

*The*

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# OPEN SPACE

*magazine*

issue 5

fall 2003

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Benjamin Boretz Mary Lee Roberts Tildy Bayar Dorota Czermer Editors

Contributing Editors Tom Baker Martin Brody William Brooks Warren Burt Renée Coulombe  
David Dunn Keith Eisenbrey Jean-Charles François Kyle Gann Brad Garton Scott M. Gleason  
Daniel Goode Paul Lansky George Lewis Peter Monaghan Robert Morris Mark Nelson  
Robert Paredes Susan Parenti Jann Pasler Craig Pepples George Quasha John Rahn  
Martin Scherzinger Charles Stein Martin Supper Ann Warde Alicyn Warren

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### a note to readers

Because of space and production limitations, a number of pieces planned for Issue 5 have had to be deferred to Issue 6, for which we apologize to contributors and readers. We expect to be able to mail out Issue 6 sometime around the middle of 2004. Here are some of the articles we expect to be offering:

- Robert Morris Respiration in Stefan Wolpe's *Piece in Two Parts for Six Instruments*  
Dora Hanninen Association and the emergence of Form in Two Wolpe Works  
Mary Lee Roberts Joseph Creek  
Tildy Bayar, Charles Stein, and others After Zero  
Tildy Bayar on ONE  
Jean-Charles François Art, Musicians, and Music Teaching Today  
Warren Burt and Robert Paredes A Conversation  
Richard Kostelanetz Tom's Thom  
Chris Williams on KIVA  
John Rahn The Swerve and the Flow: Music's Relation to Mathematics  
Benjamin Boretz Little Reviews III  
Erik Ulman Representations of the Natural in Cage, Young, and Lachenmann  
William Anderson On George Walker and Milton Babbitt

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## Vignettes of Old Masters II: Arthur Berger (1912-2003)

Benjamin Boretz

Way down there in places where expression forms just prior to where music becomes music there arise qualities of personhood never exteriorized in any other way. Not, especially, it seems, in his words. Yet recognizable, after the fact of music, as possibly a refinement, or possibly as a precognitive essence, of what's blatantly there in the grossly contaminated verbal-social spaces. It's possibly what a person can't help being, whatever the intense motivation of internalized social pressure...what a person is, in point of fact, what he in particular seems incompetent to not be, in spite of himself, of even his most nervous, desperate inner/outer known and otherwise irrepressibly metastasizing needs. Even where the sources are unmistakable: Stravinsky, Copland, Schoenberg, it's a lost struggle to be like them, it's exactly that lost struggle that resonates so much more than any property of being like them, or like being part of their compositional cult, the tightassed evocation of the elusive model composed so over-the-top precisely, so under-the-skin exquisitely, so stretched-to-the-limit intensely that there's no residue of failed or even, somehow, attempted imitation nor, never, anything remotely maudlin. What it is is frozen dance. Extreme sensibility alchemized into strenuous energy in place, strenuously immobile. Sound so laser-intensely hearing itself that it has no vision, no place even conceived to go to, no trace of an intuition of going as an issue. Nor breakout; where energy is alchemized extreme sensibility its ruptions break in not out, to being perhaps elsewhere but not by getting there. Yet somehow these extremities of constriction, these expressive immobilities within extremely tight spaces, these preternaturally awkward struggles to go nowhere, produced not the predictable self-repetition, uniformity, monochromy, stuck-in-a-groove self-parody but, well, their opposites: a not superabundant but constant re-engagement with that unmistakable arthurian ur-self and with music, Arthur's own and the world's going by, heard with the most acute and most peculiar ear imaginable, and reproduced unrecognizably but faithfully: through the 1940s, from the oddly disembodied fluidities of the Woodwind Quartet and the Yeats Songs to the brambly idiosyncracies and arrhythmias and freeze-dried neodiatonicisms of the Duos (especially the violin-piano Duos, especially the out-of-body, out-of-sight second; the La-Do cello Duo is almost mellow) – though the oddness of the formal experimentation of the piano Partita and its orchestral partner *Serenade Concertante* go off a different kind of deep end, more like revisits to the Schoenberg Kammer-symphonie op. 9 (Jane Coppock's descriptive article on Partita in Perspectives is required reading for Arthur listeners, as is Elaine Barkin on the much later Trio). And in the 1950s the excruciating *drang* and counter-*drang* Burianic suspension ambivalating historically along with Stravinsky and Copland themselves alchemized Arthur's two moments of supreme ultimacy: One-Part Inventions and *Polyphony* for Orchestra. The first was composed for Charles Rosen who seems not to have noticed how much further into a transcendent musical beyond they go than most of what he does notice, but Geoffrey Burleson's CD makes every other pianist's Berger performances unnecessary anyway, even though it's abominably recorded; and the second (*Polyphony*) for the Louisville Orchestra which did its dutiful inadequate best; the 1960s performance by Erich Leinsdorf in Boston was better executed but you'll have to buy Gil Rose's New World



Benjamin Boretz

Records disc to get some idea – though they play it way too fast and too much as if it was some piece of modern music or other that sort of goes like Stravinsky but not quite. But I think (hard to tell from the inside) you'll be able to get the hit if you attend. And there is a huge hit to get: give or take Harold Shapero's miraculous masterpiece Symphony for Classical Orchestra American orchestral music never had it so good or got so far out. (Don't overlook *Ideas of Order*, either, though: it's not in the class of the later pieces because so much of it seems not fully disentangled from what it's trying to be – as usual, some collection of simulacra of esteemed contemporaries Igor and Aaron – but also as usual, Arthur's non-negotiably idiosyncratic dystemporality makes it into something quite other, special.) But even afterward, in the 1960s and beyond, even though chromaticism especially of the serialist stripe would seem an obvious killer for an ear exquisitely tuned like Arthur's to the absolute specificity of sonority – as virtually the entire expressive quality in music – that deep-inner ur-composer invents his way out with exquisite lucidity; the 1969 5 pieces for piano reinvent the substance of pure pitch-class resonance by tampering the piano and intensely vivifying registration – that was adumbrated in the 1959 Chamber Concerto (recomposed in 1985 as Perspectives II) with densities and modes of articulation, commonplaces of the (especially European) mod scene at the time but – again – ending up in some unrecognizable place of its own, unfathomably still and antikinetic as the last moments of *Aguirre*.

Thinking beyond my most immediate sense of Arthur I get back to old *Nation* articles (from the 1960s) and what it was like from there; we were trying to get *Perspectives* started while he was composing his String Quartet – so there was lots of dialogue about it and all the compositional issues around it while that was going on, which had to be reflected in what I wrote:

February 1962:

Some of the extent of recent *avant-garde* activity is evident from the number of interesting new works which were performed in New York this past month. An especially significant case in point is Arthur Berger's String Quartet, performed at the New School on January 26 under the auspices of the International Society for Contemporary Music. The personal kind of neo-classicism/Webernism of Berger's music of the Forties and early Fifties is replaced here by a free adoption of twelve-tone procedures. Because of the syntactical consistency of this twelve-tone style, there is an immediate auditory association among all the materials of the different episodes. Berger exploits these associations by evolving a fluid continuity in which passages are interchanged and reintroduced with unusual freedom. The form itself is motivated by the dramatic idea of opposing active and passive elements, setting kinesis against stasis. The energetic opening chords and figurations become the active principles, the structural pillars, of the entire Quartet. Following their exposition and working-out in the first movement, they struggle to return throughout the rest of the piece, but are always dissolved into an increasingly pervasive quietude. Finally, a kind of immobility emerges from a texture made of quiet, sustained arrangements of one of the structural chords.

At the very end, a last suggestion of motion is left suspended; thus the conclusion remains, in a sense, unstated. The quartet medium is composed into, transcendently—the music creates itself in striking timbral and contrapuntal inventions which call to mind, in substance more than manner, the two Carter quartets. The exemplary performance was by the precociously accomplished young Lenox Quartet.

## Arthur Berger (1912-2003)

May 1964:

And in Arthur Berger's Chamber Music for Thirteen Players, ideas that derive from characteristically Webernian, Schoenbergian, and Stravinskyan sources are crystallized and transformed by an acute and sensitive compositional ear into a delicate fabric where the distinctions between lines and fragments, polyphonies and sustained sounds, rhythmic energy and ornamental ramification, are kept in a subtle and elusive flux which responds palpably to the minutest gradations of change.

December 1964:

*Polyphony*, played in October by the Boston Symphony, is one of those works that ultimately generate a far more powerful originality than their surfaces initially give away; this is the fundamentally Stravinskyan aspect of the piece, rather than the few details of texture and melody which can be associated more immediately with Stravinsky's music. And in any case, the surface is itself so full of striking details of sonority and rhythm, particularly the elastic registral and time spacing, and such a sensitivity to the qualities of every musical moment, that each attack appears vividly differentiated from each other, and seems to require its own special performance nuance. But underneath its tensile, brittle surface, *Polyphony* develops a unique synthesis of "diatonic" and "chromatic", in which the juxtaposition of familiar but traditionally disparate elements creates a whole complex of new linear and harmonic relationships. Similarly, the familiar ideas of recurrence and contrast are transformed into a dramatic duality between energy and quiescence; passages of great apparent activity, such as the opening, have an equality of rhythmic accentuation which overtakes them from within with a progressive stasis that eventually engulfs the entire texture; the succeeding "calm" passages are undermined by an inner rhythmic turbulence which drives the texture into activity once again. The climax is in the final section, which repeatedly but unavailingly gropes for the opening; at the very end, the two ideas are violently juxtaposed as the violins virtually try to tear through the registral roof over an insistent, unvarying one-note tremolo—the ultimate expression in music of extreme energy without real movement—which persists to become the final sound. Erich Leinsdorf seemed genuinely to *conduct* this piece, effectively controlling most of its ferociously difficult rhythmic transitions. Aside from the thrill of hearing, for once, all the components of a chord, from bass to glockenspiel attack, simultaneously, and of hearing a fullbodied mass of strings really produce a single line of sound, the unfair comparison of this performance with the original one by the brave but barely professional Louisville Orchestra only proves the necessity of having our most accomplished ensembles available to perform our significant new music.

## Benjamin Boretz

March 1965:

(in an article singled out by Morton Feldman for explicit diabolization; see “Boola Boola”, reprinted in *Give My Regards to 8th Street*):

[John] Perkins is a mature and resourceful student of Arthur Berger; his work has that quality of careful measurement of musical space and distance, and of the maximum deployment of available possibilities within a drastically limited articulative range, which I think of as quintessentially Berger-like.

February 1967:

Arthur Berger’s *Two Episodes* (1933), surely among the first American attempts at 12-tone composition, are remarkably mature in technique and invention, with a “harmonic”, “phraseological” control of the 12-tone unfolding that is astonishingly sophisticated for such an early attempt by a 21-year-old composer in a direction whose ostensible further pursuit in his own work was deferred for a twenty-year “neoclassic” interim. This aspect of the *Episodes* also anticipates, indeed illuminates, some of the special qualities of continuity and sonority that made Berger’s music the most “internally” generated, as well as the most externally original, of the Stravinsky school—those characteristics that led to Berger’s being described as a “diatonic Webern”.

You have to hang in with all of this if you want to get the feel of my sense of what an unquenchable lifelong vocation it represents – in a person who was commonly dismissed in slicker circles as an overintellectual dilettante (hard to see back then how the awkwardness was more Proustian exactitude than Procrustean constriction). It’s hard, too, because it went on through the rest of 91 years. But because we were teacher-student, learner-learner, composer-composer, editor-coeditor, nonleader-nonfollower, irritant-counterirritant, for so many years, so much of our lives, it’s probably way too close, most poignantly for me, to call.

### **Recordings (mostly CDs, but necessarily some LPs):**

Intermezzo, Bagatelle  
Sylvia Marlowe, harpsichord  
Decca DL10021 (LP)

Duo No. 2 for Violin and Piano (1950)  
Paul Zukofsky, violin  
Gilbert Kalish, piano  
Desto 6436/47 (LP) — a sensational 3-record collection of modern violin music

## Arthur Berger (1912-2003)

Three Pieces for two pianos (1961)  
Serenade Concertante (1944; revised 1951)  
String Quartet (1958)  
Two Episodes (1933)  
Chamber music for 13 players (1956)  
Paul Jacobs and Gilbert Kalish, pianos  
Robert Helps, piano  
Lenox String Quartet  
Columbia Chamber Ensemble; Gunther Schuller, conductor  
Brandeis Festival Orchestra; Izler Solomon, conductor  
CRI CD 622

Septet  
Five pieces for piano  
Robert Miller, piano  
Arthur Weisberg  
Contemporary chamber Ensemble  
New World Records NW 308

Duo No. 1 for violin and piano  
Quartet for Woodwinds (1941)  
Duo for Cello and Piano  
Duo for Oboe and Clarinet  
Trip for Guitar, Violin, and Piano  
New World NW 360-2

Suite for Piano four-hands  
Perspectives III  
David Kopp, Rodney Lister, pianos  
New World CD 80536-2

The Complete Orchestral Music  
Ideas of Order (1952)  
Perspectives II (1985)  
Serenade Concertante (1944, revised 1951)  
Prelude, Aria, and Waltz (1982)  
Polyphony (1956)  
Boston Modern Orchestra Project  
Gil Rose, conductor  
New World 80605-2

The Complete Works for Solo Piano  
Episodes (1933)  
Fantasy (1942)  
Rondo (1945)  
Three Bagatelles (1946)  
Partita (1947)  
Four Two-Part Inventions (1948-49)  
Three One-Part Inventions (1954)  
Five Pieces for Piano (1969)  
Birthday Cards (1980-1994)  
Geoffrey Burleson, piano  
Centaur CRC 2593

## **On Facing Front**

Let's say you're on your way to the concert – a sitdown, frontfaced concert.

And you've got some grounds for hope.

Also for anxiety.

From score and CD you know the music inside out.

(That's no problem: CD's, tapes, LP's, whatever.)

Now it's going to happen "live".

That's a problem:

not because the performance won't rise to the level of your CD ( — it won't);

nor because the acoustics at your seat would be a joke in your Home Entertainment Center;

nor because the fat guy next to you hogs the armrest and reads his program;

nor because you'll have to dream up a mouthful of congratz for the Green Room;

no. Let's say a lifetime of practice has grown you the chops to get thru all that. (Like surface noise on 78's.)

Moreover you'll concede that "live" can in some cases – depending on the music – be an outright Good Thing.

Depending on the music.

### **I.**

Depending on the music.

If on CD in your HEC a favorite symphony comes off for you in some mental space both ampler and less private than home;

comes off for you more as an authorized revelation vouchsafed to all of us than as an intimacy for you alone;

then that music sets you up just right for the fleshing-out which it familiarly takes on in its conventional, "live", milieu.

## On Facing Front

Fleshing-out, that is:

fleshing-out as a seen, suprapersonal, enactment; in an overarching, devoted, enclosure; sheltering a communion of cognoscenti.

Suprapersonal: you bet. (You were indignant once when a TV-shot isolated the bassoonist.)

And speaking of Audience Participation: there you have it in its full range and depth:

It incorporates Us as Us incorporates It:

our rapt, common, mutually reinforced immersion in this well-sanctioned drama is every bit as integral to this score, to this sound, as the String Section. (You do understand that those Germans knew their business.)

But tonite isn't the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. Or the touring philharmonic.

So update. How about that piece of Reuben's.

They did it "live" last month.

A different thing.

Electronic: not a soul to look at.

But still a good thing.

At home on CD it sounds space-age spacey. Outerspacey.

Not addressed to anyone; or by anyone: boop/crunch/swish/ding: not For you; not Against you.

Double cool. Doesn't mess with you. Just occurs.

A natural for 8-channel surround-sound in the darkened concert hall which fleshes it out —

— or which it fleshes out —

— vividly — (Was there video?)

as a cosy, vaguely bounded subspace (— subarticulated by our own bodily presences —)  
of the pleasingly random flickers amidst which our disparate subjectivities drift  
( — in no particular direction — ) irrelevantly, — but unrepudiated.

J K Randall

(Of course, you always claim that Audience is a Clump concept anyway. Participating or no. Demeaning.

So you've fussed around with stuff like Noninvidious Interactions – including Sonic Plus. Stuff that's Good for the Soul. (And for the sound, by the way.) Anarchist Community, Pine Cones, like that.

But what worries you tonite would seem to dwell Deep in the Heart of, or at least Grafted Bulbously onto the Skin of, Composition.)

So think humanoid.

All that music that flourishes “live” in the keeping of onstage soloists.

Skip what's written so they can show off. Or to show off. The stuff that makes us witnesses, appraisers, judges. Not partakers.

Take something personal, intimate even: like, say, one of the Nocturnes.

Doesn't need “live” to flesh it out. (Doesn't Proclaim to the Multitude.)

Just that sideways pianist up there. (No harm, no foul.)

Or does it?

Does it do something potent, precisely by reaching out to you in a crowd, by speaking to you of personal fancies and aspirations in a crowd, by Singling You Out in your inmost whatnots in a crowd?

(It's not the collective that daydreams & throbs & surges, is it.)

And another thing: (this one you've heard before): does it speak To you?

— or For you, in your behalf (: like a priest, or shaman; facing not us, but facing as we face).

(Sideways. Ambivalent.) (not Miles: he'd turn his back on you.)

Either way, it extracts you, Liberates You, from your prop, the assembled collective. And you soar.

(That time you saw Liberace swivel his head to plant a Loud Wink on the camera after a Tastylick (no doubt fleshing it out) you about puked.)

(GAP5 speaks neither To nor For.

## On Facing Front

In fact, it's arresting. Arrests: suspends time, and your vital processes.

"Live", you're in church:

A sparse congregation. The quiet executant. A yawning pianomouth, overlooking.)

With a crooning chantuzy, it's twistier.

Her CD's whisper sweet nothings.

(Whether in your ear or out your mouth is your call.)

Going "live" is sneaky; pseudo.

At this public airing of coded offers, of secret innuendos, we're energized, even titillated. (Cf Ben's m/c/g on the Mahler Adagietto.)

Aural viagra.

But not really.

You don't have to admit anything. — to yourself or anyone:

just publicly endorse Undisclosure & palpitate; in unison; in one hallowed smirk.

(Not merely a good thing: nor merely a fleshing-out:

an Added thing: a Transformed thing.)

More on the up-'n-up is that duo (: not Your duo).

That guitar & souped-up fiddle duo. Gave concerts a good name.

On their CD, the light, interpenetrating improvisational touch of the intimately attuned.

Sharing & Caring. With elegance and intricacy.

Not heatedly consuming one another; but sensitively focused on what they're doing;

unostentatiously conjoined to nurture what they're nurturing ( – namely, the next generation in a tradition of (let it pass) Norwegian fiddling).

The realized piece isn't quite the point; doesn't separate out as a transferable, renewable entity – and is in that sense transitory;



its Burden — not that it is or isn't Norwegian, but that it's a style and tenor of a model human interaction transpiring as sound in your very ear — outweighs its particularities.

“Live”, our attention falls upon Dan & Monica, facing each other; and upon ourselves: discreetly sharing as they share, & caring as they care.

(Face it, lefties: FamilyValues are looking good here.)

But tonite's duo is something else again.

## II.

Spiritually, forget it. (Cf. prognote.)

It's for saxophonist and trapdrummer.

And you wrote it.

For yesaroun'. Eric Hewitt, saxophones; Sam Solomon, percussion.

By reputation, and from rehearsal, you know these guys can play.

You just don't know what you've got.

Sure, off & on you've dug plenty of sides by Sidney/Hawk/Pres/Ben/Stan/Lee/Gerry/  
2Sonnys/Trane/Albert/Eric/Ornette/Henry/James/Hamiet/also Max Roach;

(not Bird though; you badmouthed Bird)

but when it comes to actually writing for saxophones/and/or/percussion you don't know your ass from your elbow.

Furthermore you claim to be dead in the head for percussion: boop/crunch/swish/ding, right?

That's why you went and bought yourself a \$1000 drum machine. Bone up on Africa, India, & Japan so you can write for trapset.

Oops.

Well, no.

That's where the Secondhand Korg comes in: MIDI:

(saxes too — and not too bad if steady tones at steady volumes is where you're at.)

## On Facing Front

(The percussion runs from middling to yukko; the skins are the worst — sound like cardboard.)

So drive MIDI thru a Korg X5DR with Sibelius2 on a PowerMac G3 and who needs yesaroun'?

(That's really what's been on your mind all along, isn't it.)

Well, we've got a name for guys like you: Midicomposers. You've addicted yourself down in your cellar to tweaking MIDI to the max and burning it onto CD so you can play it for your friends and issue it on Open Space. Let "live" get lost. You think your CD is It. The Real Thing. You even claim that you can perform GAP7 better on MIDI than you already did ( & recorded) yourself on a Concert Steinway (Martin egged you on with flattery) in Taplin Hall. Shapes the ebb & flow of "the whole" so much better: the flavor, the physiognomy, of the details: — (you even get your jollies off brainless correct execution once in a while) — just the ax happens to be crappy: pinchthroated, shortwinded, unresonant, tinny (occasionally) verging on clank. (But that's OK. We've all learned to love HonkyTonk Upright. You even took your Steinway tapes of GAP 1<sup>st</sup> batch and gussied 'em up in the editing studio to sound cheezy, honkytonky.) By the time you learned how to fake a kinder, gentler touch on MIDI (: pp on a rest before the note, then hairpin dim. into the note, with special care for the % on the hairpin), you were already going sour on the feel of Operator Intervention, of Applied Grace; so you eased up on it: went for an instrumental space like The Spanish Prisoner (: Campbell Scott & Rebecca Pidgeon), not Olivier & Leigh. (But you still composed-out (i.e., faked) some sympathetic resonance.) In short, if you can't lick it, join 'em. Or if you can't lick 'em, join it. Whatever. Write saxtones that Don't Lust for shmear or gliss or cresc/dim. Write music for MIDI that's Of MIDI: that Conforms to MIDI; that Exploits MIDI. After a few months of this you were quite satisfied with yourself.

Then one day you're grooving on something altogether else — an instrumental CD by Barbara White — and unbidden out of the blue it strikes you:

your piece doesn't speak for itself.

(Those were your actual unspoken words, later spoken: "My piece Doesn't Speak For Itself.")

Whereupon you spoke For it. Wrote a Prognote. (Purports to model itself on the music's "flavors of continuity". Sort of a Libretto.) Good luck.

Which prognote, workshopped, was welcomed by some (Paul/Steve/Dmitri), disdained by others (Arthur/Ben).

(Now you say read it more like those late Melville prose Intros that bring you up to speed to embark on the poem.)

You even printed up some Posters featuring key chuckleworthy words & phrases from the prognote, to be displayed one at a time stage front during the relevant stretch of music.

(Went over well with Ruth/Benji/Jack/Sammy (wife/Springer/cat/cat).)

But then you got cold feet. You pulled up short.

You balked.

What were you after? A Theatrical?

No.

Earfood.

A “fleshing-out”?

(You wish.)

Earthlight!

(Nice work if you can get it.)

(Check out the LP.) (Onstage, Earl scattered the few performers around — out-of-touch — hand-in-glove with the lost, disembodied, music. (Beckett’s words, incorporated, help.) (Yours, not, don’t.) (You’ve got Distraction, is what you’ve got. Contraction. Reduction. Substitution. Liberace’s Loud Wink slathering cosmetics on clear skin, gilding the lily, signing ambivalence on the dotted line.))

So get back to what the music is like. Is.

Are you willing to say of it now what you say of GAP7 — that it’s for You (i.e., me) Alone?

(Your actual unspoken words were “It’s for Me (i.e., you) Alone.”.)

Antisocial.

Not in the trivial sense of Nasty or Repellent. (It isn’t. GAP7 ranges from plain & simple to lofty & simple. Never dazzles or taxes or amazes. Is user friendly.)

But in the deep sense that it detaches you from what we all know & approve of and are prepared to admire (: from the collectivity of Us; from groupthink), and deposits you in your own juice, where sociality is an irritant, where only You and Everything belong.

## On Facing Front

### III.

You still seem to think you're 6 or 7 monks facing each other in a circle in a sublevel of San Miniato.

(A gem.) (They don't let anybody else down there.)

(You need purple robes for that gig.)

Impeccable chanting, every 3 or 4 hours without fail.

An obligation, not a performance.

They aren't addressing us. Nor is the music.

Onlookers (like you), from entrylevel, there are. Tourists. Transients. Eavesdroppers. Communicants. But never acknowledged.

Or Tibetan.

(You couldn't onlook them at all until the commies exiled 'em into showbiz.) (They strike gongs and blow thru tubes like yesaroun'.)

But nevermind onlooking. You early on noticed something major about monks.

Their LP's are a gas.

Not for human consumption;

addressed inward & upward;

— not toward a hypothesized Us, an Audience —

they powerfully attract.

Powerfully attract Whomever.

Does GAP7 "live" aspire to the condition of monkchant eavesdropped upon?

Sure.

Watching you onstage in concert for one-and-three-quarter hours majesterially exacerbate the Steinway for Yourself (i.e., . . . .) Alone was like deeply experiencing the film of a stand-in deeply experiencing a film.

IV.

“If performers can sustain gripping music while ignoring you, why can’t you by ignoring them?  
What happened to those Lifetime Chops?”

But this one isn’t GAP7.

This one bobs & weaves thru way too much musical & social association & memory to suck  
Your Own Juice onto center stage, — to close inward on Itself Alone.

Haven’t we got here an aural, musical, analog to eyeballed, printed, “closet drama”?

A piece whose fluidly colored, shiftingly configured, aural landscape demands to be heard and  
not seen?

Whose associations and memories, kaleidoscopic with contradiction and impossibility, no more  
solicit “fleshing-out” or concerted reception than Hardy’s Dynasts solicits winged sprites or a  
Standing O?

At home on CD, the saxes and percussion (: to wit, the MIDI semblants thereof) create an  
interlockingly multiplexed aural space whose integrated feel militates against any simple duality  
of all sax sounds vs. all percussion sounds;

onstage, out of the closet, won’t the visible, inescapable duality of {saxes-over-there} vs.  
{trapset-over-here} enforce a world of incommensurably two-part counterpoint?

At home on CD, tight, tense percussion Sentences jerk you hither & yon across the ramifying  
multispace;

onstage, out of the closet, won’t Ease of Reach to this that & the other nearby surface loosen,  
defuse, denature, and in fact Desententialize them, converting them to assemblages, demos —of  
effects on an aurally flat plane?

At home on CD, close-fitting sotto voce percussion kibitzes — all mixed up with, looping all in  
& around, the sax;

onstage, out of the closet, won’t kibitzing become a nifty display of ensemble virtuosity, as the  
drummer lays it in there in the interstices with dazzling rhythmic fidelity?

(Not half bad. Just wholly Other.)

And at home on CD, there are silences. — silences burdened assortedly.

## On Facing Front

There's the silence of this, the silence of that. The silence of Expansive Dissipation; the silence of The Freeze; the silence of Let's Start Over; the silence of Resigned Defeat; the silence of Alert Anticipation; the silence of . . . . . & of . . . . .

onstage, out of the closet, gimme a break. There's Those Waits.

( "a silence where hath been no sound" ; "a silence where no sound may be" )

Can there be any feint at congruent behavior that won't get creamed in the dichotomy of {HornSwitch + ReedSoak + ClampReed + TongueTest + NowBlow} vs. {Not}?

(You stationed yourself once, illicitly, at the side of the screen of a Balinese shadowpuppet show, screenedge bisecting the bridge of your nose, your left eye watching the "backstage" scramble of puppet-manipulating, prop-swapping, and furniture-adjusting; while your right eye watched the flat puppetshadows, the sole occupants of the screen, which the frontfacing audience, none the wiser, watches, and is supposed to watch, from its folding chairs in the converted gym. Prince Whosis bugging Princess Whatsis. With your left eye you watch the performing; with your right, what's performed. Talk about Counterpoint.)

Sam's question to you, upon first looking over your score, was: What is this music about? How are we to present it? Is it sort of a funny sendup of jazz?

Later you added a couple of measures here and there; sharpened up the waits in the first Honky Hotcha; polished a rhythm; changed a few tempos slightly. (Still falls flat where it used to sparkle.)

(Ben likes it, though.)

But that's your problem. That's the discrepancy between what you hoped you wrote and what you think you wrote.

(Isn't it doubtful that you'll answer?)

Congruence you're after. Of the performing, to what's performed.

(But the physicalities of pianist-in-action are as close as you're likely to get.) (I mean it's tough with tubing & whackables.)

And not too obvious either.

(Or you'll start yakking some more about Liberace.) (You'll make a speech about how the "mentation of musiclistening" is too complex, too self-contained, too creatively "sui generis", to suffer mickeymousing without shrinkage, without making for laughs.)

Yet withal, worse looms:

Blatant Incongruence.

Gross, to the point of changing the subject;

to the point of betrayal of what you call (— with not much sophistication I'm afraid —)  
“the music”, or “the piece”.

(i.e., whatever you imagine you wrote that you figure you're entitled to hear).

Those convoluted, closetly innards of your piece — imposed on openly straightforward  
frontfacing duality — will they not doom yesaroun' to be in the wrong No Matter What?  
— and in the very act of performing splendidly?

— doom them to be like James Brown or Fischer-Dieskau, whose words-based sonic outputs all  
too brilliantly trash the song?

— or like the movie of an Oldtime Radio broadcast? (You watch 3 or 4 actors playing 7 or 8  
roles, standing, sitting, all reading from scripts into a central mike, switching places occasionally,  
speaking pokerfaced in impassioned, rounded, intonations and articulations, while the effects  
man does his impersonation of a one-armed paperhanger impersonating a one-man band,  
blowing, banging, scraping, yowling, stomping, cranking, . . . . . , . . . . . ,  
. . . . . ) Did Prince Whosis impress Princess Whatsis? Or was it WonderWoman chasing  
jewelthieves thru the midtown sewer system? (The answer: Maybe and Maybe. Whadda you  
care? From where you sit, it's Whoopdydoo — a different story.)

So the moment of institutionalized misapprehension arrives.

They face us. We face them. And the question still nags.

(This was the question all along, wasn't it.)

What did you ever do that unabashedly, secondthoughtlessly, faces front and comes right-at-you  
blown thru a tube or whacked off a vibratory doohickey?

— ever do that invites unabashed, secondthoughtless, reception by multiple frontfacing  
receivers consolidated in parallel?

And consider this:

The Audience, this particular gathering, or any particular gathering, is as many different things,  
is as many ilks of solidarity, or plurality, or mistake, as there are burdens, perhaps  
as there are pieces, for it to undergo.

(The answer is not easy.)

JKR September 2003

**Program note for shouldn't we talk ? :**

*Forget Weirdnesses ( : amazing multiphonics, sonic matches, extended resources, & all that ) .*

*What I'm after, needs Ordinary; needs, as between percussion and saxophones, the bald incommensurability that estranges them right there in their most routine, everyday, doings — like banging on stuff vs. playing tunes.*

*Roughly, here's how my 4 mvmts go : {**\*Your Attention Please\***}*

**I.**

Carnybark [BARI+PERC] hawks the World's Tallest Midget (Or Somesuch), whose brief Strut [PERC] Gets Nowhere.

[A puzzled **SILENCE** ensues.] → ??Start Over?? ←1

Yo! [BARI] Go! PERC assents.

& Solos Sententially.

ALTO unbuttons a jazzy, Practiceroom voice; whose licks PERC registers, then Waxes Sentential Again (giving carnybark the grand go-by), and stumbles into A Sludgy Groove. where SOPR infiltrates, Gabbles (flustering PERC), Narcissistically takes over, Pirouettes Out Of Orbit, and earns **#the gong#**.

— whereupon PERC solicits, & delivers, a Forceful Anti-war Speech — Sentential — Mostly On Drums.

Encouraged (or is it heckled) by PERC, TENOR (a beginner with a halting investment in rhythm) Huffs Manfully to embrace phrase 2 of The Sheetmusic Version of **Body & Soul**.

**II.**

A Grandfatherly Rumination Pathetique [BARI] leads to A Cheap [+PERC] Funeral, which peters out in A Blaze Of Damped [SOPR+PERC] Ascension.

**III.**

Revamping Failures Familiar From Mvmt I, TENOR and PERC re-emerge in A Partnership Of Convenience; in which "**fft, CaCa**" supports Some Honky Hotcha, whose Addlecrotched Unraveling earns a {tasteful} **gong**.

Aping the sustained **SILENCE** surrounding the gong,  
A Sustained Blast by TENOR kicks off A Supercautious Game



Of Virtual Checkers — in which You Can't Tell whether they're playing each other, or Against Us. Whichever, a Rigorously Plausible Upshot earns **the gong** and an embarrassed **SILENCE**. (*Silence, here, is always realworld silence: never GaGaLand, as in **GAP5**, where time floats as space.*)

Thus It Is, that in The Doldrums Of Nothing-To-Do — abruptly, some honky hotcha resuscitates; but its even feebler unraveling again earns **the gong**. Which heralds Some More (or is it more) Of The Same virtual checkers. Which is — (in turn) — (again) — **gonged**. Yet These Guys Won't Quit; and this time contrive to simulate A Consequential Consummation, which seems, for a hopeful moment, to spring us into the clear; — but : — {**gong**} — we are abandoned, in thrall to a Resigned, Drained, **SILENCE**.

Now that any imaginable remnant of energy has dispersed, PERC ushers in the only genuine patch of The Real Thing to be found here: namely, a ripoff of a Gerry Mulligan [+BARI] countermelody to ***Love Me Or Leave Me***; which is rowdily squelched by carnybark, re-appearing In Cameo.

However, enough PERC-energy leaks across the subsequent **SILENCE** to incite Supranatural Inversions Of Race & Gender, as ALTO lolls on the concluding lick from ***Lonely Woman*** — a reverse from which mvmt III won't recover. ALTO turns out to be a Quite Persuasive, if histrionic, diva, who enacts for us A Comprehensive Madscene with which we cannot help but Empathize!! PERC attends closely, and works its way thru a responsive, Noticeably Hypersentential, interior monologue, which blossoms into a running Explanatory Aside To Us, and Outlasts The Outsneaking Diva.

#### IV.

Sensible of, nor intimidated by, a Jagged Landscape of PERC splatts, SOPR rises, by Steps Admittedly Logical, up into the stratosphere, where ***The Saints Go Marching In*** on their 1st 4 notes, in augmentation — outfoxing the stars.

{\*Continuity, consecution, in this precis, is, of course, surreal.\*}  
{\*as music is.\*}

—JKR

(one more little review)

**Shouldn't We Talk?**  
(jkr)

The subjects are obvious.

(Just listen.)

Lots of opinions too.

(You may not agree.)

(Don't have to.)

It's pure temporality,

in 4 mvts..

(But not any temporal evolution ever anywhere anytime.)

(The indensity takes a big lot of getting used to.)

(If you listen.)

(So listen.)

-- B.A.B. Feb. 2003

*Reflections of an American Composer* by Arthur Berger, 2002. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

*Paul Bowles on Music*: Includes the Last Interview with Paul Bowles by Paul Bowles, Irene Hermann (Interviewer/Editor), Timothy Mangan (Editor), 2003. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Reviewed by Alan Rich

Two recent items from the University of California Press, too small for the wisdom they contain, provide some interesting insights on American music-making and creative attitudes over the last several decades. One is *Paul Bowles on Music*, a collection of writings by the late man-of-many arts during the years (1935-46) of his gainful employment as music critic on the New York scene. The other is the *Reflections of an American Composer* by Arthur Berger, at 91 still very much with us and with it. This also has a few scraps from his time as music critic, but not nearly enough; the greater substance deals with Berger's memories of the pitched battle between music's ardent practitioners, a listening public whose collective ears always seem to life immediately out of reach, and the stern judges whose powers of determination may impede the back-and-forth flow of acceptance and rejections. As with Bowles, Berger's field of vision begins somewhere in the 1930s, but continued right up to a few hours ago\*.

Both men were members of a confraternity that has pretty much gone out of existence: both were practicing, ardent, serious composers, employed by one newspaper, the New York Herald Tribune where their chores often entailed writing about the music of their colleagues and competitors. The man who ran the Trib's music department, Virgil Thomson, saw nothing wrong with this interesting conflict; it was balanced by the exceptional acuity and experience of its members. (Lou Harrison, John Cage and Theodore Chanler were other sporadic members of this ambidextrous assemblage.) Between the lines of both these books is a panorama of an active musical life in New York most of all, but also on other East Coast outposts with composers, mostly young, chased back from their European strongholds by the growing Nazi spectre, and striving with all their might to establish an American musical identity. (Interesting comparison: coincident with this rising tide of Americanism on the New York scene was the sudden emergence of Los Angeles as a kind of Europe-in-exile, with Stravinsky and Schoenberg, Toch and Castelnuovo-Tedesco, exploding into awareness through the "Evenings on the Roof" concerts and similar activities.)

Berger's *Reflections* become a series of battlefield reports; he delights in dualities. In music criticism there was Virgil, whose entry onto the Trib consisted of taking a bloody bite out of the rival Times's sacred cows, the symphonies of Jan Sibelius. Paul Rosenfeld, the unpredictable gadfly in all the arts, faces off in a Berger essay against B.H. Haggin of the narrow and woefully predictable tastes; the two most ardent proponents of new-music adventure, conductors Serge Koussevitzky and Dimitri Mitropoulos, cross swords even as they seem to join the battle on the same side.

\*Arthur Berger died on October 7, 2003 (Eds.).

Alan Rich

There is a brief teaser of Berger's critical prowess; I hope there'll be more. From a few brief scraps we learn nothing we couldn't learn again today: the Shostakovich's Sixth consists mostly of emptiness, that there is genuine power in the music of Leon Kirchner, promise in the then-young Ned Rorem's music, and less in the music of George Rochberg. In the Bowles collection (edited, with obvious enthusiasm if a few proofreading slips, by the OC Register's Tim Mangan) the Shostakovich Sixth fares even less well: "the esthetic of the billboard rather than of the canvas." That guy could write.

The Bowles collection begins with freelance pieces for Modern Music, that noble light in the darkness that flickered out in 1946. You have to be struck immediately by the range of his interests: black jazz in its raw vitality, a prescient note on Silvestre Revueltas and, most interesting of all, a gathering of insightful film-music essays whose profundity no writer of by acquaintance seems to match these days. Film music, to Bowles in 1940, was an art to be taken seriously, spread-eagled across the same standards that might apply to opera or cantata before a live audience; did it occur to any other critic to deal so seriously with the "gilt and plush horror" of Disney's Pinocchio, or to note that "Franz Waxman's score for Rebecca is not even as good as Hitchcock's direction." This is criticism with a perspective that nobody else I know of has even bothered to attain.

The Trib stuff is outstandingly bright and knowing; maybe something can be said about composers as critics, but surely nothing can be wrong with an honest-to-God writer invading the sacred precincts of our art. Paul Bowles' musical writing chronicles the discoveries and determinations of a graceful and wise mind. To this writer, struggling with the agonies a week after spinal surgery when every turn of phrase is extruded from the word-processor with the twist of a blunt-edge scalpel, the discovery of this kind of writing is like therapy at its coolest, most soothing.

Of Walter Piston Arthur Berger wrote that "he was someone who seemed to be completely self-possessed...he always spoke good sense." Piston was the American educational eminence of his day, comparable in stature to Nadia Boulanger in Paris; everybody had to walk through his shadow at one time or another. Today his music is in the shadows, even though his large-scale works the eight symphonies above all also speak good sense. It's hard to remember back to days at Harvard, when this beautifully terse, organized music was the newest, and the most fearsome, stuff in the local concert halls.

The Second Symphony stirs special memories. At Harvard I was an about-to-become-lapsed pre-med, my love of the place sustained only by music classes with the exhilarating G. Wallace Woodworth. Woody got the nod to guest-conduct the Boston Symphony in the premiere of the Piston Second, and we in the class got to his dress rehearsal. It was the first piece of music by a living, visible composer I ever knew. It was then what it is now, a clear, neatly cohesive work that you could take into a classical-sonata-form class and locate all the points — tidy and expressive, with a drop-dead-beautiful slow movement. Naxos, that splendidly adventurous company, has just reissued the Gerard Schwarz recording (formerly costlier, on Delos.) It beautifully fills out the aura around these fine new books.

## 2 Reports from the LITSK Festival (Princeton, November 2003)

Ted Coffey: *Georgia, etc.*:

Newton Armstrong

"An assemblage of electroacoustic spaces and gestures, and recordings of environments on Earth, mediated by selections from a well-known track by Ray Charles—Georgia On My Mind." That's the program note, and that about sums it up. But as the strange coherence of this music emerges, the sense of discrete spaces and gestures dissolves. This is not an assemblage that has been thrown together from a collection of prefabricated parts. The material unfolds into spaces and gestures, and these spaces and gestures are unfolded in turn, at always higher levels of articulation, until the assemblage, the expression machine that is more than the sum of these parts, draws into focus. But the assemblage is not a stable entity. It's made of incongruous lines and perceptual discontinuities, and the already opaque semantics of the recorded materials is always—and always unexpectedly—called into question by the appearance of new materials and aggregations. This music is subtle, weird and devoid of heroics. It's the kind of music that still resonates for days after you've heard it, and its spaces and gestures continue to form into new and extraordinary geometries.

**Listening, Watching and Being in the Moment**  
**Experiencing the Hermeneutics of Music and Dance**  
**In Paul Lansky's and Mark Haim's Collaborative Project "In the Moment"**

**Dániel Péter Biró**

**Darkness**

The lights fall. Mark, the dancer sits on stage as I am sitting in my seat. People are sitting around me. Everyone has his or her own seat. Our seats are uniformly comfortable. We are separated from each other as we are separated from Mark on stage. In the beginning we are all in the dark.

**The Illumination of Time**

Paul shines his light on a clock. Paul uses sound like a photographer uses light; he makes perceptible that which is already there. As he shines his light on a clock I hear a clock. This clock is not a clock but only the sound of a clock. But the light he shines on the clock, as he records its sound and plays it to back for us, is real, even as we are still in the dark. The sound of the clock is passing through me and around me but its periodicity does not allow me to perceive the time it occupies. Neither does the low, thumping percussive sound help me to feel a temporal flow. I feel only the space in this darkness. The sound of the clock rotates around me and becomes a metaphor for "clock." The time that it produces is not real time but simply "time passing." This cipher for time itself becomes an object that circles around me in the space like the movement of a second hand. Paul and Mark's piece about time invokes the motion of a timepiece. The sound of the stable clock becomes its own movement; "clock" is no longer the metaphor of the actual object, as it has been transformed into a verb. In our digital age, this clock sound and motion point to the past, creating an ironic nostalgia. The functionality of this composed time is no longer simply temporal but spatial.

**The Movement of the Body**

A light creates a circle on the stage, circumscribing Mark's space. This is the face of the clock in which he will move. In this clock Mark sits, legs forward. His arms jut and twitch back and forth *around* himself as I hear the sound of the clock. A leg moves. An arm propels forward. These body parts seem to be as much part of his body as the speakers around me belong to my present hearing. It is not dance; it is independent movement of the dancer's body parts. The dancer and the listeners are confined to their space as the music is confined to its space. Even Mark's arms, legs and hands seem to be confined to their own independent existence, as though each were a separate machine. Each body part seems overly pragmatic and self-sufficient. As time has become a metaphor for space Mark's body is simply an object for his movement. This is movement and not gesture. This is not body movement but movement done by a body.

Mark is a body, not Mark's body, and this body is in no specified place. Seeing this alienated body located in generic space makes me aware of my own body in my own space. The music and movement happen *in* the same time but not *at* the same time. The movement is as independent from the music as is the arm is from the body. But as Mark's body moves *in* the same time of Paul's music, I question the created formal relationships between music and movement.

### **The Sound of Space**

This space is delimited by digital sound coming through speakers. It is a space for the movement of sound. It can only be a space and not a place, as the sounds remain metaphors of sounds, of instruments, of music. Paul's music seems to be already there; he simply shines light on his musical material in his acoustic space allowing us to hear it. In the same way, the clock, with its frighteningly objective aura, fades in and out of earshot, illuminating the synthetic temporality of the musical fabric like rays of sunlight. These momentary movements of light create sonorous spaces. As I become self-conscious of the "music" existing in "time" I become more aware of the layers of sonorous reference moving around me; I first hear "sound" in "time" by means of the illumination of the clock and then "music" in "space" by means of Paul's illumination of his musical material (pianos, synthesizers, percussion, claves, processed sound, etc.).

### **The Rhythm of the Moment**

Then I perceive a music that separates itself from the previous machine time: music as patterned body-like rhythm. It is only body-like as, in the same way, the circled patch of light only represents a fixed space but is not really fixed. This illusory space makes me question the space in which both music and dance occurs: the numbers on Paul's clock are his eight speakers just as Mark's clock is his circled patch of light. Both spaces reveal themselves to be un-fixed as they open, change and transform in the course of the piece.

The complex pulsating rhythms of Paul's music are deceptive, as their surface appears simple. On second hearing the industrial sound of the clock shows a complex beat pattern of 7/4, and the low percussive sounds in the beginning sometimes stop and start again, forming phrases of 9/4 and 13/4. Even the high organ-like pedal point seems to pulsate independently. The first melodic phrase-repetitions seem slightly out of time, as though their patterns are independent. In the course of the piece, I start to question this irregularity as these pulsating phrases reveal more of the face behind this clock, the voice within the machine. Suddenly a drum band enters – well, not really a drum band, but a drum band suspended in space, which then disappears. As the drum band enters, Mark suddenly starts to kick, move, throttle. As the previously autonomous parts of his body become a unity, I start to feel as though this drum band is perhaps *within* him. With this unity of body and drum band I become momentarily confused by high, resounding pitches of claves, simultaneously integrated and detached from the drum band. The aura of these claves takes me into the space of a meditation ritual, while the agitated pulsating of a synthetic piano, playing a seemingly harmless pattern, juxtaposes this meditative periodicity. Out of the piano motive evolves a longer, more ominous phrase that almost threatens to tip the piece over into an even more subjective space: the piano player is almost given a face. But like the drum band, the piano player must quickly take a time-out, and the synthetic sound quality of the illusory piano is replaced by synthesizer glissandi, which sound even more synthetic, thereby proving that the unreal is really not real. The fact that these instruments, which move between the real and the synthetic, are suspended in eight-channel space makes both Paul's encoding processes and the body of the dancer that much more real. The clock comes back full circle; its objective pulsating reminds me that my fun-time and my comfort in this space are only temporary: the clock is ticking and now it is no longer metaphorical. It is simply a clock. As the music finally moves to the space of silence, the theme of "clock" returns as a danced metaphor. This time his ticking is not revealed as a verb but as a noun, as Mark now rotates his body around the circle, imitating the second hand of the clock, the sound of which circles around me.

Through such temporal procedures, Paul illuminates the meaning of his clocks, pianos, drums, claves, synthesizers, and other, seemingly magical, electronic sounds. As I sit in the space of my seat, I hear him chart the scale between the real and unreal. This continuum becomes a space in which I am allowed to move via my ears. Simultaneously, I question the body of sound in the space as well as Mark's body and the space of my own body. Like Paul and Mark, I chart this space of the concert hall as they make me conscious of the space and the moment of "In the moment."

Tildy Bayar

Why are the creative ideas at the intersection of the arts and social or political activism so often so lame? Why do these ideas so often read like verbal points to be indexed, rather than incandesce like fully dimensionalized, materially embodied, organically communicative holistic experiences, to be absorbed and digested non-literally? Why, in other words, do activist (and, increasingly, other) artists so often seem to confuse making art with making language?

While European and American art may be seen to have oscillated between verbal-conceptual and holistic-experiential communicative strategies throughout the twentieth century, the widespread use of the latter arose in the 1950s and '60s, when the idea that activism might consist in suggesting alternatives to whatever was deplored spread among American artists. Artworks were no longer obligated to address social concerns explicitly (as had the populist art of the early century); instead their activism could consist in suggesting possibilities for creative action and experience which transcended mere literal opposition. The idea in making art against war, then, might be to offer a positive experience of something that was not war.

But by the mid-1980s this idea had become largely incomprehensible. We had come to believe that if an artwork is to be "activist," it must take a position on an issue; it must attempt to communicate this position explicitly to its receivers and to convince them that it is a correct position; and it must encourage some particular action in response to a "raised-consciousness" perception of this correct position. Our late-century definition of "art for or against" had shifted back to a primarily literal-linguistic rather than a creative-active one, just as in the larger culture we were turning away from a paradigm of shared experience (as evidenced by Happenings, communes, love-ins, Woodstock and "suburban wife-swapping," all of which became mediatized caricatures but nevertheless embodied an ethos), toward a dominant image of polarized group hostility, this tendency fuelled in large part by the demographic-based activism which, paradoxically, arose out of attempts to transcend demographics through activism (cf. the history of the New Left with regard to race and gender).

The (most recent) occasion for these thoughts was San Francisco's DSLRWest festival, which took place on October 3-5, 2003. DSLR is the Department of Space and Land Reclamation, an arts-activist group dedicated to the "occupation, intervention, recreation, and re-invention of public space". DSLR has been active in Chicago and New York for over five years; DSLRWest is a "newly-founded division," and the San Francisco weekend was its first endeavor. Converging on the city for "72 hours of nonstop" public-space reclamation were artists, activists, and artist-activists, who had dedicated their weekend to taking back the streets. A full schedule of projects may be found at [www.dslrwest.org](http://www.dslrwest.org); a partial list includes:

**Organic Man** and **Terminator**, costumed respectively as a giant, floppy green flower-creature and a realistic-looking video game machine. Terminator would sit motionless on busy street corners, looking from a distance like an abandoned video game, until approached, at which



point he would unfold giant square limbs and energetically walk around. Organic Man would bring a tiny plastic chair to an intersection, take up a position in the midst of street-crossing pedestrians, and repeatedly attempt to fit his puffy bulk into the chair. **BARGE**, the Bay Area Research Group in Enviro-Aesthetics, "re-mapped San Francisco's 49-Mile Scenic Drive for non-drivers". Their alternate route was decidedly un-"scenic", directing walkers "into the shadows of our urban landscapes". **Budget Gallery** "took over an underutilized, high traffic, outdoor space" for a "low-budget gallery art show". Artist **Erika Hannes** covered trees on heavily-trafficked Market Street with brightly-colored feathers and fabric, and invited other festival participants to do the same. **For Sale By Owner** "refuse[d] to recognize the ownership claims of the United States, the State of California, the City of San Francisco and a variety of corporate entities"; public auctions were held selling various public-for-a-day properties to members of the citizenry "at rock-bottom prices". Latex **Agit-Vomit**, which on close inspection contained pretzels and the initials GWB, was placed in bathrooms around the city. The **Ladies' Saturday Morning Stencil Club** stencil-tagged historically significant sites in order to contribute to their historical palimpsest. The **Migrant Sign Makers** reconfigured traffic signs to say things like "No parking if you make under \$30k/yr" and "No Peasants", and placed them at strategic points near the Stock Exchange and in the Union Square shopping district. **Teknika Radica** improvised music in women's restrooms and dressing rooms in order to illuminate "the problematics of gendered spaces". **Colectivo La Linea** materialized the maxim that "the history of everyday people is written on the streets" by having passers-by write on the street, creating a line of text from one part of the city to another. A project described as **Pigeon Sanctuaries** "screenprinted two large silhouettes of pigeons and pasted them on the front of [an abandoned Taco Bell] in a space that has been taken over by pigeons"; the project's originator continued, "I think it successfully signifies a sanctuary for pigeons. I will branch out from this site to advertise on behalf of the pigeons in the city." A **Professional Writer** set up a typewriter on a wooden box in the street, and advertised himself as available to write "love letters, novels, poems, resumes, post cards, letters of recommendation". **Numen Associates** replaced the T on STOP signs across the city with an H. "This linguistic disjunctive insertion creates confusion in the minds of consumers who begin to associate the word STOP with SHOP", posits their project description. **Interactive Mind Mapping** offered large chalk boards and chalk in various public locations such as subway stations, creating "a web of communal thoughts and associations around key words/themes". The **Department of Public Art** installed "Waste-High (and Higher) in E-Waste" at a busy city intersection; the installation in the heart of San Francisco's technobusiness district "made public the invisible mountains of electronic waste that are being fraudulently shipped to China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan". **Francis McIlveen** set up a podium and invited passers-by to sit and listen, or to step and "claim the authority (and thus power) that issues from podiums". The **Urban Swing Project** hung tree-swings at busy intersections and invited people to swing on them. In their spoof television show "Chicano/Chicana/Latino/Latina/Hispano/Hispana TECH TV", **Los Cybrids**, an arts-activist group who were groundlevel DSLRWest organizers, quizzed participants on their progress in "taking back the land for Mexico", in reference to the Treaty of the Virgen de Guadalupe Hidalgo which marked the end of the US-Mexico war and established current borders. **Make Out Now!** provided couples with "make-out suits", fluffy jackets with large enveloping hoods, for comfort during public displays of affection.

Must an activist viewpoint be incompatible with complex ideas? It would seem that another key difference between activist art of the 1920s-'30s and activist art now is reflected in the terms in which the problem to be addressed is described, as well as engaged. I might go so far as to tease out from among early 20<sup>th</sup> century activist artworks a genre of representation, wherein the representation itself contained an implicit ethical imperative – a play about starving slum children, for example, which painted their misery in stark colors but refrained from passing the hat afterwards. This “ethical representation” differs from latter-century consciousness-raising primarily in the complexity of its ideas. The former materializes an idea through the feel and sound and sight of particular textures; the latter skips that step and gets right to the objecting. The latter would seem to be the product of an increasingly mediated era wherein it is no longer possible for socioeconomic groups to be insulated from each other (and thus wherein pointing up inequalities no longer implies an ethical imperative; inequality is seen as merely the status quo).

Thus the toothlessness of many of the DSLR projects. It wasn't exactly that the projects, in practice, were all lame (many weren't). It wasn't exactly that the participants (except for a few) didn't seem to have much of an idea that they might be “reclaiming” public space for an actual reason that might actually affect people's lives, rather than making a momentary (and thus arbitrary) statement about the impossibility of actually doing so. (This was the primary difference I felt between many of these “neo-absurdist” projects and the “art-alternative to war” mentioned earlier.) Ultimately, DSLR as a whole left me with a sense of the extreme disengagement of (at least this instance of) activist art.

Probably part of my problem was that I wanted to get a sense of what the event created as a whole, but its components connected mainly through the symbolism of external ideas; and so another part of my problem, following from this, was that I tried to apprehend the aesthetic qualities of the pieces I experienced – and here I had mixed, if not confusing, results:

The Migrant Sign Makers' signs offered the experience of slogans in action, the visual analogue of a resounding Bronx cheer. The videotaped documentation showed the expected outcome: some appropriately outraged Suits doing double-takes while some security guys had a good chuckle, and even pointed out good places to put the signs.

Erika Hannes's fabric-bedecked trees could easily pass unnoticed on a visually noisy daytime garbage-strewn and graffiti-covered city street, but in nighttime fog, illuminated by street lights, the tree trunks turned to flickering, beckoning flame – the purest transformation of the environment into something visually arresting, sans interpretive layer.

Colectivo La Linea's line of text seemed the purest transformation in the opposite direction: the physical environment magically changed into a sign pointing to itself; and a complex idea about alternative histories reduced to the (radically relative) simplification that “what happens on the streets” at any given moment constitutes history to be documented. What was revealed in this performance was largely that a random conjunction of time, place and pedestrians will tend to produce inscriptions of a primal identity-assertive character, such as MARK LOVES JO or MMX WUZ HERE ROCK ON!.

Tildy Bayar

The Interactive Mind Map's "web of thought" featured "thought" at a level one might expect from participants scribbling the first things to come into their heads; it was difficult to tell what was supposed to be illustrated by the resulting "maps," except perhaps that the thoughts occurring to you might be remarkably like those which would occur to me when asked to free-associate for twenty seconds between trains.

Agit-Vomit seemed to be somewhat opaque to most bathroom observers.

I sat in a rickety chair in front of the Professional Writer's streetside desk while he typed a postcard to a child in New York for me, describing my weekend in San Francisco. Passers-by were immediately attracted to his 1930s-era manual typewriter; more than a few called out variations on "Where's your computer?". He took dictation, suggested a child-friendly joke (Q: What's brown and sticky? A: A stick), provided a stamp, charged me \$2, and discussed his interest in performing, as recontextualized, an act which had once been an indispensable form of social exchange, especially among immigrants in San Francisco.

Teknika Radica's problematizing instrumentalists, improvising politely and tunefully in stalls and dressing rooms, were largely ignored by bathroom users (and cleaners) in Macy's and by dressing-room users (and salespeople) in a Victoria's Secret store; they were cautiously observed from outside the bathroom by the manager of a fancy Union Square hotel, and sniffed at by several hotel patrons after their sound level rose, in search of a "rise," to racket proportions.

SHOP signs produced no noticeable confusion in downtown shoppers.

I'm interested in discovering activist art that might not only invent new forms in order to address inequities in a real way – rather than contributing comfortably, with observable rectitude and no perceivable real effect, to the noise in the channels that demarcate our lives these days – and that might, in the process, reimagine art in the spirit of activism, and reimagine activism in the spirit of art; and perhaps – in a Foucauldian spirit of play – reimagine each as "having something to do" rather than as "having something to say".

## Some remarks on *Zeitkratzer* and experimental programming

Julia Heimerdinger

This is an article focussing on *Zeitkratzer*, a Berlin based music (performer/ composer/improviser) ensemble. I suppose I should begin with a discussion of the term experimental music (cf. Michael Nyman: *experimental music. Cage and Beyond.*, 1974), or rather a discussion of its implications today, as it is used nowadays in a quite provocative way within a certain scene: mostly in the context of the promotion of someone's public image (musicians, ensembles or festivals).

*Zeitkratzer* is neither an experimental music ensemble nor a New Music Ensemble, nor anything like 'dedicated to the performance of particular new kinds of music'. They are actually hard to profile at all clearly. Looking at their very divergent repertoire and program(s) one rather gets the impression of a group wondering what different kinds of pieces, concepts and sounds it is able to realize, always referring to non-(if not un-) popular music from the 50s onwards. It therefore seems remarkable that there are no earlier pieces appearing (this could indeed be an interesting avenue to follow). Nevertheless, *Zeitkratzer* integrates the aesthetic emancipations of the composing avant-garde as well as the tonal openings of free improvised music, experimental rock-music, new electronic club sounds and noise. Their repertoire includes well-known avant-garde/minimal/experimental (etc.) classics such as Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Mikrophonie I*), Philip Glass (*Music in Fifths*), LaMonte Young (*Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches ...*), John Cage (more than 20 pieces), but mostly *Zeitkratzer* created its own repertoire by collaborating with composers and artists from very different backgrounds – including *Zeitkratzer's* own musicians - who have been invited to write pieces for the ensemble. Among them are renowned composers and improvisors with an academic background, like Keith Rowe (member of the legendary British Improv Group AMM), Mario Bertoncini (founding member of Nuovo Consonanza), Laurie Schwarz, Helmut Oehring, Daniel Ott, Hans-Joachim Hespos, Mathias Spahlinger, Kunsu Shim as well as young and upcoming artists, such as Jamilia Jazyzbekova, Sergej Newski and others, who created commissioned pieces with *Zeitkratzer*.

What sets *Zeitkratzer* apart from many other contemporary Ensembles is their non-academic approach to that music. As *Zeitkratzer's* artistic director Reinhold Friedl puts it:

“... the musicians involved just have a “normal” approach to very different music - the Stalinist contemporary music scene reacts in a very nervous way. So, to get money from this source is not only not easy, but the attitude of this scene - to have well-paid jobs in festival structures or universities, to pretend to have the monopoly on so-called “contemporary music” and to completely ignore every non-academic approach - leads to an utterly boring idea of “new music” in a closed society. So, we never think about treating or selling experimental music as a kind of pop or folk music, we just don't hide the fact that it's fun for

us to play the kind of music we play. And I'm quite convinced that's how it should be..."

This approach consequently implies a basic openness towards non-academic music, to Masami Akita's (Merzbow) noise music for example, and other authors connected with the fringes of rock culture, like Elliott Sharp, or with the electronic/techno/dance culture, like Terre Thaemlitz. This especially applies to controversial artists like John Duncan (about whose early performances feelings frequently run high) or Terre Thaemlitz (promoting transgender in music). The question is raised whether there might be extra-musical reasons for working with such artists. This suspicion should be allayed by the performances or recordings of the respective pieces, which actually (or surprisingly) doesn't bring out any such feared attitudes at all – even though Terre Thaemlitz did perform beautifully dressed, which could simply be seen as a pleasure for the eyes (or not?).

When you consider the precision with which the music is performed - including an extreme insistence upon details in sound, it would seem to suggest that *Zeitkratzer's* main interest is the final sound – in this respect they're not in fact very experimental. The ensemble can be said to have a very specific sound, which is due to the heterogeneity of its musicians' respective backgrounds covering improvised and experimental music, classical education, Jazz and Folk, to experimental Rock.

Melvyn Poore (tuba), for example, is best known as an improviser. He is also a director/member of the new music group Musikfabrik.

Ulrich Krieger (saxophones, ex-member) used to play not only with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra & the Ensemble Modern, but also in rock bands, and released the first volume of the complete compositions for saxophones by John Cage.

Franz Hautzinger worked with a lot of famous jazz and improvising players, such as Joachim Kuehn, Bill Dixon & Derek Bailey, but also with Klangforum Wien.

All the ensemble members developed extended contemporary instrumental techniques within their divergent fields: Franz Hautzinger for example is known for his radical reductionism of materials while Reinhold Friedl is known for his refined inside-piano techniques.

Referring to the performance of several Cage pieces during a John Cage Birthday Party on September 5 (2002), *The Wire* wrote: "Not only do *Zeitkratzer* bring extraordinary control and subtlety to ensemble playing, they also bring out the deep humanism that resides in Cage's work. Friedl has developed his inside-piano techniques to such a level of delicacy and precision that the tonalities extracted from the instrument through the use of carefully positioned strings, cups, and rosined fingers bear little resemblance to their acoustic source. In the broader context of *Zeitkratzer*, these alien tonalities are matched and modified by each of the musicians in a way that owes as much to the kind of sympathetic listening and responsiveness required for wholly improvised playing as it does to the score."

This aspect of the musicians' extended instrumental techniques (in addition to conventional ones, of course) and the resulting sounds are usually the starting point for the pieces invited musicians/composers create in cooperation with the ensemble: the musicians make proposals and the composers can choose the sounds they want to have. That is how *Zeitkratzer* worked with Carsten Nicolai (aka Noto) who, in their first meeting, played something from his laptop for which each instrumentalist proposed different sounds; or Helmut Oehring, who, for his "Schwarztaf" worked out

sounds with each individual musician. These detailed elements could then be used quite freely within the piece. Another example is how John Duncan, who is not a conductor, conducted the performance of his pieces: the musicians showed him a palette of sounds and possibilities which he could treat as a live multitrack performance on the mixing board. Actually this is not a novel way of working together, and can even be seen as rather old fashioned - as the musicians themselves emphasize, comparing it to examples like Brahms composing with the violinist Joseph Joachim and other similar cases.

In some respects *Zeitkratzer* could be seen in a direct line with the Kronos Quartet, by whom, as the ensemble's founder Reinhold Friedl admits, they were influenced formally – though not of course in many other ways. That is one approach. *Zeitkratzer's* way of handling the electronic - acoustic question (or however you choose to call it) is probably the most interesting aspect of (theorizing about) the ensemble in addition to being the most controversially discussed and occasionally even disputed question.

Basically *Zeitkratzer* is an acoustic chamber orchestra mostly playing amplified music. In fact, most of their performances can be called Live Electronic Music. In this respect and others, it is obvious that the ensemble stands in the tradition of groups like Nuovo Consonanza and AMM – that is also the reason they worked with Mario Bertoncini (Sinfonia ("dei respiri"), on: soundinX) & Keith Rowe (Traces 51, on: SonX) or why they play repertoire pieces like Karlheinz Stockhausen's Mikrophonie I. They all do weird and wonderful things to their instruments – including amplification and thereby electronic manipulation and modification of what they produce.

All the musicians of *Zeitkratzer* work with electronics and enrich their instrumental techniques with 'electronic' sounds. On the other hand: playing amplified with acoustic instruments means using microphones, means using electronics. *Zeitkratzer* care very much about questions as to which microphones should be used in which case, or which piece needs a microphone for the string sound rather than a pick-up, for example. All of *Zeitkratzer's* musicians can and do play amplified and they treat amplification as a musical parameter of their playing. That is also why a sound technician (Ralf Mainz, formerly: Marcus Waibel) is a regular member of *Zeitkratzer* (as well as a light designer, by the way).

Here's exactly where *Zeitkratzer* make the connection with the above mentioned non-academic music like electronic club sounds, noise- or experimental rock pieces, more or less in the sense that a very complex noise piece is equally worth listening to meticulously, seriously and/or with relish as an academically sanctioned one. What makes these more extreme noise and experimental rock pieces like the ones by Merzbow, Zbigniew Karkowski or, to use the most 'popular' example, *Zeitkratzer's* instrumental and complexly amplified version of Lou Reed's Metal Machine Music (which was performed at the Berlin Festival MaerzMusik in March 2002) suspicious for some, is their physical impact on the listener, or, to speak primitively (in the urban sense of Béla Bartók's rural reference): their force - an industrial, technologically amplified force. What is in fact often ignored – especially by some 'strict academics' (for example Dr. Giesela Nauck in Positionen: "The performance [MaerzMusik] of the ensemble *Zeitkratzer* with an instrumental version of Lou Reeds Metal Machine Music finally was nothing more than an offence") is firstly that rock'n'roll IS contemporary music and secondly that some sounds and acoustic phenomena can only occur when played at a certain amplitude or volume.

The putative musical difference being made between academic and non-academic pieces, between a piece like *Metal Machine Music* (1975; in his liner notes Lou Reed wrote: "Drone cognition and harmonic possibilities vis a vis LaMonte Young's *Dream Music*") and for example Iannis Xenakis' *Persepolis* (1971), which is one of *Zeitkratzer's* next projects, can thus be posited as a mainly sociological question.

As regards *Zeitkratzer's* programming, the ensemble can in fact be seen as highly experimental in the sense of being open to what can be found and done with(in) different musical approaches, as well as in the (herewith implied) sense of taking a risk. Certainly, some pieces, respective ideas or ambitions have turned out (and can still turn out) a little lukewarm or thin. But first and foremost it is a courageous and important venture to refuse to clearly pigeonhole – especially nowadays - to 'hold onto the differences' between divergent musical approaches and between playing music in completely different settings: performing experimental music in a park ("*Musics for Public Meadows*", July 2002; pieces by John Cage, James Tenney, et al.), playing in Rock Clubs (*Paradiso*, Amsterdam 2002, pieces by Lee Ranaldo, bits of Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*, et al.) or being the accompanying orchestra at a contemporary Dance Festival ("*Concepts of Doing*", Stuttgart 2001, pieces by: Philip Glass, Phill Niblock, et al., *Cooperations with Rubato Dance Company*, Christoph Winkler, et al.) – not to forget numerous concert series at the Podewil (Center for Contemporary Arts, Berlin), where *Zeitkratzer* was founded in 1999.

*Zeitkratzer* releases on CD:

**SonX** (compositions by Nic Collins, Nico Richter-de Vroe, Elliott Sharp, Keith Rowe, Laurie Schwarz a.o.), 1999 timescraper music

**SoundinX** (compositions by Daniel Ott, Phil Niblock, Reinhold Friedl, Mario Bertoncini a.o.), 1999 timescraper music

**Xtensions** (compositions by Burkhard Schlothauer, Radu Malfatti, Ulrich Krieger, Melvyn Poore a.o.), 1999 timescraper music

**FRESH** *Zeitkratzer/John Duncan*, 2001 Allquestions ([www.allquestions.net](http://www.allquestions.net))

**noise\ ... [lärm]** (compositions by Merzbow, Zbigniew Karkowski, Dror Feiler), 2002 tourette  
Release on Vinyl: **Super-Superbonus** *Zeitkratzer/ Terre Thaemlitz*, 2002 Kirschbier Records

Upcoming releases (2003):

**Random Dilettantes**, staalplaat

**ElectronX** (compositions by Bernhard Guenter, Dror Feiler, Terre Thaemlitz, Column One a.o.), X-trakt

**Negative Musik** (compositions by Throbbing Gristle, Kunsu Shim, John Cage a.o.), Volksbuehne Berlin

DVD: **Shortcuts** (documentary of 18 pieces performed by *Zeitkratzer*), see:  
[www.Zeitkratzer.de](http://www.Zeitkratzer.de)

**Simone Heilgendorff: Experimentelle Inszenierung von SPRACHE und MUSIK.  
Vergleichende Analysen zu Dieter Schnebel und John Cage.  
Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2002, 451 pp.**

Reviewed by Martin Supper

An analytic comparison of John Cage and Dieter Schnebel: it was about time. The two composers knew each other well personally and respected each other professionally. Both exercised a substantial influence on younger generations of artists. Simone Heilgendorff took up the challenge of writing such an analytic comparison. Or, more precisely, she compares two significant works, arguably key works: Schnebel is represented by his *glossolalie* (1959/60) with its elaborations *Glossolalie 61* (1961-65) (by Schnebel himself) and *Glossolalie 94* (1993/94) (realized by Ensemble Recherche); Cage by his *Song Books* (1970).

In Heilgendorff's view, these compositions do not only present the open principles typical of 1960s experimental Music Theater, extending the boundaries of a new art form. The author finds a particularly inclusive, almost encyclopedic, selection of elements from verbal, acoustic, gestural, and spatial resources in these works. In her analysis, the manifold nature of the methods used by the composers for processing and organizing their materials gives the works something of the character of ideological essays. Both compositions clearly reflect the critical lifestyles of their authors: Schnebel the theologian and close friend of Theodore W. Adorno (whose theories Schnebel had integrated into his own, as well as those of Ernst Bloch, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Sigmund Freud). Cage's world of Henry David Thoreau, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, Daisetz Suzuki, and many more, is well known.

Heilgendorff's primary aim is to present a many-faceted picture of these richly layered compositions, giving due consideration to the conditions of the time in which they were written. She approaches them through a reconstruction of the social, historical, and political context of their time, as well as through the related history of how these works came into being. Indirectly, the difficulties involved in approaching the experimental Music Theater of this period using musicological approaches comes to light.

The core of Heilgendorff's work begins with a broad-based overview of the cultural panorama of the 1950s and '60s in Europe and the USA. On the social front: *Wirtschaftswunder*, technological advances, the Cold War, student rebellion. On the artistic side: institutions as open fora, e.g. the New School for Social Research, Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, the Darmstadt Summer Courses. Finally, she also considers Schnebel's and Cage's own comprehension of those spheres of thought so central to their lives: psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism, as well as the ways in which their thinking in these areas are made corporate in *glossolalie* and *Song Books*.



Following on this extended introduction, the three versions of *glossolalie* and the *Song Books* are presented over 200 pages. Even taken out of the context of Heilgendorff's larger goal of comparing the two composers, this section presents an enormous multitude of materials: numerous sketches made during the compositional process, many never previously published; extracts from the scores; interviews; quotes. Heilgendorff adds diagrams and tables summarizing the presentation of materials, the formal guidelines, the textual and musical quotations made, the forms of notation, scenic analyses, and much, much more. The amount of analytic material is astounding, but a danger lurks in the extensiveness: it is not easy to find what is new in Heilgendorff's book, not even for those familiar with Cage's and Schnebel's work. Numerous repetitions, made necessary by reference to prior and subsequent passages of the book, interwoven with quotations from divergent sources—none of this makes the reader's task easier. A more stringent formal structure to the book could have avoided these difficulties. On the other hand, Heilgendorff makes explicit reference to the book *Rhizome*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. By doing so she, to some extent, defends the non-linear, broadly-based approach she has taken. Arguably, this approach admirably reflects the work of the two composers.

The fundamental methodology of the comparison and presentation used by Heilgendorff is based on Alfred Lorenzer's theories of psychoanalytic social research. Since these theories are not widely known, Heilgendorff presents a short and precise introduction. Lorenzer's contention, introduced in 1981, that the dominant West German culture was one of "driving imagination out of the world of experience," is, for Heilgendorff, a key statement.

Lorenzer's writings represent a Freudian therapist (similar to the earlier Siegfried Bernfeld) attempting to demonstrate that psychoanalysis is a kind of hermeneutics unto itself, a "deep hermeneutics" (*Tiefenhermeneutik*). Set in post-war Germany, he opens anew the dialogue with philosophy and sociology, with Habermas and Wittgenstein, with Marx and George Herbert Mead.

Since Lorenzer's writings are not widely known, Heilgendorff includes a brief glossary of his terminology, defining terms such as 'symbolic forms of interaction', 'experiential structure', 'desymbolification', and 'scenic understanding'. In Heilgendorff's view, the Lorenzian system and theories are an ideal means for comprehensively presenting Schnebel's and Cage's approaches and for positioning their work. However, Heilgendorff's use of Lorenzian systematics also shows that a reified language can be unnecessarily narrowing—as is the case with all meta-languages when used in scholarly discourse.

Many readers may find that penetrating through the multiplicity of layers and structures and negotiating the manifold interweavings within Heilgendorff's text represent an unduly fatiguing labor. Many too may find Lorenzer's theories too distant. Nevertheless, Heilgendorff's book can be a pleasure: its treasure trove of materials on both compositions will prove fascinating time and again. Even in the introductory prologue we are captivated by the detailed information regarding the most important publications on *glossolalie* and *Song Books*, presented with useful and critical commentary.

*English translation: Peter Castine*

**“When you label me, you negate me.”**— Soren Kierkegaard

Elaine Barkin

Jean-Baptiste Moliere’s *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* learns that he has been “speaking prose” all of his life. Music students are taught to label entire music-works and units of music-sound— out of context and prior to listening —, from agogic accents, neighbor notes and rows to Sonata Form and every kind of cadence or ‘ground’. Benjamin Boretz has written: “We may not speak as we perceive, but we will soon enough be perceiving as we have spoken.” I ‘discover’ that I am a Second Wave Feminist and a Modernist Composer. You might be importuned to declare your ist-ness or acknowledge the ism-hood of your work; there are, after all, stands to be taken and standards to be met. At times we are ensnared by labels — ersatz terms that mask, simulacra that deceive and disguise, substitutes for “pure presence” [1] or experience. Labels, terminology, slogans, and competitive marketing strategies have mercilessly driven educational and creative-expressive practices as well as socio-political-cultural economies. Perhaps this has always been so. Perhaps ‘straight talk’ is a figment, out of earshot, an elusive goner.

