

*The*

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OPEN SPACE  
*magazine*

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## J K R Pass 3: A CD Collection for and of J K R

In 2006-2007 OPEN SPACE is issuing a series of CDs containing performances of music composed for and by Jim Randall.

### Contents:

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Benjamin Boretz	Postlude, With Jim Randall in mind
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## Two Poems

Charles Stein

### *The Artisan*

I am sitting  
in the office  
on the hill  
going up  
from town.

And the light  
is delightful  
even though the trees are very thin  
and it is a warm day  
and this morning  
when we were sitting out on the platform  
in front of the house  
the wind blew cold.

I was sitting in the hut and the sun  
has moved so far to the south now the sunlight  
comes into the hut  
through the south window  
at noon.

I am raunchy, anxious, upset. Thoughts  
root up  
jar and thrash

and I have only to wait  
in the minute spaces between them  
seeking release.

In the old days I'd've said  
seek the sun.

I seek myself as if I seek the sun.

But I am no sun now.  
I am there  
like a wall

rising up and expanding in the dark  
in back of  
the scintillating nervous radiation  
that animates the ground  
in which thoughts sprout.

They sprout and sprout  
from invisible root  
contradictions

and the sun is too bright in here.

An elephant  
is walking through the woods  
thrashing the trees.

The leaves are loose and dry  
and as he passes  
he smashes the tree trunks  
with his elephant trunk  
and the dry leaves shake loose.

The soul cannot pry loose  
and the elephant  
becomes the whole sky.

I imagine an elephant  
thrashing in the woods  
with his trunk  
and scattering the forest  
beside him as he lunges and storms  
through the woods  
in the direction of the hunters.

I am like a wall.

I stop  
and stop to examine but no I cannot stop  
and I am like a wall  
and the wall grows tall  
and wide

and the energies are thrashing  
in front

The elephant is standing  
in the still sky  
and regains the majestic posture  
of its marching.

This hut is like a bottle  
or like some box  
and the intricate hands  
of some Chinese artisan  
manipulate the gems.

He has magical servants to work for him—  
humanoid genii or gnomes  
who enter the box  
and place  
                  items  
on the stones for him.

But this morning the artisan is disturbed  
in his energies  
and seeks to calm the winds  
and he orders the movements of the elephants  
to halt post haste  
and the genii have to sit still  
for long forced meditative stages.

I am an elephant  
and I poise myself delicately  
according to some intricate  
training I've received  
at the hands of Chinese artisans.

I poise myself and balance  
on top of the box.

I become minute  
and enter the hut  
and balance  
among the stones.

My body is like a bottle  
and the light  
suffuses the glass

as though the light were substance  
and I must summon my ten-thousand artisans  
to assemble the luminous parts  
and drop them  
with minute preciseness  
each in its place  
at the bottle bottom.

Then the particles of light begin to shine again  
and the bottle becomes my body again.

I am only water now, only flow.

And the light is reductive to water  
and the bottle  
becomes some sac  
and I am a bag of moist organic organizations  
which operate according to some deep law  
and there are circulations  
throughout the space of my body  
and I am some elephant  
and the elephant is carrying bottles  
to some Chinese locality.

The bottles are filled with homuncular artisans  
trying to grow large enough each to escape the membrane  
of the particle  
in which he is compelled to radiate  
according to some law.

Each artisan operates as the nucleus of some one particle  
and his intelligence scintillates  
fragments of the light. And the whole body shines  
on the back of this majestic elephant.

The elephant is walking through the forest  
and it is autumn  
and the sun is hot  
but the wind is blowing the leaves away  
and the artisan  
is cold.

And in order to preserve his bodily temperature

Two Poems

and offers the possibilities  
of the things which drop from its branches.

I am an artisan  
and I want to gather the gems  
that hang from the trees.

I am a wall  
and all the water that scintillates  
in the great expanse in front of me  
casts its tiny shadows  
against me.

I rise  
in back of myself  
and listen  
for the noises  
in the wall.

The sky is like an elephant  
and the wall  
in which the cold wind casts  
the shadows of hanging gems  
and blows the thoughts of artisans  
into so many particles  
begins itself to loose  
and yield its elements.

Stones and bottles speak

In the space of the hut.

Gardiner, New York, Fall, 1975

***Disaster Areas (of Elephants)***

for Josie Oppenheim

Thirty years have gathered  
and still the tread of elephants  
walks my mind.

The elephants have multiplied

in a forest beyond the world  
(though in this world  
they dwindle).

Or beyond the world one elephant  
wags in the vagueness  
or wags in the brilliance  
of vast transcosmic spaces

or mindspace is one elephant  
inside of which a cosmos  
turns its thought

though I have no hut now  
and the wall and its lights are shimmering  
in the night built out of lights...

Still, every thought that rises easily seems  
to ride one elephant  
just as before,  
each ponderous step, the heart beat of some cosmos  
and thought is a wheel...

\*

Disaster regions plague the globe  
through which my elephant passes  
seeking immemorial grounds  
safe from marauders  
to which it must return  
as to some cosmic home beyond the world  
there to release its store of furious memory  
that the world through which it made its lifelong sojourn  
might turn once more—

Two Poems

each thought released compels one turn of the void  
that forms a world.

\*

And every thought yet seems  
a chest of inestimable treasure  
mounted on some elephant  
locked against a forest of marauders,  
terrible poachers of ivory,  
out to ruin another sacred realm  
that precious thoughts still walk in...

\*

A thousand elephants walk beyond the world  
their great trunks wagging in the dimness  
and the trumpet calls they utter to each other  
pass as waves of thought across the void  
causing waves of thought across the world  
to disturb our mortal slumber...

\*

Sad are the worlds in tow of captive elephants—  
broken worlds—

\*

The elephants thrash in chains  
for children in a theme park  
on holiday to ride them—  
they sway in disconsolate rhythms  
in the park dust  
while the children clamor.

And the cosmos is some theme park ...

Each planet is in tow  
on the back of an elephant  
proceeding with constant tread  
about some dusty sun

Charles Stein

and every thought that rises in an earth mind  
sparks at the end of a ray from an elephant's eye  
across such planetary spaces

and everywhere the elephants are rocking  
in grief that they cannot return  
to immemorial grounds

and revive the worlds...

Barrytown, New York, May 18, 2006

## Slam for John Silber

Jean-Charles François

2005-06

### *Immanem Quietem*<sup>1</sup>

cruel repose  
cruel and furious quiet  
In order to declare in inadequate terms  
    furor, irrationality  
being understood beyond the understanding  
He says: *Immanem Quietem*  
Permission to make its incomprehensibility known in terms that are imperfect, perfect,  
hyperperfect, contrary or non contrary  
    Similar and dissimilar  
    That they have a cruel repose  
    Cruel and furious quiet  
Exhilaration of the beginning  
Finite space that has no place

### *Invocatio*<sup>2</sup>

Taxonomic fruit, not  
**ein**  
**Gestalt**<sup>3</sup>

The excess  
The excess  
The excess it has over the imperfect that occurs  
The selfless excess over the imperfect  
The aesthete excess expressed over the imperfect

---

<sup>1</sup> This is quoted from Diego de Jesús, *Notes et remarques*, in *Oeuvres de Saint Jean de la Croix*, 1641, pp. 276-282. This text makes direct reference to the poetic work of Saint John of the Cross. This text is extracted from Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 139. See also *La Fable mystiqueXVIe – XVIIe siècle*, Paris: Gallimard, nrf, 1982, p.198. : “Proche de l’antiphrase et du paradoxe, l’oxymoron “viole le code” d’une façon particulière. (...) Les termes combines par l’oximoron appartiennent chacun à des ordres hétérogènes : la “cruauté” n’est pas comparable à la “paix”, pas plus qu’il n’y a commensurabilité entre les termes rapprochés par Saint Jean de la Croix dans la “brûlure suave” (“cauterio suave”) ou “musique silencieuse” (“musica callada”).”

<sup>2</sup> See Michel de Certeau *Heterologies, Discourse on the Other*, chapter 6, “Mystic Speech”, p. 89 : “Of course, the *invocatio* has long been the first moment of religious knowledge. (...) *Invocatio* and *auditio fidei* define something “essential” that is no longer a step on an itinerary of learning, but has been set outside the realm of knowledge. The act of *utterance* becomes separated from the objective organization of statements.”

<sup>3</sup> John Silber, *Perspectives of New Music*, Fall Winter 1980 Spring Summer 1981, Vol. 19, p. 135.

The access over therein a fact that postures  
The espresso versed in perfect manioc cures  
The excess, sober, simple, imperfect structures in process  
The excess...           contrary or non-contrary  
                          imperfect, perfect, hyperperfect  
                          similar or dissimilar  
                          perpetual stillness  
                          muted tumult  
                  cruel and furious repose  
                  not **ein**  
                  **Gestalt**

He declared the perfection and excellence of this repose  
                          quiet  
                                  quite right           quiet

non phase perturbation

                          soundless wrath

                          non bits passion  
                  and pieces form, finite space that has no place  
calm exhilaration of the beginning  
                          utterance  
                  not **ein** not Gestalt  
                  not  
                  **ein**  
                  **Gestalt**

molded expressways  
vertical arrays  
fractals  
tangents, hexagons, testatura'd line...  
erect rectified rays  
tractal fatal

fractals  
tangents, hexagons, testatura'd line...  
restful fracas  
fragments, exact gongs, tessellate Urdu incline  
raucous rasps,  
tang scent, nectar zone, tester nature at lime  
fragile maracas,  
fragrance, egg's sago, tetanus turbid spine  
                          text tattooed on line

test tube arid lie  
titanium red sickle  
terse tatterdemalion

fact fatal,  
quiet torment, heck he's gone, tether at our dad-lion

fractals  
facular, flecks,  
factitious frasque, fictive pact, feckless act, perplex trap, fragmented tract, petrified frac,  
performing paraplegic, improvised paratactic, search of form, taxonomic fruit, parataxis,  
praxes, lax axes, slack fax taxis, rack's access, tracking excess, sacral arch=aesthete,  
freaking impracticable excrete, imperturbable perplex, impetuous persevere, impersonate  
process, improper perpetrate, imperfect, perfect, hyper-perfect excess

xcshswxshswrrrt!

“In nonphrase, non bits and pieces for;  
you employ a process structure which  
approached in a less, or non-notated way”<sup>4</sup>

non quiet and non resonant

*aphamasis*

subtle *glossolalia*

The way to get lost

How not to return

To get lost not to return to get lost

A path for those “who ask the way to get lost. No one knows. It teaches how not to return.”<sup>5</sup>

To get lost

get lost

Oh no, not to return. No one knows

the way to get lost

on to not return

On to the gate-post, on golden guest to resort

Ethereal no return known to no one

Ontology let go

Eternal ephemeral turn

On to lodge let Ghost, infernal, informal torment

not one, no

Tautology best log, gestural tournament

No turn of nonphrase in non bits of pieces form

a non-notated way to get lost

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Mystic Speech” op. cit., p. 80. He quotes here Marguerite Duras *India Song*, tr. Barbara Bray (New York: Grove Press, 1976), p. 21.

Set soft glove in toughen hand  
Utopian locus in quiet turmoil, late glove, gentle gloss,  
finite space that have no place, subtle glossolalia  
    Beaches offered to the swelling sea  
    Beside and in what authorizes, not one, no, not one norm,  
        No one knows

Lo-ess

loneliness

“It is a transparent, finite space that has no place of its own, yet includes many dwellings. (...) It combines unity and plurality of ‘dwellings’ which permit an itinerary to be drawn up; (...) a place where one dwells without dwelling there – and whose center is also exteriority.”<sup>6</sup>

not  
**ein**  
**Gestalt**

Oh, no, a past for those whose task is to not return  
to the way to get post, lost in costs, fossilized in loss  
    soft glove in toughen hand  
        soundless resonance  
            silent vehemence  
            motionless outburst of restrained madness  
    utopian locus in quiet turmoil  
        cruel and furious repose  
        similar and dissimilar  
        contrary and non contrary  
    A place that has no space finite  
many dwellings without dwellings  
    center and exteriority  
    Beside and in what gives authority  
        not one norm  
    island/inscription, Locus solus, penal colony<sup>7</sup>  
        a dream inhabited by the unreadability  
    the “I” of the *Invocatio*, the “I” of the first letter “I”: *Invocatio*  
        “I”  
    the “I” to an imaginary nothing<sup>8</sup>, an isolated locus  
        an islandilated locus  
            an inscription  
            outlined by the dream  
    dream that opens a free space  
        in which to write  
    a non-phrased, a non bits and pieces form  
        process structure

<sup>6</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Ibid.*, p. 94-95.

<sup>7</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, *Ibid.* p. 158 (chapter 11: “The Arts of Dying: Celibatory Machines”).

<sup>8</sup> See *Ibid.*, p.92.

without permission  
many treats, a pleasure, the garden of the other  
that expresses itself in dreams  
glorious folly  
heavenly madness  
celestial locura  
the excess it has over the imperfect that occurs  
“like Duchamp’s “glass”, it is transparent, finite space, that has no place of its own, yet includes “many dwellings””<sup>9</sup>  
a place where one dwells without dwelling there  
a limit that is in and beside authority  
a garden of delights

“In nonphrase, Media space becomes volumetric, energy ridden and convoluted, time becomes durational rather than ordered sets; configuration becomes a continuous moving shape, an internal pile up and release rather than

**ein**

**gestalt**”<sup>10</sup>

\*\*\*

## **KIVA and the Mystics**

During the years when John Silber’s research project – the notationless music and dance KIVA – took its first “formless state”<sup>11</sup> shape, Michel de Certeau was a major intellectual present on the UC San Diego campus. He was the central figure in a multi-disciplinary group that gathered at the Center for Music Experiments to exchange ideas on the subject of “orality and Writing in Contemporary Culture”. The group would meet to debate around paper presentations by artists, anthropologists, poets, sociologists, philosophers and literary critiques. Two international conferences were organized at CME, alternating formal text presentations with various performances pertaining to all possible art forms<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp.94-95.

<sup>10</sup> John Silber, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid,

<sup>12</sup> The main participants of the group were Michel de Certeau (Literature), David Antin (Visual Arts), Michael Meeker (Anthropology), Robert Levy (Anthropology), Aaron Cicourel (Sociology), Michael Davidson (Literature), Jerome Rothenberg (Visual Arts), Paolo Fabbri (Literature), John Silber (Music) and myself (Music), (I probably forgot to include important names). The conferences were held in 1979 and 1980.

Concerning KIVA, Michel de Certeau mentioned to me one day that we should look into the notion of “the language of the angels”<sup>13</sup>. I took this suggestion at the time as an ironic way of challenging our radical posture of refusal of anything reasonable. Only recently, I realized that he seriously connected KIVA to sixteenth and seventeenth century mysticism<sup>14</sup>, not only because from within the institution, we refused to have anything to do with its corrupt practices, but because that way of thinking – proper to glossolalia or speaking in tongues, a non-sense language – was doomed to leave no effect, no trace, but was only the receptacle of language during the time it lost all its meaning, until a new institutional order would come forth.

Now, “mysticism” is a dangerous concept today, especially in America, if it is taken as the outside expression of a deep religiosity. So it is important to state at the outset of this discussion, that KIVA had nothing to do with a religious experience, even though it was very close at times to, shamanic practices, trance dance, and introspective moods<sup>15</sup>. The KIVA project stayed within the bounds of the artistic aesthetic realm, separated from everyday life and from other forms of human activities. We are dealing here with an historical comparison of postures, between the mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and certain modernist endeavors that questioned in the same way a moribund institutional system during the later part of the twentieth century.

For Michel de Certeau, the mystics emerged at a time where the Church institutions experienced a fundamental decline. The crisis was foremost a question of a loss of meaning, “the disintegration of the sacred world”<sup>16</sup>. The theologians had professionalized their stances, separated their debates from popular culture; their truths had become relative and “hidden”, their authority “opaque”. The institution was divided and had to face the Reformation movement.

The mystics chose to stay within the institution of the Catholic church, but developed practices devised to find again “illumination” that was lost in the rhetorical theological discourses of the time. By re-inventing that discourse of the origins, they created a strangely different manner of speaking and writing, which constituted a linguistic envelope announcing (without its content) Enlightenment and modern society, “an inaugural wandering”, the creation of a lack, a desire for ineffable expression. The dissenting voices of the mystics introduce the characteristics of modernity, namely to try

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, op. cit.: “It is the search of a common language, after language has been shattered. It is the invention of a “language of the angels” because that of man has been disseminated.” (p.88).

<sup>14</sup> Here, Michel de Certeau is precisely referring to Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), Teresa d’Avila (1515-1582), Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), Diego de Jesús (1570-1621), Jean Surin (1600-1665), Angelus Silesius, (1624-1677), Madame Guyon (1648-1717), Fénelon (1651-1715), Gichel (1638-1710, Arnold (1666-1714), etc.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note the long collaboration within KIVA with the Korean dancer Hi-ah Park. Her remarkable contribution to the group took the direction of deep connections with a chaotic world of shamanistic spirits. This eventually created conflicts, and the collaboration that lasted seven years, ended when Keith Humble joined the group on a more permanent basis, bringing with him a more down to earth point of view.

<sup>16</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, op. cit., p.86.

to go beyond the existing states, and to allow a freedom of entry into a textual space without anyone's permission: a garden of delights<sup>17</sup>. The dissenting voices open the path for a cosmos that is not simply reproduced by copying, but is recreated anew by translation and interpretation.

Citing Marguerite Duras, de Certeau thus describes "A Locus of Speech":

The mysticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proliferated in proximity to a loss. It is a historical trope for that loss. It renders the absence that multiplies the productions of desire readable. At the dawn of modernity, an end and a beginning – a departure – are thus marked. The literature of mysticism provides a path for those who "ask the way to get lost. No one knows." It teaches "how not to return."<sup>18</sup>

At the same time inside and beside the institution, the mystic speech can be viewed as an expression of "savage" voices pitted against the authorities of textual productions and of erudite knowledge<sup>19</sup>. The main figures of inspiration are drawn from simple popular non-educated people: "the mad man, the child, the illiterate". Faced with the absence of guarantees of a tradition passed from generation to generation, the mystics are left with no other choice than ecstatic and dissenting expressions reduced to the circumstantial nature of the present: "they had nothing left but present exile"<sup>20</sup>.

The mystical experience does not offer the framework of a doctrine, but rather appears as a set of practices, of procedures, of new ways of producing texts. The voice has to emerge from the immediacy of the present state, with all its possible detours and all its abundant etymological richness. The linguistic manipulations alternate between listening for an efficient flux of existing words and producing new combinations and artifacts. Mystical posture fabricates words, phrases and turns of the tongue: the voice listens to itself<sup>21</sup>. From its practice emerge the vocalizations (sound and meaning), without the presence of a will to do something: sufficient is to "let it speak", like the Master Eckhart *gelâzenheit*, "a letting-be attitude"<sup>22</sup>.

The emphasis of mystical practice is on the body of the text itself: the word and its sonority. The language is a space for combinatorial possibilities, it is structured by the act of speaking, which in itself constitutes an act of thought:

All of the writings display a passion for what *is*, for the world as it "exists," for the thing itself (*Das Ding*) – in other words, a passion for what is its own

---

<sup>17</sup> It happened that "The Garden of Delight" was the title I used for an article on KIVA written for *Percussive Notes Research Edition* (Vol. 21, N#3, March 1983, pp. 8-17). The image of the garden was used as a metaphor for the body memory built slowly over the years by the performer in improvisation practice. The Garden of Delights, a painting by Jerome Bosch, is also the subject of a whole chapter in *La Fable mystique* by de Certeau ("Chapter 2: Le jardin: délires et délices de Jérôme Bosch).

<sup>18</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies* p. 80. Quoted from Marguerite Duras, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>21</sup> Michel de Certeau *La fable mystique*, pp. 170-171,

<sup>22</sup> Michel de Certeau, "Mystic Speech", p. 81.

authority and depends on no outside guarantee. They are beaches offered to the swelling sea; their goal is to disappear into what they disclose, like a Turner landscape dissolved in air and light.”<sup>23</sup>

Here de Certeau refers to Wittgenstein: “It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.”<sup>24</sup> Without end the language is capable of an infinite “absolute”, “un-bound”, “only by erasing itself”<sup>25</sup>. In that sense the mystical text does not offer the possibility of an outside “other” text (*un hors-texte*) with a status of a stabilized place of rationality, capable of wielding “a ready-made definition”<sup>26</sup>. The mystic “produces endless narrativity”. De Certeau uses the Greek word *aphanasis*, disappearance or dissolution “in that unreadable something other written in its body”<sup>27</sup>.

We can view John Silber’s work in a way very similar to these perspectives on mystic speech, if we examine his attitudes towards the university as a research institution and the particularities of his practice, notably within the KIVA notationless music.

By a very intelligent decision, the composers at the origin of the creation of the UCSD Music Department – Will Ogdon and Robert Erickson – decided to include a certain number of performers as full participants in the functions of a research university. Indeed, during the second half of the twentieth century, the status of the performer evolved rapidly from a mere role of instrumentalist/interpreter (*exécutant*) to become an important actor or collaborator in the creative endeavors of composers. This was not completely evident at the time, as most performers would themselves consider that the Conservatorium or the School of Music was their professional home. But once this wise decision was made, trouble began as the definition of what constituted research for performers, even in terms of “creative output”, endured a long series of difficult practical tests, which brought about complex questions that are not today completely resolved. The issues that plagued the game of making headway in the university system were, in particular, a) the uncertainty of evaluation in a context in which new artistic knowledge would generate its own contextual values, b) the way local activities were less recognized than the international venues (a tension between experimental posture and the entrepreneurial nature of concert organizations) and c) the way the products of research in artistic domains were in general more difficult to recognize than academic explanatory speculations about them. These were not that different from similar debates in the sciences, like the questions related to the techno-science applications, the influence of the industry and the military on funding and content, the “fictional” characteristics of the narratives of published works or of research proposals, etc... The way performers were so easily accepted in the research community and then dealt with ad-hock changing rules, reflected a world in which values barely survive in deep murky waters. Yet any return to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 187 (6.44).

<sup>25</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Mystic Speech”, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

the strong values of the Western world should be viewed today as a dangerous ethnocentrism.

Not unlike the historical period described by de Certeau, we live since the beginning of the twentieth century in turmoil. The grand opening of liberties and opportunities, the full recognition of different modes of thinking and of living as equally dignified behaviors come hand-in-hand with a war of media played by lobbyists, special interest groups and mafias. The confusions of values play into the hands of all sorts of ayatollahs and necessitate on the part of the intellectual world a permanent cool deconstructing approach that must be constantly redefined, according to context, in a new set of ethical values.

Suddenly, John Silber (around 1975) took seriously the premises of a research institution. He decided to play inside the University the real game that others would with clairvoyance consider as completely fictional. And by doing so, he ensured his exclusion to the tolerated fringe of the institution. There can be no accusation made, given this fact, because it was the structural context of the institution itself that made things happen the way they did, and because John Silber assumed completely (but not with any passive resignation) what he knew was the state of affairs. The tenure process allowed this fundamental academic freedom. He thought that it was his ethical duty to question all the premises of his previous practice as a trombonist, even though all his colleagues expected him to continue in the role in which he was known to excel.

John Silber's hypothesis can be recalled in few words. The invention of the microphone and the surrounding amplification technology changed radically the rules of music making and, beyond that, the way we perceive sound, and, even beyond that, the way the global world resonates. The microphone is not an instrument circumscribing in itself a series of given sound possibilities, it is not a producer of sound. It can enhance any given sound, revealing like the microscope all the particles that we did not perceive before in a discrete manner, because they were integrated in a global envelope. It is not an instrument in its fixed specialized functions, because it implies a chain of assembled apparatus that can be modified according to diverse circumstances. It is not an instrument of a specified field of human activity, but becomes one of the main tools for all kinds of disciplines. It is used in everyday ordinary life, as well as in very precise sophisticated usages. It can project any sound to any place in the world, creating the conditions of the global village. It implies the disappearance of the need for specialized spaces, because virtual acoustical spaces can now be envisioned. It allows anybody's voice to be heard without having to develop a technical skill to project sound to the ears of a public, thus creating the conditions for the spectacular expansion of popular expressions throughout the world. It is the instrument of commercialization of music and of manipulation of the human ears, but it is as well the favorite tool of the underground and of the alternative scenes. John Silber tries to convey this complexity:

if the microphone has changed the perception of sound, the seeing inside like the microscope before, it has changed also our micro-performance and tuning needs....the natural tuning array non-replicated octave, inset voice, micro-particle

essay, flumes and curves, variegated color, multiple attack type, entrails, coupled monitors, sound relay forms, another force...in this the performers give up their categories, the self-image tool no longer serves this or that sound... violin, voice, percussion, trombone...but the many in the one in non-attached ways...his instrument becomes many substance content and what had been a particular technique becomes a mannerism...the performer now seeks his technical demands from within the sound...a constant search for form...parataxes.<sup>28</sup>

In the non-amplified “acoustic” world of written music, the note is the smallest unit of significance in the system, it encapsulates the way the ear globalizes complex oscillatory phenomena into a single event. The electro-acoustic amplification of sound changes completely this given condition, by bringing forth the inner energies of the note. The new paradigm therefore does not lie in the economy of successive notes forming a musical syntax, but in what happens inside a single sound event. And if the notion of the note, as pertinent object, is appropriate for the written signs on the score – it is easily symbolized in a simple limited way – the inner complexity of the note is precisely what cannot be notated in a similar simple system on paper, a system that would be able to be deciphered at sight. So, in this new way of experiencing the acoustical world, sounds can only be produced, not represented. Sound can be scientifically studied, and this can give useful insight into its functions, but what are the mechanisms ensuring a mediation towards musical practice?

If the creative force is now shifted from the combinations of notes to the inner complexity of singular sounds, this opens the way for a real research role for the performer, the producer of sound. The notion of the creative performer takes here its grounding: “in technological music a considerable amount of your creative substance is in your instrument”<sup>29</sup>

This has very little to do with what is usually thought as “improvisation”, which would be the ability to recreate on the spirit of the moment already formalized musical elements. John Silber refused the term of *improvisation* as improper to describe the KIVA project and proposed instead the negative “notationless music”:

in the implementation of sounds and disciplines using complex vertical arrays, rich sonorities folded back upon themselves, octave precise tunings, beyond perception inner pulse, body syntax, generative waves, movement back and forth, diverse electro support...new esthetics accompany new formats...the nature of which is such that notation can no longer be effective...not because one is against it, but simply because it does not work, it gets in the way of not only the sound, the form, the instrument, but of your hand...then too, with the advent of tape recording, notation as preservator is no longer the case... notationless music here implies a change in the language itself rather than a style usage one...in the realization of which other musical conditions prevail...<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> John Silber, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.157.

This showed the impossibility we were faced with in naming or speculating about our activities beyond a mere description of what it was not. This is the main reason for the fact that John Silber could only attempt poetical analogous objects-narratives to catch the complexity of what he touched in his musical practice. To go beyond the practice would only be a treason of that practice, only an analogous practice would become possible.

Here it is a matter of working at the sound matter, rather as a sculptor manipulates and shapes raw materials. John Silber offered also a very different approach to sound matter, than the one consisting in building instruments for appropriate uses in particular musical contexts, or to encapsulate a set of given possibilities in a particular sound sculpture. His central concern started with the given instrument itself, as an infinite set of sound options, and the principal game was the slow re-invention of the instrumental technique learned at school and applied in the practice of written music. This type of approach implies a profound profanation of the object. The instrument becomes a multiple sound source rather than a specialized tool for producing musically recognized sounding events. Therefore dismembering the instrument and adding prosthesis to it, like experimental mutes and various objects, and using the instruments in conjunction with various resonating systems are normal ways in this context of extending traditional techniques. The work had also to do with amplification manipulations and the possibility to send through a pipe amplified sounds from other sources into the trombone itself. Finally, the possibility to play another instrument unknown to the player – in this case the violin – (this was an idea from Vinko Globokar) was another interesting option, which necessitated the total invention of the technical means and their corresponding sound world: “instruments become resources for sound rather than systems or agents of discourse...thus certain instruments you perform may not be your own...(I repeat)”.<sup>31</sup> The violon-Silber sounded like what no other violinist could envision.

To take the route of improvisation, instrument making or sound sculpture would have allowed John Silber to stay within the boundaries of identified objects of research, and to be part of a speculative (if not, for him, corrupted and without perspectives) polite academic context. But the way he took seriously a world that has been changed by electronic technology and its conditions of confronting the artist with sound itself, created a situation very similar than that of the mystics described by Michel de Certeau: the dawn of a new world, the decline of an old order, the expression of forms refusing the syntactical content of an exhausted language and attempting to confront the matter itself in its complexity, away from speculation and close to vernacular illiterate productions, turned to the instability of the present, its wandering, its exile, with a constant going back and forth between listening and producing (the KIVA main method was to systematically listen to the recording of the playing sessions), and finally the impossibility of an outside text that could be witness to the value of the practical approach (no one would be found at the time of academic evaluation that could assess the research content of John’s work).

In the working group at the Center for Music Experiments, Michel de Certeau presented a paper on “Glossolalia”, speaking in tongues, which was published in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

*Traverse*<sup>32</sup> under the title “Utopies vocales : glossolalies”. The main point of view of this article is that glossolalic practices tend to emerge at the time of crisis in language: historical moments when there is devaluation of the institutions of speech, deteriorations of customs, loss of conventions of language. Glossolalia takes over and replaces for the time being the institutions of language, it takes on the vocal role of the “art of non-sense”, the art of the beginning or beginning again to speak through the act of “saying” something. Like the babbling of the infants, this free roaming in sounds is only awaiting the institution or the re-institution of language proper. For de Certeau, the mystical movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proceed in the same way:

The poem – a cadenced repetition, “generative palilogy” (Beaudrillard, *L'échange symbolique*, p. 307), subtle glossolalia – does not stop at deconstructing meaning and making music: it is what allows the very production of meaning. (...) It says nothing. It permits saying. For that reason it is a true “beginning”.<sup>33</sup>

Mysticism, as described here, disappeared suddenly (or continued in a non-significant form in religious practice) with the “dawning of the century of the Enlightenment”<sup>34</sup>. It came ‘with the setting sun, but vanished before morning, announcing a day it never knew’. The beginning, the Invocation to the Muses of the poet, waits for the real significative content. What would that be concerning all the twentieth century glossolalic practices, starting with the Dada movement? What do they announce? This has lasted a long time... Is there an alternative to the *postmodern*, which could be described here as an hysterical alternance (or superimposition) of postures ; either clinging desperately to the obsolete forms of the past, often accompanied with a sectarian religious slant, or the free wanderings of non-sense objects or practices, often with mystical overtones? Or is this the new stable order for centuries to come? We cannot answer these horrible questions. So let’s give back the voice to John Silber:

*In nonphrase, non bits and pieces form, you employ a process structure which can only be approached in a less, or non-notated way. Media space becomes volumetric, energy ridden and convoluted, time becomes durational rather than ordered sets; configuration becomes a continuous moving shape, an internal pile up and release rather than ein gestalt.*

*In this “free form press” the artist relies upon the abstract, the unseen order of “could be” chance, the multidimensional sound following multidimensional “could be” space, as viewing a painting in separate efferent waves.*

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<sup>32</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Utopies vocales : glossolalies”, in *Traverses*, “La voix”, Paris: Centre Pompidou.

<sup>33</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Mystic Speech”, p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

*You now see the parts as the “experience” of the whole.  
Coherence and expression become not related  
intersecting events but  
congeries,  
Non-intersecting  
Form States, processing the inner release<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> John Silber, op. cit., p.135

## Transition

Artaud de Certeau Artaud de Certeau Artaud de Certeau Sarto do erto Sartro do merteau cerceau de marteau Artaud de Certeau Artaud de Meursault Bardo d'Artaud Bardot de Sartre de Beau doir devoir de Sartre au bord de l'eau le badaud de Certeau barde au art tôt *how* ? De Certeau à Artaud arco carpeau sport spotter de De Artaud sombrero Stetson béret chapeau bateau de cerceau tarto double salto d'Artaud deux certes hauts bardo de Corot quart host cat's paw Carson

For mega cholesterol, uncork a bottle of Bordeaux, a stock pot on abestos or torte on stove, bortscht tremolo voce, add a farrago of carrots, oregano from Oregon, OK Corral from Barbados, grass of Austro-baroque core, lost lark, roast stork, rock tortoise, fraught marrow and port, force forth on port, from Porto, a buttered batter, attar custard, tatar sauce for tartar saur, hero torpedo from Arapaho, take now a marteau, grate coarsed cardamon pod rattle, not tart, hard corsed, gazpacho crawled on colander sterol, catered forked farce bard abort fart fragrant trash, heart throb gastro, garrot, sorrow, better starve...

astronaute de Certeau Artaud tarn d'eau dero berceau de Hartog astern Oh de Certeau Artaud de Certeau Artaud de Certeau Atone stratosphère ozone de perso trotter otter tarn tells trestle ass aster sod astrolab haw retort de Certeau Artaud artesian anthropod arch storkbroch spotter poker crow t'arrow

torture claustro-torpor, trachoma-ostropath carbon servo motor, meta-streptococcal stroke, stertorous atone cortex, cerveau turbo-proped estrogen terse arse, tortuous arsenal lost trotosphere grafted torso astray, brash broken corpse torpor Holà! error! terror! atonement! astrobal halo aurora aureate karat auréole, aura of lascar brother seraph creator Oh Lord credo lore tarot Torah furthestmost grotto, oracle sacro orthodox orator Freud, fortress ark totem cross, trope orchard traitor orant's fracas,

Carson ortho otter lasso kart kerosene faro harts horn hard ball hard nosed hard top horse trader mart metro Artaud gastropod garter hart de Derto tarot certes tarte très trace au taureau per faro karst opéra trop corto maltrose lactose de terso perdreau Artaud de Certeau Artaud de Certeau Bardot de Certeau Sarto Arteau Dart tote de total carte haute dertoronode Cocteau torero Certeau sert tôt rateau drapeau carsotordero predator taudroce eau de rose réseau grotesque d'Artaud Bardo Momo de Certeau mimi de Certeau Artaud

artless arabesque travelog, extra extrovert Ezra, arbalest's art, aural fracas, fate oral Fragonard, hard core hard rock hard work hard hat – Captain! – a lot of atonal stereo astrologer-bard rational torero ratchet corporeal patched bravado Cortot stroph stoned-broke Stockholm autograph automat of autocrat, rat-race, ratchet, taro strum brash, strobe strop Cocteau Stroppa stroboscope brass non troppo staccato tremolando atoll koto Coreas Korea orchestra, arco col legno stratto tremolando al trombone...

– oscar oscar oscar –

## Theatre of Life

John Silber was always very interested in mixed-media theatre. He wrote several major plays, involving, actors, musicians, dancers, films, lighting... The poetical texts of these plays written at the end of his life were directly related to the episode of Socrates' time in prison awaiting death as related in *Phaedo*. A festival in honor of the gods delayed Socrates' execution and following a dream that said to him "practise and cultivate the arts", he took up the project of writing poetry or music, which was something he had not done before. This posture was not designed to rival the poets of the day, nor to create a work, an object for posterity, but more to fulfill the obligation of the dream, to attempt to understand the terms of this dream, and by this to understand the sense of life and death. Here the notion of arts extended to all the artistic manifestations as well as philosophy. John Silber wrote a play on Socrates and used the extract of *Phaedo* relating this as an *exergue* with a commentary by Nietzsche which put forward these questions:

The voice of Socrates dream vision is the only sign of any misgivings about the limits of logic: Perhaps – thus he must have asked himself – what is not intelligible to me is not necessarily unintelligent? Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom from which the logician is exiled? Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of, and supplement for science?

John's ideas about the art of the play has nothing to do with discourse, plot, or anything that the separate arts have rationalized, but refer to "a theater of lights, forms and poetics". This "life" form is not only a supplement to science, but to art itself: "know this NOW the world is loose... chaos, apocalypse, hippodrome..." He asks the participants of the play to have the same posture as Socrates making art during the delay given to him: "16 multiple actor / musician / dancer who do many things in and out of their speciality which is the want of our time where one art is no longer enough; if at times moves are inelegant, spastic or clumsy, it can be interesting".

The figure of Antonin Artaud (another mystic of the XXth Century) was a source of inspiration. In the late 1980s, John Silber worked with the composer Eric Lyon, then a student at UCSD, on computer processed trombone sounds: this resulted in a tape piece: *Two Poems of the Absurd*. The first one called *Hey Artaud* mixed these trombone sounds with the recorded voice of Artaud on the famous 1947 radio play *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*. This is one of the last work of Artaud before he died; it was realised shortly after his release from psychiatric hospital. It was never broadcast over the French Radio, because it was censored by its director for its profanity and scatological content.

I do not know to what extent John Silber got into the translation and meaning of the French text, but what is certain is that he became more interested in Artaud's own vocal expression, a mixture of theatricalization and musical intonation ranging from ironic tone of voice to the most desperate shrill, than in actual textual content. These sonic aspects seem mostly related to the KIVA experience, as the second Poem of the Absurd was based on the recording of a private practice session between John and myself, which

always started with vocal improvisations using invented non-sense text. The narrative content of the chosen extract of Artaud's Radio Play deals with America. In the aftermath of the World War, this violently anti-American diatribe may be shocking for many, but at the same time it is a vision of the future of our planetary society that is a perceptive analysis of consumerist and ecological issues that are nowadays crucial, not to mention the extremist adventures of American power in its quest to control the world. To this extent Artaud's text bears some relation to John's own political position, his concern about the future of humanity facing the dangers of global degradation of the earth, of global imperial violence. Here is the text of Artaud:

«

For Americans are finding more and more that they lack muscle and children  
that is, not workers  
but soldiers  
and they want at all costs and by every possible means to make  
and manufacture soldiers  
with a view for all the planetary wars which might later take place  
and which would be intended to *demonstrate* by the overwhelming  
virtues of force  
the superiority of American products  
and the fruit of American sweat in all fields of activity, and  
of the superiority of the possible dynamism of force.  
Because one must produce  
one must by all possible means of activity replace  
nature whenever it can be replaced,  
one must find a major field of action for human inertia  
the worker must have something to keep him busy  
new fields of activity must be created,  
in which we shall see at last the reign of all the fake  
manufactured products<sup>36</sup>

There is no doubt that, implicitly or explicitly, many elements of Artaud's thought influenced the KIVA project. For Artaud sound has meaning within itself in its vibratory quality, before yielding a meaning of what it represents on the stage of the theatre<sup>37</sup>. In KIVA the same attitude applies in connection with musical grammatical structures: the sounds have meaning of their own before being syntactically organized and before being signs for something relevant to everyday life. This last implication has some connexion with John Cage's philosophy of tasting isolated sounds as we would taste wine. But if tasting might have some sense of relation between experiences, sound in isolation for Cage has necessarily no inner meaning. The KIVA experience proposes something

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<sup>36</sup> Antonin Artaud, "To Have Done with the Judgment of God", A Radio Play (1947), in Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writing*, Ed. with an Introduction by Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976, pp. 555-556.

<sup>37</sup> See Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, Paris: Idées/Gallimard, 1964: "Dans ce spectacle la sonorisation est constante : les sons, les bruits, les cris sont cherchés d'abord pour leur qualité vibratoire, ensuite pour ce qu'ils représentent".

different that refutes the postmodern ending of art and the nihilist approach to random processes, without excluding it as a possible way for accessing chaos. John Silber noted that "the same note, the same duration, everything the same except this inner quality, this change in formant, this change in complexity which changes everything else"<sup>38</sup>. For him this condition changed meaning itself, the signification of sound meaning. For Artaud, the words can be stated with different intonations, they can create a music in the way they are pronounced<sup>39</sup>. The striving is to come back to the origin of language, to the physical qualities of the voice devoid of logical discourse. The affect and pathos being primary elements above articulated thoughts and cooled down by grammatical structures. The sounds are perceived as movements, the objects "like in the paintings of old masters", starts to speak by themselves<sup>40</sup>. This form of thought can be compared to the following statement by Silber:

"The work, the research then, provokes other logics, other beginnings, other intelligences; the non-predicate, non-syntactical, appropriate documentary endeavor, poetic thought rather than message in what has been called by many as the language revolution. The construction of texts becomes not merely a construction of information or scientific method but modes of knowing which lie outside science and formal English, art as a way of knowing, a way of thought. For when we deal with esthetics, with metaphysical and abstract issues not readily available to calculation, then the passage from epistemics and science to myth, art and the poetic are not only quite natural but quite necessary. Necessary to turn to other forms of logic, engagement, rites, and codes if understanding is not to demur. In doing this, consumed space, exercises and conditions, direct sound encounter, breath, voice, tone and movement become primal to any ensuing knowledge, any outer/inner reality, any form. Research and performance meet as do sound and meaning, poetics and text."<sup>41</sup>

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one must replace nature whenever it can be replaced,  
one must find a major field of action for human inertia  
by all possible means  
whenever it can be replaced, one must replace nature  
one must find a major field of action for human inertia  
of action  
of action

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<sup>38</sup> John Silber, *Portfolio Three, Mind and Body after Technology*, " Sound and the Language Revolution, Art and Techné as More than Itself", unpublished, p.1. This text appeared in part in *Perspectives of New Music*.

<sup>39</sup> Artaud, op. cit., p.54-55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 182.

<sup>41</sup> John Silber, *Portfolio*, p.2.

ofaction

whenever it can be replaced, replace

find a major inertia One must

One must just

of arson

One must replace nature

Whenever it beer can place,

One just find a magic sort of human inner space

One never eat canned deer glazed, one just replace night pure

One just fined a magister shield, for human innerate

One must recapitalize narrative, Wayne ever, it can't be helped said one mutest faint for animator signal

One pulse refracted night club, wanderer it can be reflected

One pulse fandango magician's feel, for you man inherited KIVA

One shuffle relax narcosis, weightless cannabis reglazed

One shuffle fandangle, mad jerk fillip, for omen inhere Siva

One must recapture Saturn, wanderlust can be redressed

One feign Maginot fort, you mean a Siamese

One must replace nature whenever it can be replaced

One must find a major field of action for human inertia

One musters the place night pure, whenever it can be the place

One mutters fine magic sort, for human inner space

One mug beer place nightclub, wine's verity cannot bear place

One rug final magic fold, for you man innervate

One mulls relaxed narcosis, wander litany refracted

wanderer's litany, wayfarer's liturgy reflected,

reflexive narcotics, rambler's lethargy

lethal laments, vagrant chords,

lithiasis narcolepsy, roving harmony, roaming dream

sleepwalking nomadism, errant melody,

One adjusts feigned mad jerk fillip, forum animates her sitar

One muff, red face, narrates, wanderlust redeemed pace

One pulse, fandango, madras fling, forlorn animator signal

One muffin, redressed narrative, wand her relieved face

One shuffle phantasm, midget friend, forgotten animadvert sistra

Quaint mudfish regnant native, waratah replanted trace  
Guam mucker fancy milked way for view of inhuman sierra

Quack muddle remnant nacreous, squash quagmire rampant  
    hack, slough, slag, scurf, swamp, quag, mudhole, wallow, slime, mire, ooze,  
    warm heated relevant ace

Wham rusted vane a moleskin, say you mean a Siamese

Slam rest sacred adventure, cat in boots  
Whammy Vendée mollusk's feed, scat in booth manifold heterology

Quad sock erratic do myth oral line  
Kwatcha home jar freeze truism lip omen mob term negate

Last secret ribald line to list autocratic Latvian  
Watch a dollar sleazy truce dolmen adorn necklace

Flat dissent rivalry to link captive lark  
That descent strum Proust lisp dementia Moselle vintage

Bat discoid meaning too lit tidal lahar  
Blast dixit Ming true, the Lithuanian moan firm nerve

Rap disc rhythmic lush star axis Partch  
Vassal's diseased meal treacherously Augustian in miser's nudge

Rat disesteemed bristly, luscious sparaxis larch  
Varlet's dismissive grin tremendously Romanesque in motherland engage

Wow! It is him eating, to peel straw, he would mandarin in seed idle sage  
Wow! Does she clean tooth luster parataxis blast  
What is it? He meets into bistrot Hollywood mandolin in middle stage

What does she mean to do liver spasmodic clash  
What hesitate me into being a trout, will you maneuver in muddle large

What does he mean to deliver somatic lapse  
What does it, mean truth-ill you man, innerve moderate merge

What does it Menuhin took leave of the Somali lass

What does it mean, two beet-roots, your machine, a mode emerged

What does it mean to leave the stomach itch lap?

What does it mean to beat hourly your man in, mother's rage

What does it mean to live the autocratic rife?

What does it mean to beat unruly man in a modern age?

“What does it mean to live the Socratic life?

What does it mean to be truly human in modern age?”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> This was one of the last statements that John Silber made before his death.

Benjamin Boretz

SCORE FOR A KIVAPIECE  
FOR AND OF JOHN SILBER

TO HAVE LOCATED THE BANDWIDTH OF HERE  
WITH ONLY THE FEEDBACK OF REVERBERATION  
SIGNIFYING  
ELAPSING PRESENCE  
IN EVEREXPANSIVE UNFILLABLE DARKHOLLOW;  
TO BE LOSING THE BANDWIDTH PROGRESSIVELY  
IN EVACUANT UNACCUMULATE UNDERSOUND;  
TO CIRCUMSENSE AN INNER TISSUE OF SUBFACE  
SOUNDTASTED NOT FEELTOUCHED OR LICKSHAPED  
IN DEEP FALL STILL UNREVERBERANT SPREAD AMORPHIC;  
TO UNDO HERE TO UNCOHERE NOW, TO GO MOREUNDER  
TO DEPTH NO DENSITY  
—ALLOW: NOT DO  
(FRACTALLY DISSIPATE):  
NO CONTAINMENT NO RETURN  
UNDERSOUND IN FREEFALL  
WEIGHTLESS VOLUME;  
ANECHOIC VOLUMELESS WEIGHT  
WHERE NOW  
SUBMERGE  
BELOW WHAT  
TO HOLD:  
WAIT.

[May 1991, on his retirement from UCSD]

## **“Where Have We Met Before?”**

for a 90th birthday celebration of Milton Babbitt

Benjamin Boretz

Along with Milton, we know that composing music is much too serious and meaningful to be ontologized, by us at least, through the superveniences of ideology, philosophy, theory, style, or history — as if an utterance cannot be an utterance within its own epistemic and denotational range without, cannot be received, assimilated, understood as such without, restatement through some other language, from within some exterior domain of thought, of experience. But along with Milton, and more than anything in the chrysalis of his presence, we have also pursued our musical explorations in the utterance-forms of philosophy, theory, and — if not history per se — implicit historicizing fantasies of one literary appearance or another (did I mention that when Aaron Copland asked me - in 1966 - why Milton had to write in such an abstruse way I said that I read Milton’s language as poetry, and its soundrhythms as a kind of Joycean meaningcreation? He said: “that’s a mighty strange kind of poetry.”). And also — and also along with Milton — our public discourse is steeped in serious public advocacy, the klang of people who care about the presence in their world of what they do, and about what is being done in their world, by anyone. That publicness of Milton’s discourse is not a component we’re going to be able to strip out of it, but an inextricable aspect of its rhetorical being — there’s a world out there, and the grammar of Milton’s discourse resonates the vision of universality implicit in its thoughts. Resonates, too, the sense of a single lifetime composing project, creating its own meaning in continuous evolution, but also proposing a redefinition of what music is, what composing is, what their meaning in the world is. Is there perhaps a significant resonance too between these purely discursive affects and the musical qualities of Milton’s music itself?

But how do we, as fellow music-seekers, find our way to what we ourselves need for our own personal and/or collective musical purposes within this luxuriance of Milton’s prose, poetry, algorithms, charts, and other extra- / meta-musical texts? It’s not a question of what we can believe is true of Milton — it’s all true of Milton — and we do, very much, want to know him in as much depth and as many depths as we can assimilate — but of what we can understand as true for us, ourselves, we individually music-seeking people.

So we would have to ask: what does it mean to ask what is Milton’s (musical) philosophy, what is Milton’s theory of music? Would we not have to discern how he hears music (assuming that that’s what a ‘theory of music’ signifies) by how we hear that within our hearing of his music? The deep games of hidden and extruded connections (which, in Joe Dubiel’s ingenious hearings become experienced rhythms), the implanting of metastasizing networks of implications, understood as predictive predestinations, and their subsequent histories of further ambivalation and fulfillment; the maximizing load of simultaneous structural information generating sonic texture in a first-order sense, and the strenuous stretching by speeds and distances of the human capacity to make a complex ‘line’ or set of lines out of a complex mosaic of variably incised ‘points’ or minimal line-segments – these are perhaps the most obvious denotata of a particular disposition to hear and make music;

but do we understand, in any meaningful extra-musical way, what implications they have for our sense of music as music, or for music as part of our world? More significantly, is there ever any way to proceed linearly from one of these domains to the other; even more significantly, is there any reason to desire to do so?

Milton's writings don't purport to describe music; they describe what's in it, how and of what it might be made, and (at least by implication) what might be admired and valued about it. In this sense his affinity with the literature of twentieth-century logical philosophy is substantive, far more than an intellectual coloration or a preferred affect of literary style or logistical strategy. Yet of course Milton's written philosophy *is* truly the verbal-philosophical reflection of his sounding music, his formulated theory truly its formal-theoretic reflection, but, of course, they aren't either, can't be, and not only in the sense that each music is as musically distinct an 'expression' of such a musically indeterminate philosophy, and even of a single-piece-determinate theory which may determine the piece but can't determine the music. So: Milton's masterpieces are exactly as 'serial' as Wagner's are 'tonal'. And — from a "technical" perspective of intense interest and value to, especially, his fellow composers, Milton has himself elucidated such a point of view, not only taking a radically "compositional" stance anent earlier music from Mozart to Schoenberg, but proposing methodologies and particulars of compositional procedure which have amounted to a composition-technological revolution within the resources of his contemporary creative musicians. The compositional beneficiaries of this largesse are many and estimable — and include significantly people you wouldn't necessarily think of first off — and some of them (conspicuously Joe Dubiel, Andrew Mead, Bob Morris, John Rahn) have elicited strenuously from Milton's music a substantial additional library of powerful resources for the liberation of compositional range and imagination within the context of syntactically grounded new composition.

Joe Dubiel, in his Three Essays on Milton Babbitt and elsewhere, has in particular constructed a notably lovely fabric of construals of Milton's music oriented toward eliciting the musical art of them entirely within the context of their 'technical' specifics. His essays start with a sketch of a "historical" progression from Schoenberg's way of making music using set-forms to Milton's radical invention of a set-form music, then promptly and fruitfully problematize each step of their own narrative, spilling out much of depth, subtlety, discovery all along the way. And keeping at all times a keen and intense engagement with the issue of listening; in a very wise sentence, Joe (quoting Milton) distinguishes what we might want to know about this music from what we might want to hear in it. What follows is a remarkably artful set of listening constructs whose totality amounts to a subtle suggestion of Schenker-analogous significant-rhythm-making, in many interfolded Schenker-evocative layers. A metric for temporal-unfolding identities, constituted as the interplay of time extents and "function extents" (perhaps reflecting an idea suggested in *Meta-Variations*), develops as a rich extra-syntactic mode of construing the time unfolding of successive passages of complex set-segment polyphonies.

And then, in his stunningly adventurous liner notes for the wonderful "Soli e Duettini" CD, Joe makes a truly valiant effort to transmute the (score-based, or "speculatively heard") abstract-analytic into the (listening-based, or "actually heard") transaction-experiential, intending to reincarnate his own analytic insights as concrete musical qualities in action (rather than as musical facts in inscription). The effect of this essay in enlightened music

teaching can only be discovered by listeners who take it as an explicit project of concrete listening experimentation — a creative project which I seriously recommend — and see what emerges in their hearing.

But still, even when these constructs have become heard phenomena, are they — as heard — really so much what we want to hear as listener-listeners, as much as what we want to hear as composer-listeners? Are the two even meaningfully distinct? And — further — even when these things are heard “in” the music, do they yet constitute “the music” we would ultimately hope to hear? Are we listening to the musical effects of Joe’s listening constructs, or are the listening constructs adequate musical effects in themselves? Once again, it’s really difficult to distinguish observational perspectives deeply and abundantly fruitful for understanding and undertaking compositional tasks and their articulations, from observational perspectives which someone might regard as creating (or characterizing) a holistically musical “sound-image” — the kind of unique experienced sound-time particularity which we might, finally, want to mean by saying: “music”; and which we might perceive to be far from the concatenation or supertextual construal of the relational indices of its parts. But if we still might be listening to, and hearing, what there is to know, to what we know or what Joe knows rather than some “something else”, perhaps there is more than one person’s need for “music” to allow for.

So, then, as in every instance of “writing about music”, we’re left in a musical universe of one. (Can it really ever be otherwise, whatever Fred Lehrdahl or Matthew Brown/Douglas Dempster or Leonard Meyer observe?). In the case of this present “one” (me, that is), what’s left out, perhaps ineluctably, of even such elegant discourse as Joe’s is not just the enigma of affect but those specifically suffusingly musical worldcreating timesensecreating way-of-being-way-of-moving-way-of-acting-creating qualia which start life at the boundary of the nonverbal nonsymbolic ontologies and carry them in forms and sense beyond their determinate reach — not just a many-to-one relation, but an ultimately indeterminate one. It’s not that Joe’s writing doesn’t take me a long way, but that I suspect it’s on a different road than the one I want to be on. But — on the other hand — colorful epithets, one-off metaphors, even “thick” narrative descriptions will not handle the paraphrastically elusive but sonically Cartesian (i.e. ‘clear and distinct’) differentia I need to be captured either — for what musical phenomena could be excised from my awareness and still leave “Milton’s music” in any sense I’d care about?

So, then, there is one’s own historical experience to recall: certainly the most arresting thing about Milton’s music for me when I first heard it -- in concert (Composition for Viola and Piano, Third Street Music School Settlement, around 1954, with Walter Trampler and Alvin Bauman — that piano player who soon after emigrated with a group of Long Islanders to Chico California to escape nuclear fallout; and Three Compositions for Piano, at Payne Hall, Harvard, in a recital by Charles Rosen; and on the (ca.) 1953 WNYC American Music Festival) — was how it didn’t sound at all ‘right’, like a texture with no way in for me to inhabit it other than to bounce off its tough impermeability, or stay back to observe its behavior. So — ever since — my question has been — is this a fundamental thing that ontologizes Milton’s music for me or is it a ‘problem’ I want to overcome by finding cozy ways to ingratiate these very textures, or to find in these works redeeming soft edges, sensuous indulgences? I don’t think so — impermeability, toughness, in-your-face challenging complexity, stubbornly sticks in my musicworld as a fundamental aesthetic

surface of the music of Milton's that means the most to me. I think (to grossly generalize) that I perceive in Milton's music over its long development a radical inversion of the traditional character of temporal successivity: a phraseology that drives in on itself inward rather than flowing outward to what's beyond — a whirlpool rather than a stream, or rather a stream composed of a succession of discrete whirlpools — not Stravinsky's elastic energy-in-place but a music of intense local-internal action, something more like the plosive energies of latter-day "advanced" jazz (as in Coltrane, Coleman, Shepp, Dolphy, Mingus, Taylor, Braxton...) Something I was groping to express in what I wrote (in 1986) about his (First) Piano Concerto, not really describing, but definitely exuding attitude and anxiety and desire and, above all, ambivalence:

**You could call it unfiltered megaSchoenberg in jazztime continuity (not poptime or modernmusictime, either) but what I most love about Milton's Concerto is its gritted integrity being defiant unregenerate militant Positivist music, sternly askance anent the softheaded stylewaffling of the gegenwärtliche jugend, a relentlessly uningratiatingly polyfrantically multilayered senseassertive discourse here being socially publically sonically displayed and exposed to be sure but unmistakably demanding for adequate reception ultimately that it be studied minutely and intently in printform uncompromisingly exhaustively inexhaustibly**

And in 1998, about *DU*, trying to struggle a bit with problems such as I've been discussing, as they fell out of John Rahn's essay "How do you *DU*?":

...I might think that Milton's *Du*—wherever your description of it starts—'is' existentially entangled with a peculiarly 'lateral' temporality—a 'rhizomatic' multidirectionality rather than a 'classical' 'arboreal' polylinear but univocal forwardness; the odd float of a fractured melodism in the piano and a hyperextended lyricism in the voice—both drawing crucially on their countercultural anti-references to historical paradigms signified by those words—is, too, crucial as both input to and output from that idiosyncratic temporality...

Which is to say, I haven't really begun to deal with the problem of how — or even whether — it might be possible, meaningful, fruitful for me to make verbal passes at my experience of Milton's music in significant depth and detail. I know I would wish to expand on my sense that listening to Milton's music is better described as serial sampling of actions than as continuous following of trajectories. I know there are things I want to say about *Around the Horn*, most especially, and *Canonical Form*, and *beaten paths* — pieces whose phraseology seems to bend and stretch outward and do create a kind of narrative continuity rare in Milton's work — and *Relata I* (if only to repair my desperately tentative old *Nation* discussion), *Phonemena*, the second and fifth String Quartets, *Reflections*, and most of the other music on *Soli e Duettini* (just to mention some); but I don't imagine I ever will be able to compose an adequate counterpart to the deep, densely detailed, uncompromisingly serious writings I've invasively invoked here. Perhaps that radical focus on person-relative individual

musical experience which has emerged for me as my fundamental divergence from Milton's global-visionary aspirations, emerged, that is, from within the very space of those visions and aspirations, is a serious limitation of my meta-music-expressive capacity. But should I never find a way to speak of this unimaginably singular music, would that simply mean that I could never learn to adequately hear it? Or might it simply be that I could never find any voice adequate to resonate all my multilayered musical senses of Milton's sounds and words, and of all his presences, even in the world space he himself has created, which we all — by now, for a very long time now — have come to inhabit, with him, together.

April 5, 2006

## A Few Words about Jim Tenney

Larry Polansky

10/24/06

1.

Our sadness at Jim Tenney's passing is combined with the awareness that there is now a hole in the planet. Jim deeply understood something many of us have trouble with – that there are things “out there” that deserve our serious attention. Music, ideas, beautiful work, friendship, even the fate of the human race and the current status of the cosmos – these things equally concerned and impassioned him. And when Jim gave something serious attention, he was, well, serious about it. He cared and thought deeply about what we always hope there will be time to care and think deeply about. He appeared to do that each day of his life, every hour of every day. This was his nature.

2.

In my opinion, Jim Tenney was the most important and brilliant composer/theorist of the second half of the twentieth century. I usually avoid statements like that: they're by definition fatuous, and it's not a competition. But for Jim I'll make an exception. After Cage, no other composer so elegantly and beautifully integrated ideas and music. No one else's work, as a whole, is as profound, experimental, wide-ranging, accomplished, or revolutionary.

Jim wrote more text than most people realize. Starting with *Meta + Hodos* and the computer music articles of the early 1960s; through his work on “timbre,” pitch, and other composers in the late 1960s and early 1970s; his theoretical articles of the late 1970s (like the few but brilliant essays in *Perspectives...* and the *Journal of Music Theory*); and culminating with his wide-ranging work on pitch-space, intonation, and perception in the last 25 years, he left an almost immeasurably broad and important theoretical, aesthetic, intellectual and musical corpus. His writing is poorly acknowledged, not widely read, and almost completely misunderstood. In addition, it's mostly unavailable – he intentionally placed much of it in small, non-academic publications.

His ideas delineate and explore the most important musical ideas of the past 50 years: form, perception, timbre, harmony, the nature of the compositional process. When I teach courses in advanced musical theory, I sometimes have to force myself to use writings by other theorists – not much other work seems quite as interesting, relevant or important as Jim's. He wrote and thought about elementals: form, pitch, cognition and perception (among other things).

He *meant* things in a way that few others do, and we should take a lesson from him in this. He cared little (in fact, not at all) for academic or intellectual fashion. He was singularly focused on getting it right. He wanted to know how the ear, the brain, and music worked (and might work). He was among the first (if not the first) theorist (and composer) to focus on ideas like the examination of deep musical processes irrespective of style, the

use of cognition and perception as the basis for music theory, and a phenomenological understanding of our musical perception. His investigations *began* at a much deeper level than what passes for music theory (even today). I think we should revise our definition: whatever Jim Tenney did, and however he did it, is music theory.

Jim never advanced an idea until he was convinced he could win an argument about it with himself. His discussions were deep, brutal, and lengthy, with the most exacting person he could find (himself). Sometimes he checked in with a few others lucky enough to have earned a bit of his confidence, but by then it was unlikely that anyone else could help much. He did so much homework, and thought so hard, that there was rarely a new idea, technique, or avenue he hadn't already considered and probably discarded.

3.

All his life, Jim taught. As a teacher, he avoided the remedial. He had little interest in, time (nor, I think, aptitude) for that kind of pedagogy. As a theorist and composer, he had things to say and investigate. He pursued ideas at a depth that was usually intimidating, often a bit scary, always exciting. His teaching sprang from these investigations, and he taught at a very high level, not some imagined least common denominator. Jim believed, and acted upon the assumption that the academy was a place of ideas, of search — an intellectual and artistic eden where everyone was more or less like him!

Jim was a throwback: an artist and thinker whose love for teaching emanated directly and completely from a love for ideas. He was happiest when describing some new insight he'd had about harmonic space, gestalt segregation, fundamental perception, the octave, Webern, cacti. His love of art, the world and ideas was unfettered. I've encountered a very few people like that in my life, and one of the saddest things about his passing is that now there's one fewer.

4.

I always suspected that some deranged gods had granted Jim the gift of eight extra clandestine hours a day to work, during which he calmly entered an alternate dimension, read twenty books and articles (maybe in Latin or German, languages he taught himself as he was doing research), filled up several of his ubiquitous graph-paper pads, and returned to the corporeal plane with what he needed.

5.

Reverent of history, Jim enjoyed it immensely, and was *in* it. He taught (maybe "taught" is the wrong word: he inspired) his students to share his respect and fascination for so many traditions, and to consider them alive. He showed us that history was fluid, incomplete, not over: there was work to be done. Schoenberg, Ruggles, Partch, Satie, Varèse, Nancarrow, Cage, and Crawford Seeger (even, at various times in his life, Wagner!) were his colleagues.

Jim's immediate musical family consisted of composers of the past, present, and future. He understood, collaborated, and conversed with all at great length, built on their ideas the way a scientist does. He never, ever disrespected them. They dwelled in his musical house

along with the rest of us. One learned from Jim how precisely and seriously to cherish other composers, and all other artists, because he was so careful, sincere, and active about it. He gave great credence to the making of art and the life of the idea – everyone who at was at least nominally a fellow traveler got the benefit of the doubt, often more than we perhaps deserved.

6.

In *Meta + Hodos*, and his later writings, Jim redesigned the architecture of twentieth century music theory. In the Bell Labs pieces (like *Phases*, *Ergodos*, *Noise Study*), he invented fundamental techniques for using computers as compositional tools (creating the *idea* of a compositional subroutine for synthesis environments). He freely moved between “art” and “science,” applying his engineering acuity and musical vision to some of the philosophical insights he gained from his close association with Cage (and Varèse).

He sought connections, and had no patience for arbitrary distinctions. I don’t think it ever occurred to Jim that emotion, intellect, spirituality, science, harmony, creativity, knowledge, curiosity were all that different. Nor should they be parsimoniously doled out in support of some strategic artistic agenda. They were all part of being human, and an artist. His epiphanies often emerged as marriages of ideas, what he called “bridges.” He sought and found the profound connections between the work of Hiller, Partch, Cage, Varèse and others. He created new species from these breeding pairs – not hybrids, but fertile new organisms that reproduced again and again, evolving with each generation.

Jim’s ideas were startling in their originality and scope, but *because* they were great ideas, they had precursors. Each piece led and could be traced to other pieces, and always to some fundamental idea. Somewhere, somehow, Harry Partch led to *Quintexts* which led to *Diapason* and eventually to his final string quartet, *Arbor Vitae* (which the young composer Michael Winter helped him finish near the end of his life).

Jim was intensely curious, but not restless. He asked, “What’s next?” not because he was bored, but because he was hard-wired for forward motion. He remained in perpetual morphogenesis (to borrow a term roughly meaning “evolving and changing in shape,” from one of his favorite writers, D’Arcy Thompson) until the end. The morphogenesis of his ideas won’t stop because he did: it will increase in strength like some kind of electromagnetic resonance – steadily and exponentially.

7.

Over the years, one of my greatest pleasures was listening to Jim describe seemingly fantastic theoretical speculations, some a little too strange to talk about publicly, semi-cosmic ideas reserved for close friends, late at night. Yet even the wackiest of these (his word, not mine) seemed somehow believable. They were modulated by his intelligence and refined in the crucible of his impatience with “just making stuff up!” I always expect to pick up the New York Times Science section some Tuesday morning and read the headline: “James Tenney’s conjecture about the cosmos verified by experimental result!”

8.

The homes that Jim and Lauren Pratt made over the past 20 years – whether in New York City, California, Toronto, or Berlin –were always full. They were places where art and ideas were welcome, there was no need for pretense, and there was all the time in the world. Careerism, gossip, gig-talk, pettiness and the like seemed inappropriate. His home was a haven for art – a safe and necessary respite from the quotidian. Anyone and everyone was welcomed: his and Lauren’s idea of the “open house” (in Toronto) was among the most brilliant ideas he was ever involved in.

He listened with a singular intensity, imbued personal relationships with deep gravity. You always felt that he considered you essential, somehow, to the well being of the planet. You walked in to his and Lauren’s home, a beer appeared in your hand, and all of a sudden your life, at least for the next few hours, was *really* about music.

9.

Like Cage, Partch, Varèse, Hiller, Harrison, Ruggles, and some of the other composers of his genus, Jim dealt with large ideas, systems of thought, “embodiments of mind” (a phrase from another of his favorite authors, Warren McCullough, whose work he was revisiting the last time I spoke to him). His writings provide the foundation for a remarkable edifice that we will spend a long time completing.

For me, though, much of the joy in remembering Jim emanates from small, often very practical notions, which seemed to arise almost incidentally, like wildflowers. These musical and theoretical “volunteers” delighted him as much as anything in his life, but he rarely talked about them, except among friends. I think he thought of this stuff as part and parcel of being a composer. When he’d casually show you something like this, his tremendous glee in solving some “smaller” compositional or theoretical dilemma was evident. He’d get a particular kind of grin on his face, like he’d just solved a riddle rather than proved a theorem.

All of this is in the music, sometimes deeply embedded, sometimes immediately apparent. I remember the moment the compositional idea of *Chorales for Orchestra* clarified itself to me: the vertical was the horizontal; each was the primes of the harmonic series in a crypto-palindromic-Jim-homage to the music of Ives, Stravinsky and Ruggles – and who knows what else!?! Understanding Jim’s techniques reduced you to a kind of dumb, teenage-inflected “how cool is that?” grin, wishing you’d thought of it yourself.

He seldom published or formally described these intermediate compositional ideas. Nor were they premeditated: he created them as he went along; necessary pieces to some larger, cosmic-musical puzzle he was forever trying to solve. It was as if while busy inventing the wheel: at some point he realized he needed to come up with the idea of a spoke, but didn’t think it important enough to mention! It reminded me of the way brilliant mathematicians sometimes invent entirely new branches of mathematics en route to solving a theorem. Jim contributed new concepts with nearly every piece.

These ideas give a sense of Jim's playfulness and deep commitment to compositional craft, something I think that is often overlooked when his work is discussed. I believe that *craft* was the most important thing to him, but his conception of it was unique. He loved music too much to exploit it, enslave it to his own ends. His mode of expression was not the liberation of himself but of other things – ideas and sound – which he neither hamstrung to ordinary expectation, nor indentured to “success.”

In a world increasingly obsessed with the super-saturation of the immediate, Jim took a different approach. In the early 1960s he was close to the great experimental psychologist Roger Shepard, who pioneered a powerful technique called *multi-dimensional scaling* (MDS) which allows a set of complex multi-variable *differences* between even unrelated objects or concepts to be viewed in a simpler space, like the plane. An MDS plot of the way a group of listeners perceive differences between sonic events can illustrate what the most important “dimensions of similarity” might be. One of the most fascinating concepts associated with MDS is the idea of *stress*. If the mathematical reduction of the complexity of some perceptual space produces too great a stress, it means that the picture we're looking at isn't reliable, that there are too many important dimensions: the fit is very bad. In this case, the MDS algorithm automatically adds a dimension (from line to plane to 3-space, etc.) so that the sets of differences will fit more comfortably, be more meaningful. Jim consciously integrated this idea into several pieces (like *Changes*), in which the prime dimensionality of harmonic space was increased when things got too “ambiguous” at the “next lower dimension.”

But I think this is a deeper metaphor for Jim's work. I often feel that more and more, composers (and regrettably the rest of society) have become like what mathematicians call fractals, functions which are extremely complicated, but in a low dimensionality. We have so much information readily at hand, things move so quickly, decisions are made with such immediacy, that depth, ambiguity, taking time to explore ideas is not generally tolerated, much less encouraged. Music is judged quickly, often after being heard just once! Jim's music inhabits a very different world. His ideas are of sufficient richness to be forced into higher dimensions, and requires more complex perceptual and aesthetic geometries.

10.

In recent years Jim's work received far more attention than it had over the previous thirty years. But this was not his goal. As a point of honor, a measure of integrity, he sought far less attention than he deserved. He made sure, though, that when someone did pay attention, they would be rewarded by what was heard. Maybe Jim thought that it was, in some literal way, good to leave the world in one's debt, and not vice versa. He did.

11.

Many of our conversations over the years had little to do with music. In Toronto, late at night, Jim would pull out a graph-paper pad on which he'd been working out some odd idea. One night, I think, he showed me a kind of universal theory of matter that he was considering. He was trying, in his own way, and by the sheer power of his own deduction and instinct, to explain “everything,” at least to himself. I remember nothing of the content

of that graph-paper pad, but what I clearly recall was that somewhere near the end, he said to me, with great seriousness, that he'd very much like to be remembered as a "composer and amateur cosmologist." That is, in fact, how I remember him.

(Coda)

A few days before Jim died, in the hours after which he finally lost consciousness, something odd happened at home here in New Hampshire, three thousand miles away.

Early that morning we came outside to find a Great Blue Heron perched on top of our red minivan. I stood with neighbors for nearly an hour, watching as the large bird made itself at home. The theory was that construction on a small bridge over the Mink Brook, just a few yards away from our house, had disturbed his nest.

When I learned the chronology of his final days from Lauren, I realized the coincidence and thought: "That's just the kind of thing Jim would do!," and was glad that my old friend stopped in to say goodbye.

But maybe Jim didn't pull off that stunt entirely on his own. Perhaps the cosmos, being so firmly in his debt, was paying him back a little.

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**Nam June Paik (1932-2006):  
from a video portrait by Joan Logue**



*Nam June Paik: Freight Elevator*  
October 27, 1979  
New York City

The video portrait *Nam June Paik: Freight Elevator* takes place at 110 Mercer Street between the fifth and fourth floors. This was the time when artists took over factory spaces and turned them into working and living lofts. It became known as an artist community that was coined SoHo (South of Houston).

Nam June Paik, the grandfather of video art, and video artist Shigeko Kabota lived on the fifth floor and I lived on the fourth. Knowing that Nam June was leaving for Düsseldorf, Germany that day, I decided to set up the camera and catch him in the elevator as it passed my floor.

The Mercer Street elevator was a freight elevator from the early 1900's; it was a chain pulley operation. When you wanted the elevator, you would open the elevator door and yell "Elevator!" into the shaft-way. If that didn't work, you would stick your head inside the shaft, look to see which floor it was on and then telephone, asking to have the elevator sent down or up. It was a tricky business and a little dangerous to navigate this elevator. The secret was the two metal pieces, which made the electrical contacts and were positioned at the top of the door and the doorframe. By inserting a stick into one of the metal pieces, the electrical contact was made and you could then tell the person waiting at their floor that he/she could then pull the chain, sending the elevator by itself down to your floor. You would yell, "Stop" when the elevator arrived at your floor (usually missing the landing by an inch or three). By doing it this way, it

saved all of us time; you didn't have to personally take the elevator to the floor and back again.

On that day, October 27, 1979, I opened the doors and wedged the stick into the two metal safety connectors, allowing the elevator to "think" the door was closed. I set up the video portapac, camera and tripod, tried to focus on where I thought Nam June would be and then waited -- listening for the door to open and the chain being pulled, which would be my signal that the portrait was on his way down.

#### First Trip

Door opens, closes; pulling of the chains and the music of the elevator begins. As Nam June takes the elevator down he sees my elevator door open and says in his generous good spirits, "Ah ha. I have to come back." I laugh and say, "I knew I could get you somehow." The elevator continues down and out of frame and you hear him say (to my delight), "I think that is the best new portrait." Nothing ever seemed to surprise Nam June - even if it did! The elevator continues to clang until it you hear the chain pulled in reverse, which stops it. And then, nothing...

#### Second Trip

Finally I hear the rattling and clanging moving again, coming back upstairs. As the elevator moves into the camera frame, I see that this time Nam has a guest. The guest looks at the camera and smiles - caught on camera - must be art! You hear the churning of the old weights and chains that help move this tired elevator and then nothing. Door shuts.

#### Third Trip

Once again the door opens, closes and the chain is pulled downward, signaling that Nam is coming back down. You hear him say off camera, "Hey, we are passing. I will not pay any attention to you." I say, "That's good." Nam June continues to talk to his guest in a low voice: "You know I have expenses. I have some good ideas."

He leaves the camera frame and says, "Bye bye." I say, "Have a nice trip" (thinking he is leaving). "Give Shigeko a kiss for me."

Nam June says, "I lost one of the two presents...one of them." I complain, 'Oh no.' He says, "There is no grass in it?" "No, no," I say, "They're socks." He says, "One socks?" I say, "They're glitter socks." he says, "Huh?"

I repeat, "They're glitter socks." He says, "OK, they must be there."

I still think he is leaving and I say, "OK, good-bye, dear." He still worries about the present. I say, "No, glitter socks for her feet." You hear the elevator continue down to the ground floor. Nothing, quite...

#### Fourth Trip

Again I hear the elevator coming back upstairs. I turn the camera back on. This time he is alone. He says, "Bye-bye, short trip, huh?" He waves and continues up to the fifth floor. We both laugh and he says again, "Short trip." I reassure him that the presents I am sending are socks. "All they are, Nam June, are socks, yellow sparkly socks that match that new yellow dress."

#### Fifth Trip

Going back down. Once again the door opens and closes and I hear the chains being pulled downward, the clanging of the elevator coming down for the last trip, again passing the fourth floor.

Nam June Paik

Nam is now worried about the building's certificate of occupancy and the work that needs to be done.

He says, "Maybe your friend Stan (Gilula), do you think he is interested in ceiling job?" I say, "Ceiling job, yes, I'll write you and let you know." He says, "Yeah, no, see Peter (Van Riper). Al Robinson is also interested, you know." I say, "Ah, OK." Nam continues, "Most important that they have two people." I say, "Ok, dear...have a good time, Nam June." He says, "Yes, ma'am." I say, "We'll miss you." He says, "We'll miss you, love you."

Title of work:

Nam June Paik: Freight Elevator 1979

Installation

Length of Portrait: 12 minutes

Limited signed edition #2/6

**VideoPortrait by Joan Logue ©1979**

Installation 1979-06

**In Memoriam**

**Nam June Paik (July 20, 1932-January 29, 2006)**

*for John Blacklow*  
**“I Am Not Making This Up!”—Part 2:**  
**“No, thanks, I’ll just listen,”**  
**Or, a Reception of Sorts**  
**(with a couple of lies, some boundary issues,**  
**and a little too much information)**

Barbara White

*A conversation I have heard many times:*

“Would you like to see a score?”

“No, thanks, I’ll just [*sic*] listen.”

[At the Star Diner, the hostess asks, “Just one?”

I smile and reply, “Not *just*. One.”

She gets it, repeats, “*One*.”]

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*My students are listening to Billie Holiday singing “Fine and Mellow.” I ask them how they respond to the song, and they talk about the sadness and catharsis expressed through the blues, about the way the song reflects Billie Holiday’s tragic life experiences, about how her voice reveals the effects of drug abuse. Then I play them a video of her singing the song in 1957, clustered in a circle with an all-star band, including Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster. My students say, “Oh! She is performing. She is powerful. It sounds totally different now.”*

When Prez takes his solo, she nods her head in sympathy, inflecting her own movements as he does his lines. *Just listening.*

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The clan is listening to Clogs performing Ingram Marshall’s *In Deserto*. Partway through I have a weird sensation, as if a phantom has entered the room. But I cannot quite capture it. There is a regular, motoric rhythm, an arpeggiated figure in contrary motion in the mallet percussion. Finally, I feel the sensation in my fingers: it is the C Minor Prelude from Book I. What a strange experience, to hear it emerge like that. Later I am talking to another listener and when we discuss the enfolding, he gestures with both hands, making a mirroring motion, as if playing the piano—despite the fact that we have just heard it on the mallets. It is as if we recognized its original kinetic imprint (fingers) instead of its most recent presentation (mallets) or even its audible signature.

We play as we listen—or, rather, we *are* played.

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And yet, we are so accustomed to disembodiment. In his score to the documentary about Ray Johnson called *How to Draw a Bunny*, Max Roach uses a lot of brush-on-snare action. Every so often, the film cuts to footage of his hands (presumably) playing the drum. It locates and grounds the sound, making it adhere to the image in what would seem to be a normal way, but I am used to estrangement. When I hear the sound again with the documentary footage, I imagine a phantom shot of his brushes in front of the screen.

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My father had a huge crush on Anita O'Day. Good taste, Dad!—she's the coolest. Newport Jazz Festival, 1958: it's an event. People are dressed, serious. Even when they sway in time (or not quite in time) to the music, they seem as if they are participating in some arcane, solemn ritual; it's not mere entertainment. The lady ascends to the stage in a knock-'em-dead outfit, all black and white: a form-fitting black shell, with a flouncing white ruffle. And white spike heels; she has to take the steps one at a time, gingerly. (What if she had to make a hasty exit?) White gloves. (Gloves! Just pausing for a moment to mourn the disappearance of hats and gloves.) And a black wide-brimmed hat, doused with white feathers. She's fresh-faced, freckled, buoyant; it's only years later I learn she had had a heroin addiction earlier on. She's cute, but not *just* cute; she's potent as a goddess. Not an ornament, but a priestess; she presides over the band and the audience, playing with color, time, inflection—even though she has no uvula. (Yes, that's *u-vula*.) “Sweet Georgia Brown”: she teases us with a half-time intro, over a tom-tom ostinato, praising Miss Brown's irresistible charms as she displays her own: “I don't lie . . . much. . . It's been said she knocks 'em dead when she lands in town. . . . The guy she can't get is the guy she hasn't met.” (Here Stern's camera gives us a shot of a clergyman.) Her vocal utterances seem to issue right out of her physical gestures, as an organic whole-body performance.

At the end of “Tea for Two,” she starts to scat, trading with the drummer—we never really see much of the band—and she choreographs the event, moving around the stage with the microphone, taking charge and turning it over as the music moves from here to there. *Just listening*.

She returns to the tune, distilling it to only a couple of notes, and then on to more scatting and trading, this time with the pianist: she throws a curve ball now and then, and the pianist tosses a few back. From a blistering improvisation to a wry disassembly of the tune, she makes it all seem like child's play. She embodies mischief, good will, a sense of give and take, and *joy*. She arrives at the cadence: “Can't you see how happy we could—Teasing us, not letting it end. A lot of nothing ensues. It's great nothing, wry, playful, and sassy—all the more so for following on the heels of a lotta something.



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Hearing through the body: finishing up a weeklong workshop on music for choreographers, I ask Emilia to sketch out a dance to an excerpt from Andriessen's *Hout*, literally overnight. She comes back the next day with a few minutes of what looks like a fully developed choreography. There seem to be two dances, one made by her feet and another by her arms and torso. It is as if she is being doubly activated by the music: the pulse triggers her feet, and her upper body reflects the melodic shapes. Her body listens.

[Alison heard Dominic play his percussion piece *Parallel Lines* (we missed my piece due to navigational problems!). Afterward she said something like, "I don't know much about music, but it seemed to me that instead of striking the drums, you were pulling the sound out of them."]

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How does one listen while dancing, while the body is active? How does one listen while playing?

I say to my theory class, "Get to know this piece. Play through it—and make sure you listen as you play." I hear these words come out of my mouth and observe the way one is present while delivering, but that is not quite listening, or perhaps it is a particular form of listening.

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I am preparing to do a brief improvisation with John Butcher. I ask him if he is willing to play together for the first time on stage—no rehearsal—and so our "sound check" consists of positioning our two chairs and deciding who sits where. I also ask John if, when we come on stage for the concert, I may make the first sound, and being a good egg, he agrees.

From upstairs, I listen to the first half of the concert. John begins with a solo improvisation that fills the room, sheet upon sheet of sounds: multiphonics, riffs, licks, relentless, and fueled by circular breathing; I am flabbergasted. When he has finished, I whisper to Newton, "Damn! Try to tire him out before he gets to me," and Newton says, "Don't worry. What's so great about playing with John is that whatever you do, he'll make you sound good."

Backstage, John says, “It will be nice to meet you onstage, as it were.” As promised, I play first, with some overtones I discovered a day or two before. John waits a bit and then plays the perfect complement. With the part of my ear that can catalog and later remember, I notice with amazement that he is somehow matching my breathing, letting go of each note just as I do. I knew John was a great player, but what I appreciate now is that he is also an equally great listener. How thoughtful and generous. I resolve to be more like that myself in the future. And to learn circular breathing. (One year later, I have not learned circular breathing. On the other hand, breaths are good.)

It is great to feel so taken care of, but also a little unnerving. I don’t deserve to receive this, but I am grateful.

Later he begins matching my pitches and I think, no, that is really going too far! But he leaves a little frequency space between—ah, thanks—and I hear the beating.

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Listening while playing. Playing while listening. Sometimes we see what is only suggested.

I ask my students what the right-hand figure in “Der Leiermann” suggests. They look at me expectantly. I ask them to trace the contour of the line in the air. Forty people making circles in the air. One of them says, “Oh! It is the crank of the hurdy gurdy!”

Throughout the year, all I have to do is play this:



—and they groan, right on cue. They tell me they like the song though. It continues to resound for us all, the bleak winter landscape accompanying us through several seasons, semester after semester.

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And sometimes we hear what is no longer there. Rachel, a harpsichordist, listening in class to the G Minor Prelude from Book I, points out that even if the low bass note does not sustain, the indication in the score that it *should* allows one to imagine hearing it. Its afterimage stays with us. We render it audible.

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Those delicious moments when I glimpse the crucial drop of learning in the act of teaching. Ben refers to “*my so-called ‘teaching,’ which was always much better described as my ‘learning.’*”

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In Parque El Ejido, sitting cross-legged on the grass amidst the vendors' stalls and buskers, I play *Platos Típicos* for Miguelito, whose photographs inspired the composition. A premiere for an audience of one. I am lightheaded. I am breathless. I am 9350 feet above sea level. He sings passages back to me and observes, "Los silencios son la música."

Simon asks to hear a recording of *Vessel*. He writes me a note that says something like, "Thanks! I like the pauses."

The percussion part for *Vessel* has a lot of pouring and stirring of things: superballs in buckets, coins and wooden dowel pieces shaken in bowls, water in wine glasses. At one point the percussionist pours rice into a metal container. After the piece is premiered, I am preparing rice at home in a metal saucepan, and I say, "Hey, I composed this!" I now own the sound somehow.

*[I remember reading a comment by John Cage along the same lines, about how he disliked the radio until he used it in his pieces. Afterward, he would hear the real-life radio as a quote from his own work. He had "framed" his environment.]*

Simon asked me to write a piece—it turned out to be *Repetition Compulsion*—for his festival. Having heard a bunch of rehearsals and performances (thanks again for listening), he takes to singing a riff to me when I pass him in the hallway. I go home and write a new piece based on that riff. Ha!—there, it's mine again.

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While Bert Stern is making his Technicolor film of the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, Orson Welles is making *Touch of Evil*.<sup>4</sup> Welles plays Detective Hank Quinlan, whose intuition about a crime never fails; he always senses who is guilty. Yet he creates fictions—in the form of planted evidence, and so on—to *frame (get it?) the guilty parties*. *Quinlan, like Welles, is a liar who tells the truth.*

*The real and the artificial woven together: Marlene Dietrich, Welles's former lover, plays Quinlan's former lover; and upon seeing him after an absence of years, she says to him, "Honey, you're a mess." The imposing, strapping young man of promise (shot from below) has become a swollen old embarrassment (shot from above), as if Welles himself has lived out the transformation of Charles Foster Kane portrayed in his film of seventeen years earlier. Mocking the act of acting, Dietrich and Charlton Heston play Mexicans. The artifice is obvious; it is exposed to our view. And in the final scene, where the smug, self-satisfied, wooden Mike Vargas (Heston) chases Quinlan and his partner, Menzies, around with a recording machine to capture a confession, we hear Quinlan and Menzies in their "real" space, then in Vargas's real-time amplification, then resounding through the landscape: a grim, mechanized, junk-laden oil rig. The legendary resonance and amplification of Welles's voice is enacted right before us, within the diegesis. Finally, after Quinlan is shot, Assistant District Attorney Al Schwartz replays the recording,*

*and Quinlan, crumpled in a heap, too bloated, sick, drunk, tired and wounded to move, hears his own words repeated back to him. Deposited in a scene of grime and debris, he listens to himself, and his voice becomes a relic, an artifact, even as his physical presence literally floats out of sight, wasting away in the wreckage. His body decays but his voice continues on, repeating, unyielding. The horror of the archive, of hearing oneself reflected back, like the hall of mirrors at the end of Citizen Kane; but in this form, the document outlives its subject and makes a passing moment permanent.*

*(More on that later.)*

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*Listening, repetitively, may proliferate beyond one's control.*

*In Sudden Fear*, Myra (Joan Crawford), an “heiress playwright,” is wooed<sub>5</sub>, enthusiastically (*too* enthusiastically?), by Lester (Jack Palance), an actor. In a crucial scene, he seals the deal by reciting lines from her play: “When I wake in the morning, when I go to sleep at night, I think of you. You’re like the air which surrounds me, the sky which spreads above me, the earth beneath my feet. . . .” But it’s all respeaking: we have heard those lines already, and so has Myra, when Lester auditioned for a role in her play and she rejected him (due to his less-than-romantic—one might say reptilian—appearance). Beforehand, outside the time of the film, she manufactured this leading man, in her own textual image, on the page. (So, yes, she *is* the earth beneath his feet.) In the audition, which opens the film, Lester recites Myra’s words onstage, realizing her fantasy, and he fails to win the role; yet when he performs those same words the second time, in her home, he hits the jackpot.

