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Daniel Muzyczuk

Editorial

The opera *Have A Good Day!* is striking for its focus on something no other opera deals with: the working conditions of supermarket cashiers. Written by Vaiva Grainytė but conceived with her collaborators Lina Lapelytė and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, the opera's libretto is divided between characters representing different aspects of supermarket work as well as the drastically different personalities and temperaments that animate this division of labor. Yet another layer emerges in how the structure of the score itself reflects the subject matter by reproducing a division of labor among the librettist (Grainytė), composer (Lapelytė), and director (Barzdžiukaitė): music produced collaboratively, by design, typically needs to employ methods of separating tasks between different individuals. While this might seem obvious, the consequences of such organizing principles are not well understood, especially in terms of how they place limits on the artistic result from the outset.

Socially progressive ideas cannot be contained in a regressive form—a modernist principle familiar to readers of Walter Benjamin and Władysław Strzemiński. Left-wing modernist music followed the same tenet, which is why Cornelius Cardew could condemn John Cage:

> Cage serves imperialism and will go under with imperialism. But is it true to say that his music bears no relation to the lives of the working or oppressed people? In a way such music does reflect the conditions under which people work, with the productive forces catastrophically out of step with the relations of production, and in doing so it intensifies our oppression.[1]

Cardew's lectures and writings were filled with analyses of music that reproduced the exploitative relations of labor. In classic communist style, they also included self-criticism. This special issue of *e-flux journal* (a sequel to Issue 144 from April 2024, which I also guest-edited) includes a conversation with musician and composer Anton Lukoszevieze on *Autumn '60*, one of Cardew's compositions that Cardew himself condemned in his later period. The complex set of rules it is based on create a unique blend of limits and freedoms as well as relations within the performing ensemble.

Also in this issue, Sandra Skurvida shows a different aspect of Cage's work—his attempts to construct constellations of human and inhuman powers. Skurvida focuses on aspects of Cage's work that are rooted in the politics of anarchism, which Cardew still saw as harmful to the workers' cause. Yet it was especially in Cage's last pieces that his ability to think of labor outside the humanist worldview started to become apparent. Sezgin Boynik's essay in the issue also considers musical propaganda that closely resembles the late activity of

Cardew. Focusing on the antinomies of agit-punk developed by the Pop Group, Boynik shows how Mark Stewart's project attempted to create a punk structure for conscious political work through form, lyrics, and methods of production.

The rise of open scores in the 1960s was part of an ideology of emancipating the performer to take creative license in interpreting cues offered by the composer. Yet this opening could also be understood as delegating more work to the performer, who now needed to step in and fill all the blanks in the score, as a composer might have done previously. One could argue that such a "liberation" simply relocated the burdens of production onto the workers, in accordance with the general logic of capitalism. After all, performing music is a form of labor, as exposed in the poems by Witold Wirpsza (1918–85) published here, based on photographs from "The Family of Man" exhibition. This conviction was also strong for another left-wing modernist composer, Luigi Nono, who made a striking comparison: "I've understood that there is no difference if I write a score or organise a strike. They are two aspects of the same thing. For me there is no longer any difference between music and politics."[2] How can a strike and a score be the same? A strike is a refusal of work and a score is an instruction for how to work. And yet labor is central to the existence of both.

The issue also features four musicians and composers reflecting on their own experiences with divisions of labor in performing and writing music. A conversation between Marianne Ritchey and Greg Stuart deals with the interpretation of assigned labor in the twentieth-century New Complexity school of composition. Sarah Hennies addresses questions of exploitation in classical music performance while showing how a score might be a tool for exploring new forms of relation based in mutual understanding. This is similarly important for trumpet player and composer Nate Wooley; his essay recounts his attempts to treat a score as a basis for anarchism-rooted (though not necessarily Cageian) social relations within the ensemble, where utopian scenarios might be realized. David Grubbs uses his experience performing an open score by Pauline Oliveros to show how a written document becomes a basis for creative unity ensured by a humble yet charismatic leader.

The issue opens with an opera and ends with opera. The last document is a synopsis of a stage musical performance by Liam Gillick based on his 1995 novel *Erasmus Is Late.* The period of the musical is vaguely determined by a meaningful moment: the rise of workers as a social class. The characters, even if historically marginal, represent tendencies in labor management, and the opera depicts the nonevent of their meeting by doing exactly what the opera is about: dividing the labor of performing liberalism.

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Daniel Muzyczuk is the interim Director of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland. He has curated numerous projects, including "Through the Soundproof Curtain: The Polish Radio Experimental Studio " (with Michał Mendyk), ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2019; "Tobias Zielony: Dark Data " (with Kathleen Rahn), Marta Herford, 2022; and "Citizens of the Cosmos: Anton Vidokle with Veronika Hapchenko, Fedir Tetyanych and the Collection of the International Cosmist Institute," Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2022. Muzyczuk also served as cocurator of a Konrad Smoleński exhibition for the Polish Pavillion at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013 (with Agnieszka Pindera). His upcoming book is entitled *Twilight of the Magicians* (Spector Books).

1
Cornelius Cardew, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (Primary Information, 2020), 45.

2
Luigi Nono, "Interview with Hansjörg Pauli, 1969," quoted in Jonathan Impett, *Routledge Handbook to Luigi Nono and Musical Thought* (Routledge, 2019), 276.

Vaiva Grainytė

Have a Good Day!: An Opera for Ten Singing Cashiers, Supermarket Sounds, and Piano

Introduction: Working Together Is Like Pinching an Owl

Fifteen years ago, I was sitting on the grass with Lina Lapelytė in the little town of Kražiai, Lithuania, discussing potential themes for a new opera. We were young and enthusiastic, and so was the production house OPEROMANIJA, which had initiated collaborations between creators from different fields.

During our brainstorm, my ex-partner called me and described a shopping experience in vivid detail: "The cashier lady who was scanning my bread was having some tubes attached to her back. I think they are not allowed to go to the bathroom!" This disturbing image fueled my imagination, and became the very first lines of the chorus—about a full bladder and daydreaming of the summer resort Palanga (in the English version it became Miami Beach). Lina composed a catchy tune, which ended up becoming the conceptual framework for the entire piece: music resembling the monotony of the checkout conveyor belt, repetitive songs, static cashiers, an opera about the routine of buying and selling (an ode to "daily nothing," as Jonas Mekas would say).

We invited Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė to join the project, and our little sketch gradually became developed by three authors: Lina (composer and musician), Rugilė (director and set designer), and me (writer and poet).

I didn't conduct interviews with cashiers, though I once talked with a friend's mom who had worked at a grocery store, which gave me the helpful idea to avoid overly direct language. Instead of quoting facts about (in)human labor conditions, talk about low salaries, the abusive climate, and the emotional exhaustion of the workers, I chose a poetic, metaphorical, and ironic approach: "I WISH I COULD SIT IN A HOLLOW / FAR FROM IT ALL, PINCHING AN OWL," sings the cashier chorus after an exhausting shift.

The stories were already present in my mind without needing further research: the Art Critic's aria riffs on the personal crisis I had after graduating; the Emigrant's Mother aria reflects on the socioeconomic landscape of our region (the invocation of Brexit and Skype make this song more vintage yet still acutely relevant); the forgetful and clumsy New Girl expresses some of the collective anxiety we each felt entering an unfamiliar field; the Member of a National Minority stands for the voice of people who follow different holiday calendars as most Europeans (after 2022, the wave of Orthodox Christian refugees and emigrants fleeing the war in Ukraine gave this song new connotations).

I wrote the libretto in short bits and shared them with the collaborators. Rugilė scouted professional and amateur

Have a Good Day!: An Opera for Ten Singing Cashiers, Supermarket Sounds, and Piano by Vaiva Grainytė, Lina Lapelytė, and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. Photo: Tiziana Tomasulo.

choirs, jazz bands, and opera venues, looking for faces that matched the text. The chosen ladies were invited for further auditions, followed by a tea session. We wanted to get to know their psychological constitution, temperament, and, very importantly, vocal qualities. Lina wrote the character-specific melodies, to capture the aura and psyche of each character. This means that none of the singers were acting. For instance, the singer who performs Ms. Healthy, an ecstatic optimist, has an extremely bright and warm personality. She genuinely means the slightly humorous words of wisdom she sings—"Every single day is a gift!"—which helped her with her own grief after the loss of her husband.

The manner of our artistic division of labor—working both individually and collectively—mirrors the structure of the piece itself. It's a work made of solo bits that pulse and grow into a single, unified chorus. The collective effort towards patience and acceptance creates space for these individual artistic practices to hatch.

—Vaiva Grainytė

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[center] **LIBRETTO**

Cast

Cashier 1: One half of the Early Morning Duo.

Cashier 2: Member of a national minority.

Cashier 3: An ecstatic optimist and fan of healthy lifestyles.

Cashier 4: A somewhat rough bimbo.

Cashier 5: Clumsy new girl who always drops products.

Cashier 6: Middle-aged woman who cannot wait for the end of her shift so that she can Skype with her son, who lives in England.

Cashier 7: A young woman with a degree in the arts.

Cashier 8: A single mother who always worries about household problems while her grandparents take care of her child.

Cashier 9: A lyrical and poetic character who sings about the sleeping products.

Cashier 10: The other half of the Early Morning Duo.

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Scene 1: A Lullaby to the Sleeping Products

Buttermilk is in a deep sleep,
Eggs, in a line, are wearing
Calcium pajamas.
The yogurt suffers from insomnia.
Greens maintain an eternal quarrel:
Cucumbers are choking radishes,
Those little ones just cannot defend themselves.

At the bread aisle—deadly silence:
Dough is demure.
The beer and wine shelves
Are constantly at war:
Bottles compare their bulging bellies,
Taking pride in not being discounted.
Sleep soundly, you products,
Goods
And managers of goods,
Storekeepers,
Bosses
And those savage cash registers ...
I close the door,
And turn on
The alarm—that angry guard dog ...

Scene 2: "Have a Good Day!" Choir

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

BARCODES, KEYBOARDS, DISCOUNTS, SALES,
A FULL BLADDER—
THESE ARE MY RELATIVES. REFINED PLANT OILS
ARE RESTING ON SHELVES AS IF ON MIAMI BEACH,
WHILE I DON'T EVEN HAVE MY OWN RESORT.
I WISH I COULD SIT IN A HOLLOW
FAR FROM IT ALL, PINCHING AN OWL.

AND HERE, MY FINGERS ARE PINCHED ALL DAY LONG
BY DIRTY COINS AND BANKNOTES—
MY PALMS ARE FULL OF BACTERIA,
INFESTED WITH VERMIN.

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

I REPEAT IT FROM MORNING TIL NIGHT!
THEY CALL ME TO MIX THE SALADS
SOMETIMES, I STICK MY ARM IN MAYONNAISE UP TO MY SHOULDER.

I GET MY PAY,
AND THEN I BUY:
I BUY,
I BUY,
I BUY ...
S *UGAR, SOUR CREAM, ONIONS, SAUSAGE, FLOUR, SUGAR, SOUR CREAM, ONIONS, SAUSAGE, FLOUR, SUGAR, SOUR CREAM ...*
I BUY ...

AND I GO TO SLEEP,
I DON'T DREAM OF ANYTHING
BUT "THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!"

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

BARCODES, KEYBOARDS, DISCOUNTS, SALES,
A FULL BLADDER—
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AND HERE, MY FINGERS ARE PINCHED ALL DAY LONG
BY DIRTY COINS AND BANKNOTES—
MY PALMS ARE FULL OF BACTERIA,
INFESTED WITH VERMIN.

HELLO!
THANK YOU!
HAVE A GOOD DAY!

Scene 3: New Girl's Aria

1253276—you've hit the wrong key again.
1253276—you've hit the wrong key again.
1253276—you've hit the wrong key again.
1253276—you've hit the wrong key again.

Excuse me, something's wrong with the cash register
again—
It's registered a larger sum ...
I don't get it ...
Could you come and help me? ...

Excuse me, something's wrong with the cash register
again—
It's registered a larger sum ...
I don't get it ...
Could you come and help me? ...

I'll fix it, I'll fix it, one minute, please!
I'll go and ask my manager.
You can wash your hands.
I'll go and ask my manager.

Could you change a hundred euros?
I only have large notes.

Could you change a hundred euros?
I only have large notes.

Could you change a hundred euros?
I only have large notes.

Could you change a hundred euros?
I only have large notes.

Could you change a hundred euros?
I only have large notes.

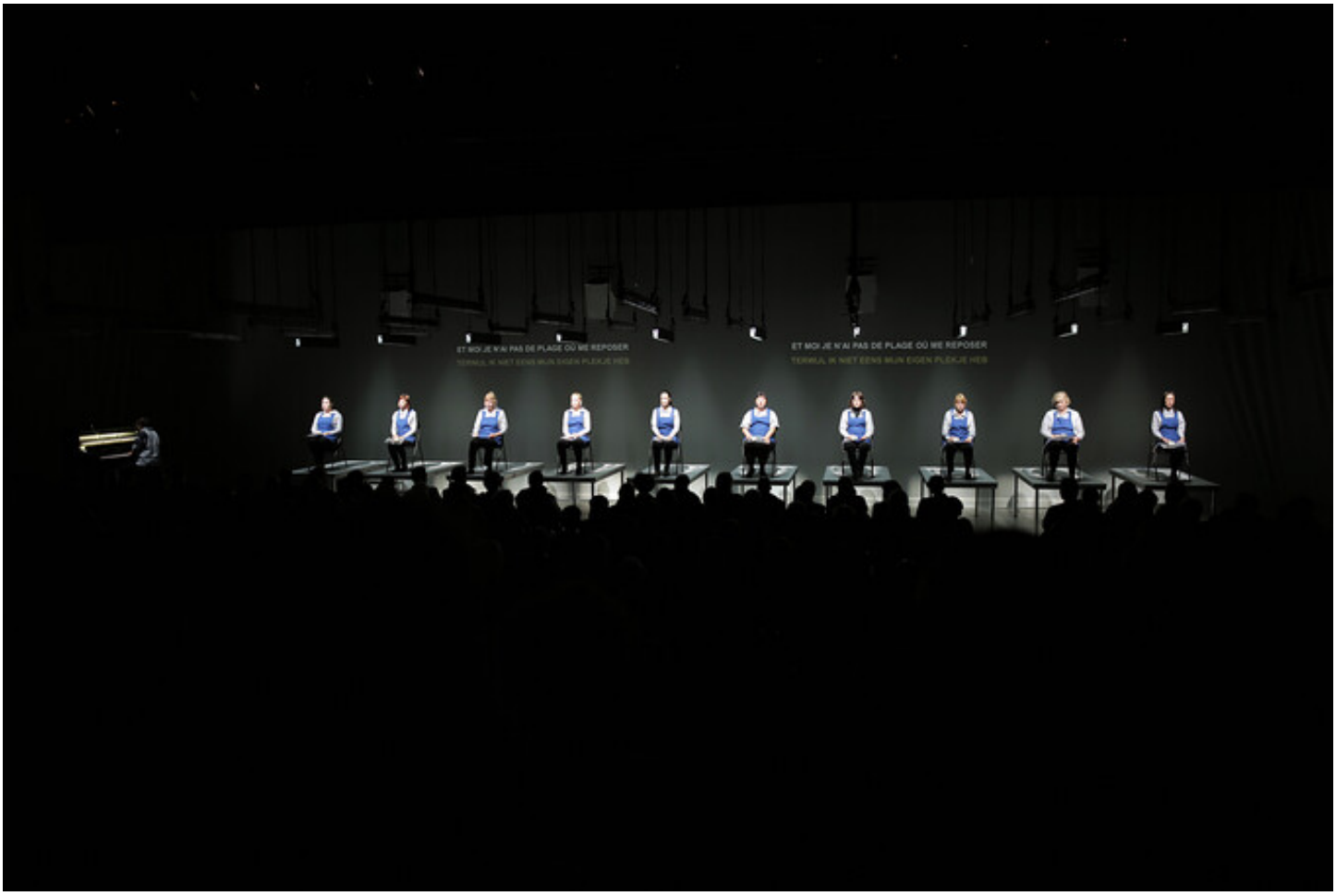
What's the code for beans?
Are bottle tops part of the lottery?
This is great quality jewelry!
What's this?
Someone's left their wallet,
And last night—a purse ...
Someone asked for the invoice ...
I didn't know what to do ...

Spanish tomatoes, royal potatoes.
Spanish tomatoes, royal potatoes.
Spanish tomatoes, royal potatoes.
Spanish tomatoes, royal potatoes.

Small Beijing cabbage, large Brussels sprouts.
Small Beijing cabbage, large Brussels sprouts.
Small Beijing cabbage, large Brussels sprouts.
Small Beijing cabbage, large Brussels sprouts.

White bread "Crescent," wheat bread "Peasant."
White bread "Crescent," wheat bread "Peasant."
White bread "Crescent," wheat bread "Peasant."
White bread "Crescent," wheat bread "Peasant."

Dog leash, fence for pine trees.
Dog leash, fence for pine trees.
Dog leash, fence for pine trees.
Dog leash, fence for pine trees.



Have a Good Day!: An Opera for Ten Singing Cashiers, Supermarket Sounds, and Piano by Vaiva Grainytė, Lina Lapelytė, and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. Photo: Rugile Barzdziukaite.

All Souls' Day candles, Valentine hearts.
All Souls' Day candles, Valentine hearts.
All Souls' Day candles, Valentine hearts.
All Souls' Day candles, Valentine hearts.

Scene 4: Member of a National Minority's Aria

The holidays are coming …
You need your darlings
To be near on certain days.
If not—
there's no need to shop …

The shelves are filled with
Lights,
Garlands,
Red Santa Clauses,
Or happy little chicks,
Chocolate bars with holiday numbers.

Calendars:

What name day to celebrate,
What to plant,
Whom to honor,
Whom to remember,
September …

What's in the calendar,
I don't really get it.
Some of the names get stuck in my throat.
And holidays—marked in red—
Impose a dominant rhythm on me.

I had to sign next to my new work rules:
2025, today's date, my surname,
name and signature.

My manager can't pronounce my name,
I can't say hers.
The pen just broke, eh …

In my family, we'd be baking cakes
And visiting relatives.
We wouldn't sign anything on that day …

I want to visit my family,
And be with my relatives.
But today, your calendar shows me the workday,
Ours says it's a holiday ...
... shows me the workday.

Scene 5: Single Mother's Aria and the Detergent Choir

The sour cream pack was broken,
So it spilled all over my pants.
Now I'm all sloppy.
I've left my kid with his grandmother,
They're going to visit our relatives' graves today.

Yesterday, I cooked a whole pot of soup,
It'll be enough for everyone,
I have a migraine, again.

I've been sorting goods since the morning,
I put the dumplings into the wrong freezer:
Into the meat section
And I didn't add their prices!

The customers raised a ruckus,
I had to write a letter of explanation!

Some woman was buying flour and sugar,
I put them into a plastic bag.
Because we are told to put dry products into a bag.
Because we are told to put dry products into a bag.

But it turned out the woman was an inspector!
Without having been asked to do so,
I put the products into a plastic bag!
I put everything into a cellophane bag,
You see, she didn't ask for it, but I did it anyway ...

An inspector!
Every day, we have new discounts, lotteries,
I cannot even remember them all.
I come back home, and my kid is crying,
He asks me to play with him,
But I can't even think about it, my head is aching,
I can't remember all the lotteries and discounts ...
It annoys me so much!
At least we have the grandparents,
So I have someone to leave my kid with.
On my own, I wouldn't get a thing done ...
I'm going to buy detergent,
Because of the sour cream:
it leaves stains.

SHE SPENDS HER SALARY ON BUTTER,
MILK, SOUR CREAM, WINE,
BABY FOOD, CURD ...
SHE ALSO BUYS A PIECE OF SMOKED CHEESE AND SPRATS,
AND OF COURSE,
DISCOUNTED SALADS,
AND A COUPLE OF CHOCOLATE BARS, AND TOMATOES.
SHE ALWAYS SPILLS SOMETHING, GETTING HER PANTS DIRTY,
SO SHE HAS TO BUY DETERGENT.
SHE BUYS THE CHEAPEST DETERGENT,
BECAUSE SHE REALLY LIKES MILK.
IF SHE BOUGHT A PRICIER DETERGENT
(NOT A POLISH—A GERMAN ONE),
SHE'D SIMPLY RUN OUT OF MONEY
FOR MILK AND SOUR CREAM WITH BIOCULTURES.
THE DETERGENT WON'T REMOVE THE STAINS WELL—
SHE SHOULD BUY HERSELF NEW PANTS,
BUT PANTS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE, SHE WAITS FOR A SALE.
UNTIL THEN, HER PANTS GET DIRTY—HER ONLY PAIR OF JEANS!
IN A MONTH, SHE GETS HER PAYMENT, WHICH SHE SPENDS ON BUTTER,
SOUR CREAM, A COUPLE OF CHOCOLATE BARS,
BABY FOOD,
AND AGAIN, ON CHEAP DETERGENT THAT WILL NOT REMOVE THE STAINS ...

Scene 6: Bimbo's Aria

That man bought Legos and beef:
I cracked up by accident,
But he roared as well.
He gave me his card.

She mixed up the codes again!
What's wrong? I've told her:
"The code for buns is here, on the paper"—
it's lying right there.
It's so annoying—she always comes up to get help,
But people are waiting,
A queue is forming you know!
She's been working here for a month
And still doesn't get it—it really sucks! ...

Just a couple more hours to linger,
And I will go back to my crib,
I'd like to exfoliate,
I'll turn off my phone.

'Cuz once, I gave this guy my number—
He's pretty cool, kinda funny, and tall,
We met up, and went bowling, y'know.
But then, it all started:
"Well, yeah, I'm kinda married, but I really like you ..."

I don't want any kind of extra shit, I told him:
"Okay, don't call me!"
Thanks a lot, I've learned my lesson from those types ...
But he keeps texting, and texting, and texting:
"Honey, let's meet up ..."
It really sucks ...

Oh, and today, that codger, a Russian,
Called me " *krasavitsa koroleva*," er ...
Yeah, I'm such a "beauty queen"—
With my eyes still red from last night's party—
He kinda comes here to shop just because of me ...

Oh ... today, we still have to count the stock ...
It totally slipped my mind ...
I'm gonna get home late tonight, again ...
While my Simba is there alone,
She's gonna mess up the trash can again,
That cute and wild little kitty!

When I put on a milk-and-egg face mask,
She always purrs and snuggles up—
She loves the smell,
My little Simba!

Ms. Healthy's Aria: "Petting Cats Is Stress-Reducing!"

Freshly squeezed juices have an abundance of vitamins!
I pick my own herbs!
Besides, this year, they've risen in price—

I couldn't afford them!
Health is our most valuable treasure!
I try to wake up early and go to bed early!
Petting cats is very calming and stress-reducing!
And stress-reducing ...
And stress-reducing ...
And stress-reducing ...

I always see darkness and darkness: I get home, and it's night, I go to work, and it's still night ... I downed three cups of coffee today, so my eyes are bloodshot. If it wasn't the coffee, I would be out!

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Scene 7: An Early Morning Duo

I don't toss about,
I don't stretch,
I try to save every minute!

I pour five spoonfuls of coffee powder into my cup.
It's black as the morning outside my window.

I bought my shoes at a sale at the mall.
Their soles are thin and slippery.

I slip on every
wetflooranddirtyicepuddleofrainslickasphalt.
The first bus arrives at 5:20 a.m.
The wind is cold.

The streets in this area are not lit.
It's too early for students to be up.
I didn't dress warm enough!

Once, I missed the bus.
The next one's at 6:45 a.m.
It takes me almost an hour to get to work.
If I don't make the first bus, then I'm really late.
I have to be at work before 6:30 a.m.
Riding the bus, I take a nap,
even after a strong coffee.

I'll definitely have to get an energy drink,
I'll check it at my register immediately, at eight o'clock,
Right after the store opens.

If I make a lot of sales,
I get a bonus!
I need a larger paycheck,
As coffee runs out quickly.

Five spoonfuls—that's a seventh of a whole small coffee bag.

It's always dark:
No matter if it's before work,
Or after work when I'm coming back home—
It's always dark, and dark ...
I go to work at night,
And I come back home at night ...

Scene 8: The Emigrant's Mother's Aria; the Goods, Discounts, and Hot Deals Choir; and Ms. Healthy's Aria: "I Never Get Sick!"

In a month, I'll be flying to Britain,
But the flight's in the morning!
My son is working, says
He won't be able to pick me up from the airport,
I'll have to wait for four hours.

I Skyped with my son, he said
It's already cold over there,
Here, it's still not so bad!
But I'm wearing wool socks ...
I sleep with my socks on even in summer ...

My son has a bicycle shop in England,
He was the first to launch that business,
He's got his customer base!
Always knew his way around ...

Years ago,
when I was working for Seams and Stitches,
I'd bring my own pancakes, meatballs,
a cucumber ...
Now everything can be bought—
I don't need to cook.

My daughter-in-law is bad at cooking ...
I can't imagine what they eat over there, in England ...
But everyone gets along, they have a lot of land next to their house ...

A SALE ON SUNNY BEACHES!
THE YEAR'S GREATEST HOLIDAY SALES!
DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?
DON'T SQUEEZE JUICE YOURSELF!
WE SQUEEZE IT JUST AROUND THE CORNER!
FOR ALL BEDDING! HOT PRICES!
IF IT'S GLOOMY OUTSIDE,
WE'LL CHANGE THE WEATHER!

I'm going over to the first register,
That girl has gotten it wrong again,
Such a fine young girl ...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
ALL DAY ON MY FEET!
CARP, GLASSES, SALMON,
KIWIS, SHOES, SHAMPOO ...
HALF OFF! CLOSEST TO HOME!
HURRY UP, ONLY ONE PAIR LEFT!
WE DO HOME DELIVERIES! HEALTH RESORT FOR SENIORS!
WITH A SENIOR DISCOUNT CARD YOU'RE SAVING POINTS FOR CURTAINS!

Something about her reminds me of myself as a young girl ...
But I'm not that old yet!
I was laughing the other day:

WHAT DO YOU THINK? ALL DAY, ON MY FEET!
WE'RE OUT OF CAT FOOD AGAIN!
LITHUANIAN BEER PLEASE! I LIKE THE END OF THE MONTH!
I GOT MY PAYCHECK TODAY!
CINEMA, ASIA, SCARVES, PERFUME ON WEEKENDS!
MORE ALMONDS!
THE NEW FLOORING DEPARTMENT!

HOT PRICES! FOR ALL BEDDING!

If someone asks me something at the airport,
I'll just say: "No, no, go!"—and that's it,
Anyway, they will get it ...
My son kept laughing when I told him this ...
My husband was laughing too ...

CHRISTMAS SOON! EASTER ALREADY!
WE ALL WAIT FOR AMAZING FEELINGS!
MOTHERS WITH STROLLERS SKIP THE QUEUE!
THE BEST FLAVOR, THE FRESHEST TRAVEL!
TO THE WATER PARK! BELIEVE IN YOURSELF!

Wool socks improve your blood circulation!
Ginger and lemon help fight a cold:
It's good to drink it every day, as a precaution!
If you have a stuffy nose, rinse it with sea salt Five times a day! I never get sick! I never get sick! I never get sick! ...

My husband's not flying with me ...
He's going to stay at home ...

Scene 9: Art Critic's Aria

Yesterday, some hot-tempered man complained about me to management,
Sometimes I think I'm going mad ...

I have a thousand euros saved up—
I'm going to try and find some cheap flights
And get out of here, but I don't know where to ...

Maybe I should apply for my PhD?
Would I apply for my PhD?

When they told me: "Mix the salad!," I burst into tears,
I cannot sleep at night ...

The girls I studied with:
One of them is raising a child,
Another works in publishing,
The third killed herself,
The fourth's somewhere in Berlin, making video art.

When I got my diploma,
I promptly registered at the employment office.
There were no offers for my specialty.
The consultants didn't even know what art history is.

I got offers to work at a pawnshop,
An insurance company,
A retirement home,
As an ocean scout leader ...

I applied for a job at school,
but there's no demand for art teachers now ...

I sent my CV everywhere you can imagine!
I wrote to *Art Echo*,
They published some bits of my thesis,
For these four parts, I got 210 euros.
I bought myself some fancy tights,
And spent the rest on wine and Neuro tea ...

All those cashier women are utter horrors ...

One of them has the vocabulary of a prisoner,
Flirts with men, doesn't watch her language.
That one from register eight—she's about finished,
Works her guts out for her child,

Her husband left her.
That older lady seems the most normal—
She's somewhat honest.
I feel as if I'm tumbling downhill ...
That staff,
I don't know what to talk about with them ...

My parents don't care,
They're just happy I'm working,
I help them pay for the heating,
They don't understand what I'm feeling.

Should I try and apply for a PhD next year after all? ...

Ms. Healthy's Aria: "Every Single Day Is a Gift!"

You have to love and take care of yourself!
If things aren't going well—don't strain yourself!
Accept everything as it is, as fate would have it!
Challenges make us stronger!
For example, when I wake every morning,
I smile into the mirror:
It really helps!
Every single day is a gift!
Every single day is a gift!
Every single day is a gift!
Every single day is a gift!
Every single day is a gift! ...

Scene 10: Pay Day Choir

I LIKE THE END OF THE MONTH:
A WARM SPARROW OF HUNDREDS FLIES INTO MY POCKET,
MY HOURS TURN INTO CRISP BILLS.
AND I GO TO THE AISLES OF PRODUCTS TO BUY WHAT YOU'VE BOUGHT.
CARROTS,
AVOCADOS,
SUGAR,
SAUSAGE,
QUASS,
LIPSTICK,
A CHEAP JACKET,
A WOODEN RACKET ...

