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C O N T A C T

a journal of contemporary music

33

Christopher Fox Loops, Overtones and
Erhard Grosskopf

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some answers to some questions

David Smeyers The Hespos phenomenon:
a performer's point of view

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R. Wood Massi Lectures on Anarchy:
John Cage at Wesleyan

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Keith Potter

C O N T A C T

A journal of contemporary music **no.33** Autumn 1988

Edited by Keith Potter, Hilary Bracefield, Celia Duffy, Christopher Fox, Roger Heaton and Peter Owens

This issue is edited by Celia Duffy and Christopher Fox

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Editorial

The editors of *Contact* welcome the submission of articles and reports to be considered for publication; they are also glad to discuss proposals for such items. All material (including quoted matter and notes) should be typed double spaced with margins of at least 2.5cm (1"); top copy should be submitted. Contributions should be sent to Christopher Fox, 3 Old Moor Lane, York, YO2 2QE. Material for review should be sent to Mrs Hilary Bracefield, Department of Music, University of Ulster, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT37 0QB.

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Editorial

It is hard to believe that it is exactly eighteen years ago that the first *Contact* appeared, dated Spring 1971, and edited by Keith Potter and Chris Villars. It is equally hard for me to believe that eighteen years on, the current issue is No. 33, and the last one in which Keith Potter will appear as one of the editors. But eighteen years is a long time to bear the agonies and the frustrations of bringing out a music journal, even though the compensations have been many, and although I cannot imagine *Contact* without Keith, I can understand that the time has come for him to move on to other things.

That first *Contact*, a cyclostyled 30-page journal (cost: 6p) was thought up in the idealistic days of the beginning of the seventies by a student of music and a student of philosophy at Birmingham University. Its editorial explained why the journal took its name: 'to make CONTACT between those involved in the practice, study and enjoyment of the widely differing forms that contemporary music takes.' Other aims included producing 'a journal devoted to the discussion of twentieth century music of all kinds' and bringing 'to everyone's attention the extremely varied nature of the present-day musical scene.'

One turns to the contents of that first issue with some amazement, for amongst its contributors were David H. Cox on Varèse, Richard Middleton on the musical significance of pop, Peter Dickinson on the improvisatory avant-garde, and John Casken writing critically about Michael Tippett's views of modern music. There was an interview with Justin Connolly, reviews of concerts in Birmingham and short articles on jazz and rock. The editors were trying to cover the complete contemporary music scene, and early issues continued to bemoan the paucity of articles on jazz or folk or pop, though the span of articles that *Contact* has published in its eighteen years is, I think, a truly catholic selection, reflecting the music that needed to be written about rather than that which the editors thought should be covered.

In all of this time Keith has remained the catalyst, planning the issues, cajoling articles out of reluctant contributors, ferreting out ideas and keeping abreast of developments worldwide. Chris Villars left Birmingham after two issues came out, and although I'd been trying not to get involved I found myself an editor with No. 3. I'd helped to sell No. 1 and assemble No. 2: the early issues all involved painful typing and correcting sessions and fearful bouts of duplicating in the long-suffering Music Department and Student Union offices, following which piles of pages were placed on a library table for press-ganged volunteers to run round until the issue was complete. There were about 160 copies prepared of No. 1, all long since sold, and perhaps now collectors' items. There were always some volunteers to help, but the editorial team has remained both small and long-serving. David Roberts joined us from No. 6 right until No. 29, John Shepherd from Nos. 10-22, and Rosemary Roberts from Nos. 22-29. With the departure of David and Rosemary Roberts in 1985 the present team was formed, and the remaining four are sorry to lose the expertise of Roger Heaton, who also departs after this issue, and are contemplating the daunting task of producing the journal without its founding editor.

It is amusing, now, to look at the first ten cyclostyled issues, but they chronicle an important part of Great Britain's musical concerns from 1971 to 1975. There is

an emphasis on Schoenberg – articles on whom appear in nearly every issue (including one by Arnold Whittall in No. 6) – but there are also articles on Jani Christou, Xenakis, Takemitsu and music in Scandinavia, Silesia, Japan and Australia. There are articles on Tippett and Ives, but also on Cage, Bruce Cole and Bertram Turetzky. Above all, there is an early recognition of the importance of British experimental music, with extensive reviews of the Experimental Music Catalogue across four issues, and there is a pioneering article on electronic music by Peter Manning in No. 7.

The need for a Schoenberg series was explained by Keith in an editorial in No. 9 – that 'there was very little published material in English that was sufficiently generalised to be intelligible to even the more than averagely interested music student and yet at the same time was sufficiently detailed to be of use.' In the year of Schoenberg's centenary Keith found the situation much improved, and ends the series with views of Schoenberg by six composers: Geoffrey Burgon, Jonathan Harvey, John Joubert, Virgil Thomson, Stuart Ward, and Hugh Wood. This issue helped us get our first advertisements, painstakingly Gestefaxed, a kind of reproduction largely forgotten. Calls for subscribers had begun in No. 6 – 80p for six issues, which, we proudly proclaimed, included postage. It took a long time for some of those early subscribers to reach their renewal time. It caused us no little amusement, incidentally, when the first subscriber – who stayed with us for many years – was found to be appropriately named A. C. Tune.

Keith's own contributions are found largely in reviews. His first in No. 2 (1971) disarmingly begins 'I have unfortunately mislaid my original draft for the review of this concert, and so I shall confine myself to a few remarks of a general nature', but he would be pleased with his acuteness in noting in another in the same issue the 'remarkable talent' of Felicity Lott (soprano) who 'gave what appeared to be an admirable and accurate performance of four songs from Peter Lawson's cycle *Sitting in Farmyard Mud*' and who showed 'a maturity that is rare in such a young singer.' Keith would, however, ruefully recall over many years that his first article, in No. 4, on Peter Maxwell Davies, promised a conclusion which has never appeared. Keith's early interest in experimental music shows in interviews with Michael Parsons (No. 8) and Cornelius Cardew (No. 10) and a perceptive review of Michael Nyman's book *Experimental Music*, also in No. 10.

As Keith moved from Birmingham to Cardiff to York, discussion proceeded on enlarging the magazine, announced in No. 10. Despite warnings of the great cost of the new format from No. 11 onwards (a devastating hike from 15p to 25p), Keith wrote that 'he hoped that readers will note that we continue to be not just the only magazine in this country devoted completely to contemporary music of all kinds, but also one of the cheapest music magazines available.' But as No. 11 (1975) explained, the aims of the magazine remain 'to promote informed discussion of all aspects of twentieth century music with special reference to that of our own time.' With No. 11 also began the financial support of the Arts Council for which we have been grateful ever since. Birmingham University Music Society gave support for the first thirteen issues, while Yorkshire Arts Association helped with Nos. 11-14.

And so to the A4 series. Long-term readers will know that No. 12 introduced a new cover design, which lasted until No. 24, with modifications, and with the subtitle 'Today's Music'; it took the price from 25p to £1. A revamp for Nos. 25-30 introduced the current subtitle 'A journal of contemporary music'; our current modified cover design began with No. 31, and the present price of £2.50 does not, I hope, seem excessive for the number of words that *Contact* gives you in each issue.

A glance at the inside front cover of this issue gives an idea of the scope of the articles *Contact* has published from No. 16 (Spring 1977) to today. Its breadth and depth and its ability to keep up with recent trends, even foreshadowing them, is in itself a tribute to Keith's comprehensive knowledge of and lively interest in music of our time. It is a pity that Nos. 11-15 are out of print for they include articles on, for instance, music in Canada, and on George Crumb, Miles Davis, Witold Lutoslawski, Henri Pousseur, Howard Riley, David Bedford, Jean-Yves Bosseur, and Mauricio Kagel, among others. Keith himself contributes searching interviews with Murray Schafer and Philip Glass (with John Shepherd and Dave Smith, respectively). And from No. 16 on as one can see, the range of composers covered is remarkable, as is the range and stature of contributors: it would indeed be invidious to draw attention to any in particular. Keith's attempts to assemble 'theme' issues didn't always succeed, but I would like to draw attention to some of the features of these eighteen years of *Contact* under Keith's guidance.

Firstly, our reviews. Started as parochial reviews of Birmingham events, they have become, I believe, important chronicles of the events of nearly twenty years of contemporary music, through surveys of records, concerts and festivals, as well as of scores, books and little magazines. The *Music in Society* series, championed by John Shepherd, running during issues 14 and 19 was an important contribution to the sociological study of music, which we have intermittently continued. The early article on electronic music by Peter Manning was followed by a series on electronic music studios in Great Britain (Nos 12-19) which only ceased because there are now other ways for such information to be disseminated. Another popular series was the New Music Diary, started by Keith on his move from York to London (No. 15), continued by Malcolm Barry in No. 19 and taken over by the late Brigitte Schiffer until No. 22 – a period of four years of London musicmaking closely chronicled with wit, perception and humour, and great attention to detail. More recently, Keith has cajoled various writers into argumentative pieces for *Controversies Incorporated*, begun with an article by James Ingram on the notation of time in No. 29, and still happily bowling along in this issue. Keith has always also sought introductory articles on music in various countries. Information on musical trends in Western Europe and USA was little enough available in Great Britain in the seventies, but our surveys of music in Eastern Europe, Albania, Australia, Canada and Brazil have also been part of Keith's plan. The present editors hope to keep *Contact's* brief as wide as Keith's always was – a tall order!

The work of editing has always kept Keith from writing as much as he would have liked. Voluminous reviews of festivals in Warsaw, Huddersfield, Glasgow and Zagreb, and titbits from visits to USA and Europe

have appeared; and there have been books and scores reviewed, and two long, thoughtful surveys of improvisatory music on record (Nos. 18 and 21). Scattered through the last nine years' issues, however, have been major articles on composers Keith has studied in depth: Brian Ferneyhough (No. 20), Gavin Bryars (No. 22), Louis Andriessen (No. 23) and Steve Reich (No. 29). These articles show the care and attention he lavishes on every project he undertakes. Now that he is relieved of the drudgery of editorial work, I am hoping that the knowledge gained over the last eighteen years of his experience of contemporary music will emerge in further articles for us.

As Keith leaves the editorial board, and as one who has worked closely with him for the duration of his editorship, I am glad to be able to pay tribute to his comprehensiveness, his thoroughness, his high standards of editing, checking, presentation and writing, and his utter commitment to contemporary music. The present editorial board hope that *Contact* can keep the standards which Keith has held for eighteen years; we hope that Keith will write for us as regularly as possible; and we point again to *Contact: a journal of contemporary music* Nos. 1-33 as a body of material which is a lasting tribute to one man's vision.

Hilary Bracefield

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Christopher Fox

Loops, overtones and Erhard Grosskopf

Erhard Grosskopf is in his mid-fifties; he lives in West Berlin, the city of his birth, and his music, like that of all but a handful of continental European composers, is virtually unknown in Britain. What makes Grosskopf interesting, in a way that distinguishes him from many of those other unfamiliar Europeans, is the synthesis in his music of a number of techniques which have conventionally been regarded as being at odds with one another. Few composers, for example, have successfully wedded strongly periodic rhythms to non-repetitive melodic forms within a music whose harmonic organisation is simultaneously mobile and derived from the harmonic series.

Grosskopf is also unusual for the range of his musical allegiances: in the early seventies his name often cropped up in association with 'political' composers like Christian Wolff and Cornelius Cardew; more recently he has fulfilled commissions from rather more mainstream organisations, including major orchestras both in Germany and in Japan; more recently still he has worked in the theatre with Achim Freyer and Lucinda Childs, artists whose reputations are closely linked with that of Philip Glass.¹ Electro-acoustic media (mostly concrete sounds manipulated on tape in the late sixties and seventies, mostly computer generated sounds in the eighties) rub shoulders with acoustic instruments in many of his works; he has also created site-specific installations, most recently *Ent-Art* (1987).² But the seeming disparity of these allegiances owes less to compositional schizophrenia on Grosskopf's part than to new music's preference for personalities which are readily strait-jacketed. Indeed, as Grosskopf's career has progressed it has become ever more evident that, although from year to year it may seem a little erratic, there is a recurrent body of ideas about the means and substance of music-making to which Grosskopf has remained consistently faithful.

The interview that follows was recorded in Grosskopf's Berlin apartment in December 1987, a few days after the première of his ballet *LICHTKNALL* (Lightbang), at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. Rather than breaking up the course of our conversation with annotations, I have chosen to use these opening paragraphs to introduce some of the central preoccupations of Grosskopf's music and of our discussion. *LICHTKNALL* itself was, inevitably, in the

background as we talked: the ballet is a culmination of Grosskopf's recent work and its commissioning and performance as part of Berlin's 750th birthday celebrations was by far the most public manifestation of Grosskopf's work to date. Nor was the ballet's première an unequivocal success: much of the critical reaction was hostile, with Rolf Michaelis' lyrical review in *Die Zeit*³ one of the few to take time both to describe the work and to reflect on the ideas it provoked.

Grosskopf talks frequently of the use in his work of 'looping technique' and this technique has lain at the heart of his compositional procedures since 1972, although, as he says, the use of a forerunner of looping technique is already evident in pieces from as early as *Nexus* (1968) for flute, percussion and tape. As the name implies, 'looping' was a technique which grew out of the classic analogue tape studio practice of making loops from lengths of magnetic tape; when the loop was played the sounds on the tape could be repeated over and over again. Steve Reich's 'phasing' technique grew out of his fascination with what occurs when two identical loops gradually move out of synchronisation with one another; Grosskopf's 'looping' technique grew out of his interest in overlapping tape loops of different lengths.

In the series of pieces entitled *Looping* from 1973 and 1974, Grosskopf combined instruments and tape (except in *Looping II* and *Looping V* which are for acoustic instruments only) and treats the live players as little more than human tape-loops, giving them short repeating patterns to play. By 1977 the technique had become more sophisticated: the five loops in use at the very start of the fourth movement of *Lied* for bass clarinet and string quartet (1977) each have their own particular durations (of five, seven, four, three and six quavers respectively as one reads down the score) and their own particular pitches and rhythms, but they are passed between the various instruments and are never repeated more than three times by any one instrument. Loops can also be replaced by silences of the same length or by repeated notes. The result is music which has the active, periodic rhythmic surface characteristic of much repetitive music but which, unlike American minimalist music of the same period, does not exploit repetition as an essential prerequisite of a music 'about' gradual processes of change (Example 1).

Example 1 Grosskopf: *Lied*, fourth movement, first 4 bars.

IV $\frac{4}{4}$ (♩ ca 90)

8. Half kein Salben und Binden

More recently Grosskopf has further developed his use of looping technique so that, instead of a particular duration almost always being identified with a particular phrase, as in the example from *Lied*, durations become units of time which may be filled with various *different* sorts of music (or with silence).⁴ What is looped in these works is not melodic patterns, but a series of time-proportions. But, as in the earlier looping pieces, a number of these time loops can be running simultaneously and, as in the earlier pieces, it is the combination of a number of loops of different durations that generates much of the music's fascination. In the works written since 1984, the micro-computer revolution has enabled Grosskopf to introduce yet more refinement: now the computer allows Grosskopf to model the inter-relationship through time of a particular collection of loops and to preview especially interesting (or potentially banal) conjunctions of durations. Thus he is able to decide whether the chosen loops are a suitable basis for the music *before* note-to-note composition has begun in earnest.

Like American (and indeed most European) minimalist music, Grosskopf's work eschews any rhythmic irrational more complex than the triplet. However, as the example from *Lied* demonstrates, Grosskopf does not attach the same structural importance to the bar-line as do most genuinely minimalist composers; for Grosskopf the bar-line is a useful notational convention by which to coordinate a group of musicians playing overlapping rhythmic patterns, rather than a measure of the metric character

of the music. As a result Grosskopf's music is often characterised by a rhythmic fluidity, the rhythms flowing back and forth across the bar-lines, that sets it apart from most of the other sorts of regularly pulsed new music that, at first hearing at least, it might seem to resemble.

The harmonic world of Grosskopf's music is similarly fluid and, again, the fluidity is the result of a sophisticated use of simple means. In his earliest works he made use of atonal and 12-note techniques, but by the time he came to write the *Looping* pieces he had started to experiment with harmonies derived from the harmonic series, discovering that it was possible to move, within a single harmonic series, from the simple consonance of the first few overtones to much denser, dissonant formations amongst the upper overtones. By overlaying the overtone series of a number of different fundamental pitches he discovered that it was also possible to write music in which particular harmonic centres shifted in and out of focus. The opening of *Slow motion* (1980) for koto and orchestra is an instance of music where the overtones of three fundamentals, each a perfect fifth apart, are gradually and slowly unfolded from the lowest fundamental, yielding music of extraordinary repose which nonetheless has no single predominant tonal centre. Elsewhere – in the viola, cello and double-bass trio, *Chaos* (1984), for example – Grosskopf writes music of a peculiarly pungent dissonance by extracting his materials from the upper reaches of different harmonic series (Example 2).

Example 2 Grosskopf: *Chaos*, first movement, beginning of third section.

$1, 3 \ 3/4$

The combination of relatively straightforward rhythms (which, nevertheless, tend to be ametric) with microtonal tunings (which need to be precisely tuned if their harmonic derivation is to be clear to the listener) is, as I suggested above, an unusual one, and Grosskopf's music requires unusually attentive players if it is to succeed. A central problem of this music (and of a number of other musics that do not readily fit either the minimalist or complex pigeon-holes) is that, while players must have a high degree of technical proficiency to meet the demands of the score, the music does not sound especially difficult. These pieces are not glitteringly virtuosic vehicles; in Grosskopf's music it is not so much that the instrument speaks the music, as that the music speaks through the instrument. Despite (or perhaps because of?) this problem this is music that deserves a much wider circulation: it is to be hoped that British musicians⁵ take up its challenge soon.

C.F. It seems to me that your music requires what somebody once called the 'other virtuosity': on the page it doesn't look very difficult but there are, nevertheless, real performance problems associated with it.

E.G. Yes, that's often been a real problem because musicians are educated in a traditional way and when they're presented with music where, for example, the dynamic is the most important parameter they often don't pay enough attention to it. They're used to music where dynamics are an overall design that they can put in at the end of learning the music, more or less how they feel it should be. But if dynamics – *crescendi*, *diminuendi* – are of real formal importance, as they are in my music, then musicians must respond to it like a new discipline. In my music a wrong dynamic is like playing a wrong note!

