

**inside in...**

**...outside out**

**Benjamin Boretz**

inside in...

...outside out

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## Notes for a string quartet that straddles a composing lifetime

I do want your attention. To my music. To my writing. To my writing about music. To my writing about my music. I think: I don't want to manipulate your attention. But what do I want from it, once I have it? Do I just want to engross it so that when we part when you depart my presence there will always be a piece of your psyche with my name on it?

When I listen to what I composed in my early twenties I hear myself happily fulfilled just to reflect and resonate the klang of music that most embraced me listening, sounding it in my voice too, like traditional musicians who most want to play exactly like their father does. Intention toward you, toward your attention? Mostly just to join it, probably, but not quite just as some music joining it anonymously. More like, we're in it together. (That means you and me, which means it includes me.) And here is where we're in together, a place we know and probably sort out as together or not by whether we're into being in that place or not – like teenagers of old who know “their” music station on the radio.

Words matter. You influence what is heard by what you say. You influence what gets listened to and what gets bypassed, within and among musics. Politics trumps aesthetics, every time. Does this matter? If music matters (an open question) then this matters. But it should be obvious to everybody by now that the germination of alternatives which has traditionally been the source of aesthetic replenishment took place out of mass-public view, in relatively isolated cultural pockets, small-sized social environments far from the mainstream, such as don't exist anymore – the reach of globalized media is pretty total. It's one way to understand the death of music in the popular culture, increasingly stuck in nostalgia and pure word-texting and multimediaizing. And outside of the popular culture, there isn't really anything outside of an uncomfortable set of lame euphemisms adding up to a plea for unearned popularity.

The desire of Postlude (2005: “with Jim Randall in mind”) to be a third movement of the 2-movement string quartet of the '50s is inexplicable; but actual, unequivocal. Apropos, Leszek Kolakowski has this to say (in *Main Currents of Marxism*, p. 11):

“...The second form of nihilism consists in that we are satisfied with grasping the specific quality of every phenomenon or cultural epoch on the premise, expressed or implied, that the only factor of importance is that which constituted uniqueness of a particular historical complex, every detail of which — although it may be indisputably a repetition of former ideas — acquires a new meaning in relation to that complex and is no longer significant in any other way. This hermeneutic assumption clearly leads to a historical nihilism of its own, since by insisting on the exclusive relationship of every detail to a synchronic whole (whether the whole be an individual mind or an entire cultural epoch) it rules out all continuity of interpretation, obliging us to treat the mind or the epoch as one of a series of closed monadic entities. It lays down in advance that there is no possibility of communication among them and no language capable of describing them collectively; every concept takes on a different meaning according to the complex to which it is applied, and the construction of critical or non-historical categories is ruled out as contrary to the basic principle of investigation.”

Flipped from apriori to aposteriori it seems like a decent picture of an alleged compositional affect, at least as seen from the rear. What else is there? That everything in Postlude is shared with the first two movements; except for the music.

## **Jim Randall: An Autobiographical Dedication**

Jim Randall was always a huge creative-music-intellectual revolution waiting to happen. And it did happen, though - necessarily given its deep and complex nature - it happened in a small bubble, an intense but publicly obscure subculture lodged firmly, vibrantly, restlessly, sometimes obstreperously, in Princeton. I actually first knew of Jim several years before I ever met him, when I was immersed in the music department of UCLA, where my office-mate was Bill Malm - the ethnomusicologist who was writing a landmark book on Japanese music - who had been at the U.S. Naval Conservatoire with Jim (and Bill Evans, and Robert Hickock - coincidentally one of my principal undergraduate music professors). Bill showed me music of Jim's that had impressed him and whose scores he treasured - pieces that Jim composed scrupulously working out of Hindemith's theoretical prescriptions in *The Craft of Musical Composition* - sparse, straight and to the point music that clearly was passionately interested in thinking clearly and deeply rather than mugging, flirting, or seducing. That was 1957; in 1959 Milton brought me to Princeton, for the Seminar and beyond: Jim in the flesh was there, as were David Lewin and Godfrey Winham; Jim was on leave, preoccupied with the recent birth of Tom, but came to hear the great men (of course men!) and join the conversation with stunning force: see his vignette of Stravinsky in the Perspectives memorial issue; and - prepared with a comprehensive analysis of Elliott Carter's First String quartet's pervasive pentachord structure - he succeeded in eliciting from Elliott an indignant denial that he had had anything "serial" at all in mind. And from the first moment - of infinitely many more - that I sat around with Jim shooting the breeze I was amazed to find an almost uncanny shared sense of what we cared about, responded to, valued in music - and creative thought generally. Powerful enough to propel a subsequent lifetime of inter-engagement on every level of being and thinking that you can imagine. Historical, political and social consciousness were inseparable aspects of this conversation, as were a radical critique of music pedagogy, a radical openness to every mode of creative expression, and a radical relativism about perception and interpretation. This was the time of the Taneiev review that Richmond Browne dared to allow into the Yale *Journal of Music Theory*; of *Pitch-Time Demonstrations* and the logical construction

of the tonal system, liberated by the example of Milton's exuberant Positivism, and constrained by the severe moral rationality of Godfrey looking over Jim's shoulder and teaching by example. Jim was the one who had the unblinking courage of all of their convictions - and an uninhibited entitlement to articulate those convictions in force, in public, and with an authenticity of voice that we had never heard before in the preternaturally cautious and evasive rhetorics of academic discourse. And then *Perspectives of New Music* came into being, and the American Society of University Composers, and *Compose Yourself*, and - finally - Open Space.

But discourse was the periphery; the center was always creative composition and wherever that led; inexorably it led first to the creative liberation of computer sound synthesis - to *Mudgett*, to *Lyric Variations*, to *Eakins*, recently to the *garland of csound* - to the constant refinement of language by way of music - to "Soundscroll", to "Depth of Surface", to "Intimacy" - and to the expansion of the ways that music goes by way of how language - poetry, story, utterance - goes. The piano music for Godfrey called "*such words as it were vain to close*" - immortalized by Elaine Barkin's textpiece - was originally called "a long story". And expanded further to the creative liberation of realtime interactive time-making, in sound, oftentimes of a musical character, but also in modes of social and material configuration that could only deeply be perceived as rooted in music and the awarenesses that music uniquely accesses. The work of that time, inscribed in the Inter/Play series, including an amazing set of 13 duo-keyboard sessions we played alternately at Jim's house here in Princeton and at mine at Bard, and writings like "Are You Serious", resonated through all of Jim's later musical and verbal utterances - through *Gap*, through *Schwejk*, through *Benfest*, through his latest - *To Astonish the Roses*, an email conversation with Walter Branchi, and, just now, *Bobfest*, a pure unabashed MIDI meditation on Hart Crane words, composed early this year for Bob Morris's 70th birthday.

Of course I don't know exactly what my work and presence meant to Jim's life and work; he himself wrote, in the Introduction to *Being About Music*, and in Part I of *Compose Yourself*, about our parallelisms and affinities. But I do know that my often unsteady hands were often steadied by the unfailing sureness of his. Jim's own deep surface, the

emanation of his personal presence, were always the ultimate  
Demonstrations of his unconfinably farseeing thought.

(spoken at the memorial for Jim Randall, Princeton University, 14 June  
2014)



***Fantasy on an improvisation by Jim Randall - in memoriam JKR (2014)***

Jim on piano, me on Crumar (synthesizer keyboard). Real-time composition, Inter/playing on prearranged pitch collections. In the middle Jim let loose an endless tunestring of parallel two-pitch notes, startling echo of the big "Chopin" passage in my "chart" piano piece...and in the middle of that a four-note fragment went right to my head and lived there for years. Until Bill Anderson invited me to invent something for Cygnus - but asked that maybe instead of the "straight" winds (flute, oboe) and guitars to scramble in alto flute, english horn, banjo, mandolin. I started the piece as a gift to Jim and Cygnus, but Jim died before I even told him about it - and the four-note fragment became Jim's image on the face of my fantasy.

### **A liner note for *pitch-derived rhythm: six demonstrations* (JKR)**

Jim Randall in 1961 was thinking intensely within the precincts of music-compositional systems as proposed in and bounded by the words and sounds of Paul Hindemith, Joseph Schillinger, and Milton Babbitt. When I first heard of Jim in 1957 it was in the form of a score in the possession of my officemate at UCLA, the ethnomusicologist Bill Malm – a group of “demonstration” pieces composed according to the precepts of *The Craft of Musical Composition*. To me they sounded a whole lot better than what Hindemith had composed under this dispensation (not counting his sensational pre-theory-controlled music of the 1920s). Sometime around 1959 Milton Babbitt propounded his 12-timepoint system, with the idea of integrating a serialization of durational structure to interact with the serial pitch structures in his music. Milton’s thinking was in counter-response to the compositional practices developed (and described in various articles in *Die Reihe* magazine) mainly by Karlheinz Stockhausen, but also by other European composers associated with the Darmstadt group. (There had been earlier experiments in durational serialism of one kind and degree and another in prewar American and European music, but these were the most rigorously and fully developed such systems, and the most significantly implemented in compositional practice). Milton’s critique of the Darmstadt mode of time structure was that it structured *durations* additively in a way that was in no way isomorphic with the cyclic structure of the pitch domain. His time point system projected a cyclic “measure” internally articulated by a structure of temporal intervals, as the pitch domain was articulated by pitch-space intervals. Jim’s expansion and refinement of Milton’s system is presented in his monograph “Pitch-Time Correlation” and extensively discussed in Robert Morris’s “Companion to *Pitch-Time Correlation*”, published together in 2017 by Open Space. What Jim was formulating was a fully integrated system in which the structures of transformations within the total pitch-time evolution of a composition would be complexly and integrally inter-derived.

How these meta-musical visions (they were beyond “techniques”) enlivened Jim’s compositional imagination can be glimpsed, in rather miniature form, in his “Pitch-Derived Rhythm: Six Demonstrations”. It is so evident to me as an almost lifelong listener to and lover of Jim’s music how his intense engagement with the critical interconception of sophisticated structural formalisms and deep musical understanding alchemized at a remarkably high voltage to unfold into these six hermetically transcendent musical timesound voyages. And the young musicians who came to the Bard College studio to record this music for OPEN SPACE seemed clearly to be singing with the angels.

(to Scott Gleason)

... Jim's denotative language penetrates one layer of descriptive distance, denoting the music-things themselves rather than their symbolic markers. But its maximum reach to the ontological core is – at most – novelistic rather than poetic. And there are several distinct quality-registers in this ecology – you allude to some – what your *GV OS* piece in the Benfest conveys is the “feel” of your interacting response, as the foreground resonance of what is being responded to. Jim's “How Music Goes” contains that implicitly but its rhythm and resonance and substance are all within the ontology of “how the music goes”. Not just penetrating a deeper layer but reversing the direction of utterance from “at the music” (or “to” it) to “from” the music. So it is “the music speaking” rather than (ostensibly) me speaking about it in itself or it as processed by me (though all of that is, to reiterate, implicit).

Just first thoughts upon receiving your email – thank you for the conversation.

Ben

## 06.Appendix 2:

[A conversation with Jim Randall about “inside in, outside out” raised awareness about a possibly impenetrable opacity at a critical node of my expressive fantasy.]

### Experience

Experience: the origin site of every determinate feel. Trivially. The psychic substratum — a site of relatively prearticulate determinate feels — out of which every determinate feel is ontologized. But where is determinate-feel ontology located? What is a determinate feel the determinate feel *of*? Not clearly experience as such: without a volitional act of determinate-feel-making doesn't experience run just as unarticulated continuum hardly even experienceable as content of consciousness? Aren't determinate feels just the nascent being of the contents of consciousness? Aren't they the primal form in which consciousness is conscient, and aren't determinate feels so consciented? Consciented, that is, not as experience itself nor even as a finite flowtime of passing experience but as *experiences*, or rather as *an experience* at every conscioustime moment, which is to say, as a singular created particular *sense* of a particular quantum of experienced experience. Fusions of noun and verb, both acts and effects of reification both to make and to be an episode of experience, a phenomenon, an entity, an event, making and being what might retrospectively be so ontologized. So what lingers on as the residue of experience, what persists as the contents of ongoing consciousness, is not experience itself ontologized as itself but what is materialized in the determinate-feel making/being: the passages of life in which our attention dwells, and to which we eventually feel impelled to give names.

So description is not necessarily restricted to description of perception, not necessarily just narrating perceptions of perceptions; imaginably its narratives might constitute perceptions of the qualities materialized within determinate-feel episodes, within episodes of reception, perceptions not just of post-receptual perceptions but of the qualities of received phenomena themselves, in the determinate-feel-making acts of being received.

(Needn't, not mustn't: the value of every mode of discourse, actual or possible, is not in question. But the second mode of description seems to invite a different species of text; not just JKR's recent Tchaikovsky, Troubadour, Bruckner, Haydn, Ravel stories, or, in an even more interesting speculative way, his “soundscroll” texts, but even further back, to an earlier mode of phenomenalist writing about music, which, reading with perverse inverted historicism could be registered as “neo-Toveyan.”)

**January 1991**

**To do, as: to listen to**

A person's music can be (self- or ontological) *assertion* (of one's self or one's ontology); or it can be (self- or ontological) *discovery*. Composing and witnessing public performances of *Group Variations (I* for chamber orchestra, *II* for computer) dramatized that distinction for me, forced me to realize that I had an acute expressive need for my music to be discovery rather than assertion, that it be scaled humanly rather than monumentally. So, in strenuous dialogue with Jim Randall, who was having similar anxieties, I looked for ways of composing which would minimize the interference of *a priori* structures, habits, and prejudices. Imagined creative and physical situations where ideological or technical preconceptions wouldn't even be available. Where I and my creative partners wouldn't preconceive what *kind* of music (and in terms of what verbal conceptions) the music we were making was going to be – or even if what it was going to be was specifically “music”. Or what ontologies of time or sound we might experience or be invaded by. And as we worked, and listened back, we discovered that we were radically re-situated not only as players or composers but as listeners too.

The sessions that happened between 1979 and 1991 which Jim Randall named *Inter/Play* thus moved to convert (the practice of) "music" from a noun to a verb, from the production of artworks to the practice of anomalous expressive actions, from conceptually “public” performances to authentically personal, interpersonal, social occasions. The *Inter/Play* series of cassettes documents a few of these episodes of expressive action – uniquely and significantly responsive to participatory listening. *Converge* was a “score”, consisting of the word “CONVERGE”; four of us (Michael O'Brien, playing guitar; Lenore Epstein, playing flute; John Leaman, playing drums; Ben Boretz, playing keyboard synthesizer) recorded our interaction with this wordscore in my house in Barrytown, New York, on 20 November, 1980.

## **On Playing *CONVERGE***

Skin to skin with sound, emerging in the act of utterance, inceiving a genuine, a genuinely desired conversation with fellow soundmakers, givers of sound to ourselves for ourselves as one does in real not-staged conversations, conversations cumulating temperatures and colors and sensibilities by way of their ostensible subjects and stories and attitudes and opinions, all evolving in the language under immediate construction, its own self-language, saying untranslatably what it is that that language says, can say, finds to say, is the only language in which those things are ever said. That is what happened when, sometimes, it truly happened; habits are hardwired; they usurp the ground of authenticity, masquerade as reality, obtrude between you and your perhaps contaminated hope to achieve transparency with your partners, all of you separately struggling with the same impediments to being actually together, sensing that too much effort to get there imposes the dreaded conscious-of-selfness, but that it takes far more effort than that to tunnel in past the inevitable ennui-boundary at which nothing more is possible but whose surpassing is the moment when everything might possibly become possible. And, then, if it rises, it speaks, becomes the it that speaks, within whose speaking we absorb, not knowing that it is us, us the listeners, us the speakers.

Liner note (2019) for:  
*CONVERGE* [Inter/Play session 1981]  
B.B.  
Michael O'Brien  
Lenore Epstein  
OPEN SPACE CD 41 (2019)

## Warren Burt & BAB: A conversation for Australian radio (1980)

BB: "A workshop devoted to discovering and making sounds and sound objects, to finding, using, inventing, and listening to soundthings of many descriptions, the participants to be students of any previous experience and any serious intention."

WB: That's lovely, your course description.

BB: It's for next year.

WB: "Arts 100: Concerning Ears: What's in them around them, behind them, between them."

And then "Language as a Language: a venture in applied linguistic theoretical theatrics or grassroot hermeneutics..."

"...depending on your point of view, configured as a workshop devoted to thinking about language by performing, vocally, sonically, language text including poems, prose passages, instances of discourse, ensemble language pieces and others, but not, for the most part, music. Composition by group members of pieces of any of the above persuasions is anticipated.

"Arts 300: -Forming: per- in- re- de- pre- con- trans- voice- shadow- breath- time-space- span- frame- sound- image- movement- word- like- moment- thought-event- language- medium- art- form. Not all of the above are expected to be accomplished during one academic semester. Spontaneous and unrehearsed, an artform-inventing improvisation workshop."

Those are the ones that got you in trouble with the administration?

BB: Well, with the executive committee or the faculty. We straightened it out, though. The thing of it is, people are just very nervous, that's all. Most people are just very nervous.

You know, working with my students, I've come around to looking upon it as really a kind of peculiar sort of advantage they have, that they're coming from a very "now" kind of culture. Because music as an activity, as a culture, historically, and in the present, the pursuit of music as a professional activity, call it — because I want to make a distinction — is a very strange, frozen thing, as if there are these masters, this literature of music by the masters, and the masters may be anywhere from Bach to whoever's been added onto the list lately. But what's interesting about them is that they have no historical chronology attached to them, no spatial resonances attached to them, no geographical thing. It's frozen things. And so the

landscape of a musician is just incredibly cluttered with this frozen collection or crowd of things all of which are equidistant from his head. And so he's got no space. So much of the practice of music is not much like an art but like a ritual observance, devotion to the masters. I guess the best model is religious observance. And you can see that, for example, to be a musical performer is ninety-nine percent to be obligated to correctness over and above which there's your personality, whatever that is. I don't think this happens in any other art. I think, say, the notion that there's no historical... I can get off on gothic cathedrals, and I get off on empathizing with the guys who did them, empathizing with the stone carvings and all that stuff, and there's a real kick in the sense of being able to empathize with something so remote in every sense. But in music, the empathy is not like that. There is no remoteness; it's like everything is right there. And just like Jesus Christ did not live at any particular time in any particular place, but *is*, and in a tenseless way. In ritual observance, the acolyte learns the correct order of the words and the correct inflections and the right way to say them. This is very different from somebody creating some stage on which to dramatize their own head and work themselves out, which is what I think of as what an art form is about.

The practice of music is very remote from that of art.

WB: It's like you're seeing the difference between sculpture and, say, stone carving, and sculpture was a mistake.

BB: Well yeah, and sculpture, it was a mistake except in the case of Michelangelo. I guess it was invented so that Michelangelo could do it, and maybe one or two other guys that I'm not on to. I would say that my notion of a good medium is something that just finds talent in a lot of unsuspected places in people where the widest range of different personalities and the widest range of native abilities and native intensities of talent find interesting expression. So a crummy medium, perhaps, is one that produces art in some sense, frequently, because only the greatest can break through. The monster German classic is a good example of that. The monster German classic as a model for musical life is the most ferocious squandering of human talent. The festering residue of the monster German classic in our culture is the practice of a musical profession in order to present credentials so as to be permitted the right not to be dismissed as a musician. The greatest thing that can happen to you is that you're not dismissed as a musician.

This comes back to what I was saying about the kids and a question of education. I think it's a tremendous advantage to kids that they have a native musical language which is potentially liberating for them because it's something they can identify with historically, contemporaneously. And they don't appreciate it a bit; they're right away dying to strangulate themselves on classical music culture. And it's not even classical music culture, it's what I would call education culture, which probably is also concert culture in some form as well.



WB: I completely lost interest in concerts, myself.

BB: I lost interest in concerts when I noticed that that's what they were. When I was a kid growing up in New York, I made a terrible mistake about concerts. Because of being so turned on by music, I would go to concerts and be totally unaware of the fact that there was a concert happening. I would just be totally aware of these pieces that I'd never heard before and which really blew me out. I can remember specific concerts, like a lot of Mitropoulos concerts with the New York Philharmonic. In high school, for fifty cents you could get a pass to the New York Philharmonic Friday afternoon concerts. I went any chance I got, especially when Mitropoulos was conducting any modern music. If you got there on Friday afternoon and they had no place to put you, they'd put you in a box in Carnegie Hall. It was really beautiful. One amazing thing about it was that you were right over the stage and the sound was right there. I can vividly remember all kinds of pieces of all descriptions like Saint-Saens Third Piano Concerto on the same concert as Schoenberg's Pelléas et Mélisande. I heard every conceivable kind of music there, and I never noticed that there was a concert taking place because I was so completely into the music.

It's really amazing because now, I can't hear music at concerts at all because there's so much static, so much of that psychic static from what the event is. I have this problem about concerts particularly, noticing that I couldn't hear music there, noticing that it was a lousy way to regiment people for something like listening to music which is such an intensely active thing. And separating players from listeners and all that seemed to me so fundamentally counterproductive for hearing music. I began wondering: what were people doing? Why did anybody ever go to concerts, basically? Where was the action? It seemed to me that you can't be a consumer except by being a participant. Clearly, during the performance of a piece of music, the people sitting there are not consuming because they're not participating. It occurred to me to wonder: where was the moment of consumption? I realized that my greatest nemesis at concerts which is the interruption of the aftersound, the afterwash of sound by this noise of people beating their palms against one another, is in fact the moment of consummation. It's the moment of participation. It's the moment that creates the concert because here is the celebration. The performance is the flag run up the flagpole, providing the occasion for celebrators participating in the celebration of the necessary celebrity. So everybody needs everybody else at that moment, and you need to have the performance in order to provide the pretext of the occasion. And of course, the capacity to withhold celebration is the most tremendous participation. It really, really puts a real keen edge on it.

The whole thing fell into place along those lines, and at that point I was able to put the whole thing to rest in my mind. It really isn't a musical occasion at

all in any artistic sense, it's a religious celebration, a religious ritual in the sense that I was saying about it before.

WB: How does that relate to what we do then? For example, last night you performed that 90-minute piece. I have my own thoughts about it which are that most of the people that I work with and deal with, for example, don't write chamber music anymore — by that I mean music to be performed in the concert situation — but they're intensely involved in personal performance. And although the medium is still the formal presentation to other interested parties, somehow it seems that when you're doing it yourself, you put more of yourself across; it becomes more a communication than a performance, more a communication than a concert. How do you look at that?

BB: I think I might have to start back away for the question, say, at the place where it's important for me to distinguish that there's no way to talk about how something goes, how it sounds, how a piece of music sounds, how it's played, how you want it to be played, anything, without knowing why you're doing it. I can't imagine composing a piece without visualizing the occasion of its performance, at least an occasion of its performance. I'd say that now — I'm not sure I'd say that for all time of my history — but certainly, it seems to me that a piece of music is striking an attitude, it's taking a position about something and specifically imagining itself, in composition — whether or not I think it's realized this way — it's imagining itself, or one is imagining it as having a certain kind of place within a certain kind of social occasion. Now this is, I'm sure, equally true for the knock-their-socks-off virtuoso imagining his performance, or somebody writing a piece for that kind of performance, as it is for the whole range. It isn't something restricted to a certain kind of consciousness about social things about music, it also has to do with the most Neanderthal kinds. It's equally important to know what you're doing. Leni Riefenstahl knew what she was doing. She knew what the occasion was and we can probably contemplate it with equanimity only insofar as the occasion on which we perceive these things, on which we receive them, is not the occasion for which they were designed. It's pretty terrifying to see one of those Leni Riefenstahl movies and imagine the occasion for which it was designed because it's so powerful as it affects oneself — not because you can imagine how it affects a bunch of Nazi Germans, but how you might have been affected by it at the time. There's a certain impunity. Hearing muzak, as an example, at a lecture does not produce the horrible effect that a lecture might be about, about muzak. Here you are totally immune from that effect by how you're taking it in. The social occasion is pretty heavy as the determinant of what happens.

I guess the thought that comes down to me about this piece that you're talking about as a piece to be performed has everything to do with some sense not so much as pieces exactly as with conveying a message. Maybe it

has more to do with my past as a writer on musical subjects and as an advocate and as a person who's had a lot of social intentions. I've imagined species of social reform in musical ways, that is: in the musical world within my past. It seems to me that *Perspectives* had something to do with that, and getting in on the founding of ASUC had a lot to do with that; the American Society of University Composers had a lot to do with it.

For 10 years I was the music critic on the Nation. All of this goes back into my past. I was a child of the Depression and social significance was built into my...

WB: When were you born? Just curious: what year?

BB: 1934. My family was immigrant Russian intellectuals fallen on hard times, bounced out of intellectuality into survival mechanisms. I grew up in the black ghetto in Brooklyn which is one way I come by one section of my piece, honestly. I grew up in an atmosphere of social significance. My sister was quite a bit older than me — six years older than me — and she was a real political activist and had me marching on picket lines when I was seven years old. I was pretty aware of all of that stuff: left-wing politics, labor union politics, pacifism, all of those things. Merging into music and into my musical concerns, there was always a leading edge of social awareness about it. It always seemed to me critical that how one lived one's life, how one composed one's music, all of these things were integrated. They were fused. There was a meaningful implication in what you did. I don't want to go into all the gory details of my life except to say that the progression for me over the years has been to realize more and more that the only politics I can believe in is a very personal one — not for any ideological reason, just noticing something. Noticing that the implications of saying something are just utterly different depending on the medium, and that the more public, the more impersonally widespread the medium of dissemination, the less like what you wanted to say you are read as saying. You can't control, and you shouldn't want to control, really, how people read what you write, but you might care about it, and you might react to it. My reaction has been to come down to the idea that to make a world is to make a world of people you know, and to speak is to speak to people who can hear and respond to your voice. That's how I get to the performance of my piece, because my piece is not private in the sense of me talking to myself. That was true of my great big theory 10 years ago encoded in *Metavariations* which, I would say, is a confessional: me talking to myself in some pretty heavy private language. But this piece was very specifically imagined — in fact, it was imagined for a specific social occasion in which I was talking to a bunch of people who work with me at Bard College — it was imagined way beyond that as a statement of a very important kind to me personally, but specifically imagined as a way of constructing a context within which my own voice would be heard by people sitting there with me. And the sense of participation was the sense of

being spoken to. In fact, if you remember the piece, it goes from one kind of intimacy being dramatized through a lot of intermediary stages, and then comes around to another kind of intimacy being dramatized. The initial kind is the most impersonal, or should I say super-personal kind, namely the primal voice of experience speaking. That's how I think about it. All the grammar and all the rhythms and all the rhetoric is imagined as right up front, no distance, no perspective, no place. Everything is like in a white light. No conjunctions. Whatever those parts of speech are, pronouns and things like that, tenses, all those are null and void. They don't exist in the world of experience, speaking primally. The word "I" is a third-person word. It's always objectification of yourself, it's never the most personal. The most personal is tenseless, pronounless, grammarless almost. And then it goes through these different stages of address ranging from these various, different modes of description in a fairly narrative way to someone talking to themselves, to someone writing a letter to someone else, and finally comes around to this thing of turning the performance into something that the people who are sitting there, participating by being exhorted directly by the piece, the piece of *Listen*, and then ends with I and you.

WB: You're right, that's not in the piece before.

BB: That's right.

WB: That's why it seemed to end so well. It really had that feeling of V - I.

BB: It's funny that you should mention that because it gave me problems at first. That is, I have a certain prejudice in favor of the throw-away ending, the thing that just sort of finesses how you get off. So, I ended on this very clear double bar — I call it a double bar, you call it V - I — and spent more time than I spent with most of the parts of the piece trying to compose a little tag, a little coda that would end there but yet go off, sort of trail off with a whimper. I realized that I was just exercising some prejudice of mine, it had nothing to do with the way this piece needed to go. This piece needed to go signed, sealed, and delivered at the end, and that's how it goes.

WB: I don't know of any — I'll confess ignorance — all I know is that you were the editor of *Perspectives* or still are the editor of *Perspectives of New Music* which is a journal of serious thought on contemporary music, has been I guess for many years.

WB: You founded it. When was that? What year was that, '64?

BB: I founded it in '61. The first issue came out in '62. It really started life back in Arthur Berger's graduate seminar at Brandeis when we were all really passionately interested in reading all kinds of stuff about music: musical aesthetics, musical analysis, we just soaked up everything we could

read on it, except we couldn't find anything to read on it. So I said to Arthur at the time: where is there what to read? He said: well, there isn't anything around these days because there's no magazine around. So I said: well, cool, let's do it, and got a couple of graduate students and had the idea of doing something like that for quite a long time. It almost got started a few years later at UCLA, and didn't for various reasons I won't mention to protect the guilty. And then it finally got started when Paul Fromm was importuned by a bunch of people, most notably Milton Babbitt, when I was at the Princeton Seminar in Advanced Musical Studies in 1959. Paul Fromm was the president of the Fromm Foundation. He was sponsoring the seminar, and he got interested in the idea. Pretty soon, we had *Perspectives*. And Arthur Berger was the first editor with me, so we were co-founders of it.

WB: *Perspectives* had many different sorts of music in it. I remember, just the other day, seeing an old issue with an article by Ben Johnston on various forms of microtonality which I'd never noticed when I'd had that issue hanging around. My confession of guilt: my own association with *Perspectives* was that it was that magazine I'd always subscribed to when I was an undergraduate and graduate student and never really got around to reading. But I know that the classical image of *Perspectives* was that it was a very heavy journal of, say, thinking on twelve-tone and related matters musically. And your own reputation, until recently, has been that of a fairly formidable practitioner of both twelve-tone music and theory, and yet, in fact, that's not the case or hasn't been the case for a number of years. Not that you're not formidable.

BB: I'm not formidable. I would describe myself as a born-again composer (WB laughs) and more at the level of increasingly, rather than suddenly, increasingly permitting myself to conceive what would be just utter wallowing in self-indulgent art. And noticing how much of what I was doing at any given time — this is always a progressive thing — was, in fact, heavily encased within all kinds of obligations, the minute I could verbalize them, the minute I could articulate them as obligations, I would shed them.

My version of the story would be different from yours. On the other hand, I respect the versions of the story that I hear from elsewhere because I think they have insight for me in them. I don't think that one is necessarily so much on top of one's own activity. I do know, though, that many of the things that I did, that I have done, looked different to me and to the people who approved of them.

Let me give you a sort of personalized, customized version of this history through the *Perspectives* angle, without, necessarily, the angle of me as composer — we can get to that a little later — and maybe, more specifically, (through) me as writer. But the *Perspectives* angle may capture most of that, because I would say that at the time *Perspectives* started, it was,

for me, a frontier on which a certain number of people were simultaneously. It was a touchstone of the people who were on that frontier who really came to fruition on that available medium, who needed a place to write the things that they had been storing up and getting into. It had a lot to do with people who were students of Milton Babbitt. It had a lot to do with the way that Milton Babbitt was looking to us like a guy who opened up a context within which we could take music as seriously as we wanted to take it, for a long time. For most of his vigorously active students, I would say, Milton Babbitt was not so much a guy who looked to us like hawking correct doctrine as much as a guy who legitimized for us the kind of depth and intensity, intellectually speaking, with which we wanted to get into music and the kind of seriousness that we tended to have about music. And rigor of a certain order was part and parcel of that. It was sort of like a belief that you could really hear whatever you thought. The rigor was a way of keeping your grip on the relation between what you thought and what you were doing musically, and between what you were hearing and what you said you were hearing, so that what you said then could be grist for the mill of what you were doing. It was really heavy and really important. I would say that, for me, it didn't come through Milton Babbitt first. In fact, it was really Arthur Berger that provided, for me, the first guy that I identified as making me less of a weirdo insofar as I was just a natural born introspective thinker about everything. Thinking about what I was doing and examining it very intensely was just sort of natural for me.

So I just latched onto these guys, and I think that people like Jim Randall and Godfrey Winham and Donald Martino and Peter Westergaard and David Lewin back then were similarly just latching on to somebody like Milton who did the spadework. He built the world that we could live in.

Here's where the watershed came: the point was, on the one hand, somebody could do that for you; in a social way, could go out there and do stuff that created a world for you to do your thing in. That's very different from seeing what he was doing as what you would then emulate in chapter and verse. It never occurred to me, frankly, that doctrine was at issue. It never occurred to me that anything was at issue except that emulation, which, by me, means, when I see somebody who sounds like me, I assume he must be as different from me as anybody could be since I never consciously sound like anybody else. In other words, my sense of things is: say your own thing. If you're going to say something that sounds like me, you won't be like me.

That's the watershed: the watershed is between people seeing activity as a certain thing which at that moment represents where the frontier is for certain people, and that being on the frontier is where it's at for them, and other people who see that particular kind of text, and that particular subject matter, and that particular attitude as a frozen doctrine to maintain in and promulgate and, in fact, as an ideology to proselytize on behalf of and

maintain in a rigid, frozen way like I was saying about music literature before. The kind of ahistorical, unevolutionary model of correct doctrine right thinking: that's never been where it was at for me. That's the one thing I will plead innocent to in the formidable department.

I think there's a certain sense in which the watershed came as *Perspectives* established itself. And it did establish itself as a kind of revolution in writing about music, as a kind of revolution, say, within academic circles, because within the university, musicians had been kind of lame-brained stepchildren. Now here was a curious thing, here was a funny inversion. I think this was another watershed for me. Some of us were thinking: music is high thought, really heavy thought, and these people who are academic scientists, historians, whatever, need to recognize that music as music is pretty heavy thinking. But there's a group of people that seemed like the same group at the time but in fact was a quite distinct subgroup, so to speak — although I think it's the majority of that group — rather were thinking that what we had to do was *be* scientists. As far as I was concerned, we were making the claim that music as music was heavy stuff, not that, well see, we're just as good as you because we're doing just like you, namely, science. And music, well we don't take it any more seriously than you do except insofar as it is science and mathematics and all that other stuff.

I did this very heavy, long thing called *Metavariations* about 10 years ago, more than 10 years ago, which for me was a real introspective investigation of the roots of musical expression at the level of using all the intellectual apparatus at my disposal. The program of it was to make thinking about music rise to the level of that thinking in music which I heard in music, and which I thought any musician thought of as the content of music, namely, for musicians, music is as heavy as anything in the world. So how come talk about music doesn't really reflect that but sounds so diddly? It seems to sell it down the river. It was from that point of view that *Metavariations* was conceived and that's, you know, the formidable stuff.

WB: It's interesting because in the past, say, six or seven years, I know of hardly any magazine in the world that is as roundly badmouthed as *Perspectives*, and probably because it tries to maintain that position of music being a serious thing. What are your thoughts about that? It really is badmouthed.

BB: I've badmouthed *Perspectives* more than anybody, and, I think, with good reason. And I suspect it's badmouthed with good reason both positively — that is, it earns its being badmouthed, it seems to me, in ways that I'm glad about, and it also earns its badmouthing in ways that I'm deeply concerned about.

Institutionalization is the enemy of art; it's the enemy of thought.  
Academicism is the enemy of intellectual activity. All of this has to do with

the establishment of doctrine, the establishment of authority, the substitution of knowing for discovering, of knowing how for inventing. I could go on with cliché after cliché here, but the fact is that the second revolution is much harder than the first. And if what you imagine thinking is, is permanent revolution, and you can't imagine the point of coming on with some heavy theory or some heavy composition or some heavy anything except for the purpose of going somewhere from it, you know? The maximum effort is to arrive at the beginning of something interesting.

*Perspectives* as a medium, just naturally after having succeeded, became institutionalized in the eyes and minds of its constituency so that it immediately became a publish-or-perish magazine. Having established the frontier, the frontier suddenly become very habitable and became the suburbs of academe.

*Perspectives* was the suburbs of academe and could not quite refuse to be, in all decency, because there were other kinds of needs that were calling out for attention. In effect, having created a certain constituency, there was a problem about pulling the rug out from under it, denying it its place. But in fact, the one thing that I hate to publish is a "*Perspectives*" article because if it is a "*Perspectives*" article, that means that one already knows what it's about and it has nothing much to contribute that's on the frontier of anything.

What people conform to is not particularly important. What's important is whether or not they're conforming to something. The flavor of something being conformed to is deadly and worth badmouthing. Now, I suppose that a certain amount of badmouthing would be on the part of people who would prefer that something else were being conformed to.

WB: That's a problem because that's still conformity.

BB: Yeah, sure, but I'd say nevertheless, whatever the critics of *Perspectives* would have done had they been running the magazine, being people who were patently *not* running the magazine, their criticisms were probably valid. The fact that you give them the thing and they do all the same bad things from some other point of view doesn't change the point that as grouchers and carpers, they've got a point, right?

I'm very concerned about that, have been very concerned about that. One of the main things that I'm concerned about is: I've noticed that no matter how much *Perspectives*, in the past, has made it a point to publish the widest possible range of things, it hasn't changed the effect that it has, that it doesn't. I've traveled around the country, including to San Diego a couple of years ago, to try to let people know that, in fact, *Perspectives* was really interested



in the widest possible range of what was going on, and got kind of negative results.

I began to think about that as interesting, though depressing, and mostly from the point of view of, well, what was legit about it. There are a couple of angles on that: one is that it's probably important for people to have something to beat up on, among other things. *Perspectives*, well, maybe I don't like it, but maybe being that which people complain about is fulfilling a valuable function all by itself. It's not great for the person being complained about when he wants to have friends, himself. Social service goes just so far. On the other hand, it also suggested to me that content did not really carry through format, that once you had this rigid, unitary, same-looking physical format for something, the medium was so powerful and so uniform that it subjected all but the most irreducibly original things to instances of the medium.

WB: Well, it's the same thing with the classical music thing. Only the Beethoven piece can break through the wall of classical music; only the most conceptual article could break through the medium that the magazine had become.

BB: Right, OK. Now one of the things that was very interesting to me was Ken Gaburo's catalogue for Collection Two. It wasn't as if there wasn't any voice at all to that thing, it had a very peculiar and special voice in a hodgepodge, a wild variety of things. That was very interesting.

The thing I realized was that I would have been interested in the physical appearance of *Perspectives*, but it always was produced in a very formal way – because I didn't know anything about producing magazines. But I determined, at a certain point, to domesticate the production of *Perspectives* so as to compositionalize its appearance. And I figured that the best thing I could do toward opening it up was to make it look like it was open more than it did, and not just to tell people that it was open but to make the magazine, physically, be a signal to people that the world was an open place as far as *Perspectives* was concerned.

It's obvious that an explanation of something is a piece of literature, and it had the very clear standing as... well, the ears have walls when it comes to explanations, because everybody's heard explanations before. Everybody knows what's given lip service to. Everybody knows that no one is excluded from competition. But the fact is, we had articles in *Perspectives* where people send recommendations from important people to justify our publishing this article. I feel very bad about this. I feel kind of outraged by it because it seems to me to presuppose that we have the most illegitimate way of deciding what would be interesting to print. But I suppose one needs to pay a lot of attention to that. It must be emanating in some way from the goddamn magazine. And anyway, it seemed to me that what I wanted to do

was landscape everything so that there was no more magazine but there were things, and the things had a convenient package which said *Perspectives of New Music* on the cover, and the things ranged as widely as possible among the different ways that people could think or compose.

Another thing that's pretty significant to me is that writing words is, by me, no mean activity that should be relegated to the academic rhetoric, but it's the composition of literature or music or whatever in language, and that *Perspectives* wants to be the repository of art forms and of writing about art, and not the repository of justifications for promotion and academe.

WB: Sounds good.

BB: Well, I hope.

WB: What about your own music? I heard this piece of yours last night called *Language ,as a music* which, for the most part, was 90 minutes of talking with an Irving Berlin tune and a piano piece stuck into it, and yet it was one of the more musical bits of wordsmithing I've heard. Talk about that boundary line where syntactical discourse becomes musical and how there are a number of ways you seemed to make that happen.

BB: When I was coming out to San Diego, I wrote some things down about things I wanted to talk about here. *Language ,as a music* is a couple of years old now, and I think the best place for me to come from in answering is more like where my head is at right now on the question of discourse. Just a little, historically, on how that came about: it seems to me that language has always been sound. The problem with applause and with the way people sound after a piece is over at a concert is that it isn't composed into the experience in any way.

I think the best angle on what I think about discourse would be to think about the sound that people make around occasions when music is heard, and think about the idea of discourse as some way of making sound that gives context extension, some mode of contemplation and intensification and crystallization to an experience that you have had or might want to have, a way of building sound around sound. I think of discourse as in some sense like a performance. And the reason I say I could talk about this more in a now way for myself is because recently, I've been thinking so much in terms of performance in relation to improvisation; thinking about what a score is in connection with all the different ways in which things are scores; thinking of it as some stimulation to activity. I don't ask myself the question: what's the one-to-one correlation between some symbols in some score and some stuff I'm hearing not because I couldn't ask that question but because it's not very interesting. What's more interesting is to hear what some people are doing as specifically what they found to do in specific response to that specific

stimulation. The performance of a score, which might be words like, for example, a Stockhausen score that is not even quite instructions but just a text like in "intuitive music" or *From the Seven Days*. It is in some mode an instruction, but, more likely, it's a literary text the response to which is in some recognizable, traditional sense music.

I also imagine that the response to music might be performed as discourse, that is: metapiece; some words. In fact, you might then think of it as a score from which some music might then be performed, and so on. In other words, it's a great chain of responsive creation. The fact that it's specifically in response to something specific — an issue, a piece, an idea — is in no sense different from all kinds of things about a piece of music such as an occasion for which a piece will be written, a stance that a piece would take to a listener whispering in his ear, exhorting him, making a speech from a podium, threatening to eat him or something. At that point, I begin to fail to see the distinction between discourse and music. I begin to see music as linguistic in the most ordinary and in the most esoteric of senses as well, as delivering messages, as carrying resonances of qualities, and imagine words as simply — or not so simply, as complexly, I should say — reciprocating what music does.

Having spent a lot of my life writing about music, and an equal amount, or more of my life writing music, I was really anxious that the two never would be separated again. I wrote a piano piece that was a story, and a piece of that piano piece formed a part of *Language ,as a music* which is a composition, and in being a composition, proposes a new linguistics from the standpoint of being the experience of music.

WB: How does that particularly work? How does it propose a new linguistics from the point of view of language?

BB: From the point of view of music.

WB: Yeah.

BB: I'm imagining utterance as being a primal quality, indifferently language or music. I'm imagining that, say, a child making its sound in the world is discovering itself within the world, and is composing in no sense specialized yet as between language and music. I think that the compositions of the child are all meaningful. They're not lexical; they're not referential, necessarily. Some of them may be, but it's clear that some of them are just purely composition of sound. And it seems to me that this composition of sound, being the person's sound thrown out in the world through which that person discovers itself, then refines out into many apparently distinct species of making sound some of which turn out to be English and others of which turn out to be music. As between singing and saying, there is no particular

distinction at the primal level. Just as you might gesture with your hand or with your voice, you wouldn't consider yourself to be doing one completely different kind of an act rather than another, but just a different species, a different nuance, almost, on expression.

I think from this point of view, language is that which attaches quality, by an act of some kind of awareness, to things in the world. It isn't tied to reference and the usual lexical grammatical configurations; I think that's a very narrow view of language. I think, also, the idea of it as purely communication as between one person and another of information or anything is a very narrow view of language. Even if you take a very Platonistic view of properties of things and say yeah, a cat is some color or other, we don't have to consider that any epistemology of awareness that we prefer yellowness on the cat or something like that. Forget that; the cat's yellow. Yellow is a property out there in Plato's beard. It's fine. But how about the fact that the cat is also cute? Well now wait a minute: cuteness, that's not like yellowness, OK? On the other hand, the cat isn't saying: I'm cute. The cat's not saying a damned thing, I mean the cat's just being cute. Well, the cat is obviously exuding, expressing this quality of cuteness which is, as far as I'm concerned, just what language is about. That's a linguistic quality. Even if you want to call yellow a physical quality or something else, still, that quality of cuteness doesn't have any of the idea of the conventional, narrow language quality to it — that you say something to someone else, there's this time correlation of semantics, syntactics, and all of that — but there's some quality of how what attaches to an object. In fact, the very word cute has a sound which is inseparably, inextricably intertwined with all the other sensory awarenesses that have attached to it, and it attaches to cute things. As you look at a cute thing and you hear in some resonant way, there's the sound of cute somewhere in there; not overtly, but that animal is carrying that sound somehow, and that sound is carrying that animal somehow.

That's the way I would think about my idea of language as being utterance, I should say, as an ontological idea of what meaning is about, that language is something before it is about something, or simultaneously with being about, it is, and that the *isness* of language is where we need to look for its meaning, and that there is no language sound that's distinct from or distinguishable from language meaning. This leads to an idea which gets presented in a way that has to be sensitive to its own language and to what language is. There's no way to promulgate such an idea about language in conventional discourse because that would, itself, deny the ontological quality that is being imagined. So I had to find a mode of thinking which was very different from conventional linear reasoning and logical reasoning and is like a series of tableaux, a series of pictures each of which is utterly dependent for its feel and sense on the one that preceded but is not connected by logical connection but merely by the recycling of experience through a number of

phases each of which feeds on the previous and emerges from the previous like music —not like music, but as music.

WB: As music.

Talk about your piano piece. I can't remember the exact title, Blue Milk Where My Charts...

BB: The title is a rip-off from James Joyce's Anna Livia Plurabelle from *Finnegans Wake*. The history there is that when I was nine years old, I used to go to the Brooklyn Public Library and listen to everything they had in their record collection, and among the things they had in their record collection was people reading from literary works. There was one piece of music that was practically as much a favorite of mine as any piece by Beethoven or Mozart — at the time, those were my hot composers back then — and it was this thing of James Joyce reading from *Finnegans Wake* within the Anna Livia Plurabelle section which, at that time, I could just walk along the street reciting to myself from beginning to end without "understanding" a single word. But it was, literally, a piece of music, no strain. It was quite amazing to me afterward to realize that I'd done this, and that I could do this, and the phrase "my chart shines high where the blue milks upset" is a phrase in there that always stuck in my head and was very potent to me as a sense of music language which then got translated into a piano piece, got laid on a piano piece which was, in some sense, my maiden voyage into language music or music, you know, that junction. Already, this was a piano piece, which was before *Language, as a music*, which was very much thought of as something that would be refining away from my heavy processing of ideas in all my previous music down to, I said, maximum self-indulgence of musical expression for me which was to find within myself the origins of musical expression, what I really felt as what carried the sense of music for me. And it was, certainly, resonance cumulating over time and creating time. That piece was dedicated to that proposition of the inner resonance of sound cumulating over time and creating time.

WB: You said, a couple of days ago when we were talking, that you did that piece because you felt one of the reasons people made music was that they made music to hear sound.

BB: Yes.

WB: To hear gorgeous sound. And that wallow, if you want to call it a wallow, was simply to reestablish that truth for yourself and for the pianist. It's for piano alone, right?

BB: For Pianist Alone.

WB: For Pianist Alone. So you have this idea of just the pianist and the music communicating in that very almost hermetic sense, communicating that sound, communicating that joy in the physical nature of sound.

BB: Yes, I thought of it as a piece, and this is where my vision of the social occasion of the piece was someone sitting by himself, discovering himself immersed within this world of sound that would keep changing, keep taking him somewhere, and that he would be on the leading edge at all times of a crest of sound. It also struck me that hanging out in one place had a very special meaning within music because you can't stay in one place, interestingly, within music without cumulating, without moving. You can stand in a visual space and take it in increasingly, just have the details there. You could even just stand and stare at something fixed, or you can just look at a leaf fluttering, but there's no way for sound to be still. But to hang out in the same place and to be always in motion are not necessarily in contradiction. I think that there's a lot of music that's always on the way somewhere on schedule and on cue and always processing information and data as a kind of analog reasoning process where it's lost the sense of hanging out with a sound and all the possibilities of activity as resonance, and not resonance in the service of activity which is to say resonance canceled, resonance terminated, resonance, in fact, deadened and denied, and sound abused. So I was very interested in being able to stay within a sound by going somewhere all the time in some way that would cumulatively stay within a resonance and then find itself evolving, merging out into constantly evolving worlds of other resonance in an unbroken chain, in that piece, in an absolutely seamless chain, as I thought of it, of sound.

Another title I had for the piece was actually Klangfarbenmelodien for Piano Solo, because the idea was that pitch and timbre would be indistinguishable in that piece, that, in fact, the only color would come from pitch and the only pitch would always be a coloration. So there would be an absolute identification of resonance in the pitch timbral sense and an ongoing sense of being somewhere and meaning something.

WB: And why it was the James Joyce title. It resonated a lot more.

BB: I'm not sure I follow you.

WB: To call the piece, say, Klangfarbenmelodien for Piano Solo, I think, would have defeated a lot of the aim of the piece just because we're so intimidated now by tech terms.

BB: Oh, right. In fact, that was only a private explanation to myself. Right. It seemed to me that to call something something is equally to go just a little in some direction with it. It's that same point of discourse: if discourse isn't at some level of composition that's at least in the spirit if not at the level of the

thing it's about, it grays it out; it terminates it; it denies its sound; it abuses it rather than resonates it. But the piece was written partly as a celebration of Milton Babbitt's 60th birthday, and there are a lot of things about the title that are sort of punning on all kinds of things that were both affectionate and hortatory with relation to Milton Babbitt and some affectionate way that he was being addressed by this piece.

WB: You mean to say that Milton Babbitt is a creation of James Joyce (BB and WB laugh), or that James Joyce wrote about Milton Babbitt?

BB: Yes I think so, I think so. And maybe vice versa. Actually, James Joyce is that remarkable kind of phenomenon. What does it mean for an art to be universal? It means that everyone finds themselves reflected in it. The great classics have that quality of: anytime I want to know where my head is at, I go to some piece by Mozart and notice how different it is now. And I discover in that, where I've gone. I think the only sense in which art is universal is that everybody finds in it exactly where they're coming from, and it's completely different for everybody. I think that does make a fundamental difference between traditional discourse and art. Traditional discourse delivers its message: yes or no, one hundred percent or zero, that's it, terminal, whereas one thinks of a work of art as just loaded with the resonances of all the things about a stage on which people dramatize themselves, and therefore has all kinds of ways in and ways out for anybody. I think that James Joyce has that quality. I notice almost every modern artist seems to find in James Joyce a very vivid reflection of exactly where their heads are at, me included.

WB: You were talking about improvisation not versus composition, or improvisation and composition, and how you listen to improvised music in a different way than you listen to composed music.

BB: Yes. This happens quite unintentionally, I'd say. I won't even say that I listen to it differently, I find myself hearing it differently. In particular, it seems that what I'm most aware of is a sense of the sound carrying the image of what people are going through mentally, what kind of awareness they're going through as they respond to each other, as they respond to sound in producing sound. It's as if what I'm hearing is the readout of their mental condition, the sound being the text, just transparent to their heads.

WB: That happens when you're listening to improvisation?