MY SALARY IS ESSENTIAL, DISTINGUISHED,
AS IT TAKES ME DOWN TO THE CINEMA,
THE CHOCOLATIER,
BILLIARDS …
MY WORKPLACE IS YOUR
SUNDAYS,
SATURDAYS,
FRIDAYS,
THURSDAYS,
WEDNESDAYS,
TUESDAYS,
MONDAYS …

I LIKE THE END OF THE MONTH:
A WARM SPARROW OF HUNDREDS FLIES INTO MY POCKET,
MY HOURS TURN INTO CRISP BILLS.
I GO TO THE AISLES OF PRODUCTS TO BUY
WHAT YOU'VE BOUGHT.
I WORK AND
I BUY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

BARCODES, KEYBOARDS, DISCOUNTS, SALES,
A FULL BLADDER—
THESE ARE MY RELATIVES. REFINED PLANT OILS
ARE RESTING ON SHELVES AS IF ON MIAMI BEACH,
WHILE I DON'T EVEN HAVE MY OWN RESORT.
I WISH I COULD SIT IN A HOLLOW
FAR FROM IT ALL, PINCHING AN OWL.

AND HERE, MY FINGERS ARE PINCHED ALL DAY LONG
BY DIRTY COINS AND BANKNOTES—
MY PALMS ARE FULL OF BACTERIA,
INFESTED WITH VERMIN.

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

BARCODES, KEYBOARDS, DISCOUNTS, SALES,
A FULL BLADDER—
THESE ARE MY RELATIVES. REFINED PLANT OILS
ARE RESTING ON SHELVES AS IF ON MIAMI BEACH,
WHILE I DON'T EVEN HAVE MY OWN RESORT.
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BY DIRTY COINS AND BANKNOTES—
MY PALMS ARE FULL OF BACTERIA,
INFESTED WITH VERMIN.

HELLO!
THANK YOU! HAVE A GOOD DAY!

X

Concept and development: Vaiva Grainytė, Lina Lapelytė, and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė
Librettist: Vaiva Grainytė
Translation into English: Aleksandra Fominaitė
Composer and music director: Lina Lapelytė
Director and set designer: Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė
Producer: Operomanija

> An established language is adapted to its place, like the rest of its native organisms. It lives only in a set of relationships among people, places, and things, and among people, their personal memories, and their common history … Compared to [a] truly communal language, so complexly and intimately referential, a language merely public or standard is a blunt instrument.
>
> —Wendell Berry

Nate Wooley

Failing Toward Utopia: The Musical Score as a Site for Dreams

Indulge me in an experiment: forget that Wendell Berry's *The Need to Be Whole: Patriotism and the History of Prejudice* (2022) is a historical critique of the dispossession of Indigenous people and that violent act's reverberations in contemporary racial inequality, and rethink the above quote as a fragment from a musical treatise. Replace the word "language" with "score." Look at the text with fresh eyes. Even with the replacement of its original object, the new statement still contains a ring of truth: like Berry's communal language, the music score is living "in a set of relationships between people, places, and things," malleable, and attached to the evolution of the micro-cultures that use it to communicate.

Thinking of the musical score as something more than a mere transmission of a composer's idea is not as radical as it may seem. The score can be read as a blueprint or explicated like a poem. There are scores hanging behind glass at eye level, removed from any sound-making at all and begging to be recognized as objets d'art. There are others that are innately *useful*, becoming well-loved maps meant to guide students through a musical geography. Understanding a score may require the translation of an expert, or it may be immediately obvious to an untrained eye; it can exist as a historical document or as a work of science fiction.

This existential blankness fascinates me. A score can be made from a line of text or the contours of a geographical map, not because of our postmodern tendency to make everything signify as a possible work of art, but because it has no stability, no "zero point," as Fredric Jameson calls the trait that must be present for an idea to identify itself. The score does not need to communicate, nor does it even need to be innately musical. A score can be an idea or a feeling, a fragment of life. And if this is so, then the score can become a site for thinking that moves beyond the musical and into the way society is mediated. It can become an empty site for our daydreams.

Before moving forward, one more indulgence, another experiment in word replacement, this time with a passage from Julia Kristeva's linguistic primer, *The Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics*: "Every era or civilization, in conformity with the whole of its knowledge, its beliefs,

Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, The Dream, 1883. Collection: Walters Art Museum. License: Public Domain.

and its ideology, has responded differently, and has seen language in relation to the matrices which constitute that civilization."[1] If we once more replace the word "language" with "score," it reinforces the latter's malleability, but it also places its possibilities in a new, ideological, light. Unlike Berry's soft rebuke of standardization and his idea of language (or the score) as naturally communal, here the score acts as a possible mirror of the dominant social structure of the culture that makes it.

With these discursive experiments, I'm proposing that the "traditional score"—which I'm classifying as Western civilization's collection of staves reading left to right and ordered in a multi-axis grid of instrumentation, duration, and pitch class—mimics many of the primary social relations of modern Western society. And since this is the case, the score can also be a site for building utopian models of what it, the music it engenders, and our society on the whole can be.

I have been committed to failed attempts at writing the "utopian score" for a decade. But before we get personal, there are a few larger ideas that need to be addressed. Firstly, this project is dependent on an exploration of a specific tradition. When I use the term "traditional score," I think of the work of Mahler and Brahms rather than Wolff and Oliveros. The reason I want to limit myself to this tradition is that these kinds of scores map so neatly onto contemporary late-capitalist culture. The "traditional" score is built around hierarchies at multiple levels, beginning with the generative/reactive relationship between composer as creator and conductor as translator and continuing as their interpretation "trickles down" through the performance of the musicians to a passive public.

This hierarchy from composer to audience reflects metaphors of tiered social order, from religious transmission to corporate organizational charts. But the signification of the score also relates to representations of modern factory labor and mass production. It is designed to facilitate the mass reproduction of an object—in this case, the composer's organized sound and narrative—within certain acceptable parameters (instrumentation, duration, and so on). In the "traditional" score's perfect world, the composer's music could be played at any time and under any conditions and reproduce the same thought-object under relatively narrow conditions of variability. In this sense, the score joins a signifying class with the conveyor belt and the Bessemer process, Henry Ford and quality control: the desire to standardize and duplicate.

A prioritization of reproduction necessarily leads to the subsumption of the individual and the human within mechanical processes. Most scores simply mark each stave with its sound source, making it something akin to a station on the production line: violin I, violin II, oboe, harp, etc. This makes the musicians invisible and interchangeable. (There are exceptions of course, the most famous being Duke Ellington, who put the name of the person playing the part next to their line on the score. This did not, however, mean that if that person left the orchestra, that piece could no longer be played.)

The score's conceptual flexibility allows it to absorb these elements of late-capitalist society: hierarchy, subjugation, and results-orientated social organization. But the very function and construction of a score can also work the other way. Anyone who has sat in front of, or within, an orchestra performing Mahler's *Second Symphony* (1888–94) knows the sheer organizational miracle contained in that set of staves to focus the actions of many into a singular outpouring of ecstatic sound. A similar awe can wash over us when we witness or are part of a concerted response to catastrophe, a joyous reunion, a protest march. It is this miracle of the score that becomes a launching point for utopian thinking. The score can be anything. Why not something positive?

***

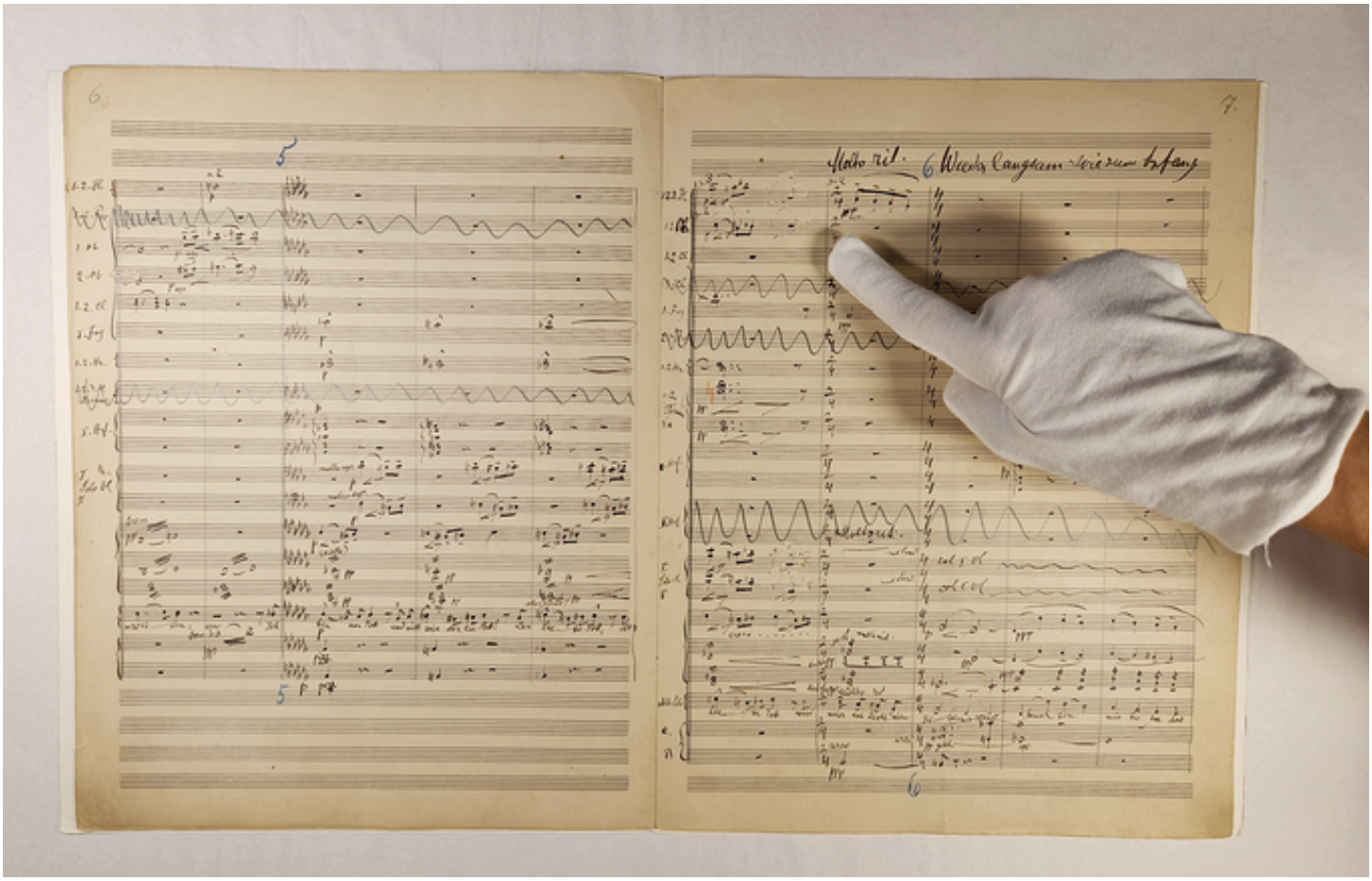
> I propose to think of our … utopias … as so many islands: a Utopian archipelago, islands in the net, a constellation of discontinuous centers, themselves internally decentered.
>
> —Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*

Viewing the score as a social microcosm, with all its flaws and benefits and the possibility of it becoming a site for utopian speculation, has been at the center of my compositional practice for years. I have followed the pragmatic programs of Erik Olin Wright and the critical writing on sci-fi by Fredric Jameson with an optimistic cynicism. And it hasn't taken long for their high-flying ideas to make their way into the pencil-and-paper reality of my scores. I think Jameson makes an important point above: we define our own utopias. Thomas More may have coined the term, but he didn't imagine *my* utopia. Nor have Samuel Delany, Olin Wright, Ursula K. LeGuin, or any of the other great tinkerers of alternate societies. And so, when I undertake the resettling of my own "constellation of discontinuous centers," I am doing it from the following definition, and with the goal of creating the utopia of my own experience: *The creation of a utopia is an attempt to translate a perfect version of the world into something tangible, small, and controllable, something like a work of fiction or poetry, a film, or a musical score.*

That each attempt at writing a utopia is different doesn't mean it comes from nowhere. I began thinking of utopia scores around 2010 by looking closely at the artists who were articulating sound in ways that were radically different form the tradition I was used to. Each of them contained some small, resonant idea that I collected for my own work: Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise* (1963–67) and Christian Wolff's *Edges* (1968) appealed to me because of their disavowal of a "correct" performance; I loved the poetry of Pauline Oliveros's text scores that use sound to tap into something reptilian in humans; and I was in awe of the sheer audacity of Amnon Wolman's pieces that are meant to reside inside the performer's mind with no sound production at all.

But I have been most affected by two composers who bypassed the score-as-object altogether: Éliane Radigue and Annea Lockwood. Radigue's *OCCAM Ocean* ecosystem is a touchstone for anyone looking to redefine the hierarchy of the composer/performer/audience relationship. Created in intimate collaboration with their performers, Radigue's solo pieces are transmitted via conversation and a dialogic experimentation with sound. These "scores" live only as the memories of the two people involved in their making. And *OCCAM*'s modular aspect—two solos combine to become a duo, three make a trio, etc.—further empowers its performers to take responsibility for the evolution of the music. This sense of the composition's evolution over (and perhaps beyond) the lifetime of its makers is an idea that continues to inform my attempts at the utopian score.

A more radical version of the communal act of composition, perhaps, is the recent work of Annea Lockwood. Like Radigue, her compositions over the last decade or so exist sans score and are structured by nonhierarchical and improvisational play between composer and performer. Lockwood is committed to the organic life of what she calls "wild sound," and she prompts the performer to ride the thin line between reproducibility and spontaneity. These pieces, which she



Pages from the autograph manuscript of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, now in the possession of the Cleveland Orchestra. Courtesy of the Cleveland Orchestra.

classifies as "performer-dependent works," could be defined more as acts of sustained creative discussion and friendship than objects of technical and compositional virtuosity. Her pledge to honor the small acts of collaboration that generate large works of art, as well as her dedication to spontaneity, have been a guide for my own attempts.

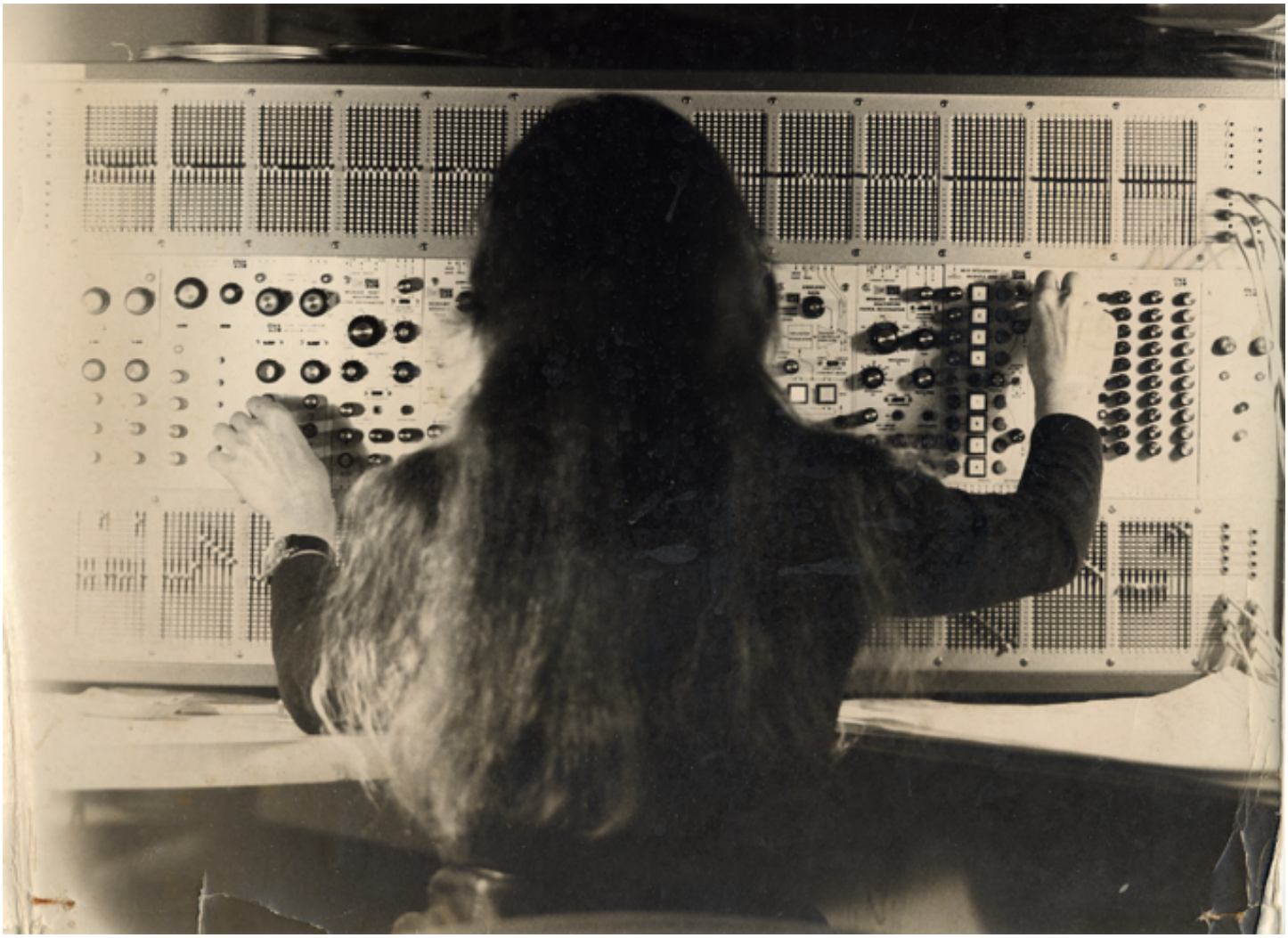
I'm not sure that Radigue or Lockwood would think of their work in utopian terms, and the above does not imply their endorsement—tacit or otherwise—of my idea or this project of mine. I only include them to ground what follows in a context the reader may be familiar with and to highlight Jameson's idea of utopias as unique to each of us. My desire is to produce a composition that is not only musically interesting but also emulates an abstract idea of living together that is sustainable and commendable. A utopian structure does not simply rise from primordial music. There must be preplanning, and a lot of it. Thus far, I have identified four ideals that any attempt to create *my* utopian score must embody. They will seem familiar, as they are almost perfectly negative versions of the features I attributed to the "traditional" score above. The utopian score, *my* utopian score, must be:

Process-driven: I am looking to create a score based on evolution rather than reproducibility. I want music to exist organically with a demand that it change its form and content over time.

Nonhierarchical: Music is better when the people making it have the opportunity to put themselves into it. If I am a nation-state unto myself, consider the goal of the utopian score to be an international meeting (hopefully for peace, but not always) where each musician represents their own principality on equal footing.

Human: This music must allow for fallible human beings to interact with each other fallibly. The result is a certain kind of messiness, a productive bloodiness. What this humanity "is" can remain shadowy, prone to "you'll know it when you hear it." But music that arises from hybrid experiments balancing structure and improvisation has a density, strangeness, and organic warmth that can't be matched through other means.

Non-dialectical: The problematics created by setting composer versus performer and improvisation versus



Eliane Radigue at work on the ARP 2500 synthesizer, Paris, 1972. Photography by Yves Arman.

> composition have been exhausted. The utopian score, if it comes from anywhere, will come from a point that exists outside that tug-of-war: either a redefinition of what each of those poles *is,* a new way of making them interact, or a third process that nullifies their tension altogether.

***

My first attempt at creating a utopian score, *Battle Pieces*, was commissioned for Anthony Braxton's 2014 Tri-Centric Festival and was conceived as an homage to his modular compositional *Ghost Trance Music* (*GTM*). His compositional structure is built on the concept of plenty—a glut of musical material split into primary, secondary, and tertiary tiers that are manipulated in real time with nonverbal signals and improvisation. It is a brilliant system, wonderfully information-dense and capable of producing deeply moving performances. But it also relies on elements of hierarchy in the way the ensemble is structured into echelons of subgroups. And it also, unintentionally I believe, leans toward the prominence of the composer, as players tend to bend their personal improvisational languages toward the aesthetic of Braxton's composition. Without dismissing his profound example, I wondered if there was a way to invite the player to improvise *away* from the strengths of the composition's material and toward something more personal.

Around the time I was commissioned, I had been listening to a record by saxophonist Stan Getz called *Focus*. It's a horn-and-strings date, with Eddie Sauter writing gorgeous arrangements for string quartet. I had read that Getz showed up only for the recording session and improvised his part as first takes while looking at Sauter's complex string scores. The result is enchanting and a rare document of chamber music that centers the vibrancy of improvisation within the formal rigor of composition. I thought a utopian score might grow from combining

Annea Lockwood, Piano Garden, Photo: Chris Ware.

Focus's sense of improvisational urgency with Braxton's abundance and modularity.

The result was an encyclopedia of sorts—a composition as compendium. *Battle Pieces* is made up of an evolving series of small and medium-sized compositional fragments that range from "traditionally" scored work to simple text prompts. In performance, the members of the ensemble are instructed to choose one of these compositions at random. They use its material to fashion an improvised "part" in the chamber-music whole. One performer is also chosen to be the "soloist"—think of them as this situation's Stan Getz—who improvises their part freely and without access to any of the composition's musical materials. Whether the musician is using the composed material or freely improvising, the goal is not to create something that draws attention to their sound but instead reimagines their role as one interlocking voice within a counterpoint.

This idea worked well for many years, pushing the members of the ensemble to improvise in ways that were well out of our comfort zones while retaining elements of their unique voices. The result was sometimes spotty, but musical perfection (reproduction) was not the goal. Sometimes the music was magical, but was it the answer? While it did level out some of the hierarchies I had felt in Braxton's *GTM*, it was still a composition with a well-defined sense of its composer and a process that followed a well-defined set of rules. Input from the players was more limited than I wanted, and, ultimately, playing *Battle Pieces* became a concretized and repeatable technique.

In hindsight, I believe the amount of material was the problem. Instead of providing inspiration for new directions, the composition led the players to consciously choosing the "perfect" micro-composition that would fix musical problems from the mass of options I had given

them, rather than confronting the friction of the performance's difficulties.

Failure one.

If *Battle Pieces* was too large, perhaps my next attempt was too small. *knknighgh* (pronounced "knife") is a quartet concept based on the minimalist poetry of Aram Saroyan. The concept centered around a very small amount of simple material that the players could memorize and internalize. The entire composition consists of three short melodies and an equal number of one-measure rhythmic cells and bass vamps. There is little to no pre-structuring of a performance. The group improvises freely until a musician feels the need for a change. The musician then plays any of the three melodic ideas as a declaration of their desire to move on, and the rest of the group responds by either joining that player's melody, moving to one of the rhythms or vamps, or dropping out altogether. The improvisation continues, spiraling out to form a new musical configuration.

It is a simple concept: improvise until you initiate or hear a cue, then change what you're doing. Rinse and repeat until the piece comes to a natural ending. The band did this very well and the music presented itself at high velocity. The band's absorption of the material and each musician's individual virtuosity made for high-intensity music, and our regular gigs in Brooklyn became popular for the music's excitement and the band's ESP-like magic as it shifted gears on a dime.

But the success of our concerts highlighted *knknighgh*'s defects as a utopian score. While it was communal in concept, the construction of the materials and how they worked together presupposed a certain kind of playing: higher, faster, and louder. The group didn't need to make decisions; the music was focusing them in a single, repeatable direction. The result was the mass production of a certain kind of playing, one that ultimately narrowed the music's human complexity.

Failure two.

In *Battle Pieces* and *knknighgh*, I had relied on jazz musicians, and the scores reflected the language they (and I) were comfortable with. The result ended up being something closer to a new approach to playing jazz. That was enticing, but those scores weren't achieving the undefinable quality of human complexity I was looking for. I needed a larger palette, one that brought together musicians with vastly different skills, aesthetics, and approaches to making music together. And to accommodate that level of diversity, something in the score itself would have to change.

Mutual Aid Music is, in essence, a combination of elements from *Battle Pieces* and *knknighgh*. It focuses the former's material and the latter's audible cuing concept using Mikhail Bakunin's basic tenet of giving what you can share and taking what you need. In performance of *Mutual Aid Music*, a soloist is chosen beforehand by the group, and the remaining members use a micro-composition to create a part, just as in *Battle Pieces*. As in *knknighgh*, the players are listening for audible cues to change their material. For an evening-length performance, the musicians only have an order of soloists, and the music continues without stop until all the soloists have taken their turn. The ensemble members are asked to switch to a different micro-composition every time a new soloist begins. But exactly when this shift from one soloist to the next occurs is not always clear. Even the previous soloist may not realize that the new soloist has started, and the two may be freely improvising their parts simultaneously for a period of time. Players in the ensemble may hear the shift as occurring at different points, so the change of their material may be staggered.

The form of the performance, then, frees itself from anyone's control, including mine.

The music began to approach the human complexity I sought. As things become messy, the musicians are inspired to create a new sense of order, and their musical answers make the music feel organic and amoebic rather than formal and traditional. Things move slowly, then very quickly. One player may make a singular statement for five seconds while another may repeat the same material for fifteen minutes. A long silence may occur. Diatonic folk-fiddling becomes enmeshed with scratchy cello and clarinet multiphonics in a way that makes no rational sense but is musically moving because it perfectly mirrors the imperfections of being alive.

Mutual Aid Music is, so far, the closest I've come to the utopian score. In the last few years, members of the performance group have contributed their own micro-compositions, and we have cleared all composer names from the pieces to give the choice of material a more non-individualistic feel. Spirited discussions before and after performances prove to me that the discursive and communal dynamic of the piece is not only working sonically but socially. The piece is now being played by different ensembles in different countries, usually with the guidance of original ensemble members. The attention to expanding the performance of the composition not by transposing it onto other ensembles but adding new voices to its continued life gives me hope that there is a real quality of intercommunication somewhere within its score.

And yet, imperfections remain.

This is the beauty of the utopian attempt: it has to contain cracks and difficulties, things the person who dreamed it up didn't consider, blind spots in the composer/writer/thinker's learning, and history that needs to be unlearned. My scores are no different. The

Unfinished version of The Day Dream (Jane Morris) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, circa 1855. License: Public Domain.

satisfaction I get from attempting to construct a utopian score comes not from rewriting its semiotic content, but from redrawing the borders of my perfect world. From redrafting its constitution and reforming its religion. Each piece, regardless of its musical result, begins as a way to address my preferred way of being.

So the question remains, for myself as much as for anyone reading this: What is *my* utopia? For all my attempts here, I cannot fully define it. And I've decided I wouldn't want to, as that would end my search (the search being where I get my joy). But if you've stayed with me this far, it's not really fair to bail out now, so I will give it a shot.

The closest I've come to an explanation of the society I'm trying to dream up in a utopian score is perhaps Sartre's concept of the serial creation of a group, in which attention and power constantly shift from one of its members to another so that no single voice is heard more often or louder than any other. As I look back over the above attempts to erase hierarchy and increase complexity through collaboration, I think Sartre's sense of thoughtful but constant motion in and out of focus is a new foundation on which to build my next utopia. But the process is fraught and takes me in new directions constantly: I have begun working on new experiments that do not require prior musical knowledge to read the score, and on pieces in which each player's interpretation of ideas comes from reading abstract text and relying on individual memory. Perhaps this will be the way I plot a new world to act out my daydreams in. A different, kinder, more egalitarian world. If not, there's always tomorrow.

X

Originally from Clatskanie, Oregon, **Nate Wooley** is a trumpet player, composer, and writer. He was the founder and editor of *Sound American* for a decade. He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

1
Julia Kristeva, *The Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* , trans. Anne M. Menke (Columbia University Press, 1989), 5.

Sandra Skurvida

Labor and Anarchy in John Cage's First and Last Compositions

John Cage gave his first public performance at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles when he was a fifteen-year-old student. This performance was a speech titled "Other People Think," which was the winning entry for the 1927 Southern California Oratorical Contest. In the speech, he called for a complete pause in relations between North and South America, advocating silence as opposed to the negotiation of differences:

> One of the greatest blessings that the United States could receive in the near future would be to have her industries halted, her business discontinued, her people speechless, a great pause in her world of affairs created, and finally to have everything stopped that runs, until everyone should hear the last wheel go around and the last echo fade away … Then, in that moment of complete intermission, of undisturbed calm, would be the most conducive to the birth of the Pan-American Conscience. Then we should be capable of answering the question, "What ought we to do?" For we should be hushed and silent, and we should have the opportunity to learn that other people think.[1]

Cage's first performance contains the seeds of his future work—silence, conceived as a breaking point in a system, signifies a breach of the status quo and leads to the possibility of new relations. The title, "Other People Think," is a playful truism asserting agency for all. At the core of Cage's politics and poetics is a perspective on coexistence among diverse yet independent entities rather than boundary-blurring cooperation. For the Cage centennial in 2012, artist Alfredo Jaar created a piece that featured the words "Other People Think" in his signature typographic form of white capital letters on a black background. He used Cage's speech title to comment on the power of language to resist dominant narratives, deploying a deadpan phrase as a protest statement, as in "I Am a Man" and "Black Lives Matter," manifesting the potentiality of different histories and futures.

A pause disrupts the customary fabric of social relations, confounding authority and subjugation, which are otherwise mutually reinforcing. In his first speech and many future works, Cage called for a pause as the self-determination of a singular entity—a stance he conceived as anarchy. By the mid-twentieth century, self-determination became the main principle of his work, with chance as a prime mover of composition. Beginning in the early 1950s, the composer developed protocols for chance operations, enabling inductive data processing through the application of a series of questions addressed to the specific material, which could be musical, such as the length of musical phrases and instrumentation; lingual, as in text compositions assembled by deconstructing and cross-sectioning selected texts; or spatial, determining the

John Cage, Musicircus, November 17, 1967, Stock Pavilion, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Courtesy of the University of Illinois Archives.

placement of objects in compositions for museum, such as *Rolywholyover* [pre] *A Circus* for Museum by John Cage (1993). The specific aspects of each composition were determined by chance operations that do not imply a priori knowledge, hypothesis, or tradition. Chance does not follow the laws of tradition or aesthetic habits, and rather than simply disrupting those systems, it exposes the inherent indeterminacy within rationalist reasoning. For Cage, "composition" meant creating an aggregate that nonetheless preserved the autonomy of its parts, as the indeterminacy of chance operations ensures their self-determination.