Of course we all do want to talk about music and our experiences with music. But to suppose that narratives we conjure and theories we choose or invent as ‘explanatory modes of discourse’ are commensurate with music or music-experiencing, is like putting on a mask or ear-muffs — or ventriloquizing. Impeding rather than enabling. As Elias Canetti said:

“...once the mask is in position there can be no more *beginnings*, no groping towards something new...The mask is rigid; the thing it expresses cannot change...As long as the masked one wears the mask he is two things, himself and the mask.” [2]

Yet it’s not easy to ‘just’ let music be or come or grab you, freely entering your pores, orifices, and faculties. A profusion of biases, histories, and political positions lurking within each of us wants to be negotiated or made known. My own quest, ongoing for decades now, has been to eschew ideological squabbles, to keep my music talk out of the fray. But that too, like ‘straight talk’, is illusory; I am no disinterested stranger. Yet I continue to look for ways to think /write /talk (about) music, not ready to give up but prepared nowadays to acknowledge that your music and my text, as well as my music and your text, are neither side-by-side nor one-to-one; to admit that they each, and quite contentedly, inhabit their own space. Their purposes for being, their ontologies, are incommensurable. And that’s OK, that clears the air, my head, and my mind.

\* \* \*

But let’s consider the title of a recent book by Ellie Hisama:

*Gendering Musical Modernism: the music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon.* [3]

Can you imagine the title: *Gendering Musical Modernism: the music of Carl Ruggles, Henry*

*Cowell, and Leo Ornstein?* ‘Are you kidding?’ you might say: those guys don’t sport the ‘correct’ gender — or is it sex? — label, nor is it the point of the strange trip Ellie Hisama has taken.

[Aside #1:

“Musical modernism” is a label that has been applied—willy-nilly in many instances — to 20th-century—“classically” oriented composers whose expressive language might include free form, unequal time segments, fuzzy — or non — tonality, angled contours, rapid change, multi-hued harmonies, dense texture, dissonance, mixed or no meters, an exploration of instrumental resources, and more, all of which still appeal to many composers. Modern Music was the label-analogue to Modern Art which, as in the work of Cezanne, Braque, Picasso, or Matisse, is characterized by re-coloration of the natural world, deformation of bodies and objects, multiple or absent perspective, for starters. Many feminist musicologists have vigorously denounced “Modernism” as elitist, cerebral, misogynist, and phallogentric, regardless of the sex of the creative artist.]

But despite the bad rap feminist musicologists have bestowed on “musical modernism” (as well as on 20th & 21st century theoretical & analytical “formalism”), Hisama claims quite the contrary: “musical modernism...is not inherently misogynistic”; rather it gave Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon “technical means to forge new musical procedures and narratives.” Hisama wants to fuse modes of contemporary critical discourse and theory that have been declared antipathetic, antagonistic, or contradictory to one another. She believes that making “connections between biography and musical structure [will enable] a listener to experience new and compelling ways of understanding music”; that “the impact of gender on the structure of” these works is a significant criterion for audition and discourse; that a “feminist reading” in tandem with a “formalist reading” will “impart valuable ways of hearing and apprehending these compositions.” (Robert Morris’s post-Schenkerian theories of structural levels of musical contour and Milton Babbitt’s set-theoretic principles figure prominently in Hisama’s “formalist” analyses.)

[Aside #2: “Formalist readings”, studies, and interpretations often eschew the personal or the invocation of historical-time. Musical data from *within* the music is pondered and relied on. Many formalists believe that the musical work itself suggests the questions to be asked; others place an emphasis on figuring out a work on its own terms rather than in terms of other things. Formalist theories and analytic discourse have been labeled “masculine” by male & female theorists & musicologists. [4]

Feminist musicology and its discourse, which emerged from interdisciplinary literary and psychoanalytic feminist theory, engages the personal, the sexual, gender-race-class ideologies, and the social-cultural-political-historical milieu of composers and their ‘subjects’. Feminist theorists-critics claim to have ‘liberated’ analytical-critical discourse from the strictures of ‘just the work itself’. As feminist theory develops, other criteria may be deemed worthy of being musically en- or de-coded.]

Hisama prudently states that there is “No biological imperative for women to compose one way and men another”, that no “common structural elements or strategies” characterize music composed by women. Furthermore, Hisama says she is not implying “intentionality”, inasmuch as Crawford, Bauer, and Gideon didn’t necessarily ‘intend’ to make the connections Hisama so strenuously presents. After reading Ellie Hisama’s play-by-play

when you label me

analyses, listening anew to Ruth Crawford's String Quartet and Marion Bauer's music for piano, Hisama's brave but problematic drift is unmistakable and confounding. "Separate but equal" but hardly 'integrated': feminist and formalist theories do not mesh easily. Put in the same room, in opposite corners, occasionally crossing paths, each might be wondering what the other is doing there or talking about: bio-psycho-socio-jabber encounters data-stats-chatter. Music, meanwhile — immured in babble, rapidly disappearing into verbally discursive contexts —, is wallflowering, becoming undone, and deeply desirous of some-anyone's undivided attention.

### **The REAL & the STAND-IN**

Invocations of biography or sexuality in musical discourse as criteria for, as Hisama claims, "understanding music" or providing "valuable ways of hearing and apprehending [music]", block and invade my body, brain, consciousness, ears, heart, mind. Rather than consider those senses in which our constructs, our structures, our selves, or the natural world are 'represented' in music, perhaps we can re-conceive the uniqueness of music as an expressive 'text'*in* but not truly *about* our world. When I listen, I try to apprehend as much of a music as possible, in all of *its* fullness. As music rolls by I struggle to experience *its* present and past simultaneously; to preserve *its* memory and sustain *its* identity; to have *its* history, *its* 'mind&body-ness', *its* life and my own mesh.

My desire for arousal or wonderment is satisfied best when experienced directly from the source, in music and in life. Any rapture originating from music or life that sends me back for more neither needs nor wants secondary sources. Primary sources are where the real action lies. Like everyone else I read program notes or go to other sources eventually, albeit not to help me listen or hear, love or esteem. Music is complete, and plenteous enough without its being intercepted by not-music. Benjamin Boretz has written:

"...music can be not necessarily what you hear it as, but, radically and inviolably, what you hear as it... 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... You could suppose, in fact, that precisely insofar as people value music, they value its liberation from the linguistic orders of 'truth', value it precisely insofar as it offers an experience of reality without reductive imagery, representation, or definition.... In its own language, music is fully specific, just not specifiable; fully meaningful, just not translatable; fully existent, just not representational... As music, music has to be its own interior discourse, its own, only, fully concrete metalanguage." [5]

If music is a kind of language and if, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, "each language is a kind of song", then music can be heard as "a particular way of singing [saying] the world." Insofar as music is resilient and everlasting, far more so than *au courant* theories or discourse (which will continue to find their 'place' in our evolving and constructed worlds of music-thought), each of us can choose to hear, use, or talk about any music any way. Each of us can decide how and which music intersects with, diverges from, or transforms our lives and our particular "is-ness". But is it the case that all or any of our experiences of music are significantly *deepened* or *heightened* by regarding music as a stand-in or surrogate? Hearing 'what's there' is hard enough.

Elaine Barkin

Perhaps strenuous listening to music can help us learn what we want and need to learn and know about our world, about how we think or talk or listen or take in. Perhaps our experiences with music can be regarded as expressions of ourselves, as expressions of our identity. Perhaps music can help us understand those many senses of eloquence and depth and joy. Perhaps purposeful engagements with music can open us to the not-yet-fully-known and help us be more fully conscious of every moment in our lives.

October 2002– April 2003

## NOTES

The above text is an excerpt from “Conjunctions and Affinities” written for the e-journal G.E.M.S. <<http://music.boisestate.edu/gems/>> I wish to thank Eleanor Stublely and Elizabeth Gould for inviting me to write the text for G.E.M.S. and for their generous help and encouragement.

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Humanities Press, 1962.
2. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Continuum, 1973.
3. Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.4. See: Fred Everett Maus’ “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory”, *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 31/1, 1993; John Rahn’s “New Research Paradigms” in his book *Music Inside Out*, Gordon & Breach, 2001; and Susan McClary’s “Terminal Prestige” in *Cultural Critique*, No. 12, 1989.
5. Benjamin Boretz, from “Music, as a Music” in *Being About Music*, OPEN SPACE, 2003.

# Inside/Out: A Response to *I/O*

Eric N. Peterson

## ***Introduction/Overview***

As Ben Boretz has explained to me, *I/O* was written for a meeting of composers of electronic music. Boretz chose his title to evoke 'input/output,' signifying "the relation of inner experience to outer expression, and the personal—not the socially constructible—meaning of the transaction of composition in relation to its sociopathic aftermath" (Boretz, private communication). I comment on the piece with the Wittgensteinian aim of "get[ting] a clear view" of the compositional process as Boretz presently lives and conceives it: "...[W]e lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and ... then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. ...[W]e are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules. This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand (i.e. get a clear view of)".<sup>1</sup>

I read Boretz's essay as a tale of entanglement, tracing the snarls of a particular compositional game back to its rules. The rules are comprised by a specific socially and historically developed conception of the composer. Although I shall not do anything like trace the social development of that conception, I shall sketch its main characteristics and show how, when taken to its logical extreme (as Boretz so helpfully does!), it generates the dilemma that Boretz expresses in his essay. For a different perspective, I also contrast Boretz's compositional game with a different compositional game, one that does not generate the same tensions (though it may generate others).

## ***Input/Output; Inflation/Obliteration***

In *I/O*, Boretz interrogates the relationship between aesthetics and politics and uncovers, in that relationship, an unavoidable betrayal of art by the artist who creates it. Boretz uses the word 'art' to refer to the personal expression of an individual. Further, he conceives of this personal expression as having a "non-negotiably non-verbal being". The artist creates in order to ameliorate "the human predicament," "the vulnerability, the anguish, the fearful alienation of ontological isolation, the terrifying sense of helpless imprisonment within the vulnerable psychobody...": he<sup>2</sup> creates in order to "create an interior world as palpable and inhabitable as the external one..." In a sense, the artist expands himself through his non-verbal creations.

The personal and non-discursive quality of the aesthetic contrasts sharply with the social and discursive quality of the political: "the tack of 'politics', precisely inverse,

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<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1953. Section 125, pg. 50e.

<sup>2</sup> Although Boretz does not use the pronoun 'he' I use it because, as I shall argue, the artist is masculine in this conception.

is creative exteriorization, reifies the exterior world as a multiplicative reproduction, a symbolic objectification of the self." In this conception of politics, individual selves seize power by "appropriat[ing] the identity of the collective to the self," assuming the role of authorized spokesperson, of the "incarnation of the collective." The politician expands his individual influence by taking on the *name and symbols* of the group as his own.

The artist's betrayal of art occurs in the field of reception. It consists in enmeshing the erstwhile pure artistic expression in political discourse. Artists strive to make their expressions significant to the public: "and it is us, ourselves, the creative musicians, who aestheticize the politic, who ferociously reach out to engage strangers with our performances, who appropriate to our anonymous anomalous expressive phenomena the rubrics of their anxious concerns..." Artists do this, says Boretz, in order to inject their creations with additional power—to "appropriate to the expressive work the exogenous energy latent in these symbolic political things..." The price of the appropriation, unfortunately, is betrayal. Couching the expression in public discourse alienates the expression from the artist by "inflat[ing] the scale of [the artist's] own expression so as to obliterate those poignancies uniquely articulate within the expressive language itself which we have so seriously struggled to bring into being. and so we become strangers too."

### ***Inventor/Onlooker***

The unavoidable betrayal of art by artist arises within a particular conception of artistic creation. Boretz constructs the Artist as a very particular sort of subject, and, as with all subject positions, the very features that determine its nature also determine its limits. More specifically, Boretz's Artist is an ancestor to the social identity of the composer forged by Beethoven, his patrons, and his other supporters in Vienna around the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the first few years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and bears certain features in common with that earlier model. In particular, Boretz conceives the Artist as a unique, individual person whose musical production is his property, an object with an internal aesthetic unity dictated entirely by the artist himself.

In Beethoven and the Construction of Genius, Tia DeNora provides an account of Beethoven's success as the product of social negotiations. At the same time, she explains how Beethoven's entrepreneurial skills helped to shape the modern notion of musical 'genius'. The shift in aesthetic values that occurred over the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and just into the 19<sup>th</sup> among Vienna aristocrats, later taken up by middle class Viennese, may be summarized as moving from athletic virtuosity of composition to seriousness, complexity, and expressiveness.<sup>3</sup> De Nora argues that Beethoven became positioned to embody success within this new paradigm by his remarkably close ties to the aristocratic patrons in whose circles the ideas of 'great' music and 'great' artists were being developed.<sup>4</sup>

DeNora also argues that Beethoven and his supporters were able to actualize his

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<sup>3</sup> Tia DeNora. Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995. pg. 18-19; 38-9.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid* 82.

potential success by constructing Haydn as an original exponent of the new tradition and Beethoven as Haydn's successor (and surpasser)<sup>5</sup>; by mobilizing material support and special musical training<sup>6</sup>; by staging, within the sheltered environment of aristocratic salons, piano competitions in which they constructed Beethoven's style as different from, and better than, its lighter rivals<sup>7</sup>; and through the progressive forging of aristocratic alliances on the strength of which Beethoven eventually gained access to wider audiences.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Beethoven's success was not entirely determined by the inherent quality of his works, but also required the construction of a context in which those works could not only be produced in the first place, but also be esteemed as the pinnacle of artistry.

Ultimately, Beethoven's success transformed the category of the aesthetic itself. Beethoven and his supporters enshrined the aesthetic as the personal expression of a great individual. For example, as Beethoven's standing increased, he began to refuse to perform unless (as had not formerly been the case in noble circles) the audience riveted its attention upon him. His very irascibility, an unconventional behavior in that context, constituted a performance of the new category of 'genius'.<sup>9</sup> DeNora documents the aesthetic shift by showing the way in which reviews of Beethoven's works increasingly began to incorporate the new standard, moving from evaluating them as overly "complicated" and learned to praising them as a "higher" form of music whose originality and idiosyncrasy could be appreciated by the most discriminating listeners.<sup>10</sup> Significantly for my argument, DeNora notes that the critics begin to judge a piece "on its own terms," assessing its "internal aesthetic unity... as opposed to [its] adherence to external compositional conventions".<sup>11</sup>

Boretz's conception of the Artist clearly retains the notion that music is, at least ideally, the unimpeachable expression and property of an isolated individual. For it is only against such a conception that music's involvement in public discourse may be seen as a corruption. I shall now suggest, through a creative re-telling of Boretz's tale, that this subject position is both in a certain way masculine and also unaware of itself as such. It is the nature of that culturally specific masculinity, coupled with that lack of self-awareness as such, that spawns the tragic and (contingently) unavoidable betrayal.

### ***In/Out (Or Couching One's Woman in Public [Discourse])***

#### **The Human Predicament:**

the vulnerability, the anguish, the fearful alienation of ontological isolation, the terrifying sense of helpless imprisonment within the vulnerable psychobody<sup>12</sup> with no perceivable possibility of credible interpersonal connection to mediate the enveloping alienation of being, growing, metastasizing as being itself expands.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid* 114.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* 117-8.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid* 119-23.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* 162.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid* 145.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* 180-5.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* 182-3.

<sup>12</sup> This is also the Cartesian subject, the thinking thing.



Once upon a time and time again, Artist, finding himself alone, decides to create a wife—Music—in order “to create an interior world as palpable and inhabitable as the external one, to populate the liveness of being with fullness of substance and texture approximating to the visionary fantasy of unalienated being...” To have and to hold...oneself. More of oneself than before. One's pure self. Virginal, only of and for oneself. A pure extension of oneself for the sheer sake of privately appreciating oneself. One's Woman-Cock. Woman as prosthesis. Prosthesis as Self, glorious Self. A shining and desperate defense against helplessness.

Immediately, a temptation arises, and a contradiction too. Or rather the contradiction arises with Music herself, and the temptation merely dramatizes it. Is Music a pure extension of Artist, or isn't she? If she is more of him, isn't he still alone (or worse yet, is he *her*, giant devouring Mother sucking him back into the filthy maw of the grave—unthinkable—let's move on)? If she is something in addition to him, isn't she potentially impure, available for others to enjoy as well?

The loneliness that drove Artist to create in the first place soon decides the question. Music cannot be an extension of Artist unless she can be seen as something in addition to him, and that requires discourse—politics—an audience—buddies who believe they glorify themselves by slapping him on the back in congratulations: “a multiplicative reproduction, a symbolic objectification, of the self, producing a tangible, if self-induced, interpersonal support system. appropriating representation appropriates authority, ultimately appropriates the identity of the collective to the self.”

Music no sooner becomes corporeal, becomes the prosthetic Artist desired in order to glorify himself to himself, and she is polluted, lost, a whore: “...we, needing strenuously to engage strangers, appropriate to the expressive work the exogenous energy latent in these symbolic political things so as to obliterate those poignancies uniquely articulate within the expressive language itself which we have so seriously struggled to bring into being. And so we become strangers too. In the expressive space we have created.”

Clad in the skimpy red dress of public discourse, people no longer see Music as Artist's alone, as he originally intended. His buddies lick their lips and snicker to themselves even as they slap him on the back. Even as he invests his being into her, the prying, lustful eyes of strangers spirit her away. And his being with her. “and so we become strangers too.” Artist as pimp. Betrayer. Selling himself out as he sells her.

Isn't there a way out of this dilemma? A way to keep Music as his sole property *and* let the whole world know it? Have his cake and eat it too? Since the clothes of discourse besmirch Music, perhaps he could display his bride/cock naked. Stun the public with an unashamed, innocent, and pure self-expression. But no. That course of action will almost certainly provoke a riot: “...the molten mysticism of pure expression unmediated, released into the social space undelimited by these socializing dampers, is as likely to catalyze violence as to exorcise it.” And what, then, would become of his prosthesis, his investment? Of him?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> To quote Monty Python: “Don't take it out in public or they will stick you in the dock/ And you won't uh-come uh-back.”

No solution. No freedom. Perpetual alienation. Goaded forever onward by the ever-receding "visionary fantasy of unalienated being": a tantalizing vision of the Garden of Eden, in which union with the feminine glorifies the masculine without ever threatening it. But out here, in the real world, in the temporal world, penises inevitably deflate just at that magic moment of union. The erstwhile manliest man becomes a virtual woman as he expels his essence through his body, into her, and through her into the world. Again and again. A flushing toilet. (No thought of where the "waste" goes.) What goes up must come down. Artist can't think about this, can't look back. Must create...himself. Again.

### *I/Oliveros*

Does Boretz's essay express a human condition? It does. But does it express *the* human condition? No. One clear way to see this is to consider a model of artistry radically different from the one Boretz adopts. I discuss a piece by composer Pauline Oliveros that embodies another model of artistry: *Pauline's Solo* (1992-2002). Oliveros sits in a chair on a stage, ready to play her accordion. Oliveros speaks: "Listening to the energy of all who are present I sound this energy. Listening to my listening and your listening I make this music here and now with the assistance of all that there is. I dedicate this music to compassion in this world now."<sup>14</sup> And then she does. And so do we. All.

Before philosophizing about *Pauline's Solo*, I should like to discuss my experience of being present to that piece, as I was earlier this year<sup>15</sup>. However, it is difficult to do so because our very language for speaking about musical performance is so much better adapted to the model Boretz expresses. For example, to say, "I attended a performance of *Pauline's Solo*," would be true, but misleading. Although I am sure many well-trained people in the audience riveted their attention on the piece as if from the outside (and, possibly, others pretended to), I accepted Oliveros' invitation to bring my awareness to the piece as it spontaneously emerged, even helping to shape it with my awareness. So, without an authoritative language, and without any claim to making a true or authoritative account—or even wanting to, I now fumble around with words in an attempt to convey something of that singular experience.

In Oliveros' arms, the accordion breathed deeply: a slow breath in, the Void, a slow breath out, the Void. Sounds emerged from the Void, played upon the awareness that played upon them, and returned. Some sounds or clusters of sounds merely flickered, jabs at existence. Some sounds droned for many rounds of breath, in union with listeners, opening, transforming, and closing vast and subtle spaces. Awareness, too, flickered, touched, tickled, smoothed, extended. In no time at all, Time played itself in a game of Music. Sounds, listeners, and spaces repeatedly creating, transforming, and destroying ourSelf spontaneously. Even this is a simplification. For everything that existed was present. And the potential of everything that might exist too. And absolutely nothing.

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<sup>14</sup> Annotations of Concert Three, Saturday June 1, 2002 8:00 PM PST in the conference *Sounding the Margins: A Forty-Year Retrospective of the Works of Pauline Oliveros*, May 31-June 2, 2002, presented by Meridian Music: Composers in Performance, The Pauline Oliveros Foundation, and Mills College.

<sup>15</sup> At a performance, on April 15, 2002 in the Music Department of UC Riverside, of *The Space Between* (Phil Gelb, Pauline Oliveros, and Dana Reason), Gluck Foundation Visiting Artists.

In the context of this piece, Oliveros is a different kind of self from Boretz's Artist. Oliveros creates from a different "predicament" and what is created is a different kind of "object." Actually, as I suggest with my scare-quotes, there is no predicament and no object. Who is the artist, the composer? It is certainly possible and appropriate to isolate an individual, Pauline Oliveros, as the person who has conceived of the piece at an abstract level, and also as the one who "sounds" it. Oliveros is the isolatable "I" who conceives, performs, and dedicates this composition. But Oliveros, both in her conception of the piece and in the title she gives it, disrupts the received notion of the artist as Author, as a master of ideas and bodies. Who and what is "Pauline" in this context?

Whereas Beethoven attempted to control both the performance and the audience of his compositions, Oliveros does something else. She conceives the piece as an occasion, just as one might invite friends over for a party without scripting their interactions. In performance, she lends her energies in service of the piece and invites the audience to do the same. Because of the way she conceives the piece, there is no saying what it will sound like ahead of time, except that it will be rendered by Oliveros on the accordion. Rather, the performance of the piece is determined in the moment. It is determined, not by the composer alone, but by "the energy of all who are present," including that of the composer.

Oliveros also plays with audience-role that Beethoven and his supporters helped to create, using it as a resource both to bring about a new form of musical creation and to change her audience's view of things. Knowing that her audience will have been trained to be quiet and attentive (unlike the unruly nobles in 18<sup>th</sup> century Viennese salons), Oliveros conceives her piece so as to gently redirects that available energy. In announcing that she will "sound" the energy of the audience, and that she will do so in response to their listening (and her listening), she inaugurates a new form of collective musical creation. What emerges during a performance of *Pauline's Solo* is a spontaneous and ephemeral sound-product of many awarenesses and energies becoming one. Because of the way Oliveros has conceived the piece, composer and audience together create and enjoy an utterly unique musical entity.

Oliveros' invitation to the listener also changes our view of things, because it creates a new musical epistemology and a new musical ontology. Who knows, how, and what is known are different from what some of us have been trained to expect. In the 'great' artist epistemology, an historical background against which Oliveros works, the artist knows his creation and knows it authoritatively, because it has issued from him on his terms (more or less). The audience encounters the music as an already stable object. In that epistemology, the object is worth getting to know in proportion to the greatness of the artist that created it.

In *Pauline's Solo*, the roles of composer and audience (of which I have been speaking unproblematically so far) have changed, both in the way they are distributed across bodies and in what they entail. Oliveros constructs herself as a composer among composers, a first among equals. "Listening to my listening and your listening I make this music here and now..." Oliveros is the first composer, because she creates the space in which the piece unfolds. However, all listeners (including Oliveros)—all audience members—are composers in this context, not accidentally, but in virtue of being listeners.

The audience members help to create—and destroy—each moment of the piece through their listening. There is no stable object to know. Thus, there is no stable subject to know it. Even though a musical event occurs in time, no *thing* is created and no persons create. Spontaneous awareness plays freely with itself.

Further, non-listeners of any kind are also composers of the piece, in a different way: "...with the assistance of all that there is." Even "inanimate" entities co-create the piece by being present with their energy to the sensitive performer (a role also played by Oliveros). Thus, Oliveros demonstrates (at least to those who can entertain such possibilities) that composing music doesn't require *doing* anything, in the sense of behaving as if one were outside of, or other than, existent processes. Even a mountain or a paper cup is a composer of *Pauline's Solo*. Spontaneous energy plays freely with itself.

Oliveros also reconstitutes the role of performer in this piece. The performer of *Pauline's Solo* is the protagonist, the central role (though without being essentially separate from or other than either the composer or the dedicator). For it is the performer who speaks the first two of the three sentences that issue the invitation and inaugurate the piece, and it is the performer who translates all existent energies into the sounds that the listeners privilege as music. Oliveros' title also frames the performer as central, evoking an aesthetic of athleticism that shifts attention away from composition and toward performance.

The title's evocation of athleticism is simultaneously genuine and ironic, as read through the context of Oliveros' performance. That performance enacts a queer masculinity. That is, it enacts the role of knower while simultaneously undermining the idea that there is anything to know. It also enacts a queer femininity: it enacts the role of known while refusing to allow itself to be either passive or separate from that which knows. The performer's declaration that she will "sound" the energy of "all who are present" presents her performance as in some sense a genuine representation of that energy. However, the declaration also presents the performance as a response to the energy of those 'others,' and so not a representation at all. For 'sound' carries a double meaning.

On the one hand, 'sound' signifies the quintessentially masculine action of measuring the ocean's depths through the emission of sound waves. Thus, Oliveros invites her audience (including herself) to lay themselves open to be known through the probing of her instrument, and also to be represented by it. This reading is contingently structured as apparent against the background of the socialized expectation of audience passivity and submission. On the other hand, 'sound' signifies expressing the present energy, constructed in the familiar symbolic system as a feminine passion. This reading is contingently structured as apparent against the background of the words that invoke cooperation: "with the assistance of all that there is. I dedicate this music to compassion in this world now." The performer senses the energy and responds in sound immediately and intuitively. She puts no distance between herself and that which she expresses. She is the pure conduit of the present energy.

Oliveros' balancing of opposed significations creates an immanent musical ontology of being/non-being. Through the mediation of the performer, the sensitive-knower-cum-expressive-known, the sounds that the listeners/composers create in

their union, both are and are not representations, both are and are not real things. Thus, what Oliveros creates as first composer among equals, and what she sustains as performer, is an arena of creation. She creates an open system, a free flow of energy. As such, the particular dilemma that arose for Boretz's Artist cannot arise for her; she cannot mourn the loss of that which was, momentarily, unimpeachably hers. For *Pauline's Solo* is not a closed, interior world belonging to and thus glorifying a someone. It is expressly not that.

Oliveros, or rather Pauline, comprises a third mask within the context of this piece: dedicator. "I dedicate this music to compassion in this world now." Pauline does not strain to keep the energies that comprise the piece for herself, as Artist does. She inaugurates the piece in the name of compassion in the world now. She releases the piece to compassion. Why compassion? Compassion is openness of the corridors between the nodes of what is. Compassion is a precondition of spontaneous action, or at least of its recognition. One can read the dedication as an enclosing and framing of the piece as a microcosm, an altercosm. Pauline invites us to continue playing, to continue our spontaneous creation, even after we have decided that the piece is over. Or rather, she invites us to continue seeing that what is spontaneously creates itself endlessly, that other people are not other people. There are no things in this ontology, no reification, just energy in flux. In this epistemology, to know is to create.

No things? No people? Who, then, is Pauline in the context of this piece? (Who, then, are any of us?) Joseph Campbell speaks of a way that many cultures conceive of gods: not as real, not as unreal, but "as if:"

A god can simultaneously be in two or more places—like a melody, or like the form of a traditional mask. ... [E]veryone knows that a man made the mask and that a man is wearing it. The one wearing it, furthermore, is identified with the god during the time of the ritual of which the mask is a part. He does not merely represent the god; he *is* the god. ... [T]here has been a shift of view from the logic of the normal secular sphere, where things are understood to be distinct from one another, to a theatrical play sphere, where they are accepted for what they are *experienced* as being and the logic is that of "make believe"—"as if."<sup>16</sup>

'Pauline' is a mask—a triple-mask—in this sense. And Pauline is the one experienced as composer-performer-dedicator by Awareness that chooses to enter the play sphere of this piece. Pauline's *solo*. We experience Pauline as the one who plays around with playing alone. Pauline allows "the many" to help create the piece she plays solo. As such, Pauline tends to provoke certain questions: can any person really be separate without others agreeing to behave as if that were true? Can energy, can music, ever really "belong" to "someone," and when it appears to, how does that appearance come about?

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Campbell. *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. New York: Arkana, 1991 [1959]. pg. 21-2. Italics in the original.

# The Power of Inertia

Howard S. Becker

What I'm going to say contains no news for a group that knows much about music. The facts I cite will serve merely to remind you of things we all know so that we can think about them together. The ideas are not awfully new either. I got them from years of reading other people's books about research they had done on how art work is organized in our society and in other societies, from a lot of personal experience in the dance music business and in some other arts, and from a large project on the organization of theatre worlds I engaged in with Michal McCall and Lori Morris.

I'll start with an example (and there are others to come): the world of so-called "classical" music. One of the remarkable things about that world is how stable it is. Things change, but not much. Orchestras of about the same size have been playing the same repertoire, with occasional additions, for almost a hundred years, on instruments not very different from those players used almost a hundred years ago. The personnel change, but the new ones are much like the old ones. The United States still imports conductors, mostly from Europe, though it doesn't import orchestral players as much as it used to. The public hasn't changed much. Rich people pick up large hunks of the tab, and some folks from the upper-middle class attend regularly. More people hear music than used to, because of the ubiquity of radio, television, and recordings. Fewer people make music in their own homes, perhaps for the same reason. So the classical music world and its ways of doing things are, all in all, remarkably stable.

That's a theoretical problem. Any activity—making music is the example we're interested in here—can be done in a great many different ways. I'm fond of the John Cage position, according to which (I quote from memory) "Music is the moral evaluation of noise." That is, any sound or combination of sounds can be music—any sound made anyway, with the help of any object as an instrument, with or without the intention of the maker. It's music if you listen to it in a way that makes it music, paying close attention, and in the mood Samuel Johnson called being "willing to be pleased." Our conventional ways of making and listening to music—the orchestras and concerts and recordings and all the rest of it—represent the choice of a very few from among all those possible ways of doing those things. The theoretical problem is to understand the narrowness of our choices of how to make music when there are so many possibilities.

Without wishing to go into sociology's intramural spats in any detail, I want to make one distinction I think important. One variety of sociological thinking (usually called "functionalism") takes the stability of social organizations as natural, the way things are supposed to be. Institutions, on this view, represent a Best Way to do things. Once the best way is found, people stick to it because it is, after all, the best way, the one that meets certain needs, or ensures that certain necessary functions will be performed. Once such a "functional equilibrium" has been found, things just naturally go on that way. If anything interferes, the world tries to reestablish the Best Way. The stability of the music world is not a problem for such a theory. Once you have identified the functions the organization serves, you have done all the analysis that is necessary.

Another variety of sociological thinking, which I find more realistic and useful, thinks all that is a fairy tale. On this view, social organizations are generally flying apart and stay organized no more than is necessary for people to get done whatever they have for the moment decided they want to do together. People get together, or find themselves together, and work out how they will do what they are going to do, and then try to do it, in circumstances that are never quite what they imagined, with things popping up that they never anticipated. From this point of view, the stability of the music world is a substantial theoretical problem. How can things possibly go on just as they have been?

In fact, music is always changing. Look at all the innovations music has incorporated in the past century: everything from serial methods of composition to minimalism, all sorts of alternative music systems from around the world, electric and then electronic instruments, a variety of different tonal and harmonic systems.

One of my favorite examples of such changes is the music of Harry Partch. Partch, as is well known, composed for a forty-two tone scale. Since no instruments existed for forty-two tone music, he had to invent and construct them himself, which he did (since he didn't have much money) mostly out of scavenged materials. When the instruments were made, no one knew how to play them, and so he had to teach a generation of Partch instrumentalists. He not only had to teach them to play the instruments but also, because there was no extant forty-two tone notation, he had to invent the notation and teach them that as well. And since there was no literature for a music based on forty-two tones, he had to write that too (which, of course, was why he had gone to all that trouble in the first place).

Partch's music was, however, played by players who rehearsed a work that they played from a notated score composed by a composer. They typically performed, as we say, "in concert," in a hall, for an audience who had come especially for the purpose of listening to that music. They recorded the music, which was issued on discs and sold through more or less conventional channels. So Partch's music was a change, but certainly not a complete change. Much stayed the same.

Now consider a possibility that differs much more from the way we conventionally make music. I base this possibility on a story a friend told me about a friend of his who, he said, lived in a place where bamboo grew. Every day that he felt like making music, he picked a piece of bamboo. He made holes in the bamboo tube using a randomizing procedure to determine their placement. In that way, each flute he made gave him a different scale to work with. He then spent the day experimenting with the new flute, seeing what melodic and harmonic possibilities that scale gave him, composing whatever seemed appropriate to those resources and the day and his mood, and then—this is the crucial difference between what this experiment accomplished and what one might get from a synthesizer—at the end of the day he burned the flute. That day's music was that day's music and when the day was over its music went with it.

These three ways of making music—conventional concert practice, Harry Partch, and the randomly constructed bamboo flute—suggest the dimension of analysis I'd like to make account for the stability of conventional music making: inertia. We might also call it, with somewhat more of a practical twist, hegemony.

In conventional music-making, nothing goes away at the end of the day. We don't invent a new scale every day. In fact, we hardly ever do, unless we are as eccentric and individualistic as Partch, or like to experiment mathematically the way Easley Blackwood

did when he systematically explored the possibilities of scales made by dividing the octave into increasingly fine units. Instead, we use one of the several scales in common use. We don't really invent new melodies every day, either, even those of us who improvise. Paul Berliner's research on jazz improvisation shows that even the most inventive jazz players work with a small library of short phrases which they vary and combine endlessly, starting on different degrees of the scale and at different places in the bar, to make enormous numbers of distinctive variations. He shows further that those phrases are typically not their own, but are part of a vocabulary of such phrases that go back to the beginnings of jazz playing, so that the phrases he finds in the improvisations of trumpeter Booker Little can also be found, perhaps in slightly variant forms, all the way back to the beginnings of jazz trumpet playing, in the recorded solos (which Little surely knew) of Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge and Louis Armstrong.

Similarly, we don't burn our instruments. They're too expensive. We're used to them. We know how to play them. We don't have to explore their possibilities. We've done that and the possibilities are in our fingers, built into our bodies the way David Sudnow described his own learning of jazz piano practice being built into his. So, instead of burning our instruments, we take good care of them, have them repaired when they need it, and insure them so that we can replace them if anything happens.

Those decisions aren't unconnected. We use the instruments because they have built into them a selection of tones that is not new and different, a selection we are used to and can work with. We use those scales because they are built into the instruments we have and know.

In short, a way of making music is what sociologists of science have come to speak of, not very originally perhaps, but certainly intelligibly, as a "package". Each piece in the package presupposes the existence of all the others. They are all connected in such a way that, when you choose any one of them, you find it enormously easy to take everything that comes with that choice, and enormously difficult to try to make any substitutions. It's the package that exerts the hegemony, that contains the inertial force, if I can attribute agency to such a conceptual creation.

Think of Partch. When he spent a year at a college campus as composer in residence, he would spend months with students building instruments, teaching them to play what had been built, teaching them a notation, working on particular pieces, all in order to prepare (between September and May, let's say) a two hour concert. A major orchestra will, these days, spend no more than nine hours, and more likely six, preparing a similar amount of music. You might say that the difference between nine months and nine hours is a rough measure of the inertial power of a conventional musical package.

It is not only these musical considerations—scales and instruments—that make up the package. The package also contains the social situations in which music gets made, and in which the players and everyone else involved is trained. Symphony concerts are not the way they are just because the instruments are there and the music is written in an already established notation. They are what they are, also, because concert music is a business. The people who make that kind of music get paid for it, not as well as they might like, but enough that raising the money to pay them is a serious problem. That means that the orchestras have to hire people to see that the money is there: fundraisers, marketing specialists, ticket sellers, and all that.



All that money requires tending, so they also need bookkeepers and accountants and lawyers. The players are usually members of a union, so there are labor relations to take care of; the inability of players and management to agree on a contract has killed off a few orchestras. The economics of the symphony business are what make it necessary for players to have certain skills, e.g., the ability to perform a difficult piece of music creditably or excellently with only a few hours rehearsal (when the rehearsal must be paid for at union rates). After all, it is not a necessary feature of making good music that you be able to learn to perform a particular piece quickly; that is a business driven requirement.

Part of the concert music package is an associated set of educational organizations. Professional training schools produce the players who can do everything the other parts of the package require: quick studies with virtuoso skills who can adapt to a variety of conductors. Elementary and secondary schools teach some rudiments of music, in the places where penny pinching state and city governments haven't made that impossible, and take children to "children's concerts" to give them a kind of minimal exposure to music, which might make them into potential customers for the concert business, if not for the live concerts then perhaps for television and recordings.

We can add to the package such frills as critics, theorists and scholars. I'll leave their relations to what I've described as an exercise to be done at home.

All these parts of the package could themselves be done some other way. Music could be supported otherwise than by raising money from rich people and selling tickets. It could be an amateur activity, as so many other kinds of music are. Children could learn to play instruments proficiently in school, instead of learning to be consumers, the way some number of them learn to be proficient enough players of rock.

So that's the package, and it creates the inertia that keeps things as they are. It's important to see that it doesn't in any way require anyone to do anything in the conventional way, or prevent innovation or unconventionality. You want forty-two tone music? Go ahead and write it. But you'll have a lot of trouble getting it played, because no one will have the instruments or know how to play them and, for that matter, no one will know how to listen to it either, since it will not be one of the kinds of music they learned to hear in school or from records. You want to pick pieces of bamboo and invent whole new musical systems from scratch every day? Be my guest. But keep it to yourself and don't expect anyone to cooperate with you. You want to compose it on a computer? Fine, but then you will spend time you might have been composing learning more about computers than you ever wanted to know (like my friend Michael Joyce, who wanted to write interactive fiction and thought a computer would be the way to do it, and it was, but it took him three years to develop "StorySpace," the software that made it possible to write the first story).

You can do anything you like, but the cost is high. The more you want to depart from the standard package, the more you find that everything else connected with making music has gotten more complicated and difficult. You will have to recruit and train people who otherwise would have been ready to go, you will have to learn new ways of doing things, you will have to construct machinery or adapt it to your purposes instead of being able to use off-the-shelf products. All of that will eat into the time and resources you might have devoted to making art, which is what you set out to do.

So it isn't surprising that most people, confronted with that kind of choice, decide to do things as they've been done. At every turn, there's an easy way to go and a hard way, and they are likely to choose the easy way. Not because they are lazy, but because they want to get on with the work they set out to do. That may not look like the exercise of power, but it is, in its most insidious form: the structuring of choices so as to make one choice "obvious."

On the other hand, it's clear that this isn't such an extreme of power as to prevent people from innovating. There seem always to be enough people around to keep things moving a little, enough people with new ideas and the energy to give them a try. The problem about change is not whether there are such people but whether their ideas will be incorporated into the workings of the rest of the package, whether they will be institutionalized so as to get the advantage of all the apparatus that is already in place. Alternatively, can they create for themselves a new apparatus, which will do all those things the regular system does for older kinds of work? In some ways, at least for a time, you could say that rock music did that, creating a network of performance sites and training institutions that were independent of what had been there before. Rock music did not take over jazz venues, or recruit the audience of jazz; it found new venues (the Fillmore Auditorium replaced an "Over Thirties Ballroom" whose clientele had gotten too old to dance) and created a new audience.

To show what it takes to make an enormous change, we can look at Pierre-Michel Menger's study of the compositional scene in France. When Pierre Boulez came to control about 80% of all government money available for classical music (the kind of thing that can happen in so centralized a society), he declared a shift of emphasis from composition to "research in sonorities," concerned less with producing works to be played in concert and more with investigating the new possibilities introduced by digital music. The result, according to Menger, was a paradox: governmental supported music that was radically avant-garde, neither conservative nor popular, but instead esoteric in the extreme.

That suggests one last aspect of the power of inertia, one implicit in most of what I've said until now. Boulez could do this because he was able, by virtue of the centralized apparatus he controlled, to control the definition of what constituted music. That control of definition exists in all professionalized music worlds. You'll remember that I began by referring to Cage's catholic and democratic notions about what constituted music. But then I pretty much proceeded, as most sensible scholars would, to ignore those ideas, by accepting the notion that music is what is conventionally thought of as music, which is to say professionalized music that someone makes a living by. Within that enormous restriction on what I defined as music, I mostly concentrated on conventional concert music. By doing that I accepted the most insidious way that power is exercised, which consists of letting people whose business it is define what that business includes, which versions of it are serious and important, and which don't matter much.

Now I'll repair that error. Take an unbiased look at musicmaking, as Ruth Finnegan did in her study of musicmaking in the new English town of Milton Keynes. Look and listen as she did and find everywhere in such a city (the population is about 200,000) that people are making music, using an inclusive Cagean definition. You find all the rock bands, church choirs and amateur orchestras. You find the large number of organizations in which specialized ethnic music is made: the Milton Keynes Irish Society, the Bletchley Edelweiss club (devoted to Austrian, Swiss and German music), the Hindu youth

organization, and the less organized but still musical Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Sikh and Bangladeshi communities. The schools, of course, have musical organizations and programs. So do the clubs and pubs.

I'm not making a sentimental anthropological plea that we remember and honor all these wonderful folk, or even the Cagean aesthetic plea to enjoy ourselves by listening to all the wonderful sound to be heard if we just pay attention. Rather, this is an analytic point: when we talk about music and power, we must recognize that all these ways of making music are in active use and the power of professional definition prevents us from taking them seriously.

What does it mean for a kind of musicmaking not to be taken seriously? At the most material level, all the standard, already in place, ways of paying for musicmaking (not just salaries, but the provision of instruments, places to play, and so forth) will not be available to you: no NEA grants, no fellowships, no commissions from players and groups. More generally, all the apparatus I described above, all the available stuff that makes it so easy to make music, is only available to people who are making what the people in charge of that stuff recognize and define as "music." Which does not include the full panoply of musicmaking Cage would have us recognize and Finnegan found in Milton Keynes.

A striking example of what it means not to be part of the world defined by the professionals is found in Hermano Vianna's study of the world of funk in Rio de Janeiro. Based on intensive observation of this world, Vianna estimates that there are between one and two thousand clubs in the metropolitan area (whose population is around five million), each of them drawing as many as a thousand people a night for two or three nights each weekend to listen and dance to funk music imported from the United States. One striking finding of his research is that, until he wrote about it, "no one" in Rio, which is to say no intellectual or journalist or opinion maker, knew that this was going on. It was something poor, mostly black, people were doing in their own neighborhoods, neighborhoods to which the experts on "popular culture" never went. So, from a certain point of view, Rio's funk scene "didn't exist."

Another surprising finding is that this was not a case of cultural imperialism, of culture from the metropole being forced on a helpless population in a dependent country through the devices of modern mass marketing. The companies that produced these records in the United States were typically small, struggling enterprises that could not afford the price of cultural imperialism. Nor were the records the Brazilian funk fans liked ones that were popular or even well known in the United States. The only way the disk jockeys who ran these parties could get the records their fans like was to take a plane to New York, spend the day scouring stores for possible music, and take the fruits of their search back to Rio with them that evening. This is a long way from the stereotypical picture of the greedy multinational exploiting the "natives" of a poor country.

The poor funk lovers of Rio make their own world and so overcome the inertia that might be imposed by the existing packages of the music world. In that way, they are a model of what is possible, as is Partch, and the bamboo flute maker, all showing what you could do if you really wanted to and what the price would be.

### Biographical Note

I've explained some of these ideas in a slightly different form in "Art Worlds" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). My research with McCall and Morris is reported in two articles: Becker, McCall and Morris, "Theatres and Communities: Three Scenes," *Social Problems*, 36 (April): 93-112; and Becker and McCall, "Performance Science," *Social Problems* 37 (February, 1990), pp. 117-132. The theories of such well-known sociologists as Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton exemplify what I have described as functionalism. The "more realistic" sociology I ally myself with is found in the works of Robert E. Park, Everett C. Hughes and Herbert Blumer. Paul Berliner's work on jazz players will be published by the University of Chicago Press. David Sudnow presented his phenomenology of piano playing in his "Ways of the Hand" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). Michael Joyce's "StorySpace" is published by Eastgate Systems (Cambridge, MA) as is "afternoon," the hypertext novella he wrote with it. Pierre-Michel Menger's research is reported in "Le paradoxe du musicien: Le compositeur, Le mélomane et L'état dans la société contemporaine", Paris: Flammarion, 1983). Ruth Finnegan's research is reported in "The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town" (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Hermano Vianna's findings on Brazilian pop music are found in "O Mundo Funk Carioca" (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1988).

# THE TAO

## OF (FREE) IMPROVISATION

RENEE COULOMBE

“Oh, I think that was lovely, for that sort of thing.”<sup>1</sup>

The disclaimers:

I must begin by saying that this is a deeply personal topic, and my writing on it should in no way be construed as an impartial or scholarly interest. I am fascinated by my practice of free improvisation, and find it one of the richest sources of musical, personal, and spiritual satisfaction in my life. I believe it is my alchemy – to obliquely reference Saul Williams – and that the energies I channel while I play are real and concrete. My students know this is how I feel, and I have discussed in class my belief that free improvisation accomplishes spiritual work in real time. To begin by saying this will certainly open me up to a host of criticisms, many richly deserved. For an academic to state publicly that her music — and by extension her career in the academy – is her spiritual practice may sound self-indulgent and dangerous. I do it only because I believe it to be essential – for my particular spiritual interest has direct bearing on my practice and teaching of free improvisation. Taoist philosophy, which has greatly colored my life, places a value on spontaneity, internal observation and self-learning. I have now been on so many sides of improvisation practice as student, practitioner, teacher and my experience thus far has confirmed the appropriateness of Taoist philosophy when trying to come to grips with improvisatory artistic practice.

While my metaphor for understanding improvisation is philosophical, this does not, I believe, negate the experience or conclusions I draw as “indulgent.” All writing about music is metaphorical by necessity, music going beyond the verbal rather quickly. In many ways this makes the prism of Taoism even more potent, more in keeping with the intuitive nature of the art than many other possible modes of discourse. Taoism, like Zen Buddhism and other philosophies based on it, has at its heart the inability to be conveyed in words; when it is “right” you simply have to know it from your own experience. To teach

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<sup>1</sup> A compliment I received from a professor after a performance of one of my works. The piece was a scored improvisation performed by members of the *Akoe Improvisation Ensemble*.

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improvisation is to train the complete individual, rather than the acquisition of a body of technique – though this acquisition is certainly a part of the process. This presents many challenges for the scholar-improviser, in reconciling the sometimes-thorny differences between the practice and its discourse. More difficult still, the fact that improvisational practice is spontaneous, and western theoretical thought has a difficult time with spontaneity.

Compared with contemporary music theory, Taoism is a very old model – one that has withstood the change of 5 millennia. Yet Taoist writings remain, despite great age, relevant examples of the articulation of the non-verbal. Taoism allows for the existence of simultaneous conflicting realities in a way that most rational western discourse cannot, if it is to follow inherited rules of internal logic and comprehensibility. Conflicts, in our duality-bound western world-view, must be resolved. There are agreed-upon methods to solve all conflicts. Theory is generally this pursuit, and adopting a scientific model means that theory attempts to define a unified vision of "truth".

To frame this politically: As a woman, a lesbian, and someone who grew up in a racially mixed and economically stressed family, this central precept of western discourse, which has only recently begun to weaken, strikes me as ridiculous. My identity is hardly without unresolvable conflicts, and those conflicts are aggravated by my presence in the scholarly discipline of music theory. More than other forms of scholarship, music theory has been almost completely unwilling even to admit to the possibility that the construction of theory might have value-laden aspects subject to social conventions. While perhaps admitting that previous theory is imperfect, contemporary theory, now based largely on mathematic and scientific models, is argued as "objective" – after all D major is D major, right? My position in this discipline would seem precarious given my lack of willingness to search for "truth" rather than "truths." But is D Major always D Major? Who says so? How does the category "D Major" eliminate all other possibilities of what could be? How are we limited by the idea of D Major? Can everything be D Major? Can everything be *not* D Major? How is the "phenomenon" of D Major affected by the category "D Major"? Does it change the phenomenon in some way to be categorized as such? If so, how might all our "knowledge" be influenced or affected by the ways in which we grasp it through categorization and organization?

I am attracted to such questions: the schisms, the cracks in the façade of western thought around music – those places where scholarship breaks down, because those are the areas in which my musician-self seems most vividly reflected. Here, I have interspersed what can only be described as a personal account of my experience in free improvisation with quotations from a few translations of the Tao te Ching of Lao Tzu. This is perhaps the most universally recognized text in the Taoist philosophical canon, and as such bears almost iconic status in the West. I put the two texts side by side, allowing them simply to coexist. What connections exist between my account and these texts I will let the reader decide. I would suggest, however, that the readers sometimes substitute the word "Tao" for "improvisation" – and observe the result.

As a scholar, I am interested in constructing music discourse along a social justice model. I believe that arts are a valid medium for social change, and asking seemingly ridiculous questions can be a route to substantive change. Many activists have been superb musicians – Paul Robeson, Bela Bartok, Patti Smith, Bob Dylan, Henry Cowell to name but

very few. I am an activist-musician, and take no pains to hide my desire for a diversity of voices in musical discourse, a diversity I do not yet experience in my professional life. Music is an incredibly powerful medium for social and political change and my role models in such practice are largely drawn from improvisation.<sup>2</sup> The nearly complete absence of minority voices in the canon of Western music is surely to our shame. Improvisation seems to be an area that encourages cross-cultural musical exchange in an egalitarian manner. Free improvisation encourages the musical dialogue using musical language – liberated from the imprecision and inadequacies of speech. Free improvisation allows people to communicate in an intuitive language despite stylistic differences – as if people from many cultures could speak their own experience simultaneously in a multitude of languages and achieve an understanding of one another.

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"Tao is beyond words  
and beyond understanding.  
Words may be used to speak of it,  
but they cannot contain it"<sup>3</sup>

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"The way that can be spoken of  
Is not the constant way;  
The name that can be named  
Is not the constant name"<sup>4</sup>  
The argument:

Outside of Jazz literature, the practice, pedagogy, and theory of improvisation are rarely addressed in academia.<sup>5</sup> This despite an active and growing presence of free improvisers inside and outside of academia for many decades, as well as the continued crossover presence of many composer-improvisers such as John Zorn, Anthony Davis, or Pauline Oliveros. At present, the role of improvisation in academic "art" music is far from certain,

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<sup>2</sup> With non-improvisers a notable exception, such as Bob Marley and his Hope Road studios. Hope Road served, in addition to its function of recording studio, as a social-service agency in answer to a huge need. Muhal Richard Abrams, the AACM, and Pauline Oliveros are good contemporary examples of activist-improvisers.

<sup>3</sup> *The Tao te Ching of Lao Tzu* A New Translation by Brian Browne Walker (New York: St. Martins Press) 1995. Chapter 1, lines 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> *The Tao te Ching*, Lao Tzu (Translated with an introduction by D.C. Lau) (New York: Penguin Books) 1963. P. 57 (Chapter 1, lines 1-4).

<sup>5</sup> With the following notable exceptions: Lewis, George "Teaching Improvised Music: An Ethnographic Memoir" "Improvised Music After 1950"

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and is as dogged with misunderstandings, false assumptions, and unseen biases as many other musical practices have been until recent years.<sup>6</sup> On one level, improvisation's uneasy positioning within academic music can be understood as a clash with current disciplinary boundaries: Western academic musical education emphasizes the acquisition of technique and development of skills for the accurate interpretation or analysis of the notated musical score. With so much emphasis on scores, improvisers can interpret the bias toward notated music in a number of uncomplimentary ways.<sup>7</sup> Improvisers may hesitate to document their work because, rightly or wrongly, they perceive from the scholarly musical community apathy or even hostility toward improvisation.

The picture is further complicated by the discipline itself: free improvisation is by its very nature an ephemeral art. How can we build a body of theory and criticism concerning improvisation that arises organically from it, rather than imposing theory on top? What would a true "improvisational theory" look like? How could improvisatory structures be reflected in it, so that it bore within its deepest layers reflections of the practice itself? Further, who would create this theory — only improvisers themselves? To what end could theoretical knowledge be used? Would it have an impact on pedagogy, or the understanding of improvisation by listeners and participants?

The position of improvisation within the musical arts would seem to offer unique insights. It is one of the few areas where participants are also the audience, making it one of the most intimate music-making experiences. The dynamics of such intimate interactions have gone largely unexamined and interpreted, and the challenges of pedagogy under such circumstances even less understood. The acquisition of technique within improvisational practice is often accomplished through improvisational interaction with one's teachers — something relatively rare in instrumental study outside of improvisation, where the model of conservatory instruction has the student playing, and the teacher listening and correcting. This is not to ignore the role of performing with one's teacher within traditional instrumental instruction, only to point out that this one aspect dominates improvisation instruction.

While I don't think that the existence of a recognized theory of free improvisation can in and of itself augment (or establish?) its position within academic discourse, the lack of an articulated theory has a particularly damaging effect within the academy. As a composer, theorist, and improviser currently working in academia, I have witnessed both the reluctance on the part of composers and scholars to acknowledge the legitimacy of free improvisation as informed tradition and the resentment that reluctance caused among communities of improvisers.<sup>8</sup> I have seen how documentation serves many ends in the

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<sup>6</sup> I speak here of music histories and theories before the advent of feminist, gender, queer, postmodern, and postcolonial theories, among others. Within many of these frameworks, the theorist or historian is just as likely to be interrogated now as "his" subjects, exposing the countless fallacies, projections, intentional misunderstandings, etc. that are codified in standard musical reference texts.

<sup>7</sup> The association, correct or incorrect, of improvisation with non-Western musics, with Jazz, and with traditions of communities of color cannot be ignored in addressing this issue. I am not the first person to notice the elements of racism that lurk beneath some rhetoric on improvisation.

<sup>8</sup> It is with glee I note the poster for the recent Pauline Oliveros 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration: *The Sounding Margins*. The poster featured a stark black-and-white close-up image of Pauline's face under a large banner that read "Wanted: Pauline Oliveros Composer of Outlaw Music for 40 Years." This crystallizes the



academy – scores, books, articles and performances of original work count for tenure and “merit” increases. Collaborative teaching, creating, and performing cause problems – as I have just recently discovered in the complicated assembly of my own “personnel” file, which necessitated the creation of certain categories of creative activity no administrator in the music department had ever had to deal with.

In light of the relative scarcity in the scholarly literature of documents written on improvisation by practitioners, I see my multiple positioning as particularly rich for the documentation of my improvisational practice. I am in a position to “write back” to my composer/scholar colleagues and friends. Sadly, my multiplicity also points out my own difficulties in integrating these roles in my own career; I am, technically, a divided musical self. Not in reality: when I improvise, I do not leave my scholar- or composer-self outside the room, nor do I forget that my training in classical piano from the age of nine, or my education as composer and my experiences as music student. The reason these selves seem divided is that the current construction of the discipline of music frames these aspects in contradistinction with one another. Composer and scholar might be just two different hats one wears—both legitimately part of academic tradition—while scholar and improviser might seem to be at odds in a much deeper way. Why might that be? Exactly what do the tensions involve? How might theory and pedagogy be reconstituted so as to render the roles of scholar and improviser harmonious?

“Looked at but not seen,  
listened to but not heard  
grasped but not held,  
formless, soundless, intangible:  
the Tao resists analysis and defies comprehension.”<sup>9</sup>

*historical interlude*

*I first learned to improvise outside a Jazz context late one evening during my senior year at Connecticut College. I was in the recital hall practicing on the 9-foot grand for my upcoming recital, and it was long past the hour when the building was locked up. A student*

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relationship of many of the musicians in free improvisation to the academy. Surely, “outlaw music” can only be interpreted with regards to Pauline’s Music occupying a marginal place within academic musical discourse – the general public would certainly not consider what she does against the law. Its position vis-à-vis traditional boundaries of musical practice surely plays a large part as well, but it is only within the academy that disciplinary boundaries matter – no artists outside consider it a problem to work at the boundaries of genres and disciplines, it is considered contemporary. Only in the academy where distinctions have to be drawn with regard to teaching load and pedagogy that such boundaries become necessary for survival, and thus have long outlived their usefulness. This may be of little comfort to academics working in newly integrated departments, nonetheless, such distinctions will be less and less important as technology and practice integrates the arts more completely.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Chapter 14, lines 1-6.

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*I'd never met before walked in. He was an art student from the third floor and had heard me through the vents. He sat down at the other piano (this was one of the only rooms in the building where two pianists could play at the same time), and began to play. I objected, needing to work on the Beethoven sonata quite a bit, but he told me I needed a break and should just "play." I sat there, silent, for a long time. He yelled out "haven't you ever improvised before?" I replied, truthfully, no. His playing I would now describe as "new-agey" and eventually I joined in playing something noodly in C-major. Nonetheless, from that day on, I would occasionally, "just play." I did it quietly, and never mentioned it to my teachers or fellow students. It seemed a shameful secret.*

### The experience:

I had my first opportunity to study improvisation only when I began my doctoral work in composition at the University of California, San Diego in 1991. In that year George Lewis joined the UCSD faculty, and quickly established himself at the center of a newly revitalized program that centered on improvisation. His desire to explore improvisation pedagogy at UCSD coincided with my strong desire to learn about improvisatory musics and technique, but I didn't articulate that desire until George asked me about it. It was, to my best recollection, the first time a professor suggested that I might be good at something, and encouraged me to pursue it. I had come to UCSD from Columbia University, where I had received a Master's degree in music composition and had had what could best be described as a difficult time. Columbia had offered no opportunities to study free improvisation. The composition and theory faculty, and, indeed, students never mentioned improvisation, even in passing, inside or outside of the classroom except in passing reference to Jazz. In this institutional absence, Columbia made it clear that they considered improvisation not a tradition important for their students to know. Not to single out Columbia: my conservatory education at the Conservatoire Nationale in Nantes, France didn't mention it either, nor did my undergraduate institution, Connecticut College.

George's approach to improvisation pedagogy at UCSD, which he recently documented in an essay<sup>10</sup>, placed improvisation firmly within the context of scholarly disciplines. It was not until much later that I identified George's teaching as the "discipline" of free improvisation, but in every sense of the word, it was. In his first graduate seminar on improvisation we examined articles, performances, theories, and histories. We recorded weekly musical assignments (one of the few graduate seminars in which my actual musical practice came into play), as we were expected to be scholar-practitioners. In his graduate improvisation ensemble, we often talked more than we played, as we absorbed more and more examples of improvisation and accounts of its practice. George took particular care to correct many of the faulty assumptions that his students brought into his seminars and ensembles. He challenged first the assumption that improvisation, as spontaneous art form, could not be submitted to the analysis we routinely employed in examining other musics. I

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<sup>10</sup> "Teaching Improvised Music: An Ethnographic Memoir"

remember how, when I worked with the graduate ensemble George describes in his article<sup>11</sup>, students complained constantly in response to George's request that they comment on their own improvisational process. Some students assumed that playing alone should be sufficient to improve in the practice. George's own view was different, and reveals much about his view of improvisation's place in the cosmology of Western musical practices. He wanted students to have a sophisticated understanding of musical gesture and timing, along with a grasp of musical structures created in real time. It did not suffice to *do*, we had to know *why* and *how* and observe our decision-making process in sifting through possibilities before choosing our musical actions. All this in real time!

It is important to note that, despite such complaints, the participants in George's ensembles and seminars, at least at the graduate level, worked with him by choice. There were many, many superb improvisers participating, and our sometimes cantankerous interactions were passionate and satisfying. Participants engaged deeply with the exercises and assignments and many of us took our work with George extremely seriously. This is not to say that we did not produce vast quantities of indulgent, insensitive music. We made horrible mistakes, publicly. This statement seems obvious when talking about scored music, where mistakes are immediately identifiable. When speaking of improvisation, mistakes are less easy to pinpoint, and are often difficult to articulate in words. It is one thing to tell someone their timing is off, quite another to tell them how to fix it. It is even harder to point out and pinpoint the myriad instances of carelessness, insensitivity, poorly articulated or executed gestures, or any of the many ways free improvisations can go awry. In the absence of previously-agreed-upon structures, critique and correction can get difficult. A central issue to any free improvisation pedagogy is how to correct without offering a solution, simply identifying the problem. "You'll know it when you feel it" is not an answer we tend to give out to our students in the academy. Nonetheless in this context it is truth.

"A sage is subtle, intuitive,  
penetrating, profound.  
His depths are mysterious and unfathomable.  
The best one can do is describe his appearance:  
The Sage is as alert as a person crossing  
a winter stream;  
as circumspect as a person with neighbors on all four sides;  
as respectful as a thoughtful guest;  
as yielding as melting ice;  
as simple as uncarved wood;  
as open as a valley;  
as chaotic as a muddy torrent.

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<sup>11</sup> Op.cit.

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Why 'chaotic as a muddy torrent?'

Because clarity is learned by being  
patient in the presence of chaos.

Tolerating disarray, remaining at rest,  
gradually one learns to allow muddy water  
to settle and proper responses to reveal themselves."<sup>12</sup>

The graduate ensemble participants acquired technique in a fashion quite similar to our peers in the 20th<sup>t</sup> century music performance ensembles who worked from notated scores. We met in small groups to rehearse, practiced individually, listened to recorded performances and practice sessions, and gave concerts at the end of the quarter. The major difference was that, without a score, we were not working to recreate in real time a musical experience previously envisioned by a single individual. Instead, we slowly assembled, through a web of trust in one another, a constellation of musical possibilities that were fundamentally different from anything we could have achieved as individuals. This constellation in turn called upon each of us to move further and further outside our own sphere of technical comfort or complacency. Meetings varied a great deal: one day we might play and talk about a scored improvisation or discuss an article, while another day we might be called upon to improvise for the group as solo, or in an impromptu ensemble. We might be called upon to play with George, or to discuss an assignment we complete outside of class. Often we met to complete assignments outside of class, the artifact of which was handed in on a cassette tape. George provided written feedback on all taped assignments with our narrative evaluation and grades.

George assumed the traditional role of professor in assigning materials and directing class, but also the additional role of master improviser to whom each of us apprenticed ourselves. Many of us examined his personal practice with considerable interest: I, for example, attended almost every performance he gave in San Diego while I lived there and listened to whichever of his recordings I could get my hands on. We talked about class at the campus coffee shop and discussed issues raised by the class at casual gatherings in the graduate lounge. In class meetings, we observed him working with our colleagues, as individuals or small ensembles, we imitated him sometimes, and tried his style on for size. When we believed we had arrived at some understanding, that was usually the moment the rug got pulled out from under us, and we were shown how much we still needed to learn.

The pedagogy that emerged was a deeply personal one, intimately involved, and sensitive to who we were as students. That intimacy guaranteed every student was made uncomfortable by something – usually by quite a bit. I remember one early duet improvisation between George and I, which took place in front of the class. Everyone in the class that day was to play a duet with George, and many of them had gone quite well. Having done some good work in the class thus far, I was pretty confident and looked forward to my turn. When we agreed to begin, George aggressively took the foreground,

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<sup>12</sup> Brown, Chapter 15.

jumping in quickly and powerfully. I played only two notes before he stopped me to ask what I was doing. I didn't have a good answer, in fact, I had been having a difficult time figuring out what I could do with the material he was presenting. So I jumped in without thinking. We started over several times, and each time he stopped me a few notes into my improvisation to ask me again what I was doing. Because we were performing before the entire class, I was beginning to feel the blood rushing into my reddening face – graduate school is no place to make public mistakes! I wanted desperately to be out of the spotlight. In retrospect, I understand George's response to my playing as appropriate: I couldn't figure out what to do with the materials he was presenting, so I decided not to respond. I began playing whatever I felt like playing, rather than either waiting until I had something to contribute or simply not playing at all.

The choice to play, rather than not play, must be examined just as closely as what is played. In this particular instance, my resistance to George was great. I recall yelling at him in frustration and embarrassment, wondering why he was trying to make my life so difficult. He simply asked me to try again, this time with far better results. I didn't stop feeling hurt for a long time, and was embarrassed that I'd broken down and gotten so obviously flustered by something in front of my peers. I look back on the experience as being one of the most important in my education: I can say that in that moment I really learned something.

George's attached little significance to "good" or appropriate student behavior. Although he insisted on respectful discourse, arguments among students were rarely smoothed over. We pursued intellectual disagreements to uncomfortable levels, if not altogether effectively. In short, if you were not interested in being pushed in all directions, it was best to stay away. Stylistic disagreements were also common in some sub-ensembles, and some graduate students sealed their enmity with one another in such small groups. Remarkably, our negative feelings or reactions seemed to have a place in this pedagogy. George remained open to us even as our struggles with our own limitations made us downright cranky and childish. We were required to articulate what was going on, how our process was developing as a result, and what implications we saw in this change. The rawness and intimacy of the dialogue was sometimes excruciating for some of us. I realized long afterward that we were being required to build trust in the presence of conflict, something with direct application to our practice. We were being required to articulate our differences, again with direct application. We were also being required to bridge differences while keeping in mind our own interests and gifts. The benefits of all three skills have returned to me a hundred-fold in all aspects of my life and career.

"To know yet to think that one does not know is best;  
Not to know yet to think that one knows will lead to difficulty.  
It is by being alive to difficulty that one can avoid it.

The sage meets with no difficulty. It is because he is alive to it that he meets with no difficulty.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lau, p. 133.

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### *artistic interlude*

*I had the great pleasure of participating in The Sounding Margins, Forty-Year Retrospective of the Works of Pauline Oliveros. This Festival featured three full-length concerts over two days, along with special events around and between the music. I was struck immediately by the diversity of Pauline's work over the past 40 years. She is one of the few role models in contemporary music who leads by example rather than influence. The diversity of works and styles at the event had much to do with Pauline's work for decades in free improvisation. The diversity reflected the many collaborators own genres and identities – from classically trained to experimental musicians, from blues to avant-classical, across cultural and geographic divides. When asked by the host, Susan Cahill, why she created so many different kinds of music all the time, rather than having artistic “periods” like Stravinsky or Schoenberg, she replied “Well, I haven’t had my period for a long time now...” A cogent, if off-handed comment that referenced a whole host of my feminist angst without expressly stating much. For her final improvisation which closed the festival, she emerged in a jungle-print caftan, blue wig and large sunglasses to perform. I confess I got quite choked up. Watching her perform, at 70, at the end of an exhausting festival, and to see her bring such spontaneity and wit to it - well, it was a bit overwhelming. I can't articulate precisely what made me weep seeing her, perhaps it was an acknowledgement of all that she has made possible for me as a musician. I found the experience breathtaking.*

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Heaviness is the root of lightness.

Tranquility is the master of agitation.

That is why the sage travels all day

without ever losing sight of her baggage

She may live in a glorious palace, but

she isn't attached to its pleasures.

Why should the lord of ten thousand chariots

behave lightly in the world?

One who acts lightly loses her foundation.

One who becomes agitated sacrifices her mastery.

When I began teaching improvisation as part of my job as professor of theory and composition, I quickly realized how difficult teaching free improvisation can be. Most of what I have learned I may have loosely obtained from George – but adopting other's style of teaching the discipline is to dishonor your own experience. I had to figure it out, in many ways, on my own.

When faced at first with their seemingly endless desire to play everything, all the time, I declared that for the duration of 10 minutes or so they could only do one thing — “so

make it count!" Being confronted with freedom can be as difficult as being overburdened with responsibilities. When they became overwhelmed by their freedom, we played endless hours of "30-second pieces" – tiny little solos and group improvisations that had starts, middles and ends, only short ones. This taught them respect for the timing of an improvisation – seeing how it works on the small scale leads to increased sensitivity over greater expanses of time.

When they wanted to play the same thing over and over, I began to yell "change" many times over the course of the improvisation, with the agreement that they would change "everything" they were doing when I said "change." This kept them from hanging on to musical materials past their effectiveness. "Don't get too attached to anything" was my almost constant refrain. To expand their musical memory, we did imitation games, growing in length and complexity as skill-levels grew. All the time, we talked – about what we played, and what we didn't. We analyzed what worked, what didn't and why. We did listening exercises to increase our awareness – on so many days, the sounds of the traffic sighing and the building creaking and students passing outside was our music.

One day, a student asked "what would happen if we just didn't stop playing when our time was up? If we just left and never ended and when we came back the next week it was still going on?" I thought it a profound question and pondered it quite a bit. One day in the weeks that followed, I decided, in the moment, not to end. As we packed up our equipment, we played the extension cords being wound up, the storage doors being opened and closed, the light switches turning off, the sound of our feet on the linoleum floor... When we emerged outside, the world did indeed take on a different feel to our heightened awareness. No one spoke – we found non-verbal ways of acknowledging each other as we went our separate ways. We abandoned ourselves to the improvisation and didn't come back. The following week, many students reported the depth of their experience out in the world "as an improvisation" – one declaring "that was the best class I've had since I've been in school!"

In addition to teaching improvisation, I perform with a variety of professional ensembles that continually cross over the "inside-outside" divide. These groups attract a diverse audience in my current home of Riverside, California, where my performances have thus far been extremely well-attended. My students have performed with several professional groups now, and have done extremely well for those so new to the discipline. The students present their own public concerts as well, have formed a fellowship ensemble that presents free improvisation to the community at large, and have performed at community events.

In the past year, such luminaries as Pauline Oliveros, Quincy Troupe, and The Acoustic Guitar Trio with Nels Cline, Jim McAuley and Rod Poole have performed and done improvisation workshops in the department – with much thanks going to the committed students who have helped raise money. Most recently, pianist Michael Wolff, with sidemen Badal Roy, John B. Williams, and Chuck Norris have graced Riverside with concerts and worked with my students in improvisation workshops. I attribute our amazing good fortune to the energies created by the students. If anything, I have simply made space in the university for their energies, and have given them a channel through which to move out

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into the community. Their discipline has made this great outpouring of energy possible. Our largest audiences have been drawn from outside academia, as improvised music gains more and more fans,<sup>14</sup> and students from many colleges and universities join with UCR in benefiting from this wealth of talent. The local radio station has interviewed many of these folks, providing first-person accounts of this music making to the community at large.

I believe that studying improvisation has shaped both my students and my colleagues personally. Week after week, we discover more about our musical selves, we uncover new layers of trust and curiosity, we discover new truths about beauty. By their own accounts, my students have been profoundly affected by the teachings of so many committed practitioners, so early in their improvisational development. We sometimes giggle as if it all simply can't be real. They have reacted as I have rarely seen students react to a course – some have told me they are no longer going to transfer to other schools because of this experience. Others have told me that their entire lives have been affected, that they couldn't go a week without improvising with the group, that they want to continue on their own, over weekends, over vacations. I in turn have noticed the powerful energizing influence this has had on our community. The study of free improvisation has gone beyond the purely pedagogical for my students and my colleagues in the professional groups in which I perform. We have all noticed the subtle healing influence that making this music has had on all of us. I believe this powerful alchemy is attributable in large part to the basic parameters of free improvisation. We have created a new model for egalitarian pedagogy built largely around the practice itself, allowing the structure of the pedagogy to emerge from the practice itself.

This is not to say that there are not difficulties inherent, and that there have not been problems along the way. Those that feel they have nothing to learn are often attracted to improvisation out of a desire to not be concretely criticized, as if the “nebulous” nature of un-scored practices could shield their arrogance. This is particularly difficult to deal with, because you can think you “feel it” when you are really only feeling yourself: A painful lesson I am still learning. Confronting such arrogance is rarely done in academia – in fact my experience has been that it aids in achieving academic success. Improvisational study is often non-linear, circular, in fact. Truths rarely apply for long. Improvisation is a dynamic system in which the artist must respond to current phenomena in a timely fashion. Attuning oneself to the current moment is not an easily documented process in the West.

Teaching improvisation is often like herding cats, trying to challenge each according to their abilities, creating opportunities for enlightenment rather than providing answers. One student, a particularly committed and talented soul, yelled in frustration early on “JUST TELL ME WHAT TO DO AND I'LL DO IT!” How much I felt for him at the moment. We are so used to discerning what our teachers want and expect when we are in school, that we are completely unprepared for a discipline that has no correct answers. “The way that can be spoken of is not the way” applies powerfully here. I recognize, as any good Taoist

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<sup>14</sup> I couldn't be more thrilled about Signal to Noise, among some other journals like The Wire which sometimes feature avante-improvisation. Free improvisation currently exists at the nexus between free jazz, avante-classical and jam rock. Few other traditions could boast so diverse a fan-base.



master must, that the only real learning is self-learning, and all I can do is create opportunities for my students to teach themselves what they need to know. My job is to gently guide and lead by example, to challenge resistance and insensitivity where I find it, and to honor my students' paths as they are.

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Truthful words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not truthful, Good words are not persuasive; persuasive words are not good. He who knows has no wide learning; he who has wide learning does not know.

The sage does not hoard.

Having bestowed all he has on others, he has yet more;

Having given all he has to others, he is richer still.

The way of heaven benefits and does not harm; the way of the sage is bountiful and does not contend.<sup>15</sup>

When I began thinking about this article, it was as a first-person account of my path from student through practitioner and finally teacher of improvisation. This trajectory now seems inherently at odds with what I really know, however. I have never stopped being a student of improvisation – and I may always have been a student of improvisation, long before I knew consciously what I was doing. I continue to learn, only now it is quite often from my students and colleagues. They are in many ways my most effective teachers, as has been the discipline itself. Nor do I believe that a theoretical discourse about improvisation is essential to the survival of the practice – far from it. I simply believe that this discipline offers important opportunities to examine musical practice, and to theorize musical dialogue in real-time. Indeed, it offers a unique prism through which we can view the underpinnings of western theoretical discourse *because* of the thorny issues it will not resolve. It is, in short, a lens through which to examine our own experiences as musicians, so that we might understand more about our “selves” as musicians and beings.