C.F. That's especially true in a piece like *Kalypso*, isn't it, where, certainly in my experience of listening

to Robyn Schulkowsky's performance, there seemed to be many finely graded *crescendi*.

E.G. Yes, in many pieces this is important because the loops which I'm using are coming and going and this is often achieved by changes in dynamics. Another thing is that musicians who like to modify dynamics often want to modify the tempo too, to 'dramatise' the music: they want to make their own interpretation before they have really got to grips with the music. My experience is that usually we have to go back to the score several times; the best solution is almost always to do it as it's written in the score! I've experienced this a lot: I've worked with some very interesting musicians and often they will offer suggestions that we try this or that change, and naturally I'm interested in what effect this might have on the music – but usually it doesn't work.

C.F. Rhythm and tempo often seem deceptively straightforward in your work. For example, the middle movement of the String Quartet presents each instrument with single notes separated by rests, so each part is individually quite easy to play, but these must all come together in a really tightly coordinated rhythmic structure. That's hard isn't it?

E.G. There are other pieces where it's even harder. I had an interesting experience with the Ensemble Modern when they played my *Kammersinfonie*. The last movement is like an abstract dance in which the twelve instruments all combine: every instrument has quite simple sounding things to play (although technically they are hard to do – leaps across very big intervals for horn, for example), but the music seems quite straightforward to each player as he works on it on his own. The Ensemble was in a very bad mood in the rehearsals – it seemed as if they didn't want to do the piece at all – so I asked them to play just what was written and we recorded. When they listened to the playback of the recording they suddenly understood what their role was in the music and from then on it worked much better.

For the Ardittis in the String Quartet there were similar problems, because everyone has to count very hard just to play a few notes. The bad thing is that, because the music is very clear, you can hear when the musicians make mistakes, especially in this movement which is in 19/8 all the way through and you can hear the rhythms which come out of this ensemble work (Example 3).

C.F. But that's a characteristic of a lot of the pieces isn't it, that your concern is with ensemble-playing and with what musicians can produce together, rather than with using each musician as some sort of individual dramatic protagonist – for you they're there primarily to contribute to some sort of collective enterprise.

E.G. For me musical structure – and I include in that the structure of the sound itself – is a very complex thing. Often I cannot work with just ordinary instrumentalists: the music needs musicians who, in performance, become part of the whole, really part of the whole, not soloists in the traditional sense, even though they are asked to do very difficult things.

C.F. Do you think that has anything to do with the fact that you came to music quite late and that also you came to composition as someone who read scores rather than as someone whose primary musical experience was gained through playing an instrument?

E.G. I don't think so, but I can't prove that it wouldn't have been different if, like most composers, I had been educated as an instrumentalist before beginning to compose. My main interest was composing right from the first moment, reading scores and then composing music: I don't feel that I am a performer, except in a sophisticated way through the medium of the electronic studio or the computer.

C.F. You studied church music – was that a particular choice that you made?

E.G. The beginning of my musical adventure had been in church: I heard Bach, and Reger – whose music I

must say made a big impression on me at that time. And I sang in a choir, a very good choir in Hannover, the Bach Choir, so that was my entry into music. Also I think that church music, especially when you are rather late starting your musical education, offers a lot of basic education – all that teaching of counterpoint! **C.F. Was church music something you studied in music college?**

E.G. No. I went to a school for church music, where I also met Ernst Pepping who was later my composition teacher. He was a very good teacher of counterpoint too, so I got a very good fundamental education rather late in my life as a musician! I was already over 20; I'd begun with other studies before, studying medicine and philosophy, although I think that was more to make time to prepare for music school.

C.F. In the seventies I read your name quite regularly in connection with people like Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff and Frederic Rzewski; as a group of composers you were always being cited as being involved in a 'political' music that was left of centre.⁶ In retrospect it seems a rather awkward grouping but did it feel like a new direction to you at the time?

E.G. I feel that I was forced to do something different: it was a time of war, the Vietnam War, and we were part of this war because we were in the West and allies of the USA, so I was forced to do something other than what I would have done if the war had not existed. And like any wartime it wasn't good for everything: I couldn't think of music all the time; I thought a lot about how we could influence events and influence people to end the war and of course this had an influence on the music. The best of it was that I was forced to rethink my situation as an artist and when I came back to pure music I was a little different, and not for the worse!

C.F. I haven't heard the early music but just looking at the titles there's a very obvious shift from titles like 'sonata' to titles like *Night Tracks* and *Looping*.

Example 3 Grosskopf String Quartet, second movement (opening)

|| 19
8 (♩ = 180) Moment, ins Ungewisse geöffnet

The musical score is presented in four staves. The top staff is Violin I, the second is Violin II, the third is Viola, and the fourth is Cello/Double Bass. The time signature is 19/8. The score begins at measure 112. The music is characterized by complex, syncopated rhythms and frequent accents. Dynamic markings include *p* and *pp*. There are several slurs and phrasing marks throughout the passage. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

*) Akzente sehr stark und unvermittelt

E.G. I think the change in my music would have happened anyway: it began before my political engagement and then for some years I wrote very little, but when I went back to writing more music a lot had happened.

C.F. There are some people – the sort of people who decried Nono's politically explicit music, for example – for whom politics and music are anathema, but it seems to me to be important that artists don't shut themselves off, even if the music 'suffers'. Looking round an exhibition like *Berlin, Berlin* it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the most important work is that by people like Grosz who did look long and hard at the society in which they lived. Were your 'Vietnam' pieces an attempt to do the same sort of thing?

E.G. At that time two influences came together: one was to use speech sounds, the other was the political influence. This started to happen as early as 1969 in a piece like *Dialectics*, which I did for the Osaka Expo, where I used a quasi-sentence from Stokely Carmichael which I developed in a very abstract musical way from white noise at the beginning to the spoken sentence at the end, passing through all the intermediate steps in between in the music.

C.F. And was it about that time that you started to use the looping technique as well?

E.G. I didn't really research it when I first used it but it's very clear that I'd started to use it by 1971-2.

C.F. That sort of clarification of technique, introducing a technique like looping which is quite audible, could also be related to a desire to speak through the music more clearly.

E.G. But these things were already coming up in the earlier music as well and only when I became aware of it did I develop it as a conscious technique. It wasn't so much that I discovered the technique but rather that it emerged in my music.

C.F. What were the first things to be looped: pitches or rhythms?

E.G. Both: in the early electronic pieces I used little phrases of pitches and rhythm and repeated them and then put them together with other loops. There are little things like this in a piece from 1968, *Nexus* for flute, percussion and tape.

C.F. And that technique's carried on?

E.G. Yes, it's still there. I'm still working with the technique, although it's changed very much: now I can go down to the most basic loops of the piece. Mostly when you hear the music you can't analyse the loops very easily because they combine to form many layers, but it gives me the feeling that the whole structure is built in a very natural way. It seems to me that this periodic method of using loops is a very natural thing, even when I combine them in a very complex way.

C.F. In a piece like *Kalypso* does each instrument have its own loop, or how does the technique work? I noticed that there are places where particular instruments predominate; in most people's music that would probably constitute some sort of climax, especially if it's one of the louder instruments that predominates, but in *Kalypso* it feels more as if the flow of events has simply become denser, in the same way that the frequency of a natural phenomenon, like waves reaching a beach, varies.

E.G. In *Kalypso* I use the different groups of instruments – wood, metal and skins – like three different instruments or like an ensemble of three percussionists or instrumental groups. So the music is put together like an ensemble piece and the groups can

have different dynamics: one group may be *pianissimo* while the other has a *crescendo* to *fortissimo*. That's very hard for one player, of course! And in *Kalypso* these three instrumental groups also represent different layers of the time and sound structure of the piece, so it really is like music in three parts.

C.F. Do you mean that the groups move at different speeds?

E.G. Sometimes: every group has its own way of developing rhythm and dynamics, so in an ideal performance they should be played very polyphonically . . . I don't know if that's possible!

C.F. Did the use of the overtone series as a source of harmonic ideas come later than the use of the looping technique? Does that work in the same way, with interlocking layers of harmonies?

E.G. It's similar. The harmonic structure is as natural for me as the looping of periodic phrases; when I combine the harmonic spectra of different pitches I can get very complex sounds out of these combinations. I feel that my harmonic thinking changed through this use of different layers of harmonic spectra because now the harmonies appear as the result of a process. I don't think in terms of using this or that chord with this or that sort of dissonance – it's very different. Let's say I have the harmonic spectra of three different pitches: when they are combined give me constellations which make, as a result, the harmony. In this way I can have harmonies which even when they are very simple are part of a very complex construction.

C.F. In the middle movement of *LICHTKNALL* does the music descend through a single harmony or is it made up from a series of harmonic layers?

E.G. It's both. The main structure is a single harmonic spectrum, based on B, and the music begins on the 32nd harmonic and moves around this, going up to the 40th partial before it starts to gradually come down to the fundamental at the end. In the instrumental group there are other harmonic spectra, but the structure on B dominates the piece and its entire time structure; when other sounds appear it's only within this time structure, so that ensures that the music is very focussed.

C.F. In a piece like *Quintett über den Herbstanfang* you seem to be able to move from very dense harmonies to very simple harmonies. Is that progression composed into the process of the whole piece?

E.G. For me it's much more interesting to compose like this, it's much more of an adventure to see how the piece develops through its entire duration. On the other hand it can present problems, particularly in the piece you mentioned. *Quintett* is composed in five layers: five layers of harmonies of time structure and of rhythm, and it's only at the very end that you can understand the whole piece.

C.F. And the same is true, I think, of the last part of *LICHTKNALL* – that too has to be heard right the way through. You mentioned that in *Quintett* there was a layer of time structure and a layer of rhythms . . .

E.G. No, they're the same: in one layer there's the time structure and out of this the rhythms are developed but, on the other hand, that layer is different from the other layers. Each of the five layers has the same material, but because each layer develops differently with different meeting-points the harmonic and rhythmic constellations that result are different. When I started composing I just followed my intuition as to when to put in a new rhythm or another sound, but with the looping technique it's much clearer because

the meeting-points of the different loops give me an excuse to change things.

C.F. Presumably, as the layers move across one another they produce all sorts of unexpected co-incidences.

E.G. I can never predict all the things that may occur; it's an adventure every time. But I do a lot of research – that's one reason why I began using the computer some years ago, so that I could research my structures and select sections which would produce more or less the results I want.

C.F. So you program the computer to produce the structure?

E.G. When I first start to think about a piece I find the proportions I want to use and then I research how these proportions will work. Sometimes the particular combinations of proportions involved in a piece could go on for years – in the *Konzert für orchester in zehn Gruppen* I used a time structure which would need millions of years to return to its starting point. But it's the same with shorter time structures – the combined proportions may produce a section with many meeting points or a 'quiet' section with very few meeting points and then I choose which part I want to use. It's like a path through time: with the computer I can go along it very quickly – like going from the past to the future – and select the part I want to use for the composition. If it doesn't work I can even input other proportions as I'm composing, although usually the proportions of a piece are completely developed beforehand.

In the *Quintett über den Herbstanfang* I had this tape of things happening on the street, fights between squatters and the police, and there was a particularly dramatic moment on the tape when a big construction lorry was turned over and it was out of this sound that I developed all the time proportions for this piece.

C.F. I see. I've used a similar sort of system but with the proviso that if a process begins at the beginning of a piece then its end will also be the end of the piece. But you're making pieces that may use just part of a huge time structure.

E.G. It's like painting on a tiny part of some great natural form!

C.F. How are the interruptions in LICHTKNALL, both the audible ones (the very loud synthesizer interjections) and also the danced interruptions, accommodated within the overall structure?

E.G. They were already there in the structure. They are places where meeting-points follow one another very quickly, so I introduced these sections as interruptions, bringing in very much louder sounds and introducing different rhythms into the music. The idea of having interludes in the dance was also developed out of these points – Lucinda Childs introduced interludes in the dance at the points where these interruptions occur, but she extended this idea in the dance and her interludes are longer. My interruptions are only between five and sixteen seconds long whereas in the dance the interludes are sometimes as long as five minutes.

C.F. I'm interested in your sense of structure in pieces with a number of movements. In LICHTKNALL the focus of the whole work seems to be the ten minute section just before the interval; the third part of the work, although it's as long as the rest of the work, is a memory of what's gone before, drawing things together and 'explaining' connections between earlier ideas in the work. But for many people in the audience this seemed quite difficult to take, perhaps because the conventional expectation in the theatre is

that everything is finally resolved at the very end of a piece, not in the middle.

E.G. It's hard for people who go to the theatre and expect drama rather than meditation or incident rather than spirituality, but I believe theatre should include all these things. It should be possible to have long periods of meditation through stage action, dance, music, whatever.

C.F. I found that when I saw the work a second time I enjoyed the last part much more. There is this fantastic event, the movement 'Lichtknall' itself, which leaves the audience wondering what on earth can possibly come next and, in a sense the last part flouts those expectations by doing something quite different. When you're writing a piece do you take people's possible preconceptions into consideration or do you hope that people will wipe themselves clean of expectations?

E.G. Mostly I write for myself: I do what interests me and then I hope that there are some people with the same interests!

C.F. You've just worked on two collaborative pieces, Ent-Art with Ulrich Baehr and LICHTKNALL with Achim Freyer and Lucinda Childs. Do you find collaboration a fruitful way of working?

E.G. I met Achim Freyer in 1974-5 and he asked me to do the music for a theatre piece; I made a tape piece and that was my first experience of working together in the theatre. I could never imagine being involved in such a collaboration unless the music was just as I wanted it to be. I have to be convinced that things will be just so, otherwise I can't do it. Achim Freyer was one person with whom I could work in this way. I also did some music for films and there too at the first meeting with the director I explained how I work and that if he couldn't accept this then I wouldn't do the film.

C.F. But do you find that when you're working with someone else, even though you're working on your terms, that things change in a way that they wouldn't if you were working on your own? In LICHTKNALL, for example, did things come into the piece that wouldn't have been there if you hadn't been working with Lucinda Childs and Achim Freyer?

E.G. I don't think so. In LICHTKNALL the music was done first so it gave the time-structure of each of the movements and of the work as a whole. Of course the visual element of the piece affects the reception of the piece: it's quite different from just hearing the music to also see the stage picture, the dancers, the lighting and so on.

C.F. In LICHTKNALL, when you conceived the piece, did you conceive it as a piece with dancers and, if so, was that conception anything like the final result?

E.G. No, but then when I write a purely instrumental piece I don't think of the players; I think of the instruments and their sounds but not about personalities. In LICHTKNALL I thought of the possibility of having dance with my music and of the stage and lights but that didn't affect the music.

C.F. So could LICHTKNALL survive as concert music?

E.G. Oh yes. I think so. But I don't know what will happen – it's a long piece, especially the last movement!⁸

C.F. I'm interested in the way you think about the reception of your music. Are you interested in taking it beyond the concert hall? Trio In Spirato, which needs a long reverberation time around the instruments, seems to be such a piece.

E.G. That was influenced by the acoustic in Speyer cathedral – it's a musical idea that's created the piece. I thought about other places to perform music in the seventies, when I rethought my attitude to the place of music in society, and at that time I also did concerts in places like cinemas and rock music venues. But I found that the music which I write, which is based on the spirit of chamber music, needs a good acoustic, so I've come to prefer rooms with good chamber music acoustics.

C.F. So your primary concern is with the room, not with society's ideas about what that room represents?

E.G. Yes, it's the music that changes the room, makes it another place. Every good performance is a ritual enabling you to really listen to the music which is performed and the acoustic can intensify this ritual. With electronics – live electronics or tape – it's possible to take music into many more types of room, even into the street, because you can influence the acoustic of the place in which you are performing. So this may also change the sorts of places where music may be performed.

C.F. In the seventies you rethought your ideas about what you were doing as a musician. I wondered what conclusions you came to then and whether they're still things in which you believe.

E.G. There's no conclusion, in that sense. I was forced to do something else and I was also influenced in a very positive way, so that at the end of this period my music had changed and not in a bad way. I don't have a conclusion!

- 1 Lucinda Childs danced in and choreographed the first performances of Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*; Freyer directed the German première of *Satyagraha* for the Stuttgart Opera and has gone on to direct all three of Glass's 'portrait' operas in Stuttgart.
- 2 The title *Ent-Art* is a corruption of 'entartete' (degenerate), an adjective made notorious when Goebbels labelled an exhibition of modernist art, chosen by the Nazis specifically to illustrate the evils of such work, as 'Entartete Kunst'. *Ent-Art* was a bunker – designed by Ulrich Baehr, with tapes made by Grosskopf – in the midst of the exhibition 'Mythos Berlin', which during the summer of 1987 took over the derelict site once occupied by the Anhalter Bahnhof.
- 3 Rolf Michaelis, 'Ein Glanz, ein Flug, ein Feuer', *Die Zeit* (20 November 1987), p. 67.
- 4 In *Ent-Art* looping technique was used to determine the collaging of recordings of a number of Grosskopf's pieces on the tapes heard in the installation.
- 5 Honourable exceptions to this stricture are Richard Bernas – who has conducted a number of Grosskopf works (most recently the *Kammersinfonie* (1982) with Music Projects/London) and was, as a member of the long-departed Gentle Fire, a dedicatee of *Looping III* – Roger Heaton and, inevitably, the Arditti Quartet.
- 6 See, for example, Christian Wolff's sleeve-notes for Ursula Oppens' record of Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* (Vanguard, VSD 71248, 1978) where Grosskopf is linked with Garrett List and Cardew as 'writing music with political subjects'.
- 7 The exhibition *Berlin, Berlin* was mounted in the Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin in 1987 and attempted an historical profile of the city through the visual arts. Especially impressive, to these eyes anyway, were a series of rooms filled with the work of Otto Dix, George Grosz and Christian Schad, images clinically documenting the infirmities of post-1918 German society.
- 8 Despite Grosskopf's initial misgivings, he has decided to present the 45 minute-long last movement of *LICHTKNALL*, 'Erinnerungen', as a concert work. The première was in the 1988 Insel Musik series in Berlin.

