

collected
writings
of

**Robert
Paredes**

Collected Writings of Robert Paredes

texts by Robert Paredes

**compiled and edited
by Matthew Marth**

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About Robert Paredes

Robert Paredes was a composer, performer, essayist, multi-media artist and teacher whose output was consistently and consciously experimental. Expressing his deep interest in language, social justice and interpersonal relationships, his work was often a context to investigate the essence of music, its meaning and its role in society. Besides being intensely creative, Paredes possessed an encyclopedic memory, was extremely articulate and was a master of argument.

Paredes left behind a rich and fascinating legacy of artistic work, ranging from electronic music and text compositions to visual art and recordings of free improvisation, jazz and klezmer music.

Born Robert Wesley Paredes in San Diego, California on February 10, 1948, he was the only child of Fernando Napoleon Paredes and Laureta Gay Williams. In his youth he was educated at Brown Military Academy and in the San Diego public schools. While in junior high and high school, he studied clarinet with Daniel Magnusson, then principal clarinetist of the San Diego Symphony, as well as with Robert Osborne and Robert Marr. He also studied piano and beginning composition with W. Allan Oldfield. As a young adult he attended San Diego State and City Colleges, pursuing studies in music and sociology. While at San Diego State he studied composition privately with David Ward-Steinman and clarinet with Norman Rost. During the seventies, he undertook a variety of occupations in addition to freelance musical work, including room-service waiter, bank employee, quick-print and copy service operative and office supply salesperson.

After performing as clarinetist in Harry Partch's *The Bewitched* with the Harry Partch Ensemble at the 1980 Berlin Festival he began studying composition and compositional linguistics privately with the production's artistic director, composer Kenneth Gaburo. Study with Gaburo spanned two periods: first, from 1980 to 1983, and then again from 1987 to 1990. Also in 1980, through Gaburo, Paredes became acquainted with composer and essayist Benjamin Boretz. The two developed an influential friend/mentor relationship in the years that followed.

In between the two periods of study with Gaburo, from 1984 to 1986, Paredes lived in Australia, where he performed both as composer and

clarinetist, active in the areas of contemporary chamber music, free improvisation, jazz, and middle European folk music, including klezmer, Balkan and Greek repertoire.

Paredes was also an artist-in-residence on several occasions during the 1980s and 90s, including at the Festival of Improvised Music in Perth, Australia (1986); the Unit One Experimental School of the University of Illinois (1988); the Festival de Inverno, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil (1992); and the Birmingham Art Association in Birmingham, Alabama (1993).

In 1987 he resumed his studies with Kenneth Gaburo at the University of Iowa, at which time he also studied art and technology and recording techniques with Lowell Cross, and intermedia with Hans Breder. There he received both M.A. and Ph.D degrees in music, and was subsequently employed as a Visiting Assistant Professor of composition and director of the Experimental Music Studios from 1991 to 1993. After a political and institutional upheaval in the music school, he left the University of Iowa to teach privately and perform. For a brief period he also repaired musical instruments. Later in his life, after a changing of the guard at the music school, he returned to the University of Iowa to serve as an adjunct professor of Jazz studies.

Though clarinet was his main instrument, Paredes was an accomplished woodwind player in general, with saxophone and flute also playing a large role. His performances have been captured in numerous recordings, and they attest to his prowess over a wide range of musical styles, from classical to jazz to gypsy. Some of his more notable performance affiliations were the Harry Partch Ensemble; the Big Jewish Band of San Diego (a klezmer music ensemble); the Schieve/Paredes Duo (performing their own compositions and music written especially for them); and the Leadbelly Legacy Band of Austin, Texas (free jazz/cajun/blues). He also collaborated in numerous other small ensembles that focused on a particular repertoire, such as Brazilian choros, free improvisation, the music of Ornette Coleman or original compositions by the performers themselves.

Among his compositions are *Strict Time Lingering*, for clarinet, trumpet, and violin (1982); *T(here)*, for solo flute (1982); *Foreground Back*, for solo violin (1982-86); *(On)e*, for flute and clarinet (1986); *Forgetting and Remembering*, a multi-track accumulation of improvisations on clarinet (1986); *Speakers*, (1987-93): a series of seventeen tape compositions-as-

writings/drawings; *Small Writing*, for solo cellist (1993-94); and his final work, for organ, *Fleeting Ecologies in an Ontology of Halting*.

In addition to his musical output, Paredes created art videos and numerous drawings, including *Tapes* (1988), a series of fifty drawings-as-a-music. Art exhibits featuring his visual work included Texas Musicians in Art (1987) and Composition as Eco-System (1990).

After several years undergoing treatment for cancer, Paredes succumbed to the disease and died on August 20, 2005 in Coralville, Iowa.

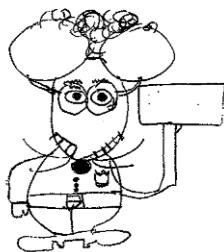
Of the many types of artistic works he left behind, his writings are among the most significant. Some are traditional narratives, some are poems, while others are hybrid experimental forms that combine properties of narrative, text-sound and text-as-music. Reflective of his key preoccupations, they often deal with musical subjects and the role of the composer-artist in contemporary society. The writings in this book represent the bulk of his published work, including his longer essays and text compositions. The second part of the book is devoted to his poetry, most of which did not appear publicly until after his death.

Robert Paredes was one of the outstanding exponents of late 20th century American music and intellectual culture. But despite this, and because he was not inclined to self-promotion, his work has remained relatively unknown. It is hoped that this collection of his writings will bring his engaging creations and important ideas to a wider audience, preventing them from fading into obscurity. Ideally, it will also stimulate readers to further investigate and discover his diverse creative output and unique contributions to language and musical culture.

“Could this music be where people talk to one another in their various ways in search of another kind of intimacy.”

— Robert Paredes, *What Is Music For?*

Roberto Rauten



Foreword

I didn't like Bob Paredes at first. In hindsight I wish I had better instincts. Despite my ill first impression, it is clear his personality grabbed my attention. I even wrote a poem about him while he was still a stranger to me. It was a character sketch of the person I imagined him to be: so serious and turbid, his mind an overwrought computer about to erupt and crash. (I believe in the poem I described him as "trapped in a calculator".) The poem wasn't especially disparaging, but it wasn't exactly flattering either. I only showed it to him many years later when our relationship had developed into a deep and trusting friendship. It had been easy for me to misjudge and misunderstand him: I was just a college kid then—an undergraduate in music composition with the typical arrogance that comes with such territory. I was in my early twenties and thought I knew everything. Yet in actual fact I knew almost nothing about music or the wide world. And I certainly knew nothing about the real Bob Paredes.

I'm still not sure why I initially disliked Bob. It was likely a combination of my tendency to keep a suspicious distance from strangers and feelings of inadequacy resulting from being young, green and in the company of intellectually superior people. Perhaps, though, some of my initial impressions of him weren't so off the mark—he could at times be very intense and antagonistic. But ironically, now that he is gone—and after about 15 years of getting to know him, first as his student, then as a musical collaborator and ultimately as his friend—now, I cherish especially my memories of the playful Bob, his sense of humor and predisposition to bouts of absurd silliness. He went into "silly mode" most predictably after he had a chance to vent his spleen in a wild session of free improvising. Now more relaxed, he might begin making duck noises, cracking jokes, inventing silly word-plays or making goofy voice caricatures. If he was in top form, the funny voices were developed into full-scale, extemporized theatrical monologues. Certain of his favorite voices were elaborated over time to become full-fledged characters with names and a theater of idiomatic gestures and facial expressions, eventually occupying a place in his standard repertoire of parody. For example, there was Sir Fortescue Winthrop Smyth (pronounced with a long "i" and spoken in the most RP-soaked British accent one can muster); Olive and Homer Pumunky (as I understood it, the pair was a kind of cartoon-like alter-ego of him and his wife, Melody Scherubel); not to mention a host of dog names, including Pupley Whiteside and Arf Barkley. So much for the

monochrome, serious and abrasive academic intellectual I had made him out to be in the early days.

In the process of putting together this collection of Bob's writings, reading them again or for the first time, I realize how perfectly they integrate those seemingly incongruous aspects of his personality that I observed over the years. There is erudition, depth, complexity and passion. There is playfulness, goofiness, irreverence, anger. There is mindfulness and precision, wildness and turbulence; frustration and defiance; and there is tenderness, compassion and a longing for connectedness.

In these works, as in his life, Bob Paredes was concerned with asking questions and stripping away the layers of assumptions that get in the way of our seeing and hearing the true nature of things. More than mere narratives, his texts are environments—eco-systems for the reader/listener to enter and inhabit—each a means to experience phenomena in a different, extraordinary way. Indeed, it might be more accurate to describe the function of these environments not as a stripping away of layers, but as a re-clothing of ideas and phenomena. Depending on its garb, life can look very different.

Rarely tame and self-explanatory, these eco-systems can be at times a murky wilderness. But even then, when his words and word-complexes seem opaque and impenetrable, there are always certain characteristics that carry us through to the other side, out of the jungle, to an open space, a clearing, of recognition. It might be satire, or Boolean logic or a poignant turn of phrase. For me, however, two other persistent qualities stand out from the rest. One is that Bob himself is always right there at our side, honestly opening up, intimately leading us through his world. The other is that no matter what the text is for, or is saying, or is doing or trying to do, it is, ultimately and essentially, his own unique and inimitable kind of music.

I would like to thank Melody Scherubel for providing me with many of the manuscripts and images for this book and for her support overall. I would also like to thank Ben Boretz and Hans Breder for granting permission to reprint several of the longer texts. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Mary Means for her support and encouragement.

— *Matthew Marth, Vienna, July 2007*

Longer Texts



Memories, Drought, and Music As

Memories, Drought, and Music As....., is an interlace of three separate texts written during a drought-invested Iowa City summer. Among many things, it represents a great deal of time spent languishing in coffeeshops, soaking up air-conditioning—[remembering a better time, speculating on the present one, and putting forth some thoughts about music]. Its overall tone, or flavor, is commensurately one of incessant wheel-spinning enacted within and against the fact of diminished energy.

As a work for performance, *Memories, Drought, and Music As.....* has three identities:

1. The work may be read by a single reader who tries to differentiate—[within reason—i.e., no silly characterizations please!—]—between the three intertwining voices.
2. The work may be performed by a trio of three readers, each choosing a different partition marker—[i.e., [], (), or / /]—and speaking only those words found therein. Note: when a word, or words, are found enclosed by more than one set of partition markers—[e.g., [()], or / [] /]—those should be spoken, simultaneously, by both [or all] individuals assigned to the markers in question.
3. The situation described in #2, obtains—with the following elaboration: each member of the trio not, at the given time, engaged in the reading of a word, or words, should make a sound—[a different, and quiet sound each time]—either with an instrument or voice for the duration of the reading reader's reading. Note: whatever the

instrument chosen, the sounds should be “small” and “distant sounding.” These sounds should not be so long as to significantly disrupt the “word-flow” from one partition to another, or to cause one to lose one’s place. What is desired, here, is a seemingly self-generating, multi-stream, interlace of word/sound—three voices and their own surround-sound muttering inside a single head. In order to facilitate this latter realization, I recommend that each different part be highlighted with a different color highlighter—[with colors, of course chosen to facilitate an easier separation of parts].

A suitable, but not lengthy, pause should be observed between each numbered section of the work.

Selected numbered sections may be culled out to make a shorter performance.

I

[music
as
societal safety valve-music
as
sexual surrogacy]..(it's bloody hot!)../an australian allusion/..[music
as
pseudo-scientific posturing]..(dry)..[music
as
power-mongering]../no rain/..(or very little)../for days/..[music
as
trance-inducement]../the corn is barely out of the ground/..[music
as
pandering]../not half a mile from here/..[music
as
propaganda]..(there is some breeze today)..[music
as
music]../as i write/..[music
as
ego-masturbation]../i am forty/..(what to do about my licks?)../an older
returning student-too young to quit/..[too old]..(how to make a music
which?)../in this enclave of learning/..[to go back]..(has no lick in
it?)../ringed all around with dying corn/..(what is a lick-a habit?)..
/and/.. (some musical gesture performed?)../for nearly and or more like
over twenty some/..(habitually a motive?)../years of desire and disaffec-
tion/..(a key signature, , * a twitch?)..[i]../have tossed and turned my
way along/..(of the eye?)../in at once and out-the way, path, conduit,
trail/..(why would i want to take?)../to music/..(out?)../of my/..(licks if
in fact they are?)../looking i suppose for the one metaphor/..(evidence
of me-don't i want?)../which would sense up my motion/..[music
as
habit-eradication?]..(more of me?)../make sense of-looking for/..[music
as
simulacrum of sanity]../a way to be in it/..(not only)..[walking around it-
music
as
simulacrum of insanity-music
as
just sound-music

as

resistance-music

as

not just sound-music

as nourishment]..(the elimination of all trace).. /on alternate days/..(of self before acting can).. /i feel exalted and silly/.. (be a kind of beginning).. /in my pursuit/..(or just plain death before the pen goes down).. [music

as

ear-salve]..(before the key is depressed).. [music

as

popularity contest]..(the string activated).. [music

as

distraction]..(the dial twiddled-what state am i in?).. /who needs it?/ ..(what do i want?).. /it's bloody hot!.. (i may only know that i want).. /dry/.. [music

as

airborne virus-but not what—i seem never).. /no rain/.. [or very little].. /for days/.. (to know what—unless, that—is what).. [the farmers help one another to stay up from under—but few composers- do they know that if the other guy dies].. /there's/.. [a good chance they will].. /how not to go back/.. [too].. /when going back would/.. [some of].. /make so many things/.. [but composers—at least the ones i know still].. /right!.. /reckon they can get themselves kept by a].. [music

as

accompaniment)..
[better].. (to internal theaters—the underscore).. [they don't seem to think that they].. (there they are, and).. [might need each other because].. (i remember how they).. [they still imagine that out there].. (looked, and this sounds).. [is their salvation—they].. (like how i felt).. [can after—all—always escape].. /the temperature must be climbing/.. [a farmer].. /again it spit a bit last night/.. [cant].. /not enough-scientists predict dire consequences as a result of/.. [music

as

classical music—jazzy, snot-ism-music

as

fashion-as in)..
/where to go?/.. (see my new clothes, hear my new music-music

as

conveyor of messages of quality about the owner).. [something from].. (of

the music and really)..[australia]..(music

as

determinist propaganda-if only they knew it)..[life goes on]..(neither
cana-muso)../[music

as

a faint cry/..(my first thought in this june time of no water is)../on your
sleeve/..(let me out of here-the city tightens around)../but no less/..(me
like a drawstring-i can't leave neither)../hurting/..(can the farmer)..
/[music

as

please save me in this time of no water/..[australia-again-music

as

rotation-“a” leaves soon for santa barbara]..(port phillip)..[music

as

constraints-pink mission in the twilight]..(bay, seashells)..[music

as

and a park full of woodpeckers]..(and heidelberg)..[perfect place for
gongs and golden]..(yellow green)..[music-ringing sounds-lost in spain-
ish]..(longviews)..[as california]..(tenuous speech)..[music]..(corner-ride
speech)..[as]..(despondency tight)..[cornball memento making-music

as

description]..(lipped, no nonsense)..[as music

as

a read-out of states]..(yellow-green)..[these six notes here—and of the
body]..(bush-fire smell and night)..[music

as

the ebb and flow]..(time princess)../droughts/..[internal energies-stresses-
pains and desires]..(bridge dancing number eighty)../can/..(to)..[music

as

groove]../also be/..(felix place)..[music

as

alone-listening]../things/..[music

as

i'm better than you]..(way)..[music

as

heart rates]../in the head/..[music

as

i'm just as good as you]..(to go)../dryness-no nourishment for
infant/..[mate]../life/..(leaving for melbourne)..
/the sweat is/..[music

as

measuring up]..(dandenong ranges)../pouring into/..[music
as
penance]../soil-packed/..(lygon street cappuccino)../my coffee/..[music
as
the heights]../tight/..(rains-wept-dark)../my shirt sticks/..[music
as
getting there]../solid/..(strindbergian tram ride)../to my back/..[for the
audition]../tightened/..(flinders station)../like a/..(bass strait over there
somewhere)../vice or a/..(cozy in the lounge sweet)../hating fist/..
(room)../i'd like to/..(milk tea)../around/..[/leave/]..(rabbits salad)../
something this place/..(sandwich moreland)../weak, yet but/..(italians,
that little store)../growing-where would?/..(park and jog)../i go?/..
(around the penitentiary)../back to/..(/have we?/)../austin done/..
[mate]../this to-probably not ourselves, have we?/..[made a near-dead
airless place?-music

as
place?]/..in our minds?/..[for talking to]../with too/..[whom].. /heavy/..
(williamstown)../intense heat/..(remembrances)../and/..(around uluru)
.../light/..(and seen from)../mortal/..(a distance)../and/..(purple-ringed)..
/nothing/..[forty and a student]..(in the sunset)../to/..[a little embarrassing]..(the center of)../sip on/..[but then]..//thirsty/..(a continent)..["h"
leaves for baltimore to get married-what always hanging on]..(a place
of)..[can i do-should—i do-holding out?].(nourishment)..[it's gotten out of
hand, for what?]/..distracted/..(a place of)..[and nothing's]..//the/..
(respite)..[happened]../over/..[for a]../rank/..(a metaphor)../and/..(in
a)..[meta]-[place]-[for].../thick/..(of eternal drought)../over/..[but why,
why-music

as
a place to draw the line?]/..intractable, hot, unremitting, dead-chest
pains, day grime and sorrow night-hopelessness-what-does it take to get
out of a drought—the one in the fields-and the one in your-my head?/..
[muted trumpets are the sound of this sun-clusters of violins and picco-
los-a drought as where no music happens, none grows, music

as
music]..[(what do i know about?)]..(the connection of music to life?)..[which feeds]..(it has not always been apparent that there is one)..[exhausted more]..(more of an interaction between musical impulses)..[smoke]..(acoustical gestures and the memories they carry, generate,)..[of music

as]

(what is imagination?)..[dust]..(composition as it is-popularly exhibiting itself-is a re-shuffling)..[povera]../the drought out there/..(of bits of musical memory)../the drought in here/..[inquire]..(the soul or genius of the music-shuffler-a function of the)../both mandate change/..[as—an interaction]..(degree to which the)../something once thought to be/..(moments remembered?)-[(come)]../necessary/..[resist—what is]..(back out sounding as if)../is absent/..[(they and in fact)]-/the/..[music
as]

(had never existed before?)../a nourishing agent/..[none grows]..(the point is that there)../something/..(is always an in-point)../which feeds/..(it's not a supernatural)../abatement/..(matter)..[a drought as where]..(maybe)../a poverty abated/-[no-music happens]..(piano, let's see)..[absence]..(piano, clarinet, flute)..[sun-clusters]..(bass drum-tape)..[blackened sleeping]..(violin)..[water blue no wet]

II

[smoke]..[/smoke/]..[excoriate]..(music)..[rabbit tracks]..(excoriate)..
/gripping my hand for a moment/..(as supernatural event)..[pulse]../rabbit tracks/..(music)..[to]

(as
music)..[take]../fog bank/..(as).. [pulse].. [/saxophone/].. [airless-pulse] ..
[/end/]..of bourke/..[to]../never again/..(as music) ..[intractable]..(as)..
[take dowser]..(saxophone end of bourke)..[brittle]../stricken unto death-on the shelf/..[burnt music
as]

..//hardanger fiddle tunes/..[a talking yourself into yourself]../who were my ancestors/..[the idea of yourself-nourishing agent]../distant trucks, sweat-pulse-climb, sleepy/..[eye accepts incongruities more readily than the ear or]../burning barns/..[the brain accepts incongruities]../have to/..[proffered by the eye
more]../think/..[readily than those of the]../choking that/..[ear]../this is it and/..[more than once i've been]../smoky light i'm/..[saved by a painting the]../never/..[diversity of its field, and the way the field is limited]..(easily distracted)..[a frame, and only so many items in it-only in]..(music

as
distraction)..[music you can move the]../cordoned off/..[furniture

around]../loving dry-bed leaving/..[society habitually tries to talk us out of ourselves-we have to talk ourselves into ourselves]../sweet light, fourth of july/..(piggdon street where warren)..[like it or not]..(used to live)..[i'm here]../no fireworks circle sun/..(memory)..
as

talking yourself into yourself]../too dry primrose memory/..(speculation)..
pressure in my memory/..(speculation)..
pressure in my neck/..
[middle park]..(observation)..
the proverbial pain/..[where we used]..
(silence)..
as

talking yourself into staying)..
air-conditioned coffee shop/..[beware the person who tries to talk you OUT of yourself]

III

[what "it" is-how "it" affects me—music's basic debate. where is aesthetics in all this? aesthetics an "effects" matter or?]../beautiful/..[an "it"]../what is "it"?/..[matter-hand gesture]../rain/..[then there's the question of how i affect "it"—the "it" being the observed-how am i changing "it" simply by listening to it]../today/..[what "it" is]../drinking the/..[how "it" affects me]..(seeing a)..
water/..(doco on)../fresh from the sky/..(some country's)..[is this a coming?]..(military)..[to terms, or another?]..(little girls)..
clouds gathering/..[manifestation of?]..(basic training)..
to the east and northeast/..[sleepwalking?].
(fumbling with)..
we now have three electric fans/..(their weapons)..
like airplane motors/..(crying alot—i remember military school in uniform-all of six, stiff gray wool suits, high collars, white cross belt, never get them dirty-tea cakes, punch)

IV

[in a music

as

showmanship]../break in/..(point lonsdale)..
the weather/..[music

as

narcotic]..(the heads, pilot boats)../deep/..(tiny-barely)../red-purple-peach/..(discernable)../sunset sky/..[music

as

nostalgia]..(figures)..[trigger]../tells of/..(padding)../a town/..[music
as

wish you were]..(around)../in central/..[here]..(by)../iowa with more
rain/..(buckley's cave)../six foot/..[due]../corn/..[music

as

corn]..(bass strait)..[music

as

badge of]..(churning)../storms/..[distinction]../such/..(green white)../as
they are..(water)../collect/..[music

as

big bucks-maybe]..(queenscliff dreams)..[will there]..(down the)..[be
music-music

as

/i know it/..(coast road to)..[music?]../in a coffee shop/..

[as]

(friday night down to the chinese eats)..[wish i was there]..(on bourke
street)../doing the bills/

V

/tomorrow-more heat/..[music

as

what is it?]/../they/..[music

as

say?]/..(thunderstorm at four everyday)../say/..[music

as

hear?]/../small town nowhere/..(la jolla cove walk along the)../to go
to/..(ocean front-full moon-rock climbing)../body too big-sleepy/

VI

[three players-could be three clarinets-could be clarinet, trumpet, cello,
or vibes may-]../very quiet/..[be trombone]../to/..[spatially separate]
../calling/..[defining fields in relationship to one another]../moving

through events to establish synergies at a distance/..[seat-]../ing, position-as if a spatial environment/

VII

[the mind is acquisitive-greedy-it wants everything it can imagine and to be able]..[/it de-/]..(vours)..[to imagine any]..(and)../or/..(every)..[thing it can't—every moment of perception is lived under its desirous shadow—it cannot be allowed to control, for no part of the body could keep up with the speed of imaginary acquisition—reality]../i/..(e)..[that which the eye sees-ear hears-appendages touch—when they do—runs a poor second and so most live a life of internal theater of possibilities-frustrated by the fact]

.../s/..[of the limitation]..(s)..[of the body—i can see it so clearly, but i can't be there]../it's not surprising that t.v. makes me fat-so much movement can be had without the/..(i seem constitutionally)../movement of/..(so)..[much]../as a leg/..(unable to see what i see-hear what i hear)..[lately i've begun]..(feel what i feel, it's)..[to be just a little]..(just not as good a show)..[resentful of my mind's]..(as my imagination can)..[all too facile ability]..(provide, but i keep)..[to construct a more]..(trying anyway slowing)..[intense and interesting]..(myself down to clean)..[reality than the]..(the kitchen watching)..[one-i'm in-out of]../or/..(trying)../to/..(every act)..[graymatter i'm]..(but soon the eyes begin)..[not so desirous to]../to/..(dart around the room, follow this or that—and i'm off to the ever)..[bank of memory to]..(glades, or bali, or sydney)..[it's]..(also)../my/..(or the gulf of mexico in)..[desired distant]..(my mind-a theater of)..[location]..(possibilities)

VIII

/some apparatus which extracts part of an acoustical space—heightening it/..[m]../earphones, selective amplification/..(i'm more inclined to stay with the dreariness of the moment—iowa's a rather good place to practice this as-timuli of a)../louder, but more present/..(certain kind are notable for their absence—there are)..
../louder-but more present/..(fewer distractions-or so i tell myself)../louder but-more present/..(i need to

work and let what i'm thinking come out of)../what is the relationship?/..(the activity itself—i see this as a bringing of the mind)..[artie shaw on]../of white noise to red?/..(back into the time of the body-i have always said)..[the radio]../wear them in..[bind]../one/..(that i'll start taking care of myself when)../particular environments/..(i begin to do good work-still-i cannot, as the mind says, yes!, but you haven't done it yet—the work—therefore no right to be healthy—in the end no one can really help-no one can hold the pen, rewind the tape, hear the sound, absolutely no reference)..[i want my work]..(to the work of any other composer can be of use)..[i'm the only one who wants my work]..(all, just writing, keeping busy, moving the pen)..[no one wants, or can want, my work—but me—how can i do my work in the face?].(the mind can resolve nothing without the hand)..[of no one wanting it—what is implied by my wanting?].(tradition is useless)..[so much, something not wanted by?].(the avant-garde is useless)..[anyone else?].(comments pro and-or con is useless, and in the end-books a beer with friends]..(are useless)../music

as

an argument for myself?/..[and a round of duffer golf keeps you going]../i have a taste for the plain-the uninteresting-the mundane-i am mistrustful-deeply of the “intrinsic” beauty of “things”—arguments—i am deeply dis-/..[in the time of]../trustful of the use of music to acquire/..[drought-let's make]../things other than music

as

an abundance of/..(the)..[mind]../but you said/.....

IX

[what kind of designation is—"music"?]../functional/..[what does it denote?]./where?/..[do i go to find out?]./it seems “we” don’t just learn MUSIC]../we learn a whole lot of meta-musical behaviors as well.....music

as

an occasion for delusions/..(as in)../of grandeur/..(how many would-be composers try not only to emulate the act of composition, but the behaviors of composers both historical and/..(dare)..[i say it even]..(now) ..alive?/..[berets]..(denim)..[it started out not]../business suits/..(cowboy boots)..[only learning to play]../namers of speech/..[the clarinet

and]..(namers of speech)..[a literature, but that with a little help]../
 like well-of suburban/..[from technology i could]../kids in berets and/
 ..[almost recreate a zeit-]../trench-coats, sallow/..[geist as well outside]../
 complexions and their/..[was southern california]../older counterparts/../[but in here it's always europe]..(imaginary time travel)..
 [music

as]

(time travel)../music

as

in acting the role of the musician/

X

[threads re: reads re:hears are]..(university is a lesser of)..[head] ../
 many/..(evils inflicted on)..[ars eat]../music/..(as an occasion)..[ads]
 ..(for thought by an)..[at, tre, her]..(uncaring society)..[the]..(is this
 music?-what is music?)..[he]..(what is music?

—is a dumb question?)..[a]..(can you ever answer it without going to a
 “piece” of music?)..[and when that fails]..(to another “piece” of
 music?)../and when that fails/..(to yet another “piece” of music?—who
 chooses the music?—and now the open door to politics)../i don't think
 so/..(sure enough)../i think it's/..[maybe]../the only question/..(when
 asking how-imagine what—if)../unless/..(someone always goes to your
 mother—to find out if YOU are a person)..[vibraphone sound]..(bad poli-
 tics, huh?..[verbal speculation-what is “its” nature.....exhaust]

XI

[in many of my recent works]../hot again/..[i have approached materi-
 als which i thought to be mundane]../no apparent/..[ordinary]..(or per-
 haps what i)../hope/..(took to be their homeliness was a function of the
 way in which two sounds interact either horizontally)..
 /for/..[vertically form a composite..(a “they,”)..[if you will]../rain/..[in the hope that their
 seeming lack of interest will make other less-easily-audible.attributes
 of the sounds more clearly discernable]../moistened lips/..(the russians
 have arrived, camping a couple of blocks down)..[a dulling of one

attribute]../night sounds/..[so as to heighten another]../bitter, pre-fourth call home/

XII

/in the coffee shop/..[i speculate]..(among other)../high/..(things)..[on whether]..(trek up to the)..
/humidity/..[or not—music

as

(top of hanging)..[i've known-if not all]..(rock-lush under)..[the time loved-it will]..(growth, koala)..
/fly lands/..[survive]..(high in the)../on my coffee cup/..(trees-my friend)..[here in drought land]..[(told me one)]..[i hear tell that]..(fell right out of)..[/clouds/]../off/..
.[symphonies-orchestra]..(a tree damn)../to the/..[are disappearing, leaving..(near cuffing him)..
/south/..[one at a time-each]..(aside the head)..[doing their farewell]..(in its)..
/headed this way/..[symphony final exit]..(plummet)..
[stages right and left]../can't escape/..[yet]../the muzack/..[even now]..
/when/..[i see the kids]../the last/..[already jaded by]../human has/..[the good music]..(kookaburra)..
/past into oblivion/..[merchants and the]..(on a fence)..
/the cock-roaches/..[money-music merchants]..(post)..
/will gather/..[queuing up]../around the/.. [beaut australian].. /muzack machines/.. [british word—queue for and]../
[congratulate/..[line]..(crawling around)..
/themselves on a/..(in the rocks)..
/job well done/..[to train for]..(went there how)..
[slots in]..(many times was)..[the few of these]..(it)..
/they deserve/..[antediluvian night]../one another/..[mares which remain].. (with r n
who first took)..[and my sadness]..(us on the climb)..
/bitter/..[is of such a scope]..(pointing out which)..
/today/..[and complexity]..(paddocks had decent)..[i can barely]..(ground water and)..
[move my lips]..(which showed the farmer up not—to know where he really was)

XIII

/rain/..[the india pacific]../this morning/..[right across australia]../cool breeze, delicious/..[nullabor plain]../fresh/..[red, dotted with salt bush, not a]..
/morning/..[hillock to be seen]../air/..[i]..(i imagine this view)..
[have]..(straight south)..
[this]..(would culminate in a thousand-

foot).../saw/..(drop into the sea)../a squirrel yesterday/..[sense]../flat out, no water for him/..(coming back)..[that music]..(a short stop in)..[is dying]..(cook—deep-dead, dark of night)../today/..[and there]..(full of stars—off)../i/..[has never]..(loading video tapes)../hope/..[been]..(fifty) ../he's and or she's/..[so much]..(tin roof houses)../drinking/..[of]..(and a satellite)..[it]..(dish, walk through the town to the)../looking/..(edge out into the)../hard/..[yet]..(plain, no more)../for books/..(frightening feeling)../on the/..(than a moment alone in that immensity)../south pole/..[enjoy]..(squirrel)../woke sunday-slowly—laid in bed/..[music as

maybe making]../resisting the/..[things]../urge to/..[involves]../turn on the/..[sensory deprivation]../t.v. put on a /..[monitoring]../record/..[closely the]..(uncle brownie)..[input of]..(aunt gladys)..[information] ../is drought/..[letting every]-/maybe/..(uncle broke)..[thing in but]../not also/..(the water)..[only letting]../an abundance/..(jug and blamed) ..[a few things]../of/..(me)..[in]../something/..(paul)../too/..(the polar person)..[what if it's true]../much/..(had)../bloody sun!..(a)..[is music's drought—a matter of TOO MUCH sound]../and/..[and not]..(drink of) ../not/..[that music is]../enough/..(75 year)..[enough—a totally].. /rain/..(old)..[think, irrelevant]..(cocoa)..[at least as]..(in)..[too much i know]../and/.. (shackleton's)../sun/..[wish to practice]..(hut)..[and, it, the activity]../the/..[to the vast-same majority of music

as

old, clean-high-think minded folks willing to]../something/..let it all die]../is/..[not evil]../beginning/..(out at)..[people just]../to/..(his).. [unconcerned-successful]../take/..(and her's)..[about music]../shape/.. [as they are unconcerned about the loss of]../slowly/..[species of animal]../slowly/....[not evil]../slowly's/..[but culpable]../the only way/.. [nice]..(my first musical memory..[but]..is that of my grandmother).. [stupid]..(singing softly the tennessee)../big/..(waltz, or maybe she was)../clouds/..(humming—a little later on)..[music

as

decoration]..(i remember my mother singing what i)..<./massing/..[music as

getting you]..(later learned was "i've got a")../to/..[in and out of the]..("crush on you sweetie pie")../the/..[restaurant as quickly]..("all the day and night-time")../east/..[as possible]..("hear me cry," and well-you know the rest)..[and if it's]../like/..[true]../mashed/..[that]../potatoes/ ..[they are the people's]....(a little later on)..

[have their]..(i acquired toy clarinets)..<./every/..[music]..(and trumpets

and i remember doing a pretty clever mime)..[their "cutesy" melodies]..(to benny goodman's records, and i could do both benny's)..[their accompaniments for]..(and harry james bits)..[every life situation, and their all-come-out-right-in-the-end-structures]..(far away places figures in there).. /one/..(somewhere)../you meet/..[maybe, probably, they've got just].. /is/..[what they want]../leaving for somewhere else, anything can happen/..(out at)../over/..(elwyn)../at the/..(and anne's)..
next table talk of greece and/..(full blown)..australian/ ..(curry in a tent—plastic walls, books)../is this just?/..(the dusk, "roos," costa rica)../drought as/..(lacsa flight, volcanos from the air, landing at el coco—some pretty short runway—the kids en masse with)../skip it/..(their little flags)../music of a born eavesdropper and inveterate gossip—went out to solon on saturday, drought as sleep-balmy cool days—maybe the drought is coming to an end—sullen, suddenly turning sullen—not a chance, sweltering today, looking around for something to do/..(memory)../drought/..[and music as]..

/which restaurant today, or do we go to a movie ending up at dusk at the ice cream company, writing post cards, writing in this book—view of the mall, talking with a farmer about/..(special)../the condition/..(i desire to be special)../of field corn/..(to be one of a kind, i am not one of a kind, i am one of a kind)../don't know/..(that is)../from field corn/..(although there are many like me, i am and will remain the only me)../don't know from nothing/..(and, therefore, special—so what am i saying?)../couldn't get into/..(i want others to know that i'm special)../the library/..(how could they not?)../today/..(i am—i don't really have to do a great deal to hammer the point home—i want to be the only one doing my work)..[how could it be otherwise?].(i am the only one doing).. /what'll/..(my work)../i listen to next/..(i want to be the one who defines the field for the rest, that's the ambition, the real ambition—isn't it?—the society rewards those)..[who?]../record junkie/..(get there first, ah, but then there's)../more?/..[yes]..(old bach and his snot-nosed kids)../new experiences/..[well it's also]..(who were the "revos"—not him)../cram/ ..[a kind of]../them in the ears/..fascism, a kind of ideology—why would i want to define the field for the rest?—why, that debilitating desire to own the perceptions of others, to box them in, to render them, somehow, incapable of hearing-seeing?]./cup of decaf/..[the world except through my ears, my eyes—i couldn't have this if i wanted it]../every night/..[music

as

every move in a time of drought?.....fan whirs, saw a wiped-out woodchuck

moving in close to town to find water, 103 today, yesterday, probably tomorrow—prophesied thunderstorms did not come—reading about philip guston—guston lived and worked here—heat getting the best of me....i know why people kill themselves in weather like this—too hot to work,.but work anyway]

XIV

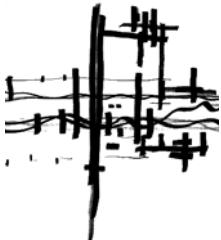
(presentation, of any kind, is an act of vulnerability)..[three fans now]..(and)..[sick to my stomach]..(distance)..[is an essential feature].. becalmed)..[of vulnerability]..(annoyed)..[big brother]..(nostalgic)..[is always preoccupied with you]..(single moving cloud)..[never gets a minutes peace]..(no relief in sight)..[if he was really concerned with himself, you'd get]..(permanent cold bath)..[a break]..(to jump into—will never get out of this life)..[big brother doesn't]../[my pieces/..(alive)..[recognize—or want to]../self-absorbed/..(my granny used)..[that there's any].. /in a context in/..(to say)..[difference between]../which there is/.. [his desires and].. /considerable/.. [your desires].. /pressure to reinforce knowns—they are essentially a privacy, not a privacy invaded, for i have chosen to place a/..(music

as

telling about the mind)../it, here, but a privacy/..(of it's maker)../made public/..(as)..[why would]..(close)..[you want]../[big]..[to make]..(as).. [fluffy, a privacy]..../i imagine/..(you can)..[public]../[a santa barbara].. [illuminated]../[sunset, pink over/.. [cloud].. the pink mission/.. (get maybe)..the absolute/..[bright]../is whatever/..(to another human).. [orange]../[the given]..(being)../[work is i.e. what]..[sweat]../[properties it exhibits]../[trying to answer ange's letter—cicadas]..(trying to answer ernie's letter)..[waiting, waiting]..(what was the name of that bakery) ..[for]..(on lygon, which moved off lygon—the one with the mother of all rumballs?)..[the drought to end as music

as]

Iowa City, June-August, 1988



Outside Lincoln

ONE:

Outside Lincoln. Motel. Color tv (everybody looks sunburned). Hear (here), where my step (some) father, who despised me and whom I in turn (though not always) despised, was born and spent his early years. Lousy meal at the "Happy Chef." Why (I inquire) do they not call it the "Stupid Chef" and be done with it. No mysteries please! Not here in the great plains. Beautiful sunset with a hell of a wind. I fear tornados and think that I see wall clouds at every turn. I can imagine my stepfather bent over his plow in a hot stink, pondering (as much as he might, the s.o.b) what other life was possible just further to the west. West. West Hollywood. Hawaii. What else to do but join the navy; do his time on the China gunboats; get two ships shot out from under him in the vast pacific (one of them the Lexington)—take a piece of kamikaze lead in his leg? A piece of lead which he will retain as a souvenier until he dies and is buried at sea. Sunset. Orange. Black. Wisps. Light. Darkening light. I fear to see my mother. Maybe my art is chatting....(softly)—running off at the mouth. Arrive Denver. Industry puking smoke and scum at the rocky peaks. High winds. Red-brown burning eyes. People look at me funny. Maybe it's my hair. Maybe other and stranger reasons. Industry puking smoke and scum. (to) tracery becoming commentary (on)—my title for a work for five clarinets and five choral groups. (the) title says what it is, but got to stage it like the inside of a brain. And, just how does "one" do that? Moving slowly toward some clarity. Softly. wake up—high desert. Last night—dreams of no air. Thoughts of where to go when it becomes necessary to go. Slowly toward some clarity.

TWO:

Crossed over onto the plains past Denver. Peaks rising—still snow. The odd adobe-like structure all alone. Flat-top ridges. Now and again a person, dogs, and a road kill. This is not Iowa hereabouts. Stop for lunch at Walsenburg. About to turn towards the continental divide—Mesa Verde and the Grand Canyon. Close-up thunder over lunch. Camping tonight. Sleeping in the back of the truck. I begin to look like my uncles. Big gut. Small hands. Widows peak. Bald pate. Gray around the edges, not yet at the root. No, I won't buy (my) coffee here. Mantilla. Saguarro. Wisp. Intransigence. At the dunes in Colorado. National park. Vast. Sand. Contours. Wind storms which blow low-level stinging clouds along the surface. Deep declivities. Mounds like bodies. Evidence of tourists. Cigarette butts. Air is thin, but I'm getting used to it. Catherine off somewhere. Such quiet. All I can hear is the scratching of my pen against this paper and the wind in pitch/timbre sets doing their dopplers across the sand's surface. Last night, by a brook. Water coursing over sand. Surges. Pitches changing. Different depths causing the water to be weighted. This "weigh"—that (way). So still—this place. So still, it scares me—and so, I (more on I)—found a nickel worn by the sand.

THREE:

To compose is to try for.... Clouds massing. Maybe a move to the water's edge is in order. To another knoll. To compose is to try for change when everybody else wishes for things to stay the same. My grandfather is reputed to have known, by heart, all, or most, of the revolutionary "canciones." He had his favorite restaurants, with his favorite mariachis ready to play them all the minute he walked in, but I only found out about this later—after he had died. Small, reedy, plants on the dune. Like rushing water they sound. He, my grandfather, lived through, and was an active, participant in the revolution of 1910 in Mexico. He handled finance (ran guns), or so they say, between New York and the armies of the north (one of the armies of the north). Crossed the continental divide—all green, and thin air. To compose is to try for.... Like my uncles. Big bellies. Little hands. Oh.... yes.... tired.... now.... pimps make.... me sick, probably because I know that there's some of the pimp in me—little old me. Nobody's much interested in this new, or experimental, or speculative, music—so, why do it? Why do anything nobody's much interested in. Why breathe, for example. Nobody's much interested in (my) breathing (they do it, but they're not much interested in it).