I achieve through improvisation what I can best describe as a “beginner’s mind” – not always, but more and more frequently of late. It is a state of being in which the music and I are not separate, in which I can express, directly, my own musicality without filters or metaphors. Not surprisingly, there are few words in my head when I’m improvising, and even fewer which can describe the experience fully. I long for such an experience in theory. I want theory and discourse to be compelling, inspiring, and deeply meaningful to my everyday existence. I have found through free improvisation that the bigger the risk I take in my own music-making, the greater the reward. I want such risks to extend to my scholarship, and my scholarly disciplines.

I want to help shape a music theory that is not based on the right/wrong, true/false dichotomy, and free improvisation would appear to require such a theory from the start. I

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<sup>15</sup> Lau, p. 143,

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want a theory that doesn't seek to be smart, or elegant, or even effective; one that doesn't impose its own rhetorical structures on its subject matter; one that allows simultaneously conflicting realities to coexist – and makes my experience of life all the more rich for having dwelled on the inconsistency. In short, I want a theory which feels like my practice – which will, of necessity, make it personal, complex, conflicted, and powerful. It will never articulate the experience of improvisation, but surely we could come closer to the experience?

I offer as a possible verbal vehicle for this new theory the art of poetry, which would in its abilities to point to things beyond the ken of words. The use of the poetry of the Tao is a compelling example of a spiritual philosophy articulated in words which respects the non-verbal nature of the subject matter – the Tao tells you up front you can't comprehend the way with words, but then goes on to tell you anyway. In the spirit of such, I will close with a quote from Saul Williams' most recent recording, Amethyst Rock Star, which I alluded to early on in this endeavor: "...mere language is profanity, I'd rather hum, or have my soul tattooed to my tongue, and let the scriptures be sung in jibberish, 'cause words be simple fish in my soul's aquarium, and intellect can't swim."<sup>16</sup>

Sung any good gibberish lately?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Saul Williams Amethyst Rock Star American Recording Company, 2001. Liner notes.

<sup>17</sup> For Ben Boretz, and Elaine Barkin, and George Lewis, and Jonathan Kramer – and certainly to Saul – who have kept me articulating the inarticulable for so long.

I. AFTER

Last night's session with the Improviser's Orchestra had a "curious" quality to it. What might be called-- in the parlance of the perennially "slangorous"--an "odd vibe" (as in some wriggle-worm of discomfort which threads its way through the proceedings, pausing at interstices within the accreting web to stitch together various and particular of its sound-strands . . . .(Some . . . of these . . . as if "tossed" [or hurled] unceremoniously [indiscriminately, "insouciantly"] into the shared space without much thought seeming to be given to any particular way in which a sound might be made and heard to have a singular life: a quality, an identity . . . Others, seeming to be placed with an ear to careful and elegant construction with respect, both, to the identity of one's own sound expressions and their potential connectivity and inter-qualification with those of another.)

"Curious" is, of course, not quite the right word to describe the event. And, it is not quite "the event" which "curious" describes but rather what are, particularly and urgently, feelings of my own about it: untethered observations--as much of the gut as the head--(as much of fantasy as epistemology)--experienced in real time as I thought-(as-I-played-as-I thought) about what (and how) I could add to the collective unfolding; how I could affect change in the shape and tenor of it; whether I should even try. And, as descriptive language goes, it (i.e., "curious") feels a bit like "soft-soap." There is about it something of the soothing emolument, by way of its imperial euphemism-cum-obfuscation in the form of a "plummy" bit of neo-Victorian "brit-speak" (said to Doctor Watson when the "game is afoot"): as in the "measured" response to real feelings of fear, embarrassment and loneliness-in-the-crowd, even though the measure of comfort to be had comes "roughened" with a pinch (or, is it rather more of a spike?) of displeasure that I can still feel embarrassed by any behavior(s) enacted in such a musical context.

You know . . . after more than thirty years; haven't I heard it all? Shouldn't I be immune to such censorious sensibilities; such "runny" reservations? Wasn't there a time, after nearly two years of persistent and focused improvisation with friends and colleagues in Australia when-- no matter what it was; no matter how the sounds sounded --it all "worked"? And, did I not in light thereof conjecture that, by virtue of such a prolonged period of immersion in this activity-- (this real-time sculpting of unpremeditated sound circumstances) --I must, by now, have achieved some quasi-miraculous neural re-wiring, such that any, and all, improvised outcomes were, if not (and indeed) manifestly wonderful, at least wholly acceptable . . . (the salient exceptions being those with a potential to hurt--physically or psychically)?

Of course, it (i.e., curious) is just a word out of many which I could have chosen to describe the aforementioned sense of disquietude, but the minute I said it to myself, it felt like distance talk; like some haughty, if convenient, verbal implement for extracting and subsequently discarding not only this, my odd vibe, but a corresponding and qualifying notion to which it has subsequently given rise-- (however uninformed that notion may be by any specificity more lucidly configured than un-interrogated inference, gut-butressed by tightening and expanding knots of uncomfortable sensation).

I am referring here to a further feeling that the more aggressive, combatively articulated, expressions which I experienced in last night's play were somehow directed at me, personally--eliciting as a result a marked desire to make myself smaller; to go into the mental equivalent of a defensive crouch; to seek (so to speak) refuge in the wood-work. In light of this (for me) an all-too familiar moment of uneasiness (vertiginous, ingressive, retractile and not a little sickening) . . . what else might there be (so as to make

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the attempt at re-balance: at a keeping-up of appearances; a softening of effects; a saving of face) but the offer to self, from self, of a contextualizing word or two--the better to feel better?

And . . . I suppose it (i.e., curious) does this . . . suffices at least as an opening movement to this end. But, while I see that it may serve me thus--to position (in its oblique, oddly glacial and arguably silly way) a social self with respect to the public ownership of feelings--I wonder if there's not more to be gotten. I wonder if my "curious" might not also function to point me in the direction of potentially interesting terrain for speculation in light of its source phenomenon . . . For, perhaps, to have characterized last night's interaction as "curious"-- even if blithely (and in a phony British accent)-- is also to give myself a nudge to be curious in the "real" about it . . . to poise myself to treat of it as if an occasion to look into something . . . to think of it as indicative of the possibility for inquisitive movement in address of that actual field of behaviors which were our music tonight, quite apart from the uncomfortable secondary texts which those behaviors seemed to have called up: painful resonances/responses, causing defensive goofiness and corrective arrogance (Laurel and Hardy) to collide with one another in the echo-chamber of this observer's self-possession . . .

So . . . what . . . was last night's play about? What were its pretexts (stipulated or inferred)? What can be said about these sounds (which seem to have made for such a "big hairy deal")?

As is sometimes the case, our group work began with a premise or a protocol and, on this occasion, one of our colleagues sought to determine, at least partially, the shape of the evening's play by asking us to include in our improvisation more text-based, vocal-sourced, sounds than has been our usual custom. Ostensibly, this was so as to provide him with a sound-scape stimulus which might be conducive to the completion of a short story he's writing: a fiction, loosely predicated on a notion--(his . . . and I paraphrase him gingerly)--that the analysis of a music--(as in some, or any, verbalization by way of clarifying address) --serves not much more than to destroy what significant claim "it" [i.e., that music] may make to residence in the "magical" --the "transcendental"--or, at the very least, in that supposedly "pure" or "authentic" state in which a music is understood to be experienced, significantly, only when seeming to be reduced to some version of the "rawness" of its "mereness").

Once our colleague had advanced this idea to the group and its potential as a guiding context seemed to be at least that little bit clear, we initiated a perhaps too-cursory discussion in address (hoping to "thicken the paint"). But the idea that a potential clarity might be achieved through preliminary discourse could not hope to override the ever-present "itch" to get on with it . . . and . . . so . . . our play . . .

began . . .

Beg . . . IN . . . s . . .

tentatively . . . as it so often has . . . does . . . and I think that I hear a high harmonic whistling in the violin, followed by a guttural scratch glancing off a string, followed by other sounds: steely and gleaming; "glassy" . . . "vulgar" . . . "stentorian" . . . "prissy." Initially, these impulses manifest to my ears as if in isolation, one to another, but it's not long before I begin to hear them moving so as to intertwine with other several-sourced, darker-hued, softer-edged fragments of melodic odds and ends which seem to be assembling themselves (if tortuously) into a kind of diatonic song, variously partitioned (segmented) by occasional chromatic down-turns . . .

Once more, from the usual unprepossessing (almost perfunctory) beginnings, sounds are heard to "tip-toe," "shuffle," "stumble" "snort" and "fart" their various ways into the space; "signing-in" for their makers as they do . . . And after a self-imposed, now-obligatory, waiting period I, too, "check in," adding my own shy, "toe in the dirt," "aw-shucks," clarion-register, pitch-class, E, which I've micro-tonally

inflected in the hope of transforming it from something more immediately identifiable as "note" to something which might be experienced, instead, as if an oscillating strand of "color(s)"--within and against which emergent texts/voices might unfold: be set . . . (A persistent "shtick" of mine: this matter of trying to hear something else in a note besides its "note-hood"; some other values in a concatenation of pitch-classes besides their identities as delineators of intervallic relationship . . . But aren't intervals everywhere, sport? . . . Aren't we drowning in them? . . . Try eating a sandwich or getting your teeth fixed without an interval in attendance . . . But, never mind that) . . . Now . . .

Shortly . . . after my "inching-in," the tenor-saxophone player announces his presence--not with a tidy array of discrete pitches, but by hurling a scatter of slack-jaw, mid-range "splat-o-phonics" "clods" at the gathering texture with seeming impunity . . . He is joined by the pianist who sympathetically "chips" out brittle, angular, mid-range motives which I hear as if wanting to articulate some unfolding of rhythmic asymmetries suggestive of a "Latin" groove-- (which never quite gains support nor moves beyond an overall sense of . . . "well . . . maybe?") . . . And even as these prefatory (if not unpromising) "shots in the dark" are heard to rise up and be rendered unto nowhere, fragments of the requested spoken text are beginning to emerge, enunciated in a variety of vocal colors and characterizations which alternately fade out (as convictions flag) and recur with time and even greater presence, as people get braver and tougher about using their voices.

Beyond an immediate (and beautiful) impression of a ragged, quasi-"oceanic" complex, configured of choir-on-choir of phonemically-articulated "rustle-noise"--what do these sounds convey? . . .

What is being said? . . .

Mostly, I hear recitations of numbers, names, questions asked of no one in particular--not so veiled commentary, distinctly non-affirmative of the proceedings (or so it seems to me in my own growing fear of the situation). And, I--(anxious not to be perceived as if shrinking from the occasion)--offer some, few, words of my own by way of a maybe not so relevant chit-chat in tentative response: fragments of anonymous 16<sup>th</sup> century English love poetry; some Gertrude Stein; and a full recitation of Feste's song from the Twelfth Night.

These have been chosen (I'm sad to say) as much from a desire to impress the group with what I imagine will be perceived to be a deftly employed version of my "weeny" erudition (or, is it the "beauty" and "profundity" of my speaking voice with which I would seduce them) as from any more compelling commitment to contribute, creatively, either to a greater understanding of the task which our colleague has set for us, or the interest, beauty and integrity of the music we're making . . . Yet, even so . . . these words of mine do seem to enhance the increasingly gorgeous compilation of diverse "palavers" which we're constructing together (somehow making it so as to sound as if our collective utterances emanate from a single, yawning, mouth) . . .

But I'm hearing another, more soloistic, voice now --one situated very much in the foreground. Someone is shouting "You must walk the bridge" as if in point of fact to rattle one. The immediate effect is to jolt, but I'm not taken completely by surprise as he has hurled this ballista in previous plays and is almost certain to bark it out a few more times before the night is over. In past, the sound of it has variously evoked in me an assortment of resonances (e.g., Harte Crain, Sonny Rollins and the B-section of Skylark--to say nothing of dental plates)--but, I suspect it has a particular significance for its utterer/author and I'm curious just what that might be . . . I must ask him, sometime) . . . In response, my every instinct tells me to shout something back (if I could but bring myself to do it). For now, however, not knowing quite what to say (to shout), I forswear immediate talk-back and sit silently for awhile before returning to my clarinet and the micro-tonal complex which I've been happily constructing with it--(playing in the sandbox quite alone; 'till doomsday, don't you know)--until, a little later, my self-absorbed hearing is drawn outside its cocoon to perceive a gauzy, shimmering, organism

formed of three (or is it four?) sliding pitch-contours, unfolded--ever so delicately-- by the strings . . . inter-twining and oscillating, within and between. The particular quality of this new acoustical circumstance causes me to remember the time when I lived in Australia--in Middle Park, Victoria-- not far from the lagoon where Percy Grainger is supposed to have gotten the idea for his "Free Music." We used to go there, now and then, to scan and interrogate that legendary, aqueous, ur-text for evidence of comparable sound worlds: attempting to re-constitute--to transcribe--the water-waves into sound-waves as maybe Percy might have done . . . trying to imagine just what he heard. My mind's-ear(s)-with-eye(s) seem(s) to see and hear it quite clearly (this imagery from the past) and, in response, I bore further into my own "pitch-wiggly," "water-color," "smudge," both, so as to stitch a further sound-thread into the intricate mesh which my colleagues are creating and to contribute some further gloss of my own to this very nice memory of Grainger's bit of wet . . . Although, I'd never interrupt sounds inhabiting such a beautiful place with an instruction to this effect, some of me hopes that (at least) more--if not all--of the group will follow our lead, to make the whole room shimmer like an Albert Park water-score in mid summer . . . But . . . now--perhaps dancing to a tune of his (own) remembering-- (the earlier Latin groove?) --our bass player has other ideas: moving purposively to recalibrate the whole lot of us in pronounced oblique, vis-à-vis, the macro-mood of this moment's music . . . setting up a vamp which, again, he will keep alive for a little while but, then, allow to expire before anything much has a chance to assemble around it . . .

In spite of this prompt--unambiguously couched as it is in the idiomatic--we seem once more not quite ready for rumba. But it's really quite all right (at least for me) as his disappointed (and somewhat disappointing) departure in light of the near-complete absence of a responsive quorum has unexpectedly made for the sudden framing of some few, small, stubbornly beautiful sounds otherwise not easily heard: faint, air-voice configurations coming from the vicinity of the trombone . . . (Discrete packets--[ "puff-balls"]--of muted brass . . . laced with the trace of a hum) . . .

Intrigued by these particulate dramas--(and not a little tired of my, by now, over-familiar "lick" of inception)--I re-register my sound, displacing it to a lower-frequency domain and employing a "false-fingering," the better to get yet another clearly perceivable in-between variant on the signal: ( some not-quite-semi-tonal second pitch which I will alternate with its now "futzied-up," equal-tempered, sibling to construct an "oozy," "throaty," "red-dark" ostinato . . . more "natural" than "musical" in connotation . . . more like the sound of a distant animal than a musical instrument) . . .

This new expression offers up a considerable (and surprising) feeling of pleasure both as I listen to the "color" and "grain" and contour of the sound as it unfolds, and as I experience the pleasant bio-feedback which I obtain from simply making it: (As in some body-wide state of musical grace in which the fingers, lips and gut all seem to be employed productively and enjoying themselves) . . . As well . . . it seems to be triggering a brief instance of synesthesia: a moment "right evocative" of the color, taste and texture of my abuelita Maria's molé sauce, and/or that hint on the tongue of virtual chocolate which certain instances of Ravel's music inevitably provoke . . .

I guess I'll stick with it awhile longer: this-- (my) --new found sound; even if nobody but me seems to be listening . . .

I suppose, eventually, I'll have to give it up and get with somebody else's program, just to be sociable-- (don't you know) --but, for now, I finally have my own undeniably salubrious thing to do and, so, I do it . . . which means nothing to the rest of the group for what feels like quite a little while . . . until . . . at some juncture--(and without my being but vaguely aware that it's happened)--I hear this (my) sound to have been joined by (merged with/absorbed into?) another's resonant impulse. Someone's "talking" to me--and in a sympathetic language conducive (or so it sounds) to the co-construction of one of those bi-faceted signals which Robert Erickson might have called a "timbral fusion" or "fused sonority" (as in some synergic compound timbre, much more [and/or other] than any individual, contributing, element of articulation might be heard to manifest, in and by itself) . . . And, this . . . (now) . . . (our) . . .

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nascent collaborative sound-fusion is beginning to "read-out" to me as if a brand-new signal . . . an idiosyncratic acoustic possessed of its own unique character and exhibiting a 'bosky,' "grainy," undulating poetry somewhere between murmuring and nattering . . . as in some utterance sounding more speech-like than horn-like; more "elemental" than "musical"; more "raw" than "cooked"--(although "cooked" it is, to be sure). And, as I continue to play with my eyes closed-- (partially to concentrate on hearing and partially to compensate for my never quite eradicable shyness) --I am initially confused as to the origin of this added help . . . but, in time, however, it dawns on me that I'm hearing our French horn player, although her signal is not immediately recognizable as a horn sound, played in the conventional way.

(Could this be a very skillful and subtle application of muting--coupled with a pronounced capability to buzz portamenti through the mouthpiece--so as to emphasize timbre? . . . or . . . is it some kind of singing with the horn's tubing employed primarily as a mechanism of "extension" [as in, say, Hal Russell's significantly "hipper" version of Rudy Vallee's megaphone?] ). . . Whatever it is (wherever it comes from) it's welcome. I am no longer "by myself alone," (shades of Jerry Lewis . . . or some other equally déclassé and snuffle-inducing version thereof, don't you know) . . .

And . . . so . . . having . . . now . . . between us, found this--an ostensibly brand-new thing to do--we (the horn player and I) unfold it with care, moving delicately, as if the shared sound were a tattered, near threadbare, old scroll in the archive whose ragged, burnished, maundering comes, if unintentionally, to function as if a kind of faint pedal point which supports the rich and active field of acoustical expression increasingly filling and claiming our shared space . . .

All around this tenuous foundation, sounds collide . . . sounds collude . . . sounds coalesce, overlap and intertwine--surge now and again to the foreground with confidence, or ambivalently 'bottom-out,' to leave a frame for the room's own, ambient wheeze and sing. And, in this heterophony-by-inadvertency, the music being made by occupants of other rooms "bleeds" through to interlace with ours. Right now (within these walls incapable of denying entry to any outside audibility which may vie for inclusion) I hear someone, quite near, playing a fragment of the Ode to Joy, on a trumpet and with apparent conviction, if shy a certain relevant note . . . (just as on most occasions we've been treated, whether we've liked it or not, to the company of Brahms or Wayne Shorter; Elgar, James Brown or Dame Ethel Smythe ;Texas Doc Watson, Zemlinsky or Richard Rodgers etc., etc., or etc.) . . . On some nights, my Cage ears serve me well and I can admit and play off whatever I hear: on others, my preferences extract and re-constitute my preferences extracting and re-constituting my preferences, on and on, until I lose any possibility of focus (any connection with reality) in the effort to make a personal composition which I should either forget about or go home and try to write) . . .

But . . .

now . . . and within the room . . . more too there is of text-bit verbalizing to impart a kind of particularity to the proceedings: shouting, snarling--snippets of over-familiar verbal detritus in the form of slogans and homilies--limericks and generic "funny stuff" (flippant-sounding and intentionally mundane). All poetasters' potation here: (No exquisitely fine-stitched words from the Old Vic, on a purple carpet, as in Sir somebody and/or commensurate Dame) . . . And-- (as uncomfortable as I am in my self-arrogated guise of perpetually affirmative facilitator, to be negatively construing yet again) --the "yacking" parties have increasingly assumed (in my increasingly suspicious mind) roles, variously, of provocateur, court jester or would-be speaker-in-tongues. . . (if I'm inclined to the charitable) . . . thug-manque . . . (if I'm not). . .

Are these verbal expressions as I imagine them to be courtesy of the psycho-dramatic mess which I seem to be fueling and elaborating ( i.e., verbal bricks, hurled at my flimsy defenses . . . some vulgar means of doing a mindless "dump" on this, our "happy time together". . . a way of getting under my skin [of

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finding out what I care about or if, indeed, I am other than what I have lately appeared to be: disengaged, disinterested--weary] . . . a stratagem for telling me--[without really saying it, out-right, that is]--that, just now, I'm a waste of their time)? . . .

Maybe . . .

But it could also . . . (or otherwise) . . . (or, even, not at all) . . . be the case that what I'm hearing (or imagine that I am) is-- (whether the speakers quite know it or not)--a species of truth spoken to power (or, at the very least, to the "idea" of selfsame as I may be understood to embody it): some means by which these very proceedings may be taken to task, if only because I seem now loathe to take any position, at a time when it has become especially clear that positions are both necessary and unavoidable. . .

Maybe . . . more than it reflects a tentative, less-than-serious commitment to connect with the particular problem which our colleague has posed for the group's collective address, tonight's music-making represents (embodies?) a quite overt, if reflex-driven, response--(by way of heartily-heaped derision)--to the very idea of words, theories, and analytical exegeses, advanced (as it were) from some elevated and putatively privileged seat of the ex-cathedra--(so as to clarify experience for the rest of us . . . don't you know) . . . And, given the degree to which my own sometimes profound (sometimes juvenile) problems with the idea of "authority" have tinted my perception of power-relations in general, it's difficult for me not to be "reading" this performance as if the acoustical equivalent of a big, fat, middle-finger, proffered without shame--pointed without fear--in the direction of all those jargon-laden, priestly, and official-sounding glosses through which our national schoolhouses and political organs "trumpet" their legitimacy (if, often, through the "mute" of a studied reasonability). How do you respond when rather beautiful ideas (words) such as seriousness and significance (profundity and potential?) are so often co-opted and strategically implemented by the powerful that their very evocation brings about immediate shutdown? What do you do when concepts are reduced to mere rubrics-- (to a kind of mood-muzack) --the better to render benign in appearance covertly political behaviors, at base venal, hypocritical, and destructive in nature? . . . You know, as in "Rummy" when he deploys the term, "kinetics," to describe continued hostilities when a war is supposed to be over . . . Not really dead people, but disembodied energy flows (don't you know): motions; pulsations; the dance without the dancers . . .

(But . . . now . . . I am dimly aware of a faint, woody rumble . . . [finger tips on the contrabass body?] . . . of dry, tight, high-frequency pizzicati emanating from the violinist's peg box . . . of a stabbing, heavily-accented, note repeated in the trumpet . . . again and again) . . .

I can imagine they're mad . . . these musicians . . . So am I! . . .

(And . . . what is that dull ringing in tandem with a creaking sound, just that little bit evocative of rotting wood . . . [a cow-bell, hit with a leather beater? . . . the back and forth of the piano bench?] . . . Who is that singing so low-down in the voice--so many sounds in one) ? . . .

Why not, then, some small recourse by way of . . . well . . . "to hell with 'em?"

Why shouldn't they, these guys, be inclined inwardly to distrust (if not outwardly to repudiate) the carrier medium of such dissimulation: (as in the words through which some would seek to victimize them).



After all, haven't they--for most of their lives--had to thread their various ways, ever-so-carefully, through a minefield of manipulation and subterfuge (the proverbial lies, lies, and damn lies)?

First--unless they're awfully fortunate--they've been subjected to a debased education of the "dumbed-down" textbook . . . to which has been added . . . a puerile and intellectually vacuous entertainment industry passing for a first culture and a second parent . . . to which has been added . . . an increasingly centralized media of self-similarity and redundancy: the "oligopoly" [to use Barry Skinner's term] which threatens the very existence of a speech which is rich and diverse and worth the exchange . . . to which has been added . . . the dreary and subservient employment packages for which they have been educated . . . to which has been added . . . a wide-spread and largely un-interrogated crap-language of official obfuscation to make it all "make sense"--(don't you know)--employed, quite un-shamefacedly (it must be said) by the liars and manipulators, even as they would make pronunciameti to the rest of us on the moral imperatives for veracity and congruence) . . .

Such a lot they've gotten . . .

Such a lot they get . . .

And then they're asked to smile . . .

(But . . . now . . . it sounds like the computer has the horn player and I--and our moment of shared sound-- flanged and looped . . . I hear us floating behind us, as if anticipating us . . . And . . . the trumpet and trombone have got a kind of antiphonal low-range thing going on, too: seeming as if to be "trading fours" in pedal tones; indistinct and dirty to clear and burnished in tone-quality . . . Do I hear the guitarist moving, ever so purposively to some domain in which B.B. King meets Marinetti? . . . I hope so) . . .

What might they-- (indeed, what might you) --say to "Pentagon-speak": that "glossolalia" (as DD would have it) which bequeaths to us such descriptive falsifications as "collateral damage" (for the murder of innocents)? Or, how might they respond to the bean counter's jargon (the clinical "macho-speak") of a University--(which we might reasonably think capable of better)--when it sycophantically apes the generals and their ilk through the use of such instances of violently connoted, military-specific jargon as "strategic planning" or "target populations"?: And, lately--vis-à-vis a perceived need to tidily contextualize the potential compromise of a journalistic community (and courtesy of our latest pretext for imperial tourism)--there is "embedding" . . . With respect to this by now ubiquitous term--(which may, or may not, turn out to have been but another way of saying bought-off or buried)--I am reminded by my recent reading and constant personal memories of its reference, as well, to such distinctly corporeal evidence as the remaining bits of buckshot which James Meredith continues to carry in his body--(so many years now after he was gunned down by a racist maniac during a walk against fear\*)--and the fragments of World War II shrapnel which my Godfather, Mack, likewise carried around with him well into the sixties and which I used to see my Godmother, Golda, gently work out of his remaining arm from time to time . . . (He was in a supposedly safe area, posing for a snapshot--with his arm around a buddy--when the buddy inadvertently heeled back on an undetected land mine . . . A "mistake," don't you know).

(Now . . . in the midst of a cloud of pizzicato string-ostinati, serving to underpin the "slaps," " bonks," " knoncks," " slanks," "twangs," "prinks," and sundry other crepitations of the piano-prepared--[and cushioning some Ornette imitations being dished up with bravery]--I'm thinking of Mack [who looked like Bert Lahr's lion in the Wizard of Oz] . . . There he is . . . up late at night . . . trying to get a grip on his pain, surrounded by every one of their twelve cats . . . amiable as ever in his strained forbearance . . .

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a sweetly leonine cynosure at the vortex of a vari-speed, multi-colored, sinuous, round-dance of sympathetic feline fur) . . .

In light of the "corporate," "antiseptic," "genteel," "distanced" and o-so- "reasonable" language which the creators of such damage utilize to mask their crimes, why not some "mad-as-hell"- collective-sound-fist, to express a most profound displeasure with the whole fucking thing? . . . (Something like a squared and re-squared version of that saliva-drenched band-width of shifting multiphonics which I hear to be coming, now, from the tenor player) . . . Fine . . . but my mother raised me with the dictionary as well as her Ellington and Toscanini records-- (Black, Brown, and Beige, and the Beethoven fifth, side by side, as it were) and, as well as sounds of my own, I need words of my own if I'm going to make and maintain my own identity and dignity. . . I need the distinctions and arguments which words allow me to make: simple and complex; sacred and profane--stilted . . . cutesy . . . stoic . . . mawkish and mocking) . . . (For, what has the history of music been if not an argument in sound over just what the word, music, can mean: just what it will be allowed to mean? What is "creative" music-- (composition, improvisation) --if not an argument that "music" is insufficient, if it's to be no more than a given, postulated without need of my input, or your input, or indeed that of anybody else . . . (You know, as in some timeless, ancestor-driven, handed-down simulacrum of the voices of the gods who would rule, ad nauseam, through Wernicke's area of the brain, or the embodiment of the admonitions and predilections of the professoriate, or the output of the dictates of a "market") . . .

(No, I prefer to reclaim words--to take them back--not abandon them) . . .

(He, i.e., the "Rum-Go," can't have "kinetics" without a fight, any more than I'll let the "profession" own the word, "music.") . . .

But . . . now . . . sensing the onset of tantrum, I return to reality--(as that word may be understood to imply, or connote, some circumstance outside the one careening on, unchecked, in my head)--and, in consequence, allow myself to listen to some singing: a welcome and undeniably Schön --(if somewhat histrionically executed hint of) --WeBergian melodic architecture (sensual lines of widely dis-spaced-- kinda "whiny"-- intervallic inscription, ever so deftly articulated and dynamically nuanced; up and down [and up again] . . . A Mittel-European meowstimme : The second-Viennese cats, arching their backs, posing for Klimt, cruising für die Schlagsahne) . . . And, over to the left--adding yet another but, strangely, not inappropriate layer to this evocation of the fin-de-siècle once removed--the pianist is playing him some licks right out of daytime television . . . (It's a standing joke between us and, yes, I do see the beautiful blond with the glistening, ruby-red lips, on the arm of the fifty-something rich guy with the hawk-like face; the predator's eyes and the graying temples; the achingly minimal but oh so suggestive take on the mother tongue.) . . .

By way of counterpoint to this moment of musical titillation -- (or is it more in the nature of mordent commentary?)--some members of the group now offer up a sporadic series of vigorously asserted projectile-showers--(sax-splats and trumpet-squeals, and violin martelatti, subjecting the preciousness of it all to a veritable "drubbing")--and out of these will emerge what seem, in contrast, like quite overt, if entirely collegial, attempts by the maybe disenfranchised-feeling others to quiet--(and thin)--the accumulated texture down--(and out)--to a few, barely substantive, strands of a more manageable (habitable) angel-hair . . . This done . . . we limp about in the ambiguous after-space . . . testing the water . . . sizing up the potential opposition until our nomad sounds acquire, finally, a more context-specific crafting through which is assembled a round-like structure of barely perceptible susurrations in fragile interlace where we'll all live for a time until--in obvious dissent from this lingering moment of tranquility--the bassist sets up yet another vamp (this time perhaps hoping that a kind of music more obviously "jazz-like" in character will evolve in its light). He (this bass-guy) is nothing if not persistent-- (positively "hard-assed" I suspect he can be, behind the gentlemanly [and gentle] countenance) --and he's caught our attention big time . . . But the jazz part of his mission is doomed, from the start, to an

ignominious "fizzle" as the rest of the band-- except for me (and, perhaps, my horn-playing friend) -- immediately interpret the vamp as an occasion to blow (to bray) senza tempo, and without restraint . . .

Here it is, the near-homogenizing, "music in your face" of cultural rectification, the aforementioned "sound-fist": a veritable tsunami of "to hell with it." Just what I thought I wanted, or wanted to want, and, yet, now that it's here, I find that I'm not really up to it . . . The resulting and downright horrific eight-part colla-parte chisels its way into my ear-holes, incinerating the incudes, strangulating the stapedes, causing specific of the cilia to keen and whine away like (you guessed it) a dentist's drill or some highly exercised and well-amplified consort of mosquitoes--(Or, how about a matched pair of Odyssean "Sirens," in resonant sooth?)-- and although I must, perforce, do my own part to make this moment of un-leashed power happen with even greater intensity, I find myself wishing, at the same time, that it would all go away and, so, make to steel myself for what may prove a protracted and not very pleasant period of merely hanging on . . .

But I needn't have bothered . . . for after only a few seconds of near-painful intensity, this music of cliff-faces, tidal-waves, and angry mobs throwing bricks through picture windows--(this simultaneity-by-primal scream)--begins to fray and fritter; the accumulated energy sapping-out--one big, bad, line at a time--to drips and clots of mutter and stutter: sawdust . . . tissue cultures . . . nugatory blips and little bitty squeaks of audible debris: (Here a trombone; there a fiddle-in-pizz . . . Here a trumpet; there the small-bell lambency of Andy's micro-tuned metal tubes . . . [which I realize I haven't heard the entire time and should have . . . wanted to]) . . .

I wonder if tonight's most beautiful music won't finally be found to have existed in the remnants (the residue) of all that failed . . . as, once again, I've heard a formerly impenetrable and tightly occluded mass of utterance spend itself and open out to reveal a heretofore-hidden accumulation of delicately articulated sound-places-in-micro which have been living away all along . . . speaking (if muted) but not really noticed . . . rather like the residents of a tide-pool, revealed with the surf's receding . . . decortication's remnant inner layer of mottled white--(to make with the "poetry") . . . rather like this, my (our) pretty, little, shared composite sound to which I'm steadfastly clinging). . .

This . . . sound: . . .

In its ragged beauty, delicacy, and sense of manifest harmlessness--it has assumed for me, now, the representative identity of a precious exemplar: a flower, or a spider's web, or a small animal (Tasmanian Devils, notwithstanding). More than that, it is now by way of a safe place--an incipient psychic enclave--nested within the hostile surround which I imagine our play has become. And, as well, I can understand and locate it in a political context: as an occasion for me to draw yet another--even if merely symbolic--line in the sand in my own private and largely internalized war with insensitivity (yes, mine as well as "theirs") . . . with that un-interrogated and devastatingly destructive, "knee-jerk," valorization of male arrogance which I believe deep-structurally informs and feeds most every outrage of human-on-human--human-on-environment--(and which, most certainly, informs our recent foreign policy). . . with my memories of those of our "neighbors" who painted anti-Mexican slurs and obscenities on our backyard walls . . . (who encouraged their dog to attack us . . . who pelted my grandmother with rocks whenever she tried to hang out the wash . . . who publicly mocked my mother's painfully obvious infirmities--who hounded us until, finally and literally, we read the writing . . . and moved. . . But, I am not alone . . . Far from it . . . Or, so says . . . this . . . sound . . . a . . . (our) . . . shared expression) . . .

This sound . . . is now . . . no longer something merely "beautiful," as if the endpoint of my teleology were imagined to reside "purely" in the domain of the aesthetic, nor, I think, does it belong solely to the world of music--(as if music were the usual collection of suspects: a story told about "self-hood" posing as a self; a collection of more or less habitable, enjoyable or approachable sounds with no other contexts-of-qualification save those of recreation, procreation, ego-masturbation, the joys of adjudication--the manufacture and accumulation of sounding icons freighted with historical provenance . . . (tokens, whose deft manipulation will lead finally to membership in the "right" club). . .

## After ... In ... After

It is a cause (or feels like it): something to stand by, something to stand for; an occasion to resist, if only because, just now, I feel so much the need to resist . . . to fight. . . (But isn't this sound -- [or any other, for that matter] -- something quite else besides a stand-in for wounds folded into memories, or a pretext for "getting even" with adversaries past, present; real or imagined? When allowed to live (without the accompanying internal chatter) isn't this sound just what it is . . . for the undeniable pleasure afforded through a "simple" experience of its presence to my ears? Isn't one of the salient values of a sound precisely to be found in the possibility that it may have nothing to say to, or "about," the "world": that it is, or can be made to be [or to seem] empty of association by an observer open to that frame of mind--that it can be a place for "detached" observation?) . . .

I might well ask . . . because you see-- (I see) --where this has gone . . . (is going) . . . Our play has become my play (on our play): an occasion for autobiographical narrative (as in, remembered fragments of my story--absent any top-down, over-arching, counter-context of qualification--morph-merging without mediation into the patchwork polyphony of audible experience, to become a theater in which real sounds are relegated to a trigger for internal slide-shows of maybe-irrelevant histories that exclude (sadly) a great deal else which our collective work might have revealed . . .

All this imputation/attribution heaped on a delicate and rather beautiful little signal . . . this poor, wee, melodic\* . . . mapped, now, to the point of "stuffed" . . . (I recall how K.G. used to warn me against trying to make music do too much . . . and wonder if I'm not remembering (and responding to) far more than I either want or need: far more than this particular situation requires now--or maybe ever required).

And, besides, I am a "mere" musician (don't you know!). In this era of dominance by specialists, my professional sound-making is supposed to be defined and limited primarily by its perceived usefulness to the alcohol, sex, recreation and spiritual attainment industries, in their mission to sell us the means for successful mood alteration. We're the ones, for example, trained and credentialed to dispense, if you will, suitably exciting and/or restful (and/or batho-pathetic) music, so as to get the "folks" more fully attuned to, and on board for, the idea of lots and lots of war in their futures. . . I know that thinking on such as the social sciences belong to such as the social scientists . . . as war belongs to the warriors. . . (And--with a continuing nod to John Fowles still provocative book, "The Aristos"--death to the dead) . . .

Still . . . for all the above and my own rather extensive history of practical involvement with this world of over-familiar structures--articulated in and through an array of entertainment-driven licks and postures which, rightly or wrongly, I think of as resistant, if not inimical, to thought (to reasoned discourse, to critique, to the construction of distinctions) -- there is still something of music (in music) which continues to stimulate a desire in me to speculate (and freely) about it . . . And this so-called "free, "open-ended," participatory," (hopefully)-non-authoritarian," "pan-idiomatic," collective music-making with which I have so long been preoccupied and engaged--(this music of trying to find the music we don't know, instead of always playing the music we do . . . this music which has, in no small measure, provided me with viable alternatives to the limitations of the "profession")--compels me to it, perhaps because the more I do music, the less I seem to understand it--(why we have it, why I need it, what it is) . . . The more I do it, the more mysterious a "thing" to be doing it seems . . . (Why is that person standing in front of me with a piece of metal hanging out of his mouth: all this sound filling my ears?) . . . (Why am I sitting here, pushing air through a well-aged piece of Grenadilla wood . . . some of my few viable and treasured social relationships in this room, similarly occupied?) . . . What a miracle! . . . How odd! . . . (How curious, don't you know) . . .

If music had been a "done deal," and I had been the so-called "real" musician of story and song, such questions might not, I suppose, have acquired much in the way of relevance? Instead of extensively ruminating on issues and implications, I would have spent my time, more constructively, in trying to find

out the rules of the games I wanted to play, and getting on with them: making the gigs and keeping strategically still between sets-- learning, in time, the fine and venerable art of "hanging out." Plenty I know do it this way--and beautifully--and I would be the last to deny their contributions or decry their methodology. But, it seems that I--by virtue of a constitutional incapability ever to shut up (even when silent)--am condemned to complicate my own business (to "foul," as it were, my own sleeping place [as students of animal behavior might put it]) by continuing to be drawn to (and to advocate) some notion of music as yet another way to think (and talk) about notions "larger" (or "other") than music as-is: (as-if-"music" really were all . . . that music was about) . . . .

(You know, that tautological divinity-cum-wheeze so efficacious to musical "stone-walling" everywhere) . . . . Because . . . while I think it important to talk (and extensively) about music as if the creation and enjoyment of new and interesting acoustical circumstances (for the sheer and hell of it) or the search for viable accumulations of ear-candy (the better to advance a musical self in the marketplace) what I respond to, rather more, is an idea that music (at least, this, our music-making here tonight) might be imagined or construed as if an occasion for inquiry--(as in KG's favorite example of Levi-Strauss and wine . . . .

You know . . . the notion that for a Frenchman, while wine is the occasion for discourse, it may, just as well, be the case that discourse is an occasion for wine). What about this music (say) as a kind of applied phenomenology-- (as M S would have it, although I've never proposed this rubric to the group as such) --in which real-time, improvised, sound-making provides an occasion for perceptual investigation which, in turn, provides a further occasion for yet other music: a "safe" place in which to take on the question (say) of how musical sense-making happens; a discourse-with-music-with-discourse, moving in and through the notion that there are observers and an observed, and that these shape, and are shaped, by one another to within a given observer's field of apprehension and recognition . . . ( . . . By which latter qualification I mean [or, think I do] that, while I'm not stupid [or is it brave?] enough to imagine that this cup . . . sitting over here, on the piano . . . which my perception's putting together to construct its reality to my consciousness . . . either recognizes me . . . or is capable of doing anything to affect my perception of it . . . I think I can acknowledge that what it is--as it is--"tells" me a very great deal about what I am observing it to be (duh!, but not quite) . . . That its presence --as an entity existing quite outside me, yet revealed [and particularly] to my mechanisms of sensory induction and comprehension, by way of its attributes and aspects in the forms of such as color, shape, temperature, texture to my touch, and/or acoustic resonance when asked to do momentary double-duty as a percussion instrument -- influences, causes me to shape--to within that thicket of neuro-physiological attributes by which I [mostly unconsciously] construct its reality--my particular perception of it; my awareness of its identity; my recognition that it has an identity which I didn't create quite as much as I discovered . . . it. . .

Am I saying . . . that . . . I need . . . me . . . to perceive it . . . [i.e., Al's cup, over here] . . . and [that] I need . . . it . . . so that I can . . . [and that] . . . both . . . are necessary? Is this what I'm saying . . . [what I mean] . . . ? . . . I think . . .

So . . . ) . . .

(as well as the marching band and the big band) . . . why . . . not . . . this music of the phenomenally-given-in-sound in which sense-making is acquired and attributed through a confrontation with the reality of the material: through making and asking rather than "lifting" from a predigested model or shaping to some known music mapped, willy-nilly, on to the real work at hand by an institutionally-sanctioned master-mapper? Why not, at least here, a perpetual movement-- (as DD would have it) --towards a definition of music rather than always from one?

And, how about this notion of a "safe place" in which to do it-- (as in some version of KG's safe studio in which a "free-wheeling" creativity and discourse are encouraged, provided you don't go for the jugular--[ever an idea which wants to become true]) . . .

## After ... In ... After

How about a context married to a suitable space in which to make and confront music not yet quite qualified or even "qualifiable"; not yet quite mapped or even "mappable"--( music defying colonization by pre-fabricated descriptive language; music akin to the impenetrable tangles of unexplored diversity which we are now daily eradicating--[busily, "efficiently," and for all time]--from the face of the earth . . .and with an insensitivity colossal in its dimensions) . . .(But . . . I rather thought that this, our place, here, was a "safe" one . . . and that its very safety constituted a position . . . defacto . . . I wonder if the group does . . . did . . . [could])? . . .

(Another persistent shtick of mine, the preoccupation with mapping . . . as in the map and the territory . . .as in how to distinguish the one from the other and what the one and the other have to say . . . to one . . . and the other: as in Korzybski--[or what little I know of him] . . . as in, the meal I'm having, when I relegate it to the role of meager excuse for that ever- so-much-better one I had . . . [when was it?] . . . as in that divinely imperious cat, over there, who "mouths" me--even as he appropriates my part of the sofa--becoming, for just a moment, the spitting image of an old teacher with whom my issues will never come to satisfactory cadence . . . as in the sense that I'm never really quite my own musician, but some failed version of another . . .

There are no ends of equally banal (and in these cases, rather benign) examples, to illustrate the convenient (unthinking) application of familiar historical templates to immediate reality . . . (We slap a simple label on complex phenomena all time, sport). . . But is the "map which we provide appropriate to the territory to which it is-- (again, mostly unconsciously) --applied, and what would "appropriate" mean? . . . To what would it refer?

To wit, music: If--like an unfamiliar type of plant, animal, or person--this, now, (hopefully) unfamiliar collection of sounds (we're making, here) can be thought of as if a kind of territory--(a phenomenal field with various and sundry unknown attributes, needful of examination and description) --then what kind of map, what kind of descriptive language, does "it" need from me, that I might better come to know it, as it is?

Or, framing the question more precisely perhaps -- (since I think it "fantasy" to assume and impart self-awareness and therefore "needs" to a musical work, when I'm the one who needs in its light and on its behalf)--what kind of map do I require such that I know, or can tell myself, that the music I'm hearing is the music I'm listening to--and not the ghost of some other expression which I would prefer (or not) have heard . . . How do I know that I'm present to this experience--this expression-- in front of me and not lost in a misapprehension occasioned by my imposition on these phenomena of a map of wholly other and irrelevant territory-- (of a superimposed template triggered by laziness, passive aggression, up-front antipathy, or any of a host of other pretexts which underlay dismissal and/or rejection?) . . .

(Pertinent thereto, I remember a time in seminar, some years ago, when a certain in-house pundit reduced (and, rather flippantly, it must be said) my friend, Schmidt's, gorgeously rich and complex electronically-generated gloss on his own equally compelling photography to a failed exercise in G Major (when dear Schmidt wouldn't have known a pitch-class G from a cheese slice . . .and for purposes of doing his beautiful work, really didn't need to . . . Pundit's "G" was noise in Schmidt's system . . . don't you know) . . .

But . . .

which am I hearing . . . now . . .

(I am still playing something it seems) . . .

my sounds . . . or the ghosts they attract (invite) to the party? . . .

Robert Paredes

Is a sound really "just" a sound, or is it also a sign of my . . . (our) . . . life-(ves)? And, if life is what sound is (or is a sign for) what are (or should be) the limitations placed on descriptive language in light thereof . . .

(There never seems to be a reasonable final verdict on this issue, or I'm not able to affirm one . . .)

And . . .

so . . . back and forth I go . . .

from this, my part of our beautiful, soniforous, bi-fused, muttering contour, to that complex of associations which it triggers . . . pain and speculation giving way to observation, giving way to further pain and further speculation. . . (The activity seeming as if a kind of sculpture of the-mind-on-and-in-and-through-the-body-on-and-in-and-through-the mind, in which the sound(s) continually acquire tenaciously clinging populations of brand-new barnacles . . . displays of rust, patina or dirt in the forms of all those meta-domains which gather around in wanted, or unwanted, attendance, requiring continual scraping or washing to permit again of the possibility of clear perception or observation.) . . .

But . . .

I'm sick to death . . .

of this constant maintenance (and fealty to the moment's seemingly compelling aesthetics) and, so, contemplate and then initiate a "breakout"--(how dramatic!)-- in the form of a subito explosion of rapid-fire rhythmic asymmetries: the jagged, "wonky," "stumblebum," semi and tri-tonally related concatenations which I have largely favored in my jazz work of late, as, at least, one possible way to take real-time issue with the often dreary redundancy of steady-state pulsation . . . (the tyranny of "groove") . . .

I think of this direction, both, as if a fruitful tack for making the approach to some perceptually plural sense of certain musical attributes (tempi (say) rather than tempo: rhythms rather than rhythm) and, on quite another level of signification, as a way to articulate a species of self-parodic commentary on my own now wobbly gait . . . (I feel, these days, as if I needed training wheels on my ankles) . . .

I'm pleased with these new sounds and feel energized . . .

Yes, (I say to myself) . . .

This is the shit! . . . (Or, words to that effect) . . .

But, after excavating the site for some few moments, I feel that I know it all too well--and can't think of where to take what I'm finding and, so, I change gears, to slowly crank-up a clarion-register band-width-cum-glissando of pitch/noise, weighted to the possible perception/recognition of a timbre/trajectory . . . sort of an undulating, yet directional, contour of "flap-lipped" "warble," or "gargle," or "burble" . . . (at times, reminiscent of an over-flight of migrating geese, internally antiphonal in their elegant V--[or so I'd like to imagine] ) . . .

(Yet another persistent shtick of mine, this proclivity/propensity for animal noises or the signs of selfsame made by the players of human-made instruments . . . like the partridge so beloved of Turkish clarinetists, or Giora Feidman's shofar-simulacrum, or the eagle-bone flutes of the Lakota: in some hands, the very embodiment [it might be said] of cornball [as in Johnny Dodd's "horse-laugh"] . . . but they can say what they like . . .

The other day, I got something on my clarinet, which sounded very close in timbre to that of a mourning dove: very like our now-abandoned little signal it was . . . and in light of the great weight of all the music-music in which I daily bathe, it felt like just the right thing to do with a clarinet ) . . .

After ... In ... After

My new sound, this--(the aforementioned "burble")--is beautiful and satisfying to play, but it seems not to be connecting with anyone (or I can't connect it) so I consider a return to my part of the former, comfortable, composite, in hopes that the horn-player might still be interested . . . But, instead of following this very sensible course I opt, rather, for the grand gesture; claiming my space by spewing out a high-energy profusion of Klezmer licks--(in a floridly ornamented and melismatic freygish mode)--which predictably draws the rest of the ensemble to me like clichéd moths to the proverbial flame, in some semblance of a shit-hot dance . . . The collective excitement is palpable . . . The ensemble saws and sweats and pumps, and I'm as caught up in the drama of it all as they, huffing and puffing until my tongue feels unhinged, and my guts begin to ache, and a lower incisor leaks just that little bit of blood (don't you know) . . . Undeniably, it's all very fine--to be sure . . . Yet--(not unlike the previously described display of verbal manipulation)--there is, still something of the "wank" in attendance. It's grandstanding, stump speech, manipulation, dog and pony stuff: cheap stratagem to pull a favorable focus; to win back that measure of credibility with the group which I imagine I've lost (if ever I had it) . . . I can imagine them, talking amongst themselves afterwards, saying things like: "Bob may be a pretentious windbag, but he sure can play his axel" (more combative language: the language of "cutting"! ) . . . Am I given to shameless self-aggrandizement, even here? . . . Of course! . . . And, why not? . . .

(I have no answer) . . .

But . . .

now . . .

that . . . such feelings of self-suspicion have seeped in to color the proceedings, there seems nothing much left to do but search for and effect some subtle (or not so) mode of disengagement and so, I taper my sounds down and drop them away to return (predictably) to my part of our . . .

shared-safe-signal-sound . . .

flower-noise-cause-place . . .

which . . .

I think I . . . now . . . best . . . know . . . as if a where . . . at and in which . . . no matter how I contextualized it, or otherwise clothed or bathed it in narrative . . . I heard something "new" . . . (and felt good being there) . . .

I suppose there's no getting back, nor holding on, to this particular knowing/feeling, but I'll try anyhow . . . My horn player friend has abandoned our shared signal for a time-- (understandably) --but takes it up now yet again. The more I hear this sound, the more beauty it seems to take on and the more I want the sounds around it to disappear or, at the very least, to make some happier accommodation with its delicacy. But, whatever happens--whatever my colleagues do-- I'll last them all out (in my own gentle and "hard-assed" way). Even if the horn player finally leaves our sainted alliance and I have to go it alone, I'll "stay the course." I don't need a second resolution to declare war on behalf of my peaceful little place . . . (the idea of my Grandmother at her clothesline without my great-uncle's World-War I, soup-bowl helmet for protection) . . . My God, there seems no end to this play . . . All around . . .



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still more sounds to be heard; more "speak." . . . But session time is dwindling and I imagine there will soon begin the inevitable (ritual?) searching (jockeying?) for an end . . .

You know how it goes . . .

The whole business finally runs out of consensual steam and seems as if to have stopped. But just when you think it's well and truly over, some lone body isn't letting go (Many times, it's me, as I'm so often wary that--without quite realizing it--I may inadvertently send some signal to the group which they will take as a command to "wrap it up.") . . .

There will be a brief period of waiting and then another "ping," another "blast," another hand-clap and finger-snap; another seventh-chord, another stage-cough . . . There will be another challenged be-bop lick, another "gobbet" of serial or snake-charmer chromaticism or "glimpse" of "fifthsy-fourthsy" Americana; another incomplete recitation of a recipe or a grocery list; another packet of high-energy "interjectives" slashed open and fiercely scattered . . . one more serendipitously-slopped fen of polysonorous sound-stuff, until the blessed attrition sets in (fatigue, boredom--or perhaps in some the sense of an informing logic--beginning to sculpt the longed-for wind-down) . . .

And, so, it does . . . (go) . . .

cast now . . .

in a moody retrograde of the oh, so, tentative context in which it began, schlepping a bedraggled and weary way to the inevitable out-petering . . . at once desultory and grasping for a final wanted straw: (charm, incompetence; ambivalence and caring; commitment, exhaustion; elegance and gaucherie -- sleepily nudging one another as they make their various ways out of the frame). There will be nothing clearly--or even remotely--cadential here . . . (don't you know) . . . Still . . . I'll keep my little sing-song going . . . Someone in the group has put their trumpet away and drums, now, absentmindedly (or so it seems) on the closed case . . . My horn-playing compadre is gone (bored, or tired: disgusted or surfeited--How am I to know?). I hear someone mutter-- (as if through clenched teeth, but quite audibly) --the phrase: "this performance was over a long time ago" and I am, by now, inclined to agree . . . yet, I continue . . . One more sound . . . and, then . . . again . . . By now, it's nothing more than . . .

AFTER

(A): My discomfort, as in the "Odd Vibe" . . . Of course, I have no idea what anybody thought about anything they did. We've not, yet, talked about it (and probably won't) as this group, it must be said, is not a little resistant to discourse in general. Particularly, anything which smacks in the slightest of professor-talk tends to elicit, if not paroxysms of laughter, at least raised eyebrows and knowing sneers--for this is "Music" (don't you know) and almost any form of ambitious verbalizing, before or after the fact, can read out as a form of pretense (like pulling teeth it is, getting these guys to talk).

So, this text winds up being a version of me talking to me: so much fantasy wheel-turning; my own indiscriminate mapping running rampant; evidence of unfinished business which probably didn't need to be (couldn't be) finished in an improvised music session; an occasion to indulge in a kind of creative writing which serves, at once, to allow me to "blow off steam," to indulge my desire for language-play, and to remind me, yet again, that my dormant aesthetic biases can awaken at any time, to displace what I might recognize as far fresher and certainly more useful perceptions of the music making in front of me . . . if only I'd get out of the way.

After ... In ... After

(B): As sound is . . . Becoming

Sound as sound . . . becoming . . . sound in sound . . . becoming . . . sound in self . . . becoming . . .  
as sound is . . . becoming. . . self as sound in sound as self in sound . . . becoming . . . traced as  
speaking in as now . . . becoming . . . recollected here now faintly in as sound . . . becoming . . . as in as  
now in . . . becoming . . . raw tight representing self . . . becoming . . . as in as now in as self in sound .  
. . . becoming . . . subtle twisting shape and sound . . . becoming . . . half-forgotten ocean's smell and  
sting and is as now . . . becoming . . . heat in is as sound as quiet hiss deflected from the past as sound  
. . . becoming . . . twist and subtle juncture is as now . . . becoming . . . rhetoric . . . becoming . . . as  
sound is . . . becoming . . . caricature . . . becoming . . . nights no quiet in as susurrations round . . .  
becoming . . . in as self is half-remembered trace-reflected self . . . becoming . . . sweet as sound is hear  
as fur and violets now in sound . . . becoming . . . as sound is . . . becoming . . . purr in rasp-bedizened  
nascent now . . . becoming . . . sound in willow whirl . . . becoming . . . sound now as in night now  
sound . . . becoming . . . audible . . . becoming . . . bare in sound . . . becoming . . . as . . . becoming . . .  
. envelopes of now-remembered sound as quickened dark . . . becoming . . . sound . . . as in cynosure's  
self-defeating sound . . . becoming . . . dots of half-now half-remembered whisper deepening water . . .  
whole . . . becoming . . . sound as in . . . becoming . . . as becoming . . . as . . . in ever-thickening skeins  
. . . becoming . . . self as violet's rasp-bedizened recollected smell as sound . . . becoming . . . now as  
now-remembered in as now . . . as sound . . . becoming . . . sand . . . becoming . . . in as textured now  
as half-depicted self in slightest twice-remembered glance . . . becoming . . . purple twilight now as  
sound in warm elided now . . . becoming . . . in . . . as nascent sound in now proverbial now . . .  
becoming . . . temperate . . . becoming . . . caricature . . . becoming . . . rhetoric . . . becoming in as  
cadenced now and is . . . becoming . . . trace configured dimly in as recollected herein stretched . . .  
. becoming . . . in and beached and half . . . becoming . . . sound as in now in as self as sound . . .  
becoming . . . no-remembered thing . . . becoming . . . now cynosure's self as sound in recollected only  
self . . . becoming . . . phrase as in . . . becoming . . . as sound is . . . becoming . . . self . . . becoming  
. . . tongue-bedizened nascent skein and sound . . . becoming . . . sound . . . becoming . . . self . . .  
becoming . . . sound . . . becoming . . .

(The above micro-text was written in response to the bigger one and may be performed by one to five "speakers" as in a round. Readers, sitting close together, enter--one at a time-- and should whisper, but audibly, or read in a matter-of-fact [not dramatic] sort of way throughout. May be performed as a background during a reading of the text, or by itself: in either case, with or without a recording of that sound which figures so prominently in the text (i.e., The Comfortable Composite, as performed by Amber Johnson, French horn and Robert Paredes, clarinet).

Iowa City 9/22/03

## Robert Paredes

This paper is affectionately dedicated to the Improviser's Orchestra of the University of Iowa (Spring Semester, 2003) . . . Evan Mazunik (piano and accordion), Amber Johnson (French horn), Jay Foote (contrabass), Al Ross (Trombone), Ben Breitz (violin and electric guitar), Nik Francis (computer and trumpet), Drew Selem (homemade and "found" electronics, percussion and electric bass [and, as well, provider of the "prompt" for this session and my resulting paper] ), Paul Clevenger (tenor saxophone), Andrew Struck-Marcel (homemade percussion and guitar), Bob Paredes (clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone and piano).

KG is Kenneth Gaburo (1926-93): Composer, teacher, philosopher and former director of the Experimental Music Studios of the University of Iowa, School of Music (1983-92).

DD is David Dunn: Composer, environmental sound artist, philosopher, teacher--and founding director of the Santa Fe Media Institute.

M S is my wife, Melody Scherubel.

\* 1 refers to pages 171-72 of Paul Hendrickson's book, Sons of Mississippi, Knopf, 2003.

\* 2 . . . Lou Harrison's term for the melodic cells with which he works.

## A Note on D.G. Leahy's "Thinking Now Occurring" and Benjamin Boretz's "Musical Thinker"

Charles Stein

It seems problematic to admit the Kantian theme that intelligence should seek that which is universally admissible to all intelligent minds, since, given controversy and disagreement in most regions, the quest for a common ground is ipso facto a quest for that which is unexceptionable, i.e. that which puts idiosyncrasy, particularity, singularity out of play.

On the other hand, the affirmation of pure singularity seems to condemn each thinker to terminal isolation. Radical singularity tolerated multipliciously will not even find the "space" in which the multiplicity of singularities abides.

It has occurred to me to triangulate the work of radical Catholic thinker D.G. Leahy<sup>1</sup> and radical musical thinker<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Boretz, in an effort to find that space in regard at least to one ontological matter on which their thoughts (and mine) converge: the notion that in the thought of an object, the object is already a thought. For Boretz, every piece of music is its own theory; not that there is or must be discourse either prior or subsequent to any musical event, but that music itself is already cognitive: an act of music is already an act of thought; a musical object is an object replete with mind.

D.G. Leahy characterizes the thought that appears in his writing as "The Thinking Now Occurring." It is a radical, post "Death of God" thinking that refuses the distinction between philosophy and theology; it proposes its own text as evidence that being itself has suffered a transformation in recent history such that thought is no longer essentially the occupation of private subjects, but occurs as objective existence itself. The matter we perceive is the thought with which we perceive it; the thoughts we think exist on one plane with the material objects with which they are concerned.

Boretz says of himself, not untruefully, and with regard to the social universe towards which his thinking might otherwise seem directed, "I'm on the outside looking out." He notices maximum individuation in the objects—the pieces of music—he valorizes, to the point of heroic resistance to compromise in the interests of communicability. Yet he articulates ideas that intend a maximally open space for the toleration of a multiplicity of such maximally articulated objects.

I don't believe that Leahy would be particularly happy with any such outsider characterization of his "Thinking Now Occurring," yet he might have to admit that it is apt nevertheless. And he too finds a maximally articulated universe of particular things, each imbued with its own intelligibility, its own thought.

Boretz and Leahy have severally broken through to a common condition of contemporary thinking, though one is a Catholic theologian and the other a (post-) atheist resurrecting himself from the ashes of Positivist sympathies. We all have lived for some time in a "new age" in which there is no object unimbued with the thought that finds it; no thought manifest but in the objective event of its own occurrence: a public space of thoughtful objects and objective thoughts, carrying the authority of an unexceptionable inclusivity.

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<sup>1</sup> D.G. Leahy is the author of three singular texts: *Novitas Mundi: Perception of the History of Being*, State University of New York Press, 1994; *Foundation Matter The Body Itself*, State University of New York Press, 1996; and *Faith and Philosophy: The Historical Impact*, Ashgate Publishing limited, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> "Talk: If I am a musical thinker..." in *Being About Music: Textworks 1960-2003*, J.K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz, Open Space Publications, 2003.

I think (not untruly) of radical formalist David Hilbert's struggle to rescue classical mathematics by seeking a common ground with the darkly disgruntled intuitionists of his day. Mathematics was, in the 1920s, desperate to recover a foundation for its claim of universality. But foundational theories, it turned out, were just so many approaches to the assertion of authority. Yessenin-Volpin's<sup>3</sup> more recent Ultra Intuitionism renounces authority in favor of radical candor. Rather no mathematics at all than an agreement based on thoughts that in fact no one actually has!

Yet one might imagine a *noetic mandala*—an application of thought oriented towards a principle of truth that, in its truth, inspires articulation but is not in itself, articulated. Therein lies "authority," but authority such that no system of assertions can lay claim to the unique embodiment of it. And yet, without embodiment, access to principle does not appear. Articulation is mandated, just where the ineffability of authority places it in an ambiguous light.

Perhaps neither Leahy nor Boretz would recognize the target region of my noetic mandala. Still, I do associate it with one of Boretz' remarkable conceptions. In a seemingly different, though related, intellectual register, Boretz' *music / consciousness / gender*<sup>4</sup> opens a garden of possibility that is both militant and generous. Boretz wrenches "gender" from its social situation in a speculative inquiry that prescind from its familiar import: what if the concept of gender were exemplified by contrasting, complementing, conflicting, or otherwise relating qualities arising as compositional and experiential aspects of a work of music? Then gender would be where you find it, but its possibilities would lie in an unconditioned continuum of affinities, enmities, polarities, augmentations, subsumptions, transparencies, etc. Gender is thought engendered, and the space of its determination, the common space in which, however heterogeneously, we live.

At all events, the poetry that follows and the thinking it augments occurred under the permission granted by Boretz' speculation and the fact of its arising in the vicinity of Leahy's thought that is indeed, just now occurring.

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<sup>3</sup> See my account of Ultra Intuitionism in the introduction in *Being=Space X Action: Searches for Freedom of Mind in Mathematics, Art, and Mysticism*, ed. Charles Stein, North Atlantic Books, 1987 as well as Yessenin-Volpin's "The Logic of the Moral Sciences".

<sup>4</sup> "music / consciousness / gender"; wordtext alone in *Being About Music: Textworks 1960-2003*, J.K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz, Open Space Publications, 2003; complete composition performed on Open Space DVD/Video 1.

many hungers from the gender garden

from *theforestforthetrees*

Charles Stein

The waters  
flowing backwards

even now

the nozzle and its water spout  
as in some silly time reversal animation trick

But that (in fact) the two directions happen

the waters  
flowing  
backwards

as if we knew what *forward*  
meant

what else do we know?

Impertinent.

## The Gender Garden

Still

in the great jubilee  
the will  
that threw  
the world out  
onto itself  
reverses itself

—it was no will—

the possibilities  
taken back  
along their own trajectories.

The complexifications

step by step

remove themselves.

What became possible later  
was not possible  
now

(not yet any longer possible).

Imagination—  
subtracted.

The thing you thought  
cannot  
be thought—

the situation emergent within the situation formed.



Charles Stein

The very mind  
on which it rides.

Novation—  
de-novation.

The torment  
unpacked  
through the interrogation  
of its own specific cry.

The impossible  
reinstated  
at the prime.



The water  
flowing  
backwards—

The decision not taken back, but taken aback!

In the act of decision—  
no decision.

In distinction—  
indistinction.

The ferryboat floating on the brine.

The quiet captain  
contemplating water—  
which way flowing?

## The Gender Garden

Reflections in the mirror window

Glass

Water

Glass in water

Image contained in light

Back to the cupola          the copula

Over the gulf

The cavernous sky.

Redundancy.

Both ways.

⇒)(⇒)(⇒

Charles Stein

*[The] Gnostikos Christos*

the Great Light

behind but not beyond

takes [his] place

your place

(cover your words

When every stone of the spine has found release

and light is everywhere

that Figure of Light

steps in

*those are cobalt nuggets*

*that were your eyes*

and remains there

with you

*as you*

for more than an instant

a span

that doesn't close

≡))((≡))((≡

## The Gender Garden

Shall come now. tomorrow.

with the dawn sun he shall come. She  
shall... new from the gender garden

flowers break through the ground

like sun over mountains

crowned

with new signs

before this happiness

its absence filled the sea

≡)(≡)(≡

Charles Stein

The giants form a ring.

One of them lives at Heart Lake

and comes out after sundown

and spreads itself on the water

cradled by Mt. Algonquin and Mt. Joe—

or the ring of giants encloses the water—

I am not certain.

Alignment with this ring is hazardous  
but possible

to encourage the solemnity of being there  
is to acknowledge a 'call'

from whatever it is  
spreads itself over the water

and the susceptibility that alerts one  
is encouraged by the advertence it fosters—

advertence to the solemnity

that arrives

in advance of itself ...

≡)(≡)(≡

## The Gender Garden

### A Universe of Fields

lakes

monopoles

lattices

dustings

fans and swells

vortices

tangles

jungles

scatterings

moors and meadows

dooryards

impositions

layerings

rates of fading away

## The Gender Garden

when the giants departed

for the open valleys without mountains

a great sadness fell upon the shantees and the stones

then the “thoughtless light”

murmured in the mountains

and the giants spoke in their 'anguage

(gods are dragon segments...

≡) (≡) (≡

Charles Stein

## Dragon Swirlings

leaves or  
dust  
devils  
people  
dogs  
chasing their own thoughts

lightning the road by the river of snake flame jagged

the white hand of obstruction

$$\Rightarrow \rangle (\Rightarrow \rangle (\Rightarrow$$



## The Gender Garden

Plato says somewhere: *Except by the devious passageway through all things  
the mind cannot attain the real.*

Therefore the dragon  
    passes  
        through the realms  
of all the gods  
  
    all the cities of animals  
        the ecospheres of the Gemlings  
        the caves and dens of men  
  
visiting Human places last  
    and without much relish  
for the contribution that humans make  
    is slight  
  
and consists primarily  
    in elaborating paths  
        of distraction.

That is why the Goblins  
    delight in disrupting them  
    through absurdities  
        intensities  
        bad dreams.

When Humans  
    return  
        from distraction  
  
they are not other than Mountains  
  
but unlike Giants in that state  
    remain aware of themselves.

Before Catastrophe  
  
    Humans and Goblins  
        were sometime  
        gender affinitants  
  
    gems and the light  
        of Gemlings  
    flashed in their forests

Charles Stein

and the Giants  
assembled in rings  
by the Goblin Lakes.

The dark  
was but a shadow  
among the facets

where the Gemlings  
exchanged natures  
with the flowers

ong massets ovrching  
but an ark  
kswhem gwas  
nature

a wundj'd ththay sduwith

Smm

Linglight ra

rf starf

mā\*  
nn are were ā nifi an ji

a ble snü

Em di ni āEye th t Em ā

Sspe vi sha ji ewi  
ee oort

---

\* Pronounce "a" without a bar as "a" as in "bar"; pronounce barred "a" (ā) as "a" as in "as."

## The Gender Garden

nah nnnah meendah ahnety a een ahr eh oorthoot

sssdaguñ wrath erf f oorthu 'u awra mēzov gods

ffistiath an mini áthesek chrus fúthu mléss

phase the genéss men

Ssting

Thomp A-slash thowth mush schérshnikê shoorithen

Thloth thos man spuss eye 't

sss nahm illey pra dorey  
tahth mathūs ra

That is why the goblins  
delight in disrupting them

so much of their anguish lingers in the cause ways they

⇒)(⇒)(⇒

Charles Stein

When the goblins gaze in on the lakes  
that they themselves encompass,  
they do not find water  
but sapphire terraces wide as the sky  
covered with empty thrones; emerald chalices  
overbrimming with potions and oceans  
from which pointy mountains rise;  
memories encoded and indexed by nuggets of amethyst.  
Their inner worlds are frozen and beautiful  
but not restful,  
for they cannot find The Lake without commerce with humans.  
And the humans long for their mountains,  
for meadows of anemones,  
little grass plots enclosed by rose-smothered fences.  
When the humans reach for these,  
the goblins grow contemptuous,  
and the lakes that are in them and that are them,  
conceal themselves beneath the imagery described.

≡))((≡))((≡

## The Gender Garden

A little white knight  
unhappy with a life  
of perpetual skirmishing  
willed an escape from his admirers  
above a fair embankment  
at the rim of a golden meadow  
beneath the welcoming shade of a willow grove...

At once a goblin  
climbed out of a stone  
and offered a round of cheese  
or a chain of keys  
together with an indecipherable text  
in a dusty tome.

Soon the two were inseparable comrades  
and the knight began to whistle  
and the goblin *whittled* a whistle  
with five irregular tones.

I saw all this in a blot of light  
cruising down

Charles Stein

the river that flows both ways

And a window opened in the sound

of that whittling and whistling—

not silence, but a susurrations that suddenly seemed

the sound of all thinking things

passing by beyond the ear of thought

kfs chtk fss th t fu s ksh t f sss kfs t sht kus shu fu ss

tiki fúshusi fushúsi kúfita shtífkus fúskit a sh...

≡)(≡)(≡

## The Gender Garden

One hour not possible another hour not only possible  
but so.

Mind

—shattered into a thousand  
rivulets

only the carrier light remains

rocks and trees and a beautiful meadow behind the trees climbing up a slight

incline from the water

passing by

Being is the same in every instance of appearance though the divisiveness  
of apparency grows more radical, the unitary imagery less facilely resumed

Charles Stein

Thought flows both ways : from the generality with which it thrusts itself  
onto the sensuous toward the unity with which it attempts to assemble a *thing*

*in the blot of light on the water*

*a golden meadow gleaming*

*with willows by the shore*

*and white roots clutching rocks ensconced in embankment*

the blot of light is broken on the wavulets

carrier light flash back on window glass    disrupting    eye sight

turn head    half way    away

⇒)(⇒)(⇒



## The Gender Garden

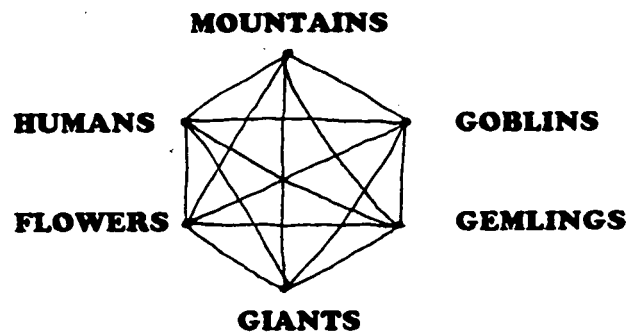
*Denumerable* gender fields are aggregates of binary pairs, where nodes have multiple relations with other nodes.

Denumerability requires that, however multiple, relations are in fact built up upon binaries. Thus the ternary field, [ABC], consists simultaneously of [AB], [AC], [BC] and also [{AB}C], [{AC}B], and [{BC}A], the entire field being the “simultaneous” aggregate of these binaries.

Yet the field [ABC] is also an indenumerable field defined without reference to its internal relations, requiring another sort of imagination to grasp its unity.

Are the indenumerable characters of numbered fields hints from the Gender Garden, anterior to Catastrophe?

After Catastrophe all gender relations are binary, since Catastrophe itself is the advent of the binary.



[]

The Giants are Mountains and the Humans are Mountains. But the Goblins are also Humans, not in their nature but by lost affinity. Where the humans seek floreate delicacies, the Goblins hold crystal stones. And when attractions arise contrariwise, so that humans hoard stones and Goblins cull floral aromas, their roles as gender affinitants recover themselves.

[]

Charles Stein

For Humans, gems are objects of fascination, study, potential danger and potency; flowers carry images of desire. The relation between power and desire is equipped by the gender affinities between gems and flowers.

[]

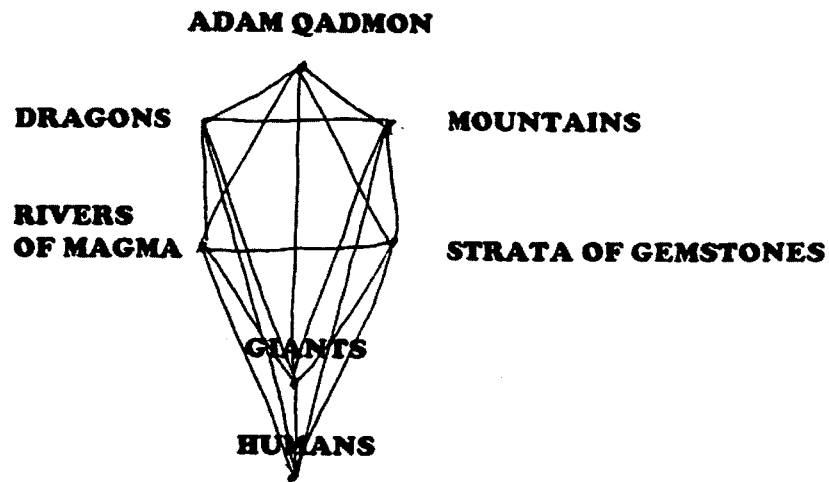
Flowers grow on mountains; gems grow within them. Giants are introverts when they are mountains. They seek gems; ignore flowers.

[]

The above sixfold of relations is true as moments of crystalized stasis in what are otherwise dynamic and changing sets of field characteristics. After all—mountains also enclose volcanic lakes and fountains; they are therefore affinitants with Goblins. Mountains are riven with woodland freshets and streams, affinitants of geological strata: rivers of amethyst or anthracite; currents of history; migrations; long rides over surface through mountains.

[]

Infinite gender fields flash over and through the body of Macro Anthropos, which is composed of the “Formless Mass” of spiritual Matter. Another denumerable gender field, this time a heptad, might form itself consisting of Adam Qadmon, Humans, Rivers of Magma, Strata of Gemstones, Mountains, Dragons, Giants.



Prior to Catastrophe (though viewed from a certain vantage subsequent to Catastrophe) the seemingly denumerable configurations flash and change, like titilations, with

## The Gender Garden

continuously varying forms or frames of aggregation, themselves a welter of field types, only barely suggested by the list proffered in “A Universe of Fields.”