Selected works

* Indicates works published by Bote & Bock (Berlin/Wiesbaden).

** Indicates works published by Moeck Verlag (Celle).

All other works are published by the composer (Zietenstrasse 28, D-1000 Berlin 30).

- 1965 Sonate 1, piano trio*
Sonate 2, violin solo*
- 1966 Fantasie 2, soprano, flute and cello (to a text from Paul Celan)*
Sonata concertante 1, flute, violin, piano and chamber orchestra*
- 1967 Sonate 3, flute and string trio*
Sonata concertante 2, violin and chamber orchestra*
- 1968 Nexus, flute, percussion and tape (with an optical installation by B. Damke, ad lib.)*
Prozess de Veränderung, 4- or 2-channel tape**
- 1969 Dialectics, 3 instruments and tape**
- 1972 Sun, 3 instrumental groups**
Night Tracks, 4- or 2-channel tape**
- 1973 Looping I, 5 players and tape
Looping III, 5-7 instruments and tape
- 1974 Looping II, 8-9 instruments
Looping IV, rock group and tape
Looping V (für Wen?), 8 instruments
- 1977 Lieder, voice and guitar
Lied für Bassklarinette und Streichquartett
- 1978 Schattensprung (musikalisch-lyrisches Environment), soprano and small ensemble
Drei Stücke für Klavier (quasi una sonata), piano solo
- 1979 Drei Blätter (Luft-Wasser-Erde), flute and tape
- 1980 Konzert für orchester in zehn gruppen, large orchestra
Violinstück mit Obertönen, violin and tape
Slow Motion, koto and orchestra
- 1981 Zwischen Himmel und Erde, trombone and tape
Triodie (Solo-Quintett-Duo), piano and cello, bass clarinet, cello and percussion
Harmonien, two pianos [see also Lichtknall]
- 1982 Quintett über den Herbstanfang, orchestra
Kammersinfonie, wind trio, piano quartet and wind quintet
- 1983 Streichquartett 1
Ich saz uf eime Steine ('Katastrophen herz'), clarinet, string quintet, piano and percussion
- 1984 Chaos, viola, cello and double-bass
- 1985 Erebos, viola, cello, double-bass and orchestra
Oktett, clarinet, horn, bassoon and string quartet
- 1986 Trio InSpirato, 3 violins
Kalypso (coupe/transformation), percussionist and tape
- 1987 LICHTKNALL (eine apokalyptische Odysee) (Harmonien-Lichtknall-Erinnerungen), instruments and electronics
Ent-Art, electronic environment

Discography

Quintett über den Herbstanfang, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jacques Mercier, 'Zeitgenössische Musik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', vol. 9 (1970-80), Harmonia Mundi/EMI, DMR 1025-27.

Christopher F. Atton

Improvised Music: some answers to some questions

In the autumn of 1987 Philippe Renaud and I sent out a questionnaire to approximately fifty musicians whom we knew to be involved in the performance of improvised music. Our intention was to gauge the current climate of discussion of the music by its practitioners, and the questions we asked were intended to provoke such discussion over a wide range of subjects, from philosophical and theoretical issues to more everyday matters such as employment and practising. The present article concentrates largely on those more philosophical issues, and should therefore not be considered as a full report on the answers we received.¹ However, I have added some more general material at the end of the article, in order to take the discussion out of the purely analytical realm and to locate it more in the field of public performance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the musicians who took considerable pains to reply (just over half of our interviewees replied), especially since the use of a postal questionnaire inevitably places a greater burden on the respondents. It is this 'burden' that is represented in the following pages.

A Question of Technique (inter alia)

Before its demise in 1979, the journal *Musics* was very much the primary platform in Britain for the discussion of improvised music (mostly, and naturally, by musicians). Since that time there have been isolated instances of similar ventures (for example the excellent Association of Improvising Musicians publication *Improvisation: history, directions, practice*) and, of course, what is now considered by many as the best book concerning this music, *Improvisation* by Derek Bailey.² We have also seen the rise (and fall, now, it seems . . .) of *The Wire*, which has provided some excellent coverage of improvised music. However, Alan Durant makes a valuable point when he says that 'much of the theoretical argument about improvised music – as musicians concerned are often keen to insist – has not been conducted by musicians at all.'³ He goes on to posit three hypotheses about what improvisation is, which he feels represent some of the fundamental concerns of the music. Briefly, these are: the pre-eminence of invention and abhorrence of cliché in the music; the importance of human relationships in the music; the potential the music allows for full virtuosity. It was these last two that have interested me most in any discussion of improvised music and consequently they formed the basis of the first question on our questionnaire. The value in highlighting such ideological concerns was to discover their significance in the practice of the individual musician; by alluding to such concerns I was interested in seeing for whom they were fundamentals, for whom irrelevant and for whom *bêtes noires*. In short, I was asking: what is your improvising about?

However, the specific elements of this first question are threefold and I have decided to present the discussion of each separately, in spite of the inevitable overlap. These are 1) the significance of virtuosity in improvised music or, perhaps more properly, the redefining of technique and virtuosity that occurs in improvised music; 2) the collectivity of improvised music, and whether such an approach has parallels in folk music (which may also be seen as having developed from a collective process); 3) the social and educative factors present in improvised music insofar as it is an activity in which anyone can engage and learn about music-making (the act of musical creation) instantaneously. To begin, Gerry Gold's reply to this first question describes quite usefully some of the operations and relationships present in the act of improvising in a group:

The successful creation of music through the process of improvisation demands that the musicians participating continuously monitor the changes and developments occurring throughout the performance. Each minute variation in pitch, volume, frequency of rhythm etc. must be comprehended in relation to the piece of music as it unfolds, and analysed to determine its significance for the whole. Care must be taken to avoid hearing each new sound as separate and unconnected, since this leads to a disjointed, disparate performance devoid of any focus or continuity. Similarly, each concert, performance or rehearsal must be approached not as a single event, but as part of the continuous evolution of music, which itself forms part of the evolution of humanity's need to maintain an harmonious relationship with Nature.

'Technique? It's hard fun' ran the slogan on the back cover of *Musics* 19, an issue which dealt at length with the definition of technique within improvisation. Phil Wachsmann is quoted as defining technique as 'the ability to sufficiently communicate what you want. You cannot achieve technique without having something to say, neither can you communicate much without the technique to do so.'⁴ The deficiency in this is that it only works if one accepts that music (or any art) is a vessel, the form through which the artist's expression (object of thought, concept, idea . . .) is mediated. This is arguably a more straightforward definition when figurative or programmatic works are considered (e.g., landscape painting, opera, the elegy), but when the form is essentially abstract – that is, it possesses no identifiable conventions by which the work may be judged – then how are we to assess just what is being communicated? Are we to look for a literary or verbal object, say, a political message or a personal, emotive opinion or what? At this level, is the artistic product perhaps rather more an extension (or an indivisible part) of the artist in that the artist is not so much saying something (essentially extra-musical) through a medium, but that what is being expressed is the musical expression itself?

Yet to what extent does one need to develop technique? The second part of Phil Wachsmann's definition implies that the virtuoso will be able to communicate more effectively than the dilettante. But communicate *what* more effectively? If one accepts the form/content division, then it is clear that all the technique in the world will be of little avail if there is nothing in the musician's mind to communicate; but if one accepts the more interlinked view of mind and music then could not technique perhaps get in the way of creativity, resulting in displays of empty virtuosity? Ken Hyder developed this point in his reply:

Personally, technical virtuosity does not interest me as a player. You learn what you need to play what you want to play. It's what you want to play that's important, and what you have to say. There are players whose playing is virtuosic and who have something to say and they say it well. There are others who are bursting with technique, but play nothing. Another way to look at it is music versus magic. While it is possible to appreciate musicality, musicality is not the purpose of performance for me. The aim is to create magic moments, and magic moments are often created with the minimum use of technique. But perhaps we should be talking about what we mean by technique, for there are techniques which are not at all virtuosic in the common understanding of the word. There are techniques for preparing the mind for performance which are ultimately more important than straightforward musical techniques.

Similarly, Sylvia Hallett talks of 'the virtuoso of the mind – having good ears and good ideas, and being able to think and feel music intelligently'. Virtually everyone felt that technical virtuosity was by no means an essential feature: 'you only need as much technique as is necessary to do what you want – technique can stand in the way of beautiful music as much as the lack of it can' (Allan Smith). George Haslam 'would expect to hear the themes of creativity, emotion, communication; not virtuosity.' 'Technical virtuosity is useful, but not essential,' said Clive Bell, 'intelligence, feeling and something to say are also important'.

Clearly, one cannot replace virtuosity with these other skills, but one must be able to assess the value of virtuosity in relation to the other aspects of the performance. Thus says Tim Hodgkinson:

The assessment of individual virtuosity requires some kind of prior agreement about conventions of excellence in performance on that instrument; where these agreements are manifestly not in play, virtuosity stops being the point, and we are, in essence, judging the degree of integration of all aspects of the performance; is the way that Charlie Patton played guitar right for the context, the music that he created? Is the way Thelonius Monk played right for his own musical context? Even within a well-established tradition, virtuosic music has always been in danger of remaining a minor form, a means of titillating the public, in which technique itself becomes an object of admiration. Virtuosity, in this sense of virtuosic display, is a special danger for the improviser because the definition of *aesthetic* imperatives is much more open. The studied 'anti-virtuosity' of a Steve Beresford is perhaps evidence of a shared anxiety about this.

But if Steve Beresford and others did share an anxiety about empty virtuosity, then it is evident that the musicians with more 'traditional' views of virtuosity felt a reciprocal anxiety about the use of such anti-virtuosic techniques. Returning to the discussion of technique in *Musics 19*, we find Evan Parker saying:

I think that the definition of technique as 'being able to do what you wanted to do' was adequate all the while 'what you wanted to do' was clearly purposive. . . . But *now*, the question of what technique is is confused by the deliberate use of incompetence as a technique.⁵

The reason for this anxiety must surely lie in part in the paradox of the technically-accomplished musician desiring to negate his own virtuosity but also in the dangers inherent in the practice of over-facility in improvised music; the freedom that such a music allows for both musicians of varying standards and non-musicians to participate equally. But is such total participation truly possible, is it even to be encouraged? Howard Riley thinks not, for although 'one of the beauties of improvised music is that it can accommodate both the beginner and the virtuoso, and all points in between, conflict could occur if the beginner and the virtuoso were to play together.' The playing experience of Clive Bell, however, is in direct contrast with this: 'I have worked happily in groups including both virtuosos and technical incompetents.' Yet there is a strong feeling that, however successful the work of a dilettante or untrained improviser may be, it is ultimately the outcome of no more than fortuity or serendipity. Is it the case that such improvising will always be qualitatively different from that of the virtuoso professional?

From the point of view of music as playing, a small child may find the experience of randomly pressing the keys on a piano as exciting as I find playing saxophone solo. I would hope, however, that, from the point of view of listening, there is a quality in what I play which could only have been arrived at by a process of thought and practice which an amateur musician might not have the time and dedication to undergo.

Tim Hodgkinson's view is endorsed by Chris Cutler, who finds an analogy with the artisan:

An amateur welder can't make a complex weld, nor can someone altogether ignorant of the skill of welding. No more can a sciolist of music make a well-made aural artefact. To a certain extent a native or 'intuitive' skill might lead to stimulating sound-objects but, arguably, not to music-objects.

Yet is the distinction between sound-object and music-object as useful as it first appears? Improvised music often has as much to do with the organisation of sound ('noise') as with the organisation of 'musical' material (pitches, for example). How then are we to make a qualitative distinction between the two? Perhaps not by the relative qualities of the material itself (i.e., sound versus 'music'), but rather by the musicality of the performance (with whatever materials) – that is, in the appropriateness and expression of response in any given situation. Such skills may be acquired intuitively, of course, but largely they are the result of experience. Can we then define technique (in free improvisational terms) as something like: 'developing the appropriate execution of skills through the playing experience'? Eddie Prévost's final comment in this regard seems to contain elements of this definition, if only in his condemnation of technique for its own sake, whilst highlighting the experiential and investigative values which the pursuance of technique will inevitably bring:

There is, in my opinion, no virtue in technique for technique's sake. Obsession with, and admiration for, technique merely reflects the ethos and values of the new élitism which is gaining strength in our world. Musical dexterity is perceived and cherished as an artistic analogue to our increasingly technocratic society. However, technique assists expression and if it serves the processes of musical dialogue, playfulness and investigation then it is obviously of value.

Collective performance

The collective possibilities of free improvisation as a type of group composition have sometimes led to comparisons being made between free improvisation and folk musics. I have always found this a curious comparison to sustain; what exactly is being suggested here? If it is the notion of collective performance alone, then surely the composed nature of folk music makes its performance more comparable with that of the classical symphony than with improvised music? Examining the relative compositional models does not help much: folk is variously the product of individual, known musicians or of uncertain origin, yet developed over time by a number of hands. Never is it spontaneous creation and execution in one pass. Admittedly, the development of folk music through history is a collective process, but absolutely diachronic: collective improvisation is just as resolutely synchronic in its creation. So why does such a comparison occur at all, between such disparate forms? Eddie Prévost:

The notion of collective improvisation as folk music is valid only as long as it reflects some kind of community of purpose. Let us not think that a return to some kind of historic folk ethos is possible. For then all we may do is to create a false and misleading parody of an older form of expression which emanated from an extinct matrix of social relations. We must live and work in the present.

This community of purpose was further examined by Gerry Gold, who similarly saw wider social concerns emerging through the practice of free improvisation:

Each member of a group of musicians must assume responsibility for developing the piece of music. The essential tension in a performance is achieved through interplay, in which each of the players responds to initiatives from the others, all seeking to develop and enrich the whole. Each of the musicians is thus at the same time both leader and follower. This is the collective approach to improvisation and is opposed to the individualistic approach, in which in response to an initiative from one player, the others retreat into a supportive or 'backing' role. The former, collective mode depends on and contributes to the building of strong bonds between musicians who must have complete confidence in each others' commitment to the process. Collective improvisation in music is a conscious creative process by a group, taking for its inspiration and starting point the development and change in the external world. Through constantly-changing emotional relationships explored musically, it reflects the shared social and musical experience of the musicians, who develop forms of expression unique to their group.

It would appear from the above that what is emerging is a comparison on social (and hence ideological?) terms: such a view seems to say that it is social relations that matter, and that both improvised and folk musics may be seen as developing special relationships between the individual and the community, relationships which are quite dissimilar from those operating, say, between a composer and his executants in classical music. In short, both forms of music-making are democratic processes. Tim Hodgkinson:

The clearest theoretical statement of a collectivist, or rather egalitarian position that I've encountered is that of Godfried-Willem Raes of the Logos Foundation. In his article 'My work as an Instrument Builder', he bases his move from composed to improvised music on an anti-authoritarian ideology; music as an activity must be made accessible to everyone. The move from traditional instruments with their associated skills to newly-invented instruments whose technical possibilities would be an adventure open to anyone, such a

move would destroy the privilege and mystique of art, breaking down the artificial distinction between professional and amateur. He mentions the Scratch Orchestra in England as independent discoverers of the same idea.

My response to this 'democratic' position is a 'Yes, but . . .'; for I see no intrinsic opposition between amateur and professional as such. That is, I do not see that music will benefit from an attitude which is against the idea of dedication and of struggle. My feeling is that music is a particular kind of activity which has particular potentials of power. Some of these potentials can only be released in the state of 'listening without playing', a state in which our energies are directed not to the physical making of the music but to the psychological making of the musical experience itself. It seems to me that in democratising music we are saying that the highest musical value is to be found in music as an activity of playing, as against music as an activity of listening.

Against which, Roger Turner most succinctly asks:

Is the old nugget 'the listener makes the music' dead?

Social concerns

In considering the extra-musical, social concerns of the music, one has to be aware of any ideological motives there may be for discovering such concerns wherein, for example, the anarchist might see reflected in the improvising group a model of his ideal society, in the symphony orchestra the tyranny of the individual (composer, conductor) over the mass (musicians). Although in such analogies musics may find themselves caricatured in the extent to which they reveal existing ideologies, and however resistant music may be to such processes, yet there remain techniques and skills in improvisation which, as Christopher Small has indicated, may be of considerable value (not necessarily in the support of absolutist politics) in the field of musical education:

By allowing our pupils the opportunity to make music in the present tense, we can introduce into the school, through this largely unregarded . . . area of activity, a concept that can overthrow the future-oriented, instrumental ethos of the school, and the preoccupation with producing a product.⁶

The Association of Improvising Musicians (AIM) in a report titled 'The Educative Potential of Improvised Music' (1983) find ways in which to revolutionise not only the musical curriculum in schools but even society's perceptions of music itself. Citing Murray Schafer's notion of 'schizophonia', it is suggested that improvisation is one way of combatting the alienation of sounds from their sources which has been the result of new technology and the resulting societal impulses, and of usurping the security of the 'classical' approach to musical education. This would entail the replacement of the traditional emphasis on the visual aspects of music with a fundamentally aural method of exploration, utilising such strategies as problem-solving, risk-taking and commonality of creation. And yet how important is this function of the music to the musicians (potential teachers?) themselves? ' . . . the social and educative functions of improvisation have been seriously undervalued by the musical and educational establishments' – Clive Bell. Only a few musicians remarked on this aspect at all and of those John Butcher's remark was more typical:

Most marginal musics could be educative to 'the general public', if only to demonstrate possibilities and attitudes rarely encountered . . . music may have interesting 'social and educative factors' but most musicians would, I hope, consider these as secondary.

Ken Hyder went further, issuing a caveat that has relevance to any discussion of improvised music:

The social factors of the music I can understand, but the educative factors sound more problematical. It can sound like a justification for the music, and it can be superior and self-important. These are reactions all too prevalent among any kind of activity which turns out to be a minority activity. It leads to arrogant and fatuous statements where proponents – in this case, improvisers – will say their music is inherently better than other musics simply because it is improvised.