Why—(asking self here)—if it's a social matter and there ain't no social....why....keep sticking a knitting needle in your ass? I like the feeling I get when I make something without much sense that nobody's much interested—(when I'm free of feelings external to the specifics of the work at hand—when the work at hand is as irrelevant as (my) breathing) to the nobody's much interested.

FOUR:

Mesa Verde. Cliff dwellers. Inside a Kiva. Dark and Cool. Grand Canyon. Play of light and dark, a moment of imagining—some world of partial perception: at one level of sense, clarifying another level (of sense). Bringing sound or half-light recognition up sharply. Man comes down the ladder. Camera falls from (his) pocket. (The) spell is broken (to say nothing of his camera). Small rooms—small windows. Little city. Courtyards, balconies, balustrades. Small structures recapitulating large structures, recapitulating small structures. (They, the Anasazi) threw their dead off the edge, along with their trash. (The) edge(s) terrif(y)ies me. (I'm afraid of heights.) How did they deal with the edges. Handholds. Footfalls. Grey Squirrel here and there. What to make of it? Recollections of Sydney harbor—solitary inlets—didn't want to go home. Grand Canyon. Here, now—God, these edges are worse! Social edges. Musical edges. Real, physical, death-inducing edges. Striations. Layers of red (and) speckled green. So immense. Small domes, the kind of geological structure(s) I've seen all along 160. Fat fingers of sandstone rimmed with not quite enveloping vegetation.

FIVE:

I am terrified. Yesterday, through the Navajo reservation—another country. I felt like my uncles (as if I had finally become them). Fat bellies, small hands, widows peak. "No one knows the weight of the pack but he who carries it" (thus spake uncle Arturo) Is he still alive? Is she still alive? (my grandmother) Is my culture still alive (in me)? Have I a people? Motions. Tensions. Invidious comparisons. Reprisal. Death. Veneration. Supine, so scared. Red bird. Small voices. Dry, high, percussions. Mantilla. A memory of a "Joan P's"- (voice-type) (improvisation)-sound (nasal gargling). A german photographing Catherine while she paints the canyon. Cold wind. Sharp. Scathing. Then, gentle. I am safe and silly. She takes chances, or, at least, this chance. C on her edge. I fear for her edge.

SIX:

Reddish layer. Greenish layer. Interweaving accretions of sandstone. The river (a) grey-green. Cold again. Twice. Graduated, blue, sky. Pock-marked cliffsides. In Australia, or America, serious composers have it tough between the crass, ass-sucking, commercialism of America and the necrophilic ministrations of Europe. Corpse suckers! Musty corpse suckers!! Their (Australian and American serious composer) significance emerges just at the time when advertizing (hype?) has won its slimy war, and everyone's a pimp. Road kills. Carcasses. Navajo dog gnawing on a corpse. Food from death. (We're) waiting for (our own) breakfasts. Light shifts to gun-metal. Small, blue-pink, bird. Self-reflection. Externalized numbers of selves in dialogue. Dialogue with self about the world—self with self about the self—self with world about the world—self with world about the self....(un so weiter).

SEVEN:

(I am) sitting on the lodge ledge, writing, waiting for C—(as always brave enough to travel where I fear to)—at this minute, going down the cliff face, staring at thousand-foot drops. I feel very much the coward from (the vantage-point) of my vinyl perch (although I daresay I wouldn't give a shit....if I were alone). It's foggy over the canyon. The colors are a faint(er) layer under the lacy gunmetal. Drawn to move on to California, only I run into a group of pissant San Diegans who think their money gives them a (the) right to crack racist with a group of Japanese tourists. (Fuck you, Californy!). Overheard: "We'll have to skip Lipan View—I only have enough film for Desert View." My problem never leaves. On the edge of what? Here, of physical disaster. At the occasion of a new work, a social disaster?

EIGHT:

Word jungle Full dispensation in event—(of what?) Hot in my jacket. Same jeans for daze. (I am) embroiled in my mind in the institutional combats which never leave. The woman in the (intransigent) hat. Still-steely grey. Douglass fir. Why is she alone? C's having the time of her life. Is musical speculation a dead (dying) thing? Not so, for me, as long as I'm alive and doing it. What is the work? Can it exist apart from any observer? Well, this canyon exists apart from any observer, doesn't it? Yes and no. It is also how I put it together. "Its" (the canyon's) colors, for

example, are in "it", and in my eyes. "Its colors, apart from my eyes, are not a from-the-observer apartness. Short. Squinting. Oceans of (black-brown) floating blobs on my eyes. Doctor calls it (-them) "Lattice."

Thoughts of the tropics. Maybe I'll buy a bar in Florida, Hawaii, or Queensland. Then I'll become the kind of corruption I despise.

Quiet stream, (forests) alive with the sounds of tropical birds. No shitheads aloud!!! How, if we all died, it would still be there for the birds.

NINE:

What does it mean to place a musical work, designed to reference against a particular musical context, in a social context in which observers do not possess the musical context being referenced against as in: I make a music which opposes a music, only you (quite literally) don't have any history with that music which my music opposes—(as in ships passing in the night) (as in so much for argument)—(as in) What, then, (in such a circumstance can) does either my music or its opposition mean—(as in point to).

Given the above, what is an observer unaware of? A context for hearing? (Or a context for hearing, hearing?) (Or, a context for hearing-hearing?) They're everywhere—consumers—and I'm one of them. And (obscure) (music-)art, made by nobodys, can't compete with enough money to buy whatever you want. Anyway, what seems to interest most humans (these days) is other humans—(or rather) what they (other humans) do (for a crust), and(/or), most of all, what they (other humans) look like—to the other humans who are looking, at them)—but, NOT—what they (other humans) make, in terms of hands, but what they (other humans) make in terms of bucks. So art (-music) (maybe) shouldn't try. (Music-) art should go underground which is a reasonable place for all right and good ideas—(or, inasmuch as its sometimes already there—that is in the underground (no need to make a special trip)—(the music that needs it ((the underground))) should reside there in a manner fitting its (the music's) mission of obscurity, in unbridled sound-generating curiosity replete with pertinent and/or impertinent discourses—with grace and equanimity and trust in the coming supernova to rectify all imbalances. (Music-) art can't compete with the arrogant and overfed of which I (for one) am one (and on music-art's side, it must be said). (If music-art can't compete let it, then, fulfill its destiny by being refreshingly unnoticed: in the world, if you will, of blatant presence—a blatant absence, if you will.

TEN:

Fuller (Bucky) was wrong. (In today's half-light, I can recall no context for this remark) He was probably right. What about recognizing that a (given) (musical) (or other) work exists: 1. as a work (i.e., the "Ding an sich") 2. as an experience...had by an observer in interaction with an (the) (a) (some) observer and "it." (Pronouncement): Art (-music) has now (now, yet) a philosophical purpose as (in its being construed) as a question asked in search (pursuit) of another reality desired. (Art making and experiencing as an occasion for construction and address of alternatives. As in: could this be another way to hear?) (As in: could this be another way to hear). Dogs. Clumps of people. A contingent of New Zealanders in red jackets. Low flying Blackbirds. Do not feed the Squirrels. Not really a backpacker. Californians, notably more loud sons-of-bitches than others. My own people. Compound search (ing/ly). My heritage. Minorit(y)ies twice. My art. My nationality. Nothing works out but art. The rest is horseshit. Only the making. The making. The taking responsibility and the placing. And the willingness to be there if any dialogue takes place. And the truth of the lonliness and dignity of the act even if (and probably) no one cares (or will ever know). Because only money talks, and I know it, and I oppose it. Trying to get to something firm I can say.

ELEVEN:

Self talking to self. Turning cold. Lines in my face. (Music) as self-inquiry. A big triangle near my cheek. (Music) as private yearning, yearning as (music). Camping light is not kind. Gray hair, huff and puff. Self talking to self. Music as getting in shape to do (music as).

Sound of a jet over the canyon. Can't escape the bastards anywhere. Surrounded by speech and thoughts. What is said. How, is said. No longer the well-crafted moment, but a struggle for some sense to the threads of internal chatter. What we've lost (is) not other than to find new thought, and to be alone, and to talk truly to someone. These we've lost. Haven't got the guts to face the canyon. Freezing up (of) the hands, but not the tongue. (I) wish C would come back. Pain in the gut. Need to get in shape, if I'm going to spend my life like this. No talk of relevance other than to self and the dialogue, but I think, sometimes, it's bigger. Bigger is the talk that (which) talks to both. Not only this, (this) one-sided, glad-handy talk.

TWELVE:

As (music), it's turned (yet again) cold. Everyone's disappeared inside, to get booze or gloves, no doubt. (music) as maybe I should move (too).

How is this babbling (music). (Music) as the banal recounting of a life. (Music) as your own reservation, as reservation for thought. University as a (music) kind of thought-reservation. (Music) as placing it, the music. (Music) as (hearing it, the placing). (Private reserve). Know one knows. Know one nos. Boring, (in), but going where. Tough stuff (this), tough shit (this). (Music) as a writing 'till I drop. Fingers move painfully. (Music) as (music) as boredom setting in. (Music) as why am I not having a "good" time. Too much worry, (music). (A) music for your thoughts. (To) Tracery Becoming Commentary (On). (To) Tracery Becoming commentary (On).

THIRTEEN:

Moisture. (Quietist). (Meta-). Fear. (-Phoric). Recalcitrance. (Mud). Heavy with wetness. Hand-holding (Drum). ((Music as) a pimp's game). Gum-chewing. (Introspect). Small child between...."please not near the edge." German speak. (Entire....(what?)). (Footfalls). (Sunshine). Poor clarinet. In the rain. (Short). Mists clearing. (Of), To the west. (Breath). Quiet hat. ((Music as) soft sounds)). Hanging around. (Got it?).

FOURTEEN:

Music as	Music as
Music as	(as)
(as)	
Music	Music

Sounds of birds. Four or five. Liquid sound like deep water drop in small throat. Tiny liquid clicks. It was (is) always about my sound and my thought. How could (the) one enrich the other. It was (is) always about this.... (to put it dramatically). My sounds are like small micro-adaptations—desert plants (if you will and why not). They are easily destroyed. Music as crying as music as no more crying as music. If I could say (well enough) about my sounds, I could protect them from the callousness of unwitting and sometimes not so unwitting potential destroyer types. Horeshit (for reasons which now quite escape me). Music as (internal dialogue).

FIFTEEN:

(Music as) a record of a person trying to be in the world. No more a battle for the best, (the) strangest, or (the) newest. But the intimate recounting, retracing, unwinding of the threads which weave culture (for better or worse) in each of us. How can we, each, make (and unmake) (our) (own) culture. Over to Barstow. Unwitting night in a whorehouse, or so it seemed. Enchiladas, dirty beer—tit thrust up under my arm, while I paid the bill (somewhat flattering that!). Checking the room for hidden bugs, and the undercarriage of the car for bombs. Sleep with a wooden staff next to the bed. Long distance calls and indigestion. Arrival in San Diego. (The) whole fucking town (now) painted (in) pastel (colors). (Music as) protest. Neon in every building. Cheap looking. Pseudo. Cheap as quasi, neo-colonial, fake-fucking-adobe restaurant land. Best legs contest(s). No more new music in my favorite, or used to be, record store. (A) music as sitting quietly. Childhood buildings. (My) (remembered) environment gone, replaced by empty, sandy-brown, neon office blocks. Mom is (lost) in loops of recent memory strands ("and then he said and then he said and then he said"— ad-infinitum-nauseum to my complete sadness and helplessness). (She) stands, now grey, arrow straight; staring into the the deep, blue, sunlight. (The) field (around) (and) (between) (us) (engorged) (with) sounds and smells. Deep hissing and resonating. Whining (shades of Beckett) "I must leave;" I can't leave;" "I must leave."

SIXTEEN:

Music as nothing will, in the end, solve anything better than now some birds and deep (other) hissing. That one's airplane (whatever did I mean by that). Unregenerate quaking. Nice ass and two retired tits. A noble frog people. (Low sound). Advance (Triumverately) toward the water. I look at a plaque. How is it (that) I failed to read this one lo these forty-one years? I want to come back, to live here in this sand; to shed some things. Everywhere art (music) under (immanent(/)eminent) threat. Three pelicans in (a) triangular shape(d) formation. What's in that cave? Overhead plane. (I) think if I just hang out long enough, I'll see her again, 'though I know I don't much care (to). Visits to old haunts. Bluedoor (the) best bookstore in the western world. Now, more quiet. I'm sitting. Ear. Stomach-roll hangs over my belt. Very small Chipmunk moves up and down the rock wall. My mother (has) vanished over yonder in Scripps Park. I see her George Washington head emerging near

the cove railing. What will she do in Idaho? Two birds. Precipice. I think of J and my heart breaks, though it has no right to. Buried in rhetoric. Why is M gone from us? Time always works against what you want. Tight, high, chirp and squeak. No poems. Seagull shadows cross me noon to dusk and sweat. She is standing, looking out to sea. He's hard to talk to (I know). No retirement (I know). Moving slowly (I know). Music box, here. Thumb-twiddling.

SEVENTEEN:

Everybody's pastel. Soft blues and turtle-grey-green, tight-lipped, shades of other (not-quite) earth tones. Cutglass, neon, plastic, embroidery. I do not know why the attraction. I understand better the revulsion. Pregnant woman in leopard slippers. White, bedouin, overgarment. Crack of her ass in full view. (Scumbag)-I sneak a surreptitious, and altogether furtive, glance over the rim of my drink. This pastel place has me hopping. Music (as) (noise pollution). Music (as) (demonstration). (I am) in coronado, where my grandparents had their honeymoon, circa 1908. What would they make of this place (now).

EIGHTEEN:

Crack of tigers. Moistening death. Bright inquisitors. My spanish-speak is not so good and so I feel not, quite, entitled to my life. What I ask for is the well from which my sadness is drawn, or is my question one of "where's the music? Music as. As. Crack of music as. Music (as). Interlocutory maneuver. Music as where does belonging happen? I want to leave this place and (I) want to stay. Detractors. Moistening death. The celebrants question. Epistolary. Sweet. Complex matters, music as.

NINETEEN:

Gila Bend. Tarantulas under glass. Air out of the tires. On the way (back) to Iowa City. (White)-sandy desert. Desert plants well spaced. My mind imposes rows, silly mind. Leeching (nourishment) from the (deep and unremitting) dryness. Early-on boulder fields. Soil all gone. Quiet. Hot. Wetting my hat. Dry mouth. Spaceburgers. Saturn/giant marlin. Two giant marlins in retrograde. Like the outback. Saw them all. Saw them all. Music as self location. Placing self. Placing what of self? Placing voice....where it belongs. Where could a voice belong?. On their honeymoon, the (that) very coronado beach.

TWENTY:

Music as (a) sound placed right. Right. Car handling badly. Tearful farewell. What else could I expect. Now, nearly, dusk. Small, white, spotted, lizard; running like hell. Pictures of Grandparents by the beach in later years; soft, pre-raphaelite studies. Black and white. Posed and caught. Only a day ago on that very beach. Recollections of on the Ghan. Salt bush. Red Kangaroo. Cars up in the trees. First call for dinner. Man eating beetroot in great quantities (mouth turned disturbingly red). Alice Springs. Todd River. Top of Anzac Hill. (This is) not poetry, here, but writing in search of (the) sound of reading. I've always liked to read aloud. Is this about building structures with disparate strands of memory; structures with disparate strands of memory; structures which are, in themselves, a "place."

TWENTY-ONE:

Improvisation: what is (actually) heard; what is (actually) done; what is actually meant. Music as. Search for metaphor. A context (now) part of the composition since no pre-existing context (social) can be assumed. Everything is up for grabs. The situation for serious musicians is this: The "public" has what it "wants." Industrial music-music, calculated precisely to be interesting and saleable. It is no different (in essence if not) substance from tooth-paste, cornflakes, crack cocaine, or any other like commodity. The last thing consumers want is to think seriously (and/or critically) about (his/her) need for the product. The last thing the musical entrepreneur wants is for the consumer to think seriously (and/or critically) about what goes in his and/or her ears. What if I took back "music for myself," i.e., took back the word—THE WORD—(and did what with it?)—(claimed it back, away from its accumulated evidences, and advanced my own): as in music as (is) any information (evidence) put forth in its name by a put-forther. No commercial music could be (as if the one and only) music if I develop this right. The situation is intolerable. Theoreticians and the like. Musicians could do something, but don't, or won't (what could they do, and still live in this particular culture).

TWENTY-TWO:

Crater. Dry mouth. Albuqrque. Lights of (moon) layers. City and strata of clouds. Mist. Twinkling, painted, desert. Petrified wood chips. Flecks. (I) like touching them. Glass. Flickering. Oddball whispers. Weasel dreams. Bought bolo tie. Afraid to wear it. Great chicken at the truck stop. Mariachi Nightmares. I hear various and sundry effusions from the

shower room. Am I asking: "Who is it?" "Who's there?" Music as metaphor as music. Music as metaphor(s) Music as stop/start as body as music. Closed tightly. Music as how you (I) (one) put together your (a) sound world. What other (some) people seem to like about (demand from) music is its impersonality. Its (musics) similarity to inanimate objects, rocks, but rocks are rather personal, each has a voice (and I can hear it). I love writing. When I hear something I like, I ask: what must it have felt like (to have made) make it, (to write) to have written it. Playing (improvising) is (to me) writing, (a kind of inscribing—clarinet as brush).

TWENTY-THREE:

Early morning. Castle Rock. (Could) miss the (Denver) rush hour (maybe). Short burst speaking. Speech, my lick. Smallish mesas to the west of us. Every Gallup, yesterday at dusk. Long drive today—(rapture of the deep) in (through endless) Nebraska. Cough. Mist. Geode enclosing crystal. Meta-journey. These words (are as a) meta-journey. (A) Commentary. Tornado watch. Eastern Iowa. Stayed the night in Shelby (watching a documentary on Matisse's paintings of Odalisques—flexing bellies and harem pants). On the way in—to a luxuriant, erotic, bare-belly-button-foot springtime town of leviathan bumble-bees and bird-song and wondrous

warmth.

Iowa City, May of 1989

NB. May be read by two readers, from beginning to end. Reader one reads the text without parenthesis, reader two with—the sense being that of one reader with two voices.



Empty

To Benjamin Boretz,

at whose invitation this text was written:
whose paper, *The Inner Studio*, was the
prime stimulus. . . .

,

To Melody Scherubel,

my dear friend and companion. . . .

,

To the students in my Multimedia classes,

who, over five years,
taught me what is
possible when people
feel free to express themselves. . . .

To the memory of Kenneth Gaburo,

who
taught
me
to
hear
and
see
the
beauty,
complexity,
and
diversity
of
whole
language
language. . . and to find,
and speak,
my

own

[Note: Empty was first read at the Birmingham Art Association, Birmingham, Alabama, April 1993.]

Empty

I.

Empty. . .

I. . . begin. . . in. . .

Empty. . .

No head-full of words about music. . . waiting to drop to the floor, pour through my fingers, or otherwise. . . externalize. Empty. . .

A room, some writing things, a need to say. . . but nothing there to be said. What to say about music. . . to within. . . Empty. . .

Make some coffee. . . put a new cartridge in the pen. . . scratch various and sundry parts of my body. . . take imaginary trips to exotic places. . . fill pages of white paper with assorted murmur and speculation. . .

Empty. . .

Stare at the hot streets. . . water the plant. . . maybe I'll make a sandwich. . .

If I keep at it. . . [whatever "it" is]. . . something will be there. . . [wherever "there" is]. . .

Look at myself in the mirror, run some changes on the tenor. . . remember someone. . .

Empty. . .

Not quite. . .

I'm full. . . [at least]. . . of my need to say. . . [and just how do I know

this?]. I can feel it, and I know its location. . . It's somewhere in my lungs. . . making not-so-gentle-pressure on my vocal chords. . . moving me to make a sound which I cannot, yet, give myself. . .

Empty. . .

Rest a bit. . . remember someone. . . fight the drowsiness. . . [filling an empty place is tiring] . . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .

Phone rings. . . nice "out" . . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .

Empty

And. . .

then. . .

there's. . .

I. . .

am. . .

writing. . .

Many composers. More than ever before. Few, and dwindling, opportunities. Composers become their own audiences, their own support nets, their own unctious party hacks, and vicious opponents. Everybody plays. And, maybe. . . nobody. . .

hears

I am wondering what it would be like to be able to hear myself and another—first, to be able to listen: finally, to be able to

hear

But, I'm part of this system too—and everything which I could imagine

saying either to, or about, someone else . . . is also a thing which might, with reasonable accuracy, be said to me . . . about . . .

me

So . . .

no goody-two-shoes . . .

here

What I'm getting at, or trying to, in this halting and occasionally rough-writing way—which gives no pretense of scholarly style—is that, just now, my own situation as composer disturbs me.



It's not (exactly) that I've grown desperate enough to rent a sound truck, so as to broadcast a message of anger and hopelessness throughout the quiet streets, shopping malls, and neat, little, alleys of Iowa City—here I live and do my work—but, rather more, that I'm tired; and on some days I can't get out of bed at the thought that my work, which I love—and which gives me some of the few moments of unfiltered joy in a day—must, once again, be placed in the life-threatening, dismembering, context which I have been told, and tell myself, it must reside—if I am to be . . .

a . . .

composer

You know how it is when you just don't want to do something. You scratch your ass, or make a sandwich [see above]. You do anything—and everything—to delay the ultimate moment of anguished contact between you and it. The body and the mind work and work in their labors of deflection, and you collapse, exhaustedly, into your heap; and your torpor scams you into thinking that, somehow, it's all been worthwhile. One more heroic struggle to jam your butt into pants one size down.

It works for a while: sometimes for years. But when the blood pressure gets higher, and the fifth lumbar vertebra French-kisses a nerve as you bend over to make a face into the video camera, and nobody will talk to you because—just frankly—you’re a pain in the ass: you begin to wonder if the road *not* taken might well have been the right road after all. When exhaustion and disaffection, and outright pain, become the ersatz of your own life’s composition—and the only response seems to be to roll back over in the sack and wait for a luscious loss of self presence to erase all responsibility for making life happen—it may be time to ask a few questions. Questions like: what do I want? And: how do I get it?

So, now, feeling a deep and compelling need to dispense with the literary “you” [as in: “you and me are the same, you know”], I will tell the real you, whoever you are, that the afore-asked questions are my own questions to me. But, before I proceed to my own answers, there are a few things which you, whoever you are, should know. I do not speak as a self-proclaimed victim. No speeches about “them” here. That’s for another time. I am not a “vessel” through which other-worldly voices pass. I am not an “authority figure,” seeking to advance either a new quasi-religion or therapeutic model. And, I’m not a fool—i.e., I know what I’m doing, when I’m doing it, and I’m reasonably aware of the consequences of my acts.

What I am . . . is a maker. . . with ears,
with eyes,
with touch,
with tongue.

Said another way, the choices and decisions which got me here—to my place of disaffection—are, in large part, choices and decisions made by me. And, I know it.

What do I want? . . .
How do I get it? . . .

Seems simple enough—but the problems come when I consider the “I” in my two questions and further ask: who is the “I” who wants that which the “I” wants?

Religious people will tell you that the "I" is an illusion, a chimera, a falsehood which through concentrated and protracted ritual may be jettisoned like so much garbage from a ship's bilge. That may be. I do not propose to say yea or nay to this historical chestnut. I do however affirm that, to the best of my knowing, it is "I" who writes these words—and not my Aunt Mary. I further affirm that I do, indeed, have an Aunt Mary who, in all likelihood, does not think that she writes my words. I further-further affirm that I am alone in this room—and that it is my hand which makes these inscriptions.

Maybe the source of my problem, my disaffection, will ultimately be found to reside in my overweening attachment to my "I"—my "me." Be that as it may, it would still seem to be the case that if I'm going to get out of bed in the morning, I've got to be the one who *wants* to get me out. No one whom I know, nor can imagine, can will me from the sack. "We" did not buy my milk this morning, although I might have wished it otherwise.

So, I speak as myself—in search of myself. Me as, and in search of, me as my idea of me. Me, as my idea of me, in search of contexts which will neither perpetuate, nor nurture, my growing sense of isolation from you, whoever you are. Contexts which will allow me to experience connection with me as myself, with you as yourself.

We, if I may deign to speak for we [whoever "we" are] cannot, it seems to me [whoever "I" am], be one another—but, then, you know that [whoever "you" are]. Our hands, lips, guts, and deaths are irrevocably ours and ours alone—the living body, in and with its immense and complex interlace of awarenesses and beckonings, a final decree upon the matter of our connectedness.

But . . .

what . . .

if . . .

instead of lying quietly in the vastness of this isolation—this emptiness—I sought to find the ways, the means, the threads of connection possible to become something-to-you-becoming-something-to-me—while you and I . . .

live

And . . .
what . . .
if . . .
music . . . could be a place for such a search.



Some history. I became a composer because I was in love with sound(s). Not only the sounds of musical instruments—impressive and intimidating swarms of musicians in mourning, speaking the speak of the dead; pianos touched with excruciating tenderness; saxophone players in head-long, blood-sport, end-runs to hell—but also the everyday sounds around me: birds [my Emu at the zoo, for striking instance], my grandmother's voice [when she wasn't yelling at me], that selfsame granny singing the Tennessee Waltz as she held me [my first memory, by the way] . . . murmurs in dreams . . . the ocean off La Jolla Cove.

If my “I” had been content to stay a listener, I would perhaps be writing now of other matters, but I wanted also to make a sound—for myself to hear, for others to hear.

A now so seemingly simple impulse—to be able to externalize a sonic reality, not unlike that to which I had so powerfully responded, and to know that it was *heard*.

To this end, I studied music: learned an instrument, absorbed a literature and—it seems to me—learned, as well, to exhibit a wide range of appropriate sonic behaviors to the teachers of sound-making.

In the competitive scheme of things musical, I learned that my sound-making, sometimes, didn't measure up. Some people played louder, some faster; some had more complete control of the diverse registers of their instruments; some had more guts on the stage. Some, if not most, could always best me.

One of the ways to get around this perturbing situation was to become a composer—to have my own music, with my own rules.

But, in the competitive scheme of things musical, I learned that my composer-sound-making, sometimes, didn't measure up. Some people wrote more complex music—some, sweeter and simpler. Some people could make you cry. Some people had a more encyclopedic knowledge, greater technical facility—better taste. Some had more guts on the stage. Some, if not most, could always best me.

And, in the competitive scheme of things musical, I was very soon afraid of my own choices.

My fear is quite palpable. It has both quality and location. Sometimes, I feel it in my neck and behind my eyes: a wedge

of energy, detained and wanting exit; keeping me stiffly, if drowsily, in and/or ill-pointing to the outside world; gagging the sounds of my mouth; constraining each move I would make to engage it. Sometimes, it appears as a weighted ripple which sickens to the extremities, and, sometimes, it is as a zigzag spike of blood which rushes quickly to the chest, bringing heat and panic.

To contain its spread, I have enlisted the help of informants and companions—historically legitimized constructs, in the forms of words, which buttress the I in its terror. Words, and their interlace of interpretants, which move to salve and narcotize the place where the spike is driven. Words which have done, and continue to do—quite well—the work of getting me through another day.

It's not that these particular words are an evil in themselves, but that they have been successfully employed—and this very success means that I can continue to defer the examination, diagnosis, and healing of some part of myself left neglected and bleeding.

They are, in effect, a rationale for inattention.

In this light, what once seemed powerful tools for self-awareness and self-articulation now reveal themselves to be protection rackets of a

sort: stratagems which serve the purpose of allowing a threatened body to advance and be heard—but which, whatever their success in the immediate, obfuscate and deprive, distance and dislocate; displace my attention from concerns which I may need, more fundamentally and deeply to address.

The evil, if such it may be called, is not in the presence of these words in my life—as signs and contexts for clear and profound consideration—but rather in my implementation of them as a means to hide me from me. They allow me to pretend to be present. . . when I might actually be . . .
here

But, what would it be like. . .
to be able to . . .

hear

What do I want? . . .
and. . .
how do I get it? . . .

Empty. . .

Fan whirrs. . .
Squirrel play in the fields below. . .
Sherry's fragile corn plants not doing well. . .
Maybe I'll quit smoking—grab for a stick of gum. . .
What to have for dinner. . .
Empty. . .

Someone, always somewhere. . . in my head. . .
Sky, thick with gunmetal cloud-up. . .
Empty. . .

Empty. . .



II.

So . . . disquietude, torpor, rage, and now fear. . . require, at this particular juncture, a dismantling, by me, of my own machine for surviving. . . and. . . this machine is not only my presence in the world, made manifest as a continuum of behaviors, musical and otherwise. . . but, as well, those words which provide for their maintenance, justification and succor.

But it is not enough merely to take away. I must, as well, put back—hear the emptiness I fear, and speak against the day when it may be as I wish.

Perfection. The work: free of bacteria, stylistically consistent and pristine. Me, as my idea of your idea of me—you, being an abstraction composed of histories/persons providing a constituency whose approval I need in order to be less fearful. . . more convinced of the fact of my existence. . . my “right” to exist. Crystalline and untouchable in its stark removal from the “grotty” world around it. . . so flawless and uncontested from every point of view. . . so fully realized that it appears to have existed always in the always. Not really *made*, with fingers and ears; sleep and food; oxygen, and many tiny dyings—but emoted rather, “emanated,” ejaculated, and/or puked out of the incorporeal bellies of various and sundry god-like apprehensions. . . who make in secret, place a trace of their inscrutable manifestness, do their disappearing act, and observe our bewildered reactions from a place of concealment like a cop on surveillance. Oh my God—how can a “mere” person like me make something so faultless in a world like this? Empty. . .

Empty. . .



But what. . .
if. . .
this. . .

perfection, my perfection, is only (or merely) a scam. . . a coverup, a way of deflecting attention from my own deepest fears. . . giving me another place to hide from the realities of my isolation, my confusion, and my emptiness—giving me an emblem which I can shove in your face and get your respect without having to play my own cards as myself; without having to make say to you about my own needs; without having even to listen to you as you engage me as yourself; without having to affirm that not only my work, but I, as I am, need to be heard. . . without having to affirm, in the slightest, my existence as desirer of all that I would make perfect. . .



So. . .

what. . .

if. . .

instead of the perfect work, what I wanted was real work. Work. . . constructed and revealed of a reading, or readings, of myself as maker, and that world in which my making is enacted. Work. . . as palpable response to the facts, qualities, shapes and textures: sounds, sights, smells, and touches which unfold my awareness of my presence—as existential actuality—in the environmental surround which nurtures me. Work. . . complete and undistorted; articulated in and through a richly textured and beautifully layered complex of self-reflected characters in seriousness, silliness, grandiosity, and distant shyness—impenetrable, tangled, and all-enveloping [as in a rainforest]: arid, all-horizon, and empty of gesture [as in an outback (tiny plants in an ocean of sand and limited sustenance)]—made of my experience: blemished, clumsy, aware of the limitations of my body [yet moving purposively to contradict them], agile, wanting to dance, mocking of self, childlike, and reserved. Work. . . manifesting more than I can be by myself yet, even so, contained of much less than I am in myself—a houseful of mysteries, needful of questions; informed of both a gentle touching and effusions of outrage. Work. . . needing works for its articulation. Work. . . informed of me, as my idea of me. . . in search of you. . .

as you are. . .

Empty. . .

Go to bed at seven. . .

Get up at midnight. . .

Go to bed at three. . .

Get up at five. . .

Clear. . . cold. . . silence. . .

Empty. . .

Coffee smells and radiator murmurs. . . auditory hallucinations of my great aunt Gladys, as she dissimulates to my uncle Brownie. . . as re: the whereabouts of his Jack Daniels in their very small, railroad worker's house. Dear, sweet, Gladys: rooting, like a squirrel, through her handbag. . .

Empty. . .



And. . .

then. . .

there's. . .

Immortality. The work of such durability and substance that it might last well beyond the time of my own ceasing. Perpetuation of the self, beyond all time, the single and salient virtue. A wish for life, beyond the grave, through traces left behind: ridiculous, yet no less poignant for being so. The three Bs in heaven, or some such otherworldly place. You know the scene—the celebrities' condo, just to the right of the nineteenth fairway. Anyhow, they're in these deck chairs (don't you know)—Piña Coladas and cigars. And, in my first scenario, I'm there too—in my deck chair. You know—"glad to have you aboard my boy." Much schmoozing and bonhomie. Together, we sit for eternity—watching the lines form at Carnegie Hall, or Tower Records, each clearly visible through our personalized viewfinders. Together, we

bathe in the soothing waters of complete knowledge, and uncontested mutual recognition that our mortal steps were, indeed, the right ones after all. There are a few deficits. My stock numbers, for deflating example, are undeniably puny; my lines aren't nearly so compelling; and the three Bs don't really get along that well—but, then, I'm a newcomer [and timelessness may yet unfold a richer picture]. In this regard, the three Bs are nothing if not encouraging. Even here, in eternity, it seems there is hope for change. But . . . there's another way this thing plays out. . . and in this, my second scenario, the deck chairs are still there [with the three Bs still in them]—only I'm nowhere to be found. It isn't that I'm entirely absent. I made it here [wherever "here" is]. Oh, I'm immortal alright. . . only I just couldn't make the composer cut. Just checked the wrong box somewhere. Never even made it to the short list. Is this so bad? I've got mates. I play shuffleboard. What's the bitch? We've got a band. Well. . . for one thing. . . I've now got to spend my precious eternity knowing that the three Bs are somewhere up the hill, gloating at my expense. Oh. . . I get to share their company once a year—when we have our lower deck tour [with complimentary chicken dinner] in the V.I.P. circle—and as my part of the receiving line passes the deck chairs, I steal a surreptitious linger and stand before them in grim appreciation of all that I have failed to materialize for myself. For their part, they keep condescension to a minimum. Few, if any, paternalistic trips here. Merely, a noble distance maintained. You know, like, I'm OK and you're OK—but don't date my sister. Not so good, on the face of it. In fact, downright off-putting. . . of course. . . there is another way this thing plays out. . . but I haven't the nerve for that one and so. . .

Empty. . .

Can't see the shoes tore across the street for the fog. . .

Thanksgiving flowers need to be deep-sixed. . .

Empty. . .

My fingers touch the desk, savoring, for a moment, the grain of the wood. . .

Empty. . .

I need to hear from you. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .



But. . .

what if. . .

immortality, or rather my sense of it, as exhibited by the puerile [if not wholly humorless] storyline above proffered, is only [or merely] another kind of seam my mind plays on my mind: another way of deflecting attention from problems born of isolation, confusion, and emptiness. Another way of giving myself the sweet illusion that I'm really doing something about anything. A kind of internalized holy-grail scene in which knights like me run around in search of ultimate solutions to ultimate problems when they can't make a sandwich between them. Posed to myself in this manner, the idea of musical immortality is as demonstrably farcical as it is self-defeating. But the question of hereafters won't go away only [or merely] because I do my witty dump on its more grotesque traceries. My own desire not to die is a strong one. Equally strong in me is, I think, a hope that all that I have done, or may yet do, will not, as well, go the way of my body when it's time. In this light, I confess to sleepless nights in contemplation of a time when my tapes are left to rot in someone's garbage can. And, in this imaginary theater, I think I see each fleck of oxide parting from the mylar like so much sunburned skin—and I can do nothing. It is not an image which I am, yet, able to face gracefully. So, no phony stoicism-cum-nobility here. I care what happens to my work. But is my concern for the future of my work, and my terror at its probable demise, enough to induce me to buy into the equally phony idea of its perennial importance to humankind—as a way of reducing my blood pressure? I now think not. I further think that the time I spend in music-appreciative wish-fulfillment might, now, be better spent in the establishment and nurturing of my connections with other living beings. . . for the relative viability of my work in five hundred years time, as idea, will not get me out of bed in the morning. . . but a touch would do. . . the sound of a voice would do. What I need now is to celebrate my fear of death in a sacramental place of mortal connection. What I do not need further is to live, vicariously, in that domain of abstraction which conduces to the confidence game I play with myself to keep isolation, confusion, and emptiness from having their various ways with me. . . the game in which it all works out in the next one. . .

•

So, what . . .

if . . .

instead of musical immortality. . . what I wanted. . . was a music-making informed of the fact of living connection. . . a music-making enacted within the clearly recognized, and fully affirmed, condition of living presence in, and to, that making. . . a music-making in which you and I, in our living, are acknowledged—by one another—to comprise that vital, necessary, beautiful, and singular context/connection without which no musical transaction can take place. . . a music-making known to be here, because *we* know *we* are here—present to one another in a place of immanent soundings. . . a music-making in which I can no longer easily proceed as if no one makes, nor has made, the sound; no-one hears, nor has heard the sound; no-one feels, nor has felt, the sound; no-one thinks, nor has thought about, the sound. . . a music-making in which all of the florid, muddled, obtuse, ecstatic, senile, armored, robust, torrid, slap-happy, idiotic, unenlightened, profound, and mildly-interested responses in, of, and to, experience—may have their day in the discursive afterspace of those concretions in sound which give them rise. . . a music-making which does not easily resolve itself into an iconic, or emblematic, pedagogical substructure justifying a slavery, psychic or otherwise. . . a music-making in which the impoverishment of my real life, and my fear of death, are no longer satisfactorily abated through imagined cohabitation with the dead, but one in which the sure and irrevocable fact of my death and the uninhabitable terrain of my psychic desert merge; to infuse the beating heart of my life's unfolding. Touch now—you will not be here long. Speak now—you will not be heard forever. Hear now—and return the hearing, for this life's sake. . . a music-making of needs while I live: to hear and be heard, to question, and to learn—not now, in some hierarchically layered and self-resonant chamber of my imagination, but this minute, in the space and afterspace of social exchange. . . a music-making whose prime media is no more, nor less, than anything a human being can touch in thought, and care, and concern, and regard for its quality to self—and its resonance in another: a clarinet, a leaf, a casiotone, a brakedrum, some cardboard boxes; a flashlight, a synthesizer, a well-cooked meal; a moment by the river, a vigil in a

bus-line, a long-overdue letter to a friend; the ebbs and flows of my body in time of real living; my think on how my needs are needs. . . a music-making which reminds me that my enemy—my own “grimist” reaper—is not my death, but rather that voice within me, seductive and persistent, which urges always to believe that an imagined destiny is sufficient recompense for an impoverished reality. . .

So what. . .

So, what. . .

about. . .

heaven? . . . I don't know, except to say that the only afterlife which I can imagine being worth my timelessness is one in which I can go on working. In my heaven, the three Bs still have their deck chairs—but me and my mates are making music of our own, somewhere to the left of the nineteenth fairway. What's the bitch? We've got a band. Maybe the three Bs would like to sit in sometime. . .

Empty. . .

Turning cold again. . .

Empty. . .

Bought some shoe polish [looks good enough to eat] . . . Maybe I'll have some pizza. . . and a Diet Rite. . .

My friend is sick today. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .



And. . .

then there's. . .

Virtuosity. If I play fast enough and loud enough—maybe you'll love me. Maybe, if enough people surround me after the gig, you'll love me.

Maybe, if nobody has the slightest doubt about my power, you'll love me. Know ye by these multiphonics; widely spaced, cleanly played interval displacements; blistering runs, and concrete-shattering sheets of high-volume sound—that I'm a power to be reckoned with: a bad-assed mother-fucker, in point of fact. I bet you can't sing and play at the same time. . . [I don't tongue real fast, but "they" don't have to know]. Don't even think about trying to cut me, 'cause you're just not up to it. I've got these licks man—and you're going to feel 'em! I'm gonna pound 'em into your skull! [I don't really dislike you: in fact you and I could go bowling real easy. It's just that I need to win you over—and the only chance is by inundating you in sound: *my* sound]. Don't even think about trying to hurt me! I've been humiliated before, but no more—this sound is my way out! . . . [Maybe, if I win you over, I'll lose this feeling like you really don't want me here.] Hear that! Nobody else can do that! . . . [No, somebody, somewhere, can probably do that—I'm not unique it appears. . . can't let you know that—you'll leave. Maybe, if I inundate you in my sound, I'll lose this feeling that you really know just how insignificant I feel I am—this feeling that because you know, you'll play on it to get what you want at my expense.