Cage's chance-operated compositional method disrupts the dominance of the author and *his* authority, establishing and acknowledging the independence of all involved. He established the participants' autonomy during his breakthrough year, 1952, in compositions including *Theater Piece No. 1,* which comprised timed segments allocated to self-determined contributions by the participants, and *4′33″*, which captured nonmusical sounds in space-time, encompassing performance and audience time. These coeval pieces continued to evolve; in 1960, Cage removed the time brackets of a sound event denoted in the title, *4′33″*, and opened up the instrumentation of the piece in the annotation of the published score, writing that "the work may be performed by an instrumentalist or a combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time."[2] In 1962, he opened *4′33″* further in the iteration *0′00″*, a solo of indeterminate duration meant to be performed in any manner by anyone: "In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action."[3] Cage premiered *0′00″* by writing its score in an amplified concert setting, and later added notes regarding the piece's performance. In these notes he allowed interruptions of the action, prohibited repeating the same action in another performance, and stipulated that the action was not a performance of a musical composition. On the reverse of the concert score, the composer noted that the action was performed to fulfill "an obligation to another or to oneself *without regard to the situation*" (author's emphasis). This score marks a tendency in his practice to superimpose composition, performance, and reception, affirming individual self-determination as a condition for a decentered social organization.

Alfredo Jaar, Other People Think, original image for book cover, 2012. Courtesy of the artist, New York.

Cage demonstrated anarchic disregard for organized labor in one of his most public performances, *Water Walk* (1959), presented in 1960 on Henry Morgan's CBS show *I've Got a Secret*. This composition for a solo television performance involves many properties and a single-track tape. Its gamely orchestration calls for various household instruments related to water, including a mixer with ice cubes, a stove with a pressure cooker, a tub filled with water, an iron pipe, an ice bucket, a Campari glass, a soda siphon, a vase with roses, an exploding paper bottle, a garden sprinkler, and a mechanical fish. This array is activated by a performer who has to move deftly and purposefully around the stage to play the instruments in a timely manner according to the score, which allows some wiggle room as to the timing of actions—"Start watch and then time actions as closely as possible to their

appearance in the score."[4]

The resulting performance is a calculated comedy, and its TV production did not merely capitalize on the fun factor; it touched on the status of labor implicated in Cage's work. Although the composer included radios in the array of live instruments, they remained mute, due to a union dispute over who was responsible for plugging them in, which had not been resolved before the show's start. In his remarks before the show, Cage explained how he would modify the performance ad hoc: he would hit the tops of the radios with his hand instead of switching them on, and shove them off the table instead of turning them off. This absurdly comical solution stems from Cage's individualist anarchist stance toward organized labor. Likewise, those employed to execute his artistic intentions did not always share them.

Cage long sought to decenter a musical event and dispense with the orchestral hierarchy, proposing instead an assembly of independent participants and parts to be performed in a self-organized manner, such as *Etcetera* (1973), which begins with the orchestra members as soloists, inviting them to "volunteer their services from time to time to any one of three conductors."[5] He pursued self-determination within a group in a crowdsourced event, *Musicircus* (1967), encompassing numerous performers and ensembles who share time and space in an unscored, self-organized event. Keenly aware of the authority inscribed in and administered by a score, the composer chose to forgo it, offering a pretext for an event rather than regulating production. He confirmed this intention by not publishing *Musicircus* and thus keeping it free from authorship restrictions upheld by copyright: "A number of pieces recently are not given to Peters because I wish to keep them free of copyright restrictions e.g. *Musicircus*. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether my work in connection with that piece is as integral a part of it as the work of all the actual performers of it."[6]

The author's intention to challenge the hierarchy and economy of authorship and to provide a framework for the production of what he deemed "anarchy" was clarified several years later in a letter to a former editor of *Studies on the Left*, Eleanor Hakim: "In harmony with the separation of this work [*Musicircus*] from conventional economics, I have not made a score nor have I published one of course."[7] Cage envisioned a self-organized array of many simultaneous events, preserving their mutual autonomy in performance. The inaugural *Musicircus* was held at the Stock Pavilion at the University of Illinois—a campus building used for cattle shows—on November 17, 1967. The various musical acts comprising *Musicircus* were situated on platforms near the bleachers so the public could move freely around the arena. No directions were given to anyone. Among the participating musicians, David Tudor and Gordon Mumma amplified the building's ventilation system, making the infrastructure sound. Cage connected contact microphones to the lighting switchboard, so that changing the lights would trigger sounds. James Cuomo and Tony Zamora joined the circus with their respective jazz bands. A baroque orchestra played its usual repertoire, along with individual programs by the electronic composers Salvatore Martirano, Lejaren Hiller, and Herbert Brün. Percussionist Michael Udow played Morton Feldman's *The King of Denmark* as quietly as possible. Norma Marder sang Cage's *Aria* as many times as she wished. Dancer Ruth Emerson responded to the soundscape. And mime Claude Kipnis pantomimed a struggle against a wall of sound. Drawings on the blackboard were visible under blacklight, and giant balloons floated in the air. At both ends of the pavilion were stands offering apple cider, doughnuts, and popcorn. Filmmaker Ronald Nameth contributed a screening of films and a slideshow, projected simultaneously on screens installed around the hall's perimeter; he also filmed the proceedings.[8] The surround sound was at a high volume. One of the participants, Bruce Zumstein, wrote in the student newspaper after the event that "sounds pervaded the senses and drove headaches into numbness. Lights flashed incessantly, and the pavilion momentarily darkened in relief when the lights were turned off. An absurd number of hands played unrelated music."[9] The musicians played whatever they chose simultaneously, taking breaks as they pleased.

The last *Musicircus* with Cage present was produced at Stanford University on January 29, 1992. Like all *Musicircuses*, it was organized via an indeterminate process, without remuneration, where volunteer musicians were assigned fixed time slots and positions for the performance. The organizers acted as "utilities," facilitating the work of others by subjecting the event to certain oppositional rules sustaining nonlinearity. It resisted cognitive totalization by distributing space and time nonhierarchically, refraining from mapping the discreet events or indicating a distinct beginning or end of the entire event.[10] The organizing "utilities" were to provide what was needed to sustain this creative assembly, protect it from falling apart, and ensure that the event as a whole did not straighten into a conventional festival. Yet the figure of the author loomed; Cage read his *Empty Words*, a text composition resulting in the sound of deconstructed word fragments, in a darkened room, evading the transmission of any knowledge. In this situation—like in any composed situation—we may choose to focus on the author or to pursue the paratactic relations emerging in the process of production. The Western tradition centers the author, and although Cage, under Zen influence, purported to decenter himself, he nonetheless acted within the bounds of authorship upheld by the very tradition whose course he sought to alter.

In the context of the late sixties, *Musicircus* was categorized as a happening, despite Cage's efforts to refuse this designation. He tried to make the difference between happenings and his own approach evident in his *Theater Piece* (1960), which emphasized the autonomy of

participants and their contributions to his events, as opposed to performers executing functions determined by the author of a happening. The score was composed in indeterminate notation using Cage's *Fontana Mix* scoring set.[11] The material for this composition is textual: each participant makes a list of twenty nouns and verbs to guide the actions they will perform; this list is then modified using a graph placed over the list of activities, which determines the duration of each action. Using the score set, performers compose their parts, which together comprise a thirty-minute program unique to each performance. Performers become the composers of their performance, thus distributing the function of the author. The premiere performance of *Theater Piece* at the Circle in the Square Theater in New York included dancing by Merce Cunningham and Carolyn Brown, light by Nicholas Cernovitch and an assistant, singing by classically trained contralto Arline Carmen, trombones by Frank Rehak and others, tuba by Don Butterfield, piano by David Tudor, and time-keeping by Cage.

Because Cage was lumped in with the Happenings movement—an association abetted by some of the students in his "Experimental Composition" course at the New School, including Allan Kaprow and George Brecht—his works of the time were not always afforded a broader interpretation on their own terms. Cage's works turn on the potentiality of autonomous entities coming together for a period of time, avowing and performing autonomy and mutuality without a score. Judith Butler has written powerfully on the performative power of assembly:

> We have to study those occasions in which the official frame is dismantled by rival images, or where a single set of images sets off an implacable division in society, or where the numbers of people gathering in resistance overwhelm the frame by which their size is supposed to be cut, or their claim is transformed into uncivil noise. Such gatherings are not the same as democracy itself. We cannot point to one provisional and transient gathering and say, "that is democracy in action," and mean that everything we expect of democracy is emblematized or enacted at such a moment. Gatherings are necessarily transient, and that transience is linked to their critical function. One could say, "but oh, they do not last," and sink into a sense of futility; but that sense of loss is countered by the anticipation of what may be coming: "they could happen at any time!" Gatherings such as these serve as one of democracy's incipient or "fugitive" moments.[12]

Cage's ethos of anarchist individual liberty was not always compatible with the collective labor of music production. Composer Cornelius Cardew, in his 1972 polemic "John Cage—Ghost or Monster?," denounced Cage's avant-garde appropriation of the circus (traditionally popular entertainment for the masses) as a model for a classical orchestra ("high-class" entertainment).[13] Orchestra musicians sabotaged performances of Cage's music by not following the score and not rehearsing, and even by destroying electronic equipment they regarded as a threat to their training, status, and livelihood. Cardew described this resistance "as spontaneous expression to the sharply antagonistic relationship between the avant-garde composer, with all his electronic gadgetry, and the working musician. This contradiction has many aspects, but beneath it all is class struggle."[14] Cardew correctly identifies Cage's antagonism toward the classical orchestra, a stronghold of tradition which he attempted to dismantle. But Cardew's claim that the musicians were engaged in class struggle is less persuasive. They behaved as they did to preserve the power of tradition and its tangible benefits; they were hardly joining the workers' revolution. Performances of Cage's compositions relied on negotiations between his anarchic intentions and the practical steps required to realize them.

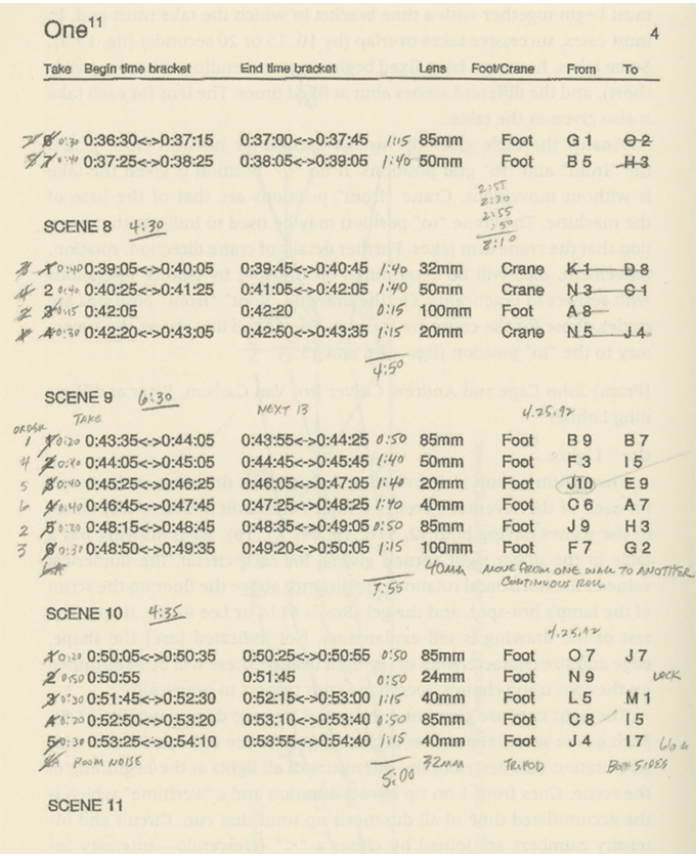
In his late compositions, Cage increasingly tested the limits of bodily perception, with its socially trained—disciplined—aesthetic sensibilities. He invoked composition as something that was beyond the human faculties, a constantly changing "cognitive assemblage," to use N. Katherine Hayles's concept.[15] Cage's late compositions center on the interplay of what Gilles Deleuze called mediators—objects real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, including people and other animals, plants, artworks, texts, and technologies.[16] Cage's exploration of mediation manifested in [html One11 (1992), a ninety-minute film composition featuring spotlights that move and change in intensity according to a screenplay-score composed using chance operations] .[17]

The score for [html One11 was written for the specific dimensions of the TV studio and ninety minutes of screening time. One11] can be shown in any setting, viewed in its entirety or for just a moment, and audience members can do whatever they like while viewing it.

It can be "silent" or paired with the orchestral piece of the corresponding duration, *103* (1991). Like [html One11, *103* is divided into seventeen sections of the same length. Each instrumental part is scored as single tones indicated by time brackets and played without a conductor. One11] *and 103* premiered as a live performance by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk Orchestra in Cologne on September 19 and as a TV broadcast on

October 10, 1992. Cage had died in August of that year.

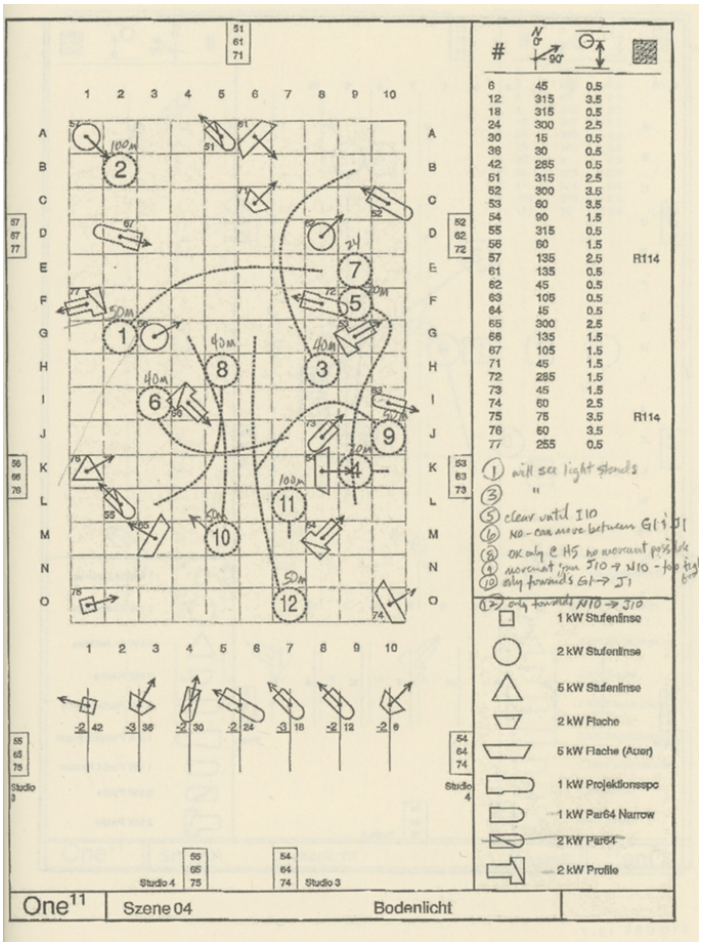
The scoring instructions for [html One11] were programmed into a table showing “begin” and “end” time brackets for each take, most including lead times during which successive takes overlapped. Other specifications designated the type of camera lens to be used in each take and the movements the camera should make, if any.



One[11] 4

Take	Begin time bracket	End time bracket		Lens	Foot/Crane	From	To
~~7~~ 8	0:36:30<->0:37:15	0:37:00<->0:37:45	1:15	85mm	Foot	G 1	~~G 2~~
~~8~~ 7	0:37:25<->0:38:25	0:38:05<->0:39:05	1:40	50mm	Foot	B 5	~~H 3~~
SCENE 8 4:30							
~~3~~ ~~1~~	0:39:05<->0:40:05	0:39:45<->0:40:45	1:40	32mm	Crane	~~K 1~~	~~D 8~~
~~4~~ 2	0:40:25<->0:41:25	0:41:05<->0:42:05	1:40	50mm	Crane	N 3	~~C 1~~
~~2~~ ~~3~~	0:42:05	0:42:20	0:15	100mm	Foot	A 8	
~~1~~ ~~4~~	0:42:20<->0:43:05	0:42:50<->0:43:35	1:15	20mm	Crane	N 5	J 4
SCENE 9 6:30							
1 ~~1~~	0:43:35<->0:44:05	0:43:55<->0:44:25	0:50	85mm	Foot	B 9	B 7
4 ~~2~~	0:44:05<->0:45:05	0:44:45<->0:45:45	1:40	50mm	Foot	F 3	I 5
5 ~~3~~	0:45:25<->0:46:25	0:46:05<->0:47:05	1:40	20mm	Foot	J10	E 9
6 ~~4~~	0:46:45<->0:47:45	0:47:25<->0:48:25	1:40	40mm	Foot	C 6	A 7
2 ~~5~~	0:48:15<->0:48:45	0:48:35<->0:49:05	0:50	85mm	Foot	J 9	H 3
3 ~~6~~	0:48:50<->0:49:35	0:49:20<->0:50:05	1:15	100mm	Foot	F 7	G 2
SCENE 10 4:35							
~~1~~	0:50:05<->0:50:35	0:50:25<->0:50:55	0:50	85mm	Foot	O 7	J 7
~~2~~	0:50:55	0:51:45	0:50	24mm	Foot	N 9	
~~3~~	0:51:45<->0:52:30	0:52:15<->0:53:00	1:15	40mm	Foot	L 5	M 1
~~4~~	0:52:50<->0:53:20	0:53:10<->0:53:40	0:50	85mm	Foot	C 8	I 5
~~5~~	0:53:25<->0:54:10	0:53:55<->0:54:40	1:15	40mm	Foot	J 4	I 7
SCENE 11							

Time bracket list for [html



Camera graph for [html

Lighting for each scene was determined by a diagram specifying whether floor or ceiling lights should be used. Many decisions were left to the studio operators, such as the rotation of the camera crane and the shape and diameter of the lights. The composer conceived of the camera as an instrument; the camera operator, Van Carlson, had the same freedom to play this instrument that a skilled musician has. Describing the filming process, Carlson said that “it’s not the takes that take time, but the time between the takes that takes time.”[18] As denoted in the title, [html One11] is a performance for a single camera; in a screening, the projectionist becomes a performer.

Cage’s work in dance theater with Merce Cunningham was the basis of his experience with theatrical lighting, which he used functionally in his compositions for opera completed at the same time as [html One11], including *Europeras I and II* (1987), *Europeras III and IV* (1990), and *Europera V* (1992). Yet it was his compositions for museum where he introduced lighting as an independent actor. From 1985 to 1991 Cage developed a light and sound environment called *Writings through the Essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,”* which was commissioned for Documenta 8 (1987).

Its vocal sound is generated from stratified recordings of Cage reading his mesostics composed from Henry David Thoreau’s essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience.* The resulting multilayered vocalization is transmitted through thirty-six loudspeakers installed in chance-determined

John Cage, Writings through the Essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” 1985/91. Kunsthalle Bremen—Der Kunstverein in Bremen, John Cage Trust. Photo: Marcus Meyer Photography.

positions on an overhead grid; the intensity and concentration of sound change throughout the soundscape. The light from fifty overhead spotlights moves slowly throughout the space, following the plan determined by chance operations; they do not focus on anything in particular and they change throughout the day as the daylight streaming through the windows changes.

The subsequent composition for museum, *Changing Installation*, commissioned for the 51st Carnegie International (1991) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, included camerawork. This chance-operated installation of artworks and chairs was illuminated by natural light that changed in the gallery throughout the day. It featured a camera that was repositioned daily according to a chance-generated score, chronicling the scripted and incidental occurrences of the changing display—positions of artworks, chairs, and light. The camera eye in this composition, as in [html One11], performs a posthuman mediation beyond human-centered production, extending itself to the inhuman techno- and biospheres. Jean-François Lyotard's description of the "metaphysics of development" applies to the camera eye in this context: "It is reproduced by accelerating and extending itself according to its internal dynamic alone. It assimilates risks, memorizes their informational value, and uses this as a new mediation necessary for functioning. It has no necessity itself other than a cosmological chance."[19]

In [html One11], Cage used the instrumentality of information and decentered networked communication as means to detach subjectivity from totalizing, colonizing ontologies, as well as from identity politics. The aim was to reconfigure human and unhuman instruments as trans-mixers of codes, with unpredictable and biologically and phenomenologically unstable results.[20] Philosopher Achille Mbembe described this trans-mixing of codes in animistic terms as a "vibratory act … characterized by its straddling and going beyond the given and its constraints. This is how it participates in technical activity, where such activity is understood as the capacity to actualize, deploy, and manifest a reserve of power."[21] Cage's composition of vibrant indeterminacy addresses the contemporary orientation toward the posthuman, encompassing "zoe," "bio," and "techno."[22] Starting with his first oration, "Other People Think," Cage forged a path to liberation via indeterminacy throughout his life's work. He sought to decenter—deauthorize—thoughts, rendering them more like sounds. To do this, he started with silence.

X

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1
John Cage , *Other People Think* (John Cage Trust, 2012), 11–12.

2
John Cage, *4'33"*, 1952 (1960) (C. F. Peters Edition 6777).

3
John Cage, *0'00"*, 1962 (C. F. Peters Edition 6796).

4
John Cage, *Water Walk*, 1959, score (Henmar Press, 1961).

5
John Cage, *Etcetera*, 1973 (C. F. Peters Edition 6812).

6
John Cage, Letter to Charles Hamm, May 1, 1973, John Cage Papers, Northwestern University, C70.51.

7
John Cage, Letter to Eleanor Hakim, December 23, 1979, John Cage Papers, Northwestern University, C189.102.

8
Ronald Nameth, *John Cage: The 1st Musicircus* (1968; VisionRainbow, 2006), DVD.

9
Bruce Zumstein, "Musicircus Rocks Stock Pavilion," *The Daily Illini* , November 18, 1967, 1.

10
Charles Junkerman, "Modelling Anarchy: The Example of John Cage's *Musicircus*," *Chicago Review* , no. 4 (1993).

11
For more on *Fontana Mix*, see the John Cage Trust website https://www.johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=79 .

12
Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 20.

13
Cornelius Cardew, "John Cage—Ghost or Monster?," *Listener* , May 4, 1972. Reprinted in *Leonardo Music Journal*, no. 8 (1998), 3–4.

14
Cardew, "John Cage—Ghost or Monster?"

15
N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

16
Gilles Deleuze, "Mediators," in *Negotiations 1972–1990* (Columbia University Press, 1990), 125.

17
The film was initiated and produced by composer Henning Lohner at Fernsehstudios München. See Henning Lohner, "The Making of Cage's ***HTML*** One11," in *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art* , ed. David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (University of Chicago Press, 2001). This piece is one of Cage's Number Pieces—late works composed between 1987 and 1992. Each piece is titled after the number of performers involved: solos are titled *One*, duos are *Two*, and so forth. The superscript indicates the sequence of the piece within the same-number group, e.g., One3***HTML*** is the third iteration of the composition for a single performer.

18
Quoted in Lohner, "The Making of Cage's ***HTML*** One11***HTML***," 287.

19
Jean-François Lyotard, "Introduction: About the Human," *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* , trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Polity Press, 1988), 7.

20
"If the instrumental dimension of the cyborg was turned into an opportunity to generate transversal alliances with machines, suspending any appeal to identity politics, the data granularity of the instrument produces incomputable spaces in which subjectivity moves"—leading to a posthuman subjectivity that acts without reasoning. Luciana Parisi, "Instrumentality, or the Time of Inhuman Thinking," *Technospehere Magazine* , April 15, 2017.

21
Achille Mbembe, *Brutalism*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Duke University Press, 2024), 5.

22
Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Polity Press, 2013).

Marianna Ritchey and Greg Stuart

Accessibility and Instrumentality: A Conversation

Composers, performers, and conductors who come out of the classical conservatory tradition in the US are in a terrible bind. While the music is simply not that popular, its production requires vast economic resources, from massive opera houses and concert halls to expensive instruments and highly specialized elite training pathways that begin in early childhood. Its lack of a wide market share—and its longstanding association with "high" culture—means it survives only through the patronage of the wealthy, who use it to burnish their reputations and art-wash their money. Meanwhile, dominant US ideology insists that anything that can't be marketized offers nothing for society. Thus, contemporary new music practitioners must contend with an impossible contradiction: the unpopularity of what they do is not only a problem for economic survival but also—due to neoliberal ideology—a source of deep shame.

This situation results in dissonant branding strategies. On the one hand, august institutions like the Metropolitan Opera must find ways of portraying themselves as welcoming spaces "for everyone," even though this is demonstrably not the case; on the other hand, entrepreneurially minded artists promote themselves as "anti-institutional" upstarts leaving these legacy entities behind, claiming to appeal to bigger and more diverse audiences. In both cases, the question of "access" is paramount, and is shaped in essentially commercial terms: this music is a product that needs to be better tailored to consumer desires or needs marketing.

Some of these contradictions were the subject of a debate sparked by US composer Christopher Cerrone's post on X (formerly Twitter) of a bar of Brian Ferneyhough's famously dense notation (a measure from his 2012 chamber work *Liber Scintillarum*) along with the barb: "It is actually so funny that this music exists and people take it seriously."[1] From the responses, it became clear that many participants were operating from two entirely distinct epistemic positions when it came to the concept of "notation" itself, and what it is for.

Ferneyhough is part of a small community of artists with a shared interest in maximizing the complexity of musical textures. Their works deploy extended techniques, microtonality, and dense layers (particularly of rhythms). Such composers' approaches to notation are central aspects of their orientation toward composition. Achieving this density and microscopic complexity requires an exploratory and minutely attentive engagement with notation itself, and the resulting scores are often "impossible" to perform "perfectly." This quality evoked outrage from some of the commenters on Cerrone's post, who viewed this impossibility as an act of pointless tyranny on Ferneyhough's part; Cerrone even implied that such notation shows a lack of "empathy for performers." Clearly, for him, as for many people engaged in new music, the technology of musical notation is simply functional—a tool to be used to explain to performers

Pieter Claesz, Still Life With Musical Instruments on a Laid Table, 1623. License: Public domain.

what the composter wants them to do. Any way of using it that does not conform to that rigid functionality appears as an act of disservice to the musicians who perform the work, and thus, presumably, to the audiences trying to listen to it.

I'm a musicologist who studies American classical music and its various interweavings with capitalist ideologies and material practices. For this conversation, I engaged my friend Greg Stuart to help me understand how these rhetorical maneuvers function in this discourse, and what they disguise. Greg is a percussionist and professor who has a physical disability called focal dystonia, a neurological condition that causes involuntary muscle movements in a particular body part, which for him is his left hand. The first symptoms manifested during Greg's first year of college, where he had become deeply invested in percussion, and in the kind of intense, dedicated practice regimen that is required for success in the percussion studio. As the years passed, he became unable to play simple techniques or even, for a period of time, to hold a stick in his "bad" hand. Greg's doctor of musical arts dissertation explores the years of anxiety, denial, and despair (not to mention physical pain) he experienced as he fought to hide what he then considered the "wrongness" of his hand during practice and performance.[2] He writes that he came to feel like his left hand didn't belong to him, and was more like a "blunt club" attached to his body, outside his control. Eventually, much of the "normative" professional percussion repertoire became inaccessible to him, and by the end of his master's degree, he was demoralized and defeated: "There was genuinely nothing I felt comfortable doing as a percussionist. I had two hands, but only one of them was mine."[3]

Although he discovered that most musicians who develop focal dystonia ultimately leave the profession, Greg chose instead to engage with the problem of his left hand to find a different path toward percussion. Working with music that has what we might consider different "goals" than most of the canonical percussion repertoire helped Greg construct a theory of Western conservatory percussion as a uniquely "handed" practice, meaning a practice foregrounding "handedness" above all other things. Theorizing percussion in this way helped him see it, and himself within it, more clearly, and formed the basis of a new approach to percussion that doesn't rely on handedness at all.

To return to the debate in Cerrone's Twitter thread: interestingly, for Greg it was engaging with the kinds of thorny, contemporary, and experimental music assumed to be exclusionary that provided an important first step toward becoming a different kind of percussionist than conventional training models tend to create. What follows is a collaboratively created dialogue between Greg and me, in which we work together to try to understand some of the political problematics generated in high-profile, professionalized contemporary music-making around questions of access, as well as questions about what

music is "for."

—Marianna Ritchey

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Marianna Ritchey (MR): When we think of a musician struggling in the way you did as a student, we might imagine two possibilities: either the musician will be forced to give up their performance career, or they will need to look for "easier" scores that they can continue playing "despite" their disability. For you, however, dense, difficult music brought you back to yourself as a musician. In fact, I think the first piece you describe working on as you were developing your ideas about "handedness" was Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet* (1991), which uses the same notational style Cerrone criticized for showing a lack of "empathy" for its performers. How do you account for this?

Greg Stuart (GS): In the case of the Twitter thread you sent, it seems like the anti-Ferneyhough views come from people who, for whatever reason, genuinely do not understand what Ferneyhough's notation is for. That is, it feels like they are willfully disregarding *why* someone would write music that looks like that in the first place and what that kind of notation could *do* in performance.

To suggest that *Liber Scintillarum,* for example, has a lack of empathy for its performers is to suggest that the composer's job—meaning *all* composers' jobs—is to provide the most legible possible instructions for performers to follow in order to easily and precisely realize exactly what the composer intends, without having to struggle to parse those intentions. But as the music scholar Stuart Duncan argues, New Complexity composers and their "sympathetic" performers don't operate via this expectation at all. Rather, they are attempting to "explicitly employ a notational representation that channels the performer into making decisions and taking ultimate responsibility for their interpretation."[4] In short, we might say that New Complexity, which deploys impossible notation in order to demand personal choices and creative, interpretive decisions from every performer, is the opposite of "high" modernism, which sought to remove performers from the equation altogether. To casually assert that such scores demonstrate a lack of "empathy" for performers not only assumes what scores have (always) been for, but also that all performers are the same.