Yet there remains the element of unpredictability in improvised music that does distinguish it from other musics and in which lies both its success (in creative terms) and its failure (in the market place):

It is understandable that an audience that pays for admission to a performance should want to get what it pays for; as with any product offered for sale, certain standards of quality are expected and that is precisely what an improvising musician cannot guarantee. Improvisation, therefore, tends to wither under the mercantile conditions of modern concert life.⁷

It is interesting to note that the only regular (and even at that, very sparse) coverage of the music on radio was during Charles Fox's programme 'Jazz Today' which, despite its shortcomings – a stable format that stagnated over the years, and the enormous selectivity that had to go into a programme that attempted to provide up-to-date coverage of jazz and improvised music in one hour a week – nevertheless afforded in its Maida Vale sessions an opportunity for audiences to hear the latest developments in the British music scene, whether this be the latest phase of time-served groups such as In Cahoots or Talisker, or the newer, often unrecorded, musicians such as The Ubiquity Orchestra, B-shops for the Poor, Alex Maguire and Steve Noble. Since January 1988 'Jazz Today' is no more; the official reason for this is that 'the network's pattern of jazz programmes has been altered so that we may accommodate more 'live' and 'recorded' jazz concerts. We believe that this will give our coverage of jazz a higher profile and perhaps attract a larger audience.' (Brian Barfield, Planning Editor, Radio 3, in a letter to me, December 1987). 'Perhaps attract a larger audience' indeed: this, after three months of the new schedule (at the time of writing), seems most unlikely. The insipid 'easy listening' styles of jazz continue on the other channels while Radio 3 output is getting even sparser and more random: the only contributions being a series of four concerts from the 1987 Camden Jazz Festival; eight hours in all featuring Steve Lacy, Carla Bley, Willem Breuker, Gavin Bryars(!). Fine musicians all, but very much known quantities (with the possible exception of Willem Breuker). And then silence – the future of the music on national radio at least looks bleak.⁸

Turning to the printed word, the situation hardly looks any better: we have lost some of the most informative and perceptive journals that dealt with improvised music, such as *Collusion*, *Musics* and *Microphone*. *The Wire* is still around, but is now obsessed with photographs and blank spaces to an almost reckless degree. It is a saddening development for what was, under Anthony Wood, a most invigorating and enthusiastic journal. *Wire* (as it is now known) is, by contrast, mostly vogueish and arch. There are others who are supportive and valuably critical of the music: David Ilic of *Time Out* and the editors of *Contact* come to mind. Chris Cutler's *Re Records Quarterly Magazine* has included features on improvisation by

improvisers themselves. Regional Jazz Newspapers have, in their series of *Jazz in . . .*, provided a valuable listings service for jazz and improvised music throughout the country, although the feature articles are slight.

Television would seem most unlikely to even entertain five minutes of free improvisation but in fact Channel 4 – although often self-conscious about its perceived role as cultural vanguard of the airwaves – has produced some fine programmes which have included much of the world music aspect (including improvisation) of musical appreciation. In 1983, 'Crossing Bridges' even presented the work of John Russell, Fred Frith and Keith Rowe. Inevitably, this is really the only channel that takes music seriously and intelligently.

It was also inevitable that everyone would concur in their replies with the preceding summary. Most would probably be far less charitable than I have been. This was in fact the case: both Howard Riley and Elton Dean provided such a reply:

The music is mostly ignored by the media, because its objectives are totally different from those of the media. I am not aware of any advances in media coverage.

The music is overlooked and often misunderstood and whilst it is not part of 'the industry' will continue to be so.

Others used such words as 'atrociously', 'very poorly' and 'getting worse' to describe media coverage. However, despite this consensus, there were some observations here represented by Eddie Prevost and Ken Hyder which were more expansive:

Sadly, I feel that there are few consistent commentators on this music. And they suffer from a media which has no appreciation of the significance of the music. Academia does not think it a serious area for investigation and so often it ends up as part of the entertainment world. And may be some of us encourage that!

Even the media which purport to cover the music are way off the mark because they deal in capitalist trends. They engage in fashionism. This kind of music is flavour of the month this month, and next month it is something else. This individual of this group is where it's happening now . . . until it's time to change. These are the groovy places to go to, and these are the groovy clothes to wear. These are the anecdotes of the funny wee incidents on the way to the gig. Ha, ha, ha, these musicians must have a great time lurching from one laugh to another. Where do the aesthetics come in? What is the music about? What do players think about their situations, their playing situations, the way they are treated by the arts establishment? Where are the investigations into promoters' scams? Sure, there are exceptions to this bland superficiality. But there are nowhere near enough of them.

How then do the musicians see improvised music in Britain developing? I do not feel it appropriate here to detail the possible strategies that might be employed to improve the coverage of the music in the media and to increase its audiences. Yet despite the pessimistic comments above, it was remarkable to see how many of the respondents were utterly optimistic about the future of improvised music. Consider them idealists, if you will, but I would like to think that it is only by dint of such commitment to this music (and a similar commitment from its commentators) that it will flourish in this country. Paul Dunmall and George Haslam together sum up this optimism, and I will end this brief examination on improvised music in Britain with their replies. First, George Haslam:

I am optimistic – there is no sane alternative. I believe in the broad encouragement of participation in improvised

(creative) music by professional and amateur musicians from all backgrounds.

And finally, Paul Dunmall:

The music, I have no doubt, will continue to grow whatever happens. It is new, and it still has a long way to go and is developing all the time. That is one of the most exciting things about playing improvised music: there is always so much to discover, to play and to express.

¹ In fact, the bulk of this article draws on answers to the following question: 'In discussions of improvised music two themes often recur: the first stresses technical virtuosity, the second the social and educative factors of the music. In other words, the former promotes the individual virtuoso, the latter a more collective approach, almost a type of folk music. Do you have any sympathy with either of these views? Do you see any conflict between them?'

- ² Derek Bailey, *Improvisation* (Ashbourne: Moorland Publishing, 1980).
- ³ Alan Durant, 'Improvisation – Arguments After the Fact', *Improvisation: history, directions, practice* (London: Association of Improvising Musicians, 1984), pp.5-10.
- ⁴ Quoted in 'Technique and Improvisation', *Musics* 19 (1978), p.5.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p.4.
- ⁶ Christopher Small, *Music – Society – Education* (London: John Calder, 1977), p.216.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p.177.
- ⁸ From November 1988, 'Jazz Today' returned for a six-week series, cut to broadcasts of thirty minutes (from an hour) and comprising only the 'Maida Vale' segment of the previous format.

David Smeyers

The Hespos phenomenon: a performer's point of view

für Lea, die Zukunft

I first encountered the music of Hans-Joachim Hespos when I came across his solo bass clarinet piece, *harry's musike* (1972). I was fascinated by both the way this piece looked and sounded. I had never seen a score with such fine nuances, that one *could* produce and that an audience *could* hear, combined with such surreal energy. Here, for once, was a solo bass clarinet work that was attractive both to learn and to perform and that still sounded 'new' and 'avant-garde'.

Hespos's music is a unique ingredient of the contemporary European new music soup, a source of discussion wherever it is performed. The 1984 Darmstadt performance of his monumental scenic adventure *seiltanz*¹ (1982) brought his music to the attention of an international audience for the first time; with one work Hespos polarized the *Ferienkurse* and provided welcome relief from the tedious arguments about tonality that were taking place at the same time.

Hespos is self-taught, one of the more successful composers of the generation, sandwiched between Karlheinz Stockhausen and Wolfgang Rihm, who toil in the shadow of these two well-known, prodigious and prolific figures. But although Stockhausen and Rihm may belong to the avant-garde, neither does much to extend or redefine the word 'music'. Hespos, on the other hand, *is* such a composer: his works are a constant attempt both to expand and to refine his listeners' sensibilities. Unconventional (and sometimes downright obscure!) instruments feature prominently in his scores; for example, he has written for piccolo A flat clarinet, piccolo heckelphon, contrabass sarrusophone, tárogató, sub-bass recorder, bass ophicleide, flugabone, singing saw, contrabass saxophone and girnata. His programme notes are concise, stimulating, but in no way intended to lead the listener by the hand. For the piece *point* he writes:

nacheinander/zugleich
interferenzen
musik – die vielzüngigkeit von stille
(successive/simultaneous
interferences
music – the many tongues of silence)

harry's musike he describes as 'spuren kratzen in die grosse stille' (scratching tracks in the great silence). Even his titles – *o.*, *Sns*, *mini mall!*, *-Z . . . ()* – are provocative.

As for the scores themselves, they are, as I mentioned earlier, full of the finest nuances. To achieve these Hespos has devised many new notational symbols to convey his wishes more completely to the performer and thence to the public (Example 1). In addition the scores contain many verbal instructions as to how the musical text is to be interpreted. Non-German speakers need a good dictionary and a lot of imagination, Germans only the latter, to realise instructions such as 'verstolpert' (stumbled), 'zäh' (sticky) or 'schattenhaft ruhig' (gently shadowlike).

There will be those who feel that it is just such notational innovations that deter more interpreters from learning Hespos's music. However, Hespos's invented symbols are not difficult to learn and retain; I have performed a number of his works and no longer find it necessary to refer to the sheet explaining the notations. The symbols are quite logical – indeed other composers might think about incorporating them in their own scores if they wish to achieve similar sounds, so that musicians are not confronted with a new symbology with every different composer. Furthermore, players unwilling to take the time and trouble to prepare proper performances are perhaps best advised to stay away from this music.

Example 1 Examples of Hespos's notational symbols and their meanings.