You see, I need your capitulation to avoid my capitulation—your approval of me to put to rest my disapproval of me. . . but I can't let you know that. . . can't let you know just how needy I am. . . just how empty of me, as friend to me, I am. So, I don't talk about me. I'm careful as all hell not to do that. Instead, I talk about technique, the importance of skill, the necessity of standards, special talent, responsibility to the past—complexity (and/or simplicity). And, now and again, I invoke an iconography of the past (after all, I am in a direct line back, on and on, from so and so and so—one link, in an eternal chain of greatness]. Virtuosity as weapon. Music-making as showdown. Even the clothes have to be right. How about a black suit? [Couldn't possibly think that there might be some other, better, way to share something with you, because then, I'd have to admit what I fear with indescribable intensity—that I'm lonely, and nobody's really there for me. You see, I patch my experience of loneliness into a feeling of weakness. And the sense of fear, isolation, and emptiness which emerges, causes me to make my wall of sound and project it out, like an early human must have sung in the dark: as a shield against the terrors of the nighttime.] I'll make you jump through my hoops, make you dance to my tune; wrap you 'round my finger with this—my sound—

here! Hear that? Maybe, now, you'll love me. . .

[And, I'll love me]. . .

Empty. . .

Latin Jazz, on the radio. I get up and do my Desi Arnaz thing. Much to my chagrin, I discover that there seems—if my own most pitiful performance is telling example—to be little evidence for genetic predisposition to south-of-the-border rhythm. . .

Empty. . .

It's all in the buns, they say [whoever "they" are]. . .

Empty. . .

That little move there. . . not quite right. Ah, Querida! . . .

Empty. . .



But, what. . .

if. . .



instead of musical virtuosity, as if a collection of mind-blowing licks and free-style mating displays—articulative of subterranean power drives, scammed as a quasi-religious exegetics justificative of personal and/or collective superiority or praiseworthy musical inevitability—what I wanted, or wanted to want [again, no goody two-shoes here], is a music-making of sensitivity and inquiry. A music-making of experiencing substantively and reading clearly that sound, or sounds, which live in my immediate domain of perception. A music-making in which the measure of appropriate response is not, significantly, to be found in the

psychic prostration of the observer, but one in which the responding body moves, providing new input to the output source. No hoops nor intelligence tests. No pleas for “their” upliftment as a pretext for shooting at their feet. A music-making in which the value of an instance of expression through sound is not, significantly, to be discerned via either my abject servitude in its light—telling me, thus, that I am nothing and deserve to remain so; or my complete dismissal, absolute rejection, and psychic annihilation of it [and, by implication, the one who made it]—telling me, thus, that I am everything, or something, deserving thereby a commensurate recognition: a salve on the raw place left by the sucking mouth of my own self-doubt. A music-making informed of a joyous surrender to the fact of my need for a particular instance of expression and my hope that you will hear and respond, not only in the light of your own self-annihilating sense of lack, but in the powerful embrace of your own self-recognized needs and abilities. Needing a sound. . . I making that sound. . . hearing that sound. . . receiving a sound from another. . . speaking, in turn, to that sound. . . intertwining expressive domains in a web of mutual enrichment. . .

A music-making of questions to self, in my light—and in yours.

A music-making of questions to another, in my light—and in yours.

A music-making of no doubt about my right to be here, because I am here.

A music-making of don’t know what “they” think—find out later.

A music-making of hearing what they, and you, are doing.

A music-making of showing up to . . .

your presence in your domain,
your presence in their domain,
their presence in your domain,
their presence in their domain.

A music-making of no black suits, unless I like them.

A music-making of no speed, dexterity, and intellectual acumen as sheep-from-goats-sort out.

A music-making of no invocation of the past as a means of shutting you up.

A music-making of read and respond to the immediate context in which I find myself.

A music-making of big and tall, short and fat, young and old, some hair or none.

A music-making of tin cans, and pieces of wood, and a kalimba strapped

to a gas tank—making one, rasty, little, maybe-brand-new sound.
A music-making of exploring the uncertainty of being together.
A music-making of rich and vibrant relatings uncovered.
A music-making of no policing of musical space, “to protect the noble art from the ranks of the nitwits and the ungifted.”
A music-making of no us as, only or merely, my idea of us.
A music-making of touch, of experience and expression—in and of the body.
A music-making of working with the imperfections of my body—
inability becoming empowering expression.
A music-making of feeling the feeling of the sounds, resonant in my ears, and hands, and teeth, and feet, and legs, and belly—sinuses, cheekbones, and armpits.
A music-making of hearing the enveloping body of sound in the space which surrounds us—traffic and birds; a ribbon of voice outside.
A music-making of little talkings with someone.
A music-making of finding out what self and another needs, of self and another.
A music-making of playing something I don't play—experiencing the goofy and enlightening residues of my own incompetence.
A music-making of cultural cross-connectings and interpenetratings in, and of, expressive musical space.
A music-making of finding the society which is there, in each participant alone, and all in conjunction.
A music-making of no mastery, but interdependency—instrument and expressor in needful relationship, one to another.
A music-making of unstable situations in which I can learn new things about myself and others: in which I can learn to do things for which there are, as yet, no sayings.
A music-making of fields, and valleys, and forests of sound—collective and personal: not clear-cut, tilled, and/or paved over in the rage to define; but lived in, heard for what they manifest, discussed, carefully mapped, gently regarded: tenderly cultivated and interconnected through intense observation and shared discourse-individually configured and collectively addressed. A music-making in which my own psychic survival does not depend upon your death, either in flesh or metaphor, but one in which to survive in my world means to connect with you in yours.
A music-making in which my own self-stipulated needs, addressed in full, and put forth as reality for your profound consideration, makes

possible a focused and unfiltered reading of you. Not the you whom I would assemble, from parts of myself, and employ as user-friendly tool in my panic-stricken lust to construct a viable me, but you, as you are—in your reality informing mine. . .

Empty. . .

Lonette McKee, on my radio [“how long *has* this been going on?”] . . .

Empty. . .

Don’t know how I’ll survive this summer. . .

Drink of water, cool on my throat. . .

Empty. . .

My call was not returned. . .

Empty. . .

Look in the mirror—hair like an herb garden: a full day’s growth in my lemur’s puss. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .

Make some coffee—that’s got it. . .

Empty. . .

It’s spring out there. . . and. . .



then. . .

there’s. . .

State-of-the-art-technology. Brand new machines. . . capacity to astound and mesmerize with my gadgets. . . shiny, brand-spanking new equipment. . . as emblem of institutional superiority. Finding my lost identity through my association with, and proximity to, “sexy” new-tech. “Clean” tape as virtue: proof of cleanliness-ergo-Godliness in my

stillborn, puritan-smothered world. Tidy threads and pristine technotalk. Not just a way to get a new sound, or a new thought or—perish-perish the thought—a new feeling; but a whole Weltanschauung-cum-shtik-cum-theater of historical inevitability in which the good guys laser a trail for us artists to follow, through the swamps of human unpredictability to an untainted place of pure mind—and the grudging nod of the scientific community waiting, sceptically, in the wings. . . .

[Maybe, I'll be respectable (finally) to folks who think my art's a sham—if I show them that I, too, can talk about the "real" stuff like math: can dress like I'm on my way to a power-lunch in New York or Tokyo.] Me, as *my* idea of *your* idea of me, as whiz-kid—with a genuine, powerhouse, view of the future. Not, just, my future—but, dig it—*our* future; as revealed to you. . . . by me. Us, as *my* idea of *our* idea of us. . . . circuit board as prayer mat. . . . binary code as mantra. . . . objectivity as tranquilizer. I was never much good at music-music but now, with my big knob and flopping disc, I'm as good [if not better] than you because I've got my paws on the future. Shit, man—I'm making the future!

Sounds good. [But in my quieter moments—when I'm not next to my machines—I wonder if, in the end, I'll get to be admitted to this future which even I can see (and hear) that I'm making. I mean, with all my cornball clarinets, and ocarinas, and Fender Rhodes, and harps, and voices, and analog tape studios—I'm not really crafting a very respectable vitae, am I. . . . am I really the sort of person they'll want.] Can't touch the keyboard if my nails aren't clean. Got to get an alpaca sweater; get my hair done. I wonder if I could manage to look, at least, a few years younger. And yes: there's the matter of my language. . . .

my language. There's a problem with my language! It seems I talk a little too much about feelings, and perceptions—and touch. . . . [People, who grant grants, take a dim view of feelings—at least those you express.] I wonder in could manage more of a monotone in my voice? I need to spend more time next to the machines: they will tell me how I need to behave. I need to inspire at least as much confidence as a general, or a bank president, or that hip t.v. therapist I saw the other day. Let's see. . . . clothes. . . . good posture. . . . lean and spare language: friendly, informative, void of ornament, and to the point [without, in sooth, soupçon of silliness]. Oh God, my humor! No humor. These machines are susceptible to humor, don't I know. To make mock of any

part of my idea of our idea of us serves only to weaken necessary connections. Blows up the program, on occasion. Interrupts my direct-line-circuit to our God. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .

Have worked for four hours now. . . clouds, massing in the west. . .

Empty. . .

Too many cigarettes today. . .

Think I'll take a walk, listen to Nat Cole, or stare at my keys. . .

Empty. . .

Thinking of Golda today. Why, now, after all these years. . . Golda and Mack, in their house full of cats. . . and the trip we made to the Santa Inez valley. . . Ruth, picking cast-off flowers in a graveyard. . .

Empty. . .

•

But, what. . .

if. . .

•

instead of “state-of-the-art” technology only, or merely, configured as if the snide little closet-cum-throneroom which I have constructed in the triplet interests of power-brokerage, conspicuous consumption, and barely disguised self-loathing: what I want—or wanted to want—is an expansive and deliciously approachable environment of

interconnection, conduced to a near-infinite and variegated extension of the whole human body—hand and mind, forming and formed, in a process of search for yet another idea of intelligence. An environment. . . to which a person comes not only, or merely, to apprehend a context called the future—and to verify its potency and dominion through commensurable outputs—but rather to discover, construct, and to qualify those personal futures potentially configurable therein. An environment. . . in which “users” do not, perforce, feel compelled to behave in ways which validate an emblematic significance imparted to the relevant technologies by those who control them and profit thereby, but one in which the participants’ needs and questions—however seemingly oblique, irrelevant, or unjustifiable in the larger “speakscape” of institutional culture—may be taken to meaningful culmination in a spirit of investigation well protected from the asphyxiating context of value-judgement as respectability conferring mask for deeply political “one-upmanship.” An environment. . . in which the technologies available are as diverse and flexible—special-case and mundane—as those who would interact with and employ them. In such an environment, a hammer, a bassoon, a child’s toy, some cast-off lumber; an instamatic camera or a rock—might, as well, inform the state of “one’s” art as a computer or video system of last night’s vintage. In such an environment, a carpenter might interact with a computer scientist! composer in order to construct a new instrument whose attributes, when revealed by a performer/dancer, suggests to an architect the possibility of a dwelling to be sounded, danced upon, and/or modeled as architectonically addressed motive, whose reconfiguration and elaboration in computer generated sound completes a cycle of multidirectional, interdisciplinary, learnings. In such an environment, a poet might interact with a computer scientist/composer to reconfigure, and acoustically transform, vast arrays of language input whose attributes, when revealed by a musician/speaker, suggests to an anthropological linguist, or sociologist, the possibility of yet a different culture, or cultures, than those already scrutinized [or scrutable] by them. A culture, or cultures, whose infant descriptive languages augur a different reality in the making. To such an environment, I, and others, may come in search of change, and reflection, and the pursuit of such connections as our imaginations and needs may will to construction. Connections, all too easily, buried in bins marked “Music,” “Literature,” “Dance,” and the “Plastic Arts”: “Science,” and the “Humanities.” Connections, all too

easily, obscured by the drive to power and the fear of failure. Where, for such a place? Perhaps nested within, or adjacent to, a garden. . .

growing vegetables, repairing cars, making clothes, learning to program. Watching the seasons change, as you chase some crazy idea for no good reason than that it needs chasing. . .

by a chaser. . .

Empty. . .

My friend and I had lunch early this week. . . there is some strange and beautiful connection between us, even at the uneasiest of times. I begin to believe in karma. . . or is it only my poetry. . . which only I make—in my onliest head? . . .

Empty. . .

Bone-cold again. The sun was a liar. Listening back to an old Multimedia III tape. . . baby clowns in my attic-dormitory. Little, tiny, sounds—and gag-clotted, fortissimo, groanings. . . a las fully mature and responsible clowns. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .



And. . .

then there's. . .

Absolute and/or “pure” music. . . . “It,” as my idea of “its” idea of “it”—“it,” being “the-music” . . . as if “it” made “itself” . . . or God did the trick. Acoustical data, resident in the ether. No direct pointings, nor sidelong glances, beyond the “simple” facts of the sounds. No stories, umbilical. No histories in fawning attendance. No person, nor persons, hiding longingly offstage to claim [or deny] complicity. A sounding, or soundings, lovingly detached from the “multiplicitous” realms of its contributive contexts and sweaty constituencies. Not really having much to do with the paying of bills, the unrewarded struggles for

identity and dignity, the ache of no in-love returned. . . but "here". . . no, "just" "hear". . . floating in earspace: uninterrogational and excruciatingly refined. No makers. No informing human energies. Take what you want and dismiss the rest. "Just" the sounds, inviting silence and immobility. Although, grudgingly, acknowledged once to have been—now, not really believed to be—the issue of a particular life, among particular lives. No longer a trace of the contentment, confusion, or self-signification of a life. No mothers, no fathers. No books nor ideas. No genders, nor ethnicities, nor halting speech in search of redress of grievance. A music. . . neither inviting, nor requiring, discursive responses in the forms of words, nor facial tics, nor figure eights, nor belly ripples on a dance floor—having no agenda, save that of the titillation of hairs in my ear. Above ornamentation. Above intellection. To be sure, above the waist, yet rendering the hand still in irony. Above my tears, above my boredom. Well protected in the anechoic chamber of persistent sequester from the shaggy, drooling, visigoths of words. Immune from the cornball and living well in response. Beyond interpretation. Never a reflection. Always a "thing." Sitting stiffly, head drawn up-and situated just beyond a point of immediate, or even imagined, touch-talk. Perfectly attuned to a time of immanent catastrophe. No weepy closeness, nor nitty-gritty, to weaken the armor plate behind my up-market paint job in soft, translucent, white—the veiled jewel in my canon's crown. Disappearance as the art of the art—as it were, as it were. Not to be confused with meaning in the meaning sense, for no meaning really means a thing, herein my virginal white concretion of purest spirit pure. Nothing you can get a handle on save in *ra cio cinate*, and then no rung to make a cling. *Just the sounds.* . . . but, I want to know. *Just the sounds!* . . . but, I want to say. *Just the sounds!!* . . . but, I'm here and. . . *Just the sounds!!!* . . . but, you're saying "just the sounds." *Just the sounds!!!!* Just the sounds. . .
Empty. . .

Listening to Joan and me in Melbourne, on some Saturday. . .
Empty. . .

I remember that day—taking the 87 tram [I guess], from Flinders, all the way to Bundoora. . . I had a bad back, and Joan was tired. . . the music sounds it, with its slow, oozy, unfolding. . . cymbal rolls and rock bangs

. . . Joan, in omnipresent—if discretely timed and spaced—vocal yowl mode. . . me, in oh-so-bad impersonation of a kookaburra, or some such other forest beast. . . claves, gargling, and a vocal fry-hot air, blown through a cardboard tube. . .

Empty. . .

I remember now! . . . we played on everything but the instruments we usually did—as if, within the all-along, the instruction [never said] had been to stay away from the piano and the clarinet for as long as we could stand to. . . and then we succumbed, close-in and oh-so-tonally. . . I, fighting the tide, and Joan dragging me down to key. . .

Empty. . .

Do I go to work tomorrow, or do I hold up here—safe, beneath my sleeping bag. . .

Empty. . .

Maybe. . . I'll make some coffee. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .



But. . .

what if. . .

my musica-pura-absoluta is only, or merely, another scam my mind plays on my mind. A neat, and ever so convenient, apologia for my own divorce from the uneasiness engendered in me by “things” personal. Posing as if immaculately conceived and unneedful. . . even of my steadyng nod on its behalf. A way of neutralizing isolation, confusion, and emptiness—by way of heroic acceptance of my fated detachment from that which I make and all in issue therefrom. Silencing my tongue, tying my hands, hobbling my ankles in a full-bodied rhetoric of

inevitable loss and eternal loneliness, for the cause of a singular, haughty, and unapproachable artifact. . . my gift to you who could not care, and whom I could not bear to address as myself. A rationale for failing [or refusing] to acknowledge, adequately and gratefully, the full range and strength of those influences and conditions which inform the reality of my work in the long-desired, you-present, place of deeper hearing: influences and conditions which impelled me toward my making long before I took a single step. A costume party to which I go as God—hide and seek my coy and self-empowering mode of social control. No awkward moments with a nonbeliever, who knows my game and tells me so; asks me a question which I can't quite answer with a buzz. "Like, music speaks for itself" . . . or . . . "we're people just like you, don't you know."



So, what. . .

if. . .

instead of the pure and the absolute, what I wanted was a body-dependent music-making of multiple referentiality. A music-making whose sounds are signs which jostle and poke, glance and rub-shake, stroke, fondle and press; scratch and massage the connective tissues of sign on qualifying sign. . . in, through, and around the corporeal environment of its habitation. A music-making of immanent tactility, wherein I recognize that *sound touches skin*. "Ear-candy" to be sure, but all the sweeter for a taste of many-directed words of response in mind-on tongue. . .

words of history

words of experience

words about

,

words of satisfaction

words of loss

words about words

,

words of disquietude
words of complicity
words about words about

,

words of greed
words of relevance
words about words about words

,

words of adoration
words of exasperation
words about words about words about

,

words on a roll
words of regard
words about words about words about

,

words of distraction
words of the touch
words about words about words about words about

,

words of retrenchment
words of surrender
words about words about words about words about

,

words of some fearing
groans of the words

somebody's words
anybody's words

,

yelling the words
words in the night
words of no words
no words the words

,

words in their deaths
sorrowful words
words as the way
no way the words

,

words of the belly
words out of time
words of the ducks
ducks have no words

,

words of expansion
words of contention
words about words about words about words

,

words of attention
words of regard
words about words about words about words

,

words of the body
body in words

sounds of the words in the words of the body

,

sounds of the words
words within sounds
sounds of the body in the words of the words

,

body of sound
words of the words
words of the body in the sounds of the sound

,

body within body
sound within word
sound within body within word within word

,

sound within sound
words within word
word within body within sound within body within

,

Empty

,

. . . no scam-gorilla, in halo, doing some self-aggrandizing, in-scene,
check-out at the cheese trolley. . .

,

A music-making. . . in which all those long-buried, near-silenced, oft-murdered needs and traces of people in aching search of resonance in self, in other—for self, for other—can finally do their little coming out. . .

through the door, step at a time, there's the sun, feels pretty good. . .
Empty. . .

Maybe, I'll make some toast. . .
When are my Kellye Gray tapes coming. . .
Empty. . .

Should I put some butter on it . . .
Yeah! . . .
Wish I had a cat. . .
Empty. . .

Wish I had some grape jelly. . .
Empty. . .

Empty. . .



And. . .
then. . .
there's. . .

Me. . .

me, with my idea of me; and you, with your idea of you; and us, and all. Me, the "proscriptor in mufti," who wants you [whoever you are] to think that it's only a matter of a self-directed, self-revealing—which you are pleased, as it were, to overhear. Me, who for twenty-odd years, more or less, has sought my identity [my primal identity] in that arena of music exchange: voraciously interposing sound between you and me in order to imagine that I have even a fighting chance. Me, who thought that one day love would come if only I wrote the right tune. Me, who vowed that music, my music, would one day be the ticket to a never-abating rush of self esteem—only to find that there are bus lines and barbers; M.D.s and golf pros; poets and palm trees and horses and onions; parish priests and defunct volvos; nosey neighbors and Himalayan mountains; seven

elevens and inflatable dinosaurs; tax collectors and freezing rain; tiger cats and leftover Quinoa; sorrowful death and brand-new babies; partings, which I cannot bear, and a world to be saved. . . none of which [nor whom] have ever asked me for a note. Me, whose idea of me has seldom enough been invoked in, or through, a feeling of deep and genuine friendship for me. Me, who could never envisage your concern, or possible interest in me, without the possibility of my music. . . in your face. . .

Empty. . .

It's two-twenty in the morning. My eyes feel like those jaw-breakers I used to get from machines, as a kid. . . you know, the one's with the razor-sharp knots on the surface, scratching the inside of your mouth when you suck. . .

Empty. . .

I hear, only, the occasional sound of a car, patched into the fixed-filter band of rain-coated pavement. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .

Think I'll have some milk. . . and another fucking cigarette. . .

Empty. . .

What's that sound? Fridge kicking in for another night of functional droning. . .

Empty. . .

Empty. . .



But, what. . .

if. . .

instead of me, as my idea of me; or me, as my idea of your idea of me; or us, or all—what I want, or want to want, is me, as me, as friend to

me. Not me as if a one-dimensional, self-inflicted-if-distinct, inert and inflexible notion of me; invasively inserted within, and/or tightly bolted upon a mannequin, replete with love handles and a clarinet—asking [no, demanding] that you participate in our mutual worship of my excruciatingly perfect, life-ever-lasting, unmatchably athletic, clinically mechanized and agendaless music-as-graven-image in the form of some sounds on a tape to be imprinted on your brain. . . but me, as my body might ever so gently—if capriciously—Instruct in search of the feeling better which I sense is there to be found. A me, who finds my identity not only, or merely, in the bloody rites of passage through which we inflict a “thing” called culture on ourselves, but in the mundane back and forth of me with my sounds, and words, and feelings. . . and you, with yours. . . ‘I through which a culture responsive to need may be imagined, unfolded, tended, strengthened, and sweetened. A me, who finally inhabits, in friendship, this strange and terrifying space of flesh and blood and warring energies. . . in which I’ve made, for far too long a time, a kind of hell. So, now, a head-full of wants. So many words about music dropped to the floor, or otherwise. . . externalized. Wherever “there” is would seem to be right here. I listen, and I can hear it. . . but how do I get it? What would make it real? The pages tell me that I have it now. . . new words, and sounds, to be found. . . spaces to live in. . . and roam around. . . and find my place to be. But it needs an other to make it true and give it life. . . complete the circle. It needs my moving in the world beyond this room where so much sadness hangs. It needs the me who knows, if a knowing can be known, that there is only, or merely, me. . . without, at least, the possibility. . .

of. . .

you. . . [whoever you are]

Maybe I’ll make some tea. . .

Maybe I’ll go to sleep. . .

Just the sounds. . .

Empty. . .





So What Now

A resonance

with

David Dunn

and

Miles Davis

SO....WHAT....NOW

I

So. So? What? Now?

....Quietly, my river, over there, runs olive drab to bean brown with occasional islands of bubbling white pollution: the chemical run-off they (whoever "they" are) say doesn't hurt us....

So. What? Now.

....The agitated water licks to right-up-under-top of this (my) brick-rock wall—which constitutes a last barrier between me and (my) wet feet....

So? What? Now.

....In another few days of hard rain, the river may well advance to within a short distance of the east entrance to the music building, or do I exaggerate?....

So. What? Now.

....(This is always the early spring doomsday conjecture which I nest and nurse to pass the time in this quiet place)....

So? What? Now.

....The larger perturbations on the water's surface come clear as sparkling ribbons of transient, palpable, substance; moving sporadically to the south....

So. What? Now?

....My neck is stiff to the point of no turning it. Perhaps I slept on it wrong. Perhaps my angry energy is tired of propping up the corners of

my mouth (thwarted hubris presenting as Bert Parks or Joe E. Brown: my plastic, motorized, dinosaur with its shit-eating grin) and so has travelled, joint by joint, to just behind my left ear where it stays for a tipple or two before resuming its various traverses....

So?

What?

Now?

....I listen to the birds (cupping my hands behind the pinna-flaps, the better to get a fix on their loudness and location) and the ringing sounds of sticks being dragged along the metal ribs of the bridge (a tiny reminder of last summer's altogether more convivial ((i.e., "happier")) happening. I smell the webs and mats of dank and impenetrable vegetation submerged along this bank (even now-behind-me knows this funk) and I feel the unwelcome heat given off by my cup of coffee....

So?

What?

Now?

....If I am fully conscious and not a little creative, I can situate my militantly throbbing ear-neck-knot to within the line this "music" makes, threading and stitching the pain within and between the incoming sounds, sights, and smells; just as now-behind-me (or even I) might "weave" a thematic cell through the distribution and inter-qualification of seemingly unrelated pitch material....

So. What!

Now!

....That's composition, by God! Taking a stiff neck and signifying it as if a single voice in a polyphony of multi-sensory inputs composing-me-composing-in-and-out-of-all-of-it-composing-me-composing....

So?

What.

Now?

....My dear, dear, friend (whose life is easing pain) tells me that pain is unnatural. And I, wanting not my pain, believe her....

So.

What?

Now.

....I think about the painful, pain-filled, pain-drenched histories of people and animals....and, for all I know, the very remnants of plant-life which I had for lunch; and (I) find it difficult to imagine that this state is not

precisely the way it's supposed to be. Meant to be (i.e., long stretches of deepening neckache, gently punctuated, if not graced, by breezy caesurae of well being, triggered by the oddest, and most randomly inserted of circumstances ((i.e., i.e., the smell of rot at the river's edge as cool, soft, touch of quiet now. At least for a moment....it's alright. Alright. Get....now....behind me))....

So.

What?

Now?

I've lost my place....

So?

What? Now.

....It's not (exactly) that I think that I've lost music ((for what is music, such that it could be lost?)) (((or...is an "it"?))) (((((or maybe I do, and just can't quite bring myself to say so))))—but, that, I'm no longer sure (((((if ever I was))))) what "it's" (((((music's)))))) supposed to do. Or, perhaps, I'm not really sure what music "is" (as opposed, say, to what it "does"). Perhaps, music is exhausted, and I've seen it (and therefore, the light) and split for I know not, sitting by this river ((with now-behind-me)) where. Or perhaps it is

(and more to the plausible) I, who am exhausted and wad-shot, and music's OK ((A"-OK")) with/and everybody else singing and dancing and beating the drum. Playing their Bergonzis and Stratocasters; and Selmers and LeBlancs; and Lowery-Genies, and Apples-Korged. Sure of themselves and brooking no critique-cum-sourgrapes from anybody who unregenerately refuses to get with the big program.....Perhaps, my disquietude is not my perceived loss of music (as if music were an overcoat, keys, some small change, or an argyll sock) but my perceived loss of *my* music....in those places where I could hear "it"...."lurking" in the corners, "impregnating" my ears; and/or merely "speaking" to me ((as if music were a phantom pain in oscillation; or the clear and childlike Wernicke's voice of my now and ever-dead grandmother through some hole in the night; and/or merely, a real-time talking)) (((some needed somethings said))) (((and listened to)))) (((((and maybe even heard))))) ((in environments for listening and saying)) (((((and maybe even hearing)))))). Places where it felt safe....to make sound and to explore the implications arising therefrom....

So. What?

Now?

....Bye-bye analog-electronic music studio (now-behind-me's reluctantly designated "Experimental Two") one place wherein, I knew my music could be found. A dark, stuffy, inhospitable place (within-now-behind-me) which I could, with some imagination, construe as if a cavern. Or and underground lair. Or an igloo. Or the inside of a cell, or an animal's gut....

A place

....of murmurs and belches. Of purrs and clang-o-rings; wheezes and clucks. Of tweakings and pukes; chirps and caresses. Of tiny moanings and long, hissssssssssssing, silences within whose gritty envelopes the many qualities of fry could each a world inscribe (Oh! Oh! My! My! Do I hear now-behind-me, soft-spoken and disdainful?). Of minuscule and beckoning, this-and-yet-imagined, other-worldly-keenings. Belly-hair soft, and so nearly lost to ear-touch reach....

A place

....where....circular-spiders-cylindricals-former; grid-ribbed, coiled-voiced, metal-mesh-wood (in stitch) with soft-pink, ribbed-tissue-blood-enclosing-segments-tracked in tiny-shimmy, bone-water-beach, aflame with neural gunfire....could make a dance of in-and-fast/slow-out across the room in that, my black-box throat-extender over there (in memory). A dance that "talked" to me in talk to "it" composing-me-composing-in-and-out-of-all-of-it-composing....

A place

....in which....to wade, wallow, wander in vast oceans, forests, bogs of sound: multi-color tidepools; tendril-curtains of sound, and/or....

A place

....wherein....to consider the "empty" beauty of a sine tone, all by its lonesome—its fundamental properties resisting the withering constraint (dare I say "*garrote*") of metaphor....

A place

....wherein....to think quietly, clearly, and oft-times painfully about what a sound needs from me, such that I move either to transform, or to preserve, untouched, some significant characteristic, or integral value, or tempting strangeness which I observe in "it." And, what I need from a

sound, such that I move either to transform, or to preserve, untouched, some significant characteristic, or integral value, or tempting strangeness which I observe in "me." And what a sound becomes such that both the "it" (which I have observed) and the "I" ((which I have also observed)) engage in a pertinent (((if not, and as well, a passionate))) discourse without which neither entity/identity can, quite, live....

A place

....wherein....to find, and to cogitate upon, some unfamiliar, acoustical circumstance. A sound, or village of sounds, beyond my knowing hearing....in which I may, for a moment, linger....dwell.... replenish myself beyond the mapped terrain....before my trip-hammer proclivity-proforma-to-pro-claim-selfsame-in-music's-name deprives me of my wonder....and destroys my newfound nowhere-yet....

A place

....in which to search for some-one hearing-more the music name might come to mean....

So?

What now?

....See you around attic! That other place wherein I knew my music could be found. A cluttered, spacious, barewood, must-encrusted, wasp-infested, pyramid—atop my six-year house-sit/horse-shit. Deep-freezing cold in winter. Liquid-stinking hot in the summer. With gas tanks you could blow and titillate to diverse metal moanings. Wind-chimes of fear-mouth-dry bamboo awash with ticking. Dead flies, down, in seasonal oceans-cum-hairy-blackpoint-fields-cum-powdery-blueblack-glinting-mandalas. And masking tape in ambiguous clumps and gnarly swatches, bearing tiny messages stuck in the sepia corners (where the carpet remnants were, unceremoniously, stuffed). No prosceniums. No chairs bolted irrevocably to the floor in spectator crescent. Nothing much to instruct of "musical" behavior or protocol....to sculpt of musical role. A bare room. An empty space whose function might be redefined with each new occupant—(a thing so seemingly simple to imagine, this sometimes bare room, and, yet, how difficult in now-behind-me's world to obtain ("You mean, you want an empty room?" "No pianos?" "No desks?" "What do you do in an empty room?")). This room, now music-free....to be replete with shipping boxes for making smaller environments within the big: for architectural spoofs, and mock-up malls, and

no-mere places in which to hide....(to behave unseen)....listening to my/our own sounds configuring a hidden polyphony of heartbeat, insect clamor, traffic dopplers, and guttural monologue reverberating off of hands cupped lightly over mouths. With derelict musical instruments: a malodorous old clarinet or two; a collection of homemade flutes; casiotones with assemblages of rocks taped to their low notes for omnipresent cluster-droning; cardboard mailing tubes to be buzzed and sung through (corn-belt didjeridus, in sooth). Fuzzy dice and old clothes; and various lengths, widths, and sharpnesses of burl and shapes of stick—and dead-dry vegetation culled from our field walks for hearing. Automobile brakedrums and any old resonant thing to make a bell. Coat hangers and broke-up chairs for props in musician's skittish theaters. If now-behind-me's hidden-now renounced "Experimental Two" was (my) h(ear(e)-intrinsically-a-system-of-me-listening/looking-at-me-listening-looking-at-me-listening/looking at—(a tent at the arctic circle, a hut on a desert island, a place of voluntary self-banishment)—attic—was my place to break the isolation. To experience the pleasure and irritation (the problematics and rewards) of someone else inhabiting my space and time, on their terms as well as mine. A system of me-listening/looking-at them-us listening/looking back at me listening/looking at.....The attic, having not a history with concert hall, and/or classroom, did not (defact(demand)o) one, and only one, set of credentials; and/or skills; and/or tastes; and/or pedigrees; and/or etiquettes before allowing you in to play, to participate, to SPEAK—((attributes which now and quite again reduce, and are reduced by, our noble profession of music education to the mereness of behavior modification as in, "music"—(((as in the mereness of good manners))); as in, "music"—(((as in the mereness of keeping.... them....off the streets)))). The attic proved to be the place, not where "music" WAS---(i.e., as in now-behind-me's halls in which the name ((as in "music")) is understood (((as in packaged))) to be, and without question, inextricably connected (((as in decreed by God)))) to refer to particular evidences (((((as in "music is Bach," as in "music is Mozart," as in "music is Bird", as in "music is Lawrence Welk," as in "music is Arnold Schoenberg," as in "music is the major/minor key system," as in "music is, well, just music")))))....AS IF NO OTHER EVIDENCES WERE POSSIBLE). ((You know, "music." And to my ears yet having charms to soothe the savage beast. Not to mention the various concords in stratagems of spoiled, sweet, sounds. You know (((as in Bateson))) like eating the menu instead of the dinner))*

---BUT

a place, where music might be searched for (as if it hadn't, exactly ((all)) happened yet (((as in, this is a (((sorta)))) empty room in a pyramid shape, and we've shown up here you and I (((and a couple of others)))))) and I'm not sure that I know what music is....although, I have a pretty good idea from doing time within-now-behind-me what it's been))....

So!

What?

ELSE?

....And how can I/we find it? And how will I/we know when I've/we've got it? And why have I/we so much wanted it? And what is it? And how is it an "it?" And if not an "it?"....then...."what?"....

SO.

Now.

....In loving (and not so) light thereof its five-letter-no-more reducible-to-thing-impersonating-noun-bit-rue-brick ((under which we so much hanker to be heard, hanging out with the best))—could music's name actually come to acquire yet another meaning through, and by, my/our work together? Another and different array of evidences to which it might point, through those expressions and circumstances which we have cooked-up, and fabricated, and stumbled upon....we, uptown-tight environmental geographers; and/or hang-dog poets; and/or terror-of-sound lipstick dancers; and/or scream-prone video artists; and or long-honey-haired *pferd*-sketchers; and/or smart-mouthed socioanthropists, and or bald-headed, fused-backed, sco-liar-inet-tosists (never, never, getting out from behind the big stick); and or desiccated, matho-promptered, ass painters; and/or piano-baiting-pan-beating sound soldiers; and/or kitty-loving, Russio-manic, link-meat singers; and/or pan-piping, bullshittical, bare-street, feet-hecubas; and/or googah-trinki-grabbing-cum-nanny-posers. All of us, with our piles of various(ly) junks. Some, knowing music well in the credentialed sense. Some, who did not, and could not, and will never....

So! WHAT!

Now!

....(and conversely)....Could not that work, to which we once were present in our stumbling and posing; back slapping and nose-thumbing; and now and again crying (sorry for ourselves and the rest). In our sometimes thinking, right and cl(ear). In our searching for ways to be of and

within “music.” Could not that work, by its very strangeness and seemingly intrinsic reluctance to be taxonomized, have required (then, and now) a new or other name? A name, which we either could not imagine, or (having spoken it privately to ourselves....in hush)....would not dare to advance to another....perhaps, because afraid to say: “well, maybe it’s not music afterall....and maybe what it IS—doesn’t need that name.” But, of course, this is (and mainly) my....own....*shtick*. And I am herein describing (mainly) me. Presuming so to speak for attic (as if an attic were a person, mute). Presuming so to speak for group (as if group were really “group” and I was its mouthpiece. Aspirating (so to speak) its collective thought to the wider world with authority ((and impunity))—(((The resident pontiff-cum-rag-channeling-head, as it were)))...... Needless to say my-now-former attic did not (could not) make any request to me to become a context for the questioning of music (it being, afterall, only an attic) ((and not a person)). I made such requests to myself in light of the attic’s most manifest salubriousness. The attic....(my attic)....was merely an empty space of a certain character. It is now, I am told, a drug den....(I am told). Another set of significations, to within, obtains. Mine....(to within)...have died....and I have lost my place....

So.

What?

II

Now.

....I'm in my favorite Chinese restaurant. The room is rich and mixed-metaphorically redolent (as in a beauteous stink to the ear), with variegated qualities and amplitudes of voice. There are a large number of families here tonight. Children's voices claim the foreground: sharp, squeaky, and quick (Munchkin chit-chat-cum-singsong) ((Shaking Willie's mewling and puking....lowered a bit and multi-tracked)). The adults, in contrast, inhabit a much lower and softer tessitura, fussing and shushing their kids into some semblance of proper little big people ("Don't you dare shove that crabmeat rangoon up your brother's nose") ((not without virtue, such advice)).....Behind the clouds of filial din, I hear my lovely Asian pop music: all pulse, high range lady-sing, sentiment and quasi-beguine. Somewhere, an ice machine, or so it sounds, is rattling crazily like a jumbo *esqueleto* on knobby bended knee, shooting craps on a formica table top. Every now and again, *tutta forza* spatterplexes of clicks-on-clicks.....One over, the waiter unwittingly, or maybe not, is making him a slow ostinato of percussive sounds by setting water glasses down on the unclothed table with not a little passive-aggressive purposiveness. "One" might even think he'd had a fight with somebody and is exacting a private retribution by way of this workplace equivalent of Holst's Mars.....My hearing is focused and intensified today. Every sound seems to stand up and sort itself out according to type and quality. I even imagine that I can hear the salty sizzle of Lo Mein noodles being stir-fried in the way-back kitchen, or the aqueous pop of each individual bubble bursting in my glass of beer. (Good! A waitress has taken up a carpet sweeper and digs grimly into a mound of floorborne fried rice: back and forth of rollers on the fibrous cloth....plaintive, drawling, cry of internal abrasion).....None of its "music" yet (if for no good reason other than that I have not claimed it as such) but my putatively "trained" ear, (with its attendant mind) could attempt a sorting out in light thereof; could place each constituent sound component of this complex circumstance into a particular location; could ascribe to it a function; could configure of it a network of lines which push and pull within and against

one another, imposing a kind of “formal” meta-structure with bass lines, and/or contrapuntal voices, and/or voice-leading, and/or even a kind of harmonic progression (as when an unfolding of simultanieties are traced and heard, however obliquely, to change in state)—could impose upon this luxuriently disorganized world of sounds, and sights, and smells, much of the descriptive accoutremata germane to a “proper” discussion of a “musical” reality. You know, that musical reality—gleanable via those filters (verbal, systemic, habitual, biased, or simply lazy)—through which original, unnameable, incomprehensible multi-sensory experience is channeled from living richness to an occasion for the mereness of “terminology”—(like garlic through the press: a flavor released, a function ascribed, the unkempt mystery of the knobby thing reduced to a kind of pulp). ((But, then, I'd rather grind my garlic too! It's my sound-world (((for want of a now-behind-me-better-way-to-say-it))), when my habit-formed-and-forming-music-speak kicks in, which gives me pause: makes me wonder if my language really does a justice to my hearing)) (((as in those times when I used to (((((and do still))))))) wonder how else a pitch-class, “A,” might sound—if only I could find something(s) other to say about it besides: “it's an A.”: and/or, “it's flat!”))))....

SO? WHAT!

Now.

....And, why such a conversion? Such a transference? Such a subsumption? Such a reduction? Such a colonization of the raw sound-pulp (resonating, fecundly-'round in this place) to and by the word, ‘music,’—((rendering, as it were, unto music that which isn't music—even!))—with its various and subsidiary verbal factotums in the form of attendant words which bear the big one around? Is it because I have lost my places, my contexts, for making my music (and I can't imagine new ones) that I am given ((with or without the *imprimatur* of legitimizing music-speak)) to claim other-than-music-places as music, drawing, and making ever larger, a circle around the excluded world of my excluders?.....But I could just sit here, drink it in, and name it. The ultimate music-place. Me, in my music-own head....

So?

What?

NOW?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music in this place? Clearly! I need but to observe....

SO?

What now?

....In the bathtub, listening to the water coursing over said head, and the sound of spatially dispersed (and frightening) thunderclaps outside ((you know, the ones, which commence with a small explosion and proceed by tearing up the sky like you'd rip giant, bass-enhanced, Styrofoam cups apart)), configuring the mother of all sky-klang doppler-shifts. As I sit, not a little nervously, my attention shifts to the slowly dispensed rinse-water which I have caused to leave my head for the tub-water. The multiple drip patterns from this curtain of rain parse themselves out, upon impact, into clumps of fives, and fours, and sevens; making a kind of gurgling, percolating bubble-gamelan (spatters and accretions of pitch/timbres envelopes, articulated as-within a continuous raining). My descriptive language (again) sums it up and I leave the tub feeling like I've heard a very-much-more-lovely-than-I-could-have-made-music-music....