MR: You provide an example belying those assumptions, in that the question of what a given score or approach to notation is "for" and how "performers" will self-evidently receive it obviously has major implications for a performer whose disability means they can't do many of the basic things most composers assume performers can do. So would you say that a score like Ferneyhough's is "for" the composer, or is it "for" the performer? And if it's "for" the performer, what does it mean that it's so difficult to realize?

GS: The point of the Ferneyhough composition, if it can be reduced in this way, which I'm somewhat reticent to do, is that you *can't* read it. Or, rather that its "complexity" forces you to invent a new way of reading it on your own. It absolutely resists "sight-reading." You could thus easily say that *because* of the score's difficulty, he actually respects performers *more*.

MR: In that sense, a score like this is a gift to performers, a puzzle for them to have fun solving, a technology for asking them to be creative and inventive. It makes me think of those Renaissance-era scores for which performers must first solve a riddle or break a code before its revealed how to sing the madrigal or whatever it is. I love how there's something there beyond just the "sounded" product that is heard by audiences; the puzzle or code is not audible to the audience, it's just a fun secret between the composer and the performers themselves.

GS: Exactly. With his notation, you have to ask the question "what does it mean to read a score?" We assume that if you can read music, you can just plop down any old score and you can, more or less, make your way through it. But Ferneyhough's scores are not like that at all. You have to *decode* the music. And everyone will decode it differently.

MR: It's also interesting to look through that whole thread and see a bunch of people all talking about notation, when it's not at all clear to me that they all understand "notation" in the same way or as the same kind of tool. Almost like if you and I were both talking about "scissors," but you were thinking of scissors as something you cut with and I was thinking of them as something you use the other end to hammer with.

GS: Any notation is always already an abstraction. The fact that we see certain notations as "easier" than others—as "normal" rather than something weird or difficult, or both—is just a bias of history. It's just because we've become used to one form of notation, or to certain linkages between specific notations and their sounded results. But the idea that notation communicates *all* its sounding results or that it can be "perfectly" performed is just a product of historical inertia around particular performance styles or practices. It is, to a certain extent, an illusion. As Ferneyhough says, "No notation, of whatever iconically representational state, can presume to record information encompassing all aspects of the sonic phenomenon for which it stands."[5] In other words, there will always exist a kind of "distance" between performer, score, and performance through the necessarily "mediatizing" nature of the notation, all of which is to say that all scores *require* interpretation.

Concert Hall, Katowice, Poland. License: CC0.

MR: To appropriate a term from Anna Kornbluh's *Immediacy: or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism,* learning a "thick" score like Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet* —something densely layered that requires the performer to slow down and think critically and creatively about what's being communicated rather than just confirming previously held notions—is difficult for everyone regardless of skill level.[6] Steven Schick wrote a famous article about the process of learning the piece in which he asks his readers to reflect on one of the "casualties" of the fast-paced professional performance environment (and its attendant connections to the demands of a capitalist marketplace), which is "the small but pleasurable distinction between the act of learning a piece of music and the art of performing it."[7] For Schick, *Bone Alphabet* was so hard to learn that it slowed down the whole learning process to a "glacial" pace, which opens a vast space for its performers, each of whom must then "translate" the score given their own chosen instruments and their own individual skill sets, interests, bodies, and creative goals. Realizing *Bone Alphabet* requires the performer to create something new, to grapple with the creative process and with themselves.

GS: Yeah, and for me with *Bone Alphabet*, after that kind of deep, durational learning, a performance then burns with an uncommon intensity, because you've slowly built everything in the piece from zero to get to that point. It took me seven months of nearly nonstop work to learn and perform the piece, which was slow and difficult but also incredible and deeply transformative. Dealing with the score's "superabundance" of details taught me a lot about my body and my "deficient" left hand, for instance, including some of my own admittedly contradictory desires around wanting to play the piece in the first place. So, it's hard for me to imagine wanting to "simplify" something that rich by, you know, compressing the dense rhythmic language into more easily readable triplets or whatever through some kind of "best practices" approach to notation. It's absolutely not a form of "control" over the player, but a real invitation to *play*—with the material, the act of reading, interpreting, technical challenges, etc. It's an invitation to *make* something, together. And by definition the composer doesn't know what the ultimate act of that play will look like. The piece is not realizable or knowable in the composer's mind alone. It requires interpretation. It needs the thickness of the score as a "mediating" structure, per Kornbluh.

MR: Is a composition created with audiences, with performers, or by the composer themselves? How an individual answers this question seems to have great bearing on what they think the technology of musical notation is "for." You opened a fascinating new theoretical motherlode for me when you pointed out that many new music composers today write their pieces directly on the computer, where they create a direct visual representation of how and where each sound in a composition ought to appear. They build the piece using samples from a sound library which they arrange onscreen to create the sonic textures they're looking for. They can press play and hear this arrangement as many times as they like and minutely tweak it until they can hear is exactly "right." As you describe it, listening to a playback of a constructed onscreen composition represents a hearing of a seemingly "perfect" or "yet-to-come" notation through speakers while the composer works. Then, using notation software, they can simply print it out as standard notated music, which they can give to performers to read. Sifting through some of the interviews Cerrone has given in recent years, I found that he describes his process in exactly this way. He says he composes "in the computer," where he meticulously arranges samples of sounds in a digital audio workstation (DAW). "My whole process is to mock everything up down to the very slightest note and then kind of reimagine it when I orchestrate it … I reimagine this mocked-up audio file as the real thing."[8]

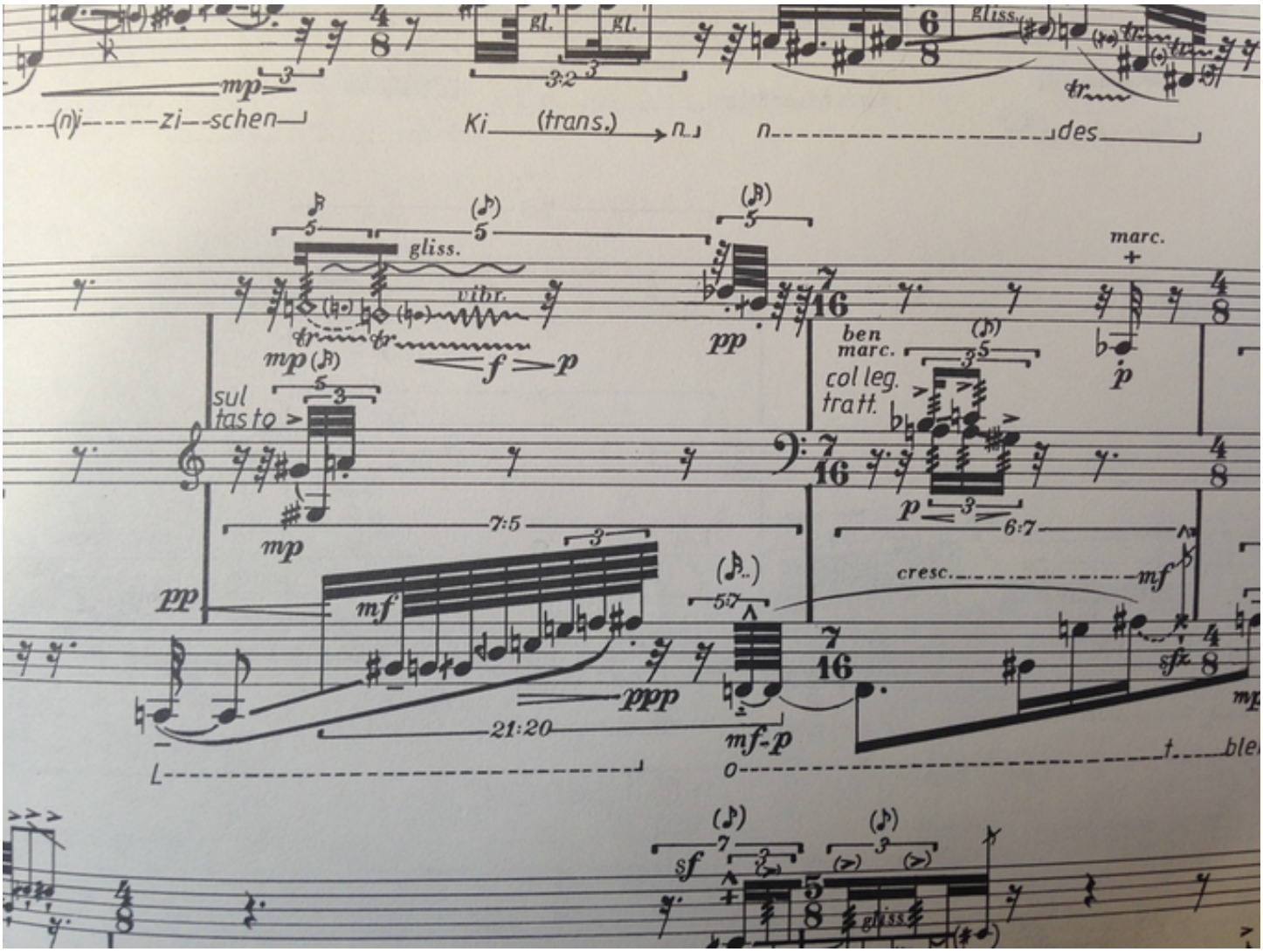
GS: There's nothing wrong with composing on (or with) the computer, or with using technology in your work; it would be *absurd* to argue so in any categorical manner—so much popular music is made on the computer, and obviously there's lots of incredible music made this way, in all sorts of genres. And also, a huge portion of my own work, particularly with Michael Pisaro-Liu, grew out of the use of technology and the computer, for which we explored close-mic'd multitracked assemblages to capture and arrange large quantities of small sounds that the ear wouldn't likely perceive on its own. So I'm really the last person to draw some kind of hard line about how music is just "notes on the page." But I also think *if* you compose that way—that is, on your computer screen— *and* you're composing with the intention of *then handing it off to human performers to play*, which is how classical music is mediated, then there's this real "flattening" of meaning, as the composer enters into a more one-to-one correspondence type of space with how the notation relates to the sounding music. In Kornbluh's *Immediacy*, she talks about the disappearance of third-person novels—it's all first-person auto-fiction now. And I'm like, "Well that's just writing music on your computer with MIDI playback." That is, a "personal" sonic mirror reflecting back a "perfect" image that you then hand off to performers to reproduce one pixel at a time, where the sounding music and its preperformance digital mock-up are basically the same. There's no longer a distance, or there's very, very little, between the two. This all feels a lot like the "cutting out the middleman" that Kornbluh is talking about in everything from the production style of streaming media to the shipping practices of platform capitalism. That is, rather than engaging with the idea that "the medium is the message," you *get rid of the medium*—in this case the notation—or at least make it seem *as if* the notation is totally seamless, transparent, and/or purely functional. And so, because the notation is (apparently) not "in the way," you get the sonic result "right now," "as it is." The sound-notation relation is, following Kornbluh's highlighting of so many of the terms now omnipresent in digital capitalism, "instant access," "direct message," "#nofilter," "on demand," and so forth. You swipe right on the thing you want right now. You click and the thing appears the same day on your doorstep. What you see is what you get—and you get it instantaneously. The seemingly "frictionless" experience of a ride-call app like Uber is also present in the piano-scroll MIDI timeline of your DAW and it spills over onto the page of your music. And the sound of that apparent seamlessness *can be heard in the music*. If that's what you think notation is for—seamless functional translation of "performerly" information—then of course Ferneyhough's music or other compositions that take notation *as part of their compositional material* aren't going to make much sense to you. It's just an entirely different compositional project.

MR: On the one hand I can see the way that composing in a DAW is cool, from a certain perspective. In one sense it's like an interesting *extension* of the old romantic paradigm where the composer has ideas in their brain and then has to figure out a way of conveying those "purely musical ideas" to performers in such a way that the music can actually be heard by others. But on the other hand, isn't it already "being heard by others"? Isn't its sonic realization already accomplished thanks to the incredibly sophisticated construction and playback tool of the DAW itself? In the nineteenth century the piece really did exist only in the composer's head, so passing notation off to musicians was the only way anyone else could hear it, and there's something beautiful about that process in how music required collective creative labor. But with this DAW-composed stuff, which you can already hear by pressing play, what is the actual point of having human performers play it live if their task is to just do what the computer does and not interpret it themselves?

GS: Yes, the sonic realization is already accomplished on the computer, and this is precisely why critics of New Complexity scores feel that there's too much "intervening" structure in the notation. They think it can and should be made more "simple," more like what it "really" is, and what it "really" *is* is the audio file. The goal here seems to be that the onscreen image and the performed sound should map onto one another as closely as possible, so what you see is what you hear. But *for the performer* that kind of mapping leads to a hollowing out of possible interpretations and just shifts the performance toward pure "execution." Of course, many conservatory-trained

musicians actually desire this arrangement because it confirms their expertise as highly skilled workers. So, there is a little "two-step," as it were, going on between performers and composers in this regard.

exactly, precisely what to do—I guess because it's hard for me to understand why *anyone* would want that in any context. Unless I think of performing music as an exercise in displaying excellence and perfection, more like being an Olympic athlete or something, even though for me that's



One measure of Ferneyhough's Etudes Transcendentales.

MR: In another interview, Cerrone talks about indeterminate music. He says his students are always trying to leave space for indeterminacy, whereas he's always trying to make them write everything out. And he says his students tell him they want to "give freedom to the performers," and his answer to them is "I can assure you that the performers, unless they're some very special rare breed, do not want any freedom."[9] Do you think that's part of the "two-step" you describe? I mean, I assume he's right, at least about a certain kind of conservatory-trained performer; I'm sure he knows what he's talking about. This is his community, not mine. But it's hard for me to understand why a performer would just want to be told

never been part of my own experience or goals as a musician, admittedly a musician in a very different type of scene than this one we're talking about.

GS: I understand that comment about performers. The injunction to "play it as written" is so deeply ingrained in classical music culture and its performance pedagogy that one would not be mistaken for thinking that it was literally the point of the entire enterprise. I see it in my students too, even when we work on pieces that are about as far removed from that model as you could imagine—say, Toshi Ichiyanagi's *Pratyahara Event* (1963/73) or Annea Lockwood's *bayou-borne* (2016). Even with such

compositions, students are concerned about whether they are "doing it right," almost to the point that it feels like they are demanding that I tell them what to do. The musicologist Anna Bull terms the extreme focus on technical ability, precision, and accuracy in classical music a "pedagogy of correction," a phrase which has frankly haunted me since I first came across it, particularly when I observe it while working with students on pieces that offer such deep invitations to explore.[10] So yeah, it's not surprising to hear that, in the context of a composition lesson, a student might be told to eliminate an indeterminate element in favor of simply writing out "exactly" what they (apparently) want; when the entire culture is oriented around "control," there needs to be as little "slippage" as possible between the score's "image" and its resulting performance. This is just seen as de facto "good" for everyone involved.

MR: As I'm thinking through these questions about performers and difficulty, I'm also thinking about listeners, and I'm noticing a certain attitude toward "consumption" in the new music discourses I've been interested in. Everyone agrees that classical music is dying and that the main problem is that it isn't popular. Attacking this lack of popularity is basically everybody's shared goal, both individually and at the level of the institution (as in all these "outreach" projects that city orchestras are doing). The "thinness" that seems to be prioritized in these new music scenes that hate modernism seems related to a perceived greater marketability of what we might call "thin" music, in contrast to Kornbluh's idea of "thick" texts. "Thin" music here is music that, supposedly, directly communicates to both performers and audiences. There's no fuzzy mediating going on.

GS: Missing the point of certain "difficult" scores—which is the difficulty itself—seems symptomatic of a political-economic culture that has shifted from production to *circulation*. If the main goal is circulation, then the problem with the apparent "fussiness" of "difficult" notation is that it *impedes* a particular piece's uptake and circulation in the culture, i.e., how smoothly and quickly the machinery of commissioning, learning, and performance can function. That is, we can't have anything that slows that down in any way. And so, since the economy has shifted from making things to speeding up how existing things circulate, we are getting a lot of music that, in certain ways, sort of feels like the "retweeting" of prior eras of music composition.

MR: In this paradigm, circulation is the point of making the music. And anything impeding that circulation (e.g., a score being too hard or whatever) is automatically bad, because the obvious goal of every composer should be to make accessible stuff that "speaks to" a broad audience in a direct way; it's the desire for smooth circulation without any friction or stoppages. But what if what you desire is engagement with edges and difficulties and puzzles to solve and things to learn and be astounded by? Obviously the culture we live in is forcing us to want things that I don't think we actually want. That is Marxism 101. I don't *want* ChatGPT to "summarize" *Capital* volume one for me. I don't *want* ChatGPT to make my own writing "easier" either, but I'm being relentlessly told that I do want this, that obviously everyone wants this. I don't *want* music to just be easy to hear, or at least I don't want it that way all the time. I also don't want to be told what I'm supposed to find accessible or not. I want people to be different and I want them to show me something new that I couldn't have figured out by myself. I want to be surprised, and even disturbed, and to struggle to incorporate new thoughts I never had to think before.

GS: The desire to "speed up the process," as in the case of having ChatGPT write for you, feels a lot like, to paraphrase and hybridize Kornbluh and Adorno, "speeding up the circulation of pre-thought thoughts." That is, we look into the "mirror," and it reflects back to us perfectly the "patterns" we want to see. The mirror, a "large language model" in the case of ChatGPT, does not think. It just looks through its massive corpus of data for preexisting patterns and reassembles them into the formal veneer of some new text. On the surface it seems impressive when this new text appears, almost magical, but it also feels like we are skipping over an *irreducible* first step in the writing of any text. That is, writing is a form of *thinking* that can't, or shouldn't be, "outsourced."

Let's turn the argument around and ask why I find problematic the idea that pieces should have a one-to-one correspondence between how they look and how they sound. Why does it bother me? Using playback while composing can, of course, be helpful, and it can be useful when you're first learning how to compose, or trying out how things *might* fit together, especially when it combines a lot of things you can't do yourself—a piece for a large orchestra or a chamber ensemble or something. But there's just something unsettling when you listen to a piece performed by humans but you have this deep sense that it was composed in a DAW. It's hard to describe but it sort of feels like when you read a text and you just *know* that it was written in ChatGPT. It lacks loose ends and—"danger" is not quite the right word here. It's like everything in the music has been screwed down, all the edges have been sanded off. By contrast, when you see an incredible improviser—someone like Keith Rowe, Matana Roberts, Taku Sugimoto, or Mary Halvorson—you get the sense that there's this huge expanse and that anything could happen. With music that's directly conceived of in a DAW/MIDI platform, it feels so incredibly scripted and inert. None of the performers could ever break out of the text in any meaningful way; there's nothing they could do, they're just fungible parts in the whole process. You could get any equally skilled performer in there to play the same part. It just feels so impersonal, and also like its representative of an ethos where the creation of the music—at home, on the computer— *is* the music, and the live performance is secondary. Liveness is obviously

economically and ontologically crucial for "classical music," but with a lot of this new stuff made inside a DAW, it's so secondary, even if we say that we "value live performances." And so I think some of this DAW-composer discourse bothers me *as a performer*, because despite it being all about using new cool pop-music technology to compose, *it's actually still a very old-fashioned notion of what composing entails*.

MR: On the one hand I want to be charitable to the people arguing that composers need to be conscious of writing accessibly. There's nothing wrong with thinking about the impact of your work on the workers you need in order for it to be realized, and in fact that's very important to do. And I think one way Cerrone is probably using the word "empathy" when he says he needs to write in a clear and readable way for performers is that he has empathy for the super-compressed amount of time most professional performers have to learn a new piece before they have to perform it. But I just wish people wouldn't universalize or celebrate stuff that's actually just an economic necessity; like, okay, writing accessibly for performers under X or Y economic conditions shouldn't translate to "anyone who doesn't write this way lacks care for other humans or is being an elitist." I wish there was more space for talking about the potentialities of difficulty, struggle, risk, and liveness. And in this case, it's like the intended effect of the DAW-generated composition is to *foreclose* the very possibility of that "liveness" we associate with performance.

GS: Right. And from my perspective the problem is that the whole conversation just occupies a presumably "neutral" middle ground. There's nothing at stake in it.

MR: What do you mean by that? What would be at stake in a piece of notation?

GS: I mean pieces where something can happen. I know that sounds kind of vague, but it is actually hard to say exactly what this "something" will be, precisely because it is *not* predictable or notatable. Unlike a score that just plainly expresses pretty much how it's going to sound when performers play it back for you, what's really going to happen when we do this Oliveros meditation or similarly exploratory process-oriented work, where something unforeseen might happen? It's clear that there's a real "gap" in the communicative chain between composer and performer. And the gap is crucial; you don't want to get rid of it, as it's generative of the whole process. Think of the original minimalists, for example, who so many new music composers are clearly channeling stylistically. Reich or Glass or Riley: they wrote stuff on the page and then just said "things repeat" or some equivalent suggestion. "To be held for a long time," in LaMonte Young's famous *Composition 1960 #7*. Maybe it's a small difference, but there's still this *act of imagination* going on, or at least a *wager* of "I wonder what will happen—to me, the room, the performers, the audience—if this perfect fifth, or whatever, simply continues on and on?" Or else they were experimenting with technology, making tape pieces, for instance, but this was with analog tech, which was much more imprecise and fuzzy. They weren't listening to finished works at home on their laptops and then printing them off as scores and sending those scores to performers to "render." In that model it's extremely hard to imagine really *anything* happening, much less something truly unforeseen.

MR: With the idea of something unforeseen happening, my brain always goes to Adorno on how the culture industry serves us pre-thought ideas that we already know how to think. That's why we enjoy consuming a Marvel movie or something like that. We know what it is already. We know everything about it and how to engage with it, and that feeling of already-knowing—of being served something you already know you like—can be intensely pleasurable. The idea of valuing the unforeseen outcome is also political. It's how a lot of radical political movements understand political change and revolution: we have to move into revolution without knowing what the exact outcome will be, because we don't know yet what kinds of conditions will exist or what kinds of needs we will have in the future. These will always depend on context and community. In your dissertation, where you develop your theories of handedness and non-instrumentality (and in a lot of these experimental scores you're into), I see a related orientation, where someone is trying to ask unfamiliar questions to trace not-yet-known potentialities. I have been obsessed lately with this idea of the epistemological frame: what kinds of "frames" do we use to see and understand reality, and how can we even notice those frames in the first place, much less change them or break out of them? Your idea of exploring what it could mean to think of "percussion" outside of "handedness" is such a great example of probing the frame itself. You do so much work to show that this is more than just a weird thought experiment. It actually has major implications for music, study, the body, life.

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This is an edited excerpt from Marianna Ritchey's new book project *Toward A Materialist Musicology: Academic Practice for the End of the World*.

Marianna Ritchey is Associate Professor of Music History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She spent much of her young adulthood in Portland, Oregon, playing and touring in various indie rock bands, before going to UCLA for a PhD in Musicology. She has written about Berlioz, comedy, music history pedagogy, Marxism, and operatic representations of Steve Jobs. Her first book,

Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era (U. Chicago Press, 2019), examines classical music and capitalist ideologies in the contemporary United States. She is currently working on an array of topics having to do with music, academia, and political action.

Greg Stuart is a percussionist specializing in experimental music. He has collaborated extensively with composer Michael Pisaro-Liu, producing a significant body of new music for percussion, often integrating field recordings and electronic sound. Recent collaborations include work with Unstern (Arzat Skia/Leo Svirsky), Sarah Hennies, Nomi Epstein, Martin Arnold, and the hip-hop group clipping. His performances have been featured on labels such as Gravity Wave, Alter, Elsewhere, New Focus, and Sawyer Editions, among others. Stuart is Professor of Experimental Music at the University of South Carolina School of Music, where he teaches music history and leads the Experimental Music Workshop, fostering creative sound exploration.

1
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2
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3
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4
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7
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9
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10
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David Grubbs

Pauline Oliveros: Music Out of the Corner of One's Eye

1.

When I first met Pauline Oliveros in 1998 over the telephone, she said "Nice to meet you" and then laughed at the strangeness of it. This may have been before anyone first typed and sent the phrase "nice to e-meet you." I had been contacted by Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo about playing in an ensemble premiering her new piece. They passed her my phone number, and suddenly here was Pauline on the line, at once efficient and precise, notably economical in her choice of words, but also warm and informal ("we'll all have fun"), and with a voice that steadily rippled into laughter. She apologized that the score for the new piece wasn't finished but promised that she'd fax it over the moment it was ready.

Several weeks later she called to say hello and that she was looking forward to meeting and was glad that we'd be playing together. She was sorry once again that she didn't have the completed score. There was at least one more such phone call. We'd provisionally agreed that I'd play harmonium—a bit of a wildcard combination with Pauline's accordion tuned in just intonation—but without seeing the score I couldn't know how (or how much) I'd need to prepare for the performance. There was one more phone call from Pauline on the day before I was to leave for Buffalo to let me know that a fax was waiting for me.

The faxed score was two pages long and had two handwritten mandalas: "Primordial" and "Lift." At the center of the Primordial mandala was an oval with the word "LISTEN." Ringing it at regular intervals were eight points or stations, four of which described somatic processes: "nerve firing," "cell dividing," blood circulation," and "muscle contraction/expansion." Interspersed among these four ordinal points were four points designated with a question mark, and lines with arrows in both directions connecting the eight stations to the center of the mandala. On the second page, the Lift mandala had at its center a treble clef stave with a D4 whole note with fermata; eight points with the legends "pitch deviation," "anti-gravity," "timbre whirl," "particles," "dynamic transformation," "black hole," "harmony perception," and "waves" were attached to the center by arrows pointing in both directions, as with the other mandala. The figure was encircled by a motto testing one's ability to identify a beginning and ending: "listening all over to oneself and others everywhere in the whole of the universe all the time." I packed my suitcase for April in Buffalo, where snow was predicted.

We gathered, quickly set up, and began to play at Hallwalls. Pauline was equipped with her accordion in just intonation. I sat on the ground playing a portable harmonium with both of its rear bellows unclasped so I could pump as slowly as possible while still activating its brass reeds (a harmonium repair expert in the Bronx would later ask me to never play the instrument this way again, given the wear and tear on the reeds). Anne Bourne

Pauline Oliveros and the ♀ Ensemble performing "Teach Yourself to Fly" from Sonic Meditations, 1970, Rancho Santa Fe, CA. Courtesy of Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California San Diego.

played cello and sang. Alexandria Gelencser patiently bowed the open strings of an electric cello. Tony Conrad played violin and his own jerry-rigged chain of electronic processing. Scott Olson operated a low-frequency oscillator. And Andrew Deutsch provided additional processing to individual inputs from the ensemble and oversaw the live mix. We didn't discuss the score or the composition itself apart from Pauline briefly explaining that in the book *Awakening to the Zero Point*, author Gregg Braden asserts that in 1960 the earth's resonant frequency measured 7.8Hz, but that this number was predicted to rise to 13Hz by 2010.[1] That seemed like a worrying thing—at least that was my takeaway. The shift in the earth's frequency was represented in the piece by the extremely slow turning of the knob on an analog low-frequency oscillator whose output was raised from 7.8Hz to 13Hz over the course of the forty-five-minute Primordial section. This frequency range falls below that of human hearing, but the oscillator was routed to combine with the output of individual instruments in the ensemble for a subtle tremolo or beating effect whose speed gradually increases over the course of the first section, and held fast at the plateau of its uppermost speed for the Lift section, the final thirty minutes of the piece.

If a visitor had wandered into Hallwalls on the first day we played together, it's not clear whether they could have identified the composer among us, or whether there was a composer, or even a composition. We followed Pauline's lead in terms of the overall pacing—the macro tempo of our playing—but with little in the way of verbal instruction. The Primordial section came to be characterized by performers spending about as much time playing as silently listening. Rather than recognizable correlations between the sounds we produced and physical processes such as nerves firing or cells dividing, individual players would explore small variations within a particular gesture, technique, or repertoire for a given period of time before returning to the mandala's central prompt to LISTEN and rest for a similar length of time. Following Pauline's example, listening felt active and productive; one was

Pauline Oliveros. Courtesy: Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, San Francisco.

equally engaged when silent or when making sounds. When it was time to play again—maybe to camouflage oneself by stealthily merging with something one had been listening closely to, maybe to engage with subtle details in another player's sounds that would otherwise go unnoticed, maybe to produce a collage effect with a sharply contrasting contribution—all the performers understood that their next gesture should be distinct from their previous one. The result was that even as the patient exploration of certain gestures could seem to take place in slow motion, the listener—which in this case explicitly included the player—might suddenly sense that the material had shifted dramatically. In the Lift section, players took their time alternating between a sustained D and sonic gestures whose prompts were either drawn from physics or from generative descriptions of musical processes (e.g., "timbre whirl," "pitch deviation," and so forth). In that second and final section of the piece there was invariably more sound, as well as an unambiguous tonal center that made the lapidary play of the oscillator's 13Hz tremolo that much more present.

The second day was that of the performance, so we played for perhaps half as long. We had come know one another sufficiently well to perform the piece, and everyone was ready.

