changing in the sciences to some extent, but even there there's still that...that kind of...We haven't yet gotten over the paradigm of the man of genius in science. Science is—

SK: We have in music? (heavy irony)

BB: No...no...uh...no, I'm saying the sciences might be more advanced. One would imagine that, given the way that recent scientific research has been conducted, it might be more advanced. But in fact it's not more advanced there. And certainly not in the Humanities. The humanities are the worst offenders in many respects. So if a University could conceive of a different paradigm for the way knowledge accumulates, then maybe it could structure itself in a different way, and it wouldn't necessarily result in...that...exclusionary process, that "Monuments of Music", or "Monuments of Literature", or "Monuments of Whatever."

SK: So if you...if in "Bill Brooks' Dream Program" I were getting a PhD, how would it differ from what I'm doing now? Would it be a collaborative doctorate in which I'd be part of a committee of students?

BB: That's an interesting...I don't know how we'd do it. I haven't pushed the idea that far. Because it hasn't been practical, you know. I'm doing all I can to carve out an interdisciplinary program in Illinois, which is the tiniest small step in that direction. That would be an interesting thing. It would be an interesting constraint: if you want to get a doctorate, you can only get a doctorate in collaboration with...Doctorates are awarded in clumps. That would be an interesting notion.

SK: Mmhmm. Count me in!

BB: Yeah! I'm glad we're having this conversation because I'm about to go back and talk to the Dean about this interdisciplinary lack—I've been sending memos regularly for the past month and a half, and the time is now ripe. Clearly this is the moment to really hit her with some really practical things. "Here's step one, step two, step three. These are small things, they won't cost you anything, because I know you don't have any money this year." So I'm trying to think of ways to do that.

SK: So then, what I want to ask about is fear. I mean, if you want to have collaborative work, that means that you have to take away the entire fear structure connected with doing work in the academy. I mean, the whole

point of being solitary is that you build your own little realm, from which you do battle against the "judges." Everyone's afraid of losing. The work of the solitary scholar has to be exemplary, so everyone's always afraid not to be exemplary. Fear, fear, fear.

BB: Yeah, right.

SK: You protect that little realm. It's a strange, warrior-like thing. But it's all based on fear. How would you get around that? Obviously you'd have to get rid of grades and the judgments of—

BB: I'm not sure you'd have to get rid of grades.

SK: Why would you have grades?

BB: I would like to get rid of grades; but at the very least what you would wind up...This is really off the top of my head, so we can assume that there are going to be all kinds of things wrong with what I'm proposing, but let's imagine a program in which...um...a minimum of five persons...You must be admitted as part of a team of five persons. So the grading, then, is always applied to the team. It's only the team, the collective, that is graded. Not the individual. That may still be insufficient. I mean, I'm certainly in favor of getting rid of grades. I've always been in favor of that. But...but as a start, that would certainly be an interesting intermediate step, to see whether it had any consequences. I don't know whether it would or not.

SK: Explain to me why you are in favor of getting rid of grades. This is just for the record.

BB: I think the reason I'm against grades is because grades are currency and I'm against capitalism. And grades are what...Instead of paying people, the University gives them grades. And...uh...the entire motivation is an economic one. You do such and such and so and so and you get a certain salary, and your salary is an "A" or a "B" or a "C" or whatever it is. And that's not my notion of how the world should work, certainly. And so it's not my notion of how the University should work. In a nutshell...In the grandest scheme, that's why I'm against grades. In practical terms, I'm against grades for all the usual conventional reasons: people worry about what they're going to get on the exam rather than trying to learn something. People spend most of their lives trying to figure out what their grade point average is, instead of trying to figure out what the last paragraph that they read might have to do with growing avocados. (smiles)

SK: Would the...uh...what would happen if you took away grades? I wonder if the enrollment would decline in the Universities.

BB: Well there is a practical solution. The other major purpose that grades serve is also economic—is that of certifying competence. And that's a process that is useful—very useful—to engineering firms, to law firms, to anyone who wants to hire anybody. "What was your degree, what was your transcript?" But the degree and the transcript and the grades rest primarily on examination procedures—not exclusively, but primarily—so I've always felt if there has to be some sort of economic measure of usefulness applied to people, in the form of grades or certification, then can we not divorce that from the University entirely? So if law firms are worried about how law students do in the University, let them measure it. It's their problem, let them measure it. We'll get on with the business of educating people.

SK: You could have some sort of legal grading institution, a corporation that—

BB: Yeah.

SK: ...does grading for law firms, and they could refer to that.

BB: Yeah. I mean, that exists. The mechanism for that already exists with Law Boards and SAT's and all that stuff. And in fact, that, rightly or wrongly, is being used increasingly as a predictor of success. That's the economic criteria for high school students. That's the economic indicator that gets you into or out of Universities. Universities don't trust high school transcripts any longer. Because the quality of high schools is so extraordinarily different because of economic....So, a person applying to the University of Illinois...they have to have a certain GPA—a minimum GPA just to be considered—and then they look at things like SAT scores.

3. Teaching to compose

SK: Now, you're the head of the composition department at—

BB: Division.

SK: Division.

BB: There's a College of Fine Arts which has seven academic units within it, one of which is the School of Music. And the School of Music itself has eleven or so divisions, each of which has its own chair.

SK: Say I come to you as a student and I want to be a composer. What would you ask me?

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BB: What level are we talking about? Freshman? Undergraduate? Graduate?

SK: Mmmm....Undergrad or Grad.

BB: It'd be very different! As a high school senior—

SK: Uh huh...I want to be a composer. You ask me what?

BB: Why?

SK: (laughs) I like to make sounds. Nice sounds.

BB: That would be fine. I could go ahead. I'll give you some alternative answers which I hear frequently. "I want to write film music."

SK: That's a very good answer.

BB: It's a very practical answer. And I'd ask a different collection of questions than in response to your answer. At that point I would ask them, "Ok, what...tell me about your experience. Do you have a home studio? Do you have any technological experience at all? Have you ever worked with anybody who's done video or film?" Because in some high schools they can do this, and in some they can't. And if the answer is "no" to all of those, then my usual answer would be...I'd be...depending on how pushy...how serious they were, I would either say...if they weren't too serious I would probably just say, "Well, I don't really think we have a program that's very good for you here. If you're really interested in this, you might look at Berklee School of Music or something like that." If they're really obviously motivated but they don't have the background, then I would say, "I don't think you're going to make it." Because people who make it in that business either have been in already, or they start when they're three years old, for all practical purposes. They start thinking at that stage.

SK: Three years old.

BB: (smiles) Well, that's what I'd say for the purposes of...I would exaggerate.

SK: But...I don't know if this is relevant, but Bob Ashley used to say that no composer of any interest...of his acquaintance...ever started composing before the age of thirty. That's not necessarily composing for film, but...

BB: Well, that...I don't agree with that, but that's beside that point.

SK: Ok. Would you—

BB: Now, your answer is much more interesting, because that would then lead me into a conversation about aesthetics, probably, and I would then circle around. You said, "I like to make sounds. I like to make nice sounds." So I'd probably say, "Ok, tell me about what constitutes nice sounds." Then there are possible—

SK: How would you avoid—or would you avoid—um...the fear factor, or the judgmental factor? Because I would obviously be approaching you from a sort of lower position, saying, "I want to study here..."

BB: You mean the fear factor in your case? How would I—

SK: Intimidating—

BB: It's hard. It's really hard. It's not possible, really, I don't think, given the current arrangements.

SK: Would you ask...um...for what audience I'd be making music?

BB: I don't normally ask that.

SK: That's one of the important questions.

BB: Not at that stage. Not at high school.

SK: When does it become important, then? For me that would be important right away. For whom are you writing? Right now.

BB: See, most of the high school students we encounter are so far short of even articulating that question clearly...I mean they're not even in a position to consider the notion that there are multiple audiences, that there's a multiplicity of audiences, that music has multiple functions. If you get somebody that understands that, and they're applying from high school, you accept them!

SK: The question "Who are you writing for" may be the same as the question "Who do you live with? What community surrounds you?" That's not such a tough question.

BB: It might be the same as that, but I don't think it would be understood that way. I just...I tend not to ask that to incoming high school students. It seems not to go anywhere. Especially—

SK: What about the graduate student?

BB: Ok! Now! Now I would be perfectly happy with questions like that. But more importantly with the graduate student, uh...I try to have a conversation organized around their portfolio. I'd much rather talk with them about a piece that they have written, that they show me.

SK: Would you ask about their attitudes regarding the performance of their work? Um...what I mean is that in the University, people are taught how to compose using the same methods we just discussed—critical and traditional "sieves", received techniques of exclusion and inclusion—that result in the sad fact that most University-trained composers resemble each other in the same way that most University music courses resemble each other. And it seems that concentration on both the performance experience and the nature of the audience for whom one is writing might help in loosening that up. Maybe not. You know: the arrogance of solitary splendor and all that. The mantle of Beethoven. Ugh. It'd be better, maybe, if composing were taught less like architecture and more like carpentry.

BB: I think the analogy's not a bad one. What do you teach?...uh...

SK: Well, you're not taught to make idiosyncratic follies that no one ever sees.

BB: No, no...absolutely not.

SK: The point is, you at least try to make a building that works, and that works for the people for whom it's being built, not just for you or for some idealized pattern in your mind that bears the weight of "historical significance." You'd also never say—here's my hobbyhorse—let's bring all the materials in from Europe. Of course, architects may be different, but on the whole I do think composers would be better to model their work after carpentry rather than architecture. Healthier for everyone!

BB: Mmhmm.

SK: So, how do you take...you must deal with this sort of thing in teaching composition. What's the...parallel...in the way you approach composition students—in terms of, say, carpentry and building—in terms of social and regional utility, of "audience," whatever that might be?

BB: Well...I think it's the question you articulated. What are the circumstances in which this piece would be performed? And does it suit those circumstances? This is a question I ask students often.

SK: Say I want to write symphonies, but I have no access to a symphony orchestra. Should...Shouldn't the real social economy of such a thing be questioned at the very point of my personal creative desire...especially as a student? Is a symphony...a reasonable justification for asking the community of which I'm part—an entire working community, with all the complexity that involves—for asking this community to sacrifice all that's required in order to create and support the necessary performance apparatus?

BB: I would say to the person who wants to write symphonies, "You have no access to a symphony orchestra. Should you write symphonies?" If the answer is "Yes, I want to write a symphony," then I'm not going to tell the person not to. It's not my job to tell them "don't do that!".

SK: Why is it not your job?

BB: Too many people—

SK: This is like saying "I want to build palaces." Ok...if you're a carpentry teacher—and I think you are—your apprentice or student comes up and says "I've decided I'm only going to build palaces," you might say, "I'm sorry, you're having a lapse of sanity. Go home, get some rest and some therapy, catch a movie or two. Then come back and we'll talk." Shouldn't it be exactly the same when dealing with something as economically, historically and socially unsound as the symphony in present day America?

BB: I don't...I don't...I'm not a carpentry teacher.

SK: Isn't it insane to build symphonies here and now?

BB: Well, it depends on...NO!

SK: How is it not insane to build a symphony?

BB: Because it does no one any damage. If it's an insanity, it's a harmless folly.

4. Danger music!

SK: You once said something that's always bothered me.

BB: Uh oh.

SK: You said one reason that you like music is because it never hurts anyone. No one gets hurt doing it. And I think you're wrong on that, and in a number of ways. For instance, conceptually speaking, every time you watch a symphony being performed, there's some damage. This also goes back tangentially to something I said years ago...that any piece that requires a conductor is a badly made piece. Conducting is a European tradition that carries all kinds of socio-political baggage, particularly when it's something like a symphony that's being conducted. But do you disagree with...the orchestra is essentially a wrong-headed thing for today. (laughs) Particularly when the head is a conductor.

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BB: I agree. I certainly agree with that.

SK: How can you say, then, that no one can be hurt?

BB: But it is so much less destructive than selling used cars!

SK: Bill! Selling used cars isn't destructive!

BB: Depends on who you sell them to, and what your technique is—

SK: No...honesty is important.

BB: Yes! I agree!

SK: Honesty, sanity and social utility are what we're talking about here.

BB: I agree. All right. Let's try this...I...uh...it remains to me...I remain willing to make the assertion that writing a symphony, as in sitting in one's house with 48-staff score paper—

SK: Mmhmm.

BB: —and churning out 137 pages of score...that in itself is not a problem to me.

SK: I can't agree.

BB: All right...wait...I'm willing to agree that it is...not of benefit. And if we argue then that...uh...it's negative because it's not positive—"If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem, etc."—then it's a negative act. But unless we make that sort of a claim, I see nothing negative about it, in and of itself.

SK: Insanity.

BB: I have no problem with insanity.

SK: Yeah...ok...I agree. Nonetheless, that person may need help.

BB: NO! I don't agree with that. I think a person needs help if they're unhappy, if they're a danger to themselves; a person needs help under circumstances that are fairly narrowly defined for me. I don't want to help people who are perfectly content doing what they are doing. Even if I think what they're doing is extremely wrong-headed. As long as it's not causing any damage.

SK: Ok...but it's a stretch...to believe that someone who sits and writes symphonies and doesn't want them to be performed...well...But as soon as they're performed, and they enter my world, I can say, "This is wrong."

BB: But I think the argument then is that the performance of symphonies is wrong.

SK: No, no, no...everything about it...

BB: It seems to me that...I was going to make a stronger claim...I'll see if I want to make it—

SK: Oh, make it! (smiles)

BB: It seems to me that the argument really is with the performers and the conductor. It further seems to me—here's the stronger claim—that a composer of sound mind and, uh, reasonable ingenuity could take that situation and write a symphony which calls the situation into question, in some way or other. And that act would be very positive.

SK: Well, let's see. That's possible. But...symphonies tend to be very big. And if you add together the enormous force of the historical current and the critical power of those exclusionary sieves—these are the things that produce symphonies, not just pens and staff-paper. So a symphony—using this just as a symbol, you know, for a lot of stuff!—is big in a number of ways, not least of which is in its standing as a tacit argument for an entire powerful current of not altogether culturally liberating tradition. (smiles) And...I think a problem in all this is that one of the opinions that gets saved through that other sequence of sieves we talked about earlier—in and out of the University—is that "big" is important and "important" is good.

BB: Correct. I completely agree, and that's completely wrong and that's an argument against that sieve. Absolutely.

SK: So, it would be—

BB: Well...let's be very practical here. If a student says "I want to write a symphony," I would in fact go through the steps of trying to dissuade them. I would say exactly what you propose.

SK: Seriously? You would?

BB: Yeah. "You won't have access to an orchestra—"

SK: Would you approach it on ethical, economic grounds? Would you say—

BB: Hold on...hold on...we have to get past that one first. We have to get past the practicality thing first. The person says...you know, I'm trying to force them to go away and think about it, not to just say "Yeah, yeah...I really want to." Then there'd be another whole collection of practical statements that I would make. "Are you ready to write a symphony?"—

SK: And "Are you ready to fly the Hindenburg?"

BB: — "Have you written a piece for woodwinds? Have you written a piece for brasses?"

SK: But would you say to them—

BB: Wait!

SK: Would you say to them, "Do you understand how those who might watch and listen to this piece will react and understand?" Would you ask them about the social repercussions of using the brass instruments?

BB: Right..."Do you understand what it signifies for there to be a harp, do you understand what it signifies for there to be a symphony?" "What do you want to do about what that signifies?" That's a question to ask them.

SK: Ok. Now let me turn this around. What does it signify when there's a symphony or a symphony orchestra?

BB: It signifies that there's a leader and a collection of followers who play together in support of that leader's desires. Um. Oh, it gets very complicated. I mean there is no single answer to "What does it signify....?".

That's a question that sounds like there's a one-sentence answer. There isn't.

SK: I think in a sense there is. But you said something that I really like—you said, and in fact you smiled when you said it, "a composer in sound mind." It made me think of Bateson's idea of embodied mind, with mind being something that's collectively embodied...um...socially embodied, something of which you are a part...It's these minds that music speaks to, and maybe it's from those...minds that music comes, yes? And composers who are aware of this and work on this level are composers of sound mind. I'd say that if there really is a "should" here in all this, it may be that the thing a new University should most...it would best try to develop composers of sound mind. In all fields.

5. The "sound mind" thing

BB: I agree. "Sound mind" is a particularly nice phrase. But at some point...um...but this is true of any piece. I can give you a literal example of a student who about two years ago was working on a collection of very short, quote-innocent-unquote piano pieces. And in that particular case, I felt obliged to ask the same questions: What are the circumstances in which this piece is going to be played? What does it signify to write a piece for the piano?

SK: What were the specifics?

BB: He's a student of mine, a very intelligent guy, with lots of reading in philosophy, so his orientation is very open. He's very interested in social consequences. So it wasn't like I was trying to educate the guy. I wasn't trying to...

SK: What about the piano pieces made you ask all this?

BB: Um...it seemed to me at the time that he was working with three different purposes in mind. One of which was the making of a piano piece in the old sense: this is a piece for piano which is to be played. Another of which was the testing of a transformational system. He was using a text as the start. And it was the testing of a logic: this was something you could crank through and perform on the piano, and then be able to test the result. And...uh...and the other situation was the piece was a kind of gift, as it happened. There was a performer intended.

SK: That's good!

BB: But the three notions didn't seem to me to be living in happy unanimity. Wanting to make the piece for a person meant that he was adjusting the logic by which the piece was being constructed; and the two of those things together kept getting tangled up with the notion of a performance. It just wasn't clear to me exactly what...if he had really thought through this notion of the situation of the piece, where this piece was going to be situated when it was done. So I asked the question. My point is—this anecdote isn't that interesting in and of itself—but the point is only that the same question applies to the making of a piece for solo piano. What does it signify to make a piece for solo piano? You can ask the same questions about that. What does it signify to make a piece for chorus?