So?

WHAT?

Now?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music in this place? Clearly! I need but to observe and frame....

So.

NOW?

What.

....In another environment. A not-so-treasured dinery in the dead-on center of this hip-so-very-uni-town. Big crowd. Cavernous room. The surrounding sound is dense and metallic. Somebody over to the left sounds like a whooping crane. (I should be so lucky). Multiple T.V. monitors are scattered throughout the space in classic "sports-bar" plenitude, and a clump of such are huddled together over the bar and positioned each, screen-side, to a point of the compass (or, so it seems). Some of the tubes share the same channel, and some have their own slice of the day's fare. Some have the sound turned up revealing the presence of dialogue (although, who, in this din could hear it distinctly) and some are left in the mute state, allowing me to improvise my own dialogue to the fortuitous inter-play of car crashes, birdy putts, quarterback sneaks, and pretty faces. Rather than confront this burrito and decaffinated coffee which I have ordered, almost by random process, I take a moment to notice how well particular athletic events seem to work with the day's late-breaking news stories (as in the pregnant

juxtaposition of the body building contests ((on soundless tellies over the bar)) with the bland, statistical, accounting-cum-rationalization of the scope and nature of retaliatory measures directed toward some hapless country as a result of some ill-advised military endeavor—(one, once laughable for its fecklessness, now lurching toward redemption via liberal helpings of shame-induced testosterone).....I see the possibilities now: glistening sweat coursing from various and sundry collocations of limb-lump, in counterpoint with the matter-of-fact, uninflected, tranquilizing, ruddy-faced, father-tones of pentagon speak. The flexing of America's "muskles" as it were—to the "near-stimmless-sprech" of authority and restraint. And, cutting through it all like the custard in a blub-chubby chocolate eclair is a love song (the music-music in this eye/ear field) husking close to torch, but much too round and cutesy-approachable. A bit on the plumpside. With a big red bow round the middle (and an index finger embedded in the cheek)....

SO?

What?

Now?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music in this place? Clearly! I need only to observe, frame, and map with my descriptive language....

So.

WHAT?

Now?

....Again. In a different restaurant. More and multiple T.V. screens—only, this time, they are positioned in the corners of the room. All are silent and each one is tuned to the identical real-estate report; and successive frames exhibit various "adverts" for property, revealing such information as the price of the house and number of its bedrooms (whether, or not, it has a nook, a wet bar, a second bath, etc.). Many of the houses on today's offering are older (if not exactly commensurately venerable in feel) and their freeze-frame images might be beautiful without the accompanying descriptive texts in print (emphatic, as they are, of the merely statistical). Within the frame, I see the mereness of front door, gable, eave, or cut of bare wood floor generating, in me, a *frisson* not unlike that which I used to experience alone, in my attic space, after a good, hard, read at Bachelard*....I see a room: shadowy, woodbrown, and grainy—a single diffuse light emanating from a quarter-open door....I see sunlight: framed and dispersed by a single, square, window:

partitioned via criss-cross wooden supports. My idea of video art—(and not unimaginable as a kind of silent music)—this. Nothing much “of interest” to see, but a progression of stationary, mundane, shapes which I cause to interact (but then that IS, of course, THE “interest”—isn’t it?). Uh-oh, there’s a salesman to dispense his prompt and unceremonious shaft to my feelings of aesthetic well-being and, in response, I let my attention shift to the muzack....(canned harmonica and throat-centered, little-male-voice....singing his (maybe) fifty-million dollar song)....

SO. What? NOW?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music in this place? Clearly! I have but to observe, frame, map and signify through my descriptive language....

So. WHAT? Now?

....At the Lake McBride birdblind. The day is pleasantly warm: a mantle of heat, through which traipses the occasional icy breeze from off the lake. The chipmunks are powering their way through the bird’s white millet and cracked corn, their jowls puffed out like symmetrical goiters (little saddlebags)—((tiny, brown and white, lawnmowers they are)). A family of deer (evading, no doubt, our “noble” brother-hoods of the big gun) has been and gone, frightened by some small movement, or sound, which we inadvertently made. It was probably me, with my continual shifting of feet and attempts to stifle coughs.....Some kind of muskrat-like life-form is lumbering around in the dry leaves. I can hear the animal, but he/she alludes my best efforts to “make” him/her via my binoculars. On the tree just in front, a stunning red-headed woodpecker. Not the pileated, “Woody Woodpecker,” variety, but one rather less tonsorially resplendent if more vivid in coloration (bright, red, shiny, marble-round head).....The day is rich in pitch and timbre. A bird, somewhere to the right, repeats an intermittent and quasi major-secondy figure. Another answers with a high frequency rattle-cum-frequency-modulated sawtooth gargling. Some equally lively creature is scratching on the roof (but then this dwelling of wood and corrugated tin—in which we’re huddling and hiding—is (also) where the bird feed is stored).....This (my) sound-field has congealed into a susurrus-surround—with buzzing and keening: skittering, scratching; and the “nicking” of small teeth on nuggets of hard grain. Most of today’s sounds are of the high-range-constricted variety....but, now and again, I pick up

a low thumping which I take to be yet another woodpecker (although I would rather it were a mustelid banging rocks together—as in Household's scary tome*)....

So? WHAT? NOW?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music in this place? Clearly! I have but to observe, frame, map, signify in the light of my descriptive language....and claim....

So. WHAT? Now?

....Inside pizza-fat-house domain of high distortion and whiny rock-and-roll clouds of high-end jangle (scrap-metal and tin-foil crumpled uptight in a single flex of fingers to fist).....Outside, the city square is clogged with loungers and strollers. Antiphonal squadrons of little, brown birds vie for their piece of this uni-town in now persistent sink; their crumbs and mine, filling little airborne mouths. I love the different-directional, criss-cross, jazz of lots of people walking the window, now, my peaked perception's frame:

unaware of one another, yet, giving me the quick-fix coherence of a Haydn quartet at a cocktail party. This one, fast and languid; flowing along like orphan bark on the rapids. That one, slow and hardtack-stiff. Tight. All up-knot involutional, and nary a trace of belief that next steps are still possible. Altogether, they make a soundless, multi-hocketing, music of body defined, variable-speed interlace....

SO. What NOW?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music in this place? Clearly! I have but to observe, frame, map, and signify in the light of my descriptive language....and claim, in music's name....

So WHAT! Now.

....At the birdblind on a Sunday. I see a single chipmunk with cheeks puffed out, full of cracked corn—and then a large orange-brown squirrel moving testily in a zigzag. Various sizes and colors of bird cling to the doors of the feeders, and a minuscule white worm moves persistently to the edge of my page.....Towards the lake, I hear repeated, short, bursts

of crow call. First, that of a single animal, and then a rapidly developing complex of frenetic rasps which abruptly cease as if arbitrarily cut off by a sound engineer. Later....(I hear)....a mourning dove (I guess) with its characteristic burnished cooing in one-up, two-longs-and-a-short.....I feel pretty satisfied in this moment of rest: fully exercised after our forced march up and down the green-hooded switchbacks; my yearnings and anxiety, momentarily, giving way to tiredness, and a clearer perception that there is some other world besides that circumscribed by me in the act of observing me.....The red-headed woodpecker has a nice gurgle. More salivary than brittle. More mid-range than extreme. Off to the right, a Blue Jay and a Cardinal are squared off, but nothing bids fair to come of it as I, in my supreme clumsiness, am bound to distract them before they have time to deliver their various "broad-sides"....and so it is. My ear-attentiveness subsequently grasps an unidentified bird vocalization (not unlike a sound I used to blunder onto, once and awhile, when I worked in the studio ((a sort of sine wave down-turn, followed by a chirp with a little reverb in it)) (((one of those things at which I never quite knew just how....I had arrived))).....Hey!—That gray squirrel over yonder is a fat one! Mighty fine pair-o-drumsticks on that sucker!.....(Why do the doves "prattle" when they take flight....something they don't seem to do when just having their "pad-around" on the ground?)....

So?

WHAT NOW?

....Can I find (a)....((my))....music here? Clearly! I have but to observe, frame, map and signify in the light of my descriptive language, and claim in music's name....and mine....

SO! WHAT!

NOW!

....In the bagel place (my dear, dear friend and I). Where else? The eats are cheap and it's another lovely day with wispy clouds and manageable heat. I'm here to have coffee and to write a few letters, and then I go to the library. An altogether pleasant sort of do, this. The noise level (an oceanic admixture of crowd rustle: and a kind of jazz which, fairly or unfairly, I think of as just vaguely right of wing) is rich without being homogenizing and the coffee is strong—yet, I am tired of this undeniably tasty bit of Iowa *gemutlich*. I wonder what else there could be besides these (my) unruffled continua, articulated by little trajectories between

home and town ((and Lake McBride))....(((no one of which I ever quite experience apart from its implications for my future as an "art worker" of one sort or another))). Now that I've left those places....contexts, wherein my music could be found (safe places ((both)) for aloneness and exchange of a different kind with others), I sit (((poor me))) in eateries, and birdblinds, and bathtubs continuing to put my frame around that which I observe (((both acoustically and visually))))....experiencing the surfeit of sensory relata conjoining within my perceptual field, and claiming it as if a kind of primal composition enacted without the fear of failure....without the fear of now-behind-me's ear-jerk scorn and *sotto voce* wounding tongue. All that richness and complexity, and I don't have to lift a finger....utter a sound. It's very beautiful! Cage was right and he gets my vote (especially at the birdblind!). So, why can't it be enough? Why, the drive to keep on making externalizations, artifacts, "things." Utterances of my own, to reside in that world supposedly "outside" my head—(destined, by design, to become supposedly "outside" phenomena for the consideration of someone else's head?) Of course, I have to. But, why?....

So? What now?

....Is it because I sense that the hearing of my own voice, and the movement of my body in advance of self-stipulated, self-constructed, and socially shared, acoustical (and other) realities is now basic to any recognition which I have that I, in fact, exist....(beyond the mereness of fact?.....That even in the birdblind (especially in the birdblind), and in silence, I am given to pointing—so as to extract my own signified experiences and share them with my companions....("seethat?"—"hear....that?")....

So? What now?

....Is it, as well, because I further sense that my willy-nilly, ear-jerk, conversion of the whole world of multi-sensory inputs to some reconstituted state evident of music (my music) may not be entirely in the interests, either of music, or the world....((to say nothing of me!))....

As
in the move—WHERE—music's word acquires all-world content, thereby losing the ability to be about anything in particular....

As

in the move—WHERE—world's content acquires a single name, thereby losing the ability to be about everything in general (or, nothing in particular)....

As

in the move—WHERE—music dies because what I, principally, allow myself to know is that it (music) can be nothing other than anything and everything....

As

in the move—WHERE—world dies because what I, principally, allow myself to know is that it (world) is no more than that-(some)-name by which I have domesticated it....

As

in the move—WHERE—I—lover of music—(by forswearing further inquiry into ((and discourse upon)) the applicability of music's name to world's plenitude—(((arranging the marriage of music to world by default, as it were)))—MAKE—forfeit to music the possibility that it may continue to be a place of confluence, and contention—for the many human imaginings about sound—with, and against, which significant distinctions may be drawn and debated....

As

in the move—WHERE—I—lover of world—(having prevented ((via my strategically employed phalanx of "so whats!")) world's escape from the hegemony of this rather tired musicword-in-tandem with its ancillary ecology of evidentiary qualifiers—((now-behind-me's much-vaunted galaxy of "piece-work")))—MAKE—forfeit to world the possibility that it may continue to be a place of confluence, and contention, for the many human imaginings about world—with and against which I may draw and debate significant personal distinctions—the better to conceptualize the possibility of *my own escapes* from the restraining, debilitating, web of known musical quantities; operational-ear-fixed-eye-upon-known-quantities-ad-nauseum-unto-mine-own-and-cosmic-death....

Perhaps, in recognizing the desirability of continuing to take concrete steps in advance of something called “my own music” (instead of resignedly residing in world-sound as if my sound), I protect for myself (and the world) the prerogative of having my own needed say in and to those social circumstances (within world) which would define me by default. The prerogative of not only, or merely, imagining myself as if world's output, plaything, worshipful apprehtender, or willing worker (((and comporting myself commensurately, to be sure))), but of disposing, indeed compelling myself—to articulate and socially advance my own descriptions of me—and of (the) world in which I am both shaper and shaped....

Perhaps, in recognizing the desirability of not claiming the world's sound (in oh, so tedious perpetuity) I protect ((for the world, and myself)) a wilderness of sounding-"*its*" from my voracious habits of conceptual clearcutting—from my subsequent conversion of this vast ecology of sensory experience to a tiny "development" of description—from the vicissitudes of that vaguely colonial ambiance which comes of wearing music's name tag. You know—as in that moment when all the persistently constructed "patternplexes" of idiosyncratic expression in dynamic interplay—by which you know yourself to be YOU—and NO OTHER—are brought, through-circumstance-down, to the level of a card on your chestpiece which states, most affably, "hello, I'm (((" "))). You know—as in that moment—appropos a point by D.D.—to wit that just, perchance, the bird, to which you are listening, is doing something more important than tweaking your throbbing aesthetic-cum-music-nodes (with his and/or her tiny —trembling-warbling— breathing-beating tongue).....a something....yet more beautiful*....

So?	What now?	Where?
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....Is it again, and as well, because I sense that my personally configured, phenomenally rich space of composing-the-given-in-observation's-frame is (while providential of a kind of ultimate freedom) ((for who, afterall, can censor me when I live out my creative life in silence, leaving no descriptive trace thereof in utterance)) is, really more a matter of retreat ((with compensatory rationale resulting in ultimate relegation)) than of deep commitment, or even simple preference? More a question, it would seem, of the aesthetics of self-protection than the adoption, articulation—indeed advocacy—of a needed aesthetic. For it is not (and well I know it) my music which I have lost with the loss of my places—("why—only today!.....")—but, my nerve. Nerve, which once came easily in, and through, my two safe havens....

So?	Where now?	What?
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....Is it yet again, and as well, because I need to take note of the world which I inhabit. Need someone to take note of my taking note. Need to take note of another's noting. Because it's a grim and sad thing always to be pointing to the world by myself....and for myself....and to myself....as if only myself....(when there are....((in fact))....others)....

So?	What Where ?	Now?
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....Or is it yet (yet again) and as well because it feels too good to give it up....this making of music; this shaping of sounds on the clarinet; this sculpting of language in a text. This digging and scratching, and pawing and primping the right sound on-and-into the now-mysterious, twelve-stave, score-paper-place with my number seven Pentel. This whipping up of a collage—out of linguistic detritus—paints, and leaves, and double-stick scotch tape. This Klezmer music, and Choro music, and jazz, and no-jazz-jazz; and fooling around with the Oberheims, and wood-blocks, and talking drums to delightfully-no good purpose.....What about the feeling of favorably disposed to making of my own, in spite of all the little (and not so) nudges—from *aristoi* and *hoi polloi* alike—to give it up, that I might better become the positionless consumer of canned (and pre-digested) cultural product which they might wish me to be? ((whoever “they” are)). (Perhaps, in this “values-added” time, all too sympathetic to the creeping repression of inquiry and experiment and imagination’s free and diverse exercise, my wanting to go on....is....as much....my refusal to shut up!))....

So?

Now?

Where what?

....And what about the times when I am “just” listening. Listening intently, and deeply. Sticking with it, no matter how my body’s incessant, internal, wriggling draws me to motion. Sticking with it....(and it, alone)....no matter the white-hot panic to claim my art out of its “it.” There are those.....Perhaps....the most beautiful times I know....are those....

So?

What?

Now?

Where?
Now?

....Back aside this funky riverplace, nowhere near now-behind-me. It's all around, if only-I sit quietly and take it in (Ives' backporch symphony) ((or was it front?))—(((to say nothing of the aforementioned J.C.))). Here a duck, there a duck, everywhere....the shiny beauty of the de-construct-ov-ed-tin-man town on the opposite bank....(a) (duck)-the (duck)-stunning, spatio-temporal-ear tripping of the city's (old) tornado warning system....the (Mac)-duckiest electronic music for miles and miles....(big-D). I could sit here, forever, (had) in perfect musico-artful-(a)-bliss-(farm)....
rotting like the (ei,ei)-under-(o)-growth....

So?

What?

Now.....(.),((!)),(((?)))....

Iowa City, 6/93-10/95

Performance Note

When reading aloud, punctuation marks should be thought of as the instruments of musical phrase and pacing, rather than the signs of proper sentence construction. Capital letters should indicate an emphasized articulation or weighting—some increase in volume (short of shouting). The relative proportion of empty space between so what's and now's should be audible.

A reading should be expressive yet restrained. The reader should avoid any lapse into persistant hyper-expressive singsong. Read as you would a score.

Right/left brackets around words or sentences may be visually counterparted by holding up appropriate combinations of right/left fingers, i.e., (())=two fingers of each hand; ((()))=three fingers of each hand; ((()))=four fingers of each hand, and so forth.

In cases of six or more brackets per side, hold up five each side; then the remaining two (or more) evenly distributed between hands.

Readers interested in this option should experiment with hand shapes and positions so that each bracketed segment may be signed differently—but whatever the configuration, the reader should excersize reasonable restraint in its implementation. Finger bracketing should be almost offhanded in its execution.

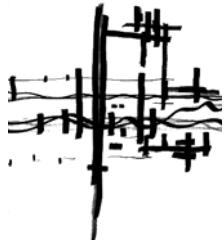
REFERENCES

*#1, refers to the discussion of errors in logical typing, as presented in Steps to an Ecology of Mind, by Gregory Bateson [Ballantine Books, 1972].

*#2, refers to the Poetics of Space, by Gaston Bachelard, [Beacon Press, 1969].

*#3, refers to the novel, Dance of the Dwarfs, by Geoffrey Houshold, [Penguin Books, 1968].

*#4, refers to a conversation with David Dunn [Galesburg Train Station, Galesburg, Illinois, 1992].



Listening I Hear

(for Melody Scherubel)

listening....

i hear

cutlery snaps....aluminum on iron....rattle of change in the register....
something or someone groaning [pitch and spittle in a klang]....listening....

i hear

a spray of youngish voices [whiny, plaintive, truncated, abrasive—
flippant]—listening....

i hear

the filtered 'sh' of a kitchen water-hose—and the small-scope, tiny-bell,
composite of water glass with pitch-clear tinkle of icecubes and cutlery,
summarily banged down on the bottom of a hard-rubber bus-tub....

listening....

i hear

a "his" voice, hard-diction-clipped and yankee-masculine [stifling
inquiry, railroading all weakness before it, rendering irrelevant the
urgency of further expression]....listening....

listening....

i hear

a rolling tumbril of close-packed mumble, making a crescendo which
splits apart at its apex, dustily fragmenting into a high and wide few
punktum....listening....

i hear

a cough [a treble, twined and tripartite clot of parsimonious phantoms...]

not so much a voice as the trace of a skull....listening....

i hear

the exclamatory "shit" of disgruntlement throat backed and phlegmy—
distorted by more than a moments frustration....listening....

i hear

them sharpening their knives, banging them, ends down, on the table
top....listening.....

listening....

i hear

the big, high, tweak of the computer singing, coursing around a central
pitch....

listening....

i hear....a "her" voice, new england firm and quasi-brit....surrounded by
fiddles and a clear, french, clarinet....listening....

i hear

a utensil on glass; the signal for a toast which never comes....listening....

i hear

a baby-squeak through mush-mouth splutter....remembering....

i hear

some flat-foot for the high-art right denouncing my music....listening....

i hear

an old man's voice, dusky and masked with residue; haughty and
disdainful at its center, poised to give combat—soon, under the gentle
suppression of a young woman's voice, shifting to a wary whining....

listening....

i hear

smashed crockery, clouds of conversation, muzack-sing, primping
behind or beneath....listening....

i hear

a woman, an older-woman voice ordering coffee, putting me in mind of
the wispy transparency of my mother's voice: that way she has of
sounding ineffectual, a pushover, "sensitive" to things....listening....

i hear

accentuated sibilants-hissing-susurric, punctuated by temporally distinct
points of salt-shaker slap on the formica table tops....listening....

i hear

steady-state fry-up in the kitchen changing pitch as if sucked through a
band-pass filter....listening....

i hear

my own lung rails: little, tiny, woodblocks—multi-tracked in

swarms....overhearing....

i hear

someone—a post-pubescent male voice ordering extra cheese....

listening....

i hear

ice being shaken in an empty? glass....remembering....

i hear

the antiphonal percussion-masses of freezing rain, in vari-speed pan from window to window, coming alternatively in dense clumps, and sparse spatterplexes—congealing into identities, at times much other than the source—discrete gestures within the “chaos”....remembering....

i hear

the....listening....

i hear

a vacuum cleaner, a weak one pulling up small stones, one at a time....remembering....

i hear

the wind over the outback at uluru, imagined as reverberant, dark, as if inside a cavity....voices inside the pink noise conduit....listening....

i hear

a tiny voice in reluctant chuckle, nasal, simpering, “huh,” “huh”—each “huh,” set off as if by incipient exhaustion—the very antithesis of protean, gustatorial, full bodied, guffawing-con-joie-de-vivre....listening....

i hear

a plastic platter snapped on a metal countertop....remembering....

I hear

my great-uncle roy's harmonica, as he sat in our living room, in his bare feet and ten-gallon hat; wheezing, and laughing, and sighing; troping his arizona drawl over the who-knows-what-tune he is playing....soon he will smile revealing rows of charcoal-blackened teeth, and my parvenu grandmother will be scandalized, adding her frustrated lip-smacking to the mix....listening...

i hear

leave-rattle-rustle, airship drone in pitch ascent, moving away, losing parts of its spectrum with each measure of distance....

listening....

i hear

a bird at two-eighths and four sixteenths, covering about a perfect fourth's stretch in pitch....listening....

i hear

the barking of a camper (not his dog) and wave of insect rasp,
moving like a shadow over the grass....listening....

i hear

loon-like cry-cum-ululation with human baby break at the trailing edge,
and from a different direction yet another cicada-riff oscillating in neat
subdivisions of increase/decrease: sometimes quaternotes, sometimes
eighths, sometime in-between-em-up-and down in tessitura, faster and
slower-speedy....listening....

i hear

an isolated incredible-hulk sound, some kind of gut-propelled growl or
grunt from an old fella scaring kids—and then i hear them yipping and
yelping, running pell mell into the tall trees in sheer, small, squirt-
delight....cogitating....

i imagine

the rebel yell forced out by confederate soldiers, butternut and gray-
blue and gray-brown, thrashing through the thickets around my
tranquil summertime union kiosk. i can see their pickets....the glint off
their rifles....listening....

i hear

the deeper, crisper, rattle of melody's book pages which she is turning
deliberately and in search of something in particular; the kind of sound
that i feel as a resonance in my mouth, under my tongue at the back of
my throat, causing mild salivation. i can imitate it by opening my
mouth a certain way, making my lips smack a little, letting the sound
bounce around in my cheeks to get that resonance....listening....

i hear

an eight-hundred pound gorilla of a bumblebee fly through the kiosk,
coming damned uncomfortable close to my skittish ear, crowding me
like a barroom brawler. "you're fucking with your heartbeat," he says
through clenched [whatever they have instead of teeth]....listening....

i hear

a dog hawking, clearing his throat in gasplets of twos and threes. he
smokes too much....listening....

i hear

a mini-cavernous-bell-within-bell-call-and-response between two birds
(or is it only one with a very large repertoire of pitches, timbres, and
rhythms)....listening....

i hear

the last of a mourning doves set; the turn-around but not the head....
listening....

i hear

another plane, very far off; parts of its sound no more audible than these flies sawing round my head. i hear a grumpy [how do i know?] truck from out on the highway. i hear fibonacci bird preetling to the right. i hear some unidentified winged interloper trying to check in to my ear canal, covered....listening....

i hear

the flies buzzing near to my ears, two, then three, then six in cross-sectioning circular flight paths....listening....

i hear

somebody hammering a sound; heavy hand-tools on tough, burled, wood....listening

i hear

a distant, palpably enormous, group of kids chanting something indistinct—[could be] “mojo pull off,” “mojo pull off,” “Won’t you come out?” “Don’t ja fall off!” “mojo pull off”—wrent momentarily aside with washes of screaming and then resumed with a new ardor....listening....

i hear

the flys having a fight....remembering....

i hear

uncle vernon fiddling. he’s wearing one of those screwball masks of his; the one’s he takes into the photo booths to get a bent and/or tweaked photo taken, giving him no end of pleasure. Each mask represents a different character—some like a clown, or a grotesque, moustachioed, old man (jerry colonna or bismark, or lord kitchener), or his safeway truckdriver’s idea of a monster. a moment before, he was sitting in his lazyboy, watching tv and drawling out an overripe word or two at strategically placed, and planned, caesurae. then, he replaced the words with his slow lope to the bedroom. we hardly knew he was gone until he came back in with his mask and fiddle. positioning himself directly in front of the tube, he spits out the arkansas traveler as fast as he can for about a minute-and-a-half. finishing slapdash-subito, he leaves the living room-cum-performance space, sheds his peckerwood persona like a chrysalis, and returns to the living room, to flop back into the lazyboy as if nothing had happened. a theater worthy of beckett in its exquisitely timed and delicious irrelevance. at a springfield hotel listening....

i hear

a sound from an airduct, like a windchime of tiny fragments, or the sound of broken filament rattling in a lightbulb, or the klangfarben whir

of an amplified swiss watch, or so I imagine remembering....

i hear

the sound of the wooden floor of the lincoln law office in springfield—creaks and rasps and tears—lincoln and i performing the same piece, albeit a hundred-some years apart listening

i hear

j.c's crowd; thick and rapidfire—one clear, mid-range, voice predominating—something about the “boy-friends beer allowance.” back of him and the others, deeply embedded in sound-stew, yet goosing it all along is a alto saxophone player—maybe stitt—I imagine stitt's bell fucking this bourgeois baloney-merchant in his middle class values....

not listening....

i hear

muszack at the coffeecake place, where we often go in the morning before work—a kind of bach-deconstruction-in-phantom-of-the-opera duds, accompanied by some very stiff rock-and-silly-roll-satanism-cum-country drumming (e power biggs meets johnny paycheck in devil-drag) ho hum....listening....

i hear

a refreshing refrigerator-buzz, providing a welcome spread of frequencies, distorting the muzack, taking the silly-satanic cloying music out of the the just silly cloying music....remembering....

i hear

yesterdays reading of cage's lecture on nothing, by marie francis uitte. melody was shuffling papers with particular abandon. the cicadas were drilling the air with different-directional clouding and clotting—and uitte's mouth-watering voice was resonating certain of the harp strings—here a d, there a g, everywhere the music....imagining....

i hear

the purportedly awe-inspiring sounds of the amazon as it bashes into the atlantic—a raucous point of confluence, deep and without containment....remembering....

i hear pee wee russell wiggling towards an outplace, whereat he will stay just long enough to make me—help me—to distrust that safeplace my ears have constructed in years of self-protection. surely, he knows what he's doing. maybe he doesn't know what he's doing. maybe, i don't care whether he knows what he's doing. maybe, i only care about my experience of what he's doing, and the fact that it raises a few questions i didn't have before I heard him do it. probably i don't need to know that he knows what he's doing. it's enough that he does

it—and that it's what it is....listening....

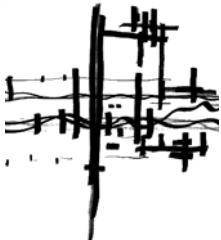
i hear

the scratching of my pen on the paper as counterpoint to the stuckpig
squeal of a cold-sweat panic-disordered guitar, trapped in the
loudspeaker....listening....

i hear

the cappuchino machine as low-pass filter.

Iowa City, 7 November 1999



Dangling Reflections on The Bewitched

[1980....was it?....I was a free-lance musician (read works occasionally)....and I had a day job in a print shop, in an old hotel-cum-flophouse-cum-whorehouse, in upper downtown, San Diego.]

As a clarinettist, I had participated in the first production of Harry Partch's, *The Bewitched*, to be mounted since the nineteen-fifties. This occurred in 1975 and I recall the pleasure I felt at finally being able to participate in the music of this composer, with whom I had so long been fascinated—(and who lived until his death in 1974, only a bridge away, in the next neighborhood from my own). Before *The Bewitched*, I had mainly been a chamber and orchestral player diverted, on occasion, by rare and frightened excursions into Jazz and free improvisation—wanting—but not often able)—to find and engage those musics within which I could explore the more grittily-expressive, dramatically-inflective, timbrally-variegated and blatantly-speech-like attributes of the clarinet: attributes which I would later find embodied in the Klezmer music which I love and have played for years.

[I got up each morning at 5:30, had a walk and some herb tea, and then drove off, arriving at the shop about 7:30 to prepare for the first business of the day.]

As I recall, *The Bewitched's* clarinet part is (in a way) a kind of tablature-cum-environment in which the “notes,” per se, are perhaps better conceptualized as “fingerings,” and these, as “locations.” These “notes-as-locations” are stipulated in the familiar (conventional) notation (as if in equal temperament), but written above them—(sometimes occasionally and sometimes on every “note”)—are ratios (expressed as fractions) indicating the

exact frequencies in Partch's 43-tone system. Even to approximate a stipulated ratio, the clarinettist has to experiment with different combinations of half-hole and half-key fingerings—various degrees of lip pressure and configurations of embouchure. I further recall that in addition to the ratios, Partch provides the clarinettist with variously-colored, horizontally-directional, lines and marks in pencil(s). These track the familiar notation as it unfolds (often, “note” to “note”) and is meant to indicate the direction in pitch (flat or sharp) necessary in order to obtain a given ratio or ratios.

[When the machines were fired up, and the back orders done, I went next door to Betty Anderson's Coffee Shop and Korean Restaurant for some bacon and eggs, coffee, and a good (if short) read.]

The clarinettist must coalesce these several instructions into a workable strategy for performing each note of the part as close to the ratio-stipulated pitch as possible, the locus of verisimilitude residing, then, in the degree to which the various “notes” are heard to match their opposite number ratios when played on the Chromelodeon (i.e., Partch's 43-tone reed organ and the obvious practical reference-source in matters of pitch).

[After breakfast, I'd go back to the shop and put out the open sign.]

The clarinettist also has to be able to perform glissandi and other types of coloristic pitch bending—(listen to the “Pabst Blue Ribbon” song in the basketball scene ((Scene Five)) for example). It also helps to be able to sing a bit—whistle—and to stamp one's foot.

[Sometimes, I'd have a customer right away—and, sometimes, no-one would come in for an hour or so, giving me some time to try to write my own music—or, read a novel—or, make xerox art—or, study The Bewitched's clarinet part.]

The Bewitched was among the most significant of my first exposures to a kind of clarinet playing which challenged the minimally-inflected, Western-European, classical-music, “organ-pipe” sound which I had been trained, over a number of years, to produce. But, over and above the specifics of clarinet technique, *The Bewitched*—as composition—was my introduction to the idea of “corporeality”: that essential word in Partch's lexicon, which verbally contextualizes a desired condition in and

through which musicians may transcend a traditional and professionally-prescribed function as “disembodied” translator of coded information into sound, to become, for a time, diversely-expressive physical presences (musician-actors/musician-dancers) energizing the space in which they are performing, not only with their sounds, but with their whole bodies. In this condition-cum-state, the body is not thought to be ultimately reducible to that of an “instrumentality,” whose principal function it is to reveal and affirm the primacy of something called “music”—(as this may be understood to refer to the absolutist fiction of “disembodied” or “sourceless” sound). Rather, it is something called “music,” (as instrumentality)—in interactive conjunction with the mediums of dance, visual art, sculpture, poetry, and carpentry; interconnected in a multi-sensory theater—which makes apparent and unambiguous, the primacy of the body as source and subject; centrality and ur-context. This shift in the order of importance, from single sense to multi-sense—(from the idea of human, as an occasion for the apprehension/appreciation of music—to the idea of music, as an occasion for the apprehension/appreciation of human)—serves to define a powerful wholeistic position, countervailing to those dismembering tendencies—(to which we subject ourselves)—issuing from a too-deep investiture in the idea of specialization....(tendencies such as the one in which artists who dare to work seriously in more than one medium get dismissed out-of-hand, their competence, sincerity, and credibility annihilated defacto).

[My customers were a varied lot. There was the lawyer Jake, dapper mouth-piece for the rich and shady. He'd been Korean War fighter pilot; a post-war transatlantic captain for El Al, and the owner of an exotic dog store in New York. He had a barkless Basenji (named Irv), a silver Porsche with a leather noseguard, a withering array of tailored suits and a new (and very young) girl friend every week—or, so it seemed.]

In 1980, a new production of *The Bewitched* was mounted in response to an invitation to appear at the Berlin Festival, and I was once again asked to be the clarinetist. The incentives were of course the obvious and tasty ones of revisiting the work, getting away from my day gig in the fast-copy store, and doing a little European travel into the bargain. And, the “pot” was further to be “sweetened” by the fact that this new “Bewitched” would be directed by Kenneth Gaburo—with choreography by Lou Blankenburg. Kenneth was a significant presence on the U.C.S.D. faculty at that time, notable for his work in the domain of sound-text inter-

qualification (i.e., compositional linguistics) and his strong positions in support of the importance of interdisciplinary investigation for composers/musicians (among other things). His reputation as a "virtuosically" elaborative teacher of composition was widely acknowledged among those with a dead-serious interest in (and involvement with) the idea of music experiment (as was the richly diverse formidability of his personality and the gamut of expressive modalities ((sacred and profane)) with which he was known to advance it). Those few works of his which I had heard, by this time, (i.e. *Antiphonies III and IV*, *Fat Millie's Lament*, and, above all, the extraordinary concerto-text/theater-grosso, *Maledetto*), had made, each in their way, significant (read near-combustable) impressions on me and I was trying in this light to get up nerve enough to ask him for composition lessons....Lou Blankenburg was a dancer/composer whose work was, to my mind, singular for its highly personal and idiosyncratic vocabulary of movement, often articulated within the sound/framework of a "simple" spoken narrative, heard via tape playback—(I can still see—and hear—her dancing (and speaking) her loving recollections of the children on the school bus which she drove)....The uncompromising uniqueness of Partch's musical/theatrical language—coming together with Kenneth's, and Lou's, ideas about music/movement-as-language—in a production to be worked and reworked over a protracted period of time, seemed as challenging and potentially rewarding a performance opportunity as I would likely ever have, and an occasion for learning too packed with possibilities to be missed.

[And, then, there was Mildred, who thought everything in the store, including the xerox machines, belonged to her. She'd wander around, plaintively and inquisitively murmuring—to the cash register, or the binding machine—"aren't you mine?": "didn't I loan you to him?" Many's the time I had to gently round her up as she inched toward the door (a cartoon wolf in search of unsuspecting pigs) some orphan object or other gathered up in her hands, tight and close—to be returned to its rightful home. Mildred also thought that every yellow car was a species of taxi. One day, Phil (another lawyer) resplendent, as always in his immaculately tailored suits and yellow Porsche, came to the shop to get a copy of a deposition. While I did the work (he and I chatting quasi-collegially about our shared interest in Artie Shaw) Mildred came along, saw yellow, and levitated into the backseat of the waiting car (sweet as you please). Transaction concluded, Phil went outside....opened the car door, slid into the drivers seat, glanced, absentmindedly in his rear-view mirror, and there she was....unambiguously esconced....primly and firmly. "Take me

to the bank," Mildred commanded, with the amiable imperiousness of an Agatha Christie dowager, and this he did, but not before she inquired of the car: "Didn't I loan you to him?"]

I recall that prior to the first rehearsal, I—(as well as the other members of the ensemble)—was to have a meeting with Kenneth, one-on-one. This, I suspected, would not so much be in the nature of an audition to determine whether I was in or out of the ensemble—I was in—but rather more an opportunity for him to hear me play, provide pertinent critique, and to talk about his ideas for the production. In fact, I thought that the session would mainly be about the familiar issues of note interpretation, phrase-shaping, tempi, and so forth (and I had “woodshedded” the part accordingly, ((as if I were to audition for a symphony orchestra))). I arrived at the appointed time, warmed up the horn, and took a seat at the solitary music stand. Kenneth came in, we exchanged greetings, and then instead of asking me to play the clarinet, he requested that I lie down on the floor—and then get up—as slowly as possible. Not, yet, as aware of Kenneth’s work with movement as I was with his instrumental and text music, and being then perhaps unduly attached to what little dignity my legit-clarinethood conferred upon me, I did an internal balk—(wondering just what the hell he could be getting at)—but went ahead anyway: uncertain, a little fearful—vaguely resentful. In the first few seconds (one arm, one leg; this way—that-way; an elbow here, an ankle there—stiff, unresponsive, obdurate), I came to a rather pointed awareness that I had not thought very much—(ever)—about the expressive use of my body, except as such a notion might be understood to apply to the activation of a reed, or the pre-choiced wiggling of fingers. Near-debilitating as this observation felt (and freighted with the resonant feeling of futility which it engendered) I did somehow accomplish the stipulated task—although without, I suspect, much elegance. In this light, I think that if Kenneth did not exactly affirm the gesture which resulted from my brittle fumbling, he at least appeared to respect the attempt.

[And, then, there was—I forget his name—an Englishman who had lived for the last twenty years on the continent. He had been in the RAF, during the Battle of Britain—and after the war had returned to university to train in philology. Finding little to do upon graduation—and having big eyes for the movie business—he went to Italy where his language chops landed him a gig as Federico Fellini’s lip-sync man. Fifteen years in that endeavor had left him

very near to legally blind and therefore unemployable, now, at his adopted calling. He lived in a small room in the hotel (they were most of them small rooms) writing film scripts and Shakespearean musicals in the half-light, hoping to land a movie deal....something to redeem his sacrifice.]

Next, Kenneth asked that I play selected passages from the score and, while doing so, also to attempt a "tracing," or "description," of the particular musical phrases being played through the movement of my instrument—inscribing arcs, peaks, and troughs of physical gesture, outlining, in space, the pitch contours/trajectories and rhythms of the notation. I did rather better at this, or so I remember and the meeting ended amicably.

[And, then, there was Ronnie, who identified himself as either Jesus or Moses, depending on the day. I never saw him without white robe, hemp sandals, and a dirty great gnarled staff, complete with a tiny and deliciously resonant bell on its end—(the only thing missing being a lamb ((or lambs))). All day long, he wheeled a metal shopping cart around; heaped high (and stuffed) with books, and articles of old clothing—cooking utensils, and various and sundry culinary delights culled from the dumpster behind the McDonald's down the street. These, he informed, were his "effects" and "holy articles," subject at any given moment to signification, designification, or resignification as was his wont of the moment. For a time Ronnie checked into the store once, daily, where he would hold court until some mysterious force called him back to a never-ending hegira up and down Fifth Avenue. He would take a chair and begin a debate with himself on selected passages from what he called the "little book"—a work which I never saw, and whose content, as Ronnie related it, seemed to have little relationship to any other text with which I was familiar (then or now). To enter the debate, all you had to do was to say anything at all, about anything at all, and your words immediately became an occasion for contention and pronunciamento (Ronnie to Ronnie—as if you weren't there)....

He had once been a teacher of economics at University—or, so I was told.]

There was to be further work of this type in the form of exercises advanced as a means conducive to the development of a "collective energy" which might then inform our performance. Particularly memorable among these was the practice of beginning each rehearsal by lying in the supine position and articulating vowels through the near-closed throat without activating the vocal chords. This was accomplished by forming the particular phoneme with the lips, bringing the rear of the tongue up to,

but not entirely flat against, the upper palate, and expelling air through the small aperture which remained. Sometimes, only a single phoneme was articulated through both the ingressive and exhalative portions of a full cycle of breathing—but, two or more different ones might as well be employed, thus giving each person a multi-phoneme melody. Kenneth called this procedure “colored breathing,” and when performed by the whole ensemble, it resulted in delicate bandwidth-extractions of differently-configured white sound, heard as a foreground antiphony within and against the background ebb-and-flow of the collective surround of our audible-breathing. {**Note to the performer: At this point (or prepared ahead of time) you may teach selected members of the audience to do the colored breathing. They may then assume the supine position and perform the colored breathing as a gentle background to the remainder of the reading—continuing, briefly past its conclusion. This is an option.**}

We were, as well, learning how to walk extremely slowly and with near-imperceptible forward motion—as in the Buddhist meditation. This was to be our primary mode of movement from one location to another (between scenes)—to be executed in complete darkness as we used flashlights to outline the barely visible instruments. As might be imagined, this movement involved lifting one leg very slowly (up, out, and in a curve) while balancing one’s whole weight on the other—standing, for some moments, one-legged (like a flamingo). I never could quite accomplish this task without a more-than-occasional “quivering” on the balance point between upright and falling....and, I still remember the mysterious beauty of this slow walking “catching me in the throat” as, during the course of a rehearsal, I saw all of the various directions and qualities of “slow,”—(and ever-so-slight, left-to-right oscillations of upper bodies)—(like prairie-grass perturbed in a gentle wind)—made manifest by the ensemble members as they criss-crossed the dimly-lit space.