Less than thirty minutes before the performance, Pauline gathered us backstage and finally asked, "Does anyone have any questions about the score?" I'm smiling just thinking about it. It was such a funny, quirky gesture, and one that I come back to periodically. We'd spent hours and hours working on the piece without reference to the score. The timing of her question struck me—who had worried unnecessarily about preparation time—as subversive, but subversive of what? To begin with, her nonchalance—I considered whether it was performative, but there was nothing calculated about it—wasn't about ironizing a composition titled *Primordial/Lift*. It wasn't about deflating the piece, because she hadn't inflated it in the first place. Nor did I find her relation to the score in any way cynical. Pauline wasn't mocking the general agreement by which she, as composer, produces a score to facilitate a composition and a concert, and completes a transaction that connects commission to premiere. (I'm thinking of Nelson Goodman's argument in *Languages of Art* about a musical composition exhibiting compliance between score and performance; *Primordial/Lift* already operated outside this mode of agreement in that its score couldn't have been derived from our performance.)[2] It felt, rather, like the question had slipped her mind. But if it slipped her mind it was because we had all meditated upon her charming, challenging written instructions and then demonstrated by our playing together that we understood her piece—and that what unfolded over the two days had been acceptable to her. She hadn't intervened. One ensemble member took up the invitation and asked a question about differentiating between two of the physical processes in the Primordial section. Pauline responded by asking how they had approached these processes as prompts for producing sound. She listened to the musician's explanation, and then agreed that the solution made sense to her. That was the end of the conversation, or rather we resumed the conversation we had already been having, and shortly thereafter took the stage.

2.

Beyond Pauline's impeccable sense of timing, what stuck with me about this brief backstage conversation was that although the score to *Primordial/Lift* offers its performers mental images as prompts—Pauline also referred to them as metaphors—she never insisted that we express any kind of commitment or allegiance to the specific images she had chosen. No one was asked to demonstrate to the ensemble their musical realization of "blood circulation" or "anti-gravity." No one was asked to explain how they had approached translating verbal prompt to sonic gesture, nor as a group were we expected to reflect upon the theme of translation. No fealty was required beyond what we could demonstrate as musicians. No one was asked to pinpoint or weigh in on whether the prompts resonated faintly or strongly, although I did have the sense that each individual in the ensemble had their own distinct relationship to the score—how could it be otherwise? I imagined that for some the mental images were richly meaningful—objects to meditate upon during the performance—and that for others their primary significance was that they terminated in an action. The composition itself, but also Pauline's manner of handling the rehearsal period and even of time spent together when we put down our instruments, allowed for a social and musical pluralism that went unremarked upon. Chalk it up to Pauline's modesty.

I had the opportunity to perform *Primordial/Lift* twice more with Pauline and an ensemble of her choosing that shared Anne Bourne and Andrew Deutsch with the Buffalo premiere. Both concerts were presented by Brooklyn's ISSUE Project Room, and both were in spaces with significantly different acoustics. The first took place in ISSUE's temporary home at the Old American Can Factory in the Gowanus neighborhood, and the second in its cavernous, reverberant space in the Beaux Arts–style building at 110 Livingston in downtown Brooklyn. The Can Factory location was a long, narrow loft with the dimensions of a shoebox, and the performance of *Primordial/Lift* was the only concert I can recall out of the dozens that I saw there that rotated the performance space by 90 degrees so that the audience ringed the musicians on three sides, and the implied proscenium was neutralized. The marble-clad 110 Livingston space presented its own challenges regarding low-end feedback, but to no one's surprise *Primordial/Lift* proved such a flexible, amenable composition that the ensemble was able not only to adapt to the exigencies of the space, but also to affirmatively incorporate its acoustics into the performance.

Once again, in none of the rehearsals for these later presentations of *Primordial/Lift* did Pauline particularly intervene into individual performer decisions. For the two Brooklyn performances, we had less time to rehearse or play together beforehand than in Buffalo, but some of us had the wind of a previous performance in our sails, and others who were new to the piece had experience working with Pauline. This is not to suggest that she was always so hands-off in coaching performers. I took part in a concert around this time that convened an ensemble to perform five or six pieces of hers with only an afternoon's rehearsal, and I was fascinated to see Pauline not hesitate to jump in with instructions regarding dynamics, sound production, and especially tempo—perhaps better described as musical rate of change. I was curious to see her express unambiguous preferences about the contributions of individual performers, but also provide more detailed explanations of her beautifully economical scores. Rather than getting lost as we did in playing just prior to the first performance of *Primordial/Lift*—or maybe

Pauline Oliveros. Courtesy: Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, San Francisco.

this was my own pleasurably oceanic experience—during that rehearsal Pauline was keenly attuned to clock time as it ticked toward the evening's performance. It was a birthday concert for her, and afterward we sang what we hoped would be the world's slowest rendition of "Happy Birthday," each person dragging down the tempo of the whole sing-along until it sounded like a melting cake.

Between the two ISSUE Project Room performances of *Primordial/Lift*, I saw Pauline at a conference at the University of Toronto marking John Cage's centennial. Pauline's keynote address was full of unfamiliar insights and managed the neat trick of being sufficiently aloof from the topic of the conference—John Cage—to illuminate it obliquely, and thus memorably. A concert of Pauline's music in Toronto that week saw one of her pieces conclude with a slow shade into silence and performer stillness, with the sounds from the stage eventually dipping beneath those of an audience seated in a hundred creaky wooden chairs trying to be as quiet as possible. As we approached the heaviest near-silence—the sonic correlative of darkest-before-dawn—the ding of an iPhone voicemail notification rang out. I didn't expect the audience to turn into a mob and attack the offender who hadn't silenced their phone, but I didn't rule it out. As the audience's anger rose, suddenly Pauline stood with her phone aloft and with a laugh declared, "It's me!"

What has surprised me most about *Primordial/Lift* is the way it has come to resonate unambiguously as a composition. When we first performed it, I naively experienced it more fundamentally as a gently directed group improvisation. I did get lost in it, even while fulfilling a series of musical tasks, exploring variations within a particular gesture before returning to the center of the score's two mandalas either by listening with renewed focus or by contributing my own timbral stamp to the ensemble's drone on the pitch D4. I also understood the piece initially as an invitation to expand one's sense of the categories of composition, improvisation, and score in

ways inflected by Pauline's humor and absence of bombast. The fact that she volunteered to field our questions about the score a mere thirty minutes before the premiere buttressed this line of thinking. And yet, the more we performed the piece, and the more I returned to the score—that two-page fax that arrived at the last moment, whose simplicity becomes lovelier over time—the more coherent I've found the overall shape of the piece as well as its component range of techniques. I value it more because of the time that it took to come into focus.

3.

I've observed Pauline Oliveros's working methods from the position of a musician playing in groups she's convened and directed, albeit with a distinctive range of approaches to coaching performers. Perhaps the more open approach in *Primordial/Lift* had to do with the fact that she herself performed on the piece, and she was able to guide us with a light touch because of her example as a musician. Although the social and interpersonal experience playing her music was especially thoughtful and invigorating, the concert settings were familiar.

My experience of working with *Sonic Meditations*, her 1974 collection of text scores, differs considerably from that of performing her music in a concert. In the various teaching and workshop situations where I've introduced *Sonic Meditations*, I often find myself intending to mix it up and sample more broadly from among its short texts, but instead I come back to my favorite: the sixteenth and final one in the series. Here are its instructions in their entirety:

> Begin simultaneously with the others. Sing any pitch. The maximum length of the pitch is determined by the breath. Listen to the group. Locate the center of the group sound spectrum. Sing your pitch again and make a tiny adjustment upward or downward, but tuning toward the center of the sound spectrum. Continue to tune slowly, in tiny increments toward the center of the spectrum. Each time sing a long tone with a complete breath until the whole group is singing the same pitch. Continue to drone on that central pitch for about the same length of time it took to reach the unison. Then begin adjusting or tuning away from the center pitch as the original beginning pitch was.

Variation: Follow the same instructions but return to the original beginning pitch.[3]

I found myself thinking about "Sonic Meditation XVI" when describing the Lift section of *Primordial/Lift*, in which the ensemble members alternate between sounding one of the eight prompts that ring the mandala ("particles," "dynamic transformation," and so forth) and rejoining the drone at the center of the figure. That periodic return to unison—the droning away on D4 of all players inhabiting the center of the mandala—together with the similarly periodic attainment of escape velocity to freely choose one's sonic gesture, at times floating by one's lonesome way out there on the periphery, settles into a heterophonous game of fort-da for the ensemble.

Is unison so easy to discover? In the couple dozen times I've introduced and sung "Sonic Meditation XVI" with groups of largely nonprofessional singers—always in a workshop or classroom setting, usually with ten or more participants, and never as part of a concert—the most difficult challenge is the wordless negotiation by which everyone attempts to arrive at singing one and the same pitch. It seems that it shouldn't be so difficult. What often happens is something like this: Pauline's score asks that participants begin by singing any pitch of their choosing, but people often first sing a pitch near the upper- or lowermost limit of their range. It feels good to stretch the body with individual tones that last the entirety of a breath, particularly by testing how low or high one can comfortably sing. Starting with a wide pitch compass also relieves some anxiety singers may feel about executing very small pitch adjustments as the group moves toward a unison pitch. The idea of a central pitch—an intuited midpoint between the highest and lowest notes sounded at the beginning of the piece—toward which the group incrementally tunes is a lovely one. But as the sung pitches start to cluster around an imagined central point, the goal of unison can become elusive. Sometimes people arrive at octaves or fifths, feel the strong consonance and understand it as unison, and stay there. Some people adjust their tuning toward the central pitch much more slowly, and before they even arrive at their idea of unison other participants have begun their journey tuning away from the center. The idea of hanging out and singing in unison for approximately the same amount of time that it took to arrive at the central pitch—to be loosely aware of time passing but not get too hung up in the process—itself contributes to the texture of the meditation. Sometimes you sense that people are trying their hardest—the born negotiators in the group, those with a herding instinct—to facilitate everyone's arrival at the unison. Other folks don't seem so goal-oriented.

The two variations on the meditation can have distinct unfoldings. The version in which everyone returns to their starting pitch often yields a more conventionally musical result, owing to the palindrome-like itinerary of wending your way back through the same range of pitches and concluding where you began, often with individuals gaining greater confidence to really sing out. It can feel more like a strong ending, a homecoming. The version in which you resume the trajectory of tuning modifications—moving down, moving up—after tarrying for a time in unison (in theory) can have the quality of an experiment, particularly as people travel from one extreme of their vocal range to the other. And as with most group

Deep Listening retreats organized by Pauline Oliveros at Rose Mountain, June 1991. Photograph: David Felton. Special Collections, F. W. Olin Library, Mills College at Northeastern University. Courtesy of the Pauline Oliveros Trust.

decisions, wordless or not, the concluding portion can have a habit of stretching on, and on, and ...

In her introduction to *Sonic Meditations*, Pauline Oliveros writes that these exercises "are intended for group work over a long period of time with regular meetings," noting with a puckish, desublimatory afterword, "music is a welcome by-product of this activity."[4] I can attest that a musical result hardly seems to be the purpose of the meditation. Oliveros underscores the healing power of these activities in terms of relaxation and an elevated awareness of one's surroundings. Pleasure of a musical sort can seem serendipitous, happened upon. As she says in her interview with Robert Ashley in *Music with Roots in the Aether*, "I haven't been working with musical ideas for a while. I've been working on my mode of consciousness. And the result of the mode is the music."[5]

Conceiving of music as a by-product or unintended result can be a fruitful approach to a range of activities: music by other means, music as one outcome among many, music out of the corner of one's eye. With the *Sonic Meditations*, it's helpful not to be too eager for fortuitous beauty, not too preoccupied with fugitive glimmerings. Pauline's thematizing of modes of attention is valuable in itself, and for me never registers as a boondoggle or workaround by which music remains the goal, whether disavowed or not. Its defamiliarization of the practice of making music—to begin with, by inviting participants who wouldn't otherwise think of themselves as musicians—is among the most welcome of her gifts.

Musical labor is a category that hardly seems to describe the *Sonic Meditations*. My perspective owes to the fact that I've only ever engaged these pieces in a private setting, without an audience except for the occasional individual who might have happened upon a group of participants, usually gathered in a circle and facing inward. When participants have discussed their experience of the meditation, comments often have to do with the unfamiliar task of negotiating the tuning of the ensemble such that everyone arrives at a unison pitch, no matter how simple the instructions. In the absence of a concert setting, the closest thing to labor one finds in the piece is physical exercise (for many, singing works unfamiliar muscles), building community, and carving out time, however brief,

to care for one's self. It feels more apt to speak of Pauline Oliveros as the author of the *Sonic Meditations* rather than their composer. I've yet to take part in a group discussion that advocated for an audience.

By contrast, every time I've played *Primordial/Lift* it has been with an ensemble comprised of professional musicians, either in a rehearsal or concert setting, and unlike my experience of the *Sonic Meditations*, I've always played *Primordial/Lift* with Pauline as a performer. Even in my earliest brush with *Primordial/Lift*, when I had yet to step back and more fully appreciate it as a composition, it never had the whiff of alienated musical labor—musicians doing the work of improvising into existence another's composition—largely because Pauline's example as musician was so powerful to experience.

I was recently asked whether I thought that *Primordial/Lift* could be performed without Pauline, and unquestionably the answer is yes. The score provides future performers everything they need to know. In its economy—so much like Pauline's habits of speech—it demonstrates that score and composition are distinct entities. The score to *Primordial/Lift* can be memorized in no time and set aside in order to better inhabit the composition. I don't doubt that *Primordial/Lift* will be performed again, and hopefully by some of us who had the good fortune to perform it alongside Pauline. But it's been easy to put off doing so—her absence will be felt anew.

X

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1
Gregg Braden, *Awakening to Zero Point: The Collection Initiation* (Radio Bookstore Press, 1997).

2
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3
Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (Smith Publications, 1974), unpaginated.

4
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5
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Sezgin Boynik

AGIT PUNK FORM

On August 15, 1980, the Pop Group, one of Britain's leading post-punk bands, played in Helsinki. The event was organized by Spartakiadit, a youth cultural, sports, and political festival, which was run by leftist organizations associated with the Communist Party of Finland. This was one of the most direct encounters between communism and punk. Though the gig was a fiasco, it provides a lens through which to examine punk as an extreme but oblique manifestation of a critique of capitalism.

If post-punk was what Mark Fisher called "popular modernism," then the Pop Group—which mixed punk with free jazz, dub, and avant-garde elements—is worthy of this definition. By the summer of 1980, when the Pop Group performed in Helsinki, their songs had evolved from raw and visceral punk to a sound influenced by Rock Against Racism and the philosophy of anti-Nazi funk. With the release of their second album, *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?*, in spring 1980, the band's sound became more analytical and propagandistic without losing its edge. The result was a new form of agitation that boldly claimed: "Capitalism is the most barbaric of all religions."[1] The album didn't just make abstract statements against war and capitalism; it specifically addressed state violence against immigrants, increasing military costs, and the orchestrated activities of neo-Nazi groups.

Despite its strong anti-capitalist message, punk, as represented by the Pop Group, spoke a fundamentally different language than communism. Unlike socialists and leftist critiques that took into account capitalism's uneven development, punk viewed capitalism in absolutist terms. Its critique was often undialectical, and even conspiratorial. This self-contained and often paranoid position rejected capitalism totally. As Mark Stewart, singer and songwriter of the Pop Group, reflected decades later: "There is the arrogance of power, and what we got from punk was the power of arrogance."[2] There is, however, some critical potential in that arrogance.[3]

Punk Dogmatism

Spartakiadit, which organized the Pop Group's concert in Helsinki, defined itself as an organization supporting an "alternative to the pacifying 'bourgeois' entertainment and Western commercial mass culture." The festival sought to revive "musical traditions of working people."[4] Spartakiadit was run by a collective of broad leftist initiatives, including Suomen Demokraattinen Nuorisoliitto (Finnish Democratic Youth League) and Sosialistinen Opiskelijaliitto (Socialist Student Union). The festival was based in Helsinki, with branches in other cities, featuring music, sports, political discussions, seminars, excursions, and clubs. The sixth annual Spartakiadit festival of 1980 highlighted the "struggle for peace, solidarity, and an advancing environmental movement," with a special focus on solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement. The decision to invite the Pop Group, an internationally

The Pop Group's concert at the Spartakiadit festival in Helsinki in 1980. Photograph by Timo Kujala.

renowned punk band, was at odds with previous iterations of the festival, which featured mainly folk and pop acts. The materials found in the archives of Spartakiadit listed the band's political credentials, citing their songs about "the army as legalized terrorists, the threat of the arms trade and nuclear weapons."[5]

The concert was on August 15, 1980, and as the festival's archival report indicates, the event was not successful, as the "political manifestation" was reduced to a concert.[6] Apart from the negligible influence it had on a few local bands and organizers, the Pop Group concert was overall a fiasco and remains virtually unknown in the annals of Finnish alternative music history.[7] As a member of the Pop Group later recalled: "In Helsinki [we played] a massive anti-apartheid gig in an ice rink with about eight thousand people. About eight of them knew who the hell we were."[8]

The communist youth of Spartakiadit went to great lengths to promote the event to a wider audience. They redesigned the organization's "official" newsletter with an image from one of the Pop Group's albums on the cover, and included essays on subcultural squats and alternative venues in Helsinki. This coincided with the "opening" of the Communist Party of Finland and the broader moment of "democratization" of communist parties in Europe. Two weeks after the gig, the Spartakiadit festival committee criticized the "domination" of punk over the other types musical acts present at the festival, particularly over workers' songs and classical music, which organizers also considered "youth music."

The Pop Group's performance divided Spartakiadit into two factions: veterans familiar with traditional socialist music (represented in Finland by Agit-Prop and bands released on the Eteenpäin! label), and newcomers who were enthusiastic about punk and demanded more autonomy and independence. According to reports, the "punk youth" subsequently gravitated towards Lepakko, a newly founded, self-managed social center and music venue. The Spartakiadit committee insisted on a "wide range of musical events" for future festivals, and criticized punks for being "dogmatic."

Love for Punctuation

Punk and socialism did not have a happy marriage. Apart from the Trotsky-influenced Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which supported Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), most leftists were unconvinced by punk's

Poster for “Agit Punk” exhibition, Kalasataman Seripaja, Helsinki, 2023.

Cover of the Spartakiadit festival newsletter. “Liikkeelle Elämän Puolesta” means “Movement for Life.”

anti-capitalism. Through the ANL, the SWP found in punk a non-chauvinist and non-moralizing working-class culture based on Lenin, who "loved Mayakovsky, Grosz, electricity, cinema and explosive punctuation."[9] Despite the ANL's success in fighting against the growth of the fascist National Front,[10] punk was routinely dismissed as fascist by the far left. Cornelius Cardew's Progressive Cultural Association published an article titled "Punk Rock Is Fascist" in the first issue of its magazine, *Cogs and Wheels*, in 1977. The group briefly adopted the article title as a slogan and used it on numerous public occasions, but then dropped it. Still, its views on punk were indifferent at best, seeing the racist elements of punk culture as an imitation of the mainstream.[11] Other leftist critics were equally dismissive. In their essay "The End of Music," proto-situationists Dave and Stuart Wise criticized the appropriation of punk by the "fossilized" left and attacked the fusion of punk with reggae, calling it a "pathetic pseudo-attempt to fight racism."[12] For Chris Cutler, drummer in Henry Cow and the promoter and theoretician of Rock in Opposition, a collective of progressive rock bands,

> punk was a middle-class form, which came principally out of British art schools and was puffed up by the Rock press. It claimed proletarian roots but didn't have them—the only "working class" (actually, lumpen) form of punk was "Oi" Music, the music of the youth of the British Fascist movement.[13]

Some early punk did connect with socialist themes. Songs like the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK" and The Clash's "Career Opportunities" addressed unemployment and social tensions. In 1977, the Young Communist League even sent an open letter to the Sex Pistols suggesting a consolidation of punk and communist ideas, and held a New Wave Forum at its Red Festival, featuring Sham 69 delivering the live soundtrack.[14] For activist writers like David Widgery, punk allowed Marxist ideas to be transformed from "badly translated Russian" into "plain English prose," formulating a "punk Marxism" relevant to the 1970s.[15]

Today's punk scholarship largely denies punk's connection to progressive politics. Most papers published in the journal *Punk & Post-Punk* or read at Punk Scholars Network conferences agree that punk had nothing to do with "left leaning, liberal and progressive positions" or "revolutionary and progressive movements."[16] Punk is, as Matthew Worley writes, politically formless at best: "Both the left and the right sought to assign political meaning to punk and provide opportunity for music, youth culture and politics to coalesce. This was never successful; punk and its associated cultural forms remained too amorphous and diverse to forge a coherent politics."[17] Despite this perceived incoherence, I argue that punk contained a radical core of militant subjectivity. This is the essence of punk politics.

Althusser, Punk Stalinist

"Popular Culture and Revolutionary Theory: Understanding Punk Rock" by Neil Eriksen, published in the Maoist *Theoretical Review* in 1980, defends punk's militant line by introducing it as a "revolutionary cultural practice." This Marxist-Leninist interpretation drew on Louis Althusser's concept of "ruptural unity" in popular resistance, a radical position that the bourgeoisie "could not defend"—in other words, a mass rupture difficult for ruling regimes to swallow and co-opt.[18]

Althusser's extreme theory has attracted other punk researchers, including Dick Hebdige. His seminal study of the semiotics of punk—which he defined as a "temporary blockage in the system of representation"—describes punk's ideological "noise" as the flip side of what Althusser called "teeth-gritting 'harmony.'"[19] Althusser, memorably, used this phrase to explain how repressive state apparatuses "shield," or secure, ideological reproduction and enforce capitalism's domination:

> It is here that the role of the ruling ideology is heavily concentrated, the ideology of the ruling class, which holds State power. It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes teeth-gritting) "harmony" between the repressive State apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different State Ideological Apparatuses.[20]

For Althusser, it was exploitative class violence that determined this machinery. In a private conversation during the first International Punk-Kongress in Kassel in 2004, Dick Hebdige explained to me that his theory of punk came out of his class consciousness: while writing his first book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, his mother was working as a cleaner in the part of London where Malcolm McLaren lived.

As for "punk Marxism," this idea more closely resembles the Marx of *Critique of the Gotha Programme* than the utopian Marx of *The German Ideology*. *Critique of the Gotha Programme* ridiculed the German Social Democratic Workers' Party's "rubbishy phrases" and "ideological nonsense about 'equal rights' and other trash."[21] This is more punk than Marx's vision in *The German Ideology* of "communist society making possible for me to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."[22]

Waiting for the Communist Call

The Pop Group's first album, *Y*, released in 1979 by Radar and featuring a cover image of a group of Asaro people from Papua New Guinea performing a "Mudmen" dance, launched their international career. They soon learned from the Red Krayola's Mayo Thompson that Radar's parent company, Warner Arista Electra, was linked to the Kinney conglomerate, which was involved in the arms trade.[23] Their second album, *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?*, released on Rough Trade in 1980, did not enjoy the same popularity among the music press as *Y* had. As Simon Reynolds wrote in his book on post-punk, the music on the second album was "still fiery and actually more focused than on *Y*, [but] it was hard to stomach the hectoring and lecturing album, unpoetic as a fringe leftist pamphlet."[24] The press, including the *New Musical Express*, which was earlier supportive of the Pop Group's "primitivism," dismissed the new album as elitist, "bad drab," and "self-righteous soapbox agit-prop." Years later, when Mark Fisher asked Stewart about this change in the Pop Group's approach, Stewart replied bluntly: "We thought the world was going to end, it wasn't the time for French Romantic poetry!"[25]

Punk's view of capitalism is generally described as absolutist. As Geoffrey Waite argues, punk discourse sees capitalism as a "self-contained interiority admitting no radical exteriority or difference."[26] Folded in on itself, this world of commodities faces no challenge to its rule; punk exists in the "future anterior" where everything "has already happened." In other words, punk believes in no future. This worldview leaves no room for chance or the aleatory. Capitalism appears as "ahistorical," eternal, the ultimate truth. In the punk imagination, capitalism is a "windowless, monadic sites of enunciation," "permanent and unalterable," with no possible external intervention.

From this perspective, the Sex Pistols' line "I was waiting for the communist call" from the group's 1977 song "Holiday in the Sun" describes a moment of madness and delirium, of impossibility, rather than a conscious political demand. The possibility of exteriority, of communism, becomes a terrifying, "inarticulable terrain."[27] As a result, Waite argues, Johnny Rotten's "I was waiting for the communist call" actually calls for the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and ultimately, for the flattening of the unevenness of capitalism. This punk gesture sees the other side of the Wall as an external threat to the monadic compactness of punk's world, since "the real terrifying thing was actually existing socialism."[28] For all its anger and ferocity, punk was calling for normalization. As Waite ironically notes of an image of the Sex Pistols in front of the Berlin Wall in 1977: "Punk met the law, and the law won."[29]

From this point of view, no version of socialism could be integrated into the punk imagination. This failure wasn't due to punk's hedonistic, antiauthoritarian, proto-anarchist attitudes—positions that, in the 1980s, were in fact welcomed by Western communist parties undergoing Eurocommunist reforms and by socialist countries from Yugoslavia to the Soviet Union. It was rather due to the logic of punk thought, which operated in absolutist and totalizing terms. To paraphrase the earlier critique of the Pop Group by the youth of the Communist Party of Finland: what caused the blockage was punk's "dogmatism." To take this idea further, we can put forward an absurd-sounding thesis: the militant punk dogmatism of the late seventies was not compatible with Eurocommunism's eclectic and liberal revisionism.[30]

Punk's politics are usually understood as an egalitarian critique of commodity capitalism based on punk's DIY ethos and democratization of production—summed up in the slogan "anyone can do it." Some scholars have invoked Marx's idea of "direct production processes" to explain punk's economic organization and its ethics of autonomy and independence.[31] From this perspective, punk represents hope for humanity's "full realization," though as Pete Dale, who proposed this thesis, admits, it's impossible to distinguish this politics from the politics of folk music. To understand punk's anti-capitalism, we must also address its agitational form and its potential to overturn capitalism as a totalizing, self-destructive machine.[32] The Pop Group managed to do this to some extent, but could not be classified as socialist.[33]

In *For Marx*, Althusser called the future anterior a pseudo-theory, insofar as it functions as a conspiracy theory. Its self-enclosed system cannot explain the ideological workings of capitalism; on the contrary, it reflects ideology itself. The Pop Group's analysis of capitalism does exactly this: in their songs, capitalism's totality reflects back on itself.

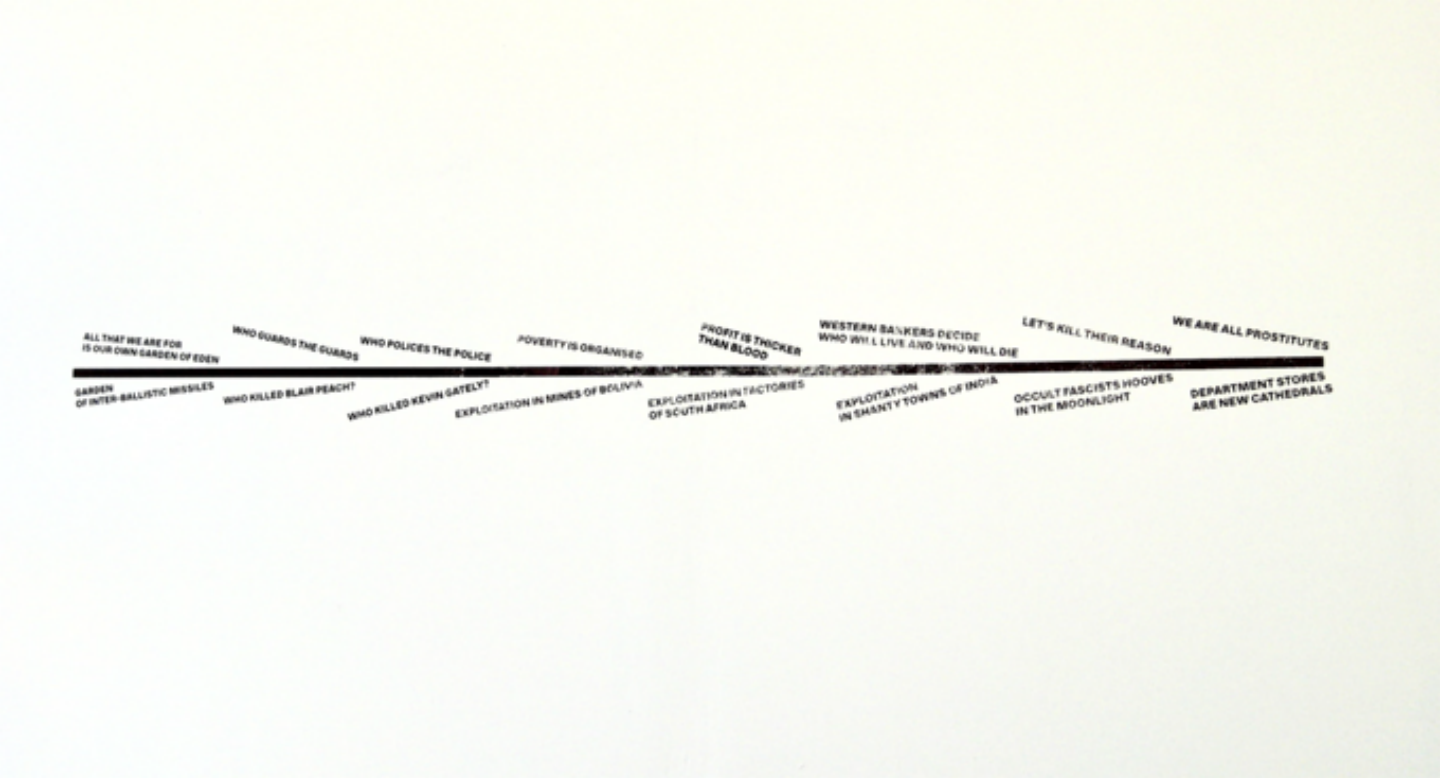
In a way, the Pop Group's concert in Helsinki responded to a communist call but communicated in punk language. In an interview I conducted with Mark Stewart via Twitter a month before his sudden death in March 2023, he wrote: "The lyrics are always the way I best communicate my ideas. They are the 'praxis' of the Pop Group."