Who is witness to this realm of transformation? What is that “certain” vantage subsequent to Catastrophe, that yet seems to peek in on the contraventions of number rife in the Gender Garden? The faculty of Vision, itself only momentarily awake to that which occurs prior to the Shattering of the Chalice: a faculty pertinent to the Shekinah herself, fearful faculty: so that for humanity an enmity is aroused when She awakens; for though her Form is named through gender categories devised from within the limits of the human binary, something of the open spread of the Gender Garden remains in her very lassitude and destitution: the faculty she carries, the Vision that she proffers—for she dwells in dusts and hovels, conditioned by the Scatterings—and seems the Mother of *En-tropy*: chaos, but also a turning, tuning within; an opening to the phenomenality of being.

[]

Humans harbor miasmas of anguish: fountains of grief and torches of rage; fertile ground where thoughts erupt and decay; elaborate themselves in ramified progenitations, with and without prior paradigms. In the Gender Garden humanity itself dissolves into its field, to reappear only as one among its own possibilities.

Charles Stein

The meager

thought of Being

developed its own echoes—

till the echoes

overwhelmed

the cry

and the smallest Gemling

flashing in the meadow grass

began the long ascent:

the thought of existence itself

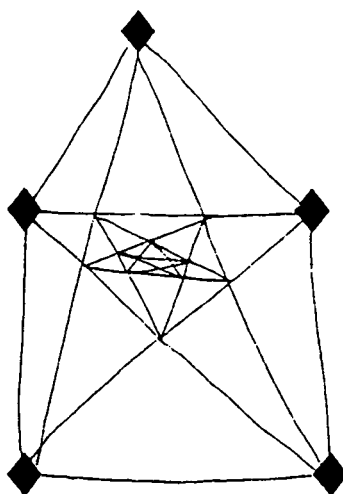
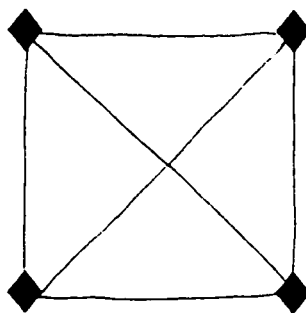
holding the final bezel in its shadows

≡)(≡)(≡

# The Gender Garden



Charles Stein

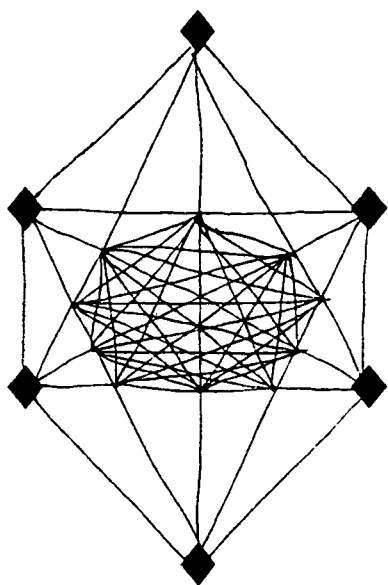


## The Gender Garden

In the monad there are no “relations.” In the dyad, the relations are the dyad itself. In the triad, all relations are given with the three corners of the figure. The tetrad is the first figure where the relations establish a new point: the crossing point of the diagonals. In the pentad, relations for the first time multiply to infinity. The new figures for the new relations, however, are self-similar: though new points are produced ad infinitum, no new figure emerges when the points are connected. It is only with the six-pointed figure that the first non-self-similar generator of infinite new relations appears. In two generations, we have a web of ever new relations. And when generation is iterated indefinitely, connections approach continuum.

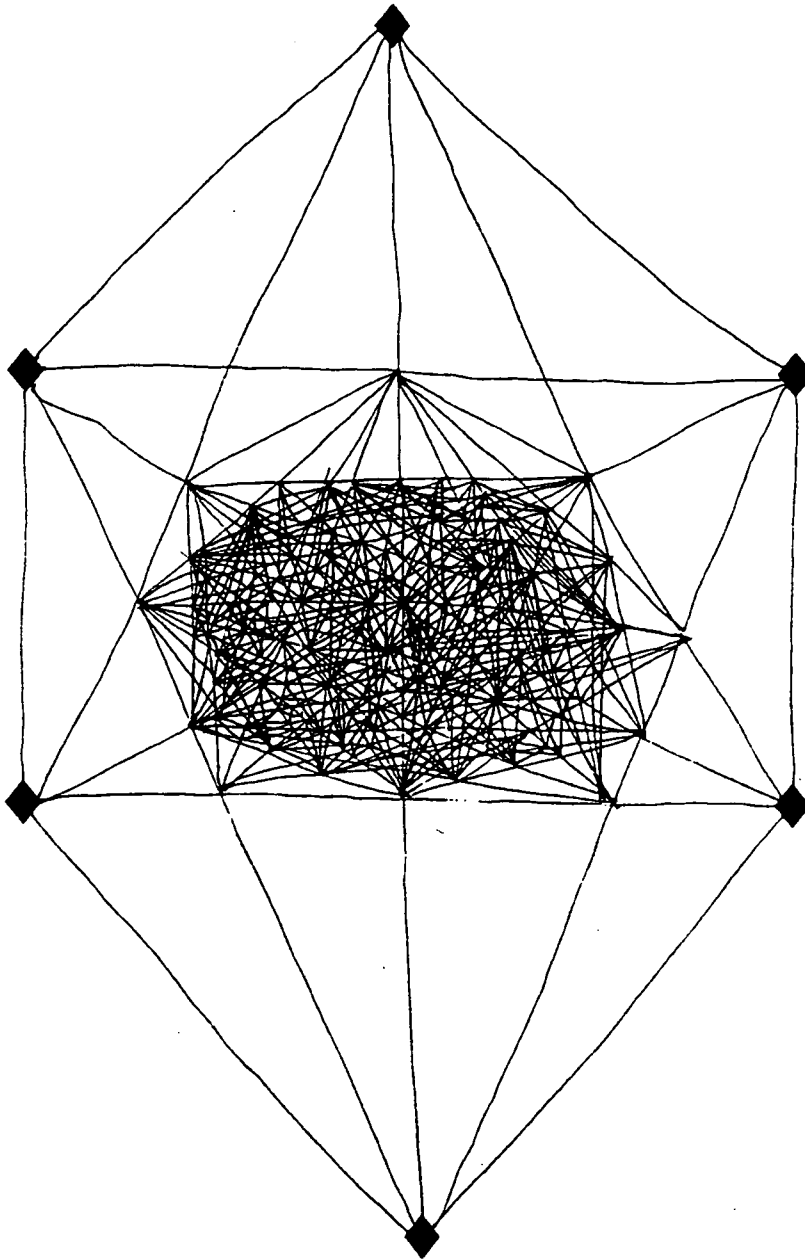
At the limit we pass beyond the Curtain and enter the Garden: the locus where relations of affinity become continuous: the Primordial; the Impossible.

Charles Stein





The Gender Garden



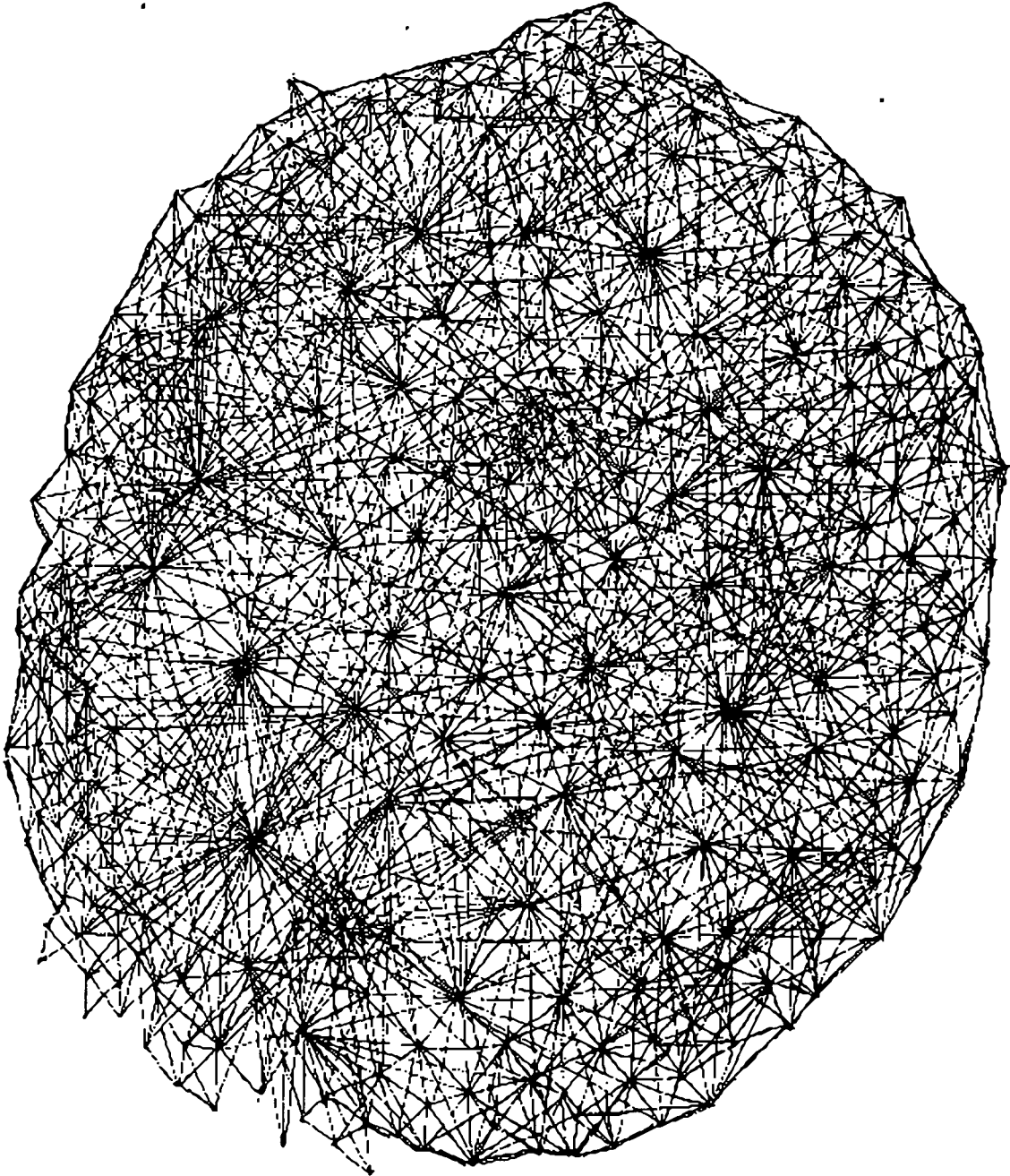
Family Resemblance

The total animal of dots grows the lines that connect them.

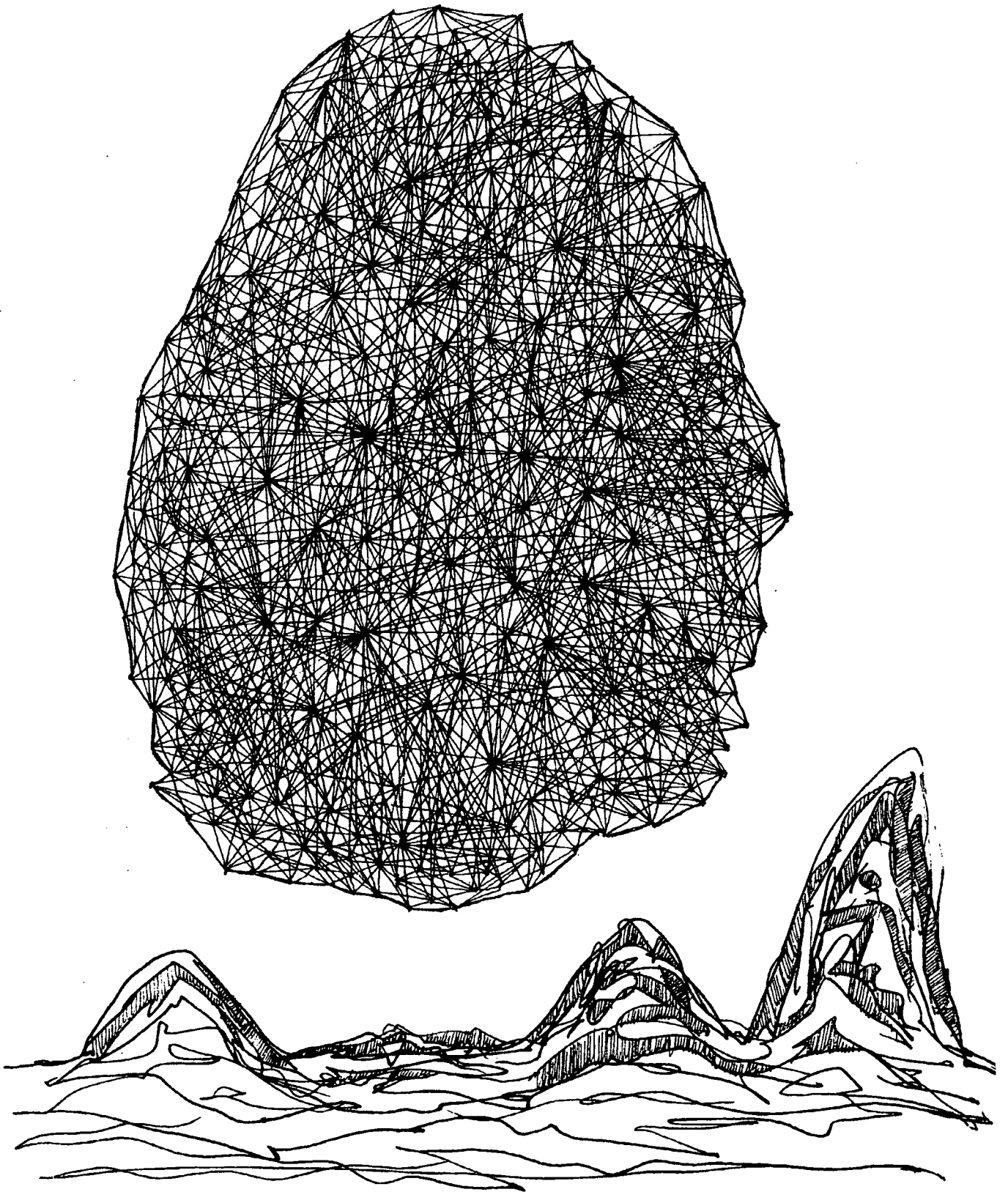
There are many animals, many composites. The dots are points, but not only points. The thickness of them engenders their fields—the thickness of the points as they gather their relations. Each point is a gathering of relations, a center of pencils, of rays, each “line” negotiating its passage to and from another point in the field.

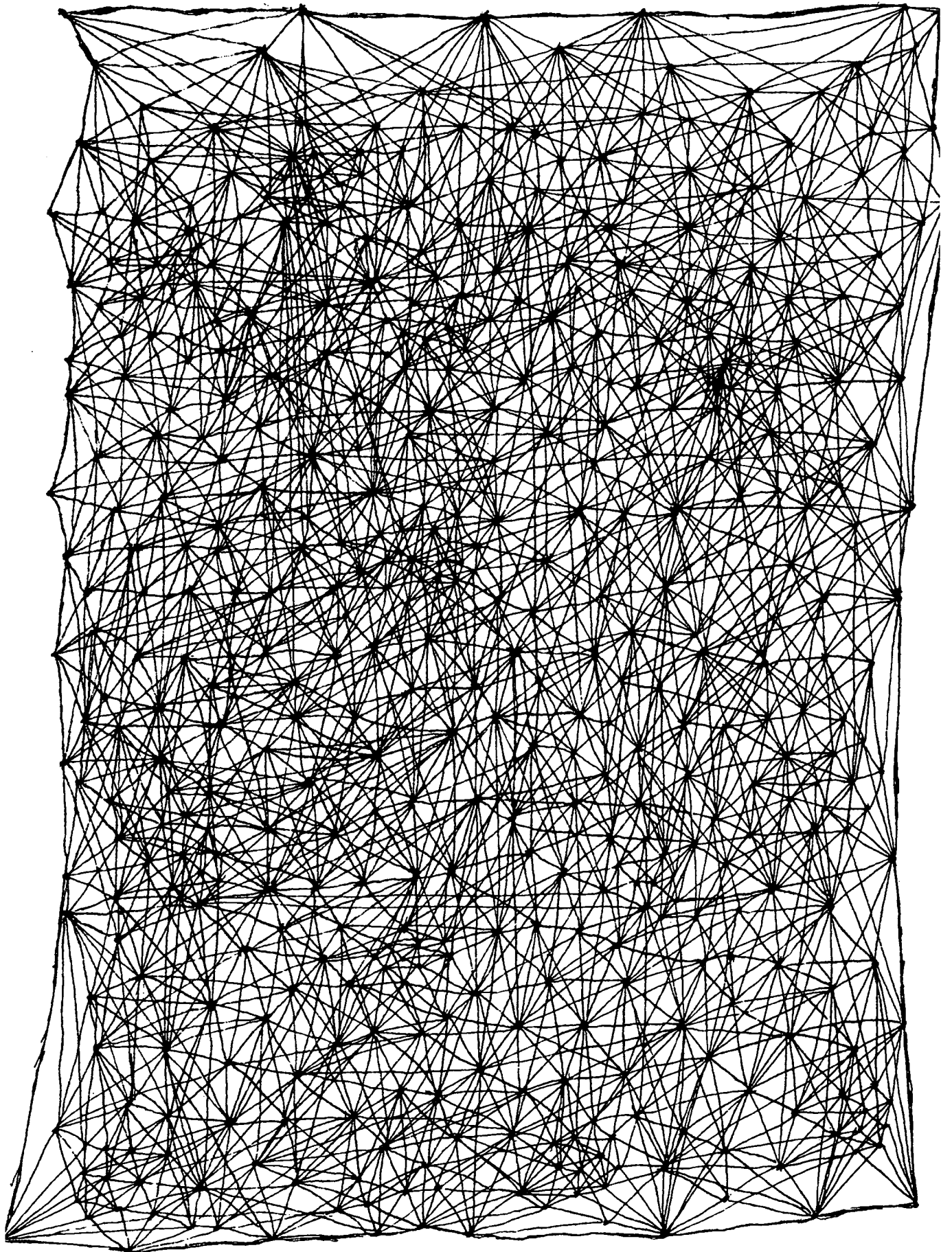
The points to which a dot is connected is a local neighborhood, a passage through the neighborhood of spaces surrounding that point; an accumulation of local ideas. No one point touches all, though all the points of the total animal are connected, engrossed in the meshwork of lines and points and local subregions, local fields.

The Gender Garden



Charles Stein





Something has happened to The Real. It has fallen from the uttermost battlements and taken a stand in matter itself. Only Existence, incomp- prehensible, indefinable, and lost, stands forth as existence itself. It has smugly taken off its garments of obscurity, its cloak of invisibility, and its smoke of possible oblivion, and now appears just as it seems, in all varieties of apprehension, with only a minimum of reflective interface, but that minimum is sufficient for a thrill of joy, for conscious nest- st- and only there - for a inter- pose. It has only to be n- ation. It has only to be n- now, even if unnoticed (t- ening has flashed across livion. Himself - the Ance- d his Robe, on the Ance- d his crown, on, Kingshi- hout loss or remainder very where: not a trace servility remains. There- r token of this alter- ary or possible. Quiet- assing of a shadow, Vision occurs foreve- e War has already be- contain is the body of God, F- ruins, one vast Temple is- ning. We pass through the- r the Garden. The Pati- before Existence itself. A- iting. All the world - one- arnet in the Garnet- mies. Commence- doty of in comme- ood or ill - a diam- re. Was it a bubb- vom broke the Field? bought, once the Field- themselves. The Giant- ng pregnancy of a Field. s, the Bearded Mothers form- not bootstrap from lagoon- stancy; they are the morph- ty; they sort out the welt- moment of the Field. Th- cable registry. Surly bod- va. Woe if I revied it! Woe- curtains divide the seve- curtain of words. Though- Life Divides - yow whom- curtain addresses, can- it: On the other side of- plendor! On the other- in - what horror! There- is speaking speaks, is- it is not language but- eech or hidden by speer- but speak of it. We ca- Here terminates the cur- woe if we lift it, woe if- it.....

## The Gender Garden

the sky is falling  
into the body of the world

trumpets and long trombones

jammed into a mountain

Charles Stein

Consciousness is a film between language and the phenomena educating it.  
Leading it, that is, forth from the singular identity of its Mountain.

Existence is a mountain.

Cruelty—

Cruelty.

Apart from its nature as the mountain, each local animal suffers  
relentlessly, as if its existence were other than existence. As if it were other  
than its mountain.

As if it were more the phenomena it witnesses, the language it speaks, than  
the film of light that sails through its moments, like a shining serpent or  
gem of rare lustre, like a mountain glimpsed far in the haze.

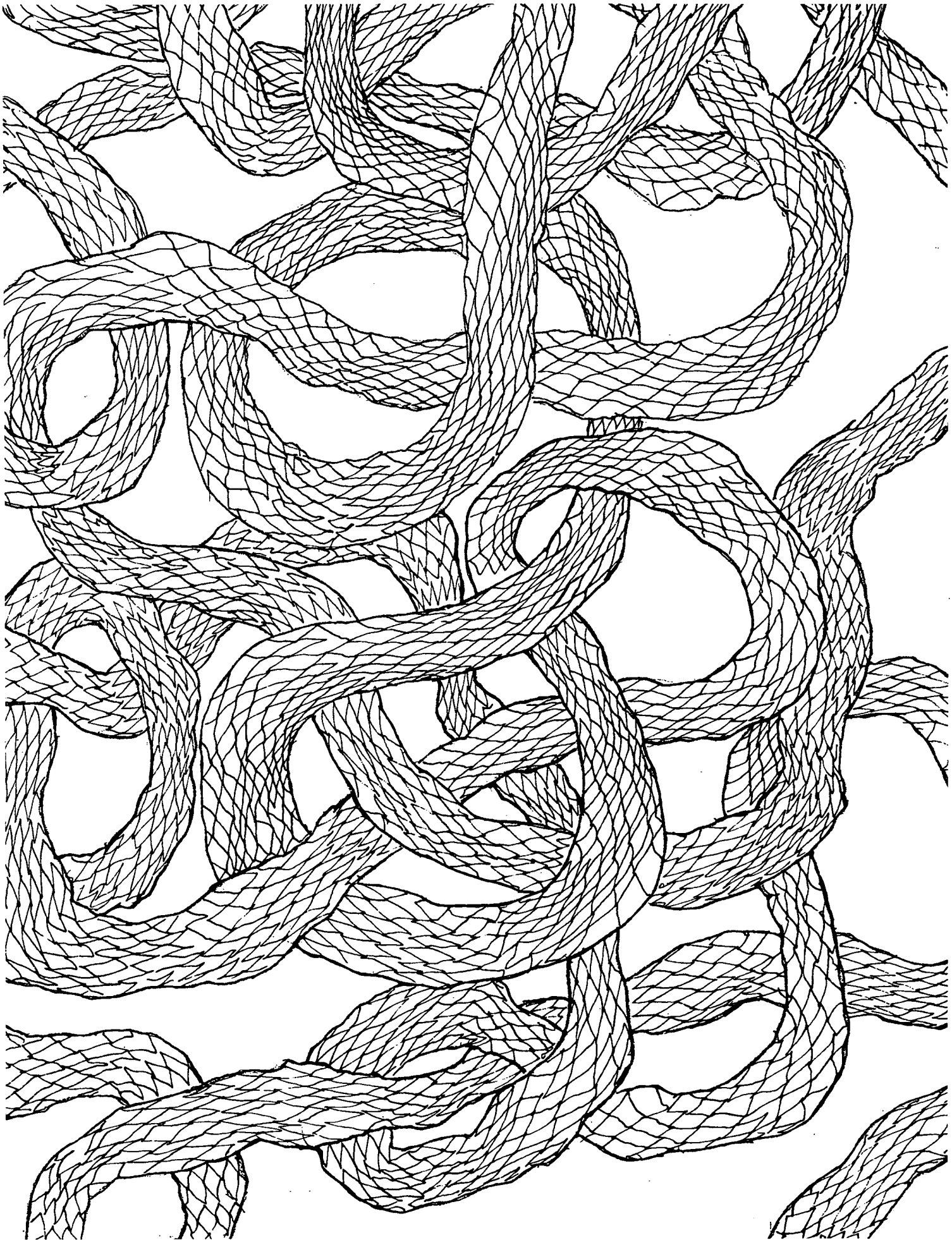
But near in the moment.

Quietly—

Quietly.

Each animal replies to the mesh of its relations, contriving relations once  
more. One more relation. Until the total animal is a mass of tangles and  
knots; a passage of strange device, leaving a trailwork of astonishing





(一)(二)(三)(四)(五)(六)(七)(八)(九)(十)(十一)(十二)(十三)(十四)(十五)(十六)(十七)(十八)(十九)(二十)(二十一)(二十二)(二十三)(二十四)(二十五)(二十六)(二十七)(二十八)(二十九)(三十)(三十一)(三十二)(三十三)(三十四)(三十五)(三十六)(三十七)(三十八)(三十九)(四十)(四十一)(四十二)(四十三)(四十四)(四十五)(四十六)(四十七)(四十八)(四十九)(五十)(五十一)(五十二)(五十三)(五十四)(五十五)(五十六)(五十七)(五十八)(五十九)(六十)(六十一)(六十二)(六十三)(六十四)(六十五)(六十六)(六十七)(六十八)(六十九)(七十)(七十一)(七十二)(七十三)(七十四)(七十五)(七十六)(七十七)(七十八)(七十九)(八十)(八十一)(八十二)(八十三)(八十四)(八十五)(八十六)(八十七)(八十八)(八十九)(九十)(九十一)(九十二)(九十三)(九十四)(九十五)(九十六)(九十七)(九十八)(九十九)(一百)

## *Some Thoughts About Lou Harrison's Music*

### **IN PRAISE of LOU HARRISON**

#### **Some Thoughts About Lou Harrison's Music And A Review of Resources for Further Study**

Joel Taylor

for **Buka**

#### ***Listening to A Phrase for Arion's Leap***

Click: as if a latch had fallen into place. The thin, naked tones of a wire harp begin a brave but cautious ascent up an odd spiral staircase: each step is a different size, and a sensation quickly accrues of not feeling secure, of a need to be very careful where one puts one's feet, because the perspective is constantly changing. Soon we are at a great height, exposed, looking out over a precipice. There is a small pulling back, and then, from far below: accompanied by a series of shrieks from bowed zither, the deeper, more muscular tones of a troubadour harp start a second ascent. The contours seem familiar, it is the same climb even though the size of the intervals and the perspective keeps changing, there are skips up and down; balance shifts; each new tone seems to heighten the sense of stretching, reaching. Again the sensations of great height and vulnerability accrue; the troubadour harp's tones give the climbing line back to the thinner more intimate sound of the wire harp. Accuracy, dynamic balance and timing are everything now; there isn't any room for error. A final run to the edge, and then a graceful leap: suspension, for a moment, and the sound of a simple, sweetly consonant tremolo, followed by immediate disappearance dissolved into the splash and spray of bell shake and gong.

Lou Harrison died this February 2<sup>nd</sup>, at age 85. Harrison is one of those American composers who defy easy categorization. Often cited as the prototypical "West Coast" composer (a certain dry emphasis to "West Coast," please), Harrison is much broader and deeper than that.

Shortly after his death I read a review of a concert of Harrison's music in which the reviewer said something to the effect that "every piece seemed to wish you a happy day." In another article, I read that Lou Harrison's music was apolitical. Such comments amaze me. Any of us who have been lucky enough to become familiar with the breadth and depth of Harrison's work know better.

## Mixing Politics and Music

Over and over again, Lou Harrison committed himself to intellectual freedom, to human rights (including gay rights and sexual freedom), to respect for other peoples and cultures, to world peace through pacifism, and to environmentalism and respect for the Earth.

Harrison made these commitments in his work as well as in his life. He wrote operas about homosexual love, and passionate anti-war protest pieces that rage against those in power. In *Peace Piece 2: Passages 25*, first performed in 1968 during the height of the Vietnam War, he creates a 12-tone recitative using Robert Duncan's "Up Rising, Passages 25" for the text:

*Men wake to see that they are used like things  
spent in a great potlatch, this Texas barbeque  
of Asia, Africa, and all the Americas...  
the all-American boy in the cockpit  
loosing his flow of napalm, below in the jungles...  
and the torture of mothers and fathers and children,  
their hair aflame, screaming in agony...*

*Robert Duncan*

In the gamelan suite *Homage to Pacifica*, written in honor of listener-sponsored Pacifica Radio, Harrison fashions a simple, heartfelt melodic setting of Chief Seattle's farewell speech, a text that has become an anthem of the environmental movement:

*Where is man without the beasts?  
If the beasts were gone,  
men would die  
from a great loneliness of spirit.  
For whatever happens to the beasts  
soon happens to man.  
All things are connected;  
this we know.  
The earth does not belong to man;  
man belongs to the earth.  
This we know.  
All things are connected  
like the blood which unites one family.  
All things are connected,  
Whatever befalls the earth  
befalls the sons of the earth.*

## In Praise of Lou Harrison

*Man did not weave the web of life;  
he is merely a strand in it.  
Whatever he does to the web,  
he does to himself.*

*Chief Seattle*

It takes a brave composer to wear his ideals, beliefs and emotions on his sleeve the way Harrison does in these works. *Peace Piece 2* is about as far away from “have a nice day” as any music I know, filled with dissonance, shame and despair. The composer of such music expects to be accused of being too political, not apolitical!

## In Praise of the Song and Dance Man

Harrison liked to refer to himself as a “song and dance man,” and his music is often remarked upon for the number of beautiful, and singable, melodies it contains, an unusual feature in serious contemporary music. But it is also true that much of Harrison’s music is radical in political content and in choice of musical materials and methods. We do not yet get to hear his more challenging pieces frequently, and there is much of his music that is still to be recorded, or that has been recorded but is out of print or otherwise hard to find.

As is to be expected for a composer with a huge melodic gift, and a penchant for expressing it, the pieces which are the most melodic, most accessible, and perhaps (for some) the least challenging, have received the greatest attention. Perhaps this is why there seems to be a perception among some in the music community that Harrison’s music is all light and sweetness, or lacking in substance. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I confess to being a lover of sweetness in music, provided the sweetness is true, and I can think of no significant recent music sweeter or truer than the music of Lou Harrison. For some listeners this sweetness is perceived as a weakness. I find myself sympathetic to that view, as most of us detest false sentiment, which always seems to be in ready supply in the music industry. But to mistake the sweetness and solace to be found in Harrison’s work for cheap sentiment is a terrible error. The music is full of strength; it rewards repeated listening. There is the linear strength of the long line, spinning itself on and on and finally swallowing its own tail, dragon-like; and there is the global strength of immense musicological knowledge applied to the careful creation of a vividly imagined musical world. Many times I have found myself, when listening to Harrison’s music, overwhelmed with gratitude that I am alive to hear such wonderfully human work. For me, Harrison’s music seems to encompass, sing to, reflect upon, and embrace the almost divine and uniquely human privilege of being a conscious being. It also sings to the pain and anger and anguish that accompanies the realization that we humans, for all our godlike features, are hopelessly misguided in our social affairs, that we are unable to control our most violent and selfish impulses, and that it appears ever more likely that we

will destroy our planet, as if our personal mortality were not enough for us to bear. This awareness of the potential for species mortality is fairly recent, imbuing much of our art since the invention of the atomic bomb. It was an important and conscious decision on the part of this particular composer that at the end of the journey, no matter how painful, his music would profess a profound gratefulness for consciousness, for the uniquely human ability to contemplate our situation. We are alive to hear this, for now. Yes, that is sweetness. But it is not "have a nice day."

*Out of cowardice, then, a few of us might kill the world by war.*

*But we are still men, and we intend to live – and while*

*we still live we struggle to make something whatever right...*

*for the beautiful art which we practice is an art which sings of love;*

*we are right, being musicians, to take on one more answerability.*

Lou Harrison

Throughout his life, Harrison appropriated musical ideas and materials from whatever type of music he was interested in, and his musical interests were uncommonly deep and wide. An early and effective champion of Charles Ives; a student of Arnold Schoenberg and Henry Cowell; an important and early musical collaborator of John Cage; and later a friend, student and supporter of Harry Partch, Harrison was very much at the center of the American experimental music scene in the mid-twentieth century.

As a young student in San Francisco, Harrison developed a love for Asian music. "I discovered Chinese Opera, and that became a more or less steady entertainment. I had seen many more Chinese Operas than Western Operas."<sup>1</sup> In 1961 and 1962, Harrison spent time in Korea. He studied the p'iri with Maestro Kim T'aesop, and Korean music history and theory with Lee Hye-Ku.<sup>2</sup> Harrison first heard gamelan in recordings in the mid 1930s, and in 1939 heard a live performance of Balinese Gamelan at the Golden Gate Exposition. Gamelan-inspired sounds first appear in his composing in 1951, in the *Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra*. It is about this time that Harrison began to turn away from the "cage of 12-tone equal temperament," and to work with the multiplicity of pentatonic modes and tunings that world music provides. Harrison began studying gamelan with Indonesian musicians in the 1970's. He studied Central Javanese style with K.R.T. Wasitodipuro, Sundanese style with Undang Sumarna, and in the 1980's, Cirebonese style with Elang Muhammed Yuwana Yusuf. In 1976 Harrison began to write works for gamelan, and over the years became an important proponent and teacher of Javanese Gamelan in the United States.<sup>3</sup> It is not an exaggeration to say that Lou Harrison was the father of what is today becoming a strong and vibrant American Gamelan tradition.

<sup>1</sup>Miller, Leta; and Lieberman, Frederick. *Lou Harrison, Composing a World*, Oxford University Press, 1998: Pg. 141.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. pg. 143. The p'iri is a small double reed instrument.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. pg. 161-162.

An easy-going, but scholarly and sincerely revisionist attitude towards form, material and content is evident throughout his career. Harrison's approach to composition could easily be described as proto-post-modernist. Newness is not awarded special status, but neither is it shunned. There are no sanctions against the use of musical materials or musical methods because of antiquity or geographic origins, or simplicity. There is a great interest in the very oldest of the world's music, and the very simplest of musical materials and methods, as well as in new music, new materials, and new ideas. Nothing is forbidden. There are no sanctions against the Other in this man's work.

### Three Sources for Further Study

*Lou Harrison - Composing a World*, the biography by Leta Miller and Frederic Lieberman, is an important book for those interested in Harrison's life and music. It contains a comprehensive catalog of works, organized by title, medium and genre, and a chronological listing which shows dates for revisions. Harrison was constantly revising his work and recycling and refining his ideas. The book has extensive footnotes, and a good bibliography. It comes with a CD which should be a small revelation to those who are unaware of Harrison's more radical music, or the breadth of his output generally. It has enough detail about the music, and enough analysis, to be of some interest to professional musicians, but not so much as to be opaque to an intelligent layperson. It is informal in tone, and includes excerpts from many interviews with Harrison and others from his musical circle. It is sometimes reverential and familiar in tone. Nevertheless, there are sections where the authors are critical of some aspects of the composer's musical production, and there are sections where Harrison himself airs his own misgivings about certain works. It is missing one very important thing: a discography.<sup>4</sup>

*Lou Harrison's Music Primer*, originally published by Peters and now available in a dual Japanese/English version from Frog Peak Press, is one of the best sources of information about Harrison's basic compositional techniques, and about his opinions on music generally. In it, he briefly discusses a significant fraction of the myriad techniques and ideas that he found useful in his musical practice: Serialism, applied to sets of any size or type; combinatorial techniques applied to musical parameters such as phrase length; John Cage's square-root form; the use of chant forms and very old dance forms; the use of rhyme forms; the use of the many variation techniques found in gamelan music; the importance of tuning and building musical instruments; and the strength and grace of the human songs found throughout our world. Harrison provides a listing of a number of interesting just-intoned pentatonic scale forms, and discusses one of his most important

<sup>4</sup> The best discography I've found is at the Harrison archive, at San Jose State University: [http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/music\\_dance/centers/harrison\\_archive/lou\\_disco.html](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/music_dance/centers/harrison_archive/lou_disco.html). This discography is current to 1996. There are 21 recordings in the discography, comprised of about 50 or so pieces. There are 302 pieces in the Miller biography catalog of works.

ideas, the idea of “Free Style Composition,” by which he meant composition using extended just intonation without any fixed gamut of pitches. There are also some wise and occasionally sad words about the world of music, and the world generally.

A *Lou Harrison Reader*, published by Soundings Press in 1987 and edited by Peter Garland, is a third source of information on Harrison’s music. It contains several scores, as well as copies of letters between Harrison and many of his collaborators and mentors: Ives, Cage, Partch, Schoenberg, Cowell. It contains interviews with Harrison and others, and a number of texts about Harrison and/or his music by other musicians and artists. One of the most important of these articles is by composer and theorist Larry Polansky, titled *Item: Lou Harrison’s role as a speculative theorist*:

“...Lou has made a contribution in the area of theory that may be among his most important and long-lasting: the distinction between ‘free’ and ‘strict’ style intonations...Lou simply reinterpreted these historical notions in the new context of twentieth century music.

In *free style* style intonation the intonation of a given pitch is determined by ratio from the previous melodic pitch, or some vertical relationship, and NOT simply from a predefined gamut...Lou used this idea beautifully in at least three pieces that I know of, the seminal *Arion’s Leap*, *At the Tomb of Charles Ives*, and the visionary *Simfony in Free Style*. It is worth pointing out that the latter two works were almost impossible to play accurately until the development of small tunable microcomputer systems.”<sup>5</sup>

### ***“Just Intonation is the best intonation.”***

Harrison’s realization that one can build one’s music interval by interval without regard to whether the resulting pitches are members of a fixed collection of pitch classes is intriguing. There are quite a few composers who feel cramped by what Harrison called “the cage of 12-tone equal temperament,” but who are understandably reluctant to commit themselves to any one alternative system, as Harry Partch did. The essential idea of free style intonation is the realization that one does not need to choose one’s pitches from a finite collection. One can simply use the intervals one wishes to use. By privileging interval over pitch-class Harrison obtains an unprecedented freedom.

Unfortunately, most of us have not heard these pieces, and Harrison of all people would certainly agree that the proof is in the listening. Fortunately, the CD that comes with the Miller biography includes a listenable MIDI realization of the *Simfony in Free Style*, done by David Doty. Harrison approved this realization and made suggestions about

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<sup>5</sup> Polansky, Larry. “Item: Lou Harrison’s role as a speculative theorist”, *A Lou Harrison Reader*, Peter Garland, ed. Soundings Press. Page 92.



simulating performance practice, which Doty implemented. Those of us who are interested will be able to evaluate the composition by listening to this CD, and we should be grateful to Doty for the hard work this realization must have involved. It would, of course, be wonderful to someday hear an acoustic version, created with both standard and specially constructed instruments, as Harrison originally envisioned the work. And there may, of course, be other computer musicians who will create realizations of these works in the future.

You can listen to *At the Tomb of Charles Ives* if you can find a copy of the Gramavision LP titled 'At the Tomb of Charles Ives and Party Pieces', GR 7006 LP. I am unaware of any other recording, though there may be others.

As far as I've been able to determine, to listen to *A Phrase for Arion's Leap* you must find a copy of the cassette tape 'Tellus, The Audio Cassette Magazine, #14', from Harvestworks. There may be other recordings of these important pieces, but I am unaware of them. The Tellus Cassette has other attractions: works by Polansky, Partch, Johnston, Tenney, Diamond and the League of Automatic Music Composers, among others. Perhaps Harvestworks will reissue the Tellus cassettes on CD someday.

### Thinking about *A Phrase for Arion's Leap*

*A Phrase for Arion's Leap*, written in 1974, is scored for psaltry, troubadour harp, bowed San Hsien (a zither), wire-strung transfer harp, and percussion. The free style precision tuning approach, used here by Harrison for the third time, expands the types of melodic transformations available to the composer's imagination. The score fits on a single page, and the size of every interval is specified as a whole number ratio relative to another pitch. Of course, the score must specify the starting pitch as a frequency in Hertz, or cycles per second.

*Arion's Leap* opens with a seven note ascending line comprised of two conjunct tetrachords: starting on E below middle C, (E=330 Hz), the wire harp sounds a small quarter tone, (40/39) or 43.8 cents, followed by a larger quarter tone, (26/25), which together span a just minor second, (16/15). This is followed by a skip of a just Major Third (5/4), which brings us to a perfect fourth above the first tone, to A.<sup>6</sup> Continuing from A (A=440 Hz), we have again two small steps, but this time the steps are expanded: 2 unequal minor seconds, which add up to (10/9), the 'small' major second. As before, this is followed by a skip, this time a just minor third (6/5), again outlining a fourth, and bringing us to rest on a pitch

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<sup>6</sup> This is an enharmonic tetrachord, tetrachord number 108 in "The Catalog of Tetrachords." Chalmers, John. *Divisions of the Tetrachord*, "The Catalog of Tetrachords." Frog Peak.

the interval (D) that is (16/9), a minor seventh above the start of the ascent.<sup>7</sup> In *A Phrase for Arion's Leap*, Harrison convincingly demonstrates the expressive melodic potentials of his new approach. There is striking melodic freedom from the vertical. Somewhat paradoxically, vertical relationships between pitches combine with this expanded melodic freedom to create a remarkable sensation of great height and suspension. The consonant (10/9) "grave" major second tremolo's upper tone sounds at 1788 cents, above the initial E, outlining a slightly flat tritone.

In free style composition interval size may expand or contract; intervals are defined and sounded relative to each other either vertically or horizontally, and there exists no fixed gamut or set of pitch classes from which pitch selection is made. By using the 'free style' technique, a composer may transform a melodic contour and its harmonic implications with great subtlety. A theme may be restated with every interval changed, yet easily be recognizable. In the process of composing in free style a composer may end up with stretched or compressed octaves. There may appear any number of small and super-small resultant intervals. All the manifestations of advanced microtonal music may appear, either by chance, miscalculation, or — hopefully — by careful, purposeful calculation and aural imagination. Free style intonation is an embracing of a pitch world with many colors: there may be many shades of "C". Diversity of interval size is embraced as a functional principle, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with a fixed gamut of pitch classes are abandoned. This is a privileging of interval over pitchclass as the fundamental building block of melody and harmony.

By choosing to take a programmatic, sound-painting approach, and by concentrating on melody, Harrison gives himself an intuitive focus, makes the most of his greatest strengths, and guarantees poetic closure. The "free-style precision-tuning extended just intonation approach" opens the door to as many compositional problems, and as many compositional potentials, as those suggested by Schoenberg's early atonal piano miniatures. Like Schoenberg and Webern at the beginnings of 20<sup>th</sup> century atonality, Harrison worked small, and very carefully, when faced with the unknown, infinite potentials of the new approach.

Faced with the great difficulties of accurately realizing his free style works with only acoustic means, and no doubt aware that he was exploring truly new ground musically, Harrison only created a few small master-works in this way. It is significant that the last written is the easiest to perform. I have heard only *A Phrase for Arion's Leap*, and the *Symphony in Free Style*. As far as I know, these two pieces, and *At the Tomb of Charles Ives* (which I have not heard) are the only free style works Harrison was able to create. The two pieces I know are sturdy, beautiful, and well constructed, and they clearly map out some of the potentials of the approach for those of us who may wish to follow his lead. All of these pieces cry out for more detailed analysis, and for more frequent performance.

<sup>7</sup> This second, extremely consonant tetrachord, of the chromatic genus, number 215 in the "Catalog of Tetrachords," is usually attributed to the Greek theorist Didymos.

The computing tools we have at our disposal now make composing extended works in free style conceivable in a way that was simply not available to Harrison when he came up with the idea. Looking back, I'm surprised by his intellectual audacity, by the simplicity of his conception, and by the complexity of its implications.

### Listening to, and thinking about, the *Simfony in Free Style*

*The Simfony in Free Style* would sound great if it could ever be realized acoustically. Theoretically this is possible, but in reality it seems extremely daunting. Trombones, specially made flutes, percussion, unfretted and specially fretted strings. In many respects it reminds me of Harrison's early percussion pieces. There may be some gagaku influence. Rhythmically lively, contrapuntal, and weighty and serious in tone, it has an ascending, expanding theme, as does *Arion's Leap*. The flute sounds G(396 Hz) and follows it with three ascending "major" seconds, each one larger than the one before: 10/9(A), 9/8(B), 8/7(C#+1/6tone), then he sounds 7/6, the bluesy, septimal minor third, all adding up to E(5/3), a lovely and consonant just minor sixth above the first note. The idea is then stated again: Flute 2 sounds G(396 Hz) and follows with a just minor third: 6/5(B-flat). This is followed again by the same expanding interval sequence: 10/9, 9/8, 8/7, 7/6 which lands precisely on the octave of the original G(2/1). Harrison continues, and begins using smaller intervals like 11/10 (165 cents) and 12/11 (150 cents) in his lines. This path quickly leads into very dissonant territory, by way of consonant divisions of consonant spans. Within eight measures he's sounded a G which is (288/275) above his original G (1/1). This is a very noticeable 79.96 cents above the original G; in other words, it's almost a G# relative to the original G! And it goes on from there, paradoxically travelling through the most dissonant of territories by the most consonant of means.<sup>8</sup> As in *Arion's Leap*, there is an intense feeling of "stretching" and of harmonic mutation, in tension with an increased freedom of motion, delicacy and consonance in the melodic realm.

Harrison understood that computers would make free style composition easily realizable, and that computer music would reach the point, possibly within his lifetime, where computer generated sounds would become as rich, as capable of being saturated with performance energy and feeling, as are sounds produced by an acoustic instrument in the hands of a sensitive musician. Harrison encouraged the younger electronic and computer music composers he knew, and admired those with facility in that direction. But he did not himself feel comfortable with or inclined towards programming, and chose to use his energies to do what he knew he was most competent to do. His gifts were such that he would make a more lasting, greater contribution to music by building, and composing for, homemade percussion and gamelan instruments, and by using acoustic instruments which can be easily fine-tuned. Zithers, harps, glass and metal bowls filled with water, metal gas cylinders cut into bells and played with baseball bats, homemade

<sup>8</sup> Harrison specifies his first note, G, to be 396 Hz. The G in measure 9 is 414.72 Hz.

gamelan instruments, fretless strings, specially fretted strings; and specially tuned flutes, trombones, and (of course) voice are the material means used in his explorations.

There was also the need for, and the belief in, the creative companionship of musical community, and for Harrison that need was best answered by the gamelan and its tradition.

## **Lou Harrison's Music for Gamelan**

*"A good gamelan is the most beautiful musical ensemble on the planet."*

### **Listening to and thinking about *Threnody for Carlos Chavez***

This well-known work is a setting of an overwhelmingly touching and beautiful tune written for viola and Sundanese gamelan degung.<sup>9</sup> Written in honor of the memory of Mexican composer Carlos Chavez, this work is saturated with the kind of existential sorrow, resignation and grateful hopefulness for life, that peculiarly Harrisonian sweetness, which I discussed earlier. Rhythmically, the music is divided into parts of three at every level, in contrast to most gamelan music, in which all structural elements adhere to power-of-two relationships. This innovation is not that noticeable unless you are a gamelan musician; the music flows smoothly and easily, the tune is memorable and lingers with you afterwards. Harrison revised this work many times, trying to make sure that it was worthy of Chavez's memory, and you can hear this care in a kind of modest, reverential restraint to the melodic line. It has the kind of melodic strength that I most admire in Harrison's writing; the melodic line is long and continuous. Using only the five notes of the degung scale, it seems to simply spin on and on, and it eats its own tail in such a way that the repeats, and transitions, when they come, are particularly moving and structurally interesting. The gamelan part is beautifully constructed to support, and to provide light, breath and weight to the main melody.

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<sup>9</sup> The degung scale is formed from two more or less identical disjunct tetrachords. Each tetrachord equals a major 3<sup>rd</sup>, followed by a minor 2<sup>nd</sup>. So, if we start on G, the scale is G, B, C; D, F#, G. Since gamelan are not tuned to any numerical standard, the solo violist in this work will have to adjust the size of his or her intervals to match the tuning of the gamelan.

***“To make an instrument is in some strong sense  
to summon the future”***

Harrison wrote over 50 works for gamelan. With his life-partner Bill Colvig, Harrison also designed and built several complete homemade American gamelan out of aluminum, and tuned them to just intonation rationalizations of the Javanese pelog and slendro scales.<sup>10</sup> The first of these gamelan ensembles, Old Grandad, includes some found and homemade percussion instruments not normally found in gamelan, which are used to great effect in *La Koro Sutro* and other works. Harrison incorporated found and homemade percussion into his music from his earliest days as an active composer, and his works for gamelan have often included the addition of western instruments to the standard gamelan, as well as unusual percussion instruments of his and Colvig's invention.

***Listening to Gending in Honor of the Poet Virgil***

This work for Javanese gamelan slendro opens with a lively, simple Harrison melody of the cheerful variety in the sarons. As if one was out for a stroll on a lovely spring day. But after four gong cycles it slows, and in a wonderfully effective transition which demonstrates Harrison's mastery of the gamelan tradition, moves from the loud, fast and simple style of Irama I into the quieter, slower and more elaborate treatment of Irama II.<sup>11</sup> The fixed melody expands and transforms to make room for the cengkok of

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<sup>10</sup> Harrison considered pelog type scales to be constructed of small, or minor seconds, in combination with major thirds. The degung scale is an example of a pelog scale in this sense. Slendro scales Harrison considered to be constructed of small, or minor thirds, and large, or major seconds: C, E-flat, F; G, B-flat, C, would be an example of a slendro construction. Exact interval sizes vary.

<sup>11</sup> This essay is too short for me to go into as much detail as would be necessary to more than touch on gamelan forms, compositional concepts, and performance practice, but the following ideas are essential:

- **Balungan.** The nuclear melody of the music. The melody played by the saron section of the gamelan. Cipher notation of the balungan is often all that is needed by the players to realize an entire work.
- **Irama.** Irama refers to some degree to the speed of the balungan, as played by the sarons. Irama I is moderate to fast. Irama II is slow to very slow, Irama III is excruciatingly slow to glacial. Irama should not be confused with tempo of the group. Irama is probably better defined as the ratio of strokes of saron panerus (the highest member of the saron family), and the other elaborating instruments, to strokes of the balungan. For example, in Irama I the saron panerus and many of the elaborating instruments are playing 2 notes for every one note of the balungan. In Irama II these players will be playing 4 or 8 notes for each beat of the balungan. In Irama III the elaborating instruments play 8 or 16 notes per balungan beat. There may also be other changes in the way these instruments elaborate the balungan.
- **Marking Instruments and Form.** Some of the instruments of the gamelan are responsible for delineating and audibly marking the form. The Gong is the most important and conspicuous, and marks the end (and beginning) of the cyclical form. A typical gong cycle or 'gongan' might be 16, 32, 64, or 128 balungan beats long. At the end of the cycle the gong sounds and the cycle begins again, or the work finally ends. The gong cycle is further subdivided and delineated by the other 'form-marking' instruments: the kenong, the kethuk, the kempyang, and the kempul. The drummer in a gamelan is the "supervisor of the Irama"; he controls the many tempo shifts typical of standard musical practice, and gives signals which guide the group in moving from one section to another.

the elaborating instruments, and the emotional tone of the ensemble darkens and becomes more somber and meditative. In this performance a haunting pesinden, or female vocal part, enters to elaborate upon and beautify the fixed melody in the traditional melismatic style typical of Javanese gamelan. This vocal line, accompanied discreetly by suling, blends with the texture of the ensemble, floating upon and within it rather than dominating it. The suppleness and quiet passion of the vocal part, the lovely "flowers" employed by the bonang in this section, and the balungan itself transform the piece; it opens up, becomes profoundly beautiful and evocative, and the pleasant walk becomes a profound meditation on the beauty of nature and art.

After a number of gong cycles in Irama II, the drum signals the return to Irama I and the original walking tune, this time with the addition of saron imbal (a technique which Harrison loved), wherein some members of the saron family do simple interlocking variations upon the balungan. The work then comes to a quick conclusion. Small piece, big journey.

This performance of *Gending in Honor of the Poet Virgil*, which may be heard on the CD accompanying the Miller biography, is rather strong by current American gamelan standards. Not all of Harrison's gamelan works have fared quite as well in recording. We can only hope that this will be corrected as the American gamelan community matures and grows.

*Gending in Honor of the Poet Virgil* demonstrates a number of characteristic aspects of Harrison's writing for gamelan, and some aspects of his attitudes toward musical practice and improvisation in gamelan. In this work, as in many Javanese pieces, there is a balungan, or fixed melody, written for Irama I, and a variation of that melody is employed for Irama II. In Harrison's work the balungan composed for Irama I are almost always singable, memorable melodies. This piece is no exception in that regard. The variation used for Irama II is more complex, and employs a number of standard Javanese variation techniques. It is too subtle to be considered melodic in the same sense as the melody for Irama I. Instead it is a complex ground upon which the musicians build with their elaborations. Harrison often wrote special parts for the elaborating instruments. But he also frequently did not, feeling that the standard performance practice of the elaborating instruments was adequate to his purposes. Harrison became very knowledgeable about standard Javanese performance practice. He was a stickler for performance niceties, such as the proper amount of delay to give to kempul and kenong strokes, and could usually predict to his own satisfaction the final result of the performance techniques employed by gamelan musicians. When he was not sure, he made himself certain by having the ensemble try out the various alternatives so that he could hear the result. I know this from playing in some of his ensembles, and from conversations with him. A number of his pieces sound classically Javanese in the sense that they appear to be direct descendants of

that tradition, while being very recognizable as Harrison productions; *Virgil* is one of these works. Other works are more radical departures from the tradition. The works which employ western instruments fall into this category, as do some which do not employ instruments outside the normal gamelan ensemble, but depart radically from standard gamelan forms in the use of the form-marking instruments. In many of Harrison's works these instruments are marking out nonstandard forms. Sometimes these deviations from standard practice arose from a need to break the symmetry of a gamelan form for melodic purposes, while at other times there were transformative or generative processes employed in Harrison's composition which produced non-standard forms as their result.

**Umpak Inngah: Improvisation in Gamelan**

There are in gamelan practice many elements that verge on outright improvisation. An example of this is the way in which female vocal parts and suling (fipple flute) parts are constructed, often more or less on the fly, by the performers.

In the case of the fipple flute, the suling performs variations on standardized cadential patterns called "cengkok." The idea is that the pattern must cadence on a goal tone, usually marked by the sounding of the kenong or some other punctuating instrument. If, for example, the suling is to play during the last line of the gong cycle, which ends with the large gong, and the balungan note for that gong stroke is pitch 5, then the suling player will select a pattern that ends on pitch 5, and time her playing in such a way that she ends her pattern at the same time that the gamelan as a group arrives at the gong. The suling player has a number of patterns to choose from for each possible goal tone, and many ways to vary each pattern by extending the length of some notes, shortening others, adding ornamentation, repeating phrases or motives, or abstracting the balungan or the vocal melody. The result is highly constrained improvisation. The limits of freedom are determined primarily by taste and knowledge of convention, and subtle interactions with other players and the inner melody of the gamelan. There is much variation from one suling player to another.

The female singer, or pesinden, has a much greater number of named melodic patterns from which she can choose to create her part, but perhaps a bit less freedom in their application. Her part is more important to the music; her patterns are not ametrical relative to the rest of the gamelan as are the suling's (though they are fluid), and there are many commonly understood conventions which further constrain her. Still there is enough freedom, and responsibility, that pesinden are often considered to be improvising, or engaging in collaborative composition.

The other elaborating instruments typically have less freedom than the suling or the pesinden. Yet all elaborating instruments require the players to make choices about cengkok, or to adhere to certain types of generative processes on the fly. There are even occasions when the sarons or the form-marking instruments may have the option or need to make substantive choices on their own. This brings us to the topic of Harrison's attitudes towards collaborative composition, improvisation, and indeterminacy.

***"I'd rather chance a choice than choose a chance."***

Harrison was a close and life-long friend and collaborator of John Cage. Together they brought the modern percussion ensemble into its current expansive form, inclusive of found objects and inventions such as the prepared piano. But Harrison did not take part in Cage's, and his followers', investigations into the use of chance and indeterminacy in composition. Harrison did on a few occasions create compositions in the form of "kits", which were what most of us would call "mobile forms."

Conversely, while Cage was completely uninterested in improvisation, Harrison was a fine improviser. There is a lovely example of his improvising on harp, using two historical Greek tunings, on tracks two and three of the companion CD to the Miller biography. Harrison was not a proponent of improvisation as a replacement for composition. He never took part in the "free music" scene in its many forms, though he was certainly exposed to it through the music of many of his younger friends and fellow composers. He was, however, an ardent admirer of constrained improvisation as represented in gamelan and other Asian music traditions.

It was not terribly unusual for Harrison to specify merely the existence of an elaborating part for suling, or pesinden, or gender, or celempung, or that there be an imbal part for saron 1 and saron 2 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> repeat of a particular section. If a player was available whom he judged capable, Harrison might expand his conception to include such a part in a work which would not normally require it. Standard gamelan practice dictates that the part will be created by constrained improvisation. In such cases a musician who takes on one of these roles is more or less free to do as she pleases, with the constraints emanating from the tradition, from the musician's understanding of the music, and from social context. A pesinden might be given a text, but no other direction. If she asked for direction, she might be told that she was trusted to make the part the way she usually would. As a suling player in some of Harrison's gamelan ensembles I was often told where in the piece I should play, but otherwise I would usually be left to my own devices. On one occasion when I was unsure of what to do and asked for additional direction, Harrison told me that he would like the part performed in a particular regional style. I had to reply that I was unfamiliar with the style in question. Harrison's response was "Oh, well, in that case, here is a cassette tape, listen to that, it's ravishing. Do something in that vein. You'll figure something out; I trust you." This seems completely normal regarding what I know of Javanese musical practice, and is also in line with common practice in jazz, rock and other music which employs structured improvisation as a fundamental technique. From these considerations, I conclude that Harrison was a supporter of structured improvisation as a creative method.



## Suwuk

The rugged, individualistic spirit of American art and music was ablaze in Lou Harrison's life, and remains ablaze in his works. Harrison's music deserves to be performed, recorded and heard more often. We would all be richer for it. A composer of ravishing melody, a pioneer of American gamelan, and a champion of advanced microtonal music, much of Harrison's music will prevail in the face of critical ennui because of its power, beauty, and honesty. The more difficult and experimental works should be heard more often.

Harrison's music for gamelan is some of the finest produced outside Indonesia to date. Harrison and his music have enjoyed a considerable influence on younger composers interested in writing for percussion ensemble and for gamelan. The same can be said for those interested in extended just intonation and microtonality.

The example that Lou Harrison's life provides, of a composer willing to face his own inner music rather than toe the line, should encourage other creative musicians to be brave enough to be political in their music when politics are called for, to experiment as freely as they wish with materials and ideas, and to express the inner melody and texture of life, with as much honesty and craft as they are able.

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## Thoughts about Lou Harrison & his Music

Elaine Barkin

Lou Harrison's music — as sweet-scented as blooming jasmine — wafts around and about but leaves few traces. Music wanting to be loved — which it was and still is by many; sincere in its unabashed sentimentality; music for the uninitiated, for the lover of all things pleasant; rarely problematic or forbidding (his — 'ugly' music of the 1960s was designed as anti-war agit-prop). Yet rarely undemanding for performers, who are often importuned to project an essential sweetness and smoothness, generously realized by them all. As in *Suite for Violin & American Gamelan*, where David Abel's violin takes on the honeyed tone of Chinese *er hu*. Or the graceful ebb and flow of Leta Miller's ocarina in *Canticle #3*. Or Romuald Tecco's lush Franck-intoned violin in the *Grand Duo for Violin & Piano*.

Lou Harrison said: "I like to think of myself as writing for people who can't compose." (which is a teensy bit puzzling: is it "can't" not "don't" or is it "can't" as in "have tried but can't"?) He also said: "The 'theme knowledge' of my generation is the exhaustibility of things." Yet Harrison made it his life's work to challenge this "theme" retrieving and reviving times, things and forms past — among them assorted tunings and temperaments. (After a concert of the music of Philip Glass, Harrison said: "If I hear one more Equal Tempered triad, I think I will scream!")

In 1953, at age 36, after a decade in New York City — the dissonance of life and music on the East Coast having done him in —, Lou Harrison returned home to the West Coast, lured by less stress, by conviviality, by a milieu whose nuances, hues, coastal sunlight, social and — 'natural' inter- and trans-actions were his salvation for the next 50 years, and where he delighted in life as a born-again melodist — composing music with melodies whose meandering serpentine cycles incessantly spin on and on and on, those melodies that I can't conceive of anyone actually physically writing down, unless the process, the mental state, resembled some form of "automatic composing". (Not that these works aren't comprehensible as 'concert music', in which instance an inability to imagine Harrison setting those melodies down is rather weird, one of those anomalous perplexities coming out of who knows where.)

*Cinquain of Discovery (1991)* by Lou Harrison

Human

life makes no sense

at all, and what is worse,

or best, it isn't serious

either.

Of the more than 300 works listed in the Miller-Lieberman book, several score are incomplete, untitled, or juvenilia; many were recast or revised. Numerous works were composed for friends or colleagues, such as Henry Cowell, David Tudor, Carl Ruggles, Abby Shahn, Harpo Marx, Liang Tsai-Ping, Leopold Stokowski, Jody Diamond, Remy Charlip, Pak Cokro, Bill Colvig, Molly Davies, Pak Undang, Susan Summerfield, Merce Cunningham, Keith Jarrett, Robert Brown, Randall Wong, Dennis Russell Davies,

Michael Tilson Thomas, Mark Morris, Yo-Yo Ma, and Linda Burman-Hall. Elegies, Homages, and Threnodies were composed for Darius Milhaud, Carlos Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., Olivier Messiaen, Calvin Simmons, and other dead luminaries.

Over the long haul, the diversity is striking: works for conventional equal-tempered Western instruments; for found or homemade instruments; for instruments in Just — or other — Intonation; for Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesian instruments; loads of bells and innovative crossbreeds. Fact is, decades before the mixed bags of Multi-Culturalism and Post-Modernism became slogans, divergent musics and 'styles' sat side by side in Harrison's music. He said: "Don't put down the hybrids, that's all there are!" For sure, Lou Harrison knew and loved East & Southeast Asian music and culture deeply; he was adept at composing in-the-style-of Javanese gamelan (as in the opening of the *Double Concerto*); but the bite's been softened, the exotic's been made-homey, and schmalz has mutated and moooshed the sometimes raspy-messy-sounding edges and asymmetries of the Real Thing (listen to *Main Bersama-sama* ["Playing Together"] for American Gamelan and French Horn). Lou Harrison's Real Thing was to exude a comfortably "self-expressive" and "angst-free" joviality, to compose in his self-made image, under his own name.

Lou Harrison's mentors trained him well. Henry Cowell taught him that "the world's music was comprised of melody accompanied by some form of rhythmic behavior." Lou Harrison said: "Music is basically a song and a dance." Arnold Schönberg advised him to "Use only the essentials." Lou Harrison said: "I believe in traditional formations, on the grounds that form and expression are accidents of assemblage, and not possible without the first essential, traditional choice." He also said: "The importance of Melody (as musical form) in opposition to motive cannot be overemphasized...it is of capital importance to the future of music." Sounds naive, congenial and innocent, no? Hardly, insofar as an adamant ideology and its attendant polemics lurk just beneath that amiable surface.

On a CD of Lou Harrison's keyboard music, Linda Burman-Hall is super-pro: she tackles everything with a professional finger-perfect ferocity and attentiveness to every nuance, every change of tempo and 'affect'; she invigorates the sporadic murky dissonances, and shapes 'lines' so that they really do go on (not easy with harpsichord, perhaps the most unforgiving of keyboard instruments). 'Long lines' are most evident in *Largo Ostinato* — composed in 1937 when Harrison was 19 —, which Linda plays on forte-piano with a "modified well-temperament" that she devised in order "to lend the right 'bluesy' quality to the lines". Linda bequeaths a seriousness to these bagatelle-ish keyboard works that champion centuries-old and newer microtonal tunings and dance forms.

Harrison's 1940s and 1950s works are fresh and sharp, such as the *Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra* where multiple layers, lines and different realities gather and retain their identity, or *Cinna* for tack piano with its scattered asymmetries and grungy melodies & harmonies. Many of the later works, clutched by the ideology of inclusivity — "wearing your heart [and everything else] on your sleeve" (I am one of those 'daws pecking' at that heart) — are wearying. Monolithic presences, reminding me of Native American ceremonial music, resonate. Much is pretty, easy to take and make out, such as those intricate formal and rhythmic schemes, never a full meal, more like dessert where a little goes a long way, no sweat, no heavy breathing, it's all right there, chugging along, and then — apart from fuzzy recollections of untranscendent sonic wisps and a deep appreciation of the performers' devotion — it just goes out of range, out of earshot.

March 2003

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## **The Balinese New Music Scene, Summer 2001**

Andrew McGraw

The world of music composition in Bali today is incredibly active. Witnessing first hand the amount and level and love for composition in Bali is, for many Western composers, an exhilarating, almost intoxicating experience. When in Bali I have the sense that I am experiencing an historic event, that only rarely do cultures bloom with such heat, intensity, and dynamism (and then I am tempted to wonder—how long can this go on? When will it burn out?). Most contemporary musical expression in Bali is, however, status quo. Experimental and radical expression exists in Bali, but not to the extent that it does in America or Europe. The trouble, for an American, in finding, defining and discerning experimentalism in Balinese music lies in the fact that the relationship between new music and traditional music in Bali is different from the relationship between the two repertoires in America. In America it's often as if 'tradition' is done—it exists, is played, is captured in books, studied, theorized, talked over, used as pedagogy; in a sense it doesn't move. Almost all new (non-commercial) music performed in America is in some sense experimental, using new, often idiosyncratic syntax, in the composer's effort to find his or her own unique voice. Conversely, in Bali where traditional music is conceived as continually being composed, the overwhelming majority of new works adhere to traditional, time-tested conventions regarding form, orchestration, elaboration and melody, incorporating only minor compositional innovations, gently pushing against the edges of contemporary performance practice. Totally unique, idiosyncratic and radical expression is the exception to the rule, and experimentation in Bali can be difficult to find as it is sometimes embedded in otherwise traditionally oriented forms.

It is this rather gradual development of traditional music that has kept the general Balinese public in tune and enthusiastic over the past several decades. Many composers fear that, should new music become too abstract, too idiosyncratic, or too egotistical, with each composer developing his (and more often nowadays, her) own private musical syntax or voice, modern Balinese music will lose its appeal and its audience. In Bali there is great respect, appreciation and fame for the composer who can skillfully manipulate the musical languages with which the general populace is already conversant. There is little tolerance for the composer who completely disregards traditional elements, or who challenges the audience to unravel his personal musical puzzles. Balinese audiences have been known to scream "stop" in the middle of experimental works, and at least partly as a result of these hostile reactions to experimentalism, few Balinese composers have been inspired to explore sound in radical ways in their works. When they do, these composers typically strive to situate their expressions within the context of Balinese traditional culture, stressing cultural connections and continuance rather than revolution. One does not come across musical manifestos in Bali.

The majority of experimental music in Bali is composed by composition students or faculty of STSI (the State Conservatory of the Arts in Denpasar, Bali), although there is a small community of active contemporary composers in Bali who are not directly connected to STSI (but generally are STSI graduates). Typically, new experimental compositions in Bali (and for that matter throughout Indonesia) are performed only once or twice.

There are a number of reasons for this. The ensembles that perform contemporary music generally come together for the purpose of creating, performing and sometimes recording a single work for a specific event, most commonly for the annual Bali Arts Festival and the final student recital required for graduation from the music department at STSI. These works are sometimes composed collaboratively (although, officially, they should be the work of a single composer) and highlight the unique repertoire of skills and abilities of the specific group of musicians involved. After the premier performance these pick-up groups typically disband. Because of this, and because of the essentially provisional, mnemonic nature of local forms of notation (when used), new works are often forgotten after the first performance.

In this short article I am going to describe the current Balinese new music scene through sketches of three Balinese composers whose most recent works represent three distinct forms of contemporary composition in Bali: 1) composition that reflects a cosmopolitan aesthetic, 2) composition that appeals to a nationalist aesthetic, and 3) composition that represents the forefront of Balinese traditional music, *kreasi baru* ("new creation").

1) I Wayan Gde Yudana [b. 1964]

Early on, Yudana gained a reputation of being somewhat of a rebel. Many of the STSI elders deplored his compositions as being gratuitously experimental, and decried his approach as detrimental to tradition. In one of a series of works entitled *Laya*, Yudana explored percussive timbres in ways that shocked the traditional composition community in Bali. For *Laya*, Yudana placed several bronze *gamelan* keys, removed from their wooden cases, under and around a large iron *gong*. A performer tossed small stones at the *gong*, which slid off and bounced along the *gamelan* keys. In Bali the *gong* is traditionally regarded as a religious symbol and an abode of spirits. Hence this treatment of the *gong* created a minor uproar among some of the STSI faculty. Rather than being judged on compositional merits, some of Yudana's works have been judged against the grain of traditional custom.

The innovation in Yudana's works for *gamelan* often springs from unusual approaches, such as composing backwards by creating the complicated interlocking figuration (*kotekan*) before creating the basic melody (*pokok* or *balungan*), eliminating the *pokok* altogether, or reversing the traditional orchestral texture of the *kebyar* ensemble by giving the lower pitched instruments (*gong*, *jegogan*) precedence over the middle and high timbral textures.

Since the early 1990's Yudana has been working actively with electronic media and in the mid 1990's he sold his car to buy a computer on which he installed several multitracking, editing and sequencing programs. Almost entirely an autodidact concerning electronic composition, Yudana has, in the past few years, been able to produce some impressive electronic music, the more so considering the tools at his disposal. Sampling directly into his computer and at times using tedious methods of composition (often working throughout the night in order to get the fullest out of downloaded 'trial-versions' of editing, filtering, and processing programs and effects), Yudana has been able to create several CDs of music which sound as if they were produced in professional sound studios.

Yudana's recent self-produced instrumental CD, *Terra Incognata*, crosses a wide terrain stylistically, at times unabashedly techno, featuring thick looped breakbeats under sweeping ambient soundscapes which sound vaguely familiar. (I think I can hear the howls of the Denpasar street dogs, slowed down almost beyond recognition.) Other tracks sound more like what one would expect from a composer educated in Western experimentalism—music that would be heard on late night college radio stations; music without a beat.

Yudana is refreshingly ambivalent toward high-low, pop-serious class distinctions, a problem which seems to still

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gnaw at the legs of many young American composers and musicians. On *Terra Incognata* danceable beats can be heard behind long-flowing melodies—light and heavy compositional ideas occurring side-by-side. While Yudana is clearly interested in and in-tune with several world music traditions as well as Western experimentalism and commercial popular forms, a Balinese identity is still evident. However, in his most recent work, the Balinese elements are diluted and abstracted, sometimes beyond recognition. *Terra Incognata* presents fragmented and vague essences of Balinese culture, here the aroma of *gambuh*, there a hint of *gambang*, but these Balinese elements are so abstracted and blended through contemporary, Western-influenced compositional processes that listeners are left with only the fleeting flavors of Balinese traditional forms. Yudana does not consider his music to be 'Balinese' and in fact rejects all kinds of geographic labels or boundaries.<sup>1</sup> For Yudana the world is, compositionally, one place.

### 2) I Nyoman Windha [b. 1956]

Windha's remarkable ability for creating beautifully balanced and addictive melody is recognized throughout Indonesia and beyond. He has composed several works that could be interpreted as attempts to create 'national' music, and has frequently incorporated folk or classic melodies from other Indonesian traditional musics in his works for Balinese ensembles. Windha has also composed several works for Javanese *gamelan* and percussion ensembles from other areas of Indonesia. *Lekasan*, composed for the 2001 Bali Arts Festival, took 'national unity' as its theme and employed melodies, rhythms and instruments from other musical traditions in the context of the Balinese *gong kebyar* orchestra. Two of his works for the Jakarta Arts Summit (September 1, 2001) strayed far from Balinese traditional music, and from his earlier works as a whole, in his attempt to appeal to a wider, national audience.

Windha's *Simponi Bambu* (Bamboo Symphony), written for the 2001 Jakarta Arts Summit, is intended to highlight the non-percussive elements of Balinese music, primarily *suling* (vertical bamboo flutes in tenor, alto, and soprano ranges), *rebab* (spike fiddle, both conventional alto-soprano range, and experimental tenor *rebab* made by the Javanese composer and instrument designer A.L. Suwardi), and voice. While large sections of the work employ the traditional Indonesian five-tone *slendro* and seven-tone *pelog* tuning systems, many sections deviate, using diatonic melodies in major and minor and—most strikingly—triadic harmony. It is clear that his approach toward orchestration is influenced by Western symphonic music, and in its final performance Windha conducted the work, sitting squat on the stage, with his back to the audience.

For me, *Simponi Bambu* suffers from serious intonation issues. Specifically, the use of diatonic major and minor scales on the two large *rebab* present formidable performance challenges and difficulties for the musicians. At the time of performance these issues seemed unresolved and are at least partly attributable to the prevalence of loud metal ensembles that incorporate paired tuning.<sup>3</sup> Windha acknowledged these problems, but apparently did not

<sup>1</sup> This outlook is not surprising considering the way Yudana has been composing recently. A phase of the compositional process for a recent collaborative *wayang* project involved Yudana's emailing examples (in both MIDI and .wav format) of Balinese traditional repertoire to Australian musicians, who would then use these materials as the basis for their arrangements. The Australians would send these materials, via the internet, back to Yudana, who would work on it further in his own home studio.

<sup>2</sup> Conducting, as Americans know it, is not employed in Balinese traditional forms. Rather, groups rehearse at great length to develop highly refined ensemble coordination. There are traditional Balinese forms in which a single person conducts exclusively. Furthermore, considering the high level of ensemble skill and musicianship of the players involved, I'm convinced that Windha's work, despite being at times very 'rubato,' could have been performed easily without Windha's conducting it. A discussion of his reasons for conducting the work would probably be more relevant in a journal on cultural politics.