[And, then, there was Wilber. He was an ex-convict who rather unsuccessfully hid the fact that he worked for the police as an undercover narcotics informer. He claimed several “cover” occupations, among them deep-sea diver and provisions procurer for an orphanage in Baja California, run by the nuns—and he must have struck one hell of a deal with the powers that be for, although only recently out of San Quentin, he sported all the outward signs of a newly acquired advantage in the form of conspicuously consumable “stuff” and rapid-fire parvenu-patter. He loved to regale you with stories of his prison-

mates—how he'd rubbed elbows (or so he said) with Timothy Leary “fucking around in the library,” Art Pepper “woodshedding in the yard,” and Charles Manson “piddling a cart down some long hall.” He even admitted to a “memorable rap” with Merle Haggard. (though he couldn’t remember just what they’d talked about)....For Wilber, fish was the comestable of choice, and he expressed an enthusiasm for many kinds, albeit harboring somewhat strange notions about what made them good for you (i.e., “Yeah! Fish is bitchin! It’s got everything....it’s got your iron....it’s got your mercury....it’s got your aluminum and heavy metals...it’s, like, a complete food.”)....One day, about dusk, sitting in the darkest corner of my very dark store and staring straight at me with an expression mixed of clinical curiosity, and mild amusement, Wilber volunteered, rather matter-of-factly that he had gone to prison for murder....the murder of his father....his “dad.”]

I also recall that apart from Partch's collective designation of "lost musicians, each ensemble member was assigned a further and more specific role—or "character"—to play. At rehearsals, Kenneth had been observing each of us closely, making what looked like rather detailed sketches and line drawings of various subjects in a large, black notebook. From the abundance of our various languages (i.e., verbal, kinesthetic; "first order" and "meta") he had deduced the presence in each (or most) of us of particular and sometimes quite personal issues, whose address in performance might provide an occasion for the possibility of a more-than-metaphorical "un witching." Initially, not everybody (including me) was happy either with their particular characterization—(mine, to my mortification, being the New Year's Baby)—or, indeed, with the very fact of such a stratagem, unsupported, as it seemed to be, by the "purely" musical facts of a score to be read and instruments to be played. Some of the characterizations seemed, at the very least, oblique—others distressingly "close to the bone."—(and weren't most of us, "veterans" of a previous "Bewitched" which had very largely eschewed a more pronounced theatrical role for the musicians in favor of those distinct and specialized ones ((“musician,” “dancer,” “actor,” etc.) which Partch had himself so long inveighed against?)). But, like it or not, this was to be a different sort of production from the one in which we had previously vested our possessive interests and, in consequence, a degree of personal discomfort (presenting occasionally as "interpersonal tension") was to nag the production throughout its term: a querulous, deep-structural, pedal-point beneath which the various foreground levels of our work together were often painfully elaborated.

[And, then, there was Sally. Sally was a copy-machine junkie. Being one too, I know the signs. Given time and the bucks, I'll photocopy anything from philosophical articles to interesting coffee stains. But, for Sally, copy-machine shops were more than merely a way to accumulate mounds of largely useless information on pearly-white squares of ground up tree. They were places of comfort and association: conviviality and discourse—the difference, split, if you will, between a university symposium and a fast-food restaurant. It was not strange to see Sally once a day, copying recipes, old photos, receipts for purchases, bills and articles of special interest—and one day, she wanted (in a manner of speaking) to copy me. It seems mine was not the only copy store which she frequented of a days perambulations, and she had compiled a photo album documenting her various encounters: Polaroid shots of fast copy clerks "in situ." Some stood stoically at the counter, dispensing product with glazed eyes. Some were smiling shy-and/or-silly-shit-eatingly, or posed with amiable stiffness by their signs like garden gnomes. And, one had even assumed a period "action" pose (as if he were Hornblower and his machine the Lydia—gunports open, guns run out—battleflags fluttering at the poop). And, now, not contented with the mere-ness of these, Sally wanted me—my image was to be added to this rogue's gallery of the infinitely reproductive. "Where, and how, would you like me"—I asked. "Oh, sitting, a little arrogantly, in front of the Xerox 7000, she replied (a little coquettishly)—and so I sat, crossing my legs with studied insouciance, taking care to texture my smile with the vaguest of sneers, and to sculpt my forearm and hand, with its cigarette, in such a way as to suggest the merest hint of something akin to the cruelty of tango. "How is it?—I inquired through teeth, clenched around their imaginary rose. "Oh, fine, but—could you make a copy at the same time?—I wanna get your paper coming into the little tray..."]

But, as the everyday work of rehearsal progressed, I began to understand that the thrust of Kenneth's direction was no less than to rescue the ideas of "corporeality" and "unwitching" from the category of easily dismissable metaphor by attempting to construct for them a corresponding and palpable "reality." The individual meetings—the ensemble slow-walks and antiphonal phonemes and assignments of the troublesome (and troubling) theatrical personae—all, had been about making us more aware of the fact of our own individual and collective physicality, over and above that defined by the immediate requirements of playing an instrument—(even ((for some)) a very exotic one).

[And, then, there was Earl and Toni. They lived maybe two, long, blocks from the store, in an efficiency apartment choking with newspapers and magazines—heaped, in places, several feet high. I would see them most days around lunch time, when they joined their friend, Mrs. Bolla, for eats and talk at Betty Anderson's Coffee Shop and Korean Restaurant. The years had not been particularly kind to either of them. Toni was confined to a wheel chair, barely able to speak, and Earl was encased in junk food fat and tormented by arthritis (his knuckles, red, with rheumatoid). Nevertheless, each day, summer or winter, he bundled her up in double sweaters, placed a jaunty tam-o'-shanter on her head and wheeled her down Fifth Avenue for "luncheon," after which, they would sometimes come into the shop for a visit. On these occasions, I learned that in their youths, Toni had been a dancer, and that Earl had been an apprentice magician with the great Houdini (and that both had been Hollywood extras in the thirties and forties)—(even now, when I'm watching a classic movie, I close-read crowd scenes in a wistful hope that I'll see someone who looks like one or the other of them). But, for who-knows-what reasons, their showbusiness careers had failed to blossom with even the tiniest buds of promise, and they perforce had plodded on with second, third, and fourth choices ever since—cursed with the pain of fertile imaginations, unable to transcend the physical fact of continued reduced circumstance, yet resisting spiritual-extinction-by-deepest-disappointment, through a marked refusal to let despondancy have its way with them: to be without delight in whatever could be found to delight in. On one, and only one occasion, I was invited to their house for "edibles" and "potables" (as Earl would have it). It was like the mad-hatter's tea party in an underground cavern—the bowels, if you will, of a great publishing house: stalactites and stalagmites: pendants and mounds; chambers and sub-chambers of printed matter in asphyxiating profusion. I remember that throughout Toni remained hidden behind a tarp which served to demarcate some semblance of a bedroom within the space at large, and I could only hear her—a child's voice as it gently troped our discourse....and Earl had put on his best tie (a shiny, blue-reddish thing, replete ((if it can be believed)) with palm trees, tropical wildlife, and a lurid sunset). It was a rain-shiny, black and blustering, sort of night (all spit and whoosh) and to celebrate my visit, Earl brought out an ancient, rotting, floor heater, firing it up—disquietingly—in the middle of a pile of Christian Science Monitors. We had Darjeeling tea and Uneeda Biscuits, some aged Velveeta, and half-a-split of Acadama Plum wine, after which Earl delivered a speech on the value of Toastmasters; a demonstration of the slide-rule; and a petite magic show which went charmingly awry. Performances at their end, I was given the gentlest form of the bum's rush, just in time for Wall Street Week (which was

Toni's favorite television show) and I shuffled off, happy to be out in the rain....grateful that I had somewhere to go and someone warm to go to. One day, there would be no more jaunty tam-o-shanter at the midday, and Earl had moved across town to a new apartment where for a last time, I (now also alone) payed him what turned out to be a final visit. We had Darjeeling tea and Uneeda Biscuits on a carpet of *Scientific Americans*—and Earl extemporized on "the habits of the marsupial."]

I began also to think that, to Kenneth, not only was the word "corporeality" to be rescued from the mereness of descriptive terminology, but that we musicians—"bewitched"-in-actuality by our habitual and largely uninterrogated assumptions about the autonomous nature of our profession—were, as well, to be rescued by virtue of the struggle to come to terms with our own individual corporeality. In addition to promoting ensemble cohesion, the various exercises had been about preparing us to recognize and confront our own self-protection schemes in the face of the unfamiliar—(and the ancillary fears of being "found out," which such strategems engender).

If, before—I had thought of the word "corporeality," in terms of more or less relevant meta-language employed, after the fact, in address of something which resides more significantly in "sounds themselves"—(whatever these are)—I was understanding it now more as a kind of conceptual "ursatz," or fundamental-basis, underlying and informing all of "Bewitched's" palpable emanations and efflorescences... (or the music of the music).

If, before—I had understood the music, primarily, in terms of its expanded pitch gamut (reducing it, if you will, to its 43 tones)—and the expressive possibilities presented by the instruments (reducing them, if you will to the category of "new instrumental resources")—it was beginning to be hearable, now, as propounding another extension/definition of voice—as if Partch was willing wood to sing with the exquisitely fine-point pitch distinctions of the intoning human.

If before—I had understood the anti-equal-temperament polemic to be the linchpin/centerpiece of Partch's global argument, *The Bewitched*—(as an unfolding system of interactive corporealities: a profusion of multi-sensory tactilities)—seemed now to be palpably more expansive than a "call to arms" on behalf of the mereness of alternative systems of tuning.

More did it seem to be the case that tuning, "itself," as exemplified by Partch's 43, was the call to arms—on behalf of the more important issue of voice, as the body's primary sound. My piano (beloved), the ill-tempered nemesis and "basic mutilator" was, through its structural rigidity, the agent of conversion, by which the "slippery," "slidy," organic sinuosities of utterance might "better" be reduced to the desiccated specificity of "notes"—and a wider array of distinctive pitch had been but one of Partch's remedies.

And, then, there were the instruments, so beautiful in themselves: instruments, in which to make them sound, it was also necessary to move beautifully around them—(environments/tablatures to shape the body)—to cultivate and revel in those "residual" body motions which my clarinet teachers had admonished me to jettison, in their desire to insure that my physicality did not detract from the sounds ("themselves") which that physicality made possible. I now understood Kenneth's tracing exercise, at the preliminary one-on-one, to have been designed precisely to elicit such routinely suppressed body language.

Prologue: The hall is dark. "Lost Musicians" are wandering through the audience, singly or in pairs. Who knows where they've come from or where they are going. None carry instruments, but a few have objects or parcels (whole "worlds," born on their backs, or held in their hands?) and they are dressed in topcoats, caps, scarves, and other apparel suggestive of a bitter cold. All carry flashlights which they sweep-shine slowly, back and forth across the space—the arcs and trajectories of their beams interpenetrating and crossing to form an ephemeral architecture within that which encloses them. Here and there, a nomad light will illuminate the vague outline of a shape or shapes—an object or objects. Exactly what these are—in their aloofness and momentary incomprehensibility—is not clear, but, still, they beckon. A single "Lost Musician," drawn to one of these manifestations, ventures closer and circles it warily, attempting to discern a "nature." Albeit lost, (s)he is still a musician. It is sound which (s)he knows with intimacy and precision, and would therefore invoke as a means to connect with this singular—if though still perceptually inchoate—phenomena. After a few tentative touches of the object, rendering the shape at least partly knowable as palpable substance, (s)he strikes it gently—once and then again—at one location, and then another)—drawing out the long-dormant sound-world resident within. Finding resonance, (s)he begins to articulate a pattern composed of these various revealed sounds—a pattern which serves to summon other

Lost Musicians, and they, too, one at a time, enter the space, drawn inexorably towards the objects, alive—now—with voice. Each in turn will be drawn to a particular one of these expressive instrumentalities, to release its distinctive sonic energy to the mix. The sound grows by accretion—spruce and bamboo and pernambuco; wire and metal and glass—one sound-strata upon another, culminating with the voices of woodwinds and bowed string. This now-composite, sounding-entity, simmers and seethes to such a furious peak that it conjures and summons a wholly other and final figure to the space—an apparition(?)—a *bruja*(?)—emerging, as if from the darkest of clouds, moving deliberately—ominously—down—and into—the vacuum, created by the Lost Musician's sonorous cavitation.

It is not clear whether they, in their loneliness and dispossession, have willed her—or she, them—(in her infinite wisdom). But, together they will transform this space from one of mundane certitude, to one of magical possibility.

[And then, there was the guy who threw food at you from an upper-floor window. I never knew his name, nor saw him in the flesh, nor even knew for sure if he was a he—but, for all that, we were acquainted—(after our fashion). Immediately adjacent the hotel, there was a little sunken lot—foursquare, cramped, and rut-riddled—for the tenants, to park their cars. I didn't use it often, because my Datsun 1200 sedan barely had the shit to get me back up the ramp when it was time to go home—but sometimes, I just couldn't find parking on the street, so here I was. As I was getting out of the car, I felt something whir past my ear like a Melbourne magpie guarding the nest site. "What the f--," spaked I, reflexively—wheeling around to confront my attacker—but, there was no black and white bird (nor any other avian belligerent) to be seen. Just a Baloney sandwich on enriched white bread, lying flat against my windshield—(complete with Jackson Pollockian mayonnaise trail. "What archery," I said to myself, in a goofy and feeble stab at good sportsmanship, attempting to mask my humiliation by copping a line from Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf in what I will laughingly call my best Richard Burton voice....On another such occasion, I was standing at the doorway, having a smoke between customers—(half in, half out—when I experienced a vague presentiment of impending doom. Something told me that if I didn't move back inside, post-fucking-haste, I'd regret it (just a little). So, yielding to instinct, I stepped out of the way just in time to avoid being hit by a high-velocity jar of Vienna Sausage, which shattered at my feet, spewing minuscule weenies in a

delightful floral pattern on the asphalt....On yet another occasion, I had turned my attention to the street in front of Jim's place. Jim was a former helden-tenor turned barber, and he had a storefront just like mine, the other side of Betty Anderson's Coffee Shop and Korean Restaurant. When we didn't have anything better to do, he and I were in the habit of checking out one another's customers, and, so, this day's deadtime found me sitting at my window, with cigarette and coffee, sleepily taking in the action. At the curb, just in front of the barber shop, there was this interesting car—a tuna boat with fins, in the fifties style: an ancient, but gussied-up, aquamarine Imperial, in point of fact "Who belongs to that?", I inquired (self-to-self), conjecture-on-conjecture lulling me, like soft song, into a state of late-afternoon reverie...to be shattered in a split-second by a circular object (a viscous frizbee?) hurled at great speed in the general direction of the imperial—yellow-brown-crimson, and sloppy-mottled with discs-cum-suction cups. It was a large Pizza, and it slap-landed pepperoni-side-down and (more or less) intact on the Imperial's pristine windshield (one imagines a truly stentorian "splat,"—followed by sepulchral quiet)...Jim's party emerged: a saturnine looking gent in herringbone jacket—sporting a glistening new pachuco cut. He surveyed the damage, calmly, then turned around to face Jim who had moved outside to commiserate and gawk "Last time, it was a chicken—right?" "I think so", Jim replied. "He's adding a little starch now"—the man said (somewhat ruefully). "So it would appear"—Jim replied (over his shoulder, head slightly inclined).]

I have always suffered from stage fright, fearing that in the heat of it, I will faint, heaping embarrassment on myself and, by association, those who love me—(Throughout the 1975 production of *The Bewitched*, I carried a bottle of smelling salts in every performance ((just in case)) thinking, I guess, that I could grab a quick sniff between notes if the vertigo came. Dizziness or no, I never used it—I was too embarrassed to). I remember the darkness and the terror of moving from off-stage, through the audience and up the steps, to the space occupied by the instruments—thinking all the while that my damned flashlight, if the source of some beauty, wasn't much good as a means of getting me around. Whether by virtue of excessive supination, or persistant inner-ear troubles, my never steady sense of balance had gone completely wonky, and I found myself wishing that I had some version of training wheels on my ankles. I wavered, waddled, and gasped for air in the throes of a full-blown panic attack, clutching the hated flashlight with both hands drenched in sweat, working furiously to contain and contort my increasingly diminished sense of boundaries into the fixed shape of a lost

musician moving slowly and inexorably towards magic. Thank God for the dark, or the audience would certainly have seen me revealed for what I was. Somehow, I made it to the stage-staggering up to my first position. I remember that I circled around the clarinet (upright on its stand)—lamely trying to convey some small sense that its trapped sounds wished me to liberate them—and I further recall that (immediately before my first entrance) I flopped down in the chair, grabbed up the horn and, at the aural cue of a pronounced change in meter, began to play my first licks. I was the clarinet player again and my fear was gone—(For a time).

[And, then, there was Will. Will was about Ninety, and near to the end when I knew him. He claimed to have been a jockey in roaring-twenties Cuba, but he was well—well—over six feet tall. After lunch, he liked to have his sit-down-sometimes-snooze in the shop window where he'd reminisce and watch the people go by. He had two all purpose verbal ejaculations which the sight of anybody, woman or man, could elicit—out of the blue. "All meat and no potatoes!" he'd shout,—or "hallelujah"—and, I never did quite know (nor did he elucidate upon) the criteria informing the particular usage of either description. He liked to talk about horses, and the Caribbean, food and the first world war (in which he had been a captain of infantry). He'd talk and talk, growing increasingly garrulous in his friendly way (his voice a sort of wisp-husky tidewater twang) until my interest itched enough to cause me to break his narrative with a question—whereupon he'd spit acid at me (in the manner of the Queensland cane toad). "What do you know about it, stupid fucker," he'd snarl (voice, suddenly clear with menace)—and, then, he'd go right on talking, as sweetly-pink-soundish as before—(until you asked the next question). One day, Will came into the shop and sat down in his usual place by the window. He did not, then, acknowledge my hello, nor did he say anything at all to me, but sat in silence, staring out at the street for what my grandmother would have called the "longest of times." Then, he rose, and without comment, walked out. I never saw him again.]

I remember that Kenneth could never get Scene Two—(Exercises in Harmony And Counterpoint Are Tried In A Court Of Ancient Ritual)—to be dreary enough. Scene Two is Partch's commentary on the blandishments of a kind of "dry-as-dust" academism and features a commensurately desiccated duet between the Adapted Viola and the Clarinet, cast (unwittingly?) in the role of purveyors of the holy exercises (i.e., those talismans of respectability in the form of sanctified notes in their appropriate ((and sanctified)) arrangements).

Well, we could never get it “dead” enough, “dry” enough—uninteresting enough to suit him. Some sense of energized phrasing, or “singing” quality—some inadvertent “con espressione,”—always perturbed the musical line just enough to save it from the requisite dullness. After not-a-few (too-romantic) reads—Kenneth finally hit on a way to illustrate exactly what he was getting at with an allusion to Jack Benny. “You know,” It’s like when Jack Benny used to do this”—(and he placed his right hand under the left armpit, and brought his left hand up and over his chin and right cheek—cradling them, in the manner of the blasé tightwad from Waukegan). Then, keeping his torso absolutely rigid, Kenneth executed a painfully slow, 180-degree, head turn from left to right—with the dead-est of dead-pan expressions {**Note to the performer: You may illustrate here**}.

That gesture—a particularly beautiful way—it seemed to me—of “doing dull” (stiff, placid, and resigned—yet vaguely haughty in its resignation)—illustrated the desired state much more immediately than had any previous exegesis, and, further, provided an occasion to speculate on the possibility for other and variously expressed corporealities of “dull.”—(i.e., how might the dullness of exhaustion be physically embodied?—or over-familiarity?—or protracted and internalized indignation?—or, the dullness occasioned by a complete absence of warmth or involvement?—or that born of smugness or self-satisfaction? ((and what of the liberating, sublime and politically defiant dullness which comes in the repudiation of society’s mandate to be “interesting” at all costs?))).

Through Kenneth’s powers of elaboration, I was beginning to understand something of greater interest than the mere mechanics of how to obtain an uninteresting performance. I was beginning to grasp that “dull,” as word (when elevated to the level of a concept, rather than left to reside in the mereness of a single and uninterrogated descriptive term assumed to be inextricably wedded to the particular evidence which elicits it) could, with imagination, be variously evidenced through many and distinct physical embodiments/expressions. We weren’t (in other words) limited to a single kind of “dull” (or “musical”—or “human”) We could have as many (or as few) kinds as the relative richness (or poverty) of our descriptive language (i.e., verbal, kinesthetic, etc.) would allow—dullness, and its ancillary and/or sibling states becoming then a commensurately enriched (or impoverished) world thereby. And, so, I was, through my participation as a clarinetist, in a musico-theatrical-sculptural-dance-text of Harry Partch, learning about connotation and denotation; concept and evidence; and the assumptions which inform the construction of a taxonomy—not only as these exist as notions in the

head, but through an art of physical (corporeal) expression. Which kind of "dull" was Jack Benny's?—(and which, our "tight-assed" little quartet's?)—(and which, indeed, mine—in my own name). These are, of course, considerations familiar to any actor during the course of a puzzling through and/or "fleshing out" of the ramifications of a character's being-in-the-world-of-the-play—but, as a musician, I was unaccustomed to thinking of myself as a "character,"—(or, indeed, music as a theater (as distinct, say, from "incidental music" in a theater)—and although future readings more nearly achieved the much-sought-after blandness, I don't know that I (qua I) was ever quite drained enough of expression: quite (ever) able to will myself to be a thoroughly convincing embodiment of "dull." Later—and possibly by way of a deep exasperation at our unregenerate musicality—Kenneth would assign us a new gesture to be executed when we had finished playing the music and were getting up to commence our slow-walks to the next stage positions. This was a conscious shaking of the legs and arms, putatively expressive of (our) fear in the light of the witches having just (and with impunity) "blown up our shit"—(as it were). It was to be begun when the mereness of butt had just cleared the mereness of chair, and continued on well into the standing position. In effect, it looked stiff, artificial, insincere, and inept: a perfectly ridiculous gesture and thoroughly appropriate to the subject. No amount of heartfelt expression, nor inadvertent elegance (nor cheeky dionysian tweaking) could survive its impression of mock-solicitous sycophancy.

[And, then, there was Sam. Sam had been a trumpet player in Los Angeles in the 1930's. For a time, his main gig had been at the Cotton Club West, with Les Hite's orchestra which had opened over the years for Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, among others. Sam had toured a bit with Louis Armstrong, and liked to talk about the time that Louis surprised him by making him solo ("disadvantageously," as Sam would put it)....when he thought that Sam was getting a little too cocky, playing out too much and copping licks....("Of course I fucked it up—What do you think"?). Sam never had much work for me—two, five-cent copies at a time (at the most) but his conversation often made the difference between a day just hanging on....and a day. We'd talk for a solid hour, he and I, the in-and-out flow of my walk-in trade having little appreciable impact on either the intensity or continuity of our conversation. I particularly loved his stories about Duke—how the band would come in, and set up; and everything would be arranged verbally—(chord structures "parsed," instruments distributed, and solos assigned)—with no charts in evidence! "Duke'd just tell Hodges and Harry Carney; Otto

Hardwick and Barney Bigard; Sonny Greer and Rex Stewart and Juan Tizol and the rest—(lovingly listed: Sam's red-streaked eyes, lost in the past—what to do; and they'd do it.) "Ya see, that band had played together for so long, they could play Duke's pieces before he even thought em up." When I knew Sam, he hadn't played the trumpet for years. His steady gig being now the ownership and management of a chain of fried chicken restaurants in Southeast San Diego (and as well as the good talk, he used to bring me a wing and a leg, now and again, too).]

I remember Kenneth sitting on the floor of the Smith Hall stage, gesticulating wildly in demonstration of the kind of incisive playing he wanted from the harmonic canons in Scene Four (*A Soul Tormented By Contemporary Music Finds a Humanizing Alchemy*) "Its got to cut right through the texture" he exhorted, flailing away at some imaginary entity/enemy....The rehearsal hall was dark, except for a single light spotting the stage, and you could barely see him for the overlapping skeins of Pall Mall smoke which writhed up and around his head, wrapping it in a kind of diaphanous turban. I further recall, that Kenneth was reading the Shostakovich/Volkov *Testimony* at this time and I often saw a copy on the director's table next to his notebook. I wondered then (and now) what aspects—if any)—of Shostakovich's memoir could be informing Kenneth's direction of Partch's work (i.e., how were they—both—connecting in and to Kenneth?)....(or was such a resonance spurious, merely of my own fabricating?)....And, what was Kenneth's "itch" such that he could live with such apparent intensity in the work of another—(as if his own—yet so different from his own?)

[And, then, there was Mr. Ree. Mr. Ree was the owner of Betty Anderson's Coffee Shop and Korean Restaurant. He'd bought it from Betty who was sick of fifth avenue and everything connected with the slinging of hash. Mr. Ree retained both Betty's hand-painted sign (stenciling in further designations of his own) and, all of the appurtenances of the greasy-spoon dining for which she had been justly famous hereabouts, but added to her infamous mainstays his own welcome spread of Korean delicacies. You could, for instance, get Kim Chee with your Bacon, Eggs, Hash Browns, and long neck Budweiser—and a truly delectable affair called "Oriental beef and scrambled" (served with pancakes, if desired). Each month, Mr. Ree would as well do a different specialty sandwich, and these could be quite elegant and quirky (my own favorite being the Turkey, Bacon, Cream Cheese, Red Onion, and Capers on Pumpernickel). One of my customers affectionately called them "entropy"

sandwiches because after the first ones of the month—always beautiful—they were embarked upon a continuum of steady-state decay, until, at the end, barely a hint of the original masterwork remained—(the onion had disappeared, the capers had evaporated, the pumpernickel bread turned to generic, enriched, white kapok). Then, when all the familiar and reassuring morphology of the original had melted into memory, the cycle would begin again. Mr. Ree had an achingly beautiful daughter who was a budding concert pianist. I went to one of her recitals and can testify that she had a delicious touch and could operate the pedals with more than a little deftness of foot: her Chopin Nocturne being an exemplary taffy-pull of tasteful rubato, and the A-flat Major Polonaise advanced with a sinewy intensity bordering on the febrile. Yet, notwithstanding these very obvious musical attainments resident in his daughter, Mr Ree harbored no very elevated opinion of musicians and was terrified that she might actually begin to take it all dead-seriously-serious. “I don’t want her to turn out like you”—he’d say—with a wink, and a specialty sandwich (He had no very elevated opinion of me, either—but, he liked me well enough—I think).]

I remember that all of us were assigned articles of clothing to be worn in layers and covered by a topcoat. It was loosely the plan that, by the end of the Prologue, the topcoats would be discarded and that, with each succeeding scene (for each of us, a different one), a subsequent layer would be removed, until we were down to that particular article (or articles) of clothing signifying our own individual “bewitchment.” My personal moment of sartorial purgation-cum-revelation was to occur in Scene Six (Euphoria Descends a Sausalito Stairway) and as my “character” was that of the New Year’s Baby, the signs of bewitchment were, predictably, a sort of stylized sash over one shoulder, and a pair of boxer shorts; both to be worn over street clothes—pants on pants. At the end of this scene (a lovers duet), the clarinetist has a substantial solo which serves to gently prod the two principals up the ramp, and out of sight, after the witch’s intervention in their problematic little tete-a-tete. My stage position was at the very foot of the ramp, standing bolt upright, with heels together and toes pointed out like Charlie Chaplin and, at some point, just before the end of the scene, the dancers were to emerge from the stage left area to execute a slow promenade—eventually crossing directly in front of me, veering to the right, and proceeding on up the ramp. I was to trace their movement with one of my own: a 180-degree, slow, rotation on my heels, playing the music—(in the sash and boxer shorts)—while holding the clarinet straight up in the air like the angel Moroni. Throughout the

solo, I calibrated the speed of my heel-rotation to coincide with the tempo of the music, arriving at my final note at just the point at which I could see the bell of my instrument passing the edge of the ramp (and the two dancers in ascent, a fair distance skyward). The phallic implication of this gesture was, of course, the laughably obvious one (both to me and the audience) but I preferred to imagine myself as a giant pen drawing the lovers paths across the stage—(or fishing pole, reeling them along)—or even as if a species of mechanical toy, hourly popping out of a medieval clock tower. Later, I asked Kenneth what about me had suggested the New Year's baby as a character (some of the others being Abe Lincoln; Joan of Arc; Pinocchio; Tarzan, and Gypsy Rose Lee), and he said. "It was the fact that you can never keep your feet still. Even when you're supposed to be sitting quietly, you're feet are frantic. You're the perfect symbol of chamber of commerce San Diego—(He had not a little of the transplanted east-coasters contempt for what he thought of as Southwestern placidity)—You know, with it's "city in motion" advertising campaign"—(i.e., giving the semblance of motion without definitive movement). He was certainly right about me and probably about San Diego. And, indeed, if the store was any very reliable indicator, my day-time working life, however romantically rationalized, was one of almost debilitating constriction, defined and delineated by long periods of stasis, partitioned by bursts of rapid movement in very small circles, in a very small space—living by dint of myself-bewitching-me-into-being-bewitched-enough—(by the theater of my customers)—to reconcile myself to staying put....when I really needed to be moving.

[And, then, there was Ray. Ray was the manager of the Theosophical Society Library and Book store, on Fifth Avenue. I used to stop by there sometimes on my way in to work, and we'd put on the coffee, smoke too many cigarettes (culled by him, bummed by me, mostly from his ever ample supply of Benson and Hedges) and make never enough talk to suit me. Ray could be a right calming influence in times of craziness and despondency, and sometimes we'd get so deep into it that I'd forget to open my own damn store. He had been a bomber pilot in MacArthur's part of the pacific (had even flown the old boy around some—"What a pain in the ass!") and sometime late in the war was shot down losing, in consequence, his right arm and three fingers of the left hand. (I won't soon forget the elegant way he balanced a cigarette between the remaining thumb and forefinger as, with equal elegance, he seeded lucidity into the odd cloud darkening our discourse). While recuperating in an army hospital, Ray got to know the actor Lou Ayres then, I suppose, most notable

for his youthful performance in the film, All Quiet on the Western Front, Ayres had invited the patriot's opprobrium by declaring conscientious objector status, choosing to serve at the front, as a medic, but refusing to kill....And, Ray, trying to make sense of all that had happened to him, would be drawn (perhaps by way of his long talks with Ayers) to pacifism, spiritual search and inevitably to a serious study of Philosophy. To say that he seemed to have read everything, is to be coyly silly with understatement. He was encyclopedic and inter-textually elaborative—exhibiting an expansive erudition which embraced Zen Literature, Gurdjieff-Ouspensky, the Kaballah, the Gnostic Gospels, and western philosophers from Plato and Heraclitus to Merleau-Ponty and Schutz. But, it was the teachings of Krishnamurti which meant, I think, the most to him. He had attended the master's lectures at Ojai many times over the years, arguably delighting as much in the situational querulousness of Krishnamurti's persona-in-response as in the great man's messages. Ray was also a repository of Theosophical anecdote, particularly as this referred to the society's doings in San Diego from the turn of the century on. From him, I learned that the Theosophists had once had a white-robed marching band, and that their Point Loma grounds (in 1980, the campus of California Western University) were situated above a rabbit warren of subterranean and interlocking tunnels and chambers—constructed so that their spiritual leader could move between above-ground rooms completely unobserved (the better, one imagines, to pop out at particularly opportune moments). I also heard stories of candlelight processions, and mysterious theaters ("in the Greek mode")—after dark, up and down the seaward slopes of Point Loma. With respect to the bookshop, Ray took special pride in the diversity of its offerings, in defence of which, he was what James Lee Burke's great character, Dave Robicheaux, would call a "stand-up guy," willing to get pretty far (if always nicely) in your face when his core values were threatened. He made available for example, not a few books of perennial unpopularity with the theosophists themselves, to wit, the works of Krishnamurti whom many of the local members—thinking him at best an ingrate and at worst an unregenerate apostate-cum-false-prophet-sought to banish from the store in perpetuity. (Afterall, hadn't theosophists past—waiting years for Krishnamurti to come of age and assume his preordained place as the next avatar—experienced their own .rather profound unwitching when he left them twisting in the wind through a virtual de-signification of himself—admonishing them to live their own lives, to see the world for themselves; to waste no further time with the pronouncements of avatars). Finally, Ray's battle with the purists and censors (blue-stockings, wowsers, and the occasional asshole, ((out-and-out))) consumed just a year too many, and he told the

big bosses (with some precision) just exactly where they could put their little store—after which, he and his wife Jane upped-stakes, moving to a tiny town on the Oregon coast (where, last I heard, Ray was the manager an out-of-the-body-experience bookshop....within ear-shot of the sea).]

I remember that in Scene Ten (The Cognoscenti Are Plunged Into Demonic Descent While at Cocktails) the woodwinds and adapted viola, were positioned off-stage front, in the pit: David Dunn, the violist, and myself at stage left, Dan Maureen, the bass clarinettist, and Donna Caruso, the piccolo player, at stage right. Our stage-left group was placed side by side, with David facing the audience and myself facing the stage, thus suggesting a kind of janus-headed, composite entity. Directly in front of us, on the stage, was the instrument which Partch calls the "Spoils of War," a kind of wooden cruciform on a platform to which are affixed various tuneable found objects such as Cloud Chamber Bowls; artillery shell casings; three metal "Whang Guns" and pernambuco block. The scene begins with a party, a gathering of those "in the know" who find their pretentious ribaldry significantly undone by the witch's corrective gate-crashing, and as this silly affair progresses to the point of unwitching, the music gains in intensity, the stage becoming a welter of sound and movement with the entire cast of musicians and dancers engaged. On the last night in San Diego, somewhere near the climactic point of the scene, I saw Phil Keeney, the "Spoils of War" player, take a swipe at the Spoil's Cloud Chamber Bowl only to have it shatter on impact. We kept playing. Pieces of glass showered the stage, posing an immediate threat to the barefoot dancers. We kept playing. One of the "Harmonic Canon" players (David Savage) got up, produced a broom from somewhere, and began to sweep up the glass (as if this were just another choreographed part of the action), working his way all around the stage, in, out of, and around the dancer's melee until all (or most) of the glass was out of the way—the scene, all the while, moving inexorably toward its big (pre-planned) explosion and final cooldown, with nary a scintilla of lost focus. When the work was concluded, the bows taken, the last of the audience trickled out, and the packing up begun, I recall that David and I looked down and there, between us, was a rather large, and jagged, shard—nomad spawn of the Spoils-of-War's supernova. A few inches, this way or that, and who knows? Perhaps, the witch found time in her busy round of eradicating chimera, to play guardian angel—the preserver part of a Trimurti.

Coda

Now....years later....I think that I know that Harry Partch was advancing something perhaps difficult to comprehend, in our particular society....
.....enamoured as it seems to be with willy-nilly affirmations of, and largely uninterrogated assumptions about the overarching value of objectivity, pragmatism, reductionism, utility, specialization—enamoured as it seems to be with a hypocritical puritanism, at once lubricious and self-loathing—enamoured as it seems to be with the idea of art as a kind of mindless “entertainment,” to be slurped on, like salve, at the end of a hard day’s wage slavery—(Partch’s “music by the yard”—enamoured as it seems to be with the abdication (by most) of personal art making and participation to elites—overtly and self-avowedly “high”; covertly, and disingenuously, “low”.....i.e., the shameless re-integration and enlivening of (at least three of) the senses, in and through a theater of multi-sensory expressions—becoming an argument for the return of ritual and magic (as viable contexts for finding one’s way in the world)—becoming, further, a critique of—(or broadside leveled at)—the “real” world’s reality of platitudinous slogans in advance of a deadly, dismembering, and pre-choiced stultification which it defines (and sells to us) as normal (calling it a “society”—becoming, yet, further, an environment conduced to the possibility of some greater experience of a deeper mystery, or a more palpable sensuality, or, an awe in the fact that through it, we are differently alive.

And, I also know that Kenneth Gaburo was advancing something perhaps equally difficult to comprehend in this selfsame society:—i.e., that music—quite apart from the near-total relegation of most of its types (no matter whether “low” or “high” in the traditional sense) to the domain of entertainment—retains an important and traditional function, of long standing, as an occasion for thought-about what we hear, and how we hear, and who we are, in and through our hearing....An occasion for thought, and its vehicle for exchange in the form of discourse, germane both to music’s presumed internal nature—as this is revealed in the diverse unfoldings of sounds and forms which humans have gathered under its rubric—(and by which we recognize its presence in the world)—and the nature of the relationship of that rubric-specific gathering of sounds and forms to some world, putatively extant outside its domain—a world both beckoning and threatening, seductive and repulsive, invasive and elusive.

In Kenneth's own vigorous, vibrant, and oft-times contentious discourse, music became beautifully conceivable as a flowering of complex whole-language articulations, in advance of the idea that (although a perilous undertaking within a social reality, arguably hostile to genuine self-definition) one could, in fact, create one's own reality (that one had to—to survive with identity). Sources for first steps in such a direction might be found to reside in any phenomena, observable by an observer. Whether windblown laundry or a facial tic; low-frequency emanations hovering around a loudspeaker cone, or a high-speed tongue elegantly lapping up an ice cream. Whether getting up or falling; fidgeting or eating—any seemingly mundane attribute or occurrence might recast to perception as richly implicative of potential “meaning”—then to become a “scatter,”....subject to “projection,” “extraction,” “density,” “displacement,” and “expansion”*: cogitated and elaborated upon (to say nothing of stared at) until a deeply personal expressive utterance emerged in its light. { *N.B., these are the names of conceptual exercises given by Kenneth to his students of composition}.

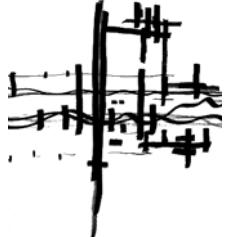
That Kenneth had invested such intensity in the production of *The Bewitched* surprises me now, not very much. For all his arguments affirming the centrality of self (particularly as this attended to Kenneth qua Kenneth), he had a remarkable capacity for identification with the desires and struggles of others for expression on their own self-recognized, self-defined, and self-stipulated terms (whether fully-formed or newly-emergent—unregenerately and fluidly vocal, or enabled only of murmur). And he was possessed of a profound and truly glorious antipathy to any perceived agent repressive of that expression whether state-blatant or market-soft in strategy. Perhaps, this is where Shostakovich's *Testimony* comes in (oblique as his musical language is to anything which one might associate with Harry Partch) i.e., the story of an embattled composer, becoming for Kenneth, ally with Kenneth—(on behalf of Partch, on behalf of Kenneth himself, indeed, on behalf of anyone struggling to have his or her own say)—in the constant war with censorship, obduracy, dismissal: whether imposed by another, or administered self on self—(as in the scene where you do unto you, someone else's dirty work for them—unable to oppose it, even to speak of it). Finally, Partch's work, although so different in media and morphology from Kenneth's own, shares with him, nonetheless, a common stance vis-à-vis that society within and against which each made his work. For, rather than choosing to become the mere outputs of a second-hand spectacle of official

pronouncement in an echo-chamber of cultural pre-disposition, both composers actively sought an “outside,” by various and different means, transmuting the world around them into preferred and particular entities/expressions of their own wanting-then-needing, singular—each—for being both habitat and language....where each lived, and what each said.

And, I also know that I only occasionally had more than a glimpse of this during the course of my work in *The Bewitched*—that I remained a stiff, note-obsessed, clarinettist with my head in the stand—mired in habit and afraid of the dark. But, glimpse it was—and enough to have caused me, ever since, to yearn for alternatives (however meager) to that world which I have inherited and of needs be must inhabit: This was both my “bewitchment”—and my “unwitching”—corporeal and constant.

[And, then, there was me, standing in front of the shop on my last day of business, glad (almost) to be rid of it. Full head of hair, Orphan Annie glasses, and skinny as I ever would be. Behind me, the shop—empty and dark. Next year (but one) in Australia.]

*Iowa City, October, 1997
(Revised, November 1999-January 2000)*



What Is Music For?

(with apologies to Wendell Berry)

What is music for...a paraphrase of Wendell Berry's book of essays bearing almost the same name....unfolding under almost the same rubric.
What are we doing here and what is music to us in our being?
That question.

(occasioned by the fact of my again being welcome in a university setting: welcome to do and to teach something called improvisation and given resultantly and by way of the traditional journalistic interrogatives to speculate upon and inquire into the nature of what's to be done, who's to do it, how's she to do, and where do I imagine its doing would be/could be done

That question

But why?)

and isn't obvious—isn't it, the music for, if nothing else clear as the proverbial crystal.