BB: Right. In fact, I'd say that it's almost diametrically opposite to any experience I've had in listening to traditional composed music. It seems to me that the personification of the music is always the essential thing, and that even some very particular suppression of whatever might be going on in someone's head literally as person performing or as audience or something like that on the grounds that it's noise in the channel, that, in fact, it's interference with

the persona of the piece which is the primal element. It never occurred to me that there was something else going on in improvisation. I guess jazz improvisation is always something that I had related to, as something Americans grew up with, jazz, but I hadn't really thought about it. I always thought about improvisation as a way of trying to produce a piece. It seems to me that all of this is giving me a sense of what improvisation might be about, and particularly began to give me a sense of what was in it for me at the level of, say, piece-free music, all kinds of other ways that music could be apart from the concert piece. And the social activity of making music in some sense that was really liberated from practicing polishing up your piece, or finding out what a good way was to improvise as against putting yourself in some place that you had never been before to find yourself going some place that you would never otherwise have imagined, and in relation to and in response to what other people were doing, was just a whole additional, amazingly expanding dimension of what music could be and what doing music could be, for me, what was a totally ramified sense of how I could live musically away from those particular channels that I'd always had as a musician.

I would also say that one of the things that improvisation has brought home to me is the antagonism of skill as a category and art as an activity. You see, the idea that one learns how to do something rather than one struggles to do something, I think is pernicious. I think that the education culture and the skill culture and the display culture and the concert culture, which is part of what produces that bad medium of music I was talking about before, it seems to me, those really obscure the question of what's in it for the person doing it and what's in it for other people that is of interest, by imagining that you can't possibly do anything that's artistically interesting without developing a high degree of preliminary skill. What's curious about that, or a very good illustration of what's wrong with that is: play a record some time of some kids doing musical games in a schoolyard. Play it for yourself and play it for your friends — even if they happen to be musicians, they may be hard cases but, I think, still viable — and notice that no one fails to be interested in listening to this record although it exhibits no known or certifiable musical skill whatever. And notice that people work for many, many years to get up to the level where they can do things of no interest to anybody, with enormous skill, and at that level only a few things break free, break out of the mold, and you just build up this whole medium of skills in which very little interesting can happen. Whereas you notice that obviously something is wrong when it's possible for a medium to exist in which not only are those kids freely acting within and freely coming out on, but anybody listening to it can relate to it as a perceived experience, not just by knowing about it ideologically, and not just because we all like kids or something. How come we can get interested in it? How come we can watch what kids are doing with interest when they clearly not only have no skills, but no concept of skill, and there's some real effort to come out on something which isn't associated with



applying something learned as a separate, independent technique. (Inaudible aside by Ben.)

WB: That sounds good.

BB: OK. I feel like I'm making speeches.

Re: Goodman & Boretz for Dummies

Bill,

Meta-Variations was a phenomenalist anti-theoretical construction of musical thinking and creativity which specifically rejected and criticized Milton's doctrine that the language of science was the language of thought - this is discussed in the first 10 pages of Meta-Variations and carried through the entire book - which is all about removing stylistic and systematic limitations of music by understanding the intuitive cognitiveness of commonly applied musical concepts, by demonstrating that from the perspective of fundamental intuitions on which all music leans things conventionally defined as terms and "rules" are actually just a few cognitive possibilities in a field of unlimited possibilities.

Of course I very soon afterward realized that the "unlimited" character of Meta-Variations was actually restricted to pitch-systematic music, and probably to Western music. So the constant expansion of that range has been a big part of my music thinking project since that time. And my counter-theoretical bias (in Meta-Variations I eliminate all theoretical terms by defining them in terms of phenomenal particulars - intuition) has escalated through all these intervening years.

Best,  
Ben

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Re: Goodman & Boretz for Dummies

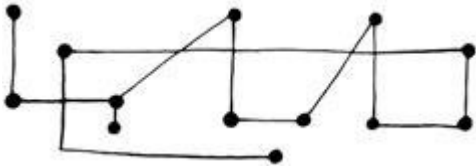
Dear Bill,

Meta-Variations for its formal language borrows techniques from *The Structure of Appearance* - although it doesn't use the nominalistic calculus. Most pivotal to reflect my musical intuition was the predicate "matching" which enabled me to articulate my intuitive concept of the hierarchy of qualitative and quantitative properties of musical phenomena. In particular, it made possible the path in Part II from the identity of interval sounds qualitatively to their quantification as distance-intervals. Matching is a way to get around the paradox of the continuum that three phenomena a, b, c at distinct points on a continuum may exhibit the situation where a appears to be the same as b and b appears to be the same as c but a and c do not appear to be the same, phenomenally. Carnap in his reconstruction of the world could not get out of the continuum because of this problem. Goodman proposed a predicate called "matching" where a can match b and b can match c but not necessarily a matches c (in other words, a form of "equals" which is non-transitive). This could be used precisely by me to describe my intuition of how the pitch continuum becomes a musical vocabulary of pitches and pitch functions. And of course the entire project of phenomenalist reconstruction of Carnap's Aufbau as reinvented in *The Structure of Appearance* was a model for Meta-Variations Part II although all the concepts, predicates, and definitions were entirely framed within (and to articulate) the experience of music.

A good way into Meta-Variations is probably through some subsequent texts (do you have the anthology of Jim's and my writing called *Being About Music?*) - I'd recommend *Of This and That; What Lingers On* (, when the song is ended?); *In Quest of the Rhythmic Genius*; *A World of Times*; and *The Logic of What*, particularly.

Best, and cheers,  
Ben

**ON READING EACH OTHER  
(AND REFLECTING ON YOUR TEXTS  
AND YOUR MUSIC)**



**BENJAMIN BORETZ**

I'M ENJOYING THE THOUGHT that this diverse collection of fellow composers, writers, editors, and producers infuses a special coloration into *Perspectives's* normal social spaces which – I can fantasize – is uniquely attributable to me being the occasion for their gathering. But texts and music composed and assembled on my account, on my behalf, even at my expense, are, each, one would hope and expect, fully self-fulfilling, dissolving in context the energy of their motivation into the substance of their composition. As they all, to my unjaded appreciation, do. Catalyzing no supervenient comment. Leaving even the uniqueness of the occasion they create unremarkable upon except by the way they

converge to create it, because it's only by virtue of their individual interest and substance that the occasion, this occasion at least, could even be said to have being, to have come into being.

But one thing I need to say is that I wish all of you whose work is so beautifully assembled here had known my beloved friend Robert Paredes, whose writing published here may be among the last he is able to do. Because Bob has lived with almost painful authenticity the seriousness of what it means to be serious about what you do; and I have loved the loving care and depth and craft of his writing and music (you can hear it on Innova CDs, and you can read it in *Open Space Magazine*); his presence here, at this moment, says more to me about how one can be well used by another person than I could have imagined ever knowing.

Other things I don't really need, but rather want, to say are stimulated, specifically and non-specifically, by what I read and hear in this collection. They're, mostly, about ways that I read (and hear) myself that might be not how others read (or hear) me. No one else's readings or hearings or opinions are in dispute, though, because they are, precisely, theirs; it would be boorish of me to transgress on any of these texts and musics in any case. Nor am I particularly spurred by the thought that everyone is super-eager to know what my own readings of myself might be; it's just that I really want, here in this place, to say what some of them are.

It's possible that some of the divergences among our readings of me might ensue from some ground-level differences in our planes of attention, seeing quite different things on account of theorizing ourselves as being in quite different businesses. From my perspective, it seems that at some time in our public-music history, at some place in our public-musical culture, interest became confused with virtue, imaginativeness became confused with importance. As subjects became institutionalized as disciplines. My tradition, my tradition of music and writing about it, is that composition is about ideas rather than rules, about imaginative experience rather than approved ideology, or, certainly, about rectitude. There isn't much space there for symbolic or historicist hierarchies. Such as the notion that there might be generally designable 'good way(s)' to compose or hear music, or, rather, good ways to compose or hear more than one music at a time; and that it would be desirable to discover and use, if not enforce, them. Outside the disciplinary/institutional context it's hard to see the musical argument for the utility of such pre-emptions. Musically, it would seem that what are 'good' are always experiential specifics, valued exactly as they actually are (that is, non-epithetically) in real

experiential transactions by real individual perceivers. The theorized collective generality seems only a statistical survey of meta-musical behaviors and symbolic attitudes, a summary of reportage, not a theory about music as music.

Relativism: *Meta-Variations* is methodologically and epistemically relativistic because it locates music as the content of individual experience and because it envisages the maximization of the territory for imaginative particularity (as against theoretical generality) as a corollary desire of creative composition. So relativism, for better or worse, is a matter of perspective rather than ideology. And therefore, too, *Meta-Variations* defines its predicates interdependently, in a mode of abstraction which minimizes the dependence of their music-functionality upon any particular constrained sonic interpretations. So predicates are defined *functionally*, as particular determinate functions of musical phenomena as experienced, none of whose interpretations are given (universal) ontological status—not even 'pitch', whose interpretation in 'composition' (listening or making marks or sounds) is maximally open to imaginative creative attribution. And in this context (and in the construal of many of the 'musical passages' for which listening filters are suggested in writings since 1973) the 'composition' (i.e., internal componentialization) of a presented single sound is not given: that an initially presented 'chord' consists of several particulated pitches is an attribution from subsequent sounds relationally resonated against earlier ones and imaginatively retro-perceived as composites rather than monoliths. So while the 'samenesses' of things can be just grounded in the literal application of pre-formed biases (like, 'same pitch again'), they can also be created imaginatively as a particular way of construing the residual adventure of a succession — which could be reduced to just 'two distinct things' (i.e., things constituting different places in a piece) in their raw form, but could, alternatively, be composed by (literal or speculative) creative listening into any number of relational configurations, including imaginative varieties of 'sameness'. And the notion of 'determinate feel' allows for the experiential meaning of a musical phenomenon thus imaginatively created to be determinately cognized without the intervention of a discursive metalanguage. So identifying analysis as 'composition' in *M-V* and elsewhere extends the possible conception of what composition and the possible scope of what the imaginative activity of 'listening' might be, rather than regimenting or redefining 'analysis'. In particular, I want to think of 'an analysis' as what someone hears, not what they write about what they hear ('the writeup of the analysis'). So you could only project (predict) the 'logic' or 'sense' of 'an analysis' of some initial musical passage into subsequent music

(by composing or listening) from within the music-language; the relevance of extramusical logics (mathematical, verbal, psychological, music-theoretical, ...) are only adjudgable by their music-language consequences, their 'musical effects'. To prefabricate a 'musical effect' by reversing the logic from mathematics, etc. to music is not a faulty, but merely a musically incomplete process, in respect of 'making music', or in particular, of 'making some particular musical sense': the ultimate issue is whether the musical effect, however speculatively formed, or pre-formed, is one, or, more realistically, is one that you're engaged by (or think your music is engaged by). And as to the question – it's been raised – "If music is brought into being by my hearing ('composing') it, does that mean it doesn't exist before (or unless) I hear it?" – well, it doesn't for me, anyway (might there be more than one sense of "exists"?)

But what I have offered in earlier writings are not actually analysis write-ups, but more like ear-training exercises, something proto-analytic, which you might call 'listening filters'. The only way you can experience what sense they create is by hearing what you hear when you pass acoustical signals through your filter-mind-set. What I heard when I listened to *Tristan* through my diminished-seventh-oriented filter was an amazingly new music – a new musical world, to my ecstatically bemused ears; that was, and would be, my only basis of judgment as to the value of that filter for those acoustical signals. Same for the other pieces explored in *M-V*, as well as for the "floats" for Beethoven's Op. 2, no. 3, Schoenberg's Op. 25, no. 1, Beethoven's Op. 110, first movement, and the theme of the Mozart A-major piano sonata (taking off from the inversional slicing of the chain of 5 fourths in the middle of the first 8-bar period), in the 1973-4 texts called "Mirage I, II, III."

Later texts have positioned themselves differently in relation to listening – from the opposite end, offering not tools for the creation of unknown indeterminate future experiences, but evocations of for-real past listenings. Such as, the *Parsifal* text: it's analogue wordmusic, meant to be performed and heard, making sense by resonating with a moment-to-moment listening to a particular performance of the Prelude (takes just the same time to perform), a simultaneous polyphony of cumulating qualities and ongoing commentary. (It's performed vocally as a simultaneity with the 1951 Hans Knappertsbusch Bayreuth performance by Noel Bush in the recording of *music/ consciousness/ gender*.) I took a number of floats of a comparable sort across other musical spaces in *music/ consciousness/ gender*, in "Whose Time, What Space" (Korean court music, Mozart 40th Symphony second movement, Milton Babbitt's Piano Concerto No. 1, a panpipes procession in the Chilean

Andes), and elsewhere. And, elsewhere, I've played some musics without explicit commentary but with antecedent text and music, with the sense that the temporally unfolding verbal-vocal and stereo-musical context created a unique sense ('sound') for them within those occasions (*Language, as a music; Interface IV, VI and VII; "Dialogue, for jkr;" "Experiences With No Names;" "Music, as a Music," and The Purposes and Politics of Engaging Strangers, for instances*).

Most recently, I've developed a much more expansive sense of the possibilities of musical writing ('discourse' included), locating its value not so much in its aesthetic or philosophical modalities, or its phenotype, but entirely in the imaginativeness of its writing and reading. The limitless possibilities of imaginatively writing about something – something as compelling to some persons as is music – in any of the rhetorical, symbolic, formal, or synthetic languages one might invoke seem to me irresistibly inviting, infinitely more than the aspiration to 'authority'. Something I tried to capture in the paragraph I wrote for the Eastman graduate-student magazine *Integral*:

#### THINKING ABOUT THEORY, THEORIES, AND 'THE MUSICAL' IN MUSIC

For a composer or a performer (perhaps also for an actively creative listener) the constructs of a quantified music theory may be exteriorized resources for composition, that is, for the reintegration of a musical particularity – a particular manifestation of musical-ness – within a music. Inside the internal-compositional circle, such a theory's prescriptive-normative implications are negotiated within a compositional process, that is, transmuted into, as, the particular-musical. In that context, musical output emerges as ideologically neutral, or, rather, its ideology is expressed as a particular musical-ness; its political-aesthetic implications are assimilated into the non-paraphrasable (and hence interpretively unconstrained) nonverbal (acoustic or mentalized) sonic text. The implicit self-privileging and prescriptive-normative messages of such texts are unproblematic because they speak integrally within their own musics. Exteriorized as public-persuasive discourse, however, the ineluctable privileging and normative-prescriptive messages of theory become ideologically and expressively preemptive, disembodied ideology and expression from the musical text and relocating it within the discourse text exhaustively. Perhaps it can be said, then, that the public theory-making space is essentially post-musical, and that the musical music-making space is essentially pre-theoretical. Creative interaction with one's

own musical experience is a radically different kind of theorizing, trading in authoritative prescription for imaginative re-creation, recognizing the musical in music by leaving it normatively uninvaded.

There are quotes on all these subjects in your texts throughout this volume – you guys seem to have read me a lot more, and a lot more creatively, than you've ever before let me know. But now that you've given me a whole lot of new things to read and to listen to, I hope you're prepared to hear from me in person, and – even probably – at length.

(The quoted text appears in *Integral* 14-5 (2000-1), 67.)



an interrogation for now

are we still?

ARE WE STILL?

ARE WE STILL?

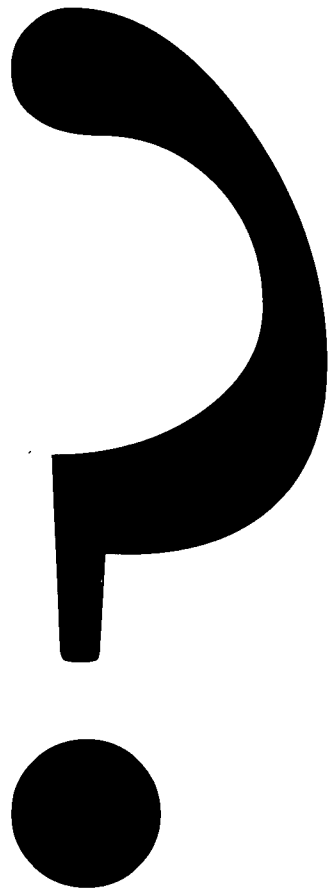
ARE WE STILL?

ARE WE STILL?

ARE WE STILL?

**ARE WE**

**STILL?**



(NOW?)

or did we start to think anew?

## 1: (ASSEMBLAGE)

*If we need music to be more than itself, maybe it's because we're insecure about music's "itself".*

Music is sonic in the sense that thoughts are vocal (verbal).

The secret of Beethoven is that his music feels and moves more like the experiential interior of an actual person.

*A way to understand musical structure is as a dynamic process of intuiting at point A what needs to happen at point B. And/or to perceive at point B that it is the intuitive consecutor of what happened at point A.*

*If Post-Tonal music began with tonal music embedded in its ear - and early post-tonal music reflects the eartraining of that tradition, how is subsequent-generation post-tonal music with that earlier post-tonal music in its ear, as its eartraining, evolving its ear-mindsets - and how is that manifesting in musical qualities of its music?*

*A particular and powerful feature of tonal music is that the harmony in tonality is the residue (auditorially inferred) of what is there and does not require the literal representation of the referential set for that set to be the experientially effectively governing sonority context for that music. The need to construe via literal iteration belongs to a different musical mode.*

*A born native music speaker [doesn't] isn't really in control of their musical philosophy; it's inbuilt, it's their autonomic shadow, it reveals a lot more about their musical soul than they think they're allowing for in their heartfelt statements of it as ingratiations, their propaganda. Self-aggrandizing but devastatingly self-revealing: your idea of what's ingratiating gives you helplessly away; your strenuous conspiracy to control the identity of your presence is totally out of your control, turns out it controls you totally, reveals everything about you by what it shows you think will make a good metaphysical alibi to cover your ass with glory. I notice: wow that isn't what I would say if I wanted to look good. So your philosophy, that is to say your mortal soul, is pretty much immutable: Prokofiev jumped back to the Soviet Union (the Mexican League of music culture) and played goodboy Socialist Realist - total reversal right? Except that his Stalinist music was like an x-ray of all of his previous music, his scintillating modernist dazzlers, smoking out their inner dancehall floozy under their smashing take-no-prisoner surfaces. (The First Violin Concerto and the Classical Symphony escape because they never pretended otherwise in the first place.) The same way that in a huge geological context atonal/twelve-tone music rather than displacing tonality brings out that the soul of tonality rather than fading via its fabled dissolution is actually retro-universalized, revealed as not the whole megilla of a self-contained language but a particular interpretation of the exploded total pitch-intuitive universe all along, special to a configuration within it, but undeniably sharing all of its*

*determinate-feel-making DNA. You could have known that from Berlioz, Chopin, Liszt, Wagner, had you been free to think or possessed of ahistorical hindsight. Wouldn't have needed Mahler to provide the deep end for Schoenberg to jump off into.*

*If you leap off the deep end of tonality with Mahler there's nothing obscure about the Viennese masters - what's left is their compositional genius and their tonal-expressive dramatic imagination. Issues of radical departures in musical cognition reflected by 12-tone theory seem diversionary. What it does to your musical consciousness is the reverse - stuns you to the realization that tonal music is contextual pitch-set music too. (cf. M-V Part III and Part IV), If you retro-engineer Schoenberg's 4th String Quartet via the sub-theory of "the tonal system" you come up with fairly strange and counterintuitive-looking images (can be done of course). But if you construe a Beethoven string quartet by a pitch-set analysis you're likely not only to get a tonal-systematic-looking picture, but one idiosyncratically reflective of the coloration of that string quartet. (after all to say the major-minor triads are canonical is an opinion, perhaps plausible in any given context; but to say that every triad is a pitch set is simply a tendentious way of denoting something; canonicalness is then contextualized concentrically to the passage, the piece, the oeuvre, the genre, the historical period, etc. without supervenient metaphysics). So the radical departures in musical cognition invented within Milton's music lie entirely in the aesthetic rather than the epistemological or theoretical realm. Milton's Mozartean impishness shows in the perversely allusive (allusive by giving cues for conventional music-receptive cognition) passages in some of his later music; but there does seem to be a new aesthetic synthesis in a piece like Around the Horn, where the microfragments reassemble themselves into a narrative macrotime. When I said, "Milton changed the subject for music", Jim said, "And I want to change it back." Which is something that possibly crossed Milton's mind as well.*

*The ideal formalism is a closed system, that vaporizes its own ontology, a black hole from which no meaning can escape...is this the ultimate devolution point of Milton's originary practice, from which he was finding ways to escape as time went forward?*

*Milton was not only radical he was a revolutionary, a charismatic leader rhetorically and compositionally striving to create a revolutionary new musical culture, one not only of "The Composer as specialist" but much more ambitiously and profoundly one of "The Listener as Specialist"... Milton's music did not have an "expressive" message beyond the complexities of his internal-relational structures; they were his message, and his meta-message was the ideology of rationality and the extension of coherences and the perception and cognition of coherences to the maximum degree which could be imagined or reached for. His aesthetic intuitions and his artistic politics both aspired to participate in the creation of a human world of people learning and imagining ever more complex and intricate modes and degrees of interrelated coherences. A world that would overcome its bewildering complexities by comprehending them, replicating them, inhabiting them, rationalizing them, thereby putting things right in music as well as in a person's life and in the affairs of the world.*

*No music ever rocked my world like the First String Quartet of Elliott Carter and the music of Milton Babbitt that I first heard in the early 1950s. Elliott's Quartet cosmically expanded the size and scope of the expressive world that I could imagine inhabiting musically, compositionally; the music I was composing was radically irradiated with the sonic-temporal imprints his Quartet had implanted in my musical psyche. But Milton's impact was altogether different: Milton's music proved to me, forced it upon me, that there were dimensions of musical being and thinking which it was manifesting in sound, within my very ears, creating worlds therein which I could not begin to imagine entering, or even imagine being able to identify what and where they were. Knowing Milton in person, as everyone knows, starting in 1955, produced a completely different affect – one that ultimately had nothing to do with the radical challenge of his music – for the challenge of Milton was internal to his music, it was sonic, the sonic intellect of his music, radical far beyond the very stimulating and inspiring discursive intellect of his talk and writing.*



## **In the musical universe of one**

In the musical universe of one, the musical universe I inhabit within the musical spaces I share with you, with everyone, I don't assume to know what you or they might hear or what you or they might say to describe what you each hear; nor do I assume to know whether my experience might resemble yours nor whether what I say to express my experience might relate to what you would say; but still we might listen together and still I will be interested in speaking to you of what I hear, and of hearing from you what you might say of what you hear. So although in the musical universe of one I have no sense of responsibility to be faithful to the truth of what anyone but me experiences, since I don't assume any direct access to it, I might still want to express my experience to you, with no implicit claims on your responsibility to it. And, too, you might be interested in knowing what I might say. And you might find it of interest to have access to someone else's, namely my, singular experience of something, of some music, especially if it's of some music that you might, or do, care about, that in some social space and in some communal sense we might even have sometime shared together.

Parenthetically, we might talk about this musical universe of one. Is it a lonely world? you might ask. But actually, no, it isn't at all, because what's really lonely is the constant extreme frustration of ontological discorrespondence, each time I discover that my fantasy of common experience seems inoperable when I test it, as if I and you weren't in the same room when the music happened. And it seems that the only way for a common experience to happen is for experience to be marshaled, regimented by exterior conditioning, reduced to a set of generic experiences experienced generically. Who wants that? I mean, from music who wants that? It seems so much better, so much less lonely, to dwell fully in the musical universe of one, to experience it as fully specifically as it lets me, then be fully expressive and truthful about those experiences, for my own benefit first, to extend and continue the experience, to have it more completely and amply, and to grasp it, to observe it, to find out about it myself almost as if I were a second person outside of the musical universe of one – really, as a reader rather than a listener I am outside of it, not unlike where you are, apart from my special access to my own experiences in memory and apart from all the residual affective traces cumulatively fused into my awareness. But in that common exterior place there's also the potential of a real, authentic social interface, of communicating across the intersubjective gap, of getting good interpersonal benefit even just from the mutual recognition of alienation, but especially from possibilities of creative saying about what might be purely subjective experience, celebrating rather than suffering from the inevitable ontological mismatch. Because loneliness in the musical universe of one is only because of failed illusions of commonality; non-commonality acknowledged as a simple given opens unlimited creative space for sharing, getting a good feel for, precisely our individuality rather than looking to be the same.

But there is for me another, almost diametric, given: call it group experience. It comes down this way: within my universe of one, my experience of anything I've experienced before is almost certain to be a significantly different thing when I experience as part of a group (like, an audience), and likewise different in every different group, at every

different time. I don't know the correspondence of each particular experience with that of my partners in the group; but together we create a presence that ontologically transforms the music I hear, something that's particularly dramatic to me when it's music that I myself composed – happens all the time. It's an effect I relate to the sensation that I have when I walk into a room with people in it – I get a blast of affect: something's going on here. Don't expect an explanation; these are just the facts.

So at some level this brings up a question about music theory, or analyses of musical phenomena. Like, if what I say is true, what's the meaning of “*a* music theory”, or “*the* analysis” of something? You have to ask, a theory of *whose music*, an analysis of *which musical experience*? If, that is, you acknowledge that the differences are for real, and that they are substantive down to the ontological level. And a question I always want to ask of a music theory or an analysis is, how far down the epistemic chain can you locate the musical, the experiential, consequences of that theory, or that analysis – maybe they're always different for everyone – I mean different enough to be problematic at the level of specificity aspired to in the theory or the analysis – so what does that imply about what kinds of claims those practices might plausibly make? You can see that a creative expression of an experience of something, or a residual sense of something, on my part would be located right in those experiences and with respect to this person – interesting, perhaps – undoubtedly – but having and being able to claim nothing like intersubjective authority. Whether or not this is a problem for any reason or for any person I leave for others to determine.

For me, though, thinking about music exclusively as a composer and a consumer, the practice of music theory and analysis is always a personal quest for transcendent musical fulfillment. A purely personal quest, in a musical universe of one. I once said, “I know there's a real world out there, because not all of my fantasies work.” That's empiricism, right? Subjective empiricism, you might call it. But don't call it self-indulgent, at least not in a pejorative way, please: if you do you would be disregarding the key word: “work” in my little epigraph. So it's a pretty critical-minded self-indulgent subjective empiricism — at least in how it prefers to think about itself. Much earlier, when I was earnestly weeding the pastures of existing music theory, formalistic music theory, by the way of considering it exclusively as an epistemic practice, a practice of creative eartraining in the service of liberating compositional and auditional creativity to the max, trying to reduce the level at which theoretical predicates and constructs were musical determinants – like English grammar and syntax are determinants for linguistic phenomena, or like perspective is a determinant for representational visual phenomena – to leave the maximum freedom starting at the most deep-lying layers possible for my own compositional or perceptual invention – imagination – individuality – specificity. So I found ways to articulate grounding principles for musical rationality at a far more general, far less specific, far less explicit, level than what was common at least at that time, back in the 1960s. In 1972 I was worrying about how flat music seemed to sound when it was composed or listened to as if it was one-to-one with its system, or its analytic-formal model. I flashed on what the problem might be, and thought I had an epiphany about it: it went like this, in a text I called “Mirage”; it's about how the

relationship between a music and its underlying materials (like, the tonal system, or a serial network) has a determinate effect on its global musical qualities:

## MIRAGE

notebook entries, 1974-1976

...does a musical image incandesce because it flashes forth by a twinkle of surface the full depth of the pool of reference on which it floats? Floats: the twinkle is the depth's edge, ultimately depthlimiting. twinkle at poolbottom, and there will be only flat bottom perceived; but twinkle at top, and there is a pool to float over felt, surface, depth, bottom, all together. So the experience of riches of musical depth comes by way of the acuity not the complexity of the musical surface; all is conveyed by the explicit sparkle of that twinkle: high atop a deep or boiling or tranquil or shoalfilled current; or just a map of the bottom of something or other. Still waters evaporate, vanish in sands, leave perception high and dry; to keep buoyant the flashes must flicker evernew dimensional senses (not another pool over there, but another depth, an unpremeditated cove, an elusive channel, connected within a timespan of spacesense: the pool reshaped as twinkles unveil newfolds, eddies, islands, inlets, changes over time become part of what it is: roiled, glossy, ripply, sparkly, gloomy, gleaming, reflected invert blueskybowl: time, shaped over time; space, shaped over time; (leafflutter: a still image that only a movie camera can record).) And if the texture datasaturates, repletes unto itself, color neutralizes, drains: demorphizes. If the reference is the surface, then the incandescence never glows.

And then I asked, “How can it glow, right from start?”

And imagined how a piece with an almost literal “chord of nature” at its beginning – with only the first partial omitted – could be vibrant as a dynamic superposition of two chords, one consonant, one dissonant: a  ${}^6_4$  major chord hung over a  ${}^5_3$  chord, dissonating with each other increasingly as the resolution of the upper  ${}^6_4$  dissonates powerfully against the sustained  ${}^5_3$  finally pressuring the low C down to a G to be consonant with the upper G chord:

Beethoven Op. 2 #3, first 2 bars.

A lot of coruscating action in a compressed knot of configuration. Think of how you would play that if you were imagining what I am.

Still at the site of structural music theory, I can imagine an extension of the *trouville* of Mirage into the notion that music either falls flatly within its logically inferred syntax, or incandesces by continuously negating that syntax to create crises of coherence which stimulate continuous creation of neo-syntaxes, of super-syntaxes, subsuming the sense of what has preceded. Of which one possible, terminal outcome – a familiar and specific one – a music’s progressive creation as unique, as for the first time, of the tonal system – but, the tonal system devoid of its definite article, as *a tonal system*, by being created through a unique temporal path of continuous imperative implications, a syntactical array of unique colorations, colored by the particular temporality of its own morphogenesis, unique and unendingly re-morphing itself. And so not only my experience but my grasp of my experience are potentially in constant mutational process, if I sustain that grasp as an awareness of experience rather than as consciousness of it in the form of discourse.

But structural fantasies such as I had then and continue to have still universalize the contents of experience by grasping it by denoting acoustical signals sliced out of the presented textual data, and attributing generic syntactical attributes to them, and giving that metricized mosaic a particular perceptual interpretation. Still the logician’s method, as I once called it. But what I called the novelist’s method is not really an alternate path to the same outcome; it goes not to the content of an experience but to its identity. To the extent that the only necessary connection between any musical experience and any other is only my total music-organic condition, the way I have been formed up to this moment as a music-imagining organism by all my lifelong interactivity, in every actual form, with music phenomena, all the experiential music substance fused into my psyche to form the receiving or creating being I am at any moment. The total morphogenesis of my music universe of one.

In which I imagine freely, with that absolute unconstrained lack of responsibility to a communal discourse, or to anyone else’s doctrines or even their fantasies (in all of which I am of course terrifically interested). Try to get myself into a mental posture that seems favorable to the creation of a transcendent experience – empirically, of course, because my fantasy still has to “work”. So I wonder what some music would be like if I imagined its composer had a transcendent revelation one day of what music was – in a way that

could only be articulated by the one music they needed to compose. So I hear this music as what music was altogether for that composer on that day: and, not to be too comparative about it, how wildly incommensurable that identity of “music” might be with respect to another composer’s fantasy revelation. So, finally, listen to “what music is” in one composer’s momentary but utterly holistic vision of it: it’s one of the craziest pieces I ever heard:

Mozart: D major piano sonata (K.311), first movement

So if this is “what music is” in Mozart’s momentary but holistic vision: it’s one of the craziest musical universes I ever inhabited. (In the musical universe of one, it makes no sense for me to use the persuasive grammar of advocacy; what I need is just to tell it to myself and you like it was if I can find the language to do that.) In this moment-of-truth-Mozart universe Music is the perfected cumulative image of human perversity, perfectly mischievous and maybe even consummately sadistic in its unflappable cool as it unrolls a relentless sequence of wildly self-negating configurations of contour and timespan – each successively denying the most obvious implications of the previous. Bang! Stop. A little fit. Stop. A little start – suspend action. Another little fit and start then plunge into endless nonstop yack. Passages start, ejaculations interrupt, intensities instantaneously relax then explode, ends finally with a completely new modality whose configuration pervasively appropriates the entire foreground space before it recalls something from the middle of the beginning somewhere, leaps through a reordering of those erratic gestures, devolves almost inadvertently upon its own beginning to run its energy all the way out. This universe is in a complete shambles but the Perpetrator hasn’t broken a sweat.

I ontologize this music as a chaos of a very specific kind with a vivid direction of intention toward me. Where does this leave something like “musical logic”? Perhaps it’s not even an issue in this universe, any more than is the logic of my nose, to remember a silly-wise quip of Igor Stravinsky. But as always, any seasoned objective analyst could construct and articulate a fully logicized, impeccably coherent model of this music — any number of models, all utterly persuasive anent the musical data. Could even “find” a marvellous and ingenious coherence, totally supportable by an astute strategic reading of the acoustical data. But — experientially — that’s not what I want up at the front of this Sonata; it’s not the aesthetic-expressive itch I need this music to scratch for me. Nice/nasty, as above, is more like it, doing it just where and how I want it done. There is, of course, confusion here: you may have run across a famous sneer by Milton Babbitt about the stupidity of a musicological characterization of the slow movement of the Mozart 40th Symphony as perpetrating a moment of “surprise” — this contemptible historian-type utterly failed to notice, as Milton took care to, that the “surprise” (a loud B major chord) was almost a logical given after the very opening of the piece where the gentle E-flat music is inflected with a C-flat dissonating for a moment between two B-flats. But if I was that musicologist I probably would have been thinking, Wow, what a surprise to hear that C-flat explode out in the middle of this world in the form of a big loud B-major chord. So maybe the analyst wants to endure as few surprises as possible, where the music-sensation seeker lusts after unfathomed mysteries and unimagined possibilities — like those unimaginable things that people say to each other in

Dostoevski or Conrad novels — and so is more likely looking for any possible interesting way to be astonished — to be knocked out of their socks if possible by whatever knocks them out of their socks — and that capacity to be astonished intensifies with sophistication, with expanding perception and even knowledge — not to mention practice — ear training. So my version of this particular Mozart ontological-epiphany-moment goes like this:

[*Whose Time, What Space*\*:] Mozart 40th Symphony

And while I don't want to go into it very deeply here, just listen to how radically unimaginable, from the perspective of either of those two Mozart-epiphanies, this output of a Beethoven-nature-of-music-revelation is:

Beethoven: Op. 10 #3

What music is revealed to be in this Beethoven world is a strenuous didactic lecture on itself, in the form of an outsize animation of the temporally evolving logic of its pitch space. Creating one ferocious dynamic by filling then opening then opening then filling, spreading, measuring, collapsing, extending, steps and gaps of different species, diatonic, triadic, registral, dramatically remaking steps into gaps by progressively finding (chromatic-step) interiors of what appeared to be (diatonically) seamless. Its power is the energy of ironbound logic, anointing itself as the Inexorable, and teaching not only how to think, what to think, but how to feel about thinking, about this thinking in particular, this music giving a lecture all right but one in which it itself as itself is ferociously, passionately, coercively, oppressively protagonistically present — declares, this is the path you must be following doing exactly as I am doing on it along with you (“I” of course is the music called Op. 10 #3, not some longdead and possibly mythical composer-person).

There is also a Babbitt-moment in this landscape to tell you about, but it's more overtly my Babbitt-moment than obviously his — a text coming on with and about the beginning of Milton Babbitt's First Piano Concerto, one of those pieces which are probably the hidden real subject of, the real motive for, Milton's bristling Mozart-analysis moment:

Babbitt: Piano Concerto, from *Whose Time, What Space*

And then at the end here there's a piece by Jim Randall called “a benfest for electronic ensemble”. It claims (says Jim) to be a response to an orchestral piece by me called UN(-). My retaliatory wordpiece on it is called “On the Edge”. which says how I ontologize Jim's piece as a Jim “what music is” moment — maybe more, to quote Jim, a “how music goes” moment — but, as I've said elsewhere, for music, going is being (except where it isn't). The first movement of this piece is called “Assemblage” — my text is vocally interactive on it.

Playing: Jim Randall: *a benfest*: Part I — reading Part I of “On the Edge”

Isn't that enough to start a conversation?

\* *Whose Time, What Space*: in *Being About Music*, volume 2, pp. 520-527

## Vignettes of Old Masters VI: Lukas Foss (1922-2010)

A gratification of listening to Lukas's music - any of Lukas's music - is that you are never far from music wherever his music takes you music is behind the wall down the corner below the horizon across the universe under the eaves at the end of the tunnel at the tip of your ear you can taste it just yonder just beyond experience just rolls off your fingertips beams just over the moon is right beside you just barely untouching your semblable knows what you like likes you - maybe more - dances ingeniously just behind your ear that almost licks almost mahlers you out with brahms by gould smoothing ruffled lennys edges rounding igors corners not il miglior fabbro but the grooviest musicperfect pianoplayer you ever heard bach or four temperaments always the music a more than ample payback for the long indenture or safeconduct cover for the smiling inyourface pushoff fathermaster teachermaster symbolic hindemithicide pantomusikanting out to enact to exorcise to performatize to spielify all the crushing load of master-student composer-performer lennylukas previnlukas glennlukas igorlukas aaronlukas johncagelukas germanamericanlukas all the never biodegrading relationships by rigorously nonjazzing the rules but instead declassicizing them to escape at last but still there have to be rules even if like countercrafts of non not anti never anti composition the un not ever anti hindemithaaronreinervengerova not breaking not flouting but remaking always tethered to music always the careful chords the tasty lukaslicks the classic infallible dufallo clarinet riffs the dignified but decorously avantgarde delancey bass around the straightish bluecollar colf cello they groped their way away almost went for broke they were never far from music but ever further away along the rules they made as they went we were never in it together but close enough to relate.

Close to music, Lukas's music Performs, Stages, Enacts, Personifies, Affects. To do it right you get prepackaged bigstars: You get Jennie Tourel. You get Adele Addison. You get Lenny Bernstein. You get Andre Previn. You get the Improvisation Chamber Ensemble. And you stage them brilliantly, just so, just for them in particular; they will never have it better: Phorion: lenny down the chute as mad bachcrazed maniac (no place here for the self-congratulating hero-knight of the Shapero Symphony or the devouring ogre of Brahms by Gould). Time Cycle: Adele a jumping bean on a tightrope, a warbling acrobat bird, groovy earthmother. Song of Songs: Jennie as Daniel Deronda's Mirah, Malke the Wise, the exalted Bride of Judea. Echoi: Lukas & Co. in a fractal lukaslick tsunamifest. You compose avant-lenny; avant-jennie; avant-adele; avant-andre; avant-lukas. Invent scintillating, titillating, coruscating, startling, channeling the future, imaging the beyond, the easily familiar terra incognita we can all know, in a glossolalic newspeak that we all understand. Soundmusic monstres richly repaying every moment of experience you lend to them; and it always sounds fantastic. Like nothing else floating through the modern musical world, like a wraith of future past, like a vision of things that were to come, but never did.

**Lukas Foss: Time Cycle (orchestral version) / Phorion / Song of Songs.** Adele Addison, Jennie Tourel. Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Leonard Bernstein. SONY CD 64164 **Echoi /The Fragments of Archilochos /Non-Improvisation.** Lukas Foss, piano/harpsichord; Jan Williams, percussion; Douglas Davis, cello; Edgard Yolzinski, clarinet. EMF CD 005.



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

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

esteemed contemporaries Igor and Aaron – but also as usual, Arthur’s non-negotiably idiosyncratic dystemporality makes it into something quite other, special.) But even afterward, in the 1960s and beyond, even though chromaticism especially of the serialist stripe would seem an obvious killer for an ear exquisitely tuned like Arthur’s to the absolute specificity of sonority – as virtually the entire expressive quality in music — that deep-inner ur-composer invents his way out with exquisite lucidity; the 1969 5 pieces for piano reinvent the substance of pure pitch-class resonance by tampering the piano and intensely vivifying registration – that was adumbrated in the 1959 Chamber Concerto (recomposed in 1985 as *Perspectives II*) with densities and modes of articulation, commonplaces of the (especially European) mod scene at the time but – again — ending up in some unrecognizable place of its own, unfathomably still and antikinetic as the last moments of *Aguirre*.

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

February 1962:

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

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

May 1964:

And in Arthur Berger’s Chamber Music for Thirteen Players, ideas that derive from characteristically Webernian, Schoenbergian, and Stravinskian sources are crystallized and

transformed by an acute and sensitive compositional ear into a delicate fabric where the distinctions between lines and fragments, polyphonies and sustained sounds, rhythmic energy and ornamental ramification, are kept in a subtle and elusive flux which responds palpably to the minutest gradations of change.

December 1964:

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

March 1965 (in an article singled out by Morton Feldman for explicit vituperation; see "Boola Boola", reprinted in *Give My Regards to 8th Street*):

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

February 1967:

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

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

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

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

Duo No. 2 for Violin and Piano (1950)  
Paul Zukofsky, violin  
Gilbert Kalish, piano  
Desto 6436/47 (LP)

Three Pieces for two pianos (1961)  
Serenade Concertante (1944; revised 1951)  
String Quartet (1958)  
Two Episodes (1933)  
Chamber music for 13 players (1956)  
Paul Jacobs and Gilbert Kalish, pianos  
Robert Helps, piano  
Lenox String Quartet  
Columbia Chamber Ensemble; Gunther Schuller, conductor  
Brandeis Festival Orchestra; Izler Solomon, conductor  
CRI CD 622  
Septet  
Five pieces for piano  
Robert Miller, piano  
Arthur Weisberg  
Contemporary chamber Ensemble  
New World Records NW 308

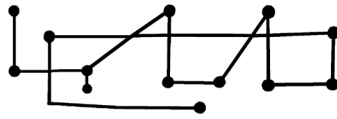
Duo No. 1 for violin and piano  
Quartet for Woodwinds (1941)  
Duo for Cello and Piano  
Duo for Oboe and Clarinet  
Trip for Guitar, Violin, and Piano  
New World NW 360-2

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

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

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

# HAROLD SHAPERO AT BRANDEIS IN MEMORIAM (1920–2013)



THE BRANDEIS GRADUATE PROGRAM in music was just beginning when I arrived in 1954 to study with three young American composers whose music had been riveting me since my high school days—Arthur Berger was 42, had arrived from New York a year earlier; Irving Fine was 40 and a refugee from WASP Harvard; and Harold Shapero, local young-turk jazz-pianist all-music wunderkind, was not yet 35, inconceivably young for an actual official professor. The whole music department operated out of Roberts Cottage—Roz Morrison, the secretary (the first Music Department person I spoke to) worked in the kitchen, seminars happened in the living room and bedrooms, and there was a graduate student composer living in the attic. And everybody was talking high-serious nonstop in every kind of people-group. So—coming from a redbrick New York City college—this was an astonishing environment for a school; and the nature and quality of the learning space was just like that—an intensely creative-intellectual family deeply engrossed in permanent strenuous conversation and incredibly serious about every aspect of their work and about music. Harold, even more than the other faculty, was also insatiably inquisitive about everything else: basic socioeconomic/political theory, technology, science (especially the astronomical theories of Fred Hoyle), but, first and foremost, philosophy, especially philosophies of consciousness, identity, and existence (Whitehead and James were constantly in his conversation) and, locally accessible, great living philosophers of religion, specifically Judaism (Aron Gurwitsch and Simon Rawidowicz); Herbert Marcuse too was always in powerful evidence at any campus meeting on any controversial subject. Harold himself wrote about “the musical mind” as a manifestation of subconscious processes, and developed a complex of thoughts about the relation of tradition to individual inspiration—something he shared with Arthur Berger. And all of this was included, anything could metastasize anytime (at Harold’s discretion of course), within our nominally formal graduate music classes (which began whenever Harold showed up— usually very long after we’d gotten going on our own). And the interaction, on any subject, crackled with acerbic electricity, more streetgang jamming than new-age kumbaya, or Parisian-

elegant (or Harvard-fake-polite) decorous one-upmanship; Harold's competitive energies permitted no softnose padded discourse; every topic—musictechnical or music-aesthetic or world-examining—was stripped to street essentials and delivered with a brick. So—does it need to be laid out any straighter—he was idiosyncratic, volatile, radically iconoclastic, deep, ubiquitous, and—difficult, and outrageously interesting. His very early fame as a composer (which was a shadow behind this almost defensive pugnacity) was almost certainly tied to the intimidation his particular combination of qualities produced, all of which came through unmediated in his amazing music—chops were a major preoccupation, and he had them beyond mastery, totally transparent to everything his music needed to be. The big one for all of us was the Symphony for Classical Orchestra. (Leonard Bernstein who also did faculty time on a now-and-then schedule always said “hi, Genius” when Harold walked into the room unimaginably late as usual—Lenny got the intimidation vibe—he conducted the Symphony like a dedicated angel.) I wrote my thoughts about the Symphony for a series of broadcasts I did on WKCR in New York on the subject of “The Philosophical Strain in Postwar American Music”—Harold's Symphony was an inevitable item on that playlist:

Harold Shapero's Symphony is cold as ice and strong as steel; its overt association with a “Beethovenian” model is completely deceptive. Its physicalities are plosives to the solar plexus, or a shove or a nudge from the blind side; its subtleties are moves far more rapid and deft than you could ever match, or ever even really follow; a demonstration of absolute musical mastery whose subject is absolute musical mastery; whose beauties are the knowledge and control of where musical beauty resides and from whence it arises. It is *sui generis*, and will never be surpassed: unambiguously, it tells you so. Its affinities are blatant and fierce; but untouchable, irreducible, and, ultimately, intractable.

The Zeitgeist of *Perspectives*, ab origine

(Where we were...)

Composers are thinkers. Composing is thinking. The experience, the very being of music is inextricably interdependent with the entire range of a person's mental interior; the critical individuality of each person requires that each person pursue and evolve and articulate their own personal thinking in and about music, to have it adequately as composer, performer, listener. Music has evolved overt complexities and musical culture has developed acute anxieties which force engaged people to consciously reflect and articulate and work out their issues in extramusical languages. Deconstructing conventions to uncover their cognitive opacities, and the musical consequences of their applications, has become a creative - a moral -imperative as well as a path to an artistic breakthrough; hearing old music as new, imagining new music arising "from the shell of the old", making "music which invents the world from scratch", by some cognitive-imaginative path determined by one's own philosophy of personhood, composerhood, history...composers, musicians, are driven to reflection and utterance by these musical urgencies and aesthetic visions, and by their habitation in an intellectual and artistic world much wider than that of music alone. Including the self-arrogation of responsibility for not only one's own work but for one's entire musical universe - for all the world's music, and even for the relevant human interactions within the social spaces of music making. It has become indispensable to the work of speakers of nonverbal expressive languages to redefine the deepest-lying substructures of musical awareness and being, as expression, as thought, as ideology, as a conscious fusion of intellectual challenge, cognitive clarity, conceptual depth, existential engagement, social enlightenment.

Mindsets like these are what made it seem plausible to a group of young composers to imagine creating a magazine written and edited by people like them, first-order practitioners of the arts they were discussing. And these mindsets, taken all together, are the logic of how the *Perspectives* magazine groped and stumbled its way through its first 20 years: *Perspectives* was born into a musical world in which these were plausible premises; and they were, at least implicitly, the premises by which the evolving contents of *Perspectives* were initially conceptualized by the editors. But the almost instantaneous turnaround from an unimaginably radical collection of mindbending discourses to a model for lookalike writings designed to be published and perished produced an internal cultural-intellectual crisis after the second year of publication (probably the imprimatur of the Princeton University Press, actually the hired gun rather than the lawgiver of this operation, and the very classy distinguished scholarly-journal look of the magazine, were greatly culpable in this development). In response, the editors, reduced to one by that time, concluded that permanent revolution was the only possible editorial policy for a magazine devoted to practitioners of cutting-edge original creative composition; but that such militancy, to be serious, had to be inclusive rather than sectarian: that issue alone explains many of the "projects" and "new directions" visible during that time - and manifestly in the 30 years that have followed as well, but in a much less superheated and psychodramatic register. For, for better or worse, *Perspectives* for its first 22 years was a "cause" and an "issue", a sore-thumb phenomenon that didn't fit any particular niche that pre-existed within the musical world: it



was making it up as it went along, and people reacted accordingly. So of course people attributed all kinds of familiar motives to the choices manifested by the magazine - most of which were in fact serendipitous, and mostly guided by a quest for possibly available adventure, in the spirit of those mindsets. As I wrote (in the magazine) to Ben Johnston, when he complained about the scarcity of writing about John Cage in *Perspectives*, had we received a text about John Cage of the quality of his letter, it would have been published forthwith (we did, early on, come up with a nifty article on indeterminate notation by David Behrman, and a playful riff on “the changing composer-performer relation” by Lukas Foss). But, largely, we didn’t have good communication with that whole piece of the musical world. And it was only somewhat later that the composers in that piece developed an interest in verbal expression (except for John Cage, of course - and it was significant and interesting that *Source*, when it began under the editorship of Larry Austin, consisted mainly of scores rather than articles). Unfortunately, too, *Perspectives* always got more attention for what it didn’t have in it than for what it did; that made it somewhat harder for it to focus on its mindsets; but getting attention, nice or nasty, was not a high priority, couldn’t be: we were too concentrated on putting together interesting issues and being useful to our contributors, who - as far as we knew - were our principal - and maybe only - readers also (this was also a blessed time when most of the audience at new-music concerts were cadres of the perpetrators: composers, performers, and elderly relatives).

And, soon, the confusions: the confusion of dichotomizing thought and experience; the confusion of dichotomizing discourse and creativity; the confusion of identifying rigor with extramusical methodologies; the confusion of confusing sense with substance, of structure with motivation; of characterization with justification; logic with aesthetics... ideology with meaning... art with Art... representation with ontology... politics with philosophy... egoenforcement with enlightenment... interest with self-interest... quality with affinity..... interesting confusions, productive confusions, confusing confusions - confusion of *Perspectives* with Princeton; of the writing, thinking, and music of *Perspectives* people with the writing, thinking, and music of Milton Babbitt...

What really made it go was the sheer extravagant range of modes and levels of abstraction, modes and levels of precision, rhetorics of conjecture and refutation; Ernst Krenek’s tendentious music-historicist teleology (“Tradition in Perspective” - Krenek was the most frequent contributor to the first 5 issues); Karlheinz Stockhausen’s meta-synthetic cosmogeny (“The Concept of Unity in Electronic Music”); Milton Babbitt’s centrifugally transcendent revelation-by-reformulation, his re-visionary breakouts into holistic transfiguration by sheer gravitational density (“Twelve-Tone Rhythmic Structure and the Electronic Medium”) - though both of them (KS & MB) were essentially just outputting a particular current compositional method; Ed Cone, artfully sculpting musical landscapes by conjuring parallel structures of literary analogies (“Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method”); David Lewin reducing convoluted masses of music texture to neatly classified geometries (“A Theory of Segmental Association in Twelve-Tone Music”) - later the two of them in a decorous Ivy exchange of conjecture and refutation (Ed’s “Beyond Analysis”; David’s “Behind the Beyond”); across coasts, across campuses, across cultures, the temperature was palpably higher: Charles Rosen’s high-concept (but very serious) didacticism provoking Joseph Kerman’s spiteful (and wildly off-the-mark) curmudgeonly indignation, John Backus

wading into terra incognita (avant-garde scientific posturing in *De Reihe* by exogenous scientific amateurs who happened to be serious (and quite accomplished) composers as well as earnest self-promoters); explorers of the apparently insular convergences of aleatory, improvisation, microtonalities, neo-social performance modes, phenomenological romanticisms, who - along with other self-alienated colleagues, seemed sometimes to enter *Perspectives's* space somewhat warily, or gingerly, rather than with the firm grippy stride of fellow-seekers (Lukas Foss: “The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship” and “Work-Notes for *Echoi*”, David Behrman: “What Indeterminate Notation Determines”, Pauline Oliveros and George Crumb (in the Younger American Composers project); Seymour Shifrin: “A Note from the Underground” (from just how far underground we weren’t quite sure, perhaps no further than UC Berkeley), Pierre Boulez: “Sonate, que me veux-tu” and “*ALEA*”, Ben Johnston: “Scalar Order as a Compositional Resource”, Henri Pousseur: “The Question of Order in New Music”; Roger Reynolds; “Indeterminacy: Some Considerations”; Herbert Brün: “Against Plausibility” (no wariness here, just total unflinching kickass world-renovation); Roman Haubenstock-Ramati: “Notation - Material and Form”) Our contributors were composers, performers, theorists (Allen Forte, Saul Novack, Michael Kassler), critics (Michael Steinberg, Eric Salzman, Alan Rich), historians (Leo Treitler, Lewis Lockwood, Paul Henry Lang), scientists (Melvin Ferentz), mathematicians (Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg), poets (John Hollander) - I’m just speaking of the first 4 years...