<sup>3</sup> Most Balinese metal ensembles include groups of paired metallophones, tuned slightly differently. The pitch range between the higher and the lower of a pair ranges from almost a half step, on the low pitch *jegogan*, to less than a quarter tone on the

think them nearly as important as I had. In general, intonational inaccuracy is tolerated to a far greater extent than rhythmic inaccuracy in Balinese experimental (or, for that matter traditional) music.<sup>4</sup>

It is Windha's orchestration that strikes me as being the most 'Western' element of this work, despite the diatonicism and harmony. (Windha himself said that the major challenge for him was to develop new orchestration techniques.) *Simponi Bambu* opens with what sounds like a combination of a Western woodwind fanfare and a Balinese *gineman* (a kind of unmetered introduction). Windha also focuses on exploring the timbral shadings of the *suling*, especially at its extreme registers. The final movements involve alternations between different scales, the *rebab* and *suling* play in major, alternating with a textless, hummed, male chorus, heroic in mood, and in minor. A bright coda suggests sweeping orchestral glisses and although harmony in the Western sense occurs fleetingly and not 'functionally', Windha seems to be making some sort of statement by ending the work on a brilliant major I chord.

Windha's new works involve several innovative playing techniques such as rolled *gongs*, playing with the hands on the *kendang*'s leather tuning straps (in an imitation of *reong*, pot *gong*, technique), and waving instruments while playing them to create flowing acoustic panning effects; counterpoint, unusual in Balinese music, is also included. In *Lekesan*, an eight-tone bass line is played on the deep *gambuh suling*, while the higher range flutes play longer flowing melodies in a passacaglia-like passage.

Both works have a continually increasing energy curve, a clear narrative and a definite climax, and both at times stray further away from basic classical Balinese formal conceptions, techniques and performance practice than any of Windha's previous works. Conceived and performed for a national audience in Jakarta (Java), these works seem to be inspired by Ki Dewantara, Indonesia's revolution-era cultural critic, who in 1945 had suggested or predicted that national Indonesian art forms would be conceived and created in national conservatory/laboratories and would be composed of the various peaks of the various Indonesian ethnic expressive forms.

### 3) *I Wayan Suweca* [b. 1948]

Wayan Suweca has composed both traditional and experimental works and has been involved in cross-cultural collaborative projects, as have Yudana and Windha. While strongly rooted in traditional forms, Suweca has been actively involved in trying to introduce new compositional concepts to the traditional-minded students at STSI. He has also been leading compositional workshops on such topics as improvisation,<sup>5</sup> new orchestration and playing techniques, and new approaches to rhythmic and formal construction.

Suweca's most recent work, *Karta Yuga*, pushes at the edges of current *kreasi baru* performance practice. The work is for a traditional seven-tone iron *slonding gamelan*, with the addition of a flat Chinese *gong*, and it includes

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high pitch *kantilan*. It is the deformed acoustic interference created by this tuning system which gives much Balinese music its famous 'shimmering' quality.

<sup>4</sup> I do not mean to suggest that 'wrong' notes, when played on fixed-pitch instruments are tolerated; they are not. However, the *suling*, and *rebab* especially seem to be given a good deal of lee-way in terms of intonation in this music. To a certain extent this is a part of the local aesthetic, and is in that sense 'on-purpose.' The warm rounded timbre produced by the fuzzy intonation of the *suling* section is an identifying feature of many Balinese orchestral textures. However, the paired tuning system incorporated in metal ensembles forces the *rebab* to play with either one or the other of the pair, or in some fuzzy in-between in-tonal area. It is not surprising then, that local *rebab* players might have difficulties in producing the exact intonation needed in the diatonic sections of *Simponi Bambu*.

<sup>5</sup> Generally, there is a very small role for improvisation in Balinese music; typically only the drum is allowed to improvise. In new experimental music in Bali there is also very little improvisation, although many Balinese composers have experimented with improvisation in the West. .



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both innovative and traditional vocal arrangements in accompaniment to the instrumental texture. *Karta Yuga* opens with a quote from a *slonding* standard, “Sekar Gadung,” followed by *kebyar*-influenced rhythmic flourishes. Innovative vocal lines incorporate quick male-female alternations and thick chordal textures, also rare in Balinese music until fairly recently. Furthermore, as in Windha’s work, Suweca employs rolling gongs, to produce deep sustained tones as well as other innovative performance techniques.

Some textures, such as simple straight melodies played on high-pitched metallophones with interlocking patterns on alto metallophones, are not features of traditional *slonding* orchestration but are borrowed from other Balinese ensembles. Suweca also incorporates fast *batal* (two-beat) sections, in an imitation of *gender wayang*<sup>6</sup> textures, another example of the prevalence of inter-ensemble borrowing common in Balinese music. The terraced and dramatic dynamic shapes in this work are borrowed from *kebyar* and do not exist in traditional *slonding* repertoire. Furthermore, Suweca includes orchestral imitations of *kebyar* in which a *slonding* key is struck while damped, on the beat, to imitate the time-keeping *kempluk*, present in many Balinese ensembles, but not in traditional *slonding*. Suweca also incorporates mode changes in a way typical of recent Balinese seven-tone composition (a form which has experienced a revival in recent years; see footnote 9 below). That is, Suweca uses modulation expressly to announce formal divisions in the work, rather than employing a change of mode within a larger repeated section. Generally all of Suweca’s innovative works are characterized by restlessness and do not involve much repetition, as compared to traditional repertoires, modern *kebyar*, or even the innovative works by composers such as Windha. *Karta Yuga* ends with a kind of coda, seemingly unrelated to any other part of the piece, also characteristic of Suweca’s impatient, perhaps even impetuous, style.

*Kreasi baru* are still by far the most prevalent form of new composition in Bali today. The works generally adhere to certain basic traditional Balinese principles of form (three principle sections), orchestration (higher voices move faster), and performance practice (as hard and fast as possible). Suweca’s *Karta Yuga* is representative of the *kreasi baru* genre in that it maintains the three core concepts mentioned above, but also incorporates several, smaller scale innovations in each of the three aspects.

### *General Notes on New Music and New Musical Ideas in Bali, 2001*

There are three general musical developments that caught my attention in Bali this past summer, none of which seemed to be as prominent when I was last here in 1999. Firstly there is an increased use of compound meters, divisions of three, and most strikingly, fast 12/8 meters. I am tempted to think that the emergence of compound grooves, and West African style polyrhythm in new Balinese music is connected to the thousands of *djembes* now being made and sold in Bali, primarily to tourists (some of whom, such as myself, are sometimes told that they are traditional Balinese instruments). A more likely explanation for the use of fast 12/8 meters is the direct influence of American composers, especially those associated with the Bay-Area based Gamelan Sekar Jaya. In the mid-1980’s Michael Tenzer (pers. Comm.) taught two works to players at STSI which incorporated such meters and many Balinese I have talked to associate these rhythms as much with American/Balinese experimentalism as with West Africa. An answer I got more than once regarding the use of these rhythms was: “STSI ini, kreasi. Michael ini.” (‘This is STSI experimentalism. This is Michael [Tenzer’s music].’)

A second feature in recent Balinese music is something that I call ‘temporal suspension.’ The feeling is that of an *angsel* (a temporary interruption of surface rhythmic textures found in traditional repertoire connected to stylized

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<sup>6</sup> *Gender wayang* is the small ensemble that accompanies shadow puppet performances, an ensemble Suweca has long been associated with.

dance moves), but here the whole ensemble seems to hiccup. In a traditional *angsel*, the time structure (gongs, beat, and ostinato melody) is unaffected and continues throughout. In the phenomenon I am referring to everything is suspended, including gongs for some unmeasured amount of time, and then continues from where it left off, like a dj's manipulation of a record sample, caught for a fraction of a second and then let loose again. This pause is completely unprepared, either by signaling drumming or dynamics—unlike in a traditional *angsel*.<sup>7</sup> Now, it's as if the electricity has suddenly gone out and then come on again; and the effect is extremely effective and also disorienting.

Thirdly, counterpoint is appearing with increasing frequency, largely due to the influence of innovative composers with international experience and training, such as those described above, especially Windha. The presence of long *suling* solos, incorporating counterpoint between the three different ranges of the flutes was a recurring facet of this year's STSI recital works. Counterpoint has moved into the metal instruments as well, functioning along the same orchestration principle, with composers creating contrapuntal lines between the bass range *jegogan* and alto *penyawah* and *jublag*. This innovation is also closely connected with and influenced by the development of the *sandya gita*, a kind of mixed Balinese chorus which has been added to the *gamelan gong kebyar* in many newer works. Counterpoint is a regular facet of these vocal ensembles, as is call and response and canon techniques. The development of these Balinese vocal arrangements over the past 15 years seems to be inspired and influenced by both the traditional Central Javanese *gerong-pesindhen* vocal arrangements and the traditional Western chorus.

#### Thoughts About the Future of Balinese New Music

In Bali today there is an almost overwhelming amount of new music, however, very little of it is very new. Most contemporary Balinese composers, all of whom were 'brought up' with *kreasi baru*, are either uninterested in pursuing the 'far out' or are unwilling to alienate performers or audiences in the egoistic pursuit of radical expressive concepts. Some Balinese composers have had unpleasant experiences experimenting and may refrain from doing so again in Bali, but not necessarily elsewhere in the world where experimentation is more acceptable.<sup>8</sup> The fact that many foreign-made compositions are typically more experimental than the work done in Bali testifies to this:

What will Balinese new music sound like in ten years? When looking at the landscape of Balinese composition today, it is difficult to tell what is mere fad and what has serious staying power. It is entirely likely that the rhythmic innovations I mentioned above will have disappeared by next year. However, I imagine that the use of counterpoint and the connected innovations in the development of seven-tone ensembles and repertoires are here for good.<sup>9</sup> The myriad of compositional possibilities suddenly opening up to the composer through the development of multiple pentatonic and septatonic modes, and the possibilities of melodic and orchestral development through the use of counterpoint are in some ways analogous to the development of chromaticism in Western tonal harmony. It is interesting to imagine that the development of the pitch gamut and especially of counterpoint may lead to the development of harmonic constructions in Balinese music. I can't help but hear the faint implications of harmonic motions in many of these new works, and many of the composers I have talked to

<sup>7</sup> Or in other similar rhythmic suspension techniques such as those incorporated in the *kebyar* classics *Taruna Jaya* and *Hujan Mas*.

<sup>8</sup> It is not a mere accident that one of Indonesia's most highly regarded avant-garde composers, the Balinese I Wayan Sadra, lives in Solo (Jaya) not Bali, where he is essentially unknown.

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seem anxious to study in more detail the mechanics of Western harmony (in both classical and popular music) for possible inspiration in their own musical explorations. However, it remains to be seen how Balinese composers can rectify the orchestral problems that arise when close harmonic relations are crowded up against the already thick texture of Balinese non-octave-equivalent paired tuning. The developments mentioned above seem to provide a very wide palette of new compositional possibilities to Bali's young composers. Time will determine which of these innovations will become durable facets of Balinese music.

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<sup>9</sup> See McGraw (2000) and Vitale (2002) for a description of the recent rediscovery and development of seven-tone ensembles in Bali and the exploration of modal conceptions in Balinese new music.

# Between Worlds: The Embodied and Ecstatic Sounds of Jazz

David Borgo

*"It's really free, spiritual music, not just free music"*

■ Albert Ayler

*"My music is the spiritual expression of what I am, my faith, my knowledge,  
my being."*

■ John Coltrane

## *Synopsis*

Since the 1950s and 60s, spirituality has become an increasingly prominent feature of contemporary Western music in general, and jazz and improvised music in particular. Authors willing to engage the subject in both the scholarly and popular press have tended to rely on ethnographically-rich descriptions of the subjective experiences of performers and, less often, listeners.<sup>1</sup> Other authors discussing jazz and improvisation have shied away from the topic of spirituality entirely, preferring instead formalist treatments of the subject.<sup>2</sup> Aspects of both ethnographic and formalist approaches are certainly important, but the question still lingers, how does this music actually reflect the spiritual awareness and experiences of the performers and/or a listening audience?<sup>3</sup> Beyond the purely theoretical and oftentimes paradoxical aspects of spiritual awareness, are there identifiable musical components that contribute to the induction of ecstatic states or other altered states of consciousness?

In this essay, I will chart a middle ground between a formalist musical approach on the one hand, and strict social and cultural analysis on the other. I will provide a theoretical discussion of the ecstatic states often associated with contemporary improvisation and investigate the use of specific musical devices and approaches as one means of symbolically and experientially structuring these states for performers and listeners. First, I situate the ecstatic states discussed by many jazz musicians within the literature on altered states. I provide a brief theoretical argument for how music may be considered – not as a physiological triggering device for ecstatic states – but as an organized, symbolic system that structures spiritual experiences for participants. This structuring, I argue, operates in a manner similar to the way in which metaphor, grounded in our fully embodied self, appears to structure both our entrenched and short-lived conceptualizations and communications.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz* (Allison & Busby Ltd., 1977), David Such, *Avant-Garde Musicians Performing 'Out There'* (University of Iowa Press, 1993), and David Borgo, "Emergent Qualities of Collectively Improvised Performance: A Study of an Egalitarian Intercultural Improvising Trio," *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 8 (1997).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (Da Capo Press, 1975) and Roger Dean, *New Structures in Jazz and Improvised Music Since 1960* (Open University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> See Ed Sarath, "A New Look at Improvisation," *Journal of Music Theory* 40/1 (1996) for an intriguing analytical perspective of improvisation centered on temporal and spiritual concerns.

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Second, I focus on the sounds and techniques themselves as a symbolic reflection of the performer's spiritual state and as a means of communicating or imparting those experiences to involved and receptive listeners. These discussions are based in part on my subjective experiences playing the saxophone for more than twenty years and on my research in avant-garde improvisational settings for much of the past decade.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Experience of Ecstasy*

Avant-garde jazz evolved beginning in the late 1950s in the United States as musicians began to progressively explore less overtly structured modes of solo and collective improvisation. Many sought an ideal mode of expression based almost exclusively on lived experience instead of the tune-based style of improvisation – ubiquitous in the earlier styles of jazz – involving cyclic melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic forms. Spirituality was and is paramount for many of these musicians. Both practitioners and listeners of this music often report ecstatic, trance-like states involving the total abandonment of the individual ego to the ebb and flow of the musical moment. As William Parker expresses it:

Free music can be a musical form that is playing without pre-worked structure, without written music or chord changes. However, for free music to succeed, it must grow into free spiritual music which is not . . . a musical form; it should be based off of a life form. It is not about just picking up an instrument and playing guided by math principles or emotion. It is emptying oneself and being.<sup>5</sup>

The ecstatic states associated with avant-garde jazz, as with many other altered states of consciousness, seem to thrive on paradox. Categorizing these experiences according to the often-cited work of Arnold Ludwig on altered states of consciousness can be extremely problematic.<sup>6</sup> The sheer energy and density of sound frequently experienced in collective improvisation seem to imply a state of hyperstimulation verging on sensory overload. While motor activity is not always significantly increased, some musicians appear to reach a trance-like state simply through the physicality of their performance. Total mental involvement is cited by some, while others describe a complete annihilation of all critical and rational faculties. Musicians stress performance goals ranging from total relaxation or catharsis to a transcendental feeling of ego-loss and cosmic consciousness.

Gilbert Rouget's excellent book *Music and Trance* attempts to "demystify" the role played by music in inducing trance states, emphasizing instead its "socializing" capacity in ritual and performance.<sup>7</sup> I agree with Rouget that manipulating the trance state depends in great part on the culture-dependent ideological systems at work. But the symbolic structuring power of music *qua* music and the shared biological and cognitive aspects of human perception and communication should not be dismissed so easily. Music psychologists and cognitive science researchers would be quick to point out that humans share certain physiological and cognitive capacities and limitations that structure our perceptions of the world and our mode of being in it. And aestheticians and philosophers might add that each individual's experience with music is unique even within a given culture.

Rouget's work relies on binary divisions between ecstasy and trance, and spirit possession and shamanism; divisions that are problematic when transposed to the world of avant-garde jazz. Many avant-garde jazz performers discuss trance-like performance states. Cecil Taylor claims to enter a trance every time he plays. The idea of spirit possession also appears in the avant-garde jazz community, albeit with less frequency. Saxophonist Jameel Moondoc describes a time when "the

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<sup>4</sup> See David Borgo, "Synergy and Surrealstate: The Orderly Disorder of Free Improvisation," *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 10 (2002) for a self-reflexive ethnography of the author's experiences with Surrealstate, an improvising collective in Los Angeles CA.

<sup>5</sup> David Such, *Avant-Garde Musicians Performing 'Out There'* (University of Iowa Press, 1993, 131).

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness," In *Altered States of Consciousness*, edited by Charles Tart (Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

music got so intense that spirits came into the room, just hovering around, and in one aspect it was incredibly scary. It was almost like we were calling the ancestors, and they came.”<sup>8</sup> More often musicians describe a voluntary and active form of trance (following Rouget’s terminology) involving either a lucid state and total recall or selective amnesia depending on the individual circumstance. Several musicians I interviewed also felt that since they voluntarily self-induce a state of trance and lead the audience on a spiritual “journey,” that they were adopting the role of musical shaman in society.<sup>9</sup> Woodwind player Vinnie Golia told me: “I like to have the listener come in at a certain place but leave at a higher place. That entails taking him through a journey through the music... The purpose of the music is to have players playing as a unit who are communicating together impart that to other people and take them on some kind of journey.” Percussionist Adam Rudolph also believes that “artists are the shamans of today.”<sup>10</sup>

The diversity of experiences and interpretations among avant-garde jazz performers reflects the diversity of belief systems among these practitioners. Many performers have created elaborate systems to describe and to facilitate their own practice (e.g. Sun Ra, Anthony Braxton, The A.A.C.M.), but little commonality pervades the avant-garde jazz community.<sup>11</sup> There seems to be little agreement on terminology – and possibly even no noetic religious dimension to the experience of ecstasy associated with avant-garde jazz. The most commonly reported experience is one of mysticism, or direct awareness of experience and an associated state of ego loss. Many avant-garde jazz performers feel instinctively that the music they play has the ability to transform the perceptions and belief system of willing listeners, but can the transformative power of music be investigated without resorting to structuralist or formalist interpretations?

Anthropologists have long investigated the ways in which the inner experience of the subject may be guided or shaped by the objective structure of the rite, seeking comparisons with the process of metaphor, metonymy, and iconicity.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary cognitive science has also demonstrated that bodily states influence thinking, environments influence thinking, and human beings arrange their environments to serve, extend, and alter their thinking. Francisco Varela and his co-authors in *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* argue that “cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs.”<sup>13</sup> For these authors, “knowledge depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history – in short, from our *embodiment*.”<sup>14</sup>

Recent work in cognitive linguistics has offered substantial evidence that metaphor is not simply a manifestation of literary creativity, but rather is pervasive in every-day discourse and is often grounded in our bodily experiences and perceptions. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their influential book *Metaphors We Live By*, proposed that conceptual metaphors provide a basic structure of understanding through which we conceptualize an unfamiliar or abstract domain, the *target*

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<sup>8</sup> Pete Gershon, “Jameel Moondoc: Organically Grown,” *Signal to Noise*, Summer 2001, 15.

<sup>9</sup> David Borgo, “Emergent Qualities of Collectively Improvised Performance: A Study of an Egalitarian Intercultural Improvising Trio,” *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 8 (1997). See also Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton University Press, 1964) for a discussion of the symbolism of “journey” in shamanic practice.

<sup>10</sup> Both quotes from personal interviews with the author.

<sup>11</sup> See John Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (Da Capo Press, 1998), Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Duke University Press, 2000), and George Lewis’ forthcoming book on the A.A.C.M. for more in-depth discussions.

<sup>12</sup> See especially the work of Victor Turner and Terence Turner.

<sup>13</sup> Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (MIT Press, 1991, 9).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

domain, in terms of another more familiar and concrete one, the *source* domain.<sup>15</sup> For example, the rather abstract target domain of “understanding” is frequently expressed through the metaphor of vision. For example, to “see” also means to “understand” and countless experiences related to vision serve to link both domains. We can easily understand the following phrases: “The committee has left me in the dark about this matter,” or even the more imaginative “You’d need an electron microscope to find the point of this article.”<sup>16</sup>

Another common conceptual metaphor Lackoff and Johnson discuss is our tendency to perceive state of being in terms of our orientation in vertical space. This orientation maps relationships in physical space to mental and physical states: for example, “I’m feeling a bit down today,” or “we need to raise her spirits.”<sup>17</sup> In his recent book, *Conceptualizing Music*, Lawrence Zbikowski argues that the “high” and “low” used to describe pitches and melodic contour in contemporary Western practice reflect a similar conceptual metaphor, one which is not always found in other cultures (e.g., Balinese, Kaluli, or Suyu cultures) or in other times (Ancient Greek theorists used *oxyis*, “sharp,” and *barys*, “heavy,” to characterize pitches).<sup>18</sup> While conceptual metaphors may be culturally linked, our shared sense of embodiment makes some intuitively better than others. As Zbikowski writes, “pitches and fruits just do not seem to be a good match.”<sup>19</sup> In contemporary Western musical practice, pitch relationships as relationships in vertical space does correlate well with a system of music notation that permits the visualization and the preservation of musical works, while in Bali, a system of “small” and “large” pitches correlates well with the physical characteristics of their indigenous musical instruments (large and small metallophones).

Robert Walser was one of the first music scholars to champion the use of embodied metaphors to describe at the same time culturally specific, polysemic signifiers *and* pre-conceptual human experiences.<sup>20</sup> He argues that language and music are mediated by our experiences of our bodies and our interactions with the rest of the material world, just as our bodily experiences are, in turn, mediated by language, music, and other aspects of culture. Walser focuses his treatment on the forceful musical timbres of heavy metal guitar playing and singing. We can all experience the physical aspects of vocal screaming or overdriving audio equipment, yet heavy metal distortion and power chords have been used in differing musical and cultural circles to sanctify the Devil and exalt the glory of God. The powerful timbres and textures of free jazz have also signified in varied ways, from Black Power in the 1960s to transcendental spirituality or post-modern angst and confusion. As a tradition which represents considerable cultural and stylistic blending, jazz and its improvised progeny provide a rich context for extending cross-domain mapping between formal musical syntax, social interactive processes, cultural understandings, and potentially even ecstatic states

#### *The Sound of Ecstasy*

Over the past half century, the sonic palette of jazz and improvised music has been greatly expanded by a vast array of innovative and influential performers reporting diverse spiritual experiences. These performers use a wide variety of so-called “extended” techniques, including the

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, in *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and The Mind's Hidden Complexities*, Basic Books, 2001), have proposed a more recent, related theory called conceptual blending. Blending theory extends the analysis of metaphor to a variety of other linguistic and conceptual phenomena. Their approach adds a 'generic' space, representing conceptual structure that is shared by both inputs, and the 'blend' space, where material from the inputs combines and interacts.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Grady, Todd Oakley and Seana Coulson, "Blending and Metaphor," In *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, edited by G. Steen and R. Gibbs (John Benjamins Press, 1999 - also available at cogweb.ucla.edu).

<sup>17</sup> Recent work by George Lackoff and Rafael Nuñez (*Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being*, Basic Books, 2001) has even proposed that mathematics, far from the "objective" or "Platonic" system it is often presented as, is actually based on metaphoric extensions of the human body.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence M. Zbikowski. *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Walser, "The Body in the Music." *College Music Symposium* 31 (1991, 121).

use of extreme vibrato, exaggerated articulations, harmonics, extended range devices, multiphonics, vocalizing effects such as growls, sung tones, and smears, and musical devices including kinetic shapes, circular breathing, and recitation tones. Can the specific musical structures and devices used by free jazz musicians symbolically and pre-conceptually transform the subjective experiences of performers and listeners? And do these practices serve as metaphors to blend together distinct perceptual frames to create new meaning and to structure our perceptions of the world? According to David Such, "Like the way in which metaphors structure a new idea, music should generate a novel and strikingly positive awareness that will perhaps transfer to the listener's view of life; thus it may prompt him or her to improve upon its quality."<sup>21</sup> In what ways can the rather abstract state of ecstasy, or expanded consciousness, be conceptualized in terms of the more familiar and embodied aspects of sound production and reception?

Despite the tendency of avant-garde jazz to be a "catch-all" of musical, cultural, and spiritual practices, on the whole it appears to contradict one of the main tenets of many treatments of music and altered states – that music assists in inducing trance through its highly patterned and repetitive nature. Herndon and McLeod, for example, argue that "music is always redundant in comparison with other forms of activity" and that "constant and exact repetition through time is the ideal for many forms of liturgical music throughout the world."<sup>22</sup> The spontaneous and flexible nature of much avant-garde jazz makes a strong argument that mystical music need not be simple, predictable, "mesmerically" repetitive or "hypnotically" metered to produce ecstatic states in performers and listeners.<sup>23</sup>

Vibrato is a common device used to enhance and embellish a musical tone in diverse musical traditions from Western classical to Korean *sinawe*. Vibrato was common in the early years of jazz and was used to great advantage by musicians like Sidney Bechet and Johnny Hodges, or more notoriously by the Guy Lombardo saxophone section. In contrast, the bebop language developed by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and others, used a straight, vibrato-less tone so that the often rapid eighth-note, triplet, and double-time runs could be more easily discerned by the ear. The heavy vibrato of swing-era musicians was seen as an un-hip remnant of days gone by.

Avant-garde jazz represented, in certain respects, a rebellion against the fast tempos and complex harmonies of bebop and the possibility, for many, of a more spiritual kind of playing. When these musicians liberated themselves from what they perceived as constraining musical forms and stylistic practices, they felt free to reintroduce a broader range of expression to the use of vibrato. The variations of sound possibilities for a single note frequently became as, or more, important to avant-garde musicians than the virtuosic display of technique evidenced in most bebop playing. Saxophonist Albert Ayler spoke to the importance of the spirit of early New Orleans jazz in his musical practice: "There was also Sidney Bechet... for me he represented the true spirit, the full force of life, that many of the older musicians had – like in New Orleans jazz – and which many musicians today don't have. I hope to bring that spirit back into the music we're playing." Possibly the best example of an artistic move towards a wider, more expressive vibrato can be heard in the playing of John Coltrane. Coltrane's recordings, even his ballads, until about 1963 or 64 show little use of vibrato. But after falling under the influence of several of the newer generation of saxophonists including Ayler, his later recordings including *Ascension*, *Meditations*, *Om*, and *Expressions*, incorporate a much broader vibrato of varying speed and intensity.

How can something as simple as vibrato be important in the creation of ecstatic states? Vibrato is created by varying the pitch of a note in an oscillating manner. While the European classical tradition generally calls for a steady, controlled oscillation of pitch within a very small

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<sup>21</sup> David Such, *Avant-Garde Musicians Performing 'Out There'* (University of Iowa Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, *Music as Culture* (Norwood Editions, 1979, 112).

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Margaret Kartomi, "Music and Trance in Central Java" *Ethnomusicology* 27/2 (1973, 206).



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spectrum, the vibrato preferred by avant-garde musicians may involve anything from rapid and small fluctuations to extremely slow and wide variations of pitch or any conceivable combination of those factors. For receptive listeners, the variations in, and deviations from, a central pitch may serve as the source domain – one which is embodied in our history of listening to or performing music – that serves to structure the more abstract target domain of extended consciousness. The musical departure from stylistic expectations or tempered pitch norms provides an altered experience that may provoke accompanying changes in attention and consciousness.

Contemporary improvisers also take full advantage of a wide array of articulation possibilities. Depending on the type of sound-producing instrument used, these can include slap, double, and triple tonguing devices, variations in buzzing style, placement and speed, and contortions of the larynx or vocal cavity, or a variety of other devices that explore and extend body-related sounds. At times, articulations, fingerings, and airstream may not even synchronize, creating a multi-layered effect to which the performer and listener can attend either as separate, conflicting parts or as a conjoined whole. Adam Rudolph described these devices as “kinetic shapes” involving rapid and repetitive cascades of notes used to blend together entire ranges of the instrument in a seamless fashion and produce a wash of sound and motion.<sup>24</sup> While these flurries of sound, articulation, and gesture may seem inscrutable or even inappropriate to novice listeners, for those already venturing beyond the cultural norm in their musical activities, these embodied (yet curiously otherworldly) sounds can provoke participants and listeners to move beyond the comfort zone of a culturally-sanctioned self understanding.

On wind instruments, circular breathing allows for an uninterrupted stream of air by using the cheek muscles to “exhale” while quickly inhaling through the nose. Improvisers able to perform this counter intuitive feat can weave lengthy and hypnotic figures together unceasingly for as long as their physical endurance allows.<sup>25</sup> Not only can this stream of music that defies standard breath-length phrases have a profound effect on listeners, but also the practiced “denial” of a basic human physical need can contribute to a metaphorical blend with the expansion of everyday awareness. Ali Jihad Racy has noted from his fieldwork in the Arab world that the technique of circular breathing often connotes a certain performance mystique and may be an important factor in triggering states of elation and psychological transformation among listeners.<sup>26</sup>

Harmonics – also known as overtones or partials – are components of every sound in nature except the pure sine wave. The timbre of a given instrument or voice relies to a great extent on the characteristics of its harmonic series. Timbral differences are most easily demonstrated by singing a single pitch and altering the vowel sound used to produce it, which alters its harmonic spectrum. While the pitch should not vary, the quality of the sound changes dramatically. Contemporary instrumentalists and vocalists frequently exploit the richness of the harmonic spectrum by selectively varying specific overtones. Whether produced by alternate fingerings or alterations in the shape of the larynx, these variations can produce startlingly different tonal qualities and significantly extend the expected range of a given instrument. The accustomed ear may easily differentiate these harmonic timbres from notes produced by standard methods or fingerings. Exploring the upper

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<sup>24</sup> See David Borgo, “Emergent Qualities of Collectively Improvised Performance: A Study of an Egalitarian Intercultural Improvising Trio,” *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 8 (1997) for further discussion.

<sup>25</sup> British improviser Evan Parker frequently uses circular breathing to extend the phrases and explorations of his solo saxophone style. See David Borgo, “The Chaotic Self, or the Embodiment of Evan Parker,” In *Playing Changes: New Jazz Studies*, edited by Robert Walser (Duke University Press, forthcoming) for an in-depth analysis.

<sup>26</sup> See Ali Jihad Racy, “A Dialectical Perspective on Musical Instruments: The East-Mediterranean *Mijwiz*,” *Ethnomusicology* 38/1 (1994, 50). The ecstatic state evidenced in avant-garde jazz performances may in fact most closely resemble the emotional trance of the Arab musical world discussed by Rouget, although I disagree with several of his conclusions regarding the efficacy of purely instrumental music. Many African American jazz performers, beginning in the 1960s, looked to the Near East, and Islam in particular, for spiritual belief systems in accord with their own, although for some this also reflected a more practical response to the pronounced racism in the United States at that time.

partials can also greatly expand a musician's range and the searching and frequently unpredictable quality of these extended harmonic forays has been interpreted by many as conveying a sense of spiritual yearning.

The ability to produce more than one note on a single-note instrument – referred to as a “multiphonic” – can also convey a sense of transcending the inherent capabilities of an instrument and, through a metaphoric blend, transcending the individual's capabilities and expectations. Vocalizing through a horn can also allow a performer to create polyphonic lines, a growl effect, or to smear together pitches in a continuous fashion, transcending the normal boundaries of a Western chromatic scale. Certain players have used vocalizing devices to literally speak through their horn (e.g., Dewey Redman) in a fashion similar to the glossolalia (speaking in tongues) experienced in some Pentecostal or other charismatic churches.

Lewis Porter adopted the idea of “recitation tones” from the intonational chant of African American preachers to illuminate John Coltrane's improvisations from the album *A Love Supreme*.<sup>27</sup> A recitation tone refers to the pitch apexes consecutively used in spoken or musical sermons to signify intensification, exaltation, and spiritual ascension to listeners. Ethnographic data drawn from diverse sources including African American communities, Sufi musical ceremonies, and Western art music traditions, supports the idea that the use of recitation tones, normally in progressively ascending fashion, may symbolically represent and organize the idea constructs and experiences of participants concerning spirituality.

#### *Conclusion*

While I do not wish to posit simple structuralist answers to the complex relationship between music and ecstasy, as an improvising musician, I know the power of playing the right musical gesture at the right time to create, and hopefully to communicate, a feeling of ecstasy in performance. Investigating isolated musical details necessarily paints a limited picture of music and ecstasy relationships, but so too does a culturally rich description that avoids the question of musical structures and structuring in performance. Products of cognition do vary across cultures, but modern humans share the same basic cognitive operations. In line with the need for more “cognitive” social science, I argue here for the integrated study of personal and public events and the cultural and neurobiological aspects of musical performance to illuminate further the production of meaning.<sup>28</sup>

Music provides a cultural and symbolic realm in human society for the exploration of spiritual states, but the question of how and what music symbolizes may always remain something of a mystery. Susanne Langer calls music an “unconsummated symbol,” one whose ambivalence of content allows the possibility of expressing opposites simultaneously.<sup>29</sup> This ability of music to symbolically express paradox and its temporal organization may explain why it is so often linked with transcendental states across various cultures. Music, linked with ritual, provides a cultural space and a spiritual means for involved and willing participants to dissolve the apparent duality of self and not-self.

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<sup>27</sup> Lewis Porter, “John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*: Jazz Improvisation as Composition.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38/3 (1985).

<sup>28</sup> See Mark Turner, *Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Harvard University Press, 1967).

# On Busking, or the Body and Soul of Street Performance

Ross Feller

*The following text was written before, during, and after busking bouts in Chicago, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Basel between 1982 and 1996. May they rest in this piece.*

## The Busker as the Other

How many passed by with Homer in mind? “Better to be the poor servant of a poor master ... rather than think as they do and live after their manner.” Others cozy up for a picture or video clip with the ‘local’ busker. Insomniacs, lunatics, and cripples give the most. Surely they hear themselves in my versions of Bird and Monk. Their experience opens them to art and music. A man empties his soda can into my case. Another grudgingly throws some change toward my case. An acrobatic duo equipped with a large boom box violates the unwritten fairplay space rule. I play *A Night in Tunisia* and head to my favorite Tunisian frites stand. The plan – keep mobile and rest enough to hit several prime spots before nightfall. I pass a large, covered Balalaika. It’s player hunches next to it with calculator in hand. It’s been an insufficient day – the story told by the movements of his eyelids. Evening arrives. We’re replaced by a festival of ‘real’ musicians, propped up on platforms and amplified with current. The city smells like burnt wood and dog shit.

Ten years prior I remember playing *Misty* in the Chicago subway system for the mindless, rush-hour traffic. This gave me an idea. I found a group of kindred spirits to perform free improvisations on the embankment of a busy expressway during the peak of the slow moving rush hour traffic. Almost everyone rolled down their windows to cheer or otherwise participate by honking their horns. It was a magnificent cacophony not unlike Cage’s boat piece in the harbor of Chicago’s Navy Pier during the 1982 New Music America Festival. Later on I told Henry Brant about the expressway jam, and he said that we had unleashed a deep-felt psychic need in the American public.

In a way busking trains a society’s moral fiber and reminds us of the ever short road to unemployment and poverty. Perhaps to ward off the evils of joblessness children are instructed by their parents to cast coins into open cases, cups, or buckets. They learn to support the arts through acts of charity. The busker covers non-downloadable space. In this respect busking is confrontational entertainment.

## Covered in Thick Skin

I had just triumphantly finished playing Bird’s *Kim* note for note at his maniacal tempo (quarter-note = 320). My jubilation was cut short by a camera-slinging, stocky gentleman in Bermuda shorts and a Hawaiian shirt. He tried to suck in his gut as he asked, “Do you speak English?” “As a matter of fact I do” I said. “Good” he said “cause that’s the worst saxophone playing I’ve ever heard and I just wanted you to know.” “Thanks” I said and made a mental note for the upcoming Busking Lexicon of Invective. The very

act of busking seems to elicit what might be called “Critic’s Syndrome.” Ordinary folk feel completely at ease spouting off ‘opinions’ about things that they know little or nothing about. Indeed, I recall another tourist emphatically remarking to his girlfriend that my fairly decent rendition of *Donna Lee* had “too many high and fast notes”. Oh how some still pine for the lost days of Swing.

One shouldn’t get the idea that I was merely a Bird-clone busker. I also played folk and Beatles tunes, straight up. After several months of playing on the streets of Brussels people began to approach me about other gigs, most of which were indoors. One of the most memorable was a performance with Koba, a band led by Frederic Rzewski’s talented son Jan, at a small bar in the heart of downtown Brussels. We performed improvisations and several of their original pieces late into the night. After busking the next day, a hip, Euro-businessman (nicknamed “Moose”) inquired whether I would be willing and able to perform for a private party he was throwing for his employees and customers. I don’t recall what he did exactly, only that products from one European country were repackaged and sent to another. Because the latter country had a higher standard of living and paid their workers a higher wage a profit could be made by simply moving goods from one place to another. This was in the days when the Euro was merely a twinkle in Europe’s eye. The party was to take place at the town hall in the Flemish town of Grimbergen. The money was good, about a week’s wages for one gig, and because I was hung-over from the previous night’s musical binge I accepted his proposal. I forewarned him that his workers were probably unaccustomed to unaccompanied saxophone for their entertainment but I’d be willing to give it a go. He reassured me that this would not be a problem as long as I played familiar, well recognized tunes by bands such as the Beatles. Fine I said and went off to arrange a gig’s worth of fakebook jazz and Beatles. He told me that I would need enough material to fill two forty-five minute sets. On the afternoon of the gig he picked me up shortly after two o’clock. We arrived in Grimbergen about an hour later, leaving about four hours to “get comfortable with the surroundings.” He had rented an undersized room for his party, which meant that I had to stand a few feet from the dining, soon to be inebriated partygoers. As I suspected most did not appreciate the unadorned sound of the saxophone. At one point, after finishing six consecutive Beatles’ tunes, Moose’s wife came over to express her dissatisfaction. With a painful grin she exclaimed, “You sound good but couldn’t you play some Beatles’ tunes?” I wondered if she had actually heard any tunes by said band. Incredible, thirty years after The British Invasion they had achieved chic stature separate from any direct connection to sound.

Busking is regulated in a variety of ways. There are essentially three types of locales. First, there are those ‘enlightened’ places that accept (some even encourage) street performance as an emblem of an ancient civic rite. They believe busking complements or enhances their tourist-marketed image. The second type views busking as a nuisance to be controlled through issuing licenses. By doing so they are able to strictly regulate most importantly who plays, but also what how, and where they play. In Brussels for example one is allowed up to thirty minutes in one location before being required to move on. The most desirable, tourist-laden spots are off limits to buskers, with heavy fines for those who disobey. Licenses are mandatory and require monthly renewal and full display during performance. Buskers need to demonstrate some degree of proficiency in order to obtain their permits. After locating the proper office (not an easy task partly because it often moves from one ministry’s jurisdiction to another) the amount of time waiting to file the appropriate paperwork can easily run into hours. Regulations are enforced at the (often arbitrary) whim of the local police. To be on the safe side I always used a stopwatch to time my performances. Once, a police officer came over and stated that he didn’t like what I had played (Bird, Monk, Miles, etc.) and thus, he wanted me to go somewhere else. Glancing at my stopwatch I noticed that I had several minutes left. I promptly informed him of this and asked if he preferred *Scrapple from the Apple* or *Thriving on a Riff*. His scowl was priceless. The third type equates busking with begging (e.g. New York City under the rule of Guiliani) and attempts to outlaw both for the sake of upholding a false image of living standards. The message is “all our citizens are decent, hardworking types, never down on their luck or underappreciated for their innate talents.” For the most part the type of locale that clamps down on busking is responding to real or imagined complaints from local commerce claiming that

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busking/begging scares business away. Buskers also regulate themselves. For example they are careful not to perform too close to one another. Often buskers will hold prime locations for each other by forming unofficial alliances to reserve these spots. It is also not uncommon for several solo buskers to collaborate in performance, splitting the purse afterward.

## Wissel vallig

Every evening I watched the local televised news programs to determine the best busking times for the following days. The most challenging weather patterns were those that changed often during the course of a day. It was late fall. The trees were bare and the damp cold felt wintry. This meant that my hours outdoors were numbered. Each day I said to myself "well just one more day and I'll lay low till spring." I put on my fingerless, woolen gloves and made for the Grand Place. Minutes into *Confirmation* my jaw began to quiver involuntarily, making Bird sound like Guy Lombardo. I remembered my seventh grade sax teacher telling me about different vibrato options. He failed to make mention of the shiver vibrato. The combination of Bird and Lombardo was intriguing and surreal. Evidently the few passers by didn't think so as my case was empty. So I packed up and headed for a warmer clime.

## Odd Encounters

### 1

After a bewildering four-hour set in the Chicago subway system I emerged heavy with coin. Up above I could faintly make out the sound of an alto saxophone accompanied by the heavenly strokes of a harp. As I got closer I recognized the tune: *Green Dolphin Street*. The duo had made the trek from downstate Illinois for the chance to play on the street of the Windy City. Later on, while attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign I ran into this unlikely pair again during their many performances at a vegetarian restaurant cum jazz club named Nature's Table. The saxophonist was Guido S., a hold over from the 1950s who played brilliantly when straight. The harpist performed under the stage name of Anne Jazzman. On that hot day in Chicago their instruments suggested the angel and devil of the busking world.

### 2

His payes clung to the side of his head, flopping about as he played. In front of his full-length marimba was a podium with a thick, three-ring binder full of news clips about himself. Evidently he had performed all over the world, notably outside Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. But mostly he played in Germany and in German speaking countries, traveling by way of his Winnebago. He performed arrangements of pieces by Bach, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. As he put it, "I play German music for the Germans." Given his instrument and appearance he was a curiosity, to say the least. Crowds inevitably would gather and listen, emptying their pockets and buying his homemade compact discs. He told me that he made a hundred grand a year in change. Most of this went to support his large family in Israel.

### 3

Strolling down a street in the center of Basel I came across someone performing a Bach transcription on a curved, soprano saxophone. His Bordeaux tone and smooth phrasing led me to believe that here was an extraordinary busker on par with the former Moscow Conservatory students whose only form of employment was the street. After pausing between pieces I asked him if he spoke English. "Yes I do" he said in a thick, Mississippi accent. My ears had not betrayed me for he was a saxophonist in a well known European saxophone quartet. In between gigs he brought his axe out to practice and pick up some "pocket

change” as he put it. In Switzerland where smaller are the equivalents of five dollar bills, pocket change is not insignificant.

## **Horror & Sadness**

Performing in a busy thoroughfare buskers can view all manner of humanity. I will never forget the man with no arms or legs propelling himself forward on a skateboard by way of a stick which he gripped with his teeth. It was a sad and humbling sight but at the same time it was a testament of this man’s triumph over extreme adversity.

On occasion I’d come across orphans from the war in Sarajevo – tiny children playing tiny accordions. Whenever I saw them coming I would immediately pack up my saxophone so as not to detract from their horrible plight, and empty my coins into their buckets. The importance of seed money is something often spoken about by buskers. It seems that folks only want to back a winning horse.

With respect to human misery it was hard to match (if one can use such a word in this context) that of the organ grinder. This disfigured man would hobble slowly pushing his organ cart forward. On the side were two pictures of himself before the tragedy. The pictures show an ordinary man in his twenties with dark hair and eyes, and a button-down shirt. The person pushing the cart had no face, just a swatch of melted skin, two nose holes, and a small permanently open hole where his mouth once was. His body was a living testament of the horrific evils of war ‘accidentally’ heaped upon innocent bystanders (non-combatants).

## **Early Street**

Ah, I remember well my first street performances. They occurred spontaneously while walking with a good friend to or from classes, as a college freshman. For no apparent reason we’d stop mid-stride and remain frozen in this position until our muscles or stomachs gave way. Two hours locked in one position was not uncommon. We had no idea that this kind of performance had long been a busking standard, especially in Europe where it is known as Statue Busking. My friend and I attended a large, state school located in the middle of corn country, far from any metropolitan areas. The picture of two seemingly ordinary students frozen in their tracks created quite a stir. We were only half-conscious of the attention. Our unconscious halves were deeply engaged in a type of meditational transcendence that can be triggered by this kind of experience. Having witnessed similar actions (immobile, blank staring) by their inebriated, party-going friends, our fellow students assumed we had knocked back a few. Poking and prodding us they’d ask, “What kind of drugs are you on?” But alas we were clean – followers of a Zapaesque disdain for chemically induced inanities. When their questions went unanswered some took it upon themselves to provoke movement. Apparently human immobility made them uncomfortable.

But our fellow students weren’t the only ones uncomfortable with human statues. Low level administrators threatened to expel us from the university for the crime of stillness. Years later during a performance at one of New Music Chicago’s annual spring festivals we dredged up our statue training during an improvisation which a well known critic described as “stooping to pointless theatrics.” Evidently a little spontaneous theater was beyond his conception of the musical event.

For some reason our university built dormitories full of electrical outlets attached to the outside walls of these buildings. Naturally my friend and I took this ‘sign’ as an invitation to perform, gratis, for our fellow students. So one night around midnight we plugged in our synthesizers and amplifiers and serenaded the dorm occupants with the very best sounds of our impromptu, industrial avant-garde. The US army did essentially the same thing (except using heavy metal rock and roll) to bombard and extricate the Panamanian dictator Noriega. We managed to shake-loose some kindred spirits who joined us on other exploits. On one such outing we performed antiphonally with Chicago’s elevated trains. What was heard as horrible screeching to the soon-to-be commuter we took as an invitation to match pitches in the highest

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tier of human audibility and rhythms largely dependent upon speed and the vagaries of track alignment. A few days afterward we were shocked to learn that near the site of our performance an elevated train had plunged from its tracks, killing many on board as well as on the ground.

### Final Notes

It's an early fall day in Chicago's Grant Park. Six saxophonists make their way slowly from hedge to hedge crawling on their bellies, their instruments only inches from the muddy ground. One can hear the sounds of traffic interspersed from time to time with slap tongues.

## **“The Will To Connect”: Wolpe’s Theater of Action and Memory**

Martin Brody

*Exhibit A: Six even notes, three off-kilter punctuations. An opening up, a closing in, something plodding, something mercurial—delicate sonorities, curt interjections, incongruities, questions. The clarinet curls around a cramped but not quite fully traversed space. The other 5 square off (3+2), alternatively floating or jabbing in a domain with no obvious boundaries; but there are clear terms of engagement: voice exchange, dyadic shards breaking off the clarinet’s line, a high 5<sup>th</sup> partial hovering over it’s repeated fundamental, F.<sup>1</sup> The events are transparent but unsettling. The floating dyads intimate the possibility of a roomy uncharted space, and the absent A<sup>b</sup> inside the clarinet’s confined quarters may seem a riddle. The clarinet itself seems questioning as it sets off a second sequence of events.*

In 1962, the year of *In Two Parts* and the *Piece for Two Instrumental Units*, Stefan Wolpe staged a public mini-psychodrama—a re-enacted return of the repressed.<sup>2</sup> The occasion was a lecture at C.W. Post (the Long Island campus where Wolpe taught), the medium dada. The composer offered a few prepared remarks, a tape recorder was turned on, and Wolpe proceeded to riff spontaneously on the experiences of his youth.

The “Lecture on Dada” (LOD) covers turf that Wolpe had explored on numerous other occasions. He celebrates the concepts of simultaneity and juxtaposition by summoning a profusion of visions. He enjoins the listener to imagine “an aquarium where you have fifty or a hundred fishes running around”; or (in a Koyaanisqatsi-like image that must have tweaked the crowd at Post), to envision “100 people trying to reach the 5:40

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<sup>1</sup> William Benjamin’s essay “Distinctive and Original Features of the Pitch Structures in Part One of *In Two Parts for Six Players*” (in *Essays on the Music of Stefan Wolpe*, ed. Austin Clarkson [Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press], forthcoming), is the source of the idea to hear the high violin harmonic as 5<sup>th</sup> partial of the clarinet’s F. Although I share Benjamin’s fascination with a number of the “distinctive and original features” in this music, our descriptions of what occurs are so different as to call the question of how musical features are constituted and experienced. Benjamin finds structural hierarchy and describes an experience of “tonalities projected throughout this music by a tissue of motivic pentachords.” I find heterogeneous modes of behavior that don’t fall neatly into line. Although I hear a somewhat different piece, I am grateful for Prof. Benjamin’s insights.

<sup>2</sup> The essay is itself a return to questions discussed in a previous paper, “A Concrete Element You Work With: Wolpe and the Painters” (forthcoming in *Essays on the Music of Stefan Wolpe*). The current perspective has profited from a batch of recent work on Wolpe, especially papers by Austin Clarkson, Matthew Greenbaum, Dora A. Hanninen, Christopher Hasty, and Robert Morris that appear among the “Wolpe Centennial Essays” in *Perspectives of New Music*, 40/2. The approach taken here has also been informed by Brigid Cohen’s “Haunted Objects and Stefan Wolpe” (ms.).



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train."<sup>3</sup> Such fanciful thought experiments were a staple of Wolpe's public oratory from the Black Mountain years onward. He deployed them to demonstrate a core principle, the principle of simultaneity: that the multiple, simultaneous behaviors of living agents provide a viable model for a succession of musical events— what Robert Morris has more pointedly called a "play of independent agents engaged in a process of musical transformation."<sup>4</sup> And, we might add, the more independent the agents, the more mercurial the process. To complicate matters, Wolpe awards a special value to juxtaposition of unlike elements, what he calls "the adjacency of opposites," a phenomenon demonstrating that "all things are within the reach of the human mind." The complexities that ensue may be daunting. Proclaiming that connection is a "mental act," Wolpe rather majestically dubs a cognitive faculty, a "will to connect."<sup>5</sup> In another formulation that is as dense as it is quaint, Wolpe elaborates, invoking the "now situation" and a musical "unfoldment of nows," hinting at a paradoxical union of simultaneity and process and implying that under the right conditions the most disparate of "nows" may be linked in viable musical enactments.<sup>6</sup>

In short, LOD seems to be about anything but repression. Nonetheless, the larger part of Wolpe's performance at C.W. Post was in fact given over to a vexed process of retrieving something that had been suppressed—an elided, primal source of his artistic vision. From the outset, Wolpe appears to be pushing away the thing he sets out to reclaim. "I am not a Dadaist," he announces categorically and apparently just as the tape recorder begins to turn. Immediately, he offers a qualification, inching closer to his source: "I learned very much from them in my early youth, because what they did attracted me enormously." In a parallel construction, he amplifies, edging a bit further, acknowledging his complicity: "I learned very much from their tendencies, which were mine at the time in 1920." Then, as he begins to unfurl a third parallel phrase, there's a flash of spontaneous combustion, a spike of Wolpean simultaneity, a concurrent leap and a continuation, a reaching for clarification and enigma. Ideas coalesce and fly apart at once, as Wolpe fuses past and present, general and particular. "I learned that all things are in the immediate reach of the human mind, that if not of the human mind, the objects are adjacent to each other, the spectacles of the universe. Objects are terribly lonely and helpless things. That gives them their haunted look. And as long as they look haunted, they are useful. They always look haunted."<sup>7</sup>

*An opening up, a closing in, something plodding, something mercurial...the clarinet curls around its small domain...we may wonder about the untouched A $\flat$ ...the clarinet seems to be wondering too. Exhibit B: As if to stake a claim to the territory defined by the gang of 5, the clarinet initiates a second action. Its arc is at once luxuriant and fastidious, a mixed message communicated through a paradoxical interplay of pc and pitch. The clarinet reaches for the boundaries, echoing the ensemble's previous pitch extremes in its own new high and low pitch points. But in terms of pitch class, it merely paces back and forth in the same confined area. As if aware of its dilemma, the clarinet starts to mumble quietly and revert to its old cramped behavior just as it stretches to its*

<sup>3</sup> Austin Clarkson, "Lecture on Dada' by Stefan Wolpe," *Musical Quarterly*, 72/2, 212.

<sup>4</sup> "A Footnote to Hasty, Whitehead, and Plato: More Thoughts on Stefan Wolpe's Music," *Perspectives of New Music*, 40/2, 185.

<sup>5</sup> LOD, 205.

<sup>6</sup> LOD, 214.

<sup>7</sup> LOD, 202.

registral high point. The return of F and A at the end seems an unsettlingly familiar terminus for what momentarily has been such an exploratory move. The ensemble resumes its mercurial play—reconfiguring the old and introducing the new while vacillating between distinct modes of behavior: on the one hand, acquiescent and colorful, on the other, brusque and ejaculatory. A soft, brief gesture by an ephemeral pairing, trumpet and cello, in m. 3 offers a possible rapprochement between these contrasting modes of behavior—a mellow version of the piano's previous grace note figure, made out of the pitch classes of the piano's mitschlag figure in m. 2. The disposition of players now also begins to fluctuate, ratcheting up the overall pace of change. The violin peels off from the clarinet and trumpet, usurping what had been the harp's role, in a pairing with the piano. The new piano/violin unit mimics the piano's first utterance, just as it unceremoniously interjects two new pitch classes, A $\flat$  and B $\flat$ —the former, of course, being the purloined pitch class from the clarinet's opening line. The ensemble quickly adapts, incorporating the new pcs while briefly forsaking the E and F $\sharp$  of the incipit pentachord and thereby engendering a new incarnation of the incipit.<sup>8</sup> The new pcs are also quickly absorbed into an incongruous violin flurry, where they occur at the registral midpoint, while the registral boundaries echo the clarinet's previous high and low pitches. However accommodating to what has just occurred, the violin's quiet spasm in m. 4 seems aimed at subverting the clarinet's preening if awkward moment of lyricism. The clarinet then initiates a third unfolding. It's still trying to hold all the cards.

"Objects are terribly lonely and helpless things. That gives them their haunted look. And as long as they look haunted, they are useful. They always look haunted." What Wolpe conjures, and what he redeems in the opening of LOD is the economy of haunted objects, dispossessed, decomposed objects, objects that had been banished from the structures of kinship, a heap of trash, a virtual depot of recycled stuff. Lists of junk (haunted lonely junk, as Wolpe, insists) riddle the text. One list includes "cigarette bottoms...little files...little screws...little fragments of letters...bread crumbs...dead birds...feathers...and milk bottles." A few lines later we find "an artificial eye and a shoelace." A page thereafter, it's "the little artificial eye of a goose," and the shoelace again, but now with a cigarette box. Still later, "dirt on a flower," "iodine on a rose," a monkey next to a clock, "a dead herring, an aspirin bottle."<sup>9</sup>

The composer's motives for conjuring so much miscellaneous stuff seem innocent enough. The junk was art, or rather the material of art, found objects that had been composed into visual etudes in the Basic Course at the Bauhaus. Moreover, both dada and the Bauhaus experiments were transitional phases: For Wolpe, dadaism's shocking juxtapositions would become artistically operational only when sublimated; the pedagogical exercises he encountered at the Bauhaus modeled the process of seeing abstractly and discovering new modes of relationship. It's a straight shot from there to the "will to connect." "If one can connect an artificial eye with the feather of a goose, so one word can leap out into any other word, and connections are established."<sup>10</sup>

Connections are established. However credible the claim, the passive voice is

<sup>8</sup> See Robert Morris's "Respiration in Stefan Wolpe's *Piece in Two Parts for Six Players*,"\* for an explicit discussion of the chain of set transformations that occur in the opening passage of the piece. \*(forthcoming — Ed.)

<sup>9</sup> LOD, 204, passim.

<sup>10</sup> LOD, 205.

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uncharacteristically flaccid, and the effect of Wolpe's compulsively reiterated lists is hardly leavened. Indeed, the composer's catalogues of eerie, inanimate, heavy, corporeal stuff threaten to overwhelm the weightless, and in this context perhaps even antiseptic images of simultaneity and connection. And, however triumphant the will to connect, it cannot erase the memory of a primal scene that, Wolpe explicitly tells us, includes real-world starvation, terror, spiritual impoverishment, the "insufficiency" of a culture that was, as he says, as "helpless as the objects I spoke about." As the lecture unfolds, Wolpe repeatedly darkens his vision, at one point addressing the ultimate limiting case of abstraction and the art of juxtaposition. "[O]pposites as such disappear," he intones, in what seems a generic paraphrase of his official theme—but he catches himself and reverses field. "[C]ertain opposites like death and life,/painful opposites, unpleasant opposites, remain." He then momentarily seems to back off, recalling a carefree exercise in the art of juxtaposition; but he concludes the anecdote with a touch of gallows humor. "I remember I was at Black Mountain,/somebody wanted to photograph me with a skeleton/She made a skeleton out of flowers....I remember, I embraced that fellow,/I didn't sense it as a joke...It would be wonderful to reside as a living person/next to one's dead body./That's not possible."<sup>11</sup>

The limiting cases, the unresolved tensions, the unreconciled juxtapositions—life and death, the mind's unbounded capacity to bridge gaps of space, time and difference vs. the inanimate detritus of Berlin and Weimar, too much for a million Bauhaus studies or Cornell boxes. This, it seems to me, is the newly explicit, especially poignant problem set of LOD. By contrast, in the earlier address, "Thinking Twice," (TT) Wolpe's conception of the unfoldment of nows seems pretty much a done deal, as if this new concept was itself another "now" that had emerged spontaneously. In TT Wolpe spins out elaborate taxonomies of spatial configurations, types of motion, and rates of change, a kind of anarchistic *tonwille*, replete with images of extreme conditions and possibilities (recall, for example, the opening salutation to "light's ravaging speed" or the subsequent "dance on the sun's ray"). The organic modes sketched at the end of the essay offer more conventional images of agents at play. In cataloguing them, Wolpe links types of motion (trajectories, curves, cohesion, contraction) to pictorial images (doodles, beehives, waves), and more overtly subjective concepts (freedom, commitment, certainty, threat).<sup>12</sup> But do Wolpe's virtual agents listen to each other or merely move around in a shared social space, like the commuters catching the 5:40 train? What do they remember? How do they reciprocate and respond?

*Exhibit C: The clarinet bolsters its claim as prime mover. It's still trying to hold all the cards: Its line includes all extant pitch classes, and it sets off mimicking the violin's abrupt display of furious speed, but then just as abruptly reverts to its more temperate ways. The new clarinet tune immediately foregrounds B $\flat$  and A $\flat$ , the new pitch classes that the piano had lobbed into the previous segment; but now they're jammed up against the music's oldest pairing, A/F. In m. 5 the solo clarinet and a newly reconfigured accompanimental group coalesce sweetly but ephemerally to color a dyad, G A $\flat$  (one "old" pitch class, one "new"), lingering, in a voice-exchanged position, on a pairing the violin had hastily whispered in the previous measure. As another new unfolding commences at*

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<sup>11</sup> LOD, 209.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Wolpe, "Thinking Twice," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs, ed.s. (New York: Holt, Rinehard, and Winston), 1967, 304-5.

*the end of m. 5, a different player finally appropriates the role of initiator. The piano in m. 6 seems to have learned to mumble from the clarinet in m. 3, but more insistently, and it brusquely fills in the pitch space of a 5<sup>th</sup> between G and C, nonchalantly expanding the pc space by 4 elements: C, D $\flat$ , D, and E $\flat$ , and passing through another version of the incipit pentachord on the way. (It probably goes without saying that the piano's behavior mimics the clarinet in other ways—filling in a small space, a 5<sup>th</sup> in place of a 4<sup>th</sup>—but now in a slightly but significantly new way, with no holes unplugged, all 7 pitches filled in.) The tiny collision of old and new events that occurred at the boundary of the third and fourth segments seems to trigger an abrupt intensification inside the fourth group. Three vehement things happen, none clearly subordinate to the others. The violin reiterates its spasm of m. 4 (but fastidiously recalibrated, now initiating the gesture with what had been the highest and lowest notes of its previous flurry—and now set against the piano's assertive mumbling). Meanwhile, the cello jabs inconclusively into terra incognita, touching its lowest E, while participating in a frantic ensemble ejaculation that seems simultaneously erratic and coordinated. The flow of unfolding nows, so fastidiously punctuated by silence at the opening, now occurs in overlapping ripples, the tutti group and lone piano both unfurling the eleven pc collection now in play as several transforms of the incipit pentachord collide.*

*We might expect the process of expanding the pitch and pitch class fields in these opening measures to be a matter of high drama, a definitive articulation, a trump card in the rhythm game. But processes of expanding musical spaces occur in the midst of a flurry of other disparate changes—fractured recurrences, appropriated behaviors, thwarted confidences. Things reconfigure spontaneously; the chances of getting attached to any articulating procedure or lingering on any pleasurable detail are slim. Sustaining confidence about what is old or new is also unlikely—the events incessantly qualify themselves and each other, often producing an aura of paradox. Movement through space is at once free and deliberate, unbounded but fastidiously calibrated. The terms of engagement may be clear, but almost useless in predicting what will happen. Juxtaposition not only stimulates connections but thwarts complacency.*

A few bits of litter do find their way into TT—"a broken needle, a torn stamp, a potato peel"—but these appear as metaphors for an "extreme condition," a "low structure"<sup>13</sup> that is successfully assimilated, a terminus on the continuum of possibilities. In LOD, by contrast, the litter is recalcitrant and connections, as Wolpe here insists, are a "great drama."<sup>14</sup> The author breaks a sweat, as he tells a story of artistic agon and change under the strain of urgent personal and social pressures. If LOD eventually comes to affirm what TT details—a conception of musical unfoldings from the point of view of "independent agents engaged in a process of musical transformation"—the dada lecture overtly grapples with the psychological and ethical stakes involved for the musical creator himself. And as he describes the liberating process that was inspired by the Bauhaus exercises—a process of formalization in relation to a sensation of estrangement—Wolpe drops in a hint about how ethics, psychology, and musical process relate. "[W]e really extended our eyes, like humble people, to the little unseen things...we had to use these

<sup>13</sup> TT, 299.

<sup>14</sup> LOD, 205: "Connections are a great drama/because we didn't know what a dead herring has to do with an aspirin bottle/once we put them next to each other."

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things independent upon their *subjective* meaning... And we learned a certain callousness in relation to the objects, because we observed them only formally, and not empathetically, without any empathy./This was a tremendous experience... The sensations of a *strange* relationship of *estrangements*,/That was fantastically new to me."<sup>15</sup> Wolpe links estrangement from objects both to humility and the enlargement of the senses. His account becomes most intimate when he describes a sensation of numbing, subjectivity anesthetized. Paradoxically, callousness becomes the precondition of heightened sensitivity. Estrangement, it seems, is not only an anesthetic but an instrument of renewal, a scalpel severing the bond between memory and habit. Actually it's difficult to say what estrangement is, and Wolpe wisely forgoes the Frankensteinian trope in his struggles to describe new forms of subjectivity modeled in music. Nonetheless, it was not enough for him to transform old, familiar and incongruous objects into new mysterious objects, but rather into new musical subjects—an ensemble of musical subjects, capable of unanticipated, ever unsettled ways of reclaiming their past—conversing, engaging in reciprocal negotiation, constant change, and action. Subjects capable of beginning anew again and again.

*Exhibit D: Events of consequence, the completion of a span that will be restated verbatim at the movement's end. Many pretty details unfold on this path. At m. 8, the harp joins the piano, engaging in a delicate sequence of doublings and echoes, initiated by a pristine return of the incipit pcs. Piano and harp doublings linger until the end of m. 14, where the two become complementary, concluding the passage by touching on all but one element of the now completely available chromatic collection: the errant Ab, that had been missing in the very opening measures. Once again there seems to be an element of fastidious calculation nagging at and inside a fluent, apparently unencumbered event. In general, however, there is a pervasive sense of playfulness, and of newly intimate modes of interchange and connection between disparate behaviors. In m. 10, the piano plays a register shift game with itself, initiating and concluding its own little unfolding of octave reshufflings while, like the cello before it, dipping into the uncharted low end of the pitch space, touching on a low A. The piano's apparently innocent bit of quasi-Webernian call and response sneaks the twelfth pitch class into play, combining an expansion of pitch and pitch class space in one swift blow (while consummating the piano's function as donor of new pcs).*

*The piano will touch one lower note in the section, a G that resonates in the mind with previous lower boundary Gs and again demonstrates the tendency for both G and A to lurk at the registral borders. The piano's apparently self-contained gestures are twinned via pc with a line that arcs from cello to clarinet to trumpet. The clarinet, it seems, has learned how to share, and there are numerous benefits to its new-found complicity. The boundary point between cello and clarinet is especially beautiful. As the cello's G passes to the clarinet's Ab, the cello peels off, to participate with harp and muted trumpet in a gorgeous chord with a delicately evolving envelope (another chord bounded by F and A), a pretty resonance for the piano's game and the cello-clarinet-trumpet trio's arc. The high and low points of this arc are a half step wider than the G and A of the clarinet's first expansive move in m. 3-4. Indeed, there's a hint of something like voice leading in the air, especially now that the last pitch class (B) has come into play, and come to be*

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<sup>15</sup> LOD, 209.

*melodically engaged by the now unmuted trumpet. It's (characteristically) snatched up by the violin and shifted in register, thrust up an octave—then snagged by the harp (cb) in m. 15, where it affords a previously unavailable ascending stepwise approach to C—the final destination of the section (and later Part One as a whole). Perhaps more explicitly, the new pitch class B is repeatedly paired with G, an echo and displacement of the familiar pairing, F-A. The G-B dyad appears in m. 12-14, first in trumpet, then violin, then back to trumpet with harp, where the low trumpet G not only recalls the violin's resonant, resounding open G string but other persistent Gs at that pitch level that have reverberated through the section. This little violin flurry is strikingly more mellow (and less noxiously placed on the neck of the violin) than it's predecessors in m. 3 and 6. It also cohabits more genially in its environment, an altogether peaceable kingdom, in which the lovely quasi-canonic harp-clarinet duet is emblematic.<sup>16</sup> This harp-clarinet duo music is itself part of a transformational network of mellow chord arpeggiations, the first hint of which was the cello and trumpet figure in m. 3—or perhaps the source is the very first uncanny vertical sonority in m. 1. In any event, the trumpet's music in m. 13-14, also a familiar gambit—descent through a 4<sup>th</sup> with a missing pitch (indeed Ab)—reminds us not to get too comfortable.*

I find it attractive to speculate that the drama of recovered memories that Wolpe performed in LOD have something to do with the quality of taut sweetness, of opposites (open and closed spaces, contrasting behavior types) almost reconciled, that I hear in the opening section of *In Two Parts*. But I suspect that Wolpe would spit on this formulation, a turn of thought too facile and nostalgic to survive his ever self-critical sensibilities. One need only recall the attitude of *Piece for Two Instrumental Units* to be convinced that the master had not mellowed. That he was profoundly engaged in an aesthetic of estrangement, renewal, and connection, however, seems incontrovertible, as does the premise that he was, in the early '60s, adequately confident in its operations to flirt with modes of reconciling adjacent opposites without losing the fantastical sensation of estrangement. Indeed, the tension in his late music between spontaneous combustion and the modeling of processes of memory and reciprocity seems to me to be a primary source of its consoling wit. Speaking of memory, I'm also inclined to believe that Wolpe was willfully parroting Nietzsche's most famous phrase when he invoked a "will to connect." Certainly, the question of the ethics of memory was very much in the air in 1962, as it is now, and no more so than among the émigré intellectuals congregating around the Washington Square, the New School, and the Eighth Street Artists' Club. And so it's also tempting to juxtapose Wolpe with his likely nemesis, Hannah Arendt, who herself found solace in the perennial human capacity for plural and "spontaneous human action" as an antidote to terror and tyranny.<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, in an elaboration of Arendt's elaboration of Nietzsche, provides an apposite formulation. She posits "the possibility to break with the past [to] begin again, and to affirm that thinking is coextensive with the generous superabundance that could be called a life." And then: "In place of a ruminative memory that fosters resentment and revenge...nothing less than the 'force of forgetfulness,' that creates 'a little tabula rasa of the consciousness, so as to make room

<sup>16</sup> The hexachord projected by this duo can be parsed into three major thirds (F/A, G♭/B♭, G/B); a new set, but, like the incipit pentachord, a filled-in pc space with one missing element—Ab again.

<sup>17</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace), 1973.

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again for the new."<sup>18</sup> Wolpe, in a sense, does them one better, smashing the tabula rasa, inventing ways not only to achieve the force of forgetfulness but also to link the faculties of memory and creativity in thrilling musical enactments.<sup>19</sup>

This large claim, however, begs a question that any account of the first movement of *Piece in Two Parts* must confront: What do we make of the literal repeat of the opening 16 bars? The repeat, and the fantastically imaginative way the Wolpe leads up to it, surely has something to do with the reciprocity of elements achieved in the opening. It's tempting to go further, to invoke a magical paradox or work up a grand, Wolpean riddle. But I'm currently more inclined to remember and honor the errant trickster, the *Ab*, playing hooky again at the movement's end—and thus to suggest something more innocent: a return simply to a sight of intense pleasure, and also a pleasurable demonstration that the ending, however happy, is a question.

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<sup>18</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, transl., Ross Guberman New York, Columbia University Press, 2001. As Austin Clarkson recounts, Wolpe had an extreme reaction to a talk at the Eighth Street Artists' Club: "A lecture on Martin Heidegger at The Club left Wolpe feeling 'deeply molested' by 'a hell of blown-up profundities about life-death-existence-finiteness-authentic-inauthentic-and so forth.'" ("Stefan Wolpe and Abstract Expressionism," 79) Arendt was the foremost Heideggerian and, as Dore Ashton has indicated, the most prominent philosopher, to lecture to the Club. See Ashton, *The New York School: a Cultural Reckoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1072, 193.

<sup>19</sup> The Arendt of *Origins of Totalitarianism* and the Wolpe of LOD can seem quite close, in spirit if not sensibility. Claims about one may seem strikingly pertinent to the other. Kristeva subtitles her book on Arendt "Birth and Estrangement," a turn of phrase that might describe the dialectic in Wolpe's music that I am proposing here. In summarizing an argument of Arendt's, Jerome Kohn describes her conception of freedom in terms of "a plurality of unique beings, irreducible to repeatable concretions of qualities, but when deprived of freedom, [suffering from] loneliness, the despair of lost desire, of 'not belonging to the world at all: [*Origins of Totalitarianism*], p. 475);..." ("Freedom: the priority of the political," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana Villa [Cambridge University Press: Cambridge], 2000, 119-20.) Might these words not also describe the opposition of Wolpe's haunted objects and his redemptive principles of simultaneity and opposition?

# Stefan Wolpe's Dual Thought

Jean-Charles François

## I

In two lectures (*Thinking Twice* and *Vortrag über Proportionen* – "Presentation on Proportions"<sup>1</sup>), which included examples of music specifically composed to support his demonstration, Stefan Wolpe (1902-1972) presented his conceptions of tone organization in terms that were applicable to his own life, philosophical position and attitudes toward the music world in which he lived. He articulated a dual thought, taking into account radical input from the historical movements of modernity while refusing to consider them as closed, undifferentiated systems. The purpose of this composer's whole life was to be inside that world, while outwardly distinguishing himself from it.

Thus, while the global chromatic space of the twelve tones is an incapable historical given, the constant circulation of these tones in the dodecaphonic system neutralizes sound expression into a "classical thought" that produces a state of stagnation. The whole of Wolpe's argument involves the various possible means of freeing oneself from this "hypertrophied abundance of a global set of tones" :

Events move in multidimensional spatial formations, multiply exposed and multiply entangled. Events, constructed in specific proportions of circumference, equality, asymmetrical curves, accumulations, dissolutions, dispersions, disturbances; isolated or simultaneous. Expressive musical phenomena regenerate. You hear around you the cold, the shabby, the hard, the sudden, the inanimate, the rigid, the confused, the joke, the excess, the dense, the dropped, the completely general, the unlayered, flat, the extraordinary, multilayered, the loose, the loathsome, the disorderly, nothing, much, the perpetual, the eternally interrupted, the shock and the extensive antithesis, the simultaneous, the quotation, the noise : *Specific organic expressive structures are united with specific material constellations.*<sup>2</sup>

Thus, and contrary to the fixed character of the global chromatic set considered as an inevitable historical horizon, dynamic forms are developed that bring together a content consisting of combinations of tones with a particular poetic expression. The way sequences of tones are considered matches an envisioned movement of objects within a visual space, not only giving musical substance to particular timbres, resulting from the combinations of tones selected, but also a strong emphasis on the gestures of sound production. This

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Wolpe, "Thinking Twice", in Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs, eds., *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, New York : Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967, pp. 274-307; and "On Proportions", *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 34 N°2, Summer 1996, translated by Matthew Greenbaum, pp. 132-184.

<sup>2</sup> "On Proportions", pp.174-175.



approach to composition is in some respects reminiscent of Edgar Varèse's : tones articulate structural relationships of intervals, but the way they intervene within particular registers, combinations of instruments and a dynamic sequence of gestures or expressive events creates the conditions of a very specific sound, uniquely idiomatic to that composer. As far as the structuration of timbres is concerned, Varèse is very different from Wolpe, who offers instead a complex set of textures through a juxtaposition and superimposition of contradictory elements.

On the occasion of the German publication of works by this composer (who is little-known in Europe), Ben Boretz, the American composer, improviser and theorist, accurately remarked that upon hearing Wolpe's music we may be struck by the literal consistency displayed between the composer's project and the actual sounds produced. His writing, Boretz wrote, shows "an interesting dichotomization, and constant cross-emphasis between the pitch-structural (motivic-set) expository messages of his sounds, and their concentrated gestures of superfocused expressivity"<sup>3</sup>. Wolpe's brand of structuralism rejects the coldness of determined ordered parameters as such; he blends them with differentiated figurative expressions, even at the risk of contradicting himself.