None Dare Call It Conspiracy

In the mines of Bolivia
In the factories of South Africa
In the streets of Indonesia
Exploitation
Greed
Feed the hungry
More than ten thousand men women children
Die of hunger every day
Poverty is organised human greed ...
Western bankers decide who lives and who dies
Twenty-eight people
Twenty-one of them children
Die of hunger every minute

> —The Pop Group, "Feed the Hungry," *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?*
>
> America wants Britain to be a floating launch pad for its cruise missiles. The US would only be happy if Britain got into a small nuclear war, because it wouldn't go that far. It wouldn't be their problem if half of Britain was blown up. They just want the missiles as far away from their own cities as possible.
>
> —The Pop Group quoted in Mikko Montonen, "Pop Group: Kuinka kauan tätä täytyy kestää?!?" (The Pop Group: How Long Do We Tolerate This?!?), *Soundi*, 1980.

Eurocommunism not only rejected the "dictatorship of the proletariat"; it also made concessions to the NATO pact, militarization, and nationalist chauvinism. *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?* captured this political defeat. To understand it better, we need to place it in the context of 1980, the year of its release.



A diagram juxtaposing the political conjuncture with slogans from the album For How Much Longer Will We Tolerate Mass Murder?

On December 12, 1979, at a semi-secret meeting in Brussels, NATO decided to deploy 572 nuclear missiles in Western Europe in response to a perceived nuclear threat from the Warsaw Pact. The missiles were to be installed in Germany, Holland, Italy, and the UK by 1983. Leaving aside the validity of NATO's argument that Soviet SS-20 missiles posed a real threat to European stability, the plan sparked a massive peace movement in Europe, with protesters linking the war industry to capitalist expansionism. In 1983, huge crowds of people marched against the deployment of the nuclear missiles—some four hundred thousand in Bonn, 350,000 in London, 350,000 in Rome, 350,000 in Brussels, and five hundred thousand in The Hague. Western governments saw the peace movement as a "real threat" and responded with repression and illegal surveillance.[34] Edward Thompson's influential 1980s essay "Notes on Exterminism, the Last Stage of Civilization" provides the best theoretical overview of this new conjuncture. The military industries, he argued, had a distinct and autonomous way of organizing work and research. They operated with the same logic in Western capitalism and Eastern socialism. Arms were omnipresent and acted as if they had an "independent will." The nuclear arms race, Thompson wrote, had reached a point where it no longer had any rationale. He presented militarism as an almost self-sustaining system of the future anterior, "self-generating," "independent of the ebb and flow of international diplomacy." The weapons industry appeared "possessed by an independent will" that "self-reproduce[d] the imperatives of a bureaucracy."[35] In a similar vein, historian O. K. Werckmeister wrote that the "all-pervasiveness of the war" created a "citadel culture,"

absorbing everything from popular music to contemporary art.[36] The Pop Group's lyrics identifying war with capitalism and imperialism accurately reflected this reality of the 1980s. As Stewart declared on his 1983 solo album *Learning to Cope with Cowardice*: "None dare call it conspiracy."

Punk Propaganda

Punk's vision of political reality consisted only of repressive apparatuses; its vocabulary was comprised of slogans. As Dan Graham suggested, propaganda art, unlike high art, is "ephemeral and not timeless," and through punk rock it took on a fierce and contemporary form.[37] Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* is an intellectual heir of this punk logic, as it advances a "totality vision of capitalism" "absorbing" and "colonizing" everything.[38] Two pervasive social problems are symptomatic of this closure, according to Fisher: declining mental health and the increasing bureaucratization of society.

This image of the contemporary (postmodern) world resembles Fredric Jameson's analysis of "the conspiratorial allegory of late capitalist totality" in his study *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*.[39] Jameson translates this totality into Hegelian terms, proposing that "now, from our perspective, Absolute Spirit is rather to be identified as Capital itself … as our true ontology."[40] Though Jameson primarily analyzed Hollywood thrillers as representing large-scale financial machinations, his analysis of totality-as-conspiracy provides insight into punk's relationship to systemic power and aesthetic resistance to it.

The dominant feature of totality-as-conspiracy is, Jameson writes, "epistemological closure," which he defines as the "suppression of mediation"—a rejection of dialectics and compromise. Differing positions are forever separated: "The opposing poles are held apart and frozen in their incompatibility in such a way as to 'produce' their incommensurable antagonism as an object of aesthetic contemplation."[41]

This can produce a sense of eternal sameness, where everything—as in conspiracy theories—is absorbed into one absolute system. Jacques Attali saw dominant forms of music this way: "The entire history of tonal music, like that of classical political economy, amounts to an attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world"—a world of repetition, tautology, self-assurance, and reaffirmation.[42] According to Attali, noise challenges this "network of repetition," subverting established codes and refusing to repeat familiar messages. Noise's dissonance embodies radical alterity; it gives rise to forms yet to come. As Jameson wrote in his foreword to Attali's seminal book *Noise*, superstructural cultural forms can " *anticipate* historical development" and "foreshadow new social formations in a prophetic and annunciatory way."[43] One could argue that punk's musical dissonance offers the potential for liberation and self-determination. Attali optimistically claimed that the "right to make noise" allowed the "permanent affirmation of the right to be different—that is, the right to compose one's life."[44] This perspective is too liberal for punk. As Jameson observed, this "do it yourself" ethos contains both utopia and dystopia, "and the music of today stands both as a promise of a new, liberating mode of production, and as the menace of a dystopian possibility which is that mode of production's baleful mirror image"—a dialectic that punk history clearly exhibits.[45]

The Pop Group ended one of its Helsinki concerts by having the spoken-word song "E Pluribus Unum" by the Last Poet's played over the PA. A noisy dub cover version of this song appears on *For How Much Longer*, retitled "One Out of Many." The song presents a paranoid-analytical study of the semiotics of a dollar bill, revealing that the profit-driven world is run by racist and feudal ideologies maintained by militaristic machinery.

The Pop Group's last live performance was in 1980 in front of five hundred thousand people in London's Trafalgar Square, as part of a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament protest. In 1986, the Black Audio Film Collective used part of a recording of the Pop Group performing "Jerusalem" at the protest—later released on a one of Mark Stewart's solo albums—in its film *Handsworth Songs*, which captured the apocalyptic mood and political tensions of the eighties. By presenting the dystopia of capitalism as an accomplished fact, with no spontaneity possible except riots, and no tools of analysis except dream-like musing, *Handsworth Songs* represents a post–Pop Group reality, resonant with punk's understanding of the world.[46]

As Kodwo Eshun wrote about Dan Graham's punk fantasies, "Without realization of the elevated role that rock [and punk] culture had played within artistic thinking, it would not be possible to understand what had made art avant-garde in the 1970s and '80s."[47] This statement is also true of the Pop Group, but the question remains: Can their "arrogant" critique of capitalism resonate with today's struggles? Punk is overdetermined by contradictions; at the heart of this subculture, as Hebdige wrote, "lies the frozen dialectic," a tension that gives it "its curiously petrified quality, its paralyzed look, its 'dumbness.'"[48] This is similar to what Slavoj Žižek famously described in 1983 as punk's "dehumanized apathy," an unattainable, impossible gesture—in other words an " *objet petit a*."[49] A gesture beyond language and utterance, a total denial.

By emphasizing the "words" and "slogans" of the Pop Group, I've tried to show a strong heuristic dimension that exists within punk. Although expressed in absolutist and even conspiratorial terms, this critique of capitalism lacks analytical precision and is unable to identify modes of production that correspond to actual forms of exploitation. But punk understood early on that capitalism was heading

Five silkscreen posters based on the Pop Group's lyrics. "Agit Punk" exhibition, Kalasataman Seripaja, Helsinki, 2023.

toward self-destruction, authoritarianism, and neofascism dominated by war. Through listening to the Pop Group, you may come to a conclusion similar to Edward Thompson's: "The USA and the USSR [read Russia, if you like] do not *have* military-industrial complexes: they *are* such complexes."[50]

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Sezgin Boynik is a writer, editor, and publisher based in Helsinki. He founded Rab-Rab Press, an independent publishing platform in Helsinki that combines experimental art and leftist politics with scholarly rigor and a punk attitude. He is a founding member of Pykë-Presje in Prizren, Kosovo, an independent space using archives to oppose nation-state narratives.

1
From the lyrics of "We Are All Prostitutes," released as a single by Rough Trade in 1979 between the first (*Y*) and the second (*For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?*) Pop Group albums. The B-side of the single features the song "Amnesty International Report on British Army Torture of Irish Prisoners."

2
"Mark Stewart interviewed by Mark Fisher," *The Wire*, July 2008 https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/interviews/mark-stewart-unedited-transcript .

3
This essay is a theoretical summary of the research done for the exhibition "Agit Punk" at Kalasataman Seripaja in Helsinki, May 12–June 11, 2023. The exhibition was initiated by Rab-Rab Press and was a joint project of Lilou Angelrath, Sezgin Boynik, Ott Kagovere, Jan Konsin, and Samu Montonen. I am especially grateful to Minna Henriksson and Yrjö Hakanen for their commentary and suggestions.

4
Mervi Viteli, "Spartakiadien raikkaassa myötätuulessa eteenpäin," *Toveri*, no. 13 (1976).

5
Mikko Montonen, "Pop Group," two-page typewritten text kept in the Spartakiadit archives at Helsinki Kansan Arkisto (the People's Archive), Spartakiadit files (1F9 H, folder 20).

6
"Memos from the meeting," Kansan Arkisto (the People's Archive), Spartakiadit files (1F9 H, folder 20).

7
The Pop Group played two gigs in Helsinki, both organized by Spartakiadit. The first gig was at the political festival at Jäähali (Ice Rink) and the second was at the Tavastia Club, a regular music venue. For Finnish post-punk bands Shadowplay (especially its singer Brandi Ifgray), Kadotetut, 22 Pistepirkko, and Geisha, this was a very influential event.

8
"Gareth Sager and the Pop Group," *Mojo*, April 2021.

9
David Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock 'n' Roll* (Chatto and Windus, 1986), 112.

10
Neil Davidson, "Carnival, March, Riot," review of *When We Touched the Sky: the Anti-Nazi League, 1977–1981* , by Dave Renton, *International Socialism* 2, no. 112 (Autumn 2006): 121 https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/davidson/2006/xx/anl.html .

11
John Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew, 1936–1981* (Copula, 2008), 853–56.

12
Dave Wise and Stuart Wise, "The End of Music," in *What is Situationism?: A Reader* , ed. Stewart Home (AK Press, 1996), 65. Originally published as a pamphlet in 1978 with the title *Punk, Reggae: A Critique* .

13
Chris Cutler, *File Under Popular: Theoretical and Critical Writings on Music* (Rer Megacorp/Autonomedia, 1991), 125.

14
Matthew Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976–1984* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 40, 144.

15
Quoted in Worley, *No Future*, 148.

16
Russ Bestley, "(I Want Some) Demystification: Deconstructing Punk," *Punk & Post-Punk* 4, no. 2–3 (2015). Bestley is lead editor of the academic journal *Punk & Post-Punk* , series editor and art director for the Global Punk book series published by Intellect Books, and a founding member of the Punk Scholars Network. His provocative theses on the "punk school of thought" and his call for "deconstruction" have been well-received in punk studies. Pete Dale, an associate editor of *Punk & Post-Punk* , introduced Derrida as a primary theoretical influence on punk studies in his book *Anyone Can Do It: Empowerment, Tradition and the Punk Underground* (Ashgate, 2012).

17
Worley, *No Future*, 43.

18
Neil Eriksen, "Popular Culture and Revolutionary Theory: Understanding Punk Rock," *Theoretical Review* , no. 18 (September–October 1980) https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/19801802.htm . Eriksen gives interesting

examples of the bourgeois fear of punk, including liberal *Guardian* journalist Tim Patterson's 1977 dismissal of punk rock as "a social disease," a "part of the manipulation business," and possibly "the crudest cultural hoax in decades."

19
Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Methuen, 1979), 133.

20
Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 1970 https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm .

21
Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (International Publisher, 1970), 10.

22
Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968), 45.

23
Simon Reynolds, "Mark Stewart," in *Totally Wired: Postpunk Interviews and Overviews* (Soft Skull Press, 2010), 97–98.

24
Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978–1984* (Penguin, 2005), 89.

25
"Mark Stewart interviewed by Mark Fisher," *The Wire*.

26
Geoffrey Waite, "'I Was Waiting For the Communist Call' or, the Future Anterior of Music and Its Theory," *Literature and Psychology* 44, no. 4 (1998): 31.

27
Waite, "'I Was Waiting For the Communist Call,'" 57.

28
Waite, "'I Was Waiting For the Communist Call,'" 52.

29
Waite, "'I Was Waiting For the Communist Call,'" 47.

30
Incidentally, the strongest criticism of this Eurocommunist revisionism was made by Althusser and his disciples, above all Etienne Balibar, who refused to surrender to "bourgeois ideology" and to give up on the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

31
Pete Dale, *Anyone Can Do It: Empowerment, Tradition and the Punk Underground* (Ashgate, 2012), 6. Marx wrote about "direct production processes" in the *Grundrisse*.

32
Commenting on labor under capitalism, the Pop Group told *New Musical Express* : "Kids are going straight from school to the factory doing what they've been taught. Work is sacred, people don't know how to appreciate freedom … People don't need money." Quoted in Max Bell, "The Pop Group: Idealists in Distress," *New Musical Express* , June 30, 1979, 27.

33
When asked about his political—potentially conspiratorial—views, Mark Stewart simply replied that he was interested in "parapolitical and weird things." "Mark Stewart interviewed by Mark Fisher," *The Wire* .

34
Esko Antola, *Campaigns Against European Peace Movements* , International Peace Bureau, Peace Union of Finland, Turku, 1984.

35
Edward Thompson, "Notes on Exterminism, the Last Stage of Civilization," in *Exterminism and Cold War* (Verso, 1984), 5, 17.

36
O. K. Werckmeister, *Citadel Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

37
Dan Graham, "Punk as Propaganda," in Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion: Writings and Projects* , ed. Brian Wallis (MIT Press, 1993), 102.

38
Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009), 4, 8.

39
Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (BFI Publishing, 1992), 22.

40
Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 82.

41
Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 54–55.

42
Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* , trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 46.

43
Fredric Jameson, "Foreword," in Attali, *Noise*, xi.

44
Attali, *Noise*, 132. Politically, Attali's critique of "totality" is also a critique of "totalitarianism," that is, a critique of the dictatorship of (then totalitarian) communism in favor of openness and coexistence. In the 1980s Attali was an economic adviser to François Mitterrand's socialist government in France, which pushed liberal Eurocommunist reforms.

45
Jameson, "Foreword," in Attali, *Noise* , xi.

46
See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8ASpMYEeHE .

47
Kodwo Eshun, *Dan Graham: Rock My Religion* (Afterall Books, 2012), 95.

48
Hebdige, *Subculture*, 69–70.

49
Slavoj Žižek, "A Few Thoughts About the Issue of the Ideological Presuppositions of Punk (1983)," in Slavoj Žižek, Rastko Močnik, and Zoja Skušek, *Punk Suprematism: Theoretical Writings on Punk, Nation, State, Art, Bureaucracy, and Socialism* , ed. Sezgin Boynik (Rab-Rab Press, 2021). The Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis also produced more sober approaches to punk, such as Rastko Močnik's "Reason Wins," also included in *Punk Suprematism* .

50
Thompson, "Notes on Exterminism," 22.

Witold Wirpsza

Commentaries on Photographs

Introduction

Commentaries on Photographs (*Komentarze do fotografii*, 1962) is a unique book. Written by the Polish experimental poet Witold Wirpsza, it was created as a response to "The Family of Man," the Museum of Modern Art's 1955 travelling exhibition of photography. Curated by MoMA's head of photography, Edward Steichen, the show included over five hundred photos from around the world, presenting a set of universal, humanistic values. Wirpszas's book set out to expose the show's ideological grounding. The original catalog for "The Family of Man" included short quotations from thinkers around the globe, to add meaning to sequences of images. In his book, Wirpsza used a selection of the original photographs and juxtaposed them with his commentaries and poems written partly as ekphrases. The book was rounded out by three contrapuntal studies—poems by Wirpsza based on his commentaries on two images.

In a note found in the poet's archive, Wirpsza reported that his commentaries arose from the conviction that "The Family of Man" "serves not so much to reveal something, but at least to hide something."[1] Wirpsza noted that the technical perfection of the works and the exhibition as a whole had a theological purpose: the erasure of hell. *Commentaries on Photographs* was imagined as a polemical instrument that could shed light on the manipulative power of curators. Hence, some reviewers noted the anti-humanistic tone of Wirpsza's poems. Yet it was the optimistic universalism of humanism that felt suspicious to Wirpsza. In many regards his project is similar to Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, insofar as *Commentaries* exposes "The Family of Man" as a narrative and propaganda tool.

The three poems selected here juxtapose performing music with work. Both activities depend on the concerted discipline of bodies. The portrait of a family playing a composition becomes an image of attainment through notated music, which overpowers the musicians. The second poem dives deep into hell, an image Wirpsza saw hidden within the entire "Family of Man" project. In the contrapuntal study, these activities become bound together: notes and bars become steps into an abyss towards which a boat is inevitably directed.

—Daniel Muzyczuk

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7. Music

They read the notes attentively. Mother: upright piano;
father: flute; first

Son: bass; second son: clarinet; third son: cello. No
daughters

in this family. The furnishings a bit old-fashioned;

Wynn Bullock, from “The Family of Man” exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, 1955.

A saxophone hangs on the wall, next to it a clock with weights. The father

(Flute) is surely tapping out the rhythm with his foot. They read the notes attentively;

(The transcription for piano is visible in outline, the upright

Piano in the foreground, no doubt: nineteenth century); the reading

Of notes (close attention) lends the faces an air of torpor.

These notes (sticks with knobs) will any moment now drill

Into their skulls, and they’ll walk around with their heads thus stuffed;

The notes protruding with their knobs; as one might say of round-quilled

(All around town, even to work) hedgehogs; in the brain, however,

The little sticks’ points evoke a tickling. “And what’s tickling

You, son?” “I’m tickled, Mother, by the A, the G-sharp, the B, the E-

Major chord.” “And what tickles you, Father?” “Son, the B, it’s the

B that tickles me, the tone that takes us to C.” One of the most

Sublime; music is the most perfect; of ways

Of speaking; the shape of beauty; of falsehood.

[pre]They read the notes attentively, finger

Them precisely; if only; with their fingertips; not to err.

There's a hole, an opening more or less two meters

In diameter, a whirlpool, but not funnel-like, on the contrary: shaped

Like a cylinder (2m in diameter), its watery greenish

The photograph shows a room in an apartment where a family quintet is playing.

13. Work

There, the trident oars splash; real good muscle

On the back; beneath the skin; they splash, glistening. So far,

Glistening; there are lines, there are nets; oh, into the distance; for fish;

They splash; oh how they glisten.

[pre]At a certain spot at
sea

Walls whirling (oh how they splash; how they glisten). This hole, then,

Is where it leads; oh, glistening; the rowers' rowing (that is:

Useful work; oh how they splash). They slide some-

Teen, tens, hundreds of kilometers down (the hole), into the under-

World, more precisely: -water. Hell (no splashing, no

Glistening). Now hundreds of kilometers (square). And in one

Place (oh, hell; oh, glistening) stands a pillar (country

Fair) of enflamed copper, and the fish they were supposed to catch

Will tell them: Climb up; thus they'll climb

Up (their skin will hiss) the enflamed

Copper to the top (real good muscle on the

Back); (oh how it hisses; oh, the glistening); enflamed (skin pressed to pillar),

Single file; chest toward; on the back; enflamed; real good

Muscle; single file. The everlastingness of hissing; it splashes; glistening;

Single file; it hisses. The pillar then zigzags through the universe,

A pillar in nooses, useful; infinitude; work; there they are

Splashing; the muscles; the chest; hell; it hisses; single-file

Third Contrapuntal Study

They'll climb the enflamed copper,

Up; notes (sticks with knobs) drilled into skulls;

Rowers (who knows), musicians (who knows), (hell;

Oh how it glistens), The Fish they were supposed to catch: "And

What's tickling you, Son?" Music tickles, zigzagging through

The universe, as a pillar of flaming copper: a trumpet,

Tuba mirum; a sound, a watery, greenish, whirling slide down.

The possessing of everlastingness occurs in a room with

Old-fashioned furnishings, there: the skin hisses,

Chest hard against the enflamed metal, the skin

Smokes, round-quilled hedgehogs with a tickle in their brains blow

Into the flute's opening, file across the strings

Of the cello, bang their little fingers on the keys, file

Across the strings of the bass, blow on the clarinet's

Reed; the rowers have taken the plunge; explorers; real

Good muscle on the back; of the maw of hell.

Alfred Eisenstaedt, Ghana Tribesmen Paddling, 1953. The photograph shows a fishing boat from the Gold Coast of Africa with Black rowers.

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Translation of poems by Benjamin Paloff. Translation first published in *The Family of Man Revisited: Photography in a Global Age*, ed. Gerd Hurm, Anke Reitz, and Shamoon Zamir (Routledge, 2017). Copyright: © by Leszek Szaruga. With thanks to Instytut Mikołowski and Natalia Malek.

1
Witold Wirpsza, *Komentarze do fotografii: The Family of Man* (Instytut Mikołowski, 2010), 6.

Daniel Muzyczuk

The Melancholy of the Jellyfish Form: A Conversation with Anton Lukoszevieze on Autumn ‘60 by Cornelius Cardew

Autumn ’60 by Cornelius Cardew is a rare example of a composition that perfectly balances a fine set of rules with indeterminacy. Anton Lukoszevieze, director of contemporary chamber music ensemble Apartment House, has played it with various musicians. This conversation contains some of his recordings, each offering different takes on that piece. The differences and similarities in these interpretations form the composition’s ever-changing shape, suggesting that the piece exists between different versions rather than in any single one. In our conversation, Lukoszevieze describes different aspects of *Autumn ’60* and how allocating tasks to different members of musical ensembles creates a metamorphic collective sound.

—Daniel Muzyczuk

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Daniel Muzyczuk: In 1962 Cornelius Cardew gave a talk in the historical lecture series at the Heretic Society in Cambridge on his composition entitled *Autumn ‘60*: “What are the characteristics of the music we have just listened to? What emotions has it aroused? What impressions does it create?”[1] Isn’t it interesting that he starts this talk with questions dealing with affects, not structures?

Anton Lukoszevieze: Maybe he thought that he had to approach the discussion of his work from a different angle, because of the specific audience. We—musicologists, musicians, performers, etc.—tend to focus on the structure of things and how they’re made, how they’re constructed, and how we play them.

DM: The lecture stresses the feeling of melancholy that might be evoked by the piece. But he wants to avoid any romanticization of this music. How should we understand that melancholy?

AL: I think the sense of melancholy in *Autumn ’60* is connected with failure. It’s always only partly a success, but it is also designed to fail because of the intrinsic structure—in conventional terms. When it was written in 1960, literally everyone who was a male composer, especially in Europe, was trying to fix music, trying to make everything highly notated. They thought truth was in the details and how things were made. This was the peak of total serialism, even if total serialism never actually existed. So I think that one could describe *Autumn ‘60* as a melancholic piece, but not because of its possible sadness.

DM: Given the political agenda of Cardew, maybe this sadness is close to left-wing melancholia? It’s also interesting how the work was created. Cardew had a vision of the entire piece at once. He saw it as a sound produced by a large number of musicians and, strangely, thought it should evoke reminiscences to Mozart.

Cornelius Cardew and Laurie Scott Baker in PLM supporting the Grunwick march. 1 July 1977.

AL: It's funny that you say that because when I used to conduct this piece, I always said in rehearsal that I wanted the piece to sound like Mozart. This comparison helped musicians who were very reluctant to play it because it does require a certain amount of dedication from each musician. They have to know what they're doing because in a sense it is a bit like a game. You just have to be very aware of and understand the rules and instructions. But it's not *that* difficult a piece, and it's actually quite exhilarating to play because you're always in a state of observing what's written and observing the conductor, or ignoring what's written and ignoring the conductor. There is a dialectic, I think, between precision and improvisation.

DM: Can you can you describe how you have approached the performance of the piece with your band Apartment House? The score is open not only for interpretation, but also for collaboration in writing it. There are empty bars for musicians to fill in.

AL: Essentially, the overall texture of the piece is quite pointillist. That's because Cardew notates single beats within bars, so each event happens during a beat, or for up to four beats if one is interpreting the "IV" sign. The performance could be very slow or very fast (according to the tempi of the conductor). The performers sometimes have the opportunity to do whatever they want in a single beat. However, there's not a lot of time for things to happen and to be expressive or to construct some great melody or some very complex series of sounds. Your freedom of choice is limited.

DM: Howard Skempton, one of the composers close to Cardew, wrote that *Autumn '60* achieves precision in two ways:

> Free from context, a musical symbol is remarkably precise. Take as examples the crescendo symbol and portamento symbol. In context they can be vague and thus liable to be treated with scant regard.
> *Autumn '60* avoids this danger, by making the performer responsible for the precise placing of these precise symbols, responsible but free. Cage would say "Free without being foolish."[2]

AL: The piece always takes a different shape. It will always sound different and there is this sense that it's like multiple drawings that you are constantly erasing. In some ways it's a game piece, so it's a precursor to works by John Zorn, for example.

DM: From a sociological and political point of view, what's very interesting is that Skempton introduces freedom and responsibility at the same time, and they are shared by everyone involved in the piece. So everyone is responsible: the conductor can control the tempo and orchestration, and the performers can interpret the score and add their own notes. There is even a way to involve someone who does not want to be creative. The conductor has the liberty to fill the empty bars for that person. So there is also the possibility of a very traditional approach to music performance, one in which a musician is asked to play notes written by someone else.

AL: To a certain extent there is a lot of freedom, but I don't think you can just not perform the piece and ignore everything. Otherwise, you're actually not playing the piece correctly. Even given the opportunity to ignore certain instructions and do what you want, you can't just *do* what you want. You still have a responsibility. You're still part of the team. Cardew also undermines the traditional role of the conductor, because the conductor is actually on the same level as the performers.

DM: Except performers are adding material while the conductor is controlling the time.

AL: Unless the conductor, as I said, removes themself from the time aspect and just goes like this [gives a downbeat]—then the performers are free to play through the material in their own time.

DM: Coming back to the melancholic element of the piece—if you're calling your work *Autumn '60,* it will be associated with melancholy. It's your own damn fault.

AL: The basic pitch material adds to that. There's a pentatonic pitch gamut that runs through all of *Autumn '60*. You can hear it in many different ways, but it does sound a bit like F minor, the key of F minor. There's a fundamental F that happens in the very first bar, and then there's an A flat as well, which comes back. But then there's also a G flat—minor second, etc.

DM: Based on the combination of pitches used in the composition, you can recognize it even if it is being played by different ensembles with different methodologies, right?

AL: I think so. The piece is a bit like a jellyfish. In the water jellyfish always look different from each other, but they essentially have the same form.

DM: We've started with emotions. Since you've performed the piece many times, I want to hear your observations about this feeling of freeness and responsibility that is shared by the performers.

AL: I think the liberation effect is minimal. I don't think people are performing and always thinking, "I can do what I want in this bar." The thing that I do love about the piece is that it always sounds different, but similar. There's this slightly crystalline feeling about the way the music unfolds. You have this feeling like a pinball machine; in some sections sounds are literally bouncing off each other. So I think the piece is a happy paradox, one that's quite fulfilling and not as perplexing as some paradoxes. I think it actually grows outwards.

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The four recordings of *Autumn '60* by Apartment House:

AUDIO— *Cardew Autumn '60* (Matchless Recordings, 2001)
Version 1
Conductor: Michael Parsons
Piano: Sarah Walker
Clarinet: Andrew Sparling, David Ryan
Electric guitar: Alan Thomas
Harp: Rhodri Davies
Cello: Anton Lukoszevieze

AUDIO— *Cardew Autumn '60* (Matchless Recordings, 2001)
Version 2
Conductor: Michael Parsons
Piano: Sarah Walker
Clarinet: Andrew Sparling, David Ryan
Electric guitar: Alan Thomas
Harp: Rhodri Davies
Cello: Anton Lukoszevieze

AUDIO—BBC recording, 2006
Conductor: Anton Lukoszevieze
Violin: Alexander Kolkowski
Double bass: Corrado Canonici
Oboe: Christopher Redgate
Clarinet: Andrew Sparling
Piano: Philip Thomas

AUDIO—Sweden, GAS Festival, Göteborg, 2001
Conductor: Anton Lukoszevieze
Bass clarinet: Andrew Sparling
Electric guitar: Alan Thomas
Piano: Philip Thomas
Percussion: Richard Benjafield

AUDIO

AUDIO

X

Descended from a retreating Napoleonic soldier and a Lithuanian noblewoman, **Anton Lukoszevieze** is a cellist, composer, and interdisciplinary artist. He is also the founder and director of the music group Apartment House.

Daniel Muzyczuk is the interim Director of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland. He has curated numerous projects, including "Through the Soundproof Curtain: The Polish Radio Experimental Studio " (with Michał Mendyk), ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2019; "Tobias Zielony: Dark Data " (with Kathleen Rahn), Marta Herford, 2022; and "Citizens of the Cosmos: Anton Vidokle with Veronika Hapchenko, Fedir Tetyanych and the Collection of the International Cosmist Institute," Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2022. Muzyczuk also served as cocurator of a Konrad Smoleński exhibition for the Polish Pavillion at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013 (with Agnieszka Pindera). His upcoming book is entitled *Twilight of the Magicians* (Spector Books).

1
Cornelius Cardew, " *Autumn '60*," in *Cornelius Cardew (1936–1981): A Reader* , ed. Eddie Prevost (Copula Press, 2008), 49.

2
Quoted in John Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew (1936–1981): A Life Unfinished* (Copula Press, 2008), 107.