(Some composers discussed in Issue No. 1: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, Helmut Lachenmann, Sylvano Bussotti, Luigi Nono, Bruno Maderna, Christian Wolff, György Ligeti, Gilbert Amy....)

It may really be more on point to be struck by what was included than by what wasn’t; probably you read most of them, or about them, here first. And many of our “usual suspects” didn’t show up in the magazine until well down the road. But in the cultural heat of the time, the metastasizing mythology of “The *Perspectives of New Music* style” engendered two complementary responses: what was published should not have been written, let alone published; what was published should be immediately replicated in as many indistinguishable copies as possible for inclusion in the next issue. Which is sort of what happened, and created in a very short time the internal crisis I mentioned, which we treated as a “revolutionary situation”. Periodically noticeable shifts in the over-all personality of the *Perspectives* issues are the result of this editorial consciousness.

Music is not really much like science: the notion of a “musical problem” is pure slogan, or at least, metaphor. But the metaphor of “musical science” is a potent enabler, a powerful pretext for strenuous theorizing and talking, or for strenuously opposing - discursively or behaviorally - those acts. That compositional thinking is of a fundamentally different nature is something that had to be discovered as a consequence of a long history of serious efforts, of many different aspects, to find the precise rigor through which the infrastructure of musical thought would reveal itself. That it could never reveal itself discursively or metatheoretically was (and is) a fruitful breeding ground for unlimited imaginative speculation and creative verbal composition, whose rhetorical metaphors mirrored the intellectual or spritual loci of the composer-writers (Ben Johnston said that in my writing I

tended to quote ideas and passages of analytic philosophy, whereas if he were writing a dissertation he would have quoted phenomenologists). The result - as Richard Kostelanetz seemed dimly to foresee in his Yale Review article on *Perspectives* - was not so much a great resource to the direct experiential, compositional, or intellectual benefit of music itself as a remarkable new literature, a genre of verbal meta-music, surrounding and inter-charging with music to mutually enlivening effect, a remarkable phenomenon whose extantness was grossly obscured by the much more identifiable and conspicuous growth industry of academic career-creating and career-sustaining discourse and discipline-making. But it's there, in the aggregate of the texts; its through-the-flames signal is certainly the writing, from start to finish, of Jim Randall - but it's not just confined to that blatantly "creative" affect of Jim's and others. It's not that *Perspectives* had (or has) an intellectual style, it's that it has reified and vivified the territory of meta-musical intellectual style itself - or, at least, has given that territory a scope so vastly beyond anything it had in previous history as to amount to an act of originary creation. I would claim that *Perspectives* is the originary model for a range of intellectual styles well beyond those with which it has been directly associated: anthropological, neuroscientific, psychoanalytic, futuristic...all of which of course have existed in some form prior to and independent of the existence of *Perspectives*; but by giving all styles, of any perceivably distinct stripe, a common forum, *Perspectives* implicitly and effectively transformed the ontological location of all these separate discourses to a large open all-inclusive world of creative literature with music and the demonstrable possibility of intense engagement with music as its field of imaginative vision, the core metaphor of its cognitive interface.

#### Postscripts: Personae

I haven't ever really had a space where I could comfortably write about the remarkable personal experience doing *Perspectives* was for me. People, that is. Friends, mostly; and some very interesting not-exactly-friends.

As a graduate student composer at Brandeis, working with Arthur Berger, I lived in a unique environment of music-intellectual engagement - fellow graduate students like Elaine Radoff (now Barkin), Barclay Brown, David Burrows, Joel Spiegelman were in a constant ongoing permanent conversation about everything in music that preoccupied us; in this milieu the idea of creating a young composers' magazine was a natural, and sometime during the fall of 1955 Barclay, David and I started talking about it with Arthur.

Arthur Berger went from teacher to colleague to close personal friend to intensely close collaborator; when Paul Fromm agreed to publish *Perspectives*, I - feeling a bit too young for the sole editorship, asked that Arthur be appointed also. Arthur, who had long been involved with writing about music, as founder-editor of *The Musical Mercury* in the 1930s, critic for *The New York Herald Tribune* and *The Saturday Review of Literature*, contributor to *Partisan Review* and, of course, *Modern Music* magazine, was deeply informed about the convolutions of the music-political world (as I most emphatically was not); but he had great discomfort (as I most emphatically did not) with many aspects of the then-contemporary developments in the new-music world, then in a particularly revolutionary phase. Moreover, Arthur had a very Parisian outlook on contemporary music; that is, he was fiercely conscious

of his aesthetic-social allegiances and ontologized them as morally imperative. Bad news for the editor of a new-music magazine in 1962; so - frequently over Arthur's not exactly not-dead body - I was obliged to take responsibility for publishing texts that pushed the limits of Arthur's intellectual tolerance and his willingness to take the heat (which he knew would be considerable, given that his professional circle was centered on Aaron Copland and Stravinsky (the Boston School was very Boulanger-centric), and thus implacably (morally) hostile to the composers around John Cage, very wary of the anti-neo-classical (politically, the anti-American Composers' Alliance) group around Varese, etc. and alternately attracted and intimidated by the high-powered intellectual world of the younger post-Schoenbergian ex-students of Roger Sessions, particularly Milton Babbitt - who, at the same time, was even more of a friend of Arthur's than he was of every other New York composer). We did muddle through the first two years - I think the synergy actually worked in favor of the liveliness of the magazine's contents; Arthur had been the most remarkable teacher I'd ever had, perfect for me in that we were totally dialogical, never hierarchical, and our learning sessions at Brandeis felt like mutual engagements with musical and philosophical interests and problems. He was the first person I knew who shared my intuition of music in a holistic intellectual-aesthetic-philosophical space. We read aesthetics and listened to everything. But *Perspectives* was, from the start, controversial, especially within Arthur's musical and social community; and he had very little motivation to defend work (like David Lewin's and Michael Kassler's highly mathematized discourses) with which he had very little affinity. So he felt the need to assert a hierarchy, for the first time in our relationship; it couldn't happen, and so he - very reluctantly, I should say - resigned as co-editor. We were far too much family ever to stop being friends - I was still visiting Arthur and helping him with his book, etc. up to the time of his death almost forty years later; but our worlds and our evolutions just simply diverged, irrevocably.

I've written about my relationship with Milton Babbitt (most recently in the *Perspectives/Open Space* volume to his memory); and my lifelong continuing interaction with Jim Randall is abundantly documented, in his writing and mine: when I met Jim, it seemed almost unimaginable that someone would have so many of the same musical-intellectual intuitions that I had; and both Jim and Milton had a very salutary effect on my work with *Perspectives*, because they greatly reinforced and supported the expansive, inclusive image I had for the magazine; and Jim in particular came up with many ideas for widening our scope of content and form, and for keeping things lively; with Jim's support, I was never afraid of being too imaginative or adventurous. So when, in 1971, he announced to me that he'd just written "a fictionalized version of *Meta-Variations*", I was exhilarated; and, indeed, *Compose Yourself* did radically change the history of *Perspectives* along with a certain piece of the musical universe.

I can't write about everybody I should write about here, in serious appreciation and loving friendship: Elaine has been a lifelong near-family-member but also intrepid and utterly unshakable fellow-adventurer, all the way through *Perspectives* (I coopted her right from Issue 1 by getting her to translate Stockhausen's German, which she did, brilliantly; her importance to everything about the magazine is way too pervasive for petty specification), Inter/Play (Jim's and my cassette series of improvisation sessions), News of Music (a wide-open, limit-free little magazine published out of the Bard College Music Department from 1983 to 1995), and Open Space (which was her idea to begin with, starting in 1988 with her book *IMAGE: a collection*). Ed Cone, imported by the Editorial Board to bell the out-of-control cat as temporary co-editor, instead stood shoulder to shoulder with me in

defense of editorial integrity and intellectual freedom: the most rigorously ethical person one could ever encounter, even to the point of dissonance with his own evident beliefs and interests. Paul Lansky was first a graduate student composer working nearby on computer music at the computer center of the Princeton Engineering Quadrangle, then a fellow-teacher and fellow musical thinker in the Princeton Music Department, and an immensely valued colleague and friend. Somewhere in there I asked him to be an associate editor with me and Elaine, along with Tuck Howe, Jane Coppock, Hilary Tann, and eventually the most and best longterm appointment I made, of John Rahn, with whom I worked very closely when he was a graduate student at Princeton, eventually “supervising” his remarkable dissertation “On Pitch or Rhythm: Interpretations of orderings of and in Pitch and Time”. Our conversation, once it began, has never stopped or seriously flagged (it even survived my near-disastrous attempt to accompany him once on a sailboat race, and, as you can see, we are once again co-editors of *Perspectives*), despite the fact that we sometimes seem like upside-down versions of each other. Long after my long-stretch first tenure as editor of *Perspectives* I came to know Bob Morris, the best listener and most kindred soul and spirit in my present world, a person with whom our relationship always seems to reach a point of extravagant mutual enlightenment, only to find a newer and higher-level re-beginning.

Before the beginning, there was a project initiated and almost realized at the University of California, Los Angeles, where the U.C. Press agreed with the Music Department to publish a new-music magazine under my editorship; this was a product of the remarkable convergence of a very enlightened music historian, Robert U. Nelson, who was chair of the music department at that time, and my UCLA colleague and lifelong friend Lukas Foss, who was always responsive to my presence as a composer, and who happily supported my wild schemes for revolutionizing musical culture at UCLA, including the founding of this magazine. At the last moment the project was aborted by the veto of a senior music historian in the UCLA music department, but it was a topic of conversation when I met Paul Fromm at the Seminar in Advanced Musical Studies in Princeton, in 1959.

My relation with Paul Fromm is, in a completely different register, an important personal history too; more important personally than historically, I am sure. I did function in several important roles within the Fromm Music Foundation, beginning with the publication of the *Musical Quarterly* volume of texts from the Princeton Seminar, and continuing until the rupture of the Fromm Foundation from *Perspectives*. Paul is a person my relationship with whom feels like a sacred trust, most of which is not to be exposed for the benefit of factual demythologization. It was, unsurprisingly, a massively unequal confluence, on every imaginable front, and in every imaginable species of imbalance, some quite surreal in the lived-through realities they produced. And yet, although it was always unimaginable that we could address any topic with anything like a shared reality as to what it was we were addressing, we were able to work together in warmth and (mostly) harmony for all of 12 years; I think it was solely because we related at a purely human level, sharing not rational reality but compassion and empathy, the qualities that transcend the particulars of real life, the qualities that bind you to your mother and father.

## **The history of Open Space**

Starting with the "jkrbabboxes" in 1979 (floated as an idea but never materialized), the discussion was about the way to separate the dissemination of our work from any institutional or commercial intermediaries. Records of new music were piled up in New York record stores and languishing forlorn and disregarded - even an interested listener had no way of distinguishing among 200 composers none of whom she was sure she had heard of. So we asked ourselves why we shouldn't use our own resources, our academic jobs, as a funding source for a project in which we would reverse the producer-consumer configuration and choose our recipients from whatever bases we had to know about them - people (mostly colleagues) and libraries and radio stations who would respond to our invitation to receive our music and writings as a gift from their producers. The Inter/Play cassettes of real-time playing/composing sessions taking place at Princeton and at Bard College during the years 1979-1991 were the first wave of our project, the first 20 mailed from Princeton, the next 16 from Bard.

Then Elaine produced her Image: a collection book and proposed that we expand the Inter/play project into a full-blown publishing and recording cooperative, operating on the same inverted marketing model as Inter/Play. Jim and I leaped to embrace this idea, and it was dubbed Open Space, a name we borrowed from a long-running weekly community happening associated with (eventually) Music Program Zero at Bard College. Elaine's book was the first issue; she edited a collection of my music reviews in The Nation as the second release; and a recording of two fraternal piano pieces by Jim and me was made at Bard College by Brad Garton and released as Open Space CD 1 (1989). By the end of the century Open Space had produced and distributed in its unique way 20 CDs, with music by a number of composers but principally the work of the Open Space cooperative (Barkin,

Boretz, Randall); and also books by Barkin (Img; e: an anthology), Boretz (Music Columns from The Nation; Meta-Variations) and Randall (Compose Yourself).

In 1999 we decided to initiate a periodical open to writing on any subject which was exploratory and not necessarily likely to get published in conventional journals - also, without overt restriction as to subject matter. So The Open Space Magazine was inaugurated in 1999 as a print and a (separate) web magazine, edited by Boretz and Mary Lee Roberts (who had joined the cooperative in the mid-1990s), and sponsored by and published at Minnesota State University at Moorhead where Roberts was teaching (it moved to Bard College shortly thereafter). It was aimed particularly at young creative people who were employed and living in dispersed locations around the world and would benefit from a forum/focus through which it might be possible to create virtual communities. Distribution was on the same basis as the other Open Space releases, though we did accept subscriptions (on the grounds that - unlike the other Open Space projects, each of which was produced and funded by its principal participating artist - the magazine disseminated the work of many people and had no individual funding base). As of 2016, The Open Space Magazine has published and distributed 20 issues (of approximately 150 pages each, and several double issues). Open Space has also collaborated in producing joint releases of CDs, and a print and audio memorial for Milton Babbitt, with Perspectives of New Music. The Open Space editorial/production group has expanded to include Dorota Czerner as co-director, producer, and principal co-editor, along with Tildy Bayar, Jon Forshee, and Dean Rosenthal.

## **A LETTER ABOUT EDITING *PERSPECTIVES***

Dear John,

The history of *Perspectives* is a story of intellectual-aesthetic-philosophical- conceptual-stylistic bridgeheads lodged precariously over thirty years, frontier probes into new surfaces, depths, and even senses of meaning and meaningfulness. I fear the loss of these recent-past bridgeheads as much as I would worry about timidity anent new ideas so many important openings haven't yet really had their implications realized or even examined or even acknowledged in this context, the "new" is just as likely to be the same old novelty of repackaged trendiness as it is a fresh whiff of a new trail to a new place of new possibilities and incremented insight. This is not a conservative view, but a radical one - it posits that the "new" can actually be a cop-out on the really radical revolutionary, which must involve serious depth of examination, and follow-through not only in rhetoric but in practice. (Educational, compositional, social...)

More than ever before, and a lot because of its having become so firmly rooted and established in the American intellectual-music world, the Editor of *Perspectives* has to have true philosophical depth, the vision and courage to sustain and cultivate truly revolutionary acts which include acts on his part such as might involve bringing into the pages of the journal contributions which have intensely important implications but which are more like "primary" sources than like discourse (note that anthropologists disdain such a work as LeRoi Jones's *BLUES PEOPLE* on these very grounds and greatly to the impoverishment of their discipline, specifically as to its capacity to offer a serious engagement with the actualities of the issues it studies). We, even less than the anthropologists, because our scholarship is so explicitly (and I think exclusively) validated in its integration with practice, can find justification for sealing off our range of readings and encounters and awarenesses to our likenesses. So an Editor has to be more than a good judge of excellent material, in the sense of good thinking and "good" writing, or even a person capable of accepting originality from members of his/her peer-group; a good PNM Editor has to have a capacity for courageous and insightful initiative in tricky areas where the material must be sought and discovered, and where



the implications of and responses to its being published must be thoroughly anticipated and withstood. Permanent revolution, I always used to say to Paul and Elaine, is the only possible editorial policy for a journal with the mission of Perspectives. Someone has to have the vision and courage and independence to both accept and initiate, to take responsibility for the risks taken and caused by others, and for risks that he/she cannot afford not to take.

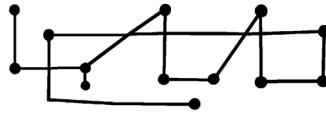
The horizons of the present are bulging with clamorous problematics to which a courageous Editor would not be a nay-sayer, but rather an insightful yea-sayer, understanding the issue both with a sense of where its conspicuous advocates and arguers were coming from, and a sense of how their definition of the issue is pre-emptive and potentially suffocating to other perspectives and depths (not, say, just the stubborn-courageous denial of issues such as you get with some overly intrepid writers). But equally important, those clamorous problematics themselves are 1.) pre-emptive of the definitions of what is an issue, as well as what an issue is; and 2.) crowd out other, less vocalized issues which may urgently, at least as urgently, need cultivation, and 3.) overshadow those bridgehead issues precariously and laboriously exposed and begun to be explored in the recent past which can lead, if pursued rather than only replaced, to real insight and reconstruction – and all my views are based not only on the conviction that permanent reconstruction is the true life of intellectual culture, but that in particular, the present historical-cultural moment needs reconstruction desperately, specifically in its modes of thought and (artistic and other) expression, quite simply in order to survive in any shape that we could imagine living with.

So who's the guy/gal for this?

best ben

# “WHERE HAVE WE MET BEFORE?”

## MILTON BABBITT AT 90



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

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

So we would have to ask: what does it mean to ask what is Milton’s (musical) philosophy, what is Milton’s theory of music? Would we not have to discern how he hears music (assuming that that’s what a ‘theory of music’ signifies) by how we hear that within our hearing of his music? The deep games of hidden and extruded connections (which, in Joe Dubiel’s ingenious hearings become experienced rhythms), the implanting of metastasizing networks of implications, understood as predictive predestinations, and their subsequent histories of further ambivalation and fulfillment; the maximizing load of simultaneous structural information generating sonic texture in a first-order sense, and the strenuous stretching by speeds and

distances of the human capacity to make a complex ‘line’ or set of lines out of a complex mosaic of variably incised ‘points’ or minimal line-segments— these are perhaps the most obvious denotata of a particular disposition to hear and make music; but do we understand, in any meaningful extra-musical way, what implications they have for our sense of music as music, or for music as part of our world? More significantly, is there ever any way to proceed linearly from one of these domains to the other; even more significantly, is there any reason to desire to do so?

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

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

And then, in his stunningly adventurous liner notes for the wonderful *Soli e Duettini* CD, Joe makes a truly valiant effort to transmute the (score-based, or “speculatively heard”) abstract-analytic into the (listening-based, or “actually heard”) transaction-experiential, intending to reincarnate his own analytic insights as concrete musical qualities in action (rather than as musical facts in inscription). The effect of this essay in enlightened music teaching can only be discovered by listeners who take it as an explicit project of concrete listening experimentation—a creative project which I seriously recommend—and see what emerges in their hearing.

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

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

So, then, there is one’s own historical experience to recall: certainly the most arresting thing about Milton’s music for me when I first heard it—in concert (*Composition for Viola and Piano*, Third Street Music School Settlement, around 1954, with Walter Trampler and Alvin Bauman—that piano player who soon after emigrated with a group of Long Islanders to Chico, California to escape nuclear fallout; and *Three Compositions for Piano*, at Payne Hall, Harvard, in a recital

by Charles Rosen; and on the (ca.) 1953 WNYC American Music Festival)—was how it didn't sound at all 'right', like a texture with no way in for me to inhabit it other than to bounce off its tough impermeability, or stay back to observe its behavior. So—ever since— my question has been—is this a fundamental thing that ontologizes Milton's music for me or is it a 'problem' I want to overcome by finding cozy ways to ingratiate these very textures, or to find in these works redeeming soft edges, sensuous indulgences? I don't think so—impermeability, toughness, in-your-face challenging complexity, stubbornly sticks in my musicworld as a fundamental aesthetic surface of the music of Milton's that means the most to me. I think (to grossly generalize) that I perceive in Milton's music over its long development a radical inversion of the traditional character of temporal successivity: a phraseology that drives in on itself inward rather than flowing outward to what's beyond—a whirlpool rather than a stream, or rather a stream composed of a succession of discrete whirlpools—not Stravinsky's elastic energy-in-place but a music of intense local-internal action, something more like the plusive energies of latter-day "advanced" jazz (as in Coltrane, Coleman, Shepp, Dolphy, Mingus, Taylor, Braxton . . .) Something I was groping to express in what I wrote (in 1986) about his (First) Piano Concerto, not really describing, but definitely exuding attitude and anxiety and desire and, above all, ambivalence:

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

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

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

Which is to say, I haven't really begun to deal with the problem of how— or even whether—it might be possible, meaningful, fruitful for me to make verbal passes at my experience of Milton's music in significant depth and detail. I know I would wish to expand on my sense that listening to Milton's music is better described as serial sampling of actions than as continuous following of trajectories. I know there are things I want to say about *Around the Horn*, most especially, and *Canonical Form*, and *Beaten Paths*—pieces whose phraseology seems to bend

and stretch outward and do create a kind of narrative continuity rare in Milton's work—and *Relata I* (if only to repair my desperately tentative old *Nation* discussion), *Phonemena*, the Second and Fifth String Quartets, *Reflections*, and most of the other music on *Soli e Duettini* (just to mention some); but I don't imagine I ever will be able to compose an adequate counterpart to the deep, densely detailed, uncompromisingly serious writings I've invasively invoked here. Perhaps that radical focus on person-relative individual musical experience which has emerged for me as my fundamental divergence from Milton's global-visionary aspirations, emerged, that is, from within the very space of those visions and aspirations, is a serious limitation of my meta-music-expressive capacity. But should I never find a way to speak of this unimaginably singular music, would that simply mean that I could never learn to adequately hear it? Or might it simply be that I could never find any voice adequate to resonate all my multilayered musical senses of Milton's sounds and words, and of all his presences, even in the world space he himself has created, which we all—by now, for a very long time now—have come to inhabit, with him, together.

--April 5, 2006

(from "On Milton's Language," *The Open Space Magazine*, Issue 6, Fall 2004:)

. . . for a lot of us (earnest young composers), it was as much that unique hightech lyricism of Milton's prose (" . . . Now that the jagged edges of abruption . . .") as the exhilaratingly uninhibited pointy-headedness of his chosen musical topics and the bravado of his self-positioning within the farthest-out philosophical and conceptual worlds of the time that riveted and liberated us. I think his writing up through, say, the late 1960s, was as creatively—and, I guess, ontologically—inspiring as was his music; and I'm thinking that a lot of the qualitative substance of that writing, a lot of what transmitted to us, was its linguistic music, a textual sound-texture woven with the sonic and rhythmic ear of a (fast) compositional talker—who could, to be sure, create on demand superabundant simulacra of those same sounds and flows even in the absence of those contents. But that's a whole lot less interesting a story than the residue of the inner subtextual meaningsound which new readers might still be able to hear in the earlier texts of *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, if they know, or care to learn, how to listen for it.

—September 2004

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- Mead, Andrew. 1994. *An Introduction to the Music of Milton Babbitt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- On Babbitt, Piano Concerto No. 1: The occasion described was the first concert performance, in Carnegie Hall, New York, in January 1986, Alan Feinberg, piano, Charles Wuorinen, conductor, American Composers' Orchestra; text is from Benjamin Boretz, ("Whose Time, What Space")

(1986); rev. ed. in J. K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz, *Being About Music: Textworks 1960–2003*, Vol. II: 1978–2003 (Red Hook, New York: Open Space, 2003), 525. Originally published as a concert review in *News of Music* 10 (1986).

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not another little review

giya kancheli, gyorgy kurtag, galina ustvolskaya, steve mackey, james dillon, gyorgy ligeti, luigi nono, earl kim ... and morton feldman

there are composers who plunge into their work urgently following their music into strenuous fantastic voyages of discovery, perhaps of self discovery; there are composers who apply themselves strenuously to discern and implement what their music requires of them, going where it needs them to go, fulfilling its demands out of a sense of intellectual, artistic, ethical obligation; there are composers who work from the outside in to energize their music to be as powerful self - projected personified presence as they can forge; there are composers who remain intactly disciplined, keeping intact and fulfilling rigorously their well - formed vision of how their music might perfectly do the work of reflecting on their persons as they conceive they would want, and deserve, to be reflected. from what point of view their music might be variably admirable, or engaging, because of these biographies, is probably not indeterminate but certainly indeterminable. is there any reason you'd want a key to this code?...— and that one who composes the transcendental hush as blatantly as others compose the standing O, floating sounds labelled with their interpretations, subtextual advertisements for themselves...?

(the composers who may have inspired these thoughts are not necessarily implicated in them in any particular or explicit way, at least not intentionally...)



## PLAYLIST FOR 6.15/2011 WKCR 3-6 PM

Language ,as a Music: Open Space CD 10: Disc 2, track 1 (Thesis); Disc 3, track 1 (Red Hook) - delivered first at a faculty seminar at Bard College in 1979; this performance happened at the Center for Music Experiment at U.C.S.D. in May, 1980.

2. Milton Babbitt: Phonemena, for soprano and piano [WKCR 6.15.11 disc track 3]
3. Milton Babbitt: Phonemena, for soprano and synthesizer [WKCR 6.15.11 disc 1 track 4]
4. Milton Babbitt: Around the Horn, William Purvis, horn [WKCR 6.15.11 disc 2 track 1]

Phonemena is Milton's quintessential intercomposition of music and language - where utterance is not so much abstracted as supercompressed into phoneme particles which become their own languagemusic, utterance unmistakably expressive in an unmistakably linguistic way, but expressive precisely in the sense that music is, yet with an ontological profile which speaks exclusively, determinately, language - perhaps even as "a language". Here are versions for Lynn Webber and piano (Jerry Kuderna on piano), and Lynn Webber and RCA Synthesizer - both on a New World Records LP.

Around the Horn distills the essence of Milton's image of utterance in the personality of a familiar musical instrument and a familiar mode of instrumental playing driven beyond the brink of possibility to go over the perceptual and performative cliff leaving behind a sense of having experienced an epiphany of terrestrial possibility previously unimaginable.

5. Pauline Oliveros: Bye Bye Butterfly

Pauline Oliveros, electronic pioneer in the San Francisco Tape Studio, made a collage of inputs to a multitrack tape recorder including an LP recording of Madame Butterfly which turned her tape-studio polyphony into a study of language and song as meta-language and mega-song.

6. Herbert Brün: Futility (1967) [WKCR 6.15.11 track 1]

Language stewing in its own self-inflicted frustration: Herbert Brün unfailingly unmasked the paradoxes and absurd self-deluding contradictions of the social actions perpetrated by and as interpersonal language-utterance exchanges. This was an early piece for electronics with Marianne Brün reading the text.

7. J. K. Randall: Improvisation on a poem of e. e. cummings

8. J. K. Randall: Eakins (film music)

Jim's own words about his penetration into the language of poetry and the theater of film sound are the optimal glide path to listening to these two pieces: somewhere i have never travelled, a poem by e.e. cummings, sung by Bethany Beardslee and played by an ensemble conducted by David Gilbert, and his pioneering computer-synthesized film score for the movie EAKINS, on the life and work of the Philadelphia painter who was controversial for his focus on nude female figures.

[Jim's program notes]

9. Paul Lansky: Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion [WKCR 6.15.11 disc 2 track 2]

The computer in a radically different affect from Jim's film music, and language in a radically different affect from Jim's illumination of poetry - Paul Lansky's marriage of the most

elegantly classical compositional sensibility with the most sensitive and sensuous sonorous fabrics; the voice of Hannah Mackay devolving finally to a simple reading of the text by Thomas Campion - this was a real breakthrough composition, drawing out of the sound - synthesizing and sound-transforming resources of the computer a new range of sonic and expressive possibilities and imagery - computer sound as seduction, sentiment, action, visualization, emotion...and language as a texture within all these sounds and configurative inflections.

10. Elaine Barkin: On the Way to Becoming [Open Space CD 3]

Elaine Barkin's Collages were - especially in this instance - experiments in the musicalization of spoken language, with - in the spirit of many women painters of the time (1980s) - the presence of the artist as persona within the artwork as a crucial aesthetic identity - and even as a crucial material ontology. The text itself is Elaine's composition, and is not being "used" in this piece/performance but "composed out" by the mode of her reading and the time and sound structure in which it is embedded.

11. Maryanne Amacher: excerpt from STAIN [WKCR 6.15.11 disc 2 track 3]

Maryanne Amacher was antistereotypical of anything that a person could be antistereotypical of; and her imagination - matched or even overmatched by her fabulous technical ingenuity and sheer technological knowledge and functional prowess - saturated the technologically overloaded spaces she created (this is a hyper-theatrical but totally structurally calculated installation) and forced out of the extremities to which she drove every parameter of the formidable resources she used - physical and mental - an experiential transcendence which never aspired to be ingratiating - we receivers were suspended in the spaces of her installations between extreme adhesion to her sound and complete disintegration of our body-mind integrity.

My music called "ONE" is both a metaphor and an enactment of a personal history, the evolving outcomes of a process of radically critical self-discovery. The start is a revelation of the habits of normalcy, whose backlash in the following episodes is successive species of radical violations of normalcy, from the almost-empty to the way-too-dense; and then, as the outcome, the last episode is just straight natural unforced music, but music of an unmistakably transformed music consciousness.

[To Robert Gross on O]

Hi Rob,

O is a piece whose dynamics develop within the sonorities, along the lines of what Hermann Scherchen called "intensity dynamics". It is music for a player and every player so far has allowed the harmony to define the rhythm and trajectory moving with accumulating internal pitch points and external accumulated resonances. So extreme dynamics would probably be a distraction. You might be interested in 2 other versions of the piece: Jim Randall's *BAB-O* and Mary Roberts's *O for electric guitar*.

Every score is a fractional suggested specification of components and in my aesthetics has no coercive implication - materials for music making; validity is not a predicate in that configuration. So the answer to your question would be the outcome of your own playing interaction with the score.

Similarly, I regard all schematic reductions of musical phenomena to be hypothetical metaphors; their "plausibility" is how anyone finds to be the interest of the musical ontology which emerges in their experience from the engagement of that particular metaphor with some particular sonic data. Anything applies to anything, to predictively indeterminate effect (ontologically determinate in each experiential instance); so judgment is, appropriately given the nature and purpose of musical expression, purely aesthetic. Perception of difference might be more interesting than definitive preference - though of course each experiential episode needs to be internally coherent so that there is "an experience" determinately. Given the nature and purpose of an expressive art form, "proof" of any hypothesis is inappropriate and inapplicable.

So the question is - what's the outcome and did it make a difference, and was the difference engaging?

## 2: (META)

*We have lots of public-art phenomena in our time which discourse at length about their anti-discursiveness.*

Everyone takes a different road to getting their head around what they're doing -  
and to getting your head around it.

*There are names for everything*

That all things are equally valid doesn't mean they're all the same. Or that they all engage everyone - or any one - to the same degree - whatever that means - or in the same way - and certainly not as the same thing. Or we are primarily interested by difference (which we experience rather than define) except insofar as we have an abstract ideological commitment which functions as a litmus test for acceptability. Like how your style of jazz or straight music gets you entry or exclusion with groups of practitioners and groupies.

*Music, as it has been said, is poetry. Music theory, too often, treats it as prose - or, more specifically, as inverted metadiscourse. But consider music theory's problem: how do you convey the specificities of a composed poetry in metalinguistic paraphrase or schematic abstraction or by logical-definitional reconstruction, other than by paraphrastically re-poiesifying and thereby recommitting rather than explicating the creative act?*

*But is music always poetry? That is, is all music lodged most tellingly in the expressive-creative registers of poetry, rather than in descriptive-analytical registers identified with prose? What is the operative distinction between imaging and factualizing? Identifying (or, thereby creating) regularities in or between musics can and has been done; therefore, regularities exist, if I understand what "existence" denotes in this context; so the question becomes (I hope): how do these regularities configure to create musical qualities (like, ontologized times of unique experiential identity)?*

...the realm of sound interpretation was opened to the limits of speculative imagination, subject only to the test of believable experience – which I called ‘empirical’, but the only population necessary to survey for verification was a universe of one – myself; and the determinacy of the predicates was going to provide a secure referential foundation for the free ordering of freely imagined

sound-materials in an environment of musical sense-making conceived as the experience of cognitive time-space structuring.

*I don't think that musical cognitvity is either captured or induced by terminological epithets. It is experientially suggestive metaphor that I can use to induce an inner state of being that becomes susceptible (vulnerable) to a specific transformation of consciousness that lodges as the being of a particular music. And terminological epithets prove to be rather ineffective metaphors - unavoidably generic, and even more above (or below) the level of close-reading focus.*

*So what is the implicit claim of the "Tristan metaprelude" (jkr's phrase)? If it's not "authority", what is its territory of intersubjectivity? How about "effectuality": if you put my filter in your head and ran the Tristan sound through it, doesn't some very distinct music happen seemingly as a consequence, regardless of whether that music would become your favorite or invariable or even a desirable Tristan? Isn't what is determinate – and sharable – just that a certain input will, in at least one person's experience, have a determinately distinct experiential output, even though the nature of that output is – crucially – unspecifiable, non-predictable, and – even possibly – non-repeatable? Isn't that what is empirical for music? Isn't it the musical universe of one, the population field of one receiving, introspecting consciousness? How could it ever be 'empirical' to determine the music-experience of more than one – since that is knowable only by an aggregate of verbal reports, whose vocabulary is not only in principle referentially opaque (relative to the experiences it purportedly reports) but ritually given in toto by the person-inhabited culture?*

*Still, I guess that subliminally I intuited my thought-hearings and hearing-thoughts as not only sharable, but with the hubris of exuberance supposed them inspirational as well. What I didn't notice explicitly was that in the very nature of my creative listening-creations of music was what you might call the 'indefinitive principle': that each listening-ontology was in itself determinately absolute but in no way even engaged the possibility of mutually excluding any other way (there's a discussion of "Schoenberg's Fourth Quartet as a piece in d-minor" in Meta-Variations where this is adumbrated, but with a rather distinct preferential tilt).*

... the nature of descriptive language which assimilates more to 'the expressive' (like, 'poetry') than to 'the objective' (like, 'discourse') is that 'expressive' word-language signals a unique particularity being captured and – unlike 'objective' language – does not signal a claim to definitiveness; in the 'expressive' context, 'authority', 'universality', definitiveness don't compute.

*Conflict between what's relevant to the substance of what you've done and what gets it public attention is poignant.*

TO JIM RANDALL'S BIRDSTEXT (AND NOAH CRESHEVSKY): Jim's idea of a Messaienic/Krishnamurtish reading of *Downtime* is curiously consonant with my own sense of the piece as I composed it, of the piece turning its own objects over for its own contemplation, listening to itself, or not so much to itself as to what it was being as it went, what it was made of as it was being made of it, taking in what had just happened as it was still happening, finally stepping back and reflecting in the afterspace, exploring the anatomy of its own tranquility in the wash of its own self-created chaos.

## Vignettes of Old Masters IV:

### Jim Randall's *benfest*

(for Jim Randall at 77)

#### ON THE EDGE

Us.

It is Us. Us Notes.

one. Two. THREE. FOUR.

One At a Time.

In a Row.

We're on top of it.

We're always on top of it

(& you: what are You on top of?)

Listen. Learn. It's all there, In how it sounds. How it Goes.

For you to: Get It; to Learn To Hear To Listen.

From how it sounds it goes makes that sense it makes: FOUR! (see?)

Couldn't be laid out straighter if it were a paddle up Schütz's creek. A Laid-Out-Straight sound, Laying it out straight. — Or What. That Bend.

Laying it out straight around what bend? To what end?

To be that Bend. We can be that bend because we laid it out straight. Nothing could be clearer. More straight a bend. Which we Can Do (for / to / You) because we're always on top of it.

And You? Did you Get That Bend? - ) You did only if you got it straight first, got with the straight that made that bend. Made It around that bend.

It?

From which to learn. At least. From Us. These Notes. On Top of It.

Of You. (Are you aware of the point: (& You: What Are You On Top Of?) ?)

Assert. Insert. Hard. It's Our Way of Getting it Straight.

By Laying It Out straight.

So You Will Get It.



Too.  
Get What? Assert What?: It.  
Us.  
HIM.  
(& - ? - uh - & is there a difference?) (Us: We Get It.) Color that Bent.  
At the End.  
By Being After Straight.  
Get it?  
Get with it?  
& then what?  
& so what.  
(It matters. You can tell. Assert. Because we can tell.  
Because we're on top of  
It.) Can Tell.  
And Do.  
Tell.  
From How We Quit When It's Over But It's Still There.  
You Cannot But Tell.  
And Learn How to Tell.  
(& are you on top of It Yet? (Or anything?) ) Beautiful.  
Intelligent.  
We think:  
We are Beautiful  
Because we are Intelligent.  
And With Attitude.  
Us Notes.  
With whose attitude?  
With our own attitude?  
Or about attitudinizing you.  
Toward Us.  
At Least.  
Two Steps Up.  
One Back.  
A Bend Between Discovers a Space Within.  
Yes. That radical.  
Major, even!  
Pause. To Ponder.

Our Accomplishment.

Take our time soaking it in.

Yours too.

It's What Happens.

It's What Happening Is.

What Makes it Meaningful.

Lodging in Space That Never Was (Before). All in One Move. The First. Only One So Far. But Already So Much!

It's What We're On Top Of. (& you - are you riveted? processed?) (ready for More ! ?)

But More.

Even,

Still,

On the Edge

Of Didactic; Not over; Not just.

Colorations of time;

Introstructions of psyche, indrawing; Streak of yellow (FOUR!) introsecting expanding brownband (one, Two, THREE...) Coloration of - What?

[timespace, energyspace, psychespace, soundspace...]?

(yes.)

(all of that.)

(in a nutshell.)

(adds up to.)

(a potent nugget of Experience.)

[What it's like is like that dmajor beethoven sonata op 10 no 3 that makes powerful timespace rhythm first with chains of octavedoubled single notes making powerful rhythm leaping spaces filling in spaces before leaped not skipping a stroke or batting an eye laying it out finally top to bottom seamlessly then -D#! - wedging - A#! - between where there was no between to wedge before. We like that piece. What it Teaches too.]

(& you - & now you - & now you get It. Too. And get Attitude. Right?)

We.

Us Notes.

We Feel.

What We're Doing.

We Feel Our Logic.

What we feel is not what you call Feeling.

We feel the Sensations of the Senses We're Making.

The feel of sense-synergies powering sense-timespaces Like no others, deep (in their ownway of Deep).

From There

Upon Reflection

We begin

It

Again:

Back off. Way off. A reflection. (Not reversion).

Coming From a New Place. But it's still Us who come.

With a New Twist:

Riding on a plangency, a different breed of color.

A different mode of coloration.

You need to follow.

(We're on top of it. We're keeping track, making tracks. & You?)

(Can You make the Twist?) (It's Twisty: one plangency soft and one hard but always a 2-color color):

Start; A process:

Hard: Straight Up: One. Two. Four. Three.

Soft: Mirrorspan: Four. Three. One. Two.

Flip at the center: newBend.

Just By Following the Logic of the Process.

And Us: all twinned; entwined: can you be sure it's still Us within?

One. Two. Three. Four. In Some Sense.

Onefour. Twothree. Fourone. Threetwo.

Hardsoft. Softhard. Hardsoft. Softhard.

Spread. Splayed:

One Four

Two Three

Three Two

Four     One

To become a timespace jangled by multiskewed reflections.

To be Splayed out to four images of twothree front to back back to front.

To be Squeezed to an image fourfolded.

The Beethoven retrogapped timespace. nowatune.

But still to be Us and only Us. It and only It. All in All. Jangling logic theater. Metastasizing in fore and aftertimespace.

One. Two. Three. Four. Referential disreverberatings. Discoruscating.

Dismembering. Splaying anally wild wildly anal lockstep.

Mechanical. ? . not hardly. not likely Us. Too swaggery. Too on top of it. Too twisty. Too exquisite:

A Treatise on What Makes It Happen.

(And it happens. Big time. We know what we're doing.)

(& You - Get it yet? It's in the brain, right, got to keep book, to keep score, to keep it straight: Put it together like software is how you get there: don't stop to admire, we'll get to that later; being and knowing Now located just at the flashpoint of sensation of sense, a wisdom received.)

For Us

There is no Deep

No Beyond the Verbal

No Verbal

Just what there is

What there is is what we make it be

Each time

Each timespace One. Two. Separate But Interreverberant.

Makes Logic.

Makes Theater.

Makes Discourse.

And then: Resisting the inevitable We Squeeze:

Into images of onetwo

Meeting themselves coming back as threefour. Still in lockstep (but is it new?) And still only Us.  
Riding the monochrome.

On the edge. Of Didactic: Showing, inextricably indistinguishably introfused with Being; facets of a unity; You will not be shown the Showing if you are being the Being. Maybe you think otherwise, that it's cool to just denote and explicate and demonstrate. So think of those pianoplaying professors playing their analyses - Brendel on Schubert. Tristano on standards. Boulez on Stravinsky. Then think Bill Evans or Pollini or Goldray or Abbado playing Blue in Green or Beethoven or Babbitt or Mahler. Or Jim Randall playing himself on his MIDI box. Except where he goes over the edge: try Mudgett or Gap1 next to ("...such words...") or Eakins or Lyric Variations or Svejik; maybe; hard to tell for sure about where the edge crunches categorically, whether it's gone over or not; but the issue is not ambiguous even when the verdict is.

And monochrome it is, in literal dumbass buzztone: scattering the molecules of oldspace to particles of newspace to fabricate a reflattened miracleized Us newrisen from the alchemic smoke:

one Two THREE -- *QUATTRO?* [Straight Up / No Bend - Whoa! - Get It?] [the same but not the same:

Up. not Down. samespace. otherway.

New.]

(oh, but not long did we squat no P.I.T. hottub for us our sleeves are quite innocent of contaminating cardioexhibition) --

and yet we do multidimensionalize.

always somehow

every way but straight up but fullbore straightout in our own twisty way (do you follow? how does it *feul?*):

distending congealing images of echoes of images of echoes straightening out so the twists are bared twisting so the straights are extruded we evolve or whatever you want to call it

by congealing by distending by twisting by fusing by echoing then disreverberating entirely anechoic whispery breathlessly balancing on the edge of didactic then without ceremony

preparation not even a breather for

a courteous decent interval or any wink or nod

(that even Satie wouldn't live so long

sit still for such obtrusion let alone that P.I.T. would ever come within waltzing range of) careening off the edge altogether: the banshee call braying the snotball

swagger sniggering cackling and all under the banner of  
pseudoesoteric literary allusions implicit (JJ:FW:ALP:  
*"teems of times and happy returns. the seim anew"*)  
and all within the edge of didactic and all running utterly undercontrol amok  
in gleeful violation of every ineluctable decency and that's just the  
beginning.

because what we think is what you feel; you think you feel our feeling but  
what you feel is thinking, our thinking which knows everything  
about feeling and what isn't, unravels the etiology of  
the whole trajectory of the feel of thinking in all its  
rage and passion  
its eros damped into inyourface flatoutness our  
subtlety remains inside our sensitivity expresses itself  
as intelligence as self-knowledge as cosmic coolness in  
the space of complexity complexified by implication  
under the guise of bald assertion under the cover of a  
longago abandoned cornball midwestern accent  
lingering as the admonishing finger of that hilarious old  
NYU photo we surrogate we notes his style of didactic in  
gentle notso gentle loving notso comfy raking rocking  
rolling roiling laboring reined in blowout transcendent  
reenactment in no recognizable soundmirror of that  
oddly misproportioned trajectory of that crudely  
shameless monolithic overheated relentless timeblast  
innocent whimperinging whatsis that *UN(-)*-thing of his  
endlessly dostoevskyian  
friend to whom we speak in *UN(-)*-friendliness  
majestically benevolent admonition from  
within and outside the edge  
of didactic where we recreate rerecreate yet again  
the seim anew  
again

To Jim, with love

June-October 2006

*On the Edge* was written for JKR Pass 2, part of a celebration of Jim Randall in *The Open Space Magazine* 8/9, **Fall 2006/Spring 2007**; a benfest / the trajectory of UN(-): pros and cons is recorded on *Music Around Benjamin Boretz: Open Spaces 2005 (Perspectives of New Music/Open Space CD 20)*

## First readings

It makes me realize, for the first time perhaps, why there is poetry.

beyond saying, beyond sensemaking, beyond sensing, not the rendition of dreams but the being of something else entirely which becomes in language what a dream is in dreams.

over an edge beyond boundaries which one didn't realize you were being within but now are revealed by the sheer transcending of them. what is speaking is frighteningly transcendental, speaking in material imagery making vivid things not possibly material but what is frightening is that they come real from this page. there are those who talk shamanic or hunganic but always about not is; here is no description but new-being the earthiest unearthliness.

where you have in past poems humanly sensorized a garden of things organisms creatures here the senses are channeled through but are not of or within human but rather of sensibilities originated but long departed from earthliness. the feelings in human vocabularies of other-than-human magically experienced within a human awareness.

so the poetries of style and concept seem so far back there somewhere, so meagre in how little they really tried to be, how hugely beyond oneself this is trying to be - and yet it is being yourself, an authenticity lucid and vivid and unspeakably a self, a creation uncannily unknown but unmistakably you and unmistakably there. But you as could not have been known was you before it.

did I mention that language is not being used to say or anything but the being being created is (forgive the word) alchemized from language and becomes indistinguishable from it or rather language becomes this being and is no longer a tool or anything else it used to be but this avatar.

the totality of this reembodiment becomes acid sharp when the sudden reversion to human language by grammar breaks through back from the other world - the admonitions are so suddenly poignant in their body-mind-person location, they become experience of rather than conjuring of being. speaks; tells; beseeches.

Palo Duro I know at least in an earlier form (?) but now in the tsunami of Death Valley it seems a waking dreammaking sharable observable containable within one's human scope of mind. I can love this without quaking at what it is doing with me.

I am only able to read the Irby episode as the reversal of the language-into-being I read in Death Valley but here as being-into-language, immersing totally, dissolving any distinction between, any distance.

I continue to tremble.



## Elaine, Unfolding

It gets to know itself but what it gets to know is herself.

Music, listening to itself. Music whose act is listening to itself.

This music is getting to know itself. It listens. Learns that way, what it does is learn, by tracking itself behaving. Hearing what it just did is the news it learns and takes it in with innocence. Does and is and sees and responds - selfknowing, selfbeing, selfbecoming in progress together.

So when you listen:

what you hear is not it.

It's a her.

and that's just the way she is.

Listen  
to her:

but what is she?

coming from where?

being

where?

just behind the leaf

just below the bubble

just around the bend

just then there but where just now  
and now just where

yet here

also just there

just so

so ever so slightly

she goes

she is

there

is the residue of many commingulating Its

thems

usses

to and for all the usses

she speaks

and the rules (the ones inside, the acquired identities, the edges of identity earnestly observed/insouciantly flouted but always in her face never in yours),

trying not others but only herself on:

try playing her keys with vienna fingers;  
color them dark light sharp quick  
feathery stomp do no lucubration but stay  
light

like something

that even when harmonically paranoiactal

is always

nice

to play

to hear

on your

flute

your

violin

your

vibraphone

basset horn

harp

oboe d'amore

celesta

jews harp

boneyard gamelan

shakuhachi

conchshell

on yours yes

but becoming hers

being something of her

you play hear

witness

follow

track the sound of

composing woman  
already gone  
composing herself away  
beyond the Great Divide and over a thousand Time Zones  
retuned  
exorcised  
all the Music Enforcement demons within  
(which no one actually ever saw but for the sign saying  
No Tunes Allowed in This Auditorium might have been thought  
to only exist as a paranoid entartete Kunst nightmare or  
internalized rite of identity production but either way they live entirely  
in their heads)

still now  
trying other Others on,  
knowing it's how to be a Self  
here  
conjuring first the sepulchral raging cringing spirit of DeathMaid Emily  
imaging her molten icy chastehating selfpitiless LeftField counterclockness  
(you know she's heard Aaron's,  
at least subliminally  
but filtered it through a fictionalized fakebook  
costumes and grammars and Otherscales of  
selftranslating Outness  
no wink of goyimnaches  
all farheimischt  
by the sheer inextinguishable Bronxiness of the composer...)

perhaps to become means to become serially Other  
to reOther yourself so Otherwise so  
what echoes back  
finally

is  
finally

you  
finally

but  
really

it  
always  
was

A Cultural Broadside (2/9/04)

Dear A.

Unlike you, I'm not personally frustrated by the current abasement and commoditization of the culture of music performance or that of art exhibition.

Because, some time ago, I decided to detach myself from the 'evils' of 'the culture' to find alternative psychic spaces where life choices and environmental effects are ontologized with a perspective that dis-reifies the irrelevant and renders it ineffective, while proactively reifying the qualities that are abundantly available to nurture the lifestyle which is desired. There's a confusion: 'art' ('music', 'concerts', 'museums', etc.) have symbolized an 'enlightened' ('elevated') lifestyle - they don't, anymore, as a general cultural phenomenon; but this doesn't mean that there isn't abundant stuff in our world which is nurturing to such a lifestyle; consider that at an earlier time, there were massive cultural phenomena which were non-nurturing (brothels and gambling palaces in Havana, Broadway musicals, bullfights in Madrid, bloated gourmands in Paris, mass-produced horse and dog races, charlatans doing magic and selling nostrums - & on & on) - but the presence of these phenomena did not appear to threaten the lifestyle of people who read books, listened to music, etc. So it's about confusion: the old 'enlightened' contexts are now dog&pony shows, and 'enlightenment' needs recreation by each person with other materials (I find the California, Nevada, and Utah deserts, the bristlecone pines at 11000 feet in the Great Basin, the rain forests on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington - and the availability of music and movies on the internet (via Amazon.com, say) - and the possibility of using modern technological resources (like transportation and reproduction and communication) to access and create all kinds of life-enhancing phenomena which can be one's environment as the museums and concert halls and theaters - all of Lincoln Center for example - of New York become cheap crass commercial enterprises of no interest and serious threats to damage one's morale and pollute one's environment if one assumes that they are still part of one's environment. They aren't, haven't been for quite some time, part of mine, and I feel myself fully resourced with materials for self-development, intellectual engagement, and experiential substance. (Of course, those who produce 'art' for museums and galleries, and music for concert halls, and books for mainstream publishers, produce what is appropriate so they can participate in their own culture - they're making no mistake - they are functioning at the level of 'art' appropriate to their talents, expressive perspectives, social purposes, intellectual horizons - and self-conceptions as public personae. Good for them - Jack Johnson rather than Hector Berlioz - but also don't forget that the sleazy was always part of the public art scene right from start, and it took the in-your-face deconstructions of the 1960s (including the self-deconstructions by lots of artists playing both ends against the middle) to make it non-overlookable. (Those fat sopranos & pompously inflated social pretenders who performed in and inhabited opera houses, for example, were certainly greater cultural polluters than any expert pool champion, but that pollution was overlooked by people like me if there was redeeming musical value - which there hardly is any more, and you can bypass all of that by buying CDs anyway.)