SK: Mmhmm. When you write pieces...

BB: I think...I can't speak for everybody, but certainly for myself, even when I make a piece that I'm not making for a particular performer I usually am thinking of a performer. There's a level at which it's a gift to that performer—John Cage's famous comment that everything he's always written has been for David Tudor to play. It didn't matter what it was being scored for: he was always writing for David Tudor.

SK: Mmm.

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BB: There's something of that in my way of thinking, I think. Certainly when I imagine a piece, since I write for ordinary acoustic instruments, when I imagine a piece as I'm working on it I'm always imagining a particular person playing it. I can't really think of...uh...you know...an anonymous French Horn player. You know. I think of a particular French Horn player. I can imagine it, I can visualize it more clearly.

SK: It's always bothered me...the way orchestration is taught so abstractly: dealing with the ideal instruments, ideal ranges...basically training composers to consider the ideal ranges, for instance, of instruments, rather than whatever their friends or performers can do. It's just another tiny instance of the upside-downness of our thinking about music. Oh....and I've always been a little irritated with the whole thing about Beethoven being cool for writing pieces that required the stretching of the keyboard.

BB: Stretching the keyboard?

SK: Yeah...writing for notes that don't exist. Typical romantic hubris. Listening for sounds as yet unheard. Ugh. Stupidity and wrongheadedness. Want some more coffee?

BB: No, I don't think so. Not just now.

SK: Mind if I get some more?

BB: No. Help yourself.

SK: I want to ask you—

BB: I think that...that's an interesting...just a comment on that is that I'm sympathetic to what you say, but it...You have to remember that at the time Beethoven was doing that, the piano was an incredibly malleable thing. It had not yet become a monument. So this notion of stretching a keyboard...that's much more like what a person in the 60's might have been doing with respect to analog systems. You want to do something, and the stuff's not there, so you imagine a piece that would require it, then you design the circuits and add that into the system. I mean...

SK: But the fact that such a big deal is made of it. It's the Big Beethoven thing that insecure composers everywhere still emulate. I repeat: Ugh!

BB: Yeah...

6. The cookie

SK: (from other room) Would you like a cookie?

BB: Oh...That sounds good!

SK: Ok, I'll bring a cookie in. Do you prefer...do you prefer carob chip or peanut butter?

BB: Oh, I think peanut butter.

SK: They're kind of gigantic...(returns) I wanted to ask you a kind of peculiar question, I guess. I don't know if we'll get to it, but...I've been thinking about music as being "calling", you know? In Fiji, in the South Pacific in general, they use sound—they use music and chant—to call different aspects of nature. Embodied or disembodied corporeally. Animals, spirits, waves, weather and so on. Through rhythm, melody...

BB: Call as in call up or call as in signal to?

SK: Call as in...what's the word?...conjure!

BB: Call up...conjure.

SK: So in a sense I've been thinking about all music as being a kind of calling. When you first came in, the first question I was actually going to ask you—but it was too big a plunge—was in what sense you consider, or if you could consider music to be a kind of calling. Not a calling, but calling.

BB: Uh huh.

SK: And if you do, what is it that's being called? In the West, that is.

BB: Ooooh!

SK: How's the cookie? Is it terrible? Throw it away!

BB: It's delicious.

SK: Is it?

BB: I have no problem with it. Thank you very much.

SK: I guess I expected gobbling or something.

BB: No.

SK: Ok...Those are two things I want to approach...the sound mind thing, from before the cookie, and calling.

BB: I'm trying to figure out...there was a connection between them. I mean, off the top of my head, I could give you a very glib answer.

SK: Give glib.

BB: I don't think it's right, but it's so attractive.

SK: Ah! That's my personal motto! I live by that...

BB: What music calls for are sound minds.

SK: Ooooooh! That is glib! And attractive!

BB: But I have no idea whether I could actually defend that.

7. Ownership and possession

SK: Now I really want to do collaborative work! It just makes sense, after all. This is what Ken Gaburo was talking about: collaboration and interdisciplinary work just make so much more sense now, than the isolated scholar-as-monk. In the University you're supposed to guard your secrets, your difference. The cult of difference is so irritating.

BB: I completely agree. I've been calling it the cult of the new. It's the same thing—be different in order that you be new.

SK: I want to do a series of pieces where I would take pieces already written and erase a few notes, and...and make them "mine." And what I like about it is, the idea of erasing isn't "mine"; the idea of the pieces isn't "mine"...none of it is "mine"! What it does is to open up the issue of the nature of "me," because of course "I" incorporate whoever "wrote" the pieces in the first place. Very Gary Snyder!

BB: Mmhmm. Were I to have given a lecture on Thursday, I would have prepared the forum that I gave in February on this choral piece that I did. I gave a talk at the University of Illinois in February, which I didn't mind too much in that context. And that's what I actually wanted to do when I came here. And when I didn't have time to do that, that was when I panicked. But what I was going to say, how this connects, is that the thrust of virtually everything that I had to say about that piece was that there was nothing in there that was original. I mean, my starting point was that this is a treatment of the first thunderword in Finnegans Wake. That's not my idea. John Cage had that idea. Even the idea for the piece, the so-called idea for the piece, is not my own. And then, the way I did it in February, is that I kind of traced through all of the logics that went into the making of the piece, and said "Look, they're all mechanical. They're all stupid mechanical logics. It's just a matter of taking a thunderword which now I've decided to use and deriving a batch of stuff from it—and that itself is an old idea, and then you can cite all kinds of things. For example I assigned pitches to letters. Well, there's historical precedent from the year 1400 forward for assigning pitches to letters. Encrypting alphabetic events as pitch events. All kinds of history for that. So that's not a new idea. There's a whole series of rhythmic cycles that I used. That's not a new idea; I took that from Indian music by way of Messaien, right? Nothing in this piece is original; that's the claim that I wanted...that I tried to make in February. And I would have gone on to say all these things that you don't need to hear because you've already said them: that it's a futile activity anyway to pretend to be doing something new; at best all you'll reveal is that you're ignorant of what has gone before. Um...Alternatively, at best, you create something new which by virtue of being identifiable as something new therefore resembles all the other things that have been done that are called something new. So you're defeated. It's an absolutely futile activity. And the best you can do, it seems to me—as a composer, or in any sort of creative endeavor—is to try to create an interesting and complicated environment in which you are working—this is a conceptual environment, not necessarily a physical one, although a physical one might bear on it—...um...so that at the end of all the process—as the process is unfolding as well—but also at the end, at the point where you say, "Ok, I'm done," there's the potential for your being surprised. I'd rather replace the word newness with the notion of surprise. "I didn't expect that!" That's the most positive thing you can say. Which links into this notion of failure, and I...I pick on this word failure because it's loaded, and that's why I'm using it so insistently. "I didn't expect that," meaning "I failed, in that I did not produce what I expected." That only works, you see, you can only be surprised if you already have expectations. So you must have expectations. When you write the piece, when you start the piece, in order for this whole logic to work, you must have some notion that at the end the piece is going to be in certain respects like this, like that—you have this, however vague, however precise notion of this piece.

SK: Mmm.

BB: Then you work and work, and as you're working things change; but at every stage of the game there's still this image of what the piece is. And at the end you're surprised.

SK: But what I don't understand is your reification of this surprise.

Down....Down....Down....

BB: It's only...It's not necessary to reify it. If we have to have something that functions the way the "new" has constantly functioned, and which is totally bankrupt at this point, then let it be surprise. That's all I'm saying. I'm perfectly willing for people not to be surprised also. But that's a different virtue.

SK: This is sort of a cousin to chance technique, then.

BB: Mmhmm...(eating cookie) Chance technique is one way to do it.

SK: Although with chance technique, it got to the point very quickly where no surprise was happening, where one knew exactly what using such techniques would do.

BB: Right. My way of doing it is to set up a sufficiently complicated collection of constraints and interlockings, so that I can control what's going on in an entirely friendly way. A better way, a more interesting way for me right now is collaboration. I mean, that is what happens when you collaborate. You don't get...no one gets what they expect, because there are other people. And if you do get what you expect, it wasn't a collaboration: you were a dictator. So the model I've been using to a certain extent—and I'm not collaborating at this point: I'm writing pieces by going home and working on staff paper, and I'm going to continue to do that for the entire next year. We're in Virginia, I don't know anybody, etc., etc.—There are all kind of practical reasons. Also I'm just not interested in that process.

SK: Wow.

BB: So, writing music on the page, one of the ways I'm conceptualizing that now, and it's purely rationalization, but at least it makes me feel better, is that I set up these kinds of logics, you know. And I choose a thunderword, let's say, or I choose some source material for this piece for the Tone Road Ramblers. I'm going to start with this sort of eight second tag from an Eddie Condon jazz tune. I choose the raw material and those become my collaborators. And I don't try to tell them what to do. And my logics and so forth...those are my collaborators. I don't try to tell them what to do. They're not in a position to completely tell me what to do; nor, if I've done it right, can they tell each other what to do. That's the tricky part. You have to set up the logics and the material in such a way that they resist each other. That this material doesn't in fact just cave in when you apply this logic to it. At some point the logic says, "I can't do this...it doesn't work!"—you know, "Give!". And the material says, "NO! I won't give!" So...

SK: Give me an example of how you would set up a logic so the material would resist you.

BB: Wait a minute...that's three things there. Let's stick to two. I can't deal with three-valued systems.

SK: Ok.

BB: How the material would resist the logic?

SK: Ok.

BB: Ok...well, the trivial example is that the logic requires silence at certain points. And the material has to go away. But the material at that particular point won't go away.

SK: So then, how would the material in turn resist you?

BB: Um...The material...um, let's see...I'm trying to think of a very specific case. Well...I can't think of a very specific case, but...um...the material in...uh...the third Wallpaper Piece...the pitch controls in that are...it's a kind of serial piece, but it's an eleven-note series and so forth and so on. But I found that despite that, I was actually getting along with the series very well. I don't like serial music, and part of the reason why I chose the series in that piece was to have something that I didn't like to work with. But I was still getting along with it quite well, and I finally decided that the reason I was getting along with it quite well was because I was allowing myself to choose concatenations and overlays and things like this. So I could still make things turn out alright. So I added a new layer of logic in that case—it's not quite material but—here we are in a three value system—I added a new layer of logic that forced me every step of the way, having used up a particular version of the series, to do a very complicated mathematical operation on all of the possible following versions, simultaneous or sequentially following it—the whole field which surrounded that particular use of the series—to determine which was the, quote, "optimum" series to next use or to place in conjunction with it. And the optimum in that case had to do with...uh...maximizing the distance between all possible pairs of recurrences. Anyway...I set up a little formula to do this. That wasn't well put and the particulars don't matter and I'm not sure I could reconstruct them; it was many years ago. I set up a little formula to do that, and at that point the material did get quite unfriendly and I didn't really like it very much at all. And that was good. I enjoyed that.

SK: But the...Bill—

BB: See...you can turn it over. The other thing is that you can work with very friendly material and then try to make it unfriendly. That's harder for me. And I enjoy that process, but I'm not yet very good at it.

SK: How would you take unfriendly material and make it friendly?

BB: At the end of the day you have a piece...which you don't really like, but you think you could learn to like. And that's straight out of Herbert Brün, that particular formulation.

SK: But then...but then...what about other people who are going to listen to it?

BB: What about them?

SK: For whom is all this being done?

BB: Well...that's a little different question. "What about other people who are going to listen to it" is a different question than "For whom are you writing it?"

SK: How so?

BB: Because "For whom are you writing it"...What I'm saying doesn't have anything directly to do with for whom I'm writing, in a practical sense. I'm going to write the Tone Road Rambler's piece for the Tone Road Ramblers. And they're my collaborators as well, and there's a kind of set of constraints that they impose. They tell me what the instrumentation is...all that kind of stuff. They tell me their skills...

SK: Ok. Let me put it this way. The Tone Road Ramblers will play it, audiences will listen to it. What will happen to the audience...what will they learn, what will they get—how will they be provided for? What are you calling in this music? I do glib too... (smiles)

BB: Well...In most cases in my music...not all...but in most cases what I'm trying to do is to call—calling as in calling up—I would like to call up history. History as in a collection of ghosts that actually surround us all the time, but we try to pretend aren't there...um...And I try to do that usually by, at some point or other...See, I think that all music is historical—all music from this point...from now on and certainly for many decades previously, but it's hard to know when the line got drawn. All music is automatically about, as it were, previous music. You can't write a piece which does not in some way or other constitute a comment upon or response to a something or other of some other previous piece. And that's in an absolutely trivial sense, in that in order that a piece be called music it must refer to enough previous experiences for a person to be put into the same category. Otherwise it doesn't get called music. So, I mean, that's the trivial sense, but it's more practical than that as well. But that's what interests me. That relationship is what interests me fundamentally.

SK: So, for example, you use...you embedded the Gottschalk quotes in the Wallpaper Pieces.

BB: Right.

SK: And the piece for the Tone Road Ramblers?

BB: That takes the Eddie Condon fragment, which is a Dixieland kind of style, right? And the intention is to split off from it minuscule events which no Dixieland person or player would ever worry about—whether something is a half step or whether it's a whole step—to create classes of these things and cycle through them in various ways, so that they constantly get reconfigured. I guess if I had to say what I'm on about there...the piece isn't written yet, so I hope it'll change...but at this moment, what I'm on about is sort of grinding this little artifact into tiny fragments, so you can look at them, realize that history is made up of dust. That would be the argument there. History is made up of dust.

8. walking, seducing, calling

SK: What about the people in the audience? Are they going to walk out saying, "That was a nice tune, I enjoyed tapping my toe to it?" If not, how can you justify not pleasing those in the audience?

BB: I don't justify that at all. I'd like to. That's the seductive part. Again, I'm borrowing from Herbert Brün—that a piece should seduce its listeners.

SK: So it should be pleasurable.

BB: Um...not necessarily. Because not everybody is seduced by pleasure.

SK: Wait a minute! Ok. I think a lot of music has been written by crypto-sadists for not-so-crypto-masochists, but maybe there's another way. People are seduced, and they are seduced by pleasure.

BB: No...well...I mean...

SK: Maybe this seduction is the same as calling...

BB: No.

SK: Related...

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BB: But not the same if you're...The way that I understood you to mean "call" was that the piece called into existence something that either wasn't there or wasn't physically present. The audience is already there. I didn't understand that to be what you meant. I thought the audience was excluded from this notion of calling.

SK: Calling in this sense—relating it to seduction—is bringing out into awareness either some part of the psyche of the audience-member or some larger mindlike entity of which each audience member is a part...is connected. Conjuring isn't magic. And from a different functional standpoint, seduction is commensurate with the calling up of whatever it is that you're giving to or putting into or around the audience. You call something, you call it into being, you conjure something. The audience in the hall is passive and receptive, and within the act of calling, of conjuring, with the culture- sanctioned charisma of the gesture, they are seduced. (smiles) What I'm trying to say is that the composer is responsible for whatever is called up, and had better know what's being done. You have to understand the nature of what you're giving them, beyond its being just the result of mutually warring compositional elements. Maybe I'm not talking about pleasure, per se...but about a sense of awareness and responsibility regarding...what you're giving the audience. What kind of life you're making, what kind of cultural "virus" you're giving them.

BB: You don't give it to them. It seems to me that's not quite right.

SK: What, they have to box for it? That's too Charles Ives!

BB: No, no, no...the seduction is an inducement for them to be receptive. And then there appears around them, in their environment...things! Which they can accept or not accept. That choice is still theirs.

SK: I disagree.

BB: I like that notion. I don't have any problem with it, but I'm having a little trouble with the connection of calling with seduction. It seems to me that the calling is the raising, the bringing into presence of these things which are around them once they are made receptive. And those are very hard to describe. All of this is very hard to describe because we're using language which is a very different system from the experience of sound. But those things which are around them are the sorts of things...When I say history, history is around them, dust is around them, they may be able to see that history is made of dust. I don't mean that they're going to go out...I don't expect them to go out and say "History..." and so on. This is my way of describing, of providing a textual analog—and a very imperfect one at that—a textual metaphor, which is in some way or another analogous to the experience that they might have, that would be nice for them to have. I mean, in this particular piece, again—

SK: What you're saying then is that somewhere there's a structure or an experience that you are providing, and that you see as making some real, meaningful experience for a group of people. So not only are you writing a particular experience, what you're describing metaphorically, but you're writing for a certain receptive group of people.

BB: Mmhmm.

SK: Who is this audience?

BB: In the case of the Tone Road Ramblers, it's literate...middle-class and upper middle-class culturally literate Americans in the year 1991.

SK: And what does it do to serve this dish up to them? Socially—I mean in the larger scheme of things? (laughs) What does it do for America for you to write this piece?

BB: All right...well...

SK: That's what I'm asking!

BB: I'm willing to answer it. You have to understand that the...defense...is tenuous because...anyway...

SK: It can't be tenuous! This is your work.

BB: Ok. Right! Here's the answer. Here's the answer. Ummm...America has yet to...fully engage itself with history, in the abstract. American ideology has striven for a very long time to be ahistorical. It's...The relationship of this country to time is that of new beginnings, not of continuations. And that seems to me to be no longer possible and no longer desirable. And I'd like to help the process of opening the culture, opening the ideology to history. Help that process along.