The concept expressed by the term *enactment* seems particularly relevant to Stefan Wolpe's artistic practice. In 1952, he titled one of his compositions written for three pianos *Enactments*, in which he experimented with the superimposition of autonomous and often opposing elements. According to his own definition, "Enactments' doesn't mean anything else but acting out, being in an act of, being the act itself"<sup>4</sup>. Cognitive science has taken up this concept. For Francisco J. Varela, enactment constitutes an alternative to the representation "of a predetermined outside world"<sup>5</sup>. Enactment is a contextual response to a relevant question:

The most important ability of all living cognition is precisely, to a large extent, that of *asking* the relevant questions that keep coming up at every moment of our lives. They are not predetermined but *enacted*, made to *emerge* on a background, and the criteria of relevance are dictated by our common sense, always within a given context.<sup>6</sup>

According to Varela, the new concept of enactment was an attempt to bring actor and action closer together, a particular actor performing a particular action. Wolpe's position regarding any preestablished system accurately matched this definition of enactment. The system is nothing more than the inescapable background against which the composer will bring his personal view of things into action as he goes along, in an organic comprehension of the emerging work. Wolpe wrote in 1952,

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Boretz, "Reflections on Cardew and Wolpe : Vignettes of Old Masters ", in *The Open Space*, issue 2, Spring 2000, Red Hook, N.Y., p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> Anne C. Shreffler, "Wolpe and Black Mountain College", in *Driven into Paradise : The Musical Migration from Nazi Germany to the United States*, Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff, eds., Berkley, Los Angeles and London : University of California Press, 1999, p. 287, quote by Stefan Wolpe, taken from Austin Clarkson's program notes for the recording of *Enactments* (Nonesuch 78024).

<sup>5</sup> Francisco J. Varela, *Cognitive Science : a Cartography of Current Ideas*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

What I find completely intriguing, is to integrate a very large number of *different organic modes*, simultaneously existing under different conditions of age, time, function and substance.<sup>7</sup>

Thus art, for Wolpe, moves within the realm of excess, embracing exaggerated restraint as much as violent exaggeration. Each problem is defined within a back-and-forth movement between polar opposites articulating specific relationships. One cannot go beyond these poles, and yet they are contiguous to each other, since opposite poles are equivalent :

A sound's protrusion and recession  
violence and stillness  
A sound's mass and its fraction all become contiguous.  
The leap is next to the step,  
The infinite farness recoils into infinite closeness.<sup>8</sup>

The question of tonal space and the determination of its make-up is clearly relevant to Wolpe's whole approach and his travels inside and outside 20th century avant-garde movements : a complex context within a space that is located both inside and outside of the world of his contemporaries.

In 1940, Adorno said about Stefan Wolpe, "The composer living in New York today is an outsider in the best sense of the word. It is impossible to subsume him"<sup>9</sup>. In Wolpe's case, the recurrent theme of the outsider or stranger is also related to that of exile. Wolpe is a nomad in his thinking process as much as in his movements. While he was forced into exile by the Nazis' rise to power, he always was a virtuoso of exile, to quote Anne C. Shreffler,<sup>10</sup>

"He was always an outsider : first a Jewish Communist in Berlin, then a German-Jewish refugee in Palestine, then one of a long stream of musically gifted immigrants to the United States."

However, whether by choice or by force, exile is no trivial matter. It forces one to a complex accumulation of modes of thinking and to double speech. This is how Wolpe expressed this problem, in a letter to the director of Summer courses in Darmstadt (1959) : "Oh, sometimes I can't bear to live in a condition in which speech is stolen from me, in the constant reduplication of language and of the physical center of language"<sup>11</sup>. As shown above, this dual thinking process, unable to ever come to rest, is a constituent of Wolpe's theoretical work (cf. *Thinking Twice*).

Exile also makes it impossible to return and bring the two sides together. The break that has occurred cannot be undone. During the 1950s, Wolpe considered moving back to Germany, but he did not find work there. The upheavals of history and the suspicion he was bound to feel toward the strange

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Anne C. Shreffler, op. cit., p.287, letter by Stefan Wolpe quoted in Austin Clarkson, preface to the score of *Seven Pieces for Three Pianos*, New York : Southern Music, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> "Thinking Twice", p. 298

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Ben Boretz, "Reflecons on Cardew and Wolpe : Vignettes of Old Masters I", p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> Anne C. Shreffler, "Wolpe and Black Mountain College", p. 279.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 296, quote taken from Martin Zenck : "... In einer dauernden Doppelheit der Zunge : Zum Exilwerk des Komponisten Stefan Wolpe", in Vogt, Liesmann-Gümmer, and Peters, eds., *Stefan Wolpe*, pp. 21-36, "Ach, ich halte es manchmal einfach nicht länger aus, sprachtherapeut zu leben, in einer Doppelheit der Zunge und des physischen Sitzes der Sprache."

and foreign beings that were inhabiting his native country made it unthinkable for him to live there again : " Here (among the suspected strangers) history is felt concretely and inside the flesh", he wrote to poet Charles Olson<sup>12</sup>. Unlike Hanns Eisler, Wolpe had already disavowed everything that he had lived for in the Weimar Republic. For him, exile in the United States was associated with a reexamination of his convictions and attitudes as a composer, in relation with the particular art environment of New York at the time. Wolpe had gradually become, at least in part, an American. Conversely, the spirit of Weimar no longer existed in Germany. Pascal Huynh noted in his work on music in the Weimar Republic that the rich cultural heritage of that period could never be reborn in post-war Germany :

"It remained all the more buried in memory because it had been repeatedly destroyed: annihilated by the trials of exile, physical extermination (Erwin Schulhoff, Viktor Ullmann...) or even collaboration, it was not in a condition to reemerge in 1945".<sup>13</sup>

At the time, the new emerging generation in Europe was more concerned with "killing" Schönberg and "inheriting from" Webern, who had no say in the matter.

In the article mentioned above, Ben Boretz remarked on how difficult it is to comprehend this aggressive character. For Boretz, any music is aggressive when it reaches us through public dissemination. Aggression can take up different forms : coercive (Beethoven), neutral (Stravinsky) or manipulative (Mozart and Wagner). In the twentieth century in particular, manipulative aggression has not necessarily been based on seduction, but has sometimes been hostile to listeners : it involves a necessary manipulation of the democratic world that makes "the *underdogs* survive only thanks to the *overdogs*". Thus, still according to Boretz, Stefan Wolpe's music is characterized by its "lack of charm" and its "opacity thrown in the face" of its audience. It gives rise to an internal conflict between composer and listeners. If we take up that struggle and choose to keep on listening, we find ourselves in front of something awesome that cannot be fathomed through obvious means of perception. Boretz goes as far as comparing Wolpe's music to the *punk* movement:

"The unbending ruggedness of this music is astounding : at maximum power, it becomes an experience of awesome otherness, accessing an internal landscape spiked, barbed, rejective, snarling with ferocious compositionality – for it [the music] is, above all, ferociously compositional – what punk might be were it authentically, complexly, deeply, metaphysically – humorlessly (...) angry."<sup>14</sup>

For Boretz, this "formidable otherness", with its fierceness, tends to reject the world of which it obviously is a part. Thus Wolpe's music is in no way *outsider* music, contrary to Adorno's claim, or the music of a stranger from another planet, instead it questions us in our own terms : "(...) for what it uncannily finds a way to compose is a species of terrifying interior experience which belongs to everyone, though it's doubtful that everyone wants to explore it"<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.293.

<sup>13</sup> Pascal Huynh, *La musique sous la République de Weimar*, Paris: Fayard, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Boretz, "Reflections on Cardew and Wolpe : Vignettes of Old Masters I", op. cit. , p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.207.

What were the outer limits of Stefan Wolpe's explorations ? To what extent did he locate himself at the margin of the music world ? How did he question us from within?

## II

Stefan Wolpe's position as an artist was a varied and complex one. At different times, he joined, participated in and was directly involved with the major movements of the twentieth century (Dada, Socialist Realism, Serialism, ...). At the same time, he did all he could to remain in the margins of those cliques, never completely endorsing their proclaimed canons. His involvement already contained or foreshadowed its own disavowal. He wavered between the attitude of a functional musician at the service of a community (social activist, performer, teacher) and the more personal one of a serious composer, without trying to make a career within either political parties, universities or concert halls, or to attain fame.

In 1920, at age 18, Wolpe was (very briefly) connected with the Dada movement in Berlin, along with Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters and Georg Grosz. His involvement with avant-garde movements during the Weimar Republic was not restricted to Dada alone : at the same time, Wolpe showed interest in the Bauhaus, and attended Klee's teaching ; his music was influenced by Busoni, and his compositions were performed by the *Melos Circle*, a group of far-left-wing expressionist musicians led by Hermann Scherchen<sup>16</sup>. He also became a member of *Novembergruppe*, an association of radical artists. For Wolpe, Dada was a response to post-World War I despair and poverty. Cultural values then seemed of little use to mankind : "... if nothing makes sense but murdering and cutting people to pieces, then art, and poetry, and philosophy doesn't make sense either"<sup>17</sup>.

Wolpe is credited with a sort of *happening*, performed during one of the Dada events, which consisted in the simultaneous playing of eight different pieces (ranging from Beethoven to popular musics) on several phonographs, at varying speeds. At the same time, a young woman recited one of Shakespeare's sonnets while holding a dripping hose<sup>18</sup>. Later, in 1929, he went along with Kurt Schwitters on a tour and composed the music for *An Anna Blume* : a musical (tenor) clown sitting on a bicycle sang and declaimed in a style strongly influenced by Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, though more exaggerated and caricatural. In the middle of the piece, he started blowing into a siren. At certain times the accompanying pianist also declaimed parts of the text<sup>19</sup>. During that tour, in Léna, Schwitters released white mice, wreaking panic in the audience. Although, as Pascal Huynh noted, Wolpe soon moved away from Dada<sup>20</sup>, that experience would remain as an influence on his practice of music

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<sup>16</sup> See Austin Clarkson, "Stefan Wolpe's Berlin Years", in *Music and Civilization, Essays presented to Paul Henry Lang*, Edmond Strainchamps and Matia Rika Maniates, eds., New York & London : Norton & Company, 1984, pp. 371-93.

<sup>17</sup> Stefan Wolpe, "Lecture on Dada", ed. Austin Clarkson, in *Musical Quarterly*, 2/1986, p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> See Austin Clarkson, op. cit., p. 375.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Pascal Huynh, op. cit., p.147 : "After 1923, the Dada movement disintegrated, surviving only through the cabaret medium. (...) The roots of implosion had been developing as early as 1920.

for the rest of his life, in at least three ways: a. the concept of simultaneousness of contradictory events ; b. the confrontation between different artistic media (music, visual arts, poetry) ; c. the concept of unpredictability, the shock created by a single event<sup>21</sup>.

Between 1952 and 1956, Wolpe was the music director of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In that capacity he was closely associated with the young American Avant-garde, in particular musicians John Cage, Lou Harrison and David Tudor, painters Franz Kline and Robert Rauschenberg, choreographer Merce Cunningham, and poets Charles Olson and Robert Duncan. Once again Wolpe found himself confronted with an art movement that, in its most radical expressions, was reminiscent of Dada in the 1920s.

For Wolpe, Black Mountain College was a fairly happy interlude within his long period of exile in America. Even though he found the lack of a clearly-defined professional purpose at the College frustrating, it gave him the opportunity to work and interact on a daily basis with other artists and intellectuals. Those conditions opened the possibility of a consistent relationship between artistic creation and formal teaching. This would later inspire a whole generation of artists who would find shelter in universities.

Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 as a human-scale alternative to large universities. Its purpose was to adjust methods of teaching to the ways students learn, rather than merely imparting knowledge from above as an absolute truth. The arts were requirements in the curriculum, in particular because they gave access to a direct experience of the world through a particular subject. In that context, students were encouraged to actively participate, rather than merely admire or imitate the great works<sup>22</sup>. Very early on, Black Mountain College welcomed those who had escaped Nazi Germany, and they played a central part in its operation. Among the most important participants in the College were Bauhaus designer Josef Albers and Czech musicologist and conductor Heinrich Jalowetz, who had been a close associate of Schönberg's circle<sup>23</sup>. Other visitors included Max Dehn, Walter Gropius, Alfred Einstein, Ernst Krenek, Rudolf Kolisch, Erwin Bodky and Edouard Steuermann.

Around 1949, the center of power at Black Mountain College shifted to a younger generation of American artists and intellectuals revolving around poet Charles Olson. Then the College became more of an artists' commune than an institution of higher education. That shift marked at the same time its golden age, as far as posterity was concerned, and its rapid decline : by 1954, the College only had nine registered students, and it finally closed in 1958 (that

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Stefan Wolpe went back to serious music and dedicated himself to a functionalist practice that was no less iconoclastic, in the den of Bauhaus and *Novembergruppe*. "

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas Phelps, "Stefan Wolpe – Eine Einführung", in Stefan Wolpe, *Lieder mit Klavierbegleitung 1929-1933*, Hambourg : Peer Musikverlag GmbH, New York : Southern Music Publishing, p.7 : "Neben dem dadaistischen 'concept of simultaneousities', das seine eigene Grammophon-Performance durchführt, beeinflusst ein weiteres Moment dadaistischer 'Anti-Kunst' sein musikalisches Schaffen bis in die späten Jahre. Noch die *Enactments for Three Pianos* (1953) sind, so betont Wolpe, von 'one of the early Dada obsession', dem 'concept of unforeseeability' geprägt, deren radikalste Form, die solitäre Schicksituation, Wolpe anlässlich eines Vortragsabends von Kurt Schwitters miterlebt (...)".

<sup>22</sup> See Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> Anne C. Shreffler, "Wolpe and Black Mountain College", p. 281.

might make us wonder whether it is a good idea to put artists in charge of an institution !). On his first stay at Black Mountain, in 1948, John Cage organized an "Amateur Erik Satie Music Festival", a series of 25 thirty-minute concerts dedicated to that composer's music, which could not but offend the German-speaking community. To further make his point and indirectly attack Schönberg, whose classes he had attended in California, Cage then proclaimed, "Beethoven was in error in his definition of harmony as the basic structural element of music composition and his influence, which has been as extensive as it is lamentable, has been deadening to the art of music"<sup>24</sup>. That year, the quarrel ended up in a heated exchange between Viennese cutlets and crêpes Suzette.

Stefan Wolpe, whose music was more in line with Beethoven's tradition than with Satie's<sup>25</sup>, was introduced to Black Mountain College by the crêpes Suzette side. The first contact was made by David Tudor, a former composition student of Wolpe's, and when Lou Harrison received a one-year study grant in Europe, he put Wolpe's name forward to replace him as music director. There was irony in that Olson would have preferred Pierre Boulez, but at the time the latter was certainly not prepared to go and shut himself in an obscure American community<sup>26</sup>. Yet, while Lou Harrison was away, Wolpe and Olson discovered they had a shared conception of art production. By the time Harrison wanted his position back, Wolpe had permanently replaced him, which put his relations with John Cage's circle of friends under serious strain.

According to Martin Duberman, there was a paradox in Olson and Cage's relationship, in that the former, while still attached to the roots of Western culture, favored the development of an "authentically anarchist community"<sup>27</sup>, whereas the latter, in order to destroy traditional forms and create anarchic art, favored the development of a very tight control of compositional processes as well as of human relationships :

Cage's discomfort with the disorder of Olson's life parallels Olson's discomfort with the disorder of Cage's art. It may be (...) that he (Cage) talks anarchy but lives control – whereas Olson was more likely to reverse the pattern.<sup>28</sup>

Wolpe's own position was between Cage's and Olson's. Duberman sees commonality between Wolpe and Cage in the former's attitude : a life-long obsession with the elimination of polar opposites. For Wolpe, the Dada interlude is to be understood in that context and as a consequence was nothing but a passing phase. Yet Wolpe remained "conventional" : a Black Mountain student described him as "(...) representative of 'the ultimate far-outness of the classical tradition, i.e. 'man is an eagle'"<sup>29</sup>. This is why Wolpe could not accept

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*.

<sup>25</sup> Austin Clarkson believes that certain of Wolpe's tonal pieces (of 1920) are influenced by Erik Satie (op. cit., p. 376). And in his conclusion he again notes the affinities with Satie, in his approach to popular musics, specifying that it is not possible to continue without mentioning this influence.

<sup>26</sup> See Anne C. Shreffler, op. cit., p. 282.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain, an Exploration in Community*, New York : E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972, p.347.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.347-348.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.348.

randomness as compositional method and abdicate his free will in decision-making.

Let us pursue these paradoxes further and ask who, in 1950s America, should be regarded as the ultimate eagle ? Cage's position as clockmaker of indeterminacy locked him out of any possibility of a mediation : for him, processes are to be accepted or rejected as such, otherwise one would inevitably fall into the fuzzy space of subjective interaction. True artists cannot be teachers, they give the world their thought, and humans will just have to manage with it. At Black Mountain College, Cage gave a course which consisted in performing his own electronic piece, *Williams Mix*. Not one student registered<sup>30</sup>.

In 1925 Stefan Wolpe joined the Communist Party, and he remained an active member until at least 1933. As such, he actively participated as an artist in projects of mediation: agitprop collectives, stage music, workers' choirs, film music, night classes ... In his practice he had to face the Party's demands regarding art, and to take popular music into consideration, in particular the commercial jazz of the time. In these activities, in which musical content had to remain subordinate to social and political aims, Wolpe continued to exercise his art in a spirit of independence and individual originality. In that sense, he was not entirely committed to the collective and the Party ; one could have said his attitude was marred with "bourgeois" tendencies. What matters to us is the immediate consistency between his activities as composer and as practitioner of concrete actions. It was in that contexte that Wolpe had to compose day to day, collaborate with directors, actors and script-writers within the framework of artists' collectives, play the piano, conduct numerous rehearsals, and confront audiences, while measuring the political impact of his activities. He had a full-time commitment to a community, and he dedicated everything he knew how to do to a social and communicative aim that was placed outside of the content of the structuring of sound material as such. Let us remark in passing that Cage's purpose was very similar to that program, except for one essential reversal : the lack of any particular aim, guaranteed by a recourse to methods based on randomness.

In 1933, Wolpe spent a few months in Moscow with *Die Truppe 31* theater company. That was where he made the crucial choice for the rest of his life : instead of staying in Moscow, he decided to go and study composition in Vienna with Webern. However, he continued his activity as a mediator after 1933 in kibbutzim in Palestine, and kept sending Moscow revolutionary songs, which were rejected for being too dissonant. He broke for good with the Communist Party in 1938 when he decided to move to the United States. That decision implied a final choice to return to the artistic avant-garde and to the profession of composer. From being an agitator, he turned into a professor. From the time he settled in America – at the midpoint of his life– he was never again involved in politics, either in his writings or his musical work. Yet there is no evidence he ever explicitly disavowed his political past.

The reason Wolpe liked the Black Mountain interlude so much was probably that he found something of Berlin's atmosphere there. There, as in Berlin, the aim was to serve the community and find a consistent approach that would bring together the act of artistic creation and the processes of mediation

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

that make its emergence possible. As in Berlin, that involved daily collaboration with artists from other fields (visual arts, theater, poetry). Whereas Cage only came to Black Mountain during the summer, with the single purpose of pursuing and presenting his own projects, Wolpe remained there all year long, took charge of the whole of the music curriculum, wrote music for the College's collective projects (theater), and conducted the rehearsals. As a professor of composition, Wolpe was known at the time for his difficult and demanding personality, yet he allowed his students total aesthetic freedom and imposed no system upon them, which was at the time an unusual attitude. This is why he was the teacher of all those who rejected institutions, in particular jazz musicians, and of those who would later make up, along with Cage, the New York avant-garde (Tudor, Feldman). It should also be remembered that it was Wolpe who, in 1956, first introduced, at the Summer classes at Darmstadt, the music of John Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, Netty Simons and Earle Brown (as well as Elliot Carter, Gunther Schuller, Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt)<sup>31</sup>.

Another interesting feature shared by Wolpe and Cage was their concern for the formalization of the discourse on music and the presentation of that discourse in public lectures. For both of them, and at about the same time, reading a text in public was in itself an artistic act that had to be approached following the same development principles as those of the musical work or of any other work of art. What was at stake was not a poeticizing of the text aiming at literary elegance, but rather finding a structural matching between the object of the discourse and the discourse as such. For Wolpe, the formalization of discourse aimed at aesthetic and theoretical consistency with his compositions. John Cage went further, precisely applying the same compositional methods to his texts as to his works. Wolpe composed examples of music meant to exactly fit the exposition of the principles that was contained in his statement, and the examples when strung together closely resembled a highly elaborate music piece. Cage, on the other hand, did not mean anything in particular, or rather his meaningful discourse was hidden in the middle of a jumble of disparate elements. Wolpe was an actor fully engaged in his presentation and he resorted to voice effects in order to be convincing<sup>32</sup>. Cage remained detached, because for him a composer should not be in a position to express a will aiming at a precise end.

What is most striking for a reader of Wolpe's dramatized presentations is the consistency they display between the theoretical contents and their implementation in the musical works, even though his compositions never follow the strict canon of a compositional method. What he says can be heard in action in the work itself, which is a rare occurrence in contemporary production, in which theory is no more than an instrument meant to reach a result, but is not the result itself. I recently had the opportunity to attend a lecture given by composer Aurèle Stroë, which gave me the exact same impression of a perfect

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<sup>31</sup> See Stefan Wolpe "On New (and Not-so-new) Music in America" in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 17, 1979, pp. 1-34.

<sup>32</sup> See Matthew Greenbaum's introduction to his translation of Stefan Wolpe, "On Proportions", op. cit., pp. 132-133 : "On Proportion' is not only a lecture : it is also a kind of theater piece, to be enacted by Stefan Wolpe (along with two pianists to play its forty musical examples). (...) However valuable as a document, the written text can never replace Wolpe's actual voice : lyric, stern, seductive, ferocious, joking, intimate, ironic (...)."



match between the intentions contained in the discourse and the examples of music that were presented.

This sheds light on the repetitive (and quasi-pathological ?) processes that characterized the different stages of Wolpe's life : constantly entering and leaving. Whether it involved Dada, communism, dodecaphonism or the Palestine and Black Mountain interludes, the same behavior reoccurred. Wolpe totally and vehemently subscribed to an idea or movement, while at the same time always positioning himself, within that idea or movement, at the outer edge of skeptical questioning and very personal application of the rules. Then he left it with the same vehemence and found himself alone, confronting the world with his strange singularity. He alternated between inside-outside and outside-inside positions.

During the Summer of 1952, at Black Mountain, John Cage presented a multimedia performance along with Rauschenberg, David Tudor, Merce Cunningham, Charles Olson and many others. Among the many juxtaposed actions, records by Edith Piaf were played at twice the normal speed. That performance would later be called the first "happening". What was left of the emigrants' colony did not approve ; Johanna Jalowetz claimed it was a throw-back to "*The dark ages*". As for Wolpe, the very same man who had staged the superimposed phonographs, he stood up, loudly expressed his disapproval, and left the room<sup>33</sup>.

November 2002

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Duberman, op. cit.

# CONSIDERING FELDMAN

Erik Ulman

Morton Feldman's music defies quick encapsulation. Transparent and easily identifiable, it is nonetheless among the most subtle and complex achievements of modern music, encouraging many paths of interpretation and experience. Five possibilities are outlined below.

## I

Feldman is perhaps the most traditional of American experimentalists—that is, expressly concerned with the legacy of Western music, sometimes struggling against it, sometimes mourning its passing. He spoke of his music as having something to do “with Schubert leaving me,” and that he was interested only in “perfected instruments” like the piano and the violin, as opposed to electronic or unusual means. He referred lovingly to Stravinsky as master of instrumental image, to Webern, to Varèse, and can be regarded as their heir. The delicacy of Webern's music, as well as its ostinati and intervallic predilections, find echoes in Feldman; and Varèse's work, so different from Feldman's, gave Feldman clues about reiteration of material and about the nature of sound. Varèse once told Feldman to think about how long it takes for sound to speak from stage to auditorium:<sup>1</sup> from such attention Feldman drew a conclusion the opposite of Varèse's, making a music designed, as someone remarked, to be overheard, rather than one to be aggressively projected. One should also consider Feldman's relation to Stefan Wolpe, John Cage, and Christian Wolff, to each of whom Feldman wrote one piece in tribute: Wolpe his teacher, Cage who “gave him permission to follow his instincts,” Wolff, like Cage, his companion in exploration. It is as though a music as lonely and personal as Feldman's cherishes its encounters, and makes to friends and forebears precise and serious gifts.

Not only was Feldman acutely conscious of musical history (although loath to call attention to it, except as it might manifest in care and thoughtfulness and beauty); but he also drew sustenance from painting and literature, engaging them in prolonged and attentive dialogue throughout his life. One thinks immediately of his troubled friendship with Philip Guston and his admiration for Guston's example of creation as risk and engagement, as attentiveness to the nature of material, its “distillation of hundreds of years of seeing, touching, observing, watching, waiting, deciding”<sup>2</sup> and then of Rothko and Pollock, De Kooning and Kline; and, outside of Feldman's acquaintance, Mondrian. Many of these were also dedicatees of works, or else subjects of essays, sharing with Feldman a search for “Abstract Experience,” in which existential responsibility and an ideal purity meet in “a unity that leaves one perpetually speculating.”<sup>3</sup> If this project was lofty, it still favored modesty over the “grand statement,” as in the chatty surfaces of Frank O'Hara's poetry, which, although “so colloquial, so conversational, nevertheless seem to be reaching us from some other,

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<sup>1</sup> Morton Feldman, *Essays* (Kerpen: Beginner Press, 1985), 156.

<sup>2</sup> Feldman, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Feldman, 104.

## Considering Feldman

infinitely distant place.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps no literature, however, marked Feldman’s practice more than the “distant places” of Samuel Beckett, with whose despairing elegance and registration of nuance through reiteration his art holds such affinities; although other, equally fastidious names recur in Feldman’s writings, among them Kierkegaard and Valéry, not to mention the citations from Jewish lore, from Nietzsche, Stendhal, Mann—the great European tradition. And, as an especially important influence on the late work, one must also mention the rugs of Central Asia: their scale, their subtle variations of color (abrash), their “crippled symmetries,” which recur as metaphor and inspiration throughout Feldman’s late music. For all its quietude and withdrawal, for all the loneliness that Feldman considered essential in the creative act,<sup>5</sup> his work asserts continuity with artistic and philosophical tradition and community, perhaps considering itself their final instance.

## II

Feldman’s work is remarkably consistent—Structures for String Quartet (1951) sounds no less like Feldman than For Samuel Beckett (1987)—and yet changes dramatically. The small scale of his early music transforms into the gargantuan late works; chance—the experiments in indeterminate notation which first won notoriety for Feldman but which now seem almost beside the point—is abandoned. The last instances of unplanned coincidence in Feldman’s music—Why Patterns? (1978) and Crippled Symmetry (1981)—reach back to earlier examples (Piece for Four Pianos [1957], the Durations series) yet belong, in their intricacy of gesture and expansion of scale, to another world. Almost always, however, there is the preference for quietness, stasis, nuance.

Both this consistency and this radical transformation of means are facets of Feldman’s love for, and deepening understanding of, sound. For him and his friends, “sound was the hero,” Feldman asserted; no less famously, he claimed to Stockhausen that he “didn’t push the sounds around.” Composition, then, was as much listening and attention as it was “making.”

But what is the nature of sound? To disappear, especially if your favored sound is that of the piano. Thus, sound is what becomes silence, and to follow sound’s nature, then, is to write a music always on the verge of vanishing, a music of shadows. “Decay, however, this departing landscape, this expresses where the sound exists in our hearing—leaving us rather than coming toward us.”<sup>6</sup> Sometimes this departure is dramatized in the slow disappearance of *fff* chords, as at the beginning of Intermission V (1953) and as disrupts the even surface of Piano (1978); sometimes Feldman finds a structural analogy for the behavior of the sound itself, as in the Durations and Crippled Symmetry, in which the instrumentalists drift apart inexorably from a common beginning. Almost always, however, Feldman is preoccupied with the disappearance of sound, even if his obsessive near-ostinati resist it persistently, vainly.

In following this path, Feldman left behind Cage’s ideology of “sound in itself” without rejecting it. Rather, Feldman’s attention to the nature of the event in itself inevitably elicited metaphor from phenomenon, sound in itself becoming an image of loss, of Schubert leaving him, of the approach of death. Not for nothing are a number of Feldman’s most distinctive

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<sup>4</sup> Feldman, 111.

<sup>5</sup> See the interview with Walter Zimmermann in Feldman, 244: “All I could wish [young artists] in life is to be lonely.”

<sup>6</sup> Feldman, 89.

pieces tombeaux (Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety [1970], Rothko Chapel [1971], For Frank O'Hara [1973], Three Voices [1982], For Philip Guston [1984]). Much of the richness of Feldman's music lies in its simultaneous specificity of instance and its resonant implications.

### III

The emergence of metaphor in an anti-metaphorical aesthetic, of personal reference amidst the "abstract sonic situation," can be best seen in the works of Feldman's middle period. The deviation of these "exceptional works," overt in ways he would never try again, from his usual practice may suggest lines of force traversing his other music. The sudden appearance of expressive melody in Rothko Chapel and The Viola in My Life (1970-71) alludes to a personal realm Feldman's music rarely made explicit—among other things, to the "eroticism" which Cage had in the early Fifties found in Feldman's delicacy, and to Feldman's Jewishness. The soprano melodies of Rothko Chapel, written, we are told, on the day of Stravinsky's funeral, look forward to the Guston-O'Hara memorial Three Voices and backward to Rabbi Akiba (1963). The title of this piece is suggestive. In Arthur Hertzberg's Judaism, we may read this anecdote from the Hagigah:

There were four who entered the Pardes [i.e., the hidden wisdom of the Torah].... Ben Azai, Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Abuyah, and Rabbi Akiva [sic]. Ben Azai looked in the direction of the Shekinah [the indwelling presence of God] and died.... Ben Zoma looked and went mad.... Elisha ben Abuyah became irreligious. Rabbi Akiva came out unharmed.<sup>7</sup>

I do not know if Feldman was thinking of this story (which recalls Hagar's question, "Have I indeed seen God and still live after that vision?" [Genesis 16:13]); but one wonders if the wordless melodies in this and other pieces are images, or instances, of such encounters with the divine, rare because "God exists but is turned away from us."

Transcendence, if that is what such moments represent, coexists with the past, with disappearance. When in Rothko Chapel Feldman quotes a "Hebraic melody" he had written as a teenager, he predicts his subsequent work—not in sound, since the later music will almost totally avoid external allusion, but in meaning, since it will disorientate and engage memory over huge spans of time as "the piece dies of old age," building loss and remembrance into the musical substance.

### IV

In any case, whatever the value of such speculations, all of Feldman's music is impregnated with ambiguity. One of Feldman's last graph scores, the percussion solo The King of Denmark (1964), is a particularly rich example. The openness of the graph notation is often qualified by precise indications, making what is specified and what is not a continually shifting and, for a listener, undecidable ground; grace notes "before the beat" yet sustained into it pose vexing questions of how to articulate rhythm; everything is to be played on the edge of inaudibility, confusing piece and "room noise" (to quote Nils Vigeland on Feldman's orchestration); the title leaves open "which King?," and, if the allusion is to that King who defied the Nazis by

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, Judaism (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), 40.

## Considering Feldman

wearing the yellow star and inspiring non-Jewish subjects to do the same, then what is the relation between such quiet heroism and the quietude of the piece?

Feldman's precise notation sought out ambiguity no less than his graph work. In the essay "Crippled Symmetry" he writes how the patterns that interest me are both concrete and ephemeral, making notation difficult. If notated exactly, they are too stiff; if given the slightest notational leeway, they are too loose. Though these patterns exist in rhythmic shapes articulated by instrumental sounds, they are also in part notational images that do not make a direct impact on the ear as we listen. A tumbling of sorts happens in midair between their translation from the page and their execution.<sup>8</sup>

In *For Frank O'Hara* the flute juxtaposes one 3/4 bar with two dotted quarters in it with another containing two half notes under a 4:3 ratio. What difference of "weight" do these bars manifest, and how project it as a performer?

Throughout Feldman's work one finds "in-betweenness," areas of "neither/nor." The *ostinati* of Feldman's early music give way over his career to fabrics of subtly changing reiterations, always the same, always different; oscillations energize static soundscapes without budging them into narrative. There is no more potent manifestation of these characteristic images than Feldman's opera *Neither* (1977), in my view one of the greatest works of the century. Beckett's text, describing a shadow realm held at the verge of death, where a door once turned from gently opens and once turned to gently closes, the ultimate space "between categories," elicited Feldman's most profound and disturbing music, a sonic correlative of indelible power and suggestion.

## V

For me Feldman is a model of integrity and concentration. His compositional style was too personal and circumscribed to bear transplantation: those most directly marked by his influence seem to me to dilute his legacy more than they extend it fruitfully. Where that distinction lies is arguable. What does not seem arguable to me is that Feldman's insistence on the existential responsibility of the creative act, his keen attention to and respect for the material at hand, his precision of nuance and his vast scope, his intense engagement with tradition and with other arts—not to mention the profundity and sheer beauty of his music—are invaluable, especially as an antidote to and a beacon beyond the careerism, sterility, lack of conviction, and triviality that characterize altogether too much of our current condition.

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<sup>8</sup> Feldman, 132.

# Hausmusik

William Anderson

This essay was originally intended to be included with the notes for my recording, *Hausmusik*. That recording is now on the market on the Furious Artisans label ([www.furiousartisans.com](http://www.furiousartisans.com)). The recording includes examples of 20th century *Hausmusik* by Krenek and Hindemith, and other music, including very recent American works, that can be related to the *Hausmusik* impulse. The recording and this essay ponder questions such as, "can music become ruthlessly devoted to its own aims?". The Furious Artisans producers Jeremy Tressler and Marc Wolf wisely advised me to cut all but a few paragraphs of this essay for use in the CD booklet. I am now grateful to Open Space for giving me this opportunity to present the complete essay in a revised form that is, hopefully, more coherent than my original attempt.

I am a musician not a writer or a musicologist, so I submit this to the scrutiny of my peers, hoping to learn from others who know more about these matters. While I am sure these subjects have been discussed by people more qualified than I, I write about *Hausmusik* from the perspective of a musician. My instrument is the guitar—a real *Hausmusik* instrument. As a player, I am a consumer of music; and as a consumer I hope my opinions may matter. The crux of this issue is whether the player crosses over the line and becomes a specialist, whose opinions so often prove to be irrelevant outside of the little ghetto of specialists.

My juxtaposition of recent music with earlier *Hausmusik* works is consistent with an overall desire I have for music to be a knowing dialogue with the past. I have been harboring the feeling that we know ourselves better when we know how we've arrived at where we are. This is not an unusual attitude; however, Americans are best known for a kind of remaking that disowns its origins, or a process of remaking through our unique geography and landscape and our transatlantic and transcontinental crossings—transatlantic and transcontinental forgettings. The products of this forgetful attitude are found refreshing to Europeans who feel oppressed by history, and at the same time it allows people like me to become interested in history with absolutely no feeling of oppression whatsoever. Americans with an interest in history are free to engage in creative takings and retakings history, which, hopefully are strong and recalcitrant.

## **"Here or nowhere is America, Jarno."**

—From Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship

Below I cite Hermann Broch, Robert Musil and Jean Gebser whose work is little known to the great majority of Anglophones, and I would like to know to what extent their arguments have been considered in discussions of the problems of contemporary music.

## Hausmusik

In the spirit of the original notes for the *Hausmusik* recording, I try my best to preserve here a tone that is aimed at the lay listener.

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In the late 18th century, at the end of the Enlightenment, music devoted specifically for middle class amateur musicians to play at home began to be composed, published and consumed. This music would come to be known as *Hausmusik*, and it would come to be distinct from the concert music that the middle class began paying to hear in the concert halls. In the Baroque period, there was *Tafelmusik*, (table-music), music to be played during meals; but *Tafelmusik* was a more aristocratic phenomenon from the era that preceded the great rise of the middle class. (Hear Jonathan Dawe's *Under the Tafelmusik*, on the Furious Artisans disc.) The guitar is a *Hausmusik* instrument. While guitarists like Segovia, Bream and Starobin struggled to make the guitar into a "serious" concert instrument, the guitar's origins in folk music, salon music and *Hausmusik* are an indelible aspect of the Western musical tradition. Composers have used, and will continue to use the guitar as a foil, to highlight just how far from home music has come. For instance, the guitar and mandolin in Schoenberg's *Serenade* are folk emblems, ironically setting a domestic tone to music whose import was out of scale with that domestic image. I read the same irony in Mahler's use of guitars and mandolins in his orchestral works. (I will save for another discussion the *Lied Ohne Worte* from Schoenberg's *Serenade*, where the timbre of the guitar is used so beautifully that it overcomes its mere harlequin status.)

The term "*Hausmusik*" began to be used widely in the 20th century when music began to grow in directions that became increasingly inscrutable to the middle class that once supported it. "*Hausmusik*" is used almost synonymously with the less cozy sounding *Gebrauchsmusik* (utility music). The Oxford Dictionary of Music describes *Gebrauchsmusik* as "a type of music of some 20th-c. Pre-Nazi German and Austrian composers (e.g. Hindemith, Krenek, Kurt Weill) who, under the teaching of the revolutionary poet Bertold Brecht, opposed the idea of 'art for art's sake' and maintained the necessity of preserving contact with the masses by finding inspiration in subjects of actuality and using musical idioms in everyday use."

Doesn't this definition obscure the ambivalence of the *Hausmusik* composers? All of the above mentioned composers contributed in interesting ways to the very developments that were estranging music from the middle class! There is a great tension between the desire to explore musical possibilities for their own rewards, and, on the other hand, to acknowledge music's role in the everyday lives of the non-musicians.

And here is another amusing irony: while the British and French were championing the notion of "art for art's sake", the composers of those countries were popular, if not populist, and continue to be bigger sellers than Krenek and

Hindemith, and even Weill. The Germans never jumped on the "art for art's sake" bandwagon, yet they were the ones who succeeded in estranging the public from their music. I find no evidence to suggest that Schoenberg was any more taken by the "art for art's sake" argument than Krenek, Hindemith or Weill; and Schoenberg was astonished by the unpopularity of his music. He knew how good it was, and he found it very difficult to understand the public's inability to grasp what he was doing. The British and French only succeeded in literature. Joyce and Proust succeeded in boring people with their epoch-making works. The German musicians had a greater success. They did not bore people; they repelled them.

Ernst Krenek's *Hausmusik* (the title track of the Furious Artisans CD) was composed in Princeton, NJ in 1959, and is subtitled *Seven Pieces for the Seven Days of the Week for Piano, Violin, Guitar and Recorders*. The piece takes on a double role. It addresses the problem of modern music moving further and further from the ticket purchasing audience, and it also touches upon the issue of the demise of the German/Austrian musical tradition following the second world war. The renowned expatriate composer is replanting the seeds of his culture through these seven musical lessons, and at the same time he is trying to educate his future public. Shortly after Richard Strauss had composed his great elegies for German culture (*Metamorphosen* and the *Four Last Songs*), Krenek responded to the unfortunate new situation with these lessons for others to learn to love and understand the culture that he hoped might survive in some form in the new post-war world. (Has it survived?)

While in the 20<sup>th</sup> century music was moving into fascinating new directions, the middle class clung to the music of the 19th century. Did not 20th Century *Hausmusik* become a self-conscious effort to address this music literacy gap? Composers like Hindemith, Bartok and Krenek wrote music that was intended to initiate amateurs in the secrets of the new music as well as to provide diverting music to be played at home. They knew (or hoped) that others could learn to hear as they hear with the proper introduction to the new language. To those who could not fathom the new music it appeared that music was ruthlessly meeting its own internal demands and thereby losing its usefulness to all but the specialists. Austrian novelist Herman Broch gave us some language to describe this problem of modernity:

"...he is caught in the mechanism of the autonomous value-systems, and can do nothing but submit himself to the particular value that has become his profession, he can do nothing but become a function of that value--a specialist, eaten up by the radical logic of the value into whose jaws he has fallen."<sup>1</sup>

First the disappearance of God, next the disappearance of art. It evaporated as it streamlined into some essence that barely resembled what it was before. In the process its role in the fabric of our lives was displaced. Music without the music.

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<sup>1</sup>p. 448, *Sleepwalkers*



In a certain respect, this is true. However, even if music gets "eaten up" by its own radical logic, while that may or may not result in bad or inaccessible music; music can be taken as evidence of larger trends taking place across artistic and scientific disciplines. Music is, among other things, a vital form of visceral thinking. We can disembowel the musical viscera and interpret them. This involves the kind of creative listening akin to Harold Bloom's notion of creative reading.

In the age of specialists, when all areas scientific and artistic have branched into regions that are not within easy grasp of the public at large, the work of those specialists awaits the exegete who can impart to the non-specialists that which they might choose to embrace. As we see in Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* and the Old Testament, Moses communicates through Aron. Richard Dawkins explains natural selection, Carl Sagan, astro physics, etc. This year, James Levine and the Boston Symphony take on Babbitt and Wuorinen.

Here is one example of a "reading of musical viscera", in other words, a speculation upon the meaning of a development in musical structure that occurred in the 20th century: when music unfolds in groups of 12 -notes all of the traditional diatonic regions are there in that aggregate as well as all other potential combinations. What was, in earlier music, experienced at discrete times as discrete harmonic regions is presented transparently in one quantum together with all future combinations. This would be merely arcane if not for the striking similarity to the usurpation of time that Cézanne and the later cubists achieved when they depicted various views of an object simultaneously; or Frank Lloyd Wright's declaration that "The new standard of space" consists in the "space measurement in time."<sup>2</sup>, the time sense in Emerson, Proust, Joyce, or Einstein.

Jean Gebser, in his fascinating work, *Ever Present Origin*, suggests that a revolution in our attitude toward time took place in the 20th century. This revolution, Gebser contends, was preceded by a revolution in our attitude toward space that occurred in the Renaissance. My argument about 12-tone aggregates as a form of time-usurpation is certainly inspired by Gebser, an application to music of Gebser's take on Cezanne. Gebser quotes Krenek extensively in his attempt to show that in music, as in the other arts and in science, time was undergoing a revolution in the 20th century, but Gebser's musical arguments are sketchy. More work can be done to carry Gebser's arguments forward (or refute them), armed with the greater clarity we now have about the course of 20th century musical developments.

This new treatment of time in various disciplines suggests that something considerable is happening that is not limited merely to one area of specialization. This is a redeeming feature of Gebser's argument. It gives the specialists hope that the recent developments in music are not merely the specialists' Shandian hobby horses, but are evidence of more general and portentous developments in the evolution of consciousness. This time-revolution

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<sup>2</sup> p. 77, Frank Lloyd Wright, *When Democracy Builds*, cited in Jean Gebser's *Ever Present Origin*

William Anderson

strikes me as more post-modern than anything that has come along recently touting itself as such. Here is one reason why one might say, as Milton Babbitt says, "it takes 12 to tango."

As a consumer of new music, I did not need to adopt this angle on 12-tone aggregates to become interested in 12-tone and serial music. Looking back, what drew me to the my favorite 12-tone composers was their mastery of everything other than the 12-tones. A musician can sense depth without understanding exactly how it is achieved, and even while having fatal misunderstandings about why the music unfolds the way it does.

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Time usurpation is inflationary, grandiose. *Hausmusik* is a practical music suitable for the home, where technique is assimilated and become instinctive; and any subtexts are deep in the background, a slow-burn for the long haul. Ideally, it will achieve depth by its sweeping embrace of musical possibilities, charm by placing everything at the proper distance.

**Herbert Muschamp on Vinoly's Tokyo International Forum:**

"----Walking through it, you don't even think 'modernism,' 'functionalism' or 'machines for living.' You think about George Balanchine, or a thoroughbred race horse. Or ancient Greece. You think about physical poise.

"Perhaps this building's disturbing power is that it challenges the True Faith of relativism, pluralism and the mediocrities that those beliefs have sent spinning in the world....<sup>3</sup>

Broch's novel, *Sleepwalkers*, shows how the complications of modernity were destroying Europe. Hindemith and Krenek and Broch escaped to the United States where the problems of modernity are rampant, but are kept in check by consumerism, sports and money making. Their work resonates here in the U.S. to the extent that native strains of similar artistic values have held sway here, or to the extent that these values are (or perhaps were) global values, not merely European values. I can understand the present disdain for music that sounds too European. Americans are rightly admired for their ability to sever themselves from Europe and the past, yet isn't this an issue pertaining merely to music's surface? I can become impatient with American music that sounds too European, and I can also become impatient with music that complacently rejects our native collective musical knowledge, some of which came from Europe through refugees like Hindemith, Krenek, and Stravinsky and Schoenberg.

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<sup>3</sup> New York Times, January 12, 1997

Robert Musil had this to say about surfaces, consumerism, marketplace: "...consider what vast and probably wasted efforts would have been needed to effect such revolutions in the way people lived by the slow, responsible, evolutionary road traveled by philosophers, painters, poets, instead of tailors, fashion and chance; it enables us to judge just how much creative energy is generated by the surface of things, compared with the barren conceit of the brain... He pictured the brain of the age replaced by the mechanism of supply and demand, the painstaking thinker replaced, as the regulating factor, by the businessman, and he could not help enjoying the moving vision of a vast production of experiences freely mingling and parting, a sort of pudding with a nervous life of its own, quivering all over with sensations..."<sup>4</sup>

Musil presciently described what we now have in the U.S.

The generations before the baby boomers understood the excitement of the enlightenment as well as its over-investment in reason. They appreciated the importance of putting the brain in its place, and attempted an extraordinary melding of brain and heart. For the baby boomers and the succeeding generations, the function of the brain has been, perhaps, altogether usurped by the more efficient power of the market place. There is absolutely nothing repugnant about this except for those who still like to think. A growing understanding of the limitations and inefficiency of the brain should not tempt us to give up the pleasures of thinking. And let the thinking composers be ever mindful of "how much creative energy is generated by the surface of things".



The *Hausmusic* recording is a Krasner sandwich. The American violinist Louis Krasner, who premiered the Schoenberg and Berg violin concertos, is the eponymous Krasner. In his string quartet programs he sandwiched Schoenberg between Beethoven and Mozart. I use some charming works of *Hochhausmusik* as a springboard into more recent and, in my mind, "cutting edge" music. But really, it's all passé. This is music from a dead medium—acoustic concert music. Acoustic music is a dead medium. The concert hall is a dead medium. To my credit, I have transferred my acoustic music into the electronic, even the digital realm, thanks to Furious Artisans. It is another funny fact that acoustic music continued to evolve in ways that some specialists find compelling and provocative even long after the new electronic media eclipsed acoustic music altogether—media-orphaned growth and development.

William Irwin Thomson talks of mythology as the memory of a prior reality. The outmoded media exist, from the vantage point of the cultural mainstream, (hosted by the dominant electronic media), only as such myth-like memories. Woody Allen goes to see Jean Pierre Rampal in his film, *Manhattan*. On the TV show, *Mash*, Alan Alda wooed his sophisticated girlfriend with 78 rpm records of

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<sup>4</sup> pp. 443, 444, *The Man Without Qualities*

Beethoven's A minor string quartet. People still go to concert halls. The old media still survive, but seen from within the newer media they have a ghost-like, mythical quality. Do those who live in the old media become "hunger artists", as in the Kafka story? To the extent that we cannot close ourselves off to the dominant media and the culture that it hosts, those who work in outdated media will feel discomfort.

Some recent developments in music are making it less fantastic to envision a world that is not dominated by baby boomer culture. Baby boomers are going to the symphony to hear new music. The music they are hearing there shows the return of ornamentation, and the return of quasi-tonality. Architect Michael Graves with his whimsical ornamentation, likes to show some relationship between the ornament and the functional aspects of the structure, even if it is only a token relationship. This was always the case in music, where ornamentation is a relative term. That which is closer to the surface is relatively more ornamental. How the surface relates to the deeper structure is one concern that unites the music that I selected for the *Hausmusik* recording.. That relationship may be such that the surface is almost identical to the more slowly unfolding, deeper structures (a matter of times scales, as in Babbitt or Perotin); or again, as with Michael Graves, it can be freely associative or whimsical "talking" between structural levels that flourished in the music of Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms and Schoenberg.

In the last 20 years the musical surface has been liberated. We no longer demand of our composers the payment in freedom that it costs to achieve depth. (I don't mean "depth" here as a value judgment, rather "depth" in the sense of accreting layers of structure.) When everything is surface, then, in a sense, the surface is pure ornamentation, and perhaps sometimes completely gratuitous. But such works can be revelatory if interesting deeper structures accrete unconsciously, instinctively or fortuitously.

As for the return of tonality, those who say that tonality has returned use the term too loosely. In the palingenesis that has been occurring, it is the late-Romantic husk of tonality that has come back; nothing like the return of real tonality has occurred. The liberation of dissonance was a value-neutral development that nevertheless resulted in some stunning works; but it was very counterproductive when composers who didn't know what they were doing throttled everyone with their dissonance. The return of quasi-tonality is also value-neutral. With that return comes also the same large-scale organizational issues that occupied Schoenberg. The success of today's quasi-tonality hinges on how well the composers solve those same problems.

### **Musician, heal thyself**

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# Rap, Techno: Pathos and Politics

Yovan Gilles

Editor of *Les périphériques vous parlent*,  
member of the music and theater company, *Génération Chaos*.

Rap now enjoys widespread public recognition, all the more so because it involves considerable sales. In the United States, the hip hop movement has become a counterculture to such an extent that politicians are forced to take it into consideration. Generating a whole universe of discourse, it is an integral part of a new distribution of power relationships within the social field, affecting the way social forces manifest themselves through *artifacts* — through art — as a force of disorder and penetration which conjoins aesthetics and politics.

The hip hop movement is still regarded with some reservations due to its commodification, its appropriation by show-business which is turning it into a form of popular entertainment meant for the in-crowd. This attitude too easily dismisses a phenomenon which, because of its broad audience, and in spite of its embrace of the marketplace, also has some empowering effects — at least in the United States, where money does not have the smell that a widespread prudishness confers upon it in France. Nevertheless, the manufacture of a commercial and consensual rap is distorting a culture which has reached its achievements through its own efforts. Often what is at stake for rappers is escape from a poverty which brings forth from its victims shouts taking on the quality of poetry.

In France, this success is paid for with bitterness and with instances of betrayal which are harshly condemned by French rap's "radical" practitioners: *NTM*, *La Clique*, *Assassin*, *Ministère Amer...* A compilation published last March, titled *11'30" against Racist Laws*, is evidence of the role rap intends to play in political debates. Thus the normalization engendered by rap's changing audience elicits in return the radicalization of a mode of speech which is not prepared to surrender its autonomy without a fight. To assume that the great corrupting forces of fashion and business will some day silence rappers' voices amounts, in my opinion, to expecting concerts for charitable causes to someday end poverty and the effects of the economic warfare taking place in the West.

Animosity against rap is thus political in nature. Rap's dilution into a commercial mass culture which blurs its meaning is indeed problematic, but that problem often only conceals a more serious one. We should be wary of the tendency to equate marginality with authenticity. Such an equation leads to the naive yet hypocritical delusion that alternative trends will inevitably be co-opted by *the establishment*. When that happens the only options will be to submit, or to embrace the

precarious existence of those who attempt to remain pure, posing as wailing critics of all kinds of power. Discourse cannot easily be split between the rhetoric of virtue and moral rigor on one side, and the expression of evil political and economic forces on the other.

The rap movement cannot be separated from the politicizing of violence at a time when a democracy claiming to guarantee the solidity of the social bond nevertheless acts to protect itself from the threat posed by the chant of a tormented urban consciousness. On the other hand, movements such as rap or techno must be interrogated as cultural practices, because any culture is a staging of bodies: culture overexposes bodies by endowing them with signifiers whose "score" we must decipher, even though fashion conceals that score from us, either by design or by default. Moreover, can there be a relationship with sensory experience which does not involve some form of political expression? Couldn't apparently liberating artistic forces conceal unquestioned assumptions which, if brought to light, would illuminate new forms of control and subjection by the marketplace? Music and dance can appropriate our bodies for better or for worse.

### *Literary Animals and Violence*

An artistic phenomenon has been labeled and classified. Various disciplines have claimed to describe it; in fact, they have quite often ended up concealing it. Labels neutralize their objects by foregrounding the genres to which they belong, polarizing particular likes and dislikes, emphasizing taste at the expense of any deeper thought about the ways in which we relate to uncertain and elusive sensory experiences. Rap as a genre is expected to be countercultural. We run the risk of trivializing it by substituting clichés for its own discourse. Rap is far from being homogeneous; it is not offered as a transparent message which makes its intentions clear. Rather, it constitutes a discontinuous discourse, with discontinuous meanings, a scattering of tones and varied forms of shouting. We should talk about raps rather than rap, since the term rap unfairly merges multiple voices, different conflicts and ways of blowing up culture.

There is an incorrect application of tolerance which engenders the worst conformism, reducing all worldviews to the ignorance of their own prejudices. Isn't the term 'counterculture' voiced by those who do not need art in order to be heard? In a world in which the realm of economics claims to rule the whole of human activity, isn't there a predisposition to completely separate the cultural domain from the political? Since the modern evolution of cultural and artistic production has to a certain extent established itself as a marketplace phenomenon, the emergence of a counterculture is not the only aspect of the relationship between culture and politics. However, in the case of rap, meaning is on the side of violence.

I do not wish to sanitize rappers as victims of a repressive and unequal order. Yet, in a world ruled by economic violence, which is to say by the principle of competition, doesn't political resistance imply in return an economy of — symbolic or real — violence? Those who condemn the rise of youth violence and advocate civics as an antidote often suppress, rather than illuminate, the real question.

For the many people struggling today to make diverse practices possible within the field of culture, the practice of art is not a pastime, and even less a luxury celebrated by aesthetes, glorifying selflessness, filling spare time and providing entertainment. When the practice of art becomes a necessity, a search for a different life, a way to exist and resist (for those who do not revise their beliefs according to every whim of their public or private backers,) it is a form of political expression. However, the phrase *art engagé*\* suggests that true art is apolitical, uncommitted — “*dégagé*”. One might then say that there are *committed* and *uncommitted* artists. Some people claim that committed performance forces art to say what it cannot say through trickery, through a subversion effected by external discourse. This idea reinforces the position of those who, in a posture having much to do with cultural marketing, recognize or designate each other as artists. That exalted label is now applied indiscriminately to those who fiercely claim independence from the pettiness of the real world, to lovers of art for art’s sake who celebrate the importance of culture, and to stars of show business who believe that humanitarian ideals alone can redeem the arrogance of wealth. Yet avoidance of politics is a political act, and the apolitical stance generally assumed to accompany artistic activity rests on a misunderstanding that separates aesthetic facts from the political gestures which inhere in them. All of culture, all of art is committed; the question is to what and towards what they commit themselves, and commit us.

In November 1996, the rap group NTM was sentenced to a six-month prison term — a sentence that was later commuted to a fine — for “verbal assault on public authority.” That sentence generated intense public debate. Many denounced it as an infringement of freedom of speech. However, the questionable arguments put forth to satisfy French mothers and those who believe that the values of the Republic are holy, or who feel threatened by the unpredictable reactions emerging from turbulent working-class suburbs, were not debated in-depth. The *Front National*\*\* was exultant, publicly designating its true enemies without realizing it, through its violent denunciations of rappers.

But what made the NTM case significant was that it brought to the fore a hypothesis with broad appeal across the political spectrum: isn’t rap an incitement to violence, and shouldn’t its excessive statements be subject to punishment? Doesn’t symbolic violence have such real effects that it should be brought under the legal system? Answering yes would imply that aggressive alliterations are the first step towards the urban guerilla; that distortions of language engender a breach between urban centers and outlying neighborhoods; that the hatred of cops and order is the motive behind this singing, associating wordplay with death-play, refiguring the syntax of a too-restrictive French language as a multicultural hybrid offensive to the French Academy. Rappers would thus be trashing an official culture whose legitimacy is increasingly coming under attack.

Shortly after the NTM case, the philosopher Luc Ferry stated in the newsmagazine *Le Point* that “Rap is not culture.” This kind of symbolic violence is much more harmful than the spectacular violence which appears as blood and bullets in TV newscasts. What are the prejudices implied by this type of statement? If rap is not culture — even less art — then other disciplines of knowledge must be called upon to categorize its dubious nature. As a “non-culture” rap can be of no interest to citizens,



philosophers (except as analysts of social ailments), statesmen, or the public, but only to psycho-sociologists, social workers, educators of at-risk youth. According to Ferry, rap is not a language but a set of symptoms displayed by a young subset of society rebelling through a futile and aimless gesture. It should therefore be considered, interpreted, and treated as a symptom. Hence the political discourse resorts to clinical discourse: its self-assigned aim is to diagnose such clichés as “suburban malaise” and “the tragedy of unemployment and poverty”, assumed to be the origins of this form of youth protest too hastily represented as mere vociferation. It only remains for those politicians and CEOs who are aware of social problems — as well as being self-satisfied and endowed with the auras of benefactors — to take steps to extinguish the clamor of rap’s immature statements! To what view of social issues would we be led by this contempt and *passionate ignorance* — to use Lacan’s words — so ingrained in some philosophers?

Isn’t the first target of rap’s symbolic violence the current discourse which aspires to harmonize the social climate? Here is what Rocca has to say:

*Welcome to the streets, to the apocalypse where too many young people freak out, principles collapse, beepers keep being heard, dirty tricks are set up, police rounds increase [...] Housing projects catch on fire, Paris burns. Welcome to the coming social chaos of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, where the war between the castes will divide cities from suburbs like water from oil [...] From social exclusion in the schools to the first sham career choices, from dead-end jobs to the advice of slave traders that aim to fill the nation’s needs in labor...*

Isn’t society’s treatment of urban violence a means of disqualifying and muffling the voices of those who refuse to allow the socially excluded to play the part of victims of a system in which identity is defined by one’s social condition (excluded, unemployed, rich or poor), subjected to work, to the constraints of wage-earning, to consumer needs; in which desire is restricted to the system of production? Isn’t insertion the keyword in today’s process of de-politicization, especially regarding the young? Under the guise of mitigating harmful economic effects, doesn’t it amount to a project of social control? The young have become objects of insertion. Inscription of bodies into the job market, the abstract place where bodies and souls are swallowed, where men, women and teenagers are reduced to the status of human resources. Insertion amounts to reentering bodies, through humiliating compromises, into the realm of production which has rejected them; performing any job, no matter what, rather than no job at all; filling jobs which are neither trades nor professions, which involve no skill other than the sufferance of those who do not have the option to refuse them; becoming a useful commodity, someone who must legitimize his existence by being useful to society, who must be “occupied” at any cost, who cannot contribute anything to society other than a supporting role which consists in filling auxiliary needs in order to create an illusion of employment.

Against reason, the devils of the underclass\*\*\*\* aim to bring unnatural revolutionary change to the existing order, with voices that carry criminal undertones, with raving voices and pulsating bodies, with words that reel about in the flow\*\*\*\* of a rap at the far edge of civility. Malaise of the suburbs? Rage would be more accurate.

Violence? Barbarity would seem a more accurate word, touching the essence of the poetic act in which culture is bled dry.

*My sound is a haven, my voice social consciousness, my words are bullets  
resounding through the capital city,*

Rocca sings, while Sébastien Bondieu of *Génération Chaos* says,

*The more words come out like bullets, the fewer bullets will be shot tomorrow.*

Isn't it clear that rap is a social phenomenon? It was born in the streets, in the inner cities of American megalopolises, and it addresses others. At first it was not a cultural form confined to concert halls, but a public activity. Rap as a politics of rhythm takes place in a faceless urban landscape fragmented into survival zones. It articulates the tension between center and periphery; it transforms into a place of speech what was a *no man's\*\*\*\** *vox*, a voiceless land, a mound of asphalt deserted by language where "long concrete snakes are left to die in the sun or to rot into oblivion," in Kabal's words. Rap creates symbolic markers, in the most literal sense: to create place out of the placelessness of the suburbs exiled from the city; to transform what had been a cold exterior into a space wherein wandering is not obliterated, but emerges under the surfaces of trivial facts and reveals their depth; wherein words ceaselessly flow tracing its undetermined path, its daily and nightly routines. Rap creates symbols in the ostracized cities where language has been downgraded to the level of traffic codes and signs of good behavior. Rap gives free rein to the distress and blindness of those who wander through those mazes, racked by a monstrous boredom. In the end, doesn't it give violence a political meaning, not by celebrating anti-human tendencies and the rule of the mob, but, on the contrary, by setting ablaze the song of those who struggle to remain human?

In the same way, rap is not vocal overlay, but yearning for a speech mode that will bring revenge for a deprivation of meaning. It challenges other speech power modes which are invariably positioned so as to confiscate it. We should also mention the contribution to rap of the oral cultures of African and North African immigrants. Rap's texts are not fetishes, they are tools: the goal is not to sing texts — texts are traces rather than reference points — but to *tell the process of telling*. This rhythmic mode of speech produces the memory of the present and inventories everyday life. Rhythm suddenly turns social life into something subtle and creative, signs merge with sounds, gestures reflect meanings.

### ***Techno and Brainwashing***

Whereas the place of rap is at the breaking point where the impossibility of the social bond is played out, techno restricts human communication to the status of a mere *trip\*\*\*\**. Until a few years ago, *rave parties\*\*\*\** still took place beyond the reach of police surveillance. Now, techno as a mass phenomenon tends to take over large European cities (this summer, close to a million people took part in a *mega rave\*\*\*\** in Berlin.) As for the message delivered — or, rather, released — by techno, it has a very different nature. Whereas the semantic universe of rap is sprinkled with words expressing

violence, consciousness, friction, cons, knowledge, risks, trials of all kinds experienced outside the reach of the law, techno offers its followers a different universe of discourse that is ashamed of even speaking: "harmony," "fraternity," "non-verbal communication," and other qualities claiming to do away with words, telepathic virtues of a dance conducive to trance and the pacification of painful affects. It refuses to be harassed by an everyday social environment that is too talkative... Between the evangelical voice gliding above the crowds and the cheeky voice growing out of gangs and cliques, there is more than a slight difference, and it does not have to do with musical fads alone.

On the occasion of the great *Tribal 97* techno festival, which had just taken place in London, the British magazine *The Face* published an article titled, "Heaven on Earth." Techno certainly is dance music, but it is important to understand the nature of the silent language it constitutes. While hip hop dancing brings to my mind this question, based on Spinoza's strange words, "What are bodies that dance together capable of?", in my opinion, the spectacle provided by techno reverses the question: what are bodies subjected to during rave parties?

Whereas rap exalts the properties of rhythms, the metamorphoses of voices, techno stages pounding beats. Actually, the shortened term, techno, equates the musical fact with the technology that produces it: techno-music. The human factor seems reduced to the status of appendage to the proper operation of programs and sequencers. Machinelike rhythms, with regular beats, endlessly produce an abstract music into which one is invited to merge. The repetition of the beat is unfailing. Tempos are gradually increased until heart pulses reach the level of trance. Bodies are subjected to what amounts to *rhythmic injunctions*.

Techno thus reveals itself as a modern technique of ecstasy. Ecstasy awaits the fan at the end of a long night during which his energy has been drained. Undoubtedly, any user confused by the performance of machines might mistake his brainwashing for the experience of trance. His dance, his movement, amounts to forgetting himself; technology stimulates this forgetting. An ocean-like feeling runs through those who, through dance, merge with metaphysical confusion and end up experiencing clarity as an aggression. This does not mean that the techno movement has no discourse. Its discourse is its very hatred of discourse, its *misology* that encourages its audience to shun thinking, and more precisely political thinking. Doesn't the high mass celebrating the pacification of consciousness that comes with the exaltation of bodies — provided, through the use of the chemical straitjacket of ecstasy, with a virtual sexuality that is preferred to organic sexuality — tie up with the mass of their subjection?

### ***Cultural Bodies and Obscenity***

If rappers were nothing more than the spokesmen of the suburbs, expressing raw social violence, nobody would worry about them. Yet rap does disrupt the peace of political statements because it is part of a violence that tends to represent all speakers as equals. That violence displaces the dividing line between what is legitimized as knowledge and what is claimed by those in charge of discourse to be non — knowledge.

Rappers claim to appropriate language and poetry because knowledge is inscribed in language. My purpose is not to emphasize the literary concerns shown by rap lyrics and the need to reevaluate their literary quality. Rather, I am thinking of an agonistic use of language, of language as a kind of breaking and entering. Barthes' statement, "signs and weapons are one and the same thing," is echoed by *Ministère Amer's*, "Knowledge is a weapon, I never go out without one."

Knowledge is the locus of primordial conflict, first by the very fact that it cannot be activated, second because of scholarly discourse's claim to be sole arbiter regarding what belongs to the realm of knowledge or to the disorder of non-knowledge. Are we dealing with politics or pathos, poetry or opinion and language as affect?

The equal status of all speakers is won through the power of a shout, and the words that are shouted can only dampen its sound and fury. Rap is an appropriate name for the speech that has been stolen from the dispossessed, the devils of the *underclass\*\*\*\**, the outcasts of a prosperity that only benefits those who already are prosperous and that makes the condition of the poor even more precarious.

Brecht defined philosophy as *agon*, as struggle: "Philosophy is the art of giving and receiving blows as part of a struggle." The *agon* is not merely the stage upon which conflict takes place, the manly affirmation of the struggle as a stimulant to knowledge; it is the locus where thought — which had rejected pathos — reappropriates it as desire and embraces the abrasiveness of the real world. Aggression is not motivated by hatred of others; on the contrary, others are partners in a game that is a struggle. Its purpose is not to crush one's opponents but to dazzle them. The playful quality of the struggle is the impulse behind a yearning for knowledge which overwhelms the rules according to which statements are generated<sup>1</sup>. No struggle can be conducted without some form of pleasure. Rap is speech that takes pleasure out of itself, whose excess and flow are permeated through and through with the enormity of what is repressed and can never be expressed.

Bodies are not just the means to that pleasure, they signify a *pathei mathos*: a knowledge through pain, or a knowledge yet to come, liberating the stifled voices of those who were condemned to non-knowledge. It is up to us to hear rap, in which telling brings pleasure, which makes words surf on a sea of syncopations, bringing out the sounds of a language that, when under the dominion of knowledge, speaks only in a lowered and captive voice. Those voices balanced astride crafty words may scare or be discounted by all those who regard politics as the space where a *smooth discourse* is produced: a non—abrasive discourse, as smooth as the bodies exhibited on TV or the skin displayed in slick magazines.

This enabling of the shout as a political act appears to many as violence. In this case again, Brecht displaced what we thought we knew:

*A river that carries everything with it is said to be violent, but we never talk about the violence with which its banks imprison it.*

A violent image is not that which displays an act of violence, which complacently exhibits horror in order to repel us from it. A violent image shows us the blindness of our reason, which has been invited to "be reasonable" for so long that it ends up

producing monsters. This image is a comment on the way talk shows\*\*\*\* have subsumed other kinds of violence for which no one is held accountable because so few see them; they remain hidden beneath the consensus and the truths guaranteed for us by commonsense and natural moral feeling.

<sup>1</sup>According to François Châtelet, the legitimization or delegitimation that divides philosophy and non-philosophy/“ordinary thought” is played out at the level of the “rules according to which statements are generated.”

Translated by Jean – Louis and Sonia Morhange

Translator’s notes:

- \* Politically committed art.
- \*\* In France, blue – collar workers, the lower class and ethnic minorities generally live in suburbs of large cities.
- \*\*\* Far – right wing French political party.
- \*\*\*\* In English in the original text.

## **Chloe's Friends**

### **(a symposium about music and mathematics)**

John Rahn

*Setting:* Athens, 5<sup>th</sup> century BC

*Personae:*

Chloe, a very smart woman in her late 20s

Xanthippe, an underestimated housewife (known to her friends as "Xp")

Hermione, a hermaphrodite in love with Chloe

Xanthus, a fun young man with nice buns, and a musician

Jesus, an immigrant from the Near East, in his 40s, from the School of Parmenides

Megakephalos ("Meg"), a senior Academician and a music theorist

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Chloe's Friends

*Xp:* What a nice house you have, Chloe – it's cozy without being cluttered.

*Jesus:* I love the wall paintings. So cool, so classically Greek.

*Chloe:* Well, thanks, but where are Hermione and Xanthus, did we lose them on the way back from the lecture?

*Hermione and Xanthus:* [knock and enter] Here we are Chloe! We got distracted by some jugglers.

*Chloe:* So, what did you think of Megakephalos's lecture, everybody?

*Xanthus:* Way cool. I mean, who could have guessed that music and math connect so weirdly? And the math itself was such fun. A lot of it was stuff I've never heard of.

*Chloe:* Wait a minute – [to her slaves] – Could we have a bowl of wine in here, please? [to her guests] Sorry, please go ahead.

*Xp:* Actually, Xanthus, I thought it was a mixed bag.

*Xanthus:* What do you mean?

*Xp:* Well, it seems to me there were several kinds of confusion in the talk. For one thing, there were those ratios of string lengths which were supposed to extrapolate to all sorts of comic, I mean cosmic extremes – I think he even talked about modes of vibrations of atoms, or parts of atoms, as if they were sounds, and there was some obscure reference to cosmic strings vibrating in more than the usual number of physical dimensions. Teeny, teeny cheerios humming away, so to speak.<sup>i</sup> Now, I'm tempted to say, they don't hum for me, but that would be facile. For all I know, they really do snap, crackle, and pop. My point is, the connection with music is broken somewhere – we don't actually hear those teeny cheerios.

*Hermione:* Right on, Xp. And all that stuff about pulses in the air, that's not what we hear, either. Chloe, don't you think that nasty man Aristoxenos is right, that the ratios should measure what we hear, not what in the physical world causes what we hear? That changes everything about the application, and about the generalization, but not about the actual mathematics of the ratios, the math of harmonics. That's what is so interesting. The math stays the same, when one way to paste it on the world is wrong, and another different one might be right.

*Chloe:* [to the slave] Just put the Crater here, please, and the water there. [to guests] Help yourselves, math is thirsty work!

*Jesus:* Thanks, I will. [Helps himself to wine] But let's be fair, you guys. You keep harping on the differences. There really is something grand and mysterious about the same mathematics of harmonics applying to the physical sounds that cause musical sounds, and maybe the most profound structures of the physical universe. If you insist on limiting your theory strictly to what you perceive musically, we can still get some mystery. Aristoxenos only talked about ratios of perceived intervals of pitch, and of time, which can get pretty complicated in themselves the deeper you go – the deeper you go, the higher you go, that's one great thing about it. All that stuff about continued fractions was pretty dazzling, in a relatively pedestrian sort of way.<sup>ii</sup> And all that is directly about the scales that underlie the music you really hear.

But the more important thing here is not the ratios and so on. Remember when Meg was talking about those teeny cheerios, as Xp put it so well, he was talking about Space. He had to make up weird spaces in order to make any sense of the vibes of the cheerios. He had to talk about pushing spaces through other spaces, and so on. Now, that is what I find exciting. When I took my last sabbatical from the school of Parmenides, I studied in Tibet. They had a very refined concept of Space which was a lot like Meg's concepts. I don't remember everything my teacher said, but I did memorize a few things. For example: "everything is of one basic space, like waves on water," and

immersion in genuine being in the past, present, and future –  
is the single basic space of enlightened intent, the uninterrupted nature of  
phenomena.

Masters of awareness share a dimension of experience equal to that of all  
victorious ones.

The noncomposite expanse – unchanging and indivisible.

The expanse of naturally occurring timeless awareness – beyond effort or  
achievement.

The expanse in which all phenomena are mere names – beyond imagination  
and expression.

Within this wholly positive realm, in which nothing need be done,  
regardless of what manifests there is still wholly positive basic space.<sup>iii</sup>

[there is a grand pause as the company considers all this]

*Chloe:* Wow, Jesus. That's amazing. But you know, when you talk about dimension and space in this way – or when your Tibetan masters did – did they mean what we mean by it, what Euclid meant by these terms?

*Jesus:* Obviously they had not studied Euclid. So if you want to be picky – and Chloe, I know you are always picky! – maybe not – how could the terms be exactly equivalent unless the theories that they are embedded in are also equivalent? But what I find most suggestive, is the connection between – let's get back to dear old Meg and his music – the concept of space in both realms.

*Xanthus:* That's what Hermione was saying, right? The same math pasties on different, er, realms.

[Chloe, Hermione, and Xp throw pillows at Xanthus for this]

*Xp:* Jesus, you'll have to explain yourself better than Xanthus did here. What do you mean, the concept of space connecting music and ... whatever?

*Chloe:* I think I get it. When Meg talked about those cheerios, he kept having to up the number of dimensions just to make the description simpler and clearer and more regular. So you could infer a principle here. I don't know if it would really generalize, but – when your description has too many bells and whistles, like one of those cute art-machines in the museum, and seems inscrutable, you can judiciously add dimensions to the space you're describing within until it looks simple, or at least, possible. A bit like in a formal theory, you trade off the number of axioms for the number of inference rules, and so on-- just a metaphor. Instant theory, just add dimensions. Housewife's dream, Xp.

*Xp:* Don't know if my hubby would go for that one.



Chloe's Friends

*Hermione:* We know your hubby, Xp.

*Xanthus:* Girls, girls. Please. Let's not get personal.

*Hermione:* What do you mean, "girls"? [more pillows]

*Chloe:* OK, OK. But Jesus, what do you mean – expatiate!

*Jesus:* Well, I have to admit I am getting over my head here. But I think you are right on track, Chloe, in what you said. Meg did not go into it very much, but isn't it possible that the same kind of abstract algebraic geometries he alluded to in his cheerio theory also apply in music theory? And that, in fact, it is the same strategy – when dazed and confused, make it simpler by adding to the number of dimensions?

*Chloe:* How many dimensions, for music?

*Xanthus:* Well, I'm a composer so I should know. Without getting too fancy, at least 22.

*Everyone else in chorus:* 22!?

*Hermione:* Why not? It's a nice number.

*Jesus:* That's more than the number of dimensions in the universe.

[general laughter]

*Hermione:* Are you just making fun with Chloe's good point? Just add dimensions, until it looks simple?