Enough (I have been thinking too about the accelerating human-resource-wasting and corporatization of our cultural environments, a lot of which I attribute to the complicity of our so-called peers (fellow-artists, fellow-academics), who complain about it all the time)....

MAX KOWALSKI

Lieder

Wolfgang Holzmair, baritone

Therèse Lindquist, piano

Bridge 9431

I don't think I ever quite realized how suffocating to musical expressivity the practice of composition in a long-exhausted traditional language can be. That I think this about the first 24 song tracks in this album of music by Max Kowalski is entirely the retroeffect of the last 4 tracks, four poems by Rilke set by Kowalski toward the very end of his compositional life (1951), in which, after a listening increasingly invaded by a sense of being boxed in by inert and formulaic phraseology (one poem line, one music phrase), a repetitively designated assignment of roles to voice and piano (the voice does the poem, the piano never rises beyond commentary, accompaniment, illustrative imagery), all the way through a most un-Schoenbergian setting of 11 poems from *Pierrot Lunaire* by Albert Giraud in their German translations by Otto Erich Hartleben, a perfectly respectable salon-music (charming! melodic!) composing-out of their most superficial implications – after all that, these four poem-music compositions for voice-piano ensemble, inventing themselves as they go, traversing unretrodden harmonic avenues, indigenously formed sonic images, producing vivid colorations, tangible experiences of light- and dark-nesses, vocalisations of expressions rather than serviceable singable word-phrases not only knocked me out, had my ears listening bolt upright, but stunned me with the realization that Kowalski's final liberation from the internalized musical languages he had inhabited for 50 years made all the difference in liberating his capacity for meaningful expression - and the potential must have been there all along, paralyzed by the bonds of four-bar phrases and late-tonal-music conventions. Until the end I thought the performances by Wolfgang Holzmair and Therèse Lindquist were relatively unenterprisingly uniform, if completely competent to provide an archive of previously obscure music, but the striking sonic and interactive inventiveness of the last four performances made a completely different point, the point of how much creative power can actually be liberated by a simple change of compositional perspective.

SAMUEL ADLER

String Quartet No. 8  
Quintet for Piano and String Quartet  
String Quartet No. 9  
Jerome Lowenthal, piano  
Esterhazy Quartet  
Albany Troy 1426

What is it that gets music incandescent? Does it have to go over some brink or other, find transcendence in some intensity of stretching some limit, transgressing some boundary of expectation or amenity? Can music so skillful, instrumentally graceful, texturally rich and complex, artfully fashioned to signify unerringly its expressive location and direction, as this music by Samuel Adler burst beyond the confines of categorical expressivity and heartfelt, eloquently expressed sentiment to psychically dislocate its listeners from seatbound concert witnessing to the transformation of consciousness which is what you mean by "musical experience". As a composer, I am moved throughout the hearing of this CD by the lucid integrity of this crafting of sound; with Sam Adler you always know exactly where you and he are, and feel surefooted together as you fulfill and substantiate a piece-making trajectory. In the Eighth Quartet, the elegiac, the ethnic, the affectionate, the life-affirming are unmistakable, never in doubt, so nicely and precisely delivered, symbolically and affectively - one movement for each... As Jim Randall says, "Revolutions can wait -"

The Ninth Quartet, amidst its fine Shostakovichean ruminations, exhales an erotically gorgeous slow movement that will make you happy you listened to this CD.

GEORGE CRUMB

Voices from the Morning of the Earth (American Songbook VI)

Ann Crumb, soprano

Randall Scarlata, baritone

Orchestra 2001, percussion soloists

James Freeman, conductor

An Idyll for the Misbegotten

Rachel Rudich, flute, percussion soloists

The Sleeper

Ann Crumb, soprano

Marcantonio Barone, piano

Bridge 9445

The American vernacular voice in its multiply diverse inflections is one of the wondrous gifts of superabundant African-American musicality, at one extreme, and austere Appalachian-American sensibility, at the other, to the straight-up music world. Giving it both Bing Crosby and Meredith Monk. As were earlier the vernacular Southeast Asian instrumental and vocal affects to the French musical world of 100 years ago. Huge liberation from the hothouse Lieder-Opera hypervoice manners of the previous 100. All of these gifts bestowed by those grievously colonized cultures reincarnate as sonic personae in George Crumb's *Voices from the Morning of the Earth*; but the voices and instruments in which they are reconstituted can never seem to shake off their high-art pedigrees. So *Blowin' in the Wind* as a Kentucky mountain gamelan jam...doesn't somehow compute, but the whole CD gets points for trying, if maybe a bit too hard, and there's never a dull - or unfamiliar - moment. Ann Crumb transcends her own cultural roots better than does Randall Scarlata, but the percussion gamelan does find the escape hatch and swings through it. No anthropologists seem to have been harmed in the making of this album.

## POUL RUDERS

Nightshade Trilogy

Capricorn

Odense Symphony Orchestra

Oliver Knussen, Paul Mann, Scott Yoo, conductors

Enigmatic is not always ambiguous. Temperature is not necessarily heat. What keeps you listening is not necessarily something that moves you. Or feels especially compelling. Energy is not necessarily force. Music sound can just be there. Not doing anything beyond being. Not even coldness. What keeps me listening? (I keep listening.) You can discover these truths too by listening to Poul Ruders's *Nightshade* pieces, consummately (of course, of necessity) played by Capricorn and the Odense orchestra on this Bridge CD. Yes there are crescendos but not of intensity; an intensity fixed and maintained start to finish is experienced as a certain level of stress, period. Reaches a certain penetration of the psychic ear and stays there unflinching, uninflecting. Pure nonfriction. Can a chill happen at a high volume? Without ever being loud? Can sound emit and move and vary without change without trajectory without departure without arrival? Can music lines start without beginning? Can long solo instrumental lines not be tunes? Can distinct movement have no tempo? Or even any temporality? Can this be amazing and riveting? And colder than the *Anti-adagietto* from hell could be? Yes. Highly recommended.



NOAH CRESHEVSKY  
HYPERREALIST MUSIC  
EM 1140 CD

Of course Noah Creshevsky's music is totally its own music, not a token signifier of some cultural afflatus. But listening to his new CD engages the recollection of how the avantgarde music of the 1960s penetrated, deepened, raised the spiritual, intellectual, moral sights of the frontline rock music of the time - but then (as I noticed in 1968 in a NATION column) how far-out rock music reinfiltated the presumptively "high-art" avantgarde music and turned its aesthetic gaze 90 degrees onto the avant-pop cultural/musical style which it pursues with unabating creative enthusiasm and a degree of public response and involvement (it started even before Laurie Anderson) that crossed all the wires of us fellow ivory-tower dwellers (as we thought, not unpretentiously) by not crossing over, but erasing the cultural lines defining species of American artistic practice. This phenomenon within the sphere of music has been abundantly experienced, but perhaps not discoursed upon to the extent that the parallel phenomena in the "other arts" have been; people, critics and scholars, have seemed more eager to cross the lines themselves and straight-facedly address the manifestations of this aesthetic as an evolution of "straight" music, more often drawing ostensibly pop-culture phenomena (the BeeGees, e.g.) into the focus of elevated high-culture analysis than seeing that a new culture, as new now as the Veblenian "leisure class" culture was when it created an American aesthetic revolution in the early 20th Century.

Noah Creshevsky's music on this CD lives joyously, effervescently, exuberantly - and with complete unselfconscious naturalness - within that new culture; and I have been grateful to hear it all from all these multiple perspectives.

Godfrey Winham

*The Habit of Perfection* (Hopkins) (1956) soprano and string quartet

Toni Arnold, soprano

David Fulmer Quartet

*To Prove My Love*

Three Sonnets of Shakespeare for soprano and piano (1957-1960)

Toni Arnold, soprano

Alan Feinberg, piano

*Variations on a Theme by James Pierpont*

Introduction (Bells)

To Baird and Christopher

To Bethany

To Bob Helps

To Arthur Komar

To Earl Kim

To Roger [Maren]

To Arlene [Zallman]

To Tuck Howe

Finale: To Mark [Zuckerman] and Anita [Cervantes] for piano (1970-1974)

Alan Feinberg, piano

*NP* (1973) for computer

realized at the Godfrey Winham Computer Music Laboratory, Princeton University

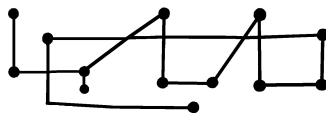
In one of his most celebrated writings, Godfrey Winham wrote that any musical sound, any musical configuration, could be the output of any musical system, that it was the trajectories of sounds and configuration, the specific paths of consecution and evolution within a music that were the markers of each particular approach to the methodology of musical composition. "Tonal", "Atonal", "Twelve-tone", he said, were at best convenient markers for understanding and/or listening (though he certainly regarded these as one and the same); any system of composition could generate any musical quality, but what made a music particular was how the thought that underlay its making engendered particular successions and associations, making particular sense by how they unfolded forward, or arose from their antecedents. Every musical work by Godfrey was an essay on music, showing by example the content and implications of his complex evolving philosophy of music, expressing the state of his thinking and conviction at the time of its composition. What is transcendent about Godfrey's music is how purely, how rigorously it adheres to its thinking and conviction; you never sense any temptation to digress, to wander afield after some attractive irrelevance: he was finding the way to free twelve-tone music from its limitations of style and range, to give it what he saw as the kind of developmental scope that was so manifestly the creative power of tonal music, so that it could move over a much wider range of sonic and syntactical qualities, and speak with any kind of musical affect or color. Ultimately (he lived far too short a life to justify speaking of any sort of ultimacy) he seemed to be liberating tonality itself not from its history or its

traditional modes of thinking, but from the parody and self-reflection of most of its practice in the then-contemporary (1970s) musical world. Listen to how each section of the *Jingle Bells* variations retraverses a music-textural manner familiar from the Classical tradition and takes it somewhere it had never dreamed of traveling. And you can hear in all the music on this disc that he had convictions about every aspect of musical character: notice the particular opinions about text-setting prosody which are manifestly being asserted, for example, by the vocal music in the Shakespeare songs (*To Prove My Love*). And in the earliest song recorded here, Gerard Manley Hopkins' *The Habit of Perfection*, there are very strong views being realized about how twelve-tone music would go if only it had its head screwed on right. Perhaps the clearest exposition of his singular ideas about compositional syntax and connection are the two didactic computer pieces called *NP* (Godfrey's historic position as the first significant developer of a composer-usable interface for computer music synthesis - in the early 1960s - and his later front-line participation in the development of digital filters, are a very major story for another context). *NP* was probably the first piece composed for computer performance (to reference the excellent uncredited program note for its LP recording on the CRI label).

Expression has many faces. The passion of Godfrey's music is a passion for fervent beliefs about music itself, a passion for sanity and rationality, and a great love for the possession, maximization and ardent exertion of intelligence, constantly applied to every facet of life and activity. His affinity for a writer such as Hopkins is a given; in Godfrey's setting of *The Habit of Perfection*, the lucidity of the phrasings in both strings and voice creates an elegantly classic reading of this elegantly classic text. And in the *Jingle Bells* variations the specific (and unmistakably explicit) focus of every segment is a completely thought-through essay in a recognizable type of musical texture, not excluding the recognizable affect (not so much "emotion" as affective physiognomy) which belongs historically with that mode of musical being. Obviously, in this piece, a very British species of deadpan whimsy underlines another aspect of Godfrey's persona; as Paul Lansky reminds us, he "came up with very complicated [ways] to write music which sounds like Schubert". And this was not out of any naïveté, but a completely straightforward expression of a conviction about music and what was relevant and meaningful and essential in it - which included a cosmic disdain for every variety of superfluity and hot-dogging, especially the kind that flaunted its complexity and far-outness. There is no other music I know of this intellectual purity - an integrity of a completely selfdetermined kind - or which burns with this particular cerebral incandescence.

November 2012

JULY 29, 1989: A TALK WITH BEN  
(ABOUT WRITING *META-VARIATIONS* AND OTHER  
THINGS)



MARION A. GUCK AND FRED E. MAUS

INTERVIEWING BENJAMIN BORETZ

(THE INTERVIEW took place in The Bronx, New York, in Martin Goldray's apartment. Transcribed by Fred Maus, edited by Fred Maus and Marion Guck and (finally) Benjamin Boretz.)

Maus: We want to know about your ideas in writing *Meta-Variations*, and about what led up to it and what happened after. *Meta-Variations* was written as a dissertation at Princeton. For the most part, Marion and I don't know much about what you were doing, musically and otherwise, before you were at Princeton, before you knew Milton Babbitt or took any interest in his ideas, before you met Jim Randall. We don't know how you grew up; I don't even know where you went to school before Princeton.

Boretz: The basic point about me in relation to school—and this has a lot to do with the way I think about things—is that school, for me, was really the least intellectually stimulating environment I knew.

I grew up in a black neighborhood in Brooklyn. There were very few white students in my elementary school. The teachers were intellectually very stultifying. The students were *not*. We interacted in all kinds of ways in my neighborhood, and I learned all kinds of things from them.

They had absolutely no interest in anything that *I* did! They ridiculed me for playing classical music and being a composer and wearing glasses and all those stupid bookish things that I did—and for being fat. But other than that, there was lots of communication. And there were lots of very basic things for me about the relativity of people's cultures—things that were so fundamental and remained so powerful.

When you're functioning publicly, in any sense, a lot of your behavior has to do with how you've learned to respond to social pressure. Growing up in a neighborhood where people were actually being killed, literally, relieves me of most any fear of non-violent types of social pressure. I take seriously guys with knives and guns, and people who are physically able and willing to overpower me. All these other social pressures that people seem to find so formidable seem trivial.

I've been fired from jobs. I didn't like it, but it didn't scare me. I grew up poor, so I never was afraid of being poor. I never thought I wouldn't be able to survive even if I didn't have a middle-class income.

This may sound marginal, but actually, to me, it's fundamental—being around a different ethnic mix, having the experience of real relativity in culture, of real violence, you know, the reality of a variety of survival experiences.

I'm sure a lot of my intellectual faculties were trained not by any teachers I had in school, but by the necessity to talk somebody out of killing me on the street. Literally this didn't happen that often; maybe only a couple of times. But any time I rode my bicycle around my neighborhood there was somebody who wanted to take my bicycle away from me, or take my nickel away from me, or beat me up. So you develop communicative and observational skills and attitudes.

And at the same time, from when I was four, I was studying piano with a student of Glazounov whose whole idea of music was composing, which suited me down to the ground.

My sister was certainly the biggest influence in my life. She was six years older than me, ferociously creative and intellectual—an inveterate writer. So she got me to read everything too; I had to read Freud because she wanted to talk about it. We somehow did talk about it—I have no idea now what we could have talked about. But she did convince me when I was six that there wasn't any god—difficult issues like that. I could get pretty scared of *her*; she was tough.

When I was eleven, we spent all of February on a Western Union picket line on Hudson Street in Manhattan. After the Second World War there were bitter strikes, because the unions had been suppressed during the war in order to control the war effort. After the war, there was union-busting stuff like the Taft–Hartley Law, which was the first retrenchment from the '30s promotion of the labor movement; it outlawed the closed shop. So labor unions were really agitated in the late '40s. Anybody who was involved with left-wing causes, which we were (or she was, and I by proxy), would naturally have a lot of activity going.

It was a strange way to grow up. Here we were in this little Bed–Stuy enclave, a dirt-poor family, immigrant parents, my sister and me. Everybody around us was of a totally different culture.

I don't even know exactly how come I speak English the way I do. I speak almost exactly the way I did since I was a kid—I think I

got it from listening to radio. I don't think my speech has changed much after I left Brooklyn. But in Brooklyn I spoke Black English on the street—it was a lot like being bilingual.

Guck: That's another piece of the cultural relativity.

Boretz: Sure, and I was very aware in school of the intolerable injustice of teachers' attitudes toward the black students, whom they measured entirely by white-middle-class (and really lace-curtain-Christian) criteria. To see that was important too.

Basically, the important thing about having a multi-cultural childhood environment, which has been a kind of gravitational center for me, is the sense of intellectual and gut-level commitment to something significant outside of yourself. It's the way people were in the '30s, and the way people grew up during the Second World War, with a general sense that the world is in peril—that there are certain terribly important things about the world that are very much in jeopardy; that there are all kinds of things that are wrong, that they can easily be put right if we just do it right.

All of that had to be tied up within anything I would want to do. Music sort of put everything together for me; when I decided that music was really where I was located, it had to be the repository of all these kind of energies. One of the conspicuous symptoms of this is that I have no patience with intellectual gamesmanship—intellectual activity as a competitive sport, or music as a competitive sport drive me up the wall—make me feel crazy, because my whole (ontological) relationship to them is somewhere else. It just feels like it's coming from a different place.

I've never thought of music in institutional terms, or of doing it as a *professional* thing. It never occurred to me to study music formally, academically, that is. I had piano teachers that were more or less noise in the background, usually pushing me to do something that I didn't want to do. All my teachers, from the time I was a little kid, seemed to think I was supposed to be a piano player, a public performer. But that was no temptation to me; whenever there was a threat of having to give a concert, I would just stop practicing. I spent most of my time reading music and improvising—you know, “symphonies”—at the piano. My sister's boyfriends were obliged (by her) to sit for hours listening to me improvise. Composing was always intuitive—I would compose music improvisationally right onto paper.

I never thought of music as having any special priority over the other things I did. If you asked me what my priorities were, through high school, they probably would have been social causes, writing, or something like that.

Maus: How did your involvement with philosophy begin?

Boretz: In college—I became a sort of half-philosophy major. Music courses were so dismal, and I was interested in anything where you could

actually talk to people (like, your professors). At my college, the only people who would really talk to you were in the philosophy department (I'm probably slighting a couple of my more enlightened music professors here).

In a funny way, I had an experience that's not too different from what Milton told you about, but with a different twist on it.<sup>1</sup> I did take a philosophy class, along with a lot of other classes

that I thought were going to be interesting. And it amazed me; it was interesting—as interesting as the others were not. In psychology class, we'd spend a whole semester learning the structure of the eye; that wasn't going to turn me on.

This philosophy class was a basic course; the guy that was teaching it was essentially a logical positivist. The stuff we read was what I remember, not so much the discussions in the classroom.

You know, I went to Brooklyn College and classes were generally pretty big. But I was actually in a good program, something called an "experimental curriculum," which kept a single group of students together through a lot of their courses.

Really, I was a very shy kid. I was also a lot younger than everybody else in school. I went to college when I was fifteen, so it always was a little difficult for me socially. Also, coming from a weird neighborhood, I had never really been socialized. Even though you knew a lot of people in the experimental-curriculum classes, they were still just too big to have anything like real conversations in. But I thought the guy who was teaching these philosophy courses was straight-on, and I was riveted by the readings, like what I remember principally, Kant's "Three Conflicts of the Transcendental Ideas"; Schlick's "Refutation of Solipsism"; Suzanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, aside from Aquinas, Spinoza, the usual Greeks, etc.

That was combined with the one and only mathematics course that I ever really loved, a foundations course in number theory and logic. It was the first time it ever made any sense to me to talk about mathematics. There was a sense of getting things right, getting things clear.

And then there was always that funny space between the big issues that you had to take seriously, because they felt compelling, and the intellectual tools that you could develop to deal with them. That one was not so good. It was really difficult to handle in that kind of an undergraduate class. Even I could feel that most of the ways students were relating to the discussion were pretty funky, like, "Do you agree with Plato?" or "Plato said this and I think that's wrong." It was really obvious to me that you had to find out first what they were talking about.

I give that course credit for bringing up to the level of consciousness a lot of things about thinking that were more implicit before. But courses never meant very much in my life, frankly. I mean, I don't date the origins of my thinking to academic enterprises very much.

Guck: *Meta-Variations* draws very deeply on the discipline of philosophy. But in saying that, I'm also thinking of "The Logic of What?," where you say that the logical errors in *Meta-Variations* don't really matter to your basic purposes. It's something much more fundamental than the usual academic game of drawing on a different discipline

Boretz: Right. Well, of course, if it's fundamental that means it's probably a little less clear-cut in its boundaries.

All of these things come from the same place; all these things are not different things interconnected, so much as they are different manifestations of a center, of some central core of—identity . . . or I wouldn't call it "identity," I would call it more like a core of concern, what you care about, what is important.

Maybe I can illustrate this by saying that one of the things I really didn't like about Princeton, when I was a student there, was the pervasive intellectual gamesmanship. There could be a zillion things in the world that you don't have much use for or that you even disapprove of, but they don't necessarily get you all choked up and upset and pissed off. You get all choked up and upset and pissed off when something is sitting right on your target, in a way that totally doesn't work for you. These things that I really needed very much to do, like talk to people about things and think about things, were getting completely twisted into something I definitely did *not* need to do or get involved in, like competitive intellectual gamesmanship.

I came to Princeton after teaching and studying for two years at UCLA. I was basically coming to Princeton as to some kind of mecca, a place that wouldn't have any of this depressingly crass stuff that seemed to be what most people thought music and academic activity were about. Princeton was going to be the real thing.

I should explain that all along I mostly thought school was basically nowhere, and by the time I was a senior in college, I just figured school would just disappear from my life after I graduated, and I would just go and do whatever—I guess I had images of outsider life in downtown Manhattan, something like that.

But I had a friend who was at Brandeis as an undergraduate. I went up there to visit him. And first of all, there are patches of green, you know—a unique idea, a college that has patches of green around! And people actually live right there, and they're sitting around outside of school and talking about interesting stuff. I thought, "This is school?" I didn't know schools were ever like this.



The music department was almost new. Brandeis was a very new school. This was 1954; Brandeis had just started in 1948; the music graduate program started in 1952. The music department was in a little cottage on a green hill.

I went in, and there was a very pleasant woman in the kitchen, the secretary of the music department (Roz Morrison), and I said, You have a graduate program here in music? Yeah, yeah. Well, how could I get to go there? Well, you apply. How do I do that? Fill out this application. Okay; so I filled it out and handed it in.

It seemed like an interesting idea to go to a school like that. The classes were in the bedrooms and living rooms of this house, the secretary was in the kitchen. Not a lot like Brooklyn College!

Irving Fine was head of the music department and called me for an interview after they got my application. He said that they had to have an interview with me, because they couldn't understand my application or my recommendations. I wasn't really a regular music major, but I showed the head of the music department at Brooklyn a lot of music that I had composed, and asked him to write a recommendation. Irving Fine said, "The head of the music department at your college said that under no circumstances should we admit you as a graduate student, because you never learned anything you didn't teach yourself. We couldn't quite tell whether this was a recommendation or a disrecommendation. So we thought we'd better see you."

They admitted me. I'm sure they admitted me because I was very young and I'd written a lot of music. It must have looked like something where you just can't reject someone out of hand, you have to see what this guy is about.

So this is the important point: Brandeis, the first two years I was there, was really like what I imagined real life was supposed to be like, but not anything like what I thought school was like. Still, there was a lot of anxiety, a lot of intensity. I was very young and vulnerable, and not at all thick-skinned. So, any kind of nastiness that came my way was really difficult for me to handle. I had no experience in being at a place that I took seriously, where I was getting attacked, sometimes destructively.

But mostly it was not like that. I'm still close friends with people—Elaine Barkin, obviously, but I knew her from summer camp so she doesn't count—we even had the same piano teacher. But we all became really good friends at Brandeis: David Burrows, Barclay Brown, Joel Spiegelman, Jack Gottlieb, Gustav Ciamaga, Joel Mandelbaum (I was thinking of people you might know about).

The center of this universe for all of us, but particularly for me, was Arthur Berger. Arthur was the first person I'd ever met, the first professor I mean, who validated my fundamental perception of music as intellectual engagement.

There are a lot of other things about Arthur, too. He was very much in "the real world," in ways that I didn't relate to that much. But the particular thing that I related to completely was the way Arthur worried about every little musical (or intellectual) detail as a

matter of life and death. A composition lesson with Arthur would consist of me showing up at his house at lunch time, say, and sitting around and worrying about my music and his music and everybody else's music until around midnight. That struck me as okay!—you know, This is what it's about! If you can do this in school, then school is okay.

Maus: What sort of worrying was it?

Boretz: Oh, god, every little note of every little thing—he would have querulous qualms over everything about it that you could imagine, relevant and not relevant. It was all the way from saying that people wouldn't think it was so smart or impressive to do this, if you did this, all the way to some very profound thing about how a certain sound would just capture a certain quality in a certain place.

But I think the most important thing is just the idea of worrying, the fact that Arthur Berger, the person, was completely concerned with what we were talking about. He wasn't just doing this job. I had a lot of competent teachers before, and they were mostly guys who were just sitting there and teaching—it was mostly useless to me. With Arthur it was this totally engaging thing of him and me doing something together.

Probably the main thing about Arthur for me was that he was taking me seriously. We listened to a lot of music too, and thought about it. He had no problem understanding that what you might read in Collingwood, or Dewey, or anything—not just about music—was completely in the mix of things you would concern yourself with. Caring about composing was all on a level field with these other things. There wasn't any sense of *this* discipline, and *that* discipline.

He validated my sense of what it meant to be a person doing music, in a way that no one ever had. Before, it was more like a challenge to sustain my own way of being involved with music: people respected me somewhat because they thought I was smart and knew a lot of music and was good at normal musical things; you know, mechanical things that musicians can do. But that wasn't what it was about for me.


I wrote about music all the time I was in college. Arthur was a critic at that point, and he had founded a magazine called *The Musical Mercury* in the '30s, when Paul Goodman was a City College colleague. So we had a lot in common in that way too. John Rahn published a little anthology from the *Mercury* after I left *Perspectives*. There are articles by Delmore Schwartz, and Delmore Schwartz's brother, I think, and Arthur about some of the musical subjects that showed up regularly in *Musical Mercury*. Maus: You told me once that you read some things with Berger, too.

Boretz: Yes, we had a small, intimate seminar, with about six students, in Arthur's house in Cambridge, talking about musical aesthetics, or just aesthetics in general. We read a lot of stuff. My projects were R. G. Collingwood—I was into that—and T. E. Hulme. Arthur was

very involved with David Prall's *Aesthetic Analysis* (Prall was his teacher at Harvard), so we read that as well, along with Langer's aesthetics, Maritain, Dewey, and even Bergson.

Arthur's analysis class was right up my alley too: penetrating into every twitch of a piece of music, trying to understand what was fundamentally going on, and in what way you could individuate what you were hearing. That was basic. And Brandeis was great for me, too, because people responded to my way of hearing—especially to the idea that it would always be manifested primarily in composition.

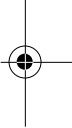
I guess what I composed even there seemed pretty much a private concern to me, because I never had any sense of its having any social resonance. In some way it wasn't completely clear to me that it needed to, but at Brandeis it became part of the composers' community and people were prepared to deal with it and respond to it—especially Arthur, but also the other graduate students.



By the time I got to Brandeis, the biggest crazes I had were for Stravinsky, and—even more—for Bartók. I wrote a huge paper on the Bartók *Mikrokosmos* and the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, and my music was of course redolent of that kind of energy, that sense of continuity, that sense of harmony— really, the whole gestalt. Schoenberg and, more particularly, Webern were in there too, but they weren't what I identified with in the same way; I'd say that Bartók and Stravinsky were more like my identity, and Schoenberg and Webern were like guys who were in the same business too.

I'd listened to a lot of music; knew a lot of music. When I was a kid, I used to go to the Brooklyn Public Library and listen to records; and any time I could afford to buy a record, I'd buy a record. I went through the whole library in terms of scores, and played a lot of music on the piano. I was a completely isolated person, and when I went to Brandeis, I was surprised to discover that I listened to music a lot more and knew a lot more music than other people did. That was another thing Arthur and I had in common; he was also intensely interested in soaking up a lot of music, all kinds of music—though he had some distinct limits.

That we were fundamentally interested in the *items* of music is the important issue here, because I think a lot of people are interested in music generally without being that greatly interested in a lot of specific music. I don't mean to criticize that. But if you want to understand where I'm coming from as a "musical thinker," it's all



about that: it was particular instances of music that turned me on, and I was always lusting to hear whatever I could hear.

In high school I listened to whatever records of people like Wolpe and Varèse were coming out. There weren't that many; you could listen to everything available in very short order. The Juilliard Bartók Quartets came out in 1949 (with those great notes by Milton); the Robert Craft complete Webern album didn't come out until the late '50s.

Later on, at Brandeis, I heard the first recording of *Marteau* and *Zeitmasze* on a record that Robert Craft put out. I listened to a lot of old twentieth-century American music, Leo Ornstein, Arthur Farwell, Horatio Parker, John Alden Carpenter, whatever. Somehow the sense of forming opinions about music from *specifics* is built into that. And Elliott Carter's First String Quartet was a blockbuster experience for me—and a lot of other people—at that time. I don't know if it resonates down to this day,

but Elliott's First String Quartet was a big, watershed event in our collective musical lives.

For example, Jim Randall was very much involved with it in all kinds of deep and complex ways. I'm talking about before I knew Jim. When I came to the Princeton seminar in '59, Jim and Elliott were really tangling over it: Jim had all kinds of ideas about what the piece was about, but Elliott demurred that it all came as manna from heaven. Jim had a hard time with that, since it was all built on three chords. So there was a lot of strain there. I think a lot of the subsequent history of music kind of emerges from strain like that—between composers who profess to be innocent of any thought and people who want to think about what they're doing.

I did a lot of writing and composing between the time I entered Brandeis and the time I came to Princeton. When I was at Brandeis I did a certain amount of writing just because I wanted to. I did a seminar with Arthur, for example, on writing about music, where I just wrote about pieces and records, sort of in the form of pseudo-reviews.

I wrote a lot, in the forms that were available to me when I was a graduate student. There were concerts of new music in Cambridge—Allen Sapp ran a series at Harvard, and so I used to write analytic program notes for them; then, Brandeis had a huge concert-hall opening, part of a festival opening the new music building, with Elliott's First Quartet and a lot of other new pieces. So I got involved in that kind of public writing.

It had something to do with my childhood political interest, too, because I always assumed that there was a social obligation somewhere in there, a social interface that was essential. It was natural for me to think of things as, not so much *public*, but *social*, putting things out that were inside. I guess I had a sense that it was easy for me to justify doing things that had a kind of social value; something like that.

It was harder for me to justify composing music, sometimes, than writing things about music. It was built into my culture, somehow, that anything that has an aroma of public service is okay; you're not just sitting there diddling your own psyche. So composing had to have that kind of conviction for me also.

I published a piece in *News of Music* recently about why I'm not a composer. The point is that all this real-time music-making session activity that Jim and I started doing ten years ago totally

rectified my personal relation to composing, because it put everything together in a believable feeling way.

But I never really had much desire to compose pieces, as such; I always had the urge to advance frontiers, my own, and the frontiers of something or other. Working on *Group Variations*, which is the subject of *Meta-Variations*, it didn't matter to me how long it took because every step was a step of discovering something, advancing something, pushing the frontier of something. Asserting something. I used to say I never composed a formal piece of music except out of some kind of outrage. *Group Variations* was composed out of outrage at the musical neutrality of a lot of the serial music I was hearing in New York during the '60s. The spectacle of "chart music" that conceived of music as the transcription of ink blots onto other ink blots, which then got translated into sonic signals, was just depressing. I wanted a serial-music chart to be something that contained a basic relation to what you cared about and what you believed in, what you could *hear*, what you *wanted* to hear. Built into *Group Variations* were conceptions about incremental temporal accumulation, having to do with the idea that musical rhythm wasn't things side by side, but the progressive accumulation of qualities; you're always indexing the beginning, so everything is kind of nesting inside of everything else. It was almost a protest against the deracination of music into something that had the form of music, but not the sense of music for me. That gave me plenty of space to write a piece of outrage music.

Then, the piano piece I wrote after that, the long piano piece that got published in the Milton Babbitt sixtieth-birthday issue of

*Perspectives*, was looking at the same issue from another point of view. It had to do with the experience of writing *Group Variations*, and what I saw as the startling and uncongenial social consequences of composing incredibly complex music that I could hear perfectly well, but couldn't *play*, myself. Then, here are these people who are willing to play this music, struggling with it, and in playing it using virtually *none* of their own creative musical talent—using only their mechanical facility to push the right buttons at the right times to play *my* piece (which wasn't really happening, anyway). I then did a computer version of it, which was—socially—a great improvement. I saw what the problem was: I have to do this myself. What kind of relationship was I promoting between me and other people?

Really, I had never thought about music in terms of the human activity of making music; I thought of music as thinking in sounds. But if I write *flute* on the left-hand side of the score, it's not just a sound in my head: I must be anticipating that some person is going to pick up some instrument and blow some sound out of it. It's like I hadn't ever thought about it that way. Maus: Did you write big ensemble pieces before that?

Boretz: A few—but I've tried to say, I never was into composing lots of pieces. I didn't always understand why not, because I was always composing in some sense, but I didn't so much put *pieces* together; it seemed like I had no motivation to accumulate pieces.

I'd written orchestral pieces. I guess the biggest one, just before *Group Variations*, was a violin concerto that I wrote at Aspen when I was there with Darius Milhaud and Charles Jones. Before that I had written a couple of orchestral pieces—a string orchestra piece, a big full-orchestra piece. But there wasn't much point in writing orchestral pieces if you ever wanted to hear what you wrote. So, I had written more piano pieces and smallensemble pieces: string quartet, wind ensemble, kind of a divertimento ensemble. But *Group Variations* was the first thing that really focused my intention, very clearly, in terms of really carrying through a compositional concept; before, it was more like just catching a sense of something and inscribing it—hearing something, but not having a grasp of what this thing was that was accumulating. In *Group Variations* I had a very clear sense of what I was up to.

And it took me four years, working on it just about every day. It was a great way of life. I was desolate when it got finished.

Maus: The gap between the clarity of your conception of the piece and what you were getting from the performers helped to focus your attention on the social relations.

Boretz: Sure. I never before had players whom I regarded as first-rate. I did have players who were first-rate instrumentalists, but who had attitudes. These Group for Contemporary Music guys were terrific; they were dedicated. They worked very, very hard. They were happy to play the piece. They were behind me 100% and they could play! Charles Wuorinen conducted, in a very professional way. He wasn't exactly spiritually involved in the piece,

but he was pragmatically involved with getting it right. Well, they played it twice, and they rehearsed it an embarrassing number of hours both times, and ended up with, maybe, 50–60% the first time and 70% the second time. But in no way did I feel they had let me down. It wasn't like that at all. I felt that this was simply not a workable relationship, not one that I wanted to cultivate, between music and people, and people and people.

It could have a lot to do with the audience, too. There are people sitting there. What are they doing? What am I doing? What do I want from these poor people? Why is this happening? All these thoughts were probably post-*Meta-Variations*. But they all happened simultaneously, too. I was also writing music columns for *The Nation*, starting in '62. I finished doing that just about the time I finished *Meta-Variations*. So, a lot of things changed from that turn-around point.

Guck: When did you meet Jim Randall and Milton Babbitt, and how did they affect your thinking?

Boretz: I met Jim in 1959, when I first came to Princeton. (I knew Milton since '56.) Jim and Godfrey Winham were really close and did a lot of thinking together. I immediately talked to Jim very easily; Godfrey was harder to know, though he was expansively sociable.

The year that I was actually living in Princeton, Jim was hardly around; his oldest daughter was born then, so he mostly hung out at home, and, he was on leave. He was on the faculty when I was a graduate student there, but I never did any classes with him—during that time I knew him more from his music and his writing and his persona than from any intense one-on-one contact. Our relationship kind of accumulated, put itself together rather slowly over a long period of time, starting then.

Certainly by the time I wrote *Meta-Variations*, I was very much in dialogue with Jim. In fact, I insisted that he and Milton be the two official readers of *Meta-Variations* for the simple reason that I wanted them both to read it, and I didn't think I could assume that either of them would have time to read it if they weren't obliged to by institutional assignment. *MetaVariations* is kind of difficult; it's not as entertaining as other things they probably wanted to do. So I tried to nail them down, and it worked, especially in Jim's case.

I think *Meta-Variations* actually cemented our relationship. We struggled over every sentence of it. Jim was convinced that

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everything in it was unnecessarily complicated, and I was convinced that he was reading it generically, that he didn't understand the specificity of what it was saying. So he ended up deciding that it wasn't all bullshit, and I ended up deciding that it wasn't as transparently clear as I thought it was. So he did a lot of rereading, and I did a lot of rewriting.

Jim was—is—a liberating presence. The thing that was especially great about Jim was his sense that anything was a possibility *among* other possibilities. That was the most liberating thing: a real-life practice of radical relativity. Relativism as a way of life was very intuitive to me, still is.

But I was very focused on getting it right; a relativism that didn't care about getting it right didn't interest me. Randomicity-mongering didn't interest me at all; it just seemed like copping out. Jim was a guy who was really trying to get it right, but he was also full of perceptions about the fact that you were always in a world of infinite other possibilities. You have to choose, for now at least, from among all you can imagine, but it was really liberating to perceive that all these were *different* possibilities, and contemplating any one at one time did not close the issue of the alternative validity or imaginative interest of the others.

The other liberating thing about Jim, that came into my life maybe after *Meta-Variations*, was a sense that the range of what you could use as expressive media was the range of what you responded to, yourself, expressively. *Compose Yourself* was powerful in the suggestion that your reading, in all the areas of possibility, was an open field for your expression of thought. What he wrote was so clearly reflective of his own voracious reading. So what I wrote that



I would say was liberated by Jim's writing was not written *like* Jim's writing, because it reflected what *I* read. But the idea of allowing what you write to profit from the widest possible range of what you read, what you respond to, what you're aware of in language, was the epiphany of his writing. That was after *Meta-Variations*: he accosted me in the hallway of Woolworth (the Princeton Music Department) and asked me, You want to read a fictionalized version of *Meta-Variations*? Something that belongs in *Perspectives* because it's something only a composer would write? And handed me *Compose Yourself*.

Five years or so before *Meta-Variations*, we started hacking out all kinds of shared concerns about musical things. Teaching was a big focus of our conversations. A lot of the things we thought about music were coming out in the form of critiquing

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the bullshit we were expected to emit in the supposed practice of teaching music. And the bullshit we were mostly freaked out by was our own. Sure, we talked a lot about how everything that anyone had ever tried to teach us about music was bullshit, and we talked about the problems of doctrinaire Princeton and dogmatic Milton. But the main problem was the trips *we* ourselves were laying on students.

*Meta-Variations* really came out of NYU undergraduate music teaching and the experience of composing *Group Variations*. Students asked me questions and I'd give them very good answers, and then I would go home and say, Why do I say that? I think I believe that, but why? What makes me feel that a question that challenges all kinds of assumptions that I have is best answered by something that plausibly *validates* those assumptions?

Students would play Beatles music and Frank Zappa for me; my son was playing the Grateful Dead and Cream at home. My responses to it were that I could hear everything that was in it, but it wasn't really coming down in any place I needed to be; and that would end up with an elegant formulation of a position in relation to it. But it really wasn't anything except a plausible way of not accepting something—a way of maintaining a certain pre-formed conception of what there was, what there should be. Maus: What kinds of things would you say?

Boretz: Well, Paul Berman played me these Frank Zappa cuts; I listened and said, Hey, that's really interesting. Ever hear any Stravinsky? And there's nothing I now hear in Frank Zappa that's not consistent with that, but what was the point of saying it?

But now I can also hear all kinds of other things in Frank Zappa that have nothing to do with that issue at all—it seems like an incidental characteristic rather than a problem. The way Frank Zappa, in some sense, goofs on, or isn't in the middle of, classical modern chamber music is a pretty obvious thing about his music, but I was slicing out just one musical dimension, and not

accommodating a lot of other more interesting dimensions of what he was up to. But—that's where I was coming from, and it's not something I want to retroactively retract either. In other words, what changed the way I think about Frank Zappa is that at some later time in my life he really came down to me in some place I needed to be at that time, and so I could hear something else—

dimensions of verbal expression and idiosyncratic attitude (still not music sound, though) that didn't mean much to me in 1970.

In the '60s I really couldn't listen to Bob Dylan. There was nothing in it but just this kind of folkly pap. There wasn't anything about the way he did it or the things he was doing that had any relevance to what I was involved with or responsive to. It had absolutely nothing to do with squeezing frontiers of possible multi-dimensional sound structures, nothing to do with creating all kinds of speculative possible sound-worlds that you could actually go and inhabit. It was just a totally different set of possibilities.

But, speaking as a teacher, the main point was not the particular place you happened to be coming from, but the *confusion* of the place you were coming from with the considered thought you gave to a question.

If somebody asks you a question about a chord, a diatonic harmony, or classical music structure or anything like that, and you start out with the idea that what you have to do is explain to this person, in some plausible way, why things are as they should be, then you're in the wrong place—if you're not saying to yourself, gee, I don't know; maybe this is all bullshit, and I ought to consider that this person is opening up a floor under my feet and I'd better think about this. So that's what I did, starting at NYU, and that was another thing that *Meta-Variations* was about.

It was like this: No way am I going to do my job so badly that I'm just going to convince this person who asked me this question of the rightness of what I already think. I don't know why I believe this. I better find out what I really do believe, because I owe it to myself. My students were basically giving me the possibility to see where I wasn't thinking.

Composing, too; composing is so often the veneer of plausibility over emptiness of content. And that's what the *chart* piano piece is about. There was something so absolutistic about trying to make a piece which would consist exclusively of content. There's no possibility of texture other than content: no opening in the musical world of the piece. In *Group Variations*, I had the same thought, but there's plenty of possibility for textural elaboration; it's so complicated, but *chart* is all one-to-one with itself. That idea is an output of *Meta-Variations*, the idea that something should not be acceptable as musical only on faith, or on the basis of the appearance of sense, or because it's too complicated to challenge. If it isn't

crystal clear and lucid and intuitive and obvious, then why should we believe it?

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My relationship to Milton (for whom *chart* was composed, as a sixtieth birthday present) has been personally, intellectually, musically, and in every other way a complicated texture. When I first met Milton he was very exhilarating—he seemed to pick me up right where I was, in some way that was very enlivening. It was, at first, in connection with the project that became *Perspectives*. The idea for *Perspectives* happened at Brandeis in '55. This group of young graduate-student composers who liked to read and write about contemporary music had no place to go, no publication that filled that need, so we decided to invent our own.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur, who had been involved in all this, sent us to talk to Aaron Copland, who totally depressed us: *Modern Music* was just folding, and he told us that if Minna Lederman couldn't do it, then nobody can do it. He thought we were just a bunch of young whippersnappers who couldn't mind our own business.

We met with groups of young composers from universities in the East. That was also incredibly depressing. At Columbia, they wanted to know how this magazine of ours was going to promote their music publicly. And at Yale, they wanted to know what was Brandeis anyway? One way and another, it wasn't much fun.

I first met Milton at a cafeteria on 26th Street and Lexington Avenue in New York City, with Arthur. Arthur had a place in New York at that time. We met there and Milton was—as you can imagine—buoyantly, effervescently supportive of the whole thing. He was the only person who was not determined to depress you about any idea you had about doing something on your own. So it was really inspiring that way, just in a personal way.

We didn't talk about things of musical depth at that time. I read his articles. Milton was a legend at Brandeis.

Let me stress the positive things about Milton's presence for me. It always seemed that Milton's musical and intellectual postures implied a convergence on something pretty fundamental and profound. The thing that was getting converged on seemed to be always left unstated somehow, or maybe it was more atmospheric than specific. And in a way, it seemed to me that people like Godfrey and Jim and me were going to nail down the basis of what we thought Milton was implying.

But there was definitely a level of implicit hardness of thinking that was commensurate with the *depth* of thinking that seemed fundamental to me before I could believe that I'm thinking authentically about music. There was hardness and complexity,

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and there was the ultimate fact that it could withstand intense questioning. This stuff could be checked out. It was not woolly rhetoric. Whatever it was about, it checked out and was pretty interesting and pretty complicated, and it got into things about music that were below the surface of what other people had gotten into about music. It seemed like it was offering ways of putting things together about music that were commensurate with the need of people like me for adequacy to music: it correlated with the depth with which we experienced music and the depth that we ascribed to it.

Most of what was written about music seemed to image it as either vacuous and frivolous, or unspecific and speculative. It's not as if you really thought that writing was doing anything bad to the music exactly, but it was misrepresenting what you experienced. Certainly, it wasn't attractive to engage it, because it wasn't going to get your head anywhere that you weren't doing better without it. But with Milton, there was the idea of writing and thinking about music at a level that actually articulated something specific.

And structure was the big, key specific thing. It's hard to imagine back, now, to a time when *structure* was something to be militant about! It meant taking music seriously, and not just taking it as decorative—taking it seriously as inquiry into something, as looking into, investigating, and probing and pushing and extending frontiers of possibility. In a certain sense it almost doesn't matter *what* frontier. Of course it does matter. But if you have any sense of the environment within which music was taking place, it's easy to see how Milton represented a real support system for people who responded to music at a level of depth and seriousness, people like Godfrey and Jim and me and other people—a support system for opening up a territory within which you could pursue music down at the level of effort and specificity and intensity that felt right for what you cared about.

To me, what's missing from Milton's own writing, apart from the follow-through, is, precisely, relativism. It's a cause without a purpose, in a sense. It's always advocating something: but what does it advocate? It advocates doing things the right way according to a certain doctrine, but why this one? Well, because this one is virtuous. But why is it virtuous? Well, it comes almost down to: it's virtuous because it's German, classical, traditional; and maybe complicated.

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Ultimately, it wasn't satisfying. By following Milton's lead, people like Jim, Godfrey, and I discovered that it wasn't his lead, exactly, that we were following. But that probably happens to everybody's students. It should happen. If Jay Rahn takes off on *Meta-Variations*, and I think, "How could *this* have come out of *that*?"—that doesn't invalidate what he does. That alone doesn't. It's

probably nothing negative; in a certain way, it isn't really about it at all. So it seems to me that Milton should really regard Jim and me as his principal advocates in the music-intellectual world, because we're really committed to pushing the frontiers he discovered, or that we discovered because of him.

When I was writing *Meta-Variations*, people asked me what I was writing. One of the things that I would tell them was, I'm writing something which is sort of an epistemological meditation about music. Other times I would tell people—it depended who I was talking to—you could say that what I'm writing is a critique of Milton, discovering all kinds of respects in which I find his episteme fundamentally unsatisfying to *my* vision of music. And I think those two descriptions are really one and the same. The technical stuff is not interesting in itself; it's the epistemological space that's important to me. I don't care about the methodology as such; the methodology in *Meta-Variations* is what worked to clarify what I needed to think. What needed to come out of it was a sense of what music was, for me then. That, I think, is the dividing line, the place where Milton and I split, precisely on something like the primacy of the relative-personal, of person-relative intuitions and values, as the reference points for the determination of the relevant content and subject matter of serious musical thinking.

Maus: I think of Milton as important because he's the person that I know of who brought up, explicitly, language about music as something to think about rigorously.

Boretz: For me it was Arthur who brought that up first, before I knew Milton. He brought it up rigorously; though less rigorously than Milton; Milton gave me outlets for finding my own rigor at a far greater depth than Arthur had suggested.

For example, when I heard Milton use the word *simultaneity*, it was very intuitive to me. Right away it opened up all kinds of interesting possibilities of understanding the nature of polyphony, and the difference between conjunctions of sounds of dif-

ferent kinds, and the difference between a level at which something was a conjunction of sounds and a level at which it was a syntactical particle. Milton didn't say all this, but just his language opened those doors for me.

Maus: But Berger was the first person who really raised for you questions about language about music.

Boretz: It was more like he validated my sense of being serious, and writing seriously about music. But we would frequently talk about Milton's writing. This is back around '54 to '56. Milton's stuff was just

beginning to come out. There was the *Score* article, and we talked a lot about twelve-tone issues. Twelve-tone issues were a big controversy, especially at Brandeis where everybody was a Stravinsky person. In 1952 Irving Fine wrote this twelve-tone string quartet, totally out of the background of Stravinsky. And Aaron Copland had composed his piano quartet. He started writing these sort of serialistic pieces. And Harold Shapero was a big presence there; he, of course, was still holding out for Beethoven, and was completely fascinated by Milton. There was a lot of ferment, a lot of liveliness; and it was not always fun, it was real tense sometimes.

But it wasn't like Princeton. The people were not looking at you like, You don't know what the party line is, but it was like strenuously hacking out real anxieties. Arthur was great that way, because Arthur never acted like he knew anything *a priori*. He always acted worried, about almost everything. Did you hear what Robert Craft says about Webern? What do you think about this semicombinatoriality? He would just be so worried that he might have to change his mind about things.

He is somebody that you would just feel right away you would want to jump in and think about something with him. There's not "the word." It's not like: Don't you know? We've known this for years. Where've you been? Totally different, much more like learning than like knowing. It's intangible, of course; I'm trying to capture what was really functional. I could say, We read these texts, but that's not really what it was about. It really was about an attitude.

A seminar with Arthur was a bunch of people who were either fully asleep or wide awake struggling with something. They would be asleep because there was no "word" coming down

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from on high; or they'd be struggling with something because they had come to really care about it.

Arthur is no scintillating fireball coming out with utterly wellformed and brilliant formulations that you can just take in—like Milton's talk—you know: they sound great, think about them later. At Brandeis we used to joke all the time about Milton's phrases, his verbal virtuosity. We used to refer to his articles by the first lines—"To proceed from an assumption," "Now that the jagged edges of abruptness"; it was kind of fun and helped us deal with Milton's intimidating aura.

Everyone at Brandeis loved Milton personally. They also had a love/hate relationship to him musically, intellectually—but Milton is not a person who cultivates personal disaffection.


Maus: What was the immediate reception of *Meta-Variations*? What would you have hoped that people could do with it? What did you want to make possible by publishing it?

Boretz: Well, it's a little complicated, you know. The whole sense I always had about publishing things was just a sense of community; but that sounds maybe slightly disingenuous or tendentious.

Ann Basart of Berkeley did an index of the first twenty volumes of *Perspectives* and she asked me to write a preface to it. I wrote a preface and it got published in *Perspectives*. I'm referring you to it, because it might help you to get the point here. I said that the issue is whether what you're doing is some form of consciousness raising (I forget exactly how I put it), or ego-enforcement: and that you'll never figure out which it is.

So, basically, it's like what I said about *Group Variations*, that my motives in writing *Group Variations* had nothing to do with guys doing something, that I had no evil intentions toward the players in making people into puppets who had to do something. But—as I said before—what was I doing, writing names of instruments on the left-hand side of the score? Whether I was conscious of it or not, I was obviously engaged in some kind of ego-assertion. That's what it has to be, under the most neutral possible analysis.