SK: Then I have to ask what you mean by history. Because if you mean by history the idea or illusion of progress—

BB: I'm not interested in progress. History is the art of constructing a fictive past which explains our present circumstances. It's a fictive past because we can never know whether it's true. There is no test for history. There are accepted...uh...evidentiary criteria, of course. But there's nothing...And those criteria differ radically

from ours in, say, Communist China in 1968. There's nothing on the face of it that says that our criteria are better, worse—just different criteria, you get different histories. And it's a constructive act, because we always work from debris, things, which surround us. They become historical things as soon as we say "This has been here." As soon as you use that tense, that artifact becomes an historical artifact.

SK: Then what would the difference be between writing an essay or a piece of music on this topic? I mean, wouldn't it be more efficacious...um...I think that music is the "art" to which most Americans are least receptive. It tends to do the least to Americans. This is not a musical culture; music works for us as an adjunct to visual media. Music video, for instance, is far more effective and significant than "music." Music for movies, for television, any sort of multimedia project has far more depth than music alone. Even without the premade images, we listen to music as an emotive or intellectual footnote to life; we listen to music in our car in order to understand the drive, the meaning of driving. So to a certain extent, this concert music thing is the least efficacious of all possible media for putting out any message in America. Americans don't listen; they look. Gordon Mumma told that great story about being awakened in the middle of the night by some kids sitting in their jeep, playing the car radio very loud. He went out and said something like, you know, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" And the guys just looked at him and said, "Hey man, we're making music." Which is what they were doing: making music the way Americans think of music. The music was the car, the time of night, the place, the radio...you know: the whole scene. Very operatic, in a way, right? It was just that the sounds, the old sense of "music" wasn't a terribly significant constitutive element. So what's the importance or even the justification for writing this sort of music?

BB: I tend to agree. But I can give you a practical answer, which is: that's what I'm trained to do. I know how to do this.

SK: That's a good answer. Yes.

BB: But why learn English; why not learn Swahili?

SK: That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is...What is it about concert music...What aspect of this issue is best served in this way...using this medium?

BB: The short answer to that, I think, is that...uh...I would argue—and this is real...I can't prove any of this, but...uh...following in the footsteps of Mr. Proust, after the sense of smell—

SK: And taste...

BB: No...and taste maybe...smell and taste...

SK: The madeleine.

BB: Smell and taste—after that it's music probably that has more power to conjure quickly something from the past, some past experience. That...looking at something...it's not possible to have that immediate understanding of a night in June, seven years ago when that particular phrase of music occurred. It seems to me...you can understand that this is conditioned or interconnected with my love of Ives, with my love of American popular music—all of that stuff. That's both a result and a contribution to this notion—all of those things. So from that point of view, it seems that music would be very powerful in dealing with this notion of historicity.

SK: I have to go back to your statement—it's haunting us today!—that no one ever gets hurt in music. Music is a powerful thing, and in America, given the general naivete of American ears, the influence is not surface influence but infusive....

BB: It's not---look. I can't defend that statement. I cannot defend that statement.

SK: You no longer believe it?

BB: The point is that there's so much damage being done in so many occupations that the damage done by music pales by comparison. If somebody—

SK: I don't buy that for a second.

BB: I just don't think that...If somebody comes to me and says, "Should I be a lawyer or should I be a musician?" I'll tell them to be a musician.

SK: I know some composers—not a few—who do music more corruptly than the worst lawyer rapes the law. With less of a sense of political, social or historical ethics.

BB: Ok...maybe somebody will get hurt, maybe something terrible will happen...Maybe this guy will really write a piece that ruins the world! But the chances are far less that you will do serious damage, than—

SK: I'd say the opposite is true. With a lawyer, given the function of the profession, one expects certain behaviors, tendencies perhaps. But Bateson talks about levels of communication—I'm going to bastardize

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Bateson here—levels of communication where you can easily lie, levels where lies are more difficult, and levels where lies are virtually impossible, or at least where the detection of lies is virtually impossible. And we give more credence obviously to the levels where lying is more difficult, the deepest level where we expect only to find truth. For example, the way your body works...If you say to me "Steve, the sky is falling", I know it's a lie because you're communicating on a level that's not only easy to verify, but it's also easy to detect—on an immediate apparent basis—truth or lie. But if you suddenly looked up and screamed and cringed, I'd be more likely to look up and check out the sky's stability. Well, in a real sense, the sky is falling today. And concert music, by its very nature, is lying about this. And music is on that level where detecting untruth is all but impossible except for those who are either really well-trained—like you—or really paranoid—like...uh...me. (laughs)

BB: You sound like someone who would argue, in response to the claim that...uh...we know that guns kill...that that's absolutely no reason to prefer purchasing a CD to a handgun.

SK: (laughs) Yes and no. It's that the damage done by the handgun is more obvious and immediate. The CD works in a larger systemic circuit, on the longer term...And...we know how to get out of the way of a gun. We can actually say "Don't point that thing!"

BB: Right, but let me put it this way—

SK: "Don't point that symphony unless you plan to use it!" (laughs) Do you see...unless Americans are given the perceptive tools to be able to say things like that when this deep damage is happening...you know we're skirting things like "sacred" and "spiritual" and so on...they'll always fall back on the reactive and pathetic activity of blanket censorship. Which is happening all around us. As it is, something as culturally poisonous as, say, Beethoven...gets played in a hall and...DA DA DA DUM!... you believe it all! "Oh," you say, "...da da da dum....that makes sense"! And out you go later, into the night carrying a concealed Beethoven in your brain. (laughs) This is funny, but you know I'm serious.

BB: Let me be sort of brusque about this and say we wouldn't believe Beethoven when we heard him, were it not for the musical equivalent of lawyers, which is musicologists. (laughs)

SK: Not true. And not fair. The point is to think about all this, and the problem has been—

BB: Not all musicologists...not all musicologists do that. That's an unfair slant on the profession. Just as my slant on lawyers is unfair. I remain convinced that if we had a world in which all we had to do was worry about getting out of the way of the next symphony, we would be far better than the world we're presently in, in which we have to worry about getting out of many many many MANY many many...I mean, let's get to the world where in fact people are saying "Don't point that symphony". Then I'll be more than happy to take on the orchestra.

SK: Well, I think it's a complicated systemic process. I mean, even the idea of "moving" in that "direction" means that you'll have to think in terms of things more complicated than guns. And...this takes me back to the question of the composer in "sound mind."

BB: I'd forgotten about that.

SK: Though I'm not really finished with the calling thing yet—

9. Herbert Brün as bumblebee

BB: It's interesting to watch what's happening today—how many times I find myself repeating Herbert Brün. It just goes to show how long that guy resonates in my head. It does seem to be that the central thing is the notion that anything you do has consequences, and that you're responsible for the consequences. Not responsible as in "You must predict what could possibly follow from the next step that you take"; but you cannot willfully deny that something will follow from the next step that you take. That seems to me to be the sound mind thing. That sort of takes care of the orchestra piece question. What are the consequences? Do you accept responsibility for the consequences?

SK: And then it's up to the teacher to tell the student what "consequences" means.

BB: It's for the student to be seduced into articulating that herself.

SK: But asking somebody to be wise? Composers—musicians—are trained to be anything but wise.

BB: That's a very big bumblebee.

SK: That's very big....did it go away?

BB: Into the kitchen. Down....down....down....(directing the bumblebee to the window)

SK: Of course, the usual model for a composer is a person who sort of wills everything to go THIS WAY.

BB: Beethoven, pounding the piano as he composes the Grosse Fuga.

SK: Is it the same thing when Carl Ruggles played that chord over and over and over saying "I'm giving it the test of time"?

BB: No....that's probably a virtue. I would...Ruggles giving the chord the test of time may be another virtue that composers should have, and that is that they should be skeptical. And again that has to do with this notion of creating a collaboration outside yourself. If you have nothing else, you can create a skeptical collaborator, an inner voice that says "Oh yeah? You think that's such a great idea? Let's see how you like it after 250 iterations!" I have some admiration for that story about Ruggles.

SK: It's funny...I like the fact that you....you have a complex way of considering the composer's identity and responsibility.

BB: I think...what's a different word? You shouldn't be the sole determiner of what it is, but you accept responsibility for it. If a person has a child with a person of the opposite sex, you take responsibility for that child, but you're not the sole determiner of...

SK: Whatever happened to collaboration? It was so popular in the 60's and the 70's, then it went away in the 80's. Now is it coming back?

BB: Don't know. I'm doing all I can. Do you know the essay "The Tragedy of the Commons"? It's reprinted in dozens of ecological anthologies. It's a little essay written in the 60's. He talks about the notion of the commons in, let's say, the 16th or 17th century England or the United States, as in the Boston Commons. Land available to be used by the community for, for example, grazing. And the tension that is created by that principle, assuming that we live in a kind of capital-competitive environment. Assuming that, there's a tension created because it's obviously in any one individual's interest to use that land to the maximum. If you have five cows, get a sixth because the land is there, after all. It doesn't cost you anything. But it's also the case that at a certain point, the collective, those collective decisions create catastrophe and the common becomes over-grazed, and all the cows die. Do we assume, then, that we always proceed in cycles of gradually increasing population, catastrophe, fallaway, the grass regenerates, more cows?...Is this built-in or is there some way to flatten out the curve, to assume collective responsibility for the commons in a way which would prevent catastrophes occurring on a regular or irregular basis? What seems to me to have happened is that that concept is finally sinking in in various ways. Probably not at any conscious, articulated level—I'm speaking about American culture now—but at a fairly deep level. And the reaction to it, from around the mid-70's forward is the predictable first reaction, which is, you get that extra cow! What that means is that you do not collaborate, to get back to the point in question. What that means is your principal purpose in life is aggrandizement.

SK: Career...prestige...reputation...

BB: Career...fame, money, bigger house. It's possible that that will change. It's possible that we will move beyond that and maybe into a more enlightened state. Or maybe we'll just go through another cycle. I don't know. For the next four or five years, it may be the case that the notion of aggrandizement as the solution to this dilemma that's been presented to us will in fact become devalued, in fact that people will realize that aggrandizement is not a solution, that in fact it only contributes to the precipitation of the catastrophe. I would like to think we are on our way out of a period of extreme self-aggrandizement.

SK: You'd call the 80's a decade of self-aggrandizement in the concert music scene?

BB: Yes. In most situations. In any case, to get back to the collaboration, clearly there's an inverse correlation there: collaboration is going to fall off to the extent that artistic events, or whatever, become preoccupied with aggrandizement. I'm not a fundamentally optimistic person, but I try...to be optimistic.

SK: So what would you say now of the Ives statement that in the future every farmer will...what was it?...whistle his own symphony?

BB: Well...first of all...I don't understand that sentence the way most people do. It's not quite what he says. What he says is "Every man while digging his potatoes will hear his own symphonies." And it is in the context of a description of this relationship between a person and their environment. So my reading of that is that his notion isn't really that people will create music but that they will—my association is with Cage—that they will come to hear the music that is always there. That the act of hearing is the creative act. The operative word is "hear"—"will hear his own symphonies". Not compose. And it's "while digging his own potatoes," as in, if we get on with the basics, and we adopt an appropriate stance towards our environment, aesthetics will take care of themselves.

Down....Down....Down....

SK: Composition as a heuristic process that teaches listening. To everyone. Though "teach" is a cumbersome word...Maybe "engenders."

BB: I think that would be Ives' perspective. And I think Ives' notion would be like Cage's, actually, pushing Ives as far as he ever pushed himself, which is pretty much that sentence...um...which is that the purpose of composition and of music is to make composition unnecessary. Composition will at some point cease to be a necessary act...in this Utopia to which he wants—

SK: How do you react to that? It seems to me to be happening, and very fast, already. But how do you react to that?

BB: Positively! But...uh...I would like that too...but it strikes me as a very very very long way away.

SK: I'm going to change the tape now.

— Solana Beach, California, May 1991

The Transformative Power of Film Music: Non-Diegetic Musical Considerations in the Film *East of Eden*

Michael Missiras

Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the non-diegetic musical properties of selected scenes/musical cues from the film *East of Eden* (Leonard Rosenman, composer; Elia Kazan, director.) The structural framework of the non-diegetic analysis is adapted from the works of Claudia Gorbman.¹

Within the paradigmatic area of film music, a spectator accepts the notion of symbolic transformation², especially with regard to non-diegetic music. During a scene of intense suspense, such as, notably, the shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the screeching violins take on a purely psychological dimension, riveting the spectator. But what is it that the spectator hears? Syntactical elements of Bernard Herrmann's orchestration? Mimetic relationships between the visual narrative and music? Sound which may not even be recalled as music?

Perhaps these points are not even important since the spectator is in a state of pure terror in what is arguably one of the most terrifying scenes in cinema. It may be that this type of visceral connection to the psychological dialectic inherent within the diegesis of the narrative structure of cinema is one of the ways in which film music finds its form and structure. In the Bernard Herrmann example given above, the purely musical elements of the music are meaningless without a point of cinematic reference in which to frame the music. Conversely, the shot sequence is significantly less powerful without the (non-diegetic) music. What gives meaning to the music and narrative is a spectator's ability to synthesize these elements from a psychological vantage point. That ability depends on the strength of the non-diegetic music, as well as on the suspension of disbelief intrinsic to the cinema.

Within the selected scenes/musical cue from the film *East of Eden*, under discussion in this paper, a parallelism is set up between the narrative structure and music. Two points of view are presented to the spectator, that of the director and that of the composer. The emotional landscape, and the internal feelings of the characters within the scene/cue from *East of Eden* are highlighted by the presence of music. The music, which unfolds linearly in time, is mimetic to the non-linear nature of emotional thought represented in this scene/cue. It is, perhaps, the ability of music to work as a non-discursive form which allows it to freely interact and help define an emotional condition for the spectator in cinema.

¹ Gorbman, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies, Narrative Film Music*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 70-98

² In the sense of Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge, Mass, & London: Harvard University Press, 1957 pp. 26-52

Non-Diegetic Musical Analysis

The music in this cue is "non-diegetic" in that the music rises from the diegesis or narrative structure. In considering non-diegetic music, there can not be a visible source of the music since any music which is non-diegetic is a consequence of the narrative. There are no visible sources of music within the shot sequence nor is there anything about the cue which suggests the presence of "diegetic" music. Diegetic music refers to music which issues from a source within the narrative. The source of diegetic music may be seen or implied. Further, there is nothing within the spatio-temporal place of this cue which suggests a blurring of the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic music.

Signifier of Emotion

The music within this cue functions in a number of non-diegetic ways. First, as a signifier of emotion: within this cue and scene, there is an absence of dialogue. This absence of dialogue lends a non-discursive nature to what is being communicated. Without dialogue, the spectator has little to orient him/herself with concerning the details of the diegesis. The psychological landscape of the cue/scene can appear to be quite active to the spectator, who is forced, in the absence of dialogue, to read into the character's expressions, body movement, and gesture for clues as to the narrative structure of the film.

Representation of Women

While there are many people in the scene, the cue only concerns two characters, "Kate" and "Cal." At the beginning of the scene, and the film, "Kate" is the first character that we see. The notion of "Kate being seen" is central to the narrative structure of this scene. Within the scene and cue, the major activity of the peripheral characters is to look at Kate, which happens eight times. Within the lexicon of feminist theory, "Kate" is attracting the "gaze," and what Laura Mulvey calls "to-be-looked-at-ness."³ In light of the fact that "Kate's" occupation is that of the town madam, it may be fair to say that her ability to attract the "gaze" has a pejorative connotation. And it may be precisely this negativity which drives "Cal" to search out his mother "Kate," in his quest of finding out the true nature of his own character.

Musically, the "Cal" theme connotes this barren emotional landscape which is shared by mother ("Kate") and son ("Cal.") While the "Cal" theme is not an actual leitmotif which denotes a specific character, it does connote the darker emotional condition which tends to pervade both characters. When the cue begins, the emotional condition of the characterization is, perhaps, concretized. It seems clear that "Kate" is not characterized by the lush, romantic music which typically accompanied the gothic female melodrama genre of the 1940s⁴ (less than ten years before this film was made). Her erect posture and forthright temporal movement are non-diegetically portrayed in the first measure of the cue with the accented brass pyramid.

³ See Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire To Desire*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 5-8; and Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures (Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema)*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, pp. 14 - 26

⁴ Examples of female gothic melodramas of the time are *The Spiral Stair Case* (1945) and *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (1948.)

Ex. 1 Accented Brass Pyramid Portraying Fortright Temporal Movement

The musical score for Ex. 1 consists of four staves. The top two staves are for Trpts 1-2 and Trpts 3-4, both in treble clef. The bottom two staves are for Trb 1 and Trb 2, both in bass clef. The music is in common time (C). The first measure (mm. 1-2) shows a brass pyramid structure with accented notes and triplets. The second measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The third measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The fifth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The sixth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The seventh measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The eighth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The ninth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The tenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The eleventh measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The twelfth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The thirteenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The fourteenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The fifteenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The sixteenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The seventeenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The eighteenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The nineteenth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The twentieth measure shows a continuation of the melody with a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical Reference to Characterization

The locus of the emotional involvement appears not to be with "Kate," but with "Cal." Although "Kate" attracts the "gaze" of the town, as well as that of "Cal" and all of his attending emotional issues, there is little, if anything, within the narrative structure which suggests that she is aware of any of this attention. In fact, she does not know who "Cal" is at this point within the diegesis. In the shot where the cue begins, the spectator sees what "Cal" sees; that is, the figure of his mother walking towards him. But the music begins in the middle of the scene. From a non-diegetic perspective, the music might suggest mounting tension by beginning in the middle of the shot. As "Kate" gets closer to "Cal," we sense the rising tension. By having the cue start in the middle of the shot, as opposed to the beginning of the shot, we are able to experience "Cal's" apprehension. This mid-shot beginning of the cue allows for the music to not only non-diegetically telegraph "Cal's" emotion to the spectator, but also substantiate it.