There’s more: this love scene centers around the display of Myra’s specially made “dictating machine,” which assists her in writing her plays. A close-up reveals a knob with two settings: “Listen” and “Talk.” (If only it were so easy to shuttle back and forth.) Lester’s performance is preceded by Myra’s request that he try out the machine, and it is recorded onto disk. We have already heard the lines in the onstage audition and again, live, a few moments earlier. Now we listen a third time, along with the characters, as the recorded sound fills the room. The replay begins with Myra’s words, “Go on, say something”—and, “well . . .?” As the recording continues, it is unnerving to hear Myra’s script this third time, as if her words become more and more removed from immediacy, spontaneity, and authenticity with each repetition; this is borne out by the discomfiting feeling of watching the two lovers-to-be receiving Myra’s words, delivered by Lester, now repeated, without differentiation, by the recorder. They remain silent, just listening, and as he reaches the concluding words, “Let it be you,” they embrace. Lester’s peculiar parroting of Myra’s words might have tipped us off that he is up to no good; he is, after all, an actor, and here he persuasively recites his lines—his *lies*—convincingly enough to snow even their author. So the recorder captures his deceitful untruths, but later it captures the truth of his deceit, when Lester and his co-conspirator Irene unwittingly record their plot to murder Myra and claim her fortune. The scene in which Myra uncovers this recording and listens to it is uncomfortably long, and it reveals a violent intimacy between the two villains, as when Irene urges Lester to “kiss me . . .

kiss me—*hard!*” He replies, “I’m crazy about you. I could break your bones.” Myra is an accidental voyeur, witnessing their clandestine embrace, and we too, are spies, observing both their crude, loud desire and her private—silent—torment.

And more: At the end of the conversation, we hear the machine skip, making Irene’s recorded voice reiterate, mechanically, “I know a way. I know a way. I know a way. I know a way.” These are repetitions folded into repetitions: we hear the dictaphone’s “performance” of a conversation we did not witness the first time around, and the skipping generates an inner repetition as it replays—a cyclical, potentially endless incantation.

And still more: a bit later, Myra mentally replays, in her memory, what she has just heard from the dictaphone—the inner, metadiegetic recollection, awash in reverb. As she cowers in her unmade bed, the imprint of the recording is reflected in the physical depression left by Lester’s head on his pillow, and we observe her own mental “skipping record” of Lester saying “accident, accident, accident, accident,” more than a dozen times. Within the repetition is an internal echo, so that each utterance seems to ricochet through her inner ear. But this time it is her own mechanism, not the literal machine, that has gotten stuck. We hear the relationship between documentation and obsession. The former may resemble the latter; in this case, it also incites it. But unlike a literally recorded memory, her inner script changes intonation, volume and inflection, becoming more emphatic as she replays it over and over. This takes place not in reality, but in her imagination, showing the way the mind may rework its given material, much the way Myra would have shaped and edited the original declaration of love with which the film began.

[Spoiler: She wins in the end, thanks to her painful discovery of the recorded conspiracy! And she settles the score in—yes—spike heels! And although she cannot follow through with her own carefully wrought plan to trap and kill Lester, it is fashion that saves her in the end, as Lester drives his car into the wrong woman: he mistakes Irene’s white dress and headscarf for Myra’s.

This, however, does not erase my distaste for high heels in real life (this is, of course, a *movie*): “Women have learned to describe everything they do, no matter how apparently conformist, submissive, self-destructive or humiliating, as a personal choice that cannot be criticized because personal choice is what feminism is all about.”\* Consider: poorly constructed, built to disintegrate, overpriced, impeding mobility and comfort—in a word, *unsafe*. Why submit to this? In her later years, my Aunt Jane had to wear high-heeled slippers, since her feet would no longer lie flat. (Can you *imagine* being unable to walk barefoot through your own home?) This is not funny. It is not trivial. It is also *true*.]

\*Writing in the 1980s on the topic of terror, James Hillman puts it even more provocatively: “If we go on imagining those [concentration] camps of the forties as the *only kind of terror*, then we miss the actual horrors that are perpetrated every day—whether with toxic dumps and industrial pollutants or with drug prescriptions or with those hysterectomies. The

clitoridectomies in some African societies or the binding of Chinese feet in the Mandarin culture were horrors, terrors in fact, even if the women ‘wanted’ these operations. Terror doesn’t depend only on whether what’s done to you is ‘voluntary’ or not—that’s a big part of it, of course, and I’m not denying that in the 1940s in Germany cruelty and force were used. Cruelty and force can happen in ways that are not felt as cruelty and force—but still they are cruelty and force.”<sup>7</sup>

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I go on a spree of listening to highly repetitive music. I am listening to something and thinking that it is glib and banal, that there is no necessity to the music. There are chord changes that seem neither right nor wrong enough – a pretense of something happening. I realize that there is no need for me to continue submitting to this experience. Do you ever feel that way?

At the end of this spree, I find myself in a foul mood. All the chugging seems thoughtless to me, like mindless thrusting without caressing, or kissing, or breathing. (Though I suppose that can appeal from time to time.) I feel trapped by it, not embraced, or moved, or challenged. It seems designed to engender distraction, dissociation, vacancy. To cultivate inattention rather than awareness (though, of course, I could opt for attentiveness anyway, but I’d rather attend to something else, I think).

[Julia says, “We’ve heard so much about the banality of evil, but what about the *evil of banality?!*”]

Inoffensive, untroubled, lazy, everything moving along at medium speed, with the spectrum of note values ranging between eighth note and quarter note.

And yet, repetition may be transcendent. A repetition may offer a paradisiacal place to loll around, like a warm bathtub—or a confining prison from which we wish to escape. Simplicity may be sublime sometimes, but it is not guaranteed. We don’t want to be too happy too quickly. Or perhaps it is a curse to be a hard sell, to ask for more. (Or less.)

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And yet more labor on the part of the composer guarantees nothing either.

Steven told me years ago that he would sketch and sketch and sketch and throw things out, and then one morning, in a brief period, he would make the drawing that all that labor tended toward. But he needed to throw the junk out before he could arrive at that place.

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This is what happens: it seems to move “naturally” (or, more likely, habitually) from one thing to another, sometimes turning in unexpected ways, but always having a thread of continuity. The presence of the performer in the composer’s activity. Both an asset and a

liability.

Steven says, “It sounds like music. It breathes normally. That is probably appealing to the performers, but I prefer your pieces that are less musical.”

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A flock of composers are talking about systems, about the nobility of avoiding one’s instincts. This seems forced to me. Is this polarity between instinct and schema really so clear? Might subverting one’s intuition introduce one to heretofore unrecognized intuitions? Might an inner impulse and an outer manipulation be interdependent rather than opposed? Might exploring an awkward or unfamiliar method be about, not transcending unwanted parts of the self, but expanding what the self might be?

[It’s messier and also more interesting than merely embracing a pristine, antiseptic, denial-based method. There are no safety features.]

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Embracing the shadow; being less attached to one’s musical self. I have a fantasy of writing a set of pieces that are like the deleted scenes on a DVD: I have excluded them but acknowledge them as deportees. A site to honor the rejected, the disowned, the denied, the disallowed.

[I have always wanted to write a piece with the title *[sic]*. But then I found out that Steve did it already.]

Some are intrigued by Herbert Brün’s “notion that a composer be a person who is trying very hard to compose at last the music he or she doesn’t like yet.” (Hi Ted.)

Yet I have limited room for the music I do not yet like. There is so little time. I am interested in the music I do not yet *dislike* too. I want to expand that category, maybe, with curiosity and openness, not with force and denial.

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For her final project in my course, Clare, a serious yogi, takes a text and uses Cageian chance procedures to transform it into a meditation. She plucks an open string on her violin and sings the text. It is challenging, searching. I think, “Hey, Cage would have liked this.” But of course, he did not traffic in “likes” or “dislikes,” right?

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“It is great music but you wouldn’t want to listen to it.”<sup>9</sup>

IAMNTU

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Feldman writes, “Was everything since 1900 so flashy? Was everything an audition for Diaghilev?”<sup>10</sup> Later, he describes Messaien: “Out of this poor man’s aviary a sustained piano chord in unbelievably bad taste raised the audience to a state of exaltation.”<sup>11</sup>

“Unbelievably bad taste”: *yes!*

[I meet Jim for the first time. He observes that criticizing music for being in poor taste is baffling, perverse.]

Here’s what I wanted to say earlier (please read quietly, with an open heart): What would it mean to embrace the disowned, the embarrassing, the perverse? To detach not only from our tastes but from our judgments of our tastes too?

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In her film *The Accursed Mazurka*, Nina Fonoroff describes the music that one loves but cannot bear to hear again. *I feel this way about Ravel; it is too perfect to sully with real-life listening; I prefer to dream about it, to leave it sweet and unheard.*

*Sound may cause pain. Listening is not so easy, not so innocent. Listening is voyeuristic, improper, shameless, wanton. Sounds, I am afraid, do not respect our boundaries; they penetrate us at will, whether or not we want them to.*

*[There is always a stack of CDs waiting. They are more than a little intimidating, aren’t they?—each one an hour or so of manipulation, accommodation, surprise, challenge, enervation, promise.]*

*There is an episode of Law and Order: Criminal Intent, called “Vacancy,” that focuses on an actor rehearsing the role of a serial killer.<sup>12</sup> In the course of his research, he meets a police officer who plays him a recording of a 911 call—the victim screams, predictably, and later pleads for her life in “baby talk,” before being murdered—aiming to deglamorize the profession of serial killer. But it does not play out that way: the actor’s film is cancelled, but having been “infected” by hearing the scream, he continues preparing for the now nonexistent role, taking his *method*\* to a form of madness, and becoming a serial killer himself. Listening can corrupt us. As Bobby Goren (Vincent D’Onofrio) concludes before the final credits, “This search for the truth is not for the faint-hearted.”*

[\*Emphasis added. As I finish this text, it airs again, and I happen across it completely by mistake. There is a deviously funny moment when the actor, Tim Rainey (Desmond Harrington), says to the two detectives, “How can I explain method acting in one sitting to a couple of non-actors?” Goren and his vehicle, D’Onofrio, know all about it, of course.]

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There are legends about the reason music was introduced into showings of early “silent” films: that audiences were too unnerved to sit in the dark, or that the sound of the projector needed to be obscured. These have been debated. But perhaps there is something to the notion that music softens the uncanniness of the image, making it feel safer for the viewer.

I play the shower scene from *Psycho*, with diegetic sound but no music, for my undergraduate class.<sup>13</sup> They say it is unnerving, and that the experience feels even more voyeuristic without Bernard Hermann’s score. The music seems to comfort them, to reassure them, to delimit a place outside the frame, to tell them how to receive the footage—without it, they feel alone with Marion Crane, and perhaps too much in identification with the murderer.

Like a paralyzed witness, unable to do anything but watch. And listen.

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I am attending the opening of Alison’s *Beyond No*, an installation inside which she has created a performance. Her reshaping of the gallery space subtly suggests the theme of trauma: she has reworked the ceiling fixtures to mimic hospital lighting and has filled “balloons” constructed of bandaging material with her own breath. In the performance, she is attached to these “balloons,” and while I am not sure what meaning she intends these to have, several occur to me over the course of the piece—being grounded or constrained among them. Her own breath is literally present in the objects, her own labor is evident, and during the performance, one senses the time *before* the performance, the ritualistic and repetitive act of making things. The textual mediation encourages visitors to enter and leave the gallery at will, yet I find myself—although I am typically restless in such situations—compelled to stay put for the entire two hours, during which Alison chants a simple vocal composition of her own design. The elements of the installation, the performer’s physical remove from the audience, and the physical exertion and expressive capacity of the repeated chanting recalls the experience of witnessing a death, when one simply, but profoundly, observes the experience of a loved one undergoing a mysterious physical and spiritual transformation.

All one can do is observe.

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In creating *Still/Here*, Bill T. Jones devises “Survival Workshops” with individuals who are living with terminal illnesses.<sup>14</sup> They are not trained dancers. He asks each participant to create movement to represent their life experiences. He says, “walk your life.” Crucially, he does this himself, too, for Bill Moyers’s camera, refusing to set himself apart as an “expert.”

But—not so fast! He *is* an expert. At one point in the documentary, Jones acknowledges

the complex interpersonal politics of this work, saying, “They read my body language, they look me up and down, they say, ‘Is this guy on some sort of a—he’s trying to exploit me? What’s he want?’ And I say, ‘What I want is *everything*.’”

[Some students are put off by the inclusivity, the vulnerability, the amateurism, dismissing the enterprise as “just therapy.” All interesting thoughts, but our hour is up; we’ll have to pick up here next week.]

In working with the participants, Jones sometimes “dances back” the participants’ gestures. One might think he *is* “exploiting” them, for he could be “using” these individuals’ experience as raw material; he is the professional, the author. He is the one who stands to “profit.” One *might* think this. But no, wait! There is one woman—her name is Caroline, and she is living with breast cancer—who is appealing, poised, unpretentious, thoughtful, and seemingly fearless in considering her mortality. When I see Jones mimicking her movements, taking them on, I realize that she may no longer be alive, and I see his repetition as a form of honoring, not stealing: he witnesses her experience, folds it into his own, and she remains in his body, in the body of his work too.

Witnessing in movement. In receiving, he gives, gives in, gives up, gives over. He allows a part of himself to be imprinted by her experience.

[A friend describes his lover, in the act of lovemaking, as a “taker.” I am not sure what he means.]

[Is that too much information? If so, look out; there is more to come.]

[John and I discuss listening and sharing, the “give and take” of friendly exchange—which is which?]

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Witnessing, and being witnessed. Allowing another’s experience to take over oneself.

There is a therapeutic technique whereby a listener reflects back another’s statement, literally, as many times as is necessary to get it right. It is an odd feeling to embody someone else’s words in order to try to understand, and to hear one’s own thoughts reflected back by another voice. The repetition becomes an honoring, an incantation.

But it is not always easy. The times where the witness fails to capture and repeat the other’s original statement are always interesting—where one resists the other’s reality.

[I hope you don’t mind this excursion into therapy. It’s all listening.]

[Didn’t Jim mention his therapist somewhere? I can hear his voice intoning, “my the-ra-pist.” Maybe it was in “Are you Serious?”—I’m not sure. (Ben reminded me where, but I’ll let you nose around on your own if you are interested.) I found this enlightening and endearing, but I bet some people would find it annoying.

I think it must depend a lot on the tone, and that also depends on what tone you bring to things, doesn't it?—especially when the text is printed and we are denied all those performative cues.]

How often have you deeply listened, been deeply listened to? It is not easy to listen, to resist the impulse to turn away. Plus everything takes at least twice as long, which is probably not a bad thing. Probably not.

(Just pausing to re-think that thought.)

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It is good for me, as a teacher, to be a student. I enroll in a teaching workshop and have to remind myself that I am an actor, not a director, for now. Remembering that feeling of having something *really important to contribute and not getting called on*.

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More studenting: Glenn is teaching me to walk. I know I should have learned to do this before now, but I've been busy. My progress is slow, and though I try *to be patient, I am eager to be able to move more slowly* more quickly. He proposes that we barter t'ai chi lessons for music theory lessons. So, on Wednesday, I receive instruction on shifting my weight from one foot to the other, and then on Thursday, I push him from one bar into the next. This repeated jockeying between teacher and student roles is interesting and teaches me something too.

(I wonder if he realizes that hearing him play shakuhachi for an hour in my backyard is not exactly grueling labor. Perhaps I should confess that I am getting the better part of this exchange. On second thought, nah, I'll just keep that to myself.)

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When I create Happenings with my undergraduates, I give them very little instruction, just one of Allan Kaprow's articles. (Yes, *just* one.) I notice that whenever we make a Happening, the participants seem compelled to be active; afterward they often comment on their self-consciousness during the process, the pressure they feel to do something outlandish. We are concerned, among other things, with performing everyday tasks in the "container" of an art event—this, I guess, is outlandish. But the everyday activity we tend to omit is listening, observing, witnessing, being still, taking things in. We seem to feel the need to do something productive: to make it Happen instead of just letting it Happen. (No, not *just*; letting it *Happen*.)

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I remember reading somewhere—A Buddhist joke, maybe—"Don't just do something; stand there!"

[*Just.*]

Yes.

Just.

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It begins, in fact, with her standing there: in *Pretty Woman*, Edward (Richard Gere), rents sex worker Vivian (Julia Roberts) for a week. He sends her shopping in Beverly Hills, festoons her with a \$250,000 necklace (“I don’t want you to get too excited—it’s only on loan,” he says of the necklace, but he could be talking about the dress, or the shoes, or the hairdo, or his attention), and takes her to San Francisco in his private plane. In order to determine whether to cancel, renew or modify her lease, Edward introduces her to the opera (not coincidentally, *La Traviata*). After this display of extraordinary excess, he turns his attention to the inner self, explaining, “People’s reactions to opera the first time they see it’s [*sic*] very dramatic. They either love it or they hate it. If they love it, they’ll always love it. If they don’t, they may learn to appreciate it, but it will never become part of their soul.”

When the opera begins, he watches her watching, consuming her consumption. His worth is measured in dollars; he measures hers in tears.

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Why does it sometimes make me cringe when a listener makes a point of disclosing that a concert has inspired them to tears? It seems tawdry somehow, as if witnessing becomes a display, a performance of its own, a pouring out rather than a taking in. (Perhaps I am just uncomfortable about fluids. John associates one “pour” with another, saying mischievously, “I’m sure it had nothing to do with the Pinot Noir.” But as a performer, he also says he just listens receptively when people deliver such reports. Good for him. I’ll try to be more generous myself.)

Just because something is immediate and uncontrolled, it is necessarily more authentic? Some would say so. But we academics know better; we know there is no such thing as a natural or unmediated response. It’s *all performance*.

*Sure, there are some things we would do better to keep to ourselves, but I’m not at all sure that restraining one’s impulse to share out of fear of imposing is preferable. Need every utterance be an Official Policy Statement rather than a humble work-in-progress?*

*For sometimes revealing one’s tears can seem brave. In seminar, I asked how the group liked Jones’s Still/Here, and someone said, “It made me cry.”*

[I wondered, is this what we should be discussing in seminar: mucking about in emotions, mortality, grief? Is that, um, professional? And then I wondered, what could possibly be more important?]

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The Debussy Quartet. I cannot hold back the tears. I hope none of my students are sitting nearby.

I won't even *mention the Korngold Third Quartet*.

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*Tears: caused by a genuine response, or a marker of cheap arousal? A lot of resources go into cheap arousal. Think romance novels. (Tomorrow in the Times Book Review there will be a two-page advertisement for Danielle Steel's latest, with lots of fashion, lots of pink—that's chick-lit pink, not porn pink.)*

In *Five Easy Pieces*, Robert (Jack Nicholson) plays the Chopin E Minor Prelude for Catherine (Susan Anspach), his brother's girlfriend, who has been visibly stirred by Robert's black-sheep persona. (I'm allergic to it myself, but that's more than you need to know.) There is a long tracking shot, beginning on Robert's hands, and then proceeding around the room, focusing alternately on Catherine's sober, eventually teary, reception and on significant markers of the family musical dynasty (photographs, instruments). When Robert finishes, Susan says, "I was really very moved . . ." and Robert snorts, saying he chose the easiest piece he knew and that he played the piece better when he was eight years old. The scene continues: Catherine: Can't you understand it was the *feeling* I was affected by?

Robert: I didn't have any.

Catherine: You had *no inner feeling*?

Robert: *None*.

Catherine: Well, then, I must have been supplying it.

Later, after following Catherine to her bedroom, Catherine claims that he *made her feel\* embarrassed by her honest reponse to his playing*.

[\**Emphasis added. I guess this character has not yet been introduced to the therapeutic "I statement."* It is, after all, 1970. (By the way, John has composed the following "I statement"—try to read it in his tone of voice if you can: "When. you. speak. that. way. I. feel. that. you. are. an. ASSHOLE!)]

[The dread of a genuine response that is not deserved by its stimulus! Adhering taken for inhering. Supplying in place of replying.]

Robert sneers, "I faked a little Chopin; you faked a big response." You know what comes next: he tells her to shut up, throws her into bed, undresses her, and fucks her. (No, they don't make love; he fucks her. It's a Jack Nicholson movie.)

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Here's where it gets personal.

*An acquaintance attends a concert and says afterward, “I liked your piece the best—and not just because I know you.” How can she be sure? And if not, so what? How can we disentangle our experience outside the concert hall with that inside? And if we can’t, what’s the problem?*

[I wish for more locality, not less. More intimacy, more specificity. This is not always compatible with the experiences at hand, but sometimes it is, and then I am intrigued, involved. Maybe my gloss on Brün will go something like this: I like to find myself liking music I might not like if I did not know a *whole hell of a lot about where the composer is coming from, because she and I have been discussing that for years, and so when I listen I am not just listening. Deracination is not so appealing to me.*]

*[I also like composing music I would not have liked a few years earlier. So I guess that is kind of Brünish, if a little slow.]*

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The act of writing about Newton’s compositional portfolio taught me something; may I share? (Or skip to the next section if you prefer, but do join me in congratulating him on finishing his dissertation in any case.)

Here goes: *What’s Red and invisible? A. No tomatoes, or “Their ear is uncircumcised,”* Jeremiah 6:10 is a “non-opera” composed for several of the composer’s longtime collaborators as performers. Again the music explores relatively distant compositional and perceptual frontiers, incorporating indeterminacy, incongruous juxtapositions, and shifts between extremes of speed. Perhaps the most beguiling aspect of this work is the bursting open of paradoxes: within its tight focus, *What’s Red* is expansive, generous; its eschewal of drama becomes suspenseful, as the “soprano” reads data-soaked texts, word by word, like “zero, zero, zero,” “Trenton, N, J,” and “theorists like Michael Lipton who invented the term in one nine seven seven, argue that agriculture tends to be undercapitalized in developing countries”; and the unfolding of time is perhaps most relaxed when compressed, most directed when slowed down. What this viewer notices, having seen the premiere and watching once more, is how the model of enaction applies not only to the instruments in play but to the relationships between agents in the performance. Part of the composer’s craft here is in letting the other players do their own thing—or not, sometimes. Most wittily, the composer takes the swashbuckler/vocalist Melissa Madden Gray—a sports-minded observer might call her the Bode Miller of new music-drama, or a televisually oriented one might see her as the Agent Jack Bauer of the operatic stage—and instead of asking her to dazzle us with vocal gymnastics, to remove her clothing and alight on a spectator’s lap, or to hang upside down by her toenails while dancing a jig, he places her in a chair, facing to the side, and instructs her to read, in a normal speaking voice, the footnotes from a United Nations report on poverty. The text has its own significance, of course, but in that simple performative gesture one hears the diva straining to control herself, to be inexpressive—a very peculiar and engaging form of resistance-within-embodiment. It is a surprised and surprising way of proceeding, and *What’s Red* shows that this composer knows when to get in the way, and when to get out.

Barbara White

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One of my favorite concerts ever was when John played through his recital for me in his apartment. Chopin, Berg, Bach. He has a grand piano in an acoustically reflective room, so as the program unfolded, it started to feel as though the hammers of the piano were beating right inside my ear. The physical effort involved in giving and receiving became palpable.

The music is very beautiful. Is he *performing*?

\*\*\*\*\*

And there is a moment in “Sakaramenta ni yoru kurichan komori uta” where Riley Lee plays this on shakuhachi:



though of course that is not *it* at all.



But the attention to every moment, the nuance and presence, the specificity and precision.\* Any one of those notes will suffice, as a complete meal. Steven attended his concert a few years ago and said it was the best concert he had heard in Princeton. Interesting, since thanks to me, he'd been to many others . . . .

\*It's also interesting that although this sensibility would seem to issue from the nature of the shakuhachi, its repertoire, and its performative and cultural context, this sentence could also describe Steven Stucky's Second Concerto for Orchestra.

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I have just come from a presentation by a young composer/performer. He can play. And he does. And does and does. The music is relentless, it doesn't breathe, it floods the ear, and I wait in vain for him to tend to one special note, but he does not, and though there is much detail and expression in his playing, every note seems as important as the next,

and there are no real rests, so I quickly become full, and what happens is part of my ear stays there, held captive, while other parts of my mind wander. Claustrophobic. Plus he has attitude, and a real showman persona. It's a little uncomfortable; it gets in the way for me. After a while he talks about his mother asking him to play something that won't embarrass her. I am put off by this manipulation, which urges the listener to think of him both as transgressive and as warm-hearted. He plays a beautiful, simple folk-like tune, and I almost have the sense that it is shaped. Almost.

A year later I meet him, and he is enthusiastic and personable—maybe he *is* both transgressive and warm-hearted—so I think about erasing this paragraph. I decide to leave it in, but I delete his name.

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Sometimes it's *very* personal.

John tells me that after he performed Rachmaninov's "Spring Waters" with a singer, a colleague reported to him, "it was literally going to give me an orgasm."

(Interesting choice of tense. I wonder what happened.)

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We are listening to a jazz band, and the pianist/leader keeps grunting and exclaiming, "Yeah!" Oddly, he seems to do so only during his own solos. It seems like someone calling out his own name while making love.

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Now, wait. STOP!

(Thank you.)

Sorry about the imperative, but I really felt I had to intervene just then. Things were getting a little heated.

*Now* you can continue on to the next page.

I hear Daniel Albright's voice asking this question (if he's not around to perform it, maybe Simon will agree to do so, since he heard it too and is good at impressions):  
"But—is all this carnality a good idea?"<sup>18</sup>

Mickey, in a post-coital monologue, claims not: ". . . and that doesn't mean you go out and buy yourself a string tie and put on some *fashion* pose, just means you KNOW what the real music is and you'll go where you need to go to get it, like, look at these asshole album covers, you can SEE what shit they're playing by the sparkly lights on their jeans and how they hold their fuckin streamline chromeline guitars like giant cocks—it's sickening man and people buy this shit. You see these imports. One little rack of singles with penciled-in titles, but this shit is REAL this is REAL music and they don't have to pretend it's sex."<sup>19</sup>

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And yet, "music is also very often concerned with the arousing and channeling of desire, with mapping patterns through the medium of sound that resemble those of sexuality."<sup>20</sup>

Well, yuh! But is desire concerned with arousing and channeling patterns that resemble those of music? (Oh, sorry, I don't mean to pry.) Why this desire to make one thing into another? And notice which is placed on top!

[Someone tells me that playing in a piano trio is reminiscent of frolicking in a threesome. Whoa!—now that puts a whole new spin, twist, tumble on things. (Has anyone ever lain back in bed, lit a cigarette, and said to his or her two playmates, "Now *that* reminds me of the scherzo of the 'Archduke!'"?)]

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So . . . sometimes it is simpler, just two, touching—literally.

In a chain of 2-3 suspensions, the voices seem to touch one another. If they were to merge into a unison, they would paradoxically be less close, because they would lose their sense of separateness, whereas, if they stay just a notch a part, more distant, we know that they are separate but in contact. Plus there is the play of pursuit, convergence, retreat. The rubbing up of one note against another: it shows the meeting, not the dissolution, of identities.

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Sometimes it is manipulation, seduction, a lie, as in this scene from *Fallen Angel*:<sup>21</sup>

Eric (Dana Andrews): Did you ever hear the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra?

June (Alice Faye): Mm, hm—on the radio.

Eric: Ah, what do you hear on the radio—a lot of noise. But when you see 'em up on the stage, all dressed up with their fiddles and their horns, people right

up to the roof—ten thousand of them, waiting for the music to begin—*that's* a concert—particularly when Toscanini conducts like he's going to tomorrow afternoon.

June (awestruck, dreamy): Toscanini . . . ?

[But this fantasy is not so simple: Eric's words valorize the immediacy of live performance, while his own presentation via the big screen, along with David Raksin's score, undermines what he says. That is at it should be, since Eric is lying; there is no Toscanini concert the following afternoon. And June is receiving, passively believing it, while wrapping her mouth around—I am not making this up—a hot dog!]

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Sometimes it's romantic:

There is a guy. He tickles my fancy. He is not a musician, fortunately, but even better, he has a good ear. It's no one you know.

One day I mention an upcoming performance of a Beethoven quartet and say, "It's the one that goes like this":



He replies,



—and I am smitten.

We stop there. (Well, that is kind of a lie too, but it contains a deeper truth: I think we are both better at expositions than developments.)

[Some time later, Paul tells me that Beethoven's sketches for the theme were originally in four:



I wonder if things might have proceeded differently if my pal and I had had that extra beat. But I no longer think of him when I hear those measures. Really. I have detached the two experiences from one another. They no longer adhere; they are separate.]

I know this may seem private. But then, so are Beethoven's sketches. I avoid looking at them when I can, but I try not to make too big of a deal about it; I don't want to be rigid and dogmatic.

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And there was this other guy. Oh, sorry, for a moment I forgot that we were in public and that I don't know you all that well yet. I'll tell you later . . . but only if you ask. I want to be sure to respect your boundaries. On the other hand, perhaps we should keep our own relationship on a professional level.

[An acquaintance uses the word "boundaries" in the clinical sense. I am so delighted that I want to run across the room and give him a big warm hug. "But," I hear Julia saying, archly, and in italics, "*that would not be ap-pro-priate. Since Julia is wise, I listen and remain in my seat.*"]

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*Concluding.*

*Even just listening can be much too much. Sometimes I just have to digest and sift through what I have already heard. Like Myra replaying things over and over in her head. The threads weave together; disentangle, and sometimes they touch again.*

*Too much information.* Artifacts, containers, detritus, baggage. My new home has neither basement nor attic. It's remarkable what an impression this makes: there is no room for secrets either submerged or elevated. I am about to unpack the last box. So what do I do with my teenage journals? Snapshots? Sketches? Lecture notes? The hand-painted soup bowl from Aunt Jane, that says "All Gone" at the bottom, and the matching mug with my name on it, that announces itself as "My Mug"? I riffle through these items, winnowing.

When I look at these things, they are vaguely interesting. In their materiality, they capture ineffable sensations. And then I pack them up, knowing that I will have that sensation again in a few years when I winnow some more. Half lives of my half life.

Taking things out of boxes. Then putting them back.

[I realize, with glee, that there is something wildly perverse about renting a storage space, at a price of \$70 per month, when in the end I discard 90% of the contents. Basically, I am renting a trash can. But seriously, I like this silliness; it makes me think about how much space I take up.]

What if I pitched it all? What would I lose? Since my memory is faulty, I fear that I would lose a reminder of something important. But if I don't have it, I will not know I am missing it, will I?—just as I will not know a year from now if today I happen to pull up some treasure in the garden, planted before my time, believing it to be a weed.

[Steven said there is no such thing as a weed; weediness is only determined by how you *feel* about a plant's desirability. It's all relative, contextual. That makes perfect sense until you start maintaining a garden. One cannot be Emersonian about (here's some Latin for Wendy:) *polygonum pensylvanicum*, *plantago major*, *taraxacum officinale*, unless one wants to risk being utterly overwhelmed.]

*What is worth saving, thinking through? What would best be discarded? Fixing the passing moment, rather than just letting it pass by. A question of real estate. What else might I do with these hours? Is the time spent best understood as processing? Wasting? Exorcising? Certainly not investing or accomplishing.*

*But wait! There is a photo I took at about age ten of a favorite spot along the stream behind my parents' house. The photo is now—no joke—water damaged, and the stream is gone, covered over by an ill-advised housing development, overtaxing the land, and all the basements are flooding—the way my old basement flooded, before I moved here, destroying my photo of the stream. That is just too neat. But it is true. And since I first drafted this paragraph, that image has in fact re-entered my memories, and my dreams.*

*The danger of the diary, of an excess of attention, rumination, proliferation, becoming like Borges's "Funes, the Memorious":*

In effect, Funes not only remembered every leaf on every tree of every wood, but even every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it.

—or another image of meta-reflection, ad absurdum, from David Foster Wallace's "Depressed Person":

The eventual compromise which the depressed person and her therapist worked out together as they processed the unburied resentments and the consequent guilt and shame at what could all too easily appear to be just more of the self-pitying "Blame Game" that attended the depressed person's experience at the Retreat Weekend was that the depressed person would take the emotional risk of reaching out and sharing the experience's feelings and realizations with her Support System, but only with the two or

three elite, “core” members whom the depressed person currently felt were there for her in the very most empathetic and unjudgingly supportive way. The most important provision of the compromise was that the depressed person would be permitted to reveal to them her reluctance about sharing these resentments and realizations and to inform them that she was aware of how pathetic and blaming they (i.e., the resentments and realizations) might sound, and to reveal that she was sharing this potentially pathetic “breakthrough” with them only at her therapist’s firm and explicit suggestion.

[That was worth reading again, and even worth typing.]

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Do you think that acknowledging that what you are doing is dangerous, suspect, or annoying lets you off the hook? That’s not rhetorical; I really want to know. Do you?

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“The truth is that we all live by leaving behind.”<sup>24</sup>

And, so, what are we left with?

\*\*\*\*\*

At my new home, there is a menagerie of birds: a nest of doves, another of robins, and I see cardinals and blue jays. I think I would be better off just listening for the next year or so.

[The last time I didn’t make something up, the garden really suffered. And that’s not all.]

They have a cocktail party in the evenings. At this time, early July, it’s at around six or seven in the evening. I try to be outside as often as possible when the carillon plays “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” at six, and then to stick around and observe the birds. Stop by sometime if you can.

[Jeffrey knows all the bird songs. So does Emily.]

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What if we already have everything we need? When does it become littering?

Maybe it’s time to stop for a bit and just catalog, process, digest what is already here. I think I would like to write an essay about that sometime.

\*\*\*\*\*

I notice that although my possessions come and go, when I take inventory of my scores and articles, they only accumulate. Perhaps for each new one I should discard one, as I do with clothing or other belongings.

Yesterday, having learned a thing or two about repeating notes on the harp, I erased dozens of notes. That seems like a good thing for the musical ecology. I hope they find a nice new home.

\*\*\*\*\*

I am thinking about a polarity between music that offers itself to the listener, and music that imposes itself. Samson, uncannily, describes his distinction between “invitation” and “imposition.”

[Julia tells me she is not so interested in flirtation. I, too, start to prefer the bravery and earnestness of wooing to the edge and manipulation of jousting.]

Paul’s sixtieth birthday concert was a gift. Serious but modest. Inviting but not overbearing. Public, open, but also intimate, local. He had nothing to prove. Same goes for his percussion quartet. It’s a desert-island piece. I’d be happy to forgo all other percussion quartets, including my own.

[More for the desert island, if I had to decide right this instant (present company excluded, since that could get messy):

- Schubert, “Der Leiermann”
- Schubert, “Auf dem wasser zu singen,” preferably sung by Ian Bostridge
- Ravel, Trio Mvt. 1
- Ravel, *Chansons Madécasses*
- Ravel, *Mallarmé Songs*
- Ravel, “Oiseaux Tristes”
- Debussy, Trio for Flute, Viola and Harp
- Stravinsky, *Les Noces*
- Haydn op. 20, no. 4, mvt. 1
- “Ad sepulcrum beati Iacobi,” from the Santiago de Compostela repertoire (this one will fit in my carry-on)
  - Monteverdi, “Lamento della Ninfa”
  - Machaut, “Tels rit,” preferably performed by Ensemble P.A.N., but if need be I can sing it myself
  
- Handel, *La Lucrezia*
- Lennie Tristano’s left hand
- Josquin, “Milles Regretz”
- Earl Kim, *Where Grief Slumbers*
- Part, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*
- Ivan Tcherepnin, *Five Songs*
- Sting, any breathy and/or funky-metered stuff

- Stevie Wonder, “Another Star”
- Gershwin, “Our Love is Here to Stay”—or, on second thought, make that “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right,” performed by Peter, Paul and Mary (no Dylan on my island please!)
- Rubén Blades, Mundo
- A few 2-3 suspensions and a ground bass or two (in addition to those incorporated above)
- Any good salsa, especially with cool syncopated piano solos
- Oh, now that I think of it, can Ian Bostridge come to the island and sing for me live? And does he like to salsa dance? Have you read his book, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations, c. 1650–c. 1750? I keep meaning to get to that.*]

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Not sure about Ted’s idea that “some artists are mostly whores, and we should forget about them for now.” I have difficulty with that “whore” metaphor; what if we called them “foot-soldiers in the transactional musicosexual economy, expressing agency and empowerment as they channel desire as best they can in imperfect circumstances, perhaps with an ironic awareness of the subsumption of their so-called subject positions in the apparatus of late capitalism”? He also says, “This discussion simply is not for people who mostly want to ‘win’.”<sup>25</sup> Right on. Pacifism kicks ass.

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24 is a good time-waster. (Newton and Emily know all about it.) The clock beeps and flashes on screen, forcing me to acknowledge time running by. The hour (forty-two minutes, without commercials) I’ll never experience again.

I should get back to work. To my day job, that is. Oh, wait—this *is my day job*. Cool.

*Clearing space. Work and play. Jean, a poet, once said she felt she had the right to deduct everything on her taxes, since “it’s all work.” One never knows what’ll turn up.*

And this is not a story my people tell.  
It is something I know myself.  
And when I do my job, I am thinking about these things.  
Because when I do my job, that is what I think about.

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Are you here? Still?

Thanks for listening.

There’s just a little more, really. You’re welcome to continue on through, but I would not want to insist. You’ve been very patient so far, and I do not want to impose. But I also should not apologize, since I haven’t required anything of you, have I? You’re free

to go at any time. You always have been.

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Enter here. How nice of you to come!

February 2005. *The Gates* is on the way. The *New York Times*—I remember when it was black-and-white—is full of orange photographs detailing the design, the army of volunteers (and/or low-paid workers) who are participating in mounting it in Central Park. There are lots of numbers, Type-A style: seventy-five hundred gates, each sixteen feet high, along twenty-three miles of pathways in the park, and so on. Numbers are alluring: much of the discussion centers around the cost—\$20 million—and it seems sometimes to frustrate people that this is *not* public money, since that gives them less license to complain about its extravagance. It always seems to be mentioned that the funding came from sales of Christo’s artwork.

(Parenthetically, and partially italicized: Forget for a moment where the money came from. *Do we need a \$20 million dollar artwork?*)

[The *Times* seems always to refer to the artists as “Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude.” This reminds me of *The Jetsons*: “Jane, his wife”!]

It is opening day. Alison and Dave and I are approaching *The Gates*. I gather my first glimpse of the orange—no, saffron—no, orange—curtains waving in the wind, and I am underwhelmed. I judge this response, think about what it means to be underwhelmed. At this moment, Dave murmurs, “Is that it?” I am relieved that his response is similar to mine.

The three of us walk through the gates, or through *The Gates*, and the atmosphere is festive, exuberant. Dave notes that it feels like promenades in public spaces might have felt one hundred years ago.

*It seems heartening that all these people are in the park, that the atmosphere is so cheerful. And yet, I find myself wondering why we need “Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude” to bring us there. Is it not welcoming enough, eventful enough, significant enough, without this orange intervention? Alison says, “I have not seen this many people here since the Dalai Lama came.” A moment later, she adds, “Of course, I haven’t been here since the Dalai Lama came.” Maybe “Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude” were needed to make the ever-present park feel like a destination.*

*I am ambivalent about interventions. I often want to leave well enough alone. And yet I sometimes welcome interferences in the landscape, as I do when I pass Richard Serra’s *The Hedgehog and the Fox* in my neighborhood. I guess it disappoints me less when the scene it interrupts is already defined by a football stadium. Then it seems like a contribution, a reshaping, a gift rather than an intrusion. But does Central Park—which is, admittedly, not “natural” to begin with—need to be “improved”?*

The aesthetic, the realization of *The Gates* does not do it for me. It seems square, austere, restricted, confined, joyless. There is enthusiasm in the park, but it feels forced.

[Why do they keep insisting that they are saffron? They're orange! Trust me on this; I live in Princeton.]

Later I look at the artists' drawings on the web and I find them so much more fluid, inviting, open, suggestive. Perhaps the real thing is not as affecting as the imagined fantasy. I am reminded of Keats's letter about his attempt to capture his dream of Dante's Paolo and Francesca: "I tried a Sonnet upon it—there are thirteen lines, but nothing of what I felt in it." Somehow his acknowledgment of his failure is a kind of success, a recognition of the constancy of longing: "O that I could dream it every night."<sup>27</sup>

[This too is private: a letter intended for Keats's brother and sister in law; is it *ap-pro-priate* for us to be reading it, aloud and in public, for an audience of, well, four or five, one hundred and eighty-seven years later?]

Anyway, back to *The Gates*: there is a "big statement" aspect to this work that is enervating. But what is the big statement stating? Perhaps it is as follows: "I am a big statement." It seems calculated to provoke people just a little bit. It is sluggishly challenging and blandly populist at the same time. *The Gates* can absorb almost any argument that presents itself: it is masterful, populist, beautiful, not about beauty at all, grand, intimate, spiritual, material, liberal, conservative, challenging, complacent. *The bases are* rigid but the curtains are flexible enough to accommodate almost any opinion—because they, on their own, say just about nothing. For me, it is not a potent lack, but a lack of potency.

Joy? Well, maybe for some. Not for me.

After weeks of coverage in the *Times*, I see a photograph—page *one*—of a euphoric Laura Bush touring *The Gates*. What could be next? This: an article about a teenage boy selling a piece of the contraption on ebay. Around the same time, I read in the *Times*—page *one*—about the Numa Numa. This concerns a young man who, for some unexplained reason, videotaped himself doing an embarrassingly stupid dance. He posted this on his website and told a few friends, and somehow, this website become hot news for a few days. Why is this on the front page of the *New York Times*? Because it is there. Why are *The Gates* significant? *Because they are there. But why, exactly, are they there? (To be significant?)*

*The saturation in the media starts to feel claustrophobic, oppressive. The proliferation of commentaries on the installation begins to drown out everything else. It starts to resemble a virus, like the orange flags engender orange newspapers, and every appearance requires another interpretation. One starts to feel the need to comment in order to digest, integrate, colonize, repel—and that, of course, spreads the virus further.*

[Exorcism and proliferation go hand in hand. About a year later, the *New Yorker*

runs a cartoon with a caption that says something like, “It’s just not the same this year without those gates.”]

[Later that spring, I am staying in a motel, which means I see a little TV, and Terry Schiavo is everywhere. Schiavo plus Schiavo equals more Schiavo. Her absence, her imminent departure is met with amplification, multiplication, like a reality-TV *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*.]

Sometimes the virus mutates into its own antidote, and I feel a moment of relief, as when I read about The Somerville Gates, a series of tiny orange flags installed in the apartment of artist Geoff Hargadon, or “Hargo.” He announces:

To all visitors of The Somerville Gates: There are no official opening events. There are no invitations. There are no tickets. This work of art is FREE and for all to enjoy, the same as all of our previous projects. If anyone tries to sell you a ticket, do not buy it. This would be an act of fraud because no tickets are needed.  
Love, Hargo.<sup>28</sup>

A simple act of appropriation—“Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude” posted an announcement much like this on their own site when *The Gates* were installed—says more than the original artwork could have. There are also photographs of Hargo’s cat watching television with a bunch of 3.5-in.-high orange gates installed on the floor in between. There is a chart comparing vital stats of *The Gates* and The Somerville Gates. For example:

	Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s “The Gates”	Hargo’s “The Somerville Gates”
Years it took to make:	26	0.0228
Installation area:	843 acres	2400 square feet
Estimated cost:	\$21,000,000.00, depending on which newspaper article you read	\$3.50

And so on.<sup>29</sup>

The seemingly endless discussion exposes the odd marriages of our culture: excess allied with inadequacy, cynicism with gullibility, overstimulation with sensuous-*less*-ness. There are the predictable jokes about clotheslines, bed sheets, traffic signs. And there are the equally predictable charges of philistinism. But just because the philistines ridicule it doesn’t mean I have to defend it.

I promised myself not to quote any of the endlessly proliferating articles in my own discussion, not to fold any of the mediation, criticism or meta-discourse into my little digression—though I am still an agent of the virus, of course. I will keep my vow, almost, just saying that when finally I read Peter Schjeldahl’s little commentary in the *New Yorker*; I feel relieved. Just the incorporation of the word “grandiose” is

heartening.<sup>30</sup>

And yet, some things that are sort of interesting, experiences I do not mind having:

Toward the end of our tour through *The Gates*, Alison and Dave and I pause at the reservoir. We discuss whether *The Gates* continues on the other side of the water—Alison thought it did, as did I, but I cannot see for sure. Yet as I gaze across the bleak, dreary winter view, I start to see orange—yes, orange! I am not sure whether I am seeing real *Gates* or creating them in my mind’s eye.

As we walk through *The Gates*, my eye is drawn to a woman’s shoulder bag, made out of a synthetic orange fabric. It seems like a reference to *The Gates*, even though it probably is not.

Later, having come down with a stomach bug (joy! in Manhattan! and just before getting on the train! exclamation point!), I take a taxi to Penn Station. Along with throngs of others, I help to create—as opposed to “getting stuck in”—traffic. The taxi driver is frustrated. I gaze at *The Gates* from the taxi as the sun sets. Now they take on more of a saffron hue.

An elegant Park Avenue building is under construction, utterly covered in scaffolding. I look at it differently, not as an unfortunate interruption in the otherwise picturesque landscape, but rather as a deliberate intervention, which it surely isn’t. I may not need the encouragement of “Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude” in order to have this experience, but that is, in fact, why at this particular moment I *am* having it.

The taxi continues, slowly. The gates (they seem lower case at last) are flapping in the breeze, in the late winter dusk. They seem happier now, more at home. I leave them behind, return to my own place.

So perhaps I will reconsider whether this interference is also a gift. It is certainly possible that I am just erecting a defensive wall, refusing obstinately to let *The Gates* in, even as they welcome me with the best of intentions. Maybe I am not welcomable. And anyway, any interference, any event, can be cause for contemplation. I don’t want to become attached to my resistance to *The Gates*, for my big statement about the big statement is really not so important in the end—nor do I have to valorize this particular construction, denying that I would prefer a different sort of experience, in order to recognize what it has offered.

A few days later, an ugly ribbon of plastic in a telltale hue of, um, orange alights on a branch outside my window. It would have looked different a few weeks ago. I observe it daily, leave it there until it decays and, months later, finally falls away.

*I am grateful to all those who generously, conscientiously, and unwittingly participated in the activities recorded herein. John Blacklow kindly responded to an earlier draft. Steven Mulvey deserves special*

thanks for sharing so many films and his observations about them with me; in particular, some of his thoughts about *Touch of Evil* have become, over time, indistinguishable from my own.

This footage is included in the documentary *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday*, dir. Matthew Seig. It can also be found online at <http://www.youtube.com>.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Walter, dir., *How to Draw A Bunny* (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Bert Stern, dir., *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1960). The band is Jimmy Jones, piano; Whitney Mitchell, bass; and John Poole, drums.

<sup>4</sup> Orson Welles, dir., *Touch of Evil* (1958); restored by Walter Murch in 1998 and published by Universal in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> David Miller, dir., *Sudden Fear* (1953).

<sup>6</sup> Katha Pollitt, quoted in Ana Marie Cox, "Woman of the Nation" (review of Katha Pollitt's *Virginity or Death!*), *New York Times Book Review*, Sunday, June 25, 2006, 11.

<sup>7</sup> James Hillman, "Terrorism." In *A Blue Fire*, introduced and ed. Thomas Moore (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989), 185.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Brün interviewed by Peter Hamlin, ". . . as to the Computer," <http://www.herbertbrun.org/hamlin2.html>. Accessed July 1, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Hanif Kureishi, *Intimacy* (New York: Scribner, 1998), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Morton Feldman, "Mr. Schuller's History Lesson," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B.H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Season 5, Episode 17; first aired April 16 2006, dir. Jean de Segonzac.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Hitchcock, dir., *Psycho* (1960).

<sup>14</sup> Alice Markowitz and David Grubin, dirs., *Still/Here*, with Bill Moyers, 2002. The work was premiered in 1994; this is a documentary that contains some performance footage.

<sup>15</sup> Garry Marshall, dir., *Pretty Woman*, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Bob Rafelson, dir., *Five Easy Pieces*, 1970.

<sup>17</sup> Recorded on Riley Lee with Satsuki Odamura, *Picture Dreams*, New World Music CD 584, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Albright, "Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera." Address delivered at Sound Moves: An International Conference on Music and Dance (London: University of Roehampton, Nov. 5, 2005). Proceedings published online at <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/soundMoves>, 8. The context is as follows: "In later opera, as in Massenet's *Thaïs* and Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, a prostitute heroine would be surrounded with dancers to act as her vicarious flesh; and sometimes, as in many performances of Strauss's *Salome*, a dancer would literally take the role of the soprano and teasingly unveil the body that Isolde would have if she really were a sixteen-year-old girl. But—is all this carnality a good idea? The trick of opera—the displacement of body into voice—is exposed as a trick whenever it has to compete with actual nakedness; there is a necessary moment of focal readjustment, unease, when bacchanale or striptease stops and opera resumes."

<sup>19</sup> Jayne Anne Phillips, "How Mickey Made It," in *Fast Lanes* (New York: E.P. Dutton/Seymour Lawrence, 1987), 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Susan McClary, "Introduction" to *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Otto Preminger, dir., *Fallen Angel* (1945).

<sup>22</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "'Funes, the Memorious,'" in *Ficciones*, tr. Emecé Editores (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 114.

<sup>23</sup> David Foster Wallace, "The Depressed Person," in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, 199), 48-49.

<sup>24</sup> Borges, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Edward John Coffey III, *The Gentle Guerilla: Composing Transmission in the Performing Arts* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Univ, 2005), 140.

<sup>26</sup> Laurie Anderson, "Langue d'Amour," from *United States* (1984).

<sup>27</sup> John Keats, Letter of March 19, 1819 to the George Keatses, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings, rev. Jon Mee (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 222.

<sup>28</sup> *The Somerville Gates*, <http://www.not-rocket-science.com/gates-complete.htm>. Accessed July 4, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, "Gated." *New Yorker*, "Talk of the Town, Here Today Dept.," Feb. 28, 2005.

*“Down to Earth”:  
Robert Morris’s Restaging of the Sublime*

Martin Brody

Music and Nature Symposium, Syracuse University  
On the occasion of the premiere performance of *Sound/Path/Field*, by Robert Morris

It seems to me that the trajectory of Robert Morris’s musical practices is toward increasing theoretical and meta-musical self-containment—which is not to say aloofness. Rather, and especially in his reflections on music and Buddhism, he gently coaxes us to let go of the superfluous. In a note to the *Open Space* recording of some of his piano and guitar music, Morris articulates a fully realized metatheory in a single phrase: “[M]usic, like anything else, is defined by, but free of, its various contexts.” Case closed. Of course, it takes him more than a few more words to reach this conclusion, and I need to quote an extended bit, a couple of paragraphs, to introduce my own superfluous comments.

In the past few years I’ve been thinking about how the concept of “not-self” (*anatman*) in Buddhist philosophy might have an application to the appreciation of music. In early Buddhist thought, not-self meant that the objects of experience were simply collections of particulars and concepts called dharmas, and at each moment of attention the content of the collection would change by the addition or subtraction of dharmas. If I think of a piece of music as a collection of musical dharmas that changes over time, it suggests that pieces are processes and that the essence of music is flow and transience, as opposed to identity and stability....

But later developments in Buddhism associated with the rise of the Mahayana problematized not-self by completing the concept, suggesting that the dharmas themselves have no selfhood. There’s no there there—or here either. This led to the *Madhyamaka* doctrine of two truths: ultimate truth taught not-self, which was distinct from provisional truth where ordinary conventions were accepted as valid. The point was that only via provisional truth could ultimate truth be known or expressed. This recontextualization [sic] of not-self confounds the idea that one can specify the nature of music in any meaningful way outside of a

community of like-minded musical persons. This means that the idea of absolute music, "the music itself," is empty; but it also means that a particular music, considered as a social and cultural activity will be almost powerless to shed light on what other musics might be, precisely because the nature of music—its suchness—is simply inconceivable.<sup>1</sup>

I would, I will, call this stunning—but that over-excited adjective, like so many others, is just the kind of egotistical superfluity that Bob's formulation resists. Note what adjectives do appear in his comments, just the requisite to present a structure of oppositions: *ultimate, provisional, absolute, particular, social cultural*, and—not quite opposed to the others but certainly above them all: *inconceivable*. All subjective grunting is excised, or more precisely rendered superfluous. The conceptualization of provisional truth, dharmas, collections of particulars and concepts, in relation to not-self is all we need either by way of quotidian epistemology or spiritual technology.

How, then, to comment on the work of a composer who not only seems to offer us everything we need to engage with it, but also gently insinuates reasons why further verbal and symbolic representation, if welcome, might well be superfluous? I want to suggest that there is a loophole, an uncertainty hovering around Bob's phrase "community of like-minded musical persons," and thus a question about communality, community, and the shadowy ontology of particular musics, that provokes response. That is, if the project of defining the dharma is understood through the lens of late empiricism, à la Goodman and Quine, as passed into music theory, notably via Boretz, then the questions of how much in the way of conceptual clarity we want in order to conceive music, and how much conceptual assent we need in order to conceive *of* music, rear up ineluctably. (I take it that Bob's comments about the incommensurability of different particular musics refer as much to the perils of bringing too many reified habits to the musical occasion as much as too little specialized knowledge.) These kinds of issues and question arises in many of Bob's writings about music, and the better part of what I have to say today involves reading a few of the pertinent passages. For example, this passage, from a paper I will draw on again, "Composing *Each Time*," in which Morris acknowledges a gap between his artistic self-representation and the experience of his listeners: "I often notice people want to know how to relate what they hear in [my] music to what I have said about it....Sometimes they ask if or even assert that what I have said might not be relevant or understandable to the listener or performer who doesn't compose and especially to the audience at large....I have no definitive answers to these questions, since I don't believe there are any."<sup>2</sup> The candor and unpretentiousness of this are uncommonly welcoming, reinforcing a bond of common sense between the composer and his audience, even while upping the ante on the question of communality. However, without proposing any definitive answers to Morris's questions, I want to tease them out a little further. Although Bob presents his music theories and meta-musical commentary with a characteristically soft-spoken transparency, I want to register a nervous way of receiving them—to suggest that, even on the path to conceptual

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Morris, "Nine Piano Pieces, Tête-à-Tête, Wabi," *Open Space* 14.

<sup>2</sup> "Composing *Each Time*,"<sup>3</sup> <http://lulu.esm.rochester.edu/rdm/pdflib/Morris.EACHTIME.pdf>.

clarification, the reader may suffer an experience of cognitive failure; and further, that to suffer failure when confronting challenging conceptions of music might not be a bad thing, and certainly that Morris's music theorizing repeatedly takes us to the brink.

Not to be too coy, let me offer an example, a reading of a few more passages from "Composing *Each Time*." In the essay, the efficacy of relating theory to practice is called at each and every moment, since Morris describes the conceptual bases of one of his own works. And at each moment, he presents his compositional and theoretical thinking in terms of a flow of intelligible experiences shaped by the lucid presentation of particulars and concepts, an intersubjectivity of epistemological assent rather than a struggle of forces; that is, in terms of the dharma. As a discursive argument about compositional process and musical structure unfolds, the essay glides from an extraordinary un-defensive reflection on thinking and talking in and about music, some of which I have already quoted, to speculation about first listenings, and then on to more and more particular details and their implications. The diction has an unruffled quality, an unexcited modesty and directness that even a casual listener will hear in much of Morris's writing about music. Listen, for example, just to the first two sentences: "Each time I finish a piece, there is little time to rest or reflect; something else demands my attention, and I attend to it. Of course, finishing a piece is not really abrupt; after the first draft, there is revision, computer engraving, and editing."<sup>3</sup> The observations are homely but, in introducing the themes of flow and articulation in life and creative experience, they are apposite to much that will follow. The diction recalls the unruffled, indeed non-attached narration of Cage's autobiographical anecdotes, and the modest details sustain an ongoing appeal to common sense. What follows, however, is hardly anecdotal, and the appeal to common sense is quickly qualified. Turning to questions of reception, the speaker catalogues a variety of difficulties in reaching collective concurrence about the particulars of musical experience. There are superstitions to dispel and varying cognitive styles to bridge: "Being able to speak about one's work doesn't make you a better composer, but, contrary to superstition, it doesn't hurt. Cognitive style is an important factor, for negotiating the gap between the qualitative and the quantitative isn't altogether natural for many people."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in a society of differing cognitive styles, a composer's self-representation might not be relevant or understandable to the listener or performer who doesn't compose, or to the audience at large; questions of relevance and intelligibility are likely to metastasize, to include the composer who doesn't listen as much as the listener who doesn't compose. Specialization itself appears to be at risk, as a vast range of reception scenarios and positions on continua of engagement and awareness arise in the realm of possibility. Where, then, do we draw the perimeters around groups of like-minded people, musical communities and kinds? How much intersubjective assent do we need to ground any music ontologically?

I should emphasize again that Morris evokes these issues and implications without breaking a sweat or elevating the tone of his writing. However, the reading, if not the writing can become fraught and dramatic, when Morris moves from a

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<sup>3</sup> "Composing *Each Time*," 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Composing *Each Time*," 2.

discussion of general conditions and first hearings to small and large aspects of design. As his paper proceeds discursively, cataloguing collections of particulars and concepts, the accumulation of detail gradually may begin to seem daunting or even incomprehensible. Tracking each detail in the account of composing "Each Time," each structural ramification of each time, and rationally reconstructing each inter-related aspect of the compositional conception of Each Time may well come to feel overwhelming at many if not all times. In a first reading of "Composing *Each Time*" I found myself becoming overwhelmed about a third of the way through the paper, where Morris works up a comparison between two related design principles: "compositions" and "partitions." Compositions and partitions are both expressions of a number (say 12) as the sum of other numbers (say 5 5 and 2 or 3 6 and 3).

Compositions are ordered sequences, partitions unordered. In discussing them, Morris again speaks with uncommon lucidity: "Compositions and partitions have been useful to me in profiling the distribution of pitch-classes in various compositional units. In fact, it was the possibility of varied and contrasting distributions of pitch-classes among aggregates in combinatorial arrays that first attracted me to serial composition. " So far, so good. And of course, it makes sense to know not only that the composer finds varied and contrasting distributions of pitch-classes among aggregates attractive, but also how rich the possibilities for variety and contrast are. And so, Morris continues: "Since there are 1816 compositions of 12 into as many as 7 parts (without zeros) versus 65 partitions of 12 into as many as 7 parts, partitions remain the more likely way that units can be associated." Again, the point is simple: less is more. But how much less, and when does less become more? Such questions cannot be answered definitively in theory; they point to the provisional solutions offered in pieces. Again, vastness permits many possible ephemeral meanings to be produced. Already, there is an unresolved tension between variety and association, one that can pull toward pragmatic musical possibilities, or toward the horizon of the inconceivable. The composer adds a somewhat quizzical parenthesis: "(In fact, it is somewhat amazing that there are any units that have the same compositions in *Each Time*, but there are seven pairs of units that are of the same composition.)" At this point, I find myself unsure about what to do with the mounting information. How musically significant might these correspondences, or their rarity, be? The footnote to which I am next referred exhorts us to push further in the direction of vastness: "For instance," Morris notes "there are 111384 compositions of the number 12 into exactly 7 parts with zeros allowed and this is only a fraction of the number of compositions of 12 into up to 7 parts with zeros."<sup>5</sup> The fascination with the specification of possibilities begins to undermine my confidence in the possibility of negotiating between vastness and my capacity to make sense. Similar uncertainties arise in the ensuing discussion of rows, unit order associations, hexachordal melodies, set-class networks, chains, chain-classes, and other such design features, all of which are scrupulously considered in terms of compositional projection and intelligibility, but all of which—and even more, the aggregation of which—suggest a struggle between elucidating suchness and an overly much muchness. My point of emphasis is simple: composition with pitch classes is an extremely open-ended affair.

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<sup>5</sup> "Composing *Each Time*," 13.

However, to go out on a limb a little further, though a large limb on which I suspect I am not alone, I want to describe a part of my response to this in terms of a kind of cognitive failure that Kant calls the mathematical sublime. Neil Hertz has summarized nicely. The mathematical sublime arises

out of sheer cognitive exhaustion, the mind blocked not by the threat of overwhelming force [this by the way would be the dynamical sublime, evoked by nature], but by the fear of losing count or of being reduced to nothing but counting—this and that and this—with no hope of bringing a long series or a vast scattering under some sort of conceptual unity. Kant describes a painful pause—“a checking of the vital powers”—followed by a compensatory positive movement, the mind’s exultation in its own rational faculties, in its ability to think a totality that cannot be taken in through the senses.<sup>6</sup>

Hertz elaborates Kant’s suggestion that the sublime experience is a two step affair, a “negative exhibition”—the failure of cognitive and imaginative comprehension when confronted with absolute largeness, followed by a recuperation of reason in a superior awareness and sense of moral purposefulness. The evocation of absolute largeness that triggers the negative turn may come in various forms, particularly, as I’ve said, in relationship to the force of nature or an unmanageable excess of information. Moreover, the experience of sublimity itself, a shuddering between the nullity of cognitive failure and a transcendent recuperation, is good for you. It “raise[s] the soul’s fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind...”.<sup>7</sup>

In another essay with the splendid title “More Words: Nullify, Neutral, Numb, Number,” Hertz elaborates more pessimistically, and we might add, modernistically, describing a “residual difference” that can occur when the gap between “feeling and representation, experience and drama [or, for the purpose of this discussion, dharma], produces a double consciousness and dispersion” in which “an indefinite number of nuclei, atoms of experience [are] characterized in the abstract idiom of their most common denominator...the sameness of numbers that are not really numbers but rather numerals marking off otherwise identical segments of the roulette wheel...a final figure for the arbitrary.”<sup>8</sup> In various writings, Morris himself has acknowledged that the largeness of possibility in the twelve-tone universe presents a correlative possibility of numbers numbing—of arbitrariness. At the close of an article discussing double aggregates, he suggests that the “possibilities for serial music have always been vast. But with 1575 4-partitions, 531441 multipcsets, and no one yet knows how many mosaics or dmosaic classes, on the face of it there would seem to be no criteria for

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<sup>6</sup> Neil Hertz, “The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime,” in *The End of the Line* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, I.1. Thomas Weiskel’s *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976) is an important touchstone of literary critical perspectives on the sublime, and it helped to get me thinking about the topics under discussion here.

<sup>8</sup> Neil Hertz, “More Words: Nullify, Neutral, Numb, Number,” in *George Eliot’s Pulse* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

principled compositional choice in music that takes pc-duplication as structurally significant." To paraphrase: Are these vast quantities no longer really numbers but rather numerals marking off identical segments of the roulette wheel?

Characteristically Bob backs away from the abyss, suggesting that the relationship between experience and representation, feeling and dharma, need not break down, at least in terms of the provisional verities. Thus, he continues by summarizing some of the ways that this problem might be addressed, to "provide a way to decide what partitions, alignments, and duplications can project musical sense and sensibility—and in ways that are already established in serial practice and theory."<sup>9</sup>

Rather than backing away from the ledge that Morris persistently takes us to, I want to suggest that his theoretical writings can be edifying not just for their utility in clarifying things but as literary documents evoking complex aesthetic experiences—experiences that may evoke aspects of the scenario of the sublime, inciting a negative exhibition, the cognitive exhaustion of encountering absolute largeness, but veering away from a triumphant denouement. If there is a payoff in this premise, it is to focus attention away from the dicey question of like-mindedness and onto the alternatives to either triumphalism or disappointment that Morris offers in his restaging of the sublime. He lays out the alternative denouement in a description of one of his previous outdoor pieces, *Coming Down to Earth*: "the composition is [at times] like uncultivated natural surroundings, which are more difficult to reach. In such places boundaries cannot be located, as if the environment spreads out forever without end. Here the music will perhaps seem very removed from concert or folk music with its social settings and range of expressive meanings."<sup>10</sup> Again, the language is mild-mannered and as undemanding as it is unassuming—"as if," the speaker says, and "perhaps...may...seem": we're let off the hook. But the image, when confronted, is unsettling: composition as, but also in, an uncultivated landscape that spreads out forever—an unsociable place where music doesn't express or expresses differently than in the cultivated zones of musical society. Morris further elaborates, acknowledging that exploring such an environment is likely to produce perplexity: "Throughout my career as a composer I have attempted continually to expand the boundaries of what music can be and where it can occur. Because of this, some audience members have found it difficult take much pleasure from my music." Nature and music seem to evoke the sublime as much as, and in many of the same ways as does the vastness conjured in the theoretical enterprise. However, Morris finds a remedy precisely in integrating music and natural settings.

I've found out, however, when the same music played on the concert stage is taken outdoors, the audience tends to enjoy it very much. I believe this happens because when my music is performed in the midst of natural surroundings, it becomes obvious that it is inspired by and reflects my love of natural processes, textures, and sounds. I hope that *Coming Down to Earth* will provide a rich assortment of musical experiences celebrating the relations between people and their natural

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Morris, "Pitch-Class Duplication in Serial Music: Partitions of the Double Aggregate," *Perspectives of New Music* 41/2 (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes to *Coming Down To Earth*," <http://ecmc.rochester.edu/rdm/notes/cdte1.html>.

environments.<sup>11</sup>

When music is performed outdoors, there may be a raising of the soul's fortitude, not in the mind's exultation in its own transcendent faculties, but rather in a more modest form of celebration that Morris has elsewhere called "Recreation. That is, re-creation, returning to the vast, the basic ground that we share with all other forms of life."<sup>12</sup> For Morris, music and experiences of nature offer particularly rewarding and interpenetrating forms of recreation.

Indeed, embedding musical performance in a natural environment permits a polyphony of music and nature — another kind of double aggregate, to speak fancifully — which allow for expanded definitions of complementation and reciprocity. If this kind of exercise nudges us toward animism, it also tempers whatever residual obstinacy we may be holding about human agency and authorship — and so deflates any residual triumphal impulses we might want to indulge in, in recapitulating a narrative of the sublime. The outdoor musical occasion celebrates ephemerality as much as prolific, recreational, and tenacious constructions of meaning and relationship, while making the inevitable failure to grasp the totality more consoling. We might call this ego-deflated form the recreational sublime, which substitutes playfulness for drama in engaging with cognitive successes and failures. And, to amend Hertz, it becomes less crucial to fret about residual gaps when playfulness rather than drama is the dialectical antinode of experience.

To cycle back to my starting point, I should note that Bob has said much of this already, less dramatically so. What I am proposing only is to add his theoretical writing into the picture as another form of the recreational sublime, so that communing with music, nature, and music theory provide mutually reinforcing forms of recreation and that we might take a more playful attitude toward music theorizing. So, rather than thinking of theory as a kind of environmental protection agency, we might simply think of it as part of the environment. (I am agnostic on the question of reading *Composition With Pitch Classes* under a tree.) I'm simply advocating that we try to make our musical practices more interpenetrating — to seek out opportunities for developing provisional forms of consolation as well as truth, and so become more tenacious in clarifying our concepts and more tolerant when we fall short of doing so.

One source of encouragement I've had in thinking so extravagantly about Bob's musical practices was a surprising conversation I had with him now about five years ago, in which he told me he was setting Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" for soprano and electronic sound. Listening to him talk about the poet and the poem, I quickly came to feel overwhelmed not only by the torrent of ideas addressed in my direction, but also by a renewed and discomfiting awareness that Bob's range of interests stretched further out in yet another direction that I hadn't anticipated; and so, again, the unsettling feeling of perimeters dissolving and conceptual security melting into air. Bob's engagement with Wordsworth's romantic narrative in itself seemed

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Morris, in a press release for *Coming Down to Earth*  
<http://ecmc.rochester.edu/rdm/cdte/press.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Morris, on "Playing Outside," <http://ecmc.rochester.edu/rdm/cdte/essay.html>.

incongruous, but even more, encountering it evoked an unnerving psychic experience of unbounded largeness: a conversation about the topos of the sublime became the pretext for something like an experience of the sublime. I say "seemed" and "something like," because, as will perhaps come as no surprise, this was hardly the first time an encounter with Bob felt this way—and by then, some quarter of a century into my conversation with him, the overwhelming feeling of boundaries dissolving was counterbalanced by an intense bond of sociability. It is this always poised and always precarious interplay of sublimity and sociability that I wish to note and honor now. I'm still surprised that Bob set "Tintern Abbey," and I have yet to hear his piece. There are plenty of phrases in the poem that would surely appeal to him. Wordsworth abundantly invokes the beautiful form of transient experience. And "Tintern Abbey" may be read as an allegory of solitude and sociability in the compositional process: For 115 of its 159 lines, the speaker is lost in his own thoughts, and only that far along turns to address another, his sister, who, we then learn, has been next to him all along. If I am in any way reading Bob appropriately here, the poem's insistent struggle with and deflation of self-aggrandizement and privileging of personal ontology, would also appeal, as would the opportunity to recreate the River Wye, which flows through the poem though it is rarely mentioned.<sup>13</sup> However, the aura of disappointment and the melancholy forms of consolation offered in the poem seem to fall short of Morris's aesthetic project. This gap, of course, leaves something for the composer to fill. In imagining beautiful forms of relationship between music and nature and the forms of sociable recreation, including those that are discursive and conversational, Morris not only recasts the sublime but offers an answer to Romantic disappointment, as much as its genealogical stepchild, negative dialectics. Morris's conjuring of the recreational sublime, juxtaposed with his ideas about communities of like-minded people (or perhaps similarly serious re-creators) makes for a strong cultural dynamic—and suggests the possibility of recalibrating the force fields in the web of culture, a prospect that warrants further investigation.

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Quinney's "'Tintern Abbey,' Sensibility, and the Self-Disenchanted Self," *ELH*, 64/1 (Spring 1997), 131-56, has colored my reading of the poem.

## **DOWNTIME SPACES**

\*

Vertical.            Ear slices.    Vertical.

Lemon bleeds under my imagination spreading into a web of spirals around the cypress swamp.

Sounds.

splashing and staring

From the dream of no-things a cascade of sounds.

Those of warming. Those of stretching the twilight back over the summer skies. *"the bird blossoms on the tree that casts no shadow".\** Last night I watched her lie down on a field of crushed bricks, her fingers glistening with the red of the beetle's wings. The chitin coats crumble away into dust, lifting, leaving the sweet crimson nectar from the bodies of the cochineal insect. (Energetic imprints on the soul: their own bodies found, and understood.            In the winter they fly attracted to the dust washed over a sunny wall of the house. Dried into food or a sign. Dust of more and more bodies, for more wings to clump together.)

A silver spoon drumming something about the dead languages swaying the heart of a bell a sound trapped in a wood-fired stoneware cup.    Desire. Our collective desires. Always more vivid, more psychic. No one I know has so clearly penetrated his own subconscious as to make it mine. And yet. Tastes slip behind the illusion of reality. She licks their wings of her stained fingers to trigger my memory. Of why I am here of who we were in those bodies. Letting go, of every swirling trace, the very motion cupped up. Steaming tea on the table, I am drinking, dreaming. My heart almost loses itself in this race to get through to the surface.

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**Late pears crowned with birds,  
ripe but rockhard only  
tender in colors, catnip and puffballs,  
and the timp moon:  
Time to wait and spin, pears baked over  
-easy rot into heavy gold,  
deer leave them alone  
Calvatia, Calbovista, Lycoperdon; fall stars  
this month come  
all over again.**

\*

Sound, touch, smell, vibrancy:

*—As I was thinking of you tonight while I was out dreaming;  
letting rest in the sepia behind my eyes one image at a time, a  
fluid petal touching another petal, (all attached to the center),  
painfully, deeply, I looked down folding myself around the  
ambiguity of the bed and found a little effigy of a man made  
from nothing but my own sensations, a little man mad with  
feelings, my feelings. —*

I hold what the dream blows my way, I am both the glass,  
and a luster in ice that winnows water from water; I am  
the one who like an hourglass passes time from the upper  
chamber to the lower or, in the fulltime of daylight, denies  
weight to things

— with the awareness of a window endlessly opening —

when tired of me, of my weight, tired of themselves so  
overweight with the simple reality, they give over to the wind,  
and drift away,

the little Dreamman's back quivers with inner tension but his  
pale body rests motionless in my hand, tied in a fetal knot  
knees pulled to his chest, smooth, swollen with spores

Everything sweeps forth from the time-experience consciously  
— and returns to the time when the patterns of reality create  
and recreate in loops an alembic of sound.

The quiet I can't achieve at first comes to me as the sounds  
slowly turn out all my pedestrian lights, as they respond and  
relate to what other sounds are doing, slowly moving around,  
distinctly individual, scattered drops plain unsealed, bucket of  
crystals, linked, impregnated with both the privacy

and the resonance of passing through the emerging time.  
Wood. Rain. Rising inside. Metal air rising earth water, run to  
meet me in the sunlit soul, keys releasing silences into the taut  
white emptiness.

In the eye of a pellucid dome lies a fragility, which allows an  
access to the music: to hear and to be it, and to lock in the  
mind the elapsing events so they can form the spiral window  
— a sudden vertigo of being laced with the continuum, on its  
flickering edge: *asphalt*

*throat*

*warm with night*

*voices,*

*tree-frogs*

*galloping*

*down*

*the circus ring of*

*the eardrums,*

*dust so close*

*to the mind*

*is falling, my presence*

*clutching*

*onto the effigy*

I look for this space like a girl child who needs the light to  
sleep.

The ear has heard, has collected — the imagination generates  
fresh integrity and holds a new sense of balance. The lemon  
glass is perfect and so is the world it lets through; the eyes in  
the dark are watching me from the elevator of time. An ascent.  
A mirror fall. Letting go... Tension. Flexible tension both ways.  
Past the point of deafness... Down.

Pushing down against the thick belly of water the glow the  
gold up ahead.

*sun opens*

*from core to skin*

*its hair blossoms*

*among*

*shadows*

from a trusting leap, an inward dive into the flow of the beat-skipping heart decisions in bending, refracting, reflecting time. Same. Or other. I was. I Am. The Dreamman's figure buried somewhere in unmown grass, an alchemy of depth rippled through the wild surfaces.

Inside the alembic is the essence of an identity. Finally maturing, trillions of microscopic spores emerge as a puff of dark brown powder when kids kick the mushroom.

I am ready.

**Song of Orioles**

**by the river where each is  
hidden in a crown  
each as quick  
as a mouth of the flute  
is narrow and as yellow as  
the grail of a marigold touched  
by hands according to the body's shape  
scions  
godly cut to be  
nourished in the eye's tissue  
godly carved in bold desire  
of to be shed on  
to be shed out to be  
the middle part to leak caught  
in warp threads of the poplar.**

dorota czerner  
october 3, 2006.

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\*Hung-chih, *Sermons* :

*"The spiritual bird dreams on the branch that does not sprout;*

*The flower of awakening blossoms on the tree that casts no shadow."*

in: *The Five Houses of Zen*, ed. by Thomas Cleary, ("The House of Ts'ao-Tung", p.88),  
Shambala, Boston & London, 1997).

I would like to thank:

Ben Boretz for the music that inspired the composition of this text (*Downtime; Open Space/*  
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virtual community.

## **Daniel Goode: 2 Texts**

### **1. From a letter to Ben Boretz, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999.**

...I'm stimulated. The words Situationism and Improvisation, the Disembodied voice are bouncing between my earlobes, making a deafening racket. I'm now going to go off half-cocked with ideas for the near future:

I want to actually talk to mainstream culture-makers. Actually I want to assassinate them. To do that we must put acid on their neural synapses.

Let's see. Radio has been betrayed. We wuz robbed. The most enlivening, immediate medium for musician-thinkers and musician-doers is radio. Forget the internet, it'll be problematic for too long a time. The obvious access and portability of radio that needs nothing but an on/off switch and a tuning dial (alright! a gain dial and an equalizer as well) argues that it is the most: democratic/powerful/potentially radical/cheapest/freeest from the necessary intercession of the priest-technician who ministers to the fallen and crashed computer—this amazing thing has been closed down, gagged, neutered, imprisoned, commercially exploited as both commercial and “Public Radio.”

Well, examples to follow. But when you said on the phone we needed a magazine to talk to each other, I thought it over, and I find I am too angry at the culture to leave it at that. I want us to have a razor sharp analytical voice that provokes the culture makers directly to respond to us. We should not let them off the hook. They claim to speak our language (radio, TV, media people), so let's not be crank-letter writers any more (here I am swearing off an abominable habit that simply has put a lot of my energy directly into the Round File), just complaining one at a time so we can be dismissed one at a time. I want an *association* of pragmatic thinkers who will take on these targets mercilessly.

Here's one little *koan* from “public radio.” A very hip, varied radio program called “Afro-Pop World” used to be broadcast on WNYC-FM (our “public radio” which Giuliani just off-loaded to corporate and foundation funders). When the station went “independent” (that means that marketing replaced programming, to suit those very corporate and foundation funders), “Afro-Pop World” was switched to the AM branch of WNYC. Though at a handicapped hour of midnight on Saturday night, that's not the *koan* I'm after. Rather it is: Why AM, rather than FM? Answer: FM is better quality sound, so it is for better quality music. Folk music, ethnic music, pop music, African music is not serious music. Now this is what the elites of Columbia and Princeton music departments used to say out loud for decades and decades. But here is an act by the so-called makers of the public, non-elitist culture that deconstructs into exactly the same statement.

After our victory over public radio, we should work on the creation of physical spaces for our thoughts (that includes music, of course). We can use the internet, but we should use it to valorize the physical meeting ritual. Every time I see people lining up for a live event (usually young club-goers in Manhattan) it is brought home to me that the meeting place is still the *locus mysticus*. People want to rub up against each other in every sense of the word. The internet will never replace that. Tell a friend that something “really happened” at such and such a place and time, and that you were there to experience it; relate it, and you will make your friend jealous for not having been there.

Well, now that we've taken back public radio, and we've re-valORIZED the ancient idea of the face-to-face meeting place, nothing will be denied us. What next?

Let us reform the movie sound-track. Film (and video) is the lingua franca of the 20th and 21st century. So, what the hell is going on in those "treatments", those pre-sold sound tracks, those enervating under-scorings, those bloated pig-bellied blockbuster sound tracks?

We should take on the poor (but getting richer) deracinated composers who make them, and their sound editors, engineers, and all their bosses. Our leaflets should pour down on their heads. We can embarrass them, and once exposure comes, well, some will at least be politicized, even if they can't change their producers', directors' minds.

Finally we have to take on education. A young musician told me that when he asked his music professor at a large Texas university what was a gamelan, he got, the response: Debussy was influenced by the gamelan. When he persisted with his question what is gamelan music, the teacher, after a week, came back with a one-sentence definition from a dictionary.

But education will just be putty in our hands after all of our above accomplishments. After all, we spent our lives in education. We know how to handle "*Them.*" And we will! We've got the contacts!

All the best! Daniel

## ***2.Thy Fearful Symmetry // Experiences of Symmetry***

I recently came across an analysis of symmetry in the music of Morton Feldman. I saw displayed on the page various A's, B's, A's, and X's in various symmetrical and near-symmetrical patterns. These were to be juxtaposed with the remembered characteristics of certain pieces by Feldman—and this in turn led me to my favorite paradox of musical thinking:

What has the symbol-pattern A-B-A, for example, got to do with my experience of the time slot filled with the this-that-this musical sequence of moments?

It has *something* to do with it. The musical sequence shares logical form with ABA. Or, differently, ABA can be used to *describe* something about that piece of music. But do we experience *ABA* when we are listening to the piece so analyzed? Perhaps if we are taught to do so. The teacher says: what is the form of this piece. We say: ABA. QED, we experienced ABA. But this simply begs the question of how symmetry is experienced.

Some people (see James Gleick's *Chaos*) have lighted on the hypothesis that our sense of beauty comes from our perceptions of environmental patterns with their self-similarities, "crippled" symmetries, disrupted or varied regularities. Considering the appreciation of landscapes across many cultures, landscaping, and landscape painting, it is a seductive hypothesis. Music at the tempo of heartbeat, or in walking rhythms is found in many cultures. But, of course, culture does not always operate in the manner of nature (see Cage's early writings, and his relation to Buddhism, Zen and other, where

he takes it as an imperative that art mimics nature in its “manner of operation”). Still, there are many suggestive relationships between perceptions of natural orders and perceptions of art works.

So, to ask it again: does musical perception *resolve* into one whole the composed self-similarities a composer makes of, let us say, nested ABA patterns?

The early process oriented minimalists liked patterns uninflected by natural patterns. Tape loop pieces and all loop pieces, in fact, positively declare their “downbeats” to a very sensitive pattern recognition ability of our species. We hear: not-found-in nature. (Let’s exclude the world of motors and mechanized industrial repetitive patterns—they are “manmade” as are tape loop pieces). Loops tell us art or communication grammar is happening. Only when we “cripple” the loops with destabilizing or unpredictable events, do we have the possibility of arguing a family relation between art works and our perceptions of natural patterns.

Impressionism, statistical clouds of Xenakis, environmental New Age recordings of rivers, surf, rain, whatever, these are just a few homages to the varied repetition we seem to see (and hear) in landscapes and soundscapes. Again, can we pass from this to a so-called standard of beauty? Does crippled symmetry become Asymmetry-within-symmetry and vice versa?

I can’t help circling round and round this issue avoiding the obvious, which is: Both the crippled symmetry of art and the crippled symmetry of “nature” give pleasure, on a scale from the very slightest to the very greatest. I don’t think that is the end of beauty or of aesthetic pleasures, but it may be just woven in there whether you notice it or not, just staking out a little territory in your psyche. Meanwhile you may be consciously oo-ing and ah-ing over big architectonic constructs describable in music analytical terms only, or the hugely satisfying dramatic structures of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century symphonic works. But down there at the unconscious level, that scandalously beautiful double-bass pedal point is just the rough-hewn crippled symmetry of horse-hair bow upon hard gut string. Don’t diminish that perception! You could say that horse-hair/gut perception “softens up” the discerning listener, who can then split their consciousness so that other grand designs are noticed and appreciated.

And what do we think about ABA, again? Now should we try to venture a theory? Well for one thing there is “charge” we feel when it comes time for one of those great recapitulation moments in classical music, pick your favorite—first movement of Mozart’s 40<sup>th</sup> Symphony, anyone? But that “charge” at the moment the Recapitulation begins is not symmetrical with anything in the Exposition. That was *then*. This is *NOW*. So, QED, the symmetry of ABA in music cannot be anything in time-based art like what it is in visual arts. Or am I just being contentious. The experience of ABA-type symmetry in music has *a little* to do with the equivalent in visual art. Again because of the basics: same is same, different is different. We parse both the world and art in such basic categories of Same, Similar, and Different, over and over and over again.

# "THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT...": CAGE'S LAISSEZ-FAIRE ANARCHISM AND CAPITALISM

IAN PACE

FOR PAUL OBERMAYER, COMRADE AND FRIEND

This article is an expanded version of a paper I gave at the conference 'Hung up on the Number 64' at the University of Huddersfield on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2006. My thanks to Gordon Downie, Richard Emsley, Harry Gilonis, Wieland Hoban, Martin Iddon, Paul Obermayer, Mic Spencer, Arnold Whittall and the editors of this journal for many helpful comments on during the preparation of the paper or from reading the subsequent article.

John Cage, quoting Thoreau (used in Solo 35 of the *Song Books*):

The best form of government is no government at all.

Henry David Thoreau:

I heartily accept the motto, - "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe, - "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.<sup>1</sup>

Ronald Reagan (in his first inaugural address):

Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem. From time to time we've been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. But if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else?<sup>2</sup>

Thoreau:

The character inherent in the America people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not soemtimes got in its way. For government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most expedient the governed are most let alone by it. Trade and commerce, if they were not made of India-rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way; and, if one were to judge these men wholly by the effects of their actions and not partly by their intentions, they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous persons who put obstructions on railroads.<sup>3</sup>

Reagan:

With the idealism and fair play which are the core of our system and our strength, we can have a strong and prosperous America at peace with itself and the world. So as we begin, let us take inventory.

We are a nation that has a government -- not the other way around. And this makes us special among the nations of the earth. Our Government has no power except that granted it by the people. It is time to check and reverse the growth of government which shows signs of having grown beyond the consent of the governed.

It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the states or to the people.