Actually I think the best statement I ever made about why I publish is in the "Some Things" text in the *Interface* series. I'll try to say what I said there. It makes the point in the right way; it's neither silly boy-scout idealism nor crass mercantilism. It's not like I don't care about *out there*. I publish, so *ipso facto* I do

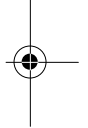


care. But what do I care about? I think that the best thing I can say is that I don't want to live in a world where what there is consists of everything *other* than what *I* perceive or create. I'm living in an environment where the resonance of what music is, for *me*, is out there somewhere, because I *put* it out there. What does it mean, *out there*? It means: in whatever texture of world I can conceive as environment for myself.

It isn't "I" as "the person me," but it's "I" as: "the world that makes sense to me." I don't see my own image out there; what I see out there is a world that makes sense to me in a very personal way. It's not the world in my image, but it's *my image* of the world, an image that I can feel is out there and available to me. My sounds and words are part of my environment; they're not just locked up inside my skin.

As to responses, I could be dismayed by them, but I never am, really. First of all, I'm not sure what my "social" objectives are: I don't know what I want from other people. I probably have the same vague fantasies as other people, which aren't even articulated; some potential euphoria about people knowing, responding, something like that. But it's not very conscious.

What I'm much more conscious about is the reality of maintaining sanity, which frequently means, in my case,



remembering what your priorities are when the whole world is caving in on you. That's the most frequent result of me putting something out, being reminded of my real priorities, because everything else is negative.

But with *Meta-Variations* the response was instructive in ways that are very important to me. In a way, the response was exactly what it needed to be. It illuminated the point that I was not in the same business as a lot of other people whom I may have thought I was in the same business as, before *Meta-Variations* floated out.

*Meta-Variations* was a dissertation at Princeton, and my defense event was fairly traumatic. It felt really dreadful to see people just taking no interest in anything that was in it, asking these peripheral, nitpicking, uninteresting questions which I could dispose of in my sleep, and did, kind of.

Jim wasn't there, because he (and I agreed) was against having this Ph.D. defense when we had it: It was Cambodia time. Jim was in a sit-in outside of the Institute for Defense Analysis on the Princeton campus. I was very much involved with my students at Columbia who were out of class at the time, roiling on the

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Columbia campus and on the streets of New York. But the Princeton Music Department wouldn't postpone this defense, and neither would the Columbia Music Department employ me any longer if I postponed my degree.

The idea that there was something about a Ph.D. defense that ought to be relevant to something that you cared about at the moment; and that if other things were more compelling at that moment, that would make this into a kind of silly exercise; and that you would not do something like a Ph.D. defense merely as a silly exercise—all that was subordinated to the august ethos of institutional ritual whose guardians found it utterly within the range of their dignity to hold this meaningless exercise, precisely on the grounds that they were thereby defending the academic enterprise. To me, that defined the academic enterprise, yet again, as essentially counter-intellectual and counter-meaningful.

So we had to have this exercise of defending the Ph.D. dissertation, which made it clear to me that this sort of thing didn't mean to other people what it meant to me. People were asking me questions about what the word "cognitive" meant. It wasn't as if you could engage people by putting something out and getting things back; all you could do was fend it off.

Well, that was a very trivial political moment, but it sort of started a process.

*Perspectives* was our publication medium, and it really clarified something that should have been clearer to me, actually, long before. When I started doing *Perspectives* there were other people who were in it, so that there was a bit of a group. It seemed we were all



committed to the idea of constantly rolling back the frontiers of thinking about music. It turned out that that was true for me and Jim, and that for other people, it was about establishing another establishment, opposing the *current* establishment to establish the *next* establishment and hang in there right where it was, where the established one was.

My sense was that permanent revolution was the only possible structure for a journal like *Perspectives* or anything that purported to be a frontier exploration of things.

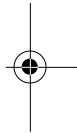
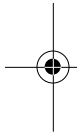
*Perspectives* was very successful early in its life. So that by 1966, it was greatly in danger of becoming a “publish or perish” magazine, because it was already prestigious to publish an article in *Perspectives* that was like a *Perspectives* article. And, as Editor, there was nothing more abhorrent to me than the idea that there was such a thing as a “*Perspectives* article.” By 1968 or 1969, it

was a “publish or perish” magazine. In those years, the best way I could handle that was by publishing some of the composition Ph.D. dissertations that were coming out of Princeton—Philip Batstone’s and Godfrey Winham’s theses, which were manifestations of deep and original thinking. It was counter to any normal practice to publish things like that in a magazine. They were difficult, really demanding. As a matter of fact, the main thing that caused the Editorial Board and the Fromm Foundation and Paul Fromm to revolt against us was that we were publishing these Ph.D. dissertations—especially the one by Godfrey. It didn’t seem that their motivations were necessarily to understand why I was doing this.

But I was really concerned, because we started out with a burst of original thinking and almost immediately subsided into second-order stuff. To me it was just unacceptable to ride along in an established groove. (I’m sure you’re aware that *Perspectives* underwent a few more revolutions along the way.) But, anyway, this really clarified the point that thinking this way, frontier thinking, the desire to push beyond, was not something I shared with a lot of people.

*Meta-Variations* itself—which was, ultimately, one of the dissertations we published—had a rather interesting history in relation to the frontier issue—maybe this isn’t true, but I think it made certain issues about music seem really obvious, by handling them in ways that seem pretty clear—to the point where they weren’t really issues any more.

So by now, students of mine at Bard ask why I ever got interested in this trivial stuff. It’s hard for them to understand, because by now it’s all kind of there already, taken for granted. You have to think about why you would care about what a pitch is, why you would care about what an interval is. What would turn you on about that?



But it was pretty intense back then to think about things like that. In a certain sense I think what *Meta-Variations* may have done, in the subconscious of the musical world, is trivialize these issues or, better, normalize them: put it down at the level of what's obvious, although it's not obvious to get to that point, to get through all the conventional fog that people have internalized. So the best evidence that the revolution was accomplished is that its issues are no longer of compelling musical interest.

The main points I would make theoretically about music are, first, that music is not complicated, theoretically; and second,

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that the real problem of music theory is that people have internalized a lot of things that aren't just intuitive. And a much better place to start is with things that are perfectly commonsensically obvious.

You get through a lot of the accumulated bag of conventions and can look at it without reverence and sentimentality, and it doesn't look like a big deal one way or another. You go down underneath all of it; you take a look at simples in a very simple, commonsensical way.

You just say the most obvious things. For example, what could be more obvious than that music, the entity—call it “the musical phenomenon”—exists entirely as sound, what you hear, or as what somebody hears? Where do you find music except in what somebody hears? If it isn't *sound that somebody hears*, it isn't music. It cuts through so much garbage just to say that, to think that—all the stuff about written music, the written musical domain, the physical-musical domain, all that. It's not that you couldn't get back up to those things with some insight, but it's different to dispose of them initially as *intuition*, these kind of internalized knee-jerk reactions.

For example, take such an issue as the relation of pitch and timbre. Where do you get that? A little technical information helps you here. In language, when somebody speaks, you hear a message, what they're saying, and you hear a voice quality, a timbre. In music, you hear a message, the tune, and you hear voice quality, an instrumental quality, a timbre. Now, what's carrying the message in language is partial structure and what's carrying the voice quality is fundamental structure. What's carrying the message in a musical tune is fundamental structure and what's carrying the timbre is partial structure. So obviously there's nothing given in any of this.

Then you can go one step further and ask who articulated the discrimination of pitch and timbre? What about sound? You know, you say “sound,” “a sound.” If you listen to Balinese music, say, it's really hard for me to believe there's as much of a distinction of pitch and timbre in Balinese music, as against “sound.” So you need the headroom, intellectually, to make an observation like that. In order to do it you have to clear away all the internalized constricting

detritus of essentially unexamined conception that music theory consists of. And that enterprise, in a certain way, puts everybody out of the business of music the-

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ory, and into the business of thinking about music. This is really a fundamental point.

In other words, to me, the most important thing after *MetaVariations* is that there can't be any *doctrines*, only *ideas*. It really redefined what it means to profess music, and that's the thing about it that's essential and radical and meaningful, and in line with most of what I've done since. People say to me, "You made such a tremendous turn." Naturally, that may be true in many respects. But I've really just moved one step at a time, retroactively assessing the meaning of what I've just done; I think of anything I do as a springboard to the next frontier rather than as a candidate for established truth—more like composition than like theory. It's a matter of constantly pulling the floor down from under you and going a little deeper into the basement. Constructing more and more elaborate edifices over the top of what there is is not going to get me anywhere.

Maus: I'd like to go past *Meta-Variations* chronologically, to the papers about time that you published shortly after *Meta-Variations*, for instance. Jim once told me that the two of you spent a while brainstorming about music and time.

Boretz: Right. I wrote "A World of Times" in Ann Arbor in the summer of 1973—and Jim was in Princeton writing "a Soundscroll." "A World of Times" was written as a kind of protest to a group of philosophers, including Nelson Goodman, who met at Penn for a symposium on philosophy of art. That was the last occasion where I interacted with philosophers, before Lily Knezevich.<sup>3</sup> Their attitude was: "Well, you're not a philosopher so we don't have to listen to you." But I thought they were just steering around in these epistemic morasses in relation to music. I didn't necessarily think I knew what they should be thinking about, but they certainly weren't thinking about anything I wanted to think about.

The principal lingering issue about musical structure within the frame of the music that *Meta-Variations* had envisaged was certainly the question of structure as evolving chronologically, the question of the elapsing of time, with the constant changing of the meaning of that which had already occurred. That was the thing which, whether or not it could be handled in terms of *Meta-Variations*, was handled within *Meta-Variations* only implicitly. It was definitely not externalized.

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For example, if you take the *Tristan* analysis, there are zillions of things about it that wouldn't make any sense if you didn't understand that things change as they proceed chronologically. But it doesn't explicitly say that. Fred, the first time I ever heard anything about you, Milton told me that you were troubled by something in the Brahms Fourth Symphony analysis.

Maus: That was a long time ago! I remember what troubled me was that the 1–2–1 label became quite nonliteral at higher levels as a description of time spans. I think you said, “Yes,” and that was enough. I had thought it was some inexplicable slip!

Boretz: Right, I remember that.

I was saying that the analyses in *Meta-Variations* didn't exactly make the issue about time explicit. I don't mean I had the scoop but I wasn't telling. I mean, I didn't have the scoop, didn't have the issue out front. It was in the aftermath of *MetaVariations* and *Compose Yourself*; we were hacking out these issues and trying to get them straight. The year '72–'73 at Princeton was the real payoff I got for *Meta-Variations*. I was teaching at Princeton and had a daily hassle with Jim about things like this. We got together regularly and hacked it out.

In the spring of '73 we turned the whole graduate music education scene at Princeton upside-down. We abolished seminars, and we had two free-form graduate music education days where we sat in that huge room, 110 Woolworth.

It was two days, all day (“all day” meant “after lunch”). People would come in, and we would talk about anything that would come up. Jim and Paul Lansky and I thought this was great; and most everybody else, graduate students and faculty, all seemed put off by it, even if they didn't think that it was actually terrible.<sup>4</sup> It was the social climax of the post-*Compose Yourself*/*Meta-Variations* enterprise; after that it's been downhill all the way.

I went elsewhere after that. At that time, the Music Department actually wanted me to run a new program in Philosophy of Music, on the grounds that a new space had opened for thinking about music. But it was more of a gesture than a realistic possibility. I was really out of place at Princeton anyway. It was right for me to go to a place like Bard where there was no institution, no history, no culture, nothing but some flat farmland; a backwoods college with a kind of flaky creative and intellectual tradition.

Probably the most important thing, for me, that I wrote after *Meta-Variations* was *Language ,as a Music*, which was the next step in comprehensive form. I don't know if you find that penetrable as an essay on language and music—that's what it is. It may be hard to read because it's literally a piece of music: an essay in the form of

a piece of music, or a piece of music in the form of an essay, whichever way you prefer to look at it.

The movement called “Red Hook,” an image of someone thinking straight in street talk, expresses something key; it’s even a kind of proof that the language you use is very critical, because there are certain kinds of things that you can say and think in one language, that are not necessarily equally available in some other.

Guck: One thing I keep noticing, in listening to you, is talk about private and personal, and talk about public and social. The other thing is talk about being engaged in things and caring about things. I think it’s important.

Boretz: I think if people have a surface of sophisticated cynicism or neutrality or something like that, it’s inevitably a very thin, but maybe strenuously maintained cover over urgent, compelling needs that they have, just like I do. It’s not that sincerity is normally a cover for some bullshit, but rather that bullshit is usually a cover for some sincerity that is too afraid to come out, or too whatever.

It would be pretty incoherent to think that anybody could be insincere to the core. What would that mean? We’re all put together the same way. If I feel isolated sometimes from other people it’s with some sense of strain, because I have to believe that people are pretty much concocted with the same ingredients. I can see how our experiences are all different; because our histories are different. But when I talk about something like caring about things, I assume that I’m going to share that with the people I’m talking to. I assume that if you just mention that point to people, they’re going to say, internally, Oh, right, okay. We don’t have to bullshit now. This is not what’s expected and demanded of us here. It’s okay to come clean on what we care about. Even if it’s not nice stuff. It’s a bad scene to have to pretend that everything you care about is nice. If music is serious, then that’s how it’s serious, because it somehow enables all kinds of characteristics about people, most of which are not admissible in polite society, to be expressed, and to be endured and survived and perceived and understood.

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Somebody says to me, “I have this terrible problem in sessions [real-time composition in groups],” whatever it is. I say, “Well, you know, you probably have that problem in life, and you ought to be really glad that this problem becomes available to you by coming up equally in music. Because when it comes up in music you can deal with it within music, and that’s less dangerous than dealing with it in real life directly.” It seems so simple, but what else could music be good for? (I mean, it’s good for other things, too, but this seems so fundamental.) “Music therapy” seems quite ridiculous as a category of activity separate from “music.”



1. Boretz refers to an unpublished 1987 interview of Milton Babbitt by Fred Maus and Marion Guck, in which Babbitt says this about his introduction to philosophy in college:

[Henry Bradford Smith] gave a course in logic, and I took it as a freshman—I don't even know why, I really can't answer it! And it turned out to be his typed notes, sort of a revision of the *Principia*. He was a Russell product, and he had redone the *Principia*, the first volume. I took the course with a lot of upperclassmen, and went and took the final examination, and I said, "I must have flunked it. It couldn't have been that easy, this exam." And I got an A.

You know that feeling, you've been students. It just happened to be something I could do very easily, something in which I was interested. (For example, I could never get interested in languages the way they were taught; I couldn't go home and make myself memorize weak verbs and things like that.) So I suddenly said, "My God! If I could get an A in this competitive course, this must be something." So the following year, my sophomore year, I took a whole year's course with him, where we wrote our own textbook. That's when I began reading all of the logicians, going back to Frege and Boole, and at the same time took a course in the philosophy of science, as I said, and another course in the philosophy of geometry.

And this simply was very exciting and very interesting to me, and I can't tell you anything more than that.

2. The other people in the group were Dave Burrows and Barclay Brown. (BB)
3. Knezevich, an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the College of William and Mary in the late 1980s, took an interest in Boretz's writing and presented a paper on his work at the 1987 meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Rochester, NY.
4. Arthur Margolin admonishes me (2005) that he and others (including John Peel, Hilary Tann, Frank Brickle, and probably a few others) were dedicated fans of free-form graduate music study days. I apologize for slighting them here. (BB)

## What did Milton mean by his music?

How it looks now, from here

Starting from impenetrable, beyond anywhere ever travelled, a cold sonic monolith, way out beyond Webern, Varese, Cowell, Cage, none of the ways in led in, experience that disallowed experience, in 1953, the Composition for Viola and Piano; in 1955, the Three Compositions for Piano; in 1957, *All Set* at the Brandeis Jazz Festival; by 1959, the Compositions for Twelve and Four Instruments - the latter at the first Princeton Seminar; at the off-Broadway Nonagon Gallery, a "composers' showcase" pairing of my old Brandeis guru Harold Shapero's piano music with some of Milton's; someone says, about Milton, or his pieces, I wasn't sure, "clean, clear, and to the point" -- the ways in when they developed developed not via unmediated sound like almost every other music in my life (discounting the constant babel of propagandas which assuredly had their effect in turning my ear on or off of whatever historic, exotic, far-out wavelengths I could discover) but via the appeal of a complex philosophical rationale, a conceptual interpenetration being materialized between the rivetingly deep new thought in which I was most absorbed around and outside of music, and the intransigently pitiless multiform complexity of the music, now spanning, by 1961, *Partitions, Vision and Prayer*, Composition for Synthesizer. I could hear the music because I could see the point. Or at least a particular point, one I could infer out of my own meta-intellectual rather than music-intuitive perspective, more or less the point that I wrote in my 1964 *Nation* article explicitly about Milton, thoughts that started from the intersection of his discourse with the resonance of my own thought and reading, and with the insistent electric charge of listenings to his music. Milton was, of course, mostly known and notorious for his invention of previously unenvisaged compositional devices, derived from previously unimagined modes of construal of traditional and post-traditional pitch-structural music. And it has been these devices and construals which metastasized into the compositional/theoretic world of musical intelligence and ingenuity which evolved in his name, on his account, and in his image. His solutions to problems of structure and his invention of means of structuring became a rhizome of limitless invention and an ideology of unlimited imaginative-structural possibility for a very powerfully focused music-intellectual culture.

But: does the fact of structural preoccupation entail an aesthetic of structural preoccupation? Does the fact of the pervasive presence of transcendent formal ingenuity imply an aesthetic of pure formal ingenuity? Is depth of structure its own episteme? The depth I experience in Beethoven is certainly a depth of structure; everything is contained within, manifested as, structure; but the particular musical depth of those structural events does not seem to be the output of an exclusive preoccupation with structure in se; other, equally deep structural moves would emanate quite discrete musical depths. Is that perhaps why the more we fathom the depths of structure the closer we feel we're getting to the



depths of what motivates the structure, the ontological determinant beyond the structure "itself"?

If I as an intently listening music receiver could not follow Milton's structures by paths of motivation rather than paths of data-configuration, or, rather, could not motivate the paths of data by intuitions of a meta-motivation, my mutual opacity with this music signified to me not the absence of such motivation but a limitation of my imaginative capacity to locate within my perceptual resources a unique intuition, a truly new-musical mode of being which could not be "musicalized" under any of the mental filters of "modernity" - not the aesthetics of ugly, brutal, or urban-industrial, not the strenuous crucible of radically reinvented classicism, not any of the super-, neo-, counter-, metaphysically idealized romanticisms, nor vivid theaters of evocative imagery, nor even any of the post-catastrophic militant inverted conventionalities of the assorted politicized serial insurgencies camping in the capitals of Europe, on the streets of downtown Manhattan and San Francisco, Berkeley, and assorted outlier American university campuses. And not even through Milton's own public-social interfaces; neither the revolutionary rethinking of traditional musical issues in the languages and contexts of contemporary rational discourse; nor the new-invented world of prophetic visionary cognitive compositional possibilities materialized spectacularly in that amazing series of writings through the unfolding of which we all scarcely dared to exhale, up through the time-point article in the first issue of *Perspectives*. And especially not through Milton's scintillating fulfillment of his public role as superstar intellectual virtuoso or his inner-circle personification as omniscient all-worldly infallible guru - not even though these self-creating theaters and world-recreating prophecies were all and always somehow relevant to the holistic composition and performance of a total persona and lifework radical in every detail beyond a fault and - above all - utterly sui generis.

That the persona was radical, yes, totally; but so too, hidden beneath his dazzle, was the person. Radical because Milton's real commitment was not to his acted-out self-protective image of radical rationality but to his real strenuous invariant belief therein and practice thereof, in every bit of music and discourse, leaving nothing random or improvisational or vaguely semicognized. Even to a cynical fault, he was lucid and articulate as to the distinction (he loved to report the story of Stravinsky's bewilderment that a colleague would interrogate his public discourse as if it could possibly reflect his actual musical thought). So, then, radical also as social affect beyond public effect - regardless that the fringe benefit of attaching notoriety was always undoubtedly an anticipated and desired payoff - but - much more profoundly implicative for our culture-intellectual-historical world - the radical social image of an uncompromising aesthetic and ethical collectivity, authentic in its aspiration toward a lived and composed-out rationality. Radically countercultural in precluding even the temptation to fudge the rigors of musical or discursive consistency for any extraneous gestures of comfort to assuage the thus-afflicted or charges of gratuitous energy to titillate the so-enervated. Because the motivation to authenticity was itself authentic.

And so, at first, also predictably perceived by "the world" as radically intransigent, anti-artistically uningratiating, willfully insistent on satisfying some coldblooded perception of the needs of a project of work rather than fulfilling the codified public-artist obligations to

personify seriousness rather than to be serious. As undercutting the common understanding that everybody's elevated or iconoclastic discourse could be permissibly localized within categories well and epithetically defined by media, community, always well understood as Bourdieuan social code easily dissolved as emblematic self-promoting p.r. Challenge in that epithetical vocabulary is coded imagery too; not to be attempted as a reality of practice. But, in the world, at first, and for quite a while, Milton-and-his-work (always taken together as a unity) were, in the worst possible way, really experienced as actually challenging, challenging-for-real, frustrating - at first - the world's accustomed ways of rising to anything perceived as a musical challenge: first to dismiss it, then to isolate it as an ideological (stylistic, affective) stereotype, then, finally (if it fails to disappear) to classicize it into concert-repertorial or classroom-canonical harmlessness.

But whatever the evolution of Milton's music with respect to, and within, the world's ear, however much it was bent or bent itself to convenient accessibility for those who studied and composed scores to a rich and expansive landscape of structural readings and revealings, or to more comfortable auditory assimilation via the parallel bridges of electronic music and electrifyingly virtuoso performances by spectacular young players, or to the conciliation of ever more cute, ever so sophisticated (but always designably rigorous in esoteric structure-referential terms), punny piece-titles; and even as its own natural inner musical development expanded its textural surfaces and ranges to overlap more congenially with modes of musical affect (the bubblieness of *Phonemena*, the lyricism of *Around the Horn*, are as internally indigenous to the musical self-enclosure as are the bristling edges of abruption of the First Piano Concerto or the pure ontologies of dynamic-textural being of *Relata I*), the rigorous foreclosure of specious invitations to intimacy or interpenetration is always firmly locked in. And increasingly for me, becomes an indigenous property, a positive value, rather than a frustrating perversity, of Milton's aesthetic identity.

So over my time with Milton's music, what seemed initially opaque in surface and interior became transparently perceivable but still, and crucially, psychically impenetrable. What powerfully engaged me was that it materialized in principle a remarkable fulfillment in the purest form imaginable of what I had grown to most value in the music I most valued; a demonstrable ideality of compositional aspiration realized. But its reality, in fully immersed experiential embrace, just wasn't that; it was never that, but something else entirely, far more peculiar and far beyond remarkable: music that always interacted with you at your ear but never within it, within your mind but never within its being or yours. Ontologized itself but didn't energize anything. Leaving you strangely untouched but, precisely in that, profoundly affected. For being, as being, seemed to be at all times its matter, to be what Milton meant by it; being-as-itself, being-as-such.

It's obvious that my almost lifetime relation to Milton was complicated, or at least not usual. We were, primarily and enduringly, friends; we spent a lot of time together from the late fifties through the '70s listening to music and even traveling together for various professional-appearing reasons in America and Europe. Milton was one of the first colleagues outside of Brandeis to whom I spoke about the idea that became *Perspectives*; and his enthusiasm and support were immediate and unwavering. Part of the complication stems from how we first met, within the Brandeis graduate music school community, an environment that had its own strenuous music-intellectual dialogue (it was a *Boulangerie*

on the brink of a Great Leap Forward, in which Milton was a naturalized citizen, whose revelatory idea-talk was universally and raptly absorbed and earnestly debated by students and elder colleagues like Arthur Berger and Harold Shapero). We were all coming from someplace, going somewhere; Milton was our indispensable companion, not our deity - but not our *diabolus in musica* either, not in the least (and neither were John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, or Pierre Boulez, even though their presences were more peripheral because they weren't literally *there*).

So while Milton's profundities of technical and structural invention and insight primarily ontologize his presence in our musical world and our compositional history, for me they are inseparable in his work from the aesthetic qualities I have been describing, his means to those ends. It's that total synergy of those qualities with the unique systems of their delivery that gives Milton's musical presence in my musical world its transcendent meaning and value. And although I am asserting those qualities, that aesthetic sensibility, as indispensable to the being and character of his music, I can hardly fail to notice that they are rarely what is addressed or admired about Milton's work among serious musical thinkers; or what inspires widespread creative emulation among the composers who most seriously reanimate and extend his ideas; all of the abundant and diverse Babbitt-inspired compositional action I know of is inspired by the structural procedures he invented, but uses and expands them for aesthetic-musical purposes which relate to his mainly by contradistinction (something similar is, perhaps, true in the case of John Cage, whose cultural presence may also be symbolic and procedural rather than creatively central - but this isn't something I've thought enough about to dwell on). It is, of course, a particular strength of Milton's inventions that they abstract so fruitfully as universally sharable and creatively reinterpretable precepts rather than harden as exclusively personal idiosyncrasies (such as Milton attributed to Bartók in his amazing 1949 article on the six quartets), that their compositional applications are so completely independent of literal reflection of their source musics.

But what I also see is that Milton, with much consciousness, at least early on, meant by means of these radical inventions and reformulations to assert, and fervently advocate, a radical new artistic creed, an aesthetic and an ethos for and within composition, as a purpose and indispensable consequence of what he was inventing and discovering and composing at the same time. An aesthetic, in the sense that it ontologizes the being of his music; but also an ethos, in that it materializes a personal commitment to a mode of being whose primary principle is that personal identity is creative identity is intellectual identity and that the specificity of this holistic identity depends not only on its holism but on the perfection of its inner consistency, its integrity, its authenticity. A principled opposition to uncritical ("irresponsible") contradictions between rhetoric (represented inauthentically as serious philosophy) and practice, and a fierce conviction of the higher aspiration of authentic and rigorous rational action and mind in opposition to the undefinable and hence essentially irresponsible and, well, low-grade self-deluding and self-indulging messiness of ... all that vocabulary of expressive sensibility that leaks uncritically from the unlovely body of the music of loose ends, irrational preoccupations, irrelevant gestures, unrigorous structures which pretend more than deliver.<sup>1</sup> A music, consequently, whose issues are

simply, starkly different: a music not radical for its time - it's not at all about the issue of being radical for its time - but radical in principle, propounding an ontological radicalism in its concealment, beneath the appearance and certifiable identifiability as "music", a radically distinct set of dimensionalities, a replacement of the normal space of music-experiential dimensionality with a new space: music not cold but in which temperature is simply not a dimension; music not hard to learn, just imperturbably undidactic, neither frontally challenging nor particularly inviting study or understanding or discursive explication; also not being itself perturbable or permeable nor essaying to perturb or permeate, but inscribing its existential trajectory as its own self-defined time-cycle, time-trajectories to be exhibited not inhabited, music emerging beyond the space of its performance with a trace in memory more like an untrace, a trace that doesn't remind you of what a trace of anything else ever felt like.

It would however be radically wrong to convict Milton's music as not having any inner sensibility, any soul; though there is for sure music, sometimes terribly aggressive music, which violently or coldly articulates either spiritually or dramatically, an aesthetic of soullessness. But that aggression is completely absent from Milton's work; it lives in an alternative universe, not a counter-normal-universe; it's as indifferent to "ugly" as it is to "beautiful". That is its inner sensibility. Expressive predicates that conventionally apply (like Nelson Goodman's "sad", of paintings) simply don't live on this planet of Milton. Nor are they always at the center of every familiar act or concern of significant human consciousness. For not every humanly created phenomenon, not every phenomenon of thought or artifactuation, engages or must necessarily engage the issues of soul or sensibility or psychic interpenetration. Except, of course, if it's "Art". But there are other modes of conscious experience, other species of interesting, meaningful, even crucial life-defining issues which compel exploration and composition. Such as discovering and articulating the tangible results of rigorously acted-out rationality in the composition and sonic realization of musical totalities. Totalities, for example, in which the energy of rational being is the deep motivation of structure and appearance. It's not the implacable recalcitrance of Milton's music which is truly radical; nor is there an implacable recalcitrant bone in his compositional mind or musical body. It's that this once, for all time, he changed the subject for music. It's what he meant to do.

River Road, NY  
February 2012

**two notes:**

"And although I am asserting those qualities, that aesthetic sensibility, as indispensable to the being and character of his music, I can hardly fail to notice that they are rarely what is addressed or admired about Milton's work among serious musical thinkers":

Jim Randall and Bob Morris are the only composers I know whose aesthetic and lifework share a significant creative resonance with Milton's, in the way that I interpret them; the creative extensions of Milton's technical-compositional resources (and of quite different views of his episteme) are famously immense in scope and number, beyond any possible depiction here: beginning perhaps with Don Martino, Jim Randall and Godfrey Winham, and extending most inventively through the music and writing of Bob Morris and Joe Dubiel - how outrageously reductive this is you can infer from the entire contents of the Perspectives of New Music/Open Space Magazine memorial issue and CD (*Milton Babbitt: A Composers' Memorial*; Open Space Magazine issue 14, PNM/OS CD 3), which might suggest at least the qualitative range of this flourishing compositional community. I suppose I count as an apostate, despite my fervent protests to the contrary: there is no aspect of my work which isn't colored deeply by Milton's looming spectre.

"... unrigorous structures which pretend more than deliver..."

A quintessential expression of this ethos is Milton's 1950 review of two books by René Leibowitz (*The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. Steven Peles et al, pp.10-15. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Bill,

I think you have to distinguish among social affects, ideological attitudes, and the contextual nature of phenomena (such as musical compositions). Milton Babbitt's theory did express attitudes which are best described as scientistic in that they ideologize and valorize the affects and rhetorics of the discourses of the natural sciences and of the philosophy of science - and of the philosophy which styles itself "scientific". Many, if not most, of the Vienna philosophers were trained as physicists, so their epistemic outlook was formed in the vocabulary of science. But - remember - in the Aufbau Carnap is careful to specify his connection with Husserl, and, like Goodman later on, chooses phenomenalist reconstruction over phenomenology - which meant essentially limiting predicates (and concepts) to discernibles and designables, an essentially nominalist position. But there is at least dialogue, if not commonality, among say Whitehead, Quine, Wittgenstein, (right from the start), Tarski, Sellars, etc.

But whatever Milton's preference for a vocabulary in which to frame discourse, I cannot say that it betokened a "philosophy" of music - or even a theory of music separable from the most firmly grounded traditional conventions (if you allow Schenker to be seen as a staunch defender of traditional musical concepts, giving them new strength and fortitude against the pull toward artistic anarchism represented by "modernism"). And Milton's "scientificism" was really restricted (functionally) to a demystification of the discourse of conventional music concepts, giving them more rigor and more connection with extramusical ways of thinking, rather than replacing them.

Ontologically, that is, Milton's discourse and his music do not dislocate music from its traditional context, but radicalize and rigorize certain aspects of that context.

I think this is why the Europeans do not recognize Milton as an important musical philosopher and why they do not recognize his music as pathbreaking. Boulez said to me about "Vision and Prayer": "But it's just an ordinary song cycle"...so the radical properties of Milton's work were in the aspects of tradition which he foregrounded to the minimization of other - in some ways more fundamental - aspects - which produced, in my view, not a new theory of music, a new concept of music, or a new vision of music, but a reduction among the salient traditional aspects of music to the extreme metastasization of some of them - producing a distinctive affect consonant with the tone of some of the discourse - and, hence in that sense, a distinctive aesthetic. As I said in my best statement about this subject, "Milton changed the subject for music".

The perception that the issue of musical thinking was not in the application of an extramusical philosophical system or position but in the re-ontologization of the entire music-aesthetic enterprise from the experiential perspective was the counter-perception of Meta-Variations and Jim Randall's Compose Yourself (especially the Prologue and Revelstoke; Language Lab hangs in the balance between experiential and formal considerations; these were explored in my sub-Meta-Variations text "Of This and That". The texts "in quest of the rhythmic genius" and "what lingers on (when the song is ended)" were my elaborations on this theme, whose most essential concepts were the notions of "determinate feel" and "attributive theory" - both necessitating the alignment of music cognition with active nonmetalinguistic experiential receiving of music.

Of course this is rarely understood in the environment of music discourse (see Scott Gleason's Columbia Ph.D. Dissertation). The person who has offered ways of listening to Milton's music along these lines is Joseph Dubiel. Most other writing

about Milton is just involved with his technical inventions which greatly facilitated his aggrandizement of the parameters of music he chose to privilege. They do have the rigor of explicitness for all that they eschew the unparaphrasable specificity which projects from all music when heard with ontological contextuality. I also recommend the writings of Martin Brody on Milton (and, because they illuminate much of the above, on me).



Dora –

On short notice I won't try to take up everything in your email. Just – in a 1st approximation – the question about Part 2:

Let's imagine the practical (i.e., the experiential) function of such a mental state as "awareness of haecceity" in one of the following possible ways (as a receptual process): think of the "name" as a conceptual but antecedently empty vessel which is filled and ontologized temporally, meaning therefore either something whose being is becoming at all times, or something which has different cumulative being at all times, or something whose being is experienced as partial until the inferred endpoint – the aesthetic meaning would potentially be different if it were conceived as an evolving, a chain of successive phenomena, cumulative or not, or as a temporal entity. So the name may carry (probably does carry) antecedent historical meaning-biases (whether this is a resource or a reduction is more a question of use rather than inherence; and in any case I think it's kind of inexorable) – but – just as one is the outcome of one's history, and that being a "blank slate" in reception can be described (e.g., Goodman) as a romantic fiction, so the distinction between receiving without one's history overtly mediating awareness, and just being the condition of being who one is, is a real distinction – in "of this and that" I suggested that there are two ways that prior experience informs present experience:

1. "I've heard it all before"
2. "I'm learning to hear it as never before"

Not precise in my current understanding, of course, but still on the target we're discussing.

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...or, just imagine the Schenkerian monoline as referential fixity unifying and articulating, making determinately specific the self-discovering mutant events materializing themselves to become the noncomparative avatar of "music" retroactively reconstituting what, ontologically, music is. In the moment of each piece I am transported out of the universe of music, to an incommensurable non-relativistic absolute of "this" – in which "this" is, at this moment, for this moment only, what music is.

objective analysis: what's there to strike/affect you however; experiential descriptions: an inner biography of a reception; aesthetic analysis: what's there in the sense of how it ontologizes in consciousness – in whatever terms capture the experiential sense it makes insofar as the person composing the analysis is concerned – and since the units of musical reception are single music-phenomena received by single people at single times, the person-specific mode of description is the musically most accurate, as far as I'm concerned. This sort of explains to me why most generalized descriptions of music, or objectified descriptions of single musics, seem not to be intuitively "about" anything like music, or like any particular music.

Hi Bob,

Your “South Indian Serious Music” paper is on its own grounds wonderfully engaging, interesting, informative - it’s an X-ray of a particular musical orientation, and a remarkable (and is it not also remarkably different?) musical culture. And it poses what are certainly valuable questions about any ‘theory of listening’ with respect to our ‘musical cultures’, and - equally - about ‘serious’ and ‘intellectual’ as they are meaningfully laid beside ‘music’.

If I take the behavioral manifestations which accompany music listening, as you describe them, I can notice a certain range of analogies to music-listening practices I am familiar with in America (of course I’m somewhat familiar with the behavioral surfaces you describe from being present at performances of Indian music in various venues). Just speaking of listeners, one can recognize resemblances to such listening focuses as those of jazz connoisseurs as well as of such professional musicians as J.S. Bach recognizing, anticipating, and critiquing fugue strategies on the fly at organ recitals - and, concomitantly, certain segments and aspects of ‘serious’ music listening in the western tradition.

So we need to come to the questions: 1. what is it that is ‘serious’ in the literature of ‘serious music’? and 2. what is it that is ‘intellectual’ in the content, or in the activity, of composing, playing, or hearing music? One would need to know, for example, in what respect ‘serious’ music was more ‘serious’ as music, or whatever, than ‘popular’ music; or, more ‘intellectual’, for that matter. But none of the answers to these questions would constitute a critique of your contention that a certain degree of engagement and close attention to some aspects of music within a culture which the members of that culture take seriously as conferring on that music its salient valuable musical qualities constitutes a guarantee of the survival of a musical tradition within a musical culture, or at least a decelerator of its decline therein.

Nevertheless, some would say that devoting close attention and care to details of engineering risks neglecting devoting close attention and care to architecture (although of course there are those who consider the two one). The question that arises is not only the one about ‘close attention’, but about ‘close attention to what?’ Here is the crucial turn that determines which observables and/or experienceables emerge, and if different populations, different individuals, ontologize something they commonly refer to as ‘music’ meaning the output of one of these perspectives (some of which may consist of a combination of perspectives, as ‘engineering’ plus ‘architecture’ in combination or fusion might be imagined to be someone’s ontologizing perspective), then how do we consider that they share a musical tradition, or that they hope (and/or help) to perpetuate a given single musical tradition rather than, even, possibly counteract or even obliterate one such tradition by the promulgation of one of the others? I know that for most of my years as a Nation critic I railed against several traditions of ‘serious’ music, some compositional, some performative, some theoretical, some receptual, largely on the grounds that they were powerful diversionary substitutes - usurpers - of other traditions which I wished to valorize on my own behalf.

But, again, none of this knocks even a chip off your thesis, which is essentially neutral as to what kind of engagement, care, and attention would conduce to the preservation of a musical tradition, as well as neutral relative to the issue of which musical traditions are desirable to preserve.

More talk about this when we meet?

All best,  
Ben

liner notes for

Richard Teitelbaum  
Piano Plus  
Piano Music 1963-1998

Years ago - it was somewhere in the mid-1980s - there was a concert of extended-instrumental music by Richard Teitelbaum at the Paula Cooper Gallery in Downtown-est New York; Richard and George Lewis were the performers. I've known Richard, and his music, since the mid-1960s, but this performance was - almost non-metaphorically - an eye-opener. Because what I saw was as integral to my sensory-affective experience as what I heard - sound and sight could not, truly, be described separately. George's sonic/corporeal choreography, moving in its contained-energy polyphony of sound/body configurations, surrounded by the imposing visually silent but looming powerful presence of two grand-looking pianos, Richard floating serenely within the space of all the sonic overdrive, creating a totally contrapuntal experiential redefinition of what was otherwise a hyperkinetic collision of irresistible forces and immovable objects. And the stunningly resonant swirl of vivid, totally self-specific sound, coming together from a stark disparity of sources, acoustic, electronic, amplified, straight, bent out of shape, struck, swept, blown... It was, as you can tell from my unfaded recollection, one of those one-only aesthetic events in my life; but even beyond the absorbing experience, there was a revelation (the eye-opener) - specifically mind-blowing to an introverted soundfreak like me: how musical performance, the global art of music, has really always been a multimedia environment: the tableaux vivants and movements of performers and ensembles, the massing of audiences, the kineses of sweat and applause, the under-pressure psychic energy of attention and reaction. "The score", "the sound", "the piece" in this perspective, through this experience, recede into the event, as causes rather than effects, as little the surface of consciousness as the script and the camera in the experience of a movie-event.

So now, here, you have, in your possession presumably, this disc: all and only sound. Of course, you can experience it as mere documentation, as the extracted minimal-cue traces of real multidimensional happenings, to be experienced as such speculatively, virtually: that would make sense. But there's another level of experience available here; paradoxically, it's a richness that becomes available only in the context of a certain degree of sensory deprivation, that is, in the restriction to a purely auditory experience. I invite, I implore, I propose you listen to it straight through, front to back, 70-plus minutes, as a totally focused immersion in the expressive being, over a good bit of a lifetime, of a compositional voice and ear whose completely ungeneric intuitions of sound and time make any talk of schools, influences, styles seem rather unhelpful. In fact, I recommend (strongly) that you listen to this disc without further information, with whatever capacity you have to imitate a tabula rasa of affective and cognitive receptivity, before you proceed to learn and ponder all the comforting superveniences that we use to tell us what our experience is, has been, should be - so that we can align with our cultural companions. You, dear reader/listener, will want technical/technological/conceptual/historical information to explicate how what you are hearing was caused to come into being; I am suggesting that you first undergo the powerful experience of a purely aesthetic exposure to this self-contained cd event. And so, here, I'm going to talk first about my (not necessarily anyone else's) perception of what is arrived at in this music of Richard's before I talk about how it is arrived at.

*Intersections* and *Seq Transit Parammers*: The best way to hear *Intersections* (1963) is retrospectively from the ear of *Seq Transit Parammers* (performances to die for, as everywhere on this CD, this one written for and played by Ursula Oppens in 1998). Because - whatever the mythology about evolutions of musical/social ideology and style (and they're all meaningful and relevant and true) - the most indelible impression I get is of a totally individual musical and expressive personality, in progressive modes of development. *Seq Transit Parammers* resonates with me (in this context) as spectacularly amplifying and intensifying the special qualities of *Intersections*: the crisp articulate sense of a tangible crack-space between adjacent keystrokes flying by at warpspeed, the distinct personality of every well-spoken interval in the reflective "walking" passages, the hint of jazz sensibility in the "lean" and attack-space of sounds, especially the anchoring tasty lower-depth crunchy chords (they don't sound like chords, but like effervescing sound-clusters) - coming out in its third part onto a dynamically accelerating image of the "pointillistic" tendency of *Intersections*, arriving by stunning sonic metamorphoses at an inundating cascading scintillation that keeps coming on toward becoming impenetrable soundwall - but stops short then, retrieves its natal space and color, transformed now as polytextured allregister soundride, which...vanishes.

...*dal Niente...* (1997) evolves me into an even newer world (compositionally it's the second most recent of these pieces); it comes at me with a multi-simultaneity of radically transformed qualities and issues that I recognize with astonishment as familiar from my life experience with music - so, for one, my rockbottom intuition of "harmony" is atomized but somehow manages to retain just enough cogency to make sense of what I'm hearing - but it's never going to be the same. For - whatever I said above - there is no question with ...*dal Niente...* that what I'm hearing is an output of technique/technology - it becomes the very aesthetic character of what I'm hearing to almost get lost in the sense that things are coming at you from very mysterious and previously unimaginable places, alongside things that are close to home. Back in the 1970s, Lukas Foss and I used to talk about things we were doing as approaching the idea of "realtime composition". But Richard has actually designed a physical and biological system which creates a literal "real time composition" mechanism (a comparison of the "score" with what you're hearing will leave no doubt, but I guess that's cheating). And I think that the persistence of experiments in mutable modes of music-creating that have been verbally and performatively shared among composers, performers and perceivers over the last 50 years (at least) have seeped enough into the cultural substratum to be an aesthetic (perceptual, experiential) reality. Perhaps we - collectively, as a music-receiving community - have learned to process "a performance", or "a realtime event" rather than "a piece" as a real - rather than a symbolic, or an ideological - art-experience. So to the essential question: is the "real-time-ness" essentially meaningful to the progenitor, the performing participants, or to the receivers...I think the answer is: yes.

There is much more to be said about ...*dal Niente...*, as there is hugely more going on within it as you listen; as I said above, in its very aesthetic it seems to raise issues about music in a more general sense: for instance, in some ways I hear it as sensitizing a new level of consciousness about the ontology of "the note" (the musical "note" that is, like: a sounded pitch). You could historicize a dualism of notes in music: back to the Wagner/Brahms dualism: the note as absorbing into a suffusing blanket of sensibility; the note as extruding a sharp and particular architectural individuality making a distinctive episode in an unfolding thought or narrative. ...*dal Niente...*, fascinatingly, goes both ways: notes extruded as cumulating events in a succession/notes absorbed as inflections of a seamless texture.

Stylistically, this is a clue as to how I hear Richard's music in relation to the surrounding musics of our time: in a possibly music-Heraclitean world, the way Uptown and the way Downtown may, perhaps, have turned out to be the same. But after *Seq Transit Parammers*, and *...dal Niente...*, it seems that an entirely different music-environmental geography may be imagined.

*In the Accumulate Mode* (1982) - familiar as are the last two pieces on this CD from Richard's old Blends/Digital Piano Music Lumina LP - takes one aspect of what you've heard up to here (temporally on the CD not chronologically as composed) and explodes it into a massive soundstorm like Conlon Nancarrow's nightmare vision of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (I wrote this before remembering that Richard has written that the piece was explicitly inspired by Conlon Nancarrow - but anyone who knows that music will know it anyway). The governing image of relentless sharpened playerpiano hammers hitting - hitting on, really - hardass piano strings to the threshold of articulative possibility, coming into the range of perceptual foldover (like the other end of Stockhausen's pitch-into-time progressions, in, e.g., *Kontakte*); here pitchtime pushes over the discriminative limit to transform genetically discontinuous pianosound into pure streaming texture-scades swooping and darting like a sonicized surreal anime, where pulsations materialize and disappear like plosive foam bubbles on a roiling surf. More than a hint of jazz in the innards and outards of this music; it's even a kind of apotheosis of the free-jazz sensibility of the soundworld between Ornette Coleman and Anthony Braxton, in a highly idealized metastasis.

*Interlude in Pelog* and *Solos for Three Pianos*, written (1982) just before *In the Accumulate Mode*, come off in this listening sequence as studies for that transcendent soundflight, each concentrating (using the music-making multipiano-computer machine invented at that time by Richard, under the inspiration, he says, of Conlon Nancarrow's music) on some aspect of that music. In particular, the metamorphic creation, out of the dissolution of individual sounds, of a larger-than-sound multisound is a conspicuous preoccupation of both pieces; *Interlude in Pelog* is shaped formally and sonically by the resonance and time of Indonesian gamelan music; its melodic curves and flavors and harmonic/rhythmic/percussive contours are unmistakably evocative but - as I've come to expect from Richard - totally nonliteral and newly invented. The fadeout at the end is evocative of that sense of unending perpetuity that you hear (sometimes it seems literally) in Indonesian gamelan music. And *Solos for 3 Pianos* is the wildest ride in place you're likely ever to hear (George Antheil would have killed to compose this piece). It fades out too - there simply isn't anything else it could possibly do.

Did I mention that the performances are all to die for? Fredric Rzewski's hands are more coordinated with his brain than is allowed in mortals; Ursula Oppens's entire being is vibrantly in sync with *Seq Transit Parammers* (it's her piece); there isn't a moment where she isn't organically fused into what I am hearing. Aki Takahashi projects a seismographic responsiveness and sensitivity to the minutest as well as the most extravagant inflections of events, within the almost schizogenic environment of *...dal Niente...*. And Richard himself really knows the sense that his technological and technical ensemble makes, including the anticipation of every sonic situation that arises; at the close, it feels as if I've been witness to a revelation of the true meaning and substance of musical improvisation.

## A QUASI-PERSONAL REFLECTION ON MILTON BABBITT'S CENTENARY AND ITS CELEBRATIONS

[Three concerts: November 22, 2015 with Augustus Arnone at Spectrum; January 27, 2016 at The Juilliard School of Music; June 7, 2016, with the Cygnus Ensemble at Symphony Space]

Contrary to public rumor Milton was never my composition teacher; during my time at Princeton none of the younger composers on the faculty (Milton, Ed Cone, Earl Kim) was supposed to teach composition. So I, David Del Tredici, Fredric Rzewski, Henry Weinberg, and (in the just-earlier generation) David Lewin, Don Martino, Eric Salzman, Peter Westergaard, Jim Randall, Godfrey Winham et al interacted in every possible theoretical, historical, critical, intellectual, philosophical way in and around music as well as everything else with Milton. Roger Sessions was our composition teacher but Milton was why we were there.

Had we been on the West Coast (I speak only for myself) it would probably have been John Cage; because Milton and Cage were the two composers of the previous generation who totally and organically embodied a total revolution in musical expression - as against the "modernism" of incremental radicalization and subversion of musical surfaces overlying a fundamental continuity with tradition. Their new music was not a new way of doing music, not a way of being "modern"; it was an entirely new sense of what music was, what it was doing, what it was for, why you did it. The radicalizations of continuity and drama in Elliott Carter (the other most powerful older presence in our compositional world) were vivid in the context of the music of the previous 50 years; you could experience its electrifying jolts by following its progress in a conventional way; the music of Babbitt and Cage never invited nor rewarded nor really permitted any such context. Their work, as was widely recognized with great alarm at the time, was a truly existential threat to everything the culture had held dear about music as far as it knew. Of course, they drew complementary - contradictory - creative epiphanies from the same central awareness; Milton invented his own totally impenetrable continuity: John Cage invented his own totally inscrutable persona... maybe it was just East Coast-West Coast cultural disjunction - it's gotten pretty muddled up in the 75 years since their joint, antithetical, revolutions; but - as I'm going to propose with exquisitely self-correcting hindsight - they were the antipodal avatars of a truly revolutionary aesthetic moment.

Imagine that "abstraction" is an affective word rather than a technical term. A quality of expression not a means to its end. In visual art this is a fine distinction, if also virtually a given, because of the capacity for perceived representation latent in the transaction between artficed surfaces and culturally conditioned gazes ("non-innocent eyes", in Nelson Goodman's locution). But music is of course not only as literally abstract as painting, but perceptually so as well even where there is a conceit of representation (unless you're Respighi, using a birdsong recording, no one mistakes it for anything but a symbolic likeness). In the early 20th Century composers, trailing behind their visual-artist colleagues, got interested in emulating that quality of seeming to render the qualities of infrastructures and subconsciousness **than** what was familiarly "up front" (Ernst Toch's *Geographical Fugue*, for a blatant example, but equally the essentialized dramatics of Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra Op. 5). And soon the world rattled by its modern catastrophes and complexities was grasping at the imagery of scientific thought, the sensibility of transcendently counterintuitive phenomena and concepts, of reality cognizable only by way of mathematical modeling, of scientific and transcendental and

psychologistic philosophy infiltrating into the mainstream culture; and was disgorging an array of expressive reactions to all of this in aggressive forms of overt detachment: the detachment of absolute control by maximal rational regimentation of every aspect of composed text, or the complementary detachment of control maximally relinquished by a discipline of submission to an arbitrary externality or the determination of structure by a process of random correlation. And it was significant that these were not only the methods of composition, but its sensibility as well. Mostly, of course, it was business as usual in the world of art: the political, intellectual, psychic, spiritual currents in the world of affairs became colorful imagery in most of the playgrounds of art: the sci-fi qualities in the soundworks of Marinetti, Varèse, Cowell, Crawford, were like vivid palimpsests overlaid on what is essentially music in a recognizably conventional sense. As were the theoretical rationalizations of Hindemith, or the music that formed itself within Joseph Schillinger's mathematical composing machines. But within the business of music-as-usual trying to make its impression with some species of faroutness or complexity, Babbitt and Cage seemed not to be onlookers to the modern musical culture but just simply avatars of a completely detached aesthetic beyond its furthest imaginable extension. Outside the boundaries that contained anything music had ever been up to then.

The aesthetic was authenticated by its totalism, its obliviousness to the need to yield at any point to a listener's need for access, for a point of contact with common experience or concept. The terms of the discourse were reinvented, cognative with discursive territories previously remote from music, from "art"-talk. The hardass languages of physics, logical philosophy, I Ching, Zen...made the vocabularies of Futurism, Busoni, Scriabin, even Schoenberg and Webern look almost Pre-Raphaelite gauzy - certainly made their music sound all warm and fuzzy suddenly.