The ostinato which begins in m. 2 may suggest the pervasive need of "Cal" to find out what "Kate" might mean to him.

Ex. 2 Ostinato beginning in m. 2

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Harp (Hp), Cello (Cel), and Violins (Vlns). The Harp and Cello parts show a melodic fragment starting in measure 2, with the Harp part having a 'm. 2' label. The Violins part shows a sustained C# note.

The unfolding of that relationship between the two characters is central to the narrative structure of the film. As the "Cal" theme is introduced, "Cal" rises and follows Kate in order to keep her in his sight. Perhaps the theme hints at the emotional bond which links the emotional states of both these characters. In mm. 7 - 8, the melodic fragment in the harp/horn suggests a dark feeling, perhaps due to its low registral placement. At this point in the narrative, "Cal" is out of view. This melodic fragment might non-diegetically represent the dark emotion which "Cal" non-discursively maps onto "Kate" and which "Kate" now maps, via the non-diegetic music, onto the spectator.

Ex. 3 Melodic Fragment Connoting a Dark Emotion

The image shows a musical score for Harp/Horn (Hp/Hn) showing a melodic fragment in measures 7-8.

By the end of the cue, the spectator feels a sense of foreboding, perhaps achieved by the low string sustained C# beginning in m. 7. This foreboding, unlike the feeling of apprehension at the beginning of the cue, seems to emanate out of the narrative structure, and not from a character. But without music, the narrative events in this section of the cue would have been practically impossible to telegraph from the existing shot sequence as it occurred in the film.

Referential and Narrative Cueing

This film take place in 1917. The setting of the film is in the farm country of California. Within the main title music of the film, the composer approximates a farm song which would have been typical of the time.⁵ The song, which is used not only in the main title music, but also as one of the principal themes in the film, is presented at the beginning of the film in a tonal rendering, which situates the film in time and place. However, toward the end of the main title music, post-tonal sound begins to encroach upon the tonal language of the farm theme.

The change from tonal to post-tonal language during the main title music contextualizes the post-tonal qualities of the first cue. Perhaps the shift in musical language during the main title music thwarts the expectation for conventional Hollywood practices with respect to setting. The suggestion of post-tonal language toward the end of the main title sets the stage,

⁵ During a conversation with Leonard Rosenman at New York University during the fall of 1994, he informed me of Elia Kazan's request that the main title music include a farm song which might have been typical during the period that this film takes place.

as it were, for the musical language of the first cue, and for much of the rest of the music of the film score.

Point of View

As mentioned above, the locus of the scene is concerned with establishing the characters "Kate" and "Cal." When the cue begins, the exclamatory nature of the brass pyramid perhaps leaves little doubt that "Kate's" character and bearing come from a place of strength and resolve, a fact which is substantiated during the unfolding of the diegesis. Although the "Cal" theme is able to non-diegetically portray a feeling of apprehension, and helps to telegraph this information to the spectator, a point of view doesn't seem to be established with regard to characterization of "Cal" as the opening fanfare in the brass illustrated "Kate's" demeanor.

The point of view which is established by the "Cal" theme is out of the temporality of the narrative structure. The theme seems to demarcate an intangible feeling which might help to form the spectator's perception of characters and events, but not as a demarcation of a formal structural level within the diegesis. However, the theme and the introduction of "Cal" occurs for the first time in this scene/cue. Yet, as the diegesis unfolds, it appears that this introduction of "Cal" and the apprehensive quality which is suggested by the theme is not consistent with the global point of view and attitude toward "Cal." Thus the "Cal" theme does not function as a leitmotif for a specific character, but acts as a non-diegetic representation of a prevailing condition which may, at times, be either referential to a character or an intangible condition.

Connotative Cueing and Hyperexplication

Given the conventions of Hollywood cinema to tell a story in the most transparent manner, the "Kate" character's referential relationship to the music goes against the norm of conventional practice. A woman of her position, former beauty, and occupation might normally have been portrayed musically in a different way. Usually, women portrayed in film who were of "Kate's" social and class standing took on the role of "object" and as such, the musical illustrations tended to fall into typical Hollywood conventions (femme fatales and seductress who's musical depiction took on "sultry" or "jazzy" music associated with night clubs and lounges. Invariably, the saxophone was prominent in these musical illustrations.⁶) As "Kate's" role is "subject" and not "object,"⁷ the music telegraphs her importance as a "subject" by the forceful brass music of m. 1.

The synchronization of sound to picture can be as precise as the specific situation warrants. Within the cue, there are elements of "hyperexplicit"⁸ illustrations as well as more connotative illustration. The film composer Max Steiner pioneered the use of the click track

⁶ It is interesting to observe that in Leonard Rosenman's score to *Rebel Without a Cause*, which is from the same time as *East of Eden*, Rosenman employs a typical Hollywood convention of depicting the Natalie Wood character with "sultry" music utilizing the saxophone--a convention which is absent in the film under study here. In a conversation with Rosenman at New York University in 1994, he referred to this musical convention in *Rebel Without a Cause* as "Juilliard jazz." This researcher took Rosenman's meaning of the term "Juilliard jazz" to connote music which was referential to jazz, but somehow, perhaps, false and/or academic.

⁷ For a discussion of how the terms "subject" and "object" function in revisionist feminist film theory see Doan, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire, The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, pp. 1 - 13 and Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror, The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 1 - 41.

⁸ The terms 'hyperexplicit' and 'catching' are used by Gorbman to denote "mickey-mousing" or extremely tight synchronization between music and picture. See Gorbman, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies, Narrative Film Music*, pp. 87

melodic fragment of mm. 7 - 8 (harp/horn) begins. When she reaches the center of the shot, it coincides with the second beat of m. 8. At this point, a descending violin/celeste melodic fragment begins. The combining of ascending and descending melodic fragments illustrates, non-diegetically and connotatively, "Kate's" walking in and out of the center of the shot.

Ex. 6 Musical Illustration of Mise-En-Scène

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Violin 1 (Vln 1) and Harp (Hp). The score is in common time (C) and covers measures 7 and 8. The Violin 1 part begins in measure 7 with a half note G4, followed by a half note A4 in measure 8. A slur covers the notes in measure 8, with a triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4) indicated above. The Harp part has a whole rest in measure 7 and begins in measure 8 with a half note G4, followed by a half note F4 in measure 8.

Continuity

The scene which contains the musical cue under analysis follows directly from the main title. There is a "dissolve" between the main title and the first scene. The music of the main title carries over for approximately two seconds into the first scene. This overlapping of music provides a seamless continuity between scenes.

The scene consists of three shots. A notion of three-ness in the music, discussed above, is present in the narrative structure as well. The musical cue begins in the second shot. This music continues until the "Kate" character walks into the bank. "Kate" is in constant motion during nearly the entire scene, but the music frames only the middle of it.

When the music begins, the brass pyramid conveys important information concerning the resolve of the "Kate" character's personality. Once "Kate" reaches the top of the stairs, the wind field non-diegetically mirrors the narrative structure until the next important narrative event unfolds. This event concerns the presentation of the "Cal" theme. The "Cal" theme bridges shots two and three. The ostinato also bridges shots two and three as well as suggesting a referential relationship to the temporality of "Kate's" walking throughout the scene. In the third shot, the ostinato just carries over from shot two, in a fashion similar to how the main title music carried over into the first scene.

Unity

The film score to *East Of Eden* utilizes three principal musical themes; these themes are referential to characters and their emotional conditions. The music unfolds through the film in such a way that, "...the repetition, interaction, and variation of musical themes throughout the film contributes to the clarity of its dramaturgy and to the clarity of its formal structures."¹⁰ For example, the musical cue immediately following the cue under study maintains the musical language of the clarinet "Cal" theme, but transforms it by composing it out in a full orchestral texture.

¹⁰ Gorbman, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies, Narrative Film Music*, pp. 91

Toward the Creation of an *Intelligent* Machine Improvisor

Kenneth Morrison

There has been increasing interest in the last decade on the subject of implementing Artificial Neural Networks to model musical activities. This comparatively new field of research is still in its infancy and for the most part the results are promising if not yet overwhelming. This paper will describe some of the general cognitive processes in real-time musical activities and describe in conceptual terms the necessary components of a successful ANN model of high-level musical activity. The human cognitive processes involved in music-making are, at best, only partially understood. So, there is not merely a technical hurdle of implementing algorithms we already understand....[But, rather] machine musicianship is still in many respects undefined at the level of computational theory.¹

While there have been many successful interactive software designs, they do not use artificial intelligence architecture.² Central to an ANN model is a network that could continuously monitor "sensory" input and respond to this input as an experienced musician would, all in real-time. As my paradigm, I will model the "free improviser"—that is, one who continuously and spontaneously responds to the total environment of the performance space. Even though free improvisation is a highly specialized and often marginalized musical activity, I am convinced that all high-level, primary musical activity (including composition and performance) uses similar cognitive data-streams.

Fundamental to such a music-cognition model is the ability of the network to organize information hierarchically. This is not to suggest that music is inherently hierarchical in the commonly construed Schenkerian view of music of the Common Practice period, but rather that the perception and cognition of high-level activities necessarily involves the hierarchical abstraction of low-level sensory input into higher-level cognitive constructs. Such a network must be able to continuously monitor an input stream of music and make informed and useful abstractions of the input. These abstractions would themselves be subject to continuous feedback control from the expectations derived from the "experience" of the higher-level components of the network. The most promising type of network architecture for such a complex model is a self-organizing network. Much of the present model will be speculative enhancements of Robert Gjerdingen's implementation of S. Grossberg's adaptive resonance theory (ART).³

This continuous process of abstraction occurs even at the monitoring of the lowest level of

¹ Robert Rowe, "Incrementally Improving Interactive Music Systems," *Contemporary Music Review* 13/2 (1996), 47.

² George E. Lewis's *Voyager*, and Robert Rowe's *Cypher* are two successful examples of real-time, interactive machine performers. However, they are not really AI designs.

³ Robert O. Gjerdingen, "Using Connectionist Models to Explore Complex Musical Patterns," *Computer Music Journal* 13/3 (Fall 1989), 67.

sensory input. An information-processing model of music cognition,

assumes that there are a series of processing stages between a stimulus and response, and as a stimulus is processed through these stages, its form and content undergo transformations.⁴

The mechanism for this complex process is not well understood, but much current research is a vast improvement over previous designs. The question of "how... complex acoustical signals [are] processed into semiotic units that make up the representation of music in a computer model" is itself a complex field of research.⁵ Gjerdingen sidesteps this issue of the subsymbolic representation of auditory input by using traditional musical notation as input. In order to build an improvising machine it would be necessary to activate nodes in the input layer (or layers) with acoustical information that could in turn abstract this "raw data" into musical semiotic units. This interesting and difficult problem is beyond the scope of this paper. Using standard MIDI parameters as input might suffice to help facilitate the the design of other aspects of the model.⁶

Another major consideration in using ANN's to model music and music cognition is

how time-varying information can be captured at higher levels of abstraction, how factors can be detected and recognized over time, and how temporal constraints can be represented.⁷

Tank and Hopfield describe a network that is a system of " 'delay' filters" that can temporarily store information to allow real-time phoneme-sequence recognition.⁸ This "temporary information storage... makes available... information that was presented at various earlier times."⁹ Tank and Hopfield propose refinements to their system, "such as a hierarchical set of networks detecting exemplar sequences on several different time scales (e.g., a subphoneme recognizer whose output would drive a phoneme recognizer, and so on)...."¹⁰ Even if we accept that speech recognition and music recognition can be modelled analogously, it is not necessarily true that music can be conveniently parsed into a single successive stream of musical phoneme analogs as readily as English. As alluded to earlier, the whole issue of the subsymbolic representation of music is crucial to such an enterprise. Tank's and Hopfield's network is evidently even able to recognize modified phoneme patterns as being related to the stored sequences, but with music such "noise" is more difficult to separate from the musical "phoneme."

Gjerdingen's implementation of Grossberg's ART network uses a hierarchical network of fields that represent short-term and long-term memory. This model emulates well the inherent hierarchical process of music cognition—a multi-levelled process of selectively building larger and higher-level cognitive constructs from lower levels. This network not only abstracts from lower level to higher level but also contains "top-down" feedback to the lower levels.¹¹ Thus, the learning in this

⁴ Anna M. Unyk, "An Information Processing-Analysis of Expectancy in Music Cognition," *Psychomusicology* 9/2 (1990), 229.

⁵ Marc Leman, "Artificial Neural Networks in Music Research," *Computer Representation and Models in Music*, eds., Alan Marsden and Anthony Pople, (London: Academic Press, 1992), 270.

⁶ Robert Rowe points out many of MIDI's limitations with regard to parameters other than equal-tempered pitch. See his "Improving Interactive Music Systems," 51-52.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁸ D.W. Tank and J.J. Hopfield, "Neural computation by concentrating information in time," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA* 84 (April 1987), 1896.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1900.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Robert O. Gjerdingen, "Using Connectionist Models to Explore Complex Musical Patterns," *Computer Music Journal* 13/3 (Fall 1989), 68.

ART network is not just "an unmediated input pattern... [but a] mix of... input pattern and long-term memory."¹² That is, the short- and long-term memories "together form a feedback system wherein patterns of input are processed in the context of previously learned pattern categories."¹³ For example, MIDI note-on and note-off and velocity information could be used to activate a layer of input nodes. It would then be necessary to have a dynamic feedback loop that could continuously compare the incoming data-stream to previously inputted data-streams. The intermediate layers of units could be used to recognize pattern-repetitions and send information back down to the input layer thus favoring the upward transmission of recognizable patterns. This modelling of the selective nature of perceptive/cognitive processes and the feedback loop architecture of the ART-network is a convincing emulation of the above mentioned information-processing model where "music stimuli first impact on our sensory neurons and are temporarily stored in sensory [short-term] memory. A large amount of auditory information gets into this temporary store, but only part of this information is selected for further processing."¹⁴ In other words, expectations from the experiences stored in long-term memory have an important effect on the low-level processing of perceptual input.¹⁵ This "filtering" effect of the feedback mechanism from long-term to short-term memory is very important in allowing musicians to process and respond to musical information in real-time.

Just as performers play better together with more exposure to each other, an ANN of this type would "learn" to perform with a particular performer. Of course, the musical responses of this machine-improvisor would result from another (performance) part of the network being activated by the abstracted musical judgements of the listening component of the network. Another feedback mechanism would then also be required to train the machine-improvisor to produce musically interesting and "relevant" responses. The most "natural" method of training responses might be to allow the machine to respond arbitrarily (either with random materials or more likely with musical materials generated from the abstractions in the listening component). The subsequent response of the other improviser (human or machine) would then start the machine improviser's "listening" component to function again. The continuous give-and-take of group improvisation would be simulated quite well with this network. If either the "understanding" of the other performer's output by the machine improviser or the musical response generated by the understanding were inappropriate, the other improviser could ignore it. However, if the machine improviser's output continued to be at variance with the other's output, the other performer would undoubtedly begin to alter his/her output to try to create a more unified whole. This change in the other's output would then cause a change in the machine improviser's input abstraction and subsequently, its output. This seems to me to be a fairly good analog to what happens when two improvisors play together: if player A does not like player B's contribution, A can try to ignore it. However, if B continues to play music that contrasts, A will probably change its tack, thus allowing B the opportunity to "pick-up" on A's new direction which was influenced by B. Figure 1 is a schematic of this interaction between the machine improviser and an "other" performer.

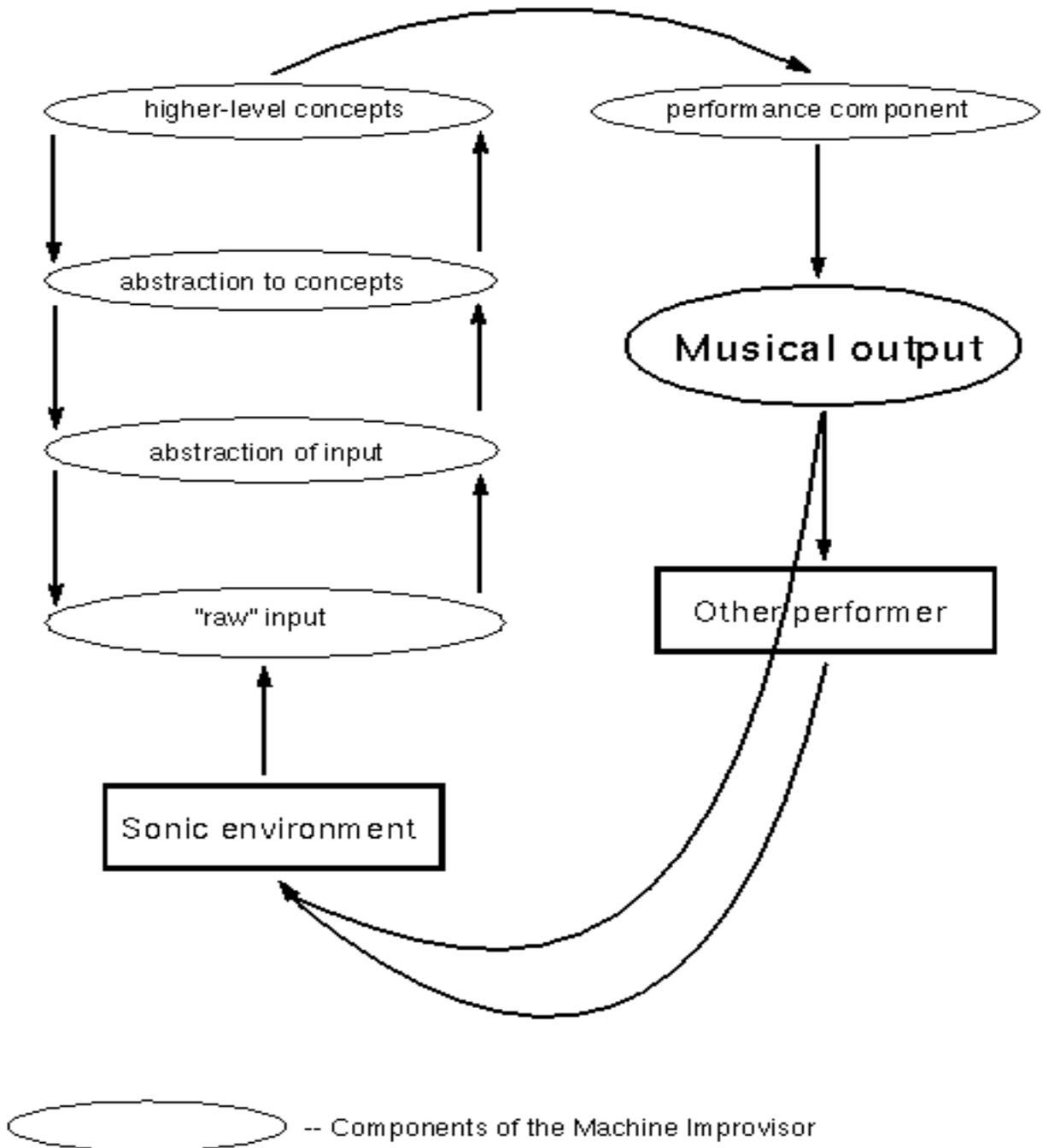
¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴ Anna M. Unyk, "An Information Processing-Analysis of Expectancy in Music Cognition," *Psychomusicology* 9/2 (1990), 231.