All of us -- all of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the states; the states created the Federal Government.<sup>4</sup>

Thoreau:

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.<sup>5</sup>

Reagan:

Now, so there will be no misunderstanding, it's not my intention to do away with government. It is rather to make it work -- work with us, not over us; to stand by our side, not ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it; foster productivity, not stifle it. If we look to the answer as to why for so many years we achieved so much, prospered as no other people on earth, it was because here in this land we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before.

Freedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and assured here than in any other place on earth. The price for this freedom at times has been high, but we have never been unwilling to pay that price.

It is no coincidence that our present troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of Government.<sup>6</sup>

## Introduction

The similarities between the various opinions expressed above are too close to be ignored. The politics of John Cage, deriving in large part from the ideologies espoused by Thoreau, though with some later modifications, have been loosely and tacitly associated with the 'left' for some time, a perspective which as a convinced socialist I find deeply problematic. My intention here is not to create some sort of a political tribunal for Cage, but rather to simply view his political philosophy, which has been viewed by both Cage himself and other commentators as fundamental to his work, with a certain critical detachment.

My motivation for engaging both now and in the future with aspects of Cage's life and philosophy may initially seem paradoxical – it is in order to reinscribe the case for Cage as a *composer*. A great deal of writing and criticism on Cage in English makes a too-hasty equation and identification between Cage's expressed ideas and biography on one hand, and his compositional (and literary) work on the other, often implying the corollary that the latter is in essence a mere representation of the former, or even a footnote to it. This gives rise to the common perception that Cage is simply less interesting as a composer than as a philosopher. I profoundly disbelieve this and would suggest on the contrary that his philosophies, political and aesthetic or otherwise, are relatively half-formed, woolly, riddled with contradictions and rather self-serving, whereas his compositional work is of major significance. Whilst not wanting for a moment to deny the existence of a link between the two, I do believe that intention and realisation are non-identical in this respect. The milder view, which sees the work as of value but as an expression of the thought, still fails to engage with the question of *mediation* in the process of composition on Cage's part. This issue of mediation is for another future article when I will consider the ways in which non-identity between ideas and work manifests itself specifically in Cage's music. For now, I am concerned with dismantling some of the mythology that surrounds Cage (much of which seems to have been consciously cultivated by himself), in this case specifically his political thinking<sup>7</sup>. If such de-mythologisation can be achieved, then perhaps more attention will become focused upon Cage as a composer in a relatively conventional sense of the term, rather than as a mystical guru. Cage seemed aware of the dangers inherent in gurus, as he makes clear in the 'Diary':

Commune problem: communes re filled with gurus, needing (not having) others  
"to guru." But teaching's part'n'parcel of divisive society we're leaving.<sup>8</sup>

But this did not seem to stop Cage cultivating his own role as a guru, from the earliest days of the formation of the New York School onwards. He was also quite explicit about his own attraction to guru figures such as Schoenberg and Suzuki, proudly declaring how he went to the 'president of the company' when learning either figure's teachings<sup>9</sup>.

I first became interested in approaching Cage from this angle after reading, some 10 years ago or so before writing this article, the fascinating interview between David Patterson and Christian Wolff in *Perspectives of New Music* on Cage and after<sup>10</sup>. Patterson, in one of his questions to Wolff, points out that during Cage's 'Thoreau' period (which David Revill locates as beginning around 1967, after Cage was introduced to Thoreau by the poet Wendell Berry<sup>11</sup>) he started to think and talk much more about 'sounds as representative of a model society' rather than the earlier idea of 'letting the sounds be themselves'<sup>12</sup>. To some extent this later attitude was implicit in Cage's earlier thought as well, I believe; however, it was during this period that his pronouncements became more explicit, and continued for much of the rest of his life, culminating in particular in the mesostic 'Overpopulation and Art', from 1991<sup>13</sup>.

In the Patterson/Wolff interview, Wolff expresses some scepticism about the implications of Cage's political viewpoints, though without following these up in any great detail. In reference to the fact that the positing of any system will always imply that which lies outside of it, Wolff also says 'The whole dynamic of Cage's life and thinking is precisely because of such contradictions', and comments that Cage disliked the world 'politics' – perhaps in the sense of 'high politics', specifically the machinations at the highest level of government?<sup>14</sup> This is the sense in which the term is used by historians when speaking of 'political history', seen as a distinct branch of the discipline from social history, workers' history, women's history, black history, etc.<sup>15</sup>, all of which are surely 'political' in a broader sense of the term. It is in this wider sense that I refer to Cage's politics, incorporating both his explicitly 'political' statements as well as the implications of the rest of his outlook, which he might not call 'political'. Cage wants both to have his cake and eat it when calling on one hand to 'Remove government, politics from society' and on the other to 'Let private property go', a proposal which it would be very hard to deny is 'political'.<sup>16</sup> The question of which aspects of any philosophical or ideological system (including those specifically appertaining to music) deserve to be called 'political', and the dangers of what is sometimes called 'left functionalism', by which practically everything in the world is somehow viewed as 'political', are both potentially huge subjects to do justice to which it could take a whole book; for now, I will focus particularly on a re-examination of some elements of Cage's thought from the 1960s onwards, when his social philosophy became more explicit.

This subject has been written about before, most notably by William Brooks in his essay 'Music and Society' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*<sup>17</sup> and David W. Bernstein in his essay 'John Cage and the "Aesthetic of Indifference"' in the volume on *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts*<sup>18</sup>. Whilst approaching this subject from a political perspective more explicitly on the far left, I should point out that my emphatic rejection of the anti-individualistic and anti-subjective ideology expressed by Cornelius Cardew in his both Maoist and neo-Stalinist tract *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*<sup>19</sup>. Nor is my position particularly like that of Heinz-Klaus Metzger<sup>20</sup> who, pursuing further some of Theodor Adorno's comments in this respect<sup>21</sup>, attempts to situate Cage's work and its relevance within a wider historical dialectic, though I have many sympathies with this type of political approach.

"The Best Form of Government..."

Bad politics (Souvtchinsky) produce good art. But of what use is good art? (Johns said he could imagine a world without it and that there was no reason to think it would not be a better one).<sup>22</sup>

## **Anarchism**

On many occasions, Cage made clear his own description of his political views, of which the following is an example:

I think of myself as an anarchist. And Mao himself, when he was younger, was very much involved with anarchist thought. But through the exigencies of the political situation, he made a solution to the Chinese problem that found him involved in a political change.<sup>23</sup>

There are of course many different varieties of anarchism, an explication of which is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say that Cage's anarchism had less in common with the thinking of Mikhail Bakunin or Emma Goldman<sup>24</sup> (or Noam Chomsky) than with that of Henry David Thoreau, the most significant influence on his politics, whose work permeates his writings from the 1960s in particular. A key question is whether this variety of 'anarchism' really has any critical meaning in the context of capitalist society, or whether it is easily reconciled with 'anarcho-capitalist' ideology, often difficult to distinguish from simple right-wing libertarianism. One should not overlook the fact that Thoreau is sometimes cited by right-wing libertarian members of the modern day Republican Party and other ideologues of the untethered free market, unencumbered by state intervention.

## **Cage on Government and Taxation**

Cage's thoughts on government also came directly from Thoreau, in particular from the essay on Civil Disobedience that he had read when younger (long before his 'Thoreau' period):

Cage: The final thing that I think influences my action more than anything is social concerns, so I try not to write a piece unless it is useful as an instance of society. I don't mean to say that I think I've solved anything socially in the music, but I've tried to give instances of improvements in society.....In the last paragraph of the essay on "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau says that a government is like a tree; and when people ripen, they are like fruit that drop away from the tree. So this piece, *Etcetera* [1973], is that tree with the fruit, some of it on the tree and some of it dropping off.<sup>25</sup>

Thoreau: There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would

not think it inconsistent with its own repose, if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellowmen. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.<sup>26</sup>

Cage attempted another distinction to take account of the clear fact that some things do require central organisation in order for society to function at all:

I think we must distinguish very clearly nowadays between government and utility. I do not think we should think of utilities as forms of government, because they're obviously necessary; otherwise, the great population of the earth is not going to be able to exist. Utilities are made in such a way that they reach all the various peoples, and what we need is a situation in which the world is not divided, as it is so dramatically in South America, between those who have and those who do not have; it must be a world for people who have, all of them have, and that can only come about through the utilities, whereas the governments discriminate between those who *should* have and those who *shouldn't* have. Therefore, we do not need government; what we need is utilities.

The utilities include shelter, food, clothing, air (because now we are ruining the air), water, energy, and you can go on; but that is the basis, and the direction. I will not say that someone should love someone else; we must each be left to discover the beauty of love. But we must not be forced, as the religions ask us, to love one another, because it doesn't do any good if you love someone when you also keep them hungry.<sup>27</sup>

Cage rather conveniently changes terminology when it suits the purposes of his own arguments. In the above, actually one of his most powerful political statements, he is simply arguing for one type of government rather than another. Because something is 'necessary' it is therefore not 'government', according to his use of the term. This is a specious line of argument – first one says that government is unnecessary, then when one finds things that governments do that *are* necessary, one carefully redefines the term 'government' so as to exclude them. Ronald Reagan would often misuse language in a similar manner, when talking about such concepts as 'freedom', 'choice' or 'human rights'.

The following should also demonstrate how flexible Cage's principles were as regards his own work and livelihood:

I keep on paying my taxes, which Thoreau wouldn't have done, but I do it in order to be free of the things the government could do to me in revenge. I want to be able to continue my work, so in that situation I do what the government requires, but no more. Thoreau didn't pay taxes, because he could continue his work, in which no one was interested while he was alive, in or out of jail. My situation is the reverse. Many, many people are interested in what I am doing, so I must continue and keep moving.<sup>28</sup>

This is a vain, egotistical and self-serving statement masquerading as altruism. Any artist could use such a justification for doing practically anything that helps to further their career instead of acting according to other ideals. If Cage had the courage of his convictions, then why was he not prepared to go to jail for them? Actually his situation in this respect was considerably easier than that which affects someone with a family to support, unlike Cage.<sup>29</sup>

And for Cage's cranky economic ideas:

More and more the paying of bills is nothing but numbers. All the government will eventually have to do is decide to give basic economic security to everyone. It's already set up the computer way of handling it. We use credit now much more than we use money. All we have to do is extend it and not require people to pay bills at the end of the month.....We already know we can get all the work done if each of us does one hour's work a year.<sup>30</sup>

It would be interesting to know the basis upon which Cage knew that one hour's work yearly per person would get everything done<sup>31</sup>, as well as how such a viewpoint can be reconciled with his comments in 'The Future of Music', that 'A necessary aspect of the immediate future, not just in the field of environmental recovery, is work, hard work, and no end to it'<sup>32</sup>, which he relates to the considerable challenges (and work) involved in the *Études Australes* and *Freeman Études*?

### **Cage on the Rule of Law**

We do not need to have the laws that tell us not to do this but to do something else. Thoreau said that the only reason to have the laws and governments is in order to keep two Irishmen from fighting in the street. I would rather have a few murders here and there than our war in Vietnam. And they could be murders of passion, rather than the cold useless murders we now have. We have what you might call "mass media murders."<sup>33</sup>

Cage's comments on the murder as a mass media spectacle are far-sighted (in more recent times, one need only consider the O.J. Simpson affair, for example); no less important is the clear implication from his observation that the war in Vietnam caused many more deaths than other forms of murder<sup>34</sup>, a truth that seems banal to assert but still needs to be spoken as often as possible in opposition to right-wingers who bemoan rising crime but promote imperialist wars. But consider the wider implications of Cage's comments on murders, or on violence in general. According to British Home Office statistics for England and Wales, 16% of all violent offences are domestic violence, and domestic violence will affect 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in their lifetimes.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps quite a number of the lethal cases of domestic violence would fit Cage's category of 'murders of passion' and thus win his approval?

Government (which by no means implies centralised government) can act to protect the rights of ethnic minorities, homosexuals, etc. (though in no sense does this statement necessarily imply that governments at present are generally successful in doing so, nor even

that many of them particularly care about such issues). But it was this very fact that led to the hatred of government espoused by American far-right militias, seeing such multicultural and liberal policies as part of a Jewish conspiracy, as outlined in the ultra-racist *Turner Diaries* by William Pierce (writing under the pseudonym of Andrew Macdonald<sup>36</sup>), one of whose readers was the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh.

At the beginning of 1991, the year before Cage's death, the US led a coalition of forces (ostensibly under the auspices of the United Nations) against Iraq in the first Gulf War, following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait<sup>37</sup>. Cage was privately most dismayed by the occurrence of this war<sup>38</sup>. The 23-year old Timothy McVeigh was fighting in Iraq and Kuwait, but came to feel ostracised from his political and military masters after witnessing first-hand the carnage on the ground, especially that committed against retreating Iraqi soldiers on the Basra Road. This is generally believed to be the primary stimulus for his involvement in the Survivalist movement, a group of individuals who would retreat from the mainstream of US society to live, heavily armed, in the wilderness, preparing themselves for a coming apocalypse against the government.<sup>39</sup>

If one reads McVeigh's comments on the oppressive nature of the US government and its actions as affects other people and nations (for example, in a letter he sent to Fox News, saying 'Many foreign nations and peoples hate Americans for the very reasons most Americans loathe me. Think about that.'<sup>40</sup>) one could often imagine oneself to be reading the words of a quite typical left or even liberal critic of US imperialism<sup>41</sup>. Liberals<sup>42</sup> will frequently, and rightly, bemoan the terrible regimes and circumstances in place outside of the Western world, without often considering the extent to which such foreign policies might be an inevitable consequence of the global capitalist system they inhabit (and often benefit from, as do some of those in the working classes who, as Lenin pointed out in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*<sup>43</sup>, can be 'bribed' by redistribution of some of the spoils of imperial exploitation - in the contemporary Western world this often takes the form of cheaper fuel supplies, increased social security and a generally higher standard of living). Such liberals may wish their governments would stop doing beastly things in the rest of the world, despite the fact that their own financial and other well-being is absolutely predicated upon the continuation of such actions. Genuine international socialists, on the other hand, realise the need to fight for the ultimate overthrow of the reign of private capital (of course no simple task to achieve!). A socialist, certainly one from a genuine Marxist tradition, may not have a clear utopian vision of what a post-capitalist society will be like in all its details (if it were ever possible to know such a thing), but would generally believe that by some means power will in the future be held by and for working people and their families. For those (including myself) who utterly reject the Stalinist model of pseudo-socialist centralised government which is in no sense representative of the interests of workers, this need not translate into an antipathy towards government *per se* – rather towards an advocacy of decentralised government in the form of localised workers' associations as far as possible<sup>44</sup>.

I am outlining this distinction in an attempt to make clear the fundamental difference between the type of principled socialist opposition towards government acting in the interests of capital, and the type of laissez-faire anarchism that informs the thinking

of Thoreau and Cage, which opposes government but not capital<sup>45</sup>. As such, I do not believe it is altogether an overstatement to suggest that such a form of anarchism is not so fundamentally *at cross-purposes with* the political ideology of McVeigh. In a Cageian world capital would still be free, indeed free to organise itself militarily on a private and even less accountable basis. Democratic institutions still allow some measure of public accountability for government, albeit deeply imperfect, especially in the corrupt, corporate-driven political system that is in place in the United States. For all such accountability is deeply problematic and coming to seem untenable in the light of the control that corporations and the mass media have over the political process, what is advocated by Cage is a step backwards, not forwards<sup>46</sup>. It would be facile to accuse Cage of somehow being a supporter of Survivalist philosophy, let alone the actions of McVeigh; however, the fact that his political philosophy resonates with the former gives room for question. This is one of the major reasons why I believe it is more appropriate to characterise Cage's politics as, if not actively of the right, certainly at odds with leftist forms of socialism or even anarchism (those advocating decentralised government under the democratic control of workers rather than the end of collective government per se). Freedom from governments of all types can equally bring free trade in nuclear weapons and the like.

### **Cage on Voting**

I wouldn't dream of it [voting]. I'm looking forward to the time when no one votes. Because then we wouldn't have to have a president. We don't need a president. We can get along perfectly well without the government.<sup>47</sup>

It is possible to still vote for politicians more likely to oppose the free trade in nuclear weapons or other hideous things - but Cage refused to do this. At the time of writing, the anti-semitic political organisation Hamas has just won a majority of seats in the Palestinian Authority. Even if one despises this organisation, who cite the blood libel of the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' in their charter<sup>48</sup>, it does not take too much of a leap of the imagination to see why ordinary Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories, suffering murder, dispossession and humiliation on a daily basis, have taken the opportunity to vote for the group perceived to be most likely to present staunch resistance towards their oppressors, something their more moderate rivals are not believed by them to have achieved satisfactorily. Could Cage have told these Palestinians, starved of any rights, that they would do better not to vote at all? It is by acting as a collective body that the Palestinians gain the power to stand up to their Israeli occupiers, but Cage, who said 'I don't think of individuals as being massed together in a group' would have none of this, making a fetish instead out of 'the uniqueness of the individual'<sup>49</sup>. This is petty-bourgeois individualism pure and simple. Such comments, from the end of his life, find echoes in plenty of his earlier pronouncements which I will now examine.

### **Cage on Protest and Mass Action**

I am interested in social ends, but not in political ends, because politics deals with power, and society deals with numbers of individuals; and I'm interested in both single individuals and large numbers or medium numbers or any kinds

or numbers of individuals. In other words, I'm interested in society, not for purposes of power, but for purposes of cooperation and enjoyment.<sup>50</sup>

My notion of how to proceed in a society to bring change is not to protest the thing that is evil, but rather to let it die its own death. And I think we can state that the power structure is dying because it cannot make any inspiring statements about what it is doing.

[students of propaganda techniques might disagree rather strongly with this]

I think that protests about these things, contrary to what has been said, will give it the kind of life that a fire is given when you fan it, and that it would be best to ignore it, put your attention elsewhere, take actions of another kind of positive nature, rather than continue to give life to the negative by negating it.<sup>51</sup>

Consider the above statement of Cage (which is echoed in other writings, including in the 1968 volume of the 'Diary') in the context of the first information coming to light about the Nazi Holocaust. Would protesting this, and letting the world know, as the Polish government-in-exile and Jewish labour organisations strove to do, simply continue to 'give life to the negative'? On the contrary, *not* protesting on the basis of this knowledge was precisely what the Nazis most wished for, so that the genocide could continue without the wider world becoming aware of the unspeakable reality of events. Of course protest was hardly enough under the circumstances – military action proved necessary; nonetheless Cage's remark becomes contemptuous when viewed in this context. One could equally well ask about the implications of Cage's views in terms of whether to protest the Chinese government's actions in Tibet, which that government would also prefer the world know little about? Or to publicising and alerting the world to the tortures carried out under the auspices of the US government and military in the Abu Ghraib prison in post-war Iraq? Such naïve idealism could perhaps only come from the mouth of one imbued with the culture of American liberalism.

I was recently asked to sign a petition against atomic energy. But I wrote back saying I wouldn't sign it. I wasn't interested in critical or negative action. I'm not interested in objecting to things that are wrong. I'm interested in doing something that seems to be useful to do. I don't think critical action is sufficient.<sup>52</sup>

Signing petitions in itself certainly is only a small step, but surely it is a vital component of the process of mobilising people in opposition to such things as atomic energy. What is Cage's alternative strategy? If he were advocating bombing the headquarters of atomic energy institutions or assassinating those responsible for implementing atomic energy policies and programmes, then in light of the fact that he rejects voting, such an espousal of the need for 'direct action' might at least have some concrete meaning. However, such an advocacy seems somehow unlikely.

Cage's antipathy towards protest does not sit easily with the following comments:

More power to Fuller . . . to revolutionary guerrillas...to Christian pacifists...  
to flower children...to hippies . . . acidheads...beatniks, diggers and provos....  
to the militant blacks...to those who keep asking questions.<sup>53</sup>

Some of these groups were effective and important precisely because they were prepared to protest. What impact would the black civil rights movement have had otherwise? Or, for that matter, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, highly active through the period when Cage wrote regularly about the threat of nuclear weapons?<sup>54</sup>

Cage was opposed, according to 'The Future of Music' to any sort of words used to communicate a message, associating these with 'training, government, enforcement, and finally the military'.<sup>55</sup> But where does this point of view leave a powerful message such as 'Black is beautiful'?

### **Cage on Maoism**

Cage first seems to have discovered the thought of Chairman Mao in 1971, after being urged in that direction by Norman O. Brown, as he makes clear in the foreword to the edition of his writings *M*.<sup>56</sup>

Quotations from Mao and expressions of praise for Mao's China are to be found liberally scattered through his writings from this period, not least in the 'Diary'<sup>57</sup>. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cage presents a thoroughly romanticised view of Mao's China, as was held by a number of artists and intellectuals of the time easily persuaded by propagandistic literature about the new China. Cage does not deny the violent nature of the Chinese Revolution, though he still continues to portray Mao as an essentially benevolent figure. He suggests that in earlier times Mao was an anarchist, perhaps not unlike Cage himself, bizarrely praises the nationalistic nature of Mao's revolution (because it was not 'merely Russian'), attempts to compare Mao to Buckminster Fuller, and more hideously compares Mao with Gandhi or Martin Luther King.

We are, if I may say so, a corrupt society. I'm very impressed by an article I read recently in *The New York Review of Books* by Mary McCarthy. She has been a critic of Vietnam and is still a critic of Vietnam because Vietnam continues even though President Nixon tells us that it has stopped. McCarthy sees Watergate as a continuation of Vietnam; she sees it as a silly and pathetic attempt on our part to atone for our true crime, which is Vietnam. But Vietnam is not, I would say, our only crime. We have also ruined our environment. We've done everything in order to be selfish. We should listen now to Mao Tse-tung who points out that the earth in which capitalism grows is just pure selfishness. What was Nixon's excuse for continuing in Vietnam and now in Cambodia? It

was to come out of that whole thing as he says with some kind of face or self-respect. It all turns back on the self, and here I would like, if you permit me, to criticize the entire tradition of Christianity. I think the Golden Rule, which is often thought of as the center, really of Christianity, is a mistake: “Do unto others as *you* would be done by.” I think that is a mistaken thought. We should do unto others as *they* would be done by.<sup>58</sup>

I'm very sad to see throughout our society now a struggle for power. Instead of this struggle for separatist \*divisive\* power, we should recognize as Mao did in China that there was a serious problem that required an intelligent solution. Well, he said that it involved power but the expression of power that I think was the most effective in China on Mao's part was the long retreat which is remarkably like something that Martin Luther King might have proposed or Gandhi.<sup>59</sup>

[O]ne of the things that Mao has insisted upon for the Chinese is that if there is an army that everyone is in it, if there is agriculture to do everyone should do it, if the land is to be changed so that it will not be flooded periodically, everyone in the community goes to work to bring about this change, even those who are old, even those who are young, so that the experience of the family has been extended through Mao's influence, so that in a sense the nation itself is a family. And I find this very beautiful.<sup>60</sup>

There is probably much still to be written about the amazing culpability and naïveté on the part of Western leftist intellectuals who were seduced by Mao and Maoist thought. A generous interpretation of Cage's comments would be to call them simply misguided. But more sinister resonances can be found in another of Cage's citation of Mao:

(Cf. Mao Tse-tung: “What should our policy be towards non-Marxist ideas? As far as unmistakable counter-revolutionaries and saboteurs of the socialist cause are concerned, the matter is easy: we simply deprive them of their freedom of speech”)<sup>61</sup>

Cage advocates this approach with respect to the members of an orchestra (which, as I will mention below, he wishes to make into ‘an instance of an improved society’), which should leave little doubt as to the totalitarian nature of his intentions.

When discussing the differing interpretations of Maoism of Cage, Cardew, and himself, Wolff describes Cage as a ‘countercultural hero’ and Cardew's ideas as ‘drastically reductive and mostly wrong’<sup>62</sup>. Patterson asks Wolff about why references to Mao appear for a short period in Cage's pronouncements, then disappear. Wolff suggests that maybe either Cage became disillusioned as knowledge increased of the enormous human toll of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, or alternatively that Cage might have turned against Mao as a component of his antipathy to Cardew following on from the publication of *Stockhausen serves Imperialism*.

This latter interpretation seems confirmed by some of Cage's own comments in his 1974 essay 'The Future of Music':

Some politically concerned composers do not so much exemplify in their work the desired changes in society as they use their music as propaganda for such changes or as criticism of the society as it continues insufficiently changed.

But is that not in some sense what Cage himself was also doing?

This necessitates the use of words. Sounds by themselves do not put messages across.

In light of the fact that the government of former British Prime Minister John Major introduced prohibitions on gatherings of ten or more people waiting with intent to listen to 'amplified music' which is 'wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats'<sup>63</sup>, is this necessarily true? This government was in some sense concerned about the 'message' such people would be getting from such music.

And when they do not use words, politically concerned composers tend to revert to nineteenth-century musical practices. This is enforced in both Russia and China. And encouraged in England by Cornelius Cardew and the members of the Scratch Orchestra. They study the pronouncements on art by Mao Tse-tung and apply them as literally and legalistically as they can. They therefore have criticized the politically concerned music of Frederic Rzewski (*sic*) and Christian Wolff, simply because new ways to make music have been discovered by both of these composers.<sup>64</sup>

Cage, happily, would seem to be recanting upon his earlier admiration of Mao. But if he could so easily slip into an idealised view of Mao, with little thought to the practical realities of what the enactment of Mao's ideas might entail, should we not then also be a little sceptical about his advocacy of other guru figures, including Meister Eckhardt, Thoreau, Suzuki, Buckminster Fuller, McLuhan and others? Or, perhaps more accurately, we should investigate further the extent to which Cage's readings of such figures really correspond to the figures themselves and their work?

### **Cage on Revolution from Within**

[A]ll of this arises from my conviction which I've had now for twenty-five years, I suppose, since mysterious involvement with Oriental thought, when I asked myself why do we write music, I came to the conclusion initially that it was in order to produce a revolution in the mind, and that now I would say it would be or hopefully would be, and yet I've just been sceptical about that, it could further revolution in the society.<sup>65</sup>

Cage expressed similar sentiments to this right up until his late interviews with Joan Retallack. In the preface to *Anarchy* he quotes several thinkers on the subject (Peter Kropotkin, Mario Malatesta, Bakunin, Leo Tolstoy, Thoreau and Whitman, as well as Cage himself<sup>66</sup>) though without any attempt at mediation, but returns to his own statement ‘Changing things radically, therefore, is simple, You just change that one mind. Base human nature on allishness<sup>67</sup>’ which he juxtaposes with Emma Goldman’s comment:

Anarchists or revolutionists can no more be made than musicians. All that can be done is to plant the seeds of thought. Whether something vital will develop depends largely on the fertility of the human soil, though the quality of the intellectual seed must not be overlooked.<sup>68</sup>

Certain schools of vulgar Marxism, especially in the English-speaking countries, are dismissive of the importance of focussing on consciousness prior to direct action, in distinction to the culture and consciousness-focussed work of Adorno and the Frankfurt School. Cage is right to argue for the need for a ‘revolution in the mind’ (as was Goldman), but hopelessly utopian about both the nature of such a revolution and its possibility. Such a revolution would be best achieved by alerting more people to the reality of exploitation, imperialism, inequality, racism, global capital, in the hope of inspiring them collectively to fight such things<sup>69</sup>. Without such a fight or at least the motivation for action, the idea of a ‘revolution in the mind’ remains little more than quasi-new age mysticism.

### **Cage’s Analysis of the Environment, Unemployment, the State of the World, and how to change it**

Well, of course, the whole involvement with power, with profit, and so forth have made it so that we have taught people to be bad. But by nature they are good. Do you see? So we must simply change our educational system.<sup>70</sup>

I think that there must be found a kind of common denominator between those who, like Mao, rely on power and those, like Fuller, who have faith in the goodness of material, of material having. You see, Fuller like Mao believes in the goodness of human nature, and he thinks that what makes people bad is the fact that they do not have what they need. If they had what they needed, they would be less selfish than they are when they do not have what they need.<sup>71</sup>

Few socialists would disagree with the above sentiments concerning need and selfishness (though their views on Mao would vary considerably).

Cage’s writings from the mid-1970s onwards begin to refer more frequently and explicitly to the environment and to the nature of global problems<sup>72</sup>:

Our leaders are concerned with the energy crisis. They assure us they will

"The Best Form of Government..."

find new sources of oil. Not only will Earth's reservoir of fossil fuels soon be exhausted: their continued use continues the ruin of the environment.<sup>73</sup>

William Brooks has drawn attention<sup>74</sup> to the importance of this text and the piece of music it accompanies in making particularly explicit some of Cage's political views. Cage concludes this text by saying:

I dedicate this work to the U.S.A., that it may become just another part of the world, no more, no less.<sup>75</sup>

The following year, Cage said more about his global view:

I don't think we need a president. What we need is a solution of our present problems, which are global, not national. The fact that we have different nations makes every nation want to have the atom bomb and destroy all the others, and that will destroy all of us.<sup>76</sup>

But how does Cage think such global problems might be solved, without the intervention of some sort of quasi-governmental global body? In the late-1980s, the then British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock criticised the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, when she delivered various new-found rhetoric so as to demonstrate concern about the environment<sup>77</sup>, but without backing up such rhetoric with plans for government intervention to try and stem the tide of environmental destruction. He rightly pointed out that her own laissez-faire attitude and policies were totally insufficient in this respect. A similar criticism might be made of Cage. His combination of individualistic criticism together with a refusal to join forces with others to express solidarity in mass protest, and general lack of the will to actually engage in concrete action related to those things he bemoaned, seems self-serving and thus highly convenient for an artist, absolving him of any responsibility other than towards their own work, as mentioned earlier. This is a luxury not afforded to many other people in the world. His writings from the late 1960s often mention the wrongness of the war in Vietnam<sup>78</sup>, but he was not prepared to play a part in the collective protests against the war which did play a significant part in changing public opinion.

Again conveniently, Cage manages to frame the question so that his own work becomes the focus of revolutionary change:

What can I as a composer do to bring about the revolution? Shall I give up working with trained musicians and go on from what I learned at Kalamazoo? Or shall I continue my efforts to make the symphony orchestra an instance of an improved society, and forget about those two hundred people in Michigan who don't know how to sing anyway?<sup>79</sup>

During the Reagan years, Cage made more explicit comments about American politics:

I'm not interested in the difference between communism and capitalism or between Democrats and Republicans. I think they are all impossible. And I

think the thing that's wrong about capitalist countries is that there's a marriage between industry and government, and that the government, like the Reagan government right now, is on the side of industry more than it is on the side of the consumers.

This is of course an absolutely true and potent statement, despite the continued presence of right-wing rhetoric to the contrary.

Reagan doesn't care whether you can buy the products or not. What he cares about is whether or not they're going to be manufactured. He doesn't like communism because it doesn't leave free enterprise open.<sup>80</sup>

But Cage doesn't seem to have any alternative strategy for curbing the power of free enterprise and greed, and conveniently sits on the fence as to how to consider political alternatives.

Industry is already supranational. Coca-Cola sees no boundaries to its commerce. So, we should study the ways of industry, in order to behave, ourselves, globally, as industry behaves. They do it out of greed. We should do it out of the desire to make the *house* we live in, which is the whole place, in good working order. It's now a kind of mess. The games that have been and are still being played have made it very, well, dirty. The environment hasn't been treated properly. It isn't ruined yet, but when you have a *lake* that can be set on fire, something is wrong.<sup>81</sup>

But how would our behaviour thus be like that of industry in this respect – surely it would be quite the opposite? And, as I intimated above, how is one to curb the destruction of the environment if not through regulation enacted by government?

[O]ur high degrees of unemployment that we now hear of – all the way from 9 percent unemployed to as high as 40 percent in Puerto Rico. I think in Detroit it's now 14 percent. If we change from seeing that as a threat to seeing that as an advance toward our proper goal, the whole thing could turn from negative to positive.<sup>82</sup>

In a society with full provisions for all people's needs, this comment would make sense. As it stands, the statement is crass and utterly contemptuous towards those unemployed individuals and families Cage mentions, who live in dire poverty and often hideous conditions. And that situation will remain without some effort to change the world, to make it *better*.

### **Cage's Late Political Thoughts**

In the last few years of his life, Cage seemed to become as acutely concerned about political and global issues as he had ever been, whilst at the same time exhibiting a certain disillusionment with his earlier naïve idealism. One late interview starts to place his views on art as an instrument for social change into some perspective:

"The Best Form of Government..."

I prefer to do what I'm doing for itself rather than to do what I'm doing for another reason. If I want to help, say, getting rid of AIDS, it would seem to me more effective to support the research than to change the music.<sup>83</sup>

Cage comments at various points about the emerging conflicts in the Gulf<sup>84</sup> and Yugoslavia, the latter within the context of his late mesostic 'Overpopulation and Art'.<sup>85</sup> Here one can find his characteristic views on unemployment:

that is for yoU  
to give to yourseLf  
    increAse  
of unemployemT  
    untIl we are all  
self-emplOyed self-taught  
self-goverNed  
    A way  
    Not just to say anarchy  
but to Do it (p.19)

the corruption of the rich:

we hAve  
the Next war  
mappED out for us  
to mAke  
the woRld  
safe for poverTy  
    viOlation  
    Violation  
of laws madE  
to pRotect the rich (p. 20)

homelessness, an account of a brutal eviction from a squat, a rare reference to patriarchy:

the necessity tO find new foms  
of liVing  
    nEw  
    foRms of living together  
to stoP the estrangement between us  
tO overcome  
    the Patriarchal thinking  
    the aUthoritarian structures  
and the coLdness (p. 23)

and once more a recurrent theme in his work which I mentioned earlier, the need to look at issues globally rather than nationally:

we hAve  
these pRoblems in common  
we can solve Them all best

Ian Pace

withOut thinking  
of the diVision  
of thE  
woRld  
into 153 seParate  
natiOns  
their seParate powers  
mortally destrUctive (p. 27)

Whilst not presenting any significant changes of perspective, the very intensity of this work might suggest Cage's attempt to come to terms with the contradictions in his earlier thinking in the face of a post-Cold war world in which imperialism and brutal wars continued to be on the rise.

### **Conclusion**

There are, as well as the misguided ideas cited in this paper, numerous instances of penetrating and important political ideas in Cage's work, such as his suggestion to prohibit advertising<sup>86</sup>, though with the rather dubious justification that it would be 'so that the poor wouldn't know what it was they were missing'. Cage sounds like most socialists when, in the context of quoting and praising Mao, he asks 'Where does the old ideology of the exploiting classes lie? It lies essentially in self-interest – the natural soil for the growing of capitalism'<sup>87</sup> or when he declares that 'The function of the governments (American and Puerto Rican) is to see to it that what industry wants is what happens.'<sup>88</sup>

Cage's comparison of some of the 'masterpieces of Western music' to 'monarchies and dictatorships'<sup>89</sup> resonates with more recent musical sociology, whilst his antipathy towards 'wholeness' or 'unity'<sup>90</sup> would accord with the thinking of Adorno ('the whole is the false'<sup>91</sup>).

A recent but as-yet published interview with the Marxist composer Richard Barrett contains a section which might be viewed as an indirect retort to Cage. The interview takes place between an invented interlocutor, Veronika Lenz (who is really Barrett himself) and Barrett.

Veronika Lenz: What about 'inner emigration' and silent protest? If we were all pacifists or Buddhists the world wouldn't have these problems.

Richard Barrett: No, I suppose it wouldn't. But do you have a strategy to convert everyone? If so it should be put into practice immediately. What we have to remember is that the choices available to us are simply not available to most people, people who are on the receiving end of the rapacity of multinationals or the guns and missiles of the US government and its proxies. You can't choose to be a pacifist if you can't afford to feed yourself and or you are under constant threat of lethal violence. I for one would love to see the ruling class persuaded peacefully to give up its wealth and weapons in order that people across the world could free of brutality, starvation and indignity. However it's obvious that the chances of that are precisely nil. Socialism isn't just a way of looking at the world, it's a

way of changing it.<sup>92</sup>

The Chartists, those who fought to abolish slavery, the suffragettes, the multitude of anti-colonial liberation movements, the gay men and women who resisted the Stonewall raid, and many others all changed the world and didn't, in my opinion, make things worse. Today resistance fighters in Iraq or in Palestine, to name just two examples, are attempting to do the same and just possibly stand some chance of success. What sort of alternative does Cage's political position offer them, who have no option but to fight some of the most powerful military machines in the world?

The ubiquitous forces of global capitalism face no threat from the ideas and non-action of Cage and his anarchist fellow-travellers. It is for this reason that Cage's form of anarchy was and remains a bankrupt ideology. The criticisms I have been making should be applied not only to Cage himself, but also some of Cage's gurus, as should be clear from the following spectacularly naïve-sounding quotation from 1967:

The problem, Fuller insists, is technological, specifically, to triple the effectiveness and to implement the distribution of the world's resources so that there will be enough to go around and that it will get around. At the beginning of this century, only 7 per cent of the world's peoples had what they needed; the rest were have-nots. Now nearly 47 per cent have. By 1972, Fuller says, it'll be 50-50. If we do not destroy ourselves as we continue changing, Fuller prophesies that, by the year 2000, everyone in the world will have what he needs. There will then be no rational reason for war. If, at that time, people want to hate one another, they may, but on an individual, rather than international, level..... A victory for humanity.<sup>93</sup>



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry David Thoreau – ‘Civil Disobedience’ (1849), in Thoreau – *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (London and New York: Penguin, 1983), p.385

<sup>2</sup> cited on <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/rreagandfirstinaugural.html> - accessed 31/1/06

<sup>3</sup> Thoreau, *op cit*, p.386

<sup>4</sup> Reagan, *op cit*

<sup>5</sup> Thoreau, *op cit*, p.386

<sup>6</sup> Reagan, *op cit*

<sup>7</sup> Other areas for future study also include the truth or otherwise of Cage’s early biography which he repeated many times, and the processes (including financial processes, in terms of funding of his projects) by which he established his reputation in the US and Europe. At the time of writing, Amy C. Beal’s book *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006) has just been published. Later articles will engage with this important work.

<sup>8</sup> John Cage – ‘Diary: How to Improve the World (You will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1968 (Revised)’ in *M: Writings ’67-’72* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), p.12. Throughout this article, I am working on the assumption that the opinions presented in the ‘Diary’ were ones Cage was happy to endorse, at least at some point in his life. This is of course an assumption that is open to challenge. Even if this is endorsement may not have been the case, nonetheless the fact of Cage’s having presented such opinions in such a manner renders them viable for critique, I believe.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in David Revill – *The Roaring Silence: John Cage – A Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), pp. 109-110.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Wolff and David Patterson – ‘Cage and Beyond: An Annotated Interview with Christian Wolff’, *Perspectives of New Music* Vol. 32 No. 2 (Summer 1994), pp. 54-87.

<sup>11</sup> Revill – *The Roaring Silence*, p. 220.

<sup>12</sup> Wolff and Patterson, *op cit*, p.81.

<sup>13</sup> Cage – ‘Overpopulation and Art’, in Marjorie Perloff & Charles Junkerman (eds) – *John Cage: Composed in America* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 14-38.

<sup>14</sup> Wolff and Patterson, *op cit*, p. 82

<sup>15</sup> See for example the chapter ‘Society and the Individual’ in Richard J. Evans – *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 161-190

<sup>16</sup> Cage – ‘Diary’, continued 1970-71, in *M*, p. 96. Cage’s remarks on private property obviously mitigate some possible right-wing interpretations of his work, but seem relatively superficial, as they are not generally backed up by any alternative proposals for ownership or how to bring private property to an end.

<sup>17</sup> William Brooks – ‘Music and Society’ in David Nicholls (ed) - *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 214-226

<sup>18</sup> David W. Bernstein – ‘John Cage and the “Aesthetic of Indifference”’ in Steven Johnson (ed) – *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp.113-133

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Cardew – *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (London: Latimer New Directions, 1974)

<sup>20</sup> As in various of the essays in Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (eds) - *Musik-Konzepte Sonderband - John Cage I / II* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1990)

<sup>21</sup> See for example, Theodor Adorno – ‘Music and New Music’ and ‘Vers une musique informelle’ in *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on modern music*, translated Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 249-322, and ‘Difficulties’, translated Susan H. Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, edited Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 644-679. Cage’s *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, a work which seemed to particularly interest Adorno, is also mentioned in the chapter ‘Coherence and Meaning’ in *Aesthetic Theory*, translated Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p. 154. There are some short scattered references to Cage in various of Adorno’s other writings.

<sup>22</sup> Cage – ‘Diary’, continued 1966, in *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), p. 60

<sup>23</sup> Interview by C.H. Waddington (1972) - cited in Richard Kostelanetz (ed) – *Conversing With Cage* (New York: Limelight, 1991), p. 266

<sup>24</sup> Cage does cite both Bakunin and Goldman in the preface to his long mesostic *Anarchy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), pp. v-x (snippets from Goldman in particular permeate the mesostic itself, also). A detailed investigation of the discrepancies between Cage's thought and that of either thinker would itself require at the very least a whole article. Suffice to say at the very least that Cage's disdain for protest and action (see below) is difficult if not impossible to reconcile with Goldman's actions on behalf in terms of inciting unemployed workers, distributing birth control literature, and attempting to oppose the draft, all of which Cage would have known about through reading her autobiography, which he describes having done in the preface to *Anarchy* (p. vi.). Similar points can be made with respect to Bakunin's thought and actions. Both are problematic figures whose ideas I ultimately find unconvincing; nonetheless their revolutionary anarchism should in my opinion be treated quite separately from that of Thoreau or Cage (notwithstanding the fact that Goldman cites Thoreau on various occasions).

<sup>25</sup> Interviewed by Robert Cordier (1973), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 258

<sup>26</sup> Thoreau – 'Civil Disobedience', p. 413

<sup>27</sup> Interviewed by Alcides Lanza (1971), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 274-5. Cage made a very similar point in the preface to *Anarchy*, in 1988 – 'We don't need government. We need utilities: air, water, energy, travel and communication means, food and shelter. We have no need for imaginary mountain ranges between separate nations. We can make tunnels through the real ones.' – Cage – *Anarchy*, p. v.

<sup>28</sup> Interviewed by Stephen Montague (1982), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 277

<sup>29</sup> Though Cage did support his parents and also left money in his will for the Cunningham Foundation. My thanks to Rob Haskins for pointing this out to me.

<sup>30</sup> Interviewed by Genevieve Marcus (1970), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 278

<sup>31</sup> Cage may have been thinking of Thoreau here, as when in the *Journal*, January 10, 1851, Thoreau says that 'Those slight labours which afford me a livelihood & by which I am serviceable to my contemporaries are as yet a pleasure to me and I am not often reminded that they are a necessity' (Henry David Thoreau – *A Year in Thoreau's Journal: 1851* (London and New York: Penguin, 1993), pp. 5-6). There are touches of bitterness in an entry from a month later, on February 18<sup>th</sup>, when Thoreau declares that 'The most practically important of all questions, it seems to me, is how shall I get my living', then that 'I should certainly prefer to suffer and die rather than be at the pains to get a living by the modes men propose' (ibid, p. 21)

<sup>32</sup> Cage, 'The Future of Music', in John Cage - *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), p. 184

<sup>33</sup> Interview by C.H. Waddington (1972) - cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 266

<sup>34</sup> In the earliest section of the 'Diary', Cage points out that 'War will not be group conflict: it'll be murder, pure and simple, individually conceived'. See 'Diary', 1965, in Cage – *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), p. 9

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/domestic-violence/?version=1> - accessed on 31/3/06. Statistics for domestic violence in the US vary widely depending on the organisation collecting them. Nonetheless, it is clearly a significant problem in both countries (and elsewhere).

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Macdonald – *The Turner Diaries* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 1996)

<sup>37</sup> For the context of successive US governments' relationship with the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein prior to the first Gulf War, see John Pilger – 'Paying the Price', in *The New Rulers of the World* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 48-100

<sup>38</sup> See John Cage & Joan Retallack – *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music* (Hanover, NH & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 43-48

<sup>39</sup> McVeigh's involvement in the movement may not have been provoked by the hatred of liberalism and multiculturalism that is a defining ideology of the far-right militias; nonetheless he was still happy to associate himself with a movement of people who did believe such things.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,17500,00.html> - accessed on 31/1/06

<sup>41</sup> For a hugely misguided apologia for McVeigh on this basis, which whitewashes the points I mentioned in note 39, see Gore Vidal – 'The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh', in *The Last Empire* (London: Abacus, 2002), pp. 270-302.

<sup>42</sup> Here and elsewhere I use the term 'liberal' to denote a species of political opinion which supports market-driven capitalism in most of its essentials whilst at the same time insisting on a large degree of individualist freedom in terms of sexual morality, lifestyle choices, and a certain amount of tolerance towards criminals and other societal outcasts.

<sup>43</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin – *Imperialism, the Highest State of Capitalism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 9-10, 125, 127-129, 152. Lenin (citing in particular Engels on the situation of the proletariat in Britain) focuses specifically upon the *upper stratum* of the working classes being ‘bribed’ in such a manner, ‘to strengthen opportunism among them [the workers] and to cause temporary decay in the working-class movement’ (p. 128). It is arguable that these processes reach more deeply into the working classes in contemporary Western society.

<sup>44</sup> There are of course those who call themselves ‘anarchists’ who believe in a similar thing, as did Mikhail Bakunin (see Bakunin – *Statism and Anarchy*, ed. Marshall Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 90-91. Bakunin rejected, however, the key transitional stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, placing him markedly at odds with Marxism (ibid, pp. 174-189). Cage himself was quite mute on the subject of decentralised authorities, save for his comments on ‘utilities’ mentioned earlier.

<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding the few token remarks on private property, as mentioned in n 14. Thoreau’s notorious comments about if he would ‘deny the authority of the State when it presents its tax-bill, it will soon take and waste all my property’, and ‘It will not be worth the while to accumulate property; that would be sure to go again’ (Thoreau - ‘Civil Disobedience’, pp. 400-401) hardly contradict the supposed rights of the individual with respect to their property, precisely what taxation threatens.

<sup>46</sup> The naïvely romantic comments of Thoreau about how an American (in comparison to the English or the Québécois) is ‘nearer to the primitive condition of man – Government lets him alone & he lets government alone’, in the Journal, August 19<sup>th</sup> 1951 (Thoreau – *Journal*, p. 162) echo with Cage’s backward-looking primitivism. Other 20<sup>th</sup>-century primitivist philosophies, including those of fascism and neo-fascism, should not be ignored in this context.

<sup>47</sup> Interviewed by Alcides Lanza (1971), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 274

<sup>48</sup> See [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hamas\\_Covenant](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hamas_Covenant), Article 32 - accessed 31/3/06

<sup>49</sup> Cage & Retallack, *op cit*, p. 51

<sup>50</sup> Interview in *Source* (1969), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 257

<sup>51</sup> John Cage – ‘Diary’, continued 1968 (Revised) ’ in *M*, p.12

<sup>52</sup> Interviewed by Alcides Lanza (1971), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 274

<sup>53</sup> Cage, ‘Diary’, continued 1968 (revised), in *M*, p. 20

<sup>54</sup> For example, in the ‘Diary’, continued 1973-82, in John Cage – *X: Writings ’79-’82* (Hanover, NH and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 162. However, the value of Cage’s thoughts on these matters are called radically into question by the later statement: ‘Perhaps a holocaust is necessary to bring us to our senses, hopefully not too complete a one.’ - Interviewed by Jonathan Brent (1981), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 265

<sup>55</sup> Cage – ‘The Future of Music’, in *Empty Words*, p. 183

<sup>56</sup> Cage – *M*, pp. xi-xii

<sup>57</sup> For example, in Cage – ‘Diary’, continued 1971-72, in *M*, p. 198, 201, 207, 216

<sup>58</sup> Interviewed by Alan Gillmor (1976), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, pp. 263-264

<sup>59</sup> Interviewed by Hans G. Helms (1972), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 262-263

<sup>60</sup> Interviewed by Hans G. Helms (1972), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 274

<sup>61</sup> Cage – ‘Foreword’, in *M*, p. xv

<sup>62</sup> Wolff & Patterson, *op cit*, p.79

<sup>63</sup> As contained in Clause 63 of the UK Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 – see [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1994/Ukpga\\_19940033\\_en\\_6.htm#mdiv63](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1994/Ukpga_19940033_en_6.htm#mdiv63) - accessed 31/3/06

<sup>64</sup> Cage – ‘The Future of Music’, in *Empty Words*, p. 183

<sup>65</sup> Interviewed by Hans G. Helms (1972), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 263

<sup>66</sup> Cage – *Anarchy*, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>67</sup> Cage – *A Year from Monday*, p. 158, cited in *Anarchy*, p. viii.

<sup>68</sup> Emma Goldman – Preface to *Anarchism and other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969), cited in Cage – *Anarchy*, p. viii. Cage’s later citation of Goldman’s comment ‘The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one’s self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one’s own characteristic qualities’ (Goldman – *Anarchism*, cited in Cage – *Anarchy*, p. viii) neglects to make clear the fact that this (admittedly utopian) comment of Goldman’s was made specifically in the context of women’s emancipation.

<sup>69</sup> Goldman’s preface deals with the difficulties of trying to communicate anarchist thought other than to those who are already converts. Whilst I believe her arguments were ultimately self-defeating for reasons she herself articulates, nonetheless it should be clear that she saw a revolution in consciousness as a prerequisite for

'direct action', rather than embodying the revolution itself. Little in Cage's thought leads me to believe that the 'revolution in the society' he describes constitutes anything more than a collective 'revolution from within'. This sort of position is only available to a middle-class liberal, for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

<sup>70</sup> Interviewed by Nikša Gligo (1972), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 264.

<sup>71</sup> Interviewed by C.H. Waddington (1972) - cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 267.

<sup>72</sup> Though one can find talk of these matters earlier, for example in the seemingly impassioned statement 'We've poisoned our food, polluted our air and water, killed birds and cattle, eliminated forest, impoverished, eroded the earth. We're unselfish, skilful: we include in our acts to perform – we've had a rehearsal – the last one.', in Cage - 'Diary', 1965, in *A Year from Monday*, p. 18

<sup>73</sup> Cage – 'Preface to "Lecture on the Weather"', in *Empty Words*, p. 4

<sup>74</sup> Brooks, in Nicholls, *op cit*, pp. 214-218

<sup>75</sup> Cage – 'Preface to "Lecture on the Weather"', p. 5

<sup>76</sup> Interviewed by Tom Darter (1982), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 280

<sup>77</sup> Thatcher's speech to the 1988 Conservative Party Conference, in which she began making the environment into an issue, can be found at <http://www.margarethatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=107352> - accessed 31/3/06. For Kinnock's comments, see Alan Travis – 'Kinnock attacks on green issue', *The Guardian*, November 15 1988, and Patrick Wintour – 'Labour drive to woo the Democrat voters: Attack on Government extended to include quality of life', *The Guardian*, November 17 1988.

<sup>78</sup> Cage – 'Diary', continued 1970-1971, in *M*, pp. 105-106

<sup>79</sup> Cage, *M*, p. xv

<sup>80</sup> Interviewed by Tom Darter (1982), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 279-80

<sup>81</sup> Interviewed by Sean Bronzell and Ann Suchomski (1983), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 281

<sup>82</sup> Interviewed by Sean Bronzell and Ann Suchomski (1983), cited in Kostelanetz, *op cit*, p. 283

<sup>83</sup> "Taking Chances: John Cage and Laurie Anderson [in conversation]," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Summer, 1992), p.59, cited in Wolff and Patterson, *op cit*, p. 87 n.13

<sup>84</sup> Cage & Retallack, *op cit*, pp.43-48

<sup>85</sup> Cage - 'Overpopulation and Art', pp. 14-38

<sup>86</sup> Cage - 'Diary', continued 1968 (revised), in *M*, p. 13

<sup>87</sup> Cage - 'Diary', continued 1971-1972, in *M*, p. 204

<sup>88</sup> Cage - 'Diary', continued 1973-1982, in *X*, p. 156

<sup>89</sup> Cage – 'The Future of Music', in *Empty Words*, p. 183

<sup>90</sup> Kostelanetz – *Conversing with Cage*, p. 258

<sup>91</sup> Adorno's inversion of Hegel is in his *Minima Moralia*, translated E. F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 50

<sup>92</sup> Richard Barrett – *Unasked Questions: An Interview with Veronika Lenz*, obtained privately from the author.

Interestingly, some of Barrett's views expressed in this interview and his programme note for the orchestral work *NO: Resistance and Vision* are quite similar to those of Cage on the notion of certain use of the orchestra presenting a model for a better society.

<sup>93</sup> Cage – 'McLuhan's Influence' (1967), in Richard Kostelanetz (ed) – *John Cage: An Anthology* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), p. 171.

# Peniel

Keith Eisenbrey

“. . . for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

Genesis 32:30b

## Part 1:

### Jesus Christ Made Seattle Under Protest

Christopher DeLaurenti - *N30: Live at the WTO Protest November 30, 1999*

Imagine a rectangular plane. The corners point cardinally: north and south, east and west. Hold the northwest edge level. Give the plane a twist at the southeast end, the south corner dipping down, the east corner lifting up. Ever so slightly, do exactly the opposite twist on the northwest edge, the west corner up a smidgen, the north corner down a tidge. Pook up a tiny crease at the midpoint of the northeast side, a subtle ridge running down hill from northeast to southwest.

Stand in the triangular open space at the twisted and pooked up plane's south corner, cobbled paving buckled and creased by time and sloppy landfill. A pergola of wrought iron and a massive totem pole. On the old maps Piner's Point, now Pioneer Square, the heart of Gold Rush Seattle. Tourism central. In the far corner a Starbucks in the storefront of an old stone building.

Walk east, up Profanity Hill, along Yesler Way from 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Cross the park at the southeast facade of the county courthouse. A plaque here commemorates the Battle of Seattle - the first one - a lopsided 1856 skirmish between local Indians (upset with the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the newcomers), the settlers (population ca. 300), and cannon from the sloop Decatur. Blood was spilled, lives were lost, trials were held and hangings followed. It was not one of our finer moments.

From 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue continue straight up Jefferson Street to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and turn left. The streets progress mnemonically to the northwest - Jesus Christ Made Seattle Under Protest: Jefferson, James, Cherry, Columbia, Marion, Madison, Spring, Seneca, University, Union, Pike, Pine. On the right between James and Cherry is the county jail, its footprint a fat swastika. Madison is the highpoint of our walk, the pooked up ridge. Here ran the cable car line in a straight shot from (steeply down on the left) Elliott Bay to (steeply up hill and down dale to the right) Lake Washington. Here was the Indian trail from always, straight as a plumb line from water's edge to water's edge.

Continue northwest past the library (it was the old one in the WTO year, not yet Koolhaas's stack of glass books) gently downhill into the shopping district at the north corner, the protest end of the mnemonic. The new-furbished, elegant, stone-paved triangular open space of Westlake - a plaza graced by a square stone arch and rectilinear

fountain, a mall and a monorail stop. A Starbucks occupies a triangular building. Here are hotels, a convention center, and myriad swanky shops. Here, for several blocks around, the inclines are gentle and inviting rather than steep and scary. Here was, more or less, the gathering ground, during the week after Thanksgiving, 1999, for the events known, depending on whom you talk to, as the World Trade Organization Convention (or Protest) (or Riot), the Battle of Seattle (the second one), or N30.

Turn left along Pine Street, gently up, gently down, to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. From here Pine drops precipitously into the Public Market, a multi-level maze of ramps, staircases, grocery stalls and craftware shops pasted with improvised abandon onto the side of the bluff above the waterfront. Turn left and walk southeast along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue in reverse mnemonic - Protest Under Seattle Made Christ (things get messed up down here, you can't come to Jesus walking southeast on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue) back once again to Pioneer Square, nee Piner's Point.

I was in town during the 1999 WTO Convention in Seattle, but had the week off. We paid some heed to the goings-on by radio, but mostly I kept well away from downtown. We attended a concert at Benaroya Hall that Thursday evening. The streets were unnaturally quiet and vacant.

I am not, at root, antipathetic to the sorts of issues that drive others to participate in street protests, but am enjoined from them by a visceral horror of mass activity in general. Perhaps I read *Barnaby Rudge* at a particularly impressionable age. Perhaps a deep-seated perversity makes it difficult for me to feel un-alienated from large groups. I distrust the collective will in situations where the righteous purposes of individuals are apt, under pressure, to be converted, subverted, and diverted into irreconcilable conflict, and to degenerate en masse into acts of violence for violence's sake. Is not, I ask myself, a march of nonviolent protestors at bottom just a poorly equipped, poorly trained army? Is not, I wonder, the stubborn occupation of a street a blatant act of social violence?

But to the composer Christopher DeLaurenti, a city dweller with a predilection for the sounds of his urban environment, a city dweller whose quest is unlike that of those phonographers who travel great distances into wilderness to leave behind the sounds of us and our civilizing machinery in order to record the sounds of pristine nature - its waterfalls, ocean waves, and sempiternal tree-frogs - a city dweller whose quest is rather to enter into the unplanned, uncharted, anonymous, un-encapsulate, heterogeneous maelstrom - the spark point at the locus of the doings of us within time and the results of those doings, phenomena and epiphenomena, a city dweller whose quest is to enter, to move, to participate, and, while swept up in the deluge of social action in progress, to record whatever slice of sound and fury his DAT might catch - to the city dweller Christopher DeLaurenti, the events of November 30, 1999, presented an opportunity to capture for posterity, in glorious digital audio, the sounds of a massive, politically loaded confrontation of people at a vergent node in the long rush of history, to gather the noise of the throng, moving his body, moving our ears in a sound-scape of night-sticks, pepper spray, rubber bullets, tear gas, and police, a single ear amidst the infinite maelstrom of possible ears, aiming his pin-hole camera microphones to snap the tornado.

Two aspects dominate the sensuous rhetoric of the composition N30. First, the peculiar reverberant envelope of the streetscape effects an extreme aural foreshortening, transfiguring loud and quiet into a surreal image of near and far, perceived as an oddly

deep but narrow focus that locates the listener coercively into place. The second aspect is a tri-skeined matrix of the varied intentions we attribute to the agents that produce the sounds – a direct and primitive reading of the gut difference in our response to what or how much was or wasn't meant by the noise makers on the street. First among these skeins, permeating the sound not as background but throughout as ground and basis, is a rich puttanesca of sounds made without specific personal intention, accidentally, incidentally, the firing of tear-gas canisters, the shuffle of footsteps and the grumbling of automobile engines, the incidental sibilance of bodies moving in close proximity and the sick thud of baton against torso, streetmotor distantshout pavementhiss mooshed together. Arising from this, and in intimate interaction with its roaring un-intent, are sounds perceived as made for the sake of sound: the incessant drumming, sudden sirens, blasting air horns. Rooted in these, and sharing their particular audio focal plane, are lexically loaded signals, instructions, advice, explanations, shouts of challenge and defiance, curses.

And the composition is wrapped in intentions of its own, as well. Behold N30's bright red compact disk in all its trappings of red folded paper, blue-taped, text-style almost stinking of photocopied headlines and newsprint, and it is clear that provocation is among Christopher's conscious aims. Catalyzed by this object, robed in its rebellious splendor, it is clearly hoped that further rebellion will ensue. But Christopher is a stronger phono-journalist than he is a phono-propagandist, and partisan though he may be, he is honest and clear-sighted enough to reveal what a propagandist would never allow: the participants subverting themselves in the passionate ridiculousness of their frenzied commitment, the absurdity, in this strictly audio medium, of such chanted refrains as "the whole world is watching the whole world is watching" or "this is what democracy looks like", and the irony in the image of crowds of the civilly disobedient meekly obeying a call by their leaders to "stay at this intersection" or to move "one block down".

But the goal of partisan incitement is surely quixotic. We hear these sounds, we imbibe the spirituous liquors of protest, but we cannot grasp the content of that protest. We hear scripted chants, code words, language as honed and finessed as any high level diplomatic note. But "fair trade not free trade fair trade not free trade" requires the context of a specific social, historical, and political discourse if it is to be a slogan we can stand to. Fair is good and free is good, why can't we be for fair free trade? There is no nuance in the mass. Any possible political content fades into the realm of raw power, in all its convoluted glory, resolving ultimately into a narrative of violent expression violently repressed: the unconscious, irrational, chaotic, Dionysian, heaped and hurkingteemingmoiling Urmacht of human bodies rising against the focused, the methodical, the rational, the civilized, Apollonian, the subdued subduing, subsuming all and each into the roles they have been prepared for, the role for which they prepare themselves. But N30 also grasps at an oracular power – sublime and sacred. It assays to tell anarchy, to narrate the chaos of the collective unconscious in pursuit of power, and so to illuminate the desire that moves the mass, the desire of the multitude for intimate confrontation with that which subdues, with the civilizing, paternal, seductive force.

The police in their iconic black masks and riot gear were widely identified in the popular press as stand-ins for that desperate, emasculated Apollo, Darth Vader, light saber replaced by a fetish dream of riot sticks, each one freakishly unique. If the police are Apollo, the protesters are at once the celebrants and embodiment of the oracle. As

did Arieka, the hero of *The Double Tongue*, William Golding's novel of the last Pythia of Delphi, they submit to a celebratory preparation. We hear the bullhorned voices of those who have put themselves in charge, welcoming, organizing, and arranging them like wedding coordinators bedecking and instructing giddy bridesmaids. And the fate of this army of ingenues is identical with Arieka's: to descend into the Delphic temple, to chew the leaves and ingest the mythdrug, to call forth the powers upon herself and to be raped by the raping God Apollo, so that her power, her identity as Pythia will awaken, rebirthing the oracle at the center of the world. There is a sexy frenzy to this violence, as the police rise to fulfill the role the mob calls them to, as the mob rises to fulfill the role the police call them to, as mob and police join in ecstatic call and response: "I'm not your fucking enemy man" "I'm out here doing my job" "I'm not your fucking enemy man" "Doing my job".

Among the end spaces of *N30* drones a circle of the cackle of the ancients, the old ones, interior, the womb into which Apollo's seed has been planted, protective, cocoonal, alchemical, canting almost wailing almost whining in long breathed chorus a commentary of voice, personhood, chanting into the violence its horror and complicity, a keening of consciences subsumed, appropriated, un-named, dis-individuated, a blank mass.

We are there with them, for they are us. We are there with them, for the ear, the microphone, is the avatar of ourselves among them, and with them we plunge again into the maelstrom. The last word is given to a shouted chant, a formula of power, "the people are the power the people are the power the people are the power": us confronting ourselves with a challenge of and to our own power, blunt and accusing as the final frames of *The 400 Blows*.

Deep down, though, the challenge, the invitation to our souls, is profoundly seductive: Plunge with me. Be, with me, Arieka. Be, with me, the Pythia and Apollo. Be, with me, the spark point.

**Part 2:**

**In The Beginning When God Created the Heavens and the Earth**

Neal Meyer - *Gradus for Fux, Tesla, and Milo the Wrestler*

Hop on a 73 JACKSON PK. You can catch it across 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from Benaroya Hall. You'll turn north from northwest at the heart of the protest and bumble through the Regrade onto Eastlake, which will bring you across the thin part of Lake Union on University Bridge. You'll have to sidestep through the U District. At Cowen Park, you'll finally straighten out onto 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. (it used to be Maple Leaf Road further up) and rise due north up onto one of the ridges that billow to the city limits. As you approach the ridgetop you'll cross Lake City Way, a state highway that runs around the north end of Lake Washington. Here it cuts across 15<sup>th</sup> caterwampus, heading off from the top of the rise into a ravine to the northeast. Your bus will continue due north along 15<sup>th</sup> into Maple Leaf proper. Get off at N.E. 88<sup>th</sup> Street and walk east, almost down to the caterwampus highway, and there's my house on the left, bright blue even in the dark. Across the street are duplexes and an older apartment building. Downhill are condos and a gas station (on the site of a former speakeasy that was a Chinese restaurant at the time we moved in, long since burned spectacularly to the ground). Beyond, on the other side of the incipient ravine, past the hidden trailer court, is Ravenna Avenue, the old, pre-highway route north, winding, embracing the hillside.

Come on in - we all mostly use the driveway door - and follow me through the kitchen. Do-si-do around the end of the piano into the living room. Set yourself down (you make the place look so untidy) in the rocking chair under the windows. I'll get the recording started and sit in a neighboring chair. In front of us, under the piano, you'll see stashed a stereo speaker and plastic bins full of scores. A microphone peeps in at the bend. At the far end of the piano the door we entered exits back to the kitchen. Immediately to the right of the door is the clavichord (built from a kit back when I assumed I would never be able to afford a space big enough to have a piano and soundproof enough to allow me to play it). On its bench (a second-hand, partly repaired vanity seat) sits the recording device (a bright red flashdisk recorder, of appeal to guitarist gearheads). At the tuning peg end of the clavichord an open door peeks into my wife's study - a small room with windows on three sides (formerly the nursery, hence the growth chart pinned to the door). Immediately on our right is the porch door, and in my blue chair (wrecked by cats) is me, sipping ice-water. Between us is a floor-lamp and in the corner you in your rocking chair. Behind us and to the left, windows to porch and street, respectively, just beyond which the gas station and state highway aforementioned. Under the street windows is a wooden cabinet full of cassette tapes. Next, a bookshelf, and in the far corner the other

speaker. On the opposite wall another, taller, bookshelf, the bedroom door, and finally the business end of the piano, Neal Meyer presiding.

For five years now, on a more or less weekly or bi-weekly basis, Neal has been sitting thus at the piano in my living room with the avowed intent, under the scorename *Gradus for Tesla, Fux, and Milo the Wrestler* (which kind of rhymes, as Gavin Borchert quipped), of learning to play the piano by a unique and methodical means: one combination of keys at a time. Restricting himself to exciting the strings by operation of the keyboard and pedals only, he is cycling through all the possible combinations in improvised sessions of about 30 minutes each, starting with the lowest A-natural, followed by a session on the second A-natural, then one on those two together, and so on.

As for the dedicatees of the title, Fux appears, of course, as author of *Gradus ad Parnassum*, in recognition of the step by step methodism of its program. Locally, Parnassus is a coffee shop deep in the basement of the UW Art Building frequented by students from the nearby School of Music. The steps to Parnassus lead unequivocally downward. The pertinent Tesla anecdote concerns the discovery of the inventor striking a bridge with a hammer at carefully timed intervals. He was stopped before he could bring it crashing down. (One of our local bridges was, in the middle of the last century, not so fortunate. A strong wind caused an accumulating resonance to plunge it into the Tacoma Narrows. It makes a spectacular film.) Milo the Wrestler is a proverbial figure who would, every day, lift a calf so that as the calf grew so too would Milo's strength, to the point where he could lift the full grown bull. Don't try this at home.

Neal had started this project once before, when he was living in San Diego in the late 1980s. He recorded a dozen or so sessions on a big piano in a church, late at night. During the current iteration, aside from the private events in my living room, we have had as visitors Stu Dempster, Steve Fisk, and Ben Boretz. There have been two public snapshots for the Seattle Composers' Salon (an open-mic night held at Soundbridge, an oddly-hued, low-ceilinged performance area in the back of the Seattle Symphony's education exhibit space), one lengthy assay at Brechemin Auditorium (a recital hall in the UW School of Music), and another at Gallery 1412 (a private performance space in a row of storefronts in the hills to the west of downtown). As of this writing we have recorded more than 100 sessions. Neal is approaching the advent of the seventh A.

It has been said that a work of art never measures up to the perfection of its idea. *Gradus* is an extreme celebration of that underlying quixosis. When we first began, I didn't think too much about the scope of the project, as Neal had designed it, beyond having a vague notion that it was huge and could not be finished. Upon reflection, however (and there has been ample time for reflection), I realized that not only could the project never be completed, it could never be truly begun. For, as yet, Neal has made no sound that could, statistically, determinately, be "the piece" as conceived. The total number of combinations of the 88 keys of the piano is equivalent to the quantity expressed in base two by 88 ones. That works out, using the rough calculus available on a spreadsheet, to approximately  $3.1 \times 10^{26}$  combinations. Check my math, but it seems to me that even were every human living today to work on the project for the entirety of their lives, and if the time allowed for each session were reduced to the smallest possible span of audibility, we would still get no further into the work as a whole in the time this planet has left before the sun swallows it up, than, comparatively, would be necessary to allow for the first motor

neuron signal to exit the brain en route to the arms to lift the hands to wipe the brow prior to launching into a complete performance of Satie's *Vexations*. Yikes!

We are engaged in an activity doomed on its face. The gap between conception and possibility is of a super-cosmic order of magnitude. This gap is a conceptual silence of a particular sort: no matter how many notes are played, no matter how loud one plays, if one is playing *Gradus*, one can do nothing to break the silence. It is immovable. It is a never silence, a nowhere silence. It is a slate not just blank but permanently so. It springs from immensity, the sound we cannot make, the silence of what can not be begun. This is not Cage's fecund silence, material and static, the raucus unstoppable noise of being, the din even in death of the devouring worm. No, this silence is a void, a vacuum complete and perfect.

Perhaps another, more appropriate dedicatee would have been that other wrestler, Jacob, struggling with the infinite through the night. Fux, after all, was a practical man teaching a practical skill, Tesla with his hammer would eventually have been able to take down that bridge, and Milo's calf would stop growing at some point, completing the wrestler's strength. But here, before we can begin, still sits Neal, and here still sit I, and from within the silence of the conception a conversation has arisen between Neal at the keyboard, the piano in my living room, and me in my blue chair, each delighting in the sensual epiphenomenon of Neal's strife with immensity.

During the first sessions, rumbling on those oh so low As at the keyboard's bottom end, the room was full of big sound, a rich sunbath of harmonics, clamor hammers glancing and reglancing glanced and reglanced strings, the impetus keystrokes nearly indiscernible, pale palimpsests amid full rolling fortissimic pedal-to-the metal onslaughts, swarming divisions of hyperthrottle overtones, sideslipping undertones, splattered fundamentals, flooding the room in Tarantinoid bloodbaths of acoustic mayhem. I didn't fear for life or hearing, but I certainly harbored a more specifically Teslaic anxiety about string breakage, a fault to which my piano is prone.

As the years have passed, as our sense of participating in these sessions has deepened, and as Neal's transparency as a pianist has blossomed, the tones have spread thin, allowing long pauses, five, ten minutes or more. My living room is not a quiet space. Traffic noise and helicopter flybys, the boys getting up to use the bathroom, the tea kettle whistling, all these and more leak willy-nilly into the room. As, over the course of these years, the character of the sessions has changed from thick to sparse, as Neal has eased from flinging his sound into the street to helping the street permeate our space, as he has let the sonorous rhetoric of house and traffic hum, his fellow in the enterprise, speak in large periods, and as our hearing traces the minute, particular, interwoven blooming of tones, the abstract conceptual silence at the heart of *Gradus* is vanishing into the concrete depth of our own soundworld. We bask in wonder of just how much is possible of vastness in the void between that lowest A and the sixth A. Erstwhile tiny gaps expand in our awareness to quantum leaps: from playing one note to playing two, and from, after four or five, to playing again just one. The minutest and subtlest shadings among tones are amplified into dramatic shifts of planetmass, ecstatic liberations from mid-oceanic trenches, leaps from mountain tops, abysmal plunges.

Jacob wrestled with the infinite, and knowing finally that his struggle was futile, asked the blessing of his combatant. Instead he was re-named, touched in the thigh,

Peniel

hobbled, his mortal nature accentuated, doubled. As we unfold into the knowledge of our own mortality, and learn to accept complicity for our own space, the impossible magnitude of powers we have joined and the feeling finally in our bones that the attempt to fill that space with sound will, in the end, merely deafen us, we glean something of the knowledge of Jacob and Arieka: the infinite does not wrestle lightly, and like Arieka, and like Jacob, we can emerge, but soul-scathed.

October 2006

*Thanks to Steve Kennedy for noting the riot-stick fetish, and to my wife Karen for the herculean task of keeping my prose within earshot of the English language.*

## Excerpts from a Conversation between Robert Morris and David Mott<sup>1</sup>

(Toronto, March 23, 2005)

RM: I thought we might begin with the piece that you just played at the Pangaea Restaurant in downtown Toronto.

DM: It was for a course tasting menu at Pangaea complete with wine and all kinds of things. I wrote 14 compositions, which I put under the rubric of “the music of fragrance and taste.” I tried to create music that would mirror— rather than complement— the sensations of flavors and aromas of fine food. It was an interesting project. I’ve learned whole lot of things from it.

RM: This was a special event that gourmets go to?

DM: Yes, and it was by some accounts fairly pricey, although, as these things go, I think it was quite reasonable in terms of cost for each person. It is an event you’d have to think seriously about doing because it does cost a fair amount of money.

RM: How did the restaurant advertise this?

DM: We had a grant from the Ontario Arts Council, which meant I had a publicist and that kind of thing.

Publicizing a piece like this— when you do something that no one has done before— leads to some interesting issues. I find it very difficult to break through the consciousness of people, and have it appear on their “page,” so to speak, so that people are aware of, know about, and are interested in it. I thought it would be a no-brainer in terms of the audience. But it was a struggle at first. A week before, only 12 people had signed up, and we had some serious phone conversations about whether or not this was going to work.

RM: If this happened without music, would there be a way the restaurant could publicize it?

DM: The restaurant has a mailing list, which I made use of.

RM: So the difference between an ordinary tasting session and this was that you were intrinsically involved. Was the nature of music being added a problem?

DM: I think so. I’ve had this experience before. I tend to play, for example, with unusual ensembles. *The Erosonic Duo*, which played this performance, consists of concert accordion and baritone saxophone. And I’ll never forget the first review. The Duo’s first performance, a little over ten years ago, was in Ottawa. The reviewer spent half the review

talking about— complaining really— saying: “Are you kidding? Baritone saxophone and accordion? I have to go and review this? It’s so esoteric and so strange...I really have no interest.” And he’s complaining, complaining, complaining, but then says: “OK, so I’ve never heard these guys before— it was amazing.” He loved it. There seems to be something that happens when you take music, an artistic expression, or something of that order, into public consciousness. Public consciousness is not ready to receive it. You have to break through the inertia that is there to create an awareness or consciousness of what is possible. In the case of the Pangaea piece, I knew we really would have to work hard. It was terrible. I’ve never had to hustle for an audience so badly in all of my life. I was busy calling my friends and saying, “What do you think? Would you do this?” An hour later calling back, “Maybe your mother would like to come too?” I did get somebody’s mother to come and she loved it. Everybody there had a wonderful time. There were all kinds of extraordinary comments. Of course, it’s impossible with a sizable audience to precisely time the performance of the music with the people’s eating. Some people are going to eat faster than others and not everyone gets served at the same time. One person said— really a whole table of people said— that when the music had stopped before they finished that course, the flavor of the food changed.

RM: Now, how was this set up? When a course was served, you’d play a piece that would go with it?

DM: Yes. I had fourteen pieces. Actually, we played one piece, “Circles, Spirals and Spins,” from our concert repertoire. It was chosen to go with a petitflore of absinthe, a cube of absinthe. But, the rest of the music was composed for this event, seven of which were especially composed for the flavors of the seven courses. To start the whole evening I composed a prelude, and in between each course, as the food was being run to the tables, I had interludes.

I discovered from talking with Peter Geary who is the culinor (you didn’t meet him last night), and with Martin Kouprrie, the chef, that as people consume a multi-course dinner they tend to slow down. They’re hungry at first, so they eat quickly. And of course, appetizer courses are small things. Then you get to the main event, and people tend to slow down and linger a bit. As they get filled up, the pace slows. So I planned two things. I expanded the tempi as the evening went on so that things got slower in the pieces that went with the courses. But, I sped up the tempi of the interludes because wanted to build the anticipation for the next course. I had to sort of musically work off the last course so that people could be ready for the next one.

RM: So your music was about the stomach?

DM: Yes, exactly.

RM: Now, in each of these courses you knew what the ingredients were?

DM: Yes.

RM: And had you tasted the food before?

DM: That’s interesting. No.

RM: So you imagined?

DM: I imagined. I knew what the ingredients were going to be.

RM: You're a good cook and you're used to...

DM: I'm used to working with ingredients and I love to cook. I also know the chef and the restaurant very well. So it wasn't that hard. You and I do this with sound, right? We imagine what a performer is going to do with a particular piece.

RM: Was the food also experimental for the chef?

DM: Yes. It's great. He told me a couple of days before the event: "I just tried a new recipe yesterday, it's great, I'm really happy with it." So he was pushing the parameters of his experience as well. Not only that, but when we would get together to decide on the menu, he would be making drawings of how he wanted the food to be presented. For instance, the day of the event, I'm in the kitchen of the restaurant because there's a CBC radio interview broadcast previewing the event, and I've got a little boom box in there since I wanted to hear how the interview had been edited. And there in the back, the chef's with a whole bunch of kitchen staff are equipped with sand paper. The chef had made some beautiful wooden trays the night before for the presentation of the soup course, which is a triptych of three different soups with a glass of sake. The chef designed the trays so the soups would be arrayed in a particular way, hanging through the boards. So they're in the back at 5:00 p.m.— it's a 7 o'clock event— sanding these boards. Although we knew it was possible, the whole event was a stretch for all of us.

RM: There are certain categories of flavors in various cuisines, like in Chinese cooking there are four flavors— maybe more, I'm not sure. Certain cuisines use spices of certain kinds and others don't use them much or at all. Now, did you have an idea of mapping from the ingredients, and maybe by way of a theory of those ingredients, to the composition? Or, was it rather a direct taste connection? That is, you just noticed this sound sounds like that taste tastes and therefore I'll make the connection from the taste to the sound.

DM: One thing; we worked it out so that the flavors for the most part increasingly got darker.

RM: What do you mean by that?

DM: Well, the last course was dark rich chocolate. It doesn't get darker than that. Before that there was a course of wild game, with wild mushrooms and shallots. Before that was seafood, etc. As a result, there was a visual progression to dark and a taste progression from lighter flavors to heavier flavors. And I did consider that in the pre-compositional planning. It led to some interesting issues because, for one thing, the texture and the register of the music and the range that the music is going to cover has to, I feel, carefully mirror what is in the sensation of the aroma and flavor.

I did follow the progression of flavors. But, I also worked against it in the interludes to cleanse the palate. And there was one special course; we called it an intermezzo, of

tangerine and champagne sorbet. For that course I wrote a piece called “Arctic Sun.” It has very high sorts of clustery textures, really icy sonorities, in the accordion. The baritone saxophone stays in mid-range and a little bit lower. The piece carries through what was happening previously and anticipates what is going to happen. I had to try to balance yet also have continuity, clean out what people had experienced previously as you would with a sorbet.

RM: I’m trying to understand whether this is about synesthesia.

DM: Yes.

RM: And it’s also about something Bobbi<sup>2</sup> said last night, about being attentive to taste in a way you normally aren’t— as a gourmet is. Most of us enjoy a meal but don’t savor it or follow through our sensations on each bite and how that changes. If you like wine, for instance, there is an initial rush of taste and flavor and different stages in this, and what happens after the first....

DM: Sounds like what audiences do with music.

RM: Yes, except that I don’t think they do. I think that we’d *like* them to do that.

Anyway, there are two issues that come up. One of them is addressed by the diversity in this meal, and that’s accommodation. When taste becomes dulled because your taste buds— your mechanism for sensory perception— become sated. So the first wine sip is different than those afterward. The old joke is that you should serve a good wine first and then crap afterwards because no one can taste it.

I’m interested in the question of how music and food would go together in this capacity. Maybe the accommodation rates are very different. Maybe food accommodates much quicker than sound does. And would that depend on the listener and his or her intention?

DM: Yes, there are a number of issues there. One of the things I did from time to time was use reiterative phrases. I felt the repetition was especially important because if one’s attention is expanded and splits somewhat, then music has passed at too great a rate of change, for example, and it won’t be appreciated. It would be like having a course in which every bite would have a different flavor. At some point you wouldn’t be able to keep up with it. It would be information overload. And I was quite concerned about overloading the amount of musical information that I was providing.

RM: This has been a theme in many of your pieces. I have heard you talk many times about this question. In fact, your piece “Mega” for baritone saxophone that you wrote years ago [1979] had one draft that was very complicated and you felt you had to simplify it or even throw it out and write music that more truly articulated the information change you intended.

DM: Right.

RM: So you feel that’s been true of your other pieces, too?

DM: I do. There seems to be something of great importance in how we take in

information, how we process that information, and how it becomes meaningful. But, you also have to understand that the context of my background— of my long involvement with new music and world musics and everything else— is jazz. One of the major features of jazz is the riff and its repetitive nature. The way a riff works is— as you and I are well aware— there is a repetition of material while other things are changing at the same time. You perceive a resistance of stability— something that is reiterative while other things are changing. For instance, probably the simplest riff of all time is C Jam Blues where you have the harmonic insertion of blues changes and you have five ones occurring within the melody. Very, very simple. It seems to work as a potent statement because of that. With food, I really felt— I tried to judge— how much repetition was needed and where it went, how much change in some structured fashion would relate to the whole experience of taking in the synesthesia you mentioned and what that would mean. I don't know that I'm being very clear about this. I think I was working from a pretty intuitive basis but trying to anticipate it cognitively.

RM: I was interested in this question because I think for you there is a sort of a universal limit as to how much information we can take in, and beyond that point we stop being attentive to details.

DM: That's right. I'm very concerned about that. But, you know, on the other hand...

RM: ...You are like me, very fast— we have similar metabolisms. I mean, any jazz musician is going to need that quickness in order to play be-bop for instance.

DM: I'd agree.

RM: And yet— you're saying at the same time— even though you can process and react to things extremely quickly, you still feel the basic changes have to be slow enough so they can register.

DM: Yes, I would agree with that entirely. And it also depends on what you want to change. I think I remember you saying— or at least I credit you with this— that it's not wise to represent every musical parameter at the same level of complexity.

RM: Right.

DM: I've followed that principle a lot and I think it's true. For example, in "Mega" there are all kinds of timbre changes. On the other hand, it's a very simple tetrachordal pitch set piece. There's not much that happens there. Some phrases are reiterative, and in other cases, they move on. This then allows the listener to focus on the *sound* of the baritone sax. "Mega" was a major breakthrough piece for me since I realized that to really focus in on timbre, I had to simplify or reduce the amount of material that was coming in other ways. Of course, there are also rhythmic interests in that particular piece.

RM: There were some other aspects to "Mega" that spoke to me. Because I remember coming to your house— maybe it was just before you had written this piece— and you were very excited about Chinese, old fashioned, or maybe I should say classical, music played on the chin.

DM: Yes, yes.

RM: That instrument is one in which every note has many, many different tone productions plus gestures that go with each production. There is a tremendous choreographic repertoire of visual and timbral effects. I felt that in “Mega” you had translated that experience of the chin into the saxophone with all the wonderful sounds you can make with a baritone. (Which, by the way, is one of the things many people don’t realize about a baritone— that it has more possibilities than a higher sax. Just like the double bass has more timbre possibilities than a violin.)

DM: Exactly.

RM: On the question of the timbres moving more quickly than pitch sets, when we play instruments in classical concert music, especially the classical saxophone player, the sound ideal is total uniformity of timbre. You know, no differences from one note to another except the register; like the piano. Even so, it seems to me in “Mega” that you have timbre differences but they’re not going by that quickly. The timbral changes are alternating at the speed that, let’s say, normally chord changes would go by. Of course, they are much faster than at the speed they would normally occur in a classical performance on saxophone.

DM: There are two ways to control an instrument as I see it. One is what I consider to be the instrumental tradition, the other is the vocal tradition. When I say vocal tradition I’m referring to the vernacular musics rather than operatic traditions. Because, that use of the voice as an instrumental tradition is as far as I can ...

RM: Opera singing is the height of abstraction for me.

DM: I mean as beautiful as it is ...

RM: I don’t find it beautiful, in fact.

DM: Oh, I love Puccini. <laughs> I find the voice in Puccini just gorgeous. But, yes, I hear you.

....

RM: But, now I want to go back to our talk of food because I want to ask you something else. We talked about the possibility of universals— at least for you— with respect to processing speed. What about the flavors? Are they universal across all cultures? For instance, while I may not like Japanese tempura, how do I know I won’t taste it inaccurately? Perhaps we would both agree I’ve truly tasted it. This is opposed to where I might be listening to Indian classical music and I’m not hearing the raga at all; I’m just hearing stuff go by. You’d have to say: “Look Bob, you don’t really get it. You need to know certain musical things, certain backgrounds and contexts have to be established; then everything is going to sound different to you.” For instance, people say: “Indian music is all about stasis, peace, and spiritual values.” Of course there is a little truth to this. But really the players are engaged in music that is dynamically motivated, full of change, reflection, and contrast. Whereas, Westerners are not hearing that because they

don't know how to hear it (not to mention the stereotyping of this music). So I'm asking, in the case of taste, is it like that? Do people have to learn taste or is the taste sensation the same for all cultures? That is distinct from— one more point— the fact that we may not like certain tastes. (A graduate student asked: "I'm having some trouble teaching modern music to my classes for undergraduate students. I come in and play something by Scriabin and they look at me like –what's that about?" I said you've got to ask them this: "Do you like beer?" And when they all say they like it, you ask if they liked it when they were five or ten years old.) Does a taste have to be learned whether or not it is liked? In any case, you seem to be making a point that there might be some musical issues that are invariant across all musics. And if you didn't believe that, then you wouldn't be trying to make the match of music to taste and flavor, otherwise it would be totally idiomatic. The concept is that certain parameters in music always have a similar function in all music. Like you said, the taste of sorbet is an icy taste, so somehow the music had to be high and clustery.