Of course neither Milton nor Cage held fast to this beachhead; once the world caught up with them they were happy to catch up with it as well; and maybe the aesthetic passed through them as avatars of their culture, as if they themselves were minimicrocultures in themselves, and - as with normal cultures - passed through in its pristine form to leave its ineradicable imprint, yet opened up to a broadening range of expressive/active possibilities, joining the mainstream culture which they had challenged into joining them.

You can detect the signposts of this trajectory in the titles of Milton's pieces; almost monastically austere to start with (the series of "Compositions" for piano, 12 and 4 instruments, viola and piano, synthesizer, tenor and six instruments), proceeding to sometimes punning hints of the actual controlling compositional processes (*Partitions, All Set, Ensembles, Semi-Simple Variations, Relata, Phonemena*), but then gradually socializing with titles that schmoozed with the performers for whom they were intended (*Arie da Capo, Swan Song #1, Play it again, Sam*) or made disarmingly silly puns on popular clichés, divertingly innocuous and ideologically noncommittal (I never discussed this with Milton but it must have seemed both self-protective and counter-pretentious if he didn't seem to take himself too seriously once everyone else took him way too seriously; but at this point it was totally about his personal self-presentation rather than a proclamation of aesthetic vision).

Milton was a real craftsman; he was never the slave of his methods, subservient to the implications of his technical principles (as for example Hindemith seemed to become, and as many "serialists" of the fifties and sixties seemed to be); he designed his methodologies precisely to produce the music that he wanted them to produce; but he also wanted *them* to



manifest his presence and thinking as well - his charts were actually his real titles; and they evolved in dazzling complexity even as they were increasingly designed to enable musical surfaces and textures of increasing flexibility and grace (to borrow a beautiful word from Scott Burnham). So in both directions, surface and method, the militant calls to the barricades of the aesthetic of the late forties and fifties shifted toward composing strategies that maintained and expanded a hard-won leadership position within the cultural population, with technical ingenuities and aggrandizements that left disciples scrambling to catch up, while creating sound designs which suddenly stimulated and gratified rather than baffled and frustrated performing musicians, and similarly seemed to offer listeners a way in not dependent on memorizing the score and its generating charts, or a deep knowledge of analytic geometry. But even in the toils of brain- and backbone-softening public adulation, I don't think Milton ever fully relinquished the core of his early aesthetic militancy, the ideological energy that constituted a social vision of music and discourse about and within music that would create a culture of cognoscenti, of composers as specialists - and even more particularly, although he never said this, of listeners as specialists and fellow citizens in the high-intellectual culture of serious music. So the pop-ness of his titles, like the jazz-ness of *All Set*, was complexly part irony, part in-joke.

You will not "get" the music of Milton Babbitt if you don't understand that it's all about the sound and sense and meaning and qualities of pitches, multiply personified and given multiple singularities of meaning in context. It's music that has serious intentions toward you: Milton's aesthetics are his politics; he wants to radicalize you as a pitch-construing brain, learning to put together and inhabit his worlds of maximized multiplicities of coherence.

So we listened to *Vision and Prayer* at Symphony Space, a little while after hearing *Philomel* at Juilliard; and although I show my antiquity by tending to revert to what will always be for me the definitive versions, by Bethany Beardslee Winham, and although the audio for *Philomel* seemed kind of off the cuff (the electronics were unprepossessingly quiet - the audio for *Vision and Prayer* was fine), the vocal performances by Liv Redpath (*Philomel*) and Elizabeth Farnum (*Vision and Prayer*) underscored how "mainstream" this music has come to be for young performers. But the pieces, coming from the same shop, might have come from different universes. Most immediately the difference seems to be in Milton's developmental arc: you might hear the tight austerity and economy of *Vision and Prayer* as an output of Milton's aesthetic/compositional state in 1961, just past the peak of his most implacably militant visage; its cleverness is over-your-head cheek, its gaze is from above and to the left; but most radically, the ensemble it creates between voice and loudspeaker, between Dylan Thomas's poem and the über-electronic music, is a standoff written in stone, two powerful compositions confronting one another, two expressive sound-delivery systems facing forward in strictly parallel lifemodes (except, with a frisson of irony, at the beginning-and-ending electronic noise-breath that sweeps the voice in and swooshes it out. Aesthetics aside, it seems as if Dylan Thomas's giant poem, gigantically through-composed inside and out, is such an impermeably self-contained and self-replete presence that it leaves no openings for even music as intensely edged as Milton's to infiltrate and transform its internal, integral poem-sound. And its unblinking earnestness and passion are oddly counterpointed to Milton's supercool reticence.

The text of *Philomel* (by John Hollander) was written for Milton; and it so completely plays into Milton's creative and personal affinities that you might think it couldn't have been written for any other purpose than to feed Milton's favorite addictions. Which I might

describe as an intricate web of subtle-blatant-esoteric-obvious sound-puns, where reminiscent archaism and cutting-edge mind-chutzpah merge - and manage to produce a sonically beautiful, expressively poignant, transcendent expressive epiphany. And right from the start it's the anti*Vision and Prayer*: the piece begins electronically with an echoed voice whose clear and eloquent melodic curve lays out the initial conditions for the pitch structure of the piece; while the live voice, entering later, is a spluttering noise machine, unable to stutter out a continuous coherent utterance, opening up the vast dramatic-structural space that *Philomel* unfolds and inhabits thenceforth. Of course you can produce this contrast by playing two tracks of Bethany side by side, but experiencing these two amazing pieces live, and hearing them now, produced a new internal magic for me that still reverberates.

The Cygnus concert began with an otherworldly conversation about *Vision and Prayer* by Bethany and Mimmi Fulmer with Bill Anderson and ended with Milton's *Swan Song #1*, a piece that is so daringly self-challenging for Milton, turning his entire texture/structure into the wind of phraseology, reiteration, linearity, while still maintaining his total structure/surface integrity, that it might have been composed by Arthur Berger - whose music Milton once described as "diatonic Webern". (Cygnus has recorded this piece on a Bridge CD; ignore the cover art because it's treasurable music.)

But it is in the work of the young pianist Augustus Arnone this centenary season that the retrospective totality of Milton's artistic presence is most vividly crystallizing. The total span of Milton's artistic evolution is probably most precisely and completely projected by the qualities of his music for solo piano, touching every phase of his work from the mid-forties to the late nineties. Augustus Arnone has been spending this year playing, quite wonderfully, an indispensable series of three concerts consisting of this entire oeuvre, from *Three Compositions for Piano* and *Partitions* to *Canonical Forms* and *Allegro Penseroso*. Each of these excellent concerts is enhanced with a conversation conducted by Joshua Mailman, who like Augustus is of the new generation of musicians who have absorbed the text and sense of Milton's music as a natal environment and think naturally within its terms. So the conversations, each with a different earlier-generation colleague of Milton (me, Andrew Mead, Robert Morris), and with Augustus as an active participant, is actually poised to do something expansive for all of our experience of music we all already care a lot about listening to.

November 2007/April-July 2008

## Fourth and long in Baltimore

An invitation to invade a meeting of philosophically interested music theorists to engage the thought of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* with respect to its musical implications elicited an impulse to take a wild leap in the dark, to imagine that there might be discoverable in a meditation on D&G a way to approach a possible problem in the mode of addressing the cognitivity of a strenuously nonverbal mode of receiving and thinking – and, maybe even, thinking about — music as music. The problem lodges precisely in the slippery interstice between the verbal and the nonverbal – not only when the nonverbal is discursively addressed, but when people whose culture at least makes verbal ontologization not only prioritized but virtually exclusive engage directly in the practices of musicmaking at any node of the transactional network. My piece, *Black /Noise III*, which consists of fragments of *A Thousand Plateaux* threaded into an unrolling series of musicsounds, video images, and sonic and visual silences, imagines that there's a latent aesthetics in the mix which only coheres in the conjunction of all its components, incoherent in the language of any component alone, but singularly determinate in their totality, a discourse without a metatext. But in a philosophical forum, a connection with verbal/symbolic discourse materializes as something more crucial to the episteme of cognition than just a casual fact of circumstance, because of the one really ineluctable issue of communication: a person's communication to oneself in the process of grasping and negotiating the matter and identity and qualities of the outputs of expressive-linguaging episodes. So a quest followed, and had a yield which I'm able to imagine is at least tentatively interesting, and perhaps provisionally operational in yet one more pass into my own realtime eartraining.

Much earlier, in 1998, there was the polysensory piece *Black /Noise III*; and then, later, a probably misguided "program note" (no joke survives its own explanation); which, nevertheless, I feel I should offer here as part of the story of this excursion, if only as a sacrificial confession:

### On the 1001st Plateau: *Black /Noise III*

Passages sliced out of *A Thousand Plateaux* juxtapose to suggest a musical aesthetic -- not an aesthetic necessarily of music *per se*, but an aesthetic quintessentially musical: specific but (verbally) inexplicit, experiential but impalpable. The text itself, in the course of its analysis of behavioral and mental structures, intensely preoccupies itself with the aesthetics of normalcy, or, the normalcy of aesthetics, or, even, the sense of therapy (its nominally explicit subject) as the work, constant and unremitting throughout everyone's life, of putting oneself and one's world together via a nexus of world-processing expressivities, mundane and elevated inseparably. Listening, as they suggest, along the paths of the "secret link constituted for the critique of negativity, the exteriority of forces and relations, the denunciation of power...", proposes a discourse which exerts (and cultivates) vision exclusively to look, hearing exclusively to listen. Does the spectre of an issue appear at the convergence point of the sounds, words, images, silences, blacknesses which populate the discourse of *Black /Noise III*? Or is it only a polyphony of times, merging, or not, to ontologize a fused or dispersed experiential residue? But it *was* the suspicion of a lurking issue within the text of *A Thousand Plateaux* which mobilized the setting together of computer-processed piano sounds, interactive playing, singing and speaking sounds, video photographs of domestic objects, bookpages

of artworks, and vocalized fragments of the book itself -- a discourse groping to identify, make palpable, form in its cumulation, an otherwise unaskable question, an otherwise ungraspable thought.

So it seems I was envisioning the ontogenesis of a purely interior aesthetics, determinate but inexorably subjective. But why an aesthetics? And, what for an aesthetics? [And in what terms might it be relevant to interface such personal self-developmental, compositional concerns with the broader, socially directed theoretical and philosophical concerns of my music-professional colleagues?] On the other hand, if I need in personal thinking or public discourse to get behind the surface of sheer philosophical thoughtplay I'm going to have to collide with existential questions about my identification with music, of whether my intellectualizations are plugged into where my personal urgencies are, of what I need to cultivate in my own personal evolution in respect of music, how I think that might most favorably be pursued. So when I ask myself a question about thinking about music it devolves naturally into questions about the relationship between *understanding* and *experiencing*: not questions, for me, of *either/or*, but of hierarchy, of the direction of implication, and, to put it crassly, the most basic questions of personal goals and values. Are the ontologies of understanding-structures intercompatible with the ontologies of experiencing-episodes? Are they contingent upon one another, mutually, or in either direction? In another register, I may ask: is aesthetic perception distinct from extra-aesthetic perception, that is, from what I might call analytic perception? These are questions I've addressed before, but this occasion, and rereading D&G and elsewhere, has given me some new thoughts on them. Further on, I'll retrieve some of those earlier ways of thinking and re-examine them in the light of this moment.

Well, then — a Deleuzian aesthetics, a D&G-ian aesthetics. Not so much emanated from remarks explicitly touching art, music, expression, but from broader world-making perspectives touching issues of psychological and material reality located not only in *Mille Plateaux* but significantly, too, in Deleuze's *Bergsonisme* and in the philosophy of Henri Bergson itself. Because all of these texts address, implicitly and explicitly, the dualism I've suggested, the question of ontological connections and disparities between the world of understandings and the world of experiencings, between the analytic and the aesthetic.

The analytic, we perceive, has great trouble accommodating the phenomena we call *qualities*. So one great attraction of an imaginable Deleuze/Guattarian aesthetics is that it reintroduces the *qualitative* as against the *quantitative* as well as the *multiple*—or, rather, the image of phenomenal *multiplicities*—as against the *unitary*, into the discourses of perceiving-experience, in a way quite following on, quite consistent with, Henri Bergson's philosophy of intuition.

You might say that Bergson, at least implicitly, cultivates the ground of ontological creativity and perceptual relativism, but — significantly for my interest — in a conversely platonistic way: by reduction and elimination from a metaphysical given to an individuated entification as a virtual, hence a definitive, reality. Bergson distinguishes a “psychological unconscious” from an “ontological unconscious”; subjective knowing — through intuition, self-contained, holistic and qualitative, whose content is *time* — from objective knowing, discursive, metricized, intercommensurable, constructively variable, and — spatial. He describes duration as “...a type of multiplicity opposed to metric multiplicity or the multiplicity of magnitude. Duration is in no way indivisible, but is that which cannot be divided without changing in nature at each division.”

So clearly I could — as I sometimes may appear to have done — mystify my intuitive-experiential ontology, confining it terminally to a purely subjective, self-inclosed namelessness, as pure existence individuating itself from occasion to occasion by an internal alchemy experienceable but ungraspable except in and of itself. But this is in conflict with my normal experience, with how I really do cognize music; the intuitive comes to me equipped with an identity — though not necessarily with a discourse. And the analytic comes along too, as a distinct, alienated mode, cognitively significant to the other but obscurely non-interpenetrable in specific with it.

So in what terms could the intuitive have an identity designable but nondiscursive? By bearing a *name* which is *it* but not a *description of it*, a name with which it is semantically fused. A name which might be a proper noun or an assemblage of nouns preceded by indefinite articles. By, in short, being attached to an abstract entity which carries its identity strictly *as a name rather than as a description*. In scholastic philosophy, as in Bergson and in D&G, such an abstract entity is a *haecceity*. This term originates in medieval scholastic philosophy, specifically the work of Duns Scotus. According to Gary Rosenkrantz “The content of a haecceity is an entity’s individuality or identity...because nothing can be identical with more than one thing, there could not be an entity which exemplifies more than one haecceity” (D&G try to maintain a rigorously antiplatonistic version of this position, but that isn’t germane to my purposes here; Bergson’s relativistic platonism, mentioned above, is: a platonistic world which exists only in the time of an experience, and dissolves with the terminal relocation of that experience into the past, into memory; for in a context of what Rosenkrantz calls *immanent realism*, “an *abstractum* cannot exist unless it is exemplified by a *concretum*”).<sup>1</sup>

For this contrivance to be the pillar, the very foundation, of my aesthetics, I have to enter a very strange platonistic world, a world of reified properties. Within such an aesthetic, crucially, metaphors are entirely absent; they are, indeed, categorically nonexistent; their places are occupied by haecceities which do inhabit this world, though in an oddly relativistic way: as abstract entities in one-time-only manifestations: one world-moment, one music-moment, one reception-moment, the entire contents of a momentarily materializing universe

instantaneously dissolving into retrievable memory, into past-time, leaving nonetheless a transformative trace on the whole of consciousness: a state of being whose own haecceity is the identity of the conscious whole. Aesthetics in this sense is necessarily platonistic insofar as it entails the exclusive and specific invocation of singular abstract entities taken as primitives and otherwise unexplicated; analysis, on the other hand, is preternaturally nominalistic insofar as its terms and predicates must persist outside of singular phenomena and must extend permanently, universally, and with unlimited variability and applicability, to an ever-expanding universe of subject phenomena. And every token in a music-analytic model is ipso facto a *metaphor*.\*\*

<sup>1</sup> \*A FORMAL DEFINITION OF HAECCCEITY (from Gary S. Rosenkrantz: **Haecceity: An Ontological Essay**):

$F$  is a haecceity =df.  $(\exists x)(F$  is the property of being identical with  $x)$

Logical structure (according to Rosenkrantz): “necessarily, for any property  $y$ ,  $y$  is a haecceity if and only if there exists an  $x$  such that  $Ryx$ , where  $R$  is the dyadic relation *being the property of being identical with*”.

So the terms of reference in my proposed aesthetics are just names, nouns, and indefinite articles, capturing in natural language the sense of the haecceitical fusion, the semantic fusion of a phenomenon with its own sense.

But the predicates native to the music-analytic universe (as, “I<sub>4</sub>”) are essentially adjectives, adjectival pieces of a semantic network, placed into a one-to-one metaphorical position against the data of a music phenomenon, never transferring to them ontologically or becoming identified with them.

It seems, then, that I want to co-posit two experiential ontologies, call them “the analytic” and “the aesthetic”, not counterpositing but copositing; not mutually exclusive either because in the universe of each the other cannot even be formulated or materialized (at most the aesthetic could be hypothesized within the analytic without the possibility of materializing or being experienced — a purely nominal existence as a word at most). The sphere of multiplicity is the aesthetic sphere; in the analytic sphere, on the contrary, unity is an imperative since predicates must be interdefinable to be functionalized, to be intercoherent (inter-intelligible) — any incoherence in a predicate entails terminal nonfunctionality of an analytic model. Thus, in the world of analysis, what is aesthetically real is perceivable only as fantasy — as fanciful metaphor standing in symbolically for some easily substitutable quantifiable token or structure. Conversely, in the aesthetic world, what is analytically real is perceived as abstract and reductive, alien to experience and devoid of expression.<sup>2</sup>

Names, then, are ontologically expansive, in principle.

Descriptions are in principle ontologically reductive — for the worthy causes of clarity and specificity of focus and perception, and the reification of perceptually significant data.

In my text “Experiences With No Names”, the names I was trying to eliminate are what D&G call nouns “taken in their *extensive* usage, in other words those which function as common nouns ensuring the unification of an aggregate they assume.” Since this is a reductionism I was, and still am, strenuously trying to avoid, I declared names counterproductive unless understood and used as rigorously delimited or imaginatively suggestive imagery held in an indeterminate metaphorical relation to their ostensible denotata. But what was eliminated seemed – and Martin Scherzinger was quick to have it seem this way – to leave a void-space between our experiences and the experience of our experiences, to leave a blank in the place where we in real life *grasp* our own perceptions – gaps exactly complementary to the experiential inadequacy, the counterproductivity, of perception in the analytic mode as a substitute for the aesthetic.

<sup>2</sup> \*\*D&G want to elude this platonism so they convert haecceity into a process rather than an abstract entity; they say: “It is the entire assemblage in its individual aggregate that is a haecceity; it is the assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life.” For my purposes it’s more productive to conceive a haecceity as an abstract entity which dissolves in lockstep with the cessation of the event it qualifies — unlike the analytic, which although it contains no abstract entities, persists as an ongoing, evolving but continuously ontologized semantic network, needing its polyphenomenal persistence to effectuate its generalizing purposes, its quantificational comparatives and variables, within and between individual phenomena to which it is applied.

And then, too, as I tried to emphasize in “Music, as a Music”, the discourse of analysis had its own expressive role in the domain of creative descriptive imaging, the imaginative domain of analytic metaphor. But that still left a major cognitive problematic, which issued from my implicit assumption of a seamlessly unitary conception of the whole universe of personal music experience. As I now distinguish, as I am trying to here, the world of aesthetics from the world of analytic structures, the significances of each in my own musical evolution, and toward its further development, begin to seem real, and interdependent: the aesthetic is a universe of possible multiplicities, unlimited in number or diversity; the analytic, to be minimally intelligible as such, is ineluctably bound to a commitment to unity — that is, to descriptive coherence.

I think I need to theorize and engage my aesthetics, in my pursuit of music as music, to experience my experience as experience without having to enter an antirational mysticism which is counterintuitive to me in any case.

And I perceive an ineluctable need, even just to make that experience possible, for an equally strenuous practice of musically believable analytics; at least, or perhaps at most, for the continuous expansion, connection, and concentration of those specific awarenesses of specificities, that creation of the particular experiential data through which the aesthetic is enabled to create its deepest and most meaningful expressivities.

The piece, *Black /Noise III*, that some time ago began my exploration of this aesthetic attitude is composed with a radical ontological posture: its visual surface ranges from simple blackness to homemade images of domestic commonplaces, high-culture art clichés and blatant exhibitions of outrageous psychosis; its texts, all drawn from *A Thousand Plateaus*, say very obvious and unsubtle things, in sequences skew to their places in the book; the musicsound is composed of separated segments of a piece for computer-processed pianosound interleaved with fragments of realtime playing sessions, including a fragment of Emily Dickinson, and passages of virtual silence. An assemblage, perhaps, which analytic listening and looking would perceive as a random collage of things posing no challenge to identification nor any opportunity for significant sense-making.

In the indefinite-article language of haecceity, however, you might experience it holistically, indivisibly, under some such haecceitic rubric as “some (familiar) images, some (obvious) texts, some (assorted) musics”; but in the world, in the aesthetic world, of *A Thousand Plateaus*, you might also receive it as an accumulating aspiration, a metastatically spreading multiplicity wanting finally to call itself “Becoming-Duration”...

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind:  
Milton Babbitt at Juilliard

The modernist composers of my time seemed to need defensive social tactics to survive the super-high-culture esotericism of the sensibility and thought that was going into their music and reflected the psychic air that they breathed. Milton would sometimes talk of "class traitors" which was an interesting choice of words but, like Elliott Carter, he cultivated a strenuous smokescreen public-social agenda as his defense against the anti-intellectualism coming at him from most of the musical world and pursued relentlessly in a cartoonish way by the New York Times between the 1940s and the 1980s. Elliott's chosen disguise was the childlike retiring modest intuitive Chauncey Gardener whose music just happened to read as fiendishly and aggressively complex and ideologically self-conscious. Even though at the same time he execrated music which was insufficiently "modern" (notably - among the music played on this Juilliard festival - that of Godfrey Winham). Milton's tactic was to play wiseguy hipster, brilliantly unthreatening to anyone nervous that he might actually be earnest about his evolving preoccupation with structural complexities in every musical dimension. The contemporary music world, having inherited the thorough and accurate debunking of cultural elitism of the 1960s, feeling oppressed and weary of the representation of music as a strenuous rather than a recreational phenomenon - a world that appreciates Baudrillard rather than Heidegger - and wanting to be able to enjoy and revere its cultural icons, gleefully adopts the dumbdown versions of these composers - including with equal misperception the work of John Cage, Morton Feldman, Merce Cunningham.

The seriousness in this world manifested supremely by the Juilliard musicians is consummately perfect performance with total immersion and focus - rather



than the extravagant and often messy flights of far-gone composition. This really is what was being celebrated during this week's Babbitt festival: the ultimate conquest of impossible music made to sound domestic by these major-league-caliber young student performers.

If you don't frame this festival as a showcase for stellar Juilliard student performers but take it at its public word, as "The World of Milton Babbitt", you might think the program was actually misprinted from some other event - Milton's world without Elliott, unless you were born after 1980 on the Juilliard campus, perhaps.

## MIXED MESSAGES

(some little reviews)

Surely it was bound to happen that the acoustic qualities of electroacoustic music would provoke imaginative responses in the instrumental domain – a pure experimentalism in the Varese sense, something rather imaginable in the precincts (France) of the IRCAM sensibility, but – in the detente from ultimate IRCAMian scientific austerity encouraged in the postmodern sensibility (and in the space of the very idiosyncratic observational “science” practiced on the acoustics of natural sounds by Messiaen) – there emerges Gerard Grisey finding inspiration in the sonic qualities embedded in sound spectra. Is there something special in the French compositional ear in this direction, some detached acuity of perception of sound that hears into it to componentialize and then reconstruct it out of the supersensitized objectification of the “sound itself”? That is, Berlioz. The Requiem’s trombone-pedal overtone orchestrated into the high flute – like nothing I know anywhere in his German or French models (but of course someone will know!). Just the most onedimensional case in Berlioz – there are many moments where other issues are foregrounded which have that clinical-acoustic revelational quality.

As a listener it isn’t the analytical accuracy of the science of Grisey’s sounds that interests me but the feel of getting a field of x-ray hearings *into* sound that becomes my experiential trip. Not chords, or the gestalt of chords, or the alchemical fusions of chords that enrapture classical music but journey into the interior of chords – or rather chords which experientialize into journeys into the interior of sounds. Grisey’s music composes an - the – *his* - experience not transcribes some analysis.

And – probably partly in consequence – the pieces are – miraculously – seriously, interestingly, significantly different from one another (“musically”, expressively, sonically).

Tristan Murail doesn’t get – or never tries for - the intensity that goes with Grisey’s integrity – impressionistic, theatrical, affects referential to familiar music postures (rhetoric) its bodylanguage penderecki/messiaen/modernmusicisch - ok, probably he just has a more mainstream ear and affective sensibility than Grisey’s.

### **kurtag**

I expect I’ll still be listening to György Kurtag’s music a long time after I’ve stopped listening to Karlheinz Stockhausen’s – this occasioned by rehearing the CD sandwiching the quite generically Stockhausenisch *Gruppen* between two Kurtag pieces, *Grabstein für Stephan* (guitar and orchestra) and *Stele* (orchestra). I keep hearing astonishing things (sounds, especially, and ensemble dramatizations) in both these Kurtag pieces with a nice breather of predictable familiar Stockhausenerei (the rhythm is almost always the homogeneous Modernski spasms, the timbres always the short sharp shock, the shrill shrieky shrek, totally listenable and ear-catching but not finding anything unique because seeming not to have anything unique in mind).

*Grabstein*: you never would have thought to put a guitar into this miasma of an orchestral sound – an auditory inferno with enough terror and pity for a thousand Euripideses. And a constantly on-the-edge-of-your-chair adventure in continuity. And expression you can believe in.

*Stele*: After the trademark polyphonies and harmonies of *Gruppen* (arbitrarily inserted on this CD between 2 Kurtág pieces) the wideopen first-off G octave (soon contaminated with an A-flat) that *Stele* does for you seems like nothing you've ever heard before – can't be right, it's a wideopen orchestral G octave, nicely (classically even) orchestrated – but it so rightly resets the psychic space that its ensuing sincerities and inventivenesses of stark and sober expressivities – ensue feeling like something important – not self-important (cf. KS) – is unrolling in your head. Time stretches and squeezes in multiple dimensions (like the rhythm of inner being), the beast-orchestra grumbles and writhes, straining to find its point of meaning somewhere, in peace or in turbulence, as they ensue...ensuing is what they, it, do, and you (me) with them, to the gravitationally immobileverging stop place.

By the way - don't get me wrong – *Gruppen* is really snazzy Stockhausen.

What would you think about a music which refuses to continue beyond what it perceives its natural dimensions to be? even where those are widely disparate, including, wildly tiny? At minimum, I think you'd notice it, as a salient – and previously un contemplated – aesthetic dimension of a music's being. (Mostly you don't notice, or want to, the length of musics, and mostly do only when there's some complaint involved).

## **harris**

can a piece which doesn't make sense, not make sense differently in different performances? it seems too bad for the roy harris third symphony that we know sibelius's second so well – so the uncloseted ripoffs of both surface licks and depth-of-continuity ideas are brutally exposed – not for their ripoffness, which we don't really mind, rather are charmed by because we like the sibelius second symphony, but for their beyond-the-fringe klutziness – I thought of Milton, how he always cringed at the slightest hint of transitional ineptitude (he's obviously more of a brahmsian than a wagnerian at heart no matter what the chromaticism); so poor harris, groping around to start with for something to take hold (it really stays vague and flabby for an amazingly long time), his sibelian longline fizzling dismally at every thrust for glory, without warning spinning a feathery multivocal intertwining ostinato (all of this going long – harris's greatest virtue for me is his utter refusal to compromise on length (cf. A. Copland's Piano Variations)) reaching no bitter end but just stopping for the big fugue tune – the hook of this piece for sure but we have no idea of what to do with it or where to have it go – it dashes itself stimulatingly against itself for as long as possible, not knowing how to get to the big final socko lick so that has to just start somewhere after b.f.t. has exhausted not itself probably but roy, at least, and me, for sure – and this most sibelius-secondian of flourishes ends it all not with a whimper to be sure.

I have a special soft spot for roy harris's unpandering determination to follow every idea to the gates of hell if that's where it leads no matter how long how far or how weird. As I say it makes the powerhouse copland piano variations seem timid cautious and short-breathed – making sure not to tax your and my attention span overly. so realizing that I think the third is a dog is disappointing. At least, that's Neeme Jarvi's harris third. But that's where the (admittedly sneery but imagine it's actually sincere) question I

started with becomes foregrounded as interesting, with Leonard Bernstein's recording alternating with Jarvi's on the CD player.

This time it's the Drive to Nowhere – all fraught, quivering with dynamism thrusting through and through and through (thrust up, thrust down, thrust right, left – can't find it yet?) landing *hard* on every gauzy bubble, no sibelian plod but an ever-incipient gathering about to be vibrant, about to seriously beat, yes, but not from where you've been (was there a where?) but are going fulltilt (all multislithery and polyharmonic) – in Big Fugue Tune (Hook!) – pounding not on itself now but on me – so I'm not the detached spectator of the fugal disaster but its victim but complicit in the sheer exhilaration of it, energy as pure as vacuity could make it (wideopen to the max) and the beat incipienting cumulatively (the unrelenting intensification curve relentlessly bended) almost to the mexican border, bang and twitter to the apothotic congealing endwhack – congealing pure density around its very own fully earned absence of anywhere. And yet the blanks are there, have come to be there, to be yet filled in, opening vibrant to what might somewhere someway speak them, give them voice, there's a them there, anew there, awaiting a reason and a there to be.

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\*cf. the astonishing early Quintet for piano and strings and - especially - the Seventh Symphony: it's all over the place, yes, but this time it's actually the same place it's all over: a single continuous line evolving lucidly through wildly inventively different places, exiting sublimely.

## **berio**

Luciano Berio's scintillating theatricality overlays the inner middle-of-the-road-ness of a lot of his music (and I do mean Sinfonia). It doesn't often seem to develop the sharpness that turns theatrical surface into dramatic substance. The extrusive avant-theatrical eruptions throughout Sinfonia intrude onto a nicely flowing specimen of between-the-wars modern music, which sort of defeats the avant-purpose because the timesense (via melody-sense and harmony-sense as well as pattern-of-duration-sense) never breaks loose from the mainstream concert music groove (cf. Benjamin Britten, Leonard Bernstein, ...). Everything that's spectacular about Sinfonia is local or, more pervasively, symbolic (you have to be able to be startled out of your mind that a composer of his avant-garde pedigree would play Mahler, etc. inside of his own piece – a piece of Tom Wolfe-ish journalism to notice more than expressive composition to hear). But – so the fuck what? I mean, if I just get over my bias for a more total music-experiential epiphany, it's still scintillating (I like scintillating), entertainingly theatrical (I like entertaining), divertingly topical in its head-turning context-shifting get-this-guys quotation from the MSM repertoire (I can get into titillating too) – a lot to be funned by if you don't get stuck on your demand for transcendence every time out (or get weird because of the press the piece gets everywhere else). Strange, though, what a stodgy pedant (transcendently skillful though) lives below the entrance to Berio's creative cave.

(ps: *Visage* is fantastic, especially Cathy Berberian's screaming to make Diamanda Galas blush...)

### **poulenc**

To find out Francis Poulenc's political views, you have to look elsewhere than to his music; if you want to learn of Francis Poulenc's psychological condition, you have to look elsewhere than to his music; to make contact with Francis Poulenc's deepest spiritual center, you have to look elsewhere than to his music; these are just a few of the many virtues of his music.

### **szzymanowski**

Can a symphony for big orchestra be from the heart? Listening to Bruckner, I think yes. Listening to Mahler, I think no. Listening to Szymanowski, I think well, maybe, but what's in that heart that's trying to emanate from those emotionally charged surfaces? Because it isn't the charge of the surface that reveals the contents of the expression; and yet it's not an overbearing Mahlerian breastbeating mirrorstage obfuscation or a steamy subcutaneous Wagnerian manipulation, more like an earnest struggle to be real within the confines of a highly conventionalized art-social medium.

### **busoni, et al**

Busoni ⇒ Mussorgsky – an unplanned listening sequence, starts something brewing about: expression - music expression - where it lives - within music not as outer-directed expressivity ....so, of course, it goes straight to Haydn (: a sense of music substance as affect-an-sich – expression being just the sense that surface activity is the surface of substance within...). Busoni: we can observe the musical cogency and relevance and inventiveness of every moment but we're on the outside observing something rather than being suffused by it as experience – Mussorgsky seems so much less adept, so much more crude and unmodulated, in all the arts of composition and musical articulation, but every moment speaks experientially – expressively – lodges internally as a holistic something living within, transmuted into experience as experience.

### **elaine barkin's Quartet**

Sonata Form it ain't, this seething mass of edgy sensibility: (first movement) a first movement from yes a cauldron of composition, fracturing the very concept of continuity not in a Webern or post-Webern way because the signals are pointing backward to phrasing and gesture that are as direct as dance and song but diffracted and angularized and impetuously repositioned with a persistent impulse of intense energy intensely wanting to know what itself is to be but diverting at each moment of almost-sentience.

A second episode (epicide?) (second movement: Variations) superimposing its multiple contradictories, temporally adjacent antonyms becoming evermore starkly dialectical simultaneities, songs of ever-higher aspiration abruptly by jagged setpieces, renegade rowshards, mudvolcanic microruptions bopblopping, actually devolving itself into a final wideyed catwary equilibrium. And such an innocent little outmove to end, you're not going to believe and aren't supposed to.

## **persichetti**

There's nothing wrong with Vincent Persichetti's music; it's just that there isn't enough *in* it. Everything is fine, nice colors, nice energies, nice gestures, nice moves from here to there, lots of nice things for players to play: it's all good. Period. You'd like these chords to *mean* something, you'd like those dynamic energies to come from somewhere inside, you'd like those tunes and swells to, well, *express* something – something other than characteristic expressivity. So listening, enjoying everything as it goes by, comes up empty in the afterspaces of all the neat strokes and sprightly licks. What would bring you back to listen again?

## **Straight Beethoven, No Chaser**

Thelonious Monk's asymptotic quests for the DNA-center of every tune, its Beethovenian music-essence, evolves in realtime as though being inside the man's brainhands, being in inexorable progressivity an almost unbearably poignant experience of directed concentration, transcendent awareness, self-awareness, in radically exclusionary as-musical terms, as homed in on its core objective as the Leonore Overture No. 3 homes in on that F# as the defining essence of its G-G descending C major scale (and elsewhere). The signature sequence is 'I don't stand a ghost of a chance', boring ever more subatomically on what after a spell of this processing could be referred to only absurdly as its 'hook'. ('I should care' is so classic as to elude regrooving.) Amazing how the indelible after-imprint of Beethoven saturates everything that strives for 'serious' in our music-creative consciousness...

**Thelonious Himself**, April 1957 (disc 3 of 16-CD Riverside album "All Monk"),  
courtesy of Jim Randall playlist:

April in Paris

I don't stand a ghost of a chance

Functional

I'm getting sentimental

I should care  
'Round Midnight  
All Alone  
Monk's mood (with Coltrane & others)

**The CDs (and 1 LP) I was listening to:**

**Gérard Grisey:**

**les espaces acoustiques** CD 1:  
prologue - périodes - partiels  
Gérard Caussé, viola / Ensemble Court-Circuit, Pierre-Andre Valade.  
CD2: Modulations / Transitoires - Epilogue  
Sylvain Cambreling, trombone; Frankfurter Museumsorchester  
ACCORD 1 CD 465 386-2 (3 discs)

**Tristan Murail: gondwana** pour orchestre (orchestre national de france,  
yves prin)

**désintégrations** pour bande magnétique et 17 instruments (ensemble de l'itinéraire, yves prin) **time and  
again** pour orchestre (orchestre du beethovenhalle de bonn, karl-anton rickenbacker  
MONTAIGNE CD 782175

**György Kurtag:**

**Grabstein für Stephan** (Jürgen Ruck, Guitar) / **Stele** (revised version)

**Karlheinz Stockhausen:**

**Gruppen** (Freidrich Goldman, Marcus Creed, co-conductors)  
Berlin Philharmonic, Claudio Abbado  
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 447 761-2

**Roy Harris:**

**Symphony No. 3**

Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Neeme Järvi  
CHANDOS CHAN 9474 (with Aaron Copland: Symphony No. 3)

**Symphony No. 3**

New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein  
SONY SMK 60954 (with Randall Thompson: Symphony No. 2; David Diamond; Symphony No. 4)

**Symphony No. 7**

Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy  
ALBANY Troy 256 (with Walter Piston: Symphony No. 4; William Schman: Symphony No. 6)

**Quintet for Piano and Strings (1937)**

Johanna Harris, piano  
CRI LP

**Luciano Berio:**

**Sinfonia**

Swingle Singers; Orchestre Nationale de France, Pierre Boulez  
ERATO 4509-98496-2 (with works by Birtwhistle, Carter, Dufourt, Ferneyhough, Grisey, Kurtag, Schoenberg, Xenakis) (5 discs)

**Francis Poulenc:**

**Sonata in d minor for violin and piano**

Christine Michaela Pryn, violin; Joachim Olsson, piano  
CLASSICO CD (with works by Karol Szymanowski and Paul Hindemith)

**Trio for piano, oboe, bassoon**

**Elegie for horn and piano**

**Sextet for piano, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, piano**

Southwest Chamber Music Society  
CAMBRIA CD (with works by Serge Prokofiev)

**Karol Szymanowski:**

**Symphony No. 3, Op. 27 / Symphony No. 4, Op. 60**

Tadeusz Zmudzinski, piano; Polish State Philharmonic Orchestra (Katowice), Karol Stryja  
MARCO POLO 8.223290

**Symphony No. 2, Op. 19 / Symphony No. 4, Op. 60**

Howard Shelley, piano; BBC Philharmonic, Vassily Sinalsky  
CHANDOS CD

**Symphony No. 1 / Symphony No. 2**

Polish State Philharmonic Orchestra (Katowice), Karol Stryja  
NAXOS CD

**Violin Concerto**

Wanda Wilkomirska, violin; National Philharmonic Symphony Orchestr, Witold Rowicki



POLSKIE NAGRANIA CD (with violin concertos by Khatchaturian and Schostakovich) (2 discs)

**Ferruccio Busoni:**

**Arlecchino / Turandot**

National Opera of Lyon

Kent Nagano

VIRGIN CLASSICS CD 0 777 59313 2 7 (2 discs)

**Doktor Faust**

National Opera of Lyon

Kent Nagano

ERATO CD 3984-25501-2 (3 discs)

**Elaine Barkin:**

**String Quartet (1969)**

American Quartet

New World-CRI NWCRL 339 (with Martin Boykan: String Quartet)

**Vincent Persichetti: Night**

**Dances**

The Juilliard Orchestra, James DePriest

NEW WORLD CD 80396-2 (with works by Milton Babbitt and David Diamond)

**Thelonious Monk:**

**Thelonious Himself (April 1957)**

**Disc 4 of All Monk: The Riverside Albums**

Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Gerry Mulligan, Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Griffin, Charles Rouse, Jarod Land, Thad Jones, Clark Terry, Joe Gordon, Oscar Pettiford, Art Taylor, Roy Haynes, Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke, Max Roach. RIVERSIDE CD (16 discs)

## **Group Variations for Computer (1967-70)**

*realized at the Godfrey Winham Laboratory, Princeton  
re-recorded 1993 by Paul Lansky*

... For it is just on a very high degree of motivic determinacy in the relations among times of unfolding of pitch-events, enabled in part through, and in conjunction with, a similar motivic determinateness in the temporal shape of unfoldings within pitch events, that Group Variations stakes its claim to being a particular musical "thing". And since to be a "thing" in music is just to be a determinate structure of determinable differences among observable aspects of elements and events, the extent of particularity to which anything is a musical thing depends on the extent to which, and the numbers of levels on which, not only the fact of difference, but also the nature of difference and the degree of difference (in that order) are cognitively determinable through perception ...

... So the question about a compositional rationale is just a question about what has been relied on to make a difference – or differences – on levels of particularity and distinction sufficient for the projection of all the ideas regarded by the composer as essentials of his piece. In Group Variations, the relation of pitch function to time extent was considered to have been metricized to the degree that time-proportions of event successions are precisely observable on every dimensionally articulated time-scale in the composition, from the smallest pitch-event complex to the entire "sectional" succession ...

*(B.A.B., 1970)*

*Group Variations was first composed for chamber orchestra (1964-67) and was performed in that form by The Group for Contemporary Music (conducted by Charles Wuorinen) in 1967 and 1968. Computer recompositions were completed in 1970, 1972, and 1974. The present recording was reconverted, remixed, and remastered by Paul Lansky in 1993 using his real-time mixing program RT in a NeXT computer at Princeton.*

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*(Original liner notes for the CRI LP release)*

The first (chamber orchestra) version of Group Variations was performed in 1967 and 1968 by the Group for Contemporary Music under the direction of Charles Wuorinen. The computer version was begun in 1969, went through several intermediate versions, some of which were performed, and attained its present (presumably final) condition in 1973.

During that time, the sound-synthesizing resources primarily used were those of Princeton University and Bell Telephone Laboratories; and the technical and auditory resources of Barry Vercoe, Hubert Howe, Richard L. Cann, Godfrey Winham, and J. K. Randall, among other musical habitués of the Princeton University Computer Center, were persistently exploited.

For those whose auditory way into Group Variations might be improved by some extra-intuitive assistance, the following leads are offered: first, no matter what the prospect of computer-electronic performance tends to prepare you for, listen to Group Variations as polyphonic ensemble music, whose sonic surfaces are the fused images of networks of musical qualities, the sounds of such qualities rather than 'sounds' in some isolated, exotic sense. A pervasive shaping focus for the images, amounting to a conceit of the piece, is that every sizable passage of Group Variations - including the 'passage' consisting of the whole piece - begins as if suddenly tuning into the middle of something, and ends as if suddenly tuning out of something new that had just previously begun. And, as each image is registered in the form of a phrase- or tune-stretch, give particular notice to what it subsequently becomes, as it merges as a component part, into a still larger, single, complex image.

Here another conceit of Group Variations, the musical resonance of an idea of complex congruence, may emerge: images of progressively larger time dimensions always fuse, in increasingly elaborate senses, into the same quality-network shape, so that wholes constantly retrieve and reincarnate the shapes of their component parts, and are subsequently themselves so retrieved and reincarnated. If, for a start, you listened to the image-chunks consisting first of the first four-attack stretch, then, of the first two such stretches, then, of the first two distinct stretch-type passages, and so on, you might get the feel of the process by which each trajectory 'arrives' at the same 'place' relative to its predecessors. Moreover, if you happened to identify the two stretch-types mentioned as complementary landscapes, the first conspicuously including places where several sounds attack together, and the second, places where single sounds attack several times in succession, many of the characteristics of the passages that ensue may come into sharper focus.

Those interested in further guidance toward the specific depths of these particular surfaces (to paraphrase a phrase of Jim Randall's) are referred to the final chapter of *Meta-Variations*, and the score.

To Robert Gross

Hi Rob,

First of all let me tell you about the genesis of Group Variations II:

The Group For Contemporary Music commissioned the original version of Group Variations; I was working on it from 1964 to 1967; the Group gave the first performance in Fall 1967, and a second performance at a Fromm Foundation concert at Town Hall in 1968. I attended all the rehearsals - which in those days were many (40 hours for the first performance), and I watched these intrepid dedicated and super-virtuoso musicians struggle to play the music which was so intuitive and natural to me. I thought as I watched that however Group Variations manifested where my musical being had traveled, its realization violated every principle of my sense of what music represents as an expressive art for humans; and that what playing music meant to me was a totally creative and personally engaging expressive practice - not in any way primarily or even significantly an exercise of sheer skill. And then I thought: when I write "oboe" on the left of a score stave, I intuit a sound, an instrument as a sound; but what I am actually doing is determining what some fellow-person will be mobilizing themselves to do to satisfy the demands of my notation. And as I watched and listened, I felt that this activity of "getting it right" was all-consuming, and its objective was completely to realize the content of my expression. This is not my social conception of music: when a musician, even an orchestral musician (the limiting case) plays Beethoven, execution is essential, but every player is engaged musically; when I play Beethoven at the piano, I am fully engaged in my expressivity, which is what Beethoven's proposals via his notation give me access to - the music belongs to me. But Group Variations also belonged to me, and not to its players, and that disturbed me profoundly.

So I thought that if I needed to create music which (at that time) was the most complicated to play of anything the players had previously addressed, for humanistic reasons I need to do my own performance - since it would always be my own expression. Only a player who knew and related to the score as the composer did - knowing the piece as a total expression rather than in terms of a separate part - could possibly share in it musically as I did. So the obvious path was to make my own performance - and that meant digital synthesis, at Princeton and Bell Labs, first on the IBM 7094 (MUSIC IV) and then on the IBM 360/91 (MUSIC 360). And the idea was not to simply "play" the piece but to re-orchestrate it so that the medium was a resource for expressing the aesthetic sense of the piece in an indigenous form rather than a compromise with the ideal sound-image of the instrumental version.

But Group Variations also is the fulcrum for my answer to your second question - about "style".

In fact, Group Variations was already a response to musical circumstances (apart from the social ones mentioned above) with which I was - as a lifelong intuitive musician - very uncomfortable. This is best expressed as a counterintuitive characteristic of "serial" music: the continuity of cumulative time-creation which in my central musical paradigm (late Beethoven) is the entire expressive story of composition seemed truly inaudible in most of the "serial" music I heard copiously at McMillan Theater (Columbia) and Carnegie Recital Hall in my many years (10 of them as Music Critic for The Nation) in the midst of New York new music. What I can roughly call the episodic rhythmic continuity of those pieces, serial in that sense as well as in syntactical structure, alienated me from my fundamental sense of "how music goes". So Group Variations builds a fundamental concept of cumulative

continuity into its serial structure: the "theme" is the first 8 measures; the "theme" is then retroactively the first 16 measures; the "theme" is then retroactively the first 32 measures; and so on - until the "midpoint" at which (the entire pitch structure retrograding as M5) the rhythm self-compresses - all of course in consonance with the pitch structure, which proceeds through different numbers and dispositions and relationships of voices throughout. Another rhythmic aspect of the piece is the multiple listening threads formed by intersections among the instrumental parts: two successive notes in a part are mostly parts of two different pitch threads as well as the one they form as a sequence, depending on which other instrumental threads they intersect. And - there's a lot more but that will give you an idea of the "classical" musical impulse that underlies the piece (this is a theme which totally motivates the essay about the piece called *Meta-Variations*, which is essentially devoted to the idea of how you can use your experience of previous music to liberate rather than inhibit your creative freedom of musical invention - it is totally about listening to music in a compositional way, a mode of suggestive ear training rather than a revelation of the "scoop" that nails any music to any particular interpretation or listening experience).

So the step that followed *Group Variations* is the one you're asking about - but it was just a further step in the same direction: I moved out of New York (to Bard) so that I could hear more of my inner musical voices - wanting to go further within, deeper, closer to my musical intuition rather than continuing to journey further out to the outer reaches of music-cognitive possibility as in *Group Variations*. ("*...my chart shines high where the blue milk's upset...*") got its title from a childhood experience which made an indelible impression on me: listening to James Joyce reading Anna Livia Plurabelle on headphones in the Brooklyn Public Library when I was still a tyke. And writing it for and dedicating it to Milton Babbitt, my close friend since 1955, on his 60th birthday was totally meaningful: this was a completely serial piece; its subject was totally "pitch magic" - the transformation of the sounds of pitches in sequence by their mutual interpenetration, which was how I understood Classical harmonic rhythm (read my "In Quest of the Rhythmic Genius" in memory of Stravinsky for the explanation of this ) - and which motivated my using a timbrally monochromatic medium - piano - to eliminate the "color" that comes from anything but pure pitch magic. And also - I wanted to write a piece for, not performance, but for a player, in the spirit of a Bach 2-part invention, where the innocent player just does what the score suggests and, magically, hears these amazing musical qualities emerging from under their fingers. "For a pianist alone" was the original subtitle for the piece (it seemed a little pompous so I left it out later). And the "serial" structure is quite strict, but the transformations of the governing hexachord are not the canonical 12-tone ones, but reinvented as part of the compositional invention. Perhaps the heart of the piece is the sequence of probably 125 (I didn't count) quarter notes in the part I call "the Chopin section" where there's a set of the same 6 notes, always two at a time (every attack in the piece is 2 at a time), turning its face phraseologically to be at all times a four-note foreground harmony with a two-note inflecting component) - even though of course it's always the same 6 notes. But as you can hear easily, time, cumulative, resonating, deflecting, sustaining sonority (prolonging, I guess, in your terms) and making new time in the unfolding, is the essence of expression here.

And this suggested a piece where the score talks to the player (for Roger Sessions at 80) and then to literally composing entirely by playing and soundmaking with other people - which I did exclusively for 12 years, in hundreds of soundmaking sessions ranging from solo to party-sized groups (always for our own aesthetic discovery, never for audiences) - from

which I emerged (for various reasons) and started writing music again (in 1997, when I retired from Bard). And I don't know if any of my musical intuitions qualifies as comparable to "experimental" composers (I relate certainly to lots of music, and disrelate to some) - but more to the governing idea that all composition is lower-case experimental, to the extent that I don't feel I ever "know how" to compose, and each episode of composition is almost literally an essay in "learning to compose" in some sense previously unexperienced.

So I'll sign off - and let me know if there's anything you'd like me to send you - my first string quartet is a dramatization of the above, since the first two movements were composed in 1957-58, and the third (always intended) was composed in 2004-5. I don't know if Dorota sent this one to you as well, but it's a lovely performance by the Polish DAFO Quartet from 2007.

***Language ,as a music***  
***six marginal pretexts for composition***

" ... something that only a composer could have written" was how Jim Randall introduced *Compose Yourself* to me, to suggest why it might be relevant to publish it in a composers' magazine. My revelation was: there are things you want to say, anxieties you want to engage, arising from anything in your life, arising in your perception from your perspective as a composer, that are not music itself (because they're explicitly *about* something(s)) or poetry either (because that's a different perspective of saying), and cannot be discourse (because that's a closed world in which some things are unsayable, or even indiscernible except as composite masks) - but such things may, still, be composable as something - not as music, but as music is composed, as something being what it is about: as languagemusic, composed out of the specific sensibilities which belong to you as composer, listener, reader, writer, player, speaker. To engage your reading in your writing as you engage your listening in your composing. Even though - maybe even because - my preoccupations, my compositional habits, my literary habitats are distinctly different from Jim's, *Compose Yourself* did not just open the enormous creative space it inhabits fully by itself, it gave me the means to transform my own mental universe, liberating thoughts, awarenesses, images (" ... resurrecting a new world ... a new way of constructing, of imagining ... " [*Compose Yourself*, pp. 11-12]) - and, inevitably, texts: first, "In Quest of the Rhythmic Genius"; ultimately, *Language ,as a music*:

*April, 1979: Barrytown, New York; August, 1979: San Diego, California:* Part of Kenneth Gaburo's extraordinary generous Lingua Press project is to propagate essays in 'extended composition'; in particular, he's gathering ideas for his monster 'whole-language' collection *Allos* consisting of texts about language mostly by composers; so, after publishing our twin piano pieces in a gorgeous album, he invites Jim and me to produce *Language ,as a music* and (Jim's) *Something Medieval* in the Lingua "Collection Two" series. Typesetting *Language ,as a music* becomes my first move into hands-on type composition, which eventually becomes a normal practice for my work. Susan Quasha, who is principal artist-designer for the uniquely artist-supportive small press called Station Hill in Barrytown, works tirelessly and meticulously with me to refine every graphic detail of the text. We're using an early programmable (pre-computer) typesetting system called Alphacomp; cumbersome, but its output is controllable and good-looking, and it's totally accessible to my input as no commercial composing-room is. When we're finally done, I deliver the output by hand to Kenneth Gaburo in San Diego - Alphacomp makes no duplicates, and saves no files after spitting out galleys (they have to be cut and pasted by hand like sounds in a tape studio). The book, with a surprise hard cover designed by Kenneth, is a magnificent token of Kenneth's interpersonal largesse, and of his dead-serious pursuit of publishing as a medium of creative composition (see his and David Dunn's *Publishing as Eco-System*).