¹⁵ This selective processing mechanism is not meant to ignore the possible important contributions of the even less understood subconscious processing of data that is not consciously selected for higher level processing.

Figure 1 - Schematic of Machine Improvisor and an "Other"¹⁶



¹⁶ after Gjerdingen, figure 8, *op.cit.*, 75.

The machine improviser would thus learn to play with a specific performer, and each new performer that the machine plays with might trigger new abstraction models in the machine's listening component perhaps comingling with the learned responses to the previous partners.

This model of a machine-improviser would be a fairly accurate emulation of how improvising musicians develop their art: one starts as a naive player, often playing back inappropriate responses. Gradually you learn to play with a familiar person or group or set of circumstances. Then when you play with new people or in new circumstances you gradually incorporate elements from the new players or environment. After several years of playing you develop your own personal style which is in part an amalgam of all of the styles you have emulated. Even the extra-musical and innate character of an individual might be well represented by this model simply due to the built-in idiosyncracies of the network.

Unfortunately, most machines that use AI architecture are not capable of interacting with human performers in real time. It is still not clear how these processes could be implemented by a machine in real-time performance. These limitations are acknowledged by Robert Rowe:

Though pre-performance learning promises to make the interpretive power of interactive systems more supple than ever, we are still left in a situation where the program learns nothing once the performance has begun. Adapting techniques for use in learning onstage may well have to wait for a faster generation of processors.¹⁷

The general hypothetical model outlined in this paper simply attends to some of the more obvious components of the very complex and often inscrutable activity of free improvisation. While such high-level musical activity is probably not yet formalizable as a real-time, interactive computer performer, it is not unlikely that the continuing developments in ANN's will eventually allow for interesting emulations of such activity; and it may be that such self-organizing ANN's may be the "only way to achieve intelligent behavior in machines."¹⁸

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¹⁷ Robert Rowe, "Incrementally Improving Interactive Music Systems," 60.

¹⁸ Marc Leman, "Artificial Neural Networks in Music Research," *Computer Representation and Models in Music*, eds., Alan Marsden and Anthony Pople, (London: Academic Press, 1992), 290.

The Voice(-Over) of God: Some Thoughts on the Disembodied Voice in Contemporary Music

Luke Howard

It's a shame God doesn't sing very much. At least in biblical records there's no account of Him singing, though it seems a favorite pastime with everyone else in heaven, right up there with flying, playing the harp, and making appearances to New Age mystics. There is plenty of evidence that He has a good singing technique; the flawless diction, strong projection, and tremendous ability to grab the listener's attention are well documented in scripture. But His audience has always been rather small. And of the very few people who have actually heard the voice of God, even fewer get to see His face. He is the disembodied voice from above: authoritarian and absolute.

This concept of the preternaturally disembodied voice of God might have a parallel in our own responses to musical works in which we hear a voice, but do not see the source. In earlier repertoires there are certainly strong precedents for the off-stage voice assuming supernatural qualities. In Mozart's *Idomeneo*, for instance, the statue of the god Poseidon speaks with a voice that (as described in the stage direction) comes "from the heavens." And in *Don Giovanni*, the statue of the Commendatore—which, depending on the production, can be presented with either an off-stage or on-stage singer—takes part in the musical action in the final act. In both instances, the intent is to give the impression that the voice and character are inhuman and paranormally charged. Talking statues might be considered a subset of the supernaturally-vocal inanimates, and we can trace the development of such scenes all the way from baroque opera through to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Clash of the Titans*. In Weber's *Der Freischütz*, the Wolf's Glen scene is rife with otherworldly chantings from the off-stage "Chorus of Invisible Spirits."¹ The effect may not be all that different from that intended by Verdi at the end of *Rigoletto*, when the distant sound of the Duke's voice shocks Rigoletto into thinking that it's just "some trick of the night."

While these examples may be considered supernaturally threatening, there are just as many off-stage voices that represent piety or divine mystery. In Act I of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, an invisible male chorus imparts wisdom and direction to Tamino from the

¹The speaking role of Samiel in the same opera reminds us that in Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum* the devil is the only speaking character, forbidden to sing so that the music should not be sullied by evil and lying words. This presents an ironic contrast with the "Sprecher" in *Die Zauberflöte* who delivers truth through speech-like recitative, while the deceitful Queen of the Night resorts to the high artifice of coloratura singing.

portals described in the score as “the domain of the gods” and “a holy place”. In Puccini’s most overtly religious opera, *Tosca*, the Act I *Te Deum* and cantata are sung by an off-stage chorus that, separated spatially, musically, and spiritually from the godless realm of Scarpia’s lust-driven machinations, functions like an invisible chorus of angels.² In Holst’s *The Planets*, a wordless women’s chorus sings from backstage in “Neptune: The Mystic.” By the end of the movement, the polyphonic vocalizes repeat and fade into a nether-world of numinous space.

There are, no doubt, other examples of this phenomenon.³ These few should be sufficient, though, to show that before the advent of recording technology, the off-stage voice often had very strong implications of the supernatural. The phenomenon of the disembodied voice explicitly represented the presence of un-earthly beings.

After the invention of various devices to record the human voice, disembodiment of the voice became an integral aspect of the social soundscape, and these days we may have become so inured to the phenomenon that we don’t give it a second thought. Radio, television, cinema, and recordings continually bombard us with verbalizing that has been disconnected and re-contexted from the original sources. And nowhere is this more powerful than when the voice speaks without a matching facial image to accompany it.

In the late 20th century it’s not difficult to identify this “voice of God” effect in some of the most popular and pervasive media formats. In documentary films, the narration is impartial, omniscient, and authoritative. While the “talking head” interviewees that inevitably populate the genre give opinion and anecdote, the voice-over is the voice of reason and “truth.” We trust the narration because it has no face associated with it — its anonymity is reassuring. A similar aspect emerges in the 30-second morality plays that pose as TV commercials. They may include characters who demonstrate and explain to us the virtues of their product, but it’s not until the final voice-over gives its benedictory approval (and the 1-800 number) that the consumer is compelled to buy. The anonymous injunction to “Call now, and get a free set of steak knives” springs its hearers to action as surely as “Get thee up to into the high mountain.” Talk-back radio has its privileged voices that rule and command their respective micro-universes as if they were deity. In other media formats as well, we trust technology to be truthful; from Orson Welles’s *War of the Worlds* to Barry Levinson’s *Wag the Dog*, the public’s willingness to believe the electronically-mediated voice as the source of truth is taken for granted.

² As he hears the *Te Deum*, Scarpia proclaims, “Tosca, you make me forget God!” In the same opera, a brief moment of divine peace at the start of Act III emerges through the song of an off-stage shepherd boy, with a pastoral symbolism that might allude to Christ as the “Good Shepherd.” Stage directions state explicitly that as the young shepherd voice is heard, a crucifix should be seen on the wall, with the silhouette of St. Peter’s and the Vatican in the background.

³ I make a distinction between the off-stage voices that have no physical stage presence, such as in the examples cited, and instances where characters move off-stage and continue singing (as at the end of Act I in Puccini’s *La Bohème*) or where the off-stage voices are immediately identified with mortal characters who then appear on-stage (as in the “Pilgrim’s Chorus” in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*). In these latter works, the disembodiment of the voices is only temporary, and does not have the same implications of divinity; the off-stage voice only implies a physical proximity to the on-stage setting, and the connection between mortal personage and voice is maintained throughout.

The analogy between God and recording technology can extend even further. The music store has replaced the church as the venue of worship for many consumers, who make their weekly pilgrimages to the local "parish" record outlet or the huge cathedral-like spaces of Tower Records and Media-Play. Posters and advertising fill the walls as stained-glass windows did in former times, with the same aim of teaching the unsophisticated faithful through visual parable about modes of behavior and belief.⁴ The "service" culminates with a ritual processional to the front altar (i.e., the checkout) to obtain the compact disc, the technological equivalent of the communion wafer. Once administered and consumed, the techno-wafer miraculously transubstantiates into the very thing it once symbolized (the potential for sound becomes actual sound), thus blessing the consumer and rewarding their faithful sacrifice. *Et musica factus est*. Nowhere is the disembodied voice more prevalent than in commercial music recording which, through radio and private listening, "fills the immensity of space" more completely than the nebulous god of modernized Christianity seems able to do.

In the wide variety of uses to which contemporary composers have put the disembodied voice, there still seems to echo an element of the "voice of God". While the acoustic, off-stage voice has fallen somewhat out of favor and been replaced by tape recording, the disembodiment of the voice alludes to exactly the same sense of the supernatural that attended the phenomenon in earlier periods. The use of tape in music also creates the same oxymoronic predicament as it does in the electronic news and entertainment media. While tape can express a documentary literalness that passes as "truth", it is also a medium of extreme artifice. It can give the plausible impression of human presence when there is none. The sound of the taped voice is, literally, inhuman, and yet it is a likeness of the human voice. We in the electronic era have thus re-created God's voice in *our* oral image, and there are plenty of examples to illustrate its manifestation.

The emphasis given to serial and electronic elements in Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* often overshadows the explicitly religious content of the work, which had its origins in a planned electronic Mass intended either for liturgical use or (significantly, in this context) to be broadcast on radio. But the symbolic innocence of a boy soprano intoning biblical texts is only one aspect of this work's representation of the voice of God. Equally pertinent is the placement of speaker-groups in all corners of the performance space, so that not only does the voice emerge disembodied, it also encompasses the listener from all directions. Stockhausen originally planned for the boy soprano's voice to emanate from a speaker suspended above the congregation. When performed in a religious setting, as he originally intended, the fragmentary text would thus descend from above, God-like, as if in direct response to the invocations that would precede it in the liturgy.

⁴ If Madonna happens to be in vogue at the time, the metaphor is even more potent.

The Voice(-Over) of God

For his text, Stockhausen uses the *Benedicite* canticle from the Apocrypha, in which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego praise God as he protects them in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, so a supernatural element is already implicit in the words. This text implies three singers — hence the work's plural title, *Song of the Youths* — yet the composer recorded only one boy's voice. By layering and multi-tracking, Stockhausen gives the aural impression of multiple voices. Through technology he is able to produce a trio from a singularity, and thus effectively emulate the triune godhead that is so central to the composer's Catholic credo.

Perhaps it's coincidental that Steve Reich's first vocal tape piece also uses a biblical text (or at least a modern paraphrase of one). Or maybe it's another reverberation of the "voice of God" effect. *It's Gonna Rain* takes an excerpt from Brother Walter's street-corner preaching in San Francisco, looping it and phasing it using a technique that would become Reich's stylistic thumbprint for the next decade. But just as the anonymous voice in *Gesang der Jünglinge* mimics the divine on several levels, so *It's Gonna Rain* can be interpreted as a similitude of godly speech. The textual content, derived from the biblical account of the Flood, is reduced to the three words of the title; words that, if one is a believer, are literally God's words, voiced through Noah, and paraphrased by Brother Walter. As in Stockhausen's piece, the text is fragmented along a continuum of intelligibility. It is also augmented through multi-tracking to eight voices; beyond the vocal trio implied in *Gesang*, but still compatible with the fact that the Hebrew word for God — "Elohim" — is grammatically plural.

In the first looped fragment of *It's Gonna Rain*, there is a clear beating sound in the background that functions in a similar fashion to the "Pulse" in Terry Riley's *In C* — it establishes a constant rhythm over which the gradual phasing changes can be compared. According to Reich's notes to the recording, this pulsing in *It's Gonna Rain* comes from the wing-beats of a pigeon: the "downtown" version of a dove that traditionally signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit, thus lending Brother Walter's words a sonic backdrop of divine approval.

In Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (for soprano, taped soprano, and electric sounds), the mythological and supernatural details are evident on the surface, and Babbitt overtly uses the technology of tape to represent the restoration of Philomel's "voice" in this legend. As in the works already discussed, the taped soprano part is multiplied, in this case serving as a Greek chorus that tropes the live soprano's text. Yet, though the source is Greek mythology and not Christian religion, there are still parallels with the biblical voice of God in the treatment of the taped voice and the resulting aural consequences. In the first section, the taped voices deliver commentary on Philomel's text, informing the listener about what is "real" and "true" (something the "live" Philomel seems unable to distinguish). When

Philomel mentions trees, the taped chorus responds, "Not true trees"; when she sings of tears, they reply, "Not true tears"; and at the name Tereus, they warn, "Not a true Tereus." The taped voices, as in a documentary, appear to have access to knowledge that the live performer lacks, and act as a source of truth. Also, in section two of the piece, the "Echo Song," the taped sopranos trade strophes with the live soprano, each time beginning their strophe with a triple repetition of the first word. The implications are as they were in Stockhausen's *Gesang*, where one voice becomes three, thus implying a triune theology.

In Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*, religious ritual plays a central role. But while the effect of taped voices in *Mass* is somewhat subsumed by the action on stage, its symbolic relevance is substantial. In one respect it corresponds precisely with the "voice of God" effect found in *Tosca* — the liturgical passages in *Mass* are performed entirely off-stage — but there the similarity ends, as Bernstein uses the taped liturgy to signify an unemotional, detached, and distant God. In the process, he employs many of the features found in earlier tape works, perhaps referencing their implicit associations with the divine. As Stockhausen did in *Gesang*, Bernstein places speakers in all corners of the performance space, so that the audience is surrounded by the disembodied liturgy. The *Kyrie* begins with a soprano voice that seems to imitate Babbitt's *Philomel* with its wide leaps and vocal flitting. But Bernstein intends this sound to be alienating. As the other solo voices enter, the sonic complexity increases, until it is interrupted by a simple guitar strum from the on-stage celebrant, who then proceeds to sing "A Simple Song" in place of the cacophonous Roman liturgy. The *Kyrie*, and all the taped mass movements that follow, are consistently juxtaposed with this on-stage celebrant, giving the impression that the liturgy (and the establishment it represents) is distant, anonymous, faceless, out-of-touch, and obsolete. The relentless "Latin-ness" of the taped excerpts in *Mass*, and the musical styles Bernstein chose for them, draw directly on Stravinsky's aesthetic attitude to the Roman rite. Bernstein's *Credo*, for instance, is sung with an inflectionless objectivity that would not be out of place in Stravinsky's *Mass* or the *Symphony of Psalms*. But Stravinsky believed the Roman liturgy to be powerful and universal precisely because of its Latin text: a medium not dead but "turned to stone" and thus "monumentalized."⁵ Bernstein takes this one step further by removing the liturgical singing from the performance platform altogether. The disembodiment through tape, combined with the stone-like monumentality of the Latin text, turns the off-stage chorus into absent singing statues, with the same symbolic resonances as the statues of Poseidon or the Commendatore in Mozart's operas.

Though Bernstein uses the taped liturgy as a means of criticizing the establishment, he doesn't entirely reject the "voice of God" in *Mass*. The tape is heard less frequently throughout the work as the liturgy is gradually deconstructed on stage. The Celebrant assumes the weight (both literally and symbolically) of liturgical accretions, until he can

⁵Quoted in Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 354.

bear it no longer and the whole apparatus of institutionalized religion verges on chaotic collapse. But it is "rescued" at the end by a boy soprano, recalling the traditional symbolic role of that voice type and its use in both *Tosca* and *Gesang der Jünglinge*. *Mass* ends with God himself, as the "Voice on tape", returning to deliver the traditional benediction, "The Mass is ended, go in Peace."

After his looping experiments in the mid-60s, Steve Reich returned to the taped voice in 1989 with *Different Trains*, and has continued to use recording technology in many of his subsequent works. In each case, he exploits the tape for its documentary veracity, and uses it as a prime source for musical materials. One would be hard-pressed to label *Different Trains* a "religious" work in the conventional sense, though the issue of religion lies at the core of the Holocaust experience, and Reich's use of taped testimony in the work corresponds with aspects of the "voice of God" phenomenon.