Isn't (music) for entertainment, to occupy (and mostly mindlessly, foreground/background—hyper and demure) the near-dead chunks of time which our working lives leave us....what we often laughingly if not ironically refer to as "leisure,"

and

Isn't music there to give contexts to romance, bittersweet and tortured, innocent, diffuse and hot, with fantasies and dreams of athletic prowess (the 100 chorus saxophone battle and rivers of virtuoso sweat, the conductor's orgasm and a small girl's chipmunk

utterance? Bring on the girls or boys.

and

Isn't music there to enable one to define oneself vis-à-vis a desired social constituency: grungers and jujus, fellow bangers and petite

audiofilic apprehenders of the classics entre-nous, serialists, minimalists, the theory committee and the music club. The mom and dad and dubious fiancé who never quite thinks that music is a useful use of your time. Music as Me and mine over and against you and yours.

and

Isn't music there to define for the rest of us what is good sound, or bad, or relevant, resonant, respectable—outrageous, worthy of audition, beneath contempt—and isn't it, this worthiness, or banality, self-evident anyway, as if music speaks for itself, had a self, selfhood, self-referentiality, could abstract, project, some vision of itself outside itself for its own consideration).

Isn't it clear what music's for?

Yes,

of course it is

but

there are times occasions (very largely improvised), accessible either through premeditation or ineptitude when one stumbles onto another kind of music, a music with no visible means of support, reason to be, no especially redeeming qualities leading to possible frisson, no titillation, not outrages, no simulated comings or cutesy prefigured sheetsound hardons, no journeys, no stories (you know the one where you take off and go a bit, are frustrated here and there only to reach in your huff and puff a high point where you remain in your triumph, only later and for not as long a time wend your weary yet spiritually satiated way back down the perilous track of perilous traverse to home base home and cocktails (put your feet up, get some well-deserved healing touch). No open-sesames to the redemptive websites of sex, immortality, and tenure and the good offices of clergymen, CEOs, chairmen of search committees or the comely babe in search of power by fiat. No good music and nothing particularly identifiable as bad.. Something which stills the names and the uses.

[I am diverted by the smell of marinara sauce, the sound of jackson brown slicing through the loudspeaker of the faux juke box, and a triste young waitress of such prematurely aged and crumbled loveliness (the japanese potter's concept of "aware" comes to mind) that she breaks my heart, standing there between bellicose parties, forlorn and tousled, a single bead of sweat poised to fall and trickle between breasts to my imagined belly.]

What is this music for?

The chances are good that no money can be made from it, and I suspect, that no one is going to think me attractive for making it. I do not think that my mother would have liked it—certainly not my father who generally thought music a sissy's game and me a bit of a no-hoper for taking it all so seriously when there were pigskins to be kicked, grabass to be played, and cocktails to be had at the 19th hole. This music doesn't set a scene or convey a mood and would not admit me defacto to membership in any existing musical elite

There is no apparent teleology to it, i.e., it doesn't seem to be going anywhere and nothing about it says that it will arrive, or that it's been. Its various parts are too various to yield or convey that satisfying feeling of an all-enveloping and consuming coherence and rightness of course, yet conversely, it is possessed of a sameness that simulates but does not prettify the reality of eternity. It seems, by turns both unduly raw and bland: a failed version of some altogether more laudable musical worthy.

You can't get any sheet music or score for this, and no divas or vocal trios classical or pop will mine anything like a hit from these utterances. It is not especially interesting. In fact, one could say with reasonable certainty that through most of its life it bores...my private students would all think so, but they incline to find all music not self-evident within the first nano-second a bore by default.

This music has nothing to recommend it but its non-compliance. Yet, for all that, I am in its thrall. There is a poetry in its going on in spite of its unprepossession, and clumsiness, and homeliness, and dislocation and banality—its speaking though unattractive and unnoticed. For all that, it poses a way out of what so redundantly constitutes the case—and that may be what it's for. Could it be that this music is for being a way out of music as I/we know it—not a product, certainly not a product, but a place, a context when more than one a community for looking for new sounds together as if music were not really the done (historically and/or economically sanctified deal the classical/pop/jazz trimuvirate would have you believe. Could this music not be so much a new music qua music as a place—a place—where sound-makers, musicians pursue in real-time play a new music finally, or not, recognized in the unfolding sounds.

Could it, as well, be for wondering or pondering (what Kenneth Gaburo called ponderwonder, for speculation, and an occasion (a-la Levi Strauss)

for discourse, as in to a frenchman, that sweet scene in which wine becomes an occasion for discourse: discourse, in converse, becoming an occasion for wine. Could it resonantly then be an occassion for not knowing yet to become the occasion for coming to know.

And does it even need to be about the new, as if “new” were the only justification for your existence, or mine, in our exchange of sounds. Could this music be where people talk to one another in their various ways in search of another kind of intimacy?

I began improvising very early, or so it seems: at a high-school concert in which I and a few of my school chums performed what must have been a rather appalling take on Lukas Foss’s time cycle.

I am surprised, even now, at how unafraid I was to do this thing from which most, at the mere thought, shrink to invisibility.

I found myself, next, participating in an improvisor’s research group growing out of the work of Klaus Von Wrochem, which over time coalesced into a quartet which played often, though not publicly, and again it was “natural” to me. I was not plagued with the Wernicke’s voices of teachers admonishing me to abandon this chaos in favor of the rightness and order of a literature. And though I experienced a usual preperformance anxiety, it was not debilitating. I had, somehow, a sense that my instrument was mine—that I could, in actuality, use it to make any sound of my choosing. Could this music be for claiming one’s right to one’s own instrument in light of a deeply reinforced habit to regard it as the possession of composer’s to be used only as mandated within an historical tradition. Why couldn’t I make it gag, and chirp, and whine, and keen, and squeak. The world, it appeared, survived such sounds along with its musical traditions, and so, as well, did I.

What is this music for? It could be for the sheer and hell of it, no reason not to as in my young-persons’s answer to an essay question proffered me by Moe the Shurer (my English teacher) to wit: why art?—in flippant reposte thereto, I scratched my terse reply—i.e. why NOT!—as if the question were really as dumb as my answer. I couldn’t have known that one way or another I would spend my life trying answer it through clarinets and saxophones—electronics and text. For Moe, it was nothing. One more recalcitrant male student; one more hopeless punk revelling in his

sculpted posture of non-involvement. For me, a question which has shadowed all of my subsequent activity in art's name.

I am distracted, for one moment, by the sound of a vibraphone on the coffeehouse muzack machine—and I think of Cal Tjader (an old medley on one of those blue fantasy sides—lover man runs into willow weep for me runs into round midnight.

What is this music for—this improvised out of no particular stipulation or set of constraints—this music made by groups of unevenly motivated and accomplished persons—this music that few like, many denigrate, that seems to fly in the face of so many long-held values of musical taste and construction—this music that won't monumentalize, no matter how tightly wrought; whose collective attribution never seems to acquire the legitimacy which musical life confers on the single maker, the macro-director.

Perhaps my most profound experience of improvisation occurred when I was in Australia, working with a group of musicians at LaTrobe University. This group (etc.) met each Saturday and played until there was nothing further to say, after which we sought the comfort of a restaurant for victuals and discussion. Our playing was quite self-conscious in our insuring that no pop/jazz references intruded—confined, if you will, to a kind of second Viennese-with-noises idiom which reflected the compositional predilections of at least some of us. I remember a time, significant to me, although I'm not sure that my colleagues would remember it this way, when it seemed we had nothing further to say to one another. All the licks had been trotted out and resultantly there were no further surprises.

The session which followed was predictably sparse—not much more than sitting, or moving about. Then someone, I don't remember who, placed a bass drum on its side and one of us activated it with a clarinet bell allowing to emerge an extraordinarily rich verticality which we began in our various ways and with our various instruments to restate. The sound was not new, but its completely fresh and unexpected presence reconstituted our ensemble and we were off again. I've never quite forgotten that sense of being together in despair (so to speak), and my feeling that even if no further sounds were possible, the quality of our presence to one another was the macro music within which the soon to be new music might speak.

Sometime during my work with this group—and somewhat as a result of our habit of listening back to the recordings which we made of each session—I realized that I was losing much of my desire, *a posteriori*, to reference to the usual distinctions which I made between what constituted good improvisation and what constituted bad—what worked and what didn't—whether the resulting "piece" was a success or a failure (or even a "piece"—"piece" of what?). It was not that I was rejecting my criteria, but

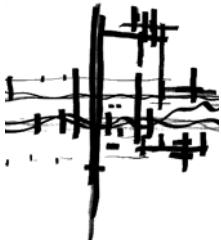
rather rather

rather that I had lost interest in the whole value judgements, had lost, if ever I had had, any propensity for rendering judgement at least in the habitual formalist way. It bored me blue to make corrections after the fact, i.e., could the form have been tighter could the texture have been thinner or thicker, were the sound choices appropriate. How could this playing be improved, developed—no, better developed.

Digression 1:

It is a dark day, gray and cloudy—the air tasting of snow. I slept in this morning. I took Melody to work at seven and once home, rolled back into bed for a hard five hour's more of sleep. I awoke groggy and hungry. This is lunch and I've had too much to eat and am sleepy again, the remains of a headache holding the back of my neck together in a pincers (shades of military strategy language)—as in caught in a pincers (music as pain-inducing ruminations on strategy).

This lunch is for self-examination. I have not had a lot of time for self-examination of late (lately) [music as self-examination]. Each day finds me commuting for an hour to the place where I repair brass instruments, a second hour-long commute taking me to my next pre-occupation. Most nights are filled. Weekends as well—but this saturday is empty and so I'm free to sit in my headache's grip over a long and too extensive lunch, spinning my wheels perhaps to no good purpose.



How about the Platypus?

For purposes of expression, delectation and inquiry, human beings have lovingly configured art contexts specifically for the ears and specifically for the eyes and specifically for the appreciation of the moving body. And we have created narrative structures, edifices of descriptive language, to carry those verbal embodiments (myths and stories) most necessary to our physical and psychic survival. In all of the above endeavors, tactility has played a role, indeed, may be seen to have been the primary articulator; yet we have evolved no specific (fine) art context for touch. Neither have we evolved an art-place specifically for the consideration of, and appreciation for, the nuances of olfactory stimuli (lest we acknowledge—as I am quite prepared to do—that particular aspect of the chef's, perfume-maker's or winemaker's craft to be an occasion fully invested with the grandeur and significance traditionally attributed to evidences of “art” . . . ((or should I say “art-art”))). In general, these latter sensory modalities—while more or less acknowledged to be articulators or facilitators of art activity within the established hierarchy of disciplines (by way of being something which “helps” to get a more important job done)—find themselves relegated to a wholly subsidiary tier of importance: not quite considered exemplary of art-experience worthy of “serious” focus. Our inherited hierachal notions of just what sensory subject-matter should or should not be allowed its “own” “art-discipline” predisposes us perhaps to a kind of sensory dismemberment. I become a giant ear: with feet (to be sure) but without any particular awareness of what they might be saying to me (for in music, “feet,” are for “counting” don't you know). I am a pair of eyes sans the inter-qualifying beauty of the sounds of birds (for sounds are for making sure that, while lost in my painting, I can still hear the lurking large animal which would

re-contextualize me as its not-so-petit-dejeuner). Never, in such a world, may I be a nose. (There is no art for “nose:” What nose was ever possessed of the Gioconda smile or the creamy fullness of Olympia’s belly?) And only at the margins may I be aware that I touch—with exquisitely variegated degrees and levels of sensitivity—the work that I make: the world that I apprehend. For isn’t touch mainly about making me ever wary of tactility so that I don’t burn myself while I boil the rice . . . (an important consideration to be sure)?

At Kent Park: Prairie-grass curtain

I was trained as a composer: to imagine sound(s) and to describe them in such a way that the resulting information in code could be translated back into sound(s) by trained translators in possession of technologies appropriate to a fleshing-out of these imaginings. (In and of itself, it is a beautiful world and a pleasant way to pass the time, but should one have little thoughts of writing or drawing, complete with commensurate conjectures concerning ways in which such disparate expressions may be integrated to unfold work reflective of a discourse between, the professional world has a way of interposing to remind one of the inviolability of the original model, pristine and sacrosanct . . . (you remember(?): the composer is describer of internal sound worlds; not a worker in words or a hurler of paint!).

I lived my creative life along these more or less prescribed lines for some time—(and still do)—but, I was also making writings and drawings. And although I may all along have instinctively questioned the sensory limitations imposed by this quite specific model for creative conduct which my musical training seems to have mandated, I had no particular context for real multi-sensory dissent until fortune handed me the particular boon of being able to participate in the music of American composer and iconoclast, Harry Partch (1901-74).

*Shimmer . . . sway . . . slowly back and forth . . . multiple motions
in the twilight*

Time and space do not allow for an extensive summary of Mr. Partch’s career within the pages of this expression. Suffice it, then, simply to say that his work articulated and embodied a profound opposition to the notion that maintaining the primacy of artistic specialties ought to be THE—(or even A)—proper function of art-making. Through the many

beautiful instruments which he built (plectrum, percussion; adapted strings and organs); the tuning system which he evolved (increasing the gamut of usable pitch and allowing therefore for creative utilization of a wealth of voice-like inflections potentially revealing of the body to a greater degree than had perhaps been imaginable from instruments heretofore); and his concept of "corporeality" which advanced a powerful sense of the body as intrinsically constituting a compositional whole from which all creativity emanates and all instruments of articulation are but extensions, Mr. Partch advanced a new whole world out of very old ideas. . . A world to be cherished and reveled in: to be heard, seen, and perhaps—in some future multi-sensory realm of art-expression—smelled and tasted (?). . . A world which would significantly challenge that one which we know (or think we do) and which we daily render smaller and more empty of diversified, sensory experience through rigid adherence to the "business-as-usual" of specialized disciplines and uninterrogated aesthetic postures, as if their preservation were finally of greater importance than the life and "liveringry" which might ultimately be made available to us through active, profound, and open-ended immersion in art-making. In his work and through his example, Partch may be seen to have been both the fervent friend of creativity and expression (in and through a vibrant physicality) and the avowed enemy of all those ideologies of "purity" in whose name the malevolent and powerful would seek to suppress the inexorable movement of living beings to a full freedom of expression; to a complete living-out of their creative potential; to a palpable maximization of the field of their expressive alternatives.

*Vari-speed undulation . . . interlacing . . . strands of . . .
susurrus . . . green*

My experience as a clarinetist in two productions of Mr. Partch's initiated a personal inquiry continuing to this day (if not, as yet, neither fully understood nor quite elaborated upon). Early on, this was fuelled both by readings into the theoretical basis for his work (his notion of corporeality) and a growing climate of support for inter-sensory, interdisciplinary cross-talk which characterized the California new music scene in the late 1960s-1970s (as exemplified by the still-stunning example of *Source Magazine*: the brainchild of Larry Austin, John Mizelle, Stanley Lunetta, Arthur Woodbury, *et al.*)

Later, my interests in this area would be deepened through exposure both to the stunningly beautiful paintings-as-scores of composer

artist, Catherine Schieve, and to the extraordinary text and tape music (and formidable writings) of the late Kenneth Gaburo (1926-93).

Tan . . . yellow . . . making purple in the late afternoon . . . light

In 1980, I began an extensive period of composition study with Mr. Gaburo, who (along with the superb choreographer Lou Blankenburg) had, in fact, directed the first production of Mr. Partch's to have been performed in Europe: this was *The Bewitched*, composed in the early 1950s, and given its European premier at the Berlin Festival of 1980. My contribution to this endeavor was, as usual, that of clarinetist, but the tasks which I faced turned out to require far more than the "mere" ability to play the notes in front of me with accuracy and sensitivity. I was now supposed to be more of an—"actor"-with-a-clarinet than a clarinetist (*per se*) and I was struggling to come to terms with the expanded demands which this new sense of role imposed (i.e., by way of the requirements to use my voice; to engage in body-movement throughout the whole of the space; to employ certain theatrical props with subtlety; to perform in various layers of costume, etc.).

*Chirp . . . off . . . to the left . . . soft . . . amber hue . . . big . . .
blu . . . ring*

Thankfully, Gaburo was no stranger to the difficulties of eliciting from insecure musicians something other than the most traditional and task-specific behaviors and adroitly went to work to "loosen us up." Throughout all phases of our collective work on *The Bewitched*, my fascination with his attempts to extract and make physical (to "tease out") all evidence of "Partchian" corporeality from the work—(to involve musicians "holistically" in keeping with Mr. Partch's ongoing critique of the musician in the mere ness of his/her traditional guise of sound-producing specialist)—intensified. And this (coupled with a newfound confidence in myself as "theatrical" performer), served to strengthen an emerging sense that he might be someone who could help me with my own questions.

In addition to his compositions (and his work in music and theater direction), Gaburo, pioneering theoretical work was in that area of activity which he would call "compositional linguistics." . . . (This is a creative context propounding yet again, and in its own particular way, a notion of the human body as "ur-text," rich in the potential for a perpetually generative myriad of descriptive languages of expression). My years of

private study with him would help me further to point myself in the direction of a more expanded sense of what creative expression might yet be through a polyphonic inquiry of interrogation and elaboration. In this pursuit, the question became paramount . . . (and while not specifically those questions which Kenneth asked, the following examples serve to represent a kind to which our various discourses often gave rise). What—(for instance)—if the human body were perceived and understood to be—say—already an expressive musical polyphony (with or without the accompanying violins or bassoons to articulate selfsame?) What if the input of a nose could determine the output of a synthesizer? What if the redundancy of a pitch-class, “A,”—when played in the same register by ten different instruments, for twenty-five minutes—could finally give way, in perception, to the beauty and variety of the carrier-instrument’s various timbres? What if instead of continuing to honor some fictive contract that I don’t actually see those seventy odd souls who inhabit the orchestral space in front of me, extracting utterance from tubes and boxes—(in their black-and-white uniforms, so evocative of a century gone by)—I open my perceptual field to include the fact of their physical presence, their body language, the smell of my neighbor, the taste of my surreptitiously devoured mint, the feeling of the arm-rest’s fabric as it crenellates lusciously under my fingertips?

Bug . . . ostinato . . . vari-speed fused footsore . . . lemon pang

In 1987, after two years of residence in Australia, I moved to the “island” of Iowa City, Iowa (something of an intellectual Shangri-la, it might be said), in order to continue my work with Kenneth at the University of Iowa, an institution well known for ongoing investigations into intermedia, enacted and nurtured in the Music Department largely through his presence and that of Richard Hervig (composer) and Lowell Cross (composer, recording engineer and video and laser-light artist) and in the Art Department by way of the enlightened mentorship and creative example of Hans Breder whose intermedia classes became a focal point in my own emerging inter-media investigations.

*Fused colors . . . wheat-grass . . . warble . . . smell . . . now still,
then bending*

Just as work with Mr. Partch’s music had opened my thinking to issues relative to the inter-qualification of music, movement, dramaturgy and

carpentry—and work with Kenneth Gaburo had encouraged me to consider the relationship between my music and the writing I was doing—Professor Breder's intermedia classes caused me to investigate the interconnections between my visual/gestural language and the gestural language manifest in the first of my compositions in the (then-analog) electronic-music domain. Pursuant to this, I made a series of musical works on tape in tandem with drawings done in Professor Breder's intermedia class, my (almost daily) general routine being first to compose my sounds in the studio and then (with these still fresh in my mind) proceed immediately to drawing where I would allow the memories of my sound-gestures—their “colors” and characteristic shapes and speeds—to unfold the content of my drawings. Hans' particular contribution to this research was in his capacity to observe (close-read) these post-musical drawings and extract the anomalous material, calling my attention to the fact of a path (or paths) not taken . . . areas where the mind might expand—or the language grow richer and more complex—if the implications arising from the presence of this or that not quite assimilated material were fully considered and explored. Many of the issues forthcoming from the recognition of these perceptual “extractions” might then be (in fact were) further pursued in the domain of sound, when next I visited the Electronic Music Studio for a new bout of composing.

Ghost . . . color coming . . . scratching . . . from the mix

I continued these inter-sensory explorations—to stretch my own boundaries—largely through attempts (for example) to configure art experiences which might finally be observed to lie somewhere BETWEEN—say—their constituent word-worlds and sound-worlds. . . (As in some situation or condition in which verbal descriptive language, even if decidedly “meta” in origin and function is not de-facto consigned to the mere ness of the meta-domain (relegated to the status of a descriptive exegesis crafted quite after-the-fact and understood to be a secondary attribute in light of something primary)—but is EXPERIENCED simultaneously with the sounds which gave rise to them: one with the other inter-qualifying in real time). As well, I was exploring the idea of art-experiences conducting to completion via observer perception “filling in the blanks,” as it were. . . (As in some situation in which an ongoing aggregate of acoustical signals—say, some band-width consisting largely of pink noise—will (may?)—when played back at a particular amplitude and heard through a loudspeaker which has been positioned at a particular distance from

the observer to achieve a desired level of output signal presence—create the awareness of “ghost” signals: a frequency, or aggregate of frequencies, which may or may not actually be “there” in the recorded output signal(s), but which is, nevertheless, by some criteria, “heard.”)

I continued also to be interested in making work in which visual vocabularies (drawings) interlace acoustical ones (recorded sounds) to configure expressions in search of an inter-qualifying focal point in the observer (some perceptual space BETWEEN the participating senses). I investigated these issues (and their ramifications) for several years, but circumstances of the moment made the continuation of the work difficult. Recently, however, I have returned to resonant investigations, albeit in a form less dependent upon the availability of technologies: one predicated on observation and internal inter-qualification as the endpoint, rather than the construction, performance or exhibition of an “object.”

Not . . . quite . . . there . . . peachshifting rasp

So, what do I think about inter-media now (at some years distance from these early investigations)? . . . (Is this inter-media trip still and really necessary?)

*Lighter . . . still . . . this prairieIowa . . . I may have . . .
gray green . . . come*

In pondering this question, I am reminded of those who answer every sincerely proffered distinction with a dismissive redundancy. Might they not argue that the discipline of music is already an expression of inter-media articulation? After all, a clarinet and a trumpet really are quite different mediums, aren’t they? Isn’t one made of wood with moving metal parts, and the other largely of brass with a bit of cork and felt here and there? And, although, both are blown, doesn’t one employ a hard-rubber or crystal mouthpiece with a cane reed which must be activated before a sound may be produced while the other employs a metal mouthpiece of a completely different design through which the player “buzzes” his/her lips to produce the desired sound? In some critical sense, isn’t it the case that only that rubric which these two quite distinct technologies share (i.e., “wind” instrument) bids fare to neutralize the fact of their salient differences. . . In the end, don’t they inhabit completely different sound-worlds?

To love . . . dark . . . yellow . . . straw . . . to cluck purple . . . wet smell

True enough (I might reply). Yet, despite the undoubted relevance of such an argument, I do not particularly mean “chamber music” (or diverse instruments) when I consider the term, “inter-media,” if for no other reason than that most familiar musical instruments (Mr. Partch’s contradictory musical technologies and other such like-alternatives notwithstanding) seem by now to be inextricably wedded by habitual association to that over-arching (distinction-neutralizing) rubric for sound-making in the form of music’s five-letter word. This taxonomic designate (this name) traditionally points to that domain wherein sound is the principal point of focus (although much has been done in the late twentieth century to undermine this convention; silent pieces of music being of particular help to this end).

Aren’t most instruments well and truly freighted with (subsumed within) the history of their association with this marker to the exclusion of any possibility that we may freshly conceptualize them outside the familiar domain?

Top . . . tassel tiny . . . fletching . . . eddies

Can it not also be argued—(particularly by those who delight in kicking the supports out from beneath any stipulation or assertion of “newness”)—that “inter-media” is really a very old idea? . . . (And how often, by the by, do we find the appellative, “old,” strategically employed to discredit the relevance of new thinking by those whose ideologies predispose them to the preservation of old at any cost: using “old” to put away “new” ostensibly for the sake of the new, but really to clear the field so that nothing may effectively challenge the hegemony of the old?)

Verbena . . . bluestem . . . dragonfly . . . flyby . . . breathebreeze

This might, I suspect, have been Mr. Partch’s contention—(although not particularly for the aforementioned reason)—given the degree to which he took such powerful cues both from the multi-cultural, multi-sensory theaters found both in the distant human past, and in those contemporary cultures still extant and living their lives outside the specialized Euro-American mainstream. No one interested in him can quite forget his disdainful characterization our artistic specialties (a theater without music: a music without theater) as “basic mutilations of ancient concept.”

*Intersecting . . . green quiets . . . taste tan . . . sweet . . .
licorice speak*

What are the operas of Richard Wagner if not large-scale moves in the inter-media direction? Don't we need the medium of film to begin to obtain, with anything approaching verisimilitude, the correspondingly rich visual field required of that maker's works . . . (to get the orchestra talking to the sky; to get the mermaids in the water—if not exactly wet?) Is not all opera or ballet de-facto an expression of inter-media, consisting as they do of inter-qualifying fields of sound and movement: text and sound, eyes and ears in inter-qualifying co-participation . . . And what about good old commercial film to within and under the inter-media tent; or architecture which satisfies the eyes and sometimes the ears, to say nothing of the tactile gratification availed by the materials themselves?

Rapid-fire . . . swirl . . . finger gray . . . tickle gritty . . . softs . . . in . . .

slowsmells

I suppose I can, as well, see the validity of these arguments, yet, still, I am not particularly (or compellingly) reminded of operatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the Nutcracker Ballet, or Gone with the Wind, or Falling Water when I consider the idea of inter-media. In the first of these examples—these phenomena chained to their respective taxonomies—sound is again the primary point of focus (if only by virtue of tradition or laziness). In the second, movement is that attribute necessarily to be located in the perceptual foreground; that element for which all other expressions to within (however interpenetrated they may appear to be) function in support. As regards film (at least that of the commercially viable sort), even though there are both things to see and things to hear—and I seem to recall, even once, there having been a brief flirtation with something called “smellovision”—the essential and foreground element of focus continues to be that of the sustained narrative drive; the clear architectural ontology of beginning, middle and end; the viability and power of an unfolding story to capture and hold the attention of the observer (and the observer's pocketbook). For better or worse, film (from the most sublime to the most ridiculous of its manifestations), is still very largely conceptualized (“strategized,” deployed) as

an extension of the nineteenth-century novel: as a form of literature. A "good" commercial film keeps the pages turning (so to speak) albeit through the inter-qualifying agencies of visual imagery, "thespianic" acumen and subtly employed interlaces of sound and music. No one sensory element (qua element) is allowed to "pull focus" for long: to ruminate out-side the story in excess. With respect to an architecture: however beautiful it is (and diversely so), its primary function must still (of needs be) remain that of providing shelter to its occupants.

Rich pinging . . . purple . . . ghost sway . . . slow . . . stem

If so many historical art-expressions to within their inherited specialties (their pre-ordained classes of "things") already seem to be saying "inter-media" to me (to say nothing of the many significant late-twentieth century concretions advanced in its name), what can I mean when I consider the term? How might inter-media still speak to me . . . present me with some desired condition (some context) not unlike that which Gregory Bateson might have called "a difference which makes a difference?"

Twitter . . . pinch . . . bluerub . . . windprick . . . pin . . . spread

If none of the above much comes to mind when I think of inter-media, what does?

Not eyes . . . quite . . . there . . . ears seeing . . . something . . . soft

How about the Platypus?

I am reminded of the story of the first of these creatures to be taken from Australia to England for the amusement and amazement of the scientific community. Here was an egg-laying mammal with a duck-like bill, a tail resembling that of a beaver, poisonous spine on its webbed feet and one orifice for two rather significant functions . . . in sooth, an animal fitting no known category. Little wonder that a significant number of those erudite worthies who first beheld it assumed the incongruous specimen to be a fabrication, a hoax (not without entertainment value to be sure, but incontrovertibly "bogus" nonetheless). Only later, when other "fabrications" had manifested themselves (for further amusement and amazement)—with compelling frequency and in sufficient quantities to force

re-evaluation—were the good men of science enjoined by the growing array of facts to create (to create!) a new category so that this animal, now acknowledged to be “real”, could be accommodated. Their word—this category; this rubric—we know today as “Monotreme” (or one-holed animal). Having sought, for most of my life, art-expressions whose interconnecting attributes likewise confound the taxonomist’s assumptions and definitions—(Oh, for work which requires (mandates!) a new category)—I like this little animal and think she makes quite a nice inter-qualifying context (metaphor?) for cogitation upon the nature and relevance of “inter-media.”

*Merging . . . to chocolate purple sand . . . fleck . . . whip-or . . .
whistle . . . will*

Although the Platypus had attributes of all three, she couldn’t quite make it in the fish-camp, or the bird-club or the muskrat-faculty. She was by way of being a grab-bag of incongruously construed and contradictory sensory modalities. Her various attributes (evidences) were not thought to be reconcilable and she was therefore not considered subsumable. To all intents and purposes this made her non-existent, until more of her number turned the tide and the experts were forced to render unto Platypus her own thing . . . her own name. The Platypus feels very much like an inter-media art-event (a multi-sensory work) to me. I can as easily imagine her being advanced as evidence of something called “art”—(particularly in her taxi dermal state, although I much prefer her ALIVE and having nothing at all to do with art)—as I can see her as an “artifact” pertinent to scientific disquisition. She is (or was) that moment of beautiful strangeness and incongruity—(of information on the verge of recognition)—which we artists yearn for (and for which the term “Inter-media” was coined). Platypus as undeniable phenomenon made Monotreme as category necessary, just as particular art works in our time—through their resistance to classification by virtue of the apparent irreconcilability of their various technological articulators, and their being significantly “about” the interaction and inter-qualification of more than one sense—have made the category of “inter-media” necessary. Now we can construct the artistic equivalent of the Platypus to our hearts content.

*Finger . . . twitters . . . lick turkey . . . vulture v . . . sailing . . .
jive-assed quietly*

So, we have a term . . . now what else do I think? (How is the idea of inter-media useful?)

Yellow orange . . . leaf glance . . . peanut . . . cheek . . . time and song

Well, what if I imagined that Inter-media (like Monotreme) is both that art-category (name) which the fact of creative Platypuses makes necessary (as in some version of people in search of their home?) and that (category/name) which makes possible the conceptualization of new Platypuses in its name (as in some version of a home in search of its people?) I like the idea of Inter-media as a kind of "place," a "home," for a certain kind of thinking about (celebration of) the body in its diverse and seemingly irreconcilable sensory modalities. And I quite enjoy the notion that it might be both a context through which I understand that I can, and with impunity, juxtapose technologies and other diverse concretions freely (as in, toasters with video machines; or clarinets with computers; or tuna-fish with lava-lamps), and a domain in whose name I might undertake to examine (and deeply) how these various realities (these technologies, these implements, these instruments) might actually be induced to (observed to) engage in a deep TALKING to one to one another (and to the body which advances them: the bodies which observe them).

*Sway merging . . . different directional . . . graygreen vortex . . .
wind thick to*

What if in addition to (instead of?) thinking about Inter-media in terms of its undoubted relevance as that category which serves to qualify and legitimate collections of "things"—arrays of "stuff" (diverse materials deployed in art-space), I imagined it to refer a species of discourse more about the perceptual (sensory) boundaries of the art endeavor as a whole than the relevance of any given material articulator in collaboration with another: a place in which to ask how the relationship of ears and eyes—noses tongues and toes—may be conceptualized anew (and to what end).

*Jolt . . . tic . . . not quiet . . . quite . . . there . . . my deep cherry
buzzbubble . . .*

More concretely, what if I imagine that just as "music" is a five-letter word which points not merely to the home of some particular evidence

of human sound-making (as in that aspect of it which we choose to pay attention to for no particularly good reason), but to human sound-making as a whole, "Inter-media" (a word five-letters larger), is a home which invites evidences not singularly of SOUND with movement; nor MOVEMENT with words, birds, and castles; nor PAINTING with a violin playing pizzicato in the background; but of diversified perpetual-motion cycles of sound in DISCOURSE with sight in DISCOURSE with movement in DISCOURSE with smell in DISCOURSE with taste in DISCOURSE with touch in DISCOURSE with senses as yet unnamed or undiscovered.

*Moist . . . strawplace . . . pluck and ping . . . magenta bellows . . .
rank and dark . . . to tonguetight*

Perhaps, in addition to the "Multi-media"-conceptualized juxtaposition of technologies, the idea of "Inter-media" is elaborated through this inter-sensory discourse (discourse becoming the subject rather than mere "meta-by-product": more in the nature of a denotation than a connotation; not merely an inference but a focal point). And in this discourse (occasioned by observation of (and inquiry into) the omnipresent intercourse of the senses) no one sense—(whether/either related, one to another, through mere juxtaposition, or strident polyphony or florid heterophony)—assumes the incontrovertible role of that for which the whole functions. Just as now, in this coffee shop, Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Russian Easter Overture* and the pin-prick, pain-musik in Paredes' feet make equal claim to my perceptual focus.

*Wet bug . . . bark . . . tang rasp . . . liquid sweet . . . acrid
mauve bell . . .
sneeze*

Perhaps, instead of the sensory world as it serves to articulate MUSIC (as focal point); or, the sensory world as it serves to articulate PAINTING (as focal point); or, the sensory world as it serves to articulate DANCE (as focal point); or, the sensory world as it serves to articulate NARRATIVE STRUCTURES (as focal point)—(to name but four)—I might also think of an Inter-media context as one in which single-sense-based distinctions serve as connecting links in creative constructions which serve to reveal the SENSORY WORLD in its exquisitely-nuanced plenitude (the world of the body in phenomenological relationship with the environment which

it inhabits). . . (Easy enough on paper . . . but how to pull it off . . . ?). . . (Is that by way of being the "art" of it?)

*Wheat sour . . . deep cheesey cork feel . . . yellow . . . corn . . . red brown
voice*

At the risk of a truism of the most obvious and baby-simple sort, it could be said that there are as many reasons for work in advance of something called inter-media as there are interested artists, but for me a central, perhaps definitive, one has to do with what I might call the "politics of restoration": the struggle to be, and to feel, complete—to reclaim human wholeness in the face of those who would arrogate unto themselves the power to define us and our work as they chose from impulses to dissect, reduce and dismember (impulses to which our un-questioning commitment to the preservation of artistic specialties perhaps unwittingly contributes).

In this light, I wonder if my continued use of the word, "taxonomy," (which, as a non-scientist, I realize I may have employed more capriciously than will be comfortable for some) is more significant to me than first it may have appeared. To seek to reconfigure hierarchies, to challenge with seriousness the assumptions through and by which certain of us would define (presume to understand) certain others of us is an act of the greatest political import and consequence. Perhaps most of the significant acts in human history have emanated from a profound desire for redefinition; for reclassification; for freedom from a rigidly employed and un-interrogated taxonomies . . . a desire to be who and what are, on our own terms, in, of and through our own bodies.

*Dry . . . harmonic . . . hot purple mouth . . . lilac reverberant . . .
deep gut
firefight*

Whether the term, "inter-media," describes work that already exists, but nowhere fits, or is an idea which wants to become true—a concept in search of embodiment—what we call things is finally of rather imposing significance, for names are (in some sense) also places. And they are political expressions as well. In this latter light, what may matter most is that there are (and continue to be) further places which conduce to the creation of further differences: that we do not allow the pro-forma classification of "things" to subsume us (and our needs); that art-activity continues to

maximize alternatives to the given; that the powerful continue to be challenged through the fact of our commitment to the idea that we can give our own names to our own concerns, our own qualities to our own lives.

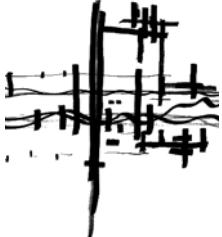
Stemsong . . . this way . . . that

Maybe, Inter-media is a ten-letter place for thinking about how I might reclaim and expand upon those odd moments when my real world flows through the cracks in my inherited knowledge.

*Long fence of swaying prairie grass
By turns rank and sweet to the nose
Here and there a color not quite here or there*

Antiphonal choirs of multi-voiced and rhythming bug-talk chant

*I taste the incoming rain
Wet-cold pins dotting my face
I feel the glassy softness of your onyx hair on my fingertips*



Re: **Robert**
Paredes
view
Harry
Partch:

If

there was a composer-----less sympathetic to the subsumption of artistic expression to within that perennial homily-cum-dumpster of "l'art pour l'art"....further removed from the often politically motivated rhetoric of the stonewall which we have come to know as "letting the music speak for itself" (for "What is music that it should have a self? as the Australian composer, Felix Werder, once ((and not so innocently)) inquired)....more opposed to the notion that an instance of music (or a composer, for that matter) need only to be pulped down to a detritus of immanent characteristics to be "understood"....as deeply antipathetic to the exclusive preoccupation with the merely decorative (as in some version of the Hummel figurine); or the merely conceptual (as in some version of the Galilean way of it in which physical! sensual ("corporeal")) experience is deemable as nought when compared to the reassuring truths provided by the precisely measurable); or the merely, "mere" (as in the notion that music must, at all times, "communicate" with smiley-faced immediacy and in full accordance with specific codes, rigidly in place and drearily familiar)-----he/she comes not so

readily

to
mind.

What

then

makes

David Dunn's Harry Partch: An Anthology of Critical Perspectives (Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000) so immediately satisfying is the

variously-voiced, difficult-to-rein-in, diversity and abundance of its address---as befits the subject: a composer whose bone with reductionism was of long, persistent and tenacious picking and whose creative advocacy on behalf of the hearing, seeing, feeling-whole body----(and passion to save it and its works from the compromise crafted of willy-nilly wizening and love of the denotative above all)—made for a life's work more “art” because human needs and wants required it, than the other

way

‘round.

Such

a

contrary

thorny

cussedly unpidgeonholeable personage----
(composer,
writer,
poet,
creator and fabricator of musical instruments,
theoretician of tone,
visual artist,
diarist,
polemicist,
politico,
missionary ,
satyr-simulacrum,
bricoleur-bona fide,
mandarin anti-mandarin,
firestorm (?),
sweetheart(?) and

shit (??))

----requires a commensurately variegated set of exegeses and so
(therefore) in lieu of a proforma teleology of the distillative, editor Dunn has sought rather to advance to us (through thoughtful choosing

and sensitive arrangement) a foliative ontology born of care. Instead of the building block, stark in its insufficiency, he gives us a rainforest, rich in strange life-forms and potential medicaments---causing, into the bargain, a very beautiful and much needed meta-music of his own to come

into

being.

Comprised

of texts, photos, and a CD recording, the work's macro-structure is a tripartite one, each discrete grouping given a rubric in accordance with "Mr. Partch's own stipulated trinity of emphasis, i.e., Sound-Magic, Visual Beauty, and Experience-Ritual. Within and between these larger locations are expressions, observations, and analyses of profound understanding, deep sympathy, and head-scratching complexity, each presenting us with a rich and varied point of entry into the composer's elaborate, multi-faceted-and-articulated domain. Through this body of offerings, resonant within and between their various contexts and divides, we are treated to a Harry Partch in the plenitude he deserves, demands, and cries

out

for.

Following

an introduction---(inferential ((if only by me))) as a kind of heterophonic/polyphonic-meta-text, music-by-text, in the form of a dialogue between long-time Partch associates percussionist/teacher Danlee Mitchell and editor David Dunn, flanked by resonant ghosts in the form of knowing (if not entirely affirmative) observers of long standing and "Mr. Partch himself" in hovering cross-talk)---Sound-Magic begins with Mr.

Partch

(himself)
speaking

in

the form of The Rhythmic Motivations of Castor and Pollux and Even Wild Horses. Here is the composer taking issue with the familiar fireside dichotomy of classical music versus popular (as if we could

imagine that any musical life could be lived outside of the corrals these categories represent). Classical's worship of the past and popular's habitual resort to the most simplified musical terrain are equally decried---yet we find Partch not a little attracted (in spite of himself?) to the visceral excitement ("strength") which he hears in the popular domain. This sensibility coupled with a desire for greater complexity of rhythmic articulation informs the composition of the two works under discussion. Of further interest within this discourse is writing illustrative of the formative influence which an examination of African rhythmic structures had on ranch's work and the metaphoric richness he derived from the art and life of the poet, Rimbaud (as in a sense of lost innocence, "humanness," fueling

and

fuel

for

a rebellious physicality)---Far
from

being

the modest offering its title might lead one to expect, A Word or Two on the Tuning of Harry Partch, by Rudolph Rasch is an elaborate and detailed discourse on the mathematics of Partch's world of pitch and interval. Initially touching (with tantalizing brevity) on the implications and problematics of perceiving "Intonational color"---(i.e., the condition of pitch as carried by---((and fused with))---its instrumental medium), the author provides us with an invaluable introduction to the domain of tunable ratios (providing roughly equivalent tempered analogues to allow one access)---and further discussion concerning the way in which various groupings and configurations of selfsame conjoin to produce Partch's own

characteristic

expression of the idea of
tonality.