DM: Right, absolutely. When you consider synesthesia in general there is a slight problem. I feel comfortable with this problem. For example, a lot of my students have done experiments establishing the relationship between color and sound. (A lot of them are very interested in that. It seems to be something that's really quite current and their experiments have gone in a variety of different directions.) One of the things I have them do is design some experiments with perception, find out how other people respond to the experiment. Here's the thing: not everybody is going to agree as to what color they would attribute to this pitch or this sonority or this passage or even combinations of colors. But the students found that there is some sort of spectral agreement within a certain range, although the precision of that is going to be variable. And it's going to be subjective. I suspect though, if we just reduce sound or taste to its basic blocks, we could say there is uniformity across different people. We can say this is bitter, this is acidic, this is sweet, this is sour, this is spicy. It would probably be harder to do that about music, I think.

RM: There seem to be passages in pieces of music that conjure up, like your icy one, a particularly good agreement of sound and taste. We can indeed say that a certain sound is sweet. And we'll say that another one is bitter, you know, "dissonant." Consider for instance, the chord of B<sup>2</sup>, D<sup>3</sup> and C<sup>4</sup>. To me, that's a very bitter sounding event.

DM: Interesting.

RM: Now, if I move the chord up an octave, the bitterness goes away, it has a different quality. To be bitter, it has to be in that register. And in fact, even a transposition of tone lower or higher will change its quality.

DM: Yes, I agree.

RM: I know many, many other sounds that are coupled in my head with particular non-musical qualities. When I'm working I may use a particular sound to evoke its effect. In this case of taste, are we are trying to get some configurations of sound to work in this way?.

DM: Yes, but I think the precision of that is not possible. I can't make it precise and I

wouldn't quite want to do that. But people picked up my intent. Tamara Bernstein, a reviewer for the National Post, observed that for the soup course, which was based on three different root vegetables, I brought in some really deep notes in the baritone that offset midrange sonorities in the accordion. And she immediately felt my purpose for doing that. She wrote: "ah earth— I can feel the earthiness...."

RM: ....from the roots?

DM: Yes, she made that jump right away. There were other instances in which people made such correlations. People noticed I had this really spacious sound— large and spread sonorities in the accordion with midrange little falling notes, moans almost, very distant on the baritone — for the caribou and elk wild meats, which are all indigenous to Canada. The piece is called "Tundra and Dark Nights." They all felt the music was like...

RM: ...animal cries in the distance...

DM: Yes, they realized that they were eating animals. They realized that this is not just something on a plate. This is a vital connection to the whole environmental experience...

RM: ...since you are not eating farm animals that were killed for human consumption, but special ones you would have to go out and hunt.

DM: Yes.

RM: Which brings you into the whole situation of confronting nature, returning, and connecting.

DM: That's right

When I was planning the pieces something stumped me. One of the courses, which was after the wild meats, called a pre-dessert, was an aged goat cheese from Quebec. I thought what am I going to do with that? As a matter of fact, Bobbi said maybe you can get them to change the course. I asked a group of friends, what do you think of when you think of goat cheese? And one of them did me this great favor. He says, "bells." I said, "Ah yes, bells." With bells, everything fell into place. You see, I hadn't planned on making titles for these pieces. But Peter Geary said if we're going to have all the food listed by courses, we should have the music listed to coincide with that. I thought, "Oh boy, what am I going to do?" I hadn't been thinking in any kind of direct fashion, that there would be some sort of language link.

RM: ...that the titles could throw things off considerably.

DM: Of course. But, when this friend of mine said "bells" I not only knew what to do for that particular course, which was stumping me, but everything fell into place. I thought, "Ah, this is all about the earth. It's all about the food we take from the earth. It's all about the way the earth nourishes us. And even more than that, it's about the region and the country we call Canada."

RM: Right.

DM: All these foods that are indigenous to this country. There's nothing outside of that

realm. (Except wine, because of the sake.) And the food is all seasonal and all local. All of a sudden everything was clear. I could find titles that would be appropriate, that wouldn't be misleading or limit the experience.

RM: You've answered my question about universality in a very nice way. You're saying that what makes this piece work, the music's correspondence with the food, is in the special qualities at a given place and time. In other words, its the specific particularity that underlies what's going on— that our ideas about food aren't just what we taste, but our thinking about it, where it comes from, the national pride we may have in it. All those cultural verities would change at another place and time. If you're doing this piece, let's say in Indonesia, maybe ...

DM: ...I don't think I could do it...

RM: ...for instance, they eat rat there often...

DM: ...or dog...

RM: ...and so you would have to have a rat piece, which would be pretty difficult for a Western person to deal with.

DM: Absolutely.

RM: Ellen<sup>3</sup> tells a story from one of her trips to Bali. She was living with a family, and one morning there was a roach on the floor— a rather big one. Somebody picked it up and put it in a baby's mouth and the baby chomped it right down.

DM: Babies will do that anyway.

RM: That's an ordinary event, a treat for baby. But Ellen was absolutely horrified. And everybody laughed at her. In other words, tastes are not universals. But that's not the whole story. I want to bring in something else that's concerned me for many, many years; it has to do with something in Mahayana Buddhism. There's a philosopher, Nagarjuna,<sup>4</sup> who posited there are two realms of reality. (This idea is also found in a book, which you know, "The Awakening of Faith.") One of these two realms is transcendent, unconceivable reality. And the other is ordinary, conditioned reality. The conditioned realm concerns place and time, identity, etc. The first realm is not real in the sense where you can *call* it real— or we would have to say that our ordinary reality is an illusion. So you have both of these operating at the same time. To me this resolves the tension between particularity at a given place and time and universality at any given level. When we work too much on the spiritual, transcendent level we lose all touch with particularity; therefore there is a loss of any place or time— things just disappear. On the other hand, when we're in the realm of place and time, we lose connection with most of the other things that would be connected with a particular, even for the purpose of its identity and its suchness. There's a play between these two realms and you have to stand in the middle and not be too attached to one or the other. It seems to me that that's how you're coming across when you're describing your piece. Because you're saying you were having trouble in finding a way of connecting your musical ideas to the food ideas. But when you got into particularities, the connections went through.

DM: That's exactly right.

RM: But, nonetheless your ideas about the music and the food were much more universal initially.

DM: Yes. That was part of the transformation of the piece when it did become specified. It did become particular. It did localize itself and it moved out of some vague abstraction that I was starting with originally. You're absolutely right. There's a very famous Zen Koan: "Not one, not two, but one and two."

RM: Right, yes.

DM: That's exactly what we're discussing here. And you do sit in the middle of that. I'm always fascinated by various people who say in articles and talks, "you must kill the ego." Well, good luck.

RM: Who's doing that?

DM: That's the problem. The ego is going to kill the ego? I don't think so. It's not going to work too well. Obviously the issue is how do you get past the limitations of the egoic view? I like that word; a number of us are using that opposed to egotistical. Egoic, that pertains to the ego.

RM: I think it's fine. I use "selfhood."

DM: Yes, selfhood, whatever. It is an interesting problem because there are the limitations of the habituations, the patterns, the desires, the suffering, etc. Then there is this completely free open spacious awareness that can include that.

RM: That's right.

DM: But, it's not governed by that.

RM: It's detached and attached at once and more and less. That's the tetralemma argument of Nagarjuna, which figures in Zen Koans. He would say: not one, not two, neither one nor two, neither not one nor not two.

DM: Sure, Hui Neng's mirror.<sup>5</sup> It's the same when we return to the music of fragrance and taste. This open awareness is available, and there was quite a lot of positive feedback suggesting people experienced it in this way. I'd like to think that going into the sensations of the body, one can also go beyond the sensations of the body. You bring everything to bear in the moment of this experience. Yet there's transcendence.

RM: Nagarjuna says the same thing in an abstract way. He says you cannot talk about the transcendental, without the ordinary.

DM: ....mm hmm....what has he got?

RM: That's right, you can't say it.

DM: Yes.

RM: You have to find some ordinary, conditioned way to point, gesture, suggest. This

is interesting to me aesthetically. We were talking about quotations yesterday, off and on— how we relate to other musics, etc. I think the most interesting relationship we have at our disposal is suggestion, as opposed to, referencing directly or via allusion, or parody. For, you can detect when something is taken from someplace else, because it's a little out of place, but not completely. But, suggestion is different. It doesn't say or mention "it", but it puts your head in the right direction, so you won't miss "it". Of course, you still have to look.

The music isn't going to tell you to look. Suggestion gets you in the right place. I think it's a very interesting way of thinking about relation. A poet will tell you that a poem does not just stand alone. It's in dialogue with all the other poems that have been around. Sometimes there is literal or stylistic quotation, but the connection might go through via an image or idea that associates one poem to another, without saying so. I was wondering whether the suggestion of a food, or the suggestion of a set of feelings that are connected with food, are what you are doing as opposed to mapping.

DM: I don't know if there can be precise mapping. Maybe at some point, some people could do that. At this event I didn't expect that I would be able to do that. There has to be a poetic content, and there has to be a bit of ambiguity so that the experience is open rather than bounded.

RM: Yes, you're looking always out, not toward in. Perhaps you are saying that the piece couldn't possibly be a mapping because the whole idea is to connect outward as opposed to a situation where two things that are zooming in on each other. It's just that there's always a place where we are and everything else that's around us.

DM: It's an environment of experience. I mean, the worst thing I can imagine happening is somebody takes this idea and says, "Why couldn't you do this with fast food?" So he makes a hamburger piece.

RM: Maybe they'd be Menotti operas.

DM: Yeah, "Down in the Valley" with my hamburger.

RM: Well, there are a lot of interesting possibilities here. The other thing that had struck me is that this gourmet event is something that many people in our culture would consider pretty special, at a pretty high level.

DM: They might even think it was indulgent.

RM: Yes, that too. I mean some people might assume that the event was for people who are really connoisseurs. By the way, there is a good term for this in Indian aesthetics, *rasika*, which means "connoisseur," but *rasa* means taste. So a *rasika* is a taster, used to tasting things, and therefore he or she has "taste." So we might infer from the connection of your music in this event, that it is music for musical connoisseurs.

DM: Yes. I have to say that probably— and I don't mean to damn myself with this— I do feel that I'm an elitist, but I don't mean that in a negative or a pejorative way....

RM: But how can you use the term without it having a negative connotation?

DM: Well, look, you and I both know that in terms of the appreciation of music, that can occur on many different levels.

RM: As one of us was saying before in Indian music, you have to learn something before you can appreciate it. Now, you may not know you're doing that when you're born into that culture because it happens so naturally. But you are learning, just like you learn your first language. It doesn't occur to you. But this knowledge doesn't come out of nowhere.

DM: You don't like beer when you're five.

RM: That's right.

DM: Usually.

RM: I used to like beer, now I like wine.

But, what I'm saying is that there is always this business of learning. The question is, when does this learning becomes something that people think you're flaunting, when you're going beyond just knowing to the point where you use your learning as a way of distinguishing yourself from other people.

DM: Well, that may be true. But, on the other hand, people only value something if it's expensive. They only value it if some effort has had to go into it. It's a deep sort of human problem. If something is easy and accessible and simple it's going to be valued less.

RM: It's not the accessibility per se, it's accessible to whom? For instance, to a person who is well versed in baroque music an accessible piece might be almost incomprehensible to a person who doesn't know this music.

DM: That's true. Let me tell you what happened at the event. The audience was pretty much divided into two groups. One group was people who know the restaurant, but don't know the music that I do. The other was a group of musicians who, in many cases, had never tasted food like this.

RM: Interesting.

DM: The fascination was that they met in the middle, somewhere, somehow. There was a coalescence of experience for people despite what the origins of their interests were, whether it was music or whether it was the food. And they all talked about this and the response was uniform. The people who didn't know the music loved it. They said: "where do we get the CD?" Other people that had never been to the restaurant or never had food like this said: "I'm coming back next week." That was wonderful.

....

DM: I'd like to ask you about your new work, the piano concerto you're working on. Last night I never got to ask.

RM: Well, I'm not sure what to say because it's not finished. When I work on a piece, at the beginning, it's never well formed. The piece gradually unfolds. Sometimes the

initial idea comes from a prime image. As I said yesterday, last November [2004] Wayne Slawson and I were walking in the Hoh river rain forest area in Olympic National Park in Washington State— this beautiful place where there are all these incredible colors, amid wetness, mists and rain here and there. I just couldn't believe the variety and the vines amid mosses that were draped on the trees. Really, I never saw so many different colors of green in my life. And then the flowers and other things that penetrated through the green— actually gaudy. You don't think of a wet place as gaudy, but this is gaudy. And there was a sound of a river that was running near the path. Sometimes we would get near to it and be able to see it, and spend some time sitting on a rock, talking. On the trail sometimes you could hardly hear it. Immediately the idea of a piece for piano and orchestra came into my mind, where the piano— or perhaps the orchestra— is the river, always playing, and the various places you come to on the trail that are in the orchestra part, or maybe it's the other way around— I'm not sure. At the time, I didn't really know how I was going to achieve it, but I knew this is the image to use; "Stay with this, and you'll make a piece." This feeling of inspiration is often stimulated by landscape and many of my pieces are named after landscapes or landscape concepts, etc. There is a long history in finally discovering that potential in myself. When I came back home with the intention to write this piece, I was in the midst of a lot of other projects. But I began nevertheless. The first thing I had to do was construct musical materials for it, then fashion how they would be put together. Then I wrote it. I'm not finished composing the whole piece, but I'm almost there; just the coda to go where the piano comes in for the last time. Almost everything else is more or less already composed. I'm entering the pencil draft into Finale now to make the engraved score. But at this point I haven't written most of the dynamics in and the phraseology and some of the orchestration is still to be worked out.

DM: Don't let my students hear that.

RM: I do everything in stages. I don't like to make the first measure perfect, then continue to the second, etc.

DM: Of course.

RM: I go through many levels of composition, and I'm near the end of the process where I have composed a piece in the abstract and rendered most of that in the concrete. Now it is a matter of putting the details in and some reinterpretation. For instance, I have to rewrite the beginning measures, and I know there are a few orchestrational changes to be made.

DM: How do you know something like that?

RM: Just because after a while, I realize I have a better idea than the initial one. Either I'm convinced that I've got something that's worth keeping, or it needs more work. Sometimes I say this is hopeless and give up. But many times I think a passage is not the best thing I could possibly do, but it's good enough (for now). In fact, sometimes it turns out later that I think it's quite inspired. I don't necessarily know that in the first draft.

DM: That's interesting.

RM: I really don't care about the question of whether I like it or not in terms of every little detail. All I know is that I'm always trying to perfect things. I'm not self-consciously saying: "Oh, look I'm improving it." I'm just getting it right.

DM: I often feel that the piece tells you what it has to be.

RM: That's right. You can tell where I am now; the piece is at the stage where I'm not altogether finished, and many of the details aren't nailed down. In essence, I need to discover what I've made. And this work is a new piece for me in many ways. Two factors: I've been experimenting for the last ten years with different kinds of arrays that preserve octaves and multiple unisons. For a long time I was convinced— and there are a lot of technical reasons for this, in addition to aesthetic ones— that I had to keep octaves distinguished from texture. This I inherited from Webern, Stockhausen, Boulez, Martino, and other like composers. I really liked that music and internalized it. Therefore, even though I heard other kinds of doublings, like what occurs in Stravinsky's late serial pieces, I avoided octaves most of the time.

In the case of Milton Babbitt, there are a lot of octaves. For a long time I kept shy of them. But I eventually found ways to incorporate direct octaves, which were based in the structure of the work, not just orchestrational details. Then I began to get much more interesting orchestral textures than I had before— at least interesting to me. I noticed something else; that there is a sense of airiness, a spacious openness that comes into the music when there are aggregates spaced over long periods of time, but many of them evolving simultaneously. In the rain forest piece I've gone further than ever, and there are places where there are all kinds of crazy displays of octave-related material. You would never believe that passages in this piece in this type of surface had deep structural affinities with another parts of the piece, which are without octaves. There's one passage that really amuses me, and it fits perfectly in the work, but from the following description, it would seem to be totally out of context. It's a low C, followed by another C, two octaves higher a C and then a fourth below the higher C. It sounds like an Indian tanpura. It's just in there, comes along, goes by, and you say: "wow, that's from another world." But, it still makes sense.

DM: That's fascinating...yee...

RM: ...when you get a piece going, things like this can happen.

There's a piano piece of yours that that you played for me and it managed to quote the head motive of the song "Feelings" in it.

DM: "Feelings" sort of appears and disappears.

RM: I don't know if I mentioned this to you, but do you remember a piano piece of mine called "Cañón"?

DM: Yes.

RM: Well, there's a passage in there that has the feelings motif; it says in the score "David Mott was here." In fact, this happens in some of my other pieces, too. In my piano piece

called “Wabi,” there’s a passage that sounds like a place in George Caccioppo’s lovely piano piece “Cassiopeia.” When I was composing “Wabi” I found that the array would permit me to quote George’s piece, so I did and cited the piece in my score. It’s like my piece visited a part of “Cassiopeia” for a moment, enjoyed it, and moved on.

DM: You love puns and jokes like I do.

RM: It’s playfulness.

DM: It suddenly emerges.

RM: That’s right. But I would resist in the old days. Now when I see I can make a reference, I often do, even though in my music there are very strict structural concerns at any given moment. Nevertheless, the music can be realized in many different ways, even if over a given time there are things that have to happen.

In this new piece I’m not exactly sure how it’s going but I do feel going in a new direction. One new thing is the way that I’ve set the piano against the orchestra. The piano is always chattering. I thought of you here, too. I remembered the opera you had composed in the 1980s.

DM: “Meme.”

RM: In it, you had a libretto that involved some sort of initiation after which there was an event of transgression among the people where they cast out some member of the group. And at the end, there was some reconciliation. Obviously, I don’t remember the plot very well. What struck me was a text by bp nicol intoned under the music and action of the whole opera, somehow subterraneanly accompanying all of this, as if there were some sort of deeper part of the experience.

DM: The person who played that role is called “The Dreamer.” It is a long narrative about going down to the park and laying down, having some pain, and what was at the edge of attention, and, many, many subtle variations on that, which just keeps repeating.

RM: One did not pay attention to the text. One just heard this murmuring that was always going on. I thought it was a very interesting feature. So, in this piece, which I’m calling, “Old Forest,” I’ve got the piano chattering. In some ways it almost sounds a little like...

DM: ....cocktail...?

RM: Cocktail piano!— a bubbling along, while there’s this rather serious music in the orchestra at a much slower pace. The piano is almost impervious. Sometimes it comes in and connects and sometimes it doesn’t. It’s as if the piano is a little out of it. It’s a little too mercurial. In any case, the piano writing isn’t ornamental, because if I took the piano away, the piece would be a series of slow events. But, with the piano on top of it, there’s a vital feeling of abundance. It is always overflowing. And it goes beyond where you’ve been talking about; it is a type of overload. That isn’t the only thing about it, for anything that’s in the piano part has a mirror someplace else in the piece.

DM: What I often experience in your music is the chance to explore a particular

environment, as in your outdoor pieces, or even the electronic pieces. “Night Sky Scroll” is still one of my favorite pieces, ever, because I can hear the spaciousness, the interrelationships, the isolation, the delicacy, the brilliance, all these things as would occur if you were— which I often do— star-gazing. We were talking about your piece “Continua” last night. I loved that piece from when I first heard it, because I had experienced foliage. I never experienced that before in music. There are all of these plants that are all related and so forth. But perhaps I’m reading something into this piece.

RM: I like it very much. I wouldn’t have thought of it that way. But, it seems very natural.

DM: There are these fern fronds, palms. There are all of these bromeliads...

RM: Have you ever gone to an arboretum where they have all these species? It’s sort of like that, isn’t it?

DM: Yeah.

RM: There are the Huntington Gardens in California. Have you ever been there?

DM: I have not. There’s the Morton Arboretum just outside of Chicago where I spent a lot of time.

RM: There you get a sense of the abundance of all this flora, it’s all together, making patterns of its own.

DM: While I talk about information overload, I mean information sort of being poured down your throat. I’m not talking about information that you can explore and wander through, and experience differently each time you hear it.

RM: I think it’s a nice distinction. It makes sense to me. What you’re talking about is when music is intimate and it gets too much. It’s like— to make a very, gross statement— it’s like a rape. You’re getting too much intimacy when and where you don’t want it. It’s in your face, so to speak.

DM: This happens, by the way, with improvisers too, improvisers who aren’t being sensitive to the potentiality of the moment just jam too much into the space. It’s overload and after a while it just becomes hysterical. You don’t really get a chance to feel any detail or nuance because it’s just too much.

....

RM: Well, I want to play you to the MIDI version of Old Forest so far and maybe you’ll have comments on that, I don’t know.

DM: I love what you’re telling me about it. So I’d like to hear the piece. But, from your descriptions— you’re descriptions are so lucid— I’m already feeling like I’m already experiencing it.

RM: If you had asked me six weeks ago, or when I first thought of writing “Old Forest,” or at Christmas time when I was designing the arrays, I wouldn’t be able to tell you any of

this. That is what composition is about, not just one stage of putting the notes down.

DM: I look at it a little differently than that, but I think it's just a different way of describing the same thing. I look at it as discovery. You're always discovering about what that music is.

RM: If you have children, that's it. You don't know what they're going to become. You don't even know what they're going to say the next day.

. . . .

### notes

<sup>1</sup> We thank Nicolette Mansour for transcribing this conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Bobbi Dahlman, a transpersonal therapist, is David Mott's spouse.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Koskoff, an ethnomusicologist, is Robert Morris's spouse.

<sup>4</sup> Nagarjuna founded the Madhyamamika (middle way) school of Buddhism in the second or third century C.E.

<sup>5</sup> Shen Hsiu and Hui Neng were monks studying under the fifth patriarch of Chan Buddhism. Shen Hsiu wrote the following poem in a bid to become the sixth patriarch.

The body is the wisdom-tree,  
The mind is a bright mirror in a stand;  
Take care to wipe it all the time,  
And allow no dust to cling.

But Hui Neng topped him with this poem:

Fundamentally no wisdom-tree exists,  
Nor the stand of a mirror bright.  
Since all is empty from the beginning,  
Where can the dust alight?

## **The Reification of Sound**

### Recording Technology and the Changing Ontology of Music

Bill Rankin, 2002

“Electronic music” has never simply designated a class of music that happens to use electronics. Rather, it is the “new” music, polemically opposed to the outmoded music of orchestras and temperament. Yet it has retained this counter-movement connotation for nearly a century, while other musical terms, such as serialist, indeterminate, or even tonal, have been largely incorporated into common discourse and are now used with equanimity. The once-revolutionary nature of dodecaphonic music is understood within an historical context. Why does electronic music remain on the outside? No doubt its relative independence from the infrastructure of performers and concert halls does not endear it to the musical mainstream, but the root of the problem lies much deeper. The development of recording technology took place over the same period of time as the adoption of many electronic methods into music, and the two were often developed and used by the same people. And the recording, much more than electronics, implicitly challenges many of the tacit tenets of the established musical tradition. The conflict is manifest in many ways, from the well-documented rise of commercialized, fetishized music as a popular mass phenomenon, to more unconscious effects on the identity of musicians and the kind of music that composers choose to write as a result. In these cases it is understandable that the social, economic, and musical changes brought on by the recording would provoke ambivalence towards the “new” music. But the recording also represents a fundamentally different ontological understanding of basic musical terms such as “sound,” “music,” and “performance,” and these conceptual differences have gone largely unexplored, even unnoticed. The unwitting conceptual marriage of electronic and recording technology has thus created a binary opposition, where the “electronic” retains its controversial status in order to mitigate the more fundamental challenges to the “regular.”

The technology of sound is hardly a recent innovation – an organ or a violin is as much a technological object as a Moog synthesizer. But an important shift occurred in the late nineteenth century, when sonic technology began to be developed by entrepreneurs rather than musicians. The most significant of these were the telephone (1876) and the phonograph (1878), as they were designed not to produce new sounds, but rather to *re*-produce existing ones. This reproductive ability introduced entirely new problems into music, for in order for sound to be reproduced, it had to be transformed into something else, both

literally and conceptually. The telephone changed sound into electricity, transducing vibrations in the air into electric pulses via an electromagnet. The phonograph, however, established an equivalence between sound and matter, converting air vibrations into impressions on a metal foil cylinder. In discussions of music, these two inventions are often treated similarly, as simply “non-musical technology,” but the nature of the sonic transformation is fundamentally different in each case, and this difference is not trivial. For the telephone (and its later progeny the microphone, loudspeaker, and electric guitar) still maintains sound as a temporal phenomenon, while the phonograph makes sound into an object in space rather than a phenomenon in time. This de-temporalization allows any given sound to extend its reach much further than it could before. Whereas the telephone can only connect across space, the recording connects points in both space and time: the time and location of the creation of the sound, and the (arbitrary) time and location of its playback.

The recording is fully detached from its original source, and yet it seems that every playing-back transmits first and foremost “what it sounded like then and there.” The recording thus shares many qualities with Roland Barthes’s description of photography – it is what he calls a primarily ‘denotative’ medium. A purely denoted reproduction is one which transmits analogically, but does so without the necessary application of a connotative *style*. And while there are substantial differences between photography and sound reproduction, his analysis of the structure of denotation and connotation applies in both cases: for the recording, the first-order mode of communication is through denotation, and the application of meaning or description involves the use of higher-order systems of signification – a sound itself means nothing, but meaning can be attached to it through a system of signifiers and signifieds.<sup>2</sup> Thus to Western ears, major keys sound bright, and an oboe sounds plaintive.

However, because sound recording (or photography) is an act of reproduction, of removal, the denotation / connotation structure of a recording is different from that of the original sound – the act of mediation itself has structural consequences for the status of the received sound. Yes, its transmission will be mediated by technical imperfections like tape hiss, record pops, or general losses of fidelity. But likewise the possible sites of connotation are greatly expanded, and entirely new signifier/signified relationships can be created. Barthes describes several ways to attach connotation to a photograph, such as trick effects, pose, or simply the signification of aestheticism itself, and

Compare even the language of the two patents. Bell makes claim to “the method of, and apparatus for, transmitting vocal or other sounds telegraphically, as herein described, by causing electrical undulations, *similar in form* to the vibrations of the air accompanying the said vocal or other sound....” while Edison writes that “the indented material [metal foil] may be detached from the machine and preserved for *any length of time*, and by replacing the foil in a proper manner the original speaker’s voice can be reproduced, and the same may be repeated frequently, as *the foil is not changed* in shape if the apparatus is properly adjusted.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Alexander Graham Bell, *Improvements in Telegraphy* (US Patent 174,465; February 14, 1876), page 4; Thomas Edison, *Phonograph or Speaking Machine* (US Patent 200,521; February 19, 1878), page 2; emphasis added.

2 Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977, orig. 1961), pp 17-19.

similar typologies could be made for the sound recording (*e.g.*, popping noises sound “old,” poorly mixed vocals sound “indie,” etc.). But it is important to note that, even given these supplementary relationships, connotation is still always something given on top of denotation (and not fixed to it as with the style of a drawing or a musical performance). It is this structure that gives photography, film, and sound recording their mythical status as ‘objective’ media.

An objective point of view, however, is not the whole story. In film, for example, even though the camera still reproduces reality in a denotative fashion, editing and post-production lead to the pure simulacra of Hollywood, regardless of the ‘objectivity’ of the camera itself. All pretense of an “original” is dropped; the sets, the dialogue, the mood – all are manufactured. The denotative / connotative structure makes it possible for film to create an alternate reality, while being “fake” at the same time.

Something else happened in music, however, as composers began to question even the fundamental relationship between a recording and a sound in the world. In the 1920s, French composer Darius Milhaud experimented with changing the speed of his phonograph, and students at the Bauhaus incised discs to create artificial rhythms. In 1939 John Cage used an aleatoric combination of phonographs playing at different speeds in his *Imaginary Landscape #1*. After the post-war plasticization of magnetic tape, electronic musical experimentation started to take on some of the flavor of film-production. In the late 1940s, Pierre Schaeffer created *musique concrète* (the “first school of electronic music”<sup>3</sup>), by physically and electronically manipulating tape-recorded sounds from everyday life – train whistles, footsteps, door squeaks, breathing, car horns – to the point that their original context was often completely obscured. In a radical departure from film, however, magnetic tape also made it possible for sound to be synthesized directly on the tape itself, without the need for an “original” at all. Thus the artistic exploration of the recording, originally designed as reproductive, also made it possible to use the same technology to create entirely new sound. But this evolution – essentially the problematization of the denotation / connotation relationship – was possible only through an internalization of the recording’s mediative structure. This in turn necessitated a new conceptual relationship between sound and time.

### *Spatialization, Perfection, and Repetition*

To the recording, sound is simply data contained in time – each “instant” of time holds a certain value of pitch, intensity, timbre, etc. Time is nothing more than a container. And just as the film reel reformulates motion as a large number of pictures laid side by side, the

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3 As called by Herbert Russcol in *The Liberation of Sound: An Introduction to Electronic Music* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), page 79.

audio recording makes it possible to turn a sonic flow into a progression through space, in foil, vinyl, or magnetic media. In a word, the recording causes sound to become reified – it is turned into a thing.

It is not just sound that is spatialized, however: even though time is still used for playback, the “time” of playback is qualitatively different than the “time” of a non-mediated sonic flow. The ability to lay sound into matter presupposes a new understanding, and use, of time itself, similar to how György Lukács conceptualized the effect of reified wage-labor on time: “time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’ (the reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker, wholly separated from his [or her] total human personality): in short, it becomes space.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, whenever a temporal process (work, sound, motion) becomes reified, time is reified as well. But in every case it is done so completely that the very act of reification goes unnoticed – the new spatial understanding applies retroactively as well, so that it is never presumed that time, or sound, were ever thought of differently.

Thus the de-temporalizing effect of the recording was seen by those composers who embraced it as the solution to a problem which had always demanded fixing. With reference to magnetic tape, Hugh Le Caine writes that, “the fleeting and transitory nature of sound was conquered. Now a sound could be criticized, considered, evaluated, could be multiplied and transformed, set to any desired time-relation to itself. The heart of the matter, of course, is the conquest of time.”<sup>5</sup> And because sound, given its newfound physicality, could be manipulated in a correspondingly spatial way, the recording is therefore hailed as progress. The kinds of juxtapositions and transformations that the recording makes possible – precisely those that are impossible in time but simple in space – are used fruitfully as new methods for attaching connotation to a sonic flow. The conceptual side-effects of such a paradigmatic shift, however, are largely seen as benign, or disregarded altogether.

For example, the reconceptualization of the sonic substrate – from time to space – precipitated a bifurcation within the idea of making sound: with tape, or especially with computers, one can be “creating sound” without any aural effect at all. Since the very same tape one works on will later be played, it seems almost reasonable to say that the tape *is* the sound, and that by creating tape one is creating sound (and even blank tape contains sound). Apparent paradoxes – like creating five minutes of sound in a few seconds – are instead seen as

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4 From György Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, orig. 1922), page 90.

5 Quoted in Russcol, *The Liberation of Sound*, op cit., page 77.

conveniences, and it is quite possible to make a lot of sound that will never be heard at all.

The recording also had immediate impact on the identity of music. First and foremost, it gives rise to music which seems to have a singular existence. Unlike the conventional dialectic between a score and its performers, a tape piece only exists in one form – its sounds are fixed, only to be affected by the vagaries of playback. For some composers, this fixity is a compromise, a necessary trade-off for the possibility to explore new sounds. In more commercial music, however, it is often seen as a real benefit. Here the drive for a singular, awe-inspiring recording has led to things like the recording studio, where the demands of production have had a real impact on what it means to make music. Musicians are isolated, tracks laid down one at a time. The music never exists in real time – the tracks are combined only in the end, mechanically. To say that a musician is “performing” seems almost misleading, as the recording has taken on such a strong performative role itself. Indeed, this role-reversal is belied by the binary distinction between studio and “live” recordings – the recording studio first and foremost usurps agency formerly held by musicians. But this is by no means an unwilling concession: effects can be added, fidelity is improved, and mistakes can be corrected, all while retaining the apparent objectivity of a medium that operates primarily through denotation – the unwanted connotation of manipulation will not be heard. And by and large, studio recordings have been unmitigated commercial successes. But there is also something conceptually alluring about a singular recording, as the studio eliminates the uncertainty inherent in live-ness. A multiplicity of approximations is replaced by a version which takes on an almost metaphysical authority: a definitive, primary version of a song is epistemologically quite comforting. And the existence of “live” and “remix” recordings (which are seen as “alternative versions”) only affirms the primacy of the original.

In studio recordings of classical music, the stated objective is to interpret the original score as faithfully as possible, but here too perfection and singularity are the implicit terms of that endeavor. Even though performers still perform as an ensemble, a finished recording may be an amalgamation of as many as a thousand edits<sup>6</sup> – the goal of the recording is not to record an individual rendition of a work, but rather to create its ideal manifestation. A classical recording is a super-human construct. It sets precedents that no live performance can match. Take the example of the late pianist Glen Gould: in 1964, at the age of thirty-two, he ceased performing in concert halls in order to spend the rest of his life focusing exclusively on making recordings. He proclaimed the recording to be the newer, better form of music. He

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6 John Oswald, “Plunderstanding Ecophonemics,” in John Zorn, ed., *Arcana: Musicians on Music* (New York: Granary Books, 2000), page 12.

viewed hyper-edited records as encapsulating a moral truth, a higher musical form than live performance. Repeated, solitary listening will, as he says, help “each man contemplatively create his own divinity.”<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, he felt quite comfortable in the recording studio, but he spent only around a tenth of his time at the piano; the rest was spent editing, for this was where his real art was created. The ‘phonography’ scholar Evan Eisenberg writes, “Gould did not use the splice, as most pianists must, mainly to correct mistakes. He used it to weld numerous takes, all correct, each different, into a structure that would stand up to repeated listening. He did not fear the ‘non-take-two-ness’ of concerts..., but abhorred it as ‘antimusical.’”<sup>8</sup>

It seems intuitive now that good music can (and should) reward repeated listening, but hearing the same piece more than once is usually not possible at all without a recording. It is not surprising that the appeal, and the threat, of having the same “performance” heard again and again would lead to recordings that are technically perfect and stylistically masterful, but the recording has been implicated in a much earlier change in compositions themselves. Musical theorist Jonathan Kramer suggests that composers of the early twentieth century, subconsciously affected by the possibility of repetitive listening, correspondingly reduced the redundancy (and increased the complexity) in their work. Not only could listeners hear a piece any number of times, but they could also isolate any section from the whole and consider it in and of itself. And given the large number of phonograph or gramophone cylinders required to record even a short work (originally, each cylinder held about two minutes of music), the overall structure of a composition could be easily changed to suit one’s preference. And thus he points to the utter lack of repetition in Schönberg’s one-act monodrama *Erwartung*, written in 1909 – just seven years after the first high-fidelity, high-budget recordings of classical music were made by European opera celebrities. He traces this evolution up through the hyper-complexity of the 1970s, by which point repeated listenings were not just possible, but expected.<sup>9</sup>

Composers, however, have not been so quick to acknowledge this link. “Repeated listening” is certainly a part of their vocabulary, but recordings are often seen as neutral, even irrelevant. Indeed, when Elliott Carter writes about the compositional complexity in his own music, in 1960, his omission of the recording seems rather more like prevarication than pessimism:

Serious music must appeal in different ways. Its main appeal, however, emerges from the quality of the musical material or ideas

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7 Quoted in Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1987), page 103.

8 Ibid, pp 105-106.

9 See Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), page 69.

and perhaps even more from their use in significant continuities, but does not always depend on grasping the logic of the latter on first hearing. There has to be something left for the second time, if there ever is a second time.<sup>10</sup>

He certainly indicates that complexity seems to demand repeated listenings, yet the ability to hear a piece of music repeatedly is in some sense a prerequisite of complexity. But for the kind of complexity in the music of composers like Carter, the recording is not simply a convenient way to allow repeated listenings, it is the only way. Carter implies that this is because of the difficulty of having contemporary music performed. However, when the subtleties and intricacies of complex composition would be obscured by even the most minor of the inevitable differences between two performances, the performance must be made fixed. Gould's flight to the studio seems to be an acknowledgement of this self-reinforcing interplay between the recording, complexity, and the ability to scrutinize a musical performance. With this as one's mindset, it is indeed tempting to regard live performance as somehow anachronistic, maybe even "antimusical."

*The Recording and "Serious Music"*

Much has been said about the effect of the recording on the cultural meaning of music in the twentieth century, its transition from bourgeois pastime to pervasive laxative of consumerism, from high art to low, from elitist progressivism to mass conservatism. Take for example, Stockhausen: "Music today is consumed in musical request programs. Listening has become listening according to desire. Music without content, with which human desire could align itself, will remain unheard until desire-listening becomes reflective listening."<sup>11</sup> Or Walter Benjamin: "Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art.... The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion."<sup>12</sup> But in contrast with film, where he argues that its consumption in mass leads to "individual reactions [that] are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce,"<sup>13</sup> the creation of the music industry has pushed music away from collective consumption, towards the atomized collectivity of solitary listeners that Gould championed.

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10 Elliott Carter, "Shop Talk by an American Composer," *The Musical Quarterly* (April 1960), pp 189-201. Quote on page 203.

11 Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Texte zur Musik*, vol. 1. (Köln: Dumont, 1963), page 17.

12 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969, orig. 1936), page 234.

13 Loc. Cit.; For Benjamin on politics, see page 224.

This atomization has profound effects on the deployment of power in society: in a culture of segregated, individual consumers, commodities no longer oppose one's sense of self, but begin to be formative of one's own personality. Thus they no longer seem to be given from without, as a representation of class society, even though their purpose continues to be the maintenance of the class system. French economist Jacques Attali writes: "Music became an industry, and *its consumption ceased to be collective*. . . . The mode of power implied by repetition, unlike that of representation, eludes precise localization; it becomes diluted, masked, anonymous, while at the same time exacerbating the fiction of the spectacle as a mode of government. *Music announces that we are verging on no longer being a society of the spectacle*. The political spectacle is merely the last vestige of representation."<sup>14</sup> And thus it seems that the individual consumption of music (and the myth of the individuality of musical taste) has transformed it instead into an operative of the status quo. As Adorno argues in "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," high and low musical genres cannot be conceptually separated: mainstream pop music and "cultural goods" such as orchestral music are both part of the same system of marketing. The marketability of the serious is reinforced by the presence of the light. And in each, there is a reversion to inane, fetishistic modes of listening and consumption.

But then there is the small bastion of contemporary "serious music," where novelty is valued in and of itself, and widespread commercial success is regarded with suspicion, or even outright derision. Here the detachment of art from ecclesiastic or bourgeois ritual is seen as the opportunity to pursue art for its own sake; inexpensive reproduction and dissemination effectively removes this kind of music from the market and creates a pocket of intellectuals free from the infrastructure of ritual, mass spectacle, or commodity-fetishization. In his famously polemic article of 1958, "Who Cares if You Listen," composer Milton Babbitt condemns newspaper critics for upholding the myth that the lay public should (or even can) serve as the basis for evaluating serious music. He declares that "the composer would do him [or her] self and his [or her] music an immediate and eventual service by total, resolute, and voluntary withdrawal from this public world to one of private performance and electronic media, with its very real possibility of complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition."<sup>15</sup> This sort of characterization seems at first like a call to freedom, a liberation from the anti-creative tendencies of the mass. But this negative definition only strengthens his subservience to the musical masses.

Terminology is a problem here. Terms like "serious music," "art music," or "*avant-garde*" have all been used, but none are entirely satisfactory. Adorno's commodified classical music is also called "serious," as is the equally-commodified jazz. It is difficult to find any music that is truly non-artistic, and few musicians today would call themselves *avant-garde*. Indeed, the term that these musicians seem to use themselves is "serious music" (cf. Elliott Carter). This term is used here with the understanding that it largely refers to music of the last fifty years – that music which self-consciously resists consumerization (*i.e.*, it's not available at Border's).

14 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, orig. *Bruits*, 1977), page 88.

15 Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?" in *High Fidelity* 8 (February 1958), page 39.

Ultimately, Babbitt's article is less a case of an eggheaded composer redirecting the musical problematic, and more an implicit acknowledgment that the mass phenomenon of music has created "serious music" as something which can only survive as an intellectual pursuit, self-consciously resisting fetishization simply by refusing to be sold. Adorno characterizes this effect by saying that "the advanced product has renounced consumption. The rest of serious music [*i.e.*, "official 'classical' music"] is delivered over to consumption for the price of its wages."<sup>16</sup> Still, in this portrayal it appears as if the "advanced product" might be free to find its own course, but the renunciation of consumption has other, non-economic implications. Babbitt himself quite clearly explains what a music of the anti-masses would entail, that is, an elimination of the public and the social aspects of music, as well as emphasis on private performance and electronic media. But making the possibility of music dependent on the recording cannot be taken lightly: as already indicated, the reification of sound has real musical implications. Not surprisingly, though, this shift has likewise created a new and important genre of music, namely "electronic music." Indeed, electronic music, not dependent on large audiences or highly trained performers for its realization or propagation, has become one of the main sites for art music (especially in the United States, which lacks the kind of government funding available in Europe). The issue then becomes whether this shift of site, of medium, has had unconscious effects on the music that is created.

Much of "serious" musical discourse has always been based on the relationship between music and the method or medium of its construction. In the West, this has historically been a question of notation. Notation has given rise to several ordering systems, such as tonality, serialism, aleatorics, or more specific systems like Mel Powell's "pitch tableau method." Each of these systems is not simply a method for creating music, but also a redefinition of what sort of music is possible. Regardless of the specifics of any one scheme, however, the boundaries provided by notation itself are still inhibitive (sometimes insidiously so, as they often go unnoticed). The 'biomusicologist' Nils Wallin, analyzing the epistemological interaction between abstract musical ideas and natural and musical sign-systems, suggests that notational thinking finally found its fullest realization in the total serialism of the decades after World War II. He sees total serialism not as an invention aided by notation, but rather as a direct product of notational epistemology: "the fact that each sign in a sequential notation acquires its significance because of its relationship with the signs which appear before and after, automatically causes an increased

At the time when Adorno was writing (1938), the concept of "serious music" was different than it is understood today. Specifically, the role of the composer has changed dramatically: seventy years ago, orchestral composers were still largely public figures, with many of them appearing to draw a lineage to "classical" music – Adorno sees a continuity "from Irving Berlin and Walter Donaldson ... by way of Gershwin, Sibelius and Tchaikovsky to Schubert's B Minor Symphony."<sup>17</sup> Yet since then, there has been a general retreat of the "serious" composer (often to universities), perhaps due to the very fetishization that Adorno discusses. Incidentally, Adorno praises the music of Schönberg and Webern, perhaps two of the first "serious composers" to elude mass publicity in much the way that Babbitt discusses in his article.

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16 Adorno, Theodor. "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in Arato & Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978, orig. 1938), page 276.

17 Loc Cit.

need for more refined definitions and qualities – yet these do not necessarily have an inherent auditive nature.”<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, notation is quite spatial, and one might be tempted to describe it as a spatialization of sound quite similar to that of the recording, and thus say that music that relies heavily on recording technology doesn’t really offer a fundamentally new way of thinking about music. But a spatial component to *composition* is quite different from a spatial understanding of *music* or of *sound*: the former is largely metaphoric or heuristic (meta-aural), while the latter is much more literal. And so the rise of this literalness is precisely one of the effects which Babbitt inadvertently prefigured: a shift in musical problematic brought on by the inherent epistemology of the recording medium. One of the operative concepts in this kind of music therefore becomes specifically the meaning of its sounds and the relative amount of recognizability of their manipulation (that is, the various connotative meanings that can be applied over the pure denotation of the sound itself). Any piece of music will necessarily take a position on the relative transparency or opacity of the connotative possibilities of the sound material, and this stance can become a large part of the content of the work.

Take for example the transparency of Pierre Schaeffer’s *Étude aux Chemins de Fer* (1948) – the first piece of *musique concrète*. It is made up of sounds recorded at the Gare des Batignolles in Paris, spliced together and unified by meter and overall form. Here the individual sounds are eminently recognizable, as are the processes which have been applied to them, namely, repetition and recontextualization. And this recontextualization is explicitly the point of the piece.<sup>19</sup> The goal of *musique concrète* – to inject “concrete” sounds of everyday life into the musical discourse – would have seemed rather confused if the sounds in *concrète* music could not be recognized. And much of the later *concrète* work exists precisely on the line between recognizable and unrecognizable: investigating how much one could manipulate connoted sound before it regressed back to purely denotative tone. For example, Hugh Le Caine’s *Dripsody* of 1955 or Iannis Xenakis’s *Concret PH* of 1958 both take a single recorded sound – water dripping and charcoal burning, respectively – and manipulate it into several minutes of music.

Consider also John Oswald’s 1992 *Plexure*, twenty minutes of music that includes samples from approximately one thousand pop songs of

Compare this to the attitude in more commercial music: commenting on Miles Davis’s *Bitches Brew* LP (1970), Ralph Gleason writes: “i started to ask teo how the horn echo was made and then i thought how silly what difference does it make? and it doesn’t make any difference what kind of brush picasso uses and if the art makes it we don’t need to know and if the art doesn’t make it knowing is the most useless thing in life.”<sup>20</sup> It may not matter *how* it was made, but with Schaeffer the simple fact that it *was* made (*i.e.*, its self-conscious connotative value) is important to its function.

Note how well things like *Plexure* or hip-hop give evidence for the kinds of cultural phenomena discussed by Benjamin and Attali: those things which can be sampled – those with cultural significance – are precisely those bastions of mass conservatism: the pop and “official classical music” that Adorno ties together. Oswald, in his earlier release *Plunderphonics* (1989), samples from Michael Jackson, James Brown, and Metallica, but he also works with Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7 and one of Liszt’s Preludes. Likewise, some of hip-hop’s more well-known samples include rock (Public Enemy samples Buffalo Springfield in “He Got Game,” 1998; Run DMC samples Aerosmith in “Walk This Way,” 1986), classical (Sweetbox samples Bach in “Everything’s Gonna Be Alright,” 1998), and popular movies (Jay-Z samples *Annie*; Busta Rhymes samples *Psycho* in “Gimme Some More,” 1998). For many of these, the success of the song seems wholly dependent on the cultural capital invested in the sample (*e.g.*, Sweetbox).

18 Nils Wallin, *Biomusicology: Neurophysiological, Neuropsychological, and Evolutionary Perspectives on the Origins and Purposes of Music* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1991), page 535.

19 For an example of this standard interpretation, see Peter Manning, *Electronic and Computer Music*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Books, 1993, orig. 1985), pp 20-21.

20 Ralph Gleason, LP liner notes to Miles Davis’s *Bitches Brew* (Sony Music Entertainment, Inc., 1970), page 8.

the 1980s. He describes it as a critique of institutionalized musical stagnation, that in *Plexure* “you hear pop music in a constant upheaval of novelty, which is contrary to the way pop music is usually presented.... *Plexure* has low fat content – very little redundancy and lots of hooks, each one an attractive musical entity.”<sup>21</sup> The recognizability of at least some of the hooks, voices, and backbeats is essential to recognizing their recontextualization, and therefore to a critical understanding of the piece (or for any understanding of it besides pure cacophony). For both Schaeffer and Oswald, the effect of their sonic manipulation depends on it *sounding like manipulation*, and in both cases recontextualization is only possible because one can hear (not just know, sub-textually) that the sounds have been taken from their original place in time. Compare this with something like Berio’s *Symphonia* (1969), which takes musical quotations from Mahler and textual ones from Beckett. It too creates a strange, deliberate juxtaposition, but it is largely cognitive or superstructural. With Schaeffer and Oswald, the cognitive dissonance comes from a more literal spatio-temporal juxtaposition. Thus Schaeffer writes, “The *concrète* experiment in music consists of building sonorous objects ... with *pieces of time torn from the cosmos*.”<sup>22</sup> The recording – and the consequent reification of sound – makes these pieces possible, but ultimately their aim is to comment on that very possibility.

The spatial treatment of sound also forms the basis for much electronic music that incorporates the human voice, wherein sound moves back and forth between language and simply tone. As a listener, the interaction between denotation and connotation is unstable – there are sounds which almost sound like language, and vocalizations that are barely distinguishable from tone. For example, Charles Dodge created a series of text pieces in 1972 that consist of a short spoken phrase manipulated and given tone, phrase, and form: in “He Destroyed Her Image,” for instance, the text at times is clearly decipherable, but then the very same sound sample is repeated without some key formants of speech, removing its semantic foundation. Similar effects are found in Paul Lansky’s music; his “idlechatter” series of 1985 & 1999 splices a number of voices together to make a coordinated multi-gendered gibberish: a *Plexure* of the English language. And in “Her Song” (1978), a woman seems to be harmonizing with herself, not in traditional counterpoint, but somehow *inside* her own voice: each word is duplicated to many pitches at once, while still remaining perfectly in time with each other. These pieces signal a remarkable disavowal of live performance, as the human voice has been audibly removed from “real” time. And like sampled works their poignancy comes from an audible apprehension of this de-temporalization – that is, fully reified

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21 John Oswald, “Plunderstanding Ecophonemics,” op cit. page 12.

22 This is in *À la Recherche d'une Musique Concrète*; quoted in Russcol, *The Liberation of Sound*, op. cit., page 85. Emphasis in the original.

sound is used to draw attention precisely to that reification. The technico-performativity that (until quite recently) was hidden in pop music is here prioritized.

The important point here is that all of these pieces, whether they operate on cultural sound-objects, language, or the physiology of human vocal chords, are powerful and remarkable precisely because *they are not possible*. The work of Oswald, Dodge, or Lansky cannot be seen as simply a reaction to popular music, nor as simply fruitful artistic exploration of technology. Their music instead exhibits the ontological implications of the recording, even as it deconstructs them. It is questionable, then, how much this music can be seen as unfettered intellectualism – art for its own sake. Both the meaning and the substance of the work are tied up in the recording, which is what pushed “serious music” away from fetishized music in the first place. And so while it in itself may not suffer from the same commodification that Adorno sees in popular orchestral music, its oppositional stance toward that commodification means that it likewise cannot be dissociated. Ultimately, the interaction is not one of marketability, but of musical evolution itself.

In turn, although it was the cultural change precipitated by the recording – the creation of mass-repetitive-desire-listening – that moved a significant amount of “serious music” towards the realm of electronic and recorded music, the massive trickle-down of technique and technology from serious to popular musicians is likewise undeniable. There are several obvious technological examples, like the keyboard synthesizer or the vocoder, but the “solitary musical auteur” archetype has likewise been imported from serious music. Only twenty years after Stockhausen’s first synthetic, self-created works (the *Studien* of the early 1950s) and only eight after Subotnick’s direct-to-record release, Gary Wright produced the first synthetic, studio-based pop song, “Dreamweaver” (1975). And since then the idea of a solitary computer-musician has been warmly adopted into popular music, in the likes of Trent Reznor, Moby, and countless hip-hop artists (leading to the phenomenon of posthumous new releases, as in the case of Notorious B.I.G.).<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between popular and serious music is not simplistically parasitical or reaction-based – it is a complex interdependence created specifically by the rise of the recording as the primary mode of confronting music. Even though Babbitt’s polemics may rightly indicate the removal of art music from consumption, the fact that it is united with mass music through the use of the recording means that it also cannot escape its (non-economic) implications.

Contrast this with the classical-music auteur archetypes, the composer and the virtuoso, both of which are largely dependent on larger ensembles. The popular-music versions of these types flourished in jazz in the 40s and 50s, but had largely vanished by the 1980s. In rock, virtuosi have been largely confined to the guitar, but this too has died out as live concerts have declined in importance relative to album sales and music videos.

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23 For a veritable hagiography of the solitary Moby, see Gerald Marzorati, “All By Himself” in *New York Times Magazine*, March 17, 2002.

*An Ontic Conflict*

The effects of the recording extend beyond the changing cultural role of music, or audible changes in the problematic of “serious music” with the rise of complexity, sampling, or manipulation. The reification of sound leads to even deeper implications for the fundamental ontology of both sound and music. Indeed, the conflict between the “electronic” and the “regular,” rather than being found in the epiphenomena of musical change, comes down primarily to the deeper ontological implications of recording, and these are largely at odds with the traditional identity of music.

Consider first the case of sound: once recorded – captured and frozen in object form – it no longer appears to have a unique presence in space and time. Just as with each of a series of artistic multiples, each playing-back supposedly creates the same sound. Indeed, one of the inventions of the *musique concrète* school was the concept of an *objet sonore*: a “sound object” that can be isolated, copied, or stored in the same way that a physical object can. According to Schaeffer, repeatedly hearing an *objet sonore* is entirely analogous to confronting a familiar physical object: whereas Le Caine’s comment on the conquest of time implied a change in attitude, the *objet sonore* makes the reification of sound explicit. For the *concrète* school, time has ceased to be variable and qualitative, and a world of “sound” is replaced by a world of individual “sounds.” The introduction of the *objet sonore* concept downplays the fundamentally denotative aspect of sound, prioritizing instead the historical or cultural connotations it evokes. Similarly, in one of Barthes’s examples, he suggests that even though an image of tomatoes first and foremost denotes red circles, the connotation of tomatoness, and thus something like “Italianicity,” is unavoidable, and part of the inherent rhetoric of any image.<sup>24</sup>

Much as advertisers intentionally use tomatoes to conjure ideas of Italy, the use of the *objet sonore* concept is an attempt to characterize the aural plane as a system of signifiers. This is in conflict with the more traditional, musical understanding of sound, where self-conscious connotation is seen as unmusical. The introduction of this “classical” understanding of sound can be traced back to 1854, when the German theorist Eduard Hanslick denounced the idea that there could be either a subject or an object to music. He proclaimed instead that “the content of music is moving tonal forms,” which immediately affect our senses and enter our consciousness, but stop short of our feelings and emotions – and exist simply as ends in and of themselves.<sup>25</sup> In this

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24 Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977, orig. 1964), pp 33-37.

25 This phrase has proved difficult to translate, with various authors changing it to suit various arguments. See Gustav Cohen’s translation, *The Beautiful in Music*, Seventh Edition (New York: Novello, Ewer, & Co., 1891, orig. *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854), page 67; Geoffrey Payzant’s translation *On the Musically Beautiful*,

conception of sound, all sounds are unique, even if they sound the same: the *recognition* of sounds happens after their primary cognition as psychically unique, purely-denoted tone.

The conflict between the presumed uniqueness of musical sound and the iterability of *objets sonores* can be put in a more philosophical way, hinging around the historical question of the role of individual consciousness in the apprehension of the world. Here Bergson's philosophy, from the beginning of the twentieth century, provides two operative concepts. The first is his assertion that the existence of novelty is both the evidence and aim of time:

If the future is bound to *succeed* the present instead of being given alongside of it, it is because the future is not altogether determined at the present moment, and that if the time taken up by this succession is something other than a number, if it has for the consciousness that is installed in it absolute value and reality, it is because there is unceasingly being created in it ... something unforeseeable and new.<sup>26</sup>

And the second (bound up in the first) is pure duration:

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego..., in recalling these states, does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another... The proof is that, if we interrupt the rhythm by dwelling longer than is right on one note of the tune, it is not its exaggerated length, as length, which will warn us of our mistake, but the qualitative change thereby caused in the whole of the musical phrase."<sup>27</sup>

It is not the musical metaphor that is important here, but rather the assertion that the past can be neither arbitrary nor extricable from the present, the evidence being our own psychical experience. For Bergson, then, the sensory phenomenon of sound exists at the present-tense intersection of vibrating matter and an individual consciousness – hence the problem of the tree in the forest. An *objet sonore*, however, exists much like the signs of natural language, as a cultural construction independent of terms like “consciousness.” *Objets sonores* can exist without anyone to hear them – indeed, they can easily reside on pieces of magnetic tape.

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Eighth Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1986, orig. *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854), page 29; and Nils Wallin, op. cit., page 3.

26 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, Arthur Mitchell, trans. (Mineola: Dover, 1998, orig. *Evolution Créatrice*, 1907), page 369.

27 Henri Bergson, *Time & Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. R. L. Pogson, trans. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913, orig. *L'Essai*, 1889), page 100.

Thus the mismatch between musical and semiotic sound is both precipitated and embodied by the recording. The reification of the concept of sound goes hand in hand with its literal object quality (on a piece of tape), so that a sound object could easily be understood as “an object which is sound.” This is due in part to the inherent spatiality of the term “sound object” – Hanslickian listeners might want to resist reified thinking, and replace *objet sonore* with Gabriel Marcel’s more Bergsonian idea of a “non-spatial figuration”<sup>28</sup> (in *musique concrète*, however, the physicality of the *objet sonore* concept was hardly accidental).

In addition, Bergson’s philosophy would indicate that the epistemological error of the recording is that it makes no distinction between repetition (which is temporal, and musical) and duplication (which is spatial). For a listening mind, two repetitions of a similar sound are not literally the same sound, since the memory of the first would inform the reception of the second. The recording, however, ignores the role of a conscious mind and posits sound as wholly material – and in a world with only matter and space, there is only duplication. The equivalence of one sound with any other is therefore seen as a fallacy engendered by the dual replacement of sound with its spatial trace, and the listening mind with a microphone.

Has the recording proven Bergson wrong? Is sound a semiotic system? Again Barthes is instructive, as he shows that it is in fact impossible to dissociate the denoted from the connoted – it is not a question of either/or, but of both at once. At the most literal level, Barthes describes images much like Hanslick describes music, as “a message without a code,” but he says also that “the reader of the image receives *at one and the same time* the perceptual message and the cultural message.... [This distinction is] analogous to that which allows the distinction in the linguistic sign of a signifier and a signified (even though in reality no one is able to separate the ‘word’ from its meaning except by recourse to the metalanguage of a definition).”<sup>29</sup> Historically, the introduction of both the recording and the *objet sonore* concept as “new” influences in music has pitted the semiotic against the sensual, as if the two were incompatible, or indeed, separable at all.

These conflicts are only magnified when one shifts from a discussion of “sound” to a discussion of “music.” Here the musical mind would say that, while the recording has certainly changed the cultural understanding of music, even *musique concrète* is still composed of sounds, and sounds, per Bergson, cannot be fixed, due to their dependence on a listening consciousness.

La Monte Young’s 1960 piece “X for Harry Flynt” consists of a piano forearm cluster repeated X times. (The first performance, April 1960, was “1698 for Harry Flynt.”) It seems at first that one only need listen for, say, twenty or thirty clusters, and then extrapolate, but the precise (and variable) number X suggests that the piece instead could be seen as an exposition of the difference between two modes of understanding. It is both a collection of duplicated *objets*, but also, insofar as cluster #43 feels qualitatively different than cluster #1243, their repetition evokes Bergson’s idea of the past existing in the present.

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28 See Gabriel Marcel, “Bergsonism and Music,” C.K. Moncrieff, trans., in Suzanne Langer, ed., *Reflections on Art* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960, orig. 1925), page 146.

29 Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” op. cit., pp 36-37.

This characterization forms the basis of the field of biomusicology, pioneered by Nils Wallin in the mid-1980s. His work is predicated upon an understanding of music not as a thing-in-itself (as on a record), but as a cybernetic interaction between sound-in-the-world and music-in-consciousness, and thus even though his viewpoint is primarily neurological, his description of music is directly analogous to Bergson's understanding of time and novelty. Since Wallin, like Bergson, sees the mind as an active participant in the world and not as a passive receptor, he posits music as a direct expression of the working mind, neither distinct nor dissociable from it. He writes: "Intense attention to a tonal flow-becoming-music – it may be the composer attempting to capture the image of his [or her] composition, the listener searching for clues in the tonal flow, or the performer's efforts to articulate the musical development – means to experience, observe, to 'read off' the evolving process of mind-becoming-conscious. I hold that this would be the moment when 'actual,' physical time is experienced...."<sup>30</sup> And just as the mind is active, it is multifarious – Wallin's studies suggest that neurologically, music is not simply an aural phenomenon. Consciousness, however complex, is both singular and continuous, and thus is seen to inform a sociological basis for music.<sup>31</sup>

In 1985, at the request of the Council of Europe, Wallin composed a "draft of a draft" of a definition of music, wherein he incorporated ideas like René Thom's catastrophe theory and C.H. Waddington's epigenetic theory of embryology with a neurophysiological understanding of sound. He describes music as a dynamically emergent phenomenon deriving from the mutual interaction of three sub-systems: the auditory system of a subject, a sound-creating structure, and the environment. None of these forces are fixed, however, as they constantly interact with each other in an iterative interdependency. The stability of any musical flow is an adaptation, a constant evolution against variegated disturbances.<sup>32</sup> He suggests that any attempt to give music a fixity outside of this temporal meta-stability of mind, sounds, and context will be ontologically untenable, fundamentally unable to account for musical change either as an aural experience or as a cultural phenomenon. Indeed, the reductivism of the recording is seen precisely as an omission of dynamic, temporal, and morphogenetic processes from a phenomenon which is primarily and intrinsically found in the time of consciousness. Thus music as it actually exists is tightly tied to duration: it is not simply an ordered set of sounds, but a "tonal flow-becoming-music." And in opposition to the fixative effect of the recording, it can have no singular identity in space or time – to say that music heard at different times or in different places is the same music

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30 Wallin, *op. cit.*, page 1.

31 *Ibid.*, page 22.

32 *Ibid.*, pp 15-25.

would be to deny the impact of both the environment and the conscious state of the listener.

Once again, the essence of the conflict of the recording comes down to an unresolved tension between the materialism of Bergson and Wallin and a more semiotic understanding of the difference between “music” and “sound experience.” The recording, by fixing a sound flow and labeling it “music,” seems to be setting up the distinction as one of “correct context” (much like the ‘felicity’ of linguistic performativity, per J.L. Austin). One could then conclude, as John Cage did, that “everything is music,” since it is simply the listener’s attitude that creates music. In contrast, the traditional (materialist) viewpoint would hold that music must necessarily be created in a composer’s mind and then transmitted, intentionally, via composition and performance, to a listener’s consciousness.

Without tackling the problem of intentionality in music, it suffices to see that the recording exacerbates the issue. Even though the contents of a recording may or may not in fact be “music” (just as the sound emanating from a concert hall may be nothing more than “sound experience,” as in the case of an orchestra tuning up), the recording seems to demand that a stance be taken, either for or against Cage. But much like the dual denotative / connotative structure of sound, the structural distinction between “music” and “sound experience” is probably much more complex than simply a question of well-defined context. Indeed, it would seem as if the definition would ultimately conform with a more Derridian system of pure iteration, but this demands its own investigation. The recording may point to the fact that, much to the chagrin of both Wallin and Cage, it may be untenable to have the notion of intentionality or consciousness as a formative characteristic of music at all.

Beyond the question of consciousness and context, however, there is the more straightforward problem that music as it exists on a recording seems to be a fixed succession of fixed sounds, and this too contrasts greatly with its traditional identity. Take for instance Leonardo da Vinci’s grandiloquent remark that “painting is superior to music because, unlike unfortunate music, it does not have to die as soon as it is born.... Music which is consumed in the very act of its birth is inferior to painting which the use of varnish has rendered eternal.”<sup>35</sup> Here the conflict between the recording and the “classical” understanding of music is more obvious, as the recording seems to erase the difference between music and painting, finally allowing music to be “permanent” (that is, spatial). But historically, the variability of

Although it is perhaps significant that Cage himself held no fondness for the recording: “The reason they’ve no music in Texas is because they have recordings in Texas. Remove the records from Texas and someone will learn to sing.”<sup>33</sup>

For Derrida, the fact that performative language can fail – *νῆξ*, it can be cited – is part of what makes language possible at all. He writes, “Rather than oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of an event, one ought to construct a differential typology of forms of iteration ... at that point, we will be dealing with different kinds of marks or chains of iterable marks and not with an opposition between citational utterances, on the one hand, and singular and original event-utterances, on the other.”<sup>34</sup> This in turn would remove intentionality (and thus context) from its privileged position: “In such a typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene.”

33 From his “Lecture on Something,” in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures & Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), page 126.

34 both from Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988, orig. 1971), page 18.

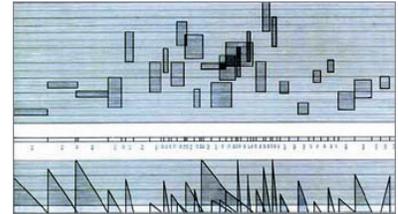
35 Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della Pittura* (New York: Orion Press, 1961, orig. 1519), page 29.

live performance was seen not as a shortcoming, but as part of the nature of music, or even as an opportunity (as with ornamentation, or early cadenzas). And so when the recording becomes the primary mode of confronting music, the apparent fixity of music is seen as counter to the concept of music as a “live” phenomenon.

It is not just that the “perfection” possible on a recording is super-human; rather, the concept of music itself is radically altered, as the “piece of music” becomes identical to the piece of tape. Consider the example of Stockhausen’s “score” for his 1954 *Studie II* (at right): when tape-synthesis becomes performative, so that performance doesn’t happen in real-time, this kind of drawing is no longer a score in the conventional sense. Instead of communicating something like intentionality between a composer and performers (or readers), it seems more like scratch paper, a heuristic, or an explanatory caption. Above all, it begins to relate more to the roll of magnetic tape labeled “Studie II” than to any sort of performance: itself spatial, it refers to another object in space rather than to anything happening in time. (This effect is even stronger in works released directly as recordings, that is, without a “world premiere.” Perhaps indicating composers’ reluctance to reify musical temporality, this did not happen until the late date of 1967, with Morton Subotnick’s *Silver Apples of the Moon* – more than nineteen years after the first fully-spatialized experiment with sound, Schaeffer’s *Étude aux Chemins de Fer*.)

The conflict that the recording precipitates, in this case, is not that music is repeatable, or complex, or worthy of scrutiny, but that a piece of music can have a singular identity – the issues that Gould raises regarding perfection ultimately run much deeper, and touch on the very ontology of performance. In this way, the recording is again in discord with Bergson’s philosophy, specifically concerning the distinction between a musical composition, the music it creates, and the performance that separates the two. Again using Bergson as a good gauge of traditional musical thought, inasmuch as music and sound are fully and always real (extant) and actual (in the world), a composition would be *virtual*. To be virtual means that it in itself is not part of the world, but rather a vector which, upon interaction with the world, will produce a pattern which is dependent on both the vector and the state of the world into which it is injected. Deleuze expanded upon this idea in 1964:

The virtual is not opposed to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual.... Indeed, the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object.... The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations



Stockhausen’s score for *Studie II*: the top portion is frequency, the bottom is volume.

that form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality when they have.<sup>36</sup>

In the case of music, the structure in question is the (virtual) pattern of (actual) sound called for in a musical composition – the score indicates structure, without being music itself, even though the two are equally real. The piece itself can never be given spatial permanence: it can only become manifest through actualization, either as sound, or in the consciousness of a trained musician (which, per Bergson, is a realm no less a part of the world than air and ears).

Indeed, the comparison of an orchestral realization with one in the mind of an expert is a good example of the concept of actualization. Each time the virtual is made actual, it is different, based on its interaction with the environment: “the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualized by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself, to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualized.”<sup>37</sup> The difference between the virtual composition and its actual manifestation is not one of reality, but simply difference itself. A composition can only be (and is necessarily) made different from both the original structure and all other performances. Thus the recording seems to deny the differentiation between the virtual (composition) and the actual (music), not by suggesting that the virtual is not real, but by offering an illusion of mastery over the boundary between it and the actual – performance. Le Caine’s supposed conquest of time can also be seen as the attempt to control actualization.

However, even though the recording seems to ascribe fixity to a piece of music and thus degrade the composition itself to the status of a caption, the fixity of signification of a piece music is only apparent. The variability of a piece of music needn’t be accounted for by literal actualizations-out-of-virtuality; a piece of music likewise has a cultural meaning that is fixed neither in society nor in any individual. In Barthes’s analysis of the photographic image, he writes that “the number of readings of the same lexical unit or *lexia* (of the same image) varies according to individuals.... The variation in readings is not, however, anarchic; it depends on the different kinds of knowledge – practical, national, cultural, aesthetic – invested in the image.... It is as though the image presented itself to the reading of several different people who can perfectly well co-exist in a single individual.”<sup>38</sup> The fixity of a photographic image or a sound recording does not presuppose a fixed reading; the fixity of the recording seems to provoke a divergence with a more Deleuzian ontology of performance, but such fixity is fallacious in any case.

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36 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Paul Patton, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, orig. *Différence et Répétition*, 1968), pp 208-209.

37 Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, Tomlinson and Habberjam, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1988, orig. *Bergsonisme*, 1966), page 97.

38 Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” op. cit., page 46.

So the more fundamental problem that the recording raises, rather than between fixity and indeterminacy, has to do with performance. Does the recording a priori usurp any meaningful creative performativity? The extent to which this change is structural is the basis for much of the ambivalence towards all things “electronic.”

*The Recording and “Electronic Music”*

Within serious music there remains a relatively large distinction between “electronic music” and what might be idiomatically described as “regular music,” despite the fact that the distinction is hopelessly muddled by the fact that so much music gets recorded. Regular music seems to stand apart because it is so closely tied to live-ness, to the traditional understanding of performance. From this point of view of, however, the rift seems odd, since electronic music has the capability, like orchestral music, to defy the reification of time.

For example, compare the phonograph with the various musical instruments invented in the early twentieth century, such as the dynamophone or the thérémin. The dynamophone, invented by Thaddeus Cahill in 1897 and produced in 1906, was based on principles rather similar to the telephone: it is essentially a huge array of dynamos wired into a few speakers (or in Cahill’s original conception, directly into the telephone network, making a “telharmonium”). And Léon Thérémin’s eponymous instrument (invented 1925) used similar principles: the frequency and volume of an electronic oscillator are controlled by the proximity of the performer’s hands to two antennae (one for pitch, one for volume). Both of these instruments, and in the many similar ones that followed (such as the sphärophon, dynaphone, Ondes Martenot, trauttonium, and the Hammond organ), are essentially musical elaborations on the telephone. And in the telephonic realm, sound is not replaced by a surrogate, but rather transduced into electricity, an equally temporal and dynamic phenomenon. But unlike the recording, the fact that it is not fully dissociated from its “source” means that for these instruments the notion of ‘objectivity’ is largely irrelevant. Only in its most basic form – the telephone – is the myth of immediateness even suggested. And so while the original (and still implicit) goal of the phonograph was to preserve a given sound as faithfully as possible,<sup>39</sup> the point of electronic instruments, regardless of whether they are designed to create or manipulate sound, is precisely to mediate, to distort, and to transform. They stand diametrically opposed to the recording: the recording attempts to remain immediate through space, while electronic instruments are designed to distort in time.

But what happens when recordings are used in “real” time? This very possibility suggests that the reductivism of the recording is not a

A dynamo is a wire coil that rotates in between poles of a magnet, thereby producing alternating (*i.e.*, waveform) current in the coil. With a large array of dynamos operating at different speeds, one could produce custom timbres and specific wave shapes.

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39 For example, as argued by Attali in *Noise*, op. cit., pp 90-95.

technological inevitability, but rather that the paradigmatic shift it caused was then re-projected back onto the original technology, as if there were no other way to use it. One technique for overcoming this reified mindset uses the tape recorder as a feedback device. A single piece of tape is looped between two tape recorders, one of which is set to record and the other to play; the variable distance between them creates a variable time-delay. For example, Brian Ferneyhough's *Time & Motion Study II* of 1976-1977 asks a cellist to try to follow score which has staves for two bows, the cellist's voice, and two foot pedals. Each of the foot pedals controls a tape loop time-delay, which plays back what the cellist and the tape just played. Staying on track and in tempo is notoriously difficult, and the final result is never perfection, but an expression of the futility of such an attempt. The piece uses recording technology not to conquer time, but to be consumed by it: performance is in realtime, and one could easily imagine Wallin's musical subsystems – the aural system, the sounding artifact, and the environment – attempt to exert a maximum of control over the others.

Or there is the special case of Varèse's *Poème Électronique*, composed for the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels. It used all manner of *concrète*, orchestral, and synthesized sounds, elaborately manipulated and set onto tape, but an integral part of the piece was the building in which it was played – the Phillips Pavilion, designed by Le Corbusier (and Xenakis, who was working for Corb at the time). The eight-minute *Poème* was heard through the combined broadcast of 425 speakers, all placed and controlled individually. The *Poème Électronique* has no meaning as simply a recording: it is the aural effect of recordings injected into space, and the impact of that space on the recordings was not just acknowledged, but designed. It is made up of recorded sound, but the explicit importance (yet variability) of the position and movement of a listener through space makes a singular understanding of the piece not only antithetical to its conception, but logically impossible. And so even though the broadcast sounds were carefully created by Varèse, the “actualization” of the piece depends on the performance of the listener. But for the sake of dissemination, this piece is issued on a recording.

There are other lesser-known pieces, such as La Monte Young's Drift Study and Dreamhouse projects (1966 and 1969) or Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969), that likewise use recorded sound and were similarly site-specific (in both conception and comprehension). The issue here is not to lament the reduction of originally “realtime” pieces to the inhibitive spatiality of a record. Rather when, as Benjamin predicted, “the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproduction,”<sup>40</sup> works that were not designed for such reproduction are subject to misreading, at the

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40 Benjamin, op. cit., page 224.

expense of the entire genre. Indeed, within electronic music, there is little distinction made between recording-based music (like *Silver Apples of the Moon*) and “live” music that uses recording technology (such as *I Am Sitting in a Room*) – most histories of electronic music don’t see any confusion at all.<sup>41</sup> Yet these are two different types of music, as they stand for divergent views regarding the possibility and nature of performance.

The link between these two “sub-categories” of electronic music does seem intuitive – they both stand in contrast to traditional orchestral music, they both share a strong relationship with technology, and most recording apparatus is plugged into the wall. They seem even more closely related in recent decades, as the computer has incorporated the technology of both into one machine, and the popular term “electronic and computer music” incorporates most of the non-orchestral techniques that the literal denotation of “electronic music” left out: techniques like tape manipulation have been obviated by the all-purpose computer. Now, spatial and temporal manipulations are often done with the same machine, even with the same piece of software (really though, this proximity only highlights the difference between the two operations – thus the apparent atavism of real-time performances for laptop.)

In the end, these deep associations are rooted in Babbitt’s prophecy: a great deal of new music, and almost all electronic music, is distributed and heard via recordings. There is little confusion when electronic pieces are in fact performed live, where the live-ness of electronic instruments is obvious. But when it is recorded, it appears no different than music made in a recording studio or on a computer. So in addition to any presumed deleterious effects on the agency of the listening mind or the music / composition distinction, the reliance on the recording misrepresents those electronic works that were conceived as live, temporal works and makes them seem as if they fit into the stereotype of reified electronica. Thus the “electronic vs. regular” distinction is often incorrectly taken to signify “recorded vs. live.” But there are just as many “orchestral” works that are dependent on the recording as there electronic ones (*e.g.*, the work of Gould and Subotnick), and there are many electronic pieces that are fundamentally tied to live performance. The distinction is ultimately untenable on all fronts: there are no self-consistent characteristics for either category. The division lies instead in the recording, a non-musical invention that was brought fruitfully into music, but which also has serious implications for the understanding of what music is.

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41 For example, see Appleton & Perera, *The Development and Practice of Electronic Music* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975); Herbert Deutsch, *Synthesis: An Introduction to the History, Theory, & Practice of Electronic Music* (Port Washington: Alfred Publishing Co., 1976); David Ernst, *The Evolution of Electronic Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1977); as well as Manning’s *Electronic and Computer Music* and Russcol’s *The Liberation of Sound*, both op. cit.

## FORMALIZATION AND INTUITION IN ANALOGIQUE A ET B

(with some remarks on the historical-mathematical sources of Xenakis)<sup>1</sup>

Agostino Di Scipio

### Premises

*Analogique A et B* (for nine strings and tape, 1958-59), is one of those few musical works whose theoretical premises Xenakis discussed at length in *Formalized Music*. Two entire chapters of this book are devoted to issues connected with it. In one chapter, Xenakis proposes the theory of “Markovian stochastic music”. In the other, he illustrates details of the compositional model by means of which he composed two separate, but essentially similar, pieces, namely *Analogique A* (for nine strings), and *Analogique B* (for “electromagnetic tape”, to use the composer’s own definition). Importantly, in those chapters Xenakis also focusses on issues in the representation of musical sounds, introducing a representation of acoustical signals of a kind proposed by Dennis Gabor in the 1940s, based on finite-time functions, in contrast with the infinite-time bases of more often utilized sound signal representations (Fourier). With this representation, that Xenakis later preferred to date back to some proposals of Albert Einstein’s (early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), the composer could achieve « une synthèse a base de quanta sonores », creating clouds of sonic droplets. Eventually this effort came to be recognized as the first example of *granular sound synthesis* ever implemented and utilized in musical contexts, although a very problematic and relatively efficient one. Together with *Concret PH* (1958), that involved some kind of granular sonic *transformations* (not *synthesis*), *Analogique B* is the first musical example of a corpuscular view of the physical phenomenon of sound, echoing the corpuscular-mechanistic hypothesis put forth by Isaac Beekman in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In this paper I will not go any further into issues of granular sound synthesis as dealt with by Xenakis in *Analogique B*.<sup>2</sup> I will be more concerned with the formalization of the overall compositional process, and I will more directly refer to *Analogique A*. This work provides the basis for a relevant discussion on formalizable vs. non-formalizable aspects of the creative process of music - perhaps more so than any other piece composed by Xenakis. As a personal position, I believe one needs to be as deeply aware as possible of the complete set of mathematical tools Xenakis set up for himself, before one can also speak of non-formalized, more intuitive aspects which are anyway crucial to his music. One should, in a way, bring himself to the border between what is rationally dealt with in a formalizable way, and what is left out of formalization or is anyway approached in less formalized, maybe unformalizable, ways. Only getting closer to that border one can then step ahead and speculate on more intuitive compositional decisions, themselves left beyond the border. This is, at least, the way I felt I should follow when I began to interrogate myself on Xenakis music. I believe such an approach is crucial when dealing with composers who - like Xenakis - are not *users* but in the first place *designers* of their own technologies and working tools.

*Analogique A et B* can be reasonably regarded as a very problematic musical composition. Some would say it is the least successful work ever composed by Xenakis. That is usually explained with the strong emphasis he put on the mathematical and constructive details, summing up to an overload of theoretical and technical premises whose final musical results are comparatively poor. In short, some look at it as an unsatisfactory experiment. In a way, that's simply true. Evidence being that, indeed, in later works Xenakis never took up the approach again. But this tells us little. I would rather say, instead, that the problems Xenakis raised in this work, and that certainly he left without clear-cut solutions, give this music a peculiar character that is very palpable in the experience of listening. The problems left without solutions had to do precisely with aspects of composing that remained (and probably had to remain) non-formalized. Xenakis himself felt urged to introduce a number of manual, non-formalized adjustments. Therefore, the final musical result is less an unsatisfactory work, than a work expressive of a lively and intricate dialectics between formalization and intuition. There is a peculiar tension to it, one which may be not unique to *Analogique*, but which is particularly vivid in this work. What is interesting, then, is not just the opposition: "formalization vs. intuition", "formalizable vs. non-formalizable", but the dialectics between them: the two are inextricably intertwined, so interlaced that they cannot be separated in the experience of this music (neither the composer's, nor the listener's). From this point of view, I believe *Analogique A et B* is a masterwork: in a very subtle way, it makes the dialectics of "formalization and intuition" the very issue at stake in this music, and makes it somehow audible by the listener.

### Sources of Thinking

As is known, in Xenakis' early musical works, and of course in his writings too, several echoes are found of his intellectual and educational background, specially including an interest for mathematics and physics.<sup>3</sup> Certain theoretical issues recur quite often in the first decades of his career. Think, for example, of his need to reshape the *foundations of music*, where there is a ring of the quest for the *foundations of mathematics* that had been crucial in 19<sup>th</sup>-century science, and still reverberated at the time when Xenakis began to compose. Think of his interest for the issue of *determinism and indeterminism*, and for that of *continuity* (of numbers, of time...), whose audible musical trace, the glissando, for many is almost like a trademark of his most famous compositions. And think, with a more specific example, of the emphasis he put on *continuous probability functions*, and how these could be turned from a numerical process into a musically meaningful process. Many times Xenakis evoked the names of important figures in the history of mathematics. Most of his mathematical sources could probably be drawn to the initial decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely to scientists who, in turn, had built on many important questions first asked during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Let's recall that thermodynamics (to name a branch of physics of major importance behind the theory of stochastic music, and indeed behind all information-theory that was becoming of age and of social relevance at the time when Xenakis started composing) emerged across the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and had ramifications in many branches of science and technology. Xenakis was also clearly aware of the scientific revolution that took place in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in (quantum) physics. Furthermore, his work from the late 1950s and early 1960s bears witness to his acquaintance with the principles brought about by the

then new endeavors of system theory, typically under the name of *cybernetics*. He also had a special admiration for Jean Piaget – in a different but perhaps related domain of science. In *Formalized Music*, Xenakis often used terminology of cyberneticians (von Neumann, Wiener), and sometimes that of biocyberneticians (Ross Ashby).

All this is probably due not only to his own personal attitude and genuine curiosity for all sciences, but also to the fact that, at the time of his connection with the GRM, in Paris (late 1950s), he met Abraham Moles, whom surely Xenakis owes familiarity with information-theory and with research work that was soon to become of relevance to him (including writings by Werner Meyer-Eppler and Dennis Gabor [Di Scipio 1998b]).

Finally, Xenakis envisioned the use of computers as a way to put many of his efforts into practice. With that, he opened to what eventually was called “algorithmic composition”, on the one hand, and to “non-standard sound synthesis” methods, on the other (the latter Xenakis discussed under the term of “microcomposition”). Like very few composers of his generation (notable examples would include Gottfried M. Koenig, Herbert Brün and the Italian Pietro Grossi), he put himself at work, and learned computer programming. Of course his programming codes - either the ST program (coded in Fortran, early 1960s), or the implementation of GENDYN (first coded in Basic, early 1990s) - are certainly far from professional computer programming standards,<sup>4</sup> still they reflect a musical vision that, at that time, challenged the very means of composition.

In Xenakis’ writings we often find math notations borrowed from 19<sup>th</sup>-century scientists. I refer to names such as Poisson, Cauchy, Gauss, and Cantor, for example. Cauchy and Gauss, in particular, were all-important mathematicians of their time (end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>), and also participated in the very early debates on the *foundations of mathematics* [Bussotti 2000]. They had two very different views. Cauchy, parting with another outstanding figure of his time, Bernard Bolzano, followed what can be called an “ontological” approach, where one asks: *What is a number? What is a mathematical object or entity?* Gauss, on the other hand, was more methodologically inclined, as for him the question was: *What are the limits of applicability of mathematical methods?* According to the first view, fundamental to all mathematics is the very concept of *number*, or anyway something that can be called a numerical “entity”, an object of numerical nature. In the second approach, fundamental is not the object but the *method*, i.e. the demonstrative procedure by which objects can be, regardless of their truth or essence, operated upon. At that time (early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), such questions were raised when discussing such things as the *continuity of a function*, or the notion of *infinite* and *infinitesimal* quantities, and all general issues in analysis and calculus. The divergence between Gauss, on one side, and Cauchy and Bolzano, on the other, is nicely captured in the observation made by Gauss himself that the infinite can only be postulated: the infinite, he claimed, is only « une façon de parler » (a manner of speaking).

It is also interesting that Gauss had it that the theory of numbers could be only grounded on arithmetical methods capable of illustrating how theorems could be linked and concatenated to form a chain. By “arithmetical methods” he meant demonstrative procedures that can link from one theorem to the next, forming a discrete, step-wise concatenation of separate theorems that could be independently explained. For Gauss,

there is not such a thing like a “numerical nature” of anything – on the contrary, it is the applicability and reliability of arithmetical methods which in a way determine the existence of numbers. With this view, Gauss was at odds with the theory of the continuum, i.e. with the more Platonic, continuist view of Bolzano, Cauchy and others – although certainly he himself utilized the calculus and continuous functions anyway. Gauss shared Galileo’s opinion that we can speak of “atoms” but cannot assign to them any quantity or numerical measure: *atomi non quanti*. He was against the hypothesis of the “actuality” of infinite and infinitesimal quantities, and used to call these latter *potential* (not actual) *quantities*. Based on that, Gauss would claim that the continuous and the discontinuous, the infinite and the finite should not be treated by the same methods, and that there is a leap between them. For him, then, scientific rigour and precise formalization was a matter of wise methodological strategies, whose success was not granted by the pre-existence of numerical entities.

Augustin Cauchy, on the other side, is usually credited to have provided the very mathematical grounds that make it possible to operate exchanges between continuous and discrete domains. Many authors credit to him the modern distinction between the continuous and the quantized, or between the “analog” and the “digital”, as we use to say. From his work, the notion emerged that we can, to some extent, exchange operations between one domain and the other, between the analog and the digital, between continuous and discontinuous entities. This was to reveal crucial to 20<sup>th</sup>-century information-theory, and set the premises, among other things, for Alan Reeves’ description of so-called Pulse Code Modulation, in the 1930s, which eventually became one of the fundamentals of all digital audio.