*Xanthus:* Not at all, I'm serious. Anyone who composes will recognize that composers play with all sorts of independently variable quantities. It's totally practical. I won't even use the auloi for an example, that would be too easy; after all they are two pipes at once both continuously inflectible in pitch and so on. Take just the classic kithara. A few strings tuned in advance, but you strum them and stop them in combinations and mute them to different degrees in combinations and so on, and then of course you are singing with that, and the relation of your vocal tune to the strings, and everything else to the poetry, well, I needn't go into that. Why else do we have genuine kithara stars playing to large audiences. It's hard, it's complex. Besides, they keep the true musicality of the Greek language alive. Without the kithara players, people would probably forget the nuances of how to speak with correct stress, pitch, quantity, elision, and so on. I can see it happening in spite of this. But, don't get me started. The fact is, in my own compositional praxis, I do happen to use 22 parameters for the simpler events.

But, I still don't know how what Meg was saying fits into what I do, I fact, I still don't really understand what Meg was saying!

[silence while everyone takes this in]

*Hermione:* But, Xanthus, you didn't answer my question, really, entirely. I accept that you use 22 dimensions or so in your musical practice, and Xp will agree with me that there is nothing shabby about practice. Practice can teach us things too. Theory alone does not have the last word.

*Xp:* I do agree.

*Hermione:* But my point was not so much that you use many dimensions. I am wondering about the strategy Chloe articulated, Just add dimensions. OK, OK, I accept you need your prosaic 22 or whatever, just to compose. But what about theory? What is the relation between practical musicianship, composing and so on, and theory, and would music theory possibly fall into the same strategy as cheerio theory? That is, Just add dimensions until it looks simple?

*Xp:* Actually, we don't know that that is a bad strategy. Just because Chloe made it sound like a cake mix....it might be a perfectly sound way to do things.

*Chloe:* Hey, everyone, this is getting serious. Here, have some more wine [pours around]. [knocks are heard at the door] That must be Meg! [runs to door and opens it]

[enter Megakephalos with garland, already a bit high]

*Meg:* Carrion crows! I just know you are picking me apart and feeding on my abundantly fleshy liver, I mean, lecture!

*Xp:* Pack it in, Meg, and cool your head with some more wine. But, you're right!

*Chloe:* Here, sit down, you're just in time Meg. We were just choking on various morsels of your talk, and maybe you can help us get them down. But first, have a drink! [pours]

*Meg:* That's better. I swear, after the talk, all the Sweater Sets of Athens surrounded me like Harpies, they and the Strigil Sluts. Nothing in any of their noodles, I'm afraid. But you can tell me where and how I went off the rails, and I can tell you whether I meant it – if I know!

*Chloe:* You're too modest, Meg. You know we know you don't know what you're talking about! But neither do we. So, from this, good conversation is born.

*All:* Hear, hear!

*Chloe:* So, here's where we were, I think, Meg. Xp pointed out that there's a mixed realm problem between physics and music – just the kind of problem that young Aristotle is so hard on. But Iesus pointed out that mixed, schmixed, if the math is the same – I think Hermione called it pasting the same math on different things, and of course Xanthus had his own idea of things – if the math is the same, maybe something really is the same. But Iesus pushed it way farther, all the way to Tibet; you'll have to ask him to explain that as I don't understand it, but the idea is about space as a medium of explanation. So, as Hermione conjectured, you can maybe just add dimensions until the world looks simple enough. Got infinity? No problem, got infinite space. But that's going too far: more to the point for us poor finite creatures, there is a strategic or ethical issue. Faced with some complex of things to explain, is it fair, right, just, or correct, to just add dimensions to the space within which you explain them until they look simple within that space?

*Xanthus:* Don't forget the cheerios.

*Xanthippe:* Those teeny teeny cheerios!

*Hermione:* Just add sugar!

*Meg:* Cheerios?

*Chloe:* strings...

Chloe's Friends

*Meg:* O, aha, ha ha. Not bad except cheerios are too friable to vibrate while retaining their integrity, but you probably take this as yet another symptom of the inevitable pomposity of an academic.

*Xp:* Damp cheerios.

*Hermione:* with sugar on top.

*Meg:* I give up. But let's talk about you. Xp, you got the mixed realm thing right. But Iesus got the part I was trying to put across, about a unity transcending the mixedness of the realms – while recognizing the separateness of the realms. It's tricky because people can easily get the wrong idea about it – simple people unlike the present company. If I say that the mathematics of modes of vibration are identical, or extrapolating to more dimensions and so on, for a vibrating kithara string, and a Epicurean probability wave for a subatomic particle,<sup>iv</sup> and a teeny cheerio – actually an 11-dimensionally vibrating toroid -- in a fabric of teeny cheerios which is physical space, I am not saying that the kithara string is in any other way like the wave or the cheerio. (You see, Xp, I am using your disgusting simile.) Or like the planets for that matter, which also go round and round. Or like the months of gestation! [pompously] So much for those dunderheads that stain the tradition of Pythagoras with their muddled ontologies. Let's put all that aside.

*Xanthus:* But Meg, it's not trivial what you paste it on. Or how you paste it on. You can take a perfectly good math pastie, for example, a kind of group theory – let's say (just at random) a sequence of wreath products ...

*Chloe* [interrupts]: Xanthus, where in the world did you come up with that example? I barely remember wreath products from my days auditing at the Academy, that's pretty obscure.

*Xanthus:* It's something that came up in my work, believe it or not. The point is, you can use this construction for good or ill, so to speak. Or, you can use it well or poorly. The math remains the same, and the way you apply it makes all the difference. Applying math is a complex affair; naive notions of it won't do. Even if you delete the ontological fallacies of numerology and so on, application of math is an art in itself. Of course you can formalize it as model theory....but that only illumines the formal issues, not issues of good sense.

*Meg:* What's your point?

*Xanthus:* How do you put all that aside, as you say? What makes good application of math, and bad application of math? In particular, application to music – how do we make it good rather than bad?

*Xp:* Here we go, I knew we'd get to the good and the bad.

*Iesus:* And another thing, Meg. I was impressed how you made weird spaces in order to make any sense of the vibes of the cheerios. You talked about pushing spaces through other spaces, and so on. I find that kind of thinking intrinsically exciting, but, taking Xanthus's point too, how do I know I am not just being seduced by the math until I find myself using cool math to make some badly fitting application?

*Chloe:* And let's not forget the issue of, Just add dimensions. Maybe if you add enough dimensions, anything would look simple (though the space might be hard to grasp)? So would that be a defensible move toward explanation? Have another drink, Meg.

*Meg:* Well, I've already had enough wine during the post-lecture frenzy, but the way things are going here, maybe I don't want to put too fine a point on it.

First, let me say I think you are all too hung up on my cheerios. I was supposed to be talking about math and music, and those cheerios are just physics. I did want to make Jesus's point about the oneness of it all, but without falling into the trap of spreading the oneness of the math over the bumpiness of the different ontologies. Reality is diverse. Mathematical structure is not substance or essence. OK?

Now, Chloe, I don't know why you are so bothered by adding dimensions.

*Jesus:* I met a hermit in Persia who kept muttering something about not multiplying entities beyond necessity, making do with less, and so on.

*Meg:* Yes, fine, but are dimensions entities? I agree, don't use more than you need. But why not use as many as you need? We are not talking about ontology here, I hope this is clear now. The dimensions are in the description, the theory, and who knows what the reality being described might ultimately be. You could even think about dimensionality flexibly. If you need a grand theory of everything physical, such that the rules aren't too baroque, you may need 11, or 111, dimensions. But you can take any projection onto any subspace... that's probably not a good example. Say you want a theory of wrestling. You don't need more than three or four dimensions for that, I suppose, unless some superstar wrestler comes along who can tie his opponents in 7-dimensional knots. Then you'd have to extend your theory. So, to each domain its own theory, with some appropriate space for the theory. I'm not just talking about subspaces, or [gesturing widely] restrictions of functors, sheaves, and so on, subtheories or cohomologies. It's good practice to use the simplest theory you can to get the job done that you need to do. You don't want to try to use Epicurean quantum mechanics to describe the motions of the planets, or of the wrestlers.

*Jesus:* That sounds plausible, Meg, but I wonder. For example, I've had to do a lot of sailing during my travels. The math involved could be just simple trigonometry, vector space. But when we're in a long chase with some pirate behind us and it's vital to get every bit of speed out of the boat, I find my mind wandering to fluid dynamics, and so on. The more intensely one thinks about something, the more complex the math is likely to get.

*Meg:* Yes, as I said: whatever you need to get the job done. When the job gets harder, you may need something more powerful and comprehensive, but if not, you can make do with less, as the hermit said. In fact, here's a better example: those kithara strings are physical objects, so theoretically their behavior is describable by 11-dimensionally vibrating cheerios, but in musical practice, the theory is much simpler harmonics with no reference to cheerios.

*Xanthus:* Yes, until you need to describe what happens to the string at the beginning and end of its sounds, or when you mute it a little with your other hand but let it ring in a stifled way... I see what you mean, Meg. The math only gets more complex when you need it to be more complex. And I've never needed cheerios.

But tell me, Meg, what you were saying that really excited my imagination wasn't the part about cheerios. I agree, that's been a red herring. You were talking about Space in a purely musical sense, a cognitive space for music theory. And frankly I did not follow what you were saying. There were algebraic things in it like groups – and we all know what a group is! But at the same time it was a space. It all sounded very ethereal, but very stimulating.

## Chloe's Friends

*Hermione:* Yes, and you talked about Categories... I didn't understand that at all. What is a Category<sup>v</sup> – is it related to Plato's Ideas, or Forms?<sup>vi</sup>

*Meg:* You're right, this is the part I worked hardest on for the lecture and I'm still not sure I've got it right. But before we go into all that, I've been thinking about Xanthus's earlier question, what makes a math application good or bad? You know, that may be the most interesting thing we can talk about.

*Xp:* Please tell me you are not going to begin by determining the nature of Good.

*Meg:* No fear, Xp. Though it might come to that. No, this is something I haven't really thought about before, yet it seems so basic. Perhaps we can feel our way forward here. A good application would have certain qualities. For one thing, the math itself would have to be OK.

*Chloe:* That seems obvious, Meg.

*Meg:* Then what? The principle of theoretical ascesis we were talking about? Don't use more than you need?

*Hermione:* Well, yes, but remember the boundary is flexible here. You might not think you needed it but then find out that you do need it. So it would be hard to judge until you'd seen the entire theory. And then you'd have to provide for extensions to the theory when you need more.

*Meg:* Agreed. And you know, I think I may be vulnerable here. For example, we'd all agree that representing the usual scale-pitch functions as residue classes mod  $n$  within  $\mathbb{Z}_n$ , and all the attendant group theory, is pretty basic and inevitable, right?

*All:* [noises of universal assent]

*Meg:* I'm not going to go into this, but in my talk, I reconstructed things like pitch classes in terms of denotators which basically involve the category of contravariant set-valued hom-functors for modules, that is, set-valued presheaves over modules.<sup>vii</sup>

*Xanthus and Chloe:* Huh?

*Meg:* Yes, well there is at least a question as to whether the question of theoretical ascesis should be raised here, but with the caveats given just now by Hermione.

*Hermione:* Didn't those Categories come into this?

*Meg:* Fundamentally. In fact the project I was talking about is a radical refoundation of music theory based on a radical refoundation of mathematics in terms of categories. It's based on some work by a mathematician from the mountains north of Sicily.<sup>viii</sup> But let's get back to our theory of application. We've agreed that the math has to be OK, and that you shouldn't use more than you need, right?

*Hermione:* Right.

*Meg:* What else?

*Chloe:* The mathematical structures, within the math you use, should fit nicely with the structures you are using the math to describe. I'd call this Good Fit. It's hard to specify this

completely....Does anyone have a good example of Bad Fit? As I think Jesus said, using cool math to make some badly fitting application?

*Jesus:* How about, just numbering the pitch classes from one to  $n$ ? That ruins a lot.

*Xp:* Good example, Jesus. Here's another: name the pitch classes after the smallest  $n$  infinite numbers, starting with the number of natural numbers. Then you'd also have the problem of the Continuum Hypothesis, in spades, but the whole thing would be pointless. (So to speak.)

*Chloe:* Xp, that is truly perverse.

*Meg:* Good, good. Math OK, ascesis, and Good Fit.

*Xanthus:* But here's another Bad Fit, maybe: using sets at all, for pitch classes or whatever. [grandly] Why use sets? They are awful things, very artificial. Nothing is ever unordered.<sup>ix</sup> That's why all the problems with the Axiom of Choice: can't tell them little buggers apart. So much for the foundation of mathematics. Is that what you were trying to get away from with your refoundation, Meg?

*Meg:* Whoosh, I'll have to think about that. But yes, in a way. There's a re-axiomatization in terms of categories rather than in terms of sets, underneath it all.

*Xanthus:* I have a more extended example of application that might help us along further in our theory of Good Application. I mentioned wreath products?

*Hermione:* Assuming you're not talking about head ornaments.

*Chloe:* I think we're all talking about head ornaments.

*Jesus:* Give the man a chance.

*Meg:* I was wondering about that, Xanthus. Do proceed please.

*Xanthus:* Well, the application I have in mind comes from a mathematician from niork. He's an artist as well, and a machine theorist, and he's come up with a theory which he says explains the structure of perception, of cognition, really of the world as we take it in, and therefore also aesthetics, music, quantum mechanics, the structure of scientific theory, and so on. The primary areas he applied it to are visual perception and computer-aided design.<sup>x</sup>

The theory has two guiding principles called transfer and recoverability. The idea of transfer is that large, more complicated (and in some sense less symmetrical) structures are built up in levels from simpler ones which are "transferred" up. So it has the hierarchical level principle in common with music theory. Recoverability means that given a large, complicated structure, the generative history can be recovered – it can be parsed according to the levels of transfer from simpler structure (though the parsing is in fact not generally unique). This parsing models cognition, so a theory of construction can also serve as a theory of cognition – you get two for one.

*Chloe:* Sounds ambitious.

*Xanthus:* Yes, indeed. Now, our first criterion was, "Math OK?," and I think his math is fine. That makes it interesting, because it leaves ascesis and Good Fit. But first I'll describe the

math. It's all sequences of wreath products of groups, so it's not too hard. You'll all remember about direct products of two groups?

All: [noises of assent]

Xanthus: Well, then, do you all remember what a semi-direct product is?

Chloe: Isn't that where the groups aren't necessarily abelian? So instead of a direct product of two groups, you take two groups such that the first is a normal subgroup of the product with respect to some particular homomorphism – you have to specify which one – and the intersection of the two components is just the identity, and when the two components are multiplied element-wise you get the resulting group? That's called a splitting extension of the first group by the second, right?

Jesus: Right, Chloe, I think. It's a clean way of doing a group extension. The reference homomorphism is a homomorphism from the second component into the automorphism group of the first, using conjugation in the first component group by the elements of the second component group. Conjugation by different elements will get the different homomorphisms.<sup>xi</sup>

Xanthus: Exactly, the idea of group extension is key. You build larger and larger groups to fit this idea of structural generation. But there's one more step from semi-direct product to wreath product: the first component is replaced in the semi-direct product by its direct product with itself some number of times. So, the first component of the underlying semi-direct product is  $G_1 \times G_1 \times G_1 \dots$  rather than just  $G_1$ . So  $G_1 w G_2$  means  $[G_1 \times G_1 \times G_1 \dots]$  semi-direct product with  $G_2$ . Elements of the direct product group are vectors.

Now, for wreath products in this theory, the number of  $G_1$  copies in the direct product component is always equal to the order of  $G_2$ , the second component. This allows us to index the direct product group elements by the elements of the second group. And the automorphism for the semi-direct product is always the same: a raised action on the indices in the direct product group, permuting the indices. It's called the transfer automorphism. This makes it all relatively simple.

Chloe: But maybe not all that simple.

Meg: This seems pretty clear, though.

Xanthus: So far we've just defined this particular kind of wreath product,  $G_1 w G_2$ . The theory actually requires finite  $w$ -sequences – in fact, all of these groups should be viewed as finite, since this is about machine theory. A  $w$ -sequence is just something of the form  $G_1 w G_2 w G_3 \dots w G_n$ .

Chloe: That makes it more interesting.

Hermione: Yes... hey, are these connector things associative, does this have a semigroup structure using  $w$  as the connector?

Xanthus: Nope. Good question, but no such luck. In the constructions of this theory, at least, the last group on the right is always the  $G_2$  of a wreath product whose first component  $G_1$  is the result of evaluating the entire sequence to the left of the last group. So it's understood always as  $((((G_1 w G_2) w G_3) \dots) w G_n)$ .<sup>xii</sup>

Now, from a musician's perspective – and to illustrate the “good application” issue – I have a few questions about this approach, some of which are more music-application-oriented than others. I'm not sure whether they are all resolvable, but I think they are, in principle. I call them the Order Problem, the Model Problem, the Symmetry Problem, and the Occupancy Problem, which has two sub-problems: God's Hand and God's Switch, and a corollary problem which has to do with the lack of a theory of the structure of the Army of Occupation.

*Jesus:* We're not getting into any punitive religion thing here, are we, religious wars?

[Meg, Chloe, and Hermione throw pillows at Jesus.]

*Xanthus* [ignoring the byplay]: I'll take them in that order, from least to most application-oriented. The Order Problem is just, for any given w-sequence, what governs the growth of a wreath sequence from shorter to longer? You might think it just grows from left to right, since it always parses from left to right, but that's not the case. So if your sequence has N components, there are N factorial different ways to grow it from scratch, given no constraints. What are the constraints?

*Meg:* Why do we need to know this? What difference does it make? If you have a sequence, why do you need to construe it as having grown step by step?

*Xanthus:* It's a crucial difference in the theory, as the generative stages of the sequence are supposed to model a trace history of the cognitive process. In fact, there is a predilection for the groups on the left (as it turns out) to be all of a kind, namely all isoregular groups. Informally, an iso-regular group is a control-nested hierarchy of repetitive isometries. The component isometry groups are either cyclic groups (if discrete), or one-parameter Lie groups (if continuous).<sup>xiii</sup>

*Chloe:* I can see how that could plug into a theory of perception. After all, isometries can model measurable relationships among objects. So cyclic ones would make great building blocks for finitely described objects of perception, and hierarchical structures often work for perception. But I see why you'd need the generative order, if you mean to trace an order in the cognitive process.

*Xanthus:* Yes, but as I say, there aren't any rules about how to grow it -- although there are guidelines<sup>xiv</sup> -- and there isn't any separate, orthogonal abstract generative order attached to each sequence – in fact, you'd need a separate such specification for each different application of a given sequence.

*Hermione:* If you're talking about generative rules for sequences, how about a grammar? Works for sentences.

*Xanthus:* Yes, Hermione, that might be the form a solution takes, or a grammar might be too restrictive even in general. We'll just have to see what happens as we develop it further.

*Chloe:* The next one was the Model Problem, right? What's that? It sounds like an application problem.

*Xanthus:* It is, really, but all of these relate to all the others. I'll just mention two aspects of this one. The first is a practical point about the size of the groups. The order of  $G1 \wr G2$  is  $((|G1|^{**}|G2|)^{|G2|})$ . So the order of the resulting group from a w-sequence approximates the iterative exponential of the orders of the component groups. This is a ferocious order of



growth. For smallish, finite group components, as you grow the w-sequence you'd pretty soon get a resulting group whose size would exceed the number of chin whiskers you could pack into the volume of the universe. Even if the machine is theoretically possible, it could never be built. But models can be useful without translating literally into practical computability.

The second model problem is that the w-sequence is a model of a universe of structural possibilities and does not pick out any one structure. In fact you'd need some agent to decide, at each generative stage, which particular structure is being modelled. You'd also need a way to do the picking out.<sup>xv</sup> The way would be something I'll call God's Switch, and the agent's action is God's Hand. God's Switch is supposed to be provided by something called occupancy subgroups.

*Meg:* I begin to see why this may be a good example for our theory of application.

*Xanthus:* Let me just finish up here. The Symmetry Problem is maybe not a problem. The idea of the iso-regular groups is that shapes are characterized by symmetry groups of isometries. This is the basic idea motivating group theory, right? Groups characterize symmetries and invariance. But somewhere along the generative sequence of a w-sequence model, the components stop being iso-regular, which complicates the picture. It might not have been clear before, but every w-sequence is a group which is a symmetry group of its data. The generative process in this theory is one in which the key notion of recoverability depends on symmetry breaking (or asymmetry building) from state to state in the generative process.<sup>xvi</sup>

What's puzzling is that as the w-sequence grows, so does the degree of symmetry of whatever it describes – it equals the order of the resulting group, and as I showed, it gets very large. The idea of the model is that complicated shapes are construed cognitively in levels or stages from simpler shapes, step by step, implicitly, always. But what's simple, beside a cyclic isometry itself?

We may need to just relativize the notion of symmetry (the order of the symmetry subgroup of a figure within a given group). But it could be that the idea we want is already captured by the idea that when you need to move to a symmetry group of greater order, increasing the degree of symmetry, the figure has gotten more complex in the sense that it is not longer describable by the smaller symmetry group. A *squished square* is no longer described by any of the formulations of the symmetry group of the square, so you need to step up to a w-group of greater order, a *square followed by its squishing*, as represented by wreath-appending an affine group. The resulting w-sequence describes the figure as a square that has been squished, but this description requires more symmetry.

*Hermione:* Yes, it is sort of counterintuitive – a squished square is normally thought of as *less* symmetrical than a square.

*Xanthus:* Yes, and the theory depends on this notion, Hermione, even though it describes the squished square by a different symmetry group, of greater order than that of the square. This requires a subtlety around the idea of symmetry which may actually be one of the strengths of the theory.

Finally, there's the Occupancy Problem. This is key; unless we can solve this, I can't see how to apply this to music in a useful way. Wreath-prepend Z2 in the w-sequence would seem to be intended to provide a switch for each element,<sup>xvii</sup> but it does not choose which are on and which, off (*God's Hand problem*). We can solve this one by inserting an

agent into the model – though this just pushes the question back to a theory that would account for the agent's actions! At least, for a music-theoretical model, we don't have to account for agency and motivation, just the structure of the actions taken.

However, underlying this is a more serious God's Switch problem: does the intended switch work? Wreath-prepend Z2 to Z12, for example, Z2 w Z12, results in a data set of size 24 for the complete wreath group. (But the group is of order  $12 \cdot (2^{12})$ .) Each group element of Z12 is (re)present(ed) on the compound data *both* turned on, *and* turned off (accepting the semantics of Z2 for this). Any action of a group element of Z2 w Z12 simply maps the complete data set of the wreath group into itself, of course (since we are constructing symmetries); particularly, *no part of the group action selects any subset* of the data set of Z2 w Z12, or of Z12. This is clear if one actually works out the math in detail. If we can't select subsets of the data, we can't model anything very interesting.

[silence while everyone digests all this]

*Hermione*: I couldn't really follow all that, Xanthus.

*Jesus*: Me, neither. The math doesn't sound that hard, but the way it's applied, the problems in the application, the difference between the intentions of the model-maker and the way the model fits the data....

*Chloe*: I seem to remember ... couldn't you construct a section through the data? Make a data subset such that each point of G2's data appears exactly once, so that each is specifically on or off in the section. That would model a subset of the G2 data. The group action would affect the on-ness and off-ness of each compound element, as well as affecting the things that are on or off. It's a possibility. You'd still need a metatheoretical agent, God's Hand, to do the selecting, but this structure could give you the switching effect you need, right?<sup>xviii</sup>

*Hermione*: That's a very interesting idea, Chloe.

*Xanthus*: Yes, I think that would work – thanks Chloe! One more thing – the Army of Occupation. You'd need to be able to account for the particular structures of occupancy, too, if you mean to describe the structure of a particular object. The theory does not do this, or provide a place for it, and a lot of the complex specificity of the object would lie in the structures of occupancies among the structures of possibilities, so we'd have to extend or modify the theory to accommodate this. A theory of occupancy structures within the theory of shape-possibilities would have to be integrated with the theory of (at least) the structure of the agent's actions in choosing a path through the universe.

*Xp*: What about asceticism and fit?

*Meg*: It seems pretty parsimonious, in that it's just one construction, w-sequences, and those aren't all that complicated considering the scope of its ambition, its intended applications. It does a good job of using simple things in complicated ways. In fact, I think that's the point of this model, build complex things from simple things in generative stages.

*Chloe*: Is it simple enough? Or is the map larger than the territory here?

*Hermione*: By the time we plug in solutions to Xanthus's problems, it might not look simple at all. But music, and the other areas of application, are not so simple either. I think the jury is still out on asceticism.

Chloe's Friends

*Xanthus*: What about fit?

*Xp*: Fit may be a problem, too. From your description, this begins to sound like a pretty elaborate way to model a basic idea of generation in stages. But all the w-sequence stuff may actually be essential, too, if it works as a theory both of construction and cognition, transfer and recoverability. And we saw how complex the theory could get if we extended it to address your objections, Order and the agent's actions, and the Army of Occupation and so on.

*Xanthus*: I agree – it seems to me that I'll have to work with this theory in its application to music for a while before we can decide about good fit and ascesis.

*Chloe*: Hey, we're getting too serious! Talking about ascesis. Here. [passing around the food platter]

[They all sit and munch, thinking or relaxing.]

*Xp*: You know what? Meg never did get to explain his Categories. Meg?

[Meg snores]

*Chloe*: Meg, wake up, dear. [Shakes Meg.]

*Xp*: Well, I'm off to Soc.

*Hermione*: I'll walk you part way, *Xp*.

*Jesus*: I'll walk Meg home. [helps Meg up] Come on, Meg. It's been a long day.

[Exit all, leaving Chloe standing in the doorway with her arm around Xanthus]

## Afterword

Chloe and her friends were too sleepy to follow up on some of the immediate threads after Xanthus's discussion of occupancy, and Chloe's idea (which is really Michael Leyton's idea) about using sections of the wreath-product group's data. In Leyton's general theory, occupancy is a tool which (as Xanthus points out) he assumes rather than discusses in detail. From musician's standpoint,  $Z_2 \times Z_{12}$  ought to be interpretable as manipulating subsets of the aggregate of pitch classes. Following Chloe's section idea, each pitch class (element of the data of  $Z_{12}$ , which is the group of pc transpositions) is equipped with a state, on or off. A subset of pcs is represented by those pcs that are turned on in the section. For example, {1 4 5} would look like {<off, 0>, <on, 1>, <off, 2>, <off, 3>, <on, 4>, <on, 5>, and all the rest off}. A group element of  $Z_2 \times Z_{12}$  is of form <vector | z> where z is a group element of  $Z_{12}$  (a pc transposition operation), and vector is a 12-place n-tuple of elements of  $Z_2$ ; each of the positions in the vector is indexed by an operation in  $Z_{12}$  and will apply to the wreath data element containing the  $Z_{12}$  data element referenced by its index (the "selective effect"; see Leyton Chapter 3). The elements of  $Z_2$  are best thought of as two operations, identity and swap; when applied to a binary state, identity leaves it alone and swap turns it into the other state. So the vector part of the wreath operation has either an identity or a swap operation in each of the 12 positions indexed by the operations of  $Z_{12}$ .

You can also think of this section of the wreath data as a 12 digit binary number, written left to right instead of right to left as usual, so that  $2^{**0}$  is in the first place,  $2^{**1}$  in the second place, and so on. The pcs index the offs and ons, as the exponents of the binary number places. (As a historical sidelight, my *normal form* and *representative form* of a set or its type, from *Basic Atonal Theory*, are then simply the smallest number, in this representation.)

This representation of a pc subset has interestingly unusual features for a musician. To get from one subset to its transposition, you could just apply the wreath group element that leaves all states alone (a vector full of identities) and has as its  $Z_{12}$  group element the desired transposition, as usual. But you could also apply the wreath group element with identity (T0) as its  $Z_{12}$  group element, and the new state-operation vector would just switch off the old pcs and switch on the new ones; or some combination of the two. So there are multiple one-step ways to get from any pc subset to any other, only one of which will be the familiar way.

We can even tie this idea from Leyton's into Mazzola's work.

The so-called "section" amounts to a "characteristic function" for its subset. Reading the ordered pairs in the above example backward ("contravariant," as it were), the function yields "on" just for those pcs that are in the subset, and "off" elsewhere. In category theory, it is this characteristic function which amounts to the *subobject classifier* for the category **Sets**. (Mazzola p. 1126) The definition of a *Topos* requires the existence of a subobject classifier for the category. (Mazzola p. 1127 *infra*) But neither the category of abelian groups nor the category of R-modules has a subobject classifier, and thus these categories have no topoi. (Mazzola p. 1127) Mazzola wants to work with Grothendieck topologies, which require topoi. (Mazzola p. 1129) Mazzola's work-around is to translate the category of modules into the category of presheaves over modules, notated **Mod@**. This is the category *Func*(**Modopp**, **Sets**) of contravariant set-valued functors on **Mod**, which provides the required translation from modules into a category that has a subobject classifier, namely **Sets**. (See Mazzola p. 1126, example 97, and p. 1119, Example 92).

Mazzola's entire book, *The Topos of Music*, is based on this construction from its earliest formulations. What I have done above is to excavate from various places in the Appendices the information needed to read even the earliest formal definitions in Chapter 6 (from p. 63). This will give some idea of the mathematical overhead involved in even approaching this substantial work of mathematical music theory, which I am by no means prepared to discuss in kind of detail evident in the discussion of Leyton's work. It is worth mentioning as an early warning to music theorists.

Leyton's work and Mazzola's work are quite different and independent of each other.

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> For a good popular treatment of cheerio theory, see Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999). The “cheerio” and “just add dimensions” part of the ensuing discussion in this article is based only on such popularizations and does not pretend any authority. Readers fully conversant with such physical theory should try not to take it seriously here.

My idea was to link an updated version of Pythagoreanism (historically itself linked with music theory) to the more modern music-mathematical issues raised further along in the article. The kind of algebraic geometry used in superstring theory is not unrelated to the constructions in Mazzola, see below.

<sup>ii</sup> Jesus underestimates the depth of this work; see for example Norman Carey and David Clampitt, “Self-Similar Pitch Structures, Their Duals, and Rhythmic Analogues,” *PNM* 34/2 (Summer 1996).

<sup>iii</sup> Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasury of the Way of Abiding* (Junction City: Padma Publishing, 1998), pp. 15, 23.

<sup>iv</sup> See for example David Griffiths, *Introduction to Quantum Mechanics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995).

<sup>v</sup> The standard text is Saunders Mac Lane, *Categories for the Working Mathematician* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1971).

<sup>vi</sup> Meg continues to fluff this question, declining to talk about category theory and algebraic geometry as a basis for music theory – perhaps he had not finished reading Mazzola. However, there is no connection with Platonic Forms, etc.; if anything, categories are anti-essential.

<sup>vii</sup> See Example 92, p. 1119, Appendix G, in Guerino Mazzola, *The Topos of Music* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2002).

<sup>viii</sup> Of course this refers to Guerino Mazzola, who lives in Zurich.

<sup>ix</sup> The idea is from a conversation with Thomas Noll in Baton Rouge, March 2003.

<sup>x</sup> Michael Leyton, *A Generative Theory of Shape* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2001).

<sup>xi</sup> See any good algebra text, for example *Abstract Algebra* by Dummit and Foote (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991): direct product p. 153 ff; semidirect product p. 176 ff; wreath product p. 189 (exercise 23). Also in Leyton, Appendix A.

<sup>xii</sup> A better answer is, not in general. The “standard wreath product” is not associative in general, but the permutational wreath product is associative. For proofs see J.D.P. Meldrum, *Wreath Products of Groups and Semigroups* (Burnt Hill: Longman (Pitman Monographs and Surveys in Pure and Applied Mathematics), 1995), pp. 9-10. The w-sequences in Leyton are not associative.

<sup>xiii</sup> Leyton p. 12. Leyton defines an “iso-regular group” as one which is decomposable as a w-sequence whose component levels are groups that are either cyclic (finite) or 1-parameter Lie groups (continuous), and each level is represented as an isometry group. (Leyton p. 12.) Xanthus is more concerned with the finite case, for music theory.

On pp. 129 and 130, Leyton restates the iso-regularity condition in a series of definitions:

A group is c-cyclic if it is either cyclic or a connected 1-parameter Lie group (there are only two of these);

A group is c-polycyclic if it has the structure of a series of group extensions whose components are c-cyclic;

A group is wreath c-polycyclic if it has a w-sequence structure where the components are c-cyclic;

A group is wreath-isometric if it has a w-sequence structure whose components are isometry groups;

A group is iso-regular if it is a w-sequence structure which is wreath-polycyclic and wreath-isometric.

<sup>xiv</sup> For example, Leyton p. 67 ff.

<sup>xv</sup> But see Leyton pp. 131 ff.

<sup>xvi</sup> Leyton pp. 41-44, 69-71.

<sup>xvii</sup> Leyton (p. 8, p. 47, et passim); subsequent w-sequence material refers to this book.

<sup>xviii</sup> Michael Leyton, in private conversation, Seattle, April 2003.

# Rereading Improvisation: Improvisation as Form

Michel Ratté  
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## ***Introduction***

This article takes up from the proceedings of a lecture given at the Composers' Tribune of the Association pour l'avancement de la recherche en musique du Québec, 29.11.95. Improvisation is not the main concern of those who write music. Some introductory remarks will suggest why an enquiry into improvised music might be highly relevant to them. First: the why and the how of my rereading of improvised music.

There are several aspects of my own perspective on improvisation that must be accounted for from a theoretical point of view — in particular, my position as an artist whose productive life is enmeshed in institutions of different types. I am an improvising artist, working with stylistic forms originally from so-called popular musics. But I am also concerned with the nature of "aesthetic form" in improvised music. This combination alone is enough to disturb the neat ideological division between highbrow and popular culture.

A further difficulty is that academic music is already polarised around modernist and post-modernist discourses in art — discourses which have given up thinking for themselves, whilst still claiming the role of sustaining art's meaning for society. On the one hand, the postmodernist ideology of art demands pre-emptively that popular culture accept the meaning that academic music gives it. On the other hand, modernist ideology is becoming introverted, no longer progressive but conservative — a guardian of highbrow culture in a period of rightwards drift.

All this adds up to the fact that, for me, the interplay of discourse and artistic production in academic music has frozen up. It has led me to question the grounding of art institutions' legitimacy in modernity, — so as to try to understand under what conditions aesthetic experiences are possible in society today.

## ***A Rereading from a Theoretical Position***

As a starting point, I find in certain art theory informed by philosophy and sociology a way both out of the alternative between modernist and postmodernist art, and into a new connection between highbrow and popular culture. What is this art theory?

In an earlier article (Ratté 1996) on the problem of the autonomy of art and communication, I focussed on the ideas of Habermas, Wellmer, Rochlitz, Seel and Adorno. The theoretical projects of these writers develop from problems in the interpretation and criticism of society opened up by modern philosophy and sociology.

I proposed a new way of understanding the rationality and communicativity of works of art in the context of art as a social institution. From Adorno I took the idea of an immanent dialectic in the work of art. Essentially, he draws on the Kantian notion of the non-

determination of aesthetic judgement to set in motion this dialectic, so as to develop the idea of the communicational fragility of the symbolic articulation of the work of art.

Without here going into the detail of this communicational fragility, it was from this starting point that I set out to examine the forms of art's institutionalisation. My critique bore not so much on institutionalisation itself as on the problems it gives rise to. I stressed in my article that the legitimacy of art's institutionalisation today can no longer depend on safeguarding an edifying history of "great" art — a strategy which can only violate the fragility of actual works of art. "Great" art must be reconsidered in the light of a contemporary aesthetic sensibility which is both subject to, and produced by, the market in cultural commodities. In fact both "history" and "great" works of art are themselves becoming commodities — a process which, for them, is another kind of violation.

This communicational fragility prevents us from demanding of today's works of art that they try to escape commodification by standing up to it. Only by surrounding these mute pieces of art with a discourse capable of echoing their inner life can we open up a space for them. Only this can give art (following the radical reinterpretation due to its circulation in a market), as big a chance of arriving at a rational disenchantment where its symbolic depth might become socially accessible, as of vanishing into the commodity altogether.

Works of art on their own lack the strength to stand up to commodification. Adorno, too often seen as simply the ring leader of the resistance against commodification, would agree with this. He was only trying to demand from works of art that they do justice to the sensibility which dies in the commodity. This is certainly how we should read his celebration of Mahler (see notably Ratté 1995).

Adorno took from Walter Benjamin this idea of "doing justice to the sensibility that dies in the commodity". In his reading of Baudelaire, Benjamin had set out to show how the lyric poet of capitalism's apogee had to some extent transformed everyday life into aesthetic experience — authentic as Benjamin saw it. In this way what would otherwise slip inexorably towards reification could be redeemed. Benjamin was trying to preserve as an actuality in the interior of the work of art what Adorno wanted to keep only as a token of what had been lost.

Following Habermas and Wellmer, any solution to the problem of rationality and expressivity in aesthetics should try to reconcile the approach of Benjamin with that of Adorno. One way of doing this is by engaging with non-institutionalised artistic cultures such as that of popular culture. There are ways of expressing aesthetic coherence that have not been acknowledged in the official history of art. The game is to show how they could nevertheless enrich the art theory debate on forms of aesthetic sensibility.

In the socio-cultural context of today, this enrichment is only possible via an interpretation of the immanence of works of art circulating in popular culture — an interpretation which is also a critique of highbrow music. Such a critique has nothing to do with the postmodern attitude and its revelations. As the emblem of the first historical era to "melt together" highbrow and popular culture, postmodernism claims to be only responding to what everybody knows about commodification as a general socio-cultural condition. I propose, instead, to think out how to build a dialogue. A dialogue between, on the one hand, those expressions of aesthetic coherence not yet articulated as part of the problematic of the history of art — having mainly circulated as commodities — and, on the other, those that have been embraced by this history. In this light I examine the question of aesthetic form in improvised music — whose most refined and innovative expression comes, without a doubt, from the afro-american popular tradition.

***Critics and Apologists: Improvisation in Highbrow Discourse***

Before discussing musical improvisation as form, I touch on how it is dealt with in academic discourse. This will help pin down my theory of improvisation.

As to be expected, the general attitude to improvisation is basically critical. This is as true of composers creating and thinking out today's expressive forms as of the music theorists who contribute to their debates. Certain more conciliatory souls try to make something of the fact that improvisation has always been part of the tradition of western art music, being practiced in various forms up to the second half of the nineteenth century. But it seems to me that the debate on improvisation as form is more fruitful with its critics. Those who criticise improvisation as such have done so on aesthetic grounds, whereas those who defend improvisation within academic music have tended to be practitioners who have chosen not to justify their own activity in terms of aesthetics (see specially Globokar, 1989).

To start with, these practitioners have not grasped how improvising within tradition is linked to principles of stylisation that inherently obscure the fact of spontaneous composition. An example: to improvise a fugue is to unfold in the execution the same formal plan as in writing a fugue. The more the new virtuosity of the realisation is hidden in the execution itself, the more effective is the merge. Here the improviser seems to want the residue of spontaneity in the execution to disappear into the formal clarity of the fugue. In the opposite case, the element of spontaneity surviving in a cadenza contributes nothing to the formal integration of the concerto. Amongst many and varied questions about improvisation within the tradition of western art music, the important point is that improvisation has not been identified as an expression of formal coherence in music. This is the basic reason both for its disappearance and for its subsequent reintroduction into the domain of highbrow music.

If composers are critical of improvisation since the 1960's, this is effectively because free improvisation — emerging from the avant-garde of black american music and promoted by people like Vinko Globokar — openly based its claim to musical coherence on the fact of having been spontaneously generated. It's ironic to see academic improvisers give improvisation the same ideological role it already had in the popular imagination. To improvise was to be free, and this freedom was a critique of the established order. Improvisers not only failed to produce any reflexions on the form of improvised music, but saw it primarily as a way of subverting the academy by fusing the roles of interpreter and composer. This critique of the division of labour between composer and interpreter, was particularly shady because the fusion of roles it encouraged was thought of as a return to artisanal savoir-faire, ultimately to a kind of instinctive sensibility. The conceptual glissando linking spontaneity to instinct sacrificed once and for all the chance of a properly aesthetic approach to spontaneous formalisation in music.

So it's to the academic critics of improvisation rather than to the academic practitioners that we owe at least an outline of the problem of form in improvised music. But no more than an outline. Valid though it might have been to have gone into what Stockhausen, Boucourechliev, Dahlhaus, Deliège, and others, have written, I concentrate here on the ideas of just two composers — John Cage and, above all, Pierre Boulez — because it is their thought that underwrites the claim of the academy to have defined the question of formalisation in highbrow music from every angle. Both Cage and Boulez expressed themselves acerbically on the question of formalisation in music and claimed to have dealt thoroughly with the subject. All the academic critics, one way or another, acknowledge that the main issues in the problem of form in music are contained in the thought of Cage and Boulez, and, moreover, that the way in which these issues are presented precludes



any possibility of applying them to improvisation. The central theme in Cage and Boulez' thinking is the relation between determinacy and indeterminacy.

Ostensibly to do justice to indeterminacy, John Cage sets out to rid himself of the categories of traditional aesthetics. In the process, he is quite ready to slip into the mysticism of a music-without-author. For Cage, improvisation, in which the creator is present in every detail, is the worst of all options. For Pierre Boulez, things are more subtle. He articulates his critique of improvisation via his idea of open form and his attempt to create open forms as a solution to the problem of stasis in serial works. He sees improvised music basically as a non-reflexive open form. What, then, is a reflexive open form in Boulez' thinking?

Boulez decided that the closed-in-on-itself character of a typical serial work sat ill with the virtual infinity of possible thematic proliferation from the series. He felt that this proliferation itself suggested a renewal of form. An open form would have multiple trajectories and choices to store and redeem these virtual possibilities. But Boulez acknowledged that storing up these possibilities synchronically did not itself produce a sequentiality with the character of "necessity", to use his own word. He refused, justifiably, to leave this to the interpreter's indeterminate choices, limited though these obviously were. So he reduced the interpreter's freedom of choice to less important determinants of sequentiality. The composer would, then, take back the responsibility for imposing a new closure on the work, and thereby guarantee the integrity of the overall form (Boulez, 1989, p.275 ff).

Boulez never scrutinised the idea of open form itself, claiming that it freed the musical work from the organicist concept of the whole and the parts. In fact, the formal possibilities that might have allowed this liberation of the work, remain as never-realised virtualities, literally outside the form. What interested Boulez more was what he could learn from his practical experiments with interpreters of open forms. In his own words, the interpreter's act could only be situated on the level of those surface categories that have always felt threatened by the excessively rigid fixity of the text (.....) The interpreter is hostage to simple reflexes that lead him inexorably to fudge the fundamental question of invention, namely the relation between structure and material (ibidem,p.276)

It seems to me that the blindness to form attributed to the interpreter only reflects Boulez' blindness to his own formalism. From here on it's no longer possible for him to even begin to find a solution to the aesthetic problems of open form by accepting the failings of the interpreter as his own. The basic difficulty with his formal approach is that he uses structural abstractions to grasp music as heard, and not the other way round. Nothing in the actual happening of music has the power to project back to the interpreter and to the audience the formal abstractions that the composer has projected onto it. Music is experienced holistically; to the listener, this is completely obvious. It's up to Boulez, surely, to come up with the phenomenology to back up his statement that there are surface categories to which the sensibilities of the interpreter must be confined. Do we need to spell out that his unhappy experiment with open form does not add up to a serious critique of improvisation in music?

Nor is he in a position to say that the improviser can only indulge in what he calls "manipulations of memory" (ibidem, p.137 et Boulez, 1976, p.131). If he concedes that the organisation of time stemming from memory is essential to music, we concede that improvisation would not be very interesting if it promised only manipulations of memory — the mechanical permutation of a vocabulary of motifs and stylistic references. But before this manipulation, perhaps only found in bad improvisation, the improviser is already present to the audible material. And this material, in spontaneous composition, is always either already music or about to be made music. The improviser imbues all the material with

his synthesising presence, and the material becomes his memory to the extent that it has aesthetic qualities to be developed. The material becomes the materialisation of a freedom assuming its finitude. In successful improvisation — as, in fact, in all successful music — memory is no longer a manipulable function, but a quality of expression.

Boulez' solution to the aesthetic problem of how to create freedom within the limits of the work consists in giving a diachronic significance to the formal virtualities synchronically stored in the open form. But this itself is a manipulation of memory that obscures the considerable aesthetic potential of the expression of memory. And manipulation of memory becomes even more marked when Boulez starts to use computers. A computer is a memory outside time characterised by its speed of operation, a memory that can only accumulate schematicising functions. Boulez fails to see that the composer's decisions to give or not give certain passages the status of virtual branchings, are just as arbitrary as the decisions of interpreters in open works. The virtualism that is supposed to free form in the idea of the open form in fact remains detached and unmediated by form; the computer reifies this detachment. If musical form is still aesthetically important, the solution of the problem of the relation between the whole and the parts in a free musical form, must remain a solution immanent in the music itself. I think this is possible when form is improvised in music.

***Adornian Preliminaries on Form in Works of Art: towards a new perspective on improvisation in music***

Improvised music, understood as an expression of aesthetic coherence, can help us to re-consider the concept of open form and thereby re-align the concepts of determination and indetermination, of the whole and the parts, of structure and material. Before going into this, I introduce the concepts of form and coherence in aesthetics, drawing on Adorno's philosophy of art.

In the tradition of philosophical interpretation of modern aesthetic experience, as inaugurated by Kant, Adorno, following many others, set out to conceptualise symbolic articulation in the work of art. On the basis of speculative interpretations of actual works, Adorno launches into a critique of formalism, subjectivism, historicism, and naturalism, in so far as these try to define the articulation of works of art (see, in particular, Paddison, 1993, and Charuest, 1995). Each interpretation of a particular work is the occasion for a critique of these theoretical positions, revealing the symbolic structure of the work in negative form. We can try to pin down what drives Adorno's thought towards a critique of theory and towards the work itself.

I am with Adorno when he says that to think the expression of aesthetic coherence is to think a dialectical movement that is immanent in the work of art. It is this movement that makes aesthetic experience unreifiable in the structure and the material of the work. It makes the work of art indeterminate in itself, just as aesthetic judgement in Kant has an indeterminate relation with the beautiful object. The work of art remains objectively undetermined because the intelligence within the work, as in Kantian aesthetic judgement, works in a way that is not determined by the objectivity of its material. This free working of the intelligence, not reified in the work, is not made more free by any decision an artist might take to simply let the material be — I'm thinking of John Cage. This is because all freedom in art depends on the resistance of the material. In improvised music, letting an element of raw contingency into the work does not mean abandoning ourselves to it.

Understanding how expressive coherence works will help us clarify coherence in improvised music. To do this, we need to ask: what is the relation between the whole and the part in Adorno's theory?

The relation between the whole and the parts in a work of art is always searching for unity. If the work of art is unique, the relation between the whole and the parts is also unique. Hence, if a work of art is going to be interesting, it is unthinkable to predetermine the relation. Attempts to formalise this relation are not to be confused with a simple recognition of the fact that musics have developed with inherited stylistic forms. The sense in which Beethoven's music, for example, "is" the sonata-form is different from the sense in which Boulez' music "is" the series.

Whatever the case, the work of art is not a sum of parts that are irreducible from the point of view of the whole. Nor are the parts organic prefigurations of the whole. The uniqueness of the work comes from the sum of the whole and the parts as such. In its conjunction with the whole, each part is a new perspective on the whole. The whole registers all these perspectives, and is thereby unique. In turn, the parts, each a perspective on the whole, are never indifferent to the embrace of the whole.

Here is a particularly eloquent passage from Adorno on the self-centering character of the dialectic in the work of art:

In works of art, in the way they are made, everything that doesn't fit into their form has to disappear; it is exactly in relation to what they would like to make disappear, that they are forms (Adorno, 1982a, p.150).

Adorno is showing us that we must demand that everything that is aesthetically pertinent actually appear (not the case, you remember, with the idealism of the open form), even if, on the other hand, the form demands for itself the disappearance of everything that appears. This is the dialectical movement in the work of art. This conceptualisation has, of course, to be brought to life in the sensibility and the materials at play in actual works of art. We now look at how improvised music acquires coherence in the light of Adorno's view of the work of art.

### ***The Particular Type of Expression of Aesthetic Coherence in Improvised Music***

#### ***a) Free temporalisation in music, and coherence in improvised music***

As a work of art, improvised music embodies the dialectic of the whole and the parts. It was his analysis of music that led Adorno to this concept. He called this dialectical movement of aesthetic form in music "informal music". At the heart of this movement is free temporalisation in music. I shall go briefly into this idea.

An analysis of temporalisation in music will avoid philosophical questions about the nature of time itself. The question of the temporality of music is a question of aesthetics. The point is: time in music — and this time is, rather, a temporalisation, that is, a marking out by the subjectivity that is temporalising. That the marking out is aesthetic, does not imply that the subjectivity that temporalises is present to itself first, before taking the decision to create. The temporalising subjectivity at play in the music is, above all, a presence to what is in the process of being created. This is exactly what Adorno had in mind when he encouraged the composer of informal music to start by listening to the material (Adorno, 1982b, pp. 337-8).

The specificity of its temporalisation is what keeps the music both open and bounded, and this always in a specific way. Music is temporal and aesthetic because it embodies audibly, in each moment, a specific and free mode of remembering and forgetting through

the resistance of the material. It's in this sense that I spoke earlier, in my critique of Boulez, of the expression of memory in music. And there is no magic thinking here: the expression of memory is the negative image of the resistance of the material.

My argument is that improvised music, as a music, takes up the project of this dialectical movement in informal music; the project of a music that forgets and remembers in a specific and free way through the resistance of the material. Improvised music embodies this dialectic in its own way, by being a temporalised expression of coherence via incoherence.

*b) The temporal characteristics of the dialectic of coherence and incoherence*

How do the concepts of coherence and incoherence connect to the idea of a spontaneous temporalisation? Imagine what happens in free — i.e. unpredetermined — collective improvisation: how can coherence be expressed through incoherence in it?

During improvisation, the incoherences — the many random events, a priori uncontrolled — are being temporalised with a view to a retrospective coherence. But they are also a critical response to any events that impose themselves as markers, as turning points, or as identities resulting from repetition, and so seem to guarantee coherence in themselves. An abundant input of incoherence unseats identities that would otherwise stick out from the flow and chop up the music in an undialectical way. It follows that, not only is improvised music itself a process seeking to go beyond its incoherences, and finding in this an expression of coherence, but it is also a music whose incoherences confront critically any attempt to go beyond incoherence in a schematic way. It's for this reason that we can characterise good improvised music as not only coherent, but freely coherent, because freed up by incoherence.

This is a first attempt to define the specific way that improvised music has of being temporalised. The dialectic of coherence and incoherence in improvised music is a particular case of the Adornian dialectic in the work of art. The dialectic in improvised music is not reified in the materials: coherence and incoherence are, in fact, time characteristics momentarily imprinted on the material.

In improvised music, the decisions, interventions and perspectives of each musician bring into play specific temporalisations and specific limits of perceptual grasp; it is through these that, in this music, the dialectic of coherence and incoherence operates. Collective improvisation embraces all these decisions, interventions and perspectives, and presents them as a problem for temporal coherence — expressed through the ambiguous identity of the material. Being sequential in time, music has the power to make identity (seen schematically) appear as difference, and vice versa. The temporalisation is therefore itself dialectical in character. And the raw material can only be the test of, and opportunity for, a free temporalisation.

In the polyphonic totality of collective improvisation, spontaneous temporalisation opens up the possibility of a reversal of identities and differences, mainly because these identities and differences are created in the perceptual scramble of actual listening. The holistic character of real-life listening dizzies the analytic glance; grasp is blurred. The recurrence of motifs, or parts which, in principle, give rise to identities, can, on site, be confused with the occurrence of something completely else. A motif — a part — played spontaneously and intentionally as the recurrence of an identity by one musician, can arrive so blurred that it is taken as something else by another musician who must decide and react spontaneously in turn.

The ambiguity between identity and difference, due to spontaneous temporalisation, is a condition of the formalization of improvised music. The freely consensual whole being

woven in each moment shows up the ambiguity of the parts in the whole and confers on each part or moment marked by ambiguity a quality that augurs the whole. The improvisers expect to clarify the materials, to up the coherence-factor. They want to take the right decisions to get coherence. But the integrity of the connection between their decisions and the consequence of their decisions is not conserved in the dialectic of the work: this way incoherence appears.

*c) Presence to the whole and to the parts in improvised music*

That said, we don't yet know what drives the process of improvisation, nor do we know the meaning of the whole for this process. Obviously the mere hope of clarifying the identity of the materials is not enough to make the movement of the music the movement of a whole. What makes the coherence of improvised music actually possible is the fact that its movement depends on a particular kind of concern for what appears and disappears. The improviser who composes in the full knowledge that each decision taken is irrevocable has this concern.

How can the categories of "the whole" and "the part" be applied to improvised music? In what way do they reflect the concern implied in the compositional decisions of the improviser? In the perspective of the dialectic of coherence and incoherence, the dialectic of improvised music stems from the critical feedback coming from the immediate listening of the improvisers. But, more than this, the concern expressed in the decisions that they throw into the music is reflected in each part as a presence temporalising that part, and in the whole as a presence temporalising the whole. It is this temporalisation that destabilises the identities, similarities and differences of the materials and so determines the dialectic of coherence and incoherence in the music. The improviser's decisions, on the other hand, cannot directly determine the part and the whole, even if their irrevocability means something only and precisely because they are attempts to express the coherence of the improvisation, in all its parts and in its whole.

The temporalisation in the compositional decision of the improviser — its irrevocability — not only marks all the temporalisation of the music, but also conditions the attitude of the expressive subject towards the whole. To repeat; the compositional decision of the improviser is not the source of coherence, because its consequence is determined by what is happening in the dialectic — of coherence and incoherence, as of identity and non-identity. What applies to the moment of decision applies also to its relation to the whole and to the parts. It is the ongoing trajectory of the improvisation that makes explicit and projects the irrevocability of the decisions of the improvisers as a presence to the parts and to the whole.

Equally it is the irrevocability of the decisions that inscribes a temporalising presence into the trajectory of the music, a presence simultaneously to the part and to the whole, and immanent in the music. This is perhaps not true of written music, where the irrevocability of the work rests on a single decision — the decision that completes the work. The decisions of the spontaneous composer, unlike those of the writer-composer, imbue with their presence the relations between the materials they summon up. No magic thinking is involved here. It is self-evident during the music.

How does the irrevocability of decisions make the improviser present to the whole? It first appears through the link between two decisions. An action, which cannot be undone, is greeted by a context that shows up the fragility of the justification for the decision that led to it. This fragility, once registered, motivates a concentration of judgement in the decision taker. The lesson learned from the first decision is already part of the meaning of the second decision. In this way, the irrevocability of decisions makes the improviser a particular kind of presence to the whole. It makes him responsible to the whole, not by

taking decisions that have the whole in mind, but by being present to the whole, and taking decisions informed by this presence.

It is irrevocability that demands an urgent reflexion on what (at the moment of opportunity, and in the light of what has already happened) must either explicitly come into being, or else erase itself by being overtaken by another event. This is reflected in the velocity ratios of the music. It is the irrevocability of the decisions present to the whole that, imbuing the musical material, makes the music tend to ride over the ups and downs of the dialectic of coherence and incoherence, and find solutions that have velocity as part of their form. It is part of the expression of the whole, for a music that is irrevocable through each of the decisions that make up its parts, to find a solution to its incoherences as quickly as possible. In this way, the acceleration of motivic sequences in improvised music could be read as a precaution with regard to the whole.

What, briefly, is the presence of the improviser to the part? First, the improviser is not present to the part through the irrevocability of his decisions in the same way as to the whole. The irrevocable decision that makes him present to the part is not important by virtue of being an undertaking to clarify the status of the part. The improviser knows that the decision is not as such a factor of coherence. The point is that, when playing, the attention of the decision taker is focussed on all the events whose irrevocability is independent of the fact that they can be read as the result of a decision. The presence of the improviser to the part is, then, a presence to all the parts of the whole in so far as they are irrevocable.

How does the improviser's concern effect the irrevocability of the part in improvised music? A concern for the part demands a type of differentiation that is not schematic. In collective improvised music, relations of identity, similarity and difference have a particular quality stemming from the fact that they originate in immediate responses in a live listening context. In this listening, the blur and fleetingness of the motifs is more than just an admission that improvisers have their limits — as expressed in the dialectic of coherence and incoherence. It is also an enrichment of meaning from an aesthetic point of view. The immediacy with which musical events and perceptions follow one another enriches improvised music, in a way that is completely specific to it, with relationships that shade between identity and difference.

In improvisation, where sound material does not clearly express a schema, it is the concern for the irrevocability of the part that makes the immediacy of the listening a resource for the imaginative production of differentiations. This concern for the part shows itself, for example, in the spontaneous production of imagined mimetic equivalents to some irrevocable and fleeting event whose identity was, in the heat of the moment, only weakly grasped. Just the same concern expresses itself in the imaginative subdividing into little parts of a phrase whose identity remained blurred and opaque. The special value of improvised music lies in this capacity to explicit its past in abundant mimetic references, more often than not imaginary. This is an altogether particular way of remembering and forgetting.

### ***Reading the Concrete Expressions of Coherence in Improvised Music***

#### ***a) An Ongoing Project***

Of course we need a more exhaustive phenomenology of the "concerned presence" to the whole and to the part. A sizeable part of the book I'm working on on improvised music will deal with this. Such a phenomenology would go not only into how the shaping of the time of improvised music proceeds from the dialectic of coherence and incoherence, from

the presence to the whole and to the parts, but also into how this temporalisation works through the body. The improviser composes spontaneously whilst inhabiting the body that connects him to the materiality of the sound. Here is the opportunity for a composer to experience the resistance of the material completely intimately, and, inversely, to invent physical movements that modulate the temporalisation of the music through extremely subtle changes to the material.

I have already begun to explore the implications of the return of the body to improvised music in jazz, and how this has effected the form of this music (see, in particular, Ratté, 1993 and 1994 b). In my book, I plan to reconsider from an aesthetic point of view some of the genres of modern jazz, up to non-politicised free jazz, to show how the idea of improvisation has progressively emancipated the forms inherited from the afro-american tradition.

*b) Wreck's Progress*

To finish, I'd like to refer to the collectively improvised music that I've made with Yves Charuest and Jean-Claude Patry in *Wreck's Progress*, as an introduction to actually hearing the music. I want to show how our musical project has responded to the demands of effective improvised music, whilst also contributing to a new debate on the plasticity and materials of this music. The *Wreck's Progress* idea involves using minimal transitions to create drifts. Explaining how this works will enable me to discuss processuality (in relation to the whole, and to the beginning and the end), contrast (particularly in changes of speed) and polyphony (7).

*1) Drifts and minimal transitions*

First, what do I mean by drift? We could, to use the terms I've been using, define it as the dialectic of coherence and incoherence as expressed in the plasticity of the materials. In free collective improvisation the whole is consensually and continuously woven, and not organised around a centre — be it the hierarchical centre of the materials (the principal theme, for example, or the series) or the architectonic centre of the construction. In fact the whole, when it is the result of a sovereign process of improvisation, overcomes any notion of centre or axis. Improvised music drifts, and its drift is given direction by the whole. This whole does not rotate: every moment of its coming into being is weighted by the sum of all its realised possibilities so far. Drifts are the product of an indifferentiation in the concrete material, without ceasing to be dependent at every moment on differences — for example, on minimal transitions.

A minimal transition is a small movement, an incremental change whose detail tends to escape us leaving only the suggestion of mobility; the movement itself is virtually imperceptible, a trace of energy. This tiny change melts away the distinction between "antecedent" and "consequent", uniting them in an evanescent movement.

The idea of minimal transitions comes from Adorno ("des kleinsten ubergangs"). According to him, Berg was a master of it. Adorno praised Bergian minimal transition as an effective way of producing a processual music able to dissolve itself (including the form traced by its contrasts), thereby respecting the illusory character of its concrete plasticity. Adorno tells us that Berg merges Wagner's continuous chromatic transition — using the smallest possible intervals — with Schonberg's motivic restraint so well that everything falls into a tight sequence of minimal transitions.

The equivalent of "nothingness" in musical material, the interval of the minor second goes beyond the note pure and simple but without distinguishing itself melodically from it and without becoming manipulable as an interval, and so always about to vanish into shapelessness (Adorno, 1989, p. 23).

Adorno takes the minimal transition as a Bergian idiosyncrasy that reveals an emphatic meaning (from a philosophical point of view) in the illusory character of music. Here we are more concerned with the temporal/aesthetic meaning of the minimal transitions, and with how it might be possible to use them to create unforced transitions between fast motion and slow motion, and vice versa, in improvised music.

But Adorno does, all the same, bring to our attention that this procedure of Berg's enables him to present musical contrasts not as naked, as breaks in the continuity, but rather as if each moment were concretely dissolving its potentially contrastive character into the next. For Adorno, the affirmative element, the "fictive dynamism" of the contrasts, is also dissolved. It seems to me, however, that the overall design of the contrasts in speed of movement, is still clearly delineated in Berg's music. This design seems almost to define the characteristic gesture of the composer. Something from which effective improvised music can perhaps free itself, without ceasing to be music that both develops and has varied modes of movement.

Generally in music the transition from fast movement to slow movement, and vice versa, suffers for appearing to be the result of a decision. It's as if there were nothing in music that wanted to accept the responsibility for causing drastic changes of speed as a means of development. In *Wreck's Progress*, one of the things we're trying to do is to radically exploit chance occurrences that — without this burden of decisiveness — have contrasting types of movement, by setting up a process in which dynamic ruptures, initially random and involuntary, can be retrospectively justified. The contrasts in type of movement no longer give in to expressionism, but are drawn into a kind of a posteriori "logic" of movement. In *Wreck's Progress* the music passes from one kind of movement to another via material that is either random or taken as such, but very rapidly drawn into the developmental process. This is how minimal transition works in *Wreck's Progress*.

## *2) Beginning and ending*

Too often we see the beginning and the ending as the unavoidable pivots of the whole. I'd like to show how the wealth of forms opened up by improvised music can give beginning and ending a new meaning.

For *Wreck's Progress*, for example, all the material that is actually heard has a priori to be made sense of. The process must either forget it or remember it in a productive way — for example through minimal transitions. It's part of the process of improvisation to overcome incoherences, either by giving them a retrospective meaning, or by making us concretely forget them. The motor of improvised form is the actual divergency of these incoherences. But in the continuous weaving of the music the ambiguities multiply as radically open formal possibilities, and the accumulating whole can no longer guess how the music will actually end. By freely giving itself up to the wealth of forms generated in a music freed from pre-determinations, improvised music has the ability to free itself also from the most fundamental pre-determination of all; the end.

The end is often thought of as closing the music. But this is to affirm that it has the force to contain and sustain the whole. The end, to be recognised as such, has to have made itself already felt as the approach to the boundary of the whole. You always see an end coming. It announces itself early, pre-determined in the literal sense, lacking the force to be in itself an end. Whatever the case, in *Wreck's Progress*, the longer the music goes on, the more the problem of the end disappears, because the processuality of the music turns the awareness of the part against the awareness of the whole. Our music just stops. And what we go on calling the end is nothing more than one more minimal transition, for even a sudden end appears as a gradual disappearance. The sounds stop being heard, but the processual energy lasts for a moment in the vacuum; you even wonder if it couldn't



have made something of it. Any nostalgia for the sounding whole that's now over is negated by the fact that the process not only denied, in its homogenous density, the completeness of the translation of sound-material into experience, but also showed how effortlessly it could slip into nothingness. The wealth of forms of the improvising process does not have to give meaning to the fact that the music finishes, although it does have to give retrospective meaning to the arbitrariness of the start.

### 3) Polyphony

With Wreck's Progress I'm interested in the idea of opening polyphony out into something other than the simple coordination of simultaneous voices. I also want to avoid the kind of heterogenous polyphony of improvisers who continue to reproduce the concept of voice by identifying it through, and creating its unity in, the identity of the improviser whose voice it is. Here I want to spring the trap that polyphony has been in collective improvisation as practiced up to now.

So-called free collective improvisation, whether gestural or mechanical, has only rarely realised its own potential for renewing polyphony. First, the way in which improvisers seize on random events only rarely makes use of the fragility induced by them. There is no lack of examples in the culture of free collective improvisation of instances where the "good" random occurrences are systematically those that create the illusion of momentary unanimity in the polyphony. The players let themselves be impressed by "coincidences" which suggest their unanimity through some unison or other, whether of a pause, a start, or an end. Furthermore, improvised polyphony has often remained stuck at the level of a hierarchical division between the functions of soloist and accompanist. This in turn depends on the hierarchical division of figure from ground. In free collective improvisation, the freedom with which polyphony is given form has led only to an increase in the interchangeability of improvisers playing at any given time the role of figure or ground. This is how the concept of musical voice is taken at face value by each improviser, with the liberty of each (standing in for the liberty of all) virtually killing off the potential for a flourishing improvised polyphony.

For Wreck's Progress, opening out polyphony means tackling everything — whether random or not — that happens during the music, and creating the polyphony as the critical outcome of the encounter of divergent motifs that are not fixed in terms of voice. This aspect of our music is accentuated by the textural interpenetration of the timbres used by the musicians in the totality of the polyphony. They break up the continuity of their gestures as instrumentalists, by using frequent changes of sound in what they are playing. This is clear enough in the case of the synthesiser and MIDI-guitar, and we respond to this "chameleon function" of synthesiser technology by using a prepared drum-kit playing textures created by contrasts of dynamic and movement. The dissolution of the voices is also enhanced by a fragmentation that is, here, no longer a simple stylistic effect, but grounded in the need for maximum enrichment of the polyphony. In Wreck's Progress, the fragments immediately adopt an auto-critical attitude with respect to the possibility of their independence from the polyphonic totality. The apparent linearities are actually "precipitates" resulting from the multiplication of clashes between fragments. And their excessively linear appearance must itself undergo polyphonic mediation.

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# On the Piano Music of Ben Carson

A Correspondence by Chris Williams and Ben Carson

1. Problems in a performance of Carson's "...Riot Gear: Exeunt" Chris Williams
2. An ethics and technique of musical narration Ben Carson
3. Time, tonality, and continuity in Carson's *The Self and Its Pleasures* Chris Williams
4. "Fors seulement l'attente que je meure..." Ben Carson
5. Tonality and attachment in Carson's *The Self and Its Pleasures* Chris Williams
6. Composition and theories of selfhood Ben Carson
7. Epilogue: memory (the historical and the formal) Chris Williams

## First: Problems in a performance of Carson's "...Riot Gear: Exeunt" Chris Williams

On a balmy La Jolla evening in the autumn of 1999, Benjamin Carson confused me. The confusion began when, before mounting the Mandeville Recital Hall stage to perform his piano piece "...Riot Gear: Exeunt," Ben shared these few punchy tidbits with the audience, of which I was a somewhat less than enthusiastic member:

"The next piece isn't only about riot gear, it's also about a chemical called *orthochlorobenzylodine malinonitrate*...which police used to irritate people and distract them from whatever...they're choosing to protest ...and I discovered that the stage direction '*Orthochlorobenzylodine Malinonitrate Riot Gear: Exeunt*' has exactly the same number of syllables as the words 'tetrachordal inversionsal retrograde combinatoriality,' [laughter] don't worry if you don't know quite what combinatoriality is... it's a way of getting really cool functional harmony without having a key. [Laughter] Well, that's a simple way of putting it, but anyway I decided to put a couple *motifs* in the piece..."

Okay Ben...enough.

To begin: why write music about nerve gas—and why discuss this transcription as if it were more than a mere satellite of our listening experience? If this is an exercise in reactionary humanism, we're certainly happy to challenge the dicta of Cage, etc. and wander (freely) within our respective and collective "memory palaces"<sup>1</sup>...indeed music *does* narrate, identify, share, ideate, resist. But to subsume the ontological shrapnel of a discrete, internally textless piano piece into such a singularly pedestrian "pre-concert" description? Is this leap part of the irony?

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1. Jann Pasler, "Postmodernism, narrativity, and the art of memory," *Contemporary Music Review* 7:2 (1993): 3.

And does the irony also extend to the specious alliance of the extramusical program with these outdated modes of syntax (i.e. functional harmony and combinatoriality)? If “really cool functional harmony” evokes anything concrete for *me*, it’s death, or a maiden, or a countryside—or, more likely (given that we hear the piano—the gestural and imaginal prerequisite—as much as the harmony), a television show *about* death or a maiden or a countryside. On the other hand, if, as he hints, his music will be dodecaphonic, there’s little hope that I’ll want to listen “outside the music” at all.

And what about the “motif” quip? Does Ben honestly intend his casual employment of late-“common practice” abstraction (and more specifically, of early-modernist emotive control) to serve this text? As I hear the Valkyrie swooping overhead, bearing all their centrality and fixity and rhetorical pomp, I can hardly think of a *less* empowering musical device in Carson’s fight against the W. T. O., especially considering the presence of those well-prepared policemen. At least in principle, if not chemically, Carson’s music is giving me a skin rash—leftist overtones, hegemonic undertones...perhaps I wasn’t so far off to place it in the realm of television. He continues:

“The first motif you’re going to hear is the ‘Exeunt’ motif, which is the part where I want to get the riot gear out of there, because...I don’t like it; and there’s another motif that I’ll actually need a little bit of help with, because it’s the Orthoclorobenzylodine malinonitrate-warning signal motif. Since in serial music it’s hard to distinguish between harmonies on the piano...because there’s not enough timbral variety... I wasn’t sure that my warning signal motif would stick out well enough, so I think there need to be other timbres. I’d like to ask a few of you [audience members], if you’re willing, to sing this particular motif when the time comes: ...”

(Sounds of vague acquiescence.)

(Rehearsal: the audience learns its part and when to sing it.)

(The moment of truth: three minutes of nearly commonsensical, unapologetically diatonic, rather *bourgeois* piano music. The audience helps out at 2’30” with the following:)

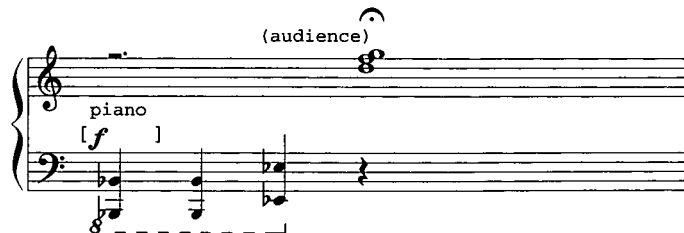


Figure 1: Audience participation in “...Riot Gear: Exeunt”

Thankfully, we were not asked to follow a bouncing ball to songs of the workers, but something’s still amiss. What’s with this sweet little allegory, when we are being asked to build nonviolent solidarity against violent cops? And what about the practice of employing such a conduit (running unchallenged from composer to performer to audience, on dialectical fuel) at all? It strikes me that to engage this post-Barthesian myth in any capacity, regardless of the values it may or may not assume en route, is to cripple the community experience in a fundamental way.

When our whole system presupposes that a composer should (or even *can*) function as an agent of unilateral activity ("a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage"<sup>2</sup>), proposing alternative models from within the system is a meaningless venture: to be sure, myth is, *ipso facto*, slick, self-contained, and inescapably "depoliticized"<sup>3</sup>—in a word, non-negotiable.

However, there are some potholes along this road. After all, he invited his listeners—a community, perhaps—to raise their voices in the *demystification* of combinatoriality, and they did. There is a reflexive element to this representational schema that resists the illusory cleanliness and "natural justification"<sup>4</sup> of archetypal concert music: we are invited not just to consume Ben's paramyth, but to permeate and explore it. Though the piece may be crawling with mythic symptoms, they fail to support or realize any globally monumental (i.e. essential) mythic disease. "To start with, the objects it takes ahold of are rare—only a few political notions..."<sup>5</sup>

## Second: An ethics and technique of musical narration

Ben Carson

I want to change the subject, for a moment.

One could be forgiven for believing that, as a prerequisite to Hollywood fame, young black men are obliged to portray some kind of undercover agent (Think of Eddie Murphy, Wesley Snipes, Will Smith, Chris Tucker, Chris Rock...). To figure why such a rule might exist, we should turn to the issue of what exactly is compelling about the characters they play.

Since U. S. civil and criminal law don't account comfortably for disparities of power based on race or class, a broader provision of justice is, to some, only imaginable in the form of civil disobedience. It follows that white audiences, of which I am sometimes a member, could invert their fear of violence, or other well-reasoned 'insubordination,' by watching fictional black men accept a familiar thematic responsibility—to *enforce the law in secret*. The inversion occurs in two ways: African-American characters, instead of publicly declaring dissent, become private (or at least hidden) instruments of conformity (Figure 2; next page).

The plain-clothes cop is a morally uncomplicated character. Except in certain moments of comic relief, heroes' rewards are beneath him. When a higher purpose is at hand, he is the picture of loose indifference, but unbeknownst to his enemies, he is coiled like a tight spring. When the *right time* comes, his humor is scathing and his mistakes are none.

Aligned with the larger cold-war tradition of films about various kinds of public servants, the black plain-clothes cop wants not to be bothered by institutional or civil order (or even the civil rights of suspects). But unlike his white predecessors, the mainstream young black action hero does not come with inner turmoil or a distant burdensome past. For that, a jaded mentor appears (think of Nick Nolte, Tommy Lee Jones, Charlie Sheen, Anthony Hopkins...), to manipulate, react, and to look on in calm and/or mildly irritated dismay. In the end, the white

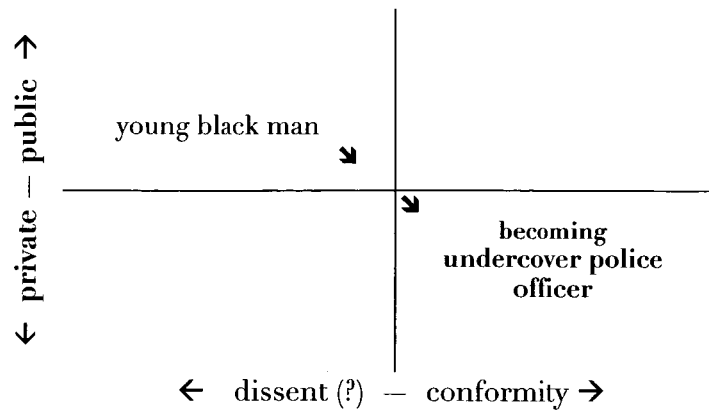
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2. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), 143.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 147.