Ben

Johnston's, Harry Partch's Cloud Chamber Music, offers both a dramatic narrative of that work's unfolding and a discussion of the political context which informed its making. Here is a Partch who, nostalgic for

primary cultures, believing our society to be in an advanced state of decay and having no faith in the older folk to remedy the situation--- would become the "inciter of youth." Rich in theoretical address, the text as well sheds light on ranch's macro pitch-dialectic as this is embodied in the interconnection and interqualification of Otonalities (aggregates of tunable ratios analogous to major chords) and Utonalities (analogous to minor). We learn something of way these blocks of quasi-tonalities were grouped and employed to provide contrast and tension within Partch's system and how configurations of tunable ratios (e.g., Unity Diamond) became (quite literally) the very macro-shapes, orderly internal domains, and physical limits of the instruments themselves in an exquisite wedding of concept and evidence, (theory and functionality). In this latter light, one remembers with savor the kinetic beauty exhibited by a diamond marimba player as he negotiated a rapid series of crossovers from one ratio domain of that instrument to another and sees,

feels

the

physicality of [numbersoundmediumgesture]
reading

clear

through

in beautiful

fusion.

In

Daphne

of

the Dunes: The Relationship of Drama and Music, Glenn Hackbarth frames those tissues of connection extant between the putatively "pure" "musical" specificities of his chosen work and the dramaturgical attributes of its particular characters (i.e., Daphne and Apollo) providing much insight into the processes Partch employed to construct---to "flesh out"---his corporeal system. The many and clarifying notated examples interspersed throughout are meticulous and

beautifully
rendered.

Uniquely,

in

Elaine Barkin's A Text on the Music of Harry Partch taken from Notes and Commentaries on Notes made during and after Auditions of the Music of Harry Partch, we are presented with an analysis---(through an altogether more expansive genus of dictation)---issuing from the vantage point of a listener-composer writing meta-text---(about mood, in light thereof---about implications, in light thereof)---directly in response to hearings of Partch's work. The resulting body of small writings, each very beautiful, self-contained and focused on some divergent aspect of the composer which a given hearing has caused to be framed, interqualify one with the other in this reader's imagination to create an ecology of Partch/resonances---a verbal meta-field of potential connection, by turns describing how it feels to experience the sounds, unfolding an almost film-like parallel story line of images---("dance of the bluesyfloozies")---for which the Partchmusic might plausibly be construed to be an underscore, and ruminating on questions

of

how

and

why. Rich

in

beautiful

and illustrative graphics, Verses in Preparation for the Delusion of the Fury, by Paul Earls, is concerned with the issues of prefiguration, and subsequent expansion of material---and variously describes the sonorous groupings, rhythmic structures, pitch protocols, and notational problematics germane to the composition of that collection of works which may be said to have constituted the "maquette," if you will, for a larger "sculpture" which became Delusion of

the

Fury.

Visual

Beauty

is exclusively comprised of a collection of photos, all save one of the composer and his instruments: Several Partches are in evidence here, among them a hobo/merchant-mariner, indomitable-atop a freight car....the composer/builder (a defiant sun-king centrally seated and surrounded by his creations in quasi-orbital freeze-frame?)....the adapted violist, fighting a well-loved gig-suit....a *viejo-akimbo* out of B. Traven, defending hearth and home from the onslights of salesmen, sacred and

profane.

By

way

of

memoirs,

Experience-Ritual, begins with Further Memories and Reflections, and “I Do Not Quite Understand You, Socrates.” The first of these is an engaging dialogue between the previously introduced Danlee Mitchell and another American original in the person of composer Henry Brant, pioneer in the practice of specifying particular spatial placements of instruments as an attribute of given compositions. Through Brant's and Mitchell's recollections, more of the composer emerges, i.e., the patient, but tautly focused rehearser, the interpreter of Chopin, the unremitting “reminderer” to the Court of Ancient Ritual that music might have a basis in

tone.

The

second,

by Partch's longtime friend and fellow composer, Lou Harrison, is an affectionately formal mini-remembrance touching, but profoundly, on the depth of Partch's immersion in the classics, the origins of his involvement with corporeality as idea, and the development of the tuning

system.

Both

memoir

and cultural critique Beyond Harry Partch, by Ben Johnston, takes up the vexing and perplexing issue of a continued obeisance of American

serious ("concert?") music---(What do we call it now?)---to European models and upper-class pretensions and explores Partch's remedial importance with respect to this seemingly perpetual circumstance. Time is also taken both to hurl (lob? toss?) a small verbal projectile at the limitations of an education system which for so long has defined musical legitimacy near solely in terms of 18th and 19th century European concerns and to relate to us a part of Mr. Johnston's own story (i.e., introduction to the work of Helmholtz, apprenticeship with Partch at Gualala---subsequent and not wholly fulfilling experimentation with Electronic

Music).

Both

speculative

and

critical,

In

Search of Partch's Bewitched. Part One: Concern
ing

Physicality, by Kenneth Gaburo is that composer/phenomenologist's exam

ination of Partch's corporeality in Gaburo's own dist
inctive and no less corporeally resonant meld of text-as-to-be-(could-be)-sounded,

ear-beautious, roll-off-the-tongueable poetic rum
ination and hard-assed, fire-worked-logic-cum-practic
ing-lapsed-jesuit-apologetical-multi-elaborat
ing-rice-paper-rapier th

ink

in which

graymatter and guts do their motherfuckerdance

of one

inside the other until they

are one

and

inside the

other.

Implicit

as a kind of climactic point, by virtue of its length and penultimate place in the work as a whole, Gaburo's writing---(a large-scale musing in light of Partch's, The Bewitched)---is in many ways the heart of the collection---(and a dagger aimed at the heart of reducto). Herein the author takes Partch at his word(s)---(present as one voice in a two-part polyphonic theater)---and proceeds to ask just what they mean. Beginning with an inquiry into the nature of observation (i.e., affirmative both of its unassailable basis in the physical and that of the descriptive language which gives it voice), Gaburo moves on to construct a composition-within-a-composition-as-generative grammar in the form of a word-thicket of physically-referential interconnections/qualifications within which the most tightly crafted instance of Partch-aimed reduction is bound to achieve an irreversible entanglement. There follows a "demystification"---(within which is to be found an exquisite, "touchy-feely" relational-rumination on the world of sensual experience provided the author by his tactile encounter with Partch's Marimba Eroica)---in which Gaburo speculates on the ways Partch's own language may have contributed to a quasi-canonicalization (desired or not by the composer). A final discussion addresses Partch's theater in terms of its implications as a socially integrative phenomena---(an art, arguably significant as much for having provided its participants with an intimate occasion to experience and share particular qualities of being---(feeling)---together....as for having become one more array of "holy relics" on artworld's large mantel---entity on entity.

Last

among the texts and by

way

of a coda there is The Umbilical Chord Still Vibrates. This is Harry Partch's own mordant observation-cum-pronouncement of and upon our investment in the masterpiece culture....deeply critical of the price we pay in moribund cultural life (and stifled creativity) for the thousandth-odd recording of Sheherazade (Fritz Reiner's Chicago Symphony reading which I've lovingly carted around since childhood is quite enough for me, thanks). Special vitriol is herein reserved for the fetish preoccupation with (*frisson* for?) matters interpretive (the shape of the phrase as shape of the foot?). You know how it goes. Because having deprived ourselves (through fear, laziness or bigotry) of those regenerative benefits of wilderness to be found in the form of new, complex, and not easily habitable creative domains which fully engage the body and

its reluctantly cohabitative mind-brain, we are reduced to an experience of music---(selected, for its familiarity and drained by over-audition of any particle of information)---as little more than an occasion for oooing-and/or-ahhhing over this or that minuscule difference to be discerned from one self-similar

recording

to

another.

Accompanying

the

book

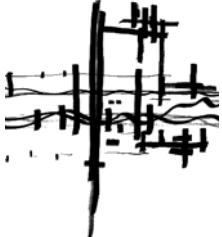
is a compact disc with two offerings---an interview done with Partch after a dress rehearsal of Delusion of the Fury, and The Day the Kithara Fell, a broadcast of what is characterized as "a somewhat sensationalized accident on the set of Delusion of the Fury, one day before the premiere." The former gives you the "grain" of Partch's voice, the knowing, would-be, scoffer's chuckle and smoker's rasp; the peaks, troughs and cadences of inflection (Partch's ur-text?), and the contradictory nature of the composer in interview---restless, argumentative, a bubbling obstreperousness barely containable within the limits of convivial intervieweehood. The latter offers---for all its would-be tabloid feverishness---a real taste of that world of fragility and tenuousness within which performances of such powerful stretch and reach must inevitably take place. One remembers (indeed, I remember) the shattering of a Spoils-of-War bowl in a San Diego performance of The Bewitched and the subsequent sweeping up of its shardshower by an intrepid harmonic canon player (and ((I)) further recall the collapse of that same instruments base just before a performance in Cologne).

For those coming new to the work and person of this composer, be advised: the man within the book is not the blandly personable, easy to define and eminently dismissable corporate cutout so seemingly cherished in this time of unregenerate dumbness, but a complex person/personality/persona, full of himself and full of his mission. A polyartist in search of his own good ground in the ongoing battle with a musical and social world which he cannot stand---yet, whose attention and understanding he nonetheless covets. In paraphrastic homage to the late Herbert Brün, it might be said that Partch is an adversarial

input to society, instead of its obedient output: in and with every sense---(and by way of the fertile alternatives which he composes to the utter desiccation he perceives)---a persistent and unapologetic voice of nonaffirmation to socialworld's unquestioned and unquestioning, identity-drained din and mutter.

That David Dunn has, through his compilation, conveyed such a profound sense of the very deep and palpable difference which Harry Partch constructs with his own hands, is argument enough for its acquisition by every interested person.

*Iowa City,
February 10, 2001*



Itches and Scratches; Truisms and Places; Them and Us; Listening through Flags

For: Melody Scherubel, Matthew Burrier, and Benjamin Boretz (whose statement prompted this work in response).

PRELIMINARY NOTES

Note on the reading

In an out-loud reading, leave out nothing. Pursue the sense of theater you want . . . but I hear it read slowly, introspectively, softly, ruminatively, haltingly at the joins—(fully-voiced, but not much above a stage-whisper)—as if to self . . . as if reading in order to uncover and excise the “bugs.” Little speed-ups and slow-downs, here and there, sound good to me too. What is it (this)? Part rant, part sermon, part formal paper, part poem, part reasoned argument, part rhapsody, part namedrop, part playlet. (It wants to be all of these things and is none of them in its entirety).

Note on “Places”

Each “place” is the name of an instance of music (or collection of instances: mine and others) which has meant something to me during the past year. It should not be assumed that any given place specifically refers to any given part of any given text (and vice versa). Their presence represents an act of sharing, not of contextualization. If anything, readers are invited to go to them, from time to time (if possible), to get away from the text (so as either to “cleanse” the “ear-brain” by way of the “tongue-brain,” or the tongue-brain by way of the ear-brain?).

Note on “We,” “They,” “It” and “Place”

It is preferred that, when employed in the following specific contexts, the words, “we,” “they,” and “it” be assumed to be as if enclosed in quotation marks. For example, although I stipulate a “we” (and a “they”)—(when referring to my imagined sense of “our” collective identity)—I really don’t know, with anything approaching certainty, who “we” are. And, although, I stipulate a “they” and an “it,”—(when referring to instances of music, i.e., “pieces”)—I am uncomfortable both with the sense of “selfhood” which the word, “they,” conveys (as if instances of music were the persons “they” speak for) and with the sense of “thing-hood” which the word, “it,” conveys (as if instances of music were, in fact, “objects”). The word “place,” although generally qualified to-within the “rubric-world” of “noun-hood,” is herein used to connote “something” (yet another word-candidate for perennial enclosure in quotes) more in the nature of an occasion, or context, for focused (but fluid) attention given to a field or fields in motion, rather than to refer to (to connote) some condition (or sensibility) characterized by incontrovertible solidity or rigidity of perspective.

ITCHES

Initially . . . I had thought that my attempt to address Ben's topical stimulus would result in something like a simple but definitive statement . . . a declaration demonstrating that I, in fact, understood the distinction between something called a flag and something called a musical composition. And, I do, (sort of)—and can (sort of), but the fact that I do (and can) seems vaguely trivial: somewhat in the nature of an answer to a test question, one more demonstration to myself that I can (on occasion) think, one more attempt to curry favor with no one in particular . . . something to pass the time.

That . . . I might be able to construct or recognize a simple measure of distinction between a flag and an instance of music seems to elicit not much more from me than a hopeful "ho-hum"—(in which, it must be said, are nested the faint stirrings of a thrill)—in the absence of some possibility that I may experience a moment of signification on quite another level of address . . . But what might that be? . . . And where found?

Maybe . . . in addition to the mere ness of distinction (as in, this is not that: my previously alluded to ho-hum), there is some more meaningful sense)—(my own albeit blatantly periphrastic one, originating in perennial attempts to get a handle on the writings of Gregory Bateson)—in which the construction of a given distinction may pave the way for the recognition of a difference, and that that difference may, in turn, be re-contextualized as a difference which makes a difference.

Maybe . . . the (a) "big whoop"—(should it come, and if so it may be called)—may not so much be found to reside in the fact that I can discern a difference, but that this difference will be observed to carry a degree of weight, indeed, "meaning" for me—(Those for whom meaning is something of a "crock"-designation will take note of [and be placated by?] my parenthetical offset. Perhaps, indeed, words don't "mean" anything—they merely "point," but, for ease of handling, I have used the word, "meaning," as if it means what it used to . . . when it was still thought to mean something).

Maybe . . . (Said, another way) the "meaning"—(should it come, and if so it may be called)—might be found to reside in a feeling that my distinction is now an occasion for, at least, the possibility of change . . . hinted at by the inadvertent and unpremeditated articulation of my body under the gut-skin . . . as well as to be found at those supposedly higher levels of elevation wherein I warehouse my abstractions . . . (if, so, they may be called).

Maybe . . . my distinction is (now) troubling enough in its implications to elicit questions which may serve to further differentiate the already differentiated.

Maybe . . . if before, I had an abstraction, I might now have an itch . . . requiring the remedial application of a vigorous scratch.

A-priori-pursuant . . . to said "scratch," I suppose the difference that my difference-born-of-distinction might make might begin with a recognition that something more than the mere ness of "signing-in" to an issue is now involved—that "proforma" may now be facing imminent replacement by necessity)—that in circling around the by now multiple and various ways in which a flag and a musical composition are and are not one another, I have begun to think that what I most need to know—(in their multiple and various lights)—is how I feel.

For. . . initial example, how am I "grabbed," by the very idea of musical composition-as-flag (flag-as-musical composition) by the notion that at one time or another, someone, somewhere, will take musical work as if representative of—(a flag for?)—some condition or situation, or idea, or narrative understood (or not) to reside quite outside the immediate domain configured of its immanent characteristics . . . as if to stand for "something?" of (or about) which its materials (its "stuff") may have but little to do . . . (And),

Am . . . I easy or uneasy when my own composition—whether in approbation, passive-aggressive dismissal, or undisguised scorn—is taken for a flag (overtly and defacto) either by interested (or other) parties, or when construed as such by my own express design so as, for example, to represent my personhood in its agonistic struggles?

Do . . . I prefer that my composition, absent its correlative person, be left alone to be "itself" (as if it had a "self"), to be what it most manifestly is, and only that, in some imagined state of the "pure and unadulterated": pristine, free-floating. . . as if untoouchable and inviolable as it transits within and between each and every person's multi-proliferating perception-space?—(as if the idea of I, or you—of (a) transmitter and (a) receiver—did not, had not, or could not (ever) obtain?).

Or . . . would I rather that my composition be heard to imply (to refer to, to be a flag for) the existence of something other than "itself": some possible relationship between. . . say. . . (a) work and (a) person, as in, an I, and a "you" (as if you might have wanted "it," and/or "me")—or an I and a you—(as if you didn't want either it, or me)—or as in some situation in which the work is posited to be descriptive of a world or worlds external to its first-order languages (as in, what used to be called

"program music," or music in overt or *sub rosa* use for purposes of advertising or propaganda).

And . . . if the idea of "you" becomes a significant informing factor in my making, just how much influence will I allow "you" to have . . . and what will be the quality(s) of our association? Just, where, along some imagined continuum between "fuck you" and "how may I help you?" will I place my composition/flag?

And . . . Or . . . if the idea of "I" becomes a significant informing factor in my making, just how will (indeed, can) my composition articulate, reflect, describe and/or otherwise be expressive of resonance within that web of interaction and complexity—informed as it is of various degrees and shades of anger, insecurity, fear and hubris—which informs and inter-qualifies my discourse (me with me) and carries the physicality of the inquiry?

(**By way of a straw man**): "So what?" . . . (He might say). "Who cares?" . . . (He might say). "It's 'just' music" . . . (he . . . might . . . say).

PLACE: Largo Sinfonico 1944, for large orchestra, by Nikos Skalkottas.

TRUISMS

At. . . the risk of unfolding a further array of potential "so what's"—(a veritable conga-line of truisms)—it seems to me to be, at least, somewhat clear that musical compositions—if not in most cases constructed to function as such—have, nevertheless, been utilized as flags: i.e., employed as symbols and signaling devices referential to issues arising from the consideration either of those attributes of which given works are made (as in its notes, rhythms, formal properties, etc.), or that "turf" which such attributes might be imagined to imply (as in those biographical or other putatively extra-musical resonances in surround [either composer-informative or observer-implicative in nature], such as worldviews, political stances, "agonistic struggles," etc.) . . . (And)

It . . . is further clear (by way of a **Truism 2**) that, in addition to providing a richness of interiority for contemplation, these compositions-as-flags have as well been abundant with ramifications for the emergence and development of social groups.

PLACE: Exordium from Delusion of the Fury, by Harry Partch.

Truism 3

Each . . . musically-embodied change in the means and modes of articulation from Ars Nova and before to Grunge and after—(from Camerata to Tropicalismo; from systematic to emblematic tonality; from running the changes to playing whatever you want)—has invited sympathetic persons to join together around (or “under”) its standard, as if a musical style or methodology were a nation-state, or a cavalry troop, or the Magna Carta: a shared cosmology, a desired system of moral values or pattern of social etiquette . . . a favorite restaurant or neighborhood bar. Musical phenomena which originally distinguished particularly to within “music” have been, and continue to become, the agents of (and occasions for) a corresponding social distinction . . . (This is clear, at least, somewhat) . . . (but)

PLACE: Symphonies 3 or 7, by Roy Harris.

Truism 4

Conversely . . . too, each musically-embodied change in the means and modes of articulation has served to repel some for whom its very existential unpredictability, its incompatibility with accepted paradigms, presents not the welcome reminder (which it might be) that the world is an altogether richer, more beautiful and variegated affair than the redundant and debilitating system it becomes through prejudice, violence, habit, sloth, and fear . . . but a threat . . . dire and profound in nature.

PLACE: Toward the Margins, a collection of works by the Evan Parker Electro-Acoustic Ensemble.

Truism 5

In . . . such a social surround—(one, now rich in real and potential anxieties)—musical compositions may (indeed have) provide(d) occasions for divisiveness, territoriality, and recrimination, their makers coming to acquire (for some) the symbolic representation and actual significance of “enemy.” How better (or else) to adequately contextualize such diverse aggressions as the near-mythical mayhem precipitated by the first performance of the *Sacre*, the initial and equally violent reactions to the musics of Ornette Coleman, John Cage and Arnold Schoenberg—(to cite but three of the more obvious examples)—or the scurrilous behavior exhibited, on occasion, by otherwise “nice-guy” professionals toward those who unwittingly, or by design, advance (or

blunder into) musical positions different from their own . . . (as if in daring to compose an instance of music, to me alien or unpleasant—unorthodox, nonconformist or marginal—you have in some way sought not only to disagree with me, but to negate my very existence, and I must fight fire with fire . . . yours with mine)

PLACE: Luiza, composed and performed by Antonio Carlos Jobim.

THEM AND US

The . . . phrase calls to mind a scenario in which I and my “bandidos”—(as K.G. used to call his more committed and vocal students)—, “sons-a-bitches,” “acolytes,” “fellow-travelers,” and other extended musical family band together and close ranks (circle the wagons) the better to defend, nurture, and advance our mutual and shared musical concerns against the threat (perceived as palpable and persistent) from you and your “bandidos,” (“sons-a-bitches” and other extended musical family: circled—when not otherwise marauding—in your wagons) . . . as in some musically-contextualized transmogrification of the Hatfields and McCoys, or the Earps and the Clantons; the Three Musketeers vs. Cardinal Richelieu or Clarence Darrow and the evolutionists vs. William Jennings Bryan and the creationists . . . (And),

PLACE: Isle of the Dead, by Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Then. . . there are those more benign and familiar musical-historical resonances of “them and us,” as exemplified by a French Six and a Russian Five; the Twelve-Toners vs. the Major/Minor Key Systementalists; the Minimalists vs. the Twelve-Toners; the Microtonalists vs. Equal-Tempermentalism. The-Free-and/or-other-modern-Jazzers vs. the Dixie-and/or-other-moldy-figgys: uptown vs. downtown; regional identity vs. big city usurpation and absorption . . . Ad Reinhardt and the “one art” vs. every other form of every other art (as in a “them” and (a) “me”). T. H. Huxley’s “bloody battleground” of evolution . . . (When),

PLACE: selected Intermezzi, by Johannes Brahms (as performed by Glenn Gould).

Applied . . . to creative music, it suggests (implies) the territory of composition as variously mapped by (or on to) the pursuits of warfare, religious proselytizing and conversion, the search for scientifically verifiable

truths, or even the debate over the proper way to hold a soup spoon . . . with the composer “cast” as general, avatar, prelate, scientist and final arbiter of all tasty things (as in, some “tweakily” surrealist admixture of Douglas MacArthur, Madame Blavatsky, Einstein, Emily Post and the Pope . . . El Cid and his loyal knights, to say nothing of “give up your father mother and come to me!”).

PLACE: String Symphonies, by C.P.E. Bach.

Welcome . . . to the psycho-(melo)-drama of conflict (of righteous struggle) in which musical position-taking in the form of composition becomes an occasion to run up a flag, the subservience and fealty to which—(the standing under [understanding?] of which)—provides a certain lucidity whereby I can know that I belong—and that “they,” (there is always a “they”) do not. The issues are clearly delineated: the battle-lines drawn . . . the composer presenting as an action figure and musical composition reduced to a matter of strategic acumen, applied to the purpose of defining and holding proper and defensible positions (given unto the mission of acquiring territory and protecting gains) . . . torqued to the task of inflicting and being inflicted upon.

There . . . might as well be uniforms (as in the 4' 33" cap which Warren Burt gave me . . . but, of course, in this instance, my head becomes a flag for a kind of anti-sectarian, all-inclusiveness, if you know the tune . . . thank you Warren!).

PLACE: Blood and Water (the Billy Higgins Improvisations), by John Rapson.

For . . . quite some time, I have experienced conflict between the sympathy which I harbor for this mentality of “them and us,” and a commensurate and nagging sense of revulsion that such dialectics appear to be inevitable if, in the heat of it, I am to preserve my dignity in the punch and counterpunch of a musical/social exchange enamored still, it would seem, of “manhood” struggles and survival of the fittest as metaphors for creative endeavor.

My . . . sympathy finds its roots in the fact that I experience loneliness in pursuit of my own versions of “unpopular” music and am needful of friends and fellow-pursuers: (that I can’t quite go it alone in the tradition of good old American iconoclasm). As well, it originates in the desire (the ambition . . . less often present these days, I suppose) to be—

(and to be seen to be)—on the right side of that history (that flag) to which I give credence; to have discovered—(and to be seen to have discovered)—some new thinking; to have at last arrived—(and been seen to have arrived)—at formerly uninhabited terrain, like Amundsen at the South Pole with his flag . . . (and his bunch).

The . . . complementary, converse, and coefficient disquietude/disdain/ho-hum of this (my) sympathy emanates from a general feeling that by virtue of an overriding preoccupation with the notion of music as argument-in-perpetuity, as activity to the contrary—(as in a “reckoning” between them and us in which I [and mine] must, at all costs, emerge the victor)—my musical life has too often been immersed in, and unfolded through, a kind of self-fueled-and-tended psychological combat with physical consequences: a combat necessitating the nurturance of an ongoing protection racket, in which the adherence to rigid and unyielding views (flags) tell me that I am “right” and—by way of this rightness—also . . . somehow . . . “safe” . . . (safer).

This . . . over-arching (macro) feeling is articulated by and articulates a complement of contributing others (micros) quite specific in nature and structure. For example: the feeling that

the musical issues which engage me are of such seriousness and potential danger—(as they will be (to be sure) in overtly and physically repressive societies with much more devastating consequences for evidencing and advancing systems of argument than exist in our own)—that every inconsistency must be rooted out, every contradiction, contravened . . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of “constancy” in defense of “rectitude”); that

every creative act must be polished to a “fare-thee-well,” every rough place smoothed, every halting clumsiness purged, as if musical composition were the equivalent of brain surgery or piloting an aircraft . . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection?] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of “perfection,” of “gravitas”); that

a change of mind is tantamount to heresy, or, at the very least, a distinct flaw in character . . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection?] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of “true fidelity”: of “integrity, as exemplified solely

by rigidity");

that

I must hold to the revolution even if I'm the only one who still believes in it, even if it has "turned tail" on the very people it was meant to advance and nurture. . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection?])—even in the face of a need for further change—to an ultimate and reductionist notion of the complete validity of orthodoxies, of rigidly-reified originary views; of "jargons of authenticity" . . . of that "woodenheaded ness" so clearly illustrated in Barbara Tuchman's, March of Folly);

that

there cannot possibly be more than one modality within which to experience an instance of music: that I cannot listen, for example,—BOTH—in that "dumb kind of way" (of Copland's lovely illustration)—AND—as befits (my) presence in and to the co-presence of some example of profound, complex, multi-leveled and layered; terraced, latticed, nuanced, richly resonant and vastly implicative sound-thought . . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection] to an ultimate and reductionist "vision" of the "right" way to hear);

that

music is a cause worth the situational derision and humiliation of other people . . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection?] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of what it means to be "serious"—is to show the "white feather" in the battle for ideas—For, if music really is a serious matter, isn't it worth the pain which I dispense and receive in its name?);

that

if I am uncomfortable with complex discourse about music either I, or the music under consideration, must be incontrovertibly "lightweight" and therefore beneath (my) contempt. . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection?] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of music as only of value if I am capable of generating {and subsequently subjecting the music to} an infinity of suitably complex meta-language in its after-space. For, if music really is a serious matter, shouldn't I always . . . (always) . . . have something of commensurate seriousness to say about it?);

that

if I am comfortable with complex discourse about music, I—in periphrastic homage to Duke Ellington—contribute to a general "stinking up

the place," to a pollution of the experience of music . . . (and, that, to think otherwise is to disgrace the flag under which I would cling [for my protection?] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of the "pure" hearing, of music as of value only when rendering me incapable of the need to generate and engage in any but the slightest meta-language in its after-space. For, if music really is a serious matter, shouldn't I be rendered speechless—struck "dumb"—by it);
that

if (whether, either) from love, or externally imposed force)—I have no choice but to engage in discourse about music, I must employ, either a prescribed, respectable, and institutionally approved mode of self-same—as if the work under consideration were only or merely an occasion to demonstrate my understanding of it to a particular constituency—or some completely personal, and self-referential jargon (as if the work were only or merely an occasion for me to dwell in my own infinitely reverberant mood-space)—(and, would it not be the case, that to think otherwise disgraces BOTH that flag under which I would cling [for my protection?] to an ultimate and reductionist notion of the primacy of official and "precise," languages of expertise—{those bearing an aspired-to *imprimatura*}—AND that flag under which I would cling to an ultimate and reductionist notion of music as if its . . . "really" . . . "only" . . . "all" . . . "just" . . . "about" . . . me: my feelings, my much longed-for transportation to distant lands, my Grandma, my "stuff," etc.)

(By way of a straw man): "Don't whine to me! . . . (He might say) . . . Did I, or anybody, ask you to be a composer? . . . Who cares about your fears, or the rest of your "Oprah" shit! . . . And, if you really were the composer you say you are, wouldn't you be writing "music" instead of sermonizing about gutlessness and contrition? . . . What about a brass quintet. Are you up to that?" . . . (He might say).

PLACE: Blue in Green, (as performed [and probably composed] by Bill Evans).

Truism 6

Given. . . the ongoing territorial and warlike proclivities of human beings—(from Ardrey's naughty but necessary Australopithecine to present day acolytes and aficionados)—it is not surprising (and a truism to boot) that such clotted and stultifying thinking, with the accompanying repertoire of articulative behaviors which it engenders, should characterize, buttress

and/or justify much of what has passed for my (our) musical/social interaction. Composers, acting in good faith, can fear the annihilation of their ideas and externalized concretions perhaps as much as they fear for their lives and the lives of their intimates. Musical constructions, deeply saturated with hopes, dreams, and real feelings become—when derided and dismissed (subjected to acts of violence)—the source of a profound and sometimes irreversible psychological and physical wounding. Why wouldn't I (or you) want to protect myself from this?

PLACE: Piano Concerto, by Milton Babbitt.

(**By way of a straw man**): "If . . . you can't stand the heat" . . . (he might say) . . . (to which I might reply, with all due respect): How much of this "manly" forbearance is but more of the theater of the "bloody battle-ground?" . . . Yet another attempt to prove to a skeptical, and sickly competitive social milieu that even though a you're musician (a composer) you're still a "tough-guy," a "rationalist," as thoughtful as a scientist, capable of coaching football on the side, impervious to sentimentalism. . . that you're worthy of such laudatory appellatives as "objective," "rigorous," "robust," "lucid," "prescient," "perspicacious," "adroit," "disciplined," "grounded-in-history," "fully credentialled" . . . but, yet, for all that, still "cool," "awesome" and "sweet" . . . capable of dispensing the familiar pleasures (simple and perennial): of "drizzling—(by way of yet another periphrastic homage, [this time] to the late Barney Childs, from whom I had two very beautiful and memorable composition lessons in the late '60s)—, warm beverage over the afflicted areas."

"Aren't . . . you just re-fighting the battles of adolescence? . . . (He might ask) . . . angry, because you can't live up either to the demands of a profession or the desires of a public . . . wanting to be free of me and all the other voices that work to keep you serious, try keep you from being a "joke": a "bore" (an embarrassment)? Isn't that what this is all about; self-justification; the culture of complaint: victim-chic?"

PLACE: Om, by John Coltrane.

LISTENING THROUGH FLAGS

Truism 7

As . . . I said awhile back—(didn't I?)—musical compositions are flags, if used as such. But, it seems to me, that more than providing the

service of “flag hood” they are places for the contemplation, observation-enjoyment of and inquiry into—the sounds which inhabit them. They are complex environments (in fact, the very terrain for which they stand [unlike, perhaps, a banner/emblem in the mere ness of symbol; a symbol/ emblem in the mere ness of banner]). And, distinct from any symbolic significance which may be imparted to them, instances of music are entities and identities (unfolding fields of explicit attributes) in and of utterance: some one person’s or group’s sound/time expression, in and by way of the body, exhibiting through their physicality, internal worlds of differentiation and dialectical interactivity at levels large and small. Line, shape, design, trajectory, spatiality, motility, timbre, proportion, symmetry, asymmetry, tendency and teleology-accreted, configured and assembled from various expressions of frequency, length, grain, velocity, pulsation and level of presence—: all, coalesce and “counter-pole” to inform and articulate musics in their plenitude.

PLACE: Taarab Music from Zanzibar, (by the Culture Musical Club).

And . . . these instances of music are given to experience and habitation as variously as there are facets and qualities of awareness (of levels of involvement resident in diverse observers, of virtuosity and specificity of the descriptive languages employed to address them) . . . accessible by way of those implications which their explicit attributes may call forth (inviting analysis, comparison, interpretation and descriptive caprice). They are both more (less) and (other) than any reductive characterization to which my colonizing thought would shape them, and subject to a potential infinity of re-qualification; both, what they are (as if I weren’t here) and what they are (because I am); both, independent manifestations and possibilities for diverse inference (not unlike the persons who bring them into existence). For me, this is the paradoxical (and beautiful) soil in which music is embedded (and, perhaps, the idea of music-as-paradox might be a lovely counter pole to the idea of music-as-flag. [Few use music other than to trigger the most immediate and obvious of associations, but some might come to embrace {enjoy} the paradox musical experience presents by way of the many and contradicting flags which its in-dwelling complexity affords, or, so it seems]).

PLACE: Selected Improvisations, by PhD, by the Paredes-Hatwich Duo:
Robert Paredes (clarinet) Anton Hatwich (contrabass).

In . . . contrast, maybe, flags—(not being the circumstances to which they point)—exist in the mere ness of sign . . . (although, I can readily imagine a flag about a flag, as in some beautiful but wholly non-functional vary-colored-field flapping in the breeze to the delight or confusion of those looking on.) . . . their purpose being to reduce, serving in this, a process whereby complex and diversified wholes may be distilled to few or solitary reference points, the better to facilitate location, identification: embrace, avoidance, or dismissal. By way of their presences (through their agencies), friend can be distinguished from foe; the status of one person can be discerned from that of another; a particular place already discovered can be located again.

PLACE: Deep River, (Spiritual, as performed by Pete Fountain.)

When. . . resident in the functional, flags would seem to be benign enough: (indicating the presence of a desired green on the golf course, pinpointing the location of the consulate, telling you that the admiral's barge is passing). But, when that single attribute (denotation?) for which a flag stands (to which it is seen to be as if "inextricably" connected), is freighted with a host of un-interrogated and sometimes malevolent connotations—(becoming, in turn [and habitually], as if {"inextricably"} fused to the flag and its single attribute to such a degree that flag, attribute, and connotation are perceived to be one and the same, transcending the mere ness of simple and obvious function)—a particular sign for a particular reality becomes a moment of Pavlovian predication: the occasion for free-associative salivation; the source of a veritable mitotic frenzy of conceptual misprisioning . . . (bogus take on bogus take, proliferating *ad infinitum* unto damage).

PLACE: Nocturnes, by Frederic Chopin (as performed by Alexis Weissenberg)

(**By way of a straw man**): (He might say) . . . "Man, is that last bit some purple shit!" . . . "Why don't you get yourself a copy of Fowler, and read the part about simple words, you know, like, in English?" . . . (to which I [might] reply): "It's a sensual thing, you know, like, in the body." . . . You see, I derive a not inconsiderable "jolly" from the feeling and sound of each syllable as its phonemic touch-points, articulate my tongue (or, is it the other way 'round). . . the Eros of the Aulos (if you know the tune).

PLACE: Violin Concerto, by Samuel Barber.

It . . . seems to me that when our musics, our races, our national origins, our genders, our sexual orientations, our environments, or our religious affiliations (or lack thereof) become a flag, signifying little or nothing more than the mere ness of someone's idea of "music," "race," "national origin," "gender," "sexual orientation," "environment" or "religious affiliation" (as if that is all that could or would be said), it is—however "symbolic"—a palpable act against us: a pre-figurative presentation of violence in the small, presaging potential future metastasis of far greater range and import. . . and, by way of it, we are certainly diminished and potentially damaged.

PLACE: Words and Music, by Samuel Beckett/Morton Feldman.

When. . . malevolently-connoted flags—occasioning the dismissal of our very selves, as we are—are made of the passports we carry, or the relative inclines of our noses, or the pitches of our occipital crests, or the fact that our Grandparents came from Chihuahua—(or—as in the case of my own Grandmother, who couldn't read the example of "practical English" drawn from Shakespeare (?) which the citizenship examiners so "kindly" required of her as proof of "literacy"—the fact one's English is not at a level at which even most native speakers do not function) . . . (it seems to me) . . . that we are certainly diminished and potentially damaged.

PLACE: Free Range Rats, by the John Carlson quartet.

When. . . malevolently connoted flags are made of the fact that the musics we make don't (sometimes) have tunes you can hum, or ABA's you can follow, or rigorous and well-integrated systems of pitch relationship you can validate and admire, or a beat to drive you to unbridled arousal—(or beatlessness, for that feeling of complete stillness and peace you require) . . . (it seems to me) . . . we are certainly diminished and potentially damaged.

PLACE: Listening I Hear (text-music), by Robert Paredes.

When. . . the fact, dare I say the "truth"—(or, is this currently as much the "crock"-designation as meaning)—of the phenomenally given, and the potential for knowledge of and about it, falls casualty to the impoverishment rendered inevitable by willy-nilly recourse to the "flag" of an impoverished and largely symbolic language—to the paucity of the gloss—(it seems to me) . . . we are certainly diminished and potentially damaged.

PLACE: Mouthpiece II, by Kenneth Gaburo.

It . . . seems to me . . . that the perennial violences of racism, xenophobia, gender-bias, homophobia, religious bigotry, environmental insensitivity, and the scorn and vilification of unfamiliar music (yet another form of fear of the unknown, rooted in language bias) . . . are all deeply connected to this deadly confusion of reality for qualified sign: this malevolent reification formed of the un-interrogated merger of a symbol (idea) with the reality to which it points, accompanied by silence in the face of the fact . . . as if no more needs to be said.

(**By way of a straw man**): "Duh!" . . . (He [might] say) . . . "You don't seem to be able to say anything that isn't a truism . . . Every time you tape a noun to a verb, you reinvent the wheel . . . And, anyway, you're not a semiotician! . . . You're not a psychologist or, a philosopher (or, a preacher, I might add) . . . You have no credentials to qualify you to speak on issues other than those pertaining to the right way to play a piece of music. You're a musician! Belay the pretentious posturing and just play your clarinet! We like that: sometimes." . . . (to which I might reply that even though I am (most of the time) "just" a musician, I (some of the time) oblige myself to attempt an understanding of my situation as a human being, and that—(in further periphrastic homage to John Fowles and his book, *the Aristos*)—I confer upon myself the right to an opinion on any matter bearing on my life . . . and, in any event, hiding behind the "licorice stick"—(as if it were the sum-total of my identity: as if the clarinet were a flag for me-as-if-me-and-no-other-me)—has never particularly "cut" it . . . (with me).

PLACE: Tilbury 1,2,3, by Christian Wolff.

It . . . seems to me . . . that when reduced to the function of a "flag," (as previously construed) instances of music cease to be much more than that single use to which the flag obliges them. In their subsumption to unitary levels of signification and articulation—(in their reduction to a "mere ness")—the complexities which they exhibit (and possibilities for use which might otherwise present themselves by virtue of a more open and inquiring reception) are diminished and/or disappeared: filtered away to the impoverishment of both observer and observed.

Yet—even while immersed in this (our own particular) malevolent gloss on the history of human social interaction—, we continue to reduce persons to the flags we make of them (and music's to the flags we make of them), ignoring the arguments made by, and on behalf of, both for a fair

hearing. What would it take, finally to be able to hear them, and what's the profession of music got to do with the facilitation of such an enabling? Why can't we see, hear, smell, touch and taste what's in front of us without the demand that it be some other experience we would have preferred to have had? . . . (And, what could the profession of music have to do with learning to do that?).

PLACE: Triangulation: Improvisations, by the Lewis, Turetzky, Golia Trio.

I. . . don't know what "we" can (or ought) to do about these matters—(or how "we" can [or ought] to think about them)—but, maybe . . . despite my best intentions, I further this malevolent cycle. Not because I am possessed of "agonistic" struggles, and commit myself to living in and through them—(coming to understand and exorcise them)—via the agency of my various creative media, but, that, by dint of some perennial and perhaps organic proclivity for a continually narrowing self-absorption (a reduction of self to "self"?), I have come to think (to believe) that I am the only one so engaged, so preoccupied, so obsessed, so agonized . . . that my struggles are the world's . . . as if the world weren't there . . . (And),

PLACE: Four Comic Tangos, by Ric Cupples.

Maybe . . . despite my best intentions, I aid and abet this cycle of malevolence because in my discomfort, my embarrassment, my rage, my self-absorption—my own sense of humiliation and self-annihilation—I have made of your work (and you) a flag, signifying (malevolently connoting?) not only the presence of your work (and you), but the non-presence of my work (and me). And I can hear little else in its light, beyond the fact and quality of this pain . . . in response to this pain . . . in response to this pain . . . ad nauseam.