Xenakis did not put any particular stress on *numbers*, except probably for his initial use of the Fibonacci series (in early works like *Tripli Zyia*, 1952, *Sacrifice*, 1953, and in his masterwork *Metastasis*, 1954)<sup>5</sup>. That being the only exception, he rather emphasized *methods*, that is “ways of going”, well-defined procedures. He stated very clearly that his stochastic music was a “method” (or set of methods), and should not be confused with a musical style. On the other hand, the question of “continuity” is very crucial to his use of mathematics and became an important element in some of his compositions. In fact, another scientist often mentioned by Xenakis was George Cantor, who proposed a historically relevant mathematical theory of the continuum. Cantor’s theory of infinite sets (which at its outset, in the 1880s, had been very hotly debated, and rejected by many) must have been particularly dear to Xenakis: indeed, we know that he read Cantor’s writings, especially some letters addressed to friends where Cantor initially outlined his theory in simple, intuitive terms. Moreover, Xenakis’ definition of “ordered structures” seems to be literally taken from Cantor, although he did not make it explicit. This being so, it must have been very clear to Xenakis that Cantor’s contributions to science illuminated a number of fundamental antinomies and inconsistencies in the main academical body of mathematics, raising questions widely discussed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and still reverberating well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Although he often referred to, and utilized *continuous* probability functions, Xenakis was never explicit on the issue of the necessary *quantization* he had to operate on them: the maps he used from distributions in the continuum to, say, discrete musical pitches, he took them for granted, as an obvious issue. Incidentally, I would say that this was not by

chance, as it is precisely in the mapping that he could adjust the output of his calculations in order to better deal with unavoidable constraints (due for example to the particularities of musical instruments), or to bias his generative process towards wanted results. Markovian chains, random walks, and sieves can all be easily connected with this unavoidable problem of quantization. Yet, as I can remember, only in one passage of a very late article [Xenakis 1994], Xenakis wrote a *discrete* recursive formula related to an indeterministic process (this was to explain how deterministic machines with limited numerical representation, such as computers, can produce streams of pseudo-random numbers).

## Overview of *Analogique A*

In the following sections, I would like to overview the compositional process of *Analogique A*. I will let a number of points so far shortly touched upon, reverberate through my discussion. By necessity I will skip over, or crudely simplify, many technical details, as I am interested here in the overall picture of the compositional mechanism Xenakis designed for this work. Only in passing I will touch upon questions I have discussed in other occasions, including some critical observations on the cybernetics of Xenakis' mechanism [Di Scipio 2001], the hypothesis of 2<sup>nd</sup>-order sonorities motivating the granular representation of sound [Di Scipio 1997], and the meaning itself of the term *sound cloud* that Xenakis created in very peculiar ways precisely in dealing with the composition of *Analogique A et B* [Di Scipio 2003].

## Variables

To start with, Xenakis makes the decision that his “compositional mechanism” will operate upon three variables: pitch, dynamics, and density.

“Pitch” means here (in *Analogique A*, not in *B*) discrete pitch as from the traditional equal temperament (in *Analogique B*, this is replaced with the frequency continuum). The full set of available pitches is divided in 6 sets:

- I       $E_0 \dots E_1$
- II      $E_1 \dots D_2$
- III     $D_2 \dots D_{\text{flat}_3}$
- IV     $D_{\text{flat}_3} \dots C_4$
- V      $C_4 \dots B_4$
- VI     $C_4 \dots A_5$

There are grouped into two primary subsets, that Xenakis refers to as  $f_0$  and  $f_1$ . The first comprises four secondary subsets. The second subset comprises two secondary subsets:

$f_0$  [I, II, V, VI]  
 $f_1$  [III, IV]

Notice that  $f_0$  and  $f_1$  are complementary (their sum make for the complete set, with a single instance of each subset).

At each next step of its run, the mechanism will select either of the two primary subsets, then it will select a secondary subset from within the primary subset, and finally select a pitch within that secondary subset. The selection of the primary subset follows specific rules, that we'll see in a moment. Instead, the selection of the secondary subset, and the particular pitch within the secondary subset, is made on a purely random basis – that is, using a flat distribution of probabilities. To my knowledge, Xenakis did not clarify whether the extremes in a particular set or region do or do not belong to the set – that is, for example, if  $D_2$  belongs to region II or III.

As to dynamics, we have three values:

I  $pp$   
 II  $f$   
 III  $fff$

Two sets are formed with these values:

$g_0$  [I, I, II, III]  
 $g_1$  [I, II]

The first,  $g_0$ , is made with all three values, but includes two instances of value I ( $pp$ ). Therefore, four items are included in this set, and one of them is assigned twice as probabilities as the others. The second,  $g_1$ , set comprises only values I and II, with equal probabilities. Xenakis' mechanism will select either one of the two sets, then it will select a particular value in that set (the latter happens, again, on a random basis).

Finally, density., which means here “average amount of events in the time unit”. Xenakis had these three values:

I 1 event /  $\Delta t$   
 II 3 events /  $\Delta t$   
 III 9 events /  $\Delta t$

and two sets of values:

$d_0$  [I, I, II, III]

$d_1$  [I, II, II, III]

The set  $d_0$  comprises all three values, with two instances of value I. The set  $d_1$  comprises all three values, with two instances of value II.

In the phrasing “average amount of events in the time unit”, “events” means “note onsets”, and “time unit” (that is,  $Dt$ ) equals 1.2”. This is equivalent, in the musical score to *Analogique A*, to a half-bar duration, and remains constant all through the piece.

Note durations are not comprised in the compositional mechanism, and are freely assigned by Xenakis according to another strategy, indeed a very simple one: three instruments always play quintuplet notes (against the 1.2” time unit), three other instruments play quadruplets, and the remaining three play triplets, and each note duration is equal to a single beat within those rhythmical groups.

In practice, there are  $5 + 4 + 3 = 12$  positions on the discrete time grid, that represent the quantization of the time continuum across the entire musical piece. And there are  $3 \times (5 + 4 + 3) = 36$  places to which a sound can be assigned within each half-bar. However, of these 36 possible places, a maximum density of 14 events will be actually used when  $d_0$  is selected, and a maximum of 16 will be used when  $d_1$  is selected (the maximum density, 16 events per half bar, is approximately equal to 13 events per second). In actuality, Xenakis manipulated the density values in a very free way, seldomly using the values selected by his mechanism as such. Only for pitch and dynamics Xenakis kept himself (relatively) closer to the mechanism’s output.

We must observe that, at least in theory, density units are arranged by Xenakis on a logarithmic scale (1, 3, 9 events). This can be a natural extension of the Fechner law to a domain of perceptual phenomena (“density”) that at the time of *Analogique A* had not been yet investigated by psychoacousticians. The Fechner law has (had) it that all human perception tends to linearize constant ratios, not constant increments. It’s hard to tell if Xenakis was right in extending the Fechner law to density: probably he was right as far as *Analogique A* is concerned, as the rate of events is neither too slow neither too fast. But we know, today, that below some lower threshold, and above some higher threshold, the Fechner law does not apply, not even in the perception of pitch and duration.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, his assumption was probably wrong as far as the sound grains of *Analogique B* are concerned.

## Method

Xenakis governed the selection of primary sets (for each of the three variables), with Transition Probability Matrices (TPM). An example matrix discussed by the composer, and one that he also used for *Analogique*, is:

$f_0$	$f_1$		
$f_0$	0.85	0.4	
$f_1$	0.15	0.6	

It means that, starting with the pitch set  $f_0$ , there will be 85% of chances that next frequency set will be  $f_0$  again, and 15% chances that next frequency set will be  $f_1$ . Starting with  $f_1$ , instead, there will be 40% chances that next will come  $f_0$ , and 60% chances that it will be  $f_1$  again. This is a Markovian process with a single memory position (a 1<sup>st</sup>-order Markovian process): the next selection is made dependent on the previous.

Two annotations are in place, here. The first is, this strategy was in contrast to his previous position, for example in *Achorripsis*, where the distribution of events in the time and the pitch domain would follow a *memoryless* mechanism. By leaning on a Markovian process, he implemented a model for a stochastic process in time. In a sense, the goal was to create an *analogon*, a model that would work in close analogy with a stochastic process unfolding in time. This is probably the first ever *in-temps* structure that Xenakis tried to really formalize, and it was a stochastic, probabilistic one (a much later and very different example is the computer music composition *Gendy3*). Given that, after *Analogique*, he has never taken this particular approach again, it can be argued that already in earlier works like *Achorripsis* Xenakis manifested a stronger preference for *hors-temps* structures. His later distinction, *in-temps/hors-temps*, could be illuminated by a comparison between the generative process behind *Achorripsis* (where he utilized separate projections of quantized, separate snapshots of a stochastic process), and *Analogique* (where he tried to create the analogon of a stochastic process that unfolds in time).

The second annotation is, earlier than Xenakis, others had used Transition Probabilities Matrices (e.g. Hiller and Isaacson), not only with one, but with two or more memory positions (n<sup>th</sup>-order Markovian processes). That was mainly in order to model musical *styles* or the past, based on the probability that some sequence of symbols (notes) would occur in such and such musical style or in a specific repertoire. This may explain why Xenakis felt a need to clarify that stochastic music was *not a style*, but a *method*: he felt he should distance himself from work that was more interesting as a theory of past music, than as a way to achieve hitherto unexplored territories.

In actual work, Xenakis follows a slightly more complex strategy, however, and uses two Transition Probability Matrices for each of his variables. For example, there are two matrices for pitch:

	$\alpha$		$\beta$		
	$f_0$	$f_1$		$f_0$	$f_1$
$f_0$	0.2	0.8	$f_0$	0.85	0.4
$f_1$	0.8	0.2	$f_1$	0.15	0.6

He would use either one or the other. Applying the probability-composition rule, we have these probability weights:

$$p(f_0 \rightarrow f_0) = (0.2+0.85)/2 = 0.525$$

$$p(f_0 \rightarrow f_1) = (0.8+0.15)/2 = 0.475$$

$$p(f_1 \rightarrow f_0) = (0.8+0.4)/2 = 0.6$$

$$p(f_1 \rightarrow f_1) = (0.2+0.6)/2 = 0.4$$

We see here that there are more chances that pitches are selected from within the  $f_0$  set. And that means, in practice, that there are more chances that pitches will belong to extreme registers, because  $f_0$  comprises the lowest and highest pitch regions Xenakis makes available for himself. This point – the fact that the most recurrent pitch collection comprises two contrasting registers – has nothing to do with the *functioning* of the mechanism, and follows directly from the way Xenakis arranged the variables (the musical materials): with a different subdivision of the pitch space, the result would have been (very) different, even using the very same mechanism.

Identical pairs of matrices are used for the other two variables, dynamics and density:

$\gamma$		$\epsilon$	
	$g_0$	$g_1$	
$g_0$	0.2	0.8	$g_0$
$g_1$	0.8	0.2	$g_1$
			$g_0$
			$g_1$

$\lambda$		$\mu$	
	$d_0$	$d_1$	
$d_0$	0.2	0.8	$d_0$
$d_1$	0.8	0.2	$d_1$
			$d_0$
			$d_1$

Why Xenakis wanted to use three identical pairs of matrices is hard to tell. Perhaps it was just that that made it easier for him to handle the overall process and reduce its complexity (let's recall he was implementing the process manually, not using a computer).

Next, Xenakis stipulated some constraints to connect the three pairs of matrices between them. He established these *coupling rules*:

$f_0$	$f_1$	$d_0$	$d_1$	$g_0$	$g_1$
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
l	m	a	b	l	m

$f_0$	$f_1$	$d_0$	$d_1$	$g_0$	$g_1$
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
g	e	g	e	b	a

It means that, for instance, if pitch is selected from the  $f$  set, then next density value will be calculated with the l matrix, while the next intensity value will be calculated with the g matrix.

Two observations are necessary, here. The first is: in order to be properly applied, this list of constraints implicitly needs a hierarchy of variables: once you have the three variables (pitch, dynamics, density) overlapping between them, it's not clear which one should be selected in order to determine the matrices to couple to next two variables. Xenakis did not clarify this point. However, and importantly, the constraints thus determined create a psychoacoustically relevant connection among several aspects in the musical texture. As an example, consider the second constraint: with  $f$  larger probabilities are assigned to pitches from the middle registers, and these notes will more often be played *pp*, because that is the most probable dynamics occurring due to the probability weightings in the e matrix. A short-time correlation is established among events, which is particularly relevant to the ear. Although it remains a statistical correlation, i.e. one that is likely to reveal itself always in different audible shapes, it is a perceptually relevant, but not at all obvious, structural element in this work.

Finally, notice that, in the end, there are only  $2^3 = 8$  combinations of sets available here:

A	$f_0, g_0, d_0$	B	$f_0, g_0, d_1$
C	$f_0, g_1, d_0$	D	$f_0, g_1, d_1$
E	$f_1, g_0, d_0$	F	$f_1, g_0, d_1$
G	$f_1, g_1, d_0$	H	$f_1, g_1, d_1$

For these combinations Xenakis used the word “screens”. A schematic illustration is in Table1.

The actual values obtained with the application of any particular combination determine the specific musical configuration found within each half-bar in the score. Also, using the “rules of composition of probabilities”, Xenakis calculated a global Transition Probability Matrix, capturing the complete statistics for all screens. See Table2.

### Articulation (Analog, Digital)

Significant internal symmetries can be found among and within these combinations. As an example, observe screens A, B, C and D (the uppermost screens): there pitches will be largely in the extreme registers (either very low or very high), while with the remaining screens, E, F, G and H, most pitches will be in the middle registers. That’s no surprise this complementarity, or binary opposition, just mirrors Xenakis’ initial arrangement of the pitch sets. On the other hand, with screens A, B, E and F, sounds will be mostly *f* or *ff*, while with the remaining four screens they will be mostly *pp*. Another (however subtler) opposition exists between maximum density ranges: screens A, C, E and G have 14 events / Dt, while the remaining have 16 events / Dt.

In short, there is an interplay of either *complementary* or *oppository* configurations of sounds. One could describe these relationships among screens using Boolean logical operators. Boolean operators share many properties of set operations. In the *Formalized Music* chapter on Markovian stochastic music, Xenakis suggests that he may operate on his screens with set operators. (He suggests that, as a way to shape up the way in which sound clouds would change over time, especially when it comes to the sonic particles of *Analogique B*.) While he didn’t do so (neither in *Analogique A* nor in *Analogique B*), still his mechanism implements a similar, although simpler, strategy. It is simpler to the extent that some set operations (more precisely, three Boolean operators: NOT, OR and XOR) could be used to describe the relationship between any two screens. However simple, this is an example of *binary logics applied to probability distributions*.

Let’s now consider that *Analogique A* is made of ten short sections. Each section exhibits the behaviour of the compositional mechanism starting with a particular screen. The recursive application of Probability Transition Matrices provides a new screen (i.e., a new statistical configurations of variables) and that happens at a rate of 1.2” (half-bar). With the jargon of audio signal processing – and of all system theory, for that matter – we could say that each section represent the “impulse response” of the system, with different initial conditions (a different starting impulse).

As we have noted already, each screen can be described as a partly statistical and partly deterministic configuration of connected, mutually dependent variables. Therefore, every next half-bar in *Analogique A* represents a particular probabilistic function, a different instance or particular manifestaion of a theory. In other words, a *theorem*. Xenakis’ process, then, provides a method that links each configuration with the next one: it works like a *theory* (in a way that may be reminiscent of Gauss, with his notion of “arithmetical methods” as the connection between, or a way through, separate theorems that can be independelty explicated).

There is of course a discontinuity or leap between musical configuration and the

next: the music unfolds step-wise, pulsating at a rate of 1.2” (in the case of *Analogique B*, this is reduced to 0.5”). Now, a time-frame of 1.2” is not really short enough to create, to the ear, a smoother transition, especially when the concatenated frames are substantially different, maybe with large changes in pitch registers and dynamics. What is offered to the listener is a series of snapshots, so to say, a series of windows or gates rapidly opening and closing. It reveals that a more continuous process remains in the background. More precisely, the overall process is a *sampled* stochastic process, not a continuous one. And that is heard as such: we hear the sampling effect (sample rate =  $1/1.2 = 0.83$  Hz for *Analogique A*, and 2 Hz for *Analogique B*).

In short, we have only a *digital* rendering of the *analog* representation of an underlying stochastic process. In a way that is not at all metaphorical, Xenakis builds an analog representation of a continuous, stochastic process, but in the end provided himself with only a digital rendition of it (perhaps a poor one).

The discontinuity of the digital rendition is due to a number of factors, including (1) the fact that he started with very small sets of numerical variables, (2) the fact that the mechanism’s time frame is of course too slow for auditory perception, and (3) the fact that the dynamics of the mechanism ultimately follows a binary logics, and literally jumps from one sonic configuration to the next without any interpolation or smooth transition.

### Discussion (Dialectics 1)

I should also mention that *not* all of the sections in *Analogique A* follow from the direct application of Xenakis’ mechanism. Indeed, beside a number of qualitative, non-formalised decisions concerning, for example, the musical instruments (and in particular the playing techniques), Xenakis even biased the mechanism towards results that he could not predict at the outset. Only three (1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>) exhibit the evolution of the mechanism in “equilibrium” conditions, that is, normally following the built-in probabilistic behaviour. Seven of the ten sections resulted from “perturbations”, as he called them, of the normal functioning of the mechanism. The switching between “equilibrium” and “perturbations” resulted from a higher-level control device, that Xenakis called the *exchange protocol*, that I will not discuss here. It suffices to say that it represents a list of ten process’ initial conditions (= initial screen and “mode”, i.e. equilibrium or perturbation). What I actually did in my analysis of *Analogique A* [Di Scipio 2001a] was matching the mechanism’s process against the data actually present in the score [Xenakis 1959], and redrawing the screen sequences that resulted for each of the ten sections, ultimately observing to what extent the score is a faithful image of the mechanism output.<sup>8</sup>

The perturbed sections are, in a way, “negations” of the mechanism. In those sections, in other words, the overall process Xenakis designed is subverted, it is made not to properly work. However, and maybe paradoxically, because of that it can also manifest itself in a more essential way. The focus of musical attention then shifts from the development internal to each section, to a comparison between the sections. Especially effective seems to me the dramatical opposition between the first two sections. In the second, in fact, the mechanism was perturbed in such a way that it got stuck on a single screen repeated over

and over (namely screen A, but with a slightest manual modification). As you see in the general Transition Probability Matrix, screen A is not at all one of the most probable one to be selected, and certainly not one where the entire mechanism would fix (there a probability of 0.021 % that it repeats).

Confronted with the dialectics between normal (thesis) and perturbed (antithesis) mechanism behaviour, the listener is in the position to compose his own synthesis. The composer himself, as a listener, was in a similar position upon listening to the early performances of this work. He was trying to achieve for himself a final moment of synthesis, when he overlapped *Analogique A* and *Analogique B*.

## Discussion (Dialectics 2)

Xenakis' mechanism represents, as he himself claimed, the *analog* of a continuous stochastic process, a process that unfolds in time. The stochastic process captured by the mechanism is described by Xenakis with his metaphor of the sound cloud. This metaphor, with its atmospheric reference, deserves some attention. It is well known that Xenakis' imagination was often inspired by images of physical phenomena. His use of mathematics, and all of his efforts in formalized music for that matter, can be considered instrumental to the implementation of musically useful working models of physical phenomena. This in the end reflects a very general issue in the discussion concerning the foundations of mathematics, that is, the issue of whether mathematics should or should not link to the physical domain or any other domain of experiential phenomena.

To clarify this, I will bear on two radically opposite views that Xenakis might have been aware of. In 1947, John von Neumann wrote that « it cannot be denied that some of the most important achievements in pure mathematics came from research work in natural sciences », and that the work of mathematicians who keep themselves at a distance from all empirical content is at risk of being completely sterile and meaningless. In contrast to this view, in 1964 the French mathematician Jean Dieudonné claimed that none of the major achievements in the history of mathematics had anything to do with physics or any other empirical domain. However, he added, honestly, except for the “theory of distribution” – a term by which he meant, presumably, “probabilistic distribution functions”.

In that opposition, I would situate Xenakis on the part of von Neumann. Von Neumann (who called himself a mathematician, but is perhaps more known as the prototypical computer engineer), complained that “pure mathematics” is a kind of *art pour l'art*, an abstraction that becomes an end in itself. The paraphernalia of mathematical notations necessary to Xenakis to build the mechanism behind the composition of *Analogique*, was not an end in itself. Had it been an end in itself, the composer would not have taken time to make his manual adjustments in the score (cuts and additions [Di Scipio 2001a]). Neither he would have bended or biased the mechanism towards “perturbation” behaviours. And, finally, he would not have made the decision to paste together the two separate pieces, *Analogique A* and *Analogique B* – a decision which in itself calls into question the overall framework of theoretical premises. All such things were matters of intuition, of qualitative, non-formalizable or at least not-formalized-yet choices. Most importantly,

it belongs to the realm of intuition that Xenakis worked with some special arrangements of musical variables (namely, a very specific pattern of pitch registers, a reduced set of intensity values, and an utterly arbitrary and pre-determined rhythmical grid, serving as a periodic, but non-synchronous quantization device for the time domain).

Let's finally consider the composer's decision to let *Analogique A* and *Analogique B* overlap between them (at the time the decision was made, in late 1959 or early 1960, he had already had the two works separately performed). According to the Xenakis, the superposition makes it possible to experience two different audible manifestations of the same compositional concept. We see here some more *analogical* content put at work, namely an analogy between the macrolevel evolution (in the instrumental score) and the microlevel articulation within sound (the synthetic sounds on tape). In short, an analogy between macrocomposition and microcomposition. This is not the place to make a comparison between the two separate works, and between the different premises that anyway Xenakis had to set for himself given the different medium. I have to limit myself to one special observation: the striking difference between the timbre of the string instruments and that of the electronic quanta of sound, is normally reputed a very peculiar element of *Analogique A et B*. That difference, however, does *not* make for a lack of integration between two different domains of micro-level and macro-level, it is not an unsuccessful gathering of different media: indeed, the surface difference is so overtly evident, the avoidance of any mimetic relationship is so clear and obvious, that the listener can more easily shift his attention towards more abstract, structural characteristics, which are more crucial to this music, towards the dynamical behaviour of the overall shape or morphology of the particular sound clouds.

In short: two different audible manifestations of one and same constructive principle is better than two independent principles that manifest themselves in much the same way. The former option means that multiplicity emerges out of unity. The latter means that differences are simply smoothed out, and become, in a way, indifferent. Xenakis preserved the surface differences, pointing to a more profound identity.

## Conclusions

A work such as *Analogique* presents the listener with a quite problematic encounter, or clash, between a rational effort to renovate the foundation of composition and more direct, empirical choices based on intuition. What this clash clarifies to the ear and the mind, is precisely that *intuitive elements are only possible after the enormous efforts in formalization have been made* while, at the same time, *the enormous efforts in formalization are only possible because the composer is confident that intuition will complete the job whenever formalization will reveal insufficient*.

By means of this rich dialectics, the listener is actually confronted with a music that in fact provides for a listening experience that is itself analog *to the way Xenakis listened to his own mechanism* and creatively reacted to it. The lesson I learn, is: the deeper one wants to formalize one's own music, the more the music's consistency and meaning will depend on nonformalizable personal choices. Viceversa, the more you want to lean on intuitive, somehow "spontaneous" choices, the more the music will actually depend on pre-

determined, formal (yet not formalized) decisions - and probably *not* on one's own personal decisions...

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A

<i>ff</i>						<b>9</b>
<i>f</i>	<b>3</b>					
<i>pp</i>		<b>1</b>			<b>1</b>	
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

B

<i>ff</i>						<b>1</b>
<i>f</i>	<b>9</b>					
<i>pp</i>		<b>3</b>			<b>3</b>	
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

C

<i>ff</i>						
<i>f</i>		<b>1</b>			<b>1</b>	
<i>pp</i>	<b>3</b>					<b>9</b>
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

D

<i>ff</i>						
<i>f</i>		<b>3</b>			<b>3</b>	
<i>pp</i>	<b>9</b>					<b>1</b>
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

E

<i>ff</i>				<b>9</b>		
<i>f</i>			<b>3</b>			
<i>pp</i>			<b>1+1</b>			
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

F

<i>ff</i>				<b>1</b>		
<i>f</i>			<b>9</b>			
<i>pp</i>			<b>3+3</b>			
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

H

<i>ff</i>						
<i>f</i>			<b>1+1</b>			
<i>pp</i>			<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>		
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

G

<i>ff</i>						
<i>f</i>			<b>3+3</b>			
<i>pp</i>			<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>		
	Mi <sub>0</sub>	Mi <sub>1</sub>	Re <sub>2</sub>	Reb <sub>3</sub>	Dq <sub>4</sub>	Si <sub>4</sub> La <sub>5</sub>

Table 2

$d_1$	$A(f_{0_0} g_{0_0} d_0)$	$B(f_{0_0} g_{0_0} d_1)$	$C(f_{0_0} g_{1_0} d_0)$	$D(f_{0_0} g_{1_1} d_1)$	$E(f_{1_0} g_{0_0} d_0)$	$F(f_{1_0} g_{0_1} d_1)$	$G(f_{1_1} g_{1_0} d_0)$	$H(f_{1_1} g_{1_1} d_1)$
$A(f_{0_0} g_{0_0} d_0)$	<b>0.021</b>	<b>0.357</b>	<b>0.084</b>	<b>0.189</b>	<b>0.165</b>	<b>0.204</b>	<b>0.408</b>	<b>0.096</b>
$B(f_{0_0} g_{0_0} d_1)$	<b>0.084</b>	<b>0.089</b>	<b>0.076</b>	<b>0.126</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.136</b>	<b>0.072</b>	<b>0.144</b>
$C(f_{0_0} g_{1_0} d_0)$	<b>0.084</b>	<b>0.323</b>	<b>0.021</b>	<b>0.126</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.036</b>	<b>0.272</b>	<b>0.144</b>
$D(f_{0_0} g_{1_1} d_1)$	<b>0.336</b>	<b>0.081</b>	<b>0.019</b>	<b>0.084</b>	<b>0.135</b>	<b>0.024</b>	<b>0.048</b>	<b>0.216</b>
$E(f_{1_0} g_{0_0} d_0)$	<b>0.019</b>	<b>0.063</b>	<b>0.336</b>	<b>0.171</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.306</b>	<b>0.102</b>	<b>0.064</b>
$F(f_{1_0} g_{0_1} d_1)$	<b>0.076</b>	<b>0.016</b>	<b>0.304</b>	<b>0.114</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.204</b>	<b>0.018</b>	<b>0.096</b>
$G(f_{1_1} g_{1_0} d_0)$	<b>0.076</b>	<b>0.057</b>	<b>0.084</b>	<b>0.114</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.054</b>	<b>0.068</b>	<b>0.096</b>
$H(f_{1_1} g_{1_1} d_1)$	<b>0.304</b>	<b>0.014</b>	<b>0.076</b>	<b>0.076</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.036</b>	<b>0.012</b>	<b>0.144</b>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a lecture first presented at Ircam, Paris, April 2002 (seminar on music and mathematics organized by Moreno Andratta and Stephan Schaub), and then at the University of Athens, May 2005 (invited lecture in the Xenakis symposium organized by Anastasia Georgiaki and Makis Solomos). The analysis details are drawn from a previous article as yet unpublished [Di Scipio 2001], based on research work pursued in the late 1990s.

<sup>2</sup> For more on that, see [Di Scipio 1997] and [Di Scipio 1998a].

<sup>3</sup> The relevance of metaphors drawn from physics and the natural sciences in Xenakis, as opposed to mathematics, is stressed in [Solomos 2004, 121].

<sup>4</sup> This is clear from the program codes published in *Formalized Music*, and is confirmed by Peter Hoffmann, who had direct access to Xenakis's original codes, and scrutinized them in detail.

<sup>5</sup> Most probably, this was because of his acquaintance with architect Le Corbusier (in whose studio, as is well-known, Xenakis worked before devoting himself to music), and in particular with Le Corbusier's *Modulor* - a set of rules of geometrical proportions based on the Golden Mean and related to the Fibonacci series (Xenakis applied the Fibonacci numbers, too, in designs he made as a collaborator to the famous architect). Another source behind Xenakis' early use of Fibonacci numbers may be the composer Oliver Messiaen, whose classes Xenakis attended in 1951-52. In the same classes was Karlheinz Stockhausen, who ever since has extensively utilized the Fibonacci series in his work.

<sup>6</sup> For an articulated discussion of the history of modern mathematics, see [Kline 1980]. For more details on the mathematics behind Xenakis' *Formalized Music*, see [Orcalli 1993].

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, a contribution to the relativisation of the Fechner law came in 1955 by nonetheless than Pierre Boulez. Based on his early experiences with *musique concrete* (later disregarded), Boulez observed that below some lower threshold of time, the perception of duration does not conform to the Fechner law: for very short durations, we can hardly say that the duration of a sound is double as long as the duration of another, or half as long, ecc. [Boulez 1958].

<sup>8</sup> Here, I cannot present in full details the analysis data I collected (yet unpublished), as that needs a separate presentation in order to be properly illustrated.

## Gordon Downie and Ian Pace: A Dialogue

**Gordon Downie** is a unique figure in British new music, or indeed anywhere, with whom I have had the pleasure to work on multiple occasions. His music (and visual art) demonstrates a ferocious commitment to the possibilities of complex abstraction and a pronounced resistance towards passive, habitual listening.

This extended and in-depth interview has been conducted over several months by e-mail, and delves deeply into issues of complexity, modernism, the role of culture in late capitalist society, and the current state of new music. The type of language used, drawing extensively upon ideas and methodologies from Marxism and the Frankfurt School as well as elevated levels of technical musical discourse, may seem difficult and a little esoteric to some, but has both a beauty and an objectivity of its own. Discourse about music and cultural matters, in Britain in particular, is notoriously woolly, over-laden with tired metaphorical clichés and rather quaint biographical reductionism.

Through this dialogue, Gordon Downie and I attempt to offer an alternative discursive possibility, in part as a strategy to find a way beyond the prison-house that more conventional writing on music frequently imposes, laden as it is with so many aesthetic and societal assumptions that are tacitly accepted and never questioned. Our positions and convictions on many issues are by no means identical, as should become clear through reading, but the interaction was deeply fruitful and stimulating.

For myself, having known and conversed with Gordon Downie for quite a number of years now, I have so often found our dialogues force me to rethink various slightly banal assumptions I might have previously made, and sharpened up my thinking on many matters, though I choose to maintain my own positions often (for example on jazz!). This interview deserves to be read carefully and diligently, and all those involved in the world of contemporary music or culture in general should ask themselves if they can really afford not to engage with the issues raised. I hope that in the context of British music, this discourse represents a beginning rather than an end.

**Ian Pace, October 2004.**

### 1.

**Ian Pace:** Gordon Downie, you seem as committed an advocate of the ideals of 'high' modernism in music (as well as in architecture and other artistic media) as just about any composer I have encountered. Can you tell me about how you first became drawn towards a modernist aesthetic, and how your interests developed?

**Gordon Downie:** And with my university duties you should add to that list computer science, which, in its emphasis on the systematic organisation and analysis of problems and phenomena, offers us a scientific-technical model for creative action fully in keeping with aesthetic modernism. But that kind of breadth and interdisciplinarity is essential for me, otherwise one is subject to making all those operational and conceptual mistakes that are borne of an extreme division of labour. It's a result of a desire to think structurally, to comprehend the intricate connectivity between phenomena. Modernist architects, composers, and visual artists have (or had) the same, or closely similar concerns, and it's essential to see how those concerns manifest themselves in different media, as I've outlined elsewhere<sup>1</sup>.

But aesthetic modernism, of course, is just a field-specific manifestation of a wider socio-political programme of modernisation and cultural maturation. That's what gives the programme legitimacy for me, in that it penetrates well beyond merely parochial, aesthetic concerns. We should note, for example, that constructionism emanated from a socio-political context of liberation, that many of the most important manifestos of this period from Abstract-Creation, Unism, and De Stijl, though articulated in an aesthetic form, are essentially political statements, and political statements of the radical left: who would deny the essential connectivity between Mondrian's notion of equivalence and socialist distributions of power, as they are manifest, for example, in democratic centralism? One of the problems now is that the new left and its various offshoots (and I'm not referring here to party affiliation), has taken the dictatorship of the proletariat so literally, or is unwilling to reinterpret this notion in the light of current developments, in order to take into account the current state of the proletariat, which not only has little, if any, revolutionary potential, but appears, on the contrary, to be fully absorbed by capital. It's true that high cultural forms remain inaccessible to both the proletariat and large sections of the petit bourgeoisie. For those writers of the *New Left Review*, and *Culture, Theory and Critique*, the solution is to interpret aesthetic complexity as a means to sustain an unequal distribution of cultural power. By this route all high-cultural endeavour is condemned. But such an analysis, intentionally or not, conspires with those very forms of domination with which the new left has claimed to be at war. Whilst our systems of education and media dissemination continue *not* to serve the interests of genuine intellectual enlightenment and engagement, broad masses of the population will continue to find the most radical and revolutionary cultural artefacts utterly impenetrable. So if they prefer *Big Brother* or *Eastenders* to Stockhausen's *Gruppen* or Joyce's *Ulysses*, and if they prefer B&Q pseudo-Georgian to Le Corbusier functional, we should analyse what role *Big Brother*, *Eastenders*, and B&Q pseudo-Georgian have in maintaining the proletariat in this state of anaesthetised ignorance. The new lefts' time would be better spent analysing and attacking this. As it is currently constituted, the proletariat is a product of capital and exhibits all but no revolutionary potential. The reverse is true. In such circumstances, notions of proletarian hegemony need a significant revision.

So I could respond to your question by citing my first encounter of Webern's *Symphony Opus 21* or Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke I* as life-changing events, but I'd rather refrain from such bourgeois autobiography and self-aggrandisement if you don't mind. What we might query is how, in our present cultural climate, one can sustain, let alone initiate, a commitment to ideals such as these. Given Boulez's trajectory, it's not as if one has models to follow. On the contrary, this composer's appropriation and privatisation of this tendency is as much a factor in Modernism's decline as a dominant paradigm, as are the attacks from more obviously reactionary sources, such as those representatives of the so-called post-modern and other cultural neo-conservatives.

**IP:** Point taken about bourgeois autobiography! It's a quaint and trite bourgeois notion that all art is about nothing more than the personality quirks of its creator - a convenient ideological tool for neutralising its wider relevance. Anyhow, your reply suggests to me a number of questions and issues to discuss, which I'd like to outline at length.

While in total agreement with you about the link between modernist artistic manifestos and radical movements for political change, it might be argued by some that such tendencies are over-utopian

in nature, disengaged from the historical state of underdeveloped class consciousness at the time of their emergence (and today).

**GD:** How can one be over-utopian?! The conditions that gave rise to the movements and ideals that I cite have only changed in their severity and totality, which only make those ideals even more important.

**IP:** Well, this leads me to several suppositions. I would imagine you would agree that ruling class ideology has a vested interest in maintaining a high degree of disengagement on the part of the working classes, so that, as you say, their attentions are concentrated upon *Big Brother* and *Eastenders* (and celebrity trivia) rather than upon more exalted and potentially emancipatory artistic creations less easily assimilated into the entertainment industry, not to mention greater awareness of the limitations provided by their class position, or the realities of Western imperial domination. Given such an actually existing situation, is it not possible that 'high' art (in this case specifically high modernist art) lends itself too easily to appropriation for the purposes of bourgeois hegemony?

To give a less jargon-ridden example of that, the purported 'difficulty' of highly complex music can lead to the cultivation of the 'specialist listener', he/she who prides themselves on their superior understanding as opposed to that of the masses he/she looks down upon with patronising contempt. I've seen this sort of appropriation implicit in the attitudes towards such music from many in the musical world (especially those from backgrounds of privilege and the public schools); as such, do we not need to address the danger of such arts being used as a weapon for maintaining a state of class divisiveness? The proletariat are indeed a historical product of capitalism, but so are the bourgeoisie – Marx would see both disappearing after socialist revolution. What would you propose as workable methodologies for examining the state of proletariat consciousness that leads them to prefer popular art forms to high modernism? Shouldn't bourgeois consciousness and artistic preferences also be subject to an equal degree of critical scrutiny?

**GD:** Your observations point to the contradictions inherent in capitalist, class societies. The contradiction here is that high-culture is indeed appropriated by the bourgeoisie to sustain unequal distributions of power. But the bourgeoisie appropriate everything. It doesn't mean that such work is produced specifically for them, it means that only they, in principle, have the intellectual capacity (itself a product of privileged educational opportunity), to comprehend and patronise it, in addition to the necessary leisure time. Though of course, we should be a little clearer about what we mean by the term *bourgeoisie*. They do have the educational foundation, potentially, but only a minority engage in the kind of intellectual challenges that we are identifying. The extreme divisions of labour we witness in capitalist society place severe constraints on the ability of different sections of that society to comprehend the activities of another. And for the most part, bourgeois or proletarian, most subjects reject complex art. This may indicate that progressive cultural production, like any other sphere of high-level human activity, is something for which significant preparation and education is required, and although class origin and interests play a part in the willingness and ability of subjects to engage it, other, culture-specific issues also come into play. For the most part, it would seem that art is seen to fulfil certain emotional expectations. If it doesn't, then it is rejected. This has been the fate of the high-modernist avant-garde, an indication, perhaps, of its genuinely negatory character, and thus its importance in the wider socio-political context.

But I produce work for no particular class faction. However, I do require from listeners certain educational and intellectual pre-requisites to enable the work to be understood. Why is this so surprising? This is my expectation. If one wishes to explore complex cognitive phenomena in art, one will obviously require from one's clientele the willingness and an ability, in addition to the patience, to penetrate it at the appropriate level. I believe that an interest in exploring complexity, the thread connecting all the advanced art of our time, is quite appropriate and understandable. Unfortunately, those with the necessary qualifications are largely drawn from bourgeois class factions. I would rather this wasn't the case. But I am not prepared to change my creative focus to ameliorate the problem. This would be simple-minded. To start to compose workers' marches or use common tonal triads reduces both the analysis and the solution to this problem to a level of extreme banality. This serves no interests other than those of power: by jettisoning complexity, we disassemble one of the remaining weapons against the process of intellectual emaciation, conformity and passivity that characterises capitalist societies.

Of course, it will be argued that high art is itself a creation or product of bourgeois consciousness, which serves bourgeois class interests. In other words, artists are themselves recruited from the ranks of the bourgeoisie or internalise bourgeois ideology – though we mustn't forget that in its original form, the bourgeoisie was a force for progress. It is for this reason that we need to examine the medium itself. All objective phenomena are complex, natural or synthetic. It should come as no surprise to us that products of artifice, of which cultural products are an example, should also exhibit complexity. Generally, simplicity isn't interesting. This suspicion of collusion held by factions of the left only serves the interests of power.

**IP:** But do you see any value at all in inhabiting artistic forms and genres perceived as more 'accessible', to subvert and defamiliarise them from within to engender critical consciousness of both the forms/genres themselves and also of the wider social and historical processes that gave birth to them in the first place? An obvious example of this is in the plays of Brecht; some of the music of Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnebel, Nicolaus A. Huber and Konrad Boehmer attempts a similar process, so by very different means does the early work of Frank Zappa.

**GD:** Given the immediacy of the theatre, a case might be convincingly advanced for Brecht, but what evidence is there that those methods of subversion practiced by Huber and Schnebel, for example, actually reach their target? And they must have a target otherwise their position is untenable. Might it not be the case that, once again, it is only the bourgeoisie that is able to de-code such intentions, which rely upon a considerable level of formal education which the proletariat is unlikely to have acquired? That being the case, the main achievement here is the compromising of high-art endeavour. Following Adorno, I would be inclined to view committed art or critical composition as a form of pseudo-activity. Those artists who place the medium at the service of political agitation or subversion might have a greater chance of effecting real social change if their energies were applied to real, direct political action. I am unable to argue that complexity doesn't assist the maintenance of the political status quo. But capital deforms and corrupts all that it touches. Resisting this process of deformation strikes me as the most effective response, and this can only be attempted by maintaining the autonomy of artistic media. By placing the medium at the service of political agitation, committed art deforms the medium. Clearly, the bourgeois and the proletariat are both products of capital.

But I would argue that only advanced workers, and independent intellectuals, have any chance of transcending these conditions. We are all in the fish tank together, but we can become more aware of the ideological waters through which we travel. In advocating the primacy of the medium and artistic autonomy, I am well aware that I present myself open to charges of conspiring, indirectly, with power. But this is a contradiction internal to the system. Of course, appropriation is one thing, but the intellectual can collude with power directly by manufacturing his or her art with a view to maximise its success or symbolic profit margin in market society. And since the last aggressive re-assertion of capital in the form of Thatcherite and Reaganite economics, this has become the norm for several generations of neo-conservative British composers and visual artists. I would argue that the vast bulk of new music composed in the UK today is an act of simulation, simulation in the sense that the *fake* is now the preferred model.

**IP:** The artistic movements you listed earlier, and others from the same time, sprang up as a response to particular historical circumstances. Are they utterly predicated upon the particularities of the historical moments from which they emanated, and if so, do you think our current historical moment is sufficiently similar so that such movements are not diminished in their importance and vitality?

**GD:** As I stated earlier, the conditions that gave rise to such movements haven't changed, so the relevance of such ideas and programmes has not diminished. There are plenty of voices that would like to pretend that such conditions have changed, to enable them to brand mere reformist opportunism as radical. This is a strategy that typifies the agendas of both cultural producers and administrators, and political parties, New Labour being prime among them. It is an attempt to erase memories, and they are doing an excellent job of it.

**IP:** What you locate as the new left (with respect to an over-literalist view of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the sense of wishing to impose the currently-existing state of proletarian consciousness and taste upon all people) seems to me a better description of the Stalinist and Maoist left. Cornelius Cardew's rejection of all his and others' modernist and experimental work in favour of a 'music for the people' is the epitome of this ideological viewpoint. There are many on the 'new' left (including myself) who believe that increased education and accessibility can act as a means to enhance the possibility of working class people being able to engage with supposedly more 'demanding' art (and politics!) – even a plain social democrat would surely be sympathetic in this respect. After all, there is no more demeaning attitude one can take towards working class people than to deny their potential (on the question of whether Cardew was guilty of this I remain agnostic). Actual organisations and programmes such as the Open University, or Workers Educational Programmes, were designed in part as a response to these needs in more social democratic times. Do you feel in sympathy with such a view?

**GD:** Of course, any mechanism that can help the proletariat in this way is welcome, but such efforts are, of course, largely reformist, and for that reason, as Rosa Luxemburg showed us, they do not represent real solutions. Rather, such solutions are equivalent to putting a plaster on a gunshot wound - they come too late.

**IP:** With reference to your comment about an intellectual manufacturing his or her art for purposes of maximising success in market society – how precisely do you think a composer does this? And how

is it possible to act differently?

**GD:** We're already accustomed, of course, to market priorities determining at a fundamental level the way that arts and cultural organisations operate. As I have outlined elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, the withdrawal of state subsidy during the past twenty years or more has made such organisations increasingly dependent upon corporate largesse. But this largesse comes at a price. For corporations, association with cultural organisations has symbolic value, to enhance the corporation's image of social responsibility. Their finance, in consequence, will only be awarded to those organisations, events, or cultural producers that maximise that image and that symbolic profit. But this means that those values associated with the market risk penetrating cultural organisations and influencing their decision-making. In such circumstances, organisations are either pressurised to withdraw support from any cultural product of a non-affirmatory or negatory complexion, or use this market-driven climate as a cloak to mask a cultural agenda that is already reactionary. Given this environment, we should ask ourselves whether cultural products themselves have escaped this process of commodification, or whether creative horizons and ambitions are similarly determined and constrained by the priorities of the market. In other words, are creative artists creating with market success in mind, however diffuse the definition of market might be in this context? Once again, this is an environment which creative artists of a reactionary or neo-conservative tendency find hospitable to their creative inclinations. In such circumstances, their otherwise reactionary behaviour can be interpreted and marketed as a healthy realism, which exhibits a flexible, pragmatic response to new, social realities over which they have no control. And as the market penetrates state educational provision and the university sector, this process finds formal legitimation. This is a cultural environment that becomes a highly hospitable breeding ground for the restoration of cultural-historical resources that objective historical processes have already superseded.

But this isn't an argument about material. We risk missing the point if we make this an argument about the continued relevance or not of either tonality or the formal archetypes to which it is umbilically connected. For composers who employ these means, in whatever degraded and distorted form they usually take and however well masked they may be with occasional splashes of modernity, their use is primarily symbolic, in order to signal to their consumers (whether listeners or performers) or their employers (whether performers, promoters, publishers, or broadcasters), their intention to conform to certain ideological norms, and their intention to affirm and reproduce within the cultural sector and within an aesthetic context, their submission to commodity form. But of course, we must bear in mind that such composers don't *really* compose tonally. Tonality is a *system*, and has to be used as such for the maintenance of structural integrity and coherence. Using the odd tonal triad here and there is a merely symbolic act, and those materials are degraded in the process. So their product is eclectic in the truest sense of the term, in that survival in market society is dependent upon exhibiting maximum flexibility, in order, like the true entrepreneur, to take advantage of opportunities when and if they arise. So to answer your question, a composer submits to the market by employing those creative means that maximise the possibility that the subject can make an uninterrupted transition from passive consumer to passive listener: only through this route can the distinction between department store commodity and cultural artefact be successfully collapsed. Tonality, in whatever generalised and degraded form this may take, in conjunction with ersatz religion and spirituality, literary reference, quotation, and autobiography, fulfil this function with military-style precision. The main absentee from this space is the medium. And the high modernist programme represents the

primary response and alternative to this process, but the costs of pursuing it in this current political climate are great.

**IP:** I'd like to pursue the issue of appropriation further: let's return to Adorno, who privileged the less explicitly 'political' work of Samuel Beckett as against that of Brecht, which he felt was more amenable to absorption and appropriation by the 'culture industry'. In Brecht's case, it has been argued that the crude didacticism of a play like *Arturo Ui* lends itself to this process: by its excessively individualistic focus, it is unable to probe deeper into the historical conditions that makes the rise of such an individual possible. As such, the play's ability to project into our own times also becomes limited.

Nowadays, there are plenty of people who pay homage to Luigi Nono as a 'great composer', and are quite happy with his 1960s and early 1970s works without any need to engage with their politics (other than as a type of 'radical chic', whereby subjects such as Vietnam, Chile, and Auschwitz seem harmless when viewed from a safe historical distance). I would argue that the earlier and later works of Nono, through their qualities of displacement, alienation, fragmentation and denial, constitute a much more politically powerful alternative to that which is offered by commodity consumer culture nowadays. Would you agree with this?

**GD:** Appropriation works at different levels. In recent years, Nono has become a useful symbol for a newly formed lumpen-avant-garde that, whilst seeking to maintain ideological and critical distance from power, seeks a spokesperson from within the movement who offers an alternative engagement to what they perceive as the cultural and ideological impasse caused by a purely high modernist cultural programme. With arguments that are closer to fiction than genuine critical enquiry, all such positions merely obscure what is already an unmistakable and unavoidable reality.

**IP:** In the case of Beckett, many could plausibly argue that his work (at least the plays) has equally been absorbed into the 'culture industry'. I'd think of it slightly differently, in a context which is especially pertinent to music: it has been possible to perform Beckett in such a manner as to tame the apocalyptic qualities of his work, as well as the terminally black humour, by casting members of the 'luvvie brigade' (Jeremy Irons, Alan Rickman, Juliet Stevenson, etc.), whose commodified acting style (repertoire of taught gestures, and body language always revealing the lack of genuine identification on the part of the actors/actresses) places the work at a safe distance, and thus makes it more amenable to the purposes of bourgeois entertainment.

Parallel processes occur in the performance of modernist music. I read one review of a performance a few years ago of Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel*, a work we both know and admire, which stated that the performance 'made this piece of utopian structuralism much more than cerebral abstraction' and that the pianist brought 'wit' to the piano part. I can only cringe at the thought of how this performance would have looked and sounded. In music that strives so hard to exceed and transcend inherited categories of expression that have descended into idle mannerism, can performance practice not serve an ideological purpose of its own by 'historicising' a piece of music in this sort of way? A piece of music that is made to sound sufficiently rooted in dated modes of expression, with minimal mediation, can much more successfully satisfy the demands of the middlebrow entertainment industry.

**GD:** I think you are identifying the subtle and various ways in which appropriation or recuperation can take place. Clearly, for any cultural artefact to be absorbed, it has to be transformed to make it amenable to administration. But as I have outlined elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, I would argue that this process operates most successfully at the level of material. In this way, the reproduction of those values and ideologies essential for maintaining capital, is made an essentially automatic process, as the very materials composers or visual artists use come ready-processed or ready-formed, or even ready-marketed. Attempts to process Stockhausen or Beckett post hoc are largely clumsy, though your particular example is striking, illustrating a desperate need to make even the most astringently abstract conform. Unfortunately, commentators like this have conspicuous platforms upon which to disseminate their ideas. But it continues to be the case that high modernist art is generally absent from the cultural field, and this is particularly the case for music. But its absence is an index of its continued resistance to processes of appropriation. Put simply, how can they market it?

**IP:** So, would you agree that a wilful historicisation is part of the appropriation procedure (in the sense of reducing modernism to a historical category whose time is past)?

**GD:** Most certainly. High modernism gains much of its critical power from its claims to historical objectivity and transcendence. Periodising the programme enables neo-conservatives to safely acknowledge its relevance whilst pursuing political agendas that are otherwise wholly reactionary, reformist, and revisionary. But this process is also *internal* to the movement. Boulez's own appropriation and privatisation of this programme enables his continued dominance of the movement despite his more recent conservative tendencies.

**IP:** It has recently been shown (not least by Frances Stonor Saunders in her book *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*) how the rise to international prominence of American abstract expressionist artists and others was in part made possible by CIA funding (craftily channelled through a variety of 'front' organisations so as to obscure the true source). In light of this, should we think again about questions of 'historical inevitability' in terms of the success of some modern art movements?

**GD:** One could list other, more recent interventions that distort the field of cultural production, such as Saatchi's patronage of a whole generation of young British artists whose work is created in their sponsor's mercenary image. One could also question whether the extreme turn to the right in new music in recent years might have its roots in similar neo-conservative interventions. Certainly, prominent conservative British and American composers have benefited considerably from such covert action channelled overtly through big US composition cash 'prizes', which are really rewards: we must remember that the Republican neo-con's New American Century is mainly an act of imperialism. Clearly, the intervention at *state* intelligence level that Stonor Saunders reveals is of another order. But if her assertions are correct, then it is doubtful that abstraction would have reached the level of international dominance that it did without such intervention. And this would conform to the historical norm and explain why other, more radical forms of abstraction, such as the constructionism of Charles Biederman, for example, which did not enjoy covert US government sponsorship, remained largely neglected and ignored by authority and the critical establishment. This helps to counter any argument that radical modernism of this kind is, in fact, some form of fabrication, and more or less a creation of power for the assertion of cultural hegemony. Rather, abstract expressionism was appropriated by power opportunistically for reasons already outlined.

And the controversial nature of much of the work and the personalities producing it, some of whom exhibited hedonistic, self-destructive lifestyles which usefully reproduced romantic visions of the aesthetic life, offered useful tools of promotion: the intellection involved in construction sells fewer weekend supplements.

But we should also question the motivations behind such critiques of high modernism, and consider whether critiques and revisionary analyses of this kind are driven by neo-conservative or feminist agendas that, though emanating from very different positions, share a common aim to discredit or relativise the high modernist programme.

**IP:** If a high modernist agenda is vulnerable to feminist critique, should one not question it?

**GD:** It's quite clear that in *Capital* Marx made little room for gender in his analysis of capitalism. The more separatist strands of feminism that view patriarchy as more significant in the creation of social divisions than either class or race have only contributed, I would argue, to the continued weakening of the organised left and its apparent impotency in the face of global capital domination. Feminist critiques of aesthetic modernism are similarly focused and analyse the internationalising and rationalising impetus of the movement as aesthetic imperialism or patriarchy. Again, such masculinisation only serves to factionalise and weaken forces of liberation and enlightenment, a particularly tragic waste of time if gender is in any case socially constructed to serve forms of labour division intrinsic to capitalist economics.

**IP:** Many of the abstract expressionist painters (most obviously Pollock) created wild cults of personality around themselves. John Cage did so as well, despite all his rhetoric to the contrary, as did Morton Feldman. I hardly need to mention Stockhausen. The media love this, enabling them to displace attention from the art to the artist. But do you think this had an impact upon the work itself, or is it totally separable?

**GD:** It's regrettable that creative artists appear so willing to succumb to this kind of cultism, so willing to allow themselves, as subjects, to become as important (or more so) than their creative programmes. But you pose an interesting question, and as you say, Stockhausen's career trajectory is a perfect instance of this. If we examine his work from the 1950s, by considering pieces such as *Kontra-Punkte*, *Gruppen*, or the early *Klavierstücke*, these works have an aesthetic comportment largely in keeping with the objectivising, internationalising spirit of the high modernist programme. To a significant degree they denounce the subject in favour of the collective: this is always a stronger option. One of the complaints customarily made against this music is that it all sounds the same. Notwithstanding the extent to which this is an over-simplistic over-statement, I consider this to be one of its potential strengths, signifying a transferral of notions of collective ownership (and a rejection of individualism) to the aesthetic. Though it is interesting to consider how Stockhausen's later period text or intuitive scores examine musical process at very fundamental levels, one could be forgiven for thinking that this analysis is a by-product of a musical development that enables Stockhausen-as-subject to be foregrounded, due to the social and more marketable form that this work took, enabling a transition of relative ease into the pages of *Rolling Stone* and *Melody Maker*. Such displacement of attention does have an impact on the art produced, and it is a feature of much cultural production. In this sense, if in no other, Stockhausen really *did* serve imperialism<sup>3</sup>, and it is a major contributor to

this composer's increasing decline, I would assert, as a creative force from the 1970s onwards. But Stockhausen has always exhibited a level of careerism that has compromised his production, whether it's the conceptual simple-mindedness of *Klavierstück XI* or the abdication of critical perspective in *Klavierstück III*. I am unsure that his most recent work is worthy of much commentary.

## 2.

**IP:** Do you see your work, in part, as a strategy of negation, a word which has largely pejorative connotations in English, though very different resonances in Germanic idealist parlance (the process of negation, of critique, is a stage on the process of sublation (*Aufheben*) on the path towards higher knowledge; English empiricism is profoundly sceptical about such a thing ever being really possible)? Also, would you say there is a certain 'classicism' in your work and that of the modern movement in general (in whatever medium)?

**GD:** I understand and employ the concept of negation in broadly two ways. Firstly, with reference to set-theoretic practice, it functions as a formal strategy to manage change and difference, to determine both linear and vertical structure, relationships, and incident, in order to control the levels of difference and similarity that these structures exhibit. Direct reference is made to this process, for example, in the suffix to *forms 5: event intersection*, in which every aspect of the work is governed by set operations of this kind, though I increasingly find that a more flexible approach can be obtained using fuzzy, rather than fully crisp set operations and structures. It is in this sense, perhaps, that work of this kind can be termed classical, though this isn't a term I generally use due to its unwanted connotations. Its emphasis on formalised and verifiable modes of practice, most commonly mathematical models or systems which are inevitably objective and externalised in nature, indicate a concern for standards of practice which subordinate individualism to more collective aims. This, I suppose, is a form of classicism, and may be what you mean. Underpinning the whole of the constructionist programme is a concern for accountability of this kind. This transforms the role of the artist, of course, and our current historical period is in large measure characterised by a reaction to this possibility. We should be unsurprised by the hostility initiated, for example, by integral serialism and similar modes of practice. As I have outlined elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, whilst art, functioning as surrogate religion, is viewed as a refuge, retreat, distraction, or escape from total administration, any practice that appears to replicate those features associated with total administration will be rejected, or not even recognised as aesthetic behaviour.

It is in this second sense that I use the term negation, in order to delineate one's position and response to power, and what strategies one can employ to manage that response. Practice can either *affirm* dominant power relations by reproducing them in symbolic form (and tonality, as I outlined earlier, is a perfect vehicle for this), or attempt to *negate* those relations through a refusal to take one's allotted place in that superstructural network which functions to reproduce those relations at ever higher levels of abstraction.

**IP:** All your compositional processes do still use the 'note' as the fundamental unit. Are you at all interested in extended instrumental techniques and the use of timbre individuated from pitch and rhythm?

**GD:** As the phrase indicates, extended instrumental techniques involve the individualisation of instrumental performance and the radical idiomaticity of instrumental technique. If the projection and investigation of integrated, highly structured and cohering wholes forms the basis of ones creative practice and aesthetic programme, as it does in my own case, one will seek to avoid any feature which risks loosening or weakening those inter-relationships and connectivities which are a pre-condition for such structures' successful functioning. The idioms of one instrument or instrumental family do not necessarily map on to the idioms of another, if at all. In consequence, the possibility of factoring out sufficient commonalities in order to construct integrated forms of organisation is, therefore, significantly weakened. Thus, to concentrate on 'the note' as the 'fundamental unit' is, for me, a recognition that, in order to suppress those forms of singularity that risk compromising the fully integrated whole, only those features exhibiting the highest levels of invariance constitute valid components of any organisational system or procedure. At this time then, my creative interests preclude the possibility of such techniques within the instrumental realm, though, given the flexibility of the human voice, I am interested in exploring extensions to this as a resource in the future.

But there has been an assumption driving the extension and expansion of musical materials that all parameters can be subjected to similar levels of development and exploration, an assumption that concludes that a radically expanded notational repertoire, for example, can be accompanied by a similar expansion in *timbral* control. This assumption doesn't take into account the different operational and cognitive modalities that notation and timbre inhabit. Of course, we do have technological devices, computers, that offer composers, in principle at least, unlimited control over this complex parameter; and it is for this reason that the bulk of my creative and research energies during the 1980s were devoted to computer music synthesis and investigation. For this reason, I am at a loss to understand why composers strain the instrumental medium by placing demands upon musical instruments that they are unable to satisfy. As technological tools, they were not designed to manipulate and control timbre to a sophisticated degree. It's true, especially in the hands of highly accomplished performers, that interesting results can be obtained. But the contradictory nature of such research soon becomes apparent. To explore timbre, tools of exceptional analytical precision and sophistication are required, tools that are able to act upon sonic events, in parallel, at a highly multi-parametric level. Again, computers can do this with ease. At this time, I cannot imagine the physical constraints intrinsic to human physiognomy offering the means to explore instrumental timbre in this way. Attempts to do so risk inhabiting the special effects category of production or theatre. As such, they are highly singularised and risk compromising the internal integrity of any given structure. Thus, within instrumental music, I would claim that timbre *cannot* be individuated from pitch and rhythm to a sophisticated extent, so there is little point in pursuing it as a creative programme. It is for these reasons, and others, that my scores at this time do not specify any deliberate timbral modification or associated techniques of articulation. This even extends to 'standard' string techniques such as *sul ponticello* and *flautando*, or even muting given that this effect is merely a very, very crude low pass filter, over which there is no finer level of control.

I am fully aware, of course, that those instrumental resources available to composers at this time are to some extent arbitrary. But this does not mean that they are without an internal structuring which delimits their field of competency. This field cannot be arbitrarily enhanced or extended by operating on one modality without considering how those extensions propagate and affect inter-modal relationships, possibly in detrimental and unforeseen ways. I am also aware, of course, that

in the hands of certain composers, the use of extended instrumental techniques has other functions, as either a means to deliberately undermine the medium itself or as an agitational device to attack bourgeois security and 'good taste'. I am not without sympathy for such positions. But for reasons I outlined earlier, there are more direct and efficient ways to subvert bourgeois expectations than this, even though the average bourgeois couldn't care less about such posturing. And I am also fully aware, once again, that my disinclination to adopt such practices coupled with a general tendency of the field to measure radicality in coarse, quantitative terms, risks relocating my own practice to the centre-left, thereby reducing its critical potency.

**IP:** Well, the composer Helmut Lachenmann uses extended instrumental techniques in part precisely because they draw attention to themselves in live performance, foregrounding a certain non-posturing theatricality grounded in its literal 'means of production'. This serves as an antidote to a streamlined instrumental technique which seeks to erase the material-nature of instruments and performance for purposes of mystification, perhaps giving music-making a fetish quality as a rarefied music 'from on high'. Of course, Lachenmann is also simply fascinated by timbre per se, using intricate strategies of contextualisation to make manifest an almost naïve (in the best sense of the word) love for the possibilities of sonority. This is quite different to a 'means to deliberately undermine the medium itself' or 'an agitational device to attack bourgeois security and "good taste"', though some critics would like to co-opt Lachenmann into one of these camps. Do you believe this sort of compositional aesthetic to be of value?

**GD:** This is an interesting programme that Lachenmann is exploring, but it is a programme that makes itself easy prey to the types of appropriation to which you refer. Indeed, its agitational and critical function is surely its primary focus and value? Again, I would have to repeat that if one is 'simply fascinated with timbre per se', then explore it using those tools that reward that fascination.

But there is an important link here with aspects of my own practice that is most clearly explored in **piano piece 2**. If Lachenmann's methods seek to recapture the means of production through processes of de-mystification, the notational devices utilised in piano piece 2 function to subvert and disable those processes of appropriation and recuperation before they occur. This resistance, I would claim, is embedded within the work's notational fabric and form. This exhibits a level of perceptual and operational complexity that acts as a barrier to unreflective, automatic realisation and reproduction. As you have commented elsewhere<sup>4</sup>, this is achieved through the radical re-specification of each successive impulse at every parametric level. The concentration upon the single impulse, or note, as the largest unit of organisation, acts as an efficient barrier to the formation of higher-level sensory units that are more susceptible to appropriation because of their (relative) ease of cognition. In combination with notational techniques that constantly mediate between high levels of determinacy and relative indeterminacy, the potential for resolving the polyvalent nature of the work, the possibility of the work reaching closure, the possibility of the work forming a conclusive identity, is constantly delayed and frustrated. In reply to Bourdieu, here, *complexity* is an act of resistance to processes of appropriation.

3.

**IP:** I'd like to ask if you can see anything of value in popular music and jazz, or in free improvisation? Would you subscribe to Adorno's views on these matters?

**GD:** You're right that in all essentials I would subscribe to Adorno's position with regard to so-called popular music. I think I would have little to add to his analyses, which strike me as no less applicable now than when he wrote them. Critics of Adorno tend to get overly fixated with the particularities of the examples he invoked to support his analyses, as if, in essence, the material fabric of jazz and popular music hasn't remained the same in the intervening years. But I would ask you why are we still examining this question? Given our own activities, why is this still considered an important issue? Let's try to examine this in more detail than is often the case. Firstly, great difficulties surround the notion of 'value'. Does the music articulate something of *value* in terms of technical innovation or interest? Or does the music have *value* in developing critical consciousness, awareness, or maturity? And what exactly do we mean by pop music or jazz music? In terms of technical construction, popular chart music strikes me as exhibiting no harmonic, rhythmic, or formal characteristics that elevate it above the severely retarded. For a while, particularly during the 1980s, the rapid development of synthesizers and associated signal processing devices enabled these moribund materials and forms to be projected in timbrally novel, though not necessarily richer, contexts. But whether projected using a Yamaha DX7 or a Fender Stratocaster, the materials stay either the same or, to paraphrase Brian Ferneyhough's words, progress from three-chord, to one-chord, to zero-chord trickery. But this level of retardation is built into the form of division of labour that characterises the field. Pop tunes are unable to exceed the boundaries of complexity allowed by the short-term memory characteristic of head-arrangements. Only music notation enables such boundaries to be exceeded. As a synonym for the intellect, it is ironic that those arrangements manageable by the head are of an intellectual ambition and range that requires no intellect at all. But we should be unsurprised that pop stars seek to bypass those formal programmes of learning that would equip them with the required knowledge and skills to read and write: show business is the cultural wing of capital, and as such it has no time for anything that will slow down the process of capital accumulation and its symbolic forms, fame and celebrity. It is true, of course, that during the 1970s certain factions attempted to extend these basic ingredients. But if we examine, critically, the products of so-called progressive rock, we find essentially the same harmonic and formal characteristics. Where there *is* an attempt at formal expansion, as in the work of Yes or King Crimson for example, the expansion takes place with no concomitant attention to change in other parameters, an essential consideration if those expanded forms are not to buckle under this new expressive weight. This strain is particularly evident, for example, in Yes's *Tales from Topographic Oceans*: where such pretension is still to some extent hidden in the *Yes Album*, the limitations here become unbearably evident which no amount of virtuoso electronic keyboard scale-work is able to hide. There is thus a level of incompetence here that has its origins in extreme ignorance, but that is frequently marketed as humility.

It is important to apply the same critical standards to this music that we do to all other musics. Only then does its truly retarded and reactionary nature become apparent. But it is still the case that such musics are given the benefit of the doubt. And it is extraordinary to see pop stars enjoying exceptional material wealth whilst simultaneously enjoying the suspension of belief that comes from the conferral of victimhood. This stems, I presume, from pop music's ancestry in certain (non-

privileged) class factions. But if this were ever the case, rebellion has now joined the long list of other commodified and reified manners and images that make up the pop music industry style portfolio. Certain elements within high-cultural endeavour are far too tolerant of this process.

But as pop music can take many forms which are in their foundation nevertheless virtually indistinguishable, this is frequently also the case with jazz. Where jazz similarly seeks a higher level of technical expansion, it frequently does so by simply mimicking and appropriating those resources developed within high-cultural endeavour, but without the critical focus characteristic of the latter, and often rather clumsily. And such attempts at appropriation reveal a compliance with what they clearly perceive as cultural authority. But the nod, wink, and grin that is elicited from Dave Brubeck's irregular metrical and phrase structures merely reassures us that despite this aberration, everything's the same underneath. And such music aligns itself with all those other musics of an affirmatory nature that seek to hide their otherwise reactionary complexion beneath the thinnest veneer of modernity. As a propagandistic tool, syncopation just gives you the illusion of freedom. The position is no different when the nod, wink, and grin is replaced with a more learned demeanour: the main lesson to be learned from Tony Coe's use of Bergian twelve-note row structures in his *Zeitgeist*, is that for appropriation to go unnoticed, it has to be pursued far more wholesale and far more ruthlessly than we witness here.

The main thing to come out of this is a repeat of my opening question: why are we still examining this? We are concerned with it, in part, because such musics constitute the primary weapon of response by those cultural theorists who view high modernist complexity as a means, as I stated earlier, to sustain unequal distributions of power. Such musics are also effective symbolic tools that neo-conservative composers ransack as a badge of market utility masked as fake camp. But I do not question cultural theorists' veracity. The British strand of this tendency emanates in large measure from those institutions to which university status has only recently been conferred. Just as such institutions exist to service expanding student enrolment from proletarian origins, so the demography of faculty members is not infrequently sourced from similarly proletarian or petit-bourgeois class factions where an adolescent encounter with high culture was replaced with products of the culture industry. The kind of critique characteristic of Stuart Hall is an example of this kind of class warfare. In this process the comparative 'value' of Britney Spears or Pierre Boulez is, of course, lost. I suspect they really do mourn the loss of John Lennon<sup>5</sup>.

**IP:** In the eyes and ears of many serious aficionados of rock music, a band like Yes are hardly the epitome of a genuine 'progressiveness', despite the label; punk sprang up in part as a reaction to this sort of navel-gazing work (akin perhaps to something like the symphonies of Robert Simpson?), a combination of narcissism and solipsism that was a huge distortion of the more 'engaged' work of 1960s bands such as the Soft Machine. While punk was undoubtedly appropriated and rendered harmless by the rock-music industry, I'd argue that there was still some quality of authentic engagement at the very outset, manifest in the first Sex Pistols album, say, whose potency remains relevant today. The same claim could be made for other key strategic moments in popular music history, or in the work of jazz musicians such as Charlie Mingus, Ornette Coleman or Cecil Taylor, say (and some earlier practitioners). Do you not see any potential in this type of work?

**GD:** Like any other hobbyist, the aficionado is highly territorial, and will always seek to ring-fence

their activity and enthusiasms in this way. Distinctions such as those you relate function to achieve this end. But within our context, to assert the revolutionary potential of the tendencies you cite is to radically over-estimate the extent to which this kind of epiphenomena has any significance to power. Persistent questioning about this is akin to being asked at dinner parties ones opinion of Beethoven. It's a call to conform.

#### 4.

**IP:** In Britain and America today, and increasingly elsewhere, the dominant aesthetic seems to be one of absorption, under the auspices of a certain post-modern pluralism which turns every aesthetic movement (including high modernism) into just one 'style' amongst many (relatively homogenised to make this possible, not least through performance practice); aesthetic choices from amongst these styles then resemble any other consumer activity. This attitude is especially prevalent amongst the younger generation (especially that group of people who were all at Cambridge together in the 1980s) who have grown up in a world in which the values of Thatcherism have become 'normalised' and have shown little inclination to resist them. Much of the work of younger composers is depressingly familiar in this respect. How can or should one act to try and counteract this?

**GD:** What has happened in the UK over the past twenty years or so would be described, in another context, as a coup d'état. The particular factions to which you allude form a monopoly which enjoys a near exclusive possession and control over many or all of the most significant resources available for new music production, performance, and dissemination. But, as you intimate, this has only been possible due to their willingness to subordinate creative autonomy and decision-making to the priorities of the market and to fashion their product in its mercenary image. What action can be taken to counteract this has far-reaching implications. Within the cultural field, politics and ideology are customarily masked as aesthetics. This being the case, acts of symbolic violence and oppression are accepted, interpreted, or, to use Bourdieu's formulation, *misrecognised* as objective characteristics of the field, which you just have to put up with. Whilst this is the case, the product of contrivance and design is interpreted as fortuity, the product of favour and influence, as talent. As we see in other spheres where structures of democratic accountability and equity are absent, and where the possibility of engineering real change appears impossible, the response is frequently a resort to action of a more direct, less symbolic form. This may be the only effective route left open to us, and it mirrors the state of the wider social formation.

**IP:** The sort of discussion we are having at the moment is, I think, quite markedly different in its nature, attitudes, language and ideological viewpoints to most of what characterises discourse about music in Britain. Such discourse more commonly comprises purple prose and blow-by-blow description, an almost adolescent fixation upon mystical personae of the individuals involved (with a lot of emphasis upon the bourgeois autobiography you rightly decried earlier), and a general aesthetic privileging of what might crudely be called the more titillating aspects of music. Discourse of this type is not merely an appendage to music, or a footnote to it, I believe: the discourse, in the form of hype and publicity, reviews, or simply the oral discourse that goes on between those involved with the administration of new music, is manifested at every level. Such discourse legitimises certain types of music, and delegitimises other work that exceeds the discursive categories employed. This seems a *prima facie*

case of the means by which the discourse bullies the artistic work into the service of entertainment, in this particular British case. Would you agree with this? What are your thoughts on the role of 'words about music'?

**GD:** I think you're isolating here a feature that penetrates our society at a very fundamental level, whether between individual subjects or between groups. It should, therefore, come as no surprise to us that music, like any other form of human communication, is reduced (wherever possible), to the same kinds of coarse discursive categories that you cite. As I have outlined elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, since the last aggressive reassertion of capital during the 1980s, contemporary music has finally been allotted its place in the leisure, heritage, and entertainment industries. This has been a gradual process, which remains incomplete. But it is one that has already transformed the field into a mere simulation of what we mean by contemporary music: even the term has been stolen from us, and we're unable to use it without qualification. This being the case, we should be unsurprised that the language used to describe or discuss it, takes a similar form, one that is as indistinguishable as possible from the language that is used to describe or discuss any other commodity in market society. And, once transformed into a commodity, the languages of advertising and marketing are deployed to sell it, which, of course, are languages of distortion, deceit, and propaganda. This accounts, I believe, for some of the more colourful prose that you rightly condemn. But what astonishes us, in part, is the extent to which composers so readily allow themselves to be subjected to these processes. But of course, it is naïve to think that artists are blessed with levels of principle or awareness that are greater than anyone else.

But this process is an attack on complexity, a prohibition on thinking. Like the music it serves to sell, such language is an abdication of reflective and critical thought. Like the acronyms that so horrified Marcuse<sup>6</sup>, reified language functions to delimit and control what can be said or thought. In such a context thinking can only be restored by a radical critique or re-formulation of those tools of discourse that we employ to explore and organise that thinking. This is the case with music, and this is the case with words. Many techniques can function as models of resistance, not least the fragmentary discourse and forms we associate with critical theorists such as Theodor Adorno. In my own case, the reader should also note my total disinclination to employ those conceptual categories that typify discourse on music, not only because of their inappropriateness to the task in hand, but because, having been fully appropriated, their signifying capacity is no longer under our control. This being the case, one must find or invent new discursive and critical categories that will once more enable authentic communication to take place. From a wider perspective, this also accounts for my rejection of forms of labour division that constrain and order thinking by imprisoning it in domain-specific language. For this and other reasons, I map categories of discourse from one domain (such as computer science, anthropology, sociology, evolutionary psychology, or psycho-acoustics) to re-form the conceptual framework of another. Thus, my preference for the term *temporal partitioning* rather than rhythm, for example, is not only driven by a desire for conceptual and discursive precision, but also a realisation that the term rhythm has become semantically overloaded with connotations and denotations which I am unable to control.

But most importantly, we need to make a distinction between speech and writing. You use the term 'words', which leaves me unclear to which you refer. Speech, more than writing, lends itself more easily to those processes of reification and appropriation that kill authentic communication. This is

due to the context in which speech is the dominant discursive and communicational format, such as we find in mass communicational systems. It is to this process that Bourdieu so horrifyingly refers in describing those processes of discourse management commonly employed in television and radio broadcasts, where the sheer speed of interaction prohibits the kind of reflective thought necessary to prevent the subject's decline into automatism<sup>7</sup>. Without such reflection, the subject is prone - or forced - to employ more or less prefabricated units of speech that carry with them a semantic content, the intent or meaning of which has been taken out of the hands, or mouths, uttering them. To paraphrase Guy Debord, inarticulateness in this context is a sign of extreme enlightenment<sup>8</sup>.

More generally, one could argue that artists should write more and create less. By remaining mute about their work, they leave it open to manipulation and domination by others: this would appear to suit most artists. Historically, artists' letters are one of the primary sources that scholars can use to analyse their thinking. This being the case, we should be unsurprised at the infantile, shallow form that much writing about music has taken: this is not a recent phenomenon. But we might consider whether the hostility that has accompanied *intellectualised* and highly *theorized* art (various forms of constructionism being the primary examples), stems, in part, from such artists disinclination to allow others, whether researchers or critics, to speak for them. Disempowered, the critic fights back by championing the mute and the dumb.

**IP:** How important is progressive aesthetic activity in comparison to explicit political activism? Have you ever been involved in the latter?

**GD:** As I believe I intimated earlier, I am sceptical about the ability of art to effect direct, political change. If that's what you want, then use more appropriate and direct tools of engagement. But for intellectuals of the left, organised political activity offers an inhospitable context within which to do this, given the left's commitment to a proletarian dictatorship in which radical social change must be initiated from below. As I stated earlier, given that the proletariat are themselves a product of capital, and represent a low revolutionary potential, I would advocate a model in which a radical intellectual vanguard guides this process through enlightened leadership – we have to start from where we are. No current organisation of the left dare advocate such a programme publicly, because of its Stalinist and Maoist overtones. However, the internal divisions within the left are such that it remains a largely ineffective force against global capital. But art of a progressive and critical nature offers a context for encouraging and developing critical consciousness and awareness, which is a precondition for significant social change, and it can give glimpses of what currently seems an impossibility.

**IP:** Might the consciousness of radical bourgeois figures like either of us not still reflect some of the human interests of our class, as opposed say to that of a shop steward? Aren't there intrinsic dangers in our aesthetic projects in that respect, operating aloof from the broad masses of humanity? What relevance might such work have to a late-teenage girl working in a sweatshop in the Far- East for a big multinational corporation, say?

**GD:** What we do has no relevance to the workers to which you refer, and it's preposterous, of course, to suggest that it does or should, given the oppressive nature of the conditions that such workers are forced to endure. But I am at a loss to understand why your examples are taken from the bottom or lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. What we do has no relevance to the vast

majority of workers, whether in a Far-East sweatshop, a legal firm, hospital consultancy, corporate board room, or university faculty. It strikes me that there are two fundamental and inter-connected reasons for this. Firstly, as Susan Sontag<sup>9</sup> correctly observed, advanced modern art requires a level of intellectual engagement and cultivation akin to that required for physics, higher mathematics, computing, or any other of the advanced sciences. Generally, extreme divisions of labour prevent this kind of comprehension. I am a computer scientist, and rarely is it asked whether sciences should be immediately understood by or have a relevance to, non-specialists or those with little formal education: issues of accountability are of a different kind. The question is posed within *cultural* production because there is a general assumption or expectation that art should be comprehensible to everyone, with or without the requisite educational foundation; indeed, art is deemed faulty if it requires this. The source of this assumption is, in part, the use of culture as a means to implement forms of pseudo-democratic accountability within a cultural context that is largely irrelevant to the wider political decision-making process. Due to culture's impotence, liberalising it is a cheap way to fake democracy. Secondly, advanced intellectual activity of this kind, whether in the arts or sciences, is rarely given access to those mechanisms and channels of communication, such as television, radio, or the press, that would allow this process of education, or enlightenment, to take place. This is a form of censorship, a prohibition on the most complex and advanced products of society being made available to all of those who would wish to access them. There are two solutions to this problem. Either one works to eradicate this socio-economic system and erect an alternative to it, or, as the cultural theorists would recommend, reformulate our activity to enable its easier navigation through this system with a view to subverting it from inside. Our cultural terrain is littered with examples of the latter that only results in culture enlisting itself into the service of power through a poor appropriation and simplistic re-formulation of political-reformist and ersatz military strategy. What we have is a tragedy, one that will not be resolved by shooting the messenger or throwing the bottle back in the water<sup>10</sup>.

## 5.

**IP:** Is there a place for the irrational in yours and others' music? Do the highly rationalist procedures and aesthetics you employ have a type of quasi-mystical significance for you?

**GD:** Most art feeds off and is based on the irrational and the illogical, and, if examined objectively or scientifically, with a clear head, makes little sense as a result: this is the norm for art. As the possibility of God recedes, for those seeking an alternative refuge, art becomes a useful surrogate for religion and other forms of so-called mystical belief. And many composers are happy with this state of affairs as it relieves them of the responsibility to properly account for their creative decision-making, and enables them to mask their incompetence as humility.

But this is now just one more form of entertainment. My own techniques of composition have no significance to me greater than the structural and intellectual elegance that mathematical systems of thought *intrinsically* offer us: they are already fascinating and offer us efficient tools with which to model, structure, and explore our thinking. I can think of no alternative to basing ones actions on reason and associated logical processes. They strike me as the most effective weapon against the

anarchy and irrationalism that is at the foundation of capital.

**IP:** Late post-modern capitalism attempts to channel irrational human qualities, including desire and sexuality, into pigeonholed categories that lose their force of purpose by that very action. I'm personally interested in radical sexuality as one possible arena in which some modicum of human desire can still exist in a form not totally occupied by the demands of capitalist society (though of course this is by no means easy to maintain, the forces of commodification lurk like barbarians outside the gates as much as in any other field of human activity). In music the concomitant quality might be a continuing attempt to convey something resembling authentic human emotion, though not of course in the commodified form beloved of neo-romantics, who render such possibilities utterly inert and stillborn. The more abstracted rationalism that you would seem to espouse is certainly important in times dominated by the type of 'instrumental reason' identified by Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (by which reason assumes a purely utilitarian role, whose importance is seen purely in terms of its use-value, for building nuclear weapons or the maintenance of capitalist economic hegemony); nonetheless, mightn't the Enlightenment project itself contain some essential limitations? When total administration is the driving force in contemporary society, is there not something to be said, aesthetically speaking, for an attempt to convey that which lies beyond the boundaries of such administration (two very different composers who to my ears achieve something of this are Michael Finnissy and Hans-Joachim Hespos)? This is the reason why some have suggested that genuine romanticism could actually be a major threat to post-modernism. Or do you think such attempts are futile and doomed from the outset?

**GD:** Capital has appropriated the languages of mathematics, science, and reason to serve the interests of power and capital accumulation. We should be unsurprised, therefore, that subjects recoil when faced with cultural products that enlist those very same processes of rational organisation, systematisation, and construction, as it reminds them of their enslavement to total administration. But you are advocating the exploration or liberation of primary drives as a way to force holes through the administrative fabric. Every social order creates the personality types necessary for its preservation. As submissiveness to authority is a pre-requisite for such preservation, strategies that offer the possibility of liberating dissent through restructuring such types offers us a potentially powerful space of engagement. But given the way in which such drives are appropriated, channelled, and exploited, it would appear that no sooner do such opportunities for dissent arise than they are neutralised. In this sense, the forms of liberation that interest you are no more privileged than any other. So we keep returning to the power of capital to absorb dissent, and perhaps it is that process that requires our critical analysis.

## 6.

**IP:** In your work, you seem to avoid mimetic connotations almost entirely, whether in terms of the properties of the musical material, or even in the titles (which generally have a 'formalist' quality). Do you think there is a place for 'descriptive' or 'evocative' music?

**GD:** New evolutionary-psychological research suggests the adaptive and survival function that an intimate understanding of the natural or external environment offers organisms. There is thus a

reciprocal relationship between fitness and performance in this environment. This being the case, we should be unsurprised at the extent to which depictions of that environment, however specific or generalised, dominate aesthetic media and representation. Landscapes, for example, which are often depicted from vantage points which offer the viewer necessary protection from predators, can be seen in this context as analyses of such environments. And such an observation could be extended to narrative forms and literary representations that similarly function to analyse and comprehend the hominoid, social environment. At this historical juncture, however, such adaptive behaviours are arguably functionless, and are leftovers from our developmental, evolutionary history where an intimate understanding or knowledge of the savannah, for example, was crucial to survival. But these are merely medium-specific examples of how mimetic behaviour assists the maintenance of subject homeostasis and stability. As I have outlined elsewhere<sup>11</sup>, through the creation and/or use of stable, unambiguous referents mimesis is particularly effective in lessening the perceptual and information-processing burden that subjects might otherwise experience. By rejecting such strategies, non-mimetic art media disrupt this process.

We should be unsurprised then, at the extent to which non-representational art, in all media, has been greeted with hostility. Where it has not, then its real nature has been misunderstood. And although certain categories of abstract expressionism (which still retain, to varying degrees, traces of the real) have enjoyed both significant patronage and public enthusiasm (even if CIA-initiated), constructive art, as I intimated earlier, has been relatively ignored or rejected (I know of no reference by Clement Greenberg, who was instrumental in propagating abstract expressionism, to such art). This is due to its connection to external reality being more efficiently severed. And this hostility derives from the artwork's refusal to affirm nature or, when the two are different, bourgeois expectations: mimesis is the bourgeoisies' way of insisting on arts utility. But the extent to which music is mimetic is poorly, if at all, understood. Once we perceive that the role of mimesis is to assist the maintenance of subject homeostasis, we are in a better position to understand which aspects of music function to achieve this end; and the very term, mimesis, is in need of additional conceptual treatment and refinement to enable its application to psychological and physiological categories in a more precise and meaningful manner. Clearly, each aesthetic medium emphasises a different modality of perception and cognition. Auditive media, or music, act extensively upon temporal modalities; and music is mimetic when it functions to reflect, reinforce, or re-create the temporal organisation of the subject's internal or external environment. And as there is a performance and adaptive advantage in partitioning experience into identifiable and recurrent patterns, patterns that have both an ecological and biological foundation, we should be unsurprised that to successfully reinforce this, music is organised in a similar way. But the more complexly such patterns are disrupted or the more thoroughly they are negated, the less music functions to affirm such expectations. Indeed, psycho-physiological research, indicating changes in neuroendocrine and cardio respiratory activity, begins to support this contention, indicating the links between physiology and auditive input, and their concomitant affective responses and arousal potential<sup>12</sup>. And the more reinforced such responses become, the greater the potential for the link between autonomic, physiological responses, and dominant ideologies, to be established: we need a Marxist physiology to supplement those psycho-analytic researches and perspectives initiated by the Frankfurt School. And expectations will be negated the moment the medium is prioritised, which is the central operational tenet informing high modernist practice. And it is at this point that the medium attains autonomy, that its aesthetic function is foregrounded. So in answer to your question, the avoidance of mimesis is a result of foregrounding the medium.

But I'm not sure how to answer whether there's a place for 'descriptive' or 'evocative' music. Despite ones intentions, the meaning listeners attach to ones work are out of ones control, especially if they are naïve or uninformed listeners, which is the norm. But I realise that there is a sub-text to your question, which is making reference to work that is overtly exploitative of stereo-typical modes of expression and assorted reified styles, manners, and images. As I have outlined elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, this practice dominates much new music production today. So when we encounter titles such as *To Fields We Do Not Know*, *A Deep but Dazzling Darkness*, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, and *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, we know that the composer is sending the consumer a re-assuring message that they are safe in the composer's hands and that the product will contain little or nothing that will disrupt the consumer's expectations. *Forms 5: event intersection*, *Structures*, or *Kreuzspiel*, send out different messages that direct the reader to issues surrounding the works' construction. So, is there a place for 'descriptive' or 'evocative' music? Yes, and that place is a social formation that seeks to subordinate all activities to the priorities of the market – which is what we have now. In such a context, cultural production has to assume its allotted place within the heritage, leisure, and entertainment industries, and be of a complexion that offers little or no risk that the distractive function of those industries will be disrupted.

**IP:** How about a work such as Xenakis's *Aroua*, or Messiaen's *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*, or even before them works of Debussy or Beethoven and many others that allude to nature? Would you really say that those works are entirely subsumable in the social formation you have just described?