- = fleetingly
- ⌈•••• = very fast (grace note-like)
- ⌈••••⌋ = as fast as possible
- ◇ = just airstream
- < = barely coloured airstream
- ◁ = lightly coloured
- = = an almost imperceptible sound
- ⊖ = weakly audible
- = open attack, open release
- ◊ = open attack, clear release
- ⊕ = clear attack, open release
- :
- ⋮ = very short

- ~~~~~ = coarsely chopped glissando impulses
- ↑↓ = overblow (indeterminate pitch)
- ↓↑ = 'underblow' (indeterminate pitch)
- ↗ = mis-blown impulse, hard, squeaking (split-sound)

spoken sounds:

- = voiceless
- = voiced
- ⊖ = as in english 'never'
- f = as in english 'fat'
-)} = as in german 'Schuh'
- ⊖) = as in italian 'cento'

ar | i | f | ff

the differing letter thicknesses indicate the intensity of articulation – the differing sound-placements indicate their relative pitch, assuming that _____ = middle of the voice.

pico – line 1

What follows is a performer's eye-view of the opening line of *pico* (1978), a work originally written for Michala Petri and soprano recorder. (Unusually for Hespos, who rarely favours flexible instrumentation, *pico* has been performed on instruments as different from the soprano recorder as B flat contrabass clarinet and E flat contrabass saxophone; I play it on piccolo A flat clarinet.)

Example 2: *aufgebracht* = angry
aus dem atemstau = out of a held breath

I perform the second indication by taking a good breath, holding it in and then suddenly releasing the air, like an explosion. The result is an overblown pair of harmonic-like notes (*ff* – exceedingly short) whose pitches are not specified. A short rest. A high sound produced on the recorder by covering up the front air holes – in the clarinet version(s) this has been alternately interpreted as a high note produced by having the teeth on the reed or as loud rushing air (white sound). The first method is very spectacular on the piccolo A clarinet. These sound combinations last a maximum of seven seconds. (The graphic distance in the original is approximately one second = a bit more than one centimetre, but this is irregular.)

Example 2

gehetzt = hurried (under pressure)

A relatively normal sequence of notes is to be performed very quickly (circa three seconds or a bit longer). The interpreter must strive to differentiate here between the fourth sound, which will be like the second sound of the piece, and the ninth sound, an overblown note of indeterminate pitch. In addition, the last two notes (the first accented normally, the second with a hard accent) should have a rhythmic relationship, in spite of their speed, to set them apart from the preceding notes.

Example 3

stark gedehnt

Example 3: *stark-gedehnt* = intensely stretched C³ (written) accented and held at a *ff* dynamic for about seven seconds. An immediate change to *mp*, harmonic-like colour with a weak vibrato for the remaining four (?) seconds. A medium-long rest follows.

Example 4

schattenhaft bewegt

Example 4: *schattenhaft bewegt* = shadow-like agitated
schlaff = slack or limp

A lightly-coloured G¹ – (*pp*) slinks under and then up to an F^{#1}. This action takes less time than the graphic space would indicate due to the rightward pointing arrow under the staff (*accel.*). The F^{#1} fingering is held while the tone colour is totally altered to air sounds only (*p*). After approximately six seconds a B¹ is played (slurred, barely coloured airstream) in *mp*. These last two notes take more time in respect to their graphic notation due to the leftward pointing arrow (*rit.*). A large pause of perhaps 2½ seconds.

Example 5

Example 5: *gelassen* = calm

A barely audible F² is played, its pitch is unsteady (wobbles) with a light glissando near the end (*pp*). The syllable *bew* (b=bar; e=lesen (Ger.); w=Wasser (Ger.)) is simultaneously hummed (sung?) during the F² and after about four seconds glissandos up on the sound *U* (*U* = *amüsieren*) and *i* (*i* = *Minute* (Ger.)). All of these sounds are fully voiced. The F² is produced with a tendency to become a 'half-flagolet' (i.e. one of the player's fingers is not properly closing a hole or properly pushing down a key; the result being a rasping sound, as if it were a flutter-tongued, overblown note). A large rest that is somewhat shorter than the preceding rest. All of this occupies something close to seven seconds.

A grace note A^b (once again a barely coloured airstream – all of these indications indicate a mix of air and tone to various proportions) precedes a harmonic (i.e. a fingering is used other than a normal one to produce a distinctly different tone colour) A² (*ppp*). *Spitz* in this case would mean a pointed tone. The shortest medium-length rest. Altogether a bit more than six seconds.

Example 6

rasch

Example 6: *rasch* = quickly

A four note group. The F² is longer than the E-E^b³ grace note pair. The G³ is played hard and is long in comparison to the other notes (*ff*-dry). This lasts two seconds.

Three seconds of rest follows and then the first line (*circa* 50 seconds) is over.

This may seem like a lot of work for less than a minute of music. It is; yet no less effort is required to develop a valid interpretation of a Classical or Romantic score. Thurston Dart claimed that 'composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky leave the interpreter no freedom whatever; every nuance of dynamic, tempo, phrasing, rhythm and expression is rigidly prescribed, and the performer is reduced to the abject status of a pianola or a gramophone'²; although at first sight Hespös's scores may also seem 'rigidly prescriptive' their realisation is by no means the cold work of a pianola or gramophone. If there is a difference between the interpretation of a Classical or Romantic work and that of a Hespös score, it is that with a piece like *pico* the act of performance must first be made fully conscious; the score presents many problems of interpretation, each of which has numerous possible solutions, all of which must be carefully considered before a truly personal realisation can be reached.

In the years since *für cello solo* (1964), the earliest surviving hesposition, Hespös's music has become more and more involved with the performer as a person. Although the recent scores look similar to those of the early years (in the wind music, for example, he has consistently made use of air sounds and of the performer's voice), the newer scores are becoming more personal, more determined in their effort to change the environment around them through their emphasis on the theatrical and social dimension of music-making. The Hespös phenomenon continues to develop and grow.

¹ The use of lower case here is a Hespös characteristic.

² Thurston Dart, *The Interpretation of Music*, 4th edn. (London: Hutchinson, 1967), p.59.

Hespös was published by Edition Modern until 1978; he has published his own work since pico. A catalogue of all of Hespös's works, including those published by Edition Modern and listing all 90 titles is available from:

*hespos edition,
Amundsenstrasse 13,
2870 Delmenhorst,
Federal Republic of Germany*

Controversies Incorporated

The following article is a response to Richard Toop's 'Four Facets of "The New Complexity"' published in the last issue of *Contact* (*Contact* 32 (Spring 1988), pp.4-50). Further responses to this and other matters raised in *Contact* should be sent to Christopher Fox, 3 Old Moor Lane, York YO2 2QE.

Arnold Whittall

Complexity, Capitulationism, and the Language of Criticism

Facets without Perspective?

Richard Toop's 'Four Facets of "The New Complexity"' is a tour de force, remarkable both for the skill with which it places penetrating analysis in a vivid documentary context and for the fact that Toop's own voice is not swamped by the voices of the composers themselves. This response is intended more as complement than critique, in recognition of the importance of the issues Toop raises, and in the belief that moving back from his very close focus may shed some additional light on the contemporary scene, in musicology as well as composition, that is his own prime concern.

Toop writes as, in some respects, a concerned outsider whose view of music in Britain is that 'parochialism seems to have taken over with a vengeance'.¹ He is also, as his terminology makes clear, wholeheartedly against any manifestation of 'New Simplicity' or 'New Romanticism' (although neither of these is a tendency confined to the British Isles). Toop may well be right about the parochialism. But it is possible to look at the undoubted differences between various composers active today in a rather different way, and one reason why I'm attempting to do that here is because I believe that the so-called 'New Romantics' – if not the 'New Simpletons' – are a rather more complex and deserving breed than Toop is prepared to allow.

Toop is careful to create the appropriate context for his study by stating, at an early stage, that the analyses which form the core of his article are 'partial'. What this means is clear: 'Whereas much recently-published analytical work is intended not only as an exegesis of individual pieces but as a contribution to a more or less specific theoretical genre, I should make it clear that mine . . . does not share the latter aspiration. I am . . . seeking to give a provisional account of the compositions I discuss; beyond that, however, my main aim is to give some indication of each composer's creative process, of *composition* as a "putting together" of *personal* preoccupations, both aesthetic and technical' (p.4). In this way Toop distances himself from the kind of approach to analysis that would give the general priority over the particular and the views of the commentator more prominence than those of the composer. The result is nevertheless far from an exercise in public relations, or anodyne music-appreciation. As Toop acknowledges, none of his four

composers is exactly anti-intellectual and so he is able to avoid any suspicion that he, as musicologist-commentator, is guilty of that 'all-purpose anti-intellectualism' that, he believes, is 'still very much embedded in the collective psyche of the musical establishment' in Great Britain (p.4). Anti-intellectual, no: but frustratingly narrow, perhaps. It is precisely because he stays as close as he does to what he regards as the composers' 'personal preoccupations, both aesthetic and technical' (but primarily the latter) that he risks creating an aesthetic – if not also a technical – vacuum. Moreover, by giving one fundamental issue too little attention, he makes the kind of critical comparison (between 'complexity' and 'capitulationism') that his polemical stance should promote, more difficult for others to undertake constructively. What is missing, in my view, is a proper, i.e. theoretical, consideration of the aesthetics of structure, such as would help to create a clearer picture of where these four composers actually stand in terms of the development of the art in our time. Of course, Toop could reasonably argue that such matters, however interesting and important, go beyond the 'provisional' and 'personal' brief of his essay. Hence my own concern to complement rather than criticise his work.

From Modern to Postmodern

If pressed, most musicologists will admit that 'perspective', whether historical, cultural or theoretical needs careful handling, if unrealistic claims and improbable 'connections' are to be avoided. Its relevance must nevertheless be tested, especially in cases like that of Toop's 'Gang of Four' where the foreground of planned compositional procedure, and something of the composers' own views of wider structural and cultural matters, have been so fully and authoritatively set forth.

The kind of perspective I have in mind relates most fundamentally to the value, generally recognised by music theorists, in determining the extent to which 'modern', progressive twentieth-century music differs both from earlier music, and also from more conservative twentieth-century music. This may seem a straightforward matter where compositional style and personality are concerned. It may even remain straightforward when technical distinctions between 'tonal' and 'post-tonal' languages are proposed; and when the term 'structure' is used simply to connote the *use* of one or the other 'language', the distinction may still be obvious. But problems come thick and fast when the ways in which structures (the formal foundations or frameworks of compositions) participate in, and ultimately help to generate aesthetic effect and response are brought into consideration. They do so because the basic research about perception – how we process and retain musical 'information' – is still being done. So today theorists are still arguing about how we 'hear' as familiar a post-tonal composition as Schoenberg's little piano piece op.19 no.6. Do we, as Fred Lerdahl seeks to demonstrate, hear this music hierarchically, to the extent that something he terms 'Atonal Prolongational Structure' can be proposed?² Or, in the absence of the only musical conditions shown with theoretical validity to generate genuine

organic integration and to create convincing hierarchies which – even if we do not literally ‘hear’ them in performance – powerfully affect the way we listen, should we accept the fundamental difference between both structure and perception with respect to tonal and post-tonal music and propose that (for example) Schoenberg’s op. 19 no. 6 makes sense simply as a succession of separate events that relate in various ways, but which are not hierarchically integrated?³

For some musicians – notably but not exclusively among the ‘all-purpose anti-intellectual’ British – this issue, and my way of putting it, will sum up all that they dislike about ‘theory’. It seeks to base extravagant conclusions on unreal distinctions: it thinks too hard and doesn’t listen hard enough. I do not propose to spend precious time and space in refutation of this unreal, thoughtless view. My only purpose here is to indicate the ways in which such issues as those touched on above can (and should) provide some helpful perspective when it comes to considering not only Richard Toop’s ‘Gang of Four’, but the wider contemporary context he so trenchantly characterises as ‘complex’ versus ‘capitulatory’.

I have written elsewhere about what I believe to be the essence of the post-tonal ‘revolution’: ‘a shift from the unifying integration of contrasted but nonetheless related elements (synthesis) to the establishment of an equilibrium, a balance between elements that remain distinct (symbiosis).’⁴ I have also proposed that musical Modernism operates principally in terms of the second possibility. In another essay I have subdivided this Modernism into musics that favour either confrontation or complementation, and it is the former category – ‘at its most challenging . . . when composers literally juxtapose materials from past and present, or when they attempt to preserve essential features of an old system – especially of course, tonality – in radically revised forms, yet in such a way that the music cannot be convincingly explained solely in terms of that preservation’⁵ – that has most in common with what literary theorists and writers on modern aesthetics tend to term Postmodernism, or Poststructuralism, and its near (some would say close) relative, Deconstruction. In a recent study, as full of definitions of its subject as it is of references to exponents of that subject, Linda Hutcheon declares that ‘the contradictory nature of postmodernism involves its offering of multiple, provisional alternatives to traditional, fixed unitary concepts in full knowledge of (and even exploiting) the continuing appeal of those very concepts.’⁶ Just as Hutcheon labours mightily to persuade us that Postmodernism is not simply a rejection of Modernism (or even of the traditions Modernism continues by other means), so Christopher Norris, as cool-headed a guide to the quicksands of Poststructuralism as one could wish for, underlines the historical dimension in what many have tended to conceive as a wholly tradition-rejecting phenomenon: ‘deconstruction is not so much a passage “beyond” philosophy – or beyond the resources of logocentric reason – as a testing of the language, the concepts and categories, which make up that same ubiquitous tradition.’⁷ In Postmodernism, according to Hutcheon, we find ‘problematization’ rather than ‘synthesis.’⁸ In Deconstruction, as Norris reads it, we reach the point where synthesis of a kind may possibly occur, but only in the sense that ‘opposites merge in a constant *undecidable* exchange of attributes.’⁹ And Norris later refers to ‘that essential feature of a deconstructive reading that consists, not

merely in *reversing* or *subverting* some established hierarchical order, but in showing how its terms are indissolubly entwined in a strictly undecidable exchange of values and priorities’.¹⁰

The Need for Balance

I am not for a moment suggesting that we should strive (theoretically) to make musical Modernism and Postmodernism conform in all their essential structural criteria to the other arts, though the analogies are there and they are striking. What is valuable, I believe, is that the perspectives which these terms and discussions create provide a proper basis from which to view *all* the different manifestations of musical language and style current today. The most important thing of all about terms such as ‘balance’ and ‘complementation’ is that they are as much aesthetic as technical in their associations: the value of a work consists in its attainment or presentation of these qualities, deemed by the listener in question (even if only by implication) to be good things. So when Michael Hall writes of Birtwistle that ‘a piece is not completed until equality or a “non-symmetrical balance” has been established’,¹¹ he is making an aesthetic judgement as well as a technical observation. And when Richard Toop himself writes of Ferneyhough that ‘much of the forcefulness and richness of the *Carceri* pieces arises both from the conceptual obstacle courses that the composer sets himself in the realization of individual layers, and from the violent collisions between these layers’,¹² aesthetic and technical interpretation could hardly be closer.

If we now return to ‘Four Facets’, it is clear that Toop spends most of his time, in Structuralist vein, singling out various significant technical features for comment and providing a fascinatingly explicit, and unfailingly readable, insight into how (complex) surfaces relate to source materials and their manipulations. In his conclusion, some of the basics for a broader view do emerge: with these four composers ‘there are no recantations of “modernist heresies”;’ and they can even, with due caution, be proclaimed the ‘logical inheritors’ of ‘Western classical tradition’ (p. 49). Instead of following up this background material, however, Toop looks to the future. He argues, persuasively as always, that the ‘fringe’ Britishness of these notably unparochial composers makes them especially open to extra-European influences. Their musical world, we infer, will become increasingly ‘open rather than bounded’ and this is one reason why complexity is preferable to capitulationism.

For composers, the present piece – or the next – is what matters most. But critics – musicologists – need to take a broader, more balanced view. Toop could certainly have dug more deeply into his perception about the ‘different versions’ of that ‘counterpoint between instinct and reflection’ he finds in his quartet of composers (p. 50), and into its aesthetic implications. He might then have been less vulnerable to the complaint that he applies Lachenmann’s dictum (about ‘emotional’ and ‘intellectual’ listening) to *thinking* about music without acknowledging that musicology *can* get the balance right.

The point is so important because – even in ignorance of the music, beyond what Toop says about it – one senses the extent to which these four composers are inescapably engaged with the most fundamental of all artistic issues of our time: whether to aim for a Postmodernist coherence that results from the balancing out of distinct contrasts or confrontations, or

whether to continue to develop the 'old' Modernism, in which a non-hierarchical, organic continuity may be sustained, and contrasts and conflicts kept 'classically' subordinate. Here again I am using musicologists' rather than composers' categories, but the reductive opposition between those musicological categories is more apparent than real: they are not inflexible absolutes but rather identify tendencies as a basis for the separate characterisation and interpretation of individual compositions.

From this perspective, the evidence as Toop presents it is appropriately mixed and ambiguous. Michael Finnissy states, of his *Verdi Transcriptions* Book I, that 'I try to allow pieces to grow organically' (p.12), and Toop's own response to the work – 'one really does hear it as one big piece' (p.15) – also gives priority to integrative factors. So too does Toop's comment on Finnissy's String Trio: 'the work avoids all trace of "bittyness": and a process 'has a certain sense of inevitability' (p.16). With Chris Dench, it may be that one reason he now finds *Tilt* relatively 'shallow' (p.27), compared with *Enoncé*, is the former's emphasis on juxtaposition. With Richard Barrett, by contrast, it seems clear that, in *Anatomy*, superimposition is more to the point than synthesis, and there is a 'constant, unresolved opposition' in *Temptation* (p.36): by the end of the section on Barrett, indeed, the term 'synthesis' seems fit only to be derided. But whether James Dillon reinforces this tendency, or redresses the balance, is difficult to judge. If, as seems to be the case, Dillon seeks to advance beyond the constant 'abruption' he finds in Xenakis (p.39), then organicism might well be on the agenda. What seems more likely, from Dillon's own comments – though Toop does not follow this up – is that a fascination which Dillon illustrates by reference to Amy Clampitt's description of the amaryllis as a 'study in disruption' leads him to make music out of 'this kind of moment where things are between order and disorder' (p.41). As a statement of aesthetic principle with great technical implications, this remark is perhaps the most thought-provoking in the entire essay.

I have been arguing here that there is no way in which even the most organic Modernist music can be hierarchic – prolongational – in the full, tonal sense defined by Schenker. Rather its organicism consists in giving priority to continuity, to an evolving (not 'Experimentally' non-dynamic) consistency that may be either motivic or gestural or some way between the two. Here, perhaps, is where the distinction between 'complexity' and 'capitulation' may most productively be sited. I regard the most positive conservative aspect of the New Romanticism as the attempt to preserve the essence of coherent argument, the placement of motivic statement and elaboration (a technique deriving – in theory if not always in practice – from Schoenberg's 'developing variation') in an appropriate harmonic context. But the more determinedly it pursues modes of creating surface continuity, the more conservative the music of the complex composers may appear, and I would tentatively cite Finnissy's recent orchestral composition *Red Earth* in evidence. The principal challenge for complex music is to create material as memorable, and a formal context and treatment as rich and refined, as is possible (if rarely attained nowadays) with motives. If New Romantics have their work cut out to devise materials and contexts that do not sound stale, complex composers have their work cut out to distinguish between arresting intensity and empty gesticulation.

Common Ground?

The Minimalists and Experimentalists already have their exegetes, and one day no doubt even the English New Romantics will find a Toop to expound their techniques and explain their aesthetic stance. Of course, no amount of theoretical or analytical exposition will persuade those who dislike the revived Romantic style, and the kind of musical ideas that go with it, to change their minds. But I will reiterate my belief that, when it comes to the aesthetics of structure, all composers – save, it would seem, the Experimentalists¹³ – are facing the same challenge: how to generate effective forms that are neither mere assemblages nor undifferentiated 'states'. Just as Toop's quartet are not simply wholehearted post-tonal juxtaposers who use local complexity to compensate for the lack of all larger balance and coherence, so the New Romantics are not invariably mindless worshippers at the temple of tonal tradition, who hide their impotence behind a thick veil of halfhearted pastiche. Recent works by Robert Simpson and Nicholas Maw provide particularly nourishing food for thought in this respect, for despite, or because of, the evident associations with tradition, a real Postmodernism is not merely alive but is growing in this music.¹⁴ After all, the sense of local hierarchies doing as much to prevent as to promote a grandly comprehensive, truly organic synthesis is likely to be more apparent in music which still preserves the distinction between consonance and dissonance, if not diatonic and chromatic, in its style and syntax.