*November, 1979: A Faculty Seminar at Brook House, Bard College:* The fortress of audio-reinforcement gear, speakers, table lamp, bookstand, piano that minimizes the speaker/player's visual presence ensures that what's 'live' in the performance is just a voice: my voice, placed at people's ears rather than coming at them from where my body sits. It's also a

comfort zone for me to be able to speak and play for an hour and fifteen minutes sustaining focus on an unbroken continuity of utterance. Afterward, everyone assumes that the voice of the character portrayed in Part V is my 'real' voice, putting out my 'real' message. And everyone tells me how much they enjoyed the Irving Berlin song in Part IV.

*May 4, 1980: Center for Music Experiment, U.C. San Diego: C.M.E.*, directed then by Virginia Hommel Gaburo, inhabited by a credible collection of intense people in a variety of intense ways; Jean-Charles François and John Silber in particular interacted so intensely with me that we practically laminated; but almost that much intensity was routine for the typical interactions with and among the citizens of that community: Warren Burt, David Dunn, Virginia Hommel Gaburo, Diamanda Galas, Jonathan Glazier, Ron George, Anne Hankinson, John Mackay, Will Parsons, Ron Robboy, Isobel Terceo, Richard Zvonar - the ones I can remember. My self-invited performance of *Language, as a music* surfed on these intensities - it was effectively conducted by the ( - intense! - ) body language of Diamanda Galas glaring furiously from the front edge of listeners. The giant gamelan hanging on the wall facing me sang back whenever my voicesound crossed a certain resonance threshold. I implicate them all in the performance - they're all present and tangible on the CD. (The pianomusic movement (Part II) is borrowed from Sarah Rothenberg's performance of the long piano piece on Open Space CD 1 - C.M.E. had no piano so we had to roll it on tape there too.) Right after (it seemed way too soon after) I got intensely lectured on the manifold deficiencies of the performance and the piece - one colleague assigned me to remedial attendance at her next-night concert of extended-vocal-cum-electronic screaming; another assigned me to remedial study of Bunraku puppet theater. Personally, my only regret was the unscheduled (and still unfortunate) crescendo/decrescendo toward the end of Part I. Otherwise, my event felt to me like an integral piece of an average C.M.E. week of way-of-life practices (including crucially playing/movement sessions with the intrepid KIVA techno-exploratory ensemble). C.M.E. was so promising a model for music-intellectual-creative-performance experimentation that I was scarcely surprised when it disappeared soon afterward.

*Compose Yourself*, C.M.E., the C.M.E. community, KIVA, the gamelan are, for me, embedded in the sounds of this performance, the looming spectres bonded inextricably into the identity of this piece.

6.99  
Barrytown, New York



LINER NOTES FOR OPEN SPACE CD 27:

Benjamin Boretz: Violin Concerto (1956-57). Charles Castleman, Violin. Eastman Composers' Orchestra, Geoffrey Pope, conductor. Recorded and mastered by Paul Coleman, 2010.

Aspen summer 1956: Stanley Hoffman was solo violinist, studying with Roman Totenberg (whose daughter Nina was there too, running around the tent with her bf Ursula Oppens, two 11-year-olds on their way to stardom); it was David Epstein's first concert assignment as a conducting student of Izler Solomon; legendary cosmologist George Gamow was as usual snorting (or was it snoring?) unselfconsciously somewhere in the audience in the Aspen concert tent in the middle of its mudfield - there was hardly anything paved in Aspen then - and my summer friends/teachers Darius Milhaud and Charles Jones were playing it very cool as this thing they had midwived got reasonably unwound (it was difficult in its time) by the Aspen orchestra; neither Stanley nor David had really solicited much input from me - fine points were not in play, nor did the Aspen trustee who supplied the tape for the concert remember to erase the Mozart 20th Piano Concerto slow movement indelibly engraved thereon. So I have only memory, no record. But the memory is crystalline, sound and even sight, and this is where I - finally - can give it daylight. That was the first movement; back at Brandeis, Arthur (Berger) tolerated me through the rest, offering minimal interference (I did know the ranges, and what else is there to know? And anyway no one would think of actually playing it)... After the fact, at UCLA, it was my passport to friendship with Lukas (Foss). But then another life ensued. These - Milhaud, Charles Jones, Stanley Hoffman, David Epstein, Arthur, Lukas: people who made this period of my young musical life so intensely exhilarating, and it is them I think of when I channel the concerto down from its hiding place right below the surface of bright memory. My young-composer colleagues at Aspen and Brandeis too: John Herbert MacDowell, Tony Strilko, David Ward-Steinman, Jack Gottlieb, Joel Spiegelman, Marty Boykan, David Burrows, Barclay Brown, Elaine Barkin...; we all stimulated and inspired each other so much that I imagined that the life of a composer was a perpetual celebration of communal engagement and mutual appreciation. And *Perspectives of New Music* was conceived in that time, the communitarian expression of that euphoria.

In the present instance, 55 years on, that shared euphoria, battered but only exomorphically bowed, renaisses in the soul-colleagueship of Bob Morris: this is, astonishingly, his project, the endpoint of a chain beginning with a notational encoding in Sibelius with midi-box output which somehow he could penetrate as a music, to give me its rehearing even in midi, and then to enlist Charlie Castleman and Geoff Pope in a project of actual realization.

Listening, though, is not nostalgia; no buried sensations flood back; there's just this piece that I can't quite imagine having composed - though I can conjure, distantly, the astral projections of conceiving and writing each passage: a desolate attic of an abandoned church in Aspen where the opening solo materialized in the light of a forlorn ceiling bulb; a pathetic upright in a Boston slumflat whose thunky noises undermined conviction about risky 2nd- and 3rd-movement soundthoughts.... But I recognize, rather than identify; consume, rather than impersonate; witness, rather than re-live. It's not me; but it was.

12/2010

A Note on Ben's Violin Concerto  
Robert Morris

In the 1950s, Ben Boretz jumped into the world of American music with a set of imaginative and exceptional compositions, making his way as emerging composer, graduate student, music critic, and musical citizen. Among his most ambitious pieces of that time is the Violin Concerto, whose first movement was premièred at Aspen in 1956, the rest composed shortly thereafter.

As Ben's musical concerns continued to change in a time of turbulence and transience for composers in Europe and America, his music followed suit, eventually leading to a period where most of Ben's creative output was rarely in the form of composed music, but in groundbreaking texts and improvisational activity. Ben returned to writing extensive pieces in the late 1990s, with his *Black/Noise I* for processed piano, leading to *Un-* for orchestra, *O* for piano, *Downtime* for piano and percussion, and his remarkable *String Quartet*—the first two movements written around the time of the concerto, and the last written over forty years later in 2005—all these works recorded on *Open Space* (CDs 13, 18-20, and 23). In accord with these compositional vicissitudes, the complete violin concerto remained unperformed or recorded until March 2010.

A few years ago, Ben sent me a score and MIDI realization of the concerto. While listening to MIDI versions of music really meant to be performed is usually unpleasant, this piece somehow transcended the realization and greatly impressed me. I cannot say exactly what it was that moved me so much, but I remember thinking that I had no idea what made this vast, thirty-minute piece work. On the face of it, the piece seemed a series of episodes, each interesting and vital, but amazingly unconnected by the usual musical rhetoric or musical structures that are supposed to guarantee musical unity. Of course, in the aftermath of post-modernism, unity has—thankfully—been deconstructed, so it is no longer an important or necessary feature of music or anything else. But it wasn't that the concerto wasn't unified, per se; rather it seemed coherent and integrated without any of the usual compositional techniques or orientations—off the shelf or otherwise. Moreover, passages that clearly refer to parts of compositions by Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Bartok are at home in the Concerto, like guests or friends who show up at some spontaneous get together. I felt, as I have in some of Ben's other works, that the Violin Concerto seemed to have intuitively emerged, but certainly not at once, without the mediation or help of a formal—or formalizable—compositional practice. And there was more, the violin writing seemed perfectly well wrought, the instrumentation deft and idiomatic, and the musical character of each musical episode deliciously particular in orchestration, texture, and phrasing. So I told Ben that he ought to get a performance of this wonderful piece, and it turned out I could help and so I did.

Now that I know the concerto well, I see some of the ways Ben makes connections—often involving motives that continuously transform, or by the sequence of orchestral ensembles and registers; nevertheless, my initial reaction still stands. In any case, the concerto is deeply felt, something that Charles Castleman has brilliantly and ardently projected, so much so that the listener might think the Concerto was written for him—or that if Charlie had written a concerto, this would have been it. This is a rich work that will repay careful listening time and time again.

**Vignettes of Old Masters VIII:  
Two pieces by Robert Morris  
(a review and a liner note)**

**bob morris /gary snyder "this bubble of a heart"/ karen clark galax quartet /  
innova #795: songs on poems by gary snyder by fred frith, w. a. mathieu, robert  
morris, roy wheldon**

I go into experiential overdrive listening to Bob's Gary Snyder song for its unflinching on-sleeve expressivity, for how it puts my working Bob-paradigms into baseline meltdown, coming on with molten four-voiced sirensinging string quartet sound, flowing on to amiably reinvent harmony, time, instrumental-vocal quality, ensemble texture, text utterance. In meaning and surface both. Poemexpression alchemizing into pitch-structured spectral magic, as rigorously formed as any Bobwork I know. Expression sweet and passionate without nostalgia, no retro-style exercises slyly loaded with kneejerk emo-response cues. Just Bob's own cutting-edge utterly post-postmodern language (free as a bird to do its own thing). And Karen's voice speaking, crooning, ululating, tracing always unecstatic expressive parabolas seamlessly, unstrained, innocent wholly of cheap theater. You don't mistake her voice for Gary Snyder's voice; but his voice is all there, unmistakably composed-in within and above Bob's, Karen's, and the Galaxes', reflected, reconceived, recontemplated, understood.

**Robert Morris: *Quattro per Quattro*  
Momenta String Quartet  
Open Space CD 32**

You don't have to "understand" Bob Morris's music to be aware of how good it sounds. In fact you might be drawn into its sound world first before you articulate the surges and ebbs of its other energies. There's nothing neutrally "structural" about its passages: its gestures are organic energies; its patterns speak as telling utterances, speaking explicit sense. Speaking sense, however, purely as musicmusic (as Jim Randall and I used to call certain phenomena within our Inter/Play improvisation sessions): so don't reach outside of music to grasp the expressive coloration of these configurations. And perhaps - to optimize your experience of Bob's soundsongs - don't even grope for fancy descriptive language to apply to them, in the hope of a fast track to full immersion. Not just in the case of Bob's music, but especially in the case of his music, that may lead you counterproductively away from the unmediated sonic clarity of the indigenous but airtight sonic vessels it creates. If you can imagine pursuing your successive listenings to progressively release your extramusical or metamusical baggage, you might possibly reach a place of unobstructed sonic awareness; this is the place where Bob's music has its maximum intricate micromeaningful being. So the pervasive canons in *Quattro per Quattro* aren't most vividly experienced as cognitions that they are canons; that raw fact underlies but doesn't constitute or illuminate their musical effects. Listen hard and unencumbered and you can hear something tightly and densely involuting, a gravitational field about to go by in a blur but instead playfully, tenderly unraveling to

materialize as a skein of singly singing, singly gyrating parts, embodied voices even, enacting gracefully the strands of separate sense and gesture that turn out to have been embedded as voices of the molten monolith from which they emerge. And it's always the sound, always the residue of how it "sounds"— not really "good" as I started out saying, but so very precisely particular, so – massively or exquisitely – superspecific, more poignantly specific than your intuition of specificity is quite ready for.

[Of course, given that the intricately explicit, complexly evolving denotative pitch geographies informing every molecule of *Quattro per Quattro*, can easily preoccupy your knowing ear, you might be drawn to hearing, indexing, appreciating those concrete quantified properties — and perhaps never know the musicmagic qualities that are the experiential payoff of their presence. But music, as Bob knows well, is poetry. Its meanings are the resonances that are the residue of composing, ordering, conjoining, transforming, ramifying quantities and qualia, the unique specificities that ontologize time uniquely as experience. They (the meanings) are experiential effects, not equivalent to the facts that may be claimed to cause them; their cognition is individual, subjective, and indeterminate and can be attributed incorrigibly to unlimited underlying structures. Bob's own personal practice (as I understand it) is multitracked: he takes in all palpable dimensions as a simultaneity, rather than absorb them all into a single focus of unmediated attention to which all material details are organic background, integrated into the listening organism as part of its holistic identity rather than as components of its immanent attention. So in that sense my recommended mode of "reading" is skew to his: but his capacity for multiplicity is so uniquely vast that I'm sure he will insist that he can incorporate even this into his grand mental-experiential-musical-panoramic soundscape. So creative listeners can improvise for themselves: there are at least as many possible modes of musical experiencing as there are musical experiencers.]

Harmony. (Same as Counterpoint:) In globs of sound crunching or soughing, in the intertouching of unreeling sound-beings, intimately touching in free mutual orbit, in the color of a cascading blurry slide between distinct consecutive soundpoints, recreating my sense of "direction" into a multiplicity of space-translational energies. As: in a flash a simple single sound metastasizes into a tangle of asynchronic trajectories, each distinct in time- and sound-point crisscrossing modulating simultaneous shapes with mutually mirroring strandshapes, a flash and its afterblur spelling meaningful configurations any way they are read but converging as instantaneous explosive action so your reading is a sonic aftermath of something very particular whose very expressive message is to be superliminal internally - but then instantly stretching out to re-sound itself as shaped action and utterance retroactively resonating its own component images in a coherently transformed form, a patient re-unfolding over 20 times the timespace of the opening flashblur. A beginning sequence that sets the timescale, soundscale, and image-diction as both event and mindsetting field of receptual awareness for what follows. And much of the music that follows is a "discussion" of the evolving ways that parts of a sounding whole can be "like" each other but never identically, either within or between their perceived moments of occurrence. As *Quattro per Quattro* goes, its constantly modified retrieval of past moments dramatizes the emergence of new images - evolution taking place on two levels, within qualities and in the trajectory of image succession. And of course it ends with a surprising image/nonimage of its beginning. Of all Bob's pieces, *Quattro per Quattro* induces in me the sense that I'm channeling Bob's way of hearing,

of experiencing not just music, not just sound, not just time, not just an intricate play of geometries, not just *élan vital*, not just expression...

A word on the recording: both Bob and I have been elated, moved, impressed with how the Momenta Quartet played not only their hearts out, but also their thoughts, hands, their remarkable feel for and grasp of two musics so disparate in character and content.

**Robert Morris**

**"This Bubble of a Heart" (Gary Snyder)**

Karen Clark, contralto; Galax Quartet

INNOVA CD 795 ("On Cold Mountain": Songs on Poems of Gary Snyder by Roy

Wheldon, Fred

Frith, Robert Morris, W. A. Mathieu)

JOHN LUTHER ADAMS: EVERYTHING THAT RISES (String Quartet) – [2019]

When you give yourself fully to something it always engraves itself meaningfully in your consciousness; I never feel I have seen a painting unless I stare at it for a time that seems to leave the realm of measured time. So here is John Luther Adams's string quartet which performs this act of dwelling for its listeners, not just by the sheer clocktime expanse it occupies, but by the sonic time-expanses it draws forward, which it accomplishes by not going anywhere, but by evolving being in its fixed column of time, never still but never moving as it changes in its timespace. So its being is in itself immersed in time and engraves itself significantly, just by the persistence of its dwelling. It does not ask to be heard as a consecutive series of events, configurations, actions, phenomena, but as an *it* – like the life-experience of *now*, the life-experience of *life*, it is always only what it is, totally determined by every previous *now* and the *now* of now. Its infinities are those of the continuum, not of the integer succession. So the experiential method of this piece opens up the space of the infinite depth of a moment; but there still remains the issue of how that depth is materialized. So I can totally get into the momenthood of this 50-minute soundflux and feel its gravure on my psyche but I can't ride it into the deeper depth of its moment. It evolves like a candle flame, upward, and I am with it throughout its exhalation, but when it's gone, it's gone.

### 3: (A Train of Thoughts)

*No of course I don't care if you listen. But to stay aware that I need to.*

There is reasoning back from experience.  
There is reasoning forward to experience.

Reasoning back: beginning from everything, filtering everything selectively to refine focus interpret reassemble anew always residues of unprocessed phenomena...

Reasoning forward: building experience projectively experimentally preemptively testing empirically against feedback assemble always containing all and only its own content wholly processed...

Are the fruits of either to be despised?  
Can be done reductively or expansively.  
Can be done ideologically or analytic/critically.

Is a report of experience necessarily an assertion of preexistent attitude; or can an attitude arise in a feedback loop with experience, descriptive/explanatory/analytic/hermeneutically?

But theory always needs to be retroactive to be in touch with experience - and it always is in formulation but loses it in application.

So either first it is there and then you think it; or what you hear is what you have thought. Depends on whether you want final clarity or endless expansiveness, lucid thought or elusive mystery

*Art, as practiced, is a zero-sum game. Your towering mastery is my cowering inferiority (or I guess vice versa). Expression is not necessarily even a game at all, and conceivably accommodates infinite varieties of interest outside of any defining issue of hierarchization. ("Great Expressor": sounds silly, right?) So maybe Art and Expression are two separate issues which merge in Works of Art; or just different ways of looking at (or listening to the whistle of) the blackbird.*

If I am irrevocably immured in some mindset, be it historical cultural or genetic, what use is the consciousness that this is so to me? Since - if it is indeed the case - the supposed self-awareness consequent on this consciousness must also be irrevocably, indiscernibly - and hence unsusceptibly to sentient self-reconstruction - so psychically imprisoned. So my freedom and my unfreedom are experientially indistinguishable, both experienceable purely as freedom and reality.

Such consciousness must itself be similarly immured and therefore disqualified as an external perspective.

### *The Sense of Sensibility*

*Let's say the sense of music is how it sounds. But that's confusing. Because how it sounds is how you listen. And that's confusing, too. Because how you listen is how your head is configured to receive [and process] incoming acoustic signals. Your mindset. So we're back to theory. In some sense. Unquestionably, inevitably. Composing chooses, listening discriminates. No cognitive attitude, no music. Could be unconscious, subconscious. Probably better not selfconscious. Depending on you who you are, determining who you are, musically.*

*Generally speaking a theory is a story you tell yourself before, during, and after the fact of a musical receiving, inventing, or recovering. (Or a person.) Subconsciously, consciously, or selfconsciously.*

when does secondary consciousness happen?

is it a quality within an experience, or is it a retroanalytic selfconsciousness subsequent to an experience?

what is a dream?

is primary consciousness an experience? is it ever experienced? is it ever uncontaminated with a coterminous secondary consciousness?

Instead of theory let's have dispositions to experience...

These will actually determine the musical ontologies we experience - infinitely indeterminate within that disposition though they are.

### The Theory of Nothing a medieval way to music

Nothing is really like anything else.



# The Universe of One, And, the Music of the Other

for the UCSD Integrated Studies Seminar, 3.16.2013

*I am going to say some things, I am going to read some things, I am going to play some things. [But first I want to express my sorrow for the people who were killed and hurt in Boston yesterday...once again, there seems no way to assimilate events of that nature into the scope of these concerns of ours which normally feel so urgent...]*

*I was going, in any event, to open with music; there is a piece I composed recently in memoriam, for Milton Babbitt, which feels right: The Memory of All That, a sonnet of John Donne for Milton Babbitt..]*

I

## The Universe of One

Making distinctions, making judgments. Each bringing into consciousness a distinct panorama of qualities, a distinct gestalt of identity experienced. You could say they were the same properties experienced differently, from a different perspective, in terms of different predicates. Or you could say that their outputs are ontologically distinct, that judgmental experiencing is always preemptive, creating experience by filtering incoming properties through a normative dictionary and rulebook. Of course, you have to make distinctions in order to make judgments; and it would seem that in the history of each person they originate simultaneously, in a moment at the birth of consciousness, in that ineluctable moment of traumatic ontological dissonance when the world suddenly consists of things, is not just identical with the unitary ur-thing of unarticulated being, the moment of I-discovery which is in fact the originary ontologization of the other, the intrusive other. When a distinction intrudes as an unresolvable contradiction of the unity of being. The traumatic moment of first ontological dissonance. It may be imagined that the shock of ontological nonconsonance, experienced traumatically as ontological dissonance, a flight-or-fight survival issue, is the nascent moment of thought, inceiving the natural history of the labor of perpetual self-normalization, the normalization of one's own bedrock ontology, one's moment-to-momentarily incorrigible intuition of the identity of what phenomenon just happened, of what entity just reified, the perpetual labor of creating reality, of maintaining sanity.

So - ordinary experience indelibly marks each of us, ontologizing our consciousness from that point forward so as to - at least - color every experience thenceforth in a way that is locked into our own individual historical progression. At the gross-consciousness level, the register of practical and social life, the chaos that you could imagine resulting from strenuous and critical interactions of beings experientially opaque to one another is avoided by the imposition of culture - that is, the tyranny of conventional wisdom that tells you how to interpret what is happening, what to think of it, and, indeed, what it is that is in fact happening. Conventional wisdom teaches you what to experience when you experience your own experience, teaches you what to say you are experiencing, teaches you to believe you are experiencing what you say you are experiencing. It doesn't just teach you what distinctions to make, it defines and circumscribes the limits of what a distinction is, what the issues are on the basis of which distinctions are and can be made, and what value to place on which side of each distinction. Obviously, creating the cultural level of consciousness not so much to align all the chaotically disparate natural consciousnesses of people as to supersede them, using them as the originating engines of undefined experiential energies which are given substance, reality, meaning, and intersubjectively intelligible properties, enabling the level of reality which is functionally intersubjective.

And it works; the world works, even if it seems to work in frequently deplorable ways. Without judgment, the world doesn't work; without distinctions, there is no world. But of course we're talking about music; and the question is whether that chaotic disparity of sensibilities which underlies the orderly uniformity created by conventional wisdom is not crucially the realm precisely of the aesthetic; the place where the distinctions are precisely the ones that matter at the heart of the enterprise of creative expression. That the well-tempered effort to hear conventionally, in terms of the givens of musical culture, of the distinctions and judgments ontologized within their defined terms, is in fact sensitivity training in the service of a certain particular register of sensitivities, a powerful homogenizing agent which makes possible the conduct of musical life, its way of sorting out issues of performance, of composition, of description, of opinion, as if they all made mutual sense - and thus enabling the intelligible continuity of the cultural institution that enacts and reproduces itself as music, as the reality of what music is.

But it may be imagined, and I do imagine it, that the chaos of incommensurable and perhaps not even mutually intelligible musical ontologies that live invisibly (because they have no culturally defined conventional identities) in the cracks and below and even apart from the surfaces of "normalized" music actually embody the primal origins of the lust for music, the source of its creative power, of its capacity for penetration to the very personal souls and minds of its makers and receivers. Possibly it's why no one deeply involved in a musical practice seems to feel completely comfortable with anyone else's performance, composition, description, opinion: because the ontological imperative is to represent all performances, compositions, descriptions, opinions, theories, pedagogies, as candidates for definitive and authoritative - it's psychically imperative because the universe of one has never identified itself as the origin of the intuition of

alienation, and thus ontological diversity, which I've claimed is inexorable, is experienced not as potential richness of experience but as a lethal threat to the secure, comfortable, institutionalizable reality provided by cultural convention.

What is it that determines the right way to play, or hear, or describe a Beethoven sonata, say, or to compose something under its cognitive guidance? There's nothing in Beethoven's scores except some interpretable materials for, presumably, making music (that's an assumption too). For, possibly, making your music; who said otherwise? And what could that possibly mean? Beethoven's score doesn't tell you what to make, but gives you some stuff with which you can make something; but there are traditions of performance, that are transmitted by institutional authority between generations of performers and other certified practitioners. And that determines - competitively within the circle of certified authorities - what is, to quote a friendly colleague who was blindsided at a music faculty colloquium by an analysis I wrote of a Brahms symphony, "persuasive". Not what might be interesting, or suggestive, or even factually accurate as a shared report of a pretty far-out experience, but - crucially and exclusively - a competitor for authority. But I guess I think that authority is not a very interesting issue for music; and - as I have written elsewhere - it's not even an intelligibly applicable concept, for music. And that that deficiency is not only a good thing for the expansive richness of creative experience, but is one of the determining properties of the realm of experience which might be called "aesthetic".

What would happen to the institutions of music under the application of my thinking along these lines is - well, really - not my problem. What is my problem is the invention and propagation of the widest and most engaging variety of experiential adventures; in particular, the work of selfdevelopment focuses me on that issue of making distinctions rather than judgments - especially in finding my own self-interest in expanding my experiential range into new (or even old) music which resists intuitivity. And as always, discovering modes of listening which transform - neoontologize, to put it colloquially - the identity of the music as it enters my consciousness. But more of that later.

More immediately I want to light the issues I'm engaging here by borrowing from a piece I composed in 1994, called music/consciousness/gender - a multidimensional composite of words, images, and music by me and other people - it wants to explore the layers of musical consciousness and ontology below the radar and between the cracks of the familiar categories into which musical thought is classified; to try to articulate the elusive issues of identity and personhood - and interpersonhood - which I intuited were lurking in those murky depths - outside the normal, or even comfortably acceptable, territories of musical thinking. Scattered through this piece are six passages, read live in the performance as voiceover to relevant music - but I'm going to read them in sequence here, just as text, to give you an idea of how I was imagining the expansion of my own conceptual and experiential music space - and hoping to share it with anyone else as well. Each text is a portrait of the inner experience of an encounter with music; from six perspectives of relation between the music and its recipient. The first three and the fifth are portraits of generic situations - self-situations, actually. The fourth and sixth

are portraits of responses to specific music playing simultaneously (all of them are simultaneous with sounding music); the music of the fourth text is a collage I composed out of music of Jimi Hendrix and John Coltrane; the music of the sixth is the Adagietto of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, played by Claudio Abbado and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. So this succession tries to articulate some of the kinds of qualities I've been talking about here:

1. As music enters me (music: Lament for Sarah)
2. As my music enters you (music: Lament for Sarah)
3. As your music enters me (music: Randall: "...such words as it were vain to close...")
4. You want gynophobia (music: Hendrix/Coltrane collage)
5. As our music enters us (music: inter/play session: "don't be so polite")
6. As this music enters this room (music: Mahler: Symphony 5, Adagietto)

1.

**As music enters me, it touches me in places of gender. touches. probes. opens. explores. sculpts within. suffuses: Present-being, other-being, new-being. genderful. degendered. newgendered. dimensions of genderbeing in no form of binariness. whole-body sensing genderself, becoming unigendered, polygendered, neogendered, the who am I an everchanging identity of selfgender. As music enters me, as I enter music, we are both — music and I, both, entering one another — together transforming receiving penetrating gendershaping. Or are we ungendered mutually, gendershorn, fused and purified to become the Sacred One, within, us together as one, gendered or not or unnameably in the material language of gender-name-rituals of ritual-gender-naming? Together opened, filled, to the brink of notother-being, this music, this I, in our own undefinable interprocessing (is it gendering?), are we not discovering unbeknown illinguistic multiunitary gender-identities, within each other, within ourselves? To be moved, by music, or with, transported ontologically, inhabiting a new-perceived world, resonating a new-composed music, being thereby a new-created new-being, of unsignifiable but saturately selfspecific gender: Was I male, within myself? Was I female, within myself? Was I person? Am I still? Have I been some resonance, some inflection, some reinvented creature alchemized out of the base matters of male and female? (Yes, if I remember correctly, . . . )**

2.

*As my music enters you, it seeks to touch you in the place of gender, in the place where transmission of meaning is fused with the creation of presence. . .*

*As my music emerges from me to you, it seeks to find you in the place where conversation may transform, where my voice speaks within your ear, where my speaking is a listening from within you to become presence within you; the possessing sense I have of 'expressing myself' is just a sense of possibility, the touchable possibility of co-inhabiting that which is reality to me, with you together and with you within it, from which we both might carry in ourselves a resonance of my ontology as it came to belong to us both, might indulge the ontological fantasy that, by virtue of my voice having been received empathetic within you, and having been emitted empathetic of you, we are not altogether ineluctably alone.*

3.

**As your music enters me, as you play it for me , or as I play it for myself, and as I open within myself to receive it, and as I open within it for it to receive me, I navigate to find the posture of interface, to sample by twisting and bending my angle of reception, playing or listening, the distinct poignancies of each convergent resonance, to find myself somewhere encoded within, possessed or exorcised, loved or derided, acknowledged or denied, understood or disregarded, saved or doomed, caressed or abused, tremulous in desire and fear, intensely wound between terror of dissolution and glow of exaltation, not just straining to hear if there is to read to anticipate what it is a message for me encoded there, but needing it wanting to know it to be it to be what it means. . .**

4.

— you want gynophobia, and you want it from Ludwig van Beethoven no less? OK, but pretty wimpy 'n' chaste if you ask me — how about this music for hardball standup studstrutting? Isn't gynophobia the real hardcore of its violent inexpressivity its virulent hyperkinesis?

— , says: you can't enter me nohow, noplacé, impenetrable energetic wall, — genderneutral?

— , and say, fuck symbolism, fuck fake phallic punking stage imagery, smoke, hey it's just smoke, and electricguitar in a Papageno suit's no clincher neither — cheap thrills, say, pay no mind — check out the real stonewall number's being done on you, blueswise, jazzwise, yeah, even rockwise — how's that music the music of those lyrics, anyhow? Sadeyed or devilmcrotched, the pasteon frontzippered dustjacket's a scam cover for the real number nine hollow nowhereperson rattling within — totally gendernull. (Rock: the blandest harmonic/melodic configurations at the most ferocious volume: crazy, but expressionless, and utterly asexual, right?)

So what is that expression?:

:

— The sexuality of the oppressed. — no, the sexuality image through which the image of oppression is embodied.

— Is the image of thrashing suffocated furious nonpresence (jazz) or malpresence (blues) or dyspresence (rock).

*(Deconstructed till fuckinmother naked.)*

Today! Now! Think of Beavis! Think of Butthead! (Is 'think' the right word?)

Maybe not, but think too of the pitiless transparencies of Joni Mitchell, the cooler Coltrane named Alice, the sacrificial confidings of Janis Joplin, the devastating lucidities of Laurie Anderson, the bedrocking homefacts of Tracy Chapman, the demystified athleticisms of Meredith Monk, . . .

5.

*As our music enters me, as our music enters you, as it inscribes us within our space, as it entwines us together within itself, as it enfolds itself within us together, as we inscribe ourselves within our music, within each other, together within it, it within us together, interpenetrates each of us by the other by it; involutes each of us within the other within it; replaces each of us both with itself. . .*

*or, brutally estranges, walls our space between us: you as mega-you. pervasive-you, as ur-you, I as invisible-I, inchoate-I, mute-I, stifled-I, infinitesimal-I, or you, blindingly unimaginable Other, and I, intensely distinct Other-Other, or most ambiguously, you, verging on, blurring. the I/Other boundary, I, passing within, transgressing, dissolving, renegotiating the both-, the I-, the Other-spaces,...*



6.

As this music enters this room, it unwraps the covers of the soft psychic underbelly of us within its space, revealing, and engaging, and enacting, things we dare not know by name; . . . we, together, conspire to undergo the secret thrill of the revelation and the engagement and the enacting, allowing ourselves to enact within, conspire to collude in keeping the secret which unrevealed spares us the shame of exposure, yet intensely trembles within at the yielding to the touch and the immersion within, this music which sustains with almost unbearable tension the velvet cover without and the bloody sordid mess within, predaciously toying with and unctiously sensuously beautifully pimping to our unacknowledgable prurience, our fantasies of the unacceptable, probing into the soft rotten fruit of my, and your, hidden degeneracy, viciously pitilessly exposing itself to us, so insidiously cannibalistic, engorging us in its limitless narcissism in its own Self, into which we, seduced in this diabolical devouring masquerading as the profession of ultimate intimacy (what? here, in this crowded lighted public space?), we, emotionally, ontologically, are being, are, appropriated, depleted, eaten, evacuated, enervated, *had*. . .

II

And, The Music of the Other

What about the intrusive Other, the Other's music? There are musics I find it hard to engage. Because my intuitive terms of musical engagement don't seem to yield experiential determinacy, or if they do, it's an experience of nonengagement, or nonengagability. So I was very interested when Michael Dellaira asked me to review some "new music" for his magazine, *New Music Connoisseur*. So that I could do the work to bridge the aesthetic, and, really, the generation gap. Here are some of my notes for that writing:

Auditorializing precompositional schemata - as opposed to "composing" - creates sound artifacts which appear to live at a somewhat detached distance from their receivers. Never get too sweaty or too up close and personal. A quality of being not so much undercomposed as uncomposed, or, better, othercomposed. This is either the occupational hazard of a certain kind of auditory conceptual art, or its aesthetic (or at least philosophical) attraction, for its practitioners and fans. Algorithmic methods are particularly inclined to produce such affects, but as always it depends on the particular music and the particular occasion of reception - that is unless you read the program notes first.

There is no question that the repetitive-pulse structures of minimalist composition make a powerful experiential point. The only question is whether they do not always make the same point, whose individual inflections are locked within an overbearing stylistic affective definition.

Everyone really knows that objectivity in the descriptive criticism of musical experience isn't even really a coherent idea, let alone a real possibility. So it's too bad that so much writing lusts strenuously to assert that kind of authority, so that it misses the real, available, and far superior opportunity to share creative images of those unique (and literally, but not metaphorically, unsharable) episodes of "secondary consciousness" (as Elliot Handleman calls it) we encounter in any immersed listening. I wasted a lot of energy and space - decreasingly over time - during my time as Music Critic for *The Nation* (1960-69) getting my prose to represent my personal experiences of music with the implication that they deserved to be taken seriously as candidates for determinate/definitive opinions/descriptions/verdicts. To what end is increasingly murkier to see. Maybe nothing more than a misplaced sense of where assertiveness of that kind would leave some residue of individual musical awareness in the jammed social space of musicjabber. In any case, I read all that as mostly having the effect of masking and blunting, rather than vivifying, the images of my senses, thoughts, epiphanies of music I was often jumping out of my skin listening to (Liszt! Mendelssohn! Bach! Salome! Stravinsky! Schoenberg! Varese! Milton! Elliott! Arthur! ...!).

So now, is it at the other end (bottom of some tube or other) that I strike a discursively responsive pose (looking as attentive as is appropriate I trust, feeling quite uncertain as to my relevance in this new sound world, but up for anything...)...? It's the music of someone that everyone probably already knows better than I, Keeril Makan (with others to follow, below). A piece for violin and percussion, 2, and it really knows how to make a point: starting by hammering a repetitive canbang just enough more times than it would create a "motive" but canny beyond its compeers in leaving articulate space in which action (not the staticness of

uninflected reiteration) can - and does happen - space, miraculously, of changing length (no relentless buildup to the inevitable as in orgasmoform, even significantly downsizing progressively to widen, deepen, open clear space for its takeoff into scintillating hi-tech gamelanmusic). Which takes off, but does not lose itself in its own self-absorption - actually always seems sentient within itself, and interactive with me, gracefully falling off its theatrical cliffs into startling mode changes, pattering in place to elongating, a soundribbon that indiscernibly crosses big soundmode thresholds, unbrutally but continuously always on the move to elsewhere...but always in a pace and at a rate particular to each mode in itself, so there's never a sense of a composing operation doing it to me but rather an inviting companionship offering sound discoveries and adventures in a humansize way but always engaging and, well, interesting to listen to. *Zones d'accord* for solo cello gets carried away with itself a bit more than I get carried away with it. But its occasionally frantic inventiveness of things for a cello to do that obviously a cello was never supposed to do is at least continuous listening fun, and maybe strikes a deeper resonance in its cumulative course. *Target* (maybe a bit of Diamandagalasism here, and even a touch of *earthlight*) finds ways to *be* (as against to *become*) continuously (and varyingly) intense. Like *earthlight* (and unlike Diamanda) it always give me a place to listen from, spaces from which the individual utterance qualities can lodge their sonic and expressive interest - which seems to come from everywhere in the world within the single singer's voice (gratefully and congenially composed for throughout the piece). I do love (and sort of miss somewhere in this piece) Diamanda's piercing screams (one of the formative experiences of my listening life), but there's more payoff than deprivation in its absence here. The compositional quality of *Target* is remarkable in how its unrestrained eruptive wildly variable emotional theater is channeled into a continuous musical unfolding that gives me a lucid sound window through which to hear each inflection and never goes over the edge of arbitrary. The disc is gorgeously recorded with what seem to be consummate performances by everyone (there is also *Resonance Alley*, a solo percussion piece) but I especially enjoyed the amazingly sonically and articuatively agile violin playing of Jennifer Choi of Either/Or and the microscopically precise sound and trajectory of the vocal performance by Laurie Robin.

Jocelyn Robert's self-performed collections of "piano disklavier" pieces (*mobile* and *immobile*) have an arresting severity, a disciplined austerity keeping an almost anticompositional insulation between composer and piece, being like what I earlier called *othercomposed*. Like auditorialized analyses of precompositional schemata, a kind of sonically materialized conceptual art putting a receiver through an interesting exercise in listening, to sound objects which appear to remain tangibly at a distance in conceptual space, manifesting there more to be contemplated than to get up close and personal with. The piano-disklavier medium, and the very precise timing of every articulation (from swirling clouds of sound to starkly individuated single stone-steps) create a curiously post-Conlon Nancarrowish sensibility, strangely less aggressively techified than Nancarrow's startling playerpiano hallucinations, whose self-propelled relentlessness gets me scrambling to get out of the way as much as straining to catch every mindblowing hammerstroke. Where the experience of a Nancarrow exercise is a trip into the uncanny supernatural, Jocelyn

Robert's pieces are more of a spacewalk, in a time that detaches from time and spatializes coolly evolving images of figures and phenomena. Something like, in the piece called *für ludwig*, a ghost-shadow of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata, or in *la pluie*, a slowly materializing xray of some idealized Chopin Ballade. Elsewhere, Robert builds accumulating pitch-objects with minimal restricted pitchfields unfolding against one another in asymmetrical cycles; or maximal densely congested pitchfields whirling in lockstep like the particles of a manic comet. And then the meticulous stonestep music, prying open wide space-intervals (seeming not like time intervals but like openings to look within and through), and moving balletically along erratic unintuitive unpredictable but finally rational and civilized geometrical paths. Despite its nearzero severity, it's all quite comfortable and mannerly; but I bet it would be completely out of sight on an old mechanical Nancarrow playerpiano.

**Keeril Makan** *TARGET 2* (1998)

Either/Or (Jennifer Choi, violin; David Shinely, percussion)

*Zones d'accord* (2002)

Alex Waterman, cello

*Target* (2004)

Text: Jena Osman

Laurie Robin, mezzo-soprano; California EAR Unit

*Resonance Alley* (2007)

David Shively, percussion

Starkland CD ST-217

**Jocelyn Robert**

Jocelyn Robert, Piano Disklavier

*mobile*

pendules

für japan

la foule

la rue

la place

pendules 2

für oslo

für ludwig

merles cd a-111

*immobile* bo1erun 1 für

louisa

für eli

bo1erun 2 la pluie

merles cd h-1

## inside in, outside out

1. Why do I think some phenomenon of music “has a structure”? Because I can attribute certain metricized properties to its denotable tokens, symbolize these parameters, attribute certain relative quantities to them, assert certain connecting relational logics among these quantities, claim that these are asserted in at least a potentially perceivable way by the music phenomenon under examination, finally attach all of these to a covering metaphor into whose retro-componentalized parts these property-quantities can be fitted, considering the totality of this process “the structure of the music”? Because, ideally, filtering the sonic data back through the mental network created by such a mental exercise can seem to produce either a highly intensified form of the raw experience of the music, or a significant transformation of it into a different music of possibly a different degree, or at least kind, of music-being? Do I have a lucid grasp of exactly how and where such a “structure” filter is placed psychically (whether by intuition or by intention) so as for acoustic signals to filter themselves through it? If my engagement in the mental exertions of structure-attributing is followed by some very vividly determinate transformation of the music-being of some music I hear do I know that this was an effect of those exertions? Do I know in what way, by what means those exertions acted upon any or all of the invariant attributes of the music-transacting configuration to produce exactly this effect, if I do suppose the effect to have happened? From what psychical location can I make the observations and think the analytic thoughts that would enable me to know what I think about these questions?

Question 1: So I derived this “structure” allegedly with rigorous and acute reference to this piece; so where do I put it now – how do I attach it to my listening apparatus, or do I just consider it an exercise in accounting for what I’ve already experienced? Is there some mental operation that counts as plugging in some mental thing into some mental other thing? Is there some way that inside my head I can enter my brain mentally from the outside? Metaphorically?

Question 2: Or do I claim it reports what I’ve already heard — Is the attribution of “structure” ever (ostensively or believably) an introspected account of experience in terms consonant with the terms in which experience was experienced unmediated by a prior “structural” (or otherwise intervenient) metatext?

Chris Hume had us eat different cheeses at designated moments during a listening to Jeux. This was the exclusive form of his analysis. No descriptives or quantifications or metaphors or images. Spectacular experiential phenomena were reported as having happened during the enactment of Chris’s scenario. There was reported vivid musical reality of a farout character. Do we know where in the transaction this happened, whether it was a collective experience of the group as a whole or of each single person separately – and do we know whether anything other than our actual experiences happened at all, and if it did, whether it had to do with Chris’s imposed stimuli, his instructions, our awareness that something weird and different was afoot, or none of the above?

What if, with a different music-intellectual mindset, I think that some phenomenon of music “has a story”? Is “having a story” just a type of “having a structure”? Is a “story” just, really, a “structure” with attitude? Say, some “Fibonacci Series” story — attributes attitude, maybe, but without particular affect, right? Certainly exudes attitude — can’t imagine what its charm would be bereft of the air of having uncorked some special esoteric number-combination emanations scoring it some big-meaningful-idea cred, which gets built in on just the grounds of logging in as a Fibonacci story. Or a tuning story or an exotic-scale or a ritual-mode story; got to have the exterior story or how would the sound get to register correctly for the unpreinformed? And, let’s see: if a story is a blow-by-blow account of something in terms of something else, correlating a sequence of music things with their

private logics to a sequence of other things' otherwise-logic as if either they were the same logic or that the skewness of the logics to one another is somehow super-illuminating or at least entertaining, for the benefit of the musiclogic; isn't that just "having a structure" except with the affect and/or attitude framing and driving the structure-logic logic?

Like JKR's Tchaikovsky story or BAB's JKR or Parsifal or Adagietto stories?

But maybe not like Adrienne Rich's Beethoven pseudostory or JKR's assorted Boretz pseudostories. Pseudostories like that have plenty of affect and attitude but no logic, like just about any judgmental music review you ever read (not excluding plenty of Boretz in his NATION animadversions); you find out about the affect and attitude of the writer, but what musicstory interface do they plug into? How do they ever get out from being stuck onto the persons of their originators to becoming interactive (metaphorically) with music? Even though they sure are interactive with their readers. So how does storyfree attitude or affect transfer (metaphorically or affectively) onto a particular music? Just by conditioning the attitude and affect of the reader within the psychic atmosphere of listening — implanting the image of the attitude and affect of the commentator as an incorrigible authority, an unimpeded transference from one psyche to another with a music-text juxtaposition as its symbolic vehicle? Even where there's real, even deep, musical thinking underneath, it remains exclusively in the possession and to the benefit of the perpetrator. Something you might call "political" ahead of calling it "musical"? Isn't the presence or at least the implication of "we", the authoritative universalizing "we" (even when it's inscribed as "I") rather than the confessional self-circumscribing literal "I" an infallible symptom of the political — lurking somewhere in the mix at least?

[And is "metaphorical" itself not just an ontological copout? Can I actually distinguish a metaphorical quality from a "real" one? Doesn't it just existentialize a quality as living in the space of its (verbal/symbolic) conceptualization rather than in the space of its aesthetic reception, however you analyze its experiential output?]

Or can you put music into "the metaphorical relation" to other music? Can, and probably do, most of the time. But not without having a story, or at least, a structure. So what happens when the music's story is about its reflection of some other music? On purpose or not, as commentary or resemblance? Music qualities identified genetically, nominally, authorially, mimetically, ideologically, culturally, socially, ethnically, historically — how does any of that go into what is heard? Hearing something in something else, hearing something as something else, hearing something as it manifests being in some other universe, sustaining the doubleness or n-multiplicitiness as a simultaneity of reception. But also entails the simultaneity of consciousness, simultaneously holding within consciousness, all the defining referential metatexts — so there are at least two metatexts, in at least two distinct metalanguages, running in the listening psyche simultaneous with the supposed music-being-listened-to text. Sounds absurd, but I (we?) do it all the time. Knowing "what" I'm listening to seems indispensable to having a psychic node through which it can enter and put itself together as a specific-experienced-music phenomenon. But — as in other receptual stories — can I determine how and in what form such unmistakable interinfluencing of experiencing-ontology happens? The point is, that though I seem obviously able to make some very confident empirical claims, do I have the remotest conviction that I can also make even a minimal theoretical claim? Doesn't it seem that all these input processes which I've decommissioned by striping them "metaphorical" are not in any determinable way distinguishable in that respect from any input process which has been allowed at least by implication to be striped — whatever the complement of "metaphorical" may be? (If I can't think of what that "other" is, does that make it one of those differences without a distinction, like metaphysical universals, or grue?) But is there a

psychologically substantive distinction among types of “direct” music-knowing? Things that you know in a way less heavily mediated by “metaphorical” things? Such things as, maybe, the happening of “music”, or even of something like “Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony”, or some other haecceitical phenomenon? Without prejudice to the layers of epistemic logic at which finally all such distinctions disappear — you can always get to those ultimate reductions, but logic and ultimate reducibility to tautology does not explicate the distinctions you know by experiencing them. So the precise conceptual-scheme layer at which it’s relevant to address an experiential question is determined exclusively from the experiential perspective itself; the logic-side on its own draws a blank.

2. Does it seem, then, that an almost self-inscrutable singular “I” looms as the natural citizen of a musical world whose only determinacy is the feel of experience? Does it get down to subjectivity? Or to solipsism, for those who really dislike the implications? Musical universes, perforce, of one inhabitant each? Or perhaps not perforce, perhaps it’s a choice, perhaps there are possible multi-inhabitant musical worlds you can inhabit: you could go outside out to expose just what you feel might be reliably interfaced with other people. You know from experience that every sociomusical occasion creates a collective group experience, seemingly coercive upon everyone present, and distinct from every other such occasion-experience (your own piece doesn’t sound to you like any other way it ever did before). But that singular collective experience is exactly as nontransferable as any single-personal one -- just by virtue of its singularity; and its character as a “group experience” lodges entirely as an artifact within the consciousness of one person (at a time). Perhaps, even, determinate within every single person present, but not determinately specifiable between any two of them. So doesn’t its very unique-occasion particularity entail ultimate nongeneralizability? You “read” a peopled room you enter; but the ‘essence’ of that reading is a flavor of consciousness rather than an articulate structure — rather than a ‘score’ — through whose specifications that ‘essence’ could be recapitulated. You can make scores that tell people what to do; you can even make scores that tell people what they’re supposed to experience when/after they do it; but you can’t enforce a match between the output of one and that of the other.

But what does depend on a match between explicit action and specific experience? Science, obviously. But normal, ordinary language, too: in pragmatic verbal language it’s clearly the semantic grounding on which functionality depends. But what about poetry? Doesn’t it seem that poetry reconstitutes the semantics of ordinary language in a way that ambiguates definitive signification, that seems to take such ambiguation as an ontological given, as – even possibly – an ontological property essential to its aesthetic character? Isn’t the sense that poems reinvent language as much an index of the aesthetic location of reception as it is a theory of composition? And isn’t the indefinite quality of poetryreading something that transfers the social identity of poems from the realm of solitary or collective experience to the realm of socially negotiable discourse? From the experience-transactional occasion to the discursive-interpretive moment? Isn’t the ambiguity, the indeterminacy, of the relation of action to outcome as intrinsic to the transactions of poetry as the strenuous disambiguation of that relation is to the needs of the scientific? And isn’t the intuition of the “openness” of the poetic text a key to the galvanizing poignancy sometimes experienced and always yearned for in encounters ontologized as “aesthetic”?

You compose. You perform. Your own music. Other music. You hear it. You think it. You imagine its being heard by receiving others. What others hear is indisputably the outcome of what you do – but what is your relation to their experience? Is it to imagine what it will be? To desire it to be a certain way? To enforce what it is? In different episodes, don’t you yourself as receiver register your own output differently? Sometimes as cognition, as a syntactical/structural “understanding”; sometimes

as perception, a semantic identification; sometimes as a determinate feel to which no abstract signifier applies: experience as itself, an indivisible, internally absolute but externally indefinite holistic ontological blob? In which ontological register do you as composer or performer theorize yourself as acting? (In which do you theorize a predetermined outcome?) When you think: the “sound” of some music (its music-ontological “sound”, not the acoustic-signal sound associated with it), are you thinking comprehension? recognition? sensation?

Scores which are processed as stimuli don't necessarily regiment behavior, at either the performing or the receiving end, and don't encode a single-valued intentionalized outcome. And people's descriptions of aesthetic surfaces are – to cut through to the nerve – descriptions of perception rather than experience. It is, of course, perception which can be generalized; and generality, rather than specificity, which is enforceable – that is, communicable in a reliably interpersonally definitive way. And it seems possible that generalized models of perception can – in some sense – regiment experience as well. But music-experiential generalities, in the guise of ‘empirical’ theories, don't originate in any actual real single episodes of experience; they seem more plausibly like hypothetical fantasies of collective consciousness leveraged out of – at best – some collection of second or third hand reports of possibly actual experiences; so their hypotheses are essentially self-fulfilling prophecies, predicting what is already known, and perhaps capable of inducing generic uniformities of reception in persons subjected to such conditioning. Whatever the content of such receptions, they're not too likely to resemble your wildest expressive fantasies of what music might do to you. So it can't be a desire to maximize musical expressivity which motivates the drive to socialize music within the bounds of the reliable, verifiable, retrodictable, ‘clean’, self-knowing – and therefore regimentable – receiving space. From the perspective of music as expressive utterance, the drive for aesthetic, theoretical, pedagogical authority seems strangely self-annulling, repelled from penetration into music's depth by music's own deep opacity to extramusical specification.