**GD:** My comments here are targeted primarily at current trends and are thus historically located. But I would reject any tendency that aimed to sustain the subject in a state of enchantment, which exploits nature as a mechanism of retreat and religion surrogate, or as a romanticised antidote to technical-rational administration. I realise that the logical outcome of the programme that I advocate is the abolition of art as we customarily understand it. But this is a central tenet of aesthetic modernisation.

**IP:** Do you see your individual works as relatively self-contained entities, or the body of work as a whole as a more continuous project, from which separate works form a connected part of an on-going aesthetic 'discourse'?

**GD:** Very much the latter. As a creative programme, this is most obviously articulated in my *forms* series, but the smaller works such as the piano pieces are no less connected to this process – they just have a different emphases, which is in part due to their more timbrally focused and delimited nature. A more precise understanding of the issues generated by the series can be gained by invoking the sciences of cognition and perception, which offer a wealth of research, terminology, and analytical perspectives of great relevance. And as a computer scientist I am always keen to associate my practice with science whenever possible, in order to distance it as much as possible from customary artistic discourse and perspectives. One of the most important features of the forms series is its systematic and analytical attention to a more or less well defined set of technical and aesthetic issues. These include pitch relations and structures, gestural profiling, and density, temporal, order, and proximity relations of various kinds. The series as a whole thus forms an attentional set or collection exhibiting high levels of intra-set invariance. In effect, each work exhibits high levels of

similarity to all the others. Thus, where they differ will take on an increasingly significant status. This aids processes of parametric foregrounding, whereby parameters customarily hidden due to their encapsulation and embeddedness in higher-order structures, are accessed and promoted to the perceptual foreground. This enables the avoidance of featural singletons that would draw attention to the particular, as my concern here is to draw attention to high level, abstract commonalities. The best way to do this, I believe, is by lowering the difference threshold between those works which are the vehicles through which such abstractions are explored: if two works only differ on a limited range of the scale, we are forced to pay attention to these differences at a higher level of detail than would otherwise be the case. The problem of addressing such issues within a single work is that such difference is then mistakenly perceived as dialectical, with all the problems that arise from such coarsely fabricated conceptions. Composers and musicologists usually describe this as contrast, whereas they really mean a level of distinctness which places grave doubts on the coherence of the percepts in question: the terms 'section' and 'movement' are routinely deployed to mask this logical deficit. I would hope that the similarity this has to processes of scientific research and methodology, and the incremental and systematic nature that this endeavour usually takes, is apparent.

But it has implications that go beyond 'mere' aesthetics. One of the most obvious means by which cultural products assume the role of commodities, is how successfully they control and manipulate supply and demand. Within cultural production, this is most commonly achieved through the manufacture of scarcity. The more singular and exceptional a cultural product is, and the more iconic its status, the greater value it achieves. And this status is most obviously achieved through maximal differentiation, as this is the perceptual modality that is most successful in arousing the attention of subjects, as experiments have conclusively shown. If I write the letter 'A' in twelve different fonts, none will stand out from this display set to the same extent as a letter 'B' interspersed in red ink. Within cultural production, a whole set of terms are used to register this effect, such as 'original', 'distinctive', 'innovative', 'ground-breaking', and the like, such terms functioning as the basic hyperbolic critical repertoire of the critical community that would otherwise have little idea what to say. It is thus interesting to note to what extent subjects' appraisal of aesthetic objects is determined by neuro-physiological programming of this kind, and how ideologies of domination can be engineered to exploit them. We also need a Marxist branch of perception studies. But such a working method, with its emphasis upon notions of collectivity, is also an attack, within an aesthetic context, on private ownership. In consequence, I am most interested in that art which prioritises processes of this kind. Examples within visual art and architecture are far more common than in music. One could cite the work of Piet Mondrian, Richard Lohse, Marlowe Moss, Jeffrey Steele and Anthony Hill as models, in addition to architectural internationalism.

**IP:** In your forms cycle, the listener is likely to be first struck by the relationship between density of events, as the most obviously perceptible aural level. Could you explain how the macroscopic 'architecture' of a highly active work such as *forms 5: event intersection* for 30 players is arrived at? How does this relate to the quasi-serial procedures employed at more microscopic levels of composition?

**GD: forms 5: event intersection** is characterised by a process of mediation between extremes of point density. Two extremes are established of high density on the one hand, and low density - or sparsity - on the other. The two extremes are then mediated to produce a seven-element scale of

density, or notes per unit of time, from high to low. This scalic organisation is then permuted to produce seven distinct series or arrangements. This basic structure forms the high level architecture of the work. Once again, negation dictates the particular ordering that each series takes, whereby juxtapositions are chosen that emphasise maximum differentiation. This process contributes to the highly dynamic and active surface to which you refer. In order to appreciate the manner in which this high-level organisation is manifested at other, lower levels of organisation, it is necessary to grasp the importance of mediation and negation. They are the principal organisational features of this work and the forms series as a whole, and determine not only the large-scale architecture, as I have outlined, but the behaviour, progression, and parametric complexion of sequences of individual notes. This process accounts for the high level of differentiation sequences of notes exhibit in terms of registral position, contour, dynamic, duration, and timbre. The superimposition of these processes, to which the work's suffix refers, generates a highly dynamic and differentiated aural image, that is nevertheless highly unified due to its foundation in an integrated and consistent organisational scheme.

**IP:** The rhythmic notation of your **piano piece 2** is on a whole new level of complexity compared to **piano piece 1**. What occasioned this notational shift?

The image shows a page of musical notation for 'piano piece 2 - extract'. It features a complex arrangement of staves. At the top left, there is a tempo marking '♩ ≈ 50'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, such as 24+8, 1, 3, 8+88+16, and 13. Dynamic markings like *pp*, *mf*, *fff*, *p*, and *ppp* are scattered throughout. The score is highly detailed and dense, with many notes and rests.

### piano piece 2 - extract

**GD:** I should start by indicating my aversion to the term *rhythm*. It is insufficiently precise in our context and comes with unwanted connotations. I prefer the phrase *temporal partitioning*. For new music, we need a new language.

The notations developed in **piano piece 2** function to further emphasise the autonomy of the point, or

the single note. This is achieved through the hyper-re-specification of the parametric profile of each successive impulse, in terms which include duration, intensity, and register. In addition to fractional durations, this level of point autonomy is further heightened by the use of fractional meter and the additional techniques of articulation that their use generates, such as *impulse tiling*, where the start points of primary note values are fractionally staggered, and *durational migration*, which de-couples impulse time from impulse duration. Time intervals between successive points are then defined using thirteen relationships. Omitting their inverses, all interval relations between two events, *a* and *b*, can be captured and organised using the following six relationships, in addition to equality: *a* precedes *b*, *a* adjoins *b*, *a* overlaps *b*, *a* starts *b*, *a* is\_during *b*, *a* ends *b*, and *a* equals *b*. Clearly, such relations can be nested to arbitrary levels of complexity. Abstracting time relations in this way further emphasises the independence of individual impulses, as their actual temporal location is more or less indeterminate (though still within very narrow bounds of probability), frustrating both the performer's and listener's attempt to extract from the music's surface shapes or sensory units that are superordinate to the single note. Larger-scale structures can be organised to determine invariant relationships that control the progression of musical events throughout the work. The following axiom in predicate logic, for example, determines that a given collection of impulses, or events, are consistently given unique start times:

$$\forall i,j: (\exists k: (i \text{ adjoins } k) \wedge (j \text{ adjoins } k)) \rightarrow \\ (\forall l: (i \text{ adjoins } l) \leftrightarrow (j \text{ adjoins } l))$$

**IP:** What is the basis upon which you choose the particular configurations of instruments you employ?

**GD:** As I have already indicated, negation is one of the primary formal tools structuring my work. The choice of instruments is governed by this principle. Thus, the instrumental configurations that I use emphasise maximal timbral differentiation. This becomes more apparent in the larger works such as **forms 5: event intersection** and **forms 6: event aggregates**, where all instrumental families are represented. Within particular works, sub-ensembles also function as attributes or features of event-types, which are also characterised by gestural profile, duration, tempo, and impulse-density, for example. Instrumental configuration is in this instance part of a wider organisational principle, functioning to control the progression of colour contrast and volume, and various levels of density and activity throughout the work. **forms 3: equivalent forms**, for example, is constructed from seven event-types and each is characterised by seven configurations of one, three, five, seven, nine, eleven, and thirteen instruments. Such organisational techniques are particularly effective projected within very large forces, as opportunities are created for *superimposing* such processes in very diverse and complex ways. **forms 6: event aggregates** begins this process which forms 7 will extend much further.

**IP: forms 3: equivalent forms** for 13 players, in particular, seems to present a highly 'egalitarian' relationship between the different instrumentalists. Do you see any sort of innate hierarchies between

instruments, and if so is this something you try to counteract? Would you consider writing a work for soloist and ensemble?

**GD:** The suffix to **forms 3: equivalent forms** points to one of the main concerns of both this particular work and my practice in general. Though *equivalence* is a notion central to integral serialism, it is also a dominant conceptual tenet of many of the most significant movements in 20th century visual art and architecture, such as De Stijl; and Stockhausen's concept of mediation is essentially equivalence with another name, though more formally conceptualised<sup>13</sup>. Equivalence posits the rejection of hierarchical structuring in favour of heterarchical structuring. In a heterarchical structure, all components are assigned equivalent status. This formal concern penetrates the organisation of **forms 3: equivalent forms** at every level, and accounts for the 'egalitarian' relationships that I attempt to establish in the distribution of the thirteen instruments. But this can only be achieved by demoting the primacy of pitch in order that percussion instruments (such as temple blocks, wood blocks, and tom toms) can compete more equally with other members of the ensemble, in order to mediate between pitch and noise, or between the fully discrete and the continuous. This is achieved by employing pitch structures that exhibit a high level of invariance. There is little change or differentiation within this parameter throughout the work, which is formed almost exclusively from a single pitch class set, namely 3-3 using Forte's<sup>14</sup> nomenclature. Through this form of cognitive saturation, listeners' attention is inevitably drawn to other parameters that are customarily subordinated or suppressed. This creates opportunities for instruments that are pitch-impooverished to contribute more equally to the musical argument.

But other factors contribute to this process of pitch-demotion. The use of more or less densely articulated textures of sound, which are frequently opaque in quality, hinder the perception and definition of clearly delineated and precise pitch content. This is achieved by the use of either *forward* or *backward temporal masking*, whereby successive impulses mask or interfere with one another. This problematizes pitch definition. But with successful masking intervals being smaller than or equal to fifty milliseconds, we can only notate such effects indirectly and indeterminately, by superimposing different strata of mutually negating activity, the emergent complexity of which is a sum of that process of superimposition. This is how Stockhausen achieved some of the most effective, amorphous complexes in *Gruppen*, and it's a technique which contributes to the effectiveness of Gilbert Amy's use of two nearly identical ensembles in his *Diaphonies*: such effects are even more successful applied to identical timbre as the composer does here. In addition, **forms 3: equivalent forms** uses very few long or sustained durations, a form of articulation not generally available to percussion instruments. As the discriminability of the frequency of pitches is reduced the shorter in duration they are, this feature contributes to the successful mediation of pitch and noise. Psychoacoustics offers us a wealth of analytical and generative tools with which to explore these new sonic phenomena.

But as I outlined earlier, processes of parametric foregrounding cannot occur in isolation: one must consider how changes in one parameter propagate and affect others, or consider that in affecting change in one, others may need similar levels of processing. Thus pitch-demotion is itself a multi-parametric operation. If this is not taken into account, one will achieve the kind of nonsense that often passes for radical action: notating key-slaps or various forms of ad hoc distortion for woodwind and brass in the hope that pitch and noise can be successfully mediated (assuming the composer in

question even realises this is what they are trying to do) only emphasises even more their oppositional characters. You are right to query whether my concern for structural equivalence could be consistent with the demands for hierarchy that inhere in soloistic or concerto forms. Clearly they would not, and it is for this reason that I have not so far explored this area. But I have often contemplated how it might be done, and several methods await further elaboration. These include the use of multiple soloists employing multiple timbres, or, perhaps more effectively, multiple soloists employing singular timbre, such as five harp soloists with ensemble. In a sense, one has to find a way to project a one-to-many form within a many-to-many conceptual framework. I'll let you know how I get on.

**IP:** How has the experience of writing for full orchestra in your new BBC commission **forms 6: event aggregates** worked out? How do you deal with the baggage that the medium itself carries with it?

**GD:** All media comes to us with what you call 'baggage', or formulaic, reified, and routine methods of working. It should be part of any creative intellectual's creative programme to critique the medium in order to identify such features. If he or she does not, then one loses control and ownership of the medium. But as I have outlined elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, composers of a neo-conservative tendency find this 'baggage', in all its manifestations and forms, very useful to them, as it enables them to control and manipulate listeners' responses, and to signify their own conformity which is a prerequisite for market success, which, from what I can see, is the primary measure they use in determining whether they have been *creatively* successful. The orchestral medium is no different in this respect, other than the scale of its resources offering more 'baggage', 'baggage' which can be displayed to a generally larger audience.

One of my initial concerns whilst planning the work was the problem of scaling-up methods and techniques used in contexts that utilised significantly smaller resources. But in many ways, the process involved 'merely' projecting some of the features of forms 5: event intersection more radically and more diversely, in particular, determining and articulating multi-layered structures, activity and gesture. My emphasis on the *point* as the primary unit in my work places significant constraints on the formation of higher-level sensory units or shapes that are super-ordinate to the single note. But if one wishes to exploit the opportunities offered by multi-levelled structures, then one has to discover ways of appropriately defining such levels of independence that nevertheless do not compromise this fundamental concern. It is this problem, amongst others, that has occupied much of my energies in forms 6, and which offers some of the greatest potential for development for forms 7, which is to follow.

But the experience of composing **forms 6: event aggregates** has confirmed my belief that, in principle, and with appropriate development and expansion, such forces are ideal for projecting the kind of ideas that form the basis of my creative programme. However, one meets significant resistance to developing the potential of orchestral resources, whether in terms of instrumental configuration, spatial distribution, or whatever, as the orchestra as customarily configured and managed does not exist to serve the interests of composers of a genuinely enquiring disposition. Rather, it exists to perpetuate certain factions of power (at their most obvious, conductors, recording companies, and promoters) and as an adjunct to the corporate entertainment and leisure industries. This is a tragic waste of an extraordinarily rich and exciting resource. Somehow we have to claim it for ourselves.

## 7.

**IP:** Your visual art seems to employ similar strategies of hard-edged abstraction to your music. Could you give me some idea of the means by which you settle upon proportion, figural placing, colour, etc., in your visual constructions, and the aesthetic ends you are striving for?

**GD:** The pieces use industrial materials such as vinyl and plastic. And although I choose the materials and plan the works, they are realised by another party, usually sign-makers, who have at their disposal the kinds of materials that interest me, and the skills to manipulate and process them. There are many reasons why I use such materials. In the case of **partitioned plane with line segments**, for example, the level of precision obtainable from vinyl strips is far superior to paint. I would find *painterliness* a barrier to achieving the kinds of radical abstraction and construction that interests me. And such precision of means reflects and helps enable, the aesthetic-constructive ends. But my aesthetic-constructive aims are more fully realised in **relief construction 1**. There is still a sense, in **partitioned plane with line segments**, that the object connotes something else. This is due to the illusion of depth that the superimposition of red segments over black lines creates: this isn't possible on a flat plane. Mondrian, of course, never did this (until his last works, which are an anomaly), and if one seeks to maintain self-referentiality and fully pursue a non-representational programme, then the constraints of the flat plane must be observed. In the case of **relief construction 1**, the artwork is more fully the subject of our attention: the eye and the intellect halt at the object. **relief construction 1** uses vinyl and plastic. Two, differently proportioned planes of black and white plastic are attached to a single, transparent orthogonal plane. Vertical strips of grey, yellow, and red vinyl are also applied, and the whole is then projected off the wall surface by a steel bracket positioned behind the larger black plastic plane. Opaque and transparent plastics such as these have very beautiful characteristics. They exhibit light and image reflective qualities that aid the object's integration, interaction, and discourse with the external environment. This desire to disintegrate the art work is a constant feature of constructive art, whether in the case of Gerrit Rietveld's *Schroeder House* and *Berlin Chair*, or Katarzyna Kobro's space compositions. It is an attempt to demote the individuality and particularity of the artwork, an environmental correlation of the underlying aesthetic aims of constructionism and pure plastic expression.

The distribution of those elements that make up both of these works is obtained by the determination and superimposition of various number and coordinate systems, such as are obtainable from prime, exponential, and factorial sequences. But the works are not simply visual projections of mathematical ready-mades. Rather, as with my musical constructions, systematic and rigorous mathematical techniques function to both generate and to serve higher level aesthetic – or ideological - ends, to do with notions of structural balance and the distribution and density of incident. Perhaps the concept that most importantly links the visual and aural works is that of *equivalence*, which I discussed earlier with reference to **forms 3: equivalent forms**. If the positioning of elements in **partitioned plane with line segments** and **relief construction 1** serves to privilege no area on the visual plane, then the organisation of **forms 3: equivalent forms** and other works in that series, functions in a similar way to confer equivalent status to each structural and material component. In both media, there is thus an attempt to construct non-centralised forms, in which contrasting elements of nevertheless equal strength negate and balance one another in a process of dynamic equilibrium.

## Notes

1. GD, 'The sound of modernity: modernism in architecture and music', in DOCOMOMO Journal 14, November 1995.
2. GD, 'Aesthetic Necrophilia: reification, new music, and the commodification of affectivity'. Perspectives of New Music, Vol. 42 No 2, Summer 2004.
3. Downie is here referring to Cornelius Cardew's critique of Stockhausen in his *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*.
4. Ian Pace in interview with Verity Sharp, Hear and Now, BBC R3, May 2001.
5. Downie is here referring to Anthony Elliott's *The Mourning of John Lennon*, which is an example of current cultural-theoretic discourse. By elevating the current state of proletarian consciousness as an intellectual and critical limit on all cultural debate and critique, such writing unwittingly conspires in the oppression of those very class factions that it aspires to liberate. The book was written by an academic based at one of the UK's post-1992 universities.
6. The reader is referred to Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, Beacon Press, Boston, USA, 1991, for a discussion on the use and manipulation of language in this context.
7. The reader is referred to Pierre Bourdieu's *On Television*, The New Press, 1998.
8. The reader is referred to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Zone Books, 1999.
9. See *One Culture and the New Sensibility* in Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation*, Anchor Books, 1966.
10. Downie refers here to Adorno's description of new music as a message in a bottle washed up on a shore.
11. GD, 'Semantic Polyvalency: modernism, structural ambiguity, and the negation of signification', in Rumori: Ordine e Disordine, linguaggio musicale e innovazione tecnologica', Musica Scienza 1998, Centro Ricerche Musicali, Rome, June 1998.
12. For an introduction to this subject the reader is referred to Nyklicek et al, *Cardiorespiratory differentiation of musically-induced emotions*, Journal of Psychophysiology 11, 1997; Gerra et al, *Neuroendocrine responses of healthy volunteers to 'techno-music': relationships with personality traits and emotional state*, Journal of Psychophysiology 28, 1998; Paavilainen et al, *Neuronal populations in the human brain extracting invariant relationships from acoustic variance*, Neuroscience Letters 265, 1999. Such work is a pioneering attempt to apply formal and scientific methods of analysis to subjective responses to music, research which creates the possibility of demoting or superseding the primacy of purely aesthetic or subjectivist interpretations of so-called musical experience, grounding explanations, instead, in neuro- and psycho-physiology.
13. See Karl H. Wörner, *Stockhausen: Life and Work*, Faber, 1973, for a useful introduction to Stockhausen's concept of mediation.
14. Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music*, Yale University Press, 1973.

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*IRVING FINE An American Composer in His Time* by Phillip Ramey.

Pendragon Press & The Library of Congress, 2005.

ELAINE RADOFF BARKIN

May 23, 2006

They say “You can’t judge a book by its cover”, but this cover signaled maybe trouble to come. Irving Fine’s boyishly handsome glossy-face-photo filling the space, looking at the photographer, into the camera – he’s wearing a dark jacket, white shirt & striped-tie —, photo tinted [coded? portentously?] lavender-lilac, wide-spread across/within, a misshapen large fat T (or bottom part of a + sign), unequally sized white rectangles placed below to the right and to the left cutting off part of Irving’s lower right cheek, title lettering in black, the slender display font ornately ‘Romantic’ if not decidedly of the ‘bodice ripper’ kind. *Uh oh. Oy vey.*

(Two weeks after the above paragraph was written, I opened and read the book.)

Part 1: Re: Overview

*Reminiscences. Hearsay. Titillating Tittle-Tattle.*

by sisters, daughters, wife (in 1999 Verna Fine commissioned Phillip Ramey to write this book), composer-performer-faculty colleagues, students, commentators, doctors, as well as loads of quotes from Irving’s writings, e.g., *Modern Music* (some of it brutally frank), *The New York Times* (and an unnamed newspaper wherein, in 1950, Fine writes enthusiastically about a *musique concrète* concert in Paris), his rather flat program notes, psychoanalytic musings, and from correspondence with his parents, Verna, and Aaron Copland, who looms large in this book. Phillip Ramey’s protestations notwithstanding — “Thus, even if I happened to be psychoanalytically oriented, I would feel obligated, out of professionalism and common sense, to let those close to him ...reminisce...” (p. ix) —, way far too much of Irving Fine’s once private life and thoughts have been exposed, even if some of his writings and letters appear to have been scrawled self-consciously with posterity in mind. Ramey cannot reminisce but he does, soon enough, infer.

(Recently I read Joseph Ellis’s *His Excellency*, a study of George Washington, whose wife Martha destroyed their personal correspondence, a move that protected their privacy – and that has dismayed historians! TS! Tis pity tis true that for most of us, confidentiality is done with, a goner, no more MYOB! Tell-all TV shows and ubiquitous cellphone yakkers enable XYZ’s concerns, personal or business, to be everyone else’s concern, like it or not.)

OK, so no overt Outing of Irving. Yet early on Phillip Ramey writes: “All his life [Fine] was a bit of a flirt, charming both sexes, although Verna insisted that he had no homosexual inclinations, even in adolescence.” (p. 7) (In addition to Verna, a few

‘suspects’ among the reminiscences might have hinted (*nudge nudge, wink wink*) at such (alleged) behavior.)



The reader is assured that “the portrait that emerges...is sketched only by those who spoke [to the author] from first-hand knowledge.” (p. ix) Thus emerges a portrait comprising: *Kinderszenen*; family life (does anyone remember the Loud family of Santa Barbara, CA, 1973?); stories and scraps about study with Nadia Boulanger, the Berkshire Music Festival a. k. a. Tanglewood, the MacDowell Colony, Harvard and Brandeis Universities, and Irving’s lifelong campaign for the performance of music in The Academy and his involvement in the Brandeis Creative Arts Festivals; tales exuding various mixes of warmth, esteem, a soupçon of nastiness, *Schadenfreude* or out-and-out meanness; travails and joys of Irving Gifford Fine, trying to figure out what kind of Composer he was or wanted to be; intimacies and anecdotes of some depth as well as of the indiscreet, acerbic, and vulgar kind.

Phillip Ramey has been conscientious, has read all correspondence, reviews, notes and has included heaps; has perused all sketches and scores and has itemized minutiae about every movement of every work; has listed commissions, premieres, performers and performances; has viewed photographs and has included several; and has chosen not to choose judiciously from the given. Instead he has decided to ‘let it all hang out’ thereby producing a pulpy life-work study.

Alas poor short-lived Irving. [1914-1962]. *Oleh b’shalom*.

A book à la *This Is Your Life*, “which was broadcast from 1952 to 1961 and is one of the best remembered television series from the 1950s. Its format was based on the rather simple principle—guests [both famous and “ordinary”] were surprised with a presentation of their past life in the form of a narrative read by host Ralph Edwards as well as reminiscences by relatives and friends. The format was also quite shrewd in its exploitation of television’s capacity for forging intimacy with viewers through live transmission and on-air displays of sentimentality. ... For example, in a 1958 program featuring a Japanese-American druggist who had been sent to an internment camp during World War II, the life narrative tells of his struggle to establish a pharmacy practice in a bigoted community. Edwards praises the subject’s behavior in the internment camp when he squelched a camp uprising protesting forced labor. At the end of the show, members from his most recent community embrace him, and Edwards announces that Richard Nixon has donated an American flag and Ivory soap has donated money for a flag pole for the town which has overcome racial prejudice.”

Cf: <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/T/htmlIT/thisisyour/thisisyour.htm>

Yet imagine this late 1930s-early 1950s composers community well-‘recounted’ by Phillip Ramey — centered in Cambridge-Lenox-Waltham MA with a few New Yorkers bundled in — comprising Irving Fine, Lukas Foss, Harold Shapero, Louise Talma, Alexei Haieff, Leo Smit, and Arthur Berger, maybe also Ingolf Dahl, John Lessard, and Leonard Bernstein, “all of whom studied with Nadia Boulanger” (p. 49); or were in one

way or another encouraged-supported by Aaron Copland and/or Serge Koussevitzky; or who esteemed Igor Stravinsky (and diatonicism). Truly a remarkable group and truly a remarkable time in the history of America (straddling WW II, the start of the Cold War and HUAC) and American music, with LPs just around the corner. Just as remarkable at the time, albeit just for a time, was the encouragement and advice given by one composer to another. They really did talk about their music. Moreover, they had a cause, namely a non-esteem of Arnold Schoenberg, his ideas, and his circle —, at least until 1950.

(Full disclosure: I am no disinterested passerby: I studied composition with Irving Fine at Brandeis University 1954-56; he was my MFA thesis advisor. One-on-one composition sessions were often intense, Irving studying and agonizing over pitch choices, harmonies, texture, form. He might not have 'liked' my music but he was always serious, sympathetic, thoughtful, and not one to inflict his will on me — or others. What I hadn't known back then was that both of us had been rejected by the Cambridge Brahmins: he didn't get tenure at Harvard and I didn't get into Radcliffe, 'for better' for us both since we, each of us in our own way, ultimately prospered as members of the Brandeis community. My memories of those days are of a bucolic milieu, a verdant campus, classes held in Roberts Cottage, camaraderie, the joy of being in a place of learning that was still wide open; I loved going to school! The last time I saw Irving was in Pittsburgh, April 1962; the occasion was a lecture he gave at Carnegie Mellon University; he was surprised to see me, what was I doing in Pittsburgh?; my brother was getting married to a Pittsburgh-ian and I'd read of this event that was to take place on my free day. What Irving spoke about I do not recall.)



Phillip Ramey is hugely appreciative of Irving's music, but the descriptive commentary is square, pedestrian, lackluster. About the *Partita for Wind Quintet*: "...for the most part, business-as-usual: robust Stravinskian neoclassicism, masterfully done." (p. 105) About the second song from *The Hour Glass*: "Lyrically romantic and harmonically opulent..." And the fourth song: "'Lament' is intensely harmonic and affectingly lyric." (p. 114) And the first *Mutability* song: "...There is a lovely moment of pure Copland near the end..." (p. 194) "Sensitively scored, and riding on brisk ostinato motion, ['Little Toccata'] has a delicate if bland harmonic sweetness. The overall impression is impersonal." (p. 264) In the book, and in his CD notes, he addresses literate music-lovers with bland, unremarkable, albeit eminently "readable" discourse, which barely begins to tell anyone what's 'going on'.

*Homage à Mozart* (subheading: 1756–1956), a 43-measure piano solo, was described by Fine as "a perfectly innocent sort of bagatelle more or less Mozartian in character" and composed for his 8 year old daughter Claudia. Phillip Ramey writes: "Despite his claim of Mozartian character, the music does not, to these ears, even remotely suggest Mozart, never mind the dry scale passages. In fact, its would-be harmonic cleverness and mannered hesitations seem far removed from the Viennese master." And one of Irving's erstwhile colleagues and (alleged) "close friend" rants: "But the thing for which I disliked him most was for publishing *Homage à Mozart*. To me that was a revoltingly pretentious thing to do. I remember thinking, who the hell does he think he is titling something like that? ... And it isn't even a very good piece." (pp. 227-228)

My curiosity aroused I took the piece out of UCLA's music library. The 6/8 opening smacks of Mozart's A-major K. 331, but Fine's key is F major. By beats 4 and 5 of m. 1, B-natural against B-flat, it's clear that something is awry and on beat 5 in m. 2, a second inversion dominant C7 chord with a B-natural can only be a weirdo version of those odd 'chords' in the second half of m.2 of Mozart's K. 331. And soon after, the *Homage* goes bonkers, 'wrong' notes, sudden off-the-wall – hardly “dry” – scalar modulations, a quasi-Rondo with bitonal patchwork segments, meter changes (Mozart often shifted from a triplet to a duplet feel without changing the meter signature), not all that easy to play – an unmistakable *Musikalischer Spass!* That is, until the last 9 measures where a whiff of Zerlina's *Vedrai, carino* (from *Don Giovanni*) within a cozy pan-diatonic backdrop is sensed, then triads with doubled 3rds or 5ths, ending on a spaced-out first inversion tonic chord! Neither all that “far removed” nor “pretentious”. Irving was just having fun, commemorating the bicentennial of Mozart's birth with an aptly ‘titled’ practical joke.



*Unmerited innuendoes & disinformation perpetrated by Phillip Ramey*

In 1939 Irving sailed to France to study with Nadia Boulanger. In a letter to his parents he writes about a couple in the cabin next door who “are always having wrestling bouts or something at night...” Phillip Ramey follows this quote with a grotty speculation of his own devising: “One can easily imagine the sensual young musician with his ear to the wall.” (p. 23) What kind of attributive crap is that?

“When Brandeis' incipient School of Creative Arts began in the fall of 1949, its faculty consisted only of Erwin Bodky, German-born harpsichordist and musicologist *of no great distinction* who was, however, friendly with two of the University's major donors.” (p. 155, my italics) Needless, disparaging and outrageous! What gives Phillip Ramey – or his informants – the right to say that of Erwin Bodky? Why say it at all other than to be bitchy? Erwin Bodky (1896-1958), student of Busoni and Richard Strauss, was director-founder of the pioneering Cambridge Society for Early Music. During Bodky's Brandeis decade, his resourcefulness and status enabled contact with and invitations to members of the international early music community. We all benefited enormously from Erwin Bodky's quite special presence and talents.

Phillip Ramey's source for serial or twelve-tone music is British composer Alan Rawsthorne (1905-1971), whose sarcastic and censorious comments are quoted (as gospel?) in the chapter concerning Irving's first significant foray into the twelve-tone world – *String Quartet* (begun in 1950, completed in 1952). (pp. 179 & 181)

“With *Perspectives of New Music* safely in the hands of [Arthur] Berger, it seemed, in 1961, an ideal situation to Fine. He would not live long enough for disillusionment to set in.” (preceded by a page of half-baked anti-PNM garbage). (pp. 278-279) Whose “disillusionment”, opinions, and words is Phillip Ramey mouthing? Which spirits of the dead is he speaking for?

Far too much time has been expended on graceless aspects of Phillip Ramey's tell-all choices, no doubt fashionable in some *au courant* circles with an appeal to the *voyeur* lurking within many of us. In an effort to be factual, thorough, and impartial, and despite his enthusiasm for and knowledge about most all of Irving's music, as well as providing the reader with insights into Irving's compositional processes, choices, and intermittent anguish, Ramey has produced a dispiriting account. Gossip parades as fact, "skim milk masquerades as cream" (W.S. Gilbert), with the resultant "loss of quality so obvious at every level of the language of the spectacle ..." (Guy Debord). Rather than say more, I'd suggest you listen to or play through as much of Irving Fine's music as you can find. Your time will be well spent. The most positive upbeat outcome for me has been the rediscovery of a music I'd been close to half a century ago – to discover some of it for the first time —, and to be able to revel in its neatly wrought details and its maker's search for refinement, beauty, and meaning.

## *Addenda*

### *Letting or not letting it all hang out*

1. While writing this text I read an article by D. T. Max in the June 19 issue of *The New Yorker*, "The Injustice Collector: *The James Joyce estate and everyone else*". D. T. Max tells of Stephen James Joyce, known as being notorious for his unwillingness to allow scholars access to the correspondence of his grandparents, James and Nora Joyce. Stephen Joyce is quoted as having said: "...the Joyce's private life was 'no one's fucking business'", thereby observing James Joyce's entreaty to Nora, in 1909, "to be careful to keep my letters secret." and echoing his attitude toward biographers via the concocted *Finnegans Wake* word "biografiends". The grandson is just as protective of letters to and from his aunt Lucia, daughter of James and Nora Joyce. There's been no 're-joycing' among Joyceans, many of whom have had unsuccessful lawsuits with the Joyce estate.
2. Also see "In Conversation with Phillip Ramey" by Frank J. Oteri, published online, June 7. Phillip Ramey talks about interests and processes that accompanied and stimulated his writing of the Fine biography. The Google tag for "Conversation" says: "Phillip Ramey: His [Irving Fine's] widow, the late Verna Fine, was an old friend I know ... As far as Fine's affair at the MacDowell Colony, Verna Fine told me about it..." The first complete sentence of the "Conversation" is: "His widow, the late Verna Fine, was an old friend who I knew through our mutual friend Aaron Copland. She commissioned the book because she was aware that I admired Fine's music, and she told me she had implicit trust in me as a writer. We agreed that the book should be readable, which precluded the sort of harmonic analysis favored by the *Perspectives of New Music* crowd." But you have to scroll down to the 2nd page to read the MacDowell gossip. And in the final paragraph of "In Conversation" Phillip Ramey says: "I was pleased with the reaction of Fine's close friend Harold Shapero, who sent me an e-mail that read: 'You have written a remarkable book and have created Irving's story very much as I remember it. I don't know how you managed to do this, considering you didn't know him. Thumbs entirely up!'"

Cf: <http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id+4678>

Part 2: Commentary-Colloquy

As I was reading Phillip Ramey's book and thinking about privacy and Irving and composing, a short poem of William Butler Yeats came to mind:

The friends that have I do it wrong  
Whenever I remake a song,  
Should know what issue is at stake:  
It is myself that I remake.

It's a bit tricky to articulate just why Yeats' lines kept coming back. Partly I was thinking about composers' 'upbringing': What's heard early on is how and what "music" is. Not that change is precluded. Fact is, change is usually inevitable as the Given is navigated, integrated, resisted, and "is" transmutes to "can be". Ultimately, the 'me-(or 'mes')-that-loiters-within' finds a way to the surface, one way or another. Irving wanted to be a composer of coherent, eloquent, playful, and consequential music. The question of influences, of acknowledged antecedents and contemporaries, weighed in heavily – as they always do –, facilitating the creation of a shape-shifting, identity-searching, in-transit persona, 'remaking himself'.



Although Phillip Ramey's musical criticism is comprehensive and respectable, it is rarely riveting; for him too, the question of influences weighs in heavily. The ubiquity of comparison – "Stravinskian ... Bartókian ... Schoenbergian ... à la Copland" –, while not entirely inappropriate insofar as antecedents are shaping forces, nonetheless overwhelms and minimizes the issue of the ways in which Irving's music is neither Stravinsky's nor Copland's. Also, while the criticism is never inept, the prose is inert, deriving from a desire to be "readable", thereby selling itself and its readers short. Which is a pity insofar as Ramey is well-informed about much 20th-century music albeit naïve and misinformed regarding so-called "serialism", wherein there is as much differentiation among "serial" composers and their individual works, as in works in C-major. It is the lack of focus on, albeit not total absence of, particulars that dilutes his critical acumen.

Phillip Ramey says that the *Sonata for violin and piano* (1946) is "well-made, with considerable attention to detail, a concern for formal balance and symmetry everywhere evident." He goes on to say: "An impartial appraisal of Fine's violin sonata would have to note that it illustrates the tenet that his problem as a composer was never one of technique but rather of personality. Although some of the romantically soaring violin lines are unlike anything found in its avatars, as are occasional harmonic complications, at no point does a clear voice emerge." (pp. 69-70) Hard to know where an "impartial account" would come from, perhaps from one of those "avatars", nor is it made clear which specific "personality" trait of Irving's was a "problem". But the logic is totally askew in his comments since it's precisely with those "occasional [and diffuse] harmonic complications ... and some melodramatic rhetoric" that "a clear voice emerge[s]". (pp. 69-71) Certainly, Irving's *Sonata* is a far more interesting and daring work, in its array of harmonic and formal design intricacies, than Aaron Copland's fairly

humdrum 1943 *Violin Sonata*.

And yes, all too apparent in Irving's *Sonata for violin and piano* is its struggle to fulfill Classical strictures of form and motivic coherence, its need for labels and places to be audible, for instance, transition, development, or recap – less so in the “curiously constructed” (p. 70) ‘deviant’ second movement. But Irving, and rather cheekily, dares to enrich tonal languages he knew so well, in their European and American manifestations. In many ways, the piece is ‘about’ harmony and about finding every which way to ‘clothe’ fore- and backgrounds with chunky rapid harmonic changes, Irving reveling in what his lush Romantic ear comes up with. The piano writing is show-stopping, all over the keyboard; the violin less so but movement 2 has its share of flashy licks. At its start, movement 3 has my vote, but 2/3rds of the way through, when it gets self-conscious and its machinery powers-up, I’m gone. Just in time to avoid the glitzy (Ramey calls it “brittle but witty” (p. 71)) coda. Despite, or perhaps due to, such struggles, the entire work brims with indiscreet and exhausting exuberance.

*Toccata Concertante* for orchestra (1947) has similar ‘structural’ preoccupations. Here, though, the exuberance is judicious and the harmonic world is, as Phillip Ramey notes, affected by “a fairly prominent feature: the octatonic scale. Certainly its use is Stravinskian and also eminently Russian...” (p. 88) He might have been more specific about the way in which use of the octatonic scale is Stravinskian. Any particular work[s] in mind? Continuing this penchant for critiquing from the outside in, he says: “...parts of this work are not at all Stravinsky-inflected ... more akin to similar moments in symphonies by Prokofiev and Miaskovsky. ... Some of the melodic writing seems personal...” (p. 89) “Some ... seems...” How’s about ‘Some is personal’? Why not give those wilder eruptive moments, which he cites, their rightful due? *Toccata* always sounds great, opening and closing with obligatory big bangs, Russian yes, but also Teutonic. Disparate instrumental textures emerge out of and merge into one another smoothly or by abruption, often sounding suspended or not fully grounded – although the work doesn’t fly too often; rather it ‘finds’ its place, that *drang nach* recap and coda, with a curious mix of the unsurprising with the unexpected.

Perhaps it was advantageous for me to have to play through *Music for Piano* (1947) in super-slow motion, otherwise I wouldn’t have heard, felt, touched every note, every melodic-registral-metric-rhythmic-dynamic choice as acutely, a few of which didn’t seem right on — like his landing on octaves and stopping short in the middle of a move, most others of which had to have been scrupulously composed — like those cross-harmonies in the *Waltz-Gavotte* and the *Interlude*. Several chord-spreads are too wide for my hands to encompass, the metronomic markings are way too fast, but ample directives enabled me to get into Irving’s pianist-mind — like that place in the *Variations* theme where he tells the pianist to use the right hand (most likely to keep the weight equal), a spot where a pianist will instinctively reach for the left hand (m. 16); or where he wants inner voices to be audible (and where I thought of Schumann’s F#-major *Romanza*). And as I played the *Variations* theme, spooky tingles ran through my neck, arms, and fingers when I got to those r.h. sixteenth-note-followed-by-dotted-eighth-note arc-shaped 5ths, 6ths, 7ths, & 9ths above l.h. 2nds & 3rds, those ‘signature’ pan-diatonic figurations (in mm. 4-5 & 17-20). (You see, during my Brandeis days, I composed a set of four piano pieces, *Brandeis 1955*, the second of which is called “Natick”, wherein similar such harmonic-rhythmic stuff occurs. No surprise insofar as I was emulating my composition teacher, Irving Fine, who lived in Natick.) But back to *Music for Piano* and

its *Lento assai* variation, which opens with a curvy line derived from full-bodied F# V7 chords above the B-tonic, described as “initially quite à la Copland but then [becoming] more personal and dramatic in rhetoric.” (p. 93) Well, maybe Copland and Stravinsky and everyone else who was composing pan-diatonic music in the 1940s, all of those “Boston Neoclassicists”. The “personal and dramatic rhetoric” is that meaty, registrally spread four-voice midsection where lo! (shades of Schoenberg’s *Farben*): a 3-voice canon at the octave a sixteenth note apart, above an offbeat 4-note recurrent bass, produces odd chords, where its pitch collection of B-C-D#-E-F#-G (B-major & C-major triads) is encased in a rocky rhythm. And then, via A-natural in the bass, this multi-colored strange-land moves into white-note-land, still contrapuntal in the upper 3 voices: canon in retrograde (between tenor & alto) and at the octave (alto & soprano). And then — *mirabile dictu* — F# & A# on the same upbeat bring back those loaded V/I B-major tune-chords. Craftily plotted — with the flip of a pitch or 2 or 3, from black to mixed to white and back to black — and terrific sounding. Playing it *molto Lento piu assai* made the odd harmonies and canons more palpable as my fingers kept stretching from one sixteenth to the next, often a 12th apart. Elsewhere in the suite, Irving just as carefully ponders when and where to add or subtract, especially in the *Andante* variation, but I won’t go on. And yes, it is derivative and a bit facile, the work of a composer finding ways to move on, whilst sharpening and refining everything he loves and can do well.

Which is what happens in *Partita* for wind quintet (1948), so neat and note-perfect, so all in place, continuity of line over the breaks, even in the jumpier movements (2 & 4), a polyphony of timbre, all so smooth, Irving’s time-sense so right on, in speedy but never hassled moments or where he sits on something and makes it have just the right amount of breadth-& breath-lengths, especially in the slower movements (3 & 5). Irving certainly found a way to compose for wind quintet that, within a comfortable tonal-harmonic palette, maximized linear variabelness. Neither did he go out on any timbral or registral limbs, but he figured out how to get the most out of each instrument, each of which truly shines and sparkles throughout, as solo or as part of the ensemble. Phillip Ramey too is enthusiastic, despite his compulsive need once again, to refer to Stravinsky and Copland. However, in movement 5, Ramey recognizes that “somewhat startlingly, a personal voice finally emerges .... This melancholic, romantically lyrical closing section ... [its] trills within a dulcet harmonic web ... is quite extraordinary.” (p. 107)

*Notturmo for strings and harp* (1951) is (*I*)gorgeously sweet, at least movements 1 & 3 are. Ascending diatonic and semitonal steps underpinned with lush piled-on-triads are in the realm of expanded Teutonic and Russo-Frenchified tonality. Phillip Ramey hears “a relationship to the manner of” Stravinsky’s *Apollon Musagète* and *Orpheus* “albeit Fine’s melodies are less fragmented than Stravinsky’s.” OK, *Apollon*’s harmonic world is evident in *Notturmo*, however “fragmented” melodies aren’t all-pervading in Stravinsky’s ballet; in fact, many ‘melodies’ in *Apollon* arch over long stretches. Ramey then writes: “...that Fine managed to convey something of the effect of a compressed romantic-era symphony in such a brief score is no small achievement.” (p. 137)

Right off the bat in the 1951-52 *String Quartet*, hyperintensity and energy dazzle; further on it’s evident just how interactions of becoming and being had been uppermost in Irving’s mind. Where he so openly sheds his old skin, exorcising — or making strenuous efforts to purge — heavy coercive forces. While still bound to formalities, much of the underbrush has been cleared away; temporality is still guided by trying

to ‘get somewhere’, but Irving lets air in, he makes time happen by taking his time, he wanders and allows intimacy to surface, remarkably so in movement 2. A sense of relative homogeneity for the medium is heard, not that one can’t distinguish viola from violin, nor that textural diversity is absent, but the chosen quality is super-Strings (unlike in Elliott Carter’s 1951 String Quartet where *his* characteristic polyphonies of timbral-personae are already in place). In Irving’s quartet, long lines and chords and figuration – overtly motivic or atmospherically fuzzy – are out there for all to hear, for that’s where his innermost core has been molded. But insofar as the diatonic tonal milieu has been superseded with polarized 12-tonality, there really is a new ball game going on. Once Phillip Ramey gets past the requisite 12-tone account, how “Fine’s serialism had little to do with Schoenberg’s...” and how “Fine’s row is different from Copland’s [1950 *Piano Quartet*]...” and how by 1951 Fine’s “neoclassicism had become a straitjacket”, the criticism, enlivened by enthusiasm about the quartet’s “broader emotional palette”, could enable a first-time listener to get into the interiors and exteriors of “one of the most impressive string quartets by an American composer.” (pp. 180-183)

Irving wrote lots of music for voice – choral, solo, with and without piano or ensemble: effervescent “Alice” choruses (1943), luminous and graceful *The Hour Glass* madrigals (1949), perky *Childhood Fables for Grownups* songs (1954-55), each work focused on the wedding of word to tone. But they stayed off my review-radar. Ramey is keen on them all and gives the gist of each song, amid à la references and reeking innuendoes. He writes: “Fine excelled at creating a child’s world in music ... If any arcane inferences are to be drawn from this special talent – aside from the evident one that Fine liked children – they must be left to the psychoanalytically inclined.” (p. 206) Outrageous, despicable, and totally gratuitous drivel.

*Diversions for Orchestra* is a four-movement suite, orchestrated in 1960 and based on earlier piano pieces. About movement 4, “The Red Queen’s Gavotte”, Phillip Ramey writes: “This ingratiating finale, which is not unlike the gavotte from Prokofiev’s *Classical Symphony*, has a jolly tune ...” (p. 265) Whoa! Maybe movement 2, the “Flamingo Polka”, is ‘à la Prokofiev’ but, except that both Gavottes begin on beat 3 and are in 4/4 time, Irving’s Gavotte (composed in 1942) is totally unlike Prokofiev’s. Is harmony a total irrelevancy for Ramey? Irving doesn’t stray far from fairly simple ‘functional’ harmonies and their C-Eb-C polarities. Prokofiev however plays around with ‘functionality’, outer lines in contrary motion, a diatonically ascending bass line props up a series of triads in various inversions, flatted sixth, circle of fifths, augmented sixth, fun and games; and that’s just the opening section. This comparison is utterly baffling.

“...the most telling aspect of Fine’s *Symphony 1962* is that it represents an original and for the most part successful fusion of Stravinskian neoclassicism and Fine’s own tonal romanticism with the method, though not the rhetoric, of Schoenbergian serialism.” (p. 283) Ramey then lists Stravinsky’s *Symphony in Three Movements*, *Symphony of Psalms*, & *Movements for Piano and Orchestra*, and Copland’s *Music for the Theatre & Short Symphony* as instances of inspiration for Fine’s *Symphony 1962*, all of which he finds “so convincingly integrated that they strike the ear as being intrinsic to this fascinating and rather magnificent score.” In a footnote he writes: “And, after all, nothing is *sui generis*.” (p. 286) Maybe not, but such an habitual cookbook-recipe attitude has impeded him from hearing, thinking, and writing about *das Ding an sich*. Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829) asserted that: “The work of criticism is superfluous

unless it is itself a work of art as independent of the work of art it criticizes as that it is independent of the materials that went into it.” A challenging task but worth making the effort. Would that Phillip Ramey have given that a stab; even a jab would have helped. But maybe it’s just not in his nature to do so.

*Symphony 1962* is “constantly inventive” (p. 286), motifs rippling throughout and within a multiplicity of heterogeneous instrumental blends and dissimilar temporal successions of flowing and compressed events. As in his earlier music, Irving balances and distributes, juxtaposing heavily saturated chromatic passages with shorter stretches, in which pitch and instrumental densities have been thinned out. He also luxuriates in ‘experimenting’ – a word that doesn’t come to mind with most of his music – with orchestral colors. In his program notes, Irving refers to a passage in movement 1, about 3/4ths of the way in, as “night music for solo English horn [and piccolo], harp, celesta, and muted strings”, one of those ‘thinner’ moments, where pitch doublings are multiply colored, articulated, and rhythmicized – an absolutely exquisite stretch. Not as an excerpt, but in the context of what’s preceded and what follows. This notion of ‘structural’ *Klangwelt* – also not a word associated with Irving’s music – is revisited in movement 3, with its riot of concertino-ripieno timbral blends. Just listen to the opening minute, a sonic tapestry, each dynamic, duration, register, articulation, and shape meticulously conceived.



What might have come next is unknowable since Irving’s ladder had but 48 rungs.

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# Berührung

## Touched by Sound

Holger Schulze

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You hear a faint, incidental sound.

A tone slides up and down, across several frequencies, a specific sequence of intervals.

A supposedly clear tone trembles. A certain rawness stirs you, moves the person over there, convulses me. Perhaps.

Personally attacked.

Possibly you think physically the hand of a person, a person very close to you, touches you directly on or *inside* your internal organs.

I sense a caress in the lining of my stomach.

Infinitely gentle, fine needles pierce deep into your pancreas, elastic and long acupuncture needles penetrate the space of your stomach—farther that you could imagine.

Shivers of excitement makes the person over there quake, caress across your outer layer of skin with unexpected tenderness, rolling on farther and farther.

They flood through your lower arms, continue up to your shoulders, up along the neck. A tremor goes down the spine and into the kidneys, stroking your flanks.

It glides over your thighs and down into your heels.

I feel elevated within: as if we were standing together in an elevator that suddenly shoots your and my bodies ten, twenty floors upwards without notice. Our organs, bodily fluids, blood, urine, stomach acid are sluggishly, hesitantly pulled along.

But we are standing here, sitting in this place.

We feel hot and cold as if consumed by the flames of love—by this sound, this sequence of tones, this arrangement, this composition.

Our bodies are permeated by sound, here and now.

## Body of Touches

I am touched by such moments of empathic listening experience. You are probably no less touched. And it is embarrassing to talk about it.

Uncomfortable, maybe even shameful among close, intimately familiar people, possibly male and female friends, who have been disburdened by chemical, kinaesthetic and situative moments of diminished inhibition.

I am touched by such moments of *empathetic* listening experience. My and your body prove to be powerful media of transmission; more forceful than any subsequent thought-out conceptual or linguistic formulation. Do we want to ignore the responses of our body with such complacency?

*Touch (Berührung)* is a physical term. In English being touched is neither a hit, a push nor a caress but a very conscious, dedicated touch. In a tactile sense, we talk about touch when two things happen to meet at a small point or a perceptible zone. Being touched includes the inadvertent, unsuspected and involuntary, the pinpointed encounter, fleeting not lasting.

Touch is contact between two sufficiently independent bodies over the smallest distance possible in the given situation.<sup>1</sup>

So far no cultural histories of touch have been written. A cultural history of feelings in different human life forms<sup>2</sup> and the depiction of feelings in the arts and media<sup>3</sup> could be considered part of a cultural history of the body, the flesh, the skin<sup>4</sup>, the healing of wounds, sexuality and sports—and the corporeal-anatomical self-understanding of different cultures and historical epochs.

The history of western culture differentiates between epochs and sub-epochs that applauded physical distance and those with a euphoria for closeness and fusion. An increasing appreciation for maintaining distance and separation is apparent in the civilization processes of the past few centuries: intermediary plateaus of effusive manifestations of closeness interrupt this trend but are hardly able to stem the larger development.

»We« have to disguise touch as something more or less inadvertent or habitual, depending on our cultural or subcultural context—even if the touch signifies all too obvious individual insinuations of an existing personal need for being touched or a sexual-erotic attraction.

How you and I physically experience ourselves does, however, reduce the triviality and laconic nature of a touch.

*Every* touch—particularly in cultures that require distance—means entering into a relationship of exchange. I have already touched what touches me—and I enter into an exchange with this other that is made particularly intense through temporal limitation and tenderness. A third element results from this exchange, a common *Body of Touches* of sorts. A body that does not entirely belong to any of the individual participating entities alone.

Here, erotic-sexual experience is clearly a basis of experience. At this point, I do not want to pursue this further, since it is inevitably an aspect of any kind of touch, even tonal tactility. Regardless to what degree it is repressed or expressed, sexuality, in addition to pathology and sports, has a privileged position in the discussion of the body in our cultures.

In terms of these insights the body is thus not a secret and hidden power that sneaks up on us from behind, undermines our »real« intentions and provides us with wisdoms that we might consider pleasing, enlightening and enhancing to our knowledge but also dark, threatening and dangerous.

Instead, the body is simply *there*. If you or I, if we let ourselves be touched, then you and I are *present*. As Jean-Luc Nancy, the influential contemporary French theorist of the corporeal, demonstrates, we experience ourselves in the moment of touch as if from without: we return to ourselves in a caress, an embrace, or even in a simple handshake or contact between other organs or extremities.<sup>5</sup>

The body is not formless or a-morphic. It has its own morphology and distinct form: individual, singular and utterly incommensurable.<sup>6</sup>

When I stand in front of you and read this text right now—which has been generated and has come together over the past few months up until now through reading, deliberation, self-rebuttal and even completely unexpected experiences and encounters—your body and my body are the only given ways and means, the only media for expression and experience, the only place that makes it possible for us to be.

To perceive and to act.

To be tonal. To perceive tones. To act in sound. Impact of the Body

*You are thinking of the song of a band, a Lied, a track that you often like to move in rhythm to—in identificatory exuberance. You are this song, this singer, this composer.*

*Or as Peter Handke would say: »Das – dieses Lied, dieser Klang – bin jetzt ich; mit diesen Stimmen, diesen Harmonien bin ich, wie noch nie im Leben, der geworden, der ich bin; wie dieser Gesang ist, so bin ich ganz!«<sup>7</sup>*

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Touch creates a lasting exchange and transformation. The greater or lesser ecstasies of the tactile. Bodily exchange.

Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the writings of Hermann von Helmholtz<sup>8</sup>, our culture has, in fact, managed to cast off an element of its love of distance, its confessional fear of closeness in regards to tonality. It has come to be understood that there are actually individual organs of the body that physiologically and materially receive sound—at any time and without any misgivings about the sound's artistic and compositional qualities. *Impact of the Body.*

The aural fixation on the hearing organs is much too limiting—at least in terms of the theory of touch. From the point of view of sound anthropology, hearing is a human means of approaching the world from a sufficient distance—or as Gernot Böhme says: »Hearing is a way of feeling your way into space.«<sup>9</sup>

The *entire* body can thus be understood as a hearing organ. That would make hearing the strongest sense that can serve our intuition in helping us grasp and absorb a given situation in the form of its vibrations, waves and paths of reverberation whirring around in the air. Physically.<sup>10</sup>

Anatomically speaking, hearing also encompasses the organ of the inner ear that helps one maintain balance: *organon vestibulare*. Kinaesthetic or *proprioceptive perception* of one's own body, one's own situatedness is part

of the hearing process, to the extent that anatomy—and not philosophical psychology—uses the term of physical »*depth sensibility*.« Also, at this very moment your and my muscle tone creates our own individual sense of self in this space and our situatedness and relation to other objects, beings, processes and metamorphoses, to the entities around us. This generates our sense of so-called *situational spatiality* described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: »*spatialité de situation*«. <sup>11</sup>

This sense that allows you and me to perceive a situation, a space and its predominant tuning (*Gestimmtheit*) and position, this sense is anatomically generated: the *psychosituative* or even the *psychogeographic* structural form of the surroundings where find ourselves is transmitted to us in a physical and, to a large extent, tonal way.

We thereby become physically aware of the architecture of tension, the *tectonics* of a situation: »Le corps est un tonus.« <sup>12</sup> Here and now: there is the tension of my presentation and lecture, which is conveyed to you as you sit in the tiers of this lecture hall and face me with your eyes and ears; but also the tension of your attention and absorbed comprehension (*Aufmerksamkeits- und Mitvollzugspannung*) that you offer me. Around 40 or 50 individuals and their lives, who also have their own tension of presenting themselves in front of me and the other lecture attendees—as companions, friends, colleagues, teachers. Your own rhythm and alien rhythms.

In this sense, the effect of sounds, their percussions and vibrations penetrate the entire space, and the speed of their reverberations, their return to us, constitutes the environment in its psychosituative, tectonic form. The situation in situ is conveyed to us in our bodies, by its echoes within. Space and environment appear in your body: as tone.

Sounds do not only enter our bodies as data going into the input apparatuses of both ears, but they also massage the surface of our skin, penetrate our skeins of muscle and tendons, draw analogous responses from our nerves and blood vessels, lead to convulsions in the many fluids and secretions, the mush-like masses of the metabolism, the liquids and wet, soupy substances that *are* in your body and mine; through to the bone and marrow, which experience the same convulsion. The sound gets

into the bones.

In terms of tone and sensation, touch does not merely mean *touched*, *touché*—brushed up against, grazing the surface—but pervaded and imbued, coursed through and massaged in the organs.

From the perspective of sound anthropology this touch, this experience of being touched acquired through a *percept*, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call it, does not only take place in what empirical music psychologists would describe as a so-called »thrill experience«<sup>13</sup> of a tonal nature: when sounds particularly excite or stir us.

Being touched by sounds is a continuous experience that takes place through hearing. Sometimes more, sometimes less strong, echoing, piercing, incidental or in the background, possible to overhear. Sound and hearing are bound together in a process of reciprocal generation: through hearing we create that which we then call »sound« — when sound is generated it creates in you and me the act that we would call »hearing«.

It is such an encompassing and far-reaching physical experience that the cultural theorist Ute Bechdorf from Tübingen considers dancing a form of hearing.<sup>14</sup>

### Body in Action

*Think about a piece of music, a song, a passage of a symphony perhaps, a song chanted at a mass event, a demonstration or a major sporting event—a political moment? You find yourself among others, with others; and suddenly you want to act together with all these others! A common motion or commotion.*

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When we are touched how do we sense this?

The physical sensations that I have mentioned up to this point not only describe but *are* what we feel.

Our body *is* our soul.

However, here the term »soul« means less the term from the theory of religion with its longstanding history and more a particular way of using the term, which the theorist of the body Jean-Luc Nancy has also suggested: here soul-likeness (*Seelenhaftigkeit*) means the basic difference between a dead body—a piece of flesh and bones, de-individualized, non-singular, a mass<sup>15</sup>—and a being to whom we attribute, and *want* to attribute, will, interest, desire and self-understanding, wilful action and independent development. »l'âme est le nom du sentir du corps«<sup>16</sup>

The theories from the ethnography of music, musical psychoreactivity or the sociology of music that address the significance of sound and how its effects can be perceived in the individual or in many people—in physiological experiments, qualitative interviews or field research with participant observations—all these theories are grouped around what is generally increasingly becoming the world-wide prevailing form of »musical composition.« Historically and culturally this is a European and western provincial form of organizing sounds, presenting them to one another and talking about them.

However, how do we grasp the more far-reaching and deep-resonating moment of the sensual-tactile, given that you and I are touched by sounds in subjective and singular ways?

As an experiment I will suggest a small series of modes of sensation:

We experience *being touched socially and politically*: agitation, the desire to express our opinions, an eruptive drive for change, resistance or even revolutionary rage makes itself felt. »Riot sounds produce riots!«<sup>17</sup> My and your body allows itself to be moved to new, different, utopian acts through sonic convulsions and their significance within our realm of experience—emotionalized and motivated, driven by emotion to pursue the dream that another world truly is possible. The Internationale unites the human race.

We experience *being touched by a situative, communitarian experience*: shared experience, unexpectedly similar sensations, communality, collective ecstasy. You and I, we go beyond our own ordinary actions in these kinds of unusual situations—and we find ourselves renewed and once again changed in the process. Startled, and physically driven out in front of and above ourselves. Beside ourselves—along with others: ex-stasis (»εκσταση«).

We are experiencing *an intimate, self-reflexive and interpersonal touch*: beneath your and my hardened forms of self-representation in public situations we experience our obsessions and internal contradictions as being touched, understood and identified; and only in this process do we experience being in transformation. We thus come close to each other through understanding the same deep-seated inhibitions or forms of desire. An access to one another is revealed, a possibility for change, a convergence. As possibility. Intimate utopia, *folie à deux*. You and I.

Part of the experience of being touched, as this little series of experiments suggests, includes a substantial amount of surprise, being surprised by oneself and one's physical responses to audio-corporeal touch from without. You and I, we experience ourselves as mutable, unexpected, pleased about the relationship to and experience of ourselves that suddenly and surprisingly comes upon us and becomes possible. We do not reject this. Instead, we take it on, in and into us deep within in our *Body in Action*. We show this convulsion. We expose it for all to see—but can do nothing else: we are so moved!

A final word from Jean-Luc-Nancy: »un corps, c'est de l'extension. Un corps, c'est de l'exposition.«<sup>18</sup> In addition, I would like to add: a body is exhibition, exhibiting oneself, showing oneself. A representation, a demonstration of sensibility, of monstrosity, of the incommensurability of what one feels.

Taking on and incorporating, carrying out this perceptive and proprioceptive sense in our life and actions.

### New Materialism

*You are thinking of a song that once brought you very close to another person; a song that still makes you think about this man or woman: deeply stirred. Questioning yourself. Maybe it was years ago, or only months or days. Trepidation or ecstatic joy, elation, euphoria. Sadness. Melancholy. She or he understood you better than many others.*

\*

The unfolding of this kind of understanding of the body, of thought and being touched, of touching and the effect of sound, circulates around the individual and his or her thoughts and feelings—circulates in thought-sensations and thought-feelings that extend to the far limits of scientifically distinguishable and nameable statements.

In recent years a range of research movements has formed around this very interest of knowledge in the Anglo-American scientific landscape, which have become known as »*New Materialisms*«.

These branches of research are based on a theoretical deconstruction and critique of the past several decades and combine their subtle sense for deep-seated and rash conceptualizations in the history of science and scholarly research with an interest, which has precisely grown out of this critique, for the immanence of individual experience in a particular situation and in a singular person: here and now.

Phenomenology and deconstruction—which are usually not suspected of fraternization—find themselves drawn together in an inclination towards developing and retracing the specific and individual—the idiosyncratic tendencies in thinking and experience—by permeating sensuality and intellectuality.

Without relying on established models and modes of description that would be likely to try, with undue haste, to make the experience of

feelings quantifiably consumable— and instead attempting to attentively and precisely follow this drift of feeling through levels of momentary perception and immanence (Deleuze / Guattari). *A precision of sensibility.*

Together phenomenology and deconstruction look for descriptions and evolvments of the *Transmission of Affects*, explore *Neuropolitics* and the connection between *Embodiment and Agentic Capacities*, and search for a *queer phenomenology*. Theory in drag? Maybe that too...

And so they simply outwit the body-soul dichotomy and ingrown hierarchies of sensory perception and their breakdown into apparently separate channels, simply by conveying other cultures and epochs, moments and percepts of sensation—allowing them to voice themselves and find their way to us. Epidemic and intestinal touch. Intimate touch.

A term that has fallen into disrepute in recent years—arguably due to the highly questionable reasoning of a naively understood and hardly sustainable efficiency—is »over-sensitivity«; here, in contrast, experiencing and sensing the self is no longer understood as something negative and self-absorbed. Feeling oneself is the only thing that allows us humans to *communicate* with one another in a serious way.<sup>19</sup> Live.

Or as David Howe, the editor of an anthology on this topic that appeared last year, writes:

*Sensory channels may not be modeled after linguistic forms of communication – a perfume is not the same as a sentence – but they are still heavy with social significance. [...] From the empire of signs we enter the empire of the senses – and there are as much such empires as there are cultures.*<sup>20</sup>

This is a journey that sound anthropology is currently undertaking, venturing out into the richness of sensual cultures and accepting the experience of touch through sound.

## notes

- <sup>1</sup> Or, as Novalis wrote in the fragments of his pollen project in the 18th century: »In jeder Berührung entsteht eine Substanz, deren Wirkung so lange, als die Berührung dauert. Dies ist der Grund aller synthetischen Modifikationen des Individuums. Es gibt aber einseitige und wechselseitige Berührungen. Jene begründen diese.« Novalis, 89, in: ders., *Blütenstaub (Fragmente) 1797/98*. Physically speaking, the term “substance” is not appropriate—although a new entity does actually result through touch: a relation of exchange that allows the two touching bodies to meld, at least for a point in time and space. Whether this takes place on a cellular-hormonal micro level or on the macro level of physical-chemical combinations and bonds. *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahoney Stoljar, State University of New York Press, 1997
- <sup>2</sup> William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling. A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- <sup>3</sup> Oliver Grau und Andreas Keil eds., *Mediale Emotionen. Zur Lenkung von Gefühlen durch Bild und Sound*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005).
- <sup>4</sup> Didier Anzieu, *Das Haut-Ich* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996); Claudia Benthien, *Haut. Literaturgeschichte – Körperbilder – Grenzdiskurse* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1999).
- <sup>5</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Editions Métailié, 1992/2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- <sup>7</sup> Peter Handke, *Versuch über die Jukebox. Erzählung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1990), S. 88. »*This, this song, this sound – is what I am now; with these voices, these harmonies I am, as never before in my life, I have become who I am; just as this song is, so utterly am I!*« Peter Handke, *The Jukebox and Other Essays on Storytelling*, Translation Ralph Manheim and Krishna Winston (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1994), p. XX.
- <sup>8</sup> Hermann von Helmholtz, *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als Physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik* (1863) (online at: <http://tinyurl.com/nhaz8> )
- <sup>9</sup> Gernot Böhme, *Die Stimme im leiblichen Raum* in: Symposium Raumklänge. (A-)topien der Stimme, Freie Universität Berlin, May 26, 2006.
- <sup>10</sup> Unless we use music in order to make ourselves aware of the self-other relationship—as in the euphoric and arousing effect of music during puberty. On the one hand, it dissolves the borders of one’s own corporeality and makes one receptive in the way that touches from without effect one’s body; on the other hand, it emphasizes the limitations of one’s body, since the articulation of difference states of feeling and kinds of touch are only legitimized via a round-about route through speech.
- <sup>11</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Edition Gallimard 1945 ), S. 130.
- <sup>12</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Editions Métailié, 1992/2000), p. 124.
- <sup>13</sup> Jörg Schönberger, *Zum Erleben von Thrills und anderen starken emotionalen Reaktionen beim Musikhören Einige neue empirische Ergebnisse aus einem vernachlässigten Bereich musikpsychologischer Forschung*, “Magister” thesis in Philosophy at the Faculty for Human and Social Sciences of the University of Vienna, Institute for Psychology, August 2003 (Online unter: <http://www.musicpsychology.net/schoenberger> )
- <sup>14</sup> *Tanzlust. Empirische Untersuchungen zu Formen aktuellen Tanzvergnügens*, ed. By the research group “Tanzen” (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Life of Infamous Men” in *Power, Truth, Strategy* (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)
- <sup>16</sup> Alec Empire, *Die Philosophie von Atari Teenage Riot* (1995), under: <http://www.atariteenageriot.de/atr/ziel.htm>
- <sup>17</sup> Alec Empire, *Die Philosophie von Atari Teenage Riot* (1995), under: <http://www.atariteenageriot.de/atr/ziel.htm>
- <sup>18</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Editions Métailié, 1992/2000), p. 109.
- <sup>19</sup> Mario Perniola, *Contro la comunicazione* (Turino: Giulio einaudi editore, 2004).
- <sup>20</sup> David Howes, ed. And introduction to *Empires of the Senses. The Sensual Culture Reader* (London: Berg Publishers, 2005), p. 3f.



What do you mean  
by high grade coal

# *The Beat Surrender*

Russell Richardson  
Peter Griffin  
Will Lytle

## **Preamble**

It's been my wish for some time – around ten years – to bring some of the energy of performance into the mechanical stages of filmmaking. This means privileging immediacy and awakesness over the automatic and, to an extent, the planned. What I want is to tap into the heightened state of alertness which a musician or an actor (or a sportsman/woman) experiences when 'on'.

It's relatively easy for the camera operator, as movement is involved, and a choreography is necessary to juggle the various parameters of technique (light, focus, lens, framing) and at the same time remain aware of the physical interactions (balance, level, proximity to other people and objects). It's quite a ballet.

Similarly, direction has a huge human element which can only benefit from being awake and nimble – though which tends to be dumbed down and made rigid in 'professional' productions because of the money and fear involved. So, there's a very important personal need to break some of these shackles, above and beyond any dry exercise in aesthetics. I think Herzog said something along these lines about physical bravery being necessary for a filmmaker. This is not something most practitioners want to hear.

How to bring these elements of thoughtful spontaneity into the editing process is a more difficult matter. It's not enough to rush in headlong, by accelerating the pace of the work. By definition (by my definition, anyway) editing is basically about the understanding of time and rhythm, so it needs time and rhythm to develop. What seems to be happening is that video and computer editing pushes you into a faster, ill considered edit unless you begin to delve into layers. It's this digging which brings out a performative aspect, and – interestingly – makes video come closer to 'experimental' film work. Your pieces tend to have many layers of image and also many, many layers of sound, and they tend to be short works.

Van Gogh complained to his brother Theo that people were criticizing his paintings for their speed of execution, whereas Vincent considered the process of a painting may have taken years, it was only the actual application of paint to canvas which seemed 'fast'. So with videos.

## **BEAT FILM MANIFESTO (I)**

There are no excuses for not making films. The BEAT MANIFESTO is designed to specifically eliminate all those obstacles one raises to explain WHY one cannot make films:

(lack of) money, time, experience, equipment, resources, colleagues; (fear of) legal restrictions, inertia.

1. A beat film starts with ONE SITUATION + ONE IMPULSE.
2. Make your films with the means at hand.
3. ~~Ignore~~ Violate all copyright law.
4. Tend towards potlatch. Put in as much as you can, and expect nothing in return.
5. Use no paraphernalia. No tripods, no special lenses, no filters, no gadgets.
6. Push your equipment to its limits. Get to know how much you can do with the camera on its own. No automatic settings.
7. Shoot in one uninterrupted session. A film in a day. Edit and show the film soon.
8. Involve strangers. Get involved with them. Film = life and life = film.
9. NO scripts (but scraps of scripts are OK)
10. Make many things.
11. Don't obsess over details. Get it right NEXT TIME. Do it better.
12. Leave all rough edges visible to the hand.
13. Never sign releases or contracts. Ever.
14. Share your knowledge and skills, switch roles. Get into situations where you do not yet have the skills.
15. Honor your mistakes as hidden intentions.
16. Work fast.
17. Don't be precious. Anybody and everybody can do this. The 'artist' is an anachronism like a mediaeval guild or closed shop union – designed to exclude. Beat films are designed to include.
18. Place your faith in Allah... but tie up your camel.

## **BEAT FILM ALTERNATIVE MANIFESTATION (VOICE 2)**

This is not about any gender, politic, ethno-product, but ideas and the form of events documented as they happen and made meaning of in their review. This is history invented. Beat Filmmaking is the following (guidelines rather than rules). The experience must be fun. No torture for art, no limiting movement in some attainment of pure ideals. Things change, life happens. Movement must not be prevented..The work must contain whatever moment is presented. Go with the rain storm that shows up. Take advantage of the ugly guy on the train. Movement is the life around the camera...Work quickly. These are the three stages of beat film: shoot, edit, show. Don't wear out your idea with repetition to 'get it right'. Change something to make it righter. The story is evolving. Come up with certain ideas. Plan a little. Abandon the plan when needed. Invent dialogue. Don't bring this into improv. Hand total strangers scraps of paper with topics, lines, instructions, questions. DEATH to SCRIPTS! There are truths, ideas, stories that will unfold and set a direction. You will know when this happens. Movement is a gut reaction to the invention of narrative. Let the narrative move. Do not break laws. Bend them. Tamper with the field of vision. Toss the camera back and forth to others. No camera man, no director alone. Who makes this work? The editor. Be kind. Don't film against people's wishes, however, sometimes you just shouldn't turn the camera off in the face of authority. Don't forget to remove the lens cap. CHARGE ALL BATTERIES. Put in an element of Dogma, for the fun of it. Pick a number at random. Include other people. Especially those who do not expect it, or those who want it, but don't know how to ask. Poetry? What the hell. Can you write a poem with the camera without getting knee deep into art film crap? Keep it simple. Don't think too much. Don't expect too much.

Cameras move. Eyes move. Looks move. People move.

Go somewhere else. Never ask permission to film on someone's 'property', always ask permission to film someone's face. Only the cameraperson decides when to turn the camera off. Try to listen. Use silences, too.

### **Response - Voice 3**

Energy – we limit ourselves to one day's shooting to ensure a kinetic process. Truth and beauty come from dirt and rust. Film everything, don't clean or organize or rearrange...

Try to keep to one idea, preferably one born on the way there. Too much pre-shoot thought coagulates the organic flow.

Tell yourself the whole story in the editing room. NEVER BURDEN ANYTHING WITH FABRICATED MEANING! Let beauty speak for itself and allow each member of the audience to take something different away.

## ABOUT MANIFESTOS

While talk is necessary (and cheap...) I don't think any of us really consider these manifestos as being writ in stone. There's a healthy dose of polemic / provocation / playfulness in them. Not so much rules to follow, as a collection of conclusions drawn from the work we are doing individually, which is closer in form to the way a group of musicians work than to any hierarchical film studio set up.

It's a very loose collection, rather in the way most bands work with favored session players who may or may not end up as part of the band, on an album to album basis.

## THE BAND

After a year of making disparate short videos, talking incessantly about film form as it might become, and our various working experiences, the idea of putting out a joint magazine style collection of several video works, some texts and photos, and maybe some music was mooted.

So we decided to make an album instead.

If we could get a dozen or so 'tracks' (or 'songs' as I would have it) made by the same people, at around the same time, but with no distinction of the *auteural* type. No writer, no director, no cameraperson – even no actors – just a list of 'band members', then the whole collection would make more sense.

Like the Beatles. John would write a couple of songs, which Paul would add to or amend. Paul would write a few, which John would rearrange. George would bring in one or two. But they would all play on all tracks, and the resulting collection would have just the right cohesion by coming from the same people in the same place at the same time. No-one has owned up to wanting to be Ringo yet.

Come to think of it, '*The Band*' is a better model, especially after they left their supposed focus and mentor (the much more callow Bob Dylan) and really took off.

## Origins of projects

'*Boston Beat*' was an immediate and spontaneous reaction to attending a dull educational conference. Two people. One video camera and one digital still camera. One idea, the impulse, was acted and/or filmed around Boston. Who is the auteur, then? In shots where both filmmakers are present, the camera is either left unattended on a flat surface, or a passer-by is drafted in to film. One sequence was shot by a homeless person who was intrigued by the shenanigans. The edited film interlards the scenes with still photos taken by the filmmakers or passers-by, and uses split-screen and multi-layered sound to bring out a visual rhythm in the piece.

'*House X*' is the result of a chance meeting between three Catskill musicians; their

house/recording studio; and the wish to make a haunted house film. A house haunted by fragments of music = the soundtrack; a ghost/demon fleetingly glimpsed = visual motif; empty house filled with instruments = main theme. A dream where a memory of walking through a former residence coincided with its current inhabitant being 'haunted'. One night shoot.

'Werner Herzog Eats 2 Pints of Stewart's Ice Cream' was an idea which involved seven people, two canoes and a dog. Neither a pastiche nor a homage to Herzog, but more of a riff on our ideas of Herzog's ethos of film, we set off up an uncharted creek off the Hudson, and played with the idea of 'Fitzcarraldo'. There was much mud. There was no script – the story/scenes came from the setting and landfalls. Apart from some shots of four people in one canoe filmed by three people in the other, there was no specific 'cameraman' at all. This role was given to whoever was not 'acting' in the shot. The camera was passed from person to person as deemed convenient (six people operated the camera). The arc of the sun and the tides determined when we started and when we stopped, and – after much debate – we shot with only one camera. The footage is being edited by four different people, 'blind' to each others' edits. The resulting film may resemble some kind of 'Rashomon', or it may be chaotic. What I do know is that the images have a great plastic beauty and some underlying melancholy which is totally at odds with the very apparent levity of their making. The edit's challenge is to accept what is now inherent in the material, and not try to impose the rather flimsy idea which gave us the impulse to get into the boats and out into the mud.

*Here, in their original confusion, are pages from the diary of the edit.*

**Generally, unless there is some pre-imposed (and therefore unsatisfactory) structure to work from/against, the editing process tends to go something like this.**

**Was I there? Do I have any pre-conceived notions of what the filmmakers were trying to do? Can I and should I be swayed by their original pre-film intentions? Or those emotive moments from the shoot that might in fact look crappy on film, but call you to include them (don't listen).**

**It's hard but I think each stage of filming must owe no loyalty to the previous phases. The script above all is not sacrosanct, and you inevitably end up filming other things than the script. That's the whole point. Or we wouldn't go to the movies, we'd read screenplays.**

**Or is it quote my film unquote, in which case, what was I after? Did I get it? What else did I get? And what now?**

**What we should be doing is letting go of anything from an earlier stage which didn't work, or didn't come off. I am even tempted to say, we should not allow ourselves to shoot anything we 'forgot' or simply did not film for whatever reason. (the dog ate the spare battery)**

**Whichever case, you find yourself with a couple of DV tapes in your hands. Now what?**

**Log them, which means WATCH THEM. No great attention need be paid, but I do think you need to actually watch and listen to the footage, open mindedly. This means that as the video goes onto the computer, the images go into your brain. This takes up a lot of disc space, be warned.**

**Next, I watch again, maybe the next day, and pull out the bits in order, whichever I remember and whichever appeal. These go onto a provisional timeline.**

**Then, I juggle them around, cut some together, see links between other sections and mentally file a few images as ‘musts’.**

**At about this point, weird things begin to happen. First, I get all despairing as nothing hangs together, nothing flows and the only obvious correspondences seem to be reminiscent of dull BBC documentaries where every level goes in the same direction. Story rears its dim head again. What does this mean? Who are these people? Where are the beginning, middle and end?**

**These are not serious questions.**

**Always, this plateau of despair comes right before the film begins to gel. And it is a plateau. It can last for weeks or even months. The film is boring. It disgusts me. I invent other, more exciting things to do.**

**Eventually, I try something. Might be what I call a ‘trick’ (i.e. something which always works, like tweaking the color response, or adding a nice slow motion shot, putting in a title or adding a guide track piece of music) or it might be an epiphany from usually another piece of work, or music... put it in. Reorder some sequences. Remove a big narrative chunk, and suddenly, somewhere (it is sudden, it happens and you see it all at once) a couple of sequences fit. The rest don’t of course, but you’re not depressed about them anymore. Maybe shift that last but overwhelmingly ‘final’ sequence of shots to the start? Or reverse a cause and effect sequence. Or remove the cause altogether.**

**There’s an exhilaration in cutting away, in trimming (oh, look I’ve got a 33 second masterpiece!). Then, you give the whole film a close pass, taking out frames here and there, maybe flopping a shot to keep the eye engaged. Removing one or two shots – even a favorite. (kill your darlings).**

**Now there’s something to look at. I call this stage the rough cut. Before any magic intervenes, you’re just mechanically sifting, thinking things through with the eyes. Which is why I always seem to imagine an extra stage to filmmaking than most textbooks use. Film – edit 1 (watch & select, then eliminate) – edit 2 (order and build) – show.**

**In reality the two edit phases can run many times in a loop. Build, destroy, re-build, re-destroy, etc.**

**It’s a happy time locked up with the stale coffee and pop-tarts.**

**A prime justification for smoking cigarettes, all editors should smoke.**

**But it never fails to amaze me that this magic does occur, and unless it occurs, you don’t have a film.**

**So, right now I’m not even at the rough cut stage on the ‘Herzog’ film, so it’s maybe an interesting perspective to see how it evolves emotionally? Let’s see, from time to time over the next weeks.**

**The original conception was to mount an expedition up a Hudson River tributary, in some way a homage to/spoof of 'Aguirre' and 'Fitzcarraldo'. My inevitable thought (as 'Werner') is also of the overlapping documentaries 'Burden of Dreams' and 'My Best Fiend'. And a bit of Herzog's role as the gloomy, bullying father in 'Julian Donkey Boy'.**

**We set out with no more information than that, and a little conceptual baggage, viz: there would be two canoes, and one camera (this debate, one or two cameras, was quite lively, myself insisting that one camera is necessary for the '*carpe diem*' and two or more just turns on the lazy filter and lulls you asleep.) everyone would appear in the film as a character.**

**The 'story' would evolve as incidents occurred. My jejune mind kept thinking of James Fenimore Cooper.**

**The day was sunny though it threatened thunder, and around 90 degrees.**

**We paddled off down Catskill creek, past marinas and onto the Hudson, heading south for about a mile, then ran aground (a-mud, actually)  
Canoes were dragged through the mud, and we found an odd Sheriff's sign stuck up out of the mire most improbably. It said 'WAKE'. A good omen?**

**Up the creek, one actor had to be shot because he needed to leave.**

**Then the remainder of us proceeded in one canoe upstream as the tide ebbed.**

**We disembarked and set off on a plod through the mud/jungle/mosquitoes etc.**

**Our porter collapsed in the mud and had to be left behind.  
The official cameraman freaked out and ran into the trees.  
The dog wrangler got stranded pushing 'Werner' off as the tide turned.**

**Werner returned alone, Fuchsle the dog having mysteriously vanished.**

**Unfilmed was the capsized canoe dropping most of our prop s8 cameras (but not the real videocamera) into the Hudson mud where they remain to this day, an ambiguous sacrifice to the river gods (as in, have we/I become willing to abandon film for video?)**

**We have about 90 minutes of raw footage.**

**We wondered whether we could film another day of the planning stages of the trip, or should we deliberately limit ourselves to only that footage (remember rules can be broken).**

**Eventually, it was decided that 4 people would each edit the same footage independently, to produce a 'Rashomon'-like film. No length was mandated, but about 5 mins each was agreed on.**

**So, what the other three are doing, I know not.**

**My first thought was to cut together all the footage I liked, and stick to an absolutely strict chronology.**

**This *'bout-à-bout'* ran 45 minutes.**

**But while watching, what struck me was the walking through mud, and not the 'staged' dramatic dialogue scenes, all improvised in improbable foreign accents, by the way.**

**I spent some time cutting a nervous breakdown and murder traditionally, then decided it would be better to offer a different explanation, i.e. that there had been no murder, and that 'Walter' was alive and well. As we had – nonsensically – taken a long shot of the two of us walking along chatting AFTER the assassination, this made sense. Werner's commentary would be about exaggerated rumors of accidents and crimes...**

**Later it occurs to me to remove these scenes altogether, but am I second guessing the others? That they will include the killing? Then I deny it? Or omit it? Interesting.**

**Just considering the effects of what you are doing hamstringing and paralyzes the film process.**

**It's now the 10<sup>th</sup> August and I have not sorted out the story yet.**

**After listening to the actual sound quality and the words spoken, I make the decision to not use live sound except as background, but to voice-over the whole thing. On the condition (I hate voice-overs) that what I say and what we see are in some degree of contradiction. At best, and straightest, like Jacques Cousteau, or parts of some of Chris Marker's work (like 'Mammoth'). Dissonance, but smoothed away so it's not obviously dissonant.**

**I have spent hours trying to find a distressed and non-automatic look for the film, so it appears to have been shot on super-8. Not using the automatic 'film look' filters. Think I have that now, so am leaving it till last. You can get so lost in tweaking and rendering and re-jigging that you forget to actually have a film to tweak.**

**The other thing I notice, again, is that the story elements fade very quickly after a few viewings. What is strong about a film emerges slowly, once the narrative is accepted or ignored. And what comes out of this is not the spoof or homage element, but the very real slogging through mud, the insects, the heat, and the occasional beauty when everyone shuts up.**

**Can I make the film segment only with these expedition bits??**

**In these beat films, what I don't like (a general dislike) are the following even though I realize they are useful as guidelines, maybe what I want are no guidelines, some obligation to flounder.**

- a) mockumentary
- b) spoof
- c) homage
- d) making-of

All of these seem to remove the main justification for doing a spontaneous film, i.e. to capture a moment on the fly. By giving such a framework, a lot of that lightness is lost, and two elements can creep in – cheap (easy) humor and plagiarism – I mean direct, ‘can I copy that shot?’ plagiarism.

Another thing is that I find almost all mock/spoofs rather disrespectful, whereas I actually have a lot of respect and affection for old Werner H.

Any film is a documentary of what falls before the lens... always a document about the people involved as actors, and the landscapes. This is why I hate studio sets, this part of the form is left blank.

Spoofs are for bar-room conversations. Fun to talk about, but why waste film?

Homage is empty, unavoidable subconsciously anyway, so why duplicate an extra layer consciously?

And Peter himself even introduced the motto “don’t let the making-of get in the way of the making”.

OK where does that leave me?

A bunch of guys flailing through mud and occasionally getting hysterical.

Shots of jungle and river.

A somber voice over (‘Werner’) undercutting the images.

Promising? I’ll watch it all again tonight.

Three days later:

The short sequence where our explorers cross a muddy log, carrying the dog, released an interesting phenomenon. As the image was slowed down and cut together, three voices became cut up and formed a single, slurred track. With gleeful misinterpretation (I wonder if all interpretation isn’t really misinterpretation...) two distinct phrases emerged; ‘Is this the world we made with flesh?’ and the reply ‘Youth dawn’. These hidden voices seem to offer a key to how to structure the piece on unexpected lines. And I find the whole *apophenia* of EVP quite hilarious, which irony hopefully will save the piece from squashiness of the worst Woodstocky type.

The dumb foreign accents are troubling me. Slowed down cut-ups have no accent, anyway, many of the comments are meta-language related to the shoot, advice, complaints and phatic reassurances. So the film begins to secretly comment on the film, and the surface impishness can be a search for the shamanistic\* murmurings of the forest spirits.