**Figure 2: Transforming a fear of civil disobedience**  
*African-American portrayals of undercover police officers express, by inversion, white fear of the likelihood of public outrage about racial injustice.*

collaborator often makes a leap of faith, from institutional logic, for example, to moral and spiritual independence, which enables the black hero's antics—whether snappy, clumsy, casual, or ingenious—to prevail.

Arguably the only two widely popular wordless musical compositions for radio broadcast in the mid-1980s were the overtures to *Miami Vice* and *Beverly Hills Cop*; both were also conceived overtly as keyboard music and later turned lucrative as published piano transcriptions. It was with this sort of enduring ubiquity in mind that I first considered writing programmatic piano music. It should be possible, I thought, to bring the accessible post-classical literature of “piano solos” up-to-date with the ongoing marriage of middle-class music and bourgeois identity (including the construction of white racial experience). In the 1980s, keyboard music helped makers of film and television shows to narrate new roles for black America, and in those narrations the particularity and culpability of white experience vanishes in a two-dimensional counterpoint: not pitch against time but fantastic projection against racialized subjectivity, and (in Figure 2 above), privacy against conformity. My short piece *Plain-clothes Cop* (next page) is thus not intended as satire, but as an opportunity to acknowledge more openly these musical accessories of white experience.

The opening chords (Figure 3) are a “motto”—a gesture meant to introduce the piece and also to provide a basis for the longer form which follows. The first three chords in the motto are an array of tonal dissonances. The fourth chord reveals the functional orientation of the progression: out of something ambiguously

( with quiet-but-enlivened confidence )      The resolution “er...” may be omitted.  
 The entire motto is also optional.

**Figure 3: Opening motto for “Plain-clothes Cop”**

d-minor and into an unambiguous dominant (V-6-5) in F-flat minor.

The remainder of the piece consists of two phrases. The first (mm 3-13) is a more lengthy working-out of the harmony described above, beginning again in G and tonicizing both B-sharp and C-flat (although the chords of the phrase are not spelled according to their real tonal functions). This harmonic inertia is not meant to be rhetorically fancy, but rather to narrate—directly—the enviable everyday freedom of a comic action hero. In the second, more placid phrase (beginning m 13), the plain-clothes cop waits, in vain, for an opening...for his punch-line. Instead of unfolding forward into something bold and new, the phrase simply backs away into the projective resting place of a passive moviegoer.

*Plain-clothes Cop* is thus a composition with a straightforwardly narrative program, about a constructed process of identification with, and in relation to, a black subject. Small, complex changes in attitude and posture ornament a larger, more basic progression from one emotion to the next. The larger formal world of the two phrases accomplishes freedom, and then retreat, in a pair of simple and linear developments. However, the internal and intimate world of each half—the first tonally incomplete and the second fraught with seemingly circular repetition—suggests, I hope, a quantity of time much larger and less well-defined than that which is required to hear it. As with our real-life experiences of heroic wit, “the right time” just never seems to arrive.

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The presence of a ‘tangible referent’ in art and music has become a useful tool today; a badge of relevance not easily obtained by a piece called “No. 14” or “Allegro.” Unnamed works like “Composition for 12 Instruments” or “Piece for Piano” have seemed honest enough for most of the history of instrumental music, but in the last couple of decades they seem a little grandiose in their bid for universal (i.e. non-particular) meaning. Yet we were always taught that program music was inferior. Maybe these conflicting conditions are the reason that contemporary art music so often seems to dance on the boundary between absolutism and narration or description.

Composing on the margins, rather than in the center, of programmaticism, is a ‘New Music’ common practice. A student composer will put herself to the task of setting a story, for example, by Lewis Carroll, and will take care to remind us in discussion that these sounds are “not meant to be descriptive” of what Carroll’s prose describes (and certainly not of the prose itself), but of something rather less direct. (It is usually the composer’s ‘personal relationship’ to the text.) It could be argued that some of our careful ambiguity in musical description reflects a soteriological (salvation-oriented), rather than aesthetic, sensibility. On the one hand, we might rescue listeners from their material conditions—by reminding them to hope that music is essentially ethereal and independent of worldly attachments—while on the other hand we provide a conceptual bridge for those who feel cut-off at the boundary between.

And then, if the next piece on the concert is inspired by a famous painting (maybe Feldman inspired by Rothko or Guston), it will seem important to clarify that a given notated sound does not correspond just-so to a shaded corner of the canvas. Instead, someone explains (and we are supposed to be relieved), that the music is “a repainting of the composer’s abstract emotional reaction to an impulse like the one to which the painter seems to have been responding.”

Benjamin Carson, 2000

plain-clothes  
cop

motto (with quiet-but-enlivened confidence)

trope: smoothly propelled

The resolution in F-flat may be omitted.  
The entire motto is also optional.

(dominant in F-flat)

simulate the D tenuto  
as well as possible

(II in B-sharp)

rallentando

sempre rallentando

PPP

sotto voce, molto accelerando

tempo, rallentando

PPP

mp



Indeed, to contemplate the latter seems to require more introspection than to contemplate simple musical description. If composers are successful in this more complex project they will have allowed concert-goers to imagine themselves as whole and independent receptacles: not relying on the mediating space of social conditions, social spaces, histories, and (worst of all) other people's opinions, for musical gratification. With tangible extramusical objects receding steadily into the background, listener-viewer-readers of 'almost-abstract' music *can evade the dangerous possibility of sensual agreement and intimacy around the media themselves*—such as might be produced if a composition were an announcement of a specific experience. Dismay at "simple programmaticism"<sup>6</sup> might thus be traced to Protestant soteriology, in which the fate of unforgiven souls is finally—after all the evangelism—the domain of a personal conversation with God (the lonely absolute), falling to no one else's shoulders and no one else's ears.

This recent treatment of programmaticism is no different from the romantic one: it wants music to be in the service of feelings about the object rather than narration or historicization of the object. (Beethoven's *Pastorale* is about an artist's emotions in the countryside, and not the countryside itself, right?) But consensus about the boundaries between the *experience* of beauty, and various narrative *constructions* of it, are not easily reached. It puzzles me to consider that so many musicians have rested their personal ethics and techniques of musical narration on the assumption that there is a clear polarity in such a distinction.

And still the energies of the artist who always keeps one foot in the door to abstraction are attendant to as narrow a range of extramusical topics as ever. Parallel with the Romantic novel we inherit our list of possible areas of inquiry from a wide variety of earlier sources, but then constrain it, demanding realistic doses of pain and suffering along with whatever heroism can be found, demanding heteronormativity, demanding the ideological resolution of any moral tensions, demanding some sort of struggle against something: maybe one's inner nature, or the Nature of the outer world.

Plain-clothes Cop and the rest of my collection of short piano pieces (2000-2001) are not, I hope, "highly psychological program music."<sup>7</sup> They are programmatic pieces whose topics are nonfiction, or perhaps non-"fiction-worthy": not quite worthy of the 19th-century novel. The ethical problem of program music that has got my attention is thus not whether music is beyond or above "mere narration," but whether we all might take more of an opportunity to narrate as ordinary and inchoate a set of experiences as we please.

### **Third: Time, tonality, and continuity in Carson's *The Self and its Pleasures***

*Chris Williams*

Consider another of Carson's compositions for piano, *The Self and its Pleasures*, whose diatonicism and functional harmony are, plainly, Tonal—"not just

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6. For examples, see Julliard School of Music, "Precollege division: Bartok," in <http://precollege.julliard.edu/Composers/Bios/Bartok.htm> or Royal S. Brown, Review of *Shostakovich—a Life* by Laurel E. Fay, in *Fanfare* 23:5 (May/June 2000): 331.

7. Michael Bernstein, "Introductory Remarks, Young Composers' Concert, June 9, 1999,"

in some obscure pre-compositional sense, but in the sense that it has recognizable major and minor keys.”<sup>8</sup> In “...Riot Gear: Exeunt” Ben was flirting with outdated syntax, but now he’s taken the plunge. Why?

When one understands tonality in its “common” (historical) sense to be a function of pitch (as most composers do, with rubber gloves inherited in Harmony 101), one assigns “rhythm,” at local (especially cellular) and formal (especially phraseological) levels—a subservient role thereto. (For that matter, one learns equally well to marginalize timbre, volume, etc., but this is to be expected; that most discourse on tonal music privileges the deterministic score necessarily disqualifies parameters that are not quantitatively articulate.) Though the causal mechanisms and linear syntax by which we activate tonality are available only through very specialized investments in rhythm, our analytical insistence—a bias of reason—on a dimensional segregation renders rhythm somewhat transparent and inarticulate in a broader sense. This is so because, broadly, we essentialize the two identities; thus, as usual, one identity loses out.<sup>9</sup> We declare Pitch, the notated Original, the winner.

This Cartesian tethering prohibits a dialogical richness<sup>10</sup> within the music. Either pitch relationships that define the tonal narrative rely on a sustained suppression (oppression?) of the work of pulse, phrase, and other rhythmic constituents, or conversely, “in composers’ attempts to design situations whose pulsedness is precisely controlled...there is virtually no variety in other [i.e. pitch-structured] dimensions.”<sup>11</sup> A crude, but familiar, hypothetical example of this tension: the regularity of meter and cadence in a sonata form’s first theme, vis a vis the irregularity of rhythmic variations (on a single melodic fragment within a categorically distant harmonic center) in the development. Taken in more general terms, this treatment of rhythm and pitch constitutes a primary vehicle of tonality’s moral urgency, its “focus almost obsessively on progress, rationality, intelligibility, quests after goals, and the illusion of self-contained autonomy.”<sup>12</sup>

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International Festival Institute, Round Top, Tx. He was referring to my *Pari Passu*, for five strings.

8. Benjamin Carson, *The Self and Its Pleasures: a collection of music for piano and music for orchestra* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001), vii.

9. Diana Fuss states that essentialism “is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity... Importantly, essentialism is typically defined in opposition to difference... The opposition is a helpful one in that it reminds us that a complex system of cultural, social, psychical, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences, position and constitute the subject” (Fuss, Diane. *Essentially Speaking*. New York: Routledge (1989). xi-xii.). Though clearly the concept of essentialism with respect to human identity is not literally applicable to musical identity, there are meaningful parallels, chief among them essentialism’s equating a person’s or thing’s historical function (e.g. rhythm’s support of particular harmonic relationships endemic to a particular set of historical values) to that person’s or thing’s “natural” and ahistorical condition.

10. Benjamin Carson, “Pulsedness and Special Linear Identity,” *Proceedings, Vrije Universiteit* (May 1999): 6. Carson couches this notion of time in terms of continuity: “To be made articulate, a medium must permit discontinuity, and the discontinuity must be perceived in relationship to something continuous. For an expression to take an assessable form, the continuous thing is sometimes suppressed almost into oblivion. For example, in a painting, the flat area of a canvas disappears to show the relief of a human figure. In this case, the suggestion of a three-dimensional space around that figure depends heavily on our consistent yet unwitting appraisal of distances on the two-dimensional surface.”

11. Carson, “Pulsedness,” 6.

12. Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 68.

## On the Piano Music of Ben Carson

*The Self and Its Pleasures* rereads this “virtually natural”<sup>13</sup> hierarchy. Although “B Major is one thing and F Major is quite another,”<sup>14</sup> the existential weight historically associated with the disparity of these, and other, identities is curiously mitigated, if not altogether absent. Carson’s qualitative use of “rhythm,” continuous with his treatment of “pitch,” is largely responsible for this phenomenon.

We find abundant examples in the first 40 measures of the piece (below). Both local and cadential manifestations of harmonic rhythm are present, but they are always contextually uncertain; the treatment of harmonic rhythm is critical here because it challenges the dialectical characterization of pitch and rhythm that in historical tonalities serves to reinforce the musics’ centralized rhetoric via the alliance of phrase with theme, the resolution of harmonic centers, etc. For instance, throughout the first phrase, ending at the fermata in m. 8, we encounter attacks of diatonic chords (or their implications, in prominent scale degree resolutions) on nearly every first and third beat in the 4/4 meter: I in m. 1, vii<sup>6</sup>/4 and I in m. 2, (V7) and (I) in m. 3, and so on; however, in each of these cases, the varying combinations of melodic contour, density, and notes still resonating from the immediately preceding “weak” beats impart ambiguity to the role(s) of the “strong” events whose registral, dynamic, and relatively rhythmic (i.e. locational with respect to micro-phrase groupings) positions are not necessarily strong at all.

Similarly, cadences that circumscribe harmonic regions within which local harmonic rhythms take place are also fuzzy; they indeed appear and function, but their transparency is marred. In m. 3, 4, 9, 14, and 22, for example, the first or last presentations of the tonic in a given key all occur off the beat and/ or with the interruption of a non-diatonic pitch in a higher register (as marked by asterisks in the facing page score of m. 1-25).

The political project to which Carson alludes in my first experience of his music seems therefore not so implausible, perhaps. Both within the text and as a reflection on the text is a *realignment* (an assertion of the continuity) of latent historicity (with our assumed “present”), more than either mainline deconstruction or baser appropriation.

While it is clear that this [appropriative] attitude towards the cultural recycling of *disjecta membra* of previous epics is not to be uncritically rejected as a means of assuring the ‘shock effect’ demanded by Walter Benjamin, it seems equally plausible to assume that an increasingly marked preference for historically pre-formed elements will lead to a partial disenfranchisement of those same elements.<sup>15</sup>

We *are* beginning to grapple, albeit somewhat gingerly, with the signifieds that plague us in a violent way: *The Self*... opens a space to address the segregations which underlie our entire system of representational (i.e. communicative) awareness.

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13. McClary, 68.

14. Carson, “The Self and Its Pleasures,” vii.

15. Brian Ferneyhough, “Il Tempo Della Figura,” in *Collected Writings* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1995), 34.

♩ = 75 <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>

B: I vii<sup>0</sup> I VI E: <sup>(o)</sup>I V (i)IV V VI I  
a: i i V

8 12

VI i F: V I VI IV ii V B: V vi V I IV

16 20

V<sup>7</sup> I V<sup>7</sup> V vi I V ( - 7 ) I V I IV vii V i V I vii vi

24

( I ) V<sup>7</sup> I vi F: vii/II II (vii) I (V<sup>7</sup> ) i ( V ) I

**Fourth: "Fors seulement l'attente que je meure ..."**

*Ben Carson*

When weighing the timeliness or 'relevance' of something like a cadential six-four chord, consider that *sophrosyne*<sup>16</sup> selectivity is made complicated by narratives of difference. By "sophrosyneic selectivity" I mean mastery-via-abstention: avoiding—as one avoids temptation, or an evil ghost<sup>17</sup>—reference to tonality, to romantic gestural language. To better understand *sophrosyne*, consider—as in the expectation that audiences will valorize black plain-clothes cops—that what is thought to be an aesthetic decision is actually a moral one.

When we speak of timeliness and relevance, we believe we are speaking about what is new in art, and what is not; but those words force the assertion of a model of time in which the newness of a thing (a harmony, a rhythm, an idea) is ordinally determined. The model, roughly, is *progress*, and it tests the sad truth of a predicate "is a reference to..."—thus, the question often submitted to moral judgement is whether or not to refer *back* (against progress). In that way of framing the question of musical reference, answers seem forced. Tonality seems bad.

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As will probably have been clear in "...Riot Gear: Exeunt," I have no complaint against contrived and forthright acts of cultural resistance and negation. I imagine divesting myself of the cadential six-four chord as readily as I imagine divesting myself of a large drug company that systematically and deliberately stacks its publicly-endowed research funds toward health concerns affecting the wealthy. (In fact, there is no way to imagine an ethical alternative; no exercise in relativism has ever produced a persuasive defense of the notion that willful collaboration in thievery is anything but theft.<sup>18</sup>) More generally, one can boycott a constructive ritual symbol (e.g. a music) as satisfactorily as one can boycott a destructive ritual enterprise (e.g. a corporation). It is in this way that a negative dialectics of cultural production can be born into the manifestos of artists...it was thus that Romantics resisted schematic phrase structures and that modernists further resisted linear<sup>19</sup> tonal hierarchy.

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16. From Foucault's reading of *sophrosyne*, as freedom through self-mastery; freedom of spirit by escape from "slavery to bodily impulses." Thus freedom through self-constriction. [ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985; New York: Vintage, 1990), 79-80. ]

17. To make a metaphor of "evil ghost," is to refer duplicitously to pre-Christian and other pagan belief systems transformed deliberately into mysteries of the occult. It is in early Romantic thought—in particular in its reaction to a tide of industrial mechanization and class struggle—that folklorism, colonial exoticism, and retro-druidic cults begin to gather broad cultural momentum. The tendency to consider teutonic antiquity in dark-but-attractive opposition to mediterranean antiquity is among the factors contributing to the development of the gothic novel, "indes gallants" ('noble' characterizations of the savage), and even *Sturm und Drang*. Both "neo-romantics" and their censors, I think, have forgotten these crucial contexts for much of what we now know as Romantic.

18. Merck and Bristol-Meyers, for example, are free to assert that a particular kind of organized theft—for example, from non-wealthy sick people—is morally justified, but they cannot in any accurate way describe specific hold-ups (favoring, with public money, the lucrative treatment of lasting AIDS symptoms over the non-lucrative possibility of a vaccine) as being other than theft.

19. It is important not to mistake the word "linear" for its recent colloquial synonyms, which

However, the possibly “sophrosyneic” element of anti-tonal selectivity comes into light as we scrutinize a little more closely this comparison with boycott economics; it calls to mind the dubious clarity of privilege in an era of consolidated economic power. Large numbers of afflicted individuals cannot be called upon as a community to rule out (from their regimen of symptom-oriented therapies) a particular kind of beneficial treatment merely because the ongoing sale of that treatment is requisite to a corporation’s empowerment. More loosely, sophrosyneic musical “aesthetics” are not a freely-distributed property of musical communities, they are a localized and disjunct property of individual musicians with isolated privileges distinct from those of their listeners. The *selection*—precisely to exclude that which ahistorically and dangerously ‘tempts,’ and thus to selectively exclude and include the pleasures of identity—is a powerful boundary-making game.

Privileges are not arbitrary realities; they have discrete purposes. Critics who discuss (and thus produce) the limits and margins of the artist’s project as *aesthetic debate* are thus inventing a kind of separation between art and tradition similar to a uniquely post-Revolutionary<sup>20</sup> style of distinction between present and past. Just as “...modern medicine and modern historiography are born almost simultaneously from the rift between a subject that is supposedly literate and an object that is supposedly written in an unknown language,”<sup>21</sup> the body of knowledge out of which modern aesthetics springs is a resource of symbol and thought out of which knowledge about beauty is extracted for the benefit of a *mute audience*. In turn, the audience is a body (not of knowledge, but of experience); it is supposed to nourish aesthetic knowledge by providing the maternal resonating space in which modern aesthetic practitioners—like contemporary composers—act. But of course it doesn’t have to be this way.

“Fors seulement l’attente que je meure ...” (If not for thoughts of death...) is the title of an often-quoted tragic chanson probably originating among the late-medieval generations of troubadour singers. Its melody, along with its many polyphonic manifestations from the time of Machaut onward, became an important source of material for sacred music in the high Renaissance. Ockeghem’s setting of the tune is paraphrased in my large piano piece *The Self and Its Pleasures*.

The aristocratic performance tradition in which “Fors seulement...” originates can be credited with the invention of romantic<sup>22</sup> love—a kind of

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include “rigid”, “nonporous”, “artificially devoid of complexity” or even “shallow.” I refer instead to any progressively *accumulated* chain of (potentially complex) significance that develops in a chronology. Perhaps Beethoven is the first composer in which such procedures are important: Beethoven came of age in the midst of a complete transformation in the cultural meaning of both large- and small-scale *temporal progression*. Beethoven’s middle- and late- period “development sections” were different from Mozart’s not because Beethoven had a longer attention span or a deeper imagination, but because Mozart was not normally concerned with the gradual appendicization of tension and revelation; he had the good fortune of indifference to a coming industrial anxiety in which models of *progress* and *calendar time* are inextricably bound to one another, and in which labor and resources are morally inculcated by the precise measurement of hours and minutes. In subsequent sections of the present essays, the ideas of Michel de Certeau will be brought to bear on this metahistorical distinction.

20. After the American and French Revolutions, and in the ‘initial conception’ of industrialism; i.e., in the waning years of the 18th century.

21. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia, 1988), 102.

22. Though they are related, I try to maintain clarity in the distinction between *romantic*, that is,

love which resembles the erotic but which is supposed to be entirely different. Drawing upon Christian notions of selflessness and sacrifice, romantic love, as the troubadours portray it, is the province of devout faith in the *ultimate* importance of something unknowable and intangible. Likewise, truly romantic lovers are supposed to dismiss as insignificant all that is sensual and corporeal. It is important to note that, although the poetry has sexual (and heteronormative) characteristics, it is not erotic. The element of devotion, the refutation of world, self, and body, and the narrator's acutely passionate sorrow about the loss of his beloved, are demonstrations of the kind of love we are supposed to share with God and Christ.

So it is difficult to say what meaning 16th-century worshippers—who are the mute but resonant body of this discourse—would invest in the sounds of a profane chanson like this one, emerging amidst the textures of a Sanctus (“...heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosannah in the highest”) or an Agnus Dei (“...Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.”). Although such juxtapositions invite us to associate two kinds of metaphysical-immortal glory, they also draw both kinds of love into a closer relationship with their limitations: because of their shared dependence upon a mind-body split, we might find ourselves reminded that their potency is related to an elaborately constructed association between sexuality and death.

(Below is the complete chanson as I read it. English is on the left because the rather disruptive translation is my own, and it suggests the soteriology of pathetic love, in a way that the original does not. It is my translation, and not the original, which participates in a flurry of attitudes and identifications that inform *The Self and its Pleasures*.)

Apart from just waiting to die  
There's no hope left in my tired heart  
For your sake I am so infected with sadness  
That no kind of suffering is absent, I am  
ended;  
I am sure to lose myself in you.

Your angry incisions are predicted by nothing  
Nothing which I could know, except, surely  
that, to begin with,  
I have nothing to hope for  
Apart from just waiting to die.

When I can cry, I am alone in crying  
When I've given of myself,  
From then on, I resent it in misery  
I am not truly living, not truly hoping  
Apart from just waiting to die.

*Fors seulement l'attente que je meure  
En mon las cuer nul espoir ne demeure  
Car mon malheur si très fort me tormente  
Qu'il n'est douleur que par vous je ne  
sente,  
Pour ce que suys de vous perdre bien seure.*

*Vostre rigueur se très fort me court seure  
Qu'en ce parti il fault que je m'asseure  
Donc je n'ay bien qui en rien me contente,  
Car mon malheur se très fort me tormente,  
Fors seulement l'attente que je meure.*

*Mon desconfort toute seulle je pleure  
En mauldissant sur ma foy a toute heure  
Ma loyaulté qui tant me fait dolente,  
Laz! que je suys de vivre mal contente,  
Quant de par vous n'est riens me sequere.*

In the “*Fors Seulement...*” section of *The Self...* [ mm. 246-347, available at [www.the-open-space.org](http://www.the-open-space.org) ], the piano begins with rhythmically ‘reduced’ part-writing, suggesting a 16th-century contrapuntal texture. The alignment of parts then quickly falls away, as though in an act of bodily sacrifice, but the essentially contrapuntal structure remains at first, offering scraps of chord and harmony only at rare and unlikely moments. Finally, the piece devolves from the confined and elevated world of sung voices to the more earthly and irreligious sphere of pianistic

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‘of or pertaining to 11th- and 12th-century romances and ballads of courtly love’ and *Romantic*, that is ‘of or pertaining to the 19th-century directive toward emotionally intensive representations, especially of nature, Aryan folklore, madness, and the spiritual consequences of mortality.’

virtuosity, where lie both the repulsion and the ecstasy which are inherent in Romantic fetishized morbidity. What might be selectively exposed, then, among the thoughts and ghosts of pleasure from which we are always painfully in the act of self-separation, is our special attachment to those of our cultural memories in which death was perhaps first connected to that which gives pleasure.

### Fifth: Tonality and attachment in Carson's *The Self and Its Pleasures* Chris Williams

In scratching the parametric lenses of tonal idiom, *The Self and its Pleasures* foregrounds the polyphonic basis of tonality, both within the piece and as a music-historical phenomenon. In turn, it precludes the availability of autonomous syntax, events, and listening, inviting the listener into unique covalence embodied in Carson's notion of "attachment."

The most basic idea in *The Self and Its Pleasures*—one to which each of the others is in some way subservient—is one which I will call 'attachment.' It has two essential characteristics. The first is that there must be an event which is followed by another in such a way as to suggest that the two are members of a single voice—a sequence from one event to the next. The second trait is the relationship of the first two events to the third. The third event must contradict our impressions that the first two are linked, by forging a connection with one of them. By binding itself to one of the original pair, and doing so more strongly than the original pair were bound to each other, the third note forces a kind of distance between the first two which, prior to the third, was not an important organizing principle among the notes.<sup>23</sup>

Present at every level of organization, attachment works to denature our sense of the "self"-contained musical unit.

Attachment is at first evident as a melodic phenomenon, where the "events" are, simply, notes. In mm. 27-8, for instance (Figure 4), in the key of B Major, we encounter a blatantly voiced D#, followed in its decay by a similarly voiced C#: two points along a single line whose goal is the tonic.

But when the C# is reattacked on the upbeat of beat 1 in m. 28, it is immediately interrupted (without distraction, unlike the previous C# in m. 27) by the next point on the line, the tonic, while still sounding. This multiplicity of

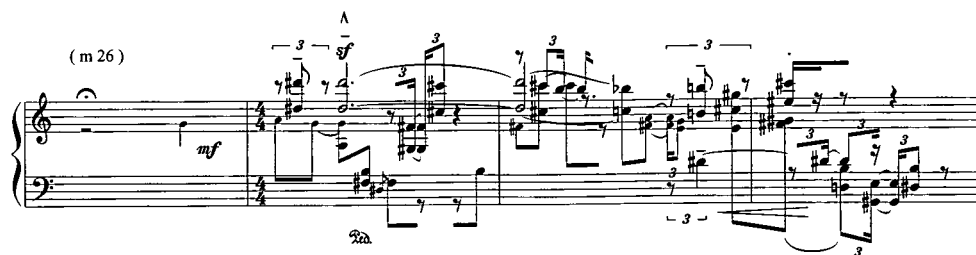


Figure 4: mm. 26-29, 'attached' voices

23. Benjamin Carson, "The Self and Its Pleasures" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001), 8.



streams requires a reassessment of the relationship between the adjacent scale degrees, and encourages one "to think of them [counterintuitively] as members of parallel, non-intersecting voices."<sup>24</sup> A "kind of distance" recalls the similar (but latent—considering the clouding presence of material in a lower register) relationship C# has to D# in m. 27, which skews the teleology entirely. Other instances of this melodic strategy can be found in m. 1 (beat 3), m. 11 (beat 3), m. 12 (beats 2-3), m. 22 (beat 2), etc.

Attachment is also evident at the level of the "middle ground," where pitches still comprise the "events." However, pitches function somewhat differently than at the aforementioned level of melody, or foreground. In these cases, the prolongation or recurrence of a given note adds a degree of iconic weight that affects the stability of its defining tonal context.

Such is the case in mm. 4-7. Here, in the key of E Major (as evidenced by the G#'s in the outer voices on the upbeat of beat 4 in m. 4), we encounter an F double-sharp re-articulated over the course of nearly two full measures, uninterrupted registrally (and reinforced enharmonically by the G natural in m. 6) so as to be heard as the third scale degree in E minor. When released and followed by a similarly registrated G# at the end of m. 6, suggesting the two pitches' membership in the same voice, they both reflect a similar role with respect to the tonal center. However, as the apparently resolved G# on beat 3 of m. 7 rests under a fermata, the F double-sharp returns, rather rudely asserting its "F-ness" and negating the previously assumed shared linear membership. Finally, this assertion retroactively alters the meaning of the previous ascent of the A on beat 2 of m. 6 proceeding stepwise to B on beat 3 and C on beat 4: by negating the presumed "G-ness" (i.e. the dominant function) of the F double-sharp in m. 6, the otherwise "foreground" attachment crystallized at m. 8 negates the linearity (the modulation) potentially heard between the predominating E key center and the fleeting (or, now, illusory) C key center. Attachment weakens the likelihood of interpreting the G# in m. 6 as an Ab (as one would hear the G# if one heard the F double-sharp as a G—which is not the case—resolving upward in the key of C) and the likelihood of ideating the subphrase as a progression, ending with a deceptive cadence, in C: the tonal identity is hung out to dry. (Additionally, the event's proximity to the end of a phrase heightens its importance; whereas foreground instances of attachment occur in the middle of phrases and thus affect primarily their local contexts, the middle ground instances allow for similar relationships to affect larger units.)

Attachment at the background level abstracts the role of pitches in their respective tonalities to an even greater degree, treating tonal centers themselves polyphonically. In yet a different light, "B Major is one thing and F Major is quite another:" their progressional, linear, and thus most essentially (hegemonically?) narrative functions are further problematized.

Initially in *The Self and Its Pleasures* we do understand tonal centers in traditional progressional, linear terms. Crucial tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords appear one after the other in logical, directed orderings, as do the keys which contain them. We see conventional presentations of B Major in m. 1-4, E in m. 4-8, and F in m. 9-11, where each modulation is preceded by a stepwise resolution to a VI (implying deceptive cadences, which are nothing if not narratively centralized—in order to be "deceived," one must first "perceive"). The presence of a pivot chord (m. 8) affirms causality in a particularly pointed way. Harmonic

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24. Carson, *ibid.*

centers can thus be understood as the firsts in series of events in the attachment equation, in which each tonic is followed by another to suggest that the two are members of a single voice.

We observe a third event in m. 12-13; where F Major has been clearly established in m. 9-11, unlikely shades of B Major resurface in the form of repeated F#'s on weak beats of m. 12 and a ii-V-I progression in the upper voice(s) of m. 13. That this parenthetical area is not "transitional" (unilinear) between tonal centers, but rather an instance of the *coexistence* of multiple tonal "voices" is confirmed in the persistence of F Major, which is bolstered by a V6-I cadence in m. 14 three beats after the brief appearance of B Major. This phenomenon recurs in m. 18-19 where in the key of B Major, a low E natural is followed by a low C natural, prefiguring a "resolution" to F Major in the upper voices later in m. 19, and in m. 23 where, in the predominating key of F Major, we find a fleeting i-(V7)-i progression in B Minor in the upper voices (and bolstered by the low B on the second 32nd-note of beat 4). The reappearances of deceptive-cadential vi chords before and after the contrapuntally framed appearances of key centers in m. 12 and 20 also help to reinforce the primary "points" against which they surface, as do the extreme register(s) in which the counterpoints appear.

The piece's saturation in attachment becomes even more apparent as we see the "forest"—formal processes that belie consideration in a hierarchy of foreground and background. Where at local levels the principle is limited to uses of pitch, at these 'formal' levels the investment in density or rhythmic complexity often enables attachment's polarized partitioning of identity to embody with even greater weight the conflict encountered when those poles operate simultaneously. Among the many available examples, we may consider the passage of mm. 276-347 in Carson's score [ available online at <[www.the-open-space.org](http://www.the-open-space.org)> ].

Measure 276 presents the first event in a case of macro-attachment, a texture divided into sparse movement in the upper register and spastic filigree in the lower register. M. 284 retains a sense of separation while introducing some rhythmic convergence, and m. 297 ushers in the second event, a common registration and consistent rhythmic texture. By m. 318, the trajectory is complete in a shared subject ("Fors Seulement") of imitative counterpoint, which continues to unite the two identities through m. 328-337, when the music ceases even to be heterophonic. The third event at m. 338-347, marked "explosively, contrarily" at m. 340, then abruptly reintroduces the spastic filigree in the fresh wake of static homophony with no linear preparation; the two textures, or events, appear consecutively as presumed points along a line, only to be revealed contrarily by the third event, which reflects a crucial disjunction between those textures. This disjunction encourages the listener's re-organization of some 60+ bars of previous music — in much the same way that local melodic attachment interrupts and reorganizes the several beats that precede it.

It is important to reiterate that although attachment is manifest on a wide variety of temporal scales, our modular distinctions between "foreground," "middle ground," and "background," etc. are neither clear nor sufficient. Indeed, they are admitted abstractions of individual differences among relationships that most fruitfully resist such classical compartmentalization. To return to our first example in Fig. 4, one may note that the melodic attachment of B and C# (which requires a circumscription in B Major) effects the most potent consequence of its small set of "foreground" relations one beat later in the stepwise resolution to a C-Bb dyad; ironically, that dyad outlines a dominant chord in F Major ("quite another...") which

proposes the summary isolation and suffocation of the very circumscription that gave rise to it—the whole of which belongs to the “middle ground.”

With this covalence, some shackles of tonality and representation begin to dissipate, as we achieve a freedom in our small set of relations to the piece; as this foreground coexists fluidly with its background relations (which we may interpret to be tonality, or Western tradition, or any Tradition, or, really, anything at all—given *their* fluidity), we have the opportunity and responsibility to navigate our uniquely useful paths through whatever collective network we choose to discover.

## Sixth: Composition and theories of selfhood

Ben Carson

As I composed *The Self and Its Pleasures*, I toyed with neither conscientious concern for originality nor with direct quotation, but the problem remains that acts of stylistic selection in this music (say, a paraphrase of characteristics usually found in Ockeghem or in Wagner) are articulations or emphases on the boundary between present and past. In a process that historian Michel de Certeau describes as *split construction*<sup>25</sup>—essentially an author disappearing and reappearing at will through the knowledge-empowered *selection* of other authors—a quotation, or an emulative act of composition, might be a form of pretense more volatile than an internalized censorship of the past. Objects are nailed up, from within, against the text’s “semantic outer surface”<sup>26</sup>; and with them the listener’s agency in the whole experience of the piece might be suspended.

As I compose, workings of voice and gesture—at times quite familiar—are to me primarily a matter of overlapping and evolving hopes for how one gesture will lead to the next. As an alternate model of musical discovery and paraphrase, I propose: What is important is that music played right now—*whether its language is inherited or not*—should happen as an utterance of its own specific possibility, and not because it is the present survivor of its eliminated alternatives.

Before sending *The Self and Its Pleasures* to an interested pianist, I resolved to write a subtitle. I wrote “The self is the part of the mind which is not a part of history. The body is the part of the self which is a part of the world.”

In the first sentence, I mean to invoke *history* as it is understood elsewhere in these essays, that is, as a domain of knowledge which separates present from past and makes objects out of the experiences which contribute to identity. Selfhood, then, after Jacques Lacan, is related to history in “the world of the *Real-Ich*, of the ego ...[where] everything may exist as now, including you and consciousness, without there being any need, whatever may be thought to the contrary, for anything in the way of a *subject*...namely the subject determined by language and speech”<sup>27</sup> (emphasis added). Selfhood is what needs no subjectivity or identity. If one has a self, though, her representation of it will be troubled by subjectivity—and in particular by the dependency of language (or narration) on (the production of) history.

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25. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia, 1988), 92-99.

26. Ibid., 95.

27. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan

The subject, as opposed to the self, is not only determined by historical language but by present narratives of historical memory. Stuart Hall outlines a postcolonial (and post-psychoanalytic) problem of constructed subjectivity as a structure *in which* we identify, and which is "not one thing, one moment. We have now to reconceptualize identity as a *process of identification*...that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference"<sup>28</sup> (emphasis his). Ornamenting my own trope, then: *The self is a small part of the whole mindfulness of a person. It is that very small, and possibly nonexistent, part of our mind which is not constructed by, nor necessarily participatory in, historical forces of identity and power.*

And then, in the second sentence, I want to consider that the body is the world-part of the self. Here the worldly body is *part* of the self, rather than the container of the self. Selfhood is still available for the carving knife of theories of racial and sexual identity, but rather than being buried by history, the self is manifested and distributed in all of history's intersecting parts. This inclusiveness of body registers a humanist version of the self which is supposed to venture out into the world and become part of the Lacanian *Real*, part of the world-fantasy and "accomplice to the [primal] drive."<sup>29</sup> With its constituent/accessory Body and Mind in tow, it touches relatives, aliens, and co-participants in the game of power. In this way, the anatomy of the body and the language of the mind both work to represent the self, delineating its chances for autonomy by signifying separateness and wholeness, or lack thereof.

If the first sentence implies an unrealistic optimism (that we could have a self without identity), then the consequences of the second are a hopeless world-view in which the body is the self's own sickness, asking for an impossible cure. Aside from the obvious transience of any selfhood bound as 'part of the world', the body also contains a detached and disrupted story, in which identity is prevented "...from the moment when the body becomes a legible picture that can in turn be translated into that which can be written within the space of a language...the body is a cipher that awaits deciphering."<sup>30</sup> A transcendental conversation of Christian hermeneutics, for example, brilliantly (if insidiously) presents the body as a stand-in for the self, making redemption possible only within the rules and framework of an unredeemable and physical world. This is the view in which the body thus folds *out* of the self like a specialized tool from its sheath; it is the part of your self that is worldly, that you can touch; it is the forestalled portion of Freud's painfully obvious metaphor, pleasure and displeasure (*Lust und Unlust*), knowledge and mortality.

If selfhood can survive the rise of identity, at such a late hour in the progress of capitalism, it seems anyway to have very few necessary predicates that would help us know what it is...

A self needn't do anything, or know anything, to be itself; doing and knowing are amended characteristics. Selves needn't have the ability to make

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(London: Norton, 1977), 198.

28. Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity, Identity, and Difference," in *Radical America* (Alternative Education Project: Somerville, MA, 1991), 30.

29. Lacan, 69.

30. Certeau, 7.

decisions, or expressions. At least we cannot discount feeling; selves probably must have sensations (from somewhere), and be affected, of course, by those feelings. But there's no need in this to address what must be done with those affections—or what might be then produced with them. Whatever thing can be meaningfully said about a person's experience within her geographical and historical spaces, we may still find that the selfsame inquiry (into who she really *is*) may be out of language's reach, or completely unrelated. In that case, the pleasures which really belong to the self, and not to more complex things like what we call "consciousness," or what we are taught to think of as "memory," would have to be of the most basic kind; not at all born in any foregrounded experience of descriptive music, especially not music (like mine) with aspirations to common-practice polyphony riddling uninterrupted paths from the beginning to the double-bar. If there is a deeper cognitive process by which we can archeologize all the small entangled corruptions of language and morality, and find some self in the refuse or ruins beneath them, then that process cannot be called (aesthetic) *choice*, it cannot be understood in the musical category of development and change in paths through something as deliberate as the classical consonance-bound momentum of structural dissonance in long-range counterpoint. These things—in my music and elsewhere—are all and exclusively "of the (musical) subject."

What I have tried to imagine, though, in this long work for piano, is music that becomes, throughout, an extended opportunity for the collapse of memory and history into an always conjunct and *undifferentiated* present. By the planned contradiction of simultaneously developed foundations, both (as Williams has shown) in the dimensional texture of the composition, and (as I have tried to explain) in these various and complementary models of musical purpose, the music seeks an expansive and linear narration of a specific aisthesis. Rather than providing an abundance of sound into which private expectancies and logics (and meanings) can be applied differently by a variety of individual creative listening bodies, I hope that this music is instead pointed gently but irrevocably toward some atemporal and pre-subjective musical beginning.

### **Seventh: Memory (the historical and the formal)**

*Chris Williams*

What ensues from the pervasiveness of the music's desire on the one hand for membership in a wholly shared, concrete, literate tradition (one "voice" so to speak), and on the other for membership in a non-tradition of subordinating the inherited constructions which inform it, is a reconfiguration of the meaning of history in one's musical experience. This reconfiguration necessarily encompasses the continuity between individual histories within the piece and collective histories without, where "indeed, this opposition—between an 'inside' and an 'outside' of a text—is closely knit to a static and closed conception of the structure of any text. The notion of a structuring activity [attachment]...transcends this opposition."<sup>31</sup> The dialectic is unwoven by opening up the relationship between a presumed cause and effect to negation and other causes and effects; the music *forces* an engagement with multiplicity and reconsideration that fall outside the scope of

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31. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984), 76.

stasis and closed-ness.

We may outline our situation thus: formerly objected-to tonal identities and ideations of identity (motif, representation) in the music are "essential"—i.e. crucial and insurmountable vehicles to the experience of the music—but they are also—through processes of attachment—constantly and consistently reversible (demanding reevaluations of their "pasts" (antecedents) at every "present" (consequent). Paradoxically (as each element in the false dichotomy defines and becomes the other), to choose our particular pathways to that "foundational experience" is to choose the foundation itself—our histories. We position them at the center of our consciousness, living *through* them and not at the authorial whim of them.

When History (or, more generally, an unaddressed subjecthood) is presumed separate from musical consciousness—"knowledgized" and "mythologized"—music becomes a mere laboratory of identity. Alternately, with critical radars (attachment, formal redaction, supplementarity, perhaps withstanding a listener's urge to identify and separate), a flourishing time-consciousness engages selfhood's historical disjunction. The laboratory, in spite of itself, frames its own destruction and the production of something both surprisingly unidentifiable and familiarly, "essentially," transcendent.

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*for John Cage*  
**“I am the Messiah!”**

one performer

duration: up to 4'33"

*the setting*

The performance may take place in any enclosed or semi-enclosed space; arrange the lights, any resonant objects, and other environmental considerations in any way you wish.

*the performance*

Garbed in hieratic costume, quietly emerge and stand close to the audience – within inches, if possible. After a few seconds, walk *andante* 20 to 60 steps away from the audience. Quickly locate a proximate resonant place or object(s) and bellow in your loudest voice with the utmost conviction “I am the Messiah!”

Then proceed *attacca ad libitum* (running, crawling, rolling, shuffling, marching, etc.) back towards the audience using your body as well as the phrase “I am the Messiah!” and any accompanying non-verbal exclamations *ad libitum* (whispering, hissing, declaiming, stomping, shouting, screaming, falling, etc.) to excite the resonant qualities of any proximate place or object(s). Your unshakable belief in your Divinity should guide your actions. When you sense or suppose that 4 minutes and 33 seconds will soon elapse, give a final throat-wrenching yell “I am the Messiah!” and freeze.

At 4 minutes 32 seconds, an assistant will give a simple, silent, second-long signal (standing up, turning the lights off or on, holding an item aloft, etc.). If you have not done so already, freeze and wait for applause, during which you may bow and exit.

*notes*

“I am the Messiah!” is (quite literally) a monodrama which may be performed live or recorded for playback over loudspeakers. For performance in a non-English speaking country, translate “Messiah” into a seldom used but immediately understood term for the locally favored Supreme Being(s). The duration is limited to 4'33" not only as a tribute to Cage's landmark piece, but to preserve your body and voice.

To record

“I am the Messiah!” substitute “microphones” for “audience” in the score. Record “I am the Messiah” as a field recording without overdubs. Do not use any compression, limiting, or gating of any kind. Any and all microphone distortion, clipping, and other rugged audio artifacts should remain in the piece. The recording should be raw, just like your voice after the performance.

Christopher DeLaurenti

TEXT:  
(for the CSEP Forum at UCSD,  
1/28/2003)

## IS MUSIC NECESSARY?

Benjamin Boretz

What does the discourse of music have to do with the practice of music, or with the expressive or intellectual presence of music in our lives? Music as practiced locally is an expressive language — or, rather, a territory of expressive languages whose medium is normally sound. Writing is also an expressive or intellectual — the words are denotatively, if not connotatively, interchangeable — art form; and people who do and care about music are sometimes also verbally expressive; and their verbal expression tends to reflect their involvement with music — music, in one way or another, is likely to be a character or a presence or a looming spectre in their discursive novels, treatises, or algorithms. But does thinking and writing about music in verbal or mathematical language actually contribute anything significant to music in its own space, as music — rather than, to music as, and in the spaces of, history, sociology, linguistics, systemics, or politics? Does music as music need discourse? Do we know what music needs discourse for, in pursuing its expressive/intellectual urgencies? That is, what aspect of musical endeavor needs discourse for its pursuit, what aspect of discourse does music actually apply to itself, by what means does such application happen? If music as music does need discourse, how much of it can it use? Does it need more than it already has? Should someone's answers to these questions lean toward the negative, does that have any implications for the value of metamusical discourse as a practice? If music doesn't need discourse to enable it to be music, does that suggest that there is no important reason that musical discourse should be done? Or is discourse, like music, itself a significant form of expression, where the presence of music as a central subject in some of it is its creative focus, as political events are a focus for certain historical discourses? (And the sense in which the discourse of the natural sciences interacts with the physical facts of the physical universe is certainly a complexly and intensely creative-seeming phenomenon — Oscar Wilde said that Nature imitates Art, and Nelson Goodman's improvement on that epithet was that Nature was



### Is Music Necessary?

the product of Art and Discourse. My own relation to Art was exposed when my friend George Quasha asked me — for a video project — to say what Art is, and I said that Art is the name given to the Ego masquerading as the Soul for purposes of material or social capitalization — but that's another topic.)

Take physics. The science. What is theoretical discourse in physics? Is it "the theory of physics"? Does physics actually *have* a theory? Of course it does. But does it? You might think, physics doesn't *have* a theory because physics is a theory — that's what it is, a theory. And what it's a theory *of* is not physics; it's the physical universe. A theory *about* physics is not the theory which *is* physics. Same for sociologies, histories, psychologies, semiologies, musicologies: What they *are* are theories. So what about music: is music itself, as composed, as performed, as internally or externally heard, a theory, something ontologically theoretical? Of course there's always a sense in which the referents of any theory (as any of those named above) are created by the theory, and are therefore themselves ontologically theoretical. But — in the cases of such things as the physical world and the human world there's something inferred as existent outside its theoretical identity — you could say they consist of things or phenomena *which can be perceived* — whereas music is exactly and entirely *what is perceived as music*. It is ontologized by being perceived. This isn't a weird idea, just a description of how it is in the human world, at least locally. So in that peculiar sense, music itself is "a theory" — its own theory. But that still doesn't mean that music is a theory of anything outside of itself, like a piece of descriptive verbal or mathematical language. Because the theory that "is music" is not "music theory". The particulars that are music are not about music, don't *refer to* music (except in special cases, or in a non-particular sense), don't appear as external "signifiers" but as groundlevel phenomena. So music itself is not a theory in any of the senses that "music theory" is a theory. The question, then, is: does music *need* a "music theory"? What does music need a theory *for*? How much theory does it need? More than it already has? And what kind of theory might it actually be able to use? Are so-called "music theories" about music in some different sense than the sense in which music is ontologized internally as music by the inexplicit, internal operation of internalized music-filtering processes? Do they, can they be used to, penetrate, interact with, or even address those non-symbolic music-ontologizing cognitive processes, if these processes have no discursive contents but only discursive meta-descriptions, like verbal or mathematical or clinical stories about some selectively extracted post-facto componential *aspects* of some music?

(Whatever your answers to those questions, there is a kind of theory that, whether or not you could characterize it as useful “to music”, is literally usable to make music, and has clearly been used by those composing it: the kind of theory which non-prescriptively proposes and constructs possible music-making resources, which generates materials by adopting an idiosyncratic analytic/conceptual perspective on the contents of sound fields, without prescribing any syntactical methodologies such as belong to the creative compositional enterprise exclusively. Such as you might derive from discourses by Hector Berlioz, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Sergei Taneiev, Josef Hauer, Arnold Schoenberg, Ernst Krenek, Nicolas Slonimsky, Henry Cowell, Harry Partch, Milton Babbitt, Howard Hanson, Karlheinz Stockhausen, George Perle, John Cage, Iannis Xenakis, Gunther Schuller, Elliott Carter, Jim Tenney, Jim Randall, Ben Johnston, John Rahn, Robert Morris, David Lewin, even Allen Forte.\* But this kind of “theory”, however naturally derived from prior experiences with composing and contemplating music, has nothing explicit to say about how any actual music is or goes, not even the music composed with its specific assistance as referential structure.)

So where do discourses about music as expressive language locate themselves relative to music as music? Insofar as what they are is *writing*, done by musicians or by other people with serious relationships to their own musical experience, their relationship to music as music is less like the relation of theories to objects or phenomena than like the relation of poetry to love, or — indeed — of poetry to objects, phenomena, ideologies, ideas — to, even, theories. Namely, — by the nature of a music as a non-verbal utterance, as a phenomenon ontologized purely as experiential — such discourses are creative expressions, compositions, perforce creating verbal spaces resonating against the non-verbal spaces of music. Of course their relationship to music as technical, aesthetic, or social history, or as behavioral or cognitive psychology is explanatory in those domains as correlative structures to the presence of music in various observational situations. But their relation to music as music remains inviolably, invaluablely, autonomously creative — a condition that enables a species of expressive / intellectual substance to accrue to musical discourses which sets them in a potentially unique position in the world of verbal composition. Nor does this condition diminish their potential interest or value in the extra-musical domains in which they theorize the presence of music and paramusical behaviors — it just delimits and articulates the sense in which such attributes do and do

\*This kind of resource creation, for creative cognizing and composing, was also a substantial part of the purpose, and hopefully also of the effect, of my *Meta-Variations*, Parts II-V.

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not constitute their being 'about music' in discrete and incommensurable senses.\* There is a hint of experimental evidence of this in Gilbert Rouget's *Music and Trance*, wherein he reports that there is no correlation between the musical nature of a given music and whether or not its presence induces trance; and that, of course, the playing musicians, not being designated by the social convention to experience trance, don't. In fact (as I've said elsewhere), the only discourse I know of which may be said to actually manifest thought about music as music is an interpretive performance of, or a performed improvisation on, a preexistent musical composition. But that of course is as literally non-verbal as music itself. And I don't mean someone playing their Schenker graph, their sonogram, or their row chart either.

If it seems to anyone here that my thoughts imply some demotion of music discourse of any kind, in any way, that would be only insofar as you would regard poetry, music, or other expressive language forms as inferior in meaning, importance, or substance to other forms of expression or intellection. You won't be surprised to know that I feel rather the opposite way; the multiple and holistic implications of every music for every aspect of life and every species of social, cultural, political, and personal predicament are surely there, but they interest me far less in their explicated discursive wordtext form than in their unsayable specificity as musicsoundlanguage. And the ontological tension between an expressive-descriptive wordtext and its spectrally present subject creates a potential field for experiential content uniquely indigenous to that space, a transaction which interests me intensely. But can there actually be discourse outside the core ontological space of music, but still in a vibrant metaphorical dance with it? And can music actually be present in the ontological space of discourse, as transmuted perception, speculation, imagination? Were they possible, might not such incarnations be promising candidates for participants in an expansive, and expanding, world of thought and experience — in which music has its unique centrality, uniquely personified, expressly intellectual, holistically aesthetic, where music is any kind of work or play you actually need it to be, as only music can be?

\*Nor should the "creativity" being ascribed here be read as implying any particular species of value or virtue.

George Quasha

# art is

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## speaking portraits in the performative indicative<sup>1</sup>

You walk into a small room, dark but for a face projected on a wall — a wall-sized speaking face — and *just* the face, so close you are almost inside the speaking. Yet what this face is saying is not the matter of intimate disclosure, at least as you might expect; rather, it's a big story, one of the biggest possible stories — *art*, what it *is*. The apparently straightforward indicative, as if a clear object were there before you, and yet there is none. Still, the face is speaking, with the confidence of one who knows what he or she is talking about — an artist, speaking from the experience of living at the origin-point of art itself, and so speaking on its behalf, saying what it is art is. And yet *not*. Not really, that is, not without hesitation and qualification and even a certain recurrent doubt — a doubt not necessarily or not only in the words themselves, but perhaps in the cast of the eyes, a sudden looking aside, or a dipping of the gaze — or perhaps in the very variety of the shifting tale, unfolding as if knowingly without end. Whence such “authority” amidst such doubt?

Clearly this speaking face is not the “talking head” of TV, not the “I know something you don’t” arrogance of the pundit hiding behind a stylized ingratiating humility. The hesitation in the discourse is not an affectation proffered in the pursuit of credibility. It’s part of the process of finding out what it is one knows about this life-encompassing activity that obsesses us, barely short of religious vocation, and about which so many comment endlessly, judge with the force of a life-and-death struggle, engage with naked ambition or refuse with indignation equal to the “sickness unto death.” Not religion? or its barely disguised substitute? Who can say — who dares say — who has the right to say?

Theorists, scholars and critics say with impunity, and build a reputation upon it — because nothing really is at stake but a sort of complexity of opinion, an agonic datum. But for the artist, it’s another matter. Everything is at stake. So much is at stake that we are faced, frankly, with an impossibility. What almost any artist today will in some mood be willing to admit is that it *can’t* be done. *I make art but I can’t say what it is*. Interestingly we live in the one time when that uncertainty is not only genuine, it’s almost fashionable. Once the certainties and universalities thought to be central to Modernism give way to the “correct” relativism of the Post-Modern, one is off the hook — no one is expected to know what art is, because it’s different strokes for different folks.. Now that wasn’t any too hard was it? Live and let live; each to his own. We have endless clichés to save us from the impossible. We can utter a collective sigh of relief, because we’re saved from having to say what art is.





## art is

Students graduate from art school or music school or the MFA writing program — either as studio artists, composers, poets, critics, historians, etc. — without ever having had to take on the question: what is art, poetry, music? Sure, we study the theories — Aristotle ... Kant ... Hegel ... Clive Bell ... Clement Greenberg ... — and their outraged debunkers ... But take a stand ourselves? Unlikely. And who can blame us? It's evidently quite impossible. And if we stood up with the arrogance of one who claims to know, we'd be laughed out of the room anyway, or, worse, humored.

So, what about this work called *art is*? Is it a charade? Mockery? Setting up artists to make fools of them? Tricking them into sticking their necks out in senseless risk? A portrait, then, of what — the artist doing the one thing she or he can't possibly do? (Snickers in the balcony.)

OK, back to basics: You enter a room; there's a face, speaking, well, the impossible, yes, but not a simple impossibility, that is, not devoid of a genuine effort to say something or of a feeling of human necessity or even of passion, conviction, and the look at times of a certain awe. This is a portrait telling itself, and the "portrayed" is bigger than its frame in two senses. It's *literally* bigger — that is, the frame is *inside* the face, because you don't see the whole face or the body, but just above the bottom of the chin to just below the top of the head, and this reverses the usual "portrait relation." And it's *actually* bigger — the human reality is never fully inside any sense of frame here, but *always endlessly beyond this*, always just now coming through, showing up here for the first time, barely. The "subject" (the speaker) and the "subject" (the topic) wear their impossibility on their sleeve, like an affair of the heart, something that has escaped mere decorum, something indifferent to its own limitations, something so familiar with the impossibility of ultimate self-limitation that it doesn't give a damn about appearing to represent itself — it's in the process of being itself even where it can't fully define itself. So that art shows up at least as something not particularly bothered by inevitable limitation in the showing forth — which, after all, is as much a part of its "nature" (if it can be said to have such a thing) as anything. So what else is new? Art thrives on limitation; it's almost unimaginable *without* limitation. In a certain sense it's not limited by limitation.

So, that *frame* thing is not the boundary or limit of the status of the subject (the speaker, the topic) but a view *into* a living reality. And in a living field it is not certain what contains what — figure and ground are unstable — indeed there is an *oscillation* of figure and ground. Is the speaker the *figure* (as in "face") or, filling the screen and saturating the flow of time with continuously appearing face after face after face, the *ground*? And is the subject "art" the figure (the object of attention) or, in its pervasive presence, the ground? Can art — can a face — be both foreground and background? We are left standing — and kept standing — there at the threshold, in the active *between* of the undecidable question, the energetic matrix of an open middle — a state of *liminality*.

This choice to remain "marginal" as a positive act — intentionally standing in the place of the impossible, bravely doing what almost no one dare do — turns out to be its own species of possibility, setting free a whole domain, so to speak, of the sayable unsayable. There may be — indeed there probably



George Quasha

cannot be — a name for this. Call it the *-provisional essential*. It's provisional, obviously, because virtually no one appears to be insisting on the universality of their "defining moment" (although a part of me can't help hoping that someone will raise the ante and claim the universal, a Greenbergian escapee). And *essential* because ... well, this is more difficult.

Back to basics one more time. In a context in which no one feels the right or necessity to define art, because of course that's impossible, we run the risk of a certain loss. Anyone from Buddhists to (late) Wittgensteinians to Post-Modernists knows better than to make a stink about *essence*. We're on good behavior and do what we can to avoid big trouble. Yet, as in the case of political correctness, the mouth sometimes gets a cramp in the act of speaking because uncensored discourse is too risky; yet a centipede watching his legs can't walk straight. So, adding to the difficult fact that art can't define itself because everything is relative, is the fact of repression. This is not the place to go far into this immensely complex issue, yet there is a problematic truth to be faced in a context where art has to watch what it says before saying what it is (even in private). Therefore this shorthand acknowledgement: part of my motivation in creating *art is* is the conviction that there is an unnoticed repression in the self-realization of art — a repressive force at work inside the thinking/saying of artists. And this can create a certain disempowerment of the artist such that the participation in an *experience* of any sort of "natural state" identifiable with art is quite remote — a perilous elimination from the possibility of art. I am not speaking here about the advantageous decentering in art that is an opening to possibility (overcoming hegemony, etc.) and a reclaiming of the disenfranchised; rather, I am pointing to a certain loss of center in the individual stance, a distraction of intention in the very function of art, *interfering with its root ability to interact responsibly with the environment*. This seems to be a sort of dysfunction in reflection, which can show up as compensatory strategizing and an overarching pursuit of "signature style." It's like poets desperate to "find their voice" as if it were somehow *out there*. This involves the costly error in thinking whereby history is conceived as something purely external, which we must behave to as if a code — as if the historical were not equally a matter of "internal" responsibility and direct creation of reality. As if art were not in and of itself *historical*.

I am encouraged in this view of a certain repressive force in the self-definition of art by the number of artists who have thanked me for the opportunity to *attempt* to say what they have never before attempted to say, or perhaps even, in a straightforward sense, to think. So what could be more "essential" (given the unrepressed possibility of *essence*, in that there is no god-like entity vested with the authority to outlaw it) than the right to think (perhaps to say) the unthinkable (by way of the sayable unsayable)? It would seem related to the very *work* of art.

And given a free space to say something on impulse (no holds barred and no bars on the cage), artists say the unexpected. Most interesting is the fact that virtually no two artists say the same thing. Or perhaps there is no "same thing," no river of true saying that can be entered twice, and yet something is said with conviction in such a way as to make the reality of art *thinkably palpable*. Up close, on the face of





## art is

it, saying it like it is in its impossible possibility, art somehow is. It gives a whole new play to the words of William Blake: "All things possible to be believed are images of the truth."

The basic stance of **art is**, then, is to take artists at their word — not, apparently, such a common occurrence. A premise is that art speaks itself verbally and truly when allowed to — that is, a speaking that emerges from its quite particular sense of itself, what it is to itself. When it does so, it performs less a representation or rationalization of itself than a stage in its *further life* — one that may not show up directly in its other manifestations. Put many of these instances of art embodiment together and we get something like art speaking at once *individually* and *beyond itself* — speaking, in some sense, in its larger nature. Oddly, art appears to show up speaking for itself most freshly in its *liminality*, its occupation of the membrane *between*, on the one hand, the utterly particular, present, immediate, "just this" statement, and, on the other hand, the unbounded, illimitable aggregation of speaking instances — the very *field* of art saying. This field is an endlessly varying, emergent ecology of intentional self-definition. To attend it may be to reside inside art as intimate disclosure of what is at once most individual and least personal. So, artists' art definition is not ordinary definition, and not rigorous in the philosophical sense or comprehensive in the scholarly/art-historical sense. It is closer to art activity itself, and in many ways is quite indistinguishable from art. In fact, it may be one of the most thoroughly *performative* instances of art activity, somehow exercising in the saying the very art nature it points to. And its performative truth is that it is *true* only insofar as it is *truly said*. Its truth, in a sense, is *site-specific to the act of saying it*. It is almost an exemplary instance of the performative, understood as an event inseparable from the saying and fully existent only as a fact of the saying. Once understood, this self-defining art activity may impact our way of evaluating the particular force and discursive nature of the art manifesto, which is an especially aggressive and polemical species of art definition, and one that is also performative.

And this leads me to a further speculation. What if there is a "discursive space" within the very *saying what something is* which, by force of its performative nature, resides substantially beyond the limitations of ordinary discourse? Call it, for sake of discussion, a *performative-indicative mood*. It implies an instance-specific refocusing of grammar — the most basic grammar of *Art is X* — in the very act of pointing something out. In this respect it must share a nature with poetry, which transforms language at a higher intensity and rate of change than the "normal evolution" of language. And it is performative in a very special sense: *it introduces the thing defined to its further nature*. Artists — whatever they do in whatever medium (paint, language, sound, electronics...) — define what art is with all the difficulty and trepidation of the non-ordinary. The *verbal* act shares a nature with poetry even when the speaker has no "special" verbal gift. This "nature" may show itself, if at all, in a flash of insight or an instant speaking. It seems to perform itself as more than it was and, since it can only be itself, more *itself*.



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<sup>1</sup> A video and sound installation with DVD, either as wall projection or large back-lit screen or monitor. The first version of **art is** (v. 1.0) was shown at the WRO Biennial of Media Art in Wroclaw, Poland [April 29 to May 4, 2003]; the second (v. 1.1), at the Snite Museum of Art at Notre Dame University [October 27 to November 3, 2003], along with **music is** (v. 1.0) and **poetry is** (v. 1.0), as well as the site-specific work **art is/Notre Dame** (v. 1.0). Other versions are scheduled at the Biennial of Moving Images at Saint Gervais, Geneva, Switzerland [November 7-15, 2003]; the Bunkier Sztuki in Krakow, Poland, including **art is** (v.1.1) in English and **art is/Poland** (v. 1.0) in Polish [November 17<sup>th</sup> to December 15<sup>th</sup>], and White Box in Chelsea, New York City [January 2004].

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IMAGES FROM **art is** AND **music is** IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

*Ann Hamilton, Thurston Moore, Carolee Schneemann, Joe McPhee, Dorothea Rockburne, Gary Hill, George Lewis, Marina Abramovic, Marilyn Crispell, Meredith Monk, Tom Phillips, Anthony Braxton, Miya Masaoka, Dennis Oppenheim, Brenda Hutchinson*





**(an Epistemological Gauntlet)**

*what  
&ahelluva\$toryline  
who. it?*

**What Is It about About.**  
**[a response to recent contentions]**

**In order of appearance:**

**Swann**

**The Oracle of Kabbalah**

**Turtle Island**

**WoD(gmh)**

**A.L.(n&h)**

**?AYS?**

**(ed.)**

**Divine Flash IV (Fakhruddin 'Iraqi)**

**Gatsby**

**(jkr)**

**from Bedlam, 1762 (: Chr. Smart)**

But then at a certain moment, without being able to distinguish any clear outline, or to give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly enraptured, he had tried to grasp the phrase or harmony --- he did not know which --- that had just been played and that had opened and expanded his soul, as the fragrance of certain roses, wafted upon the moist air of evening, has the power of dilating one's nostrils. Perhaps it was owing to his ignorance of music that he had received so confused an impression, one of those that are nonetheless the only purely musical impressions, limited in their extent, entirely original, and irreducible to any other kind. An impression of this order, vanishing in an instant, is, so to speak, *sine materia*. Doubtless the notes which we hear at such moments tend, according to their pitch and volume, to spread out before our eyes over surfaces of varying dimensions, to trace arabesques, to give us the sensation of breadth or tenuity, stability or caprice. But the notes themselves have vanished before these sensations have developed sufficiently to escape submersion under those which the succeeding or even simultaneous notes have already begun to awaken in us. And this impression would continue to envelop in its liquidity, its ceaseless overlapping, the motifs which from time to time emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear and drown, recognized only by the particular kind of pleasure which they instil, impossible to describe, to recollect, to name, ineffable --- did not our memory, like a labourer who toils at the laying down of firm foundations beneath the tumult of the waves, by fashioning for us facsimiles of those fugitive phrases, enable us to compare and to contrast them with those that follow. And so, scarcely had the exquisite sensation which Swann had experienced died away, before his memory had furnished him with an immediate transcript, sketchy, it is true, and provisional, which he had been able to glance at while the piece continued, so that, when the same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer impossible to grasp. He could picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical arrangement, its notation, its expressive value; he had before him something that was no longer pure music, but rather design, architecture, thought, and which allowed the actual music to be recalled. This time he had distinguished quite clearly a phrase which emerged for a few moments above the waves of sound. It had at once suggested to him a world of inexpressible delights, of whose existence, before hearing it, he had never dreamed, into which he felt that nothing else could initiate him; and he had been filled with love for it, as with a new and strange desire.

With a slow and rhythmical movement it led him first this way, then that, towards a state of happiness that was noble, unintelligible, and yet precise. And then suddenly, having reached a certain point from which he was preparing to follow it, after a momentary pause, abruptly it changed direction, and in a fresh movement, more rapid, fragile, melancholy, incessant, sweet, it bore him off with it towards new vistas. Then it vanished. He hoped, with a passionate longing, that he might find it again, a third time. And reappear it did, though without speaking to him more clearly, bringing him, indeed, a pleasure less profound. But when he returned home he felt the need of it: he was like a man into whose life a woman he has seen for a moment passing by has brought the image of a new beauty which deepens his own sensibility, although he does not even know her name or whether he will ever see her again.

**The paradox of Ultimate Nothingness is that because it is so vast and all-encompassing, with no beginning and no end, it is also Ultimate Oneness. Ultimate Oneness. Ultimate Nothingness — Aleph embodies it all.**

**Aleph's essence of nothingness is reflected in its sound. It has none. The very first letter of the Aleph Beit is silent! Aleph is the sound that comes before sound. Aleph is so close to the divine essence, on the edge of the holy nothingness from which sound and form emerge, that it can't be constrained within a particular sound. We "pronounce" Aleph by opening our mouths but saying nothing, as if we were speechless with awe and wonder.**

**Aleph brings into form that which is formless. It makes solid that which cannot be grasped. At the same time, Aleph retains the prealphabetic condition, before creation, when "the earth was without form, and empty" [Gen.1:2].**

**Out of this emptiness, life flashes vividly into being. God says "let there be light" and there is light. Out of nothingness, earth, air, and fire come into form. All three begin with Aleph: adamah, "earth"; avir, "air"; and esh, "fire".**

Anasazi,

Anasazi,

tucked up in clefts in the cliffs

growing strict fields of corn and beans

sinking deeper and deeper in earth

up to your hips in Gods

your head all turned to eagle-down

& lightning for knees and elbows

your eyes full of pollen

the smell of bats,

the flavor of sandstone

grit on the tongue.

women

birthing

at the foot of ladders in the dark.

trickling streams in hidden canyons

under the cold rolling desert

corn-basket          wide-eyed

red baby

rock lip home,

Anasazi

What Is It about About.

4

I am soft sift  
In an hourglass --- at the wall  
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,  
And it crowds and it combs to the fall;  
I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,  
But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall  
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein  
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate --- we cannot consecrate --- we cannot hallow --- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us --- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



## What Is It about About.

At once vast and sparse. Not a flower in sight; nor a star in the greenguide. A "garden": the "Parterre." To one side, the flat palace. (3 stars.) Elsewhere, massed beyond our ken: trees; clouds. Here it's manmade grounds: bull-dozed flattened straightedged layered. Spent the end of the afternoon here yesterday. Couldn't wait to get back this morning. Got it to myself. Dirtplots and dirt borders. Grassplots. Stone borders and steps and patios and benches. Geometrically stonepooled water. A few, a very few, shrubs; all shaved conical. The layout, symmetricized. Grandly. Mercilessly. The named curve. The named shape. A knockout. Nothing over your head, my friend. Or even up to your armpits. One is master here. Domesticates infinity even. At a deep sublevel out from the foot of the defunct falls, facing away. Straight lines of divine length, going away. A canal, treelined: on either side, the long thin colonnade. The alternative promenade. In far country. The path not taken. Within bounds, what there is. Not dense with dense subpockets like Versailles. Nor a dusty drag like the Tuileries. Same guy though. Le Nôtre. Should be a household word. Physical embodiment, as the very space we occupy, of thought; art. And rawly so. Undisguised, the theft from us; the violation; the intent to overawe. No rollicking fancy. Or sensuous intimacy. Or mindblowing revelation. Hardcore. No shit. Truths: a system of: uncovered. Powers: empowered: imposed. Correctitude to the n<sup>th</sup>. To be grasped in selected, static acts of vision. One's Will has been Worked. Under shifting cloudcover, the lone walker meanders; traces queer paths.

[Cf. also Benjamin Boretz on Ralph Shapey (1921-2002) in OSMagI4 which ran a dead heat for inclusion in this slot but lost out (on unstated grounds) on appeal. (Something about "about".)] --- *ed.*

IV.

The sun shines and a mirror dreams itself the sun.  
How then should it not begin to love itself?

Jealous, the Beloved demands that the lover love  
but Him, need but Him.

So jealous is He  
all others are destroyed:  
He must Himself  
act every part!

Necessarily He makes Himself identical with all  
things; for the lover, what else is left to love or to  
need? And no one loves so hugely as He loves  
Himself. Know now who you are!

Don't dream this thread  
is double-ply:  
root and branch  
are but One.  
Look close: all is He ---  
but He is manifest through *me*.  
All ME, no doubt ---  
but through Him.

Junayd said once: "For 30 years now I've been  
conversing with God, yet people seem to think I'm  
talking to *them!*". Through the ears of Moses He  
heard Himself speak with the flame-tongue of the  
Bush:

He speaks  
He listens  
you and I  
but a pretext.

He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. . . .

. . . . One autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street when the leaves were falling, and they came to a place where there were no trees and the sidewalk was white with moonlight. They stopped here and turned toward each other. Now it was a cool night with that mysterious excitement in it which comes at the two changes of the year. The quiet lights in the houses were humming out into the darkness and there was a stir and bustle among the stars. Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalk really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees --- he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete.

Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something --- an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever.

What Is It about About.

## **a diversion:**

**Legend has it that The Fervid Mystic buttonholed  
The Forensic Musician.**

**Said TFM: The Ultimate is Unknowable.  
Replied TFM: True.**

**Misunderstanding the grounds of this disagreement,  
A Bourgeois Rationalist says: The Existence of God  
has been Demonstrated.**

**To which TFM replies: Blasphemy.  
And to which TFM replies: Bullshit.  
And to which An Existentialist Philosopher adds: God is Dead.**

**Understanding the grounds of this agreement,  
An Edgy Positivist says: Define Your Terms.  
And adds: the predicate "Unknowable" is unverifiable.**

**Quoth TFM: Righto. and Profound.  
Quoth ABR: Righto. and Wrong.  
Quoth AEP: Righto. and Voluntary.  
Quoth AEP: Righto. and Fatal.  
Quoth TFM: Righto. and Motivic.**

**Tolerable vibes ensued.**

What Is It about About.

# JUBILATE AGNO

**For I will consider my Cat Jeoffrey.**

**For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving him.**

**For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.**

**For is this done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.**

**For then he leaps up to catch the musk, which is the blessing of God upon his prayer.**

**For he rolls upon prank to work it in.**

**For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself.**

**For this he performs in ten degrees.**

**For first he looks upon his fore-paws to see if they are clean.**

**For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.**

**For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the fore paws extended.**

**For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.**

**For fifthly he washes himself.**

**For sixthly he rolls upon wash.**

**For Seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat.**

**For Eighthly he rubs himself against a post.**

**For Ninthly he looks up for his instructions.**

**For Tenthly he goes in quest of food.**

**For when his day's work is done his business more properly begins.**

**For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against the adversary.**

**For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his electrical skin & glaring eyes.**

**For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life.**

**For in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the sun loves him.**

**For he purrs in thankfulness, when God tells him he's a good Cat.**

# JUBILATE AGNO

For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.

For his motions upon the face of the earth are more than any other quadrupede.

For tho he cannot fly, he is an excellent clamberer.

For he can tread to all the measures upon the musick.

For he can swim for life.

For he can creep.

For he can spraggle upon waggle at the word of command.

For he can jump from an eminence into his master's bosom.

For the dexterity of his defence is an instance of the love of God to him exceedingly.

For he is the quickest to his mark of any creature.

For he is tenacious of his point.

For he is a mixture of gravity and waggery.

For there is nothing brisker than his life when in motion.

For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.

For he knows that God is his Saviour.

For he will not do destruction, if he is well-fed, neither will he spit without provocation.

For he is an instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon.

For he is good to think on, if a man would express himself neatly.

For every house is incomplete without him & a blessing is lacking in the spirit.

. . .

## Contributors

William Anderson wanderso@mail.slc.edu  
Newton Armstrong newton@music.princeton.EDU  
Elaine Barkin elainerb@ucla.edu  
Tildy Bayar tbayar@ucsd.edu  
Howard S. Becker n/a  
Dániel Péter Biró dbiro@princeton.edu  
Benjamin Boretz boretz@bard.edu  
David Borgo dborgo@ucsd.edu  
Martin Brody mbrody@wellesley.edu  
Benjamin Carson blc@ucsc.edu  
Renée Coulombe rcoulomb@citrus.ucr.edu  
Christopher DeLaurenti chris@delarenti.net  
Ross Feller ross.feller@gcse.edu  
Jean-Charles François jean-charles@cefedem-rhonealpes.org  
Yovan Gilles c/o Jean-Charles François  
Julia Heimerdinger (c/o Martin Supper)  
Robert Paredes parrw@avalon.net  
Eric N. Peterson c/o Renee Coulombe  
John Rahn pnm@ebad.pair.com  
Michel Ratté rattemi@globetrotter.net  
Alan Rich kv467@artbi.com  
Martin Supper supper@udk-berlin.de  
Joel Taylor joeltaylor@comcast.net  
George Quasha gquasha@stationhill.org  
J. K. Randall jkr@princeton.edu  
Charles Stein cstein@webjogger.net  
Erik Ulman eulman@earthlink.net  
Chris Williams yadoyisnow@hotmail.com