I will leave the argument there, appropriately open-ended. This article is an immediate response – provisional, personal – to Toop, and far from the long-meditated, exhaustively-argued fifty-page rejoinder he deserves. If it does not sound too illogical, I would defend my response on the grounds that the issues involved are too important to wait for the kind of carefully-plotted treatment that would do them justice. Composers – even complex ones – may find them supremely unimportant, though I hope not. As a musicologist, I will concede that theorists do find it much too easy to detach themselves from the realities of what composers think and do. But there are realities – real ones! – in musicology too. The ideal position for a full response to complex music would be a pragmatic, sceptical, undyingly curious one, somewhere between my distance and Richard Toop's closeness. The best of both worlds?

¹ Richard Toop, 'Travelling Hopefully', *Contact* 31 (Autumn 1987), p.42.

² Fred Lerdahl, 'Atonal Prolongational Structure', *Contemporary Music Review* (forthcoming).

³ Even the hierarchically-disposed organicism of the Bach C major Prelude, as shown in the celebrated Schenkerian analysis (see Heinrich Schenker, *Five Graphic Music Analyses* (New York: Dover, 1969)) is more mental construct than experienced, heard-in-time 'reality'. It is a legitimate interpretation of the musical language and structure which, if present in the mind when the music is being heard, does most to create the impression that one actually perceives a single structural span in all its diversified unity. The Schenkerian revolution consists precisely in the gulf the theory drives between compositions which can be convincingly analysed by

such means and those which cannot – paralleled, of course, by the gulf between those who believe Schenker was right and those who do not. As for op.19 no.6, I cannot share Lerdahl's interpretation of bars 7-8 as ultimately subsumed under the previous 'event'. Subordinate, in the sense of providing unequal contrast, by all means. But Lerdahl's (my) problem is that his graphic medium promotes the absorption of elements that I hear as leading more independent existences.

- ⁴ Jonathan Dunsby and Arnold Whittall, *Music Analysis in Theory and Practice* (London: Faber Music, 1988), p.173.
- ⁵ Arnold Whittall, 'The Theorist's Sense of History: Concepts of Contemporaneity in Composition and Analysis', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol.112, no.1 (1986-7), p.2.
- ⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), p.60.
- ⁷ Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana, 1987), p.138.
- ⁸ Hutcheon, op. cit., p.221.
- ⁹ Norris, op. cit., p.35.
- ¹⁰ Norris, op. cit., p.56.
- ¹¹ Michael Hall, 'The Sanctity of Context: Birtwistle's recent Music', *The Musical Times* (January 1988), p.15.
- ¹² Richard Toop, 'Ferneyhough's Dungeons of Invention', *The Musical Times* (November 1987), p.626.
- ¹³ See Michael Parsons, 'Howard Skempton: Chorales, Landscapes and Melodies', *Contact 30* (Spring 1987), p.16.
- ¹⁴ For two relevant studies, see Lionel Pike, 'Robert Simpson's "New Way"', *Tempo*, no.153 (June 1985), and Bayan Northcott, 'Nicholas Maw: the second phase', *The Musical Times* (August 1987).

Michael Parkin

High and dry on the beach

Philip Glass and Robert T. Jones, *Opera on the Beach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), £17.50

Philip Glass the composer is a master of collaboration: anyone who has survived and flourished in the theatre for almost 20 years must have impressive credentials in cooperation. However, there is a difference between a collaboration and a committee: a collaboration can produce a *Marriage of Figaro* or (not quite in the same breath) an *Einstein on the Beach*; at best a committee is capable of a Government White Paper. I suspect that Philip Glass's book, *Opera on the Beach* (subtitled, 'On His New World of Music Theatre') is not so much a collaboration between Glass and his editor, Robert T. Jones, as an exercise in writing by committee, the committee consisting of any members of the Glass household – encamped for the summer in Nova Scotia – who could be coaxed into reading the manuscript.

In his introduction, Jones says that he constantly argued for 'more details . . . more colour, more humour'. Ironically, Glass wanted a tight structure and a 'clear line of thought'. More on the clear line of thought in a moment; as for detail, colour and humour, while the book sometimes degenerates into little more than a list of names – virtually a Who's Who of the New York alternative arts scene – its strength lies in its fund of anecdotes, in its ability to entertain, as a good political diary can also inform and entertain. But the book fails in the crucial task of providing the reader with a clear pathway through Glass's artistic

thinking, from the early 1960s, through the operatic trilogy to his recent collaborations in the song cycle, *Songs from Liquid Days*, with popular American songwriters such as David Byrne, Paul Simon and Suzanne Vega. Instead the book pulls and tugs at important threads in the Glass aesthetic without ever coming to grips with them, leaving the reader with a series of impressions rather than with any clear understanding.

The book is full of grand opening statements, classic one-liners guaranteed to whet the reader's appetite for the ensuing 'clear line of thought'. Thus Glass on serialism: 'to me it was the music of the past, passing itself off as the music of the present'; Glass on twentieth-century music in general: 'the great majority of music . . . has been in the tonal tradition'; Glass on the theatre of Chekhov, O'Neill and Miller: 'this kind of theater never interested me much . . . The kinds of theater which spin familiar stories, moralising, sometimes satirising, occasionally comforting us about our lives, has never meant much to me. What has always stirred me is theater that challenges one's ideas of society, one's notions of order'. Unfortunately, the expectant reader is nearly always left frustrated as the tide of Glass's own narrative sweeps on down the beach, leaving all those prickly statements high, dry and undeveloped.

Opera on the Beach opens with a chapter headed 'Apprenticeship of sorts' in which Glass talks about his early musical training, first in New York at the Juilliard School, and then, as a Fulbright scholar, in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. Theatre and Indian music are identified as the seminal experiences of this period and are discussed at some length. Glass writes about the non-narrative 'new theater' ensembles working in New York in the 1960s, ensembles such as the Living Theater and Joe Chaikin's Open Theater. Glass seems to have accepted without question that this was the new theatre to challenge 'one's ideas of society, one's notions of order'. In other words, for Glass, social/political anarchy is equated with nothing more meaningful than restless sixties alternativism. It is clear that this 'new theater', and perhaps especially its notions of collectivist creation and of a new extended type of theatrical time, were a source of inspiration for Glass. They were all working 'towards a similar goal' he writes. But I suspect the nature of that goal remains a mystery to him, as does the real nature of the inspiration he derived from these experiences.

What this book reveals is a lack of any real awareness of history or context. There seems to be little or no conscious insight into important currents of contemporary thinking, although sometimes Glass does seem, paradoxically, to be able to tap them intuitively. This lack of awareness is particularly apparent when Glass describes his first contact with Indian music. In 1966, while he was still in Paris, he was asked to collaborate with Ravi Shankar on Conrad Rook's film *Chappaqua*, transcribing and notating Shankar's music for the French musicians who would be recording the soundtrack. He writes, 'The problem came when I placed the bar-lines in the music as we normally do in Western music. This created unwanted accents . . . The whole thing was very unnerving'. At a moment like this one gets the impression that Glass's musical education must have taken place on a different planet! He continues: 'I saw then what any first year student in a world-music course (which did not exist in 1966) would have learned in his first semester. Indian music was organised in large rhythmic cycles'. Yet

Glass need not have looked to the East for precedents or explanations: the bar-line is a relatively recent invention, as any first year student of Western musical history ought to have been able to tell him, even in 1966, and by 1966 the avant-garde, both in Europe and across the Atlantic, had been successfully circumventing the tyranny of the bar-line for at least sixteen years. As for large rhythmic cycles, Glass must have been as unaware of the isorhythmic techniques of medieval European music as he was ignorant of Messiaen!

When he comes to grips with his own music, we are again confronted with what is either tantalising understatement or alarming naivety. *Opera on the Beach* has at its centre chapters on each of *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha* and *Akhmaten*, the operatic trilogy for which Glass has coined the term 'portrait operas'. Little is said about earlier works, but even during the discussion of the large-scale operatic works, Glass and Jones have adopted a formula whereby consideration of the music is relegated to a few pages. These pages are sandwiched, on one side by lengthy descriptions of the collaborative conception of the opera and of its eventual staging, on the other side by the complete libretto for the opera, so that out of 166 pages on the trilogy a mere 20 deal directly with the music. As a result, the mechanistic processes such as the use of additive rhythms and the superimposition of varying rhythmic units to produce larger cycles, which are at the heart of Glass's compositional technique, are described but never adequately discussed. Furthermore, Steve Reich and Terry Riley appear once and twice, respectively, and then only in passing references: the sense of community and fellowship that Glass acknowledges so warmly in the world of progressive theatre was evidently not extended to composers working in the same musical area.

Glass either avoids or is unaware of the aesthetic issues underlying the use of 'process' and of the arguments for or against mechanistic techniques, as opposed to the organic/reactive use of process. In this he is at odds with those composers, particularly in Europe perhaps, who, in moving away from purely mechanistic procedures and mindless repetition, have developed processes that interact with other processes or with their moment-to-moment musical environment. In the work of these composers there has been a reaffirmation of the values of invention and imagination, albeit within a mechanistically derived framework; I suspect that, for Glass and the new wave of American 'minimalists', 'process' is now merely equated with the use of cycles of repetition. In the same way, the simple, yet effective diatonic material that Reich, for example, feeds through his elaborate compositional systems to make his process audible, has for Glass and his successors become a mere gestural tool. 'Minimalism' has become the populist language of post-modern music; what for Reich remains a means with which to achieve complex musical objects has for the others become the object itself.

Steve Ingham

Electro-acoustic Music: Towards the Fifth Decade

Trevor Wishart, *On Sonic Art* (York: Imagineering Press, 1985) [available direct from Imagineering Press, 83 Heslington Road, York YO1 5AX], £12.50

Simon Emmerson, ed., *The Language of Electroacoustic Music* (London: Macmillan, 1986), £9.95

What you are about to read is probably my 'last will and testament' as a composer. It seems highly unlikely that the technical facilities, both in terms of machines and computing know-how, will become available for serious musical applications in Britain within my working lifetime. I'm committing my ideas and speculations to paper in the hope that a new generation of musicians will have the facilities and the imagination to explore this exciting . . . domain.¹

No, not Edgard Varèse, but Trevor Wishart bemoaning the present state of British electro-acoustic music, and sounding a warning note to the peddlers of perennial optimism and technological progress, a warning note that is symptomatic of the sense of unease currently permeating the charmed circle of EMAS devotees and university-based studio composers. The problem, put in its simplest form, would appear to be this: how is it, how could it *possibly* be, that

the only truly original development of Western music in the twentieth century²

has foundered on the rocks of public indifference and economic stringency? Has electro-acoustic music been somehow deflected from its true path, hijacked by commercial interests? Has it simply run out of steam?

Five years ago, Roger Scruton's dismissive description of IRCAM as a

musical laboratory . . . where the arcane tinkering of the initiated ring out in holy stillness³

could be happily dismissed as merely uninformed and reactionary. Today, those of his political persuasion are firmly entrenched in power at all levels, 'Thatcherite philistinism' is in the ascendancy (not only in Britain!) and the smiles are frozen on our faces. A chill wind is blowing, and contemporary electro-acoustic music is by no means the only experimental art-form at risk from hypothermia. What is left of the wave of enthusiasm that launched EMAS not so long ago? Where are the musical results of the rapid expansion of studio facilities in the sixties and seventies?

It may be argued that this crisis – if crisis it is – is not entirely attributable to external pressures, that it is all very well for university composers and others to whinge on about under-funding and lack of public support when really the truth is that they have quite simply failed to deliver the artistic goods? After all as Simon Emmerson himself admits:

The clue to the difference between the two decades [the 1960's and the 1980's] lies in the recognition of the concept of failure.⁴

I am presupposing in all this that Jean-Michel Jarre and Kraftwerk haven't yet earned their place in the pantheon alongside Ussachevsky and Pierre Henry. For it is obvious that there is a colossal imbalance between the 'serious' and 'commercial' implementations of the new technology, both in terms of

resources allocated (by whomsoever) and – dare I say it – in the popularity of the product.

In much the same way that Andrew Lloyd Webber, for example, is simultaneously shunned by the élite, and praised by many as a leading contemporary composer, 'electronic music' has become the property of the entertainment industry and emasculated itself in the process.

And so it would appear that the storm clouds are gathering. Genuine doubts and fears about the future direction and shape of electro-acoustic music, in the 1990s and beyond, cast a shadow over an area of artistic activity previously characterised by unquestioning optimism and an unshakeable belief in the inexorable forward march of technology. Now, forty years after Schaeffer's *concert de bruits* and the birth of *musique concrète*, creative artists in the realm of electro-acoustic music are experiencing a state of acute alienation. This may take the form of alienation from their non-electro-acoustic composing colleagues, or from the industrial concerns which develop and market the tools of the trade, or from the organisations which promote and disseminate new music in general. The danger today is that frustration will set in, leading to the isolationism and entrenched aesthetic posturing and defensive jargon-ridden cliquishness which is sadly all too familiar in, say, the world of musical analysis. Bruce Pennycook, in his perceptive contribution to Emmerson's anthology, formulates this paradox:

... with the exception of a small number of highly motivated composers and theorists ... teachers and students within the music institutions continue to reject the technology of electro-acoustic music and computer music research. The students most interested in the field are denied access or are diverted from expressing themselves in the musical styles from which their interests first emerged.⁵

All the more necessary, then, to assess the present situation in electro-acoustic music, to stimulate discussion of its methods, aims and directions and, with luck, to draw some tentative conclusions as to the more fruitful avenues of exploration. The publication of the two volumes under review here is, therefore, to be welcomed, adding as it does already to the fast-growing number of books and articles on the subject. This is especially the case as they come from composers in the 'front line', so to speak, of the medium.

Very little of the literature concerning electro-acoustic music published prior to the mid-1980's has attempted to promote such open-ended discussion. Eimert's *Lexikon der elektronischen Musik* (1977)⁶, for example, is not much more than a reference manual for the 'educated reader', a pseudo-scientific exposition of terminology. Although one senses that its authors would have liked to tackle wider issues (there are actually a couple of paragraphs on 'Aesthetik') they all too readily opt for a rather defeatist cookery-book approach.

Nicht nur, daß ... eine genaue Abgrenzung des Gegenstandes kaum noch möglich erscheint; vielmehr hat sich auch gezeigt, daß eine geschlossene Theorie der elektronischen Musik ... nicht ausgebildet wurde, und daß ... eine einheitliche Terminologie fehlt.⁷

(Roughly translated: 'Not only is it scarcely possible to define the limits of the subject; we have not yet been able to develop a unified terminology let alone a complete and self-enclosed theory of electronic music.')

Again, Paul Griffiths' *Guide to Electronic Music*⁸ is inadequate even at the level of an historical introduction to the subject, whilst educationally-targetted publications of the early eighties such as Richard Orton's anthology, *Electronic Music in Schools*,⁹ or David Keane's *Tape Music Composition*¹⁰ have necessarily occupied themselves with the 'how' of hardware and technique at the expense of the 'whys and wherefores' of ideology and aesthetics. Peter Manning's *Electronic and Computer Music*¹¹ was one of the first attempts (in Britain, at any rate) to produce a definitive historical survey which is both scholarly and well-researched; his solid tome is likely, however, to date quite quickly, unless his publishers permit a new edition.

And so to the new wave of writings on electro-acoustic music, typified by the two books reviewed here. They constitute, as far as I am aware, the first real attempts to transcend the text book or 'scholarly tome': provisional, opinionated, often quirky, but always lively and well-informed, composers themselves breathe some fresh air into the debate at last.

On Sonic Art, by 'a freelance composer living in York, U.K.' is a book which repays careful reading. It is both a complex amalgam of the author's own radical critique of Western musical tradition and a phenomenological exploration of the nature of sound, together with frequent excursions and side-steppings into areas as diverse as linguistics, anthropology, computing, behaviourism, mathematics and poetry. Any first impression, however, that this work represents the musings of a somewhat eccentric latter-day Renaissance dilettante is quickly dispelled by the sheer scope of the author's knowledge and the depth of this commitment. This is a defiantly individualistic volume, and its rather *samizdat* appearance (with its typos, amateurish presentation and cheap printer) underlines and reinforces Wishart's public image as a leading British musical anarchist whose involvement with the institutions and apparatus of music education and dissemination is kept to the absolute minimum necessary to ensure his functioning as an artist.

Refreshingly, unlike many writers on contemporary music, Wishart rarely allows himself to erect barriers of phoney erudition and home-grown jargon behind which to hide. His authorial posture alternates wildly and unpredictably between that of the pedagogue, the philosopher and the raconteur, and his sense of humour mercifully prevents the adoption of a tone of high seriousness or pretentiousness. Welcome above all are his views on the sterility of academic musical formalism and his obvious sympathies with the styles of music which lie outside the cosy, self-referential and totally rationalist world of what he terms 'the lattice aesthetic'. *On Sonic Art*, then, is the work of an 'outsider'; a polymath and autodidact who is, above all else, a creative artist whose scribal activities assume a secondary role.

Like Partch, whose *Genesis of a Music*¹² also explores the dichotomy of Western and non-Western musical traditions and proposes radical alternative methods of composition backed by systematic acoustical studies, Wishart is a true subversive who challenges the assumptions of academic formalists and pays the price of possible neglect. And like Xenakis, whose radical left-wing perspective he shares, and whose *Formalized Music*¹³ is in many respects a direct precursor of *On Sonic Art*, Wishart has remained staunchly independent and aloof, trusting only in experientially verifiable hypotheses in the realm of musical creation.

Moving now to the Emerson anthology, we find an even richer mosaic of theory and speculation. Split rather arbitrarily into three sections ('Materials and Language', 'Problems of Language' and 'Influence of Computer Technology'), we have here a useful collection of ten recent essays, incorporating Boulez' so-called 'classic' article 'Technology and the Composer' of 1977. Emerson, Wishart, Harvey, Smalley, McNabb and the other contributors to Emerson's anthology are all respected practitioners of electro-acoustic music, with a deep commitment to the future of the medium, rather than journalists or historical musicologists.

Many of these writers are suspicious and distrustful of academic formalism and are aware of the dangers inherent in the manufacture of instant music history:

... all information is afforded a veneer of neutrality all events treated as equally worthy of analysis; ... true critique is stifled.¹⁴

Unfortunately, those contributions that deal with individual composers' discussions of their own work are the least satisfactory and most boring. 'Suffice it to say', enthuses Michael McNabb, 'that I used the Weierstrass-Mandelbrot random fractal function'. This is pure self-indulgence. Why, too, should we be particularly interested in Tod Machover's lengthy ramblings on his latest operatic opus, proudly entitled 'A Stubborn Search for Artistic Unity'? My own feeling is that the more generalised philosophical attempts to impose order on the chaos by way of classification and analysis (in particular, the essays by Wishart, Smalley and Emerson) are the most successful.

As space does not permit a thorough-going discussion of each article, I shall confine my remarks to Denis Smalley's 'Spectro-morphology and Structuring processes'. This owes much to Schaeffer's pioneering *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966)¹⁵, a fact that the author readily admits. Central to Schaeffer's concept of the sound-as-object is the entirely novel and actually rather perverse idea that the apprehension of a sound should occur without relation to its source or cause. This 'acousmatic' or 'reduced' listening then becomes the basis for an analytical method founded on the supposed existence of sonic archetypes of one kind or another.¹⁶ Smalley then argues that a common terminology must first be established before any meaningful discussion or evaluation of electro-acoustic music can take place; accordingly much of the chapter is taken up with a meticulous classification and labelling of spectral types, morphological models and categories of sonic motion in the virtual space created by loudspeaker networks. The tone is didactic rather than speculative, and occasionally pompous (the royal 'we' appears regularly):

We claim that the very rapid development of spectro-morphology is the most radical change in Western musical history ... Spectro-morphological thinking is the rightful heir of Western musical tradition ...¹⁷

a cynical interpretation being that the 'vernacular language' (i.e. the music of the proles) is inferior to the other prong of the twentieth-century musical fork (i.e. what 'we' electro-acoustic composers get up to in our university studios). Such snobbery is forgivable, however, if only because Smalley constantly emphasises the primacy of aural perception as the ultimate arbiter of quality and source of all value-judgement, and because his rejection of formalism and excessive conceptualisation in twentieth-century music is as sincere as Wishart's. This is the thrust of his

concluding paragraph, in which he reaches the entirely laudable conclusion that electro-acoustic music deserves to go under

unless aural judgement is permitted to triumph over technology.¹⁸

Unfortunately, Smalley's penchant for jargon renders an otherwise interesting discussion almost impenetrable for all but the academics amongst us. 'Spectro-morphological', 'pitch-effluvium continuum', 'dislocated surrogacy' – these are learned neologisms hardly destined to delight the ears of the Clavinova player in his parlour or the street-wise rock musician at his local emporium. Nor is 'electro-acoustic' an adjective that rolls smoothly off the tongue, although institutions of higher education love it: its aura of scientific respectability conjures just the right images of sterile laboratories and earnest research.