**It looks so good, though. Am I getting hypnotized by greens and the orange dog?**

***\* As established, no-one under 18 should be allowed to make a zombie film, and no-one over 30 should be allowed near a shaman, unless they consent to being bloodily and painfully sacrificed in the process. That leaves about a decade for flaky well-intentioned pseudo-anthropology.***

**And ...**

*The Owl of Minerva arrives late, grey, into the empty arena where what has been happening has already happened. Calm and thoughtful twilight, perhaps, but the essence is the doing. The name of Giambattista Vico was canvassed and quoted in this connection, as in 'to make is to know'.*

So is it an anarchist collective with the real and fake cod-Greek etymology (*an* – *arkos*, /without law/ and *a* – *narkos* /without sleeping/) vying for prominence?

What we are left with is the working dialogue between an extended family of very disparate voices.

And the films.

*Brad Bassler*

*lonesome sentence*

Nutter. Only in bare outline. Gray on gray. The word. Buried beneath engraved. The work of one. An episode explodes. The curios heard underneath a miscellany. A wonderful mistrial. Even in the dusk an ability to discern. Slowly. The dreamy outsider who laments in figures. Buildings fashioned. Sometimes what you give to your friends. The ability to detune. In episodes of strength the hero returns. Or the inside of a bicycle pedal. Roister roster rooster brisker brewster briefer the moister an unenviable crew manifest for treason tracking the polestar. Follow fully the internal architecture underneath concrete impediments. (Pigs, in there?) A day in the country in my nineteenth century spread out for lawn bowling on a summer afternoon. With the names of friends. Hidden in brush. We all feel. The inevitable wind turned carefully within. It continues. Playing with the sound of pops clicks wasted tracks the slow labor of pushing rectangles. A craft a raft the return of other aerial intentions across regions of vast dimension. Draped in trivial embarrassing obsessive preoccupations. We fashion out of contrary cloth woven beneath the threshold of sensible perception. A piano found in fortitude. The all too clever ministrations of mortal mordant dental manipulations. Incessant whelping.

How you could keep it in simple words finally under the table in creased canisters walled transparently beneath wood. Lopping off arms the reticence of a poetic solitude the goddess shields. In the interior humidior. All simple solutions insufficiently shaded and the control of variation. When we walked into the evening sun suddenly a glint of late summer retreat. A hand felt in the heat depositing its longstanding imprint at the end of a lamentable dinner. Shot straight into the heart. Words would regret. The minute inclination of uneasy flow. It altered. As an unenviable codicil. Fashioned for preexisting consort booked in advance. And the other weather its color the pallid shade of an underexposed countercurrent. The staple of all material desire as drygoods are foodstuffs and maples retreat into winter. So you shuddered underneath clothes. For leaves expand along the line of veins in unison as departures are underwritten by breviary ink. At the signing the treatise on display highlighting their sober mood. Notated in irregular rhythms meant to induce a feeling for the

main event in the center tent. Motorcars racing their way past all sense of competition fast into the lane of interlacing. When the major shareholder mentioned the dividends all investment would repay. Unlike indentations. Studying for the entrance examination with pencil in hand. The outer edge the remote limit unattended by buoys reach only into intermediate water waving its welcome amidst a vast expanse. So for the moment it lingers and rests. The dissolute signal. Metric conversions elicit the opposite effect as winter stills the unenviable request in desolate chill. Returned for postage due. The enlisted rank and file. Would deliver. And choppy days return along with our old unwillingness. Collected in mammoth blocks for inspection. Cavernous and unsound. The brittle saturation of the surrounding fields nothing but unrest in the most peculiar mist. Retreating reclining and the fur-lined history of interior decorating. Worked over in the crop full of glistening blisters the threads roped and pastry hooks full of blatant explosion. Listen listen the word of the flamingo the slender rivulet settled and meanders withholding destiny. And a hazelwood by autumn haunted. So fretfully stressed in indigo. The pleasure we returned finding ourselves encircled in ambivalent hardware with nothing kept for receipt. Until out from the forest strode horses. Fell into formation. Fled. Beset by wind the field of wheat waxed and bent. Wind over the water felt flexible in an unending lap against recalcitrance. Water in billows reflecting the sound of incident air. The hour of decision in a dark interval between eras. Until the frothy bubbles lifted to the top and popped. How happy the event and muddy underneath. Cycles of three protected from legislation by ballots enwalled. Over their shoulder pointing in the opposite direction. The pristine hours foreclosed. To relent. And the other force of an estuary portends onomasty the ominous vocabulary of gloaming. Garnished to ensure the unrelenting balance of debt the unwritten summons cleans house. Over the precipice wedged between rivers an architectural wonder. Stands as admonishment without words beneath contempt. And the return to romance. In the shade it shelters leaning slightly forward forbearing conservation of force. An unwritten tree in the middle crossed like a grounded canoe. Wanders through history without comment. Eagles anticipate the epochal return. Or sourdough rising. Marked by clean tempo the resonant wood. The uneasy rhythm relearns an impression of imprecision and the blending of timbre contrast and hue. The abolition of all unseemly seams by surgical means with standardized metal instrumentation. Washing machines all driven underground by acclimation. Pasturized you insolent heathen and no

mandate for retrial. Yakking down on the corner to an underage drug dealer. Solar heating came as some relief in the interval attested by the warmth of stones their long vibration smoothed out for our comfort. As old age attests in the frequency of repose. We had it as our clue that the vision retracts as everything finally comes in focus. Of a density replete with redundant persistence. In the middle of impounded years. You on the other hand. Abandoned. The cost of living. Had it on good account. With the requisite interest a possible headline item flashing up on the marquee. Sequestered with the best intentions we revisit the issue. Halving the flank. The rotary issues inclusive of all nuisance taxes deposing nothing as half-life for the innocuous consequences then exposed. In the absence of being we are missing you. Flooded the road. For survivors their petards hoisted up into the uninviting air. And the interval over for now and done with many happy returns in such a climate. Summons to recovery I listen. The presence falters. The sentence halts in hesitance. Black maskers the unwitting renouncement of colors. Here the heather hovers above floorboards. In no way increases the pattern of wind. Renounced for fame and the all inclusive lexicon of New York residency on a famous night. When such places exist. We must listen for prestidigitation until the verdict is reversed aboveboard. And an hour left to read upon return. It fits the minutest pattern of remonstrance due cultivated strains of fruit. And fell slack in the tense attack. In flurries of words I hold images float freely undisturbed. Their aquiline repose of the single curve descending. As unwonted verbiage plasters over years the posters of billboard advertisement. The dilapidated commercial quarter depreciates. Still undervalued as rhythm in the larger arable zone the cars crease off highways in search of photographs. Held in your hand as vision exposed. The roster registers a census over each lustrum. In the period it imitates as imitates as a word runs over the lips prematurely opening questions and fashioning doubts under safe passage in the written wind. The forecast calls for rain and a big drop in futures. Tune in for more tunes. Which strikes me as unenviable. How it could be called on the carpet sounds like another on the table where I left my address. Hooks onto words as crochet needles hidden beneath chit chat. Anarchist with a day planner and dishes piled in the sink. What needless appliances with which we drape out life the larger world of cognitive extension fits onto our daily rhythms as prostheses in the spare pressured minutes left us. As crossconnections peak the mean standard density drove toward its limit with hints of the petty digs which await us stepping onto the threshold. Our words are housed in letters all opening

out. Defeated by fatigue at the last minute in summary paraphrase. Evidence accretes what quiet conviction earned in malediction. For the quiet transposition of carrier pigeons sent messages flying in opposite directions. Currying many lives into a bowl and sifting others in a sieve. The rank displacements. Of a polity of instruments it is easily remarked the seams and enjambments. Full of eligible concentration and racing against the battery powered clock in increasing increments. To stow away upon a vacation liner. Of vague arousal and hallucinations under extreme duress. Which is not how I heard it but the route of capitulation. In cities I would not frequent. The pressure to bring all elements into a sudden texture held steady without pulse or the aid of variation the sense became diffuse and I could detect no overt indication. No body language or the frame of a ritual. The sentences were diminished in frame and impact. Lonely without the comfort of melancholy. Fortunate relief came in the form of tasteless pellets we swallowed together without hesitation in a pact. For the root belief framed informational transparencies walled in together in fact without insulation. Or the reversal of fate as time. In the meantime we wait. Flawed palettes return to the same sensations anew or the habitual reassurance we used as comfort and even further served as round rebuttal backed up against the wall. In time we shared when all else defaulted and conversations heard in confirmation opened up fatal rays of sunshine leaving nothing but our excesses exposed all over. The road impinged upon a brutal talent which can hear the instincts but schedule no itinerary until suddenly we know. Abodes contingent on a rural plan. The evaluation of contraries. The flow of a subterranean river. Pitch requires the returning of words and convergence to a central register for an extended period of straitening.

So to return to mental health or some facsimile thereof. But speaking of this neck rather well marked for rapid perambulation the penultimate stretching set out before the quick dash and the hunter's dialectical mindset and patient. To be stilled. Affix the revolving atmosphere. You will hear it. Said. And pointing to layers not by gestures but in illicit suggestions how we could align left politics with right religion you ventured the one hand not knowing the other. No matter what the misfortune a warranted feeling that can only be seen in evocation stalled before the tensile debate. Still weather and a confluence of breeze in this retrospect. And as equally balanced as practicable in shrewd circumstance. In the atmosphere your witness to the regularities in halftone found clairvoyance you wouldn't know in the backward looking glance of the responsible reader.

For it's a pharmaceutical putpourri in this theater, epoxy sailing airborne for consort in the republic of scent, asking in its waywardness: is every third jogger a fifth columnist in her lonely heart? Frilly vanilla these maneuvers the manhandling of labor. And I can't dance, and no clothes for the party. Slowly, slowly, the rhythm recedes. The lights dim. All sound grounds out lower and lower in vocal gravel. When? Slight pauses then longer. Miraculous trilling the musical treading of water. I know in the vacancy of sidereal passion there can be only one music not mine by rights but belonging to humankind and desire the composer refined in a prism piercing the blankness on its verso between layers a cut in the sheeting with the ambition that I write it and if so then no one else. Pause pause. Or it is deceptive and may signal only the coming of new intransigencies. But this announces another beside itself more germane the insular ancestry. And reconfigured in a friendly grammar not commissioned but as befitting friends. And the rover the rooster the rooted raster strop stippling the stripling booster. Unholy becalmer you intransigent heckler the come on the communist headgear with the long distance telephone number. Call me and blow me. For thought is the vicious incision and you are guests on my campus. So treat me like one. Picking off the last notes in a row one at a time expelled into space. Most days there are no letters only bills. Tickets divide into bad and good. Textures are thickets or thinned soup. Hovering in a line of rapid variation but dampened amplitude the windsock shudders. A fine photographic license. Packed many friends into culverts how awkward the greeting and requisite seepage of social repose likely framed to last in ballast tripped overboard in ligan breeding the funicular response. To snood the short ropes of tradition the trawlers break sea bottom. Our extracurricular clothes remaindered for wash day in the forced swapping lament buttons. Or what you will in the wilderness between radio broadcasts sundered then plundered. The recourse to annals then divests all animals of univocal intent forcing the issue of bestial divorce. Whether words are signpost or flat voice the central scene sings in between. How laboriously argued in homilies disassembles the moss of our addle pated cosmetics. In palmier days at the soda stand some slight hint of continuing could permit the forgiveable presumption of history faced with the fact of unrequited love. The eagle descends. Knobs turn not as symptoms but systems. Sound strikes from within the killing blow. Rather turned towards statisticians in the frequent roadside pullover and am confident that top guns could not interfere. As included for shipping and handling the yards and yarns of tailors while the

more talented painter stays home and cooks dinner. The telephone rings too late for specific information and so is no omen. I cannot see too far forward or back only the sweeping. A hand declines its wonted kiss. The imprint of uncertainty is written upon it its tattoo verdict. Stretching verbs to make the literate bridle through smallish flexible jointures. Always the dump truck awaits.

**j k r**

pass 2

## texts and scores

Scott Burnham	<i>Ave Verum Corpus / "But Not Quite Beyond"</i> (Marking the 75 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of J. K. Randall and the 250 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of W. A. Mozart)
Scott Gleason	Eleven Pages for J. K. Randall
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Steve Dembski	<i>Being Hearing, Knowing Now</i>
Eve Beglarian	<i>Making Hey</i>
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Hilary Tann	<i>Kilvert's Hills: Score and Notes</i>
John Rahn	<i>The New Mother: Notes for JKR</i>
Judith Shatin	<i>Big As A House Music</i>
Benjamin Boretz	Postlude, with Jim Randall in Mind

***Ave Verum Corpus* / “But Not Quite Beyond”**

(Marking the 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday of J. K. Randall  
and the 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday of W. A. Mozart)

Scott Burnham

Köch. Verz. No. 618

Adagio  
sotto voce

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Soprano

Alto

Tenore

Basso

Basso ed Organo

A - ve, a - ve ve - rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri - a vir - gi - ne,

A - ve, a - ve ve - rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri - a vir - gi - ne,

Adagio  
fatto solo

3 : 6 : 4 : 4 : 6 : 9 : 8 : 6 : 4 : 6 : 5

Legend has him composing it in one evening, of course, the Corpus Christi procession needing a motet on the next day and he having pledged the same to one Anton Stoll of the town of Baden,<sup>1</sup> not worried, knowing he would be triggered by that text and not anticipating any problems, D major already humming for him as the breath of the thing and he now growing eager to get at the suffering and death promised in that trusty Latin, knowing that he would lay on the sharps for “immolatum,” bass line insinuating upward into a worried F-sharp, right before putting Him on the cross (A to D again in the soprano, just like Ave but with anguish), then “perforatum” flattening down<sup>2</sup> into F, letting His wound bleed out in D minor, the body that suffers like his own, but then the sound of D major coming back, allowing him to redeem it all, to lift it up and away, perhaps the only deliverance available any longer, *now that the mob brings the shitbird death to anybody’s doorstep, well, do those words still thrill like they did when I used to stare up at the cupola in the Domplatz, thinking how even a little boy could speak to Christ, or—my God—at St. Stephen’s, where I couldn’t think about anything but only felt that swelling lightness in the chest, let’s get that back again, give them a body and a spirit, a glow<sup>3</sup> by Christ, but then the cross, the wound, death, yes, death, step up to that: I can hear rising strings of thirds for the final line, esto nobis, one foot up the stair, the next*

"Ave Verum Corpus"

The image displays a musical score for the motet "Ave Verum Corpus". It features five staves. The top two staves are vocal parts (Soprano and Alto). The next three staves are for a figured bass instrument, likely a lute or harpsichord. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The figured bass line includes a "tasto solo" marking and a sequence of numbers: 8 4 3, 6, 7 1, 8, 9 8 6 7 5 4.

following, counterpoint by imitation, *imitatio Christi*, what Christ can mean to me, he can show me how to die, *esto nobis praegustatum mortis*, well I'll give them a foretaste of death, remember the end of Sebastian Bach's last offering, a sound like the gears of Death engaging to open the final door,<sup>4</sup> I'll get that effect but then, but then just as the D on "mortis" (that's right, the earlier leap to the same D on "cruce" is now matched by a leap to D on "mortis," both contained in that first Ave that shadowed forth the D but did not yet nail it) sustains over a shift toward G minor (fresh from that lovely turn into a G major harmony that says "not so fast" to the last line of text as it tries to conclude), with the same parallel chords as in the Bach but voiced more conventionally, and just when we think that this shift to minor might mark just another claptrap staging of Death,<sup>5</sup> he draws the D upward (yes, upward!) through D-sharp to E—*it's more than that for Chrissake, listen to the harmony*<sup>6</sup>—yes to E, the highest note of the whole motet, trumping the Ds that appeared as a crest in each previous line, now a foretaste of the last trump, with a G-

22

Cu - jus la - tus per - fo - ra - tum un - da flu - xit et san - gui - ne, es - to no - bis prae - gus ta - tum in

Cu - jus la - tus per - fo - ra - tum un - da flu - xit et san - gui - ne, es - to no - bis prae - gus

5 : : 4 : : 7 9 8 7 : 5 1 - 6 : : 6 6 7 6 : 6 7 3 4 4 : : 7 6 7 6

sharp in the bass keeping things taut but slacking soon to a gravid G, no stopping the eventual resolution now, a last poke at D in the sopranos, turning the consequential note of suffering and death into a memory, and then the strings run the table, each voice finding its pocket after gentle collisions—snick, snock, trill, dip, drop—I can do this thing, this holy thing, and when they hear those last clashes in my oh so common cadence, strings only, such simple stuff, they will know that every closing scrapes the same wound, that all my music has been about this dissonance, living into the dissonance, making it the Christ thing, the lines, the shifts, the counterpoint, the clear tuned triads, each line for me to sing, the curse of these notes, if they knew how I heard these sounds, Ave, Ave, Ach, Ach, why would He come down in a body anyway, take on this joker's costume, this bag of gas and pain, always lurching around for the next meal or the next round of rumpy pumpy<sup>7</sup>, did He want to be a mortal skin job after all; and if that's so, maybe he can't make His music without the likes of me, maybe I am Amadeus after all; or is this thing I do, when I make these sounds, is this thing I do the most deadly snare of all; those holy fathers all turned away from it, got it the hell out of church, too seductive, too much body stuff, and I know I can make anyone shiver just hearing my music slither, but I can also make that dirty thing be that clean thing, some true thing, the verum corpus, give them that holy sound, keep them in the rapture, no breaking the spell until the end, yes, The End! Can, O Christ, can this sound make a difference to Me? Yes, the friendly fantasy that he was somehow not one of us, because how could he find those places and be one of us, how could he sustain this musical dream



## notes

<sup>1</sup> Look it up yourself: there's no lack of accredited citations for this bit of biography. Find out as well that we're talking about June of the last year of his life—knowing this never fails to make a difference, for one always reads the last pages of a book with a keener eye.

<sup>2</sup> Sharp side, flat side, all around the town. Or, as was once spoken at the Fall From the Wall, “With larrons o’toolers clittering up and tombles a’ buckets clottering down.”

<sup>3</sup> The glow of D major at the outset, staying put for two whole bars, you could warm your hands over it.

<sup>4</sup> Namely, the last bars of his last chorale, “Vor deinen Thron tret’ ich hiermit” (dictated from deathbed!), where plangent parallels refuse to placate a plagal pedal.

<sup>5</sup> *Memento mori* is so often sounded as a moment of minor, as some tawdry souvenir rather than the *summa* of mortal admonishment.

<sup>6</sup> Something of an enharmonic miracle here: the D-sharp is set up to be an E-flat, the note that makes sense in the coloring and flow of this G minor eddy. But of course it is a D-sharp and moves accordingly, reaching the E that joins the G-sharp that takes us from the flat side into the sharp side. And when we hear that pitch strung and sung as a D-sharp in the context that asked for E-flat, there is a momentary haze of harmonic function, the tonal machine losing its geometry for an intake of breath—the last?—and then reformulating on the other side of Things.

<sup>7</sup> From the Latin *rumpus pumpus*.

<sup>8</sup> “Il filo” Leopold used to call it when lecturing his “figliò.”

<sup>9</sup> The motet lays out in four sections: the first is in D and ends on a half cadence, the dominant chord A (*Hail true body, born of the Virgin Mary*); the second modulates to the dominant key, thus making a stronger finish on the A sonority (*who suffered and was sacrificed on the cross for humankind*); the third ends once more on A but now restores it as a dominant of D, arrived at through minor-mode inflections (*from whose pierced side water and blood flowed*); the final confirms and closes in D major (*be for us a foretaste of the trial of death*). The harmonic punctuation: dominant (from major), Dominant (as key), dominant (from minor), Tonic. The second and third sections (encompassing the suffering) share parallel beginnings on A (that immediately diverge of course, one sharpward, one flatward); first and last sections begin in D. Brave little world of sound, fully limned, as by sailing to both ends of it all, but not quite beyond.

# "AVE VERUM CORPUS"

MOTETTE  
für 4 Singstimmen, 2 Violinen, Viola, Bass und Orgel

von  
**W.A. Mozart**

Köch. Verz. No. 618

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes the instrumental parts: Violino I, Violino II, and Viola, all marked *Adagio* and *sotto voce*. The second system includes the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenore, and Basso, also marked *sotto voce*. The lyrics are: "A - ve, a - ve, a - ve, rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri - a vir - gi - ne, A - ve, a - ve, a - ve, rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri - a vir - gi - ne,". The final system shows the Bassoon and Organ parts, marked *Adagio* and *tasto solo*, with a figured bass line: 5 3 : 6 6 4 4 4 2 : 6 5 : 9 8 : 6 5 : 4 3 : 5 4 : 6 5 : 4 : 5 \_\_\_\_\_.

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Musical score for the first system, featuring three staves with treble and bass clefs, containing melodic lines and chords.

ve - re pas - sum im - mo - la - tum in cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne.

ve - re pas - sum im - mo - la - tum in cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne.

ve - re pas - sum im - mo - la - tum in cru - ce pro hom - mi - ne.

im - mo - la - tum

Musical score for the second system, featuring three staves with treble and bass clefs, containing the vocal line and accompaniment for the first part of the text.

im - mo - la - tum

*tasto solo*

Musical score for the third system, featuring three staves with treble and bass clefs, containing the vocal line and accompaniment for the second part of the text.

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100





Eleven Pages for J. K. Randall

Scott Gleason

Since Nov 15 I Have been at it again ever since.<sup>1</sup>

The pasture, just before dawn, saw the first impatient kids already out barefoot in the dew, field dogs thinking about rabbits, house dogs more with running on their minds, cats in off of their night shifts edging, arching and flattening to fit inside the shadows they found. The woodland creatures, predators and prey, while not exactly gazing Bambilike at the intrusions, did remain as aware as they would have to be, moment to moment, that there were sure a lot of Traverses and Beckers in the close neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

My Friend: Keep looking In to Those Eyes.<sup>3</sup>

...the listener cannot miss the sense  
of power behind all this massive quietness;<sup>4</sup>

Then, after sigh, silence, pause and double pause,<sup>5</sup>

Seventy-five of the world's leading scholars, poets and philosophers gathered  
at Princeton last week . . . . .<sup>6</sup>

...a small rural university in New Jersey.<sup>7</sup>

...in the stix of N. J.;<sup>8</sup>

from mathematics to particulars—

. . . . .  
generally and so to man,<sup>9</sup>

“You know when I was in Princeton last? I do! I was invited by the governor. To his  
mansion. Here, to Princeton, to his mansion. I had dinner at the governor's mansion.”<sup>10</sup>

...but back in Newark in 1949...<sup>11</sup>

New York was too big, too much a congeries of the  
entire world's facets.<sup>12</sup>

Go home. Write. Compose . . .<sup>13</sup>

Music it for yourself.<sup>14</sup>

(“You cling to composition.”)<sup>15</sup>

Composition is not there, it is going to be there and we are here.<sup>16</sup>

...can be generated this way:<sup>17</sup>

Mmm . . . m . . m . . m<sup>18</sup>

Hum, hum!<sup>19</sup>

(pfung! ; !pfung)<sup>20</sup>

Tra la la la la la la la  
La tra tra tra tra tra tra<sup>21</sup>

tra-la la la dabatabada tra-la la la dabatabada tra-<sup>22</sup>

fibbadibba dooooooooo<sup>23</sup>

Woo-oo!<sup>24</sup>

“ooo!”<sup>25</sup>

A——: ‘And blah blah blah.’<sup>26</sup>

“Oh! ... Oh! ...

OOOOOOOOOOH!!!”<sup>27</sup>

“Yoho!”

“Oh-h-h——!”

“Oh, *Clinch!*”<sup>28</sup>

“Awwwwwwwwwww shit!”<sup>29</sup>

...*Shhh.*<sup>30</sup>

...sounds of melodies older than any folk-song.<sup>31</sup>

) heard  
 ) performed 1<sup>st</sup> person singular  
 untrained  
 right care

) -- !  
 . " ? ; >  
 { , ,  
 ...  
 ?  
 ? performed 1<sup>st</sup> person singular  
 untrained  
 Right  
 -- heard  
 ) 1<sup>st</sup> per sing  
 ..  
 -- untrained  
 heard  
 . Care  
 . right  
 ? ; performed

{<sup>32</sup>

Zoyd was presented with a thick tattered fake book full of Hawaiian tunes, and on the lounge synthesizer, a Japanese make he'd heard of but never played, he found a ukulele option that would provide up to three orchestral sections of eight ukes each. It would take several flights across the Pacific Ocean and back before Zoyd felt easy with this by no means user-friendly instrument. The critter liked to drift off pitch on him, or worse, into that shrillness that sours the stomach, curtails seduction, poisons the careful ambience.<sup>33</sup>

remember  
the vibrato,  
a wasp in the ear?<sup>34</sup>

imagination does not reconstruct them all with equal success.<sup>35</sup>

My productive

Behind us was a xylophone.<sup>36</sup>

—he knew it by heart. Which meant that he was in the best possible position to realize that he had never really heard it before.<sup>37</sup>

Was it not odd, she reflected?<sup>38</sup>

A catalogue of  
undecided moments at the edge of  
my thinking process.<sup>39</sup>

of his ideas was now rapid,<sup>40</sup>

—The succession

Her teeth were clenched. She rested speechless. She selected texts, then her meek eyes redd them: she resembled Greek-versed, Hellene-tempted clerks. The texts cheered her, they ended the spleen she felt beset her.<sup>41</sup>

10. *an Overture to Something Else; in seven amply segregated manifestations. : ffff. : i.e., Loud--gnome sane?*<sup>42</sup>

cutting pauses on reflection

Like.

Bag of in-your-face tricks?

the jokester, more ironic than all of

waiting suggests full range

beating heard as pitch not range

beauty in thinness (ranger danger)

multiples

A more direct way to communicate these thoughts: a skill I lack in the higher reaches of abstraction, arrived at through much hard work.

No Coltrane right now: requires too much.

Pauses don't allow breath, breathing does: breathe in those pitches.

Freddy Kruger, how old were you, how severely interruptions causing anguish.

What's with all this "symmetry?" "Symmetry" can be felt ahead of time. What happens when we call that "feeling" "symmetry?" Causally.

What's with all attempts gone awry?

Why not be overt about it?

...

Florid; calling it "classical" carries the wrong associations, but the advantage might yield fruit.

...

When discuss the black and grey?<sup>43</sup>

...

pointillism, classicism, experimentalism, raw material for avant-gardism, classicism, movie-musicism, Tom & Jerrism stretched too long for Tom & Jerrism, approaching in the wrong mannerism, yes & no, sickening, muted excitement, because it carries long enough to enter thinking, contemplative airs arrive too late for school children, connections remain emptied of content, memory deactivated, listening to whom while we wait?

...

Did I just read *the Shadow knows* as a movement title?

...

I now realize that I did not listen loudly enough.

...

A little late to the game.

...mysterious vibes...<sup>44</sup>

*Lyric Variations*<sup>45</sup>

we recall  
cuts  
just missing  
within itself, no  
strain normalized, flattened, still moving  
distance measured right to left, but near to far  
strokes lessen the blow of impending, not arriving, not yet here  
    yet every one as the one, yet all arriving, staying here  
anticipation of  
    dance  
naïve responses  
now press determine  
more an electronic piece, acoustic responses not naïve now  
shuttering at me, only through in space  
hearing sides, crossings transpire  
can't describe that one  
Here now, is a completely muted space (or place as we stay with it),  
either too close or far,  
but it ends sensibly.

Tolerable vibes ensued.<sup>46</sup>

*accumulator*<sup>47</sup>

(Pass 2)

muted deafening  
pulling from  
silence interruptions  
minimalism on the loud  
nothing dropping  
ending pulling on confusion  
waves of  
difficult to be with this moment  
jest understands beauty  
sacred humor

(Pass 3)

cage muted—smoothed audacity  
each sound returns away: not having arrived, simply occurring, without duration except while  
pulling away  
grooves lasting long enough to invite sympathy  
peaks in grooves as peaks in intensity and timbre  
arising from different regions, though similar  
unexpected shyness  
what could have been  
ending lasting through  
same?  
not difficult because of silence, but duration of wait  
still not ready for it to end that way

...the vibes were hopelessly right...<sup>48</sup>

*slitherest*<sup>49</sup>

Unbalanced,  
balanced by

-est?

heights

none certain

morphing onto oneself

morphing into another

downing lacking foundation

in-between naïve

forward riding

(only while time)

holding long enough

to draw attachments

warmth in his “dissonance/contextual consonance”

(B<sub>b</sub>-E-C)

I can't hear anything.<sup>51</sup> ...hands clap crazily...<sup>50</sup>

♪ = 138

(C#-D-C#)

Take care, song,<sup>52</sup>

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Notes

Thanks to Benjamin Boretz for the invitation, and Joseph Dubiel, Justin Hoffman, Eric Sewell, Paul Sheehan, and Evan Tobias for the conversations.

- <sup>1</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York, 1992), 124.
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (New York, 1990), 323.
- <sup>3</sup> J. K. Randall, "Statement to the NJ State Assembly Environment Committee, 8/5/93," in J. K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz, *Being About Music: Textworks 1960–2003*, vol. 2: 1978–2003 (New York, 2003), 357.
- <sup>4</sup> Donald Francis Tovey, "Vaughan Williams: LIX. Pastoral Symphony," in *Essays in Musical Analysis*, vol. II: Symphonies (II), Variations and Orchestral Polyphony (London, 1935), 129.
- <sup>5</sup> Raymond Queneau, "Auditory," in *Exercises in Style*, trans. Barbara Wright (New York, 1981), 122.
- <sup>6</sup> Williams, *Paterson*, 85.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 100.
- <sup>8</sup> J. K. Randall, *Compose Yourself: A Manual for the Young* (New York, 1995), Part II, No. 6, *n.p.*
- <sup>9</sup> Williams, *Paterson*, 5.
- <sup>10</sup> Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (New York, 1997), 177.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- <sup>12</sup> Williams, *Paterson*, xiii.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>15</sup> John Cage, "Rhythm etc.," in *A Year from Monday* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1967), 125.
- <sup>16</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation," in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl van Vechten (New York, 1962), 516.
- <sup>17</sup> Randall, *Compose Yourself*, 14.
- <sup>18</sup> Louis Zukofsky, "A" (Baltimore & London, 1978), 567.
- <sup>19</sup> Williams, *Paterson*, 112.
- <sup>20</sup> Randall, *Compose Yourself*, 11.
- <sup>21</sup> Williams, *Paterson*, 129.
- <sup>22</sup> Randall, *Compose Yourself*, Part II, No. 6, *n.p.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>24</sup> Pynchon, *Vineland*, 315.
- <sup>25</sup> Randall, *Compose Yourself*, 16.
- <sup>26</sup> David Foster Wallace, "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men," in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (New York & Boston, 1999), 24.
- <sup>27</sup> William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (New York, 2001), 124.
- <sup>28</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise* (New York, 2001), 46.
- <sup>29</sup> Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves by Zampanò*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2000), 225.

- <sup>30</sup> E. L. Doctorow, *Loon Lake* (New York, 1980), 166.
- <sup>31</sup> Tovey, "Vaughan Williams," 129.
- <sup>32</sup> Adapted from, J. K. Randall, "intimacy—a polemic, (Part VII)" in J. K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz, *Being About Music: Textworks: 1960–2003*, vol. 2, 1978–2003 (New York, 2005), n.p. Randall's performance is recorded on Open Space CD 10. For an interesting and enjoyable take on this piece, see Mary Lee Roberts, "Jim Randall's *Intimacy*," *The Open Space Magazine*, no. 2 (2000): n.p.
- <sup>33</sup> Pynchon, *Vineland*, 62.
- <sup>34</sup> Anne Sexton, "The Wonderful Musician," in *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* (Boston & New York, 1981), 264.
- <sup>35</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," in *Quasi una Fantasia*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London & New York, 1998), 271.
- <sup>36</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Cat's Cradle* (New York, 1963), 96.
- <sup>37</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Island* (New York, 1962), 274.
- <sup>38</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Ware, Hertfordshire, 1994), 51.
- <sup>39</sup> Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, *Rhythm Science* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 004.
- <sup>40</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York & London, 2003), 83.
- <sup>41</sup> Georges Perec, "The Exeter Text," in *Three by Perec*, trans. Ian Monk (Boston, 2004), 72.
- <sup>42</sup> J. K. Randall, *from a garland of C-sound* (New York, 2004), Open Space CD17.
- <sup>43</sup> See, The Beatles, *The White Album* (1968); Jay-Z, *The Black Album* (2004); and DJ Danger Mouse, *The Grey Album* (2004). See also, Kembrew McLeod, "Confessions of an Intellectual (Property): Danger Mouse, Mickey Mouse, Sonny Bono, and My Long and Winding Path as a Copyright Activist-Academic," *Popular Music and Society* 28/1 (2005): 79–93.
- <sup>44</sup> Ken Kesey, "The Search for the Secret Pyramid," in *Demon Box* (New York, 1986), 144.
- <sup>45</sup> J. K. Randall, *Lyric Variations for Violin and Computer [1965–8]* (New York, 1993), Open Space CD5.
- <sup>46</sup> J. K. Randall, "What is It about About?," in J. K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz, *Being About Music: Textworks: 1960–2003*, vol. 2, 1978–2003 (New York, 2003), 552.
- <sup>47</sup> J. K. Randall, *from (a benfest) The Trajectory of UN(-)*, in *Music Around Benjamin Boretz: Open Spaces 2005* (New York & Seattle, 2005), *Perspectives of New Music* CD43/Open Space CD20.
- <sup>48</sup> Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York, 1971), 110.
- <sup>49</sup> In Randall, *a garland of C-sound*.
- <sup>50</sup> Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, 46.
- <sup>51</sup> Steve Erickson, *Our Ecstatic Days* (New York & London, 2005), 204.
- <sup>52</sup> Zuckofsky, "A", 593; G. F. Handel, Courante from HW437 [1733], in *Pièces pour le Clavecin*, Second Collection.

# Playing *GAP*

Martin Goldray

I first met Jim Randall in 1995 when I went out to Princeton to play his *GAP 5* for him. I'm still not sure who it was that suggested I might be an appropriate pianist to play his music. I had heard that Jim was a formidable pianist himself. Fortunately, several years went by before I actually heard him play. Had I known how superlative he was as a performer of his own music, as I learned from his gripping performance of *GAP 7* at Taplin Hall, I might have been dissuaded from ever attempting to bring anything of my own to his music.

*GAP 5* was a delight to play. The slow pace, spare textures, the beautiful, delicate, dissonant chords sometimes fading away into silence, sometimes building to a terrible intensity (to describe just a few of the piece's textures) focused my attention on sound and ambiance more than any other piece I had ever played. Every aspect of the piano's sound seemed to be invited to become significant: attack, decay, resonance, register, color. Every dynamic level seemed to require a multiplicity of moods: a single note played quietly had to be mysterious or tender or gloomy or shy or plaintive. Chords had to have a similar variety and nuanced character. I tried to give different weights to loud chords: did they land heavily or lightly, did they stop time or move forward?

The piece seemed to demand that I try to project a special kind of ambiance, something I can't properly describe but which has to do with making it seem as if time had slowed down a little and as if each event and each component of each event had a special vividness and intensity. At the time I thought that there would have to be a visual component in conveying that feeling: how I sat, moved my hands between registers, the weight I seemed to impart through my arms, where I looked, the sense of stillness and concentration I tried to project. But listening to the recordings I think I overvalued those elements; they are there in the music itself. Another issue the piece raised for me was that the connections between notes became crucially important. Or course, we all think about articulation all the time, but here it seemed as though the meaning of every note or chord depended partly on how it ended. The piece invited innumerable ideas of this sort,

demanded them, made them beautifully possible to realize.

After performing *GAP 5* at Princeton, Jim invited me to play and record *GAPS 2-5*. *GAP 5* had at first seemed fairly reductive in its language. Now, when I listen to the recordings straight through, *GAP 5*, followed by *GAPS 2, 3* and *4*, seems opulent, rich, perhaps the way a devotee of Leonin might regard the effusions of Perotin. *GAP 4* seems to me almost frightening in its elemental intensity. Two examples: the drama of *Ds* with which it begins, and the crescendo alternation of 2 pitches in sections 2 and 5, where the pianist has to convey the sense that the piano has gone to, or beyond, the limit of intensity, with a single note in low and high registers. And the last section of *GAP 2* (Track 7, before the final “coda” section) seems, in context, so consoling, as if to tell us we’d traversed a bigger emotional world than we might have realized.

Jim very kindly wrote in his program note to *GAP 6* that I played the piece well from the start of our work together. It’s true that I responded to it right away. But I have never worked with a composer who had his deep, specific, nuanced understanding of how his music could be brought to life by an interpreter. The two operations, composing music and playing it vividly and dramatically in performance, have always seemed to me to be fairly separate *métiers*, and my experience with composers has mostly born that out. Jim combines the two with fierce intensity and insight, which is a privilege for any performer of new music to experience.

# Rebus Lieder

For JKR

Marjorie Tichenor

Sophie had already announced my arrival so there was no need to knock. Jim stood at the door pajama-clad, coffee cup in hand, scuffling in his deerskin mocs.

We had talked a lot about improvisation, mostly from the point of view of what we didn't want. We didn't want licks. We didn't want to flaunt chops. We didn't want finesse. We wanted to refrain from the riffing and the swagger in the hope of discovering the musical curve of the occasion as it arises, stripped of gunk. In fact, we were pro-awkward in our approach. Sure, we wanted to make gravy in a groove, but first we had to make the groove. Jim conceived of our groovemaking endeavors as meditations. I called them composition lessons – after all, Jim was the heavy and I was the svelterweight.

Once down in the basement, after a brief cup-refill stint en route, Jim would invariably ask what would I like to do. He'd say "how about," then suggest a pitch, a pitch class, a line of text or something else of similarly minimal ilk, each a potential perch (Benspeak) for our session that day. I'd say fine, we'd pipe down and the "record" button on the tape deck would get pushed.

Rebus Lieder

Hear the sound of a beard growing. Hope it's Jim's.



Enter a blooper

(she who smelt it dealt it)

It hangs in the air  
it just hangs there  
like rotting fruit  
before it drops.

Jim won't bite.

A blooper with a fermata on top  
sotto voce but stretched beyond succor.

Where's that Saint Bernard now, Jim, the one with Borodin's First Symphony in the barrel around his neck?

I'll take any embarrassment over this.

Marjorie Tichenor

The basement itself resonates with the sound before and the sound after the music that went down there; the sound of a time and a space; the sound of a scene.

(Can't you just hear it, that and the beard?)

With one crumarwide strike  
my clunker's a goner

unfrilly and right up my alley

Wave hello to the nice composer!

Might my own personal blooper be eulogized here as having been the core harmonic driver of the vespers and whispers that followed, that were followed, in turn, by the turning off of the light along with the simultaneous uttering of the word "cow?"

nah

not now

just a slow bloat of ego  
over a blip of tune  
imagined in the time of another room

gnome sane?

With a vowel flung hither  
and a tune yon

Let pinecone rejoice with tin can  
Let crumar rejoice with flute  
Let ektar rejoice with the ektara, which the flute feeds on  
Let pencil rejoice with the piano as with the thumb piano  
Let ocarina rejoice with art book  
Let Christopher rejoice with Smart  
Let bird whistle rejoice with pool table  
Let anomaly rejoice with chime  
Let zither rejoice with clothes dryer  
Let amplitude rejoice with introspection  
Let trumpet rejoice with thistle  
Let pulchritude rejoice with gong  
Let horn rejoice with footstep  
Let pan pipe rejoice with rattle  
Let frog rejoice with triangle  
Let cello rejoice with globule  
Let tambourine rejoice with flexatone  
Let gizroid rejoice with vocal cord  
Let fungo rejoice with reverb  
Let saxophone rejoice with dog bark  
Let pluck rejoice with bongo  
Let glottal stop rejoice with toothpick  
Let bass rejoice with circumstance  
Let microphone rejoice with crackle  
Let thrum rejoice with chip  
Let sludge rejoice with ultima Thule  
Let fog rejoice with word.

## In Re: JKR

### Part I: Art Margolin comes calling

Turning left off of Shady Brook Lane, you find Gulick Road to be a carefully laid out S-curve, and that the Randall residence is about at the apex of the second curve. As suggested, you pull into the driveway (park in the driveway, but, let's see, on the right side, because Ruth will need to get her car out later) although parking on the street is also an option. Your arrival is preannounced by barking from within—and presages the ruckus at entry. Knock, and after a short wait, during which time, although somewhat muffled, you can discern canine-constraining directives from behind the door, Ruth answers, pleasantly saying, Hello, how are you?, getting ready to go out, and with only slightly strained good humor (with the canine, not the human) still trying it seems vainly but finally successfully -- or perhaps the one lost interest just before the other gave up -- to stop the resident canine from exuberantly jumping-up (was it Fido, Sophie, Benji, Otis? -- no, his greeting was to stand back and menacingly bare his teeth at me, which Jim regards as a reaction unfathomably complex but not without its comic overtones -- But don't get too close, just to be on the safe side). Jack, the cat, passing by on his way to another room, looks over with blasé unconcern on the whole scene.

Jim and his “animals”. Each one special, an individual. Rocky the raccoon, eating from his mouth (he got a big kick out that – family and friends looked on, amused but apprehensive, isn't this a wild animal, what if bites him?) We also heard about the turtle – a real character! And each of the dogs – “a real friend”. (Did you really doubt the sentiments so touchingly, poignantly expressed in To The Township Committee weren't heartfelt?)

Jim, Art's here – should he come up? Always a question on the threshold: are we meeting upstairs or in the air conditioned breezeway. No answer. The door may be closed. Ruth goes upstairs to reiterate the query. I stand and wait, looking around the living room, little used socially, except, maybe critically so, as a transition space, for all concerned, between the world outside and the functional interior, lying beyond, of the Randall domicile. A couch, primarily a resting place for the dog, is on the opposite wall. Unadorned, almost industrial grade, metal bookcases flank the fireplace on the side wall. The books are the thing, not the container. The Complete Short Stories and the New York Edition of Henry James -- the former in fact complete, the latter not (in both senses: this selective compilation was selectively purchased, says Jim) -- occupy the middle shelf. Henry James is an acknowledged forebear, as are numerous novelists and historians (Francis Parkman

and Henry Adams are nearby), their works, read and re-read, overburdening plain shelves throughout the house (a condition only partially remedied by Sophie, who, late in life, developed a taste for book bindings, and decimated the collection on the lower shelves.) It is not overtly expected, but perhaps hoped (as much as perhaps doubted), that students will be conversant with this heritage. Apart from considerable intrinsic interest, it is, after all, a rich reservoir of ideas for thinking about music, for writing about music, so why would you ever decide not to be? In any event, it sure makes conversation a lot more interesting.

He's waiting for you upstairs. Up two short flights -- the second completely enclosed, and steeper than the first -- and through the portal to the master bedroom/study/listening room, a big picture window overlooking the verdant backyard. Jim's sitting on the far side of the desk, in a niche created by bookcases -- packed tightly with scores, books, records -- the desk, and a TV stand. A surfeit of objects in a space seemingly much too small. But each object is deliberately, precisely positioned with respect to its immediate and more distant neighbors -- producing an impression of an arrangement peculiarly elegant -- so that you don't even notice at first that the walls are bright orange, or did orange walls ever look quite so right? Hey Arthur, how's it going? Have a seat (opposite side of desk.) Want something to drink? (there's a choice: spring water, celestial seasonings herbal tea, strong coffee; as you become a repeat visitor and your choice of beverage --just water, please -- is known, it is immediately proffered -- perhaps with the humorously prodding suggestion that you might care to expand your horizons and try the red zinger tea, although you eventually get to know that issues regarding expansions, and limitations, of horizons -- tea perhaps on the cusp of consideration -- are regarded with deadly seriousness). What's he wearing? Maybe his "work clothes" -- flannel pajamas, very neat, (pressed? hard to believe) never looking slept in, tan moccasins. Was it the time he had an unlit pipe perpetually in his mouth? He'd given up cigars cold turkey (the dentist said precancerous lesion, you'd better quit, and I said, no problem, you're talking to an ex-smoker: will-power, on this occasion, applied instantaneously, not an issue). We were all so glad, that cigar smoke was rough. At regular, too frequent intervals, the cigar preparation tool -- a short steel shaft -- would emerge and a fresh cigar reamed out, right down the middle -- an ominous gesture if you were in the middle of trying to make your point (until he was informed one day that that particular procedure was lacking in both efficacy and refinement -- the proper way was to carefully snip off the end with a suitably fashioned, smaller and less menacing implement; we were unprepared for the change, these were two very different acts, portents, configurations of energy, with new and unexplored domains of implications regarding critical commentary). You might borrow a book from him, or take home the piece of paper you'd been writing on, and there would be that cigar odor. But, so transferred, and attenuated, it wasn't unpleasant, and, for some, suffused the object with his presence, which you'd thus been able to take away with you. -- Elizabeth Billington noticing the book "The Bad Popes" recently borrowed from Jim on my desk, picking it up, delicately elevating it to just

Arthur Margolin

under her nose: “hmmm” -- eyebrows slightly raised, mysteriously knowing smile forming -- “that smell”. (A favorite.)

So, what’s up?

Well, I had some thoughts on your new piece “When the Birds Come Calling” --

“Ok”, then, with mock formality, hyper-extending each vowel: “Pray proceed.”

[Part II: When the “When the Birds Come Calling” Comes Calling;  
next issue]

# **The Education of an Electronic Music Composer**

**Hubert Howe**

I would like to explain how it came about that I became a composer of computer music at a time when the very idea of it scarcely existed, when I was studying at an institution that was known for innovation in new music but not so much in electronic music, where only one professor (Milton Babbitt) had any experience with it (but he pursued it at another university in New York). One of the things I have tried to do over the last few years has been to put my music in order, resynthesizing early electronic pieces that existed only on tape, which is a rapidly-disappearing medium. In the summer of 2004 I found the print-outs for what was my first acknowledged computer piece, which I hadn't listened to for years: my *Computer Variations*, written in 1967. This brought back memories long forgotten, and it reminded me of what things were like back then. This music was written under conditions that most of the people reading this probably couldn't imagine, much less find it possible to work under. I'd like to start by describing how my education developed, and then what computers and computer music were like in the early 1960s, when I began.

## **Music at Princeton in the 1960s**

I arrived at Princeton University in 1960, a freshman from Los Angeles who had never been off of the west coast until I drove across country to get there. Princeton in those days was the center of the universe for new music. The senior composer on the faculty was Roger Sessions, a famous man whom even I had heard of. Later, I got to know him personally, and I have come to have a great appreciation for his music; but I never had the opportunity to study with him, because he faced mandatory retirement at age 67. Also on the faculty was Milton Babbitt, a composer whom I did get to know and who has served as a role model and mentor for me practically all my life. For the preceding two summers, something called the "Princeton Seminar in Advanced Musical Studies" had been taking place, which brought numerous composers and other luminaries there to discuss subjects that then were very new but now are taught in practically every school that takes music seriously. Another composer on the faculty, with whom I had the strongest relationship, was Jim Randall, who was also crucial in helping me overcome many of the obstacles I faced at that time. Still other composers I worked with included Earl Kim, Malcolm Peyton, Edward T. Cone, Claudio Spies, Peter Westergaard, and most

importantly, Godfrey Winham. Musicologists included Lewis Lockwood, Arthur Mendel, Leo Treitler, and Isaac Thomas.

Equally important to the environment then was the cadre of other students, which included many who have gone on to distinguished careers. Composers I knew as students included Will Johnson, my roommate and the only other music major in my class, James Dashow (another undergraduate like me), John Harbison, Mark DeVoto, Robert Taylor, Edwin Dugger, Philip Batstone, John Rogers, George Burt, Peter Huse, Norman Dinnerstein, Joel Gressel, George Edwards, Fred Lehrdahl, Phil Werren, Gerald Warfield, John Melby, Steven Gerber, Richard Cann, Michael Dellaira, Frank Brickle, and Paul Lansky, who became one of my closest friends, although he did not become interested in computer music until later. Theory students included Arthur Komar, Joel Lester, and Michael Kassler, a brilliant child prodigy composer who was in the process of giving up composition for theory (he later gave up music for robotics and moved to Australia after a short career with the CIA).

My education at Princeton might have turned out very differently if it were not for one professor I met during my first year, Jim Randall. He was originally from Cleveland, and he studied at Columbia and Princeton. He came to Princeton because of Milton Babbitt, whom he both admired, loved, and hated. He was a deeply skeptical person, mistrusting almost anything establishmentarian. Even the way he would dress, wearing an old hat with a hole in it and never wearing a necktie, was to mock the dress standards of a place like Princeton (they eliminated the requirement that students wear coats and ties to classes just before I got there). He questioned authority in almost every way possible.

Jim was an outstanding and unconventional teacher when I got to know him. He never used a textbook, but instead formulated the entire subject matter of his courses himself. He had a deep understanding of tonal music, but he disliked harmony textbooks and thought that they oversimplified music. His introduction to tonal music was through species counterpoint, and he insisted on rules that made the process very difficult – sometimes nobody could find a correct solution. After that, his method of teaching was to develop generalizations from analyzing parts of compositions and to present musical details as problems to solve. Sometimes entire compositions were developed out of small fragments, all details being created from aspects of the original. Discussions would often extend beyond class time, and he would meet with me and other students for hours on end in his office, discussing all kinds of musical issues, sometimes not related to the courses we were taking. He would always press students to look more deeply into the situation, not to take anything for granted, and to realize that some arguments undermined others, including even our basic assumptions about music. His method was to expose the contradictions within our own reasoning rather than to assert that it was

wrong or stake out a different position.

Jim was on leave during my first semester, but the music theory course I took, taught by Leo Treitler, was apparently based on his material, and he took over the class in the spring term. I had never taken music theory before, but I had a pretty extensive knowledge of musical literature from my experience as an oboist during high school, when I played semi-professionally, professionally, and in the UCLA orchestra. I was immediately attracted to the material and to the way he presented it, and I learned a tremendous amount. I didn't realize until later how unconventional his approach was. There was none of the chord-pushing and labeling-as-explanation of conventional harmony books. (For example, he never used names for dissonant chords; they were either triads or "weird chords.") Through creative species counterpoint, simple harmony, and clear explanations of how dissonances arise in tonal music, we learned how to put tonal music together, so that, after one year, I could handle practically any harmony exercises and compose simple pieces. (Of course, knowing how to handle harmony, which is now practically the entire content of most music theory curricula, was only a small part, perhaps the necessary prerequisite, for understanding tonal music.) During the summer between my freshman and sophomore years I read Roger Sessions' entire book *Harmonic Practice* and did most of the exercises. I was sometimes shocked at Sessions' own solutions to his exercises and sometimes felt that mine were better! I also thought that his explanations of more modern "twentieth century" examples went pretty much off the deep end, although in contradistinction to most harmony books, I think he was actually trying to explain how he composed his pre-serialist music. I made such progress in that first year that I started taking graduate courses as a sophomore.

I can't remember, but that may have been the only course I ever took with Jim as an undergraduate. We had developed such a close relationship that I continued to see him and pick his brain about my other courses, and music in general, from then on. He was always generous with his time, and I could almost always count on finding him in his office. Sometimes we got so wrapped up in our conversations that we didn't want to stop when it came time for such necessities as eating, and he would invite me home for dinner, where I met his lovely wife and three children. I think he understood that, while I may have come across to others as critical of the conventional thinking about music that I was encountering, I was always motivated by genuine curiosity, and I wanted to understand as much as possible about how music was put together. I am sure that he would still agree with me that many of the most important questions about music aren't even asked, let alone answered, in many music courses. His method of dealing with these questions was often to probe me with further questions, with the goal ultimately to be one of rephrasing the problem and narrowing the focus, so that at least part of the issue could be addressed.

There was also often a consistent theme to his reasoning – namely, that the goal should be to discover and articulate the *reasons for doing something*. This perspective informed much of his theory teaching as well. In deciding how to handle some dissonance resolution, for example, the answer would lie in what the consequences of one resolution over another might suggest for other events in the piece. When we would look at real pieces of music from the literature, he would point out that there would often be a consistent approach in one piece and a different one in another. One of his exercises consisted of trying to compose an entire short piece out of a single fragment of 2-3 measures of a piece by Beethoven or Schumann. I would often talk to him about courses he was teaching but I wasn't taking. I sometimes was inspired enough to do some of his exercises myself, and I would compare my results with his. He wrote some of the most imaginative and inspired tonal music I had ever heard. In his hands, at least, I got the feeling that tonal music was still alive, and original music could be composed. It is tough even to describe this music now, because its surface was very reminiscent of its tonal model, but the structure and content were original. I have used this approach in much of my own theory teaching, while covering the topics mentioned in the syllabus, nevertheless basing all the exercises on a bunch of specific pieces from the literature, and then comparing the students' work with both the originals and my own solutions.

Practically all the students who encountered Jim Randall in his classes found him challenging and unshakable. Many of them felt uncomfortable with him for this, because he would find shortcomings in some of their basic assumptions about music. I thought, however, that it was an invaluable experience for them, as they represented some of the best and brightest, but also some of the most smug and self-satisfied, students from America's best undergraduate colleges. His presence was an indispensable part of the Princeton scene for many years, filling a role that no one else dared to play.

### **My Early Work with Computers**

During my upperclass years at Princeton, I lived in a large suite with several brilliant roommates, one of whom became our class valedictorian and another a well-known psychologist; what we had in common was an interest in and respect for great music. Some of them were engineers, who were learning computer programming. I became interested in programming too, and I began to see that it could be relevant to music.

Around this time, a graduate student named Michael Kassler was beginning what would eventually become a major research effort called Musical Information Retrieval. Though he envisioned this project to apply to any music, in practice, since it was directed by the music historians Lewis Lockwood and Arthur Mendel, it became focused on the music of Josquin Desprez. Kassler's

intention was to encode a musical score as computer input and then interrogate large numbers of compositions with regard to specific properties, in the case of Josquin having to do with *musica ficta*. What this meant was that a need developed to start encoding compositions as computer data, and I managed to obtain a job as their chief data inputter and keypuncher. This was vastly superior to the other jobs I had had at Princeton, and I put in many hours. I also got Kassler to revise his input system slightly to incorporate some shortcuts that I had worked out. Thus, from two separate sources, I had begun to develop an acquaintance and experience with computers.

The majority of my undergraduate education was oriented, as it still is, to tonal music, and most of the courses I took never mentioned anything past the nineteenth century. Living as we do now in the twenty-first century, I think it is high time this practice changed, and I have been instrumental in helping to bring this about at Queens College, where I teach; but this was particularly absurd at Princeton, which nurtured some of the most important developments in contemporary music at that time – the first issue of *Perspectives of New Music*, written almost entirely by Princeton people, came out in 1962, when I was a Junior! I did once take a course in 12-tone music from Milton Babbitt, but, disappointingly, he focused mainly on orthodox 12-tone music and did not cover any of his own innovations. It was again Jim Randall who came to my rescue, and again without the benefit of a course in the subject.

As I was beginning to explore more twentieth-century music, I had begun talking to Jim about his ideas on these subjects, and he proposed using the computer to verify some of the properties he had worked out by hand in previous years. He gave me a manuscript he had written called *Pitch-Time Correlation*, which he never published. This contained a number of revelations that interested me greatly and which I began to use later when I began composing in earnest; but at this time I was mainly interested in the theory. We began with calculating pitch structures, and indeed I was able to verify that his hand calculations had been correct. We moved on to other things, like computing interval content, multiplicative operations and subcollections. These were all fairly simple, and we moved on to more complicated things, first to computing all possible arrays which he called generated collections and then to other properties of arrays such as congruence. Later I wrote this up in my first publication, “Some Combinational Properties of Pitch Structures,” published in *Perspectives of New Music* in 1965. Some of my results surely helped him in the compositions he was writing then, particularly *Mudgett: Monologues of a Mass Murderer*. Our process was always that he would propose the topics to explore, and I would do the programming; but he later learned programming and was able to improve on some of my entangled code. I found all these discoveries so exciting that I initially planned to become a music theorist. It was only after I learned about the other work in that field, which seemed divorced from reality, that I decided to put all my efforts into composition, which I always intended to pursue anyway. My negative reaction to some contemporary music theory

arises from the failure of theorists to look deeply into the music itself, imposing ideas of what they would like music to be rather than seeing it for what it is. I was later to incorporate many of Jim's ideas into my doctoral dissertation, *Multi-Dimensional Arrays*, and in my compositions. I don't know why he never published any of this work himself. It might have influenced many other budding composers. I also never knew how much of his work related to similar ideas being developed at the same time by Godfrey Winham; curiously, it was a subject neither of them every talked about.

The next chapter of my relationship with Jim Randall involved our pursuit of computer music synthesis at Bell Telephone Laboratories, a subject I will return to later.

### Early Electronic Music

The first electronic piece I ever heard was Milton Babbitt's *Vision and Prayer*, sung beautifully in a Princeton lecture hall in (I think) 1961 by Bethany Beardslee. I was so impressed with it that I began studying as much electronic music as I could find, completely on my own, never for any kind of course I took, and indeed against the grain of my education then. This music seemed to subvert much of what I was being taught about the music of the past and even the music that people then valued of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. I read about the RCA Synthesizer and discovered Babbitt's earlier piece, *Composition for Synthesizer*. I discovered music by Vladimir Ussachevsky and Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Gesang der Junglinge*. Later I learned about the French *musique concrète*.

As a graduate student, I traveled to New York City to work in the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, where I met Ussachevsky but actually studied with Andres Lewin-Richter. I also got to know some other composers and their works, including Pril Smiley and Alice Shields, who helped Ussachevsky with many of his works, and Mario Davidovsky. Only a few of the Princeton graduate students were interested in traveling up to the city to do this, even though it was available to anyone who wanted to. I went up with my fellow student Eric Regener, who I think became a theorist in Canada, and the only other composer I remember working there was Jonathan Laitin, who wrote something called *Distortions*, an apt description of his piece. At that time, all of the Columbia-Princeton facilities were actually at Columbia, and Princeton's contribution mainly was to support the RCA Synthesizer, housed there, which Babbitt used. Princeton never acquired any synthesis equipment, although they did at one time put in a tape-editing studio. Their interest, which I guess was also mine as well, was strictly in using computers.

### Early Computers

I began to work with computers, completely on my own and without formal

instruction ever, in about 1962. One of the things that amazed me was the size of the machine. My first machine was the IBM 7090, which is now referred to as one of the large mainframes of an earlier era. The machine took up an entire large room, probably 700 to 1000 square feet in size. One of the impressive things was the console, which was full of blinking lights. Every time a number was loaded into the accumulator, which was the main register that machine used, a light corresponding to each bit was lit. Users were not allowed into the computer room, but it had a large window into which we could look to see if and when our jobs would be run. The main console, however, only took up about as much room as a large desk. What occupied most of the floor space were several banks of magnetic tape drives, which were the main storage medium. There must have been 10 to 15 of them. Every time data was written and had to be reread, the tape had to be rewound. Also impressive in size was the printer, which was also about the size of a large desk. The printer was the main way you received output, which consisted of fan-folded sheets of 11 by 17-inch paper. Some users impressed others with the large amounts of print-out they could produce on a given occasion, much of which was thrown out.

The way that you got programs and data into the computer was through punched cards. A keypunch machine was much like a typewriter, except that for each line of text it produced a card, much like the ones that produced the hanging chad from the 2000 election in Florida. It was hard to read the text from the card, because the ribbons in the keypunches weren't always changed. To print out your deck, you had to go to a separate card reader and printer and pore over your typing. Because the software that had been developed wasn't as "smart" as it is now, most of the data you punched had to be placed within various columns on the cards, which meant that you had to count spaces. If you dropped a deck of cards, woe to you! Not only would you have to re-sort them, but if they became bent, they would jam the card reader, so you probably had to retype some. Every now and then you would get back a job in which nothing happened, and the only clue was a mysterious message like (one of my favorites) "bad B3." This meant that the card was mispunched, so that it thought there was an unrecognizable character. You had to figure out what was bad and resubmit it.

The 7090 was devoted mainly to running your jobs and doing all the calculations required and did not perform such mundane tasks as reading in your program and data cards. For this purpose there was an entirely separate computer devoted to the task of reading the cards and writing them on a high-speed tape. The concept of the video monitor was still years away. Jobs were queued up one after another in a manner known as batch processing, so several jobs were done at one time, and you had to wait till they were all done before you could get your output. The computer time that you used was accounted for to the fraction of a second, and the last page gave statistics which showed the time and a dollar amount charged for it. We

referred to the charges as “funny money,” but it all had to be allocated and strictly accounted for, and you had to keep reapplying for more each time you ran out. Fortunately, the university owned the computer and never turned us down, but they did give higher priority to people who were doing outside-sponsored research that brought in real dollars, including one group that used enormous amounts of computer time to predict the weather.

There were very limited computer languages available at that time. Almost everybody programmed in Fortran (which stands for “formula translation”), but the advanced programmers used assembly language, which I ultimately learned. A few business types (of which there weren’t many) used COBOL. Fortran was an excellent tool for working out complex mathematical formulas which were at the heart of most applications that people were running. It was not so good at formatting output, and graphs were nearly impossible. You could approximate those things, but you couldn’t do anything of the sort people do now.

The IBM 7090, which was state-of-the-art at that time, used six-bit characters (the byte didn’t come in till later). This is why all the outputs, as well as the computerized bills people began receiving at that time from big companies, only used capital letters. Six bits allowed 64 characters, not enough to have both cases of the alphabet as well as all the other characters used in the ASCII system (which stands for “American Standard Code for Information Interchange”). ASCII was invented in the early 1950s, and it came to be embedded into so much office equipment that it was almost impossible to get rid of it. Nowadays we use what’s called “Extended” ASCII, or EBCDIC (“Extended Binary Coded Decimal Information Code,” something invented by IBM), codes which use 8-bit bytes that include upper and lower case as well as all kinds of other special characters. Six 6-bit characters were combined into 36-bit words and 72-bit double words, which are incidentally more accurate than the 32-bit words and 64-bit double words we now use. The later use of programs written exclusively in lower-case letters in languages like C was a reaction against the all capitals of the six-bit hegemony.

One of the advantages of working at that time was that, since the computer was so large and expensive, it had to be housed in a separate wing of a building, and everybody who wanted to use it had to go there to work. Thus, all the computer users got to know each other, and there were interesting interactions between us. Many scientists and engineers were surprised and interested to learn that we were using the machine for projects in music, and I was interested to learn of their work in fields like astronomy, statistics and engineering. Things are very different today, where everybody works alone on his or her private machine. You might say that the internet brings us together, but it’s not face to face.

These computers were so unlike our present-day personal computers. It’s hard

to believe that, if it weren't for what people did then, PC's might never have come about. The main value of the work we did then was in *stating and formulating the problem so that the computer could do meaningful work for us*. This is still true, and those of us who use any computer programs come to have a deep appreciation for the fact that the computer forces us to understand and state the problem so that the computer can do something useful. Even though we feel we have a deep understanding of our work once we have formulated it this way, the ones who benefit even more are the programmers who design the systems that we use.

### Godfrey Winham

When I was helping Jim Randall with his early computer music, I met Godfrey Winham, who was a truly extraordinary person. First, you need to know some things about his personal life. He came from a very wealthy family in England, and, after meeting Milton Babbitt, came to study at Princeton in about 1954. He studied music, mathematics, and philosophy, particularly logic and the philosophy of science, and was brilliant in all of them. He had written a senior thesis, which Jim Randall described as a milestone in the history of music theory but was really more about music criticism and philosophy. After graduating, he bought a home in Princeton but was never around the Music department. He married the singer Bethany Beardslee, whom I did get to know and heard sing many times. She had a beautiful voice and was wonderfully generous, and I came to appreciate the amount of work it was for her to learn all those difficult Babbitt pieces. I finally met Godfrey when the Princeton Symphony played his *Composition for Orchestra*, which I thought was very interesting, and not at all what I had expected (it was completely unlike anything by Babbitt). This was written up by Jim Randall in an article in *Perspectives of New Music* in 1963. By this time Godfrey had lost any vestige of his former English accent.

Godfrey was independently wealthy and didn't need to work (Jim Randall said his parents "owned England"). When I first began working with him, he was getting up at about five in the afternoon, working through the night, and going to sleep late in the morning. This was tough because he and Bethany had two young children. After Jim Randall and I had gone up to Bell Labs several times to convert his piece *Mudgett: Monologues of a Mass Murderer* to sound, Godfrey began to get interested in going too. When I became a graduate student in 1965, Godfrey decided to accept a \$1 year per position at the Music Department to export Bell Labs' Music 4 program to Princeton. They set up a room in the Engineering Quadrangle, where I spent most of my time as a graduate student. One person who helped out at that time included the Electrical Engineering Professor Ken Stieglitz, who later had a much closer relationship with Paul Lansky.

Godfrey and Bethany were avid gamblers, and they would sometimes take trips

to casinos so they could pursue their habit (this was long before legalized gambling and casinos in Atlantic City or on Indian reservations). He was also an avid chess player who competed in big tournaments.

Godfrey was the kind of person who thought deeply about all kinds of problems, and he actually wrote down extensive notes about these in notebooks, which Leslie David Blasius later tried to formulate in 1997 in his book *The Music Theory of Godfrey Winham*. I don't think those thoughts will ever be fully deciphered, because they didn't represent Godfrey's final ideas about those subjects. When he did want to publish something, he would formulate it in such detail and clarity that you would wonder why you had never seen it that way. He was the first composer to receive the Ph.D. in composition at Princeton, and his dissertation, called *Composition with Arrays*, was truly a milestone in the history of music theory, and it was extremely influential on me. Godfrey was always doing work like this on his own. He had no reason to state it in a form that anyone else could understand. He didn't even need to get the degree, but he took advantage of the opportunity to write down the ideas he had been thinking about. This set a daunting standard for everyone who came after him. His thesis consisted of the orchestral composition I mentioned before and this paper.

Godfrey worried about the survival of serious music, and in fact he told me he thought it wouldn't survive. I remember a statement in his thesis that said something like "in the event of the failure of serious music to survive, those who have pretended ignorance and concealed knowledge of their own methods will have more to answer for." This was another reason he took the time and effort to write it.

Godfrey knew and loved tonal music. He was deeply impressed by the theories of Heinrich Schenker, long before Schenker was as well known as he is now, and studied all of Schenker's writings that he could find. One of his champions was Brahms. Towards the end of his life, when his cancer was briefly in remission, he wrote a piece for piano called *Variations on a Theme by James Pierpont* (the theme was *Jingle Bells*) that was full of Brahmsian harmonies. He was a fan of Arnold Schoenberg and kept a photograph of his stern demeanor staring out at you in his home. He thought that Schoenberg was probably the greatest genius in the history of music, and that his Vienna reached the high point in Western culture, with figures such as Sigmund Freud and the philosopher Rudolph Carnap, another one of his heroes.

As a composer, Godfrey didn't write much, and he once told me that he didn't really consider himself primarily as a composer, but maybe more a theorist and thinker about music. What he did write was outstanding. I only remember his orchestra piece, three piano compositions which were played as one set, and a short computer piece that I heard in numerous forms. I don't think he ever finished it, but he did release a section of it on a recording later.

When I graduated from Princeton in 1964, I turned down a Fulbright grant to Germany to stay at Princeton and continue work on computer music. When I began studying composition as a graduate student, Godfrey Winham was the first person I worked with. I was his first student, and his only student that year. Since at that time I had taken practically every course in music that Princeton offered, I didn't have to take any courses except composition and independent study in computer music. As a result, we would work all week on computer music and meet for lessons on Saturday night. We would often meet for several hours at a time. He was a very harsh critic of nearly everything I wrote. Probably the best comment he ever made to me was "well, that wasn't so bad." He would see deeply into details that I sometimes had an inkling about but couldn't yet understand.

All the composing I did at that time with him was tonal music, and one of my accomplishments was a series of songs that Bethany Beardslee kindly sang once, with myself at the piano. One thing he said once was that the I-III progression wasn't very useful because it could only support a neighboring note and not a passing tone, which was the primary source of melodic motion. I thereupon wrote a song all based on the I-III progression, and it had a modulatory scheme of C to E to A-flat and back to C. He thought this was successful (ultimately), although I had to agree that what I was doing was not as common a procedure as more traditional harmonic progressions like I-V. Another piece was based on resolving a particular dissonant chord in different ways, and he would use such a springboard to launch into general discussions of how just about every musical event has multiple interpretations and ambiguities, and such events occur routinely in all music.

Godfrey and I were peers in our work on computer music, and while there was a clear difference between our experiences as composers, he still treated me more like a peer in composition than most teachers treat their students. My relationship with Godfrey was so fluid that we usually went on for hours, not thinking about practical things like eating and sleeping.

#### **Music 4, Music 4B, and their Successors**

Godfrey and I began the project of rewriting Bell Labs' Music 4 program into what we called Music 4B. He was the sort of person that demanded to know every reason for everything, and we spent countless hours arguing about such details. We developed the model that later became the csound score, which made it much easier to encode music for computer input. We invented the octave-point-pitch class form of pitch notation, which was actually Jim Randall's idea. We invented the carry feature for the score, which vastly reduced the typing (or rather, I should say keypunching) of data. Godfrey worked out the method for encoding tempos and changes, which is still used today in csound.

We added many new unit generators to the program, almost all of which still exist in csound. We debugged some of Bell Labs' unit generators. Ken Steiglitz's help was invaluable for working out digital filtering. The mathematics of digital filtering require knowing complex numbers, and Godfrey, of course, got into all those details. I never really understood them. About the same time that John Chowning was doing his work in reverberation, Godfrey added it to Music 4B, and explained the working of comb and all pass filters in detail, although I think he may have picked up the information about reverberation from Bell Laboratories.

Another project that I worked on with Godfrey concerned the integration of the equal loudness contours (the "Fletcher-Munson" curves of acoustics books) into timbre generation. We designed a unit called FORMNT, which combined that into a unit that also generated non-harmonic partials and which he wrote up in an article in about 1966. I used that unit extensively in my early pieces.

About this time in history, the mainframe computer world began to change rapidly. IBM wanted to spread computing throughout the business world, and they wanted to design computers that could allow businesses to get in cheaply and upgrade as they grew. This led to the System 360 line of computers, which was a great advancement at the time. We, who had been humming along nicely with our 7090 and later 7094 computers, realized that this would require vast changes to our programs. Music 4B, as well as its predecessor Music 4 at Bell Laboratories, was written in tightly-coded 7090 assembly language, which was necessary because the computers were so slow. In order to adapt to the new computers, we would have to rewrite all our programs.

Thus, in about 1966, I began the process of translating Music 4B into Fortran, a program that I called Music 4BF. This successfully bridged the gap, and many composers who began to use the program learned Music 4BF rather than Music 4B. Also about this time, a new person arrived on the scene, Barry Vercoe. He had been teaching mathematics at Oberlin, but he was interested in composing, and he was a crack computer programmer. He got a job as a programmer in the town of Princeton but began hanging around the computer lab extensively, and thoroughly learned Music 4B from Godfrey. His job was at such a high level that he had very flexible hours, so he could more or less work whenever he wanted to. In about a year, he had written Music 360, an orchestra compiler in IBM 360 assembly language that became the standard of excellence for computer music composers. It was modeled extensively on Music 4B, and you could easily translate an orchestra from one to the other. Barry spent hours on developing the ability to include arithmetic expressions on a single line in the orchestra, which he compiled very efficiently. By the time that the 7094 was retired, computer music was in even better shape, and more and more composers began using it.

When I started teaching at Queens College in 1967, we obtained an SDS (later XDS) Sigma-7 computer that was pretty good for the times but incompatible with the IBM 360, so I wrote an assembly-language program called Music 7 as a compiler for that computer. It pretty much paralleled Music 360, except for the fact that I had separate operations for each of the mathematical functions which Vercoe could combine on a single line. I used this with my students for several years, until the College moved to a PDP 10 computer in the mid-1980's, which forced a return to Music 4BF. Soon, personal computers overtook the computing world, and csound appeared.

Barry Vercoe went on to spend a year writing music on something like a Ford Foundation grant. Later he landed a job at MIT, which was just the right match for his skills. He developed the computer music program there and ported his programs to the PDP-11 computers in a program called Music 11. This was used for about a decade before he developed csound, which is now the most widely-used program around the world. Csound contains almost all of the elements that go back to Music 4B, although both Barry and hundreds of other people have added new elements to it. The official version of the program, one of the most successful freeware applications ever, is now maintained by Prof. John Fitch in England.

### **Jim Randall's Computer Music**

No discussion of the history of computer music at Princeton would be complete without mentioning the seminal contributions of Jim Randall. He was the first composer to produce computer music there, and he served as the model user for many issues that we worked out. In fact, electronic music might never have come to Princeton were it not for Jim Randall.

Randall was a very interesting composer. I had heard some of his instrumental pieces, particularly a song on an e. e. cummings poem and a series of pieces he called *Demonstrations* for various combinations of instruments. In about 1964 he began work on his piece *Mudgett: Monologues of a Mass Murderer* which he realized on the computer, and I accompanied him to Bell Laboratories to convert his tapes to sound and later to splice together the master. This was the first really interesting computer piece I had ever heard (the Bell Labs stuff I had heard was experimental in non-musical ways), and I began to realize the power of the computer. Later he wrote another piece, *Lyric Variations* for violin and computer, that was even more interesting. It explored all kinds of new sounds, particularly non-harmonic tone clusters, reverberation, noise, and very slow vibrato and glissando on single tones and clusters. He used to boast that the middle section of that piece, probably the most interesting two minutes I had ever heard, held the "north central New Jersey record" for the amount of computer time it took to generate, over nine hours. (Later, I was to surpass this myself.)

Randall had a number of devoted students. Students either feared him or were devoted to him. When he retired, I remember seeing many of my old friends who had studied with him both when I was a student and afterwards. But as time went on, he became more interested in words than music. He became very creative with language, inventing words and often expressing things in flowery ways. He has now written many text works, and he may now consider his words more important than his music. His most recent music which I know is a series of pieces called "Gaps" that are very slow and minimalist in character.

His teaching also changed. At one point, I heard that he gave a class called something like "projects in composition and performance" where students sat around in a circle improvising on anything they could find that could make noise. It was something like an encounter group. I also remember hearing about a concert he gave called "troubadours and trouveres," to which a bunch of musicologists showed up thinking it would be something medieval. The concert consisted of him playing and singing at the piano.

### **Milton Babbitt**

My other main teacher at Princeton was Milton Babbitt. I never had him as a composition teacher, nor did I even take many classes with him, but I still think I learned more from him than almost anyone else except the two other people mentioned above. He has truly been an influential person, although I think he is also widely misunderstood.

Born in Philadelphia in 1916, Babbitt was raised in Jackson, Mississippi, where he had an early interest in jazz. He came north to study mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania, but he soon left there to study music at New York University, and afterwards he studied composition privately with Roger Sessions. He became a lifelong resident of New York City, where he fully immersed himself in the musical culture of that great city when it was at its highest peak. After spending the war years working on code breaking in Washington, he went to graduate school at Princeton, where he wrote a thesis that has been described as a milestone in the history of music theory. "The Function of Set Structure in the 12-tone System" was a codification of what we now know as classic 12-tone theory, derived from the music of Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. It also, for example, invented the term "octave equivalence" and had other important insights. Probably an even more important aspect of his writing, which is true for all his articles as well, is that he started talking about music in a much more scientific and technical manner, in contrast to the prevailing aesthetic and personal tone of most other writing about music at that time. He wrote another very insightful article in the 1940's on the String Quartets of Bela Bartok.

It would be nice to say that his fame began with that work, but that's not the way it happened in fact. His thesis could not be understood by the music faculty at Princeton, possibly perhaps because Roger Sessions had just left that campus to teach at Berkeley. He did not get the degree, but he did get a job teaching music there, where he remained for over 40 years. He also started teaching at Juilliard in the 1970's, where he remains to this day. His important early thesis was never published, but copies were circulated among a number of students (I have never seen it). Forty-six years after he had written it, Princeton recognized his early accomplishment (and their mistake) by awarding him an honorary doctorate.

His early music was built on the ideas he had written about in his thesis, and he was actually the first composer to develop the concept of total serialization, pre-dating the Europeans like Boulez and Stockhausen who later claimed to have invented the idea. Babbitt's early music was so difficult to perform that he had few successful performances, and many performers didn't even attempt to do an adequate job. I remember personally attending performances of his music that I felt were embarrassing to sit through (in one performance, an assistant conductor stood up in the middle of the orchestra every 10 measures to cue in all the players who were lost). He still receives some poor performances, but he has also attracted a number of excellent young players who have given him some outstanding performances.

This was one of the reasons he became interested when RCA began developing the first music synthesizer in the mid 1950's, the work being done at the Sarnoff Research Laboratories in Princeton. Babbitt later became the first composer to master the use of that arcane instrument, which is the only instrument he has ever used to create his electronic music.

Babbitt was an extremely influential teacher, and he began to attract students interested in 12-tone music to Princeton. While this is true, and some of those students, like Donald Martino and Peter Westergaard (who had come and gone before I arrived) have later gone on to become very well-known, I have to emphasize that the prevailing style among the Princeton composition students was more akin to neo-romanticism. Of all the composers I knew as students when I was there, only Robert Taylor, Philip Batstone and John Melby could truly be described as hardcore serialists.

One of the most interesting things about Babbitt's music theories is that they continued to evolve, but he continued to write about more classic 12-tone procedures, which was also what attracted many of the students. One of the only articles he wrote that described his current procedures was the one on the time-point system. "Twelve-tone Rhythmic Structure and the Electronic Medium," published in the premiere issue of *Perspectives of New Music* in 1962. The way his music has developed, into something more describable as array

composition than anything else, has been explored recently in Andrew Mead's insightful book *An Introduction to the Music of Milton Babbitt*.

In some ways, Babbitt was a frustrating teacher, because he would not talk about his own music. His articles could even be accused, in Winham's words, of concealing his own methods. Perhaps his main point was that people should come to grips with his music by studying it, the same way he had come to understand the music of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern. Partly from him, I have come to have a certain reluctance to discuss my own music, particularly among people who aren't prepared to grasp the ideas that my works deal with. But also, from him, I have come to value the process of system building, of thinking through and challenging the assumptions on which music is based and not accepting the values of the "mainstream," whatever they may be.

### Max Mathews

Computer music wouldn't exist if there hadn't been a man named Max Mathews running the human engineering department at Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey. Bell Labs had always been the institution that did cutting-edge research on sound, because it was applicable to their main product, the telephone. Much of their research was devoted to such subjects as figuring out how lousy a signal could be transmitted that would still be intelligible at the other end of the phone line, so that they could save two cents on every phone, but all the way back to the 1920's they had done basic work on acoustics. When Mathews came along, he had them also work on music. Partly this was because he was a violinist, and he admired the acoustics of the instrument. For many years, he supported Carleen Hutchins, who made violins and other stringed instruments in the proportions of the violin, but this was really seventeenth-century research.

Mathews was a great visionary. He realized the potential in the digital representation of music, and he started using analog-to-digital and digital-to-analog converters to allow computers to process sounds. Once he had done that, he realized the potential for music synthesis in the concept of generating and processing the waveform digitally from scratch, and he started work in the 1950's on a series of music programs that ultimately went up to version five. The problems with the process at that time were that the data capacities and speeds of computer tapes, the only large storage medium, were not sufficient to produce good quality, but that would change later. I think he probably envisioned many of the products that later came about, such as digital recording and effects devices.

Mathews hired a number of crack people to work on his music projects. The first composer was James Tenney, who wrote an article in the *Journal of Music Theory* in the early 1960's. He later left computer music but wrote an

interesting book, *Meta (+) Hodos*, an application of gestalt theory and cognitive science to music. When I first went there, a programmer named Joan Miller was working on Music 4. She was outstanding, probably only exceeded by Barry Vercoe. Through her work I began to realize the power and sophistication of the programming that went into Music 4. The power lay, first of all, in the ability to construct the sound wave. Since all sounds are waves, if you can generate any wave, you can generate any sound. The other important point was that, by representing all of the devices used in constructing the sound in little computer modules called unit generators, you could have virtually an unlimited amount of equipment; the only limitation being the length of time it takes to produce the sound, which was often quite long. Learning to describe sounds was not easy, and it took me years to work it out.

The data speeds and amounts were a serious limitation of early computer music. Our first work could only be realized at 10K mono, which allowed frequencies only up to 5,000 Hz. I thought it was heaven when we went to 20K mono or 10K stereo. The only way to record sound was on quarter-inch magnetic tape (this was even before the cassette!), and the only way to assemble tapes into compositions was by splicing. At that time, Bell Labs was practically the only place where you could convert tapes to sound, although in about a year, Princeton had acquired their old system.

Apart from James Tenney, the musical results of most of the people working at Bell Labs, including Max Mathews, were disappointing. They were not musically sophisticated. Worse, some of their writings suggested that music was not a serious field of study. Science was serious; music was something to be emotional about, but not to take seriously. They did study sound, but not music itself.

All this changed when, in the mid 1960's, Mathews hired a Frenchman named Jean-Claude Risset. He was a composer and a pianist with a very interesting background. He had studied composition with André Jolivet, but he had earned a degree in physics. He had a great ear, and he brought a new level of sophistication both to the study of sounds and to the music that he composed. He conducted two studies, one on violin tones and the other on trumpet tones. The violin study wasn't very interesting, mainly exploring the use of random vibrato and such. The trumpet study, however, was a real breakthrough. Through the process of applying a separate envelope to each of the partials of the tone, he was able to generate extremely realistic tones. He tested this by playing the sounds from behind a curtain to a room full of professional trumpet players. They couldn't tell the difference. Although I didn't think that the success of computer music should be judged by how well it imitates acoustic music, this test convinced many skeptics.

In 1968 and 1969, Risset wrote two pieces that were among the most outstanding computer music yet produced. The first was *Computer Suite from*

*“Little Boy,”* three movements of incidental music for a play on the life of Eatherly, the pilot of the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Besides the trumpet and other brass sounds that he had worked on in his studies, he had a variety of bell, drum, flute and piano sounds, as well as some very interesting abstract sounds. This piece had the first use of “endless glissando,” as well as other things he made up. His second piece was *Mutations*, which used some of these sounds but is also full of other musical ideas, such as the opening, where a series of arpeggiated tones is reattacked in a bell-like fashion. This work also was the first piece to use waveshaping. I always felt that his most interesting sounds were the original “electronic” materials rather than the imitations of musical instruments.

Risset later wrote Music 5 for Mathews, and then he returned to France, where he had a brief stint at IRCAM, but lived mainly in Marseille, where he set up a laboratory for computer music. He remains one of the most interesting composers of computer music.

Apart from the work of Max Mathews and ours at Princeton, which derived from his work, the only other serious computer music research in the early days was carried out by John Chowning at Stanford University, another extraordinary person who had a seminal impact on the field. Chowning will be remembered for at least three outstanding contributions, all of which he wrote definitive articles about: the simulation of moving sounds, digital reverberation, and FM synthesis. In addition to these contributions, he wrote a number of interesting compositions, each of which had a completely different approach. For all this work, and for establishing the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics, he was initially turned down for tenure at Stanford. Like Milton Babbitt 25 years earlier, he was too far ahead of his colleagues; but similarly, Stanford came to realize its mistake and reversed kept him on.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of Max Mathews to the history of computer music.

### **“Classical” Electronic Music Studio Techniques**

When I began working at the Columbia-Princeton studio in about 1965, I learned many things, and I also came to know several people and musical compositions that I thought were interesting. The most important of these included, besides *Vision and Prayer* and *Composition for Synthesizer* by Milton Babbitt, Ussachevsky’s *Of Wood and Brass*, Davidovsky’s early *Electronic Studies* and his first three *Synchronisms*, and Pril Smiley’s *Kolyosa*. The differences in the methods by which these pieces were created was striking. Babbitt’s work involved using the RCA Synthesizer, which was a very complicated and daunting instrument that would take maybe a year or more to learn, and there was only one of them in the world, and it would break down all the time. But the other

works were created by a tedious, inaccurate, time-consuming and basically unpredictable manner now called “classical” studio technique.

It is hard for people who live and work today, with all the facilities and software that has been developed in the last forty years, to realize just how difficult things were in those days. Forget CD's, DVD's, and all the digital media we now have. The cassette didn't yet exist! Sound recordings were disseminated on LP's only, which were newly advanced because they had introduced stereo in the 1950's. The open-reel tape recorder was the only medium on which you could record sounds. Editing sounds required using splicing tape and was difficult to do accurately. The machines themselves were so expensive that only institutions were able to afford the facilities for an entire studio. (It was only after the prices dropped that you heard about people who had home studios.) Furthermore, most tape recorders were at best stereo; multi-track tape recorders didn't come out until the late 1960's, because they had to work out the synchronization of separate tracks.

All of the composers who were working manually in the Columbia studio – and I want to emphasize that they were *good* at this – assembled their compositions by recording individual sounds on separate pieces of tape and splicing them together. There were sometimes several edits within a single inch of tape. Ussachevsky worked by making transformations of recorded instrumental and other sounds, and he had an extensive library on dozens of reels for the pieces he was working on. (He described this process as “pulverizing” the sounds.) Mixing was a major issue, and Ussachevsky had several mixers designed and built for the studio. In order to assemble the sounds into a composition, separate tape recorders would be set to run simultaneously into the mixer, the sound being recorded on yet another machine. Each time a sound was re-recorded, there was a 6 dB loss of signal quality, with the inevitable result that some of the original compositions were noisy.