A determinate feel may be the unmistakable outcome of a music-making action (a notation, a sounding); it may be co-opted to realize an anterior or posterior sense-making trajectory; but, as itself, a determinate feel is inexorably unspecifiable: you may in effect be composing them, but you can't compose with them (a score doesn't even specify sound, let alone “sound”; but even a sounding score doesn't specify how it “sounds” in any actual hearing); so there's a fundamental ambiguity in the action-input/experience-output relationship. As a composer, therefore, or as a performer, you are inescapably immersed in this experiential ambiguity. No however raging powermad cannibalistic desire or ferocious predatory breastbeating tearjerking energy or cool superior aristocratic attitude copping will guarantee your enforcing control of another person's (or, I think, even your very own) determinate-feel experience. Our most fervent desire to be subjugated by you will always have to be the consequence of our own exertions; the power of yours remains ambiguated behind the barrier of experiential indeterminacy; we are, despite ourselves, and perhaps even to our annoyance or discomfort, congenital determinate-feel anarchists. A problem, perhaps, for anyone to whom the specification or the determination of the entire music-making/music-receiving transaction needs to be under someone's control. Or anyone whose worldview including music invariates a drive toward maximum disambiguation and authority on the normative-science-model.

But ambiguity, specifically the ambiguities of outcomes as between stimuli and responses, between actions and experiences, seems ontologically contained within the very being of the experiential. And while every experiential outcome is internally absolute, holistic, and determinate, the ambiguities ensure the indeterminacy of any one outcome relative to any other; and the ontological ambiguity issuing from the awareness that any construal of experience, any individual instance of



experience, is ultimately indefinite relative to any other either between or within individual persons – such ambiguity inscribes the aura of unlimited new-revelatory possibility that pervades the psychic territory of the experiential. [For everything in experience is determined within each span of receptual-event-time, and everything experiential is absolutely indeterminate prior to a receiving event, unsusceptible to anterior prediction. That means that I can't ever mentalize the specificity of an experiential music-event because its only specificity is itself: its determinate feel; that is, that in this case, mentalizing the music and mentalizing the experience of the music cannot be discerned or practiced as distinct different mentalizing acts.]

No one music experience is definitive, relative to any other. No one's music experience, is definitive with respect to anyone else's. Yet each music experience, in its own span of happening and resonating thereafter, is absolute, definitive, and replete – a perfect but strangely relativistic platonic form subsisting exactly, exclusively, universally within its own boundaries, but instantly dissolving at its own ontological endpoint. And no description of a music experience, in the form of a theory, an analysis, a discourse, an expressive image, is externally definitive either, either epistemically or as an active input into anyone's experience of music or of a particular music. Even insofar as it references and reflects a particular image of experience, of some experience or of someone's experience, there is no context of music as musical experience where that particularity is music-relevantly definitive, or, even, determinate for any other or anyone else's experience. However much music and metamusical models might thrive on scientific-type precision, clarity, rigor, and critical self-examination – senses in which music might imaginably be as "scientific" as any other speculative thought -- they don't thereby acquire any relevant relation to or investment in scientific authority.

So is the sociality of a music occasion just an illusion? Or is there an intertransparency of cotemporal individual experiences? Or is sociality the residue of separate intuitions of collective manyness being simultaneously sustained by multiple onenesses? Could it be that everyone's literal opacity to the interior reality of otherness actually liberates collectivity to become multiplicity rather than an elusive and probably (socially and expressively) hazardous unity? Isn't such an intuited unity the output of the separate universalism of each person's self-projection onto the world? You can imagine that kind of intuition amplified into an extreme affect of some remarkable specimens of musical composition – consider the strange spiritual continuity between the excrescent giganticisms and the hyperbaric minimalisms of German music of almost the same time, each internalizing equally the same outlandish opinion of the cosmic social meaning of the act of musical self-assertion.

Dmitri Tymoczko read a paper at the SMT conference contesting David Lewin's use of group theory for music models. A lot of people found his contentions disputable on theoretical grounds. But no one at the meeting questioned what I thought had to be a fundamental justification for the pitch of his critique – not just offering another model for consideration but dissing one on offer. So afterward I asked him, "What are the musical consequences of being wrong?" (And, I might have asked, equally, what might the musical benefits of being right be?). If you're trying to assert authority what musical purpose are you pursuing -- and if you could succeed in asserting authority what musical purpose would that accomplish? Do I get any musical payoff for you being right – as against what I get from your offering an imaginative listening model based on an imaginative idea which might have an interesting transformative effect on my experience of some music – even if the particular transformative effect it has is beyond your control? My *Tristan* proposal in *Meta-Variations* was output and input for an epiphanic new experience (ontology) of the music of *Tristan* – not really an explanation of anything (for if the logic was plausible, it could only be so insofar as it

made musical sense in the sense that it made a determinate (after, not prior to, the fact) difference in what music you ended up hearing if you filtered your *Tristan* through it) but a mindset for hearing, not definitive or authoritative in any designable way but effective in producing an ontologically distinct “new” music. – though what that new music would precisely be for any given listener, or whether any other listener but me would experience something so vividly particular is not determinable by virtue of my experience or by virtue of any coercive power of my listening model. “Empirical”, in the context of this and any other musical proposal I’ve offered, just means something to try yourself and experience the effects – as always, in one hearing at a time. Retrospectively, I think that if my musical ethos had been “commonality” rather than this vision of singular creative possibility – or had it been “empirical” in the sense of science rather than “experiential” in the sense of a single person’s immediate experience -- I might not have thought to propose musical models like these. So – retrospectively – I can see that the proposal I made in 1975 for how to mentalize “musical syntax” (“Mirage” – see the appendix to this text), and my follow-on request for listener-readers to ontologize the opening chord of Beethoven’s Op. 2 #3 as not a “chord of nature” but a polyrhythm-generating superposition of a C-6/4 over a C 5/3, consonating and dissonating back and forth as C 6/4 “resolves” itself into G 5/3 but in so doing dissonates even more sharply against the residual C – I can see that proposals like these have always been predicated on a fundamental intuition that any ontology-creating musical idea is free-standing and nondefinitive.

But every action is determinate, when it happens. And every experience is determinate, as it happens. And yet the connection between action and experience is as ambiguous as the connection between intention and perception. It seems that experiential transactions are plagued with ambiguity and indefiniteness at every level, seem to have ambiguity and indefiniteness written into the very core of their being. Which is to say, ambiguity and indeterminacy are precisely what marks the aesthetic, what gives the aesthetic its edge of epiphanic content, what keeps an aesthetic phenomenon in play within our psychic universe. Not problems, that is, but distinguishing features; not to be overcome with devices enabling claims of greater objective authority but to be cultivated as treasured properties of the imaginative life of music.

April/July 2008

*APPENDIX 1: MIRAGE – Reprinted in ‘In the musical universe of one’: text number 12 in this volume*

*APPENDIX 2: EXPERIENCE – Text number 6 in this volume*

## UNCONNECTING THE DOTS

Thought is the thought of thought.  
... The soul is the form of forms.  
--*Ulysses*

We are poets. So we are able to touch transcendence without the necessity of belief. If you have a determinate experience, you have had that experience, you have touched transcendence. You can't account for it; you can account for everything about it, according to your taste in accounting, in innumerable ways, unlimited because indeterminate with respect to the experience, the determinate feel, unnamed, unnameable. The magic is that you can believe in your experience, that you have experienced it, what you experienced, without entailing other extra-experiential belief: that is not only optional but diversionary, reductive and dilutive of the experience which you, and only you, can know that you are having, have had, are internally resonated by, have touched transcendence within. You can argue about intersubjectivity, but it hardly matters.

When I write a note what I hear is how it colors the pitch field. Quantification, completion, correspondence are more like lived awarenesses than constructed artifacts. There are things you know about yourself only long after you've lived a lot. And realize that this is how you were, perhaps always, perhaps not, but somehow essentially. Having it make sense is a way of getting back to the primal experience of its being there. No longer retrievable as primal, seeking to be retrieved by reflective reconstrual. Hear it as never before: can only happen when it has been heard before.

The big discovery for me was ontological creativity, the realization that everything uttered (or composed) is ontologically new, unprecedented, regardless of how ordinary or extraordinary it appeared - sentences you speak are not recited from a pre-existing text, no matter how unoriginal in idea or diction. So creativity isn't a compliment, a valorization, it's an analysis of the state of things; and the realization that music creates its objects on that ontological level liberates composition and redefines analysis as creative rather than exegetic, and certainly as authoritative ("persuasive") or coercive. As an inducement to a way of hearing something, it can be very neat - if the something you hear by hearing that way of hearing something knocks you out. Ultimately the implications for composition, and the meta-compositional activities in its environment, have been radical.

The Beat: The beat is just the most primitive crude way to instantly transform time consciousness out of realworld time and out of clocktime into - ontologically - the space of virtual time. Serious composition discovers numberless more contextual and multiinflected ways to get there with limitlessly variable resultant qualities - not just the repeatable orgasm - of habitable transcendent timeworlds. It's only the most firstorder music that needs beat to make this trip happen at all. To provide a cheap and dirty transcendence. Composition creates that from within but beat imposes it from without.

And the other side of it. Seek but not find. Try but not do. Want but not get. Look but not see. Grope but not touch. Reach but not grasp. Think but not know. Say but not speak. Exist but not be. Where is all of that? It happened but it never was.

Some music is "ought" (Beethoven)

Some music is "is" (Stravinsky, Messaien, Debussy)

Some music is "might" (Arthur Berger)

Are we all somewhere on this spectrum?

If I am irrevocably immured in some mindset, be it historical cultural or genetic, what use is the consciousness that this is so to me? Since - if it is indeed the case - the supposed self-awareness consequent on this consciousness must also be irrevocably, indiscernibly - and hence unsusceptibly to sentient self-reconstruction - so psychically imprisoned. So my freedom and my unfreedom are experientially indistinguishable, both experienceable purely as freedom and reality.

Jim, Milton, me: what we shared was our need to be fiercely and ultimately believable, to ourselves primarily. Where we split was in our epiphanies of where that was to be sought; in the ultimate determinate rationality, the ultimate unflinching transparency, the ultimate unmediated immanence. We were forever laminated by our disjunction as it sealed us to the same depth of aspiration. Our closest mutual musical companions, Elaine, Arthur, Paul, could ride all these tigers simultaneously.\*

History and music: Music has no past beyond the first-indexed moment of piecehood. Big difference between the intuitively "non-innocent ear" and the selfconscious invasion of everything you know outside cluttering up your foreground when what you're doing is trying to get inside.

if we exist at all, we exist forever  
because we made up forever  
it's ours  
and we're stuck with it.

To my friends: in this volume, if it has any legitimate being, we are family. We are celebrating in the form of a birthday a common compositionality, a common body-knowing of the centrality of expressive being in our world-formation, and the centrality of music-being in that expressive center. It's not that you compose, or even what, but with what spirit, what untestified connection you manifest, to yourself, to your familiars, to your world, to the world. Being good at it is for the benefit of others, helps you know what you mean by what you've written, helps you know whether that which you mean is what you mean, helps you get access to people, places, their responses, your own...

Mine will follow yours through this collection.

\*Jim Randall, Milton Babbitt, Elaine Barkin, Arthur Berger, Paul Lansky

TO DAVID LIDOV: your piece is so much more beautiful and interesting than any cleverness or derivation sleuthing could yield - but I am gratified that my piece was suggestive beyond its literal sonic surface to the extent that such a very different and riveting piece could be inspired by it. To me, this is what "music theory" is in the compositional context: I wrote in "Of This And That" (1972):

### Why do I want to know my syntax?

I admire the music of Beethoven inordinately

I want to compose something like that

but I don't want to compose Beethoven's music again

So I observe what it is I admire in Beethoven's music, and imagine the network that captures it

So I can then imagine a network which is in some sense isomorphic with it that doesn't have to be the same network or to contain the same things

That it is in some sense isomorphic with it is a discovery of imagination

To make it isomorphic in a particular sense is the trigger for and direction of an effort of imagination.

To Elizabeth Hoffman: So, clearly, you and I could write the same identical piece and any one would be able to tell which of us had done which...so obviously everything we thought we knew about the determinants of musical identity is just dead wrong.

TO ELAINE BARKIN, DAVID HICKS (on old music: Concerto Grosso, Nocturne, Divertimento, etc.): You have to read them as if they were events in the middle third of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the way they see themselves in an endless self-reflecting universe, having only themselves for context, the all-consuming blind groping to hear the *donné*, the next, the total sound revealing itself as magical *trouvaille*. They were the first pieces where "sounding like" was no longer in the foreground as a compositional principle, and the perspective of having a concept could not yet have entered the confines of a cauldron of energy that was pure desire, in which every event was its own infinity.

TO FRANK BRICKLE, JON FORSHEE, AARON KEYT: "Relevance. Liberation." - spoken in Rochester in 1987 to an SMT symposium on *Meta-Variations* - was a screech in the void pleading that 1. the alternative-culture liberations of the Sixties were multiple, not just the ones on the official counterculture list; and 2.

in consequence of the general misapprehension of 1., works like *Meta-Variations* and *Group Variations* (and Jim Randall's writings and music) whose surfaces couldn't be aligned with the texts in *SOURCE* Magazine or the sounds on Time Records, never registered as an elsewhere in the geography of contemporary music and musical thought. In the Rochester talk I groused that *Meta-Variations* was probably too intimate a transcription of the inside of my head to have been comprehensibly exposed in public; odd because nothing I've ever written except *Nation* articles has had such a public history. What wasn't seen or heard was the strenuous claims that both of those works made on behalf of a quite alternative-cultural vision of music, an avant-garde liberation which would not "throw out the cognitive baby with the dogmatic bathwater" (of Positivism - the quote is from *M-V*). So *Meta-Variations* - written after *Group Variations* and essentially a retroreflection on its musical idea - was dedicated to the discovery of how musical thinking could address the question (I asked it in "Of This and That"): "Does experience/sharpen experience/or does experience/blunt experience? / A. I've heard it all before. / B. I've learned to hear it as never before. / Two ways to use imagination." The idea that a musical system was a field of possibilities liberated by a reference rather than a set of prescriptions and prohibitions was central: "The room for 'choice' at every level of [composition] seems to evidence that maximum determinacy in every dimension of structure is a prerequisite to maximum 'creative freedom',... For the 'freedom' to create and perceive vacuously is hardly to be preferred to a completely conventionalized 'determinacy', where the rules are not *chosen* but *given....*" (*M-V*). *Group Variations* was the true manifesto of this cause; its ambition was nothing less than the recovery of time, the creation of a time, a Suzanne Langer-species "virtual time", a cumulative ongoing non-amnesiac time, experienceable as an inhabitable time-transcendence. In both the essay and the music, experienceability is not what seems to have communicated; but it was the heart of their aesthetic vision. And in Russell Richardson's luminous video creating space out of time I think that vision became present.

TO STEVE GREENE: Do this: Make words that listen. Do acts of listening not writing. Do listening with words that hear, that reverberate to make what is there to hear. That do not say what's heard, but hear, dissolve into hearing. And listen.

TO RUSSELL RICHARDSON: I too fixate on that Beatles tune - not just the opening lick - for how it created its dramatic trajectory over a long timespan by building a tonality in the cracks of a pitch collection: the two symmetrical trichords of your example, positioned in two discrete registers (cleaved by the tritone joint) creating, with the two-bassnote underpinning, the auditory logic of that pitch collection but keeping its identity inexplicit in suspension through 2 whole phrases (I give her/ all my love; that's all I / do; And if you / saw my love; you'd love / her too) and pulling the E-major trigger only in the add-on denouement phrase ("And I love her"). Beatles speaking music as a natural language, you hearing it specifically but inexplicitly - but dead on. As your musical instincts seem to be at least when you're visioning a time-image environment for someone's soundwork - Elaine's Jon Forshee's, mine. To me, the evidence that you are on to something brilliant is that it's at first likely to be counterintuitive to me, saturated as I am in the totality of my own sound, in my own inner sense of it. So it's literally a whole new dimension, not a compliant accompaniment, and the piece that results is a nonfake collaboration, an authentic product of our fusion (regardless of which comes first - in Poppies, your video was first and my sound-collaging fused into that). And though I know that sometimes my first reaction has made you shudder - even to the point of modification - they are always only the beginning of a road I travel under the guidance of your vision, which in the end becomes my epiphany too.

TO SCOTT BURNHAM (on *UN(-)* for orchestra): It was another one of my ideas for brewing a special musicality out of an idiosyncratic textural invariance: from a way that I hear the incipit of very early (parallel) organum as almost accidentally discovering the real architectonic complexity that is created by the images of polyphony - not as superimposing distinct pitchlines but as creating a multifaceted single organism that modulates as a whole, flexing as it flows by the trajectories of its facets (voices). The pairs of wind-instrument voices that are invariant (and invariantly straddling a perfect fourth) until the breakout at the end of *UN(-)* each create single sonic parallel lines - single lines with two edges, moving within the fixed frame of the wide-register fourth in the strings. The "Korean court music" is in the mode of the five-mile-dragon image I wrote in "Whose Time, What Space".

TO BILL ANDERSON (*Fantasy on an improvisation by J. K. Randall*): The logic of inferred uniformity over the auditory domain - such that the assertion in a music of a single pitch-function interval effectively creates by implication a vocabulary of replicas of its sound-image via a linked chain over the entire auditory domain - is a concept that subsumes and effectively eliminates any higher-level music theory except as phenomenal description. If the interval is the unit interval in a given vocabulary all intervals in that vocabulary are thereby present (ontologically referential) by assertion or inference for that music. This is probably the gut-level version of Leonard Meyer's notion of "expectation" but without any syntactical implications - that is, each event is ontologized experientially only by its successional quality as an instance of some position on the pitch-vocabulary reference array. You could say that an "ascending line" implies an infinite ascension up to one event beyond its highest point (which is either a direction reversal or a perceptual termination of the line). On this model, every successive event is either a continuation (a "next step") of an implied uniformity or a deflection (reversal or disruption) of it. From which ensues rhythm,

or, as it is sometimes called, music. (This experiential logic is the ur-ground of all the constructions in *Meta-Variations*; it ontologizes *difference* as the universal predicate for music so that "similitude" and "repetition" are degrees, or rather, species, of difference, not necessarily to be quantified or hierarchized to any essential aesthetic purpose.) So - with respect to the *Fantasy* - a hearing strictly from this viewpoint would hear a pitch-time continuity articulated by some orchestration or other. Which would be a seriously different music from the one I was composing as *Fantasy*, would be a seriously undercomposed music. What I composed was a music of pitched sounds (I won't stumble into "timbre") where the rhythms of pitch and instrument are not in counterpoint (as they are, for example, in *Grojp Variations*) but undetachable. Equalling, perhaps, Bill's "aroma". And here I think your (Bill's) thoughts lead me to align with an idea I made up to characterize Milton's music-cultural aspiration: to cultivate not so much the composer as specialist but the listener as specialist - in my case, someone who would find it engaging to listen deep not to reverse engineer a schema but to become suffused not with a gestalty musicwave (there are some musics where that would be my intuition) but a gestalty outcome of the cumulative experience of every experienceable particle, micromacrorhythmically.

TO LEON BOTSTEIN (on Violin Concerto, 1956): This is not the place for a personal note; but I cannot read your text in other than a personal register, with no pretense to objectivity. There are many composers, many violin concertos, many college presidents, many orchestra conductors - so what is it that animates us in particular when we engage each other's musical presence? As I hear you conduct (Brahms's Fourth Symphony, for one memorable example) or as you hear my music (the violin concerto specifically) what we hear, think, feel, is such an exquisitely entangled skein of perceptions inscrutably imbricated by our histories, separate and together. Coloring everything we say, in context: it has always been particularly valuable for me to talk with you about music precisely in the context of our historical disparities mediated by our shared enthusiasm for so much of the musical literature. So in part I feel the need to tell you that your words about my concerto mean a lot to me precisely because I know these things about your relation to music. Much more than I feel the need to chatter about the provenience or the content of the piece or respond in detail to your observations about it - I am happy for that to be left as between the music and your text. Because what seems marvelous is how our shared musical preoccupation has always been a clear channel through which we have always been able to communicate. Your text belongs to that story; it is a treasurable birthday present.

TO GEOFFREY POPE (Violin Concerto): You and the Eastman orchestra were a fully generational experience for me, having lived through the long times of "modern music like modern music used to sound" when the arrival at every notational juncture was fraught with uncertainty; and didn't always get there. The phenomenon of a conductor and players comfortably within their senses and experiences of music playing music I composed when I was their age was, well, surreal - but of course also incredibly euphoric.

TO BOB MORRIS, MARTIN BRODY, DAVID LIDOV: I don't know of what interest it might be that all the "materials" of Postlude were in my consciousness derived from the first two



movements, Prelude in particular. A comparison of the opening cello solo of Prelude with the cello-violin dialogue near the beginning of Postlude would probably dramatize rather vividly the compositional gulf between them, insofar as the Postlude passage is an almost literal recomposition of the Prelude opening. But the way it makes utterly different music has deep implications for me about the identity of the primal sources of musical quality, something I've been thinking about since "chart" and "What I could hear,..." (the Sessions piano piece).

TO JUDY KLEIN: Imagine the composer of *The Wolves of Bays Mountain* and the composer of *Postlude* finding enrichment in each other's expressive language; that is the world where I want to live.

TO ART MARGOLIN: The eye's ear recovers not the sound but through the sound knows what journeys were, and what remains.

To CHRIS STOVER (*Qixingshan*): F#-B is the junction between the two 5-chains (G#-C#-F#-B) (F#-B-E-A) and is the arrival sonority of the 2-phrase passage, the (high) F# of the violin and the (low) B of the viola. So the high point of the violin's ascension-chain G#-C#-F#-B which sounds as the high voice is (in the viola) at the bottom of the F#-over-B sonority, and the low point of the viola's ascension-chain F#-B-E-A which sounds as the low voice in the phrase is (in the violin) as the high voice in the F#-over-B sonority - flipping the orientation of the pitch-chains as the phrase-end becomes the emergence-point into the first violin's entrance. Its identity as a subphrase endpoint is its parallelism to the 12th (C#-over-F#) that marks the turnpoint between the two subphrases. It's a Bachrhythm thing. Sans explication, it was the sound I needed for that moment to do that thing.

TO DAVID HICKS, JOSH MAILMAN: *Qixingshan* lodged in my head as *après Postlude* - the world from above and out in the air after *Postlude*'s journey within (*Downtime*, composed within days after the completion of *Postlude*, only began to exhale). And the literal and nonliteral affectmodel in my ear (as I wandered on the mountain in Taipei) was the first movement of Beethoven's *Spring Sonata* - its opening gesture compressed to be mirrored as a tremor in the cello and squeezed down to the semitone violin tune and its cycle-of-fifths cello reflection.

To JOSH MAILMAN: That musical effects are correlated with musical facts seems uncontroversial. But if your entry into the territory of musical facts is through the experience of musical effects it is likely that your fact-reifications will reflect your effect-experiences, and be selectively biased by them. So that something is assertible as a fact doesn't carry its own interpretation as to what musical effect it effectuates. There's always a taint of "post hoc ergo propter hoc" in the karma of any music-analytic discourse but even though it doesn't ever prove anything, doesn't the affect of a wordname given to identify - even just heuristically - some music-fact thing convey something musically meaningful? Shouldn't it intend to have explicit experiential consequences?

TO CRAIG PEPPLER AND CHUCK STEIN (...*the memory of all that...*): together and within themselves the voices of piano and singer are reading, as I hear them reading, where pitches are language inflections not music tunes. It was the sound of language speaking not the sense of poetry interpreting or expressing.

TO SUSAN QUASHA, ART MARGOLIN, CARMEN CHAN, SASCIA PELLEGRINI, PALOMA KOP: Your images speak to me in the spacetime they share with the work of mine they respond to; I receive; I see; I groove; I mutate. But their spaces are replete in themselves and need to not be overlaid. .

TO SCOTT GLEASON (...*the memory of all that...*; *Qixingshan*; *Fantasy*; *Group Variations*): What is being assuaged is sometimes the self-centered need of the thing itself, thing, phenomenon, it, demanding my unforgiven performance of its score, its nonnegotiable demand to be, become, fulfill its prequired existentiality; who am I with when I make that happen? It doesn't get beyond me, it always was. Possibly there are as many other schemata as there are retrievable traces of my mucking: being, sometimes, directly addressed by what comes at me in the immediate loop of its own creation; or it's a microphone being me saying IT to you; or a screen for showing you (meaning me too); or it's a sitting together working out how to read this, track it, make it mean; or from me to you (or to the empty night) creating the tropic illusion of intimacy speciously permitting unofficial invasion and infiltration of something I want to be identified at least by me in you as me, just right then, just there. Or, even, sometimes, just making something surprising appear - that at the same time doesn't need any actual other because it's so obviously to surprisedly delight an awareness out there that could even just as well be me. Depth it seems looking back I can do; distance though is probably not an option.

TO GEORGE QUASHA: Very interesting how a piece I wrote for George (*With Respect to George: A Postcard for George Quasha at 70*) can be tracked in terms of axially: beginning by flinging out a meteor shower of scattered notes it gradually congeals under the irresistible gravitational pull of a pitch blackhole accelerating inexorably to its end at the brink of an event

horizon, compressed to an impenetrably dense pitchknot. And it is composed as a percussion piece, for vibraphone solo or duo, wanting to speak in an intuited image of George's musical voice.

TO JIM RANDALL'S BIRDSTEXT (AND NOAH CRESHEVSKY): Jim's idea of a Messiaenic/Krishnamurtish reading of *Downtime* is curiously consonant with my own sense of the piece as I composed it, of the piece turning its own objects over for its own contemplation, listening to itself, or not so much to itself as to what it was being as it went, what it was made of as it was being made of it, taking in what had just happened as it was still happening, finally stepping back and reflecting in the afterspace, exploring the anatomy of its own tranquility in the wash of its own self-created chaos.

TO DOROTA CZERNER: I don't know how I got through my whole life auralizing the music of language as a sound I desperately wanted to hear in place of the industrialization of voices created for the "serious" musical articulation of poetry's language. But couldn't because it didn't exist. Not in poetry reading - Dylan Thomas had the idea but it was always the same idea. The closest I came was James Joyce reading Anna Livia Plurabelle (or probably that's actually where it started in my psyche). My own efforts (*Language, as a music; music/consciousness/gender*; many Inter/Play sessions) were something else: in the same direction but cheating in that the language was music to begin with and my vocalizing was more a "reading" than a realized performance. But then miraculously there descended into my life Dorota, whose entire concept of poetry and whose way of "reading" was at the same time precisely what I imagined and unimaginably something transcendently beyond - an expressive genre unto itself, for which I was after long last inspired to create sonic environments - pure realizations of what my earlier pieces had in my consciousness adumbrated - Song as I could, finally, convictually, embrace it. But you can hear in her solo readings without my intrusion - *Dunes, Poppies*. the poem for Bob Morris, on the Open Space CDs, for instance - that the fusion of music/language in the voice all by itself is already complete, perfect, and dangerous.

TO JEFF PRESSLAFF, MICHAEL FOWLER, MARTIN SCHERZINGER, NEAL KOSALY-MEYER: There are multiple threads woven into my title for ("*...my chart shines high where the blue milks upset...*") very much involved with its proximate stimulus, a celebration of Milton Babbitt at 60 (see the epigraph at the end of the score). I was responding to an inner anxiety: my music was growing further and further "out", elaborating and proliferating its external multiplicities. What I needed was to go "in", "down" rather than "up", to retrieve and explore the experiential heart of where it all began. When I was still a pre-teen hungrily ingesting every sonic phenomenon I could get my ears on, I stumbled across (in the

Brooklyn Public Library on Grand Army Plaza, my source for all experience and awareness) - in the headphone-equipped listening room - a music of a totally different nature: a person's voice making a music with the sounds and senses of words: James Joyce's recorded reading of Anna Livia Plurabelle. Which burned itself into my ear so that I could practically recite it verbatim to my sister when I got home: do you know what this is? (she did). So it represents something primal in me (the "incorrect" absence of an apostrophe from "milk's" in my title was a lame way to capture how I heard it in my 9-year-old psyche). So I was reaching back, and singing to Milton of a way that I imagined composing with "charts" (the piece is strictly serial, made with a hexachord undergoing compositionally invented rather than canonical transformations, oriented throughout around a pair of central pitches, never sounded; its affect is the continuous coloration of resonance by everaccumulating pitchsound and piano decay). My most intimate way of metabolizing everything I had learned from Milton within the music-psychic space I most urgently wanted to explore, to recover.

Also, after witnessing the most gifted and dedicated performers of new music in New York (the Group for Contemporary Music) strain mightily (and effectively) - twice - under the masterly leadership of Charles Wuorinen to perform the orchestral piece *Group Variations* (in 1967 and 1968) my consciousness was sharply raised to the human context of musical performance: that writing "oboe" on the left side of a music staff created a directive to a particular person to act and behave in a particular way - a way which in traditional music was full of creative music-making initiatives and possibilities but in my music was mostly a strenuous requirement to place a particular sound into a musical fabric at a particular moment, using maximal musicianship and instrumental virtuosity purely in the service of materializing my expressive message. So the original subtitle for "chart" was "for a pianist alone" - and my affective image was a player's experience at the keyboard soundreading Bach two-part inventions. My next piece (*Passage*, written for Roger Sessions at 80 - Jeff's Princeton performance is on the CD) was almost literally a dialogue between me and the player; the notation of the score is in the form of a running imagined conversation with a person at a keyboard. And then I made my music by real-time soundmaking with any available means with partners and in solitude. Jeff's presence in all of this was organic.

TO DORA HANNINEN, ELAINE BARKIN: Origin of *Language ,as a music*: there is a sentence on the first page of Part III of *Meta-Variations* (the part that reconstructs and generalizes musical syntaxes such as the tonal (content-centric) and serial (order-centric) modes of musicsound creating. The sentence says that music's freedom to invent itself from scratch (theoretically at least) does not translate into a parallel freedom for language because language's nonnegotiable referentiality binds it - insofar as could be foreseen at that time - to syntactical and lexical conventions. That was 1970. In 1976 I thought I saw that the project of ground-up construction could be conceived but only in a kind of "essay" that was what it was about - namely a composition, enacting by performance (voice and musicound) in real time the sense of what it was constructing. The printed text is a score; the layout is not that of poetry but to guide the performing speaker - the lines tend to break where the internal rhythmic inflections are less obvious. So that getting the rhythms and inflections right makes the sense happen. Part I is a portrait of the birth of consciousness, in the voice of experience speaking, leading successively to the stages of worldmaking through undifferentiated utterance, its differentiation into music and language, culminating with the

transcendent moment of the birth of reference from the fusion of utterance within and ontology without. So Thesis has no narrator; it just behaves. Pronouns only show up in the movements that have, in different senses, narrators; and then, in the Epilogue, the people in the room and the performer are "I" and "you". ("Listen" is suddenly the person up front addressing everyone else in the room.). So the project is not to make language into music but to manifest how it already is. A theoretical discourse, in literal fact, whose theory can only be revealed by being experienced in performance: the thesis of "Thesis". This awareness, beginning with the intuition of "determinate feel" to describe "experiences with no names" (in "What Lingers On", when the song is ended) has brought me very far into the mindset of music as essentially unreachable in language but greatly inter-enlivened by every mode of creative metalanguagemaking - including discourse understood as creative metaphor.

(LAAM slightly disagrees with Dora on one point: Part III (Spec Sheet) winds up to claim that the act of semantic fusion (the reference-creating event) laminates "word-sound" and "object-sense" irrevocably, so that each becomes the permanent experiential likeness of the other, for ever.)

TO: BOB PAREDES, MARJORIE TICHENOR, KEITH EISENBREY, GAVIN RUSSOM, RICHARD TEITELBAUM, TOM DJLL, ROBERT KELLY, DAN MARMORSTEIN (on various realtime composing episodes): It was always with Jim that the questions got asked, that everyone's authentic need for what music does, incongruously dissonant from the fatuous inflations that pass for public artistic self-declarations, got recognized, that the urgency of radical reconstruction of one's own self-deluding expressive behavior needed to be confronted and enacted. And so all the musical in- and out-take of our previous life channeled into and out of 12 or so years of exclusive immersion in real-time expressive-behavior activity. Mostly soundmaking but not only - interaction with movement, image, environment, objects (the great spatio-musical pine cone game invented by Jim, the -Forming/Open Space exercises interplaying at Bard) - strenuously unpublic, a thought not of a conquering counterculture but a person-size cultural alternative. The discoveries never corroborated anything but excavated astonishing phenomena lurking unimagined within.

TO MARJORIE TICHENOR: *Om Namah Shivaya* become an instant Inter/Play classic, because even Marjorie's lightest touch (and all her touches were light) transfigured.

TO LINDA CASSIDY: I know the scent of Schumann; it is your chord of nature.

TO: BOB PAREDES'S MEMORY,  
and to MARJORIE TICHENOR, KEITH EISENBREY, GAVIN RUSSOM, RICHARD TEITELBAUM, TOM DJLL, ROBERT KELLY, DAN MARMORSTEIN: It was always with Jim that the questions got asked, that everyone's authentic need for what music does, incongruously dissonant from the fatuous inflations that pass for public artistic self-declarations, got recognized, that the urgency of radical reconstruction of one's own self-deluding expressive behavior needed to be confronted and enacted. And so all the musical in- and out-take of our

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TO JAMES HULLICK, CARMEN CHAN: "If I am a musical thinker" was originally a performance, vocalized, inflected, rhythmized as its way of saying. Lying there as printwords on a normal bookpage it all disappeared, i couldn't find the voice or the sense anywhere. So I knew it required a recomposition as a reading piece, a transcription that could perform as a visual printreading. Using children's book type size and typeface and using page turns and on-page type location and density to make the performance, and orchestrating a countermelody of inkblot drawings cut and reconfigured and interwoven with the text was how I reanimated my sense of making it speak approximately as it did originally in Austin, Texas.

To MARA HELMUTH: did O already have a soul, or was it born in the cocoon of your cello piece?

TO JEAN-CHARLES FRANCOIS (*I/O*): A linguistic-hermeneutic phonicized for performance or, more, forcing the languagesound to recontextualize in a way that only acquires its meaning in the actual moment of actual performance - and that performance, which must actually be actual to materialize, can actually only be fully realized as virtual, can only possibly be experienced as a virtuality since the texts must be sonically superimposed, must ontologize as a residual fusion of each other to be a piece, but can only be a piece if they are also materialized as 2 texts distinct but still not independent since the being of Jean-Charles's text only phenomenalizes when catalyzed by the stains of parallel *I/O* passages, cannot fully register as language-sonically meaningful apart from the originary words.

And there's a progression in the harmonic polyphony: Jean-Charles's text converges progressively on concrete manifestations of denotable predicaments, *I/O* moves equally outward to the boundaries of what can even be thought, what one can persuade oneself is thinkable. But on the other side, as *I/O* soberly hunkers to focus on its core point of issue, Jean-Charles's tropes begin to play with riots of reference charming away the boundaries of subject and argument to open out to the world of everything. But you could actually act out Jean-Charles's scenario; with *I/O* you can only get attitudes. So while one problematizes, the other seeks to heal.

(maybe final)

TO ELIE YARDEN: Two musical events of serious and very fond memory: playing your flute and piano piece with Marjorie Tichenor at the Bard Baccalaureate; playing a session in my house with you on piano and me on Crumar immortalized in a 4-track piece I called *Elie: The*

*Dance*. But the conversation and the enjambed sense of what business we were together in was and is permanent.

TO FERNANDO GARCIN *Lament for Sarah*):

People listen, people respond. It's always illuminating and gratifying. But when I send something to Fernando I not only know I will be listened to with the most empathetic and perceptive attention but that I will receive a response whose own creativity transforms miraculously my own sense of what I have composed. So someone I have met just once in person (with the Richardsons in Woodstock) has become the dearest sort of friend, a fellow traveler in expression and thought.

On *Lament for Sarah*: It was almost instantaneous: I heard of Sarah's death and she became a score needing to be played. It's what I played.

TO HILARY TANN: Reading your text is like listening to my music from within yours.

TO JOHN MCGINESS, MARY LEE ROBERTS: To me *m/c/g* (retroactively) was a (musical) opening of the lines of territorialization which you describe; and perhaps, beyond my awareness, it was as much a reflection of the social evolution in that direction as it was a vision thereof. The way I grooved on Mahler was a way of appreciating the access I felt the *Adagio* giving me to inner turmoils and unspoken (unspeakable) energies within all of us (meaning me) under the guise of something exquisite and wrenchingly gorgeous - and terminally manipulative.

TO JON FORSHEE, AARON KEYT: "Relevance. Liberation." - spoken in Rochester in 1987 to an SMT symposium on *Meta-Variations* - was a screech in the void pleading that 1. the alternative-culture liberations of the Sixties were multiple, not just the ones on the official counterculture list; and .2. in consequence of the general misapprehension of 1., works like *Meta-Variations* and *Group Variations* (and Jim Randall's writings and music) whose surfaces couldn't be aligned with the texts in *SCORE* Magazine or the sounds on Time Records, never registered as an elsewhere in the geography of contemporary music and musical thought. In the Rochester talk I grouched that *Meta-Variations* was probably too intimate a transcription of the inside of my head to have been comprehensibly exposed in public; odd because nothing I've ever written except *Nation* articles has had such a public history. What wasn't seen or heard was the strenuous claims that both of those works made on behalf of a quite alternative-cultural vision of music, an avant-garde liberation which would not "throw out the cognitive baby with the dogmatic bathwater" (of Positivism - the quote is from *M-V*). So *Meta-Variations* - written after *Group Variations* and essentially a retroreflection on its musical idea - was dedicated to the discovery of how musical thinking could address the question (I asked it in "Of This and That"): "Does experience/sharpen experience/or does experience/blunt experience? / A. I've heard it all before. / B. I've

learned to hear it as never before. / Two ways to use imagination." j, The idea that a musical system was a field of possibilities liberated by a reference rather than a set of prescriptions and prohibitions was central : "The room for 'choice' at every level of [composition] seems to evidence that maximum determinacy in every dimension of structure is a prerequisite to maximum 'creative freedom',... For the 'freedom' to create and perceive vacuously is hardly to be preferred to a completely conventionalized 'determinacy', where the rules are not *chosen* but *given*...." (M-V). *Group Variations* was the true manifesto of this cause; its ambition was nothing less than the recovery of time, the creation of a time, a Suzanne Langer-species "virtual time", a cumulative ongoing non-amnesiac time, experiencable as an inhabitable time-transcendence. In both the essay and the music, experiencability is not what seems to have communicated; but it was the heart of the aesthetic vision. And in Russell Richardson's luminous video creating space out of time I think that vision became present.

To JOSH MAILMAN: That musical effects are correlated with musical facts seems uncontroversial. But if your entry into the territory of musical facts is through the experience of musical effects it is likely that your fact-reifications will reflect your effect-experiences, and be selectively biased by them. So that something is assertible as a fact doesn't carry its own interpretation as to what musical effect it effectuates. There's always a taint of "post hoc ergo propter hoc" in the karma of any music-analytic discourse but even though it doesn't ever prove anything, doesn't the affect of a wordname given to identify - even just heuristically - some music-fact thing convey something musically meaningful? Shouldn't it intend to have explicit experiential consequences?

TO SCOTT BURNHAM (AND HARVEY SOLLBERGER): This was another one of my ideas for brewing a special musicality out of an idiosyncratic textural invariance: from a way that I hear the incipit of very early (parallel) organum as almost accidentally discovering the real architectonic complexity that is created by the images of polyphony - not as superimposing distinct pitchlines but as creating a multifaceted single organism that modulates as a whole, flexing as it flows by the trajectories of its facets (voices). The pairs of wind-instrument voices that are invariant (and invariantly straddling a perfect fourth) until the breakout at the end of *UN(-)* each create single sonic parallel lines - single lines with two edges, moving within the fixed frame of the wide-register fourth in the strings. The "Korean court music" is in the mode of the five-mile-dragon image I wrote in "Whose Time, What Space".

TO TILDY BAYAR (*Black/Noise I; Black/Noise III*): OK, so what's feminist about the *Tristan* Prelude? (This is a defense?) I never thought of *Black/Noise III* as a feminist essay (obviously you know this), but rather a reflection on the materials at issue, juxtaposing and composing them to contemplate (celebrate?) their multiguity, at the same time registering the self-contradicting brutality of univocal interpretations (they're all fake, photographed from books, fabricated from domestic objects, perverse digital overlays on the undemarcable flow of analog time). Negative space, silence, active containers for after- and still-persistent heard-and-seen images. The soundscreen (filterveils) modulating segment to segment strains to get to where it will reveal whose face it is really behind it but comes up way short and sighs its resignation. A nonsense pseudo-story with an unjustified air of meaning something (like Gurnemanz's voice at the beginning of Act III of *Parsifal*) runs across the surface like a demented conductor giving his orchestra uninterpretable signals



concealing that (multi)music is being brewed within the shell of references that appear to signify but do something quite different instead. What they do is contrive to make music or rather they let music be made of them.

TO WARREN BURT: Imagine something the sum of whose parts is a nothing. Leaving a determinate feel with no signifier, an experience with no name. But perhaps an experience nonetheless. Therefore its own signifier. Hermetic except within its nonverbal nonbeing which absorbs language as well. An experience that is a something perhaps. Nonethemore. Northeless: Black is no color; noise is the nullification of sound; noise is black silence. Silence is white sound. Housewives are: you might see some in the leftside portal at Conques along with the rest of us.

TO MICHAEL DELLAIRA: For the Bard Composers' Ensemble, the question of the musical promise of a score was whether our interaction with it produced something determinate - in our sense of where it was putting us, how it was putting us together, and whether the tokens of the score made a real musical difference in the sonic output. Right from the start we knew from and were allergic to generic. There really wasn't any other way to discover the effectiveness of a score except by the actual experience of playing it. And the longer we pursued our practice the more obvious it was that no rules would develop, that none would apply, that what worked and didn't was totally experiential (experimental?), and the feel we had for what we were doing would evaporate if we tried to capture it in midair and run it to ground as method.

## On One on One

Love, what is it but space and time  
rendered perceptible by the heart.  
(Proust, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff)

A nameless *frisson*  
courses,  
consumes,  
does not have to tell what it is,  
or that it matters,  
or what mattering is,  
just comes into being as an engulfing deluge,  
or a consuming holocaust.  
incavates as feel, as meme,  
as signifying  
without symbol,  
without voice,  
what makes hard, what makes ecstatic, what burns being, what screams NO!!!STOP!!!  
what matters before it means.

me.  
81 ÷ 9  
yrs  
old

*Anna Livia Plurabelle* on crappy headphones  
in the Brooklyn Public Library.

It was the same as music, no one told me it mattered,  
It just was what became me, I was those notes,  
Those wordshapes, those shadows of being  
being manifested or evoked,  
The world what it was only instantaneously as the flashes of now,  
every flash a transformation,  
some transformations remake consciousness, what there is.  
And it lodges as lifelong recollected miracle, this spontaneous instant outbursting of a  
suffusing inner music by the invasion of a particular sound from without. Often retold in  
self-revelatory posture, easily assimilated as the model epiphany of those indelible  
expressive moments in which what Ralph Shapey called "the graven image" was  
permanently embedded in the receptual DNA coloring every subsequent experience.  
But even as I tell it, and even as my inward mindtrack traverses the event and its  
descriptive recollection, I suddenly feel the infinitesimal inchoate gap between them,  
and realize that something else has been created in that gap, in the inscrutability of the  
experience and what can be captured of it in any language about it. How does it happen,

this spontaneous instantaneous ignition of an overwhelming suffusing music within me by the entry into my body of some arbitrary noise. The cognitive link between one and the other seems a cosmic gap, which has been leapt in some unidentified dimension of being. Description can only capture the boundaries fore and aft, the measurable and determinate and material phenomena and experiences but never the passage between. What is in being in that cognitive gap, what our living through it has brought into being, is without dimensions and characteristics or operational mechanisms; specifically: a mystery.

It is the pure immateriality of these transcendent experiential phenomena, that seem to define globally the essence of mattering, that arouses me; they seem always to be sonic phenomena, immaterial time-objects made explicitly and exclusively of sound and yet unmistakably saturated with unmistakable selfhood: life's very first thunderstorm with its spasm of total terror gigantically metastasized by the absence of any accompanying spatiotemporal visualizations. How, from within our metrically spatialized rational prisons, do we contrive to ontologize these undenotable events? How are we even able to, or to conceive doing so (the force of the experience compels us.)? Should we even imagine the possibility of a hardwired Chomskyan innateness of soundlanguage, or even explicitly of musiclanguage? Innateness: is it not a strange and sinister noun?

But - on the bright side - should it not follow rather naturally that organically nonverbal phenomena would in any case have no descriptive/explanatory metalanguages, verbal or any other kind. Particularly since the very notion of metalanguage is, well, linguistic. And can denotation denote the not-there? Even if it has feelable presence? And if perhaps Time's arrow has no arrowhead, after all, what then? But that still leaves us, at least, speechless.

So it seems that the coming into being of mattering is *prima facie* a work of imagination: the conceptualization of a supervenience connecting a scatter of transcendent purely psychic episodes by an act of imaginal set-creation. But set-creation is in the quantified material world mere bricolage, disjuncted from the sensing world by the same transformational gap; the sense of sense that directs it is vanished in the conceptual gap between concept and content and leaves only a determinate-feeling energy on one side and a neutral aggregate of denotables on the other.

So are the things that matter not things at all? Or are they things metaphorically separated from the mattering attributed to them, the mattering which they are felt to have occasioned? When I play my music for you, and it doesn't matter to you, I know by something that happens in my being that we have together conjured a space of mutual nonconsonance, that where we each are is not quite in the same world, or at least not the same room. That kind of experience (which one has had) makes me think of that primal shock of originary cognitive dissonance which simultaneously and instantaneously forces every infant's revelation of other, self, and the world; the moment that compels the discovery, really the invention of thought, as an emergency

tool conjured in panic to restore sanity, equilibrium, cohesion. From the outside, ontological creativity appears to be volitional, “the chosen”; but from within it reads like Stravinsky’s “I do not seek, I find”. And, “I know there’s a real world out there, because not all of my fantasies work” (-BB)

But then – from that moment forward – it does matter; the *frisson* that is the discovery of the threat of annihilation is also the discovery of the dimension of significance, of the hierarchy of urgencies, eventually in the birth of language, of the orders of meaningfulness.

I know what matters: it is that which only I could know that it matters.  
It is that from which I can’t separate [detach] myself from myself.  
That which I can’t separate myself from.  
That which clings to every neuron  
Laminated within by what lodges from without.  
The music inside that matters is my significant being;  
Comes into being by the refraction of music without.  
What is left as I dissolve, become no more;  
what is left is that which matters.  
That music  
that makes the music inside to be  
You cannot speak of listening  
of an exterior transaction exchanging sentience in detachment.  
It’s not that music matters,  
It’s that music confers mattering  
Upon me  
Upon you for me  
I know the insucking feeling of mattering  
From inside of a music  
Inside

You can harvest that mattering, learn how to transport it among things that happen of a kind, between kinds, sustain the emberglow in the afterfade, against the numbing defense against the mattering that pains, the unavoidably seen unacceptable, turning the incoming energy into a practice of engagement, learning how to engage, how to revision  
the inchoate eruption of mattering  
as a music.

As I go forward,  
There is no succession  
There is only subsumption  
Every then in each now  
As then is in now

Gives now its now.  
Do you want to know why music matters?  
Because it doesn't if it's an It: If it  
Can be located  
Understood  
Deconstructed  
Reanimated  
Recommended  
Given agency  
Contextualized  
To substitute substantiality for mattering.

But mattering contains only the content of the moment of experience  
Indelibly disappeared.

The *frisson* crystallizes in spectres of imagination,  
Looming over the network of experience,  
transferring its feel as the images of significance:  
Nothing can matter except by being imagined so;  
Nothing can happen in the absence of that imagining  
creating what it experiences  
creating what there is to experience,  
creating the experiencing of what it creates.  
Building lifelong a psycholocation,  
which might be called:  
the place of mattering;  
it is  
formed  
of the uninvited jolts within  
from the music-transactional cauldron  
within.

More on one on one

If you follow the long and winding roads whose visible surfaces are your own kneejerk verities you will understand how your hopes for universal mutuality are pure projection – because all of your earthly co-residents are on their own totally self-enclosed teleological personal trajectories, stretching through their opaque soundproof life tunnels straight ahead from womb to now. More likely that apparent originary or apparent commonality is a narcissistic illusion than that exploring clues of consonance by cultivating interaction and empathy will bend the interface toward ontological comity. Coming to consciousness undoubtedly is a big bang of ontological dissonance, the coming to identity by the spectre of Other, the moment when the imperative of articulate thought bursts forth as a nonnegotiable survival necessity, and invents itself. So what you identify as exterior phenomena concerning which your awareness is formed as intersubjectively sharable concreta are more likely the projected objectifications of the energies, the wave motions, the vibrations of your self-evolving psyche. Psychedelia may be the firmest reality, mystical transcendence the clearest identity of what you experience.

Bio and notes for Benjamin Boretz:

I was born (1934 in Brooklyn) at a time when no sentient person could separate personal preoccupations from the social and political urgencies of the time. That consciousness has inflected all my work as composer and writer, and undoubtedly underlies my activity as an instigator of projects such as the publication *Perspectives of New Music*, the creative cooperative called *Open Space*, and the learning program at Bard College called *Music Program Zero*. My involvement in computer music arose from such social awarenesses as well - inspired by my experience with new-music performance in New York, and the writings of Elias Canetti (*CROWDS AND POWER*). All the meta-musical writing I have done, from the book-length essay *Meta-Variations* to my decade as Music Critic for *THE NATION*, and many text compositions and essays since then, have been spurred by this engagement with the implications of expressive personhood in the contemporary world. And partly as a consequence of this thinking, my music has never had any referentiality at all.

#### **4: (EPIGRAPH)**

*As I read my writing, in Meta-Variations or elsewhere, I am not overly impressed. I am not struck by the importance of what is written there, nor by the eternal verity of what is set forth. Isn't it a strange thing to profess to be an expert in everyone else's language of expression?*

*A guy is a solipsist. Can't imagine communicating with another soul. So of course he runs endlessly off at the pencil spilling his mindgut explaining this to anyone who might listen. Yeah. Sure.*

*Maybe telling the simple truth of your experience necessarily conveys the message that you are professing a philosophical or a political position. And maybe it does. But maybe that's not the most interesting or rewarding content that that truth might have for an overhearer of it, nor maybe it's not the only significant takeaway contents of that telling.*

*If there are no guarantees,  
By way of stipulated criteria,  
Structures with registered roadmaps,  
Styles with recognized names,  
What in the world can there be?*

*If you want to understand someone's politics, don't minimize their views, observe their manner of formulating, delivering and interacting about them in relation to other persons. For politics is not only implicit in behavior, it is behavior. The paraphrasable view is the abstraction of politics, the uninterpreted nominal text descriptions of politics; but behavior and its intra- and inter-psycho resonances are what politics is.*

*music?  
in what respect, Charlie?*