But what are we to call this music if not 'electro-acoustic'? Wishart neatly side-steps the issue by coining his own all-inclusive phrase, 'sonic art'. If we are discussing sound and its organisation, then why not use the adjective 'sonic' and replace 'music' (a loaded term) with 'art' (pleasantly diffuse).

All this may seem like nit-picking, but our act of choosing labels, our very word selection, imposes an ontological status and narrows the limits of that being defined. Computer technology intertwines itself so intimately with so many aspects of life today that soon it will be taken for granted like electricity itself. And, just as we no longer talk about an 'electric' refrigerator or an 'electric' light bulb, perhaps we will one day soon be able to talk about 'music', if not 'sonic art'.

These contributions, to conclude, are most welcome at a time when studio composers' work is still being largely ignored, trivialised or treated as a fringe activity by the vast majority of the music establishment, press, and concert-going public alike. It is to be hoped that these writings and others like them, will spark off a forest fire of debate as we move towards electro-acoustic music's fifth decade.

1 Trevor Wishart, foreword, *On Sonic Art* (York: Imagineering Press, 1985).

2 Simon Emerson, ed., *The Language of Electroacoustic Music* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.1.

3 Roger Scruton, 'Harmony hath charm, din destroys', *The Times* (28 June, 1983).

4 *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, p.2.

5 Bruce Pennycook, 'Language and Resources: A New Paradox', *ibid.*, p.137.

6 Herbert Eimert & Hans Ulrich Humpert, *Das Lexikon der elektronischen Musik* (Hamburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1973).

7 *Ibid.*, foreword.

8 Paul Griffiths, *A Guide to Electronic Music* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).

9 Richard Orton, *Electronic Music in Schools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

10 David Keane, *Tape Music Composition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

11 Peter Manning, *Electronic and Computer Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

12 Harry Partch, *Genesis of a Music*.

13 Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971).

14 *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, p.1.

15 André Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*. (Paris: Seuil, 1966).

16 Smalley actually goes further than this and suggests that 'reduced' listening can be an alternative mode of genuine musical experience.

17 *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, p.93.

18 *Ibid.*, p.98.

R. Wood Massi

Lectures on Anarchy: John Cage at Wesleyan

From February 22nd to the 27th 1988, Wesleyan University was host to the festival-symposium 'John Cage at Wesleyan', a celebration both of Cage's 75th birthday and of the diversity of his influence on contemporary arts and philosophy. The quiet of Middletown, Connecticut, the small New England town in which the Wesleyan campus stands, was in striking contrast to the intensity of the festival: as well as fifteen panels, lectures, roundtables, workshops and paper-reading sessions, involving 56 speakers from around the world, there were also twelve performance events in which 25 different groups or soloists performed 34 works. There were exhibitions of Cage's graphic pieces, displays related to his written works and scores and even a 'Giant Cagean [sic] Disco', at which three bands and two disc-jockeys performed simultaneously.

Cage's own contribution to the festival, a Lecture on Anarchy, was accompanied by a pamphlet, containing Emma Goldman's observation that 'anarchists and revolutionaries can be no more made than musicians. All that can be done is to plant the seeds of thought. Whether something vital will develop depends largely on the fertility of the human soil, though the quality of the intellectual seed must not be overlooked'. For Neely Bruce, the soil of particular interest here was that of the universities where, he felt, artists like Cage found haven during the 1960s. But the seeds Cage planted have borne abundant fruit in fields much wider than those of academia and the festival organisers (Neely Bruce, Jean Shaw and Elyse Sanzi) reflected this by inviting speakers from many different disciplines. Even apparently tightly focussed papers and discussions, under titles such as 'Cage and the Intellectual Climate of the Sixties', 'Technology and the Evolution of Cage's Music' and 'The Performance of Cage', in fact covered a wide range of topics. At the same time some topics recurred at session after session; for me five particular categories of inquiry emerged: 1) anarchy, ordinariness, egalitarianism and permission; 2) noise, chance, meaning and aesthetics; 3) mindfulness and Zen philosophy; 4) ideas about teaching and universities; 5) the nature of influence. What follows is not meant as a complete precis of the various presentations, but as a distillation of contributions germane to these topics.

Cage's own lecture was a unique study in anarchy: for more than an hour he read mesostics,¹ in which fragmented quotations from Emma Goldman, Walt Whitman, Leo Tolstoy, Errico Malatesta, Albert Einstein, Buckminster Fuller, *et al*, were arranged around names and titles appropriate to the subject of anarchy. Especial emphasis was given to Thoreau's statement, 'That government is best which governs least'. The effect of Cage's ideas about society on his other beliefs was also the subject of a special lecture by Richard Kostelanetz. Cage 'is essentially a thirties leftie', he said; 'Zen and chance and everything else came afterwards. They are merely icing on the anarchistic cake'.²

The politics of the ordinary figured importantly in the presentation by Michael Wolff, a specialist on

Victorian England. Indicating his own fascination with everyday life, Cage once told Wolff, 'You want music? Listen. You want art? Look.' For Wolff, such a perspective reflects 'the power of the ordinary imagination to make its own joy and its own sublimity'. Wolff said he found refuge in Cage's formulations from the disconnectedness of contemporary life; nevertheless he also questioned some of Cage's assumptions. First he addressed the belief that the political solution lies

in the technological utopias of Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller. [This] makes sense if for no other reason than it seems to preserve the anarchy of the self within a community of mutuality and abundance. Nevertheless, for many of us there has been a severe discontinuity between his discussion of individual aesthetic and ethic, and his hopes for a benign world order . . . Our task is to move out from the permission which Cage gives us to see ourselves as at once ordinary and artful, through the middle ground of temporary and fluid reworkings of family or clan or tribe (such as this gathering), into a world politics of the ordinary and the artful where multitudes of selves reconnect through the sharing of embodied imaginings and enactments of decency and love.

Reconnection was a concern of Sidney Monas, a Slavic languages scholar, who mentioned a kaleidoscope of movements and ideas from the sixties, including feminism, gay liberation, black power, communes, drugs, Vietnam, and aleatoric music. These ideas ultimately led us, he suggested, to a more participatory society and to the breaking down of barriers. During the panel on world music, the composer Pauline Oliveros said that 'the emergence of the women's movement about the same time that Cage's work became more and more visible is not just a coincidence, but is a resonance of ideas'. Keith Potter reported on Cage's reception in England, pointing out similarities and differences between Cage's music and that of Cornelius Cardew. He mentioned new performance and notational techniques which reflect the openness and democracy implicit in the experimental aesthetic once shared by the composers.

Themes of equality and ordinariness pervaded the presentation by the music theorist Leonard Meyer, who began by recalling that when he and Cage were both at Wesleyan's Center for Advanced Studies in 1961, 'I was naive, pretending to be sophisticated. He was sophisticated, seeming to be naive'. Turning to an analysis of Cage's place in twentieth-century music, an art which he claimed was still in the ardent embrace of Romanticism, Meyer noted that egalitarianism, a concept rooted in the politics of Romanticism, permeates Cage's 'conception of musical experience and aesthetics, and his compositional practice. [These] emphasize the irrelevance of context, convention, and prior learning while affirming the primacy of unmediated, innocent apprehension'. The Romantic glorification of nature developed into two different ways of viewing the world, according to Meyer. First, there was organicism, which stressed the unity of a work, the constraints that lie behind the surface of the sounds, and which leads ultimately to the deterministic techniques of structural anthropology and linguistics, Schenkerian analysis and strict serial composition. The other perspective, followed by Wordsworth, Thoreau and Cage, 'emphasizes the value of unmediated, innocent experience of the phenomenal world... To make an underlying structural principle more important, somehow more aesthetically significant than perceived stimuli, [as the organicists had], is almost like confusing the structure

of the DNA molecule that constrains the development of daffodils with our experience of them tossing their heads in spritely dance'. While acknowledging his great debt to Cage, Meyer nevertheless admitted that he does not know how to attend innocently to nature or art. 'I leave innocence to those who can bear the tedious burden of eternal purity.'

The resonance of ideas and the problem of meaning also figured heavily in the presentation by the social theorist Charles Lemert who connected them with the fundamental revolutions of the last quarter-century. He indicated that by the sixties Cage and a number of others had already 'cleared the way to a very profound and important critique of linearity, of our understanding of the idea of the centre'. Lemert used the contrast of silence and noise as a model for the ideological conflicts of the period. Students and leftists reacted to the silence of the fifties with noise and a good deal of talk. This helped create among social theorists and others a special interest in linguistics, according to Lemert. One significant consequence was deconstructionism, 'a frontal assault intellectually upon classical metaphysical terms which sought, in the words of Derrida, to restrict the play of thought by relying too heavily upon the notion of either a cryptic or explicit metaphysical center. Of course, Derrida is a very important... thinker in relation to this conference... because his work was designed, at least in the early stages through 1968, primarily to attack the classic notion of a voice, the notion that meanings in consciousness could be at the center of social life and thought about social life.' This parallels Cage's belief that each activity is centred in itself and that there exists a plurality of centres, a belief derived from his studies in Zen philosophy during the fifties. For Lemert, deconstructionism, Cage's philosophy, and such sociological techniques as ethnomethodology are 'radically relativizing notions [which] have fundamentally changed the way in which we think about our political lives and also about our intellectual lives.'

In formulating a philosophical response to Cage's work, the Wesleyan philosopher and member of the writers' panel, Noel Carroll, talked about the use of noise to redefine music. 'Part and parcel of Cage's brief against musical tradition... is that the sounds he foregrounds neither say anything nor do they have a purpose. Chance preempts a direct operation of the will on the material. This makes their interpretation in terms of the artist's intention impossible, for the artist no longer has the means to express herself or to realize intended purposes.' But in fact, Carroll maintained, Cage's works do have meaning and purpose, otherwise they would be indiscernible from the noises of everyday life.

Cage's noises are not like everyday noises... They are, to use Nelson Goodman's terminology, exemplifications of everyday noises. They are samples of everyday noises... in the way that tailors' swatches of material are symbols but at the same time physical samples. Ordinary noise is not a symbol in this sense, because ordinary noise is not framed [as it is in Cage's work]. One reason that I think contemporary philosophers might disagree with the claim that Cage's music is meaningless is because many of them have been convinced of the Wittgensteinian notion that meaning is a function of the use of a word or a gesture within a context, a context that has a structure... In virtue of its historical context, Cage's compositions have a subject; that is, they are about something... the contrast of ordinary sound and musical sound. Indeed, through his ingenious intervention in the tradition of music, Cage may well have created an entirely new aesthetic category, that of ordinariness... But

this isn't to disparage Cage... Cage's work opened art to the environmental surround, which in turn led us to the appreciation of the cultural and historical surround.

Poet and performer Jackson Mac Low, who had earlier given a provocative account of Cage's impact on various poets, reacted to Carroll by underlining the subjective nature of meaning. 'I've always felt that, in the use... of anything produced by the human voice... there is an embodied meaning. But I tend to veer away from talking of symbols... Meaning is enacted rather than referential... When we perceive, meaning becomes enacted within us - and it is a different meaning since we take part in it. Especially, this would be true of chance works.'

Cage once said that sounds are facts, not symbols. At the festival, I discussed these ideas with him. His perspective is that experience transcends meaning. 'In life, what we're involved in', according to Cage,

is reflection, transparency, superimposition, etcetera. All you have to do is look anywhere around the room, or into your glasses, and you're seeing the whole thing at once, and seeing it reflected back in surprising and interesting ways. If you start getting that complex situation and reaction we're living in, which involves both seeing and hearing predominantly, and if you try to make that thicker by making it symbolic or... philosophical, or other than what it actually is, then you have such a complex thing that I think you'd hesitate to have an idea, or even an experience. I remember asking a lady once, 'What did you think of what you just saw?' She said, 'Oh, I'll have to think about it.'

The San Francisco Conservatory's Doug Kahn, and two members of the panel on Europe, French philosopher Daniel Charles and Polish musicologist Zbigniew Skowron, addressed Cage's attempts to abandon meaning. They connected the appreciation of the sound object and the processes by which it is produced with the philosophical precepts of phenomenology and contrasted these with the assumptions of symbolism.

In explaining the influence of Zen Buddhism on Cage's life and work, a musicologist from the University of Illinois, Heidi Von Gunden, focused on the practice of mindfulness, that is, attuning the mind and the body to whatever is happening at the moment. She demonstrated how unimpededness, interpenetration, and compassion have deeply affected Cage. By contrast, the oracular Norman O. Brown of the University of California at Santa Cruz compared the perspective of Zen with that of James Joyce. 'We go with *Finnegan's Wake* rather than Suzuki. In that Dionysian body in which all are members of one body, things are necessarily confused. Ordinary language is always wrong. We do not want to recover our sanity. "What a mnicc old mness it all mnakes." It is not true that each thing is itself and not another thing. It is not true that men are men and sounds are sounds. All lives, all dances.' He further observed that 'John Cage is an extreme case of the artist suffering the contradiction between Dionysian and Apollonian tendencies - a living oxymoron.'

Ideas about teaching and universities came up often during the festival. Leonard Meyer delineated three ways that universities deal with knowledge:

You can take fields of knowledge and [plough off the top two inches]. That's a general education. Then you can take a post hole digger and go straight down as far as you can. That's called a graduate education. Then you can take a shovel and dig a hole. [Anyone who has ever done this] knows that the farther down you go the broader the perimeter of the hole at the top has to be. That seems to me the way one has to

become interdisciplinary . . . , not because one wants to, but because one has to . . . Some are born interdisciplinary and some achieve it . . . , all the rest of us have it thrust upon us.

An audience member, taking up Meyer's analogy, said that universities are good at handing out shovels and showing people plots to be dug, by, for example, having Cage in residence, but that they fail to encourage one to keep digging. Meyer replied that such encouragement comes from faculty who ask interesting questions but do not give the answers. Dick Higgins, one of Cage's students at the New School of Social Research in the 1950s, pointed out that this was the way that Cage taught. At another point during the festival, Yale's Vivian Perlis said that Cage once told her he did not think that teachers should teach anything to students, but that they 'should discover what it is that the student knows – and that's not easy to find out – and then, of course, encourage the student to be courageous with respect to his knowledge, and to be practical, and to bring his knowledge to fruition . . . Once John asked David Tudor, "How should I behave at these university situations?" . . . Tudor said, "Think of yourself as a hit and run driver." ' Citing Cage's remarkable work on mushrooms, Neely Bruce offered the metaphor that the university should be a rich layer of horse manure into which the right kind of spores would fall.

Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, Gordon Mumma, Alvin Lucier, and William Duckworth on the panel 'Cage and Other Composers' talked about what Cage's permission, encouragement, and discipline have meant to them. The topics they addressed covered a wide range, though much of what they said was anecdotal. Brown traced some of the differences between his style and Cage's. Wolff talked about the responsibility that comes with detachment. Lucier said that a Cage concert he attended in Venice had such a strong effect on him that he did not write a note on five-line staff paper for twenty years thereafter. Mumma recounted his experiences collaborating in performances with Cage. Duckworth reminded us of the perspective explained in the *I Ching*, that influencing people is gradual and comes about by constant and patient concern for one's own moral development. Other speakers discussed influence in terms less personal than those used by the composers. Using Yugoslavian art movements as examples, the musicologist Niksa Gligo discussed the mutual influences between 'centres' of culture and 'peripheries'. In one case, Cage himself was hardly referred to at all by the artists involved, though their work was 'obviously related to him as an almost unknown source of radiation'. In another case, he was an explicit point of reference, but 'actually only as an excuse for quite independent interpretations'. Influence is not always as clear as it may seem, according to Gligo, who characterized it as 'that something hanging in the air which falls to the earth without any explainable reason'.

In addition to the panels, there was an important roundtable on Cage research. This included presentations about the three major Cage collections: by Rita Bottoms of UC Santa Cruz where the mushroom archive is held, by Elizabeth Swaim who is in charge of Wesleyan's archive of Cage publications, and by Deborah Campana from the music library at Northwestern. Campana gave a marvellous slide show of Northwestern's large collection of items related to Cage's personal history and to his work with various types of notation. Everyone felt that a list of the

locations of other Cage artefacts – manuscripts, letters, posters, etc. – should be drawn up, and Campana agreed to maintain such a catalogue.

The Cage works chosen for performance during the festival ranged from the simple, quiet piano solos of the 1940s, through the massive orchestral works of the 1950s, to the finely crafted string quartets of the 1980s. In a note about the concert of 1955, Cage's first appearance on the Wesleyan campus, music professor Richard Winslow wrote that the effect of Cage's visit continued for days after the concert. 'To an astonishing extent the aesthetic focus created by Cage's music and ideas took center stage – for debate, for vilification, for anger, for embrace.' Neither Cage, Winslow, nor David Tudor, however, remembers exactly which pieces Tudor performed that night. The first evening's concert of the festival, consisting of piano works by Cage, Feldman, and Stockhausen, commemorated, even if it did not duplicate, that previous concert.

The most interesting concert of the festival *recreated* one held in 1965 at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis. There were two pieces in the first half, one an amplification of the body, another of the mind. Cage's *0'00"* is a solo to be interpreted in any way in a situation provided with maximum amplification. The composer performed it sitting at a table in a squeaky chair and writing a letter. Every movement of the pen or his body filled the concert hall with sound. The effect was fascinating. Then Alvin Lucier presented *Music for Solo Performer* using enormously amplified brain waves and percussion. Lucier explained that the score calls for assistants to pan alpha signals to loudspeakers which are physically coupled to percussion instruments. 'The cones of the speakers move, sometimes violently, in response to [the signals], causing the instruments to sound'. During the performance, Lucier sat motionless with electrodes taped to his head.

The social nature of performance is the subject of Christian Wolff's *For 1, 2, or 3 People*, which he performed along with Lucier and Cage. The players must learn a complex set of symbols and instantly take cues from each other and the environment. The outcome is unpredictable. Instrumentation being indeterminate, these players chose a piano and a balloon. A good deal of the power of this performance came from watching Cage mash the balloon against the edges of the piano until it finally broke. A spectacular rendition of Cage's *Rozart Mix* by approximately thirty students of Lucier and Mladen Milicevic followed the Wolff piece. They had prepared eighty-eight tape loops, some of great length, consisting of thousands of spliced pieces. During the concert, they extended these from at least a dozen tape recorders to microphone stands positioned throughout the concert space. Crawling over the stage, around each other, and among the audience, they created a wonderfully complex sculpture and sound texture. Cage, sitting in the middle of it all, was clearly pleased.

For me, the best of the afternoon concerts was that given by Mitchell Clark and Company; it revealed the striking originality and variety of Cage's musical conceptions even early in his career. *Amores* (1943) for prepared piano, nine tom-toms, seven wood blocks, and a pod-rattle was the clearest example of Cage's technique of composing with complex, interlocking rhythmic structures; or at least so it seemed the day after having heard Thomas Moore analyze it.

The programme also included the *Suite for Toy Piano* (1948), *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* (1952) for forty-two records (realized on tape), *Water Music* (1952) for piano,

radio, and submerged whistle, and the most moving piece of this group, *Inlets* (1977). During this piece four players tilted twelve water-filled conch shells this way and that to produce gentle gurgling noises which were amplified. About half way through the piece came the sound of fire as other performers burnt pine cones outside; then, again from outside, one long sounding of a conch blown like a trumpet.

The performances of the works for larger ensembles were of uneven quality. The *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Orchestra* (1951), discussed in a paper by James Prichett was a pivotal work in Cage's development, incorporating chance and determined processes, the equality of sound and silence, and the primacy of the individual musical event. The soloist Jon Barlow and the conductor Melvin Strauss brought out the many subtle layers of meaning in this work. In *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961) Cage based the pitch choices for all eighty-six parts on star maps and dedicated each part to individual friends or couples, many of them members of the Wesleyan community where Cage was working. On the evidence of this performance it remains a popular work at Wesleyan. The performance of the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-8) did not live up to my image of this masterpiece. Perhaps I have been irreparably imprinted by the recording of its première at the Town Hall Retrospective in New York City in 1958, one reason why Cage has rarely been enthusiastic about recording his work.