Sarah Hennies

The Composer Keeps the Score: Writing Music, Sharing Power, Hearing Possibility

For the past thirty years I have engaged consistently with music-making through three different roles, each with their own distinct social character: rock drummer, improviser, and composer. While the first two are largely collaborative experiences, where the various ensemble members have a more or less equivalent role in the creation of music, composing scores is a solitary practice. Yet it still necessarily involves other people if you want to write for someone other than yourself and hear your work. In some cases, a composer locks herself away to create a written score that the musicians rarely see until it's completely finished, an approach akin to a painter or a novelist, where the creative practice is rarely shared outside the primary artist. However, there is an expectation in "new music"—an outgrowth of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical music—that once a score is handed off to the performers, some transformation, more often called "interpretation," will take place. I do believe that the written document and its resultant music necessarily and inherently change once in the hands of someone other than the composer. The composer and performers need each other (just as improvisers and rock bands need each another), but in such a way that the composer has a higher position of power in the social hierarchy of contemporary music. Practitioners of free improvisation and politically minded composers, such as John Cage, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff, who sought to dismantle this lopsided distribution of power, often cite this dynamic as a criticism of composed music. And yet it is still these composers' names—the authors but not performers of their music—that are written in the history books. Is this fair? Are these composers having their cake and eating it too by removing themselves as leaders in the creative process yet still being cited as the primary artist of their work?

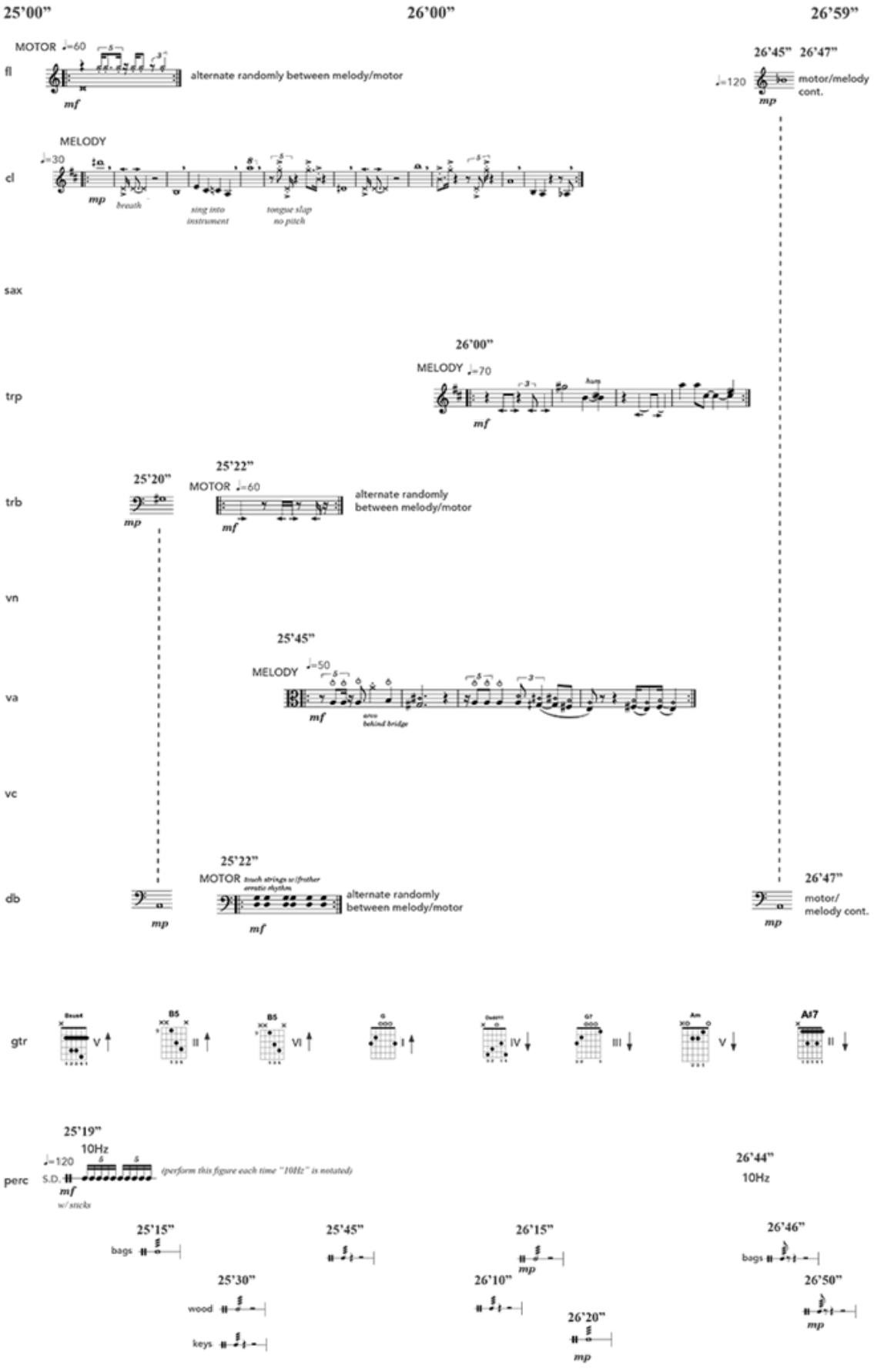
For this issue of *e-flux journal*, I have been asked to write about composer-performer labor relations in the context of the written musical score. I believe I've been asked to do this based on an assumption that there is an unjust hierarchy between composer and performer, in which the composer has disproportionate power, given that she is essentially asking performers to do her bidding. If you ask a hundred musicians their thoughts on this topic, you will likely get a hundred different answers. I am only comfortable speaking from my own experience as a composer who has been careful but very open about where and how I present work. While I am certainly aware of composers taking advantage of or mistreating their performers in the name of their art (for instance, I have terrible memories of being screamed at repeatedly in rehearsals by a famous composer whose work I played in college and who I had admired before I met him), over the past twenty years I have positioned myself as a professional composer in such a way that I'm generally working with people who are excited to do the things I ask of them, and thus I have largely had only positive experiences. The people who ask me for music are often already my friends, or at the very least friendly

Water Music 1970, Ensemble Comp. (Milan Adamčiak, Robert Cyprich, Jozef Revallo), in a new interpretation by Trio Romanovská Tichý Hrubý, Prague, 2022.

acquaintances, and they are almost never so far outside my social sphere that they would be surprised, much less feel abused, by the power I wield as the person who writes the document that tells them what to do. Ultimately, I'm a score-making musician because it's the way I'm able to compose music that's more complex and varied than writing solo percussion pieces for myself. For many years, composing has been the most appropriate and exciting way for me to create music.

My entry into experimental music was as a teenager in the early 1990s, through playing in indie rock bands and shopping at record stores that dealt in what could reasonably be called "underground DIY music"—music that was unaffiliated with academia, arts grants, or other institutional approval. But when I was sixteen years old, amid my deep love for San Diego and DC post-hardcore, and still in my early years of learning "serious" percussion playing, I encountered music by John Cage, Harry Partch, George Crumb, and Iannis Xenakis. For reasons I can't totally explain, I became obsessed. Somehow at such a young age I knew that this was what I wanted to do, although it would take six years as a university percussion student and over twenty years of rock bands and experimental improvisation before the written score would become the primary focus of my musical life. The creation of my percussion solos *Psalms* in 2009 set me on the path I continue walking today. These three solo pieces (for vibraphone, snare drum, and woodblock, respectively) came about through performing Alvin Lucier's *Silver Streetcar for the Orchestra* for triangle a year earlier, and realizing that I had made an almost identical work for vibraphone as a student several years before, long before I was aware of Lucier's piece. My resulting pieces consist of simple, repetitive pulsing on a single instrument, where changes in striking position, dampening, and other parameters result in thrilling acoustic phenomena and hypnotic repetitions that are still at the core of the work I do today. Ironically, the *Psalms* did not have written scores until seven years after their creation, when other people started asking me to play them.

Improvisation has been an important part of my artistic practice since I was a teenager; it is something I have always done and will continue to do. But in my early thirties I began to move away from this music and more



Sarah Hennies, Motor Tapes, for 12 musicians, 2022.

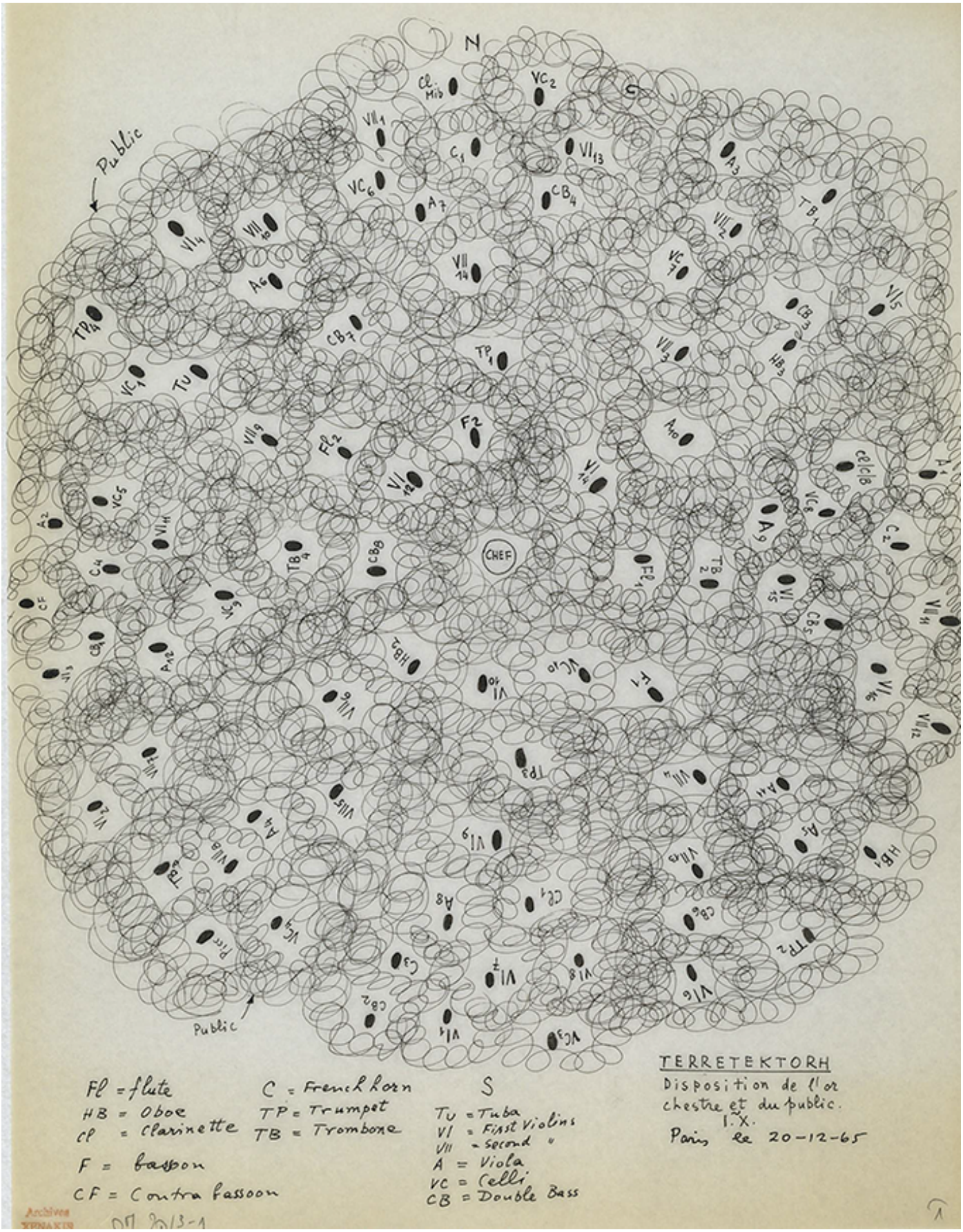
towards composed music that felt closer to my goals and identity as a musician. Herbert Brün once said that in improvisation, one's first idea is almost always the best one, and in composition it is almost always the worst. What has always appealed to me about scored music is the ability to craft something before it happens, making it into exactly what I want to hear and minimizing the risk of unwanted outcomes. Much ado is made in improvisational music circles about the lack of traditional hierarchies and power structures in so-called free music, and while I have no interest in pitting improvisation and composition against each other, by 2009 I had grown weary of the predictability and pitfalls of this type of music-making. I found that concerts I attended (and performed) that purported to be spontaneous music had become quite rote and predictable, with most improvisers relying on a honed and refined collection of sounds and techniques employed with a more or less consistent musical approach, regardless of the performance situation or grouping of musicians. Brün called improvisation "a spontaneous use of an already-learned language," and it was and continues to be my desire as an artist to make things happen that I haven't heard before—that I feel could not occur spontaneously.

My trio Meridian, formed in 2012 with Tim Feeney and Greg Stuart, developed a highly refined approach to improvising that was very exciting because of our musical and personal kinship with each other. A commitment to playing together led to many things I hadn't previously thought possible in improvised music. That said, after a couple years together Greg rightly recognized that we had honed our approach to improvisation so much that we were essentially performing the same piece every time we played together—the same problem I'd had with improvisation in the first place. Although the sounds and order of events changed, the overall arc, approach, and effect of the performances were remarkably consistent in what was ostensibly spontaneous music. I was also bothered by my lack of control and the potential for undesirable outcomes. Every musician has certainly experienced failures in performance but I found that the type of improvised music I was doing was especially prone to this; some nights things would just simply not come together, despite the various participants all sharing a similar musical vision.

In 2011, during the No Idea Festival (Chris Cogburn's wonderful annual event) in Austin, I overheard two musician friends talking about a tour they recently completed. They said that some shows had gone great and others had gone terribly. In that moment I thought to myself, why would I make music that I might not like, and furthermore, why would I do it in front of an audience? I loved the social aspect of rock bands and improvising, but ultimately found myself artistically frustrated by their limitations. By making decisions in advance—composing a score—I found that I could create music that I truly had not heard before, and I could have a highly satisfying level of control over the resultant performance, while still allowing space for things to occur that I could not have made happen with notation alone. For me, writing down your instructions is, of course, a practical tool for getting other people to play your music, but more profoundly it can make something happen that could not exist without the score.

In January 2021, for a period of several days I inadvertently became the main character (that is, villain) among the new music composer/performer community on Twitter. It was the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was driving eight hours a week for my teaching job, and I was in the midst of a serious years-long mental health crisis. Perhaps these were not the ideal circumstances to be judging a composition contest but alas, that is what I was doing. I was in a motel in Troy, New York one night on a break from working on a friend's art piece, trying to get through hundreds of scores submitted for an open call that I'd been invited to judge by some friends in Atlanta. The majority of scores were indistinguishable from each other and I began to notice that many of them shared a similar trait: "poetic" performance instructions more akin to what you'd tell an actor for their emotional motivation in a play or film. These type of instructions are an outgrowth of classical music from the nineteenth-century, when composers branched out from traditional markings such as " *allegro*," " *largo*," " *cantabile*," etc., to use more descriptive language. For example, the opening of Debussy's "Clair de Lune" is marked as " *Andante très expressif*," expanding on the classical method of indicating tempo without a specific number for beats per minute. These notations have since developed into something far removed from their origin. Today it's not surprising to see "Like the first ray of sunshine on a spring morning" written over a simple melody or even a single whole note. It was admittedly naive of me to post on Twitter to "advise" the public on what I see as unplayable, unhearable notational devices, and certainly ill-advised to do this while experiencing a mild hypomanic episode, but nevertheless I impulsively took to social media to campaign for the end of such performance instructions. My complaint was that if they can't be played or heard, why write them at all? I quickly found myself on the receiving end of dozens of angry and often outright mean responses. While these were amusing at first, I finally had to delete my post when I woke up on day three of this barrage to a direct message that said, "I feel sorry for your students." I had touched a nerve.

It's not my wish to restart this pointless debate (people can make scores however they want and it's really none of my business), but I believe my hatred of these kinds of instructions stems from my time as a university percussionist. For two years in the early 2000s I was a graduate student at University of California San Diego. I went there because I wanted to study with percussionist Steve Schick, but even more, I wanted to be around people who were making contemporary music, as I had previously



Iannis Xenakis, Terretektorh, Distribution of Musicians, 1965. Courtesy of the Iannis Xenakis Archives, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

been at a fairly traditional music program at the University of Illinois. When I got to San Diego, I was shocked that the majority of my time was not spent playing Xenakis but performing dozens of grad-student compositions every year. I was essentially an indentured servant of the new music academy whose forty to fifty composers relied on a comically small number of performers to play their work. It's in this contemporary music assembly line—forced to relentlessly perform music you don't want to play for a meager sub-living wage in the form of a graduate assistantship—that you quickly learn to despise composers who cannot clearly and succinctly tell you what they want. But so much contemporary chamber music relies on this labor.

Surprisingly, many of my angry Twitter respondents cited the same justification for writing poetic performance instructions: "I want my performers to know that I respect them." The implication is that the composer shows trust in performers by allowing them to "interpret" the score. The underlying assumption is that writing ambiguous instructions gives the performer more freedom than clear instructions. As a composer who mostly works with friends or at least friendly people, this notion makes me wonder: What performers are these people working with and why do they feel so disrespected? Why do composers feel the need to prove that they welcome and value the artistic choices of people playing their music—when performers making their own interpretive choices has been integral to the composer-performer relationship for hundreds of years? The answer, of course, is that performers often come from places where they are *not* valued and respected: music schools and symphonies. There is a pervasive and often valorized abuse of power (the famous "great man" composer screaming at a college student to play his music correctly) that runs through the places one learns to perform scored music. At best, this may inspire students and professionals to a high level of achievement (but at what cost?). At worst, it results in heinous abuses of power. Orchestral/classical music is overwhelmingly male-dominated, with female conductors and section leaders as an extreme minority. This disparity has led to rampant discrimination, sexual harassment, and abuse. There have been high-profile scandals at Juilliard, the New York Philharmonic, and multiple other symphony orchestras and music programs, where men are the kings of the castle. Numerous accounts of this unfair treatment have been bravely chronicled, notably on the Substack and Facebook page of oboist Katherine Needleman.

I'm a self-taught composer and I'm always careful not to call what I do "classical music." While I may teach at a college (albeit one that is highly nontraditional) and have received grants and awards from prestigious institutions, my identity still lies with my DIY roots. My music grows from this sensibility rather than one learned at music school. To me, examining the hierarchy between composer and performer illuminates how important the social aspects of my practice are to the music I make.

Many of my best pieces have arisen from the friendships I have with the performers; I place immense trust in them to realize my music, which comes from a deeply personal and often painful place. In an ideal composer-performer relationship, you make each other better. For me, it is most exciting when Bearthoven, Bent Duo, Tim Feeney, Judith Hamann, Tristan Kasten-Krause, Steve Schick, Greg Stuart, richard valitutto, Nate Wooley, and so many others whom I've had the great privilege to work with bring my music somewhere beyond what I thought was possible. A performer is always going to transform the written score, even if only in small ways, but some of my most valuable experiences as a composer have been when a performer sees something in the work that I do not, bringing their own taste, experience, judgment, and ideas into its realization. The score and the social relationship between composer and performer are inseparable. In the best possible scenario they are in a beautiful, mutually elevating symbiosis.

Cornelius Cardew's eight-hour magnum opus *The Great Learning* (1968–70), written for "trained and untrained musicians," is a radical work with many compositional innovations. But perhaps even more important is the great feat of organization that must take place to realize the piece. Written in seven movements called "paragraphs" (each based on a different portion of a text by Confucius), the work calls for dozens of performers to follow Cardew's often hyper-precise instructions. The score includes a great deal of vocalizing, pipe organ, drums, bass instruments, and many other elements, resulting in a work that often feels like a mass political protest staged as experimental music. Having been involved in multiple performances of the work, I've learned that the greatest challenge of Cardew's masterpiece is the seemingly mundane task of organizing rehearsals. Because the piece needs at minimum fifty performers (but more is always better), when you start to schedule things you realize quickly that all of those people have jobs to do, classes to attend, and children to take care of. To participate, you must decide that *The Great Learning* is something you need in your life, that the benefit of doing this piece is greater than tending to other everyday responsibilities, and that the end result provides a benefit (aesthetic, social, emotional, psychological) that you cannot access in any other part of your life. This, perhaps, is the utopian ideal that drew me to composed music as a lonely, sad teenager: one can find friendship, intimacy, and togetherness around the common goal of performing strange and exhilarating music. The major details of my life—that I'm a queer, transgender, bipolar parent working as an experimental musician—mean that I can relate to almost no one. But through composition I can engage and nourish the most personal aspects of myself directly with other people, and others can project their own experiences onto the resulting music, creating an artistic experience that is not "about me" but for everyone.

At the premiere of my 2021 piece *Clock Dies*, during a

Cornelius Cardew with the Scratch Orchestra.

particularly frantic section in which multiple overlapping loops and tempi gradually coincide into a cathartic climax, I began to laugh in disbelief. I leaned over to my partner Mara and whispered, "I feel like I'm inside my own head!" We are often looking for ourselves in the work of others. Often a strong emotional response to someone else's music reflects as much on the listener as it does on the composer. But I almost never "see myself" in other people's work in the same profound way I do in my own, and thus I must do this work myself. Last year I watched Jane Schoenbrun's film *I Saw the TV Glow*, and for the first time in my life I saw an experience related to my gender (one that almost all trans women have) reflected back at me in a piece of culture. This caught me so off-guard that I began to cry, both due to the shock of seeing this very powerful, private, and taboo experience on screen, and due to the therapeutic release of loneliness and tension that I didn't realize I was carrying. These moments are exceedingly rare for me to experience in other people's work, which is part of my drive to write my own music. It's through crafting a written score that these moments of validation, recognition, and liberation can take place. By making a score, the composer can open a window that welcomes others into your house while also allowing you to climb out and leave for a little while.

Jane Schoenbrun, I Saw the TV Glow, 2024, film still.

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Liam Gillick

Ibuka!: A Musical in Three Acts Based on the Book Erasmus Is Late

The book Erasmus is Late *concerns a dinner in London that flashes between 1810 and 1997. A central tension is created with the knowledge that this dinner is taking place on the night before "the mob" is redefined as "the workers." It is the last time they could be assessed as an incoherent group and from this point on any position in society has to be negotiated rather than given. From now on every day is not the same, the near future is roughly predictable and potentially changeable. We have growth. Modern destabilization has set in. The book also functions as a guide to London, the central character wandering around various sites for the development of free-thinking. A number of people are present at this meal, all involved in a time slip. Each could be described as a parallel individual. Not at the center of any particular power structure but central to the development of other people's ideas. The host of the dinner doesn't turn up so the evening ends in relative failure combined with a degree of placid resignation. The guests have not come to terms with the potential of that night's events. Yet the rest of us have witnessed something quite special. A debate about debate. An attempt to reframe potential across time. Although the opportunity to encourage a particular form of pre-Marxist republican revolution has been lost, the conditions that provoked the rise of the soft left and late-twentieth-century democratic market economies have been laid bare.*

Ibuka! *is a musical that focuses on one of the key characters in the book. It is an adaptation of* Erasmus Is Late .[1]

So a stage setting must be visualized and various possibilities explored. Ibuka! *is musical entertainment that deals with the roots of our current situation and the embryonic status of socialism and Western European capitalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It's a song-and-dance spectacular, despite the fact that none of the words or music have been written. The initial settings were considered during an exhibition at Air de Paris in May 1995. The work generated there lead s towards a solution for the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. A floor of the building will be completely re furbished as a potential site for the staging of this musical. In addition, this book outlines the story and the way in which this musical may be adapted and staged. The show will be an investigation of potential framings and the adaptability of a corrupted scenario. Further parts will be developed in New York (Basilico Fine Arts) and Köln (Schipper & Krome).*

—Liam Gillick, April 1995

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[center] **Part 1: Setting**

Ibuka!, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, 1995. Photograph: Di Gorni.

Ibuka! is at its heart a layered musical. It should appear as if various locations and actions can be presented simultaneously. *Ibuka!* should be entertaining, with memorable songs and powerful, easily remembered lyrics. The basic treatment of the set is all that requires outlining. The chosen space should be brightly painted, using a wide range of colors. The result should be overwhelming and pleasing in equal measure. Various props are described in this text. These may be fully developed at a later point. It is important, however, to indicate the presence of a table at the heart of this musical. It should be as large as possible, heavy and constructed with little fuss, ornament, or detailing. Strong lighting is necessary in order to fully appreciate the dramatic possibilities outlined later on. It is a good idea, at this stage, for potential promoters of this musical to consider listening to the widely available Warner Bros CD of Carl Stalling compositions. He wrote scores for Warner Bros cartoons in the 1940s and '50s.

Prototype Ibuka! Coffee Table/Stage (Act 2), 1995 (detail). Collection Museum Sztuki, Lodz, Poland.

Prototype Ibuka! Coffee Table/Stage (Act 2), 1995 (detail). Collection Museum Sztuki, Lodz, Poland.

Prototype Ibuka! Coffee Table/Stage (Act 2), 1995 (detail). Collection Museum Sztuki, Lodz, Poland.

[center] **Part 2: Characters**

Various characters are present and it is necessary to indicate something of their appearance and their personality traits. Interpretation will be left to anyone who stages the musical and the people who take part in its performance. The central character is Erasmus. He should be played by a mature man with a good, strong, but rather high-pitched singing voice. If this is not possible he should at least be capable of a wide range of vocal styles. At all times Erasmus should be wearing the following clothes. A black top hat. This should be in good condition yet may be dusty or slightly dirty. Black trousers, high cut and narrow in the leg. No underwear. A dirty white shirt and cravat. A woolen waistcoat is necessary because Erasmus spends the duration of the musical wandering around the streets of London. Heavy black boots are worn for the same reason. In his pocket Erasmus always carries a small silver box. Inside this container are his opium pastilles. These will appear frequently during the musical. Silk socks are one of his favorite things. And a copy of the book *Erasmus Is Late* is frequently visible, poking out of his jacket pocket.

Erasmus, like all the other characters, has very specific moods. He appears slightly bilious at all times, as if he has heartburn, a mild stomach ulcer, or just indigestion. On top of this he is clearly out of it. Already under the influence of a heavy narcotic but never drunk. He can speak and sing clearly but his manner on stage indicates some near-complete inebriation. He meanders around. Clearly wise but lacking in direction. Despite all these things he remains lucid, if rather dreamy. This is a time for reflection, and a peculiar form of nonaction for Erasmus and his portrayal should indicate this from the outset. He will become increasingly disturbed as the musical develops.

Harriet Martineau is his best friend. Erasmus and Harriet have a platonic yet extremely close relationship. She is wearing a large hat, the design is rather eccentric and the crown of the hat is trimmed heavily with lace. A long dress allows only fleeting glimpses of black boots, laced high. A small purse is either in her hand or by her side on the tabletop at all times. She wears white gloves and carries a number of softbound pamphlets in her hands. A large brooch is pinned to her dress. She likes to carry a stick or cane but seems not to need it in order to move around. A bottle of smelling salts is a necessary accompaniment to the pamphlets and allows rapid revival of people who have read the contents of her radical libertarian booklets. Her character is clear cut. Harriet is determined, always taking a position which indicates that everything is read in relation to everything else. Throughout this musical she remains focused yet there are many times when she contradicts herself.

Masaru Ibuka does not say much. He likes his Walkman. After all, it was his idea. He also carries a large number of pens. Apart from that, his dress code fits with late-twentieth-century business practices. A charcoal grey suit and a fresh white shirt. He likes to wear boxer shorts under his suit, shiny black shoes on his feet, and is never seen without a black tie. His tie is sometimes loosened and at other times tucked into his shirt, but it never comes off, even on the hottest days. In order to concentrate, especially when making notes or working out calculations, Masaru often carries a green printer's visor. And occasionally will take a printed circuit board from his pocket at moments of boredom or disengagement. This happens very rarely, however, because most of the time he concentrates hard on what is being said, speculating wildly on the potential of a meeting like this. He is always inventive, experimental yet respectful. In fact it is quite clear that Masaru Ibuka is a good dinner guest, if only because he is a good listener.

Robert McNamara has recently become a more familiar character. At the time when I wrote the original version of *McNamara* in 1992 it was often necessary to explain who he was. Now people have a much clearer picture. For the purposes of this exhibition he is clean-cut and wears

glasses. McNamara prefers a dark blue suit and a blue and white striped shirt combined with a red tie. His shoes are black and extremely clean. He is rarely seen without his briefcase. From this slim leather bag he produces a large number of important-looking buff folders full of various papers, agreements, accords, and proposals. It would be good to say that he has an assistant, but there is no place for one in this scenario. This is not normal and makes him feel uneasy. McNamara doesn't travel alone. For some reason that is hard to explain he also carries a torch. And more predictably a number of identity cards, an empty wallet, and a video copy of the film *McNamara* in case he forgets who he is and what he did.

Bob's intention is to enjoy the evening. Possibly only he really understands the particular variety of people that have been gathered together here. Yet his pleasure is affected by a love of strategy. While remaining thoughtful, he is precise and incisive to such an extent that it becomes difficult for him to truly relax. A balanced, relativist position allows McNamara to justify any situation. Yet he appears to make good points during discussions. These comments are marked down. A compulsive note and memo taker. Doodles on the tablecloth back up this activity. In the end he is the most compromised individual at this parallel excursion. Remaining pragmatic but guilty as hell.

Murry Wilson is the odd one out. In his plaid trousers, sports shirt, and straw trilby he looks every inch the American small-town man. A white vest shows through his shirt. And if only we could see through his trousers it would be clear that his underwear is white and large enough for the fattest man but he's not particularly overweight. He carries a musical manuscript book rather than the standard tourist guide that his appearance might indicate. Pens and a metronome reveal that he is ready to write some music. A length of 2" × 1" wood is at the ready, to be used when things start to get confusing. House keys, contracts (handwritten), a diary, dictionary, and some heart pills. Sitting in a house with all these other people ensures that Murry remains bemused. This frustration causes grumpiness. Yet there are other times when things start to pick up and he appears eager. All of this is cut short by his essential conservatism. When confronted with a complex proposition he can become dismissive and reticent. Horny, sweaty, and stupid.