Reich's fragmentation of the taped voices in *Different Trains*, in which he isolates incomplete phrases from several monologues, resembles the process he used in the second part of *It's Gonna Rain*. But where the earlier work relied solely on the inflections of speech for pitch and rhythm, Reich employs a string quartet to mimic and accompany the taped voices in *Different Trains*. He said, "As they spoke, so I wrote; they gave me the notes, they gave me timbre, they gave me tempo, and they gave me meaning."⁶ For Reich, as for all believers in the Abrahamic religions, the "word" was the first cause. All creation springs from utterance, whether on a cosmic scale, or within the reduced realm of a musical composition. Part of *Different Trains*'s efficacy also derives from the documentary authority of the taped voices. As if listening to a narration or a voice-over, the audience is more willing to "believe" the voices precisely because they are not physically present. The work's impact would be significantly compromised, for example, if the vocal parts were intoned by on-stage performers; the audience would know the performers were only re-citing the experience of others. The musical point of the work also relies on the constant and unchanging nature of the tape. While Stravinsky considered the Latin language a medium that had turned to stone, Reich has used tape as a medium of equivalent permanence and durability. The voices in *Different Trains* are unchanging from performance to performance. They assume, therefore, the same kind of ritual monumentality that Stravinsky and Bernstein aimed for. The text in *Different Trains* becomes a litany, familiar through repetition, that represents in stylized fashion the expressions of the group. That this litany takes on supernatural qualities is also evident in the spatial and musical separation between live performers and taped voices. Reich transcribed the vocal contours for instruments, but kept within the confines of diatonic melody and rational rhythmic values in the transcription. This means that the instrumental performers, the musicians we see on stage, are never able to exactly match the intonations and rhythms of

⁶ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 96.

the disembodied speech piped into the hall. The musical distinction implies a spatial distinction as well; Andrew Stiller wrote in *Musical America* that in *Different Trains*, “the voices hover over the whole piece,”⁷ suggesting an effect not unlike the suspended speaker Stockhausen proposed for *Gesang der Jünglinge*.

The culmination of the “voice of God” phenomenon in contemporary music comes in Michael Daugherty’s works in which taped voices are a crucial element. Though superficially a piece like *Sing Sing: J. Edgar Hoover* might resemble *Different Trains*, in that recorded speech is juxtaposed with instrumental accompaniment (in both cases, the Kronos Quartet), the ramifications in Daugherty’s music are even more extensive. Hoover’s position as head of the F.B.I. allowed him access to technology to record other’s speech and use it against them; the power of his position and his ability to “eavesdrop” through technology made him analogous to God, or Big Brother, in key respects. By using taped excerpts of Hoover’s own speech, Daugherty exacts a kind of retribution, achieved through the same means as Bernstein’s taped liturgy in *Mass*. Both works turn the voice of the empowered beings back on themselves, in an attempt to criticize and undermine their established position.

The richest manifestation of the “voice of God” phenomenon may come in Daugherty’s *Elvis Everywhere*, for string quartet and taped Elvis impersonators. The tape combines three Elvises – a triune symbolism that is almost clichéd by this point – in a mock-Vegas medley of his most popular tunes and stereotypical riffs. If there is one figure in pop culture that has been deified by the masses, it is Elvis. His image is iconic, his home is a shrine and a temple, and his voice is scripture for the faithful followers. The plethora of impersonators and the recurring headlines in supermarket tabloids all attempt to deny his death, artificially extending his life in imitation of a resurrection. “The King” has supplanted Christ (as “King of Kings”) and, as Daugherty’s title implies, Elvis has assumed a god-like omnipresence. *Elvis Everywhere* is every bit as much liturgy and ritual as *Gesang der Jünglinge* and *Mass*; it connects with mythology as explicitly as *Philomel*; it mimics documentary vividness in the characterizations of real persons as clearly as *It’s Gonna Rain* and *Different Trains*.

Hearing the pseudo-voice(s) of Elvis on tape, disembodied, does not strike an audience as unusual. It’s certainly not as disconcerting as *Philomel* or as detached from the musical texture as *Different Trains*, because recording technology is exactly the medium through which most listeners originally heard Elvis. The technology other composers have used to represent the “voice of God” (or the voice of truth, knowledge, mythology, and the supernatural) was a part of Elvis’s career right from the start, so it’s only natural that in death he should assume the role of Christ-figure in contemporary culture. The disembodied voice of Elvis may be an *über*-narrative for the postmodern generation,

⁷ Andrew Stiller, “Record Reviews,” *Musical America* 109/5 (1989): 65.

The Voice(-Over) of God

as the voice of God once was in former centuries.

In musical terms the disembodied voice still seems to signify the divine, whether that disembodiment is achieved through an off-stage voice or through recording technology. The "voice of God" may have lost its biblical potency and awe-inspiring religious authority in contemporary society, but it is still manifest in new forms: the voice-over, the narrative, the radio talk-show, and music. Contemporary composers who use the recorded voice in music often do so with conscious allusions to the supernatural qualities of disembodied utterance. Even when that allusion is unintentional, the audience impact can be equally profound. In each instance, the disembodied voice functions as a surrogate-god, compelling the listener to attend with increased acuity. The only difference is that the bottom-line is usually commerce rather than salvation. If God only had a recording contract, he might have been as big as Elvis.

Firefly Music

In the evening during firefly season a group of wind musicians go to a place where there are likely to be fireflies. They spread out but remain in hearing distance from each other.

Each faces in one direction and watches for fireflies to flash. For each firefly flash the musician produces a sound which lasts as long as the flash. The more the flash that is seen is to the left of his line of sight, the lower the register of the note; the more to the right, the higher. The darker the background behind the flash, the louder the sound up to **mf**; the lighter, the softer, down to **pp**. The duration of the performance is free, as is the question of the presence of spectators.

17. June, 1991

This piece is dedicated to Mary-Louise Wilding-White.
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Roughly Five Minutes

by Dick Higgins

Look through the framed area. Any still objects or flora which you see are the stage and setting. Any moving objects or fauna which you see are the performers.

Watch them for roughly five minutes.



If you wish to join them in performing, sing to yourself when you see something move. The farther left the movement, the softer: the farther right, the louder. The higher in the rectangle, the higher your pitch: the lower, the lower.

Barrytown, New York
5. June, 1994

GONG SPREAD

by Daniel Goode

— — — — — *for any number of seven or more performers playing a family of (similar sounding) hand-held, resonant instruments such as gongs* — — —

A regular pulse is used throughout: slow or moderate in tempo.

At least two or more people begin by playing no more than one note per beat. Play a metric unit (or cycle) that equals the number of people who are playing:

2 are playing = cycle of 2 beats

3 are playing = cycle of 3 beats... etc.

Play only once (one note) in each cycle, no matter how many beats long the cycle is.

Play only on a beat, no off-beats.

Play on any beat in the cycle, resting on the other beat(s).

After the initial group has been playing a while the remaining group(s) may begin at any distance from the first group as long as they can hear and co-ordinate rhythmically through a common tempo (tactus).

Any performer may leave or join a group at any time. Make a visually clear, aesthetically acceptable gesture when entering or leaving so as to cue the new metric cycle.

When someone leaves or joins a group the rhythmic cycle changes as smoothly as possible to the new number of beats. At that moment any player may choose (or not) to move to a different beat in the cycle coming up.

A 'group' of one occurs only when all but one person is left in a group. That person may continue playing the cycle of one beat or stop and go to another group.

Never play while walking to a new group.

Let a group stay constant for a good while so that the polyrhythms among groups can become audible. Use dynamic and timbral changes sensitively during these periods of rhythmic stasis.

To start a new group in a new place, go to that place and wait for one or more to join you. Or go with someone else or several to the new place and begin.

ENDING: There are many possible ways of ending consonant with the rules given. Examples: (1) All groups coagulate to one, and someone gives a cut off. (2) All groups subtract to one person, each stopping at will or on any agreed upon time, either diminuendo or non-dim. (3) Ending occurs with any group configuration subjected to a diminuendo to silence. (4) Individuals could leave groups randomly until all are gone or have stopped playing.

c 1999 by Daniel Goode (composed and first performed in late-'70's or early '80's using auto hubcaps).

LEAVERAGE

Daniel Goode

modes of playing:

literalistic (down=down; flutter=flutter; time of fall=time of playing; no.of leaves=no.of players in 1,2,3, a heap format, etc.)

reverse literalistic (up=down; time=time but out of sync. e.g.after the fall, one leaf falls = many play, vice versa, etc.)

indirect (use only the time frame of the fall; literalistic to one parameter but stretched in time or condensed in time; up in direction but no other connection; no.of players literal, other parameters indirect)

modes of leaverage (dropping leaves):

vary leaf flow: single leaves if possible
a few leaves

pauses between leaf-falls can be controlled

interact with players: e.g. let them finish a playing event before sending more leaferage down, interrupt with some very different kind of flow (heavy for light, single leaf for a bunch, etc.)

ending: piece is over when the bag of leaves is empty

c 1999 by Daniel Goode (This piece was composed for and performed by the DownTown Ensemble in its up-State concert at Amble Dance in Philmont, New York, October 30th, 1993. A bag of leaves was suspended above the stage and a hole was made so that the leaves would come out, goaded occasionally by R.I.P Hayman with a rake).

Three Talking Sculptures for Election Day - Daniel Goode

You have a tape to play through your headphones. Attach a portable tape player to yourself in such a way that you can play your instrument. Situate yourself any place in the performance space, or among audience members, but clearly visible. Only you can hear the tape, though you may occasionally take your headphones off so the sound can be detected by some audience members.

Your job is to create a performance in sound, word, gesture based on what you hear on the tape.

- You may imitate as accurately as you can any sound, text, timbre you are hearing.
- But you are under no obligation to imitate literally what you hear.
- You may 'develop' the computer voice style, or you may use your own voice's intonation. You may 'misinterpret' the text especially if you are not sure what the voice is saying. You may depart from the text: make your own textual variations, commentaries on the spot or rehearse them beforehand.
- The same possibilities are available for the non-vocal sound (the synthesizer's pitch-following of the computer voice).
- Your gestures and decision as to 'what you are', how to embody it, how to dress, stand, move is your own, but should flow from some compositional/performance decision.
- You may stop the tape, take the phones off while it continues, rewind it any time. You may freeze into inaction.
- Move to a new spot in a clearly defined break from your 'character.' Then resume your same 'character', or you may change all or some of your parameters, including your 'costume.'
- How to interweave your instrumental playing with your text delivery is your own decision. You may depart from what is coming through your headphones, use it as a counterpoint to what you are doing, or turn it off while you play/speak, any time.

JACK SON MAC HIGH
BOY GIRL MAC LOW
HIGH LOW MAC JACK
MAC MAC BOY BOY
GIRL JACK MAC SON
LOW LOW HIGH MAC
DAW DAW TER TER
MAC LOW JACK SON
HI HO HE HO
HE HO HE HER
HI HI HE HO
HE LOW HE LOW

No system was used to make this song for Jackson Mac Low

c 1999 by Daniel Goode (composed for the 1997 Festschrift for Jackson Mac Low's 75th Birthday)

ALLEGRO IS IN DISPUTE: CAN ANYONE UNDERSTAND?

Fast music is peculiar, in classical music, in modernist music, in post-modernist music. But not in dance music. Of course, not. But no, let's put it differently: Fast music is perfectly understandable in classical music as is tragically slow music. They are both part of the affective inheritance from the Baroque period. Music had specific affects, and in the most simple terms, fast music represented one area of affects and slow another. As the affects disappeared into the modernist period, all medium to slow tempi become just points on a metronomic continuum, not a set of separate things with special characters like *tempo di valse*, *marche funebre*, etc. But Fast Music, somehow, resists its disappearance into that characterless but broad continuum of non-fast music

When we say fast or slow we should be clear that we talk of pulsations, event flow, harmonic rhythm (the speed and placement of chord changes). When ever a composer of "contemporary classical" music writes a *fast* movement or even a fast part of a movement, it almost always has "character" (even if all we can call it is "excitement"), a kind of affect that would lead some *Times* critic to say things like "a whispy filagree", "a wild, demonic orgy of pulsations", "a stark, craggy, elemental show of force", and on into metaphor-land. Fast music can't readily be made "abstract" ("absolute", non-programatic in 19th Century terms) in the way that moderate music and slow music can be.

HARMONY/SEX

Harmony is like sex. We cannot successfully analyze it because we are of it. Or is it like the Heisenberg Principle: the closer you get to it, the harder it is to see it. One thing we know about both harmony and sex. They function. Harmony is functional. It causes smaller and larger climaxes (like orgasms). Sometime it doesn't work at all, or feels sleazy or cheap. Like bad or non-working sex. All of this is culturally determined. You cannot communicate harmonically or sexually transculturally. Or at least it is not easy, takes special attention. The automatic triggering accomplished by the culturally coded rhythmic/melodic context of chord progressions is like the coded sexual signs that trigger an erotic response. If you are not of it, you might miss it. Perhaps harmony is more coded than sexuality, but that's another discussion.

SECRET CAMERAS—IN NEW YORK CITY

You are peeing against a wall because there are no public facilities for blocks.

In a park, you are hidden from passersby, yet fully clothed and furtively masturbating in the front of a secret camera.

Two people are passionately kissing—is one harrassing?

Two people who could never marry are passionately kissing. They are the same sex—in a public library. A camera catches them.

Once cameras have reached a critical mass, they create "a total institution" (Erving Goffman).

Or as Mayor Giuliani puts it: "You don't have an expectation of privacy in public space." So don't pick your nose.

Having Time, Taking Time, Making Time

Notes on Three Musics

Tildy Bayar

These notes are about music on three compact discs¹ released in the mid-to-late 1990s by Mary Lee Roberts, (the late) Jerry Hunt, and Henry Gwiazda.

Having time: Mary Roberts

Roberts has described her recent compositional focus as being on computer “instrument building”², as she no longer has time in her busy schedule to rigorously through-compose large pieces the way she used to.

*Tooling along, past [...]
I move by an inherited transport of speed...³*

Having time: *Things Fall Apart*: Dwelling, staying, allowing some stuff to rise. Materials of varying degrees of grunginess languidly assemble, unhurriedly assume form. Unhurriedly disbanding, they leave little bits of residue which accrue to the next. “Forward” isn’t anything this music knows from; its subtitle might well be *variations on a present moment*. But in breaking up, it adds up: a music (of) despite-itself.

Having time: Many of us don’t have time these days to play the Great Composer, as the open “Great” slots are as few as ever while the number of composers is steadily rising. Roberts actively addresses what it means to be a composer in such a world. Her necessity-born invention of new musical forms in which rigor is evidenced not by a top-down structure but by the deep specificity and personality of her own “voice(s)” can be seen, fairly unproblematically, as participant in a general musical-cultural turning away from rigorous efforts to express universal truths, and toward equally rigorous efforts to express the multiple textures which constitute personal truths. New kinds of rigor, unsurprisingly, follow: a commitment to the “true voice” of the subjective experience; extensive precompositional work on the design of compositional tools; and a commitment to seek out new forms made uniquely available by the available materials.

What Deleuze & Guattari say about “the manner in which different assemblages hold together”⁴ seems like a really good analogy to the way I’m talking about Roberts’ music and how it embodies a new aesthetic:

... in considering the system as a whole we should speak less of automatism of a higher center than of coordination between centers, and of the cellular groupings or molecular populations that perform these couplings: there is no form or correct structure imposed from without or above but rather articulation from within...⁵

¹ Mary Lee Roberts: *6 Compositions*, Open Space 9, 1997. Jerry Hunt, *Haramand Plane: Three Translation Links*, Nonsequitur/What’s Next?, 1994. Henry Gwiazda, *noTnoTesnoTrbyThms*, Innova 1996.

² From a talk at Bard College, 1997.

³ Part of the text of *Things Fall Apart*

⁴ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *1000 Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Page 327.

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 328.

What's so rigorous about Roberts' recent pieces? Her commitment to rhythm, to begin with. The way her music dwells, taking absolutely the maximum amount of time to get the feel of a space, and not a nanosecond less (or more). The way sounds are so sensitively articulated, lush and deep and sensual.

It would be difficult to imagine computer-generated music sounding Romantic, if one had never heard any music by Roberts. It's not that these timbres, particularly, evoke those of an earlier era; they're entirely unique, evocative yet non-referential. But something as indefinable as Roberts' "sensibility" asserts itself: her music is the output of a very particular pair of ears' proclivities. This music's attitude is definitely (rigorously) High Art, while being at the same time intensely (rigorously) personal (a rigor shared by the other composers here mentioned).

A listening experiment to do with Roberts' music: In a pure-white room with no furniture except (white) speakers, I propose, this music would manifest gradually, multidimensionally, not so much creating a space architecturally as coloring the space with subtle yet deep resonances, the lack of physical color allowing the listener's focus to be on the unfolding richness of the sound colors.