The *Song Books* (1970) are a compendium of Cage's compositional techniques before 1970, and an embodiment of musical anarchy. The score for each of the 89 solos which make up the piece indicates whether it is a song or a theatre piece, whether it is to be performed alone or with electronics, and whether it is relevant or irrelevant to the subject 'we connect Satie with Thoreau'. Performers may present any number of solos in any order, with any superimpositions, for any length of time. The hundreds of objects and actions used by the four members of the American Music/Theater Group for 90 minutes added up to a very satisfying performance.

For the final concert, the Arditti Quartet played the engaging *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1949-1950), the divisions of which signify not only the four string parts but also the seasons of the year, representing creation, preservation, destruction, and quiescence. They also played two recent works for string quartet, both demonstrating Cage's interest in accommodating variable relationships among the players' parts. Each instrument in *Thirty Pieces for String Quartet* (1983) may begin each of its 30 sections at any point within a 45 second time period, and end it within a 75 second period. *Music for Four* (1987), which the Arditti Quartet premièred here with impeccable technique, is similar, but here the flexibility of beginnings and endings varies even more than it does in *Thirty Pieces*. Also, Cage has employed chance operations to determine the ranges used by the four players in each section. The floating mosaic forms of these pieces contain a huge and gratifying diversity of compositional techniques.

The only dance work in the festival was Cage's *Four Walls* (1944) choreographed by Sin Cha Hong who, with the pianist Margaret Leng Tan and the mezzo-soprano Isabelle Ganz, performed it beautifully. Merce Cunningham, Cage's closest domestic and professional partner for the last 40 years, wrote the words to *Four Walls*, but he was not at the festival; nor unfortunately were any of the visual artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg, who have been important to Cage's

development over the years.

Nevertheless, 'John Cage at Wesleyan' was an exciting and significant contribution to the understanding of Cage's music, art, social thought, and philosophy. John Cage is a person of tolerance, warmth, and kindness and these characteristics seemed to permeate the atmosphere of the festival, where anarchy and mindfulness combined in a splendid tribute to a great composer.

- ¹ Mesostics are like acrostics in that individual letters in each line of a text form words or phrases when combined vertically. In acrostics it is the first letter of each line that forms the word, whereas in Cage's mesostics the designated letters may fall anywhere in the line. Cage explains how he applied the mesostic principle to *Finnegans Wake* on p.134 of his *Empty Words* (London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1980).
- ² Kostelanetz also revealed that Harvard University has recently offered Cage the Charles Eliot Norton Chair of Poetics.

Michael Blake

Kagel at the Almeida

The Almeida Festival, 25-28 June 1988

It has been said of Kagel that his ideas are often much better than his music. More often than not this has been said by those who have heard very little of the music, and certainly nothing of his recent output. Kagel's work has always been little known in this country and recordings virtually ceased to appear after about 1970.

The 1988 Almeida Festival has changed all that, with the mounting of a retrospective covering thirty years, from 1957 (soon after Kagel's arrival in Europe from Argentina) to 1987. Over the space of four days, eighteen pieces were performed by both local and visiting artists, and the film *Ludwig Van* was shown. This had been complemented over the previous three weeks by the showing of seven of Kagel's other films on Channel 4. The first two days concentrated on works involving text and/or film, and the first day (held at the South Bank) included three music theatre pieces. The third and fourth concerts were devoted to chamber music: his string quartets and works for various permutations of the piano trio medium.

I think it can safely be said that Kagel (and not Peter Maxwell Davies or anyone else) has defined the medium of new music theatre and instrumental theatre. No other composer has examined and continually developed the medium as thoroughly as Kagel has, from his earliest works in the fifties, through *Staatstheater* (1967-69), his major examination of the conventions and resources of the opera house, to some of his finest works such as *Kantrimusik* and *Mare Nostrum*, written in the seventies. Only recently does there seem to be a tendency towards writing 'absolute' music (the Third String Quartet of 1986-87 for example). It was a pity that the retrospective did not

include a work such as *Kantrimusik*, as this is not only a very fine musical score, but a wonderful piece of music theatre – if sensitively and tastefully done.

I'm afraid that this wasn't the case in Vocem's staged performances of *Ensemble* and *Hallelujah*, given on the first day. Kagel is a very sensitive and subtle composer, and these same qualities, together with absolute precision, are crucial to the performance of his music. Firmer direction was definitely needed here. *Hallelujah* (1967-68) allows the performers considerable freedom as regards both musical material and theatrical presentation. The work can last from 15 to 45 minutes, be performed by 16-32 voices or only three solo voices, and done in a conventional concert arrangement or in a mixed concert and music theatre format. Kagel suggests that the actions may be derived from the field of ritual and liturgy. Vocem's performance lasted for just over half an hour, and was given by seven singers dressed in white habits, one of whom took on the role of leader/conductor. Some of Kagel's suggestions regarding staging were followed: five of the singers emerged from different parts of the auditorium and departed the same way; but the piece began with two of the singers on stage, one seated at a dummy organ console performing wildly in mime. Throughout the piece one had the feeling that Ken Russell had been directing this rather tasteless performance of *Hallelujah*, which was quite simply way over the top.

Ensemble (1967-9), one of the sections of the nine-part work *Staatstheater* is scored for sixteen voices, but in this eight-voice version each singer took more than one part. Each singer represents a well-known character from the operatic literature, and Kagel suggests that they be costumed accordingly. In Vocem's version they were not, so one could not identify characters easily, and the chosen setting was the dressing room of an opera house with the singers warming up before a performance, with the addition of a stage hand sweeping, his broom eventually taken into service as a prop by one of the singers. The composer's idea in *Ensemble* was to 'illuminate what is frequently the void between the intentional expression of the music and the gestures chosen to convey it'. The singers should have been confined to chairs, as the score suggests, to limit their dramatic movement. But for all this, the performance was not without its humorous moments.

Anagrama, the programme given by the New London Chamber Choir and Ensemble under James Wood demonstrated rather neatly three of Kagel's approaches to text-setting which the composer had also talked about in a pre-concert interview. The first of these was also the earliest of Kagel's works to be performed in the festival, *Anagrama* (1957-8) for four solo voices, speaking chorus and ensemble. The exact function of the four (seated) soloists was not really clear, as most of the text was declaimed and sung by the 'speaking' chorus, with occasional contributions from the soloists. This was pure fifties serialism, something Kagel moved away from fairly quickly, but nevertheless an enjoyable piece, (which is more than can be said about so many compositions from this period). The text consists of the vowels and consonants of a palindrome: 'in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni' (we are circling in the night and are devoured by fire), from the *Divine Comedy*, translated into four languages. Kagel points out that 'here language and music are combined in a vocabulary that displays their correlations and reciprocal aspects'.

The second approach to text-setting came in the form of *Fürst Igor, Strawinsky* (1982) for bass voice and

ensemble. This is in many ways a straightforward setting of a text: Igor's aria from Act 2 of Borodin's *Prince Igor*. Kagel's wonderful use of instrumental colour is manifest in his deployment of the very small but characteristic ensemble, particularly the presence of the tuba (almost obligatory in his music from *Kantrimusik* onwards) and the unusual diversity of the percussion. This is a homage to Stravinsky, through a setting of a text whose ambiguity reminded the composer of Stravinsky. As he says, 'Many of these words could have been spoken by Stravinsky', for example, 'Now I often see corpses in the dark night / They accuse me! You sacrificed us! / My fame and honour are disgraced, / The distant "homeland" curses me. Woe!'. This mood is expressed in the instrumentation too: bass voice, low instruments with dark colours (cor anglais, french horn, tuba, viola) and percussion instruments symbolising death, imprisonment, etc. (anvil, iron chains, wood pieces, heavy wooden block, metal pail with heavy stones – all played by an unseen percussionist) and instruments with a liturgical association (the deep bell producing a 'plaintive and mysterious sound', the semanterion – a resonant board struck with a wooden mallet, used by the Greek-orthodox church as a primitive bell). *Fürst Igor, Strawinsky* was exquisitely sung by the American bass Nicholas Isherwood.

Another recent piece *Mitternachtsstück* (1980-81, 85-86) for chorus and instruments, represents a third approach to text-setting. The text is taken from Robert Schumann's *Diaries of 1827-1836* (published in Leipzig only in 1971). The contents of these diaries sound absolutely fascinating (what a pity they are not available in an English translation!): Schumann's thoughts on music, poetry, economics, politics, social life, etc. So Kagel's piece is about the writer Schumann, rather than the composer. The choir acts as narrator, 'who sympathises with, but retains a distance from the characters' – Selene, Gustav/Skeleton, the Prince, and two unnamed characters – sung by five soloists. What caused confusion was the constant reference in Kagel's programme note to three movements, which were followed in this performance by a fourth, the latter almost as long as the first three put together. This presumably is the movement written in 1985-86, while the others date from several years earlier. As it happens the last movement also turned out to be the most beautiful, accompanied by a fantastic combination of violin and harmonium, which both enhanced the cathedral setting of this scene (entitled *Altarblatt* (Altar Sheet/Piece)) and the wordsetting of the text itself. Lines such as 'chords, like tears from gentle wistfulness; hovering and gliding they floated by like gentle rays of light' or 'Now new sounds joined in . . . now it was as if a single broken note was speaking slumberously' are beautifully painted in musical terms, and even the more obvious depiction of lines such as 'Silence – then a single deep note hardly audible . . . fills the nave' or 'one more dissonant chord and then no more' seem fresh in the context of Kagel's setting. The writing for violin and harmonium is particularly well displayed in a purely instrumental prelude and an interlude. The work as a whole, however, felt somewhat overlong, as did a number of pieces in other concerts; but the setting of the texts, the deployment of the chorus, the exploration of unusual vocal effects, the use of the soloists, and the choice of instrumentation – a different combination for each movement – was always fascinating and often produced breathtaking effects.

The concert had opened with Kagel's instrumental realisation of two ballades by Guillaume de Machaut. Although Kagel does not indicate tempi, the pieces were taken at a deadly pace, and not even Kagel's sensitive orchestration could save these from sounding like the very worst excesses of early music performance in the bad old days. Also on the subject of performance, while one acknowledges the New London Chamber Choir's commitment to new music, their more amateur approach to performance was very apparent when contrasted with Nicholas Isherwood's moving account of *Fürst Igor, Stravinsky*.

Two other works involved the setting of texts: *Tango Alemán*, performed at the final concert, and *Oral Treason*, a 75-minute music epic about the Devil, given its UK première at the QEH. This choice of venue made one wish that the whole Almeida Festival could be moved there: comfortable seating, air conditioning and uncramped restaurant facilities. The one thing that remained unchanged was the late starting time of each event. *Oral Treason* (1981-83) turned out to be a fascinating sequence of texts interwoven to form the epic, and accompanied by what is often a very good musical score consisting of 36 numbers. The text, in an English translation by Christopher Logue, was spoken by three actors – the marvellous Eleanor Bron, and the rather less marvellous Geoffrey Chater and Karl Johnson. The design for this somewhat tacky production, directed by Pierre Audi, consisted of three suspended corpses which seemed to have little significance, dwarfed as they were by the size of the QEH stage. Eleanor Bron shone, moving through an incredible range of moods and characters in this considerable *tour de force*. The ensemble playing of the Almeida Ensemble (which like the New London Ensemble the following night, is an *ad hoc* band, and consists of anyone who is free in June), despite the presence of a conductor (Rupert Bawden) was often ragged but the tuba player (Joseph Hassan), cimbalom player (Gregory Knowles) and percussionists (Terence Emery and Keith Bartlett) were outstanding. Once again Kagel's wonderful sense of colour and sympathy for the instruments was in evidence. His use of the cimbalom was particularly striking, and the violin often recalled the same instrument (and the Devil!) in Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat*. In many ways the BBC television presentation a week later was much stronger: the individual speakers were focussed, the ensemble were always headless and the cutting was quite imaginative. But the problem of the work's length, which I had felt at the first performance, remained.

Three nights later, in the programme entitled *Finale*, we heard what might be called *Reminiscences de Oral Treason*, or rather the Piano Trio (1984-85). This important 25-minute contribution to the fairly scanty twentieth-century piano trio repertoire made one of the deepest impressions of the entire Kagel retrospective.

Cast in three movements, and using material from *Oral Treason* (mainly the best bits), Kagel seems to have achieved what he did not often achieve elsewhere: by compressing the material into three succinct movements and scoring it for a familiar and intimate medium, the work never loses pace – indeed, it is action-packed! And it is superbly conceived for the medium. Looking at it a little more closely, it becomes apparent that Kagel has arranged the numbers of *Oral Treason* into three movements in such a way as to give the impression of a conventional piano trio, in a broad

sense not unlike the Charles Ives Piano Trio (the soundworld of the Ives is sometimes not all that far away either, just as in *Klangwölfe*). The first movement, the shortest of the three, is essentially a slow movement, consisting of a sequence of four numbers plus a short coda – using an E minor triad – which recurs later. The second movement is the 'scherzo', with a slower, quieter 'trio', and an extended 'scherzo' repeat. The final movement, essentially quick, but with a slow introduction (underlaid with the E minor triad passage), is characterised by its central waltz leading to a strong climax, and followed by a final distillation in the same coda material as the first movement. But I suppose what really made this finale to the retrospective so convincing was the performance. Three great musicians (the violinist Saschko Gawriloff, the cellist Siegfried Palm and the pianist Bruno Canino) playing as if they'd lived with the work for years (not just two!). And this was undoubtedly the best Kagel performance of the festival. It prompts speculation as to the performances we would get if other great artists took Kagel's works into their repertoires – the Vermeer Quartet, the Alban Berg Quartet, the Beaux Arts Trio, *et al.*

The other works were performed with the same care and precision: *Klangwölfe* (1978) for violin and piano, *An tasten* (1978) for piano, *Siegfried/p* for solo cello (1972) and the humorous and charming *Tango Alemán* (1978) for voice, violin, piano and bandoneon. Kagel was himself the speaker of the made-up language in this piece – meant to sound like German to the Argentinians, and like Argentinian to the Germans. Kagel's intention was to recreate the 'essence' of the tango by using typical melodic and rhythmic structures, but presented in a somewhat fragmented form. The singer narrates a 'sentimental' tale – Kagel reminds us that the singer is, as is customary, a bard singing of shattered hopes, remembering great longings, always anticipating tragic love.

The other three instrumental works are small-scale pieces: *Klangwölfe*, with its references to Bartók, Ives, Berg and Ravel is quite beautiful in places when played without the wretched Tonwolf mute required by the composer (I know from having rehearsed it in that way myself). Saschko Gawriloff, nevertheless, delivered the piece with breathtaking poise, and Bruno Canino was ultra-sensitive in balancing the Steinway concert grand with the practice-muted violin. Canino's solo, *An tasten* (which actually received its UK première about ten years ago, and not at this concert!) is not an étude in the traditional sense. What we have for the most part is a 17-minute sequence of Alberti-basses, but played by both hands, so that melody and accompaniment have, as Kagel puts it, become inseparable. As in *Klangwölfe* there are references to music of the past, in this case piano music, both specific (the *Moonlight Sonata*, the opening motif of Schoenberg's op.11) and general (Debussy, and Bartók again). Originally written for the remarkable Aloys Kontarsky (like most of Kagel's piano works until a few years ago), Bruno Canino made this piece very much his own, poised over the piano like a bird of prey, playing cleanly and incisively – something which I valued in his playing of all the works in the programme, and something that I missed as an essential elsewhere in the Kagel concerts. Siegfried Palm, meanwhile, almost stole the show with his tailor-made solo, *Siegfried/p*. The difficulties of playing this work (and singing and grunting – inspired by Palm's vocalising when he plays) can perhaps only be

appreciated by cellists, in particular the table of fingering the five pitches (taken from Palm's name) as harmonics, in 75 different ways – which Kagel calls his contribution to an anti-spectacular virtuoso style. The results are pretty spectacular nevertheless.

I have left until last what was probably the least interesting concert as a whole – that by the Arditti Quartet. This was not so much their fault, rather the fact that Kagel has not produced a particularly strong corpus of music for string quartet. The First/Second String Quartet of 1965-7, two movements which can be performed in any order and can be separated, turned out to be rather silly 'squeaky gate' stuff from the sixties. However, the music-theatre element did rescue me from total boredom. The players gave a reasonably unembarrassing presentation of the theatrical dimension (I understand that the composer had worked with them for a good many hours on the piece), but one couldn't help feeling that this work would have been better left out of the festival, particularly as there are better Kagel works than this from the sixties. The range of special effects yielded some unusual sounds, which created an element of anticipation for the listener – sellotape on the strings, knitting needles, and a bit of wood replacing the bow were among the best, although the leader's donning of a leather glove on his left hand was the highlight here. According to the composer these effects are all used 'to realise a prefabricated prepared poetry'.

The two movements were separated by a trifle for piccolo and string quartet dating from 1985 and called *Pan*. Based on the ascending five-note figure from *The Magic Flute*, this four-minute piece made no impression, despite an extensive programme note by the composer extolling the 'magic' of Mozart's opera. The most recent work of Kagel's to be heard in the festival – it had only been premiered the week before – was the Third String Quartet (1986/87), and this was also one of the great disappointments. Kagel took on the challenge of writing for that most challenging of media, and he took it on with a vengeance too, producing a 45-minute work. Fairly arbitrarily cast in four movements, for he seemed to have composed short musical 'numbers' here (as in *Oral Treason*, and other recent large-scale pieces), he uses many of the clichés of string quartet writing in his investigation of the medium, along with what sounded like his by now customary allusions to or quotations of other music (I thought I heard Prokofiev in the fourth movement). There were nice moments, in what seemed like a good performance of the piece, but, at three quarters of an hour, once again, it came out as far too long. Kagel seems to have hit a twofold problem with this work: purely the composition of a piece of 'absolute' music, plus his tendency towards stretching pieces out to a quite unnecessary length. The Piano Trio at half the length more than made up for it, and that is the work that I shall want to hear some more.

Three pieces remain: *Eight Short Pieces for the Organ* from the radio fantasy *Rrrrrrr*, marvellously played by Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, who obtained wonderful colours from the instrument and imbued each of the pieces with just the right character; and the two works involving film. Kagel's recent score for Buñuel's surrealist masterpiece from 1928, *Un chien andalou*, is an example of Kagel's art at its finest. In his score for strings and tape, played live by an anonymous ensemble, he has created the sort of counterpart for this remarkable film that few other living composers probably could. He contrasts a fairly

traditional, melodic sound in the strings with solitary dog sounds heard over loudspeakers. Perhaps this will become the standard (or at least optional) soundtrack for this film now. His 100-minute film tribute to Beethoven, *Ludwig Van* is rather showing signs of its age, and seeing Kagel's recent films one is aware how much he has developed as a filmmaker. Following Ludwig Van, a cameraman, around the city of Bonn and joining a group of tourists who are taking the Beethoven tour to the Beethoven House, is a fascinating experience. Less so is the very serious roundtable discussion by a panel of musicologists and Kagel himself. However, the realisation of the musical score, from the works of Beethoven, remains a landmark in the area of collage pieces.

Looking over the Almeida Festival as a whole, my strongest feeling is that had it not been for the Kagel retrospective (entitled *Ode to Cologne*, one of those dreadful titles that only the Almeida could come up with) the entire festival might have passed unnoticed this year. I still feel that more imaginatively planned, it could have given a far greater overview of Kagel's best work. There have been several far more interesting festivals in past years, even given the Almeida management's tendency towards overkill and often less than ideal artistic standards. Unfortunately what will probably happen now is that the music of Kagel will not retain its current high profile, and we will see a return to the days of the occasional performances that we had before. It seems that most of this country's ensembles do not play Kagel as a rule. Imagine the wide currency that groups like the London Sinfonietta or the Nash Ensemble could give to pieces like *Kantrimusik*, *Mare Nostrum*, *Fürst Igor*, *Strawinsky*, *Mitternachtsstück* and the Piano Trio, while giving middle-of-the-road British music a wee rest. Imagine *Staatstheater* at the Coliseum!

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