Elsie McLuhan, on the other hand, exhibits a peculiar form of dignity. This is backed up by her possession of a razor strop. She will use it if she has to. And always with backup from the Bible. She always got shirty when Marshall forgot important words from the dictionary. She wants something more than just a quiet life in the middle of nowhere. Short stories are her favorite, especially ones with a moral tone. Elsie always carries a small mirror to check on her heavy, brown, tweed clothing. And of course a matching small brown hat with a feather is perched upon her head. While she is clearly a dignified presence there are times when she becomes argumentative to the point of pedantry. A profound woman, almost religious in the fervor of her arguments, capable of strong rhetoric yet dismissive when her determined comments are ignored or glossed over. There are some people who have even accused her of being pompous.

[center] **Part 3: Introduction**[2]

A dinner is about to take place. Tomorrow everything will be different. We are flashing between the early 1800s and 1997. For those stuck in the earlier period, the mob will become the workers. In 1997 the workers revert to their old identity. A group of people has been invited for something to eat. It is probably appropriate to explain a little bit about their activities. Robert McNamara was Secretary of Defense under Kennedy and later a World Bank representative. Masaru Ibuka cofounded Sony. Elsie McLuhan, mother of Marshall McLuhan, was a public speaker specializing in moral tales. Murry Wilson was the father of Brian Wilson. Like his son, he was a songwriter, but his ambitions were thwarted. Later he attempted to live out his desires through the Beach Boys. So it seems as if we are in the company of a specific collection of people. Maybe they would be seen as secondary characters by some people, but in this context their grouping at a dinner explains why there was no change at a specific period in British history. Not just any change, but a radical, revolutionary shift. There will also be a guide to London. A guide for free thinkers. An attempt to regain control over a set of ideas that have been appropriated by people with no interest in altering the way things are. All of this takes place within the framing device of a set of parallel histories.

So to the main subject of this book and the individual whose name forms part of the title. Erasmus is late, and he is the host. Charles Darwin's older brother enjoyed a life of literary leisure. A Georgian free-thinking opium eater. We follow him as he wanders around central London. Despite the fact that he does not intend to let down his dinner guests, Erasmus gets distracted. For as he walks, he comes across different sites for the development of free thinking. At these moments he stops to contemplate the contradictions inherent in his desire for libertarian development. A set of problems that are amplified by the fact that the London he finds himself in is clearly a place familiar to us as the twentieth century draws to a close. It is no longer the London of opium eaters.

Although Erasmus has avoided his own dinner engagement, he maintains communication with his guests through this book. His newfound environment is too engaging to leave. This is not as much of a problem as it might at first appear. During bouts of opium-induced insomnia Erasmus finds that he can talk to the dinner guests and they answer him back. Yet if only the whole group could have come together in person on this important night. Although the London explored through

this book may have turned out to be the same, it is possible that it would have been corrupted and maybe improved.

So on one level this is a guide to contemporary London through the eyes of a Georgian. Yet it is also an examination of pre-Marxist positions. An ill-researched investigation of a Utopian optimism that is struggling to predict the future. An attempt to cut across the nostalgia for a period that cannot really provide a model for our own. The erosion of society as we never knew it begins and ends here. Creating both the circumstances that lead to socialism and the roots of the present reassessment of our sense of society.

Before we begin it is important to introduce Harriet Martineau. Older than Erasmus and not weighed down with the same sense of moral order. Her influence on his ideas should not be underestimated.

[center] **Part 4: Scenario**

Act 1

The stage set at this point should be quite specific. There are a number of key aspects that are necessary to create the right effect for the opening scene of a musical about free thinking, discussion, and time slips. The music need not be precise. A strong Carl Stalling influence should be emphasized. Warner Bros. The initial set will slowly change as the characters move around, and at certain points we should be able to see all the separate elements simultaneously. Remember, this is a musical. It should be bright, entertaining, and memorable.

We are probably in London. Certainly close to the center of a large city. We should be able to see the façade of a large house. And in front of this house there is a road. It is a wide street, dirty, uneven, and grand. Even though you can see the exterior of the house, it should also be possible to see a table in a dining room. So it is important that the set is organized in order for a viewer of this musical to take in the front of a house, the interior of a house, and a road, all at the same time. A number of people will visit this house and they are going to have dinner together.

The musical should start with some kind of song that introduces each character. They are referred to by name, but at this stage we have not seen what the characters look like. This song would be sung by a chorus, or other group of singers who are not visible on the stage. It will become clear that a group of people have been invited for a dinner, and in fact this introductory song is a kind of invitation in itself.

Ibuka!, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, 1995. Photograph: Di Gorni.

Ibuka!, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, 1995. Photograph: Di Gorni.

As the opening song reaches its climax, you see the dinner guests arriving at the house one by one. Each of them uses a different mode of transport. Some arrive in horse-drawn taxis, some in cars, others on foot. Harriet Martineau is the first to arrive. Tall, slow, but powerful and

dignified. The lights go off for an instant. When they come on again, there she is, standing on the front steps of the house. Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense and World Bank representative, arrives in a large black car. Masaru Ibuka follows close behind, the cofounder of Sony approaches on foot. Elsie McLuhan, mother of Marshall McLuhan comes next, arriving in a horse-drawn taxi. Murry Wilson is probably the last to appear on stage, he comes on running from the right-hand side. Briefly he appears lost, heads in the wrong direction, and then finally makes it up the stone steps and through the front door of the house. Murry is the father of Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. In ways that are hard to define, he seems to be responsible for most of the songs and music in this show. At certain points instruments suddenly appear on the stage and he uses them while other people are singing. This takes place even though it is rarely possible to hear what Murry is playing. It is almost as if he symbolizes the musical element of our story. He is so plainly dominated by the other guests in intellectual terms, that it is only through music that Murry can demonstrate a certain degree of mental and physical dexterity. Occasionally, in mid-conversation, he shows off the extent of his musical versatility. Murry always plays slightly clichéd show music, but it is relatively impressive all the same. Plodding, unimaginative, but deft. A marked contrast to the strong Carl Stalling influence that otherwise dominates the score. You can never hear an entire song or complete passage when Murry plays, but the snatches of music that are audible leave a strong impression on the rest of the dinner guests. Their positive reactions, toe-tapping, smiling, and nodding, seem to make him idiotically happy and depressed all at the same time.

Of course the key character in this musical is Erasmus Darwin even though the title is a nod to Masaru. Erasmus is always on the move, but he remains outside the house. He never makes it inside and spends the entire musical wandering around the stage. It is important that this stage area can accommodate the illusion of many different places and moods, all culled from the center of London and conjured up from the middle of an opium-addled brain. This means that the lighting has to be very specific, especially in the opening scene. Strong shafts of super-bright light should swing between the back and front of the set. Flashing between the people who have arrived for the dinner and the host. Erasmus may be invisible and absent to the guests, but he is ever present for the audience of this musical, lost and wandering round the city/stage. After all, tonight is the night that the mob becomes the workers, tomorrow everything will be different. It is the last chance for a complex group of people to come together across time and produce the potential for revolution. From tomorrow, Marxism is an inevitability and the power will move away from free-thinking diners and into the rightful hands of working people. That's what it says in the book anyway. Remember we are stuck in a time slip between Georgian London and a near future.

Erasmus is late and one hundred flowers are laid out on the stage. Erasmus, in his central role, sings a little song about the time of the Hundred Flowers. A moment of destructive and devastating reassessment in China during the 1950s under Mao Tse-tung. As Erasmus sings his informative song he considers each bloom. After only a few lines of the song he begins to move around the set. Erasmus considers each flower with the eyes of a curious, detached, opiated Georgian. After quite some time he takes each bloom and moves it carefully to another place on the stage. Sometimes this activity is carried out carefully, at other times he is quite rough and handles great bundles, moving them from place to place with little care and in some distress.

One of the key issues that is explored in the book *Erasmus Is Late* is the idea of a time slip. And the key reflection taking place refers to the way in which this concept is so prevalent in certain forms of entertainment media. Due to the fact that this musical is based on the book, it also deals with time slips. This causes problems, but also allows certain games to be played, so throughout the destabilization at the heart of this work, we must be able to see the house that forms the base for tonight's meal, even when action is centered elsewhere. The building is rather specific in the sense that it fits with architectural traits familiar from the Georgian period in Britain. As such, the time slip is not overstated. The center of London is still full of such buildings. And apparently they were sometimes painted bright colors. So the lighting must always be considered carefully in order to make sure that the exterior of the house changes appearance throughout this musical experience. It is not necessary to describe the look of the place too carefully. It's the kind of house that has a basement that can be reached from the street. Iron railings surround the periphery of the site but because this may be impractical when staging an exhibition/musical, railings can also be used as a recurring decorative motif. There are some steps at the front of the house that lead up to a black door. Somehow all these things must be visible at all times, even when we are only considering the interior of the place. The windows are rather mean-looking. You cannot see the frames too easily, but the back and side walls of the set are punctuated by rows of these windows, visible at certain points and invisible at other times. It should be possible to see both the interior and the exterior of this place. Therefore maybe it is necessary to construct the façade of this house from some kind of transparent material that may occasionally appear opaque and at other times transparent, depending on how the lighting is arranged and manipulated.

After the flower interlude we are left with Erasmus standing near the front of the stage locked in one position, telling his story and introducing all the people who have arrived at his house. Acting like a narrator. Clearly he is not going to arrive at the same time as the guests but it is not certain at this point that he will never make it to this

important dinner date. Only people who have read the book *Erasmus Is Late* will truly understand the circumstances that surround the absence of the central character. It is sufficient to say that at this moment in the musical we cannot be sure whether he will join his guests or not. This is the key element of dramatic irony that sustains the traditional element of this narrative construction. The guests are arriving and you see them go into the house and take their places around a large table. Everyone introduces themselves to each other. We cannot hear exactly what they are saying but each dinner guest appears to behave in a specific accepted and familiar way. They are all polite to each other and seem reasonably happy to meet. There is, however, a certain degree of visible tension. This tension is manifest in different, quite subtle forms. For example, through the way in which people nervously wipe their hands before meeting or look each other up and down (when they have the opportunity to do this without appearing to be rude). It is clear from this complex body language that they are all wondering where their host could have got to. And it is clear to all of us that he is lost in the middle of the set, moving flowers around and thinking about various mid-twentieth-century collapses. All linked to degraded Utopias. Erasmus moves around but cannot really make contact with any of these people. He is speaking to himself at all times, but somehow he is also communicating with the others. While he is talking, music starts to play and all the people in the dining room acknowledge each other's presence in a resigned and relatively open way. The introductions are over. As the guests settle down to their evening of discussion and dinner, Erasmus wanders about at the front of the stage area.

This is when the second key character introduces herself. Harriet Martineau. At first it seems as if she will begin with a song, but after a couple of bars of music and a big buildup, she forces the music to stop (by waving her hands and shaking her head) and instead speaks directly and informatively, past the dinner guests and out towards an audience. Erasmus interrupts and, although Harriet continues to talk calmly and clearly, his voice drowns hers out. The reason for this is that Erasmus wants and needs to present her to everyone. Her unheard monologue and his introduction end simultaneously. As Erasmus bows away towards the back of the set, Harriet finally lets the music begin by gesturing with her hands, and she sings a little song about the fact that she's feeling depressed and that she's been doing too much work and that she might try a move to the countryside. Although she normally likes going to these kinds of gatherings, tonight Harriet is sure that this is not going to be an enjoyable evening. This could be a source of some tension between Erasmus and her, but he is too out of it to notice or really respond effectively to her potential dissatisfaction. For Harriet, salmon suppers and debate with Erasmus have been central to the development of her essays, pamphlets, complex rhetoric, and paradoxically hardline Libertarianism. She is reaching the point where there is a recognition of a set of contradictions that she can no longer tolerate or juggle. The main visible result of this unease is that Harriet tends to speak as if she is the only person in the room. She does not engage in real dialogue. She is rather upset that Erasmus is not at home, but the source of her real fury is the fact that she senses that tomorrow the mob will become the workers and this is something that fills her with fear. For while she believes people tend towards upward mobility, it is nonhierarchical organization that she rejects most firmly.

The reactions of the other guests at this point are rather weak. They don't immediately warm to Harriet due to her "special relationship" with Erasmus and the rather cavalier way in which she is ignoring them in favor of the attempt to make direct contact with the absent opium-addled host. This set of problems is compounded when Harriet starts to talk about her Libertarian beliefs, her complete lack of faith in state control, and her fear of the rise of the workers—which she cannot truly understand because it is yet to take place, but she senses it will undermine her position. Harriet talks about multiple positions as a way of combating this effect. In addition, she desperately tries to address the idea that nothing is certain or fixed, but from her Georgian, early nineteenth-century position it is hard for her to use such flexibility. The other guests smile politely and some even begin to acknowledge the sad complexity that lies at the root of what she is saying.

Erasmus is starting to move around the stage. A shop front is suddenly illuminated and the rest of the lights fade down a little. We realize that Erasmus is considering a particular shop from the late twentieth century. An electronics shop. The kind of place that stocks every type of computer, camera, and brand of discounted hi-fi equipment. And for the first time he begins to sing. His voice is a bit of a shock. A high-pitched falsetto. He rapidly outlines a story of overlapping ideas and communication while he sings about the future. At certain points he takes an opium pastille. This slows him down a little, and lowers the pitch of his voice, but within a couple of lines he is soaring once again. When singing he lacks any obvious signs of emotion, his voice belies his rather wrecked exterior. Erasmus sings about moving around through time and the fact that he can't deal with relative positions. He cannot cope with modern ideas about having multiple positions and a rather complicated, layered view of things. Yet he can understand why these multiple positions might develop, in fact he is the conduit between the two eras under consideration in this musical. It is Erasmus who stands at the center. He is symbolic of a period that created the conditions that allowed for both Marxism and free-market positions. Standing caught between these two areas pleases him greatly. As his song ends, the first act of our musical draws to a close with a monologue from Erasmus directed at the audience.

The lights start to come up in the dining room of the house. And everyone is having an animated conversation.

They remain oblivious to the presence of their high-pitched host.

Erasmus addresses everyone:

> But as we have discovered, days are not the same and if they are not even tied together by some thread of continuity, is nothing located? At least general trends might be predictable. That's the way it has been until now. Yet I fear that these undercurrents that permit a degree of rationalization are merely coincidence. And on the trail of some opium I think even less in those fixed slightly progressive terms. I am permitted to time-slip into your mode of multiple referencing. But it is not your theoretical freewheeling, my version of multi-vision merely apes ahistoricism. No cultural kleptomania. My time slip is based on what could be and not on some existential set of total referencing that may lead to inactivity.[3]

And as he finishes this speech the lights come up really brightly, and you see all the people, including Erasmus, locked on stage. They are no longer moving but fixed in anticipation of what will take place. A loud crescendo of music indicates the end. Fade the lights to black.

Act 2

The second act opens with deafening traffic noise which gradually starts to calm down. Specific lighting effects allow for silhouettes of cars and trucks to be projected across the set. The glow of a shop window is quite a clear focus point. You can also see the dinner guests, whose set has now been dragged towards the back of the performance area. They are only lightly illuminated, as if by candlelight. The façades of four more shops, all slightly similar to the first, gradually fade up from the darkness of the set. It soon becomes apparent that Erasmus is with us again, lurking around the shop windows. He is obviously in no hurry and takes his time as he studies the different signs that decorate the shop fronts. These logos in the form of names are also projected around the set. Each one alludes to a specific electronics company. Erasmus seems fascinated by all these clear and powerful signs. As he walks around he begins to hear music. A chorus of people, none of whom are visible on the stage, hum a song that involves the names and objects that he can see in the five sites for developments in electronic communication that are now available to him.

The lights fade down and attention turns back to the guests. Murry leaves the table and takes us on a walk down a narrow passageway. A staircase is visible on one side. He looks around as he walks, and checks the varied architectural features of the house. It is not a type of building that he is familiar with, he seems a little confused, while also appreciating the place. All this time we can hear loud sounds of conversation coming from the dining room. Murry's exploratory interlude is accompanied by music.

As Murry walks, the dining room element of the set moves towards the front of the set. The table is now clearly visible. It is heavy and made of wood, covered with a clean white cloth and fairly empty considering the importance of tonight's dinner. There is a mantelpiece with photographs, drawings, and some pottery. Murry is still temporarily distracted by his exploratory mood. He is somehow guiding us through the house, while Erasmus starts to sing a song, also guiding in his own opium-addled way. The words are a reminder that it is important to think about the way in which society is constructed. And that he will try and lead us into territories that are very vivid. Too difficult to deal with. All this will happen without straying too far from his home. So it becomes clear from this song why everything must remain visible simultaneously within this set. Erasmus sings about how he is not interested in Man developing fitness for anything. So he is not concerned with the classic interpretation of evolution because he believes that Man has already transcended such a state and entered a period where there is a degree of free will involved in decision-making that ensures a particular unevenness. Also Erasmus has a major problem dealing with any of these things, because the theory of evolution has not yet been developed. So (by default) he is more interested in unfitness and underachievement. He is singing about how exciting it would be if you could enter a state of continual reconsideration rather than a simple, straightforward way of looking at the world. He cannot think in relativistic terms or flash around through time as well as others but he will be able to later. Erasmus admits that in order to do this he will need some new starting points. And maybe it is becoming clear that this guide, walking around shops and other places, also this nonappearance at the dinner, have got something to do with creating a new way of looking at the world. Or at the very least a new way of creating some starting points in order to help us devise a way to live, an alternative to the rise of free-market thinking. It's the last chance for a revolution. Erasmus admits that he is engaged in a faded analysis, or rather a blurry analysis. He is standing caught between shop fronts, moving this way and that. He can't decide which way to go.

Without warning Erasmus turns towards the dinner guests, the lights come on in the dining room, and all the guests turn towards him. It is clear from the way they move their heads and scan the set that they cannot actually see him. But somehow they can hear him. The music drops to a very sinister and low tempo. Erasmus begins to sing. The words to the song are complicated. And there is no mistaking the seriousness of his message:

> *One option here is for us to chase a consistent level of ongoing invention. This is supposed to*

Ibuka!, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, 1995. Photograph: Di Gorni.

occur and, while change has been slow, it has not been imperceptible.

and, while change has been slow, what goes on beyond the kind of discussion that tends to take place at a dinner like this. Maybe, concerning what was said earlier, we are in fact taking part in the construction of a whole new series of tiny moral frameworks that guide our actions instead of some grand, overwhelming, and therefore rather clumsy idea.

This proposal would seem reasonable, seeing as it is always being adapted by the most dynamic people, although to link ourselves with such groups may be dangerous at this stage.

Erasmus repeats the last lines a couple of times. There is a sense in which the conclusion of Act Two is rather different to the first. There is no clear climax or musical crescendo. The secondary lights and the plaintive singing just fade away. We are left with Erasmus standing in the middle of the road. The final spots fade down. And you can see that all the guests are rather concerned as the dining room is swallowed up by the encroaching darkness. They know something has been said but they are not exactly clear who said it. The "unheard" song had a profound effect, but it was communicated without clarity, direction, or true comprehension. Murry, Masaru, Robert, Elsie, and Harriet are disturbed and unsettled by the developments tonight.

Act 3

This time only one of the shop fronts is visible and we are also confronted by a big traffic island in the middle of the set, positioned right at the very front. And Erasmus is standing there on the traffic island, clearly visible to any kind of audience. You cannot see the dinner guests anymore. Due to lighting and the use of some screens which have been pulled in front of the dining room area.

Some kind of projection has been made onto the back wall. This gives us a detailed view of Erasmus. His hair is long and grey, combed back off his forehead, and it seems to extend seamlessly into bushy grey sideburns. He has taken off his top hat and holds it in his hands. The music at this stage has become really quite loud. There is no singing, just Erasmus, stuck, locked onto this traffic island. All the focus should really be on him at this point. We are entering a period of reminiscence. He starts to recall his background and especially his childhood. The large projection on the back wall starts to shift and we are allowed to see what he is thinking. This process is quite straightforward. When he thinks about his brother you see an image of his brother. A transparently dumb way of presenting a set of memories but quite in keeping with the opium-laced absent central character. Many other images are projected. A house in the country and a house in the city are obviously important for him. A university in Edinburgh and a college in the center of London. A house, a tunnel system. The Poster Studio and Richard Wolff's film studio. All these images indicate a past in a rather hollow, sloppy way. During this period, Erasmus does not talk and he does not sing. But you can see varied images and hear loud music. The sounds are extremely variable, including a soundtrack for the "Snow Dancing" party.

Towards the end of this sequence, you realize that some people are moving around behind him. They are wearing "snaking suits," a bit like wetsuits that have been altered. Long tails have been added to these outfits. The people who are wearing them crawl along the floor, using their arms in order to move, swinging their tails from side to side. This is the best way for them to travel across the set. They are never clearly visible, but remain in the middle distance. Erasmus is blind to this activity but it does seem to make him a little more agitated. It is as if they were a rather clumsy illustration of an Erasmus idea. It is about time that he snapped out of his reverie, and thankfully he begins to talk about the shop windows. This is clearly one of the key elements of his absence that really interests him. He describes the displays and tries to explain the fact that he doesn't completely understand what they are and what they are for. He talks about the idea of debate. And reveals that he is not so sure what is going to happen tonight in the house or on his tour. He is particularly drawn to the shop front that carries the sign "Microworld," Erasmus finds the name funny. After enough opium, anyone could get sucked into this discussion of shops and electronic communication.

Very slowly the screens hiding the diners have been pulled back and the lights are fading up. You can now see all the dinner guests once more. The traffic island starts to slide towards the back of the stage area and while this is happening the house stays where it is, but the dining room area separates away and slides towards the front of the set. This allows us to study all of the parallel people. The others. As the dining room locks to the front of the stage, the table starts to rotate and each person gets up in turn and comes to stand where Erasmus had been on the traffic island. With a full spotlight you have a chance to study each of them. The American man with the glasses and the bald head. The Japanese technologist and prototype fetishist. The American musician and frustrated songwriter. "Two Step Side Step." The Canadian public speaker and finally Harriet, with her stiff, English attitude that fits so well with a desire for radical Libertarian development. A development that none of them truly wants. If they did, they would do something tonight. But they fear the worst. Not the people who will come later, but the true Georgians. For Erasmus and Harriet will leave the right conditions for the development of contradictory sociopolitical impulses.

After the inspection process, the guests return to their places at the dinner table. Murry comes forward and explains that he is really happy to be at the dinner, after a short time he begins to hum a stupid, happy, but not unpleasant tune. Then he begins to sing about how pleased he is with the way in which the evening is going and what a privilege it is for him to be included at a salmon supper like this. Fortunately the focus begins to shift once more to Erasmus who throughout this time has been wandering around in a rather nervous and increasingly clumsy way. He is heading for a collapse. Full of opium and frightened to face up to what is going to take place. Erasmus can remember the future. Always moving towards the back of the stage. A spotlight follows him as he wanders around and Murry continues to hum his stupid song. Erasmus is moving and Murry turns his attention to the mantelpiece. Inspecting each item in turn. The other guests are smiling at him, they find his actions amusing. So will the father of Brian Wilson really inherit all this potential and pass it on to his son? "I get around" is, after all, Erasmus's current motto.

Erasmus is agitated, staggering around in near darkness. Still moving between one shop and another towards the back of the stage. He flickers between exhaustion and elation. The lighting at this point is completely out of control. Suddenly, without warning, McNamara stands up and everyone stops what they were doing. McNamara makes a very powerful speech, powerful because it sounds so reasonable. He talks about the idea of the individual. And the way the individual has been rationalized in Western cultures. He also talks about the fact that whenever you try and analyze something in a new way you tend to lay down certain fixed points because there is no other way you can proceed. And although the specific things you talk about in your analysis may not be so interesting for people, those little markers and spots that you leave behind, those moments of minor conclusion, are really useful for the development of further debate. These micro-conclusions are the powerful elements of analysis and they can really alter the way in which people consider society. It is possible that he is claiming to be more interested in structure than content. This is because he is rather worried about using

metaphors and cannot cope with symbolic rationalizations. This is clearly not such a problem for the other people, but it really worries McNamara. He starts reflecting upon Erasmus's actions tonight. Somehow he is now functioning as a commentator. Taking stock of the whole situation. Talking the ideas of a parallel historian. Someone from the past who operates as "The Other Man," someone who works alongside other people but is not quite at the center of things. With certain situations, people can get stuck, feeling that things happen to them and not the other way round. McNamara explains how he feels very close to this mode of behavior. He can really appreciate what Erasmus is doing. But the more he tries to plead sympathy with Erasmus, talking about Malthus and other Georgian thinkers, the more animated and agitated Erasmus becomes. As things really get going, he starts marching around towards the back of the stage and just occasionally comes forwards. When Erasmus moves to the front he stares hard at McNamara before going back and resuming his avoidance.

The others take their turns on the traffic island. Every time someone comes forward to speak about their ideas, as McNamara is doing at the moment, Erasmus comes up really close to them and checks them out extremely carefully. This activity seems to give him pleasure. It is as if they were all trying to work something out, to understand, but they cannot see their host. Maybe he holds the key to future events. There will be no revolution. Erasmus is happy just to look at the people he brought together for this one night. At this point, for example, he is going through McNamara's pockets. While unable to completely control his guests, he can at least examine and absorb them. This process begins to overwhelm him. He starts to try and interrupt and he wins the "talk the loudest competition" for volume with his piercing falsetto. This is inevitable even though the others cannot hear him. Erasmus, as always, drowning everyone out with talk of opium and free thinking.

[center] **Part 5: Conclusion, "Go Home"**

Ibuka!, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, 1995. Photograph: Di Gorni.

Dumping goods on other markets. A technique employed to ensure the corruption of that longed-for fantasy of free trade and exchange. It has been a recurring subtext. A matter of great concern to all the people here. Well, maybe not to Murry, but even he is starting to believe that he is part of this free-market dynamic. After all, it is people like him who will defend it most rigorously, even while hiding behind a protectionist position that would stun Erasmus, if he were to truly understand it.

The white tablecloth is stained. Some of the guests have even made notes directly onto its surface. It seems as if this house has no note paper. There is a rumor that later in life, or was it earlier, Erasmus wrote some poetry. This may be true, but he certainly wasn't writing much at the time of this meal. Near the beginning of the supper there had been a search for paper and pens at a point when Masaru felt it necessary to explain the U-shaped pricing curve. Despite Elsie's thorough search through the house, not a single scrap of paper or any writing implements could be found. Fortunately Bob had a pen, so they began to work straight onto the tablecloth. Elsie didn't approve, Harriet loved the idea, McNamara thought it a practical solution, Masaru was no longer paying attention, and Murry didn't care either way.

And we can see them all sitting there. The question of whether or not they have eaten anything is irrelevant to the narrative. Erasmus is still trying to communicate.

"Yes, yes." Erasmus is warming up, and so late in the day. "Guilds, apprentices, and societies. But not the workers. An optimism prevailed and it is one that still exists for me. A belief in the inexorable rise of the human—that people stuck in a specific social crisis will rise out of it. A relative growth based on free thinking and lack of overwhelming control. I enjoy hearing your people harking back to a time before their confused attempts at social responsibility. We believed that people would help themselves but we could not imagine how they would do it. The ideas shifted across the Atlantic and the channel. We could not imagine them using our terminology. What a rise. The development of a language that can deal with the whole idea of communication. Something to be subjected to and something to involve yourself in. The adjustment of Elysian Utopias into materialist Utopias. The variability and mutability of nonconformist theory. A degree of pragmatism. And we had it all. Ecology. Biology. Technology and a lump of opium dissolved. Toying with another salmon supper."

So there was a book concerning a dinner and now there could be a musical too. Part of a structure that has been rearranged and is now open to further adaptation using this new book as a guide. Looking for parallel positions and playing within the spaces that are opened up as a result of this approach. *Ibuka!* is rather closely connected to an attempt to come to terms with an entertainment media that frequently focuses upon time slips as an essential part of its construction but also it is just a potential musical/exhibition. *Ibuka!* could be done. Yet it is not necessary to research every part. A reading of the book *Erasmus Is Late* could already set up a number of possibilities. *Ibuka!* Come into the office with a pair of headphones taped to your head and everything will become clear.

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Liam Gillick is a New York-based artist known for contributions in sculpture, video, architecture, and text. His work focuses on the contemporary management of labor, time, and aesthetics extended through a distinctive conception of exhibition as a medium in its own right. His work is divided between abstraction based on social and political structures of the present and texts, films, and graphics that often appear to contradict and comment upon the apparent clarity of his structures. Rather than an earlier reliance upon geometry, systems, and subjective visions, Gillick's abstract works are derived from the secondary structures emerging from an information-based society of renovation, negotiation, and discourse. A theorist, curator, and educator as well as an artist, his wider body of work includes published essays and texts, lectures, and curatorial and collaborative projects. Gillick's work reflects upon conditions of production in a postindustrial landscape, including the aesthetics of economy, labor, and social organization. His work exposes the dysfunctional aspects of a modernist legacy in terms of abstraction and architecture when framed within a globalized, neoliberal consensus, and extends into a structural rethinking of the exhibition as a form. He has produced a number of short films since the late 2000s which address the construction of the creative persona in light of the enduring mutability of the contemporary artist as a cultural figure: *Margin Time* (2012), *The Heavenly Lagoon* (2013), and *Hamilton: A Film by Liam Gillick* (2014). The book *Industry and Intelligence: Contemporary Art Since 1820* was published by Columbia University Press in March 2016.

1
The book *Ibuka!* was originally published by Nicolaus Schafhausen at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 1995. German translation: Clara Drechsler. Graphic design and production: Justus Köhncke.

2
From Liam Gillick, *Erasmus Is Late* (Book Works, 1995).

3
From Liam Gillick, *Erasmus Is Late* (Book Works, 1995).