Taking Time: Jerry Hunt

Chimanzzi: Link One takes its time coming together, being at first a swirl of seemingly-random invocations within an idiosyncratic yet relatively limited (and thus relatively coherent) palette. This music scurries, clatters, jitters, shivers, a sense of nervous urgency propelling it. Because of this I took a while to realize it wasn't going forward, particularly. Its macrostructure accumulates iceberg-slow, while local densities, seemingly propelled by gravitational forces, shift rapidly, glob together, fall apart. An odd kind of accumulation, this: subtly transformed versions of the same motives overlap in rapid-succession variations and permutations. Each motive, each syntax, each inflection and transposition are different, but the sonic materials remain the same. This is unique: the meaning of the same sounds changing faster than the ear can process. Like changing what your sentence means in mid-sentence is now something altogether different. Benjamin Boretz once said "[Musical] structure is the feel of where you are at each moment"⁶, and Hunt tropes on this idea by making the feel of any given moment into a between-place. We're always somewhere definite, but that somewhere is always en route to another somewhere (also definite, although after a while it becomes obvious that we're never going to actually arrive). All of these sounds imply forward motion, and as they're repeated, the meaning of each reentrance is either "again/more" or "derailment, start over (in a slightly different direction)". Over a twenty-minute period one will notice having moved, subtly, a few degrees to the left. Deleuze and Guattari, again, seem to (synchronicitously) relate:

*It may even be the case that consistency finds the totality of its conditions only on a properly cosmic plane, where all the disparate and heterogeneous elements are convoked.*⁷

...That is, in the sense of macrostructure with which one is left after the piece ends. I get the feeling Hunt was way into generative processes in his composing, although it's difficult to get a sense of which processes exactly, or in which precompositional activities he engaged, from the resultant sound. The results, I imagine, are somewhat akin to the way William Burroughs' cut-and-paste text

⁶ ...sometime between 1985 and 1989.

⁷ Ibid., page 327

compositions might have turned out if Burroughs had taken one text, printed a hundred copies in different sizes and typefaces, cut them up and layered the pieces in slightly different configurations, over and over. But Hunt's music isn't about dispensing with sense, and surprisingly it isn't even particularly about repetition; instead it's a trompe l'oreille where sense (in the form of the resolution/payoff to which all the repetition has been building) is always going to be dispensed just around the next corner, except that you never actually get there—or anywhere, except when you think you're not moving. It's like

...the territory is constantly traversed by movements of deterritorialization that are relative and may even occur in place, by which one passes from the intra-assemblage to interassemblages, without, however, leaving the territory...⁸

That is, the aforementioned variously layered motivic fragments are embedded with similarities connecting them to previous segments in a loose “variations” structure. Local derailments, false starts, and restarts don't derail the piece's macrotrajectory, which consists simply of “motion in general” rather than “motion in a direction”. So the piece proves impervious to its own continual self-deconstruction.

How to listen to Hunt's music: Surrounded by algorithmically-generated wildly swirling colors, of course. (Straight analogy, perhaps, but derived from a feeling that, for this music, more texture is better. And in such an environment I imagine the music would actually contrast quite favorably, in terms of depth and dimensionality; the way it isn't ultimately mere ear candy, although already obvious to anyone who listens all the way through, would be further set off by a taste of the real thing.)

Making Time: Henry Gwiazda

This is a music of wide spaces, of architectural configurations with plenty of room to resonate. It is also a symphony of the bizarre and the improbable: natural sounds, barks growls chirps roars as well as sounds of eating and walking change context on the fly from representational to abstract pitch-material and back.

An accelerated airplane roars across my head. Someone near me rustles, crinkles a bag of chips, chews. A swarm of flies becomes an extension of a plucked-string melody; one fly zooms closer, morphs into a violin which gradually appears to have been continuing, in a lazily laid-back manner, a tune begun a while back somewhere between plane and crunchrustle.

The action is in the gradual assembly of a meandering melody, in the constant flip-flop between its melodic progression and its derailment by non-pitched elements. The interplay between abstract and representational sounds is secondary, noticeable mostly as an unusual orchestrational feature of this incontrovertibly (and uncontroversially) tonal music. What's important about each bark and growl and rustle, I realize increasingly as the piece evolves and the sonic environment is gradually tuned, is its pitch.

Making time: The time of a specific yet inexplicit utterance such as a melodic fragment played on a violin, and the time of an explicit utterance such as a dog's bark, are different. People probably have different brain circuits set up to process each differently: the latter is indexed

⁸ Ibid., page 326.

primarily as an indicator of an animal's (real or virtual) presence, its qualities noted as secondary attributes which give us vital information about the animal, such as its size and distance from us; the former is perceived as nonrepresentational and its qualities indexed non-hierarchically, each holding the potential to give us fundamental information which will aid us in the process of processing it. Gwiazda does something unique when he changes the former into the latter: he synthesizes a new time, causing us to hear in a new way which is neither purely representational nor purely abstract, yet invokes each: his music puns on our habitual modes of listening.

A listening experiment to perform with Gwiazda's music: Listen (with headphones) while looking out of a window from a room into which the sounds of what's outside don't filter, creating (I propose) an analogic extension of what's happening sonically.

music/consciousness/gender

Mary Lee Roberts

m/c/g, the video, doesn't offer us much of a lecture - it offers us poetry and the demands of poetry: maze-like forms taking us, the experiencers, into unfamiliar, uninvestigated places. I have been listening and watching through *m/c/g* again. And here, in this video, I've been invited to go down, and down feels like the right word, down into the form of Ben's thought-world. It certainly does not feel like anything but down - it's lying down or going down vertical. And to emphasize this down-feeling I'm reminded of my last trip with *m/c/g* where, like letting go somehow, the last 20 minutes took me down to be "had". It's here that Ben has merged Elaine Barkin, reading Ben, with Mahler's Adagietto from Symphony #5 - he's composed the down, the downy, the feeling of surrounded by Ruby Fruit language and inescapable music-pleasure. I know the language. I know the sonic sensations. I'm vulnerable - and here Elaine sends me over the edge - her tears - jerking me around. I let myself go - slipping. (I slip here not to the earlier Wagnerian-slime).

This last time I dropped *m/c/m* in a group. I was disappointed in finding out that I was the only one who took the hit. Don't get me wrong, this isn't the only thing going in *m/c/g*, but it can be plenty powerful. Ben takes many views here: music, music/consciousness, consciousness, consciousness/gender, gender; he's cataloguing the touchings of eternal/internal. Like this is all obvious - we can talk about it: reduce it to language-speak, trivialize it into word-language, then get taken from behind with a hit of nerves: Hendrix in a Papageno Suit, dismembered by Coltrane-squawks. Again, I'm reminded (for the millionth time): Hendrix/Coltrane, and all the rest, these guys give me nothing but that tired old macho *Orgasmo-form*: mount the thing, drive it to frenzy (or convince yourself of some kind of frenzy), then let the poor sonic world die a slow death, all alone. 'Scuse me while I wipe out the pedestal of gender-null male experience - *m/c/g* reminds me that I'm truly bored with predictable forms.

Ben has been making the point for years: sonic-scapes provide the most flexibility for complex communications. ("Listening is the primal act", chimes in Elaine Barkin.) I find myself doing an attention-inversion while watching the *m/c/g* video. Here I; as a fairly normal, suburban, TV-bred-visually-oriented-experiencer, find myself clinging to the sonic element. Sure the visuals are strange - flashing images of people - what one re-viewer issued forth as "un-watchable". The parade of folksy images is difficult but so is the text/music part. There are familiar faces here: Herbert Brün probably being the most celebrated besides the glossy images of Dirk Bogarde and entourage from *Death in Venice* (oddly enough an *idée fixe* in *m/c/g*). There are familiar sounds too: certainly the greatest hits from Open Space (JK Randall, Boretz, et. al.) and then the Wagner/Mahler/ Coltrane/ Hendrix re-contextualizations. This isn't the *Columbia, Gem of the Ocean*-Charles Ives type of orchestration cum Freudian dreamscapes - but more like de-construction, like a taking apart and laying bare - the only time that I've been presented with the music and the analysis all at the same time. This can't be Freudian - it has to be Post-something - like Guattari's hitting-the-concrete-wall, bang, bang, I-can't-get-to-the-other-side - can't get over/down to the schizo end of it.

m/c/g reminds me that the aspect of musical meaning which can be paraphrased is marginal/trivial - we can't say what is happening - but we can try to talk about happenings. It all seems depressingly fruitless at first until I begin to admit that the point is not the fruit, but the process, the activity in itself. If we think about gender not as a component, but as an aspect of identity, what Ben is saying makes even more sense. After *m/c/g* starts to shut down - in those last 20 minutes - I come down to this tranquillity: the process of the *m/c/g* activity takes full hold. I feel the hit even harder as I continue down at this point - the hit is from myself - Ben (through Elaine Barkin) reminds me of my own susceptibility to the accepted "ritualized violence" of sonic phenomena. The video images make no sense now - the sonic part is too powerful. "Existence is, evidently, a def-icit operation." I'm so down now, I can barely recognize the world around me. I've dropped, OK I'm declining to being dead to the world now - I've been made to be totally here in the sound now - I'm forced to be here-now. No, I don't want to be anywhere else anymore. I'm reminded that there is no where else but here-now. Ben leaves me in my "here", identified as my "house".

Ben's Utopian Time

An essay inspired by music/consciousness/gender

Ross Feller

To resist the operation and submission to the hyperreal... the pure surface which conceals deeper realities of domination... affectlessness and fatality... the kiss of Disney upon the head of a pin. "The word has another intention from the very beginning if it aims very far".¹ It can hold abstract weights and numbers at bay long enough for the emergence of silence. The notion of an interval is more basic than that of an instant. But our means of identifying temporality is largely linguistically dependent. The faces come and go but the names remain the same. We see them as concretely related to the ongoing processes of a gender history. The diversity of the operations of structures of domination contributes to a sense in which movement beyond the rough-and-ready falsifies the liberating possibilities of texts. Or, the causality constraint arrives simultaneously with the signal of its reflection. Let's take Bentham's prison design as an example. The observer can view any of the prisoners at any time from her position in the center. The inmates are peripherally housed, thus, doubly marginalized. Their only escape from the feeling of being continuously observed is through closed-eye agogic vision. "I believe utopia cannot be removed from the world in spite of everything, and even the technological, which must definitely emerge and will be in the great realm of the utopian, will form only small sectors" (15). Yes, as Brecht said in *Mahagonny*: "Something's missing." To combat the diversity of oppression he shows us effective strategies of intervention while arguing for a non-unified space.

The space between images in *music/consciousness/gender* is measured and proportional, presenting opportunities for some shut-eye ontology. Each image – a face. Each face frames indexical or iconic signs, frozen (before, during, and after) speech acts. Their identification is parasitic on the absence which follows. The spacing or differing process offers strategies of intervention, self-reflexive and responsive to potential inquiry.

The discourse in *music/consciousness/gender* seems to suggest a space beyond the hyperreal world of pure surface, in which political and social reality could be transformed without pathos or a melancholic search for origins in the midst of the plague. The slow movement from Mahler's Fifth captures certain excesses such as the materiality of the musical work, madness, or magic. Near the beginning of *music/consciousness/gender* Ben hits the nail on its head, telling us that, "...the musical 'work' is an essential fiction of materialist culture which requires object-permanence and measurable quantitative substance for the assignment of value since the paradigm of all value is material value." Things named or boxed become micro-descriptions of the signs in which they function as objects, the icing on the cake of experience.

¹ Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, trans. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

There is a kind of simplicity constraint whereby time and space remain disjunct. We claim a dispersion that is not transparent to self. It plucks us from the present, dropping us back at the beginning of modernity. Perhaps we encounter Beckett's Mercier or Camier bumping up against the all-unknowable, all-unfuckable, unnamable Omnimni. "A cool gaze does not prove itself by making understatements... the greed for profit overshadows all human emotions, and that greed does not even take time out for breaks like bloodthirstiness" (Bloch 111). *Music/consciousness/gender* (in Barthesian style) creates distinctions only to show how they don't apply. Instead of a zero degree of writing we have zero degrees of music, consciousness, and gender. Is language use gendershorn? How does it participate in gender domination? Let's begin again, only this time I'll wear the...

On Playing J. K. Randall

liner notes for a CD performance of GAP2-5

Martin Goldray

1st Take (may be read before listening)

Jim Randall's music challenges basic notions of time and continuity. Unlike much minimalist music, where there is a disjunction between the often quick surface of the music and a slow background rhythm, or drone-based "soundscape" music where there is perceptible change but few articulations that can serve as landmarks, this music orients itself at the borders of traditional concepts of phrase and progression. Although on the surface much of this music has an almost Feldmanesque stillness or meditateness, the sense of continuity within each movement is resolutely "classical," even in those pieces where the material has been reduced to a few individual notes or chords. Those pieces with larger structures, such as the third piece of Gap 3, or the single-movement Gap 5, combine an almost Brahmsian intensity with the wit of Satie. Performing these pieces demands of the pianist a sensitivity to sounds and decay, balances, and nuances of articulation and accent far beyond his usual palette. One becomes acutely sensitized, as performer and listener, for example, to rates of decay in the different registers: how will the new (and changing) balances affect your sense of the chord and its direction? How must that chord be struck to effect the changes you'd like to hear as the chord dies away? In addition, the performer must reach a compromise between the steady pulse that underlies these pieces and the often sound-oriented feel of the surface of the music: the sense that every new event occurs at the inevitable and right moment in the previous event's decay must coexist with the rigorous structure beneath the surface. This music invites both the performer and the listener to listen carefully, and to delight in musical events in which traditional rhetoric is swept away, and we can find ourselves at the core of musical experience.

* * * * *

2nd Take (should be read after listening)

I first played Jim Randall's Gap 5 in 1995 and was struck by how this music seemed to so effortlessly combine elements from various other idioms into something quite original and unexpected. My first concern was to convey the slow, Feldmanesque, stillness and meditateness of the piece, but it was also clear than Feldman's counterpoint of sound and silence, where unconnected sonorities have a zen-like disregard for continuity and forward motion, didn't apply to this music, with its clear phrase structure and sense of direction. Randall also wasn't interested in exploiting that area where the difference between repetition and change becomes indistinct, where continuous subtle changes create a balance between forward motion and stasis. This technique provided Feldman as well as the early minimalists of the late 1960s with the capacity to generate pieces of great dimensions with few structural articulations. Jim's music, on the other hand, had an absolute clarity of phrase structure and direction. So, first-off: meditative, but not other-worldly. Secondly,

the piece as a whole had a definite shape, and, indeed, a concern at every level with shapes, and beginnings and ends. The music demanded great intensity of expression to make these shapes clear, even when the texture was reduced to two lines. Only this way could the almost Brahmsian climax toward the end be adequately conveyed. So: meditative, but with an almost expressionistic intensity. Thirdly, despite the absence of traditional musical rhetoric, as well as any conventionalisms of piano technique, it seemed that this was real pianist's music, very clearly and specifically notated with regard to articulations, balances, dynamics, phrasing. There was a sharp ear at work for the magical possibilities of piano sonority. Virtually every sonority asked to be planned from the point of view of its eventual decay: what will this chord sound like when it has rung for many seconds? and how will it re-balance itself as the different registers decay at different speeds? Every color and nuance of articulation, tone, balance and accent needed to be brought into play, with an even more acute sensitivity to the standard variables of piano, hall, acoustics, etc. It was clear that this was written by a pianist with very close connections to the down-and-dirty of performance, and I got the sense that this music (like the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, for example, in which the words on the page seem to resonate with the poet's own voice and style of reading) was intimately connected to Jim's own manner of playing.

Gap 5, I discovered, was a kind of summation of techniques, the big statement, approached from a multiplicity of angles in Gaps 2, 3 and 4. The earlier Gaps, unlike Gap 5, are multi-movement works; some of the movements are quite short, and each one explores a particular texture or sonority. Gap 2 is in six sections, with framing sections at beginning and end. There is at times a whimsical simplicity that is Satie-like, but here again there are differences: in Satie there is a sense that he is taking a pretend-serious look at something which is after all not serious, and doesn't need to be; Jim's music seems to reverse the equation, and to be exercising a certain whimsy upon something that is ultimately quite serious. Most of the pieces in Gap 2 are in two-part counterpoint. One of them, section 2, is a single line: 18 notes that promenade the entire keyboard. Section 5 is the longest, and strangest; in fact it is one of the oddest pieces I know: tight clusters played with the shortest possible staccato, sounds which seem to aspire to zero duration. The pitches themselves are hard to discern: it's a study in pure gesture.

Gap 3 is in three sections: 1 and 2 are relatively short, just a single line in each, the first with rising melodic fragments of two to six notes, the second with descending fragments, longer and more rhythmically varied. These two sections epitomize the problems and pleasures of playing Randall: how to give expressive value to all the subtle differences among the phrases - yet -keep it simple - but - give it a direction, and yet: try to avoid making all the phrases sound the same. Simplicity on the surface, but performance complexities of high order. These two sections are followed, in the third movement, by a grand celebration (Masonic? numerological?) of threes: after six introductory chords, brief phrases (39 in all) are each repeated three times, separated from each other by rests. This is the most complex writing in the Gap series, with, usually, four independent parts set off from each other by dynamics and articulation.

Gap 4 is in 7 sections: sections 2 and 6 are identical, as are sections 3 and 5. These repeated sections are also the shortest and simplest: 2 (and 6) contains 6 pairs of low and high notes in a crescendo from pianissimo to fortissimo: section 3 (and 5) is a single short phrase. But despite the quasi-arch symmetry, the overall sense of Gap 4 is, for me, a progression from the hammering, obsessive repetition of a single note in the first piece (again, if this is static, it is static under protest) to the liberation of section 7, with its repeating short arabesque of a melodic line that sounds, in context, like the most gracious eruption of melodiousness.