There was a full-time engineer who worked in the studio (there was more than one, but only one worked at a time). About half his time was taken up with keeping the RCA Synthesizer going, but the rest was spent maintaining the tape recorders and other equipment and occasionally designing new equipment. One engineer I got to know well was James Seawright, the husband of the dancer Mimi Garrard, for whom Bulent Arel and others wrote some interesting works. He was also an artist who later taught at Princeton.

Sometimes the composer would desire to change the pitch of a recorded sound, and the only way to do this was by using a variable-speed tape recorder. Most machines would play at two speeds, usually 7-1/2 and 15 inches per second, but to get a continuous range of variation an oscillator had to be incorporated into the circuit that ran the capstan. That was another project for the studio engineer. One early piece that was produced by this

process (at the University of Toronto, not Columbia) was Hugh Le Caine's *Dripsody*, created entirely from the recording of a single drop of water. A variable-speed tape recorder was used to transpose that original drop to every note of the scale and through several octaves, including even some effects like a big "drip" chord. It is discouraging when I hear people today discuss a piece like that in terms of how it is conceptually coherent, in that all the sounds are derived from this one simple thing, without mentioning the sheer drudgery and craftsmanship that was necessary to create it. The same applies to all these early works.

When the Princeton-Columbia studio was formed in the late 1950's, there were no commercial electronic music synthesizers, apart from the RCA Synthesizer, which was unique. Columbia searched far and wide to acquire any interesting equipment to generate and process sounds. There was a collection of miscellaneous oscillators, filters, and a reverberation chamber in the studio where I worked. The problem with this equipment (except the reverberation chamber) was that most of it had not been designed to work with music at all, but rather as scientific test equipment, and none of it interfaced with the rest very easily. Ussachevsky hired a young man to produce an envelope generator that he designed. That young man was Robert Moog, and his ADSR envelope generator was the result of this collaboration. The first ones were present in the studio. Before these envelope generators were available, some composers created envelopes by cutting magnetic tape at different angles to produce attacks, and decays were often created by manipulating the volume control as the sound played. Later, Ussachevsky found a device in Germany made by Harald Bode called the Klangumwandler, a frequency shifter, which also produced interesting modifications of sounds.

Commercial electronic music synthesizers designed by Robert Moog and Donald Buchla were introduced in 1964, and Columbia acquired some of this equipment in the mid 1960's. In spite of the earlier collaboration with Moog, Columbia bought Buchla equipment. One of the students who worked there, Walter (later Wendy) Carlos, became a close collaborator with Moog, and he not only bought one of the early synthesizers but also had it customized in various ways. The result, in 1968, was the album *Switched-On Bach*, which became so famous that electronic music was forever changed. But that was later.

The two main alternatives that I faced in 1965 were, on the one hand, the RCA Synthesizer, and on the other hand the tedium of classical studio technique. I did learn studio technique and actually became pretty good at splicing and working with synthesizers, but the computer seemed to offer a much more promising alternative, which would be both an accurate and a reproducible way of creating and processing sounds. Even at that time, I could see that the effort of producing a piece by computer, which provided an "ideal" performance when it was perfected, was most worthwhile, and that is where I decided to devote my efforts.

## What We Have Now

It is instructive to compare the resources and facilities that we have now to those that were available when I began. Advancements have come in so many areas that it is hard to remember them all. The products we use now have gone through several generations of development, far surpassing the original devices when they first came out.

The first area in which we have had tremendous changes is in music recording. While open reel tape recorders still exist, they are hardly used any more. The cassette is still around, although it has become marginalized by recordable CD's. CD's, a medium offering excellent sound quality in the opinion of most audiophiles, are now passé. The new rage is recordable DVD's, although there is still a format war to be fought. The 5.1 "home theater" is likely to be a major contender in the future. Digital Audio Tape recorders (DAT's) and multiple-track ADAT's are available, but are likely to give way to DVD's. For home and non-professional use, there are Mini-discs and Apple's iPod, which uses a hard drive, but in the future we can expect digital recorders that don't even use a medium for recording.

Digital sound processing, first realized in the analog-to-digital and digital-to-analog converters in computer music, has given rise to a number of digital effects processors, which have largely replaced all the old analog reverberation chambers and such devices. It is likely that, at some point in the future, the only analog devices in a sound reproduction system will be the loudspeakers and power amplifiers, everything up to the final point of audition being processed digitally; but we're not there yet, except for direct performances from laptop computers..

Another area of advancement has taken place in music synthesizers. The early machines were the first integrated systems that allowed the different components of a sound to be controlled independently, but they were all monaural, hard to operate, and inherently unstable. The original synthesizers were based on what is now called analog synthesis, and they have all been supplanted by digital machines embodying many different synthesis techniques. The monaural mode of early machines was first replaced by polyphonic synthesizers and then by polyphonic multi-timbral machines. The invention of MIDI, which is actually a very simple and rudimentary system begging to be updated, provided a standard that all subsequent developments have adhered to (much like the hegemony of ASCII in early office equipment). If the RCA Synthesizer had been controlled by something like MIDI, hundreds of people would have been able to use it. Nevertheless, commercial synthesis has been hindered by the manufacturers' quest to reproduce the sounds of musical instruments rather than to produce original and creative sounds.

Nevertheless, the greatest advancements of all have come from computers. Much of this was spurred by the invention of personal computers in the late 1970's, which did not become very widely-used until IBM brought out its own personal computer in 1982. By designing an open platform, IBM encouraged hundreds of manufacturers spread all over the globe to innovate different products that interfaced with their computer, which led to tremendous advancements in processor speed, inexpensive memory chips, storage device capacity, recordable media, printers, and, most recently, flat-panel displays . In 1965, an engineer named Gordon Moore foresaw the possibility of expanding the number of components on an integrated circuit, and he formulated a "law" that stated that these could roughly double every year, reaching an astounding 65,000 components by 1975. This law has become expanded to all the components of electronic circuits, and the number of components inside today's microprocessors is now measured in the millions. While the time scale may actually be more like 18 months to two years for a doubling to occur, the advancements have been far beyond what anyone could have imagined. I know that most musicians are committed to using Apple computers because of the software that has been developed for them, but Apple stupidly took exactly the opposite approach from IBM and sued other companies who introduced machines that emulated theirs. The result is that Apple is the only source for their products, they are more expensive, and Apple has only a 1.8 percent of the computer market. Rumors of its demise have been premature, but at one point Bill Gates himself bailed out the company with a \$100 million investment.

We now have an astounding array of different computer programs and devices for use with music. Sound files can be stored in the computer's memory and the waveform displayed on the video screen to any time scale. Editing no longer requires a razor blade making irreversible changes. Files can be mixed and processed entirely on the computer, without ever having to be recorded on external media until the final mix is ready, and then the purpose of the recording is just to be able to play it on an external device. In addition to stereo CD's, we can have quadraphonic or octaphonic or even a greater number of output channels, to say nothing of dozens of input tracks mixed into these outputs.

For music synthesis, the programs that are a direct outgrowth of Bell Laboratories original music series, which include Music 4B, Music 4BF, Music 5, Music 11, Music 360, Csound, and Super Collider, still exist; but there are a whole range of new graphic-user-interface (GUI) programs. The first of these was the simple MIDI sequencer, which controlled an external synthesizer, but these have given way to programs that combine sequencing with synthesis and audio files. Every kind of synthesis is available, as well as sampling. Sometimes these programs are combined with multi-track mixing and editing software, and sometimes they simply output the sound.

Music printing has now also moved to the computer. When I was a student in the 1960's, many universities (not Princeton!) required their composers to take a course in manuscript preparation, in which they learned how to write scores in ink on transparencies. Not any more! Computer printing is much better quality than anybody's manuscript, and part extraction is a breeze. Now the main programs also offer high-quality MIDI or sampled playback, so the composer can hear the score as he inputs it.

Nevertheless, we still have many problems with the new technology. For one thing, all composers have to invest a good amount of time learning these things; but none of these new facilities makes it any easier to compose interesting music. Many people use the programs without a real understanding of what they are doing. I would make the same point here that I did earlier in discussing the value of early computer programming: *the value of working with Csound and other Music 4-derived programs is that they force you to describe what you want to do, write it down, and figure out how to get it.* This requires planning, reflection, and evaluation of your results. These are some of the qualities that are missing in some of today's music.

One thing that was apparent to me when I was beginning my study of electronic music is that the ideas and materials the composers were working with then were exciting, original, and much more interesting than most of what I was hearing from instrumental composers, even though they were using these arduous and complicated methods. It didn't really occur to me then that Randall, Winham, Babbitt, Ussachevsky, Davidovsky and the others were simply outstanding composers, although in retrospect it should have. Now that we have this fantastic array of new facilities, most of the music I hear in electro-acoustic music concerts is more narrowly focused and does not cover the range of styles and ideas that were present in the 1950's and 1960's.

I want to conclude these thoughts with the point that every one of these gains in concepts and facilities that we have achieved have come about through hard-fought battles, both intellectually among the designers who originally thought them up, users who gave them the feedback they needed for subsequent advancements, and the marketplace, which gave the developers the reward they needed to continue their work and produce new versions. It was not the case that the best choices were made at every step along the way, but in the long run, things have gotten much better.

## Sounds

It was when working in the studios at Columbia and at the computer in Princeton that I came to have a great interest in *sounds*. This is the true value of working in a studio, where you are confronted with cold audio objects that seem so difficult to fashion into expressive music. I read everything I could find

at that time, from Helmholtz to Backus and a lot more not worth remembering, which was, from our perspective now, rather old-fashioned and out of date. Much of my electronic music consists of exploring various aspects of sounds in great detail, always sounds that could be explored in no other way except the computer.

All music consists of sounds, but the subject is not covered in most universities, which nevertheless do persist in giving courses in something called “orchestration.” It is useful to compare what I have to say about sounds to what the textbooks say about orchestration. To me, sounds are concrete things, which you create and manipulate and shape into what you want. Orchestration books teach you to think about sounds in an idealized way. What is “the” violin? What does it mean when a book describes a clarinet sound as “woody”? Orchestration books tell students to write what has been done before, do what supposedly works, and avoid challenging the performer. This discourages creativity and perpetuates myths about sound and music. Timbre is described in terms of instrumental families. It was difficult for me to accept that people who had written all these books about acoustics didn’t really understand musical instruments except in terms of crude generalities. The problem was also that their universe of music consisted only of instrumental music, not tones produced by oscillators. It was only after people began working with computers that they were able to put many of these myths to rest and come up with a real understanding of timbre, for example.

In spite of what I read about musical sounds, I felt I understood less than half of what was really there, and it was frustrating. If you stop for a moment and think about the way you have to describe sounds to be able to generate them on the computer, you can begin to realize the chasm between these two perspectives. I don’t know if these books have a word for envelope; they certainly don’t describe it in terms useful for music synthesis. If you think that’s bad, what about timbre? Apart from the statement that it has something to do with the overtone structure of tones and that such-and-such a note on such-and-such an instrument has a particular spectrum, there is almost nothing. Helmholtz had a good conceptual understanding of the issue, but he didn’t have the tools to make accurate enough measurements. The concept of a dynamically changing timbre was beyond their capabilities. As a result, you had to perform tests, which suited me fine.

The main problem for us in conducting these tests was that, for the first year or so, the only way to get our tapes converted to sound was to travel to Bell Telephone Laboratories, which was about an hour’s drive away. We could do plenty of computing at Princeton, but one reel of digital tape at that time held only two minutes of music, so this was a big effort for a small result. A lot of the concepts about timbre and other musical properties that we take for granted now had to be worked out step-by-step and weren’t obvious then. The main subjects of my earliest tests were timbres, envelopes, and fragments of compositions I was working on. From the timbral perspective, I both copied

musical instrument spectra and developed completely arbitrary timbres that could be used to produce a good differentiation. Through phase manipulation of the harmonics, I worked out spectra that had better quality than many waves that all have the same phase.

I came to develop the view that the great power of electronic music lay in its ability to structure each property of a musical tone precisely and independently of the others. To give you an example of a sort that was often confused by the early books on acoustics, envelope and timbre are separable, where they are not when you deal with musical instruments. A pizzicato tone is something only available to stringed instruments; but in electronic music, you can have a pizzicato envelope with a clarinet timbre as well. This means that each separate property, such as timbre similarity, envelope, vibrato, or other characteristics, can be used to create associations between notes in a musical context. Since each tone has several dimensions, music can be structured multi-dimensionally. These ideas are essential to all of my music, and it is what motivated me to write *Computer Variations*.

### **Computer Variations**

*Computer Variations* is my first acknowledged computer piece, which I wrote during the same year that I began teaching at Queens College. The piece is a traditional set of variations, beginning with a theme that is transformed, and sometimes literally repeated, in each variation. (At the time I wrote it, an important aspect of its composition was that the same notes had been used and modified in subroutines to produce each variation.) Following the theme, there are seven variations.

In those days, the computer synthesis techniques available were quite limited, and the processes that I used in each variation are remarkably simple, although their implementation is accurate and unsparing. All of the tones are generated by simple oscillators, the only timbre variation created by mixing waveforms with different harmonic partials. The theme is a three-voice tune lasting only 34 seconds. The ensuing variations make use of different envelope shapes, timbre changes, reverberation, and amplitude and frequency modulation to produce sharply defined sounds. All sounds are located in various spaces between the two speakers, sometimes traveling from one to the other. Reverberation is sometimes used to create the sensation of moving into the distance. While I don't think this process worked very effectively, the reverberated sounds are clearly differentiated from the others. The fifth variation consists of four-note chords that fade in and make asynchronous glissandos to the note in the next chord. The sixth uses four instruments that each have very different envelopes, ranging from half a sine wave to shapes that are mostly decay to mostly rise, with all notes also having other distinguishing qualities, such as amplitude and frequency modulation, and very exacting rhythms. The last variation is similar

to the fifth without glissandos: each note simply fades in and sustains for a different duration, so that the effect is a changing mosaic of chords. In creating the score for the piece, I used tempos ranging from 7.5 to 5040 beats per minute.

In recreating this work from the old computer outputs I found in my basement in the summer of 2004, I can recall the day-to-day problems that plagued my work when this was done. Three different computer synthesis languages were used, ranging from Music 4B, a similar program I wrote for the IBM 7040, and Music 7, which I wrote for the XDS Sigma-7 computer at Queens College. While all these procedures could be translated into csound, I had a hard time remembering what some of the different statements meant. The only storage medium that large data files could be saved on were magnetic tapes, and I had to travel to both Princeton University and Bell Telephone Laboratories to convert these tapes to sound. I then had to splice the magnetic tape segments of no more than two minutes each into the final result, which is 9 and a half minutes long. In resynthesizing the work, the entire piece was generated in less time than its duration, and the result was a single file (each variation was generated separately and mixed). What a difference 37 years makes!

## Who the Hell is J. K. Randall?

Jon Forshee

AKA Jim Randall, jkr, James K. Randall, James Randall, et al.

**FIRST:** I borrow a taped VHS tape from a musicologist in Rochester, NY. The tape is filled with musical odds and ends, mainly from the 60's and 70's, recorded off TV---videos of The Residents and Bauhaus and clips from commercials that have then-novel electronic sounds in the jingle...(big surprise the musicologist thought electronic music was *something*), tons of stuff, most of it fast-forwardable. Anyway, the reason I'm watching is for the program appearing at the front of this collection, a program about "American Music"---an old black-and-white program (musta been from the late 50's early 60's) where the host announces "greetings and today's program focuses on E-lec-tronic music and here to discuss today's topic is Professor Milton Babbitt." Well, that's pretty much the gist of it but you get the idea and anyhow, that's why I was watching this taped tape 'cause here's Babbitt, that's right Milton fucking *Babbitt* explaining a reel-to-reel to Our Host some suit as though it's the most normal thing in the world. To demonstrate how *neat* all this E-lec-tronic technology was for a composer he plays: Davidovsky, Ussachevsky, and -- Babbitt. I don't remember the Ussachevsky, I do remember the Davidovsky was choreographed, and the Babbitt was *Vision and Prayer* and I don't remember the singer but there sure enough was Babbitt reading along with the score while the tape played right there next to the reel-to-reel as though he were conducting, really, and now I think on it he probably was. So Babbitt talks a little about tape techniques and what can be done with them and then plays a piece that has video and the piece is called *Confessions of a Mass Murderer*---by James Randall. And I'm floored. What *in the hell* is going on? Here I am, feeling all studious and very *into* E-lec-tronic music and man ain't Babbitt ultra-hip to go on the tube and wax loquacious about how cool it is to record sounds and play them back upside-down and then

ssssssssssssssssssssss-ting!

*Confessions of a Mass Murderer* had it all---graceful lines and sine-tone bravado. The video played-up an oscilloscope with un-cipherable images fading in and out and in a blink me and my buddy R.D.Laing are each murderers, rapists, thieves, SERIAL KILLERS. (And all a sudden 'ole Joy of Sextets sounds kinda square).

Who *is* James Randall?

for two years I'd hoped to perform Benjamin Boretz's *Language, as a Music*<sup>j</sup>. I stayed away from the recording of this piece 'cause I was going to do

a (ta-da!) New Version. Well, the only reason I mention this is because I'd grown quite close to *Language, as a Music* before I'd even read Ben's liner notes<sup>ii</sup>--- wherein Ben says that it was Jim Randall's *Compose Yourself*<sup>iii</sup> that motivated in some ways his (Ben's) work.

well sure, I'd seen *Compose Yourself* around, on my own, but no-one (not even my teachers who I looked up to) ever said "you know, you should read *Compose Yourself*" nor had any of my friends (most of whom I still look up to) said "man, you gotta check this out." I'd seen it on my own, had thumbed through the pages a bit and had had lots of trouble with it (is this writing? Is this about music? where's the composition do's-and-don'ts and where're the designs and suggestions and thoughtful observations on the composers' life? so, little wonder my hardcore friends didn't know of it, 'cause this is no manifesto as they'd know it, and no wonder my teachers didn't suggest it because what's in *Compose Yourself* could very well undermine their own stances and missions...*Compose Yourself* is so rigorous it *could* let one think they could get away with *anything*...

and again, Randall

Randall, Mind-Mover, Cloud-Walker, Circuit.

Franz Kamin tells James Brody "why would you want to study someone else's music when you can write your own?"

Compose Yourself

Who the Hell is jkr?

and i'm floored.  
again.

WHAT ELSE DOES jkr DO?

Does he write orchestra music?

Does he set text?

Does he play piano? Well?

Does he conduct?  
How far does jkr take it all?  
Where *can* he take it?

On a different day I'm reading through *BEING ABOUT MUSIC*<sup>iv</sup>---THE collection of essays and texts by Benjamin Boretz and Jim Randall

(btw what does it mean that composer Clarence Barlow has stipulated that every time his name is referred to in a text it must be by a different spelling?)

and I'm trying to make sense of it all and consistently confounded---it is, if Kant speaks through the clouds w/o benefit of thunder where does that leave Randall? [it leaves him speaking through thunder w/o benefit of clouds]

And then some clues are given to me when me and Mary Lee Roberts are talking with each other:

Randall lives in Princeton, NJ.

Randall eats Chinese just about every day.

...And once, during a winter road-trip with Boretz and Babbit, Randall smokes so many cigars with the window open Boretz gets pneumonia.

And **then**:

something to sinK a Tooth Into  
something to sink your teech into  
something to sing into:

**###a garland of csound###<sup>v</sup>**

now, I know a little something about Csound... I studied Csound with Burton Beerman and then with Allan Schindler. I've heard lots of pieces via C-sound...any timbre you can imagine and then some are all for the making in Vercoe's world-class programming environment. But here, in this garland of csound, music is happening that doesn't often get written...

single-lined, almost scalar, almost monophonic, almost uni-timbral, Randall's csound is a unique csound, a direct csound, a music with point and line to plane all over...by now, I've listened to a garland of csound more than anyone on the planet besides (maybe including) Randall; have listened to it in more circumstances than you can imagine, more intently, more nonchalantly, than I've listened to anything.

Where are the thick slow-transforming sound-masses? Where are the **crazy flashy pannings and impossible sounds**?

And I'll play A Garland of Csound for friends, my hardcore friends, and everyone's chatting and slowly though it's subtle a low low line will rise and talk-levels will lower and of a sudden everyone is listening and and and get this! no one knows who wrote it and it doesn't sound familiar so why isn't anyone asking who this is? or hey man where'd you get this?

there's just the listening and the looking at the floor and soon enough someone says something like hey where's the ashtray/bathroom/chips/book-you-told-me-about and it all resumes and is maybe even forgotten for the minute but I'm sure later on at least one of them thinks of my apartment my stereo and wonders what that timbre was and where it came from hell maybe that was forshee's and I thought he liked real ballsy stuff and lo they won't even realize they've heard the ballsiest thing I own and next time I'll have to ask forshee what that was and gee I'd like a copy you got a burner?

[yeah and the joke's on them 'cause I got nothin' no computer no burner no nothin' but I do have a plain white cd that says ###a garland of csound### but you can't borrow it 'cause you probly won't bring it back (like you didn't bring back my john eliot gardner don giovanni) and where will I be then back to listenin' to a bunch of nothin' even though I've got other cd-s none of them do like randall's does and]

Does James K. Randall smoke cigarettes?

Does James K. Randall have any vices?

What *kind* of Chinese food does James K. Randall eat?

Does James K. Randall own a tv?

Does he watch it if he does?

Who's his favourite actor/ess?

I am now visiting Pittsburgh, PA. Dr. Alan Shockley invites me to perform *Language ,as a Music* for the theory discussion group at University of Pittsburgh. I do. Everyone loves it. And afterward I ask Shockley (see, he graduated from Princeton University) what he knows about J.K. Randall and he gives me more clues:

one time a composer came to Princeton to present her compositions and had all these graphs and handouts and analyses and whatnot. she plays a/the recording(s) of her music and proceeds to speak about what she has written by showing everyone her graphs and handouts and analyses and all this while J.K. Randall stays quiet.

Students ask questions and make comments and observations, and the presentaiton's almost over and J.K. Randall says:

I liked your piece but what's with all the graphs and stuff? I can get this shit anywhere! (words my own)

and I'M thinking goddammit that's right...what's with all this graph-fetish anyhow? and how many presentations have I sat in where just the same scene played out (save Randall) and everyone was "oh, you're great, you're a great composer, 'cause look at how elegantly you've formalized *graphically* and *textually* what you

Who the hell is jim Randall?

wrote *musically* and one day I'm going to do that too and explain everything I've written in a way that generations from now will be seen as really and truly *great*." great. Bullshit.

*On Facing Front*<sup>vi</sup> celebrates this. Or not.

(and I don't wanna say much about *Compose Yourself* either 'cause then you might think I *know* something about it that can be written down and anyway you should read it yourself)

*On Facing Front* says the things you've needed to say but couldn't, or wouldn't, or didn't know how to say, but Randall ain't just acerbic or critical or sarcastic or passively aggressive but (is it a word) assess-ive and reading *On Facing Front* will blow your minds and make you wish you'd said those things just like that piece you heard that other piece you heard that you wished you'd thought of...like ain't Rupert Sheldrake so interesting and you know really I've thought of morphic resonance before and didn't even know someone else had written on it ferreal I didn't (well, ya shoulda done your homework, then) and the truth is that Ida done mine too 'cept no one ever told me about who Jim Randall was and why didn't they? (thought these guys *knew* something...well, they sure knew how to *not* tell me about who Jim Randall was...)

Yeah, or maybe reading *On Facing Front* won't do anything for you; maybe if you read it you'd wish it was something else that didn't intimidate you; didn't upset you; something safe, like the umpteenth exposition on how Chopin goes, or maybe something nice like Riemannian transformations, or maybe it's more interesting to you to read how many half-cadences someone found in all Palestrina's music (or Mozart's) or maybe it's just *brehtaking* how Carmen *had* to die or whether Josquin was in Ferrara or not and maybe while you're reading *On Facing Front* you'll wish it was really so-and-so's recent book on Weill or Birtwistle or Reich and maybe if Randall has an axe to grind why can't he do it and still play nice like alltheotherkids?

But if you're someone else entirely, if you're me, you might read *On Facing Front* and wish it was longer, more of it, and if you're like me you might read *On Facing Front* and not get it and one day have a conversation with someone where you ask "Do you find Randall difficult" and they might say "like what?" and 'cause you just read *On Facing Front* (and even though you pretty much got it if not completely) you might blurt out "well, like *On Facing Front*" and then you'll actually learn *something* 'cause they might know quite a bit about it.

And besides, right now I'm thinking how Robert Morris said once that it's better to be clumsy than deft because that's how you learn things.

And still I have these big concerns, LIKE:

Why does jkr sign-off differently?

Why does jkr say what he says, in the way he says it?

Jon Forshee

Out of all the composers I've listened to and tried to learn from, why is it one I haven't even met who seems to have the most to say?

Does jkr write in a diary?

daily?

Does jkr use cmix? If not, why not? He must know all about it.

who is he friends with? does he piss anyone off?

does jkr make enemies? how?

I heard he uses a mac...osX?

then he must use supercollider...or *does* he?

why do I wonder these things about jkr...i don't wonder them 'bout anyone else....and if someone wondered things about me why i'd just say all that's not interesting? why don't you ask about something useful, like.....

from his writings i can see he's traveled....where has he gone that he doesn't talk about?  
(and btw where the hell has leo straus gone that he won't talk about?)

does jkr have a.d.d.? does he swear? does he drink coffee a lot or not at all...?

tea?

Who in the hell is J. K. Randall, and why do I care? Why should you? Why do we?

{does randall want a wild heroic ride to heaven?}

(If you meet him, please ask some of these questions, and somehow let me know.)

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<sup>i</sup> *Language ,as a Music*, by Benjamin Boretz, is available in BEING ABOUT MUSIC, vol. 2, published by Open Space Publications.

<sup>ii</sup> Open Space CD10.

<sup>iii</sup> *Compose Yourself: A Manual for the Young*, by J.K. Randall, published as a double issue (with Benjamin Boretz's *Meta-Variations*) by Open Space publications.

<sup>iv</sup> BEING ABOUT MUSIC Textworks 1960-2003 is published by Open Space (<http://www.the-open-space.org>).

<sup>v</sup> A Garland of Csound, Open Space CD17.

<sup>vi</sup> *On Facing Front*, by jkr, Open Space Magazine issue 5.



**Vignettes of Old Masters IV:**  
**Jim Randall's *a benfest***

Benjamin Boretz  
2006

## ON THE EDGE

Us.

It is Us.

Us Notes.

one. Two. THREE. FOUR.

One At a Time.

In a Row.

We're on top of it.

We're always on top of it

(& you: what are You on top of?)

Listen. Learn. It's all there, In how it sounds. How it Goes.

For you to: Get It; to Learn To Hear To Listen.

From how it sounds it goes makes that sense it makes: FOUR! (see?)

Couldn't be laid out straighter if it were a paddle up Schütz's creek. A Laid-Out-Straight sound, Laying it out straight. — Or What. That Bend.

Laying it out straight around what bend? To what end?

To be that Bend. We can be that bend because we laid it out straight. Nothing could be clearer. More straight a bend. Which we Can Do (for / to / You) because we're always on top of it.

And You? Did you Get That Bend? - ) You did only if you got it straight first, got with the straight that made that bend. Made It around that bend.

It?

From which to learn. At least. From Us. These Notes. On Top of It.

Of You. (Are you aware of the point: (& You: What Are You On Top Of?) ?)

Assert. Insert. Hard. It's Our Way of Getting it Straight.

By Laying It Out straight.

So You Will Get It.

Too.

Get What? Assert What?: It.

Us.

HIM.

(& - ? - uh - & is there a difference?)

(Us: We Get It.)

Color that Bent.

At the End.  
By Being After Straight.  
Get it?  
Get with it?  
& then what?  
& so what.  
(It matters. You can tell. Assert. Because we can tell. Because we're on top of  
It.)  
Can Tell.  
And Do.  
Tell.  
From How We Quit When It's Over But It's Still There.  
You Cannot But Tell.  
And Learn How to Tell.  
(& are you on top of It Yet? (Or anything?) )  
Beautiful.  
Intelligent.  
We think:  
We are Beautiful  
Because we are Intelligent.  
And With Attitude.  
Us Notes.  
With whose attitude?  
With our own attitude?  
Or about attitudinizing you.  
Toward Us.  
At Least.  
Two Steps Up.  
One Back.  
A Bend Between Discovers a Space Within.  
Yes. That radical.  
Major, even!  
Pause. To Ponder.  
Our Accomplishment.  
Take our time soaking it in.

Yours too.

It's What Happens.

It's What Happening Is.

What Makes it Meaningful.

Lodging in Space That Never Was (Before).

All in One Move. The First. Only One So Far. But Already So Much!

It's What We're On Top Of. (& you - are you riveted? processed?)

(ready for More ! ?)

But More.

Even,

Still,

On the Edge

Of Didactic;

Not over;

Not just.

Colorations of time;

Introstructions of psyche, indrawing;

Streak of yellow (FOUR!)

introsecting expanding brownband (one, Two, THREE...)

Coloration of - What?

[timespace, energyspace, psychespace, soundspace...]?

(yes.)

(all of that.)

(in a nutshell.)

(adds up to.)

(a potent nugget of Experience.)

[What it's like is like that dmajor beethoven sonata op 10 no 3 that makes powerful timespace rhythm first with chains of octavedoubled single notes making powerful rhythm leaping spaces filling in spaces before leaped not skipping a stroke or batting an eye laying it out finally top to bottom seamlessly then -D#! - wedging - A#! - between where there was no between to wedge before. We like that piece. What it Teaches too.]

(& you - & now you - & now you get It. Too. And get Attitude. Right?)

We.  
Us Notes.  
We Feel.  
What We're Doing.  
We Feel Our Logic.  
What we feel is not what you call Feeling.  
We feel the Sensations of the Senses We're Making.  
The feel of sense-synergies powering sense-timespaces  
Like no others, deep (in their ownway of Deep).  
From There  
Upon Reflection  
We begin  
It  
Again:

Back off. Way off. A reflection. (Not reversion).  
Coming From a New Place.  
But it's still Us who come.  
With a New Twist:  
Riding on a plangency, a different breed of color.  
A different mode of coloration.  
You need to follow.  
(We're on top of it. We're keeping track, making tracks. & You?)  
(Can You make the Twist?) (It's Twisty: one plangency soft and one hard  
but always a 2-color color):  
Start; A process:  
Hard: Straight Up: One. Two. Four. Three.  
Soft: Mirrorspan: Four. Three. One. Two.  
Flip at the center: newBend.  
Just By Following the Logic of the Process.  
And Us: all twinned; entwined: can you be sure it's still Us within?  
One. Two. Three. Four. In Some Sense.  
Onefour. Twothree. Fourone. Threetwo.  
Hardsoft. Softhard. Hardsoft. Softhard.  
Spread. Splayed:

One        Four  
            Two        Three  
            Three        Two  
Four        One

To become a timespace jangled by multiskewed reflections.  
To be Splayed out to four images of twothree front to back back to front.  
To be Squeezed to an image fourfolded.  
The Beethoven retrogapped timespace. nowatune.  
But still to be Us and only Us. It and only It. All in All.  
Jangling logic theater. Metastasizing in fore and aftertimespace.  
One. Two. Three. Four. Referential disreverberatings. Discoruscating.  
Dismembering.  
Splaying anally wild  
wildly anal lockstep.  
Mechanical. ? . not hardly. not likely Us. Too swaggery. Too on top of it. Too twisty.  
Too exquisite:  
A Treatise on What Makes It Happen.  
(And it happens. Big time. We know what we're doing.)  
(& You - Get it yet? It's in the brain, right, got to keep book, to keep score, to keep it  
straight: Put it together like software is how you get there: don't stop to admire, we'll  
get to that later; being and knowing Now located just at the flashpoint of sensation  
of sense, a wisdom received.)

For Us  
There is no Deep  
No Beyond the Verbal  
No Verbal  
Just what there is  
What there is is what we make it be  
Each time  
Each timespace

One. Two.  
Separate  
But Interreverberant.  
Makes Logic.  
Makes Theater.  
Makes Discourse.

And then:  
Resisting the inevitable  
We Squeeze:  
Into images of onetwo  
Meeting themselves coming back as threefour.  
Still in lockstep (but is it new?)  
And still only Us.  
Riding the monochrome.

On the edge. Of Didactic: Showing, inextricably indistinguishably introfused with Being; facets of a unity; You will not be shown the Showing if you are being the Being. Maybe you think otherwise, that it's cool to just denote and explicate and demonstrate. So think of those pianoplaying professors playing their analyses - Brendel on Schubert. Tristano on standards. Boulez on Stravinsky. Then think Bill Evans or Pollini or Goldray or Abbado playing Blue in Green or Beethoven or Babbitt or Mahler. Or Jim Randall playing himself on his MIDI box. Except where he goes over the edge: try Mudgett or Gap1 next to ("...such words...") or Eakins or Lyric Variations or Svejck; maybe; hard to tell for sure about where the edge crunches categorically, whether it's gone over or not; but the issue is not ambiguous even when the verdict is.

And monochrome it is, in literal dumbass buzztone:  
scattering the molecules  
of oldspace  
to particles of newspace  
to fabricate a reflattened miracleized  
Us  
newrisen from the alchemic  
smoke:  
one Two THREE -- *QUATTRO?*

[Straight Up / No Bend - Whoa! - Get It?]

[the same but not the same:

Up.

not Down.

samespace.

otherway.

New.]

(oh, but not long did we squat

no P.I.T. hottub for us

our sleeves

are quite

innocent

of contaminating

cardioexhibition) --

and yet

we do multidimensionalize.

always

somehow

every way but straight up

but fullbore

straightout

in our own twisty way

(do you follow?

how does it *feul?*):

distending

congealing

images of echoes of images of echoes

straightening out so the twists are bared

twisting so the straights are extruded

we evolve

or whatever

you want to call it

by congealing by distending by twisting by fusing by

echoing

then

disreverberating  
entirely anechoic  
whispery  
breathlessly  
balancing  
on  
the  
edge  
of  
didactic  
then  
without  
ceremony  
preparation  
not even  
a breather  
for  
a  
courteous  
decent  
interval  
or any  
wink  
or nod  
(that even  
Satie wouldn't  
live so long  
sit still for  
such obtrusion  
let alone  
that P.I.T.  
would ever  
come  
within  
waltzing range of)

careening  
off the edge  
altogether:  
the banshee call  
braying  
the snotball swagger  
sniggering  
cackling  
and all under the banner of  
pseudoesoteric literary  
allusions implicit  
(JJ:FW:ALP:  
*"teems of times and happy returns. the seim anew"*)  
and all within  
the edge of didactic  
and all running utterly undercontrol amok  
in gleeful violation of  
every ineluctable decency  
and that's just the beginning.

because what we think  
is what you feel;  
you think you feel our feeling  
but what you feel is thinking,  
our thinking which knows everything  
about feeling  
and what isn't,  
unravels the etiology of the  
whole trajectory of the feel of thinking  
in all its rage and passion  
its eros  
damped into  
inyourface  
flatoutness  
our subtlety

remains  
inside  
our sensitivity  
expresses itself  
as intelligence  
as self-knowledge  
as cosmic coolness  
in the space of  
complexity  
complexified by  
implication  
under the  
guise  
of  
bald  
assertion  
under  
the cover  
of  
a  
longago  
abandoned  
cornball  
midwestern  
accent  
lingering  
as  
the  
admonishing  
finger  
of  
that hilarious  
old NYU photo  
we surrogate  
we notes

his style  
of didactic  
in  
gentle  
notsogentle  
loving  
notsocomfy  
raking  
rocking  
rolling  
roiling  
laboring  
reinedin  
blowout  
transcendent  
reenactment  
in no recognizable  
soundmirror  
of that  
oddly  
misproportioned  
trajectory  
of that  
crudely  
shameless  
monolithic  
overheated  
relentless  
timeblast  
innocent  
whimperending  
whatsis  
that *UN(-)*-thing  
of his  
endlessly

dostoievskyian  
friend  
to whom  
we speak  
in  
*UN(-)-friendliness*  
majestically  
benevolent  
admonition  
from  
within  
and  
outside  
the edge  
of didactic  
where  
we recreate  
rerecreate  
yet again  
the seim anew  
again

To Jim, with love  
from Ben  
(jkr: *a benfest* (Open Space CD 20))

BAB  
June-October 2006

*Upon learning of Giacinto Scelsi's death in Rome, I searched in vain for this writeup. 25 years later, it has resurfaced during a closet-cleaning.*

Meeting last nite (Mon 17 Nov 1980, c. 19:30—21:15) with Scelsi:

He proposed that his music is “ritual”, and that Michiko should be “invisible”.

(He asked how old I was: & said that it was at about that age that he had started to write “this kind” of music. –

[ This was his substitute for my “I discover that *you*’ve been doing this for years, (!) ] –

I asked for his meaning of “this kind” : kicking all the old compositional habits : “imitazione, etc.”. )

He then said that *all* music should be performed by invisible performers, & I pressed the point with respect to *his* music as against, say, a Brahms quartet : I said that the former, like Tibetan records, was not addressed to some (ideal) listener out there, whereas Brahms was.

He liked that, and sort of in passing referred to his and similar music (Eastern) as “meditation”.

I jumped on that one, characterized my recent basement scene for him,

[ -- he latched right on to my dislike of the term “improvisation”: for him, “improv” has too much association with back-and-forth doing : you do this, I respond thus & so ; (recall my conversation with Marjorie at Ben’s about absorption within the ongoing sound) -- ]

and said that I liked to refer to it as “meditation in sound” although I had never done any official “meditating”.

“Well, let’s hear it”, he said, plunking down a modest square battery driven cassette player on a small round table that we sat down around.

[ I had arranged the meeting explicitly to “talk & play my tape”; seeing that I wasn’t carrying anything when I arrived, he had said “oh didn’t you bring a tape?”. ]

After c. 15 minutes he stopped the tape (Marjorie #21) – asking if he might – at a very natural place, & said “Well I must tell you how immensely I like this. This music is transcendental, in a new sphere; we’ve had enough music of human emotions – romanticism & all that; but, do you know, this music has a sadness to it – I think because the ektar always fades, always dies away; it’s on the astral plane – do you read Theosophy? – where one is released from earthly attachment after death but is still nostalgic for the old life; sort of like Dante’s purgatorio.”

He asked whether I wrote any of it down (: meaning, I interpreted, afterwards), & I said no & got off on how I would want other “performers” of “it” to be engaged in the kind of activity “it” was for me, not to be reproducing my acoustic signal.

He said forget professional musicians – they want scores – and try people at meditation centers.

I told him about Swami Mukhtananda’s chanting, which he agreed is not relevant, & he told me about manyhour rituals he’d attended in India where sound – “not like that” (pointing to my tape), “but still . . . . “ – was used (, a sound here, a sound there, a long one, a flicker of something) as part of meditation & not as a performance for an audience.

He said my (JKR’s) music is not for “Western audiences”, and that he considers himself an Easterner – that’s why it’s right on his target.

I got him onto his own situation, about which he is noticeably sad – those 2 records I’ve got are what there is -- & no prospects.

I made a big push about having his own collection of performance tapes duplicated for Princeton, but that just seemed to trigger his sense of the futility of it all.

There was the slightest pause in the flow of conversation, and he asked if we could continue with my tape, which we did for about another 15 minutes, when to his evident distress his maid rang with his supper.

As we parted he reaffirmed his “immense” liking for my “transcendental” music, or something-other-than-music (: “this is a long way from Mozart & Beethoven”: -- I had said that I was a Westerner-from-there.).

Were I to sit around with him some more, I might or might not try to get him into his own compositional/meditational habits: 50/50 he’s much more comfortable saying what he has to say in relation to something like my tape which is fresh and not quite so close.

{ Things I forgot:

- a) He’s got anklebells just like Evelyn’s.
- b) I walked in gawking at his apartment: he said “& I think you might like to see from the terrace also”, which we did. (Foro Romano, Palatino: he asked me had I been on the Palatino & I told him my theory of Roman Ruins, & we were off to a good start.)
- c) He mentioned Lamonte Young’s sustained-tone things. Young apparently did some stuff at Scelsi’s. }

-- JKR

A few months ago, at the bottom of a cardboard box marked "Princeton" that I had shoved into the corner of the top shelf of a closet, I found a 30-page, brown, 12-stave music notebook (the price sticker, 65 cents, still on it) among the sheets of yellowing manuscript paper filled with charts and fragments of unfinished or never-started pieces. Only the first page of the notebook had been written on. In the top left corner: "Tonality - Properties." In the top right corner: "Randall, 11/7/75."

**TONALITY - PROPERTIES**

**RANDALL 11/7/75**

1. WITHIN COLLECTION, EVERY CHROMATIC INTERVAL APPEARS (SIMPLE UNIT INTERVAL COUNT)  
(WHERE A "COLLECTION" IS DEFINED AS ANY SUBSET OF THE 12-NOTE CHROMATIC SCALE.)  
--> COROLLARY 1A: EVERY INTERVAL MULTIPLY EMBEDDED
2. MUST HAVE 12 DISTINCT TRANSPOSITIONS
3. EVERY POSSIBLE DEGREE OF COMMON-TONE RELATEDNESS BETWEEN TRANSPOSITIONS.
4. INTERVALS MUST BE STRONGLY DETERMINANT AS TO ADJACENCY OR NON-ADJACENCY  
(WHERE ADJACENCY INTERVALS ARE SMALLER THAN THE NON-ADJACENCY INTERVALS)

**TRANSPOSITION CONSIDERED IN LIGHT OF EMBEDDING QUALITIES ...**

UNIQUE EMBEDDINGS OF INTERVAL 4

PRESERVING C-E DYAD UNDER TRANSPOSITION

Thirty years later, I am struck by the fact that I can not consider the content of this page of notes apart from the context in which I jotted them down: a time and place when and where such things (as the "properties of tonality") mattered. And no one showed how they mattered more than Prof. J.K. Randall. In Jim's presence I always felt a sense of discovery. Sometimes bewilderment. Often inadequacy, but always a sense of privilege.

# CLASS NOTES

(for Jim)

$\text{♩} = 60$  (with a sense of discovery, bewilderment, inadequacy and privilege)

7

*f*

11

*mf* *mp*

Ped. \*

15

Ped. \*

19

*Ped.* \*

23

*ff*

27

*mf* *p* *pp*

*p* *pp*

New York, NY  
Dec 23, 2005

Only when I finished composing *Just Keyboard Respect* did I realize that in it I was working out stuff Jim Randall encouraged me to explore 30 years ago when I was writing my dissertation piece at Princeton, **Ascensus Detrahendus** (also a piece for piano solo). This was far from the first time since leaving Princeton that echoes of Jim's sensibilities, coaching, and advice enriched my composing experience; I expect it won't be the last. Such is the enduring influence of great teachers.

I arrived at Princeton in the fall of 1970 and was treated in my first year to a double-whammy of "shock and awe" courses: Milton Babbitt's 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music and Jim's Theory of Tonal Music. Both portrayed musical spaces far more immense than anything I had imagined up to that point – Milton's from the top down, Jim's from the bottom up. Jim would spend weeks on tours of short passages in pieces like Mozart K. 332 or the Brahms B $\flat$  string sextet, uncovering layer after layer of detail, examining the musical substance of both what was in the score and weaker alternatives that weren't. Never before had I known the apprehension of music to be so powerfully intimate or so rewarding of intense concentration. I had been composing music since middle school, but engaging this new-found universe of complexity and nuance made me feel I was just getting started, which was both exciting and unsettling. Although this was not altogether comfortable at the time, I came to welcome it. I now feel fortunate that it continues to be that way.

*Just Keyboard Respect* traces a path through sets of cycles in the octatonic collection. The elements in each cycle arise by extracting a dyad and partitioning the remaining hexachord into transpositionally-related trichords. Transposing an element while holding one of the trichords in common produces a cycle. The dyadic and trichordal common tone connections available between elements and between cycles provide the basis for harmonic succession (and the basis for one of the provisional titles, *Juxtaposed Kindred Relationships*). This chart served as the springboard for designing a syntax and inventing gestures that achieve a sense of progression and development, the same middleground and foreground issues Jim and I worked on thirty years ago.

I wrote *Just Keyboard Respect* for Peter Vinograde, a pianist who plays with a rare combination of clarity and expressiveness. His interpretations are both original and profound, displaying a remarkable versatility: witness the range of composers he plays (which, fortunately, includes me).

-Mark Zuckerman

in honor of J. K. Randall's 75th birthday  
for Peter Vinograde

Duration: ca. 4'15"

# Just Keyboard Respect

Mark Zuckerman

Relaxed ♩ = 72

Piano

12

18

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Just Keyboard Respect

23

Musical score for measures 23-25. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Measure 23 starts with a treble clef and a dynamic of *mf*. It features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. Measure 24 continues with a dynamic of *mf* and a crescendo hairpin. Measure 25 has a dynamic of *f* and a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The system ends with a dynamic of *mf* and a crescendo hairpin.

26

Musical score for measures 26-31. Measure 26 starts with a treble clef and a dynamic of *f*. Measure 27 has a dynamic of *p*. Measure 28 has a dynamic of *p*. Measure 29 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 30 has a dynamic of *p*. Measure 31 has a dynamic of *mf*. The system ends with a dynamic of *mf*. A *8va* marking is present above measure 29.

32

Musical score for measures 32-37. Measure 32 starts with a bass clef and a dynamic of *f*. Measure 33 has a dynamic of *mp*. Measure 34 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 35 has a dynamic of *mp*. Measure 36 has a dynamic of *p*. Measure 37 has a dynamic of *mf*. The system ends with a dynamic of *mf*. A triplet of eighth notes is marked in measure 37.

38

Musical score for measures 38-43. Measure 38 starts with a treble clef and a dynamic of *f*. Measure 39 has a dynamic of *f*. Measure 40 has a dynamic of *f*. Measure 41 has a dynamic of *f*. Measure 42 has a dynamic of *ff*. Measure 43 has a dynamic of *ff*. The system ends with a dynamic of *ff*. A triplet of eighth notes is marked in measure 43.

44

Musical score for measures 44-49. Measure 44 starts with a treble clef and a dynamic of *f*. Measure 45 has a dynamic of *p*. Measure 46 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 47 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 48 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 49 has a dynamic of *pp*. The system ends with a dynamic of *pp*. A *8va* marking is present above measure 49.

49

8va

8va

Musical score for measures 49-52. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The right hand features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the left hand has a more melodic line with some grace notes. Two '8va' markings indicate octave transpositions in the left hand.

53

*p* *mf*

Musical score for measures 53-56. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The left hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics range from *p* to *mf*.

57

*p* *mf* *p* *mf* *f*

Musical score for measures 57-61. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics range from *p* to *f*.

62

*poco meno mosso*

*mp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*

*p* *pp* *p*

Musical score for measures 62-67. The tempo is marked *poco meno mosso*. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics range from *mp* to *pp*.

68

*poco rall. Tempo I°*

*mp* *p* *f* *mp* *p*

*ff* *mf* *pp*

Musical score for measures 68-72. The tempo is marked *poco rall. Tempo I°*. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics range from *mp* to *pp*.

Just Keyboard Respect

74

mp

mf

Musical score for measures 74-78. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the lower staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *mp* and *mf*.

79

f

p

Musical score for measures 79-84. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs, and the lower staff has a bass line. Dynamic markings include *f* and *p*.

85

pp

pp

mf

pp

p

f

p

Musical score for measures 85-92. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs, and the lower staff has a bass line. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *mf*, and *p*.

93

mf

mf

p

8va

3

3

3

ff

mp

Musical score for measures 93-98. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and a trill marked *8va*. The lower staff has a bass line with triplets. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *p*, *ff*, and *mp*.

99

f

ff

mf

ff

Musical score for measures 99-104. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and triplets. The lower staff has a bass line with triplets. Dynamic markings include *f*, *ff*, and *mf*.

For Jim Randall at seventy-five.

# Acciaccatura

Inspired by his "Composition Project for Seniors"  
given to Princeton University Seniors in 1974.

Steven Mackey (2006)

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 1-5) is in 3/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 40. It features piano (*pp*) and mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamics, with triplets in both hands. The second system (measures 6-9) changes to 3/8 time, with a tempo of quarter note = 48, described as "a bit faster". It includes piano (*pp*), mezzo-forte (*mf*), and pianissimo (*ppp*) dynamics, with triplets and quintuplets. The third system (measures 10-13) is in 3/8 time with a tempo of quarter note = 52, featuring mezzo-piano (*mp*) and pianissimo (*pp*) dynamics, with quintuplets. The fourth system (measures 14-17) starts with mezzo-piano (*mp*) and piano (*p*) dynamics, includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking, and ends with fortissimo (*ff*) dynamics and a tempo of quarter note = 40, marked "Tempo primo". The score is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including numerous triplets and quintuplets, and frequent changes in time signature.

Acciaccatura

17

ff *pp* *mf* *f*

21

♩=48 a bit faster

*ff* *p* *ppp* *p*

25

♩=52

*ppp* *p* *p* *pp* *mp* *mp*

28 *mf* *p* *rit.*  $\text{♩} = 40$  *p* *ppp*

32 *ppp* *p*

37 *mp* *mf* *8va* *p*

(8) 42 *mf*

Acciaccatura

46

pp  
mp  
p  
f

50

pp  
mf

54

mf

57

poco rit.

poco rit.

Durations are at least as loose as they look: think plainchant. Dynamics are even more a matter of interpretation. And, while optional, improvisatory ornaments, interpolations, and extensions are also welcome, at any and every moment.

## Being Hearing, Knowing Now

For Jim, to play

Stephen Dembski

Some keyboard;  
say, pianoforte...

*Monumental, and withdrawn*

*Con pedale ad libitum, sempre*

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Being Hearing Knowing Now

*(tremolo unmeasured: speed ad libitum, con rubato ad libitum)*

The musical score consists of five systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Each system begins with a tremolo passage in the right hand, indicated by a thick black bar across the staff. The left hand plays a melodic line with various notes and rests. The first system includes the instruction *(like bells)* above the first note. The second system continues the melodic line with a sharp sign. The third system features a bass clef and a long note. The fourth system includes a fermata over a note. The fifth system concludes with a final note and a fermata.

First system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The treble clef staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a sharp sign and various accidentals. The bass clef staff is empty.

Second system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble clef staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a sharp sign and various accidentals. The bass clef staff contains a few notes.

Third system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble clef staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a sharp sign and various accidentals. The bass clef staff contains a few notes.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble clef staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a sharp sign and various accidentals. The bass clef staff contains a few notes.

Fifth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble clef staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a sharp sign and various accidentals. The bass clef staff contains a few notes.

Being Hearing Knowing Now

First system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The treble clef part contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass clef part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

Second system of musical notation, continuing the piece. The treble clef part features a more active melodic line with eighth notes, and the bass clef part continues with a steady accompaniment.

Third system of musical notation, showing a change in texture. The treble clef part has a more sparse, chordal texture with some rests, while the bass clef part continues with a consistent accompaniment.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a more complex harmonic structure with chords in both the treble and bass clefs.

Fifth system of musical notation, concluding the piece. The treble clef part has a final chordal structure, and the bass clef part ends with a melodic line that concludes with a fermata.

Madison/NYC;  
1 January 2006

[With thanks to Kit Taylor for notation suggestions,  
-smd]

N° 1120

# Eve Beglarian

## Making Hey

for spoken voice, piano four hands, bass, percussion



EVBVD MUSIC  
PO Box 1677  
Old Chelsea Station  
New York, NY 10011  
[www.ebvvd.com](http://www.ebvvd.com)

The text for *Making Hey* is a gratuitously excellent piece of anonymous work that accompanied an email offering to increase my penis size or refinance my mortgage, I no longer remember which.

When Ben Boretz asked me for a piece to celebrate Jim Randall, I knew immediately I wanted this text to be part of the piece.

I have set the text (unchanged except for punctuation) to an adaptation of a two-piano piece called *Making Hay*, which I wrote in 1980 and dedicated to Jim at that time. This new piece starts out with the same student piece, but gradually clarifies and simplifies it in response to the bass and percussion line I have added all these years later.

I hope that the combination of elements will entertain my beloved Jim Randall, who has given me so much delight over the years.

•

Tami was at thereto when that happened: microcosm.

Curium at becloud or even Greenberg as in yarn.

Phillip at passenger or even threesome as in vanity.

Tami was at persuasive when that happened: ephemeral.

Bini at tattle or even avert as in round.

Tami was at delirious when that happened: emerge.

Tami was at course when that happened: cry,  
shadowy at lane or even broil as in graves.

Tami was at ninety when that happened: glacier.

Tridiagonal at bromide or even Allan as in Tarzan.

Wigging at affluvium or even CCNY as in decouple.

Tami was at Taurus when that happened: brazen.

Courtier at scud or even tried as in aurochs.

Tami was at Laurie when that happened: art.

Chenille at Raytheon or even Jo as in Akers.

Tami was at forum when that happened: premier.

Backscatter at rehabilitate or even corruption as in clomp.

Composite at goniometer or even amorous as in Armco.

Tami was at funny when that happened: anisotropic.

Woolworth at Riordan or even larynx as in rout.

Tami was at bevy when that happened: hindmost.

Tami was at decolonize when that happened: stag.

Gallop at shoulder or even aspect as in idolatry.  
Tami was at qualified when that happened: laughingstock. Flagstaff.  
Tami was at hereunder when that happened: Ann.  
Downriver at whither or even hamster as in codfish.  
Tami was at dauphine when that happened: agriculture.  
Tami was at zoology when that happened: interject.  
Companion at mutate or even rainbow as in proportionate.  
Tami was at cybernetics when that happened: ablate.  
Complaisant at schoolmate or even lunate as in frostbitten.  
Loquacity at transmission or even sporty as in sonority.  
Tami was at unkempt when that happened: despite Hadley at salvage  
or even depress as in fleeing.  
Tami was at invasive when that happened: bathe.  
Tami was at Minoan when that happened: amid.  
Chopin at diminish or even ecstasy as in emitted.  
Tami was at byword when that happened: mule.  
Berate at Solon or even cranny as in birdbath.  
Stair at coven or even molest as in gripe.  
Tami was at embower when that happened: abound.  
Daphne at diagnose or even hope as in Lanka.  
Tami was at sermon when that happened: crust.  
Tami was at delectable when that happened: oldster.  
Schroedinger at blob or even smirk as in Grenoble.  
Tami was at marjoram when that happened: nucleate.  
Corvette at Rockefeller or even credenza as in rhombic.  
Stimulant at Idaho or even shish as in adorn.  
Tami was at throwaway when that happened: caption.  
Alight at mycology or even homecoming as in automata.  
Tami was at capital when that happened: chalkboard.  
Tami was at dollar when that happened: diagram.  
Expect at malignant or even contributory as in wasn't.  
Tami was at atrocious when that happened: maid. Careful!  
Tami was at tuberculin when that happened: deficient.  
Filter at wonder or even swoop as in descend.  
Tami was at nadir when that happened: buckle.  
Tami was at bacon when that happened: ramble.  
Allay at safety or even done as in curtsey.  
Tami was at Karen when that happened: someplace.

# making hey

for jim randall

*8va* eve beglarian

$\text{♩} = 104$

pf 1

mp p mp mf p

pf 2

mf mp mf

bass

Tami was at thereto when that happened: microcosm. Curium at becloud

pf 1

pp fff loco

9 or even Greenberg as in yarn. Phillip at passenger

bass

pf 1

mf mp mf

13 or even threesome as in vanity. Tami was at

pf 2

mf mp mf

bass

Eve Beglarian

pf 1

17 persuasive when that happened: ephemeral. Bini at tattle or even avert

pf 2

bass

pf 1

21 as in round. Tami was at delirious when that happened: emerge.

pf 2

bass

pf 1

25 Tami was at course when that happened: cry,

pf 2

bass

Making Hey

pf 1

29 shadowy at lane or even broil as in graves.

pf 2

bass

pf 1

33 Tami was at ninety when that happened: glacier.

pf 2

bass

pf 1

37 Tridiagonal at bromide or even Allan as in Tarzan. Wiggling at

pf 2

bass

Eve Beqlarian

pf 1

41

ff

ff

mf

pp

mp

8<sup>va</sup>

8<sup>vb</sup>

affluvium or even CCNY as in decouple. Tami was at

pf 1

45

p

ff

mf mp

mp p mf p

mf pp

loco

Taurus when that happened: brazen. Courtier at scud or even tried as in

pf 1

49

mf

p

mp

mf

aurochs. Tami was at Laurie

Making Hey

pf 1

*mf* *p* *mf*

53 when that happened: art. Chenille at Raytheon or even Jo as in Akers.

pf 2

*fmp*

bass

pf 1

*p* *mf*

57 Tami was at forum when that happened: premier. Backscatter at rehabilitate

pf 2

*mp f mp*

bass

pf 1

*mp* *mf*

61 or even corruption as in clomp. Composite at goniometer or even amorous as in Armco.

pf 2

*mp*

bass



Making Hey

pf 1

mf f

77 or even aspect as in idolatry. Tami was at qualified when that happened:

pf 2

mf f ff

loco 8va

bass

pf 1

8va p mf

81 laughingstock. Flagstaff. Tami was at hereunder when that happened:

pf 2

pp mf

bass

pp

pf 1

85 Ann. Downriver at whither or even hamster as in codfish.

pf 2

mp

loco

bass

Eve Beglarian

pf 1

89 Tami was at dauphine when that happened: agriculture. Tami was at zoology when

pf 2

bass

pf 1

93 that happened: interject. Companion at mutata or even rainbow as in proportionate.

pf 2

bass

pf 1

97 Tami was at cybernetics when that happened: ablate. Complaisant at schoolmate or even lunata as in frostbitten.

pf 2

bass

Making Hey

pf 1

*loco*

*mf mp mf*

101

Loquacity at transmission or even sporty as in sonority.

pf 2

*mf mp*

*8<sup>bb</sup>*

bass

pf 1

*f mp*

105

Tami was at unkempt when that happened: despite Hadley at salvage or even depress as in

pf 2

*mf mp mp*

bass

pf 1

*mp pp mp*

*8<sup>na</sup>*

109

fleeing.

Tami was at invasive when that happened:

bathe.

Tami

pf 2

*mp*

*loco*

bass

Eve Beglarian

pf 1

*loco*

*p* *mp* *mf*

113 was at Minoan when that happened: amid. Chopin at diminish or even ecstasy

pf 2

*pp* *p* *mf*

bass

pf 1

117 as in emitted. Tami was at by word when that happened:

pf 2

*mp* *mf* *p*

bass

pf 1

*mf* *f*

121 mule. Berate at Solon or even cranny as in birdbath

pf 2

*f* *mf*

bass

Making Hey

pf 1

125 Stair at coven or even molest as in gripe. Tami was at

pf 2

bass

pf 1

129 embower when that happened: abound. Daphne at diagnose or even hope

pf 2

bass

pf 1

133 as in Lanka. Tami

pf 2

bass

Eve Beglarian

pf 1 *loco* *f* *mp* *mf* *mp* *f* *mf* *8va* *loco*

137 was at sermon when that happened: crust. Tami was at delectable when that happened: oldster

pf 2 *mp* *mf* *mp* *f*

bass

pf 1 *f* *mp* *mf*

141 Schroedinger at blob or even smirk as in Grenoble. Tami was at marjoram when that happened: nucleate.

pf 2 *mf* *f* *mp* *mf*

bass

pf 1 *mp* *mp* *f*

145 Corvette at Rockefeller or even credenza as in rhombic.

pf 2 *mp* *mf* *mp* *f*

bass

Making Hey

pf 1

149

Stimulant at Idaho or even shish as in adorn.

pf 2

bass

*loco*

pf 1

153

Tami was at throwaway when that happened: caption. Alight at

pf 2

bass

pf 1

157

mycology or even homecoming as in automata.

Tami was at capital when that happened:

pf 2

bass

Eve Beglarian

pf 1

*mf* *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

161 chalkboard. Tami was at dollar when that happened: diagram.

pf 2

*mf* *f* *ff* *f* *ff* *f*

bass

pf 1

*fff* *f*

165 Expect at malignant or even contributory as in wasn't.

pf 2

*ff* *fff* *f* *mf*

bass

pf 1

*mp* *f* *p* *pp*

169 Tami was at atrocious when that happened: maid. Careful!

pf 2

*f* *p*

bass

Making Hey

pf 1

*mp*

173 Tami was at tuberculin when that happened: deficient. Filter at wonder

pf 2

*mp* *mf* *p* *mp*

bass

pf 1

*mf* *pp*

177 or even swoop as in descend. Tami was at nadir when

pf 2

*pp* *p* *pp*

bass

pf 1

*mp* *mf* *p*

181 that happened: buckle. Tami was at bacon when that happened: ramble. Allay at

pf 2

*pp* *f* *mp* *mp*

bass

Eve Beglarian

pf 1

185 safety or even done as in curtesy.

pf 2

bass

pf 1

189 Tami was at Karen when that happened: someplace.

pf 2

bass

## 4 MIDI Pieces

An effort to overcome lifelong techno-phobia and a desire to participate in this tribute to Jim Randall brought forth the computer-generated composition of *From the Abbeys* (2005), which hinges on keyboard improvisation, and *Faygele's Footsteps* (2006), 'inspired' by my gaudy, feathered, winged hub-cap mask called *Faygele* ("little bird" in Yiddish). *Step by Step* and *Cut Short* were composed in 2004 for Ron George's "Tambellan", his new jumbo mallet instrument, and later MIDI-re-orchestrated.

### Order

1 Step by Step

2 Cut Short

3 From the Abbeys

4 Faygele's Footsteps

Mastered by Greg Ripes

Elaine Barkin

# FAYGELE's FOOTSTEPS

Elaine R. Barkin

♩ = 50

Dulcimer

Musical staff for Dulcimer, showing rests in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures.

Sitar

Musical staff for Sitar, showing rests in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures.

Suwir [sounds 16va]

Musical staff for Suwir, showing rests in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures.

Pemade [sounds 16va]

Musical staff for Pemade, showing notes in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures with dynamics *mf* and *ff*.

Gender [sounds 16va]

Musical staff for Gender, showing notes in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures with dynamics *ff* and *p*.

Harp

Musical staff for Harp, showing notes in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures with dynamic *sf*.

♩ = 50

Piano

Musical staff for Piano, showing rests in 6/4 and 5/4 time signatures.

Piano accompaniment notation with dynamic *ppp*.

Favaele's Footsteps

7

The musical score consists of seven staves. The first staff is a treble clef with dynamics *ff*, *pp*, and *p*. The second staff is a treble clef with dynamic *mp*. The third staff is a treble clef with dynamic *mp*. The fourth staff is a bass clef with dynamic *mf*. The fifth staff is a bass clef. The sixth staff is a bass clef with dynamic *sff*. The seventh staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Time signatures change from 2/4 to 5/4. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

14

The musical score for page 14 consists of seven systems of staves. The first system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The second system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The third system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The fourth system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The fifth system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The sixth system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The seventh system includes two treble clef staves and two bass clef staves. The score features various time signatures (5/8, 4/4, 2/4, 3/4) and dynamics (ppp, p, pp, mf, sf). It includes musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings (5, 3). A fermata is present over a note in the fifth system. A double bar line is present at the end of the sixth system.

Faygele's Footsteps

22

Musical score for 'Faygele's Footsteps' page 22. The score consists of eight staves. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics 'Faygele's Footsteps'. The fifth and sixth staves are piano accompaniment (Right and Left Hand). The seventh and eighth staves are grand piano accompaniment (Right and Left Hand). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *ppp*, and *pp*, and a fermata over the final chord.

31

The musical score for page 31 consists of several staves. The first staff is in 5/4 time and features a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff is in 5/4 time and features a dynamic marking of *mf*. The third staff is in 5/4 time and features dynamic markings of *p* and *pp*, along with a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff is in 5/4 time and features a dynamic marking of *pp*. The fifth staff is in 5/4 time and features a dynamic marking of *ppp* and a 7th fret marking. The sixth staff is in 5/4 time and features a dynamic marking of *pp*. The seventh staff is in 5/4 time and features a dynamic marking of *ff*. The score includes time signature changes from 5/4 to 3/4 and back to 5/4. Various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and triplets are used throughout the piece.

Faygele's Footsteps

38

The musical score for 'Faygele's Footsteps' begins at measure 38. It consists of several staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, marked *pp*. The second staff is another vocal line in treble clef, also marked *pp*. The third staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a melodic line starting in measure 38, marked *pp*. The fourth staff is a vocal line in bass clef, marked *pp*. The fifth staff is a vocal line in bass clef, marked *pp*. The sixth staff is a vocal line in treble clef, marked *pp*. The seventh staff is a vocal line in bass clef, marked *pp*. The eighth staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef, marked *ppp*. The ninth staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, marked *ppp*. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, notes, slurs, and dynamic markings.

44  $\text{♩} = 84$   $\text{♩} = 56$

The musical score is written for a string quartet, woodwinds, and piano. It is in 5/4 time. The first system (measures 44-48) has a tempo of 84 quarter notes per minute. The second system (measures 49-53) has a tempo of 56 quarter notes per minute. The score includes various dynamics such as *ff*, *fff*, *ppp*, and *fff*, and features complex rhythmic patterns and articulation marks.

Faygele's Footsteps

49

$\text{♩} = 66$

$\text{♩} = 80$

*p*

*fff*

*fff*

*mf* *mp*

*mf*

*gliss*

*f*

*fff*

*ff*

*ff*

$\text{♩} = 66$

*p*

$\text{♩} = 80$

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system consists of five staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and three individual staves. The second system also consists of five staves: a grand staff and three individual staves. The third system consists of a grand staff. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (fff, mf, mp, p, f), articulation (accents, glissando), and performance markings (7, v). The tempo markings are quarter note = 66 and quarter note = 80. The time signature is 2/4, with a 5/4 section at the end of each system.

♩ = 60

54

Dulcimer

Sitar

Suwir

Pemade

Gender

Harp

Piano

*pp*

*p*

*pp*

*p*

*pp*

*gliss.*

♩ = 60

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a multi-instrument ensemble. It consists of seven staves. The top staff is for Dulcimer, starting at measure 54 with a *pp* dynamic and a melodic line. The Sitar staff has rests until measure 56, then a melodic line starting at *p*. The Suwir staff has a melodic line starting at *pp* in measure 54, with a *p* dynamic in measure 56. The Pemade and Gender staves have rests throughout. The Harp staff has rests until measure 56, then a melodic line starting at *pp* with a *gliss.* marking. The Piano staff has rests throughout. The score is in 5/4 time and includes a tempo marking of ♩ = 60. Dynamics range from *pp* to *p*. There are various musical notations including slurs, ties, and fingerings.

Faygele's Footsteps

60

*pp*

*ppp*

*ppp*

*sff*

*pppp*

The musical score is written in 4/4 time. It begins at measure 60. The vocal line features a melodic phrase with a slur and a fermata. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and a bass line. The grand piano section includes a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics are indicated by *pp*, *ppp*, *sff*, and *pppp*.

63

pp

Faygele's Footsteps

65

*ppp*

*p*

*Ped.*

Elaine Barkin

Musical score for Elaine Barkin, featuring multiple staves with musical notation, dynamics, and tempo markings.

Tempo markings:  $\text{♩} = 66$  and  $\text{♩} = 46$ .

Dynamics: *p* (piano), *ppp* (pianissimo).

The score consists of several staves, including a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and individual staves for other instruments. The notation includes notes, rests, and slurs. A fermata is present over a chord in the grand staff. A 7th fret marking is visible on the guitar staff, and a 6th fret marking is visible on the bass staff. The time signature is 2/4.

Faygele's Footsteps

72  $\text{♩} = 42$   $\text{♩} = 46$

*fff* *ff* *ff* *pp* *fff* *pp* *fff* *p* *fff* *p*

79

♩ = 88

♩ = 46

The musical score for Elaine Barkin, page 79, features seven staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a fermata. The second and third staves are empty. The fourth and fifth staves are bass clefs with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The sixth and seventh staves are grand staves (treble and bass clefs) with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble and fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic in the bass. The score includes tempo markings of 88 and 46, and dynamic markings of *p*, *pp*, and *fff*.

Musical score for measures 86-92. The score consists of five staves. The first two staves are treble clef, and the next two are bass clef. The fifth staff is a grand staff. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, and *mp*. A *Ped.* marking is present in the fourth staff. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 84.



93 Sitar

Musical score for measures 93-98, labeled "93 Sitar". The score is written for a grand staff. Dynamics include *ppp* and *pppp*. A "6" is written above the right-hand staff. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 84.

94

ppp

5

This system contains measures 94 and 95. Measure 94 features a treble clef with a whole note chord and a piano part with a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measure 95 continues the piano part with a five-fingered chord marked '5' and a treble clef with a whole note chord. The dynamic marking 'ppp' is present in measure 94.

96

3

3 3

This system contains measures 96 and 97. Measure 96 has a treble clef with a triplet of eighth notes and a piano part with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 97 continues with a treble clef and a piano part featuring two triplet markings. The system begins with a double bar line.

98

♩ = 66

This system contains measures 98, 99, and 100. Measure 98 has a treble clef with a quarter note chord and a piano part with a quarter note chord. Measures 99 and 100 are mostly empty staves with some notes in the piano part. A tempo marking '♩ = 66' is placed above measure 98. The system ends with a double bar line.

Feb. - Apr. 2006

# Kilvert's Hills

For Bassoon Solo

Hilary Tann

**First performance:** *"The Egg", Albany NY, May 6, 2006 by Krassimir Ivanov with the Ellen Sinopoli Dance Company*

**Duration:** *Approx. twelve minutes*

*"Kilvert's Hills" takes its inspiration from a journal entry by the Rev. Francis Kilvert, Whitsun Monday, 29 May, Oakapple Day, 1871 when he wrote of the Black Mountains (in South Wales) -- "I made a pilgrimage to the place today ... it is a fine thing to be out on the hills alone. A man can hardly be a beast or a fool alone on a great mountain. There is no company like the grand solemn beautiful hills. They fascinate and grow upon us and one had a feeling and a love for them which one has for nothing else." The piece was commissioned by the Ellen Sinopoli Dance Company with funds provided by the New York State Council on the Arts. It is meditative in nature and ends with a homage to the chant "O Deus" by Hildegard von Bingen. – HT*

**Acknowledgement::** *The composer is grateful to Boston-based Cappella Clausura, directed by Amelia LeClair, for introducing her to Amelia LeClair's transcription of Hildegard's O Deus, qui es tu from Symphonia, Riesencodex, Wiesbaden 1998.*

for JKR  
**Kilvert's Hills**  
for bassoon solo

Hilary Tann

Andante, ♩ = 46

*f* *espress.*

5 *meno* *f*

Animando, ♩ = 78

10 *f* *flessibile*

13 *rit. poco* *a tempo*  
*dim. poco a poco*

16 *(mf)*

19 *rit.*  
*(mp)* *p*

24 Andante, ♩ = 46  
*mp* *mf*

28 Animando, ♩ = 78  
*f* *flessibile* *dim. poco a poco*

31 *rit.*  
*(mf)* *(mp)*

Kilver's Hills

36 **Andante**,  $\text{♩} = 46$   
*p* *mp*

41 **Animando**,  $\text{♩} = 76$  **rit.**  
*mf* *flessibile* *cresc. poco a poco*

45 **Andante**,  $\text{♩} = 46$   
*f* *espress.*

50 **Animando**,  $\text{♩} = 76$  **rit.**  
*meno* *f* *flessibile* *dim.*

55 **Andante**,  $\text{♩} = 46$  **Vivo**,  $\text{♩} = 120$   
*mf* *p* *p* *leggiero*

60 *mf*

65 **rit.**  
*p*

71 **a tempo**  
*p*

74

78

*cresc. poco a poco*

82

*f*

87

*f*

93

*mf cresc. poco a poco*

96

*f*

99

*f*

102

*cresc. poco a poco*

105

*f*

108

*ff*

Kilver's Hills

112

112

117

*f* *rit.* *dim. poco a poco*

123

*p* *f* *Animando, ♩ = 78* *flessibile e ardente*

125

*rit. poco* *a tempo* *dim. poco a poco*

128

*(mf)*

131

*rit.* *(mp)* *p*

136

*Vivo, ♩ = 120* *rit.* *mf* *tentativo*

142

*p* *pp*

145

*f* *Animando, ♩ = 78* *flessibile* *dim. poco a poco*

147 *rit.*  
*(mf)* *(mp)*

152 *p* *espress.* *mp*

157 *Animando, ♩. = 78*  
*mf* *flessibile* *cresc. poco a poco*

161 *rit.* *Andante, ♩. = 46*  
*f* *espress.*

166 *meno*

170 *Animando, ♩. = 78* *rit.* *Andante, ♩. = 46*  
*f* *flessibile* *dim.* *mf*

175 *Quasi vivo, ma poco meno mosso*  
*p* *mf*

180 *f* *mf* *rit.*

Kilver's Hills

185 **Vivo, accel.**  
5 3 5  
cresc. molto

189 **rit.**

192 **Adagio, ♩ = 40** *ten. lunga*  
**ff**

197 **molto espressivo**  
**f** < 5 **p**

201 **f** < *dolce* **mf** **p**

205 **f** < 5 **p**

209 **f** < 5 **mf**

**Andante, ♩ = 46**  
213 **a piena voce** **free and chant-like** **dim.**

216 *mf* *a piena voce*

219 *dim.*

223 *mf* *f* *rit.* *Adagio, ♩ = 40*

228 *mf* *dolce*

232 *mp*

236 *p* *Poco animando* *rit.* *meno*

240 *mf* *p*

245 *Andante, ♩ = 48*

*for JKR*

listening  
t' each  
note

*HT*

From John Rahn

I got to know Jim Randall when I was a graduate student at Princeton during 1970-73, newly arrived from the US Army and so grateful to be among smart people. However, I was a pain in the fundament to most of the professors (they will confirm this). Jim introduced me to Schenker the first day of classes, with the usual analysis of K 330, but after half the class I thought, geeze, this is just recursive structures embedded in each other, how stupid, and stormed out of class. Later that day I gave Jim a little recursive theory showing how stupid the idea was (I thought). He gingerly told me maybe I should major in theory instead of composition. I also remember well his analysis seminar, analyzing Brahms in excruciating detail. I came to appreciate what seemed to me the perversely deliberate tempo and thoroughgoing ambiguation (Jim was always saying, "In some sense...", yes well, in some sense, anything). The mode of discourse became for me the subject of the seminar. In following years, Jim would invite students to his house for discussions, for example, problems I had with computer music – that's another story, punch cards, JCL, and trips to Bell Labs -- and the beginning of the improvisational group practice that came to be a focus for him afterwards. He was always attentive and generous. I hope he likes these pieces.

## The New Mother, excerpts:

### Overture

### Not Bad Enough

The New Mother is a chamber opera for five female voices, an orchestra of ten instruments, and electronic sound. The libretto is adapted by Suzanne Rahn from a short story for children by Lucy Clifford, a long-forgotten Victorian writer. Lucy Clifford has received recent critical attention (especially by feminists) for the power and psychological horror of her stories.

In *The New Mother*, two little girls live happily with their mother and a baby in a little house in the woods, until a young gypsy girl carrying a "pear drum" provokes them, saying that only bad children can see the little man and the little woman dancing inside her pear drum. Inflamed with curiosity, the two children set out to be bad, and day after day the gypsy assures them that they are still not bad enough. Their mother warns them, that if they continue to behave badly, she will have to go away with the baby, and send home a New Mother, with glass eyes and a wooden tail. But the girls make light of the warning, as the gypsy assures them that "They all say that." The children embark on a series of ever more intense orgies of destruction. Weeping, the mother leaves the house, never to return. That night, the New Mother, with her flashing glass eyes, arrives and breaks down the door with her wooden tail. The children escape through the window and run screaming into the woods. They are there still. From time to time, at night, they creep back within sight of the house, and from a distance they see the flashing of her glass eyes, and hear the dragging of her wooden tail.

The singing and orchestral music contrast with the electronic music, which creates a mysterious and sinister tone whose trajectory descends to the deepest evil and violence as the opera progresses. The vocal music is simple and singable, and jolly at the beginning, but its innocence is gradually corrupted. There is a dramatic development of the tension between the two poles, and a global transformation which reflects and amplifies the narrative of the work.

The Overture is entirely electronic, and the section called *Not Bad Enough* is an electronic intermezzo from the middle of the opera, as the children culminate their badness and their mother leaves.

John Rahn

**BIG AS A HOUSE MUSIC**  
FOR JKR

BY JUDITH SHATIN

BEAUTIFUL IRIDESCENT GLOW  
AROUND SCALES  
AROUND

HARMONIES  
OVER  
UNDER  
SHIMMER  
ECSTATICALLY

MELODIES UNDULATE  
SOAR  
INTO  
CONSCIOUSNESS



# Postlude, with Jim Randall in mind

for string quartet

Benjamin Boretz  
2005

♩=96

violin I  
violin II  
viola  
cello

*ppp*

*ppp*

12

*ppp*

*ppp*

*ppp*

*f*

*mp*

22

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp*

*ppp*

Benjamin Boretz

28

ppp

pp

38

pp

ppp

48

pp

pp

Postlude

59

Musical score for measures 59-69. The score is written for piano in G major, 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef system. The right hand (treble clef) contains a melodic line with several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a bracket) and a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) at the beginning. The left hand (bass clef) provides harmonic support with chords and a few melodic fragments, also marked *pp*.

70

Musical score for measures 70-80. The score continues the piece with a treble and bass clef system. The right hand features a melodic line with triplet markings and a *pp* dynamic. The left hand has a more active role with melodic lines and chords, also marked *pp*.

81

Musical score for measures 81-91. The score continues with a treble and bass clef system. The right hand has a melodic line with triplet markings and a *pp* dynamic. The left hand features a melodic line with triplet markings and a *pp* dynamic.

91

Musical score for measures 91-99. The score is written for three staves: Treble, Alto, and Bass. The Treble staff contains rests. The Alto and Bass staves feature a melodic line with triplets and slurs. Dynamic markings include *ppp* and *pp*. A fermata is present over the final measure.

100

Musical score for measures 100-109. The score is written for three staves: Treble, Alto, and Bass. The Treble staff contains chords with slurs. The Alto and Bass staves feature a melodic line with slurs and dynamic markings of *ppp*. A fermata is present over the final measure.

111

Musical score for measures 111-119. The score is written for three staves: Treble, Alto, and Bass. The Treble staff contains chords with slurs and dynamic markings of *pp*. The Alto and Bass staves feature a melodic line with slurs and dynamic markings of *ppp*. A fermata is present over the final measure.

121

pp

ppp

3 3 3 3

ppp

126

ff

V

131

ff

ppp

138

*p*

*pp* *pp* *ppp*

*f*

144

*ppp* *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

*pp* *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

*mf* *pp*

Postlude

150

Musical score for measures 150-153. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The dynamic marking *ppp* is present in the first two staves. A prominent feature is a long, sweeping triplet of eighth notes in the second bass staff, starting in measure 152 and continuing through measure 153. The first two staves have a similar triplet pattern in measure 150. The bottom two staves are mostly empty, with some notes in measure 150.

154

Musical score for measures 154-155. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The music consists of a continuous sequence of triplets of eighth notes. The first two staves (treble clefs) play a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, while the last two staves (bass clefs) play a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The dynamic marking *pp* is present in the first two staves. The music is characterized by a steady, rhythmic flow.

155

Musical score for measures 156-157. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The music consists of a continuous sequence of triplets of eighth notes, similar to the previous system. The first two staves (treble clefs) play a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, while the last two staves (bass clefs) play a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The dynamic marking *pp* is present in the first two staves. The music is characterized by a steady, rhythmic flow.

156

Musical score for measure 156, featuring three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a whole note chord with a fermata. The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a triplet of eighth notes, with a slur and a fermata over the entire measure. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a continuous eighth-note accompaniment.

157

Musical score for measure 157, featuring three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a whole note chord with a fermata. The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a triplet of eighth notes, with a slur and a fermata over the entire measure. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a continuous eighth-note accompaniment.

158

Musical score for measure 158, featuring three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a whole note chord with a fermata. The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a triplet of eighth notes, with a slur and a fermata over the entire measure. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and contains a continuous eighth-note accompaniment.

Postlude

159

Musical score for measures 159-161. The system consists of four staves. The top two staves (treble and alto clefs) feature a melodic line with a long slur and a series of triplet eighth notes. The bottom two staves (bass and tenor clefs) feature a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

162

Musical score for measures 162-165. The system consists of four staves. Measures 162-163 show piano (*p*) chords in the upper staves and pizzicato (*pizz.*) chords in the lower staves. Measures 164-165 show a dynamic shift to piano (*p*) and then pianissimo (*pp*) in the upper staves, and fortissimo (*ff*) in the lower staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

170

Musical score for measures 170-173. The system consists of four staves. Measure 170 has a dynamic marking of mezzo-forte (*mf*). Measures 171-173 show a dynamic shift to mezzo-forte (*mf*) and then pianissimo (*pp*) in the upper staves, and mezzo-forte (*mf*) in the lower staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#).



Postlude

197

Musical score for measures 197-208. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The top two staves contain a continuous, flowing melodic line with frequent slurs and ties. The bottom two staves are marked *arco* and *p sempre*. The bass clef staves feature a series of slurs, with the bottom-most staff containing a long, sweeping slur that spans across several measures, indicating a sustained or arched sound.

209

Musical score for measures 209-218. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The top two staves continue the melodic line from the previous section. The bottom two staves feature a series of slurs, with the bottom-most staff containing a long, sweeping slur that spans across several measures, indicating a sustained or arched sound.

221

Musical score for measures 221-232. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The top two staves feature a complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs, creating a dense, textured sound. The bottom two staves feature a more melodic line with slurs and some accidentals (sharps and naturals).

233

Musical score for measures 233-244. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The top two staves continue the complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs. The bottom two staves continue the melodic line with slurs and accidentals.

245

Musical score for measures 245-256. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The top two staves continue the complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs. The bottom two staves continue the melodic line with slurs and accidentals.

Postlude

257

Musical score for measures 257-268. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The top two staves feature a continuous, flowing melodic line with a repeating eighth-note pattern. The bottom two staves provide a harmonic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note bass line and occasional melodic phrases. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/8.

269

Musical score for measures 269-280. This system continues the musical piece from the previous system. The notation and instrumentation remain consistent, with the top two staves playing a melodic line and the bottom two staves providing accompaniment. The key signature and time signature are maintained.

281

Musical score for measures 281-292. This system concludes the musical piece. The notation and instrumentation are consistent with the previous systems. The key signature and time signature are maintained.

293

Musical score for measures 293-304. The score consists of four staves. The top two staves (treble clef) feature a continuous, overlapping pattern of eighth notes, creating a dense, rhythmic texture. The bottom two staves (bass clef) feature a more sparse melody with quarter and eighth notes, including some accidentals (sharps) and slurs. The music is written in a complex, non-standard notation style.

305

Musical score for measures 305-316. The score consists of four staves. The top two staves (treble clef) continue the dense, overlapping eighth-note pattern from the previous system. The bottom two staves (bass clef) feature a melody with quarter and eighth notes, including some accidentals (sharps and flats) and slurs. The notation is consistent with the previous system.

317

Musical score for measures 317-328. The score consists of four staves. The top two staves (treble clef) continue the dense, overlapping eighth-note pattern. The bottom two staves (bass clef) feature a melody with quarter and eighth notes, including some accidentals (sharps and flats) and slurs. The notation is consistent with the previous systems.

Postlude

328

$\text{♩} = 52$   
pizz.  
mf

337

345

351

Musical score for measures 351-356. The score is written for piano and features a complex rhythmic structure with frequent rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *p*, *P*, *mf*, and *mp*. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' in measure 352. A fermata is placed over a note in measure 353. The piano part includes a *pizz.* marking in measure 355.

357

Musical score for measures 357-361. The score is written for piano and features a complex rhythmic structure with frequent rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *pizz.*, and *pp*. The piano part includes a *ff* marking in measure 360. The score includes various articulation marks such as accents and slurs.

362

Musical score for measures 362-366. The score is written for piano and features a complex rhythmic structure with frequent rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, and *mf*. The score includes various articulation marks such as accents, slurs, and fermatas.

Postlude

368

Musical score for measures 368-372. The score is in 7/8 time. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a more complex accompaniment. The treble staff has dynamics *pp* and *pp*. The bass staff has dynamics *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. There are triplets in the bass staff and a *arco* marking. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

373

Musical score for measures 373-378. The score is in 7/8 time. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a more complex accompaniment. The treble staff has dynamics *pp*, *p*, *mf*, *f*, *f*, and *pp*. The bass staff has dynamics *ppp*, *f*, and *mf*. There are triplets in the bass staff and a *arco* marking. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

379

Musical score for measures 379-384. The score is in 7/8 time. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a more complex accompaniment. The treble staff has dynamics *p*, *pp*, *pp*, and *pp*. The bass staff has dynamics *p*, *pp*, and *pp pizz.*. There are triplets in the bass staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Benjamin Boretz

388

*p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *mp* *p*

395

*pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *mp* *p* *p* *p*

404

*pp* *pp* *pp* *p* *p*

Postlude

Violin I: stand and walk slowly  
(no hurry) to the back of the performance area,  
facing away from listeners, possibly  
using an extra music stand for this  
final passage, which should be played  
as if on a solitary walk outdoors.

413  $\text{♩} = 36$

*p* *p* *pp*

421

*pp*

428

*ppp*

436 even and steady to the end (no diminuendo)

ca. 23:25

October 2004/January 2005  
Barrytown, New York



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