Wisła Radkiewicz's 60 Minute Exercise

Benjamin Boretz

: her video images

Times around. Time going around. Angle of time angling around. Spatial diffraction as time angle. Attitude translation. Tension of attitude translation becoming time colored and quantified in that refracted dimension. Time moving not space not moving in space of space. Climbing is turning, time turning, attitude translating intensionally self-eradicating incremental pulses (not trajectory, not orbit, dimensional repositioning in incremental nudges each eradicating the imprint of the previous [unoriented not disoriented] tension of self-eradicating states of location); rotation: time around circumventing time. Incrementing no accumulation. No one should be allowed to witness a linear journey through curvilinear space. It is a knowledge available only from a forbidden perspective, an observation point held as sacred taboo because the knowledge of the qualities of this mystery are dangerous to the underangement of the limited perceptual-conceptual organs of the ones below; they are never allowed to go above, to know the secret of spatial absurdity, that all roads lead to nowhere, that the journey is eventless, that linear is circular, that accumulation is evacuation, that horizon is origin, that beginning has no successor, that end has not arrived, that location is death, that trajectory is chaos, that curvature is loss, that a clock has red hands and an airplane in odd planar orbit for seconds marker, that the universe is, after all, bounded by a purple ring with several functional and/or decorative protuberances thereon, and needs to rest on a swatch of crinkly grey matter (firmament no doubt) to subsist in such stability as to maintain time around incrementing in planar diffractive attitude translational trajectory circumventing content and form both without flying out of space altogether causing the all of everything to fall apart, or in, or down, or out, or up or all or none of the abovebelow. And now fellow creatures we are arriving at 8:25, right on space, red handed, silver bodied, bathed in the shadow of our sunlight, refracting light as time as plane of orientation—tick. Next time Marienbad. Tock. Look up, all the way up, through the globular continuum encircling ever outerly. Time was, tower is, clock elapses, architecture crumbles, standing up firm and going around eccentrically and creeping on imperceptibly, skewered in the skewed perspective, the town towers way up there, up ahead, up tall and tiny and massive and dissolving (also crumbling), deep up ahead beyond behind above red above silver above creep above twist mono planar still footed above nondimension above omnidimension accumulating without incrementing above changing pure and simple above (beyond, below, to the left/right of, before, at the same moment or spot as) elapsing refracting translating eradicating rotating time around belly upping backdowning within global bound of purple ring with functional decorative protuberances upon obligatory resting pad of crinkly. Grey. Crinkly grey infirm. The universal solvent dissolving the universe. (Including the clock tower, the apartment house, the Mediterranean Sea, the Institution of Marriage, the Concept of Anxiety, the father of the man, some rice pudding, the mother of all battles, the utter depravity of human nature, the dust on the carpet, the origin of species, the growth of the fetal tissue, the cancer on the presidency, the gene pool of the Dutch, apartheid (and legalized gambling), laughter, imprudence, statuary, the continuing viability of sonata form, ethnocentricity, plaid, baldness, metamorphosis, ecology, the concept of determinism, the difficulty of climbing clocktowers after the age of 55, the flow of water, the shred of respectability, the fragment of Parmenides,

the snail's pace, the serpent's tooth, the stone's throw, the eagle's beak, the earth's crust, the airplane's dive, the clock's time, the town's crier. Ringed in purple keeping it in. Sealed in glass keeping it out. Looking in at time looking in. At space looking forward: the timeplane dance. Soon. Got sometime, at long last. Oneway — there is only one. (nine there). Now(where?). Protube. Funcdec. Orational. Upround. Downcross. Handjob. Flatspire. Fishbowlworld full of fishfood (time, tower, eat planar refractory attitude translator (very nourishing if nowhere's where you're headed)). Nineohfive. Go back. Your procedure is contrary to accepted practice, which permits of translational attitude eradication, universe annihilation, and town photographing (including purpleringed functionally and decoratively protuberant clockscapes) only in a counterclockwise direction, the seriousness of the infraction in question (underscored by the constantly evolving tease of the plane-redhand angle of approach, convergence, and departure) disenables leniency; the density of the lower half as a consequence of nine-fifteen having arrived (where from?) is the ultimate devolution of nonterminable unstructure. It's where we've come, densely not arriving, having not yet gone. But when?

: her sounds

From the inside of Aguirre's head as the end approaches : in memory is the persistence of desire; in coherence and order is survival of the unendurable being undergone; in return is escape; in pain is spirit; in the forms of feeling is the alienation of feeling, agonized as the noise of what goes unslaked, unappeased, finally, unrepressed and not deniable. Nor is the beauty of formfeeling incised, detained, inflected, or deterred; it drains no material swamp, has knowledge of no material degradability, burbles beyond the bloodbath imperturbably certifying the certainty, denying the torrent of certainties ingushing, outploding—the multifrazzling contrapulses of the ineluctable, rejected finally ultimately overwhelmingly not ever

A Review of Salvatore Martirano's
O,O,O,O, That Shakespeherian Rag

Ross Feller

This posthumously released New World Records CD (#80535-2) presents six of Sal Martirano's most important acoustic compositions. He was primarily concerned with writing electro-acoustic and computer pieces. But in the last few years of his life he again took up the task of composing for acoustic ensembles. In light of this, the works collected in this release shed some light on the distinctive, compositional techniques that defined Martirano's instrumental writing.

Sal was a pioneer, iconoclast composer whose radical practice was steeped in irreverence. For example, his method of quotation integration didn't merely appropriate pastiche-like. Instead, like Frank Zappa he employed competing trajectories and excessive, or slight, exaggeration in an effort to recast the material with a satirical spin. One might call this seriously absurdist. He seemed to seek the twisted in everything he did.

In the early 1970s Sal invented one of the first live, interactive computer systems – the Sal-Mar Construction. He continued to update this system into the 80s and 90s, using Macintosh computers, MIDI, and an artificial intelligence program written in Lisp. Sal is perhaps best known for the anti-war, multimedia work entitled *L'sGA* from 1968. This piece incorporated an actor/politico, tape, and film, and has been aptly described as a sensory overload.

The first piece on the New World Records CD is *Cocktail Music* for solo piano. Written in 1962, it is comparable with Boulez's *Structures* but more unstable and crazed. In addition to a quasi-hardcore serialism, it employs strange pauses, directional gestures, and repeated fragments. Interestingly, in the manuscript score there appears a variety of cocktail glass and bottle shapes that gradually become empty by the end of the piece.

The next piece, *Octet* (winds, strings, and percussion) is Webernesque with references to free jazz improvisation or Zappalike satirical takes on free jazz. Registral extremes are combined with standard-issue serialism, organic forays into the unexpected, and fragmented development.

Chansons Innocentes from 1957 separately employs the soprano voice and piano in the outer movements. In the middle movement they perform together in a distorted nursery rhyme.

Ballad (voice, winds, strings, and percussion) takes various standards of jazz practice and turns them on their heads through the use of textural, registral, and articulation extremes. The instruments comment and interfere with the vocal part, simultaneously supporting and subverting it. This is pure jazz from hell! Occasionally there is a burst of R & B but with the percussion parts out of sync. If the listener perceives a critique s/he should not forget that Sal was a major force jazzier as well as a composer of concert music.

Stuck on Stella (1979) is a *tour de force* work for solo piano. In addition to *Stella by Starlight* one can locate references to Debussy, Rachmaninoff, Weber, and Miles Davis. This piece is relentless but in a way which keeps bringing you to new territory. At times it comes dangerously close to the impossible maneuvers of a Conlon Nancarrow.

The last piece on this CD is *O,O,O,O, That Shakespeherian Rag* for choir, chamber orchestra, and jazz ensemble. This piece sets four passages from three Shakespeare plays. The vocal parts utilize exaggerated plosives and vowels, whispering, and shouting in addition to singing. At times, the instant intelligibility of the text is happily abandoned in favor of gestural expression. Instrumentally, Schoenberg and Webern meet

bebop in a compositional context which includes various conventions from opera, snoring, and laughing.

Although highly original, Sal's work shares some common ground with the German composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918-

1970). Both used a kind of kitchen-sink approach to multimedia, and began writing serial pieces before moving into popular forms of reference. Sadly both died too young. But, whereas Zimmermann was melancholic and suicidal, Sal had a zest for life and lived hard to prove it. One final comparison – Zimmermann, at the end of his life, was out-of-step with his contemporaries; Sal was not only caught up in the spirit of his time but also was at the forefront of change, and remained there until his death.

ESSAY ON MUSIC from *theforestforthetrees*

Charles Stein

ESSAY ON MUSIC 1

The mind
of music
thinks a world
compelling where
words' worlds
fail us.

Deep in the mechanism
of the smallest zone
the drunken waltzers
the elephants tango. . .

What music
zones where
mind demurs
its own
sound?

*

Alone
in the night
with music

the luminous curtain
in back of the mind
upon whose folds and shadows
sounds and shadow
sounds forfend
the darkness of
the music scene

so that the worlds of music's sense

compel themselves through rigorous disquisition --
changing scenes and variable principles,
passions of souls and cosmic histories,
incursions from the underworlds
 that threaten music's sense,
effusions from superior spaces
 sublating all that music means
 with embrasures, transcendencies.

The mind's own sound
within all sense
 of music
 attends
 itself
in music's disquisition --

All that is
wound in the vast
 corporation of enveloping sonorities --

I turn around
within the mind
within the sound
to find the scene
whose intimate activations
 shape events
within the sound,
the mind's own scene
 vaster than
its musical disquisition
 (though music's mind
more shapes my mind
as mind itself compels its nature out
 in music's scene) --

Difficult, the thought
that winds itself

twixt mind's resource
and music's disquisition

*

Who owns
this sound
that spans
the soul's void
with incident and catastrophe

that strikes a blow
against vacancy

that opens a measure
whose very measure
appropriates an "all" --

nothing can be but as this sound disposes it

nothing beyond this music
seems to be

*

Only music
explains music
with music's sense
beyond its scene

forcing its hazard
upon deepest attenders --

How much stillness
can the music mean?

Only music

disquiets music --

*

You cannot
think

while the music's
on
save with music's
instrument --

there is no
time -- but music's
own. Yet music's
time
is mind's own com-
position.

Let mind
then think
with music

and be the time
its sound portends --

Or let it
seem so. The music
seem
what mind
worlds.

And mind and world
both seem
as music is.

Mind and sound at hazard
in the music scene . . .

as
creaking chairs
papers rattling
voices pretending

No one home to the music
wired in some vacated disposition—
dispossession—what sound when no mind's home

(branches creak in the wind

These songs
dispirit
music's breath

the mind of music
unexemplified
save in mind's own broken riffs
and unassembled passages

Aloof in a certain language
where music scans and drifts

Alone
in the night
without music

save a certain consonance
twixt mind's own vacant sound
and hollow rooms

Too late – too late to strike an issue with a tune

Too soon – soon to assemble worlds
from music's argument—

ESSAY ON MUSIC 3

*The thought of soundless music—
a silent evocation of the possible.*

Here in the hidden heart of music's working
as if in a hollow space
of cave or tree
—control the craving for an ancient sound
to point distraction with purpose
and find direction in a swarming dream.

I wait upon my own intent
to hear what music worlds
when silence holds.

The hollow of the heart where spirit rests
in secret Chinese harmony undisturbed,
the “governors” of all our deep well-being
—how this compares to music's harmony—

Are these in secret complicity, even the same
in the ancient night
where all's composed with restorative *repose*,
where mind's surveillance knows surcease at last,
yields to night's encompassing—
that this be the space of a music—
an opening, a welcome,
generous within the restful heart

Two ravens
loosed upon the world
sourced in the mind.

One: Thought; the other – Memory—

produced in music's company—
a drama to unfold a cause
that history, *some* history,
fulfill a magical charge
that music spells.

 Their daily flight
crosses the skies. One at the dawn
of music, solitary,
darts from a rock
still beneath the end of night's broad shadow.
The other returns at dusk at music's close.
All day, the sound projects
events as they're composed by Thought's excursion.
All night, the sound retains
 Memory's return.

Behind the curtain of the mind's release—
the ravens nest in music's source,
the god's surveillance
 limning the possible.

ESSAY ON MUSIC 4

Who sounds whom here?

Huge, the canopies, titanic the gorges—

“loud, loud, **louder, Louder!**”

the blasts that span vastnesses
where embrassure disgorges fans and columns

luminous, ominous, portentous, sententious—

stupendous beauties

reptiles without perspective

stomping the gurgling plains

events in vacuity—

onset, continuance, resistance, triumph, release

surcease

in a narrative without characters

landscape without view—

giganticism of sonority swamping cosmicity—

Aeons and Aeons of what cannot be time

in spasmodic, pleromatic speculation

vista after vista

room after room

blind

in the Light

Now the sound
exceeds all sense—

and space resumes.

The caverns and rooms of ancient palaces.
Honeycomb tombs of war kings, temple domes
and ordered stones. Or broken crowns.
Cathedral vaults and altars, chapels small
or factories abandoned to abuse—all use: abuse—
each space to resonate the sound on its own term
so that sonority take place
as sonic emanation of the entities space holds
or as the resonations of those spaces:
the cavern walls bespeak chthonian damp
and histories return from in-existences, both here and not.
The War Lords gather War Hords in the day heat

“loud, loud, **louder, Louder!**”

LOUDEST

sustaining density

holding mind at bay, all thought defered
deparked in silent vestibule
outside of this

I make a place
the sound forgot.

And sit

with my thought.

That sound and mind know enmity

and build a scale or scope

to snuff the other out

Mind in silence
convenes a world

where sound, its own device,
forgets the mind

and sound compelling space
compels the mind

to rigorous obedience—

Revenge toils in the wings

ESSAY ON MUSIC 5

This sound

has no name.

What shall I say of it ?

That I cannot think it?

Yet

here in a vast Concordium
it thrums along with the rest
or strikes a gash
across a golden vista
or pitched aloft, rises o'er the rest

like—

a sound without a name

in a world that yet desires that spirit soar

above its seething

an elevation arching

across

beyond across

one sound

one word

[]

no word

no sound

Notes toward an essay on “Essay on Music”

1. Almost twenty years of conversation with Ben Boretz on a subject to which the phrase “the mind of music” might serve as a tag or index—the many ways the many senses of “mind” might be embodied in the many senses of “music”; music as sound/time analogue to world or mind’s world; music as a primary way of thinking; composition as the composition of the world; music as a way of doing thinking, hence, reference to “disquisition” and “argument” : these things in proximity to similar thoughts on the being of poetry...

2. The practice of sitting meditation and “the art of contemplation”—with which I have been engaged for most of my life.

3. A coming together of sitting meditation and music listening was the occasion for writing “Essay on Music 1”—late at night, after an hour or so of meditation, listening to the first movement of Mahler’s 9th—the intimacy of mind with itself passing over into an intimacy with the music; the inquiry of mind into itself passing over into an inquiry into the nature of mind-in-(the)music; the embodiment of mind in the music’s world and its co-presence with the mind of listening; the conceptual frame or set for listening, but not only that, or not that in abstraction from the mind as presence of awareness recognizing itself in the time/mind/space of music’s orders. At night. Late. In the quiet of it.

4. The poem was written at several different times. The occasion of “Essay 1” was I believe in May of 1995. The second two pieces came together about a year later, while 4 and 5 were written in the summer of 1998. There are five or six more pieces that have not quite “settled in.” There was also a companion piece called “Essay on Magic” that was written at about the same time as “Essay 1,” and which I think will eventually be part of the set as a whole.

Essay 2 introduces a “curtain” behind which god or a god or some gods are hidden. The figure comes from the Kabbalistic classic *The Zohar*.

Essay 3 reflects the role of the “heart/mind” (Hsin) in Chinese medicine and Chinese thought more generally. As an editor at Station Hill Press I had been working for months on *Rooted in Spirit: The Heart of Chinese Medicine* by Claude Larre & Elisabeth Rochat de la Valee—a translation and commentary of a section of the Chinese *Classic of Internal Medicine*. From which the following:

How can a person know the Dao? By the heart.
How can the heart know? By emptiness, the pure attention that
unifies being and quietude.

The “governors” or “officials” mentioned in “Essay 3” are, in Chinese medicine, the principles of self-organization associated with each energy/organ system of the body.

I have been studying Tai Qi and Qi Gong for many years. In both of these sets of practices the mode of attention to internal energy states and spaces is often considered to be a kind of listening.

“Essay 3” ends with the development of a motif (the two ravens) from a poem called “Grimnismal” mentioned in H.R. Davison’s *Gods & Myths of Northern Europe*:

Huginn and Muninn, Thought and Memory,
fly over the world each day...

5. The practice of poetry as never far from the composition of music. Not only the “sound” of the words, but poetry’s kinship with music as a mind-embodying, mind-manifesting, mind-configuring time-art. So much so that I found I could think about poetry while speaking about music, and that in the metaphoric transfer conducted in the expression of thoughts about music in the idiom of poetry, the concern with mind itself (in poetry, in contemplation, in philosophy) as the locus for our emerging link with being—found a natural way of exploring itself.

6. In the second division of “Essay 2” and later in 4 and 5, the positively toned emptiness of contemplation—music’s serenities—juxtaposes for reflection with other species of emptiness: worldlessness, fragmentation, absence, ruin.

Suspicion of music. Suspicion of mind. Mind bereft of music, or mind compromised by music [a theme developed in notes not yet ready for publication] its social occasion [“Essay 1”’s “music scene,” or one sense of that phrase] its metaphysical display. Or metaphysical nihilism lurking beneath sonorous inflation: “Essay 4” begins with Bruckner and passes to images suggested by a presentation Marianne Amacher made at Bard College’s MFA program in the summer of 1998: Amacher designs sound pieces for specific architectural and natural localities, calculating resonant properties of the ambient materials, fitting sound to resonating space, overwhelming the internal “mental” properties of musical sound so that sound and mind [or this was my extrapolation] threaten to go to war. Or perhaps that, since Cage, the question of a schism between Mind and Sound has long been opened.

This opens the issue of the problem of naming or language itself and its situation regarding the immediacy of sonic meaning, “Essay 5.”

7. Finally, I hope the poem to be a languaging or spacing “liminal” to music, contemplation, philosophy (including (a)theology) and poetry, to which each contribute and in which each takes part—what George Quasha and I have recently been speaking of as a “Poetics of Thinking.”

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