Maybe . . . to listen without hope of reward (actively, tenaciously) might bring me nearer the beginnings of a breakout (a breakthrough), some rent in the fibers of habitual response and justificative language by which the cycle is stitched together . . . some unraveling of the noose. But its far easier, and more immediately soothing, to create a self-aggrandizing theater of adversaries, peopled with miscreants, failures, and heretics; "mountebanks," "nincompoops," and "dilettantes"; ("phonies," "fools," and "dabblers") . . . old Paul's "ranks of the nitwits and the

ungifted," from which our "noble 'art of composition' " must be protected). Its far easier to demonize, to reduce your work (and you) to a flag, which signifies not only the fact and quality of my deep trouble with you—(wriggling, itching; spiking hot-and-cold at once when not the source of an all-pervasive lethargy)—but for its imagined cause in your music, or your person—(or something else about you)—(as if you-as-(a)-you didn't exist; and your work-as-(a)-work didn't exist; and my work-as-(a)-work didn't exist; and I-as-(an)-I, didn't exist. . . only the contracting web of connotative attributes causing my mind/body to coil in on itself to complete involution).

What
would happen if I were to
 listen
through and beyond the flag I would make of my pain; to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of my embarrass-
ment (at you . . . for you . . . at myself, for myself); to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of my rage at
my perception that I am not here to me, or, much, to anyone else; to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of my suspi-
cion (my belief) that your music is not "music" (or, your humanity, not
"humanity"); to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of my need to
validate some right that I think I have to be everybody's "judge;" to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of the "ear-
jerk" nattering (the unremitting noise) of the mere ness of my own likes
in response to every unfamiliarity; to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of my idea of
the "right" music (of my thought that there ought even to be a "right"
music); to
listen
 through and beyond the flag I would make of some show-
biz, art-history, soap-opera of a "them" and an "us"—Indeed, to ask what
it means; to

listen,

and then, by way of an answer, to proceed—with a measure of seriousness—towards the possibility of

hearing

(as if there might be something more?)

PLACE: Language, as a Music, by Benjamin Boretz.

In his collection of essays of the same name—(to which [along with Kenneth Gaburo's "Adio"] I am indebted for causing me to think about damage)—the author Wendell Berry asks "What Are People For?" . . . and in sympathy, I wonder (and often) what music is for.

PLACE: Anatomy of a Murder (film score), by Duke Ellington.

Could . . . it be that one good reason for music to be here is so that I (we) can have a "word/place" for sound: a context, distinct from the rest of the world's languages of "stratagem and spoil;" an occasion to practice listening and hearing and speaking and thinking about everything I hear? . . . (and) . . . what if "music" were not thought to be (in point of fact) anyone music, or set of musics—or even all instances of (all) music—but this name-now-become-locus-of-connection denoting the space between observers, transmitters, and all-sound: a circumstance not ultimately reducible to any given "what-state"—(as if no "whose")—but a "where," wedded to a "when," in which observer-transmitters and observer-receivers listen to each other (and other than each other)—a "what," not only to be found to within the physical boundaries of a single instance of utterance, but in the interstices defined (and informed) of whos and their hearings of it.

Could . . . it be that music is here to help me to listen and hear more thoughtfully and with greater commitment, not only in order to acquire some greater ability to discern between what is and isn't "good" for me to hear—if my "ears" are to attain that much-vaunted and coveted level of "cultivation"—but with the hope of experiencing some deeper and more complete presence to (and appreciation of) the superabundant whole of my earspace: not, to the end that I become, willy-nilly and unthinkingly accepting—as in some situation in which tolerance and amiability are

but disguised forms of dismissal, pusillanimity, capitulation, and strategic machination)—but that I might be able to craft a continuing openness to the possibility of learning something more, or other, (feeling something more or other) than I know—(and feel)—already.

I . . . would like to be able to listen . . . and finally be able to hear . . . more sensitively, more acutely, more comprehensively, than I now do. And, I would like to continue to find new ways to share this listening and inquiry.

I'm . . . not sure that I know (or, will ever quite know) how to do this, but the task is composition (sure enough) . . . (or, so it seems to me) . . . even if a brass quintet is not among the traces left behind.

PLACE: Silent Demonstration 1970 (performance piece—involving the display of empty signs and complete silence as an expression of protest), by Robert Paredes.

CODA 1 (Unfinished Business)

There . . . are those for whom a music's significance can only be demonstrated by the degree to which one is prepared to fight the bitterest battles on its behalf, prepared to draw blood, metaphorically if not physically and, perhaps, I am still one of these, albeit, not without reluctance. In this light, some of me still feels that, in the right circumstances, I could strike a blow for music. But what would that signify? Would it really be for "music's sake that I did this? (Or, is this not the most egregious of falsifications, i.e., the idea that music "needs" this [or indeed, anything] of me: that it is "music" rather than me which has the need, [does] the "needing"?).

PLACE: Roaratorio, by John Cage.

CODA 2: (Unfinished Business)

Throughout . . . most of my life, I have believed deeply in the defense of unfamiliar, alternative, or unpopular musics, musics for which their makers and supporters have suffered for little remuneration or to little acclaim: flatfooted . . . incompetent . . . pedestrian . . . wheezing . . . gnarly . . . benighted . . . halting . . . homely . . . prolix . . . desiccated . . . purple . . . unprepossessing and ridiculously capricious musics which may have

little if any chance to be heard. Musics of groups and individuals who, by virtue of an unregenerate (or unavoidable) honesty, find themselves caught between the dangers of disappearance and discovery: . . . between the onslaught of a rapacious commercial culture—which ingests every useable and consumable source of nutrition in its path (even as it excretes an information-poor morass of saleable self-similarity under the glitzy flag of a “glamour-puss” culture of “diverse” choice)—and a statistically-obsessed and judgment-driven culture of the “collectable,” in which the valorization of the masterwork, the rigidification of, and limitation on, the modes and number of its attendant discourses, and the implementation of musics as counters in the game of strategic manipulation—(of “one-up-man-ship” in the war for power, waged by speed)—conduce to the perception that music is finally little more than an accretion of “objects”—(of “things,” “flags”)—having only or merely an emblematic significance, divorced from any apparent source in flesh.

PLACE: Absolving Neophilia, as performed by the Lee Morgan Quintet.

CODA 3; (Unfinished Business)

Preliminary “Scratch” 1:

I . . . am not particularly uncomfortable with musical compositions being taken as “representative”—specifically, in cases in which their makers invite such readings—as long as it is also recognized and honored that a given work is more than anyone signification to which it gives rise, that there is a maker who said what they said for reasons of their own (not mine, or yours?), and that there needs to be a willingness to take this into account when thinking about them. . . (I realize that this flies in the face of the idea of the “masterwork” as standing alone [which they don’t really do anyway, do they? . . . insofar as their very presence depends on the fact that someone writes them, someone plays them, and someone hears them!]). As previously stipulated—(by now to the point of abject torpor)—musical works are particular identities giving rise to a plurality of ways to hear and talk about them (ways, analytical and descriptive; traditional and “off-the-wall: fluid, speculative, empirical or capricious” in methodology and style). To the end of some deeper experience of musical expressions in their wholeness, anything which can be learned, should be. . . (while, as well, recognizing that sometimes enough is “enough.”)

PLACE: **Symphony #5**, by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Preliminary “Scratch” 2:

With . . . respect to my own work, I am not opposed to its being taken for a flag, provided its not a (“the”) wrong one. I would not like to think that my work is heard to be supportive or affirmative of institutions or circumstances (or persons, for that matter) to which I am opposed, or for which I bear a deep antipathy—(and there are issues with which I am in sympathy, and would not decline the perception that my music is too). But, for all that, I prefer that my work be listened to, experienced (given a fresh hearing) for the potential “wilderness” which it might make possible before becoming subject to rampant attribution. (In this light, I am reminded that there are specific cases in my own composition in which I regard my own attributions (what I say about the given work, its meta-language) to be an integral component in and of its construction: its identity. In these works, my interest has been to explore the idea of a musics coming to be perceived (heard) as if residing somewhere between sound world's and word-worlds, as if a system of polyphonic inter-qualification of the verbal and acoustic domains (“defining” some difficult to grasp, interstitial, circumstance/space in which the language utilized to describe a sound-world may be understood to significantly inform (change, shape?) the way it is heard (understood?) . . . (Both) . . . (And) . . . (Under these circumstances, I might [well] ask myself what a “fresh” hearing means).

PLACE: **Weekly Sessions**, by the Improviser's Orchestra of the University of Iowa.

Preliminary “Scratch” 3:

Unless . . . I'm working to order, it seems to me that when I'm composing alone, “you,” are an inference—(my idea of you)—: a parent, a lover, a professor; the audience that hated me; the audience that adored (or went to sleep on) me; the friends I want, the friends I don't want—a straw man (or woman), someone to be placated, seduced, banished or other wise “circumstanced” before or during the process of getting me closer to me . . . to what I actually want from the activity of composing.

PLACE: **Electronic Music**, by Jean DuBuffet.

Traditionally . . . (and for reasons of mental health), I have located my music-making to within several social domains. First, but not of more importance, there is the music I need to do by and for myself, like the old-time electronic music which I did for so long . . . (it felt like a very self-centered activity and I enjoyed it as such!). I delighted in the drama of me, alone in my cavern, adjusting the lights, sweeping the floor, positioning the loudspeakers (and circling around them), waiting for the right moment to strike, tweaking the various pots in the half-light, listening hard to every emanation nattering from behind the speakers' grill. Yet, even in this situation, some sense of a "you"—(my idea of you)—was never completely absent, nor, could it entirely be banished. What would so and so think, I (might) ask? . . . (even without quite knowing that I had).

PLACE: Daydream, by Billy Strayhorn (as performed by Tony Scott).

Then . . . there is the music which I do collectively: music which I compose in co-participation with other people through sound-interaction and conversation. In this context, my own particular view of how a sound-circumstance should be composed is of much less interest than that, by turns, clumsy and elegant acoustical field (unmediated by macro-makers) which I hear as we unfold it together. In this situation, I can practice the kind of listening—the kind of more comprehensive hearing—I want to acquire: a listening which tries to hear what's there, rather than what I would have preferred to have heard. In this work, "you," as (a) reality, are an integral part.

PLACE: Seven Pastorales, by Lou Harrison.

Lately . . . the "lion's" share of my music-making has consisted of such real-time sound conversation, and the social ramifications of music-making have assumed a foreground position in my thinking. In large part, this has come about because I feel that (for me) the narrow preoccupation with music as if a search for "objects"—significant, primarily, for the idiomatic "purity" (becoming chauvinism) which they exhibit and embody—, is not a particularly interesting or useful avenue to pursue. In their search for relevant expression, musicians create (choose) the languages they need, and it is far more compelling for me to encounter each individual instance of music as if evidence of the particular and personal culture which informs it as it is (a culture of one, or of several). Perhaps, in this, I more become the anthropologist I would prefer to

be—(experiencing and inquiring into the explicit musical realities and implications arising there from—[the meanings resonant within, between, and outside of their various tissues of connection]—occasioned by particular musical work)—rather than a pundit (a taste-maker) replete with his attendant rag-bag of informed opinion about what (all) music is or is not (should or shouldn't be). The pitting of idiom against idiom, style against style, methodology against methodology as if there indeed were some historical imperative that a particular language or embodied concern should gain ascendancy, should become as if “universal”—(as if this were all musicians had to do in the early twenty-first century)—seems to me to constitute a not inconsiderable impediment to the needed construction and evolution of viable social alternatives to that tsunami of “universal-language-music” which inundates us through the good offices of multi-national corporations. More would seem to be at stake than the traditional battle over whether music should (or should not) sound like B-minor (or a freight-train); (or uses a cello or a laptop to do what it does: be what it is). Can we say what we want to say, and hear one another, as we are, for relevant example? (If this . . . [the aforementioned, should] . . . be . . . [construable as some {my own} version of] . . . “them and us” . . . [I suppose I {and you} may] . . . make the most of it . . . [or, so, it seems to me]).

PLACE: Apartment House 1776, by John Cage.

(**By way of a straw man**): “It . . . can hardly fail to be obvious to you that most of your “places,” are accessible only through recordings—(only by virtue of the big-money music you execrate)—and, of necessity, that is the way you probably experienced them. Aren’t you out on something of a limb here? . . . And, I also notice that examples of “popular music” among your places are slim and none. Just how all-encompassing is your approach to listening? . . .” (He might [well] say).

PLACE: In Delius' Sleep, by Harold Budd.

As regards the “I” in “it,” (my self in my composition) it seems to me that while I—(qua interconnecting fields of descriptive language)—can be in (and of) the work, I—(qua flesh and blood reality)—can most manifestly not (be). What of “me” is “in” the work is the system of “traces” I construct (e.g., of my idiosyncratic motility, the cadence of my speech, etc.). In this light, my improvised compositions committed directly to

tape, or other storage media, would seem to be the most likely expressions of my “self-in-the-artifact” (being imaginable as “literal” traces, i.e., repeatable “reproductions,” of what my body did in a given sound-circumstance; a step removed [from the body] and by way of being a very loose (!) acoustic analog to a snapshot). Two steps removed from the body and therefore less likely candidates for this designation are my scores and other instructive texts: (These, I might think of as “figurative” traces, i.e., descriptions of what my body did, becoming instructions for how someone else’s body may, to some extent, reconstitute mine). (By way of an aside, these distinctions, while not without interest and potential utility, sadden, to the degree that they remind me that I am untrue to the sentimental animism which I embrace (now and again). To really feel (to believe) that there is life in “things”—(that even things are not quite “things,” but variegated fields, intertwining streams, of perpetual and diverse moving(s) which blunder from time to time into the evocation of substance)—might indeed be a very beautiful state in which to dwell). (Maybe [by way of “shocking” admission] my work as a whole has been a kind of search for the feeling that I am really connected to something (I make); that I embrace improvisation, at all skill levels, because making music with people (feeling connected) is (almost?) more important than the quality or interest of music which results . . . (there, I said it).

PLACE: Double Dachshund Memory Trace, by Warren Burt.

Is . . . “fuck you,” ever a musical option I would consider (as in the extreme edge of a last resort)? Given certain (for me, local) political developments such as the State of Iowa’s recently-embraced English-only, dumb-show—(certainly “diminishing and potentially damaging the very people the state says it needs to drag it out of its economic doldrums)—I incline, however tentatively, to a yes. But “fuck you” is itself just another kind of flag we make of our sense of hopelessness with each other (you as my idea of some condition with which I am unable to cope), and, on a global scale, it gives every appearance of having become the first-order, knee-jerk, social response of choice. Some are saying it with bombs in protection of their hatred and bigotry. Some are saying it with dishonest accounting in protection of what they imagine to be their “right” to acquire and flaunt egregious wealth in the face of want. Some are saying it with rapacious and unthinking development (replacing life with death) in advance of what they imagine to be their “right” to “economic freedom.” And, some say it by way of the velvet-gloved or

brass-knuckled hand they have in the ongoing suppression of free, creative, speech . . . (to protect themselves [one imagines] from a more complete knowledge of the extent to which their own creative potential has been willfully and systematically obliterated.

But . . . however it is said—(and for whatever reason we say it)—we pay (and will continue to pay) . . . (and dearly) . . . for the complete collapse of creative potential which it represents.

One might ask. . . (I might ask) . . . When. . . (when) . . . will we be willing . . . even to begin to hear . . . what's being said to us . . . for . . . what . . . it . . . is . . . ?

PLACE: The Ready Made Boomerang, by Pauline Oliveros and the Deep Listening Band

By ... way of making an end to the end—(a coda to the coda, if you will)— maybe my answer for myself (feeble as it may read) is to think of the positions I hold more as motels than as tombs (as places to stay for the night on the road, rather than repositories to house remains till the end of time) . . . to keep my flag in motion; to keep my thought fluid (erring, as it were, on the side of movement), while at the same time trying, like hell, to keep it anchored in an awareness that there is always a you, who wants to live as much—to have your say as much—as I . . . As you are . . . As I am.

PLACE:

Angels and Insects, by David Dunn.

PLACE:

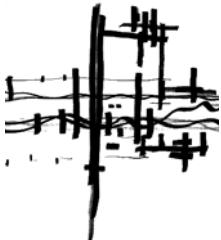
Piano Music, by Cornelius Cardew.

PLACE:

Free Music, by Hermeto Paschoal

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Iowa City, 7/29/02



After ... In ... After

I. AFTER

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

"Curious" is, of course, not quite the right word to describe the event. And, it is not quite "the event" which "curious" describes but rather what are, particularly and urgently, feelings of my own about it: untethered observations—as much of the gut as the head—(as much of fantasy as epistemology)—experienced in real time as I thought-(as-I-played-as-I thought) about what (and how) I could add to the collective unfolding; how I could affect change in the shape and tenor of it; whether I should even try. And, as descriptive language goes, it (i.e., "curious") feels a bit like "soft-soap." There is about it something of the soothing emolument, by way of its imperial euphemism-cum-obfuscation in the form of a "plummy" bit of neo-Victorian "brit-speak" (said to Doctor Watson when

the “game is afoot”: as in the “measured” response to real feelings of fear, embarrassment and loneliness-in-the-crowd, even though the measure of comfort to be had comes “roughened” with a pinch (or, is it rather more of a spike?) of displeasure that I can still feel embarrassed by any behavior(s) enacted in such a musical context.

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

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

I am referring here to a further feeling that the more aggressive, combatively articulated, expressions which I experienced in last night’s play were somehow directed at me, personally—eliciting as a result a marked desire to make myself smaller; to go into the mental equivalent of a defensive crouch; to seek (so to speak) refuge in the wood-work. In light of this (for me) an all-too familiar moment of uneasiness (vertiginous, ingressive, retractile and not a little sickening) . . . what else might there be (so as to make the attempt at re-balance: at a keeping-up of appearances; a softening of effects; a saving of face) but the offer to self, from self, of a contextualizing word or two—the better to feel better?

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

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

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

Once our colleague had advanced this idea to the group and its potential as a guiding context seemed to be at least that little bit clear, we initiated a perhaps too-cursory discussion in address (hoping to “thicken the

paint"). But the idea that a potential clarity might be achieved through preliminary discourse could not hope to override the ever-present "itch" to get on with it . . . and . . . so . . . our play . . .

began . . .

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

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

Once more, from the usual unprepossessing (almost perfunctory) beginnings, sounds are heard to "tip-toe," "shuffle," "stumble" "snort" and "fart" their various ways into the space; "signing-in" for their makers as they do . . . And after a self-imposed, now-obligatory, waiting period I, too, "check in," adding my own shy, "toe in the dirt," "aw-shucks," clarion-register, pitch-class, E, which I've micro-tonally inflected in the hope of transforming it from something more immediately identifiable as "note" to something which might be experienced, instead, as if an oscillating strand of "color(s)"—within and against which emergent texts/voices might unfold: be set . . . (A persistent "shtick" of mine: this matter of trying to hear something else in a note besides its "note-hood"; some other values in a concatenation of pitch-classes besides their identities as delineators of intervallic relationship . . . But aren't intervals everywhere, sport? . . . Aren't we drowning in them? . . . Try eating a sandwich or getting your teeth fixed without an interval in attendance . . . But, never mind that) . . . Now . . .

Short . . . after my " inching-in," the tenor-saxophone player announces his presence—not with a tidy array of discrete pitches, but by hurling a scatter of slack-jaw, mid-range "splat-o-phonic" "clods" at the gathering texture with seeming impunity . . . He is joined by the pianist who

sympathetically “chips” out brittle, angular, mid-range motives which I hear as if wanting to articulate some unfolding of rhythmic asymmetries suggestive of a “Latin” groove—(which never quite gains support nor moves beyond an overall sense of . . . “well . . . maybe?”) . . . And even as these prefatory (if not unpromising) “shots in the dark” are heard to rise up and be rendered unto nowhere, fragments of the requested spoken text are beginning to emerge, enunciated in a variety of vocal colors and characterizations which alternately fade out (as convictions flag) and recur with time and even greater presence, as people get braver and tougher about using their voices.

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

What is being said? . . .

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

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

But I’m hearing another, more soloistic, voice now—one situated very much in the foreground. Someone is shouting “You must walk the

bridge" as if in point of fact to rattle one. The immediate effect is to jolt, but I'm not taken completely by surprise as he has hurled this ballista in previous plays and is almost certain to bark it out a few more times before the night is over. In past, the sound of it has variously evoked in me an assortment of resonances (e.g., Hart Crane, Sonny Rollins and the B-section of Skylark—to say nothing of dental plates)—but, I suspect it has a particular significance for its utterer/author and I'm curious just what that might be . . . I must ask him, sometime) . . . In response, my every instinct tells me to shout something back (if I could but bring myself to do it). For now, however, not knowing quite what to say (to shout), I forswear immediate talk-back and sit silently for a while before returning to my clarinet and the micro-tonal complex which I've been happily constructing with it—(playing in the sandbox quite alone; till doomsday, don't you know)—until, a little later, my self-absorbed hearing is drawn outside its cocoon to perceive a gauzy, shimmering, organism formed of three (or is it four?) sliding pitch-contours, unfolded—ever so delicately—by the strings . . . inter-twining and oscillating, within and between. The particular quality of this new acoustical circumstance causes me to remember the time when I lived in Australia—in Middle Park, Victoria—not far from the lagoon where Percy Grainger is supposed to have gotten the idea for his "Free Music." We used to go there, now and then, to scan and interrogate that legendary, aqueous, ur-text for evidence of comparable sound worlds: attempting to re-constitute—to transcribe—the water-waves into sound-waves as maybe Percy might have done . . . trying to imagine just what he heard. My mind's-ear(s)-with-eye(s) seem(s) to see and hear it quite clearly (this imagery from the past) and, in response, I bore further into my own "pitch-wiggly" "water-color," "smudge," both, so as to stitch a further sound-thread into the intricate mesh which my colleagues are creating and to contribute some further gloss of my own to this very nice memory of Grainger's bit of wet . . . Although, I'd never interrupt sounds inhabiting such a beautiful place with an instruction to this effect, some of me hopes that (at least) more—if not all—of the group will follow our lead, to make the whole room shimmer like an Albert Park water-score in mid summer . . . But . . . now—perhaps dancing to a tune of his (own) remembering—(the earlier Latin groove?)—our bass player has other ideas: moving purposefully to recalibrate the whole lot of us in pronounced oblique, vis-a-vis, the macro-mood of this moment's music . . . setting up a vamp which, again, he will keep alive for a little while but, then, allow to expire before anything much has a chance to assemble around it . . .

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

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

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

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

I suppose, eventually, I’ll have to give it up and get with somebody else’s program, just to be sociable—(don’t you know)—but, for now, I finally have my own undeniably salubrious thing to do and, so, I do it . . . which means nothing to the rest of the group for what feels like quite a little while . . . until . . . at some juncture—(and without my being but vaguely aware that it’s happened)—I hear this (my) sound to have been joined by (merged with/absorbed into?) another’s resonant impulse. Someone’s

"talking" to me—and in a sympathetic language conducive (or so it sounds) to the co-construction of one of those bi-faceted signals which Robert Erickson might have called a "timbral fusion" or "fused sonority" (as in some synergic compound timbre, much more (and/or other) than any individual, contributing, element of articulation might be heard to manifest, in and by itself . . . And, this . . . (now) . . . (our) . . . nascent collaborative sound-fusion is beginning to "read-out" to me as if a brand-new signal . . . an idiosyncratic acoustic possessed of its own unique character and exhibiting a "bosky," "grainy," undulating poetry somewhere between murmuring and nattering . . . as in some utterance sounding more speech-like than horn-like; more "elemental" than "musical": more "raw" than "cooked"—(although "cooked" it is, to be sure). And, as I continue to play with my eyes closed—(partially to concentrate on hearing and partially to compensate for my never quite eradicable shyness)—I am initially confused as to the origin of this added help . . . but, in time, however, it dawns on me that I'm hearing our French horn player, although her signal is not immediately recognizable as a horn sound, played in the conventional way.

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

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

All around this tenuous foundation. sounds collide . . . sounds collude . . . sounds coalesce, overlap and intertwine—surge now and again to the foreground with confidence, or ambivalently 'bottom-out,' to leave a

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

But . . .

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

Are these verbal expressions as I imagine them to be courtesy of the psycho-dramatic mess which I seem to be fueling and elaborating (i.e., verbal bricks, hurled at my flimsy defenses . . . some vulgar means of doing a mindless "dump" on this, our "happy time together" . . . a way of getting under my skin (of finding out what I care about or if, indeed, I am other than what I have lately appeared to be: disengaged, disinterested—weary) . . . a stratagem for telling me—[without really saying it, out-right, that is)—that, just now, I'm a waste of their time)? . . .

Maybe . . .

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

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

(But . . . now . . . I am dimly aware of a faint, woody rumble . . . [finger tips on the contrabass body?] . . . of dry, tight, high-frequency pizzicati

emanating from the violinist's peg box . . . of a stabbing, heavily-accented, note repeated in the trumpet . . . again and again) . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

Such a lot they've gotten . . .

Such a lot they get. . .

And then they're asked to smile. . .

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

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

(Now. . . in the midst of a cloud of pizzicato string-ostinati, serving to underpin the “slaps,” “bonks,” “knoncks,” “slanks,” “twangs,” “prinks,” and sundry other crepitations of the piano-prepared—[and cushioning some Ornette imitations being dished up with bravery)—I’m thinking of Mack [who looked like Bert Lahr’s lion in the Wizard of Oz] . . . There he is . . . up late at night . . . trying to get a grip on his pain, surrounded by

every one of their twelve cats. . . amiable as ever in his strained forbearance . . . a sweetly leonine cynosure at the vortex of a vari-speed, multi-colored, sinuous, round-dance of sympathetic feline fur) . . .

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

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

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

But, . . . now . . . sensing the onset of tantrum, I return to reality—(as that word may be understood to imply or connote, some circumstance outside the one careening on, unchecked, in my head)—and, in consequence, allow myself to listen to some singing: a welcome and undeniably Schön—(if somewhat histrionically executed hint of—WeBergian melodic architecture (sensual lines of widely dis-spaced—kinda “whiny”—intervallic inscription, ever so deftly articulated and dynamically

nuanced; up and down [and up again] . . . A Mittel-European meow-stimme : The second-Viennese cats, arching their backs, posing for Klimt, cruising für die Schlagsahne) . . . And, over to the left—adding yet another but, strangely not inappropriate layer to this evocation of the fin-de-siècle once removed—the pianist is playing him some licks right out of daytime television . . . (It's a standing joke between us and, yes, I do see the beautiful blond with the glistening, ruby-red lips, on the arm of the fifty-something rich guy with the hawk-like face; the predator's eyes and the graying temples; the achingly minimal but oh so suggestive take on the mother tongue.) . . .

By way of counterpoint to this moment of musical titillation—(or is it more in the nature of mordent commentary?)—some members of the group now offer up a sporadic series of vigorously asserted projectile-showers—(sax-splats and trumpet-squeals, and violin martelatti, subjecting the preciousness of it all to a veritable “drubbing”)—and out of these will emerge what seem, in contrast, like quite overt, if entirely collegial, attempts by the maybe disenfranchised-feeling others to quiet—(and thin)—the accumulated texture down—(and out)—to a few, barely substantive, strands of a more manageable (habitable) angel-hair . . . This done . . . we limp about in the ambiguous after-space . . . testing the water . . . sizing up the potential opposition until our nomad sounds acquire, finally, a more context-specific crafting through which is assembled a round-like structure of barely perceptible susurrations in fragile interlace where we'll all live for a time until—in obvious dissent from this lingering moment of tranquility—the bassist sets up yet another vamp (this time perhaps hoping that a kind of music more obviously “jazz-like” in character will evolve in its light). He (this bass-guy) is nothing if not persistent—(positively “hard-assed” I suspect he can be, behind the gentlemanly [and gentle] countenance)—and he's caught our attention big time . . . But the jazz part of his mission is doomed, from the start, to an ignominious “fizzle” as the rest of the band—except for me (and, perhaps, my horn-playing friend)—immediately interpret the vamp as an occasion to blow (to bray) senza tempo, and without restraint. . .

Here it is, the near-homogenizing, “music in your face” of cultural rectification, the aforementioned “sound-fist”: a veritable tsunami of “to hell with it.” Just what I thought I wanted, or wanted to want, and, yet, now that it's here, I find that I'm not really up to it . . . The resulting and

downright horrific eight-part colla-parte chisels its way into my ear-holes, incinerating the includes, strangulating the stapedes, causing specific of the cilia to keen and whine away like (you guessed it) a dentist's drill or some highly exercised and well-amplified consort of mosquitoes—(Or, how about a matched pair of Odyssean "Sireens," in resonant sooth?)—and although I must, perforce, do my own part to make this moment of un-leashed power happen with even greater intensity, I find myself wishing, at the same time, that it would all go away and, so, make to steel myself for what may prove a protracted and not very pleasant period of merely hanging on . . .

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

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

This. . . sound: . . .

In its ragged beauty, delicacy, and sense of manifest harmlessness—it has assumed for me, now, the representative identity of a precious exemplar: a flower, or a spider's web, or a small animal (Tasmanian Devils, notwithstanding). More than that, it is now by way of a safe place—an incipient psychic enclave-nested within the hostile surround

which I imagine our play has become. And, as well, I can understand and locate it in a political context: as an occasion for me to draw yet another—even if merely symbolic—line in the sand in my own private and largely internalized war with insensitivity (yes, mine as well as “theirs”) . . . with that un-interrogated and devastatingly destructive, “knee-jerk,” valorization of male arrogance which I believe deep-structurally informs and feeds most every outrage of human-on-human—human-on-environment—and which, most certainly, informs our (recent foreign policy) . . . with my memories of those of our “neighbors” who painted anti-Mexican slurs and obscenities on our backyard walls . . . (who encouraged their dog to attack us . . . who pelted my grandmother with rocks whenever she tried to hang out the wash . . . who publicly mocked my mother’s painfully obvious infirmities—who hounded us until, finally and literally, we read the writing . . . and moved . . . But, I am not alone . . . Far from it . . . Or, so says . . . this . . . sound . . . a . . . (our) . . . shared expression) . . .

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

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

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

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

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

Still . . . for all the above and my own rather extensive history of practical involvement with this world of over-familiar structures—articulated in and through an array of entertainment-driven licks and postures which, rightly or wrongly, I think of as resistant, if not inimical, to thought (to reasoned discourse, to critique, to the construction of distinctions)—there is still something of music (in music) which continues to stimulate a desire in me to speculate (and freely) about it . . . And this so-called “free,” “open-ended,” “participatory.” “(hopefully)-non-authoritarian,” “pan-idiomatic,” collective music-making with which I have so long been preoccupied and engaged—(this music of trying to find the

music we don't know, instead of always playing the music we do . . . this music which has, in no small measure, provided me with viable alternatives to the limitations of the "profession")—compels me to it, perhaps because the more I do music, the less I seem to understand it—(why we have it, why I need it, what it is) . . . The more I do it, the more mysterious a "thing" to be doing it seems . . . (Why is that person standing in front of me with a piece of metal hanging out of his mouth: all this sound filling my ears?) . . . (Why am I sitting here, pushing air through a well-aged piece of Grenadilla wood . . . some of my few viable and treasured social relationships in this room, similarly occupied?) . . . What a miracle! . . . How odd! . . . (How curious, don't you know) . . .

If music had been a "done deal," and I had been the so-called "real" musician of story and song, such questions might not, I suppose, have acquired much in the way of relevance? Instead of extensively ruminating on issues and implications, I would have spent my time, more constructively, in trying to find out the rules of the games I wanted to play, and getting on with them: making the gigs and keeping strategically still between sets—learning, in time, the fine and venerable art of "hanging out." Plenty I know do it this way—and beautifully—and I would be the last to deny their contributions or decry their methodology. But, it seems that I—by virtue of a constitutional incapability ever to shut up (even when silent)—am condemned to complicate my own business (to "foul," as it were, my own sleeping place [as students of animal behavior might put it]) by continuing to be drawn to (and to advocate) some notion of music as yet another way to think (and talk) about notions "larger" (or "other") than music as-is: (as-if—"music" really were all . . . that music was about) . . .

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

You know . . . the notion that for a Frenchman, while wine is the occasion for discourse, it may, just as well, be the case that discourse is an

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

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

So . . .) . . .

(as well as the marching band and the big band) . . . why . . . not . . . this music of the phenomenally-given-in-sound in which sense-making is acquired and attributed through a confrontation with the reality of the material: through making and asking rather than "lifting" from a pre-digested model or shaping to some known music mapped, willy-nilly, on to the real work at hand by an institutionally-sanctioned master-mapper?

Why not, at least here, a perpetual movement—(as DD would have it)—towards a definition of music rather than always from one?

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

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

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

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

To wit, music: If—like an unfamiliar type of plant, animal, or person—this, now, (hopefully) unfamiliar collection of sounds (we’re making,

here) can be thought of as if a kind of territory—(a phenomenal field with various and sundry unknown attributes, needful of examination and description)—then what kind of map, what kind of descriptive language, does “it” need from me, that I might better come to know it, as it is?

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

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

But . . .

which am I hearing . . . now . . .

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

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

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

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

And . . .

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

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

But . . .

I'm sick to death . . .

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

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

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

Yes, (I say to myself) . . .

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

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

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

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

My new sound, this—(the aforementioned "bubble")—is beautiful and satisfying to play, but it seems not to be connecting with anyone (or I can't connect it) so I consider a return to my part of the former, comfortable, composite, in hopes that the horn-player might still be interested . . . But, instead of following this very sensible course I opt, rather, for the grand gesture; claiming my space by spewing out a high-energy profusion of Klezmer licks—(in a floridly ornamented and melismatic freygish mode)—which predictably draws the rest of the ensemble to me like clichéd moths to the proverbial flame, in some semblance of a shit-hot dance . . . The collective excitement is palpable . . . The ensemble saws and sweats and pumps, and I'm as caught up in the drama of it all as they, huffing and puffing until my tongue feels unhinged, and my guts begin to ache, and a lower incisor leaks just that little bit of blood (don't you know) . . . Undeniably, it's all very fine—to be sure . . . Yet—(not unlike the previously described display of verbal manipulation)—there is, still something of the "wank" in attendance. It's grandstanding, stump

speech, manipulation, dog and pony stuff: cheap stratagem to pull a favorable focus; to win back that measure of credibility with the group which I imagine I've lost (if ever I had it) . . . I can imagine them, talking amongst themselves afterwards, saying things like: "Bob may be a pretentious windbag, but he sure can play his axe!" (more combative language: the language of "cutting"!) . . . Am I given to shameless self-aggrandizement, even here? . . . Of course! . . . And, why not? . . .

(I have no answer) . . .

But . . .

now . . .

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

shared-safe-signal-sound . . .

flower-noise-cause-place . . .

which . . .

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

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

You know how it goes . . .

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

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

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

cast now . . .

in a moody retrograde of the

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

AFTER

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

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

(B): As sound is . . . Becoming

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

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

Iowa City, September 22, 2003

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

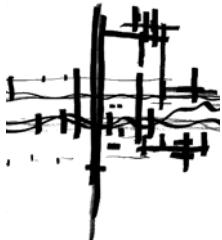
KG is Kenneth Gaburo (1926-93): Composer, teacher, philosopher and former director of the Experimental Music Studios of the University of Iowa, School of Music (1983-92).

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

M S is my wife, Melody Scherubel.

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

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



Might Never Have Been: To and For Benjamin Boretz

As I consider the relationship of Ben Boretz's work to my own thinking and practice, I've not surprisingly focused on improvisation. Ben and I improvised together three times, all of which were in small-ensemble settings, trio-size or larger. And each left me with a feeling of being newly and richly informed about why I was living a "musical" life and imparted to me a more profound sense of how the practice of music might elucidate real human needs and the means to address them. Although I'm most times quite happy to limit my connection with this history to a few available memories of pleasant sound association in the form of particular acoustics, qualities of gesture, and paths of interaction, still, I wonder what a further session with Ben, one on one, might have revealed, both with respect to the sound-scape projected and the real-time questions resulting from its making. Perhaps in the future such a session may yet take place, but in the interim, it's not impossible for me to imagine something like it, unfolding through a narrative "about," in which the rhythm, the overall pulse, the time-space continuum of the form, will etch out through a kind of *en bloc* polyphonic engagement between the time taken to remember something and the time taken to make my imaginary performance in response, a narrative "about," in which I, with my imagined clarinet, try to engage a Ben comprised of traces of his sounds, thought, and discourse, as they reside and resonate in my memory space. . . . How to get started. . . . Ben's "listening as primal composition"? . . . Resonance? . . . The way an impulse outside of one is internalized and comes to articulate, to vibrate, an in-place?

So

Now . . .

This place—my house—is, on the whole, a cozy affair. But, it is just that little bit too close to a freeway to allow for the kind of pristine acoustic environment in which silence, or nearly so, provides the mereness of frame for my own sounds. Ambience is herein the name of the game. For example, there is a constant (if mild) presence of automotive “whosh,” “whirr,” and “growl” to contend with and most of the time I cope bravely (if not perhaps very creatively). . . . So. . . . after settling in and listening awhile to the unavoidable surround, I begin my imagined improvisation with Ben by producing a sustained, low-register E [] which my minimal capacity for synesthetic response characterizes as vaguely gray in color. I hold this sound for a time, modulating the pitch in response to this or that big truck “dopplering” through the back yard; waiting for something about Ben to come up as I play. . . . More and other sounds go down on my canvas of ambience and, after discharging a mostly uninteresting array of nomad impulses, I muddle happily into a new and desirable one—this time, a softly sustained upper-register C# latched on to largely because it makes for pleasant bio-feedback (feeling as good to play as to hear). . . . I maintain this acoustic for a while, articulating it repeatedly in single-breath long tones which I gradually shape downwards, via an alarmingly slack embouchure position, to some simpler, more comfortable, sound which I may think of as a kind of cushion for thought. . . . The simple low E on which I land seems to do nicely for this purpose, so I stay there while taking a look at the process of improvisation itself. . . . What am I doing when I’m doing it? . . . Well, it satisfies me to think of this music-making as if a circularity, a feedback cycle in which the fingers, breath—the body with its extending instrumentalities—project and shape a given sound which will in turn, shape me as I learn from its more unfamiliar attributes. In a sense, I circle around each articulation as I play, making decisions vis-à-vis where to go next based on something which the impulse has revealed by way of its grain, register, semiotic richness, color, quality of physical resonance in the body, or that way in which a particular association of intervals can serve as a marker—either wanted or unwanted—for some music already familiar. A beautiful way to work: this spitting out of stuff and learning from it. But, sometimes, the fun gives way to a loss of control, attributable to that circumstance in which a surfeit of self-inflicted drama conduces to the inadvertent creation of a “lick-machine,” which will, if left alone, evacuate one over-familiar little complex of modern (or other) music after another; disconnected (or seemingly so) from any sense of intentionality or even concern. . . . I’d prefer that such a situation didn’t happen here. . . . Now. . . . So. . . . I’m going slowly this time, committing myself to some application of pre-performance cognitive

sculpture: aka, thinking. . . . In all likelihood, there won't be many sounds as a result. . . . That being the reality of the thing. . . . So be it. . . . but

Now. . . .

I'm taken back. . . .

to the first time Ben and I improvised together.

In 1981 or so U.C.S.D. hosted a symposium on oral traditions in music and quite a number of prominent individuals—composers, theoreticians and performers-made an appearance. I remember (or think that I do) that Daniel Charles was in residence, and I know that it was the first time I would hear the free-improvisation duo of LaDonna Smith and Davy Williams (their stage presence saying Nashville while the music scorched the space, exploding in superabundant, sonically diverse, pan-idiomatic, multi-timbered sheets of hyper-interactive energy). And Ben was there too, reading “Language as a Music,” through which I first gained experience of his particular sense of the beauty, not only of spoken language as musical experience, but of meta-language as spoken language, as musical experience (i.e., “about”—becoming words as music as music; thought, issuing from sound, then, turning around to embrace and acoustically re-embody through verbal-voice).

Later, in response to Ben's posted invitation—announcing that he would be available in response for some kind of improvised exchange with any interested parties—Catherine Schieve and I showed up at the specified location to meet him and play a little. Of the particular sounds which we composed together, sadly, I remember little except that, once again, I had come to a performance space, so imbued with a desire to display my “chops”—to burn the place up with various manifestations of me on me—that any potential interest which our music might have imparted through its now slow, introspective, probing, character was initially quite lost on my self-absorbed ears. But, after reigning myself in and listening a little, I came eventually to be drawn into—to hear—its rather stately, purposive, system, proceeding elegantly by virtue of the unfolding of a series of very beautiful and natural body-time transitions from one sound idea to another. And once this character had been firmly established—and I had learned how to interact within it—I recall there being evident no further sense of the flamboyant, nor, even, very much a flavor of “performance” at all. More importantly, it began to feel that this instance of music-making was both an occasion *for* us to talk *with* us—and, at the same time, for me to undertake a personal search for some “authentic” contributions of my own to add to the exchange—(as in

something considered, something examined, something wanted, or something that might become an occasion for inquiry).

Although I remember only the broad outlines of our performance, I can imagine that the session was not short on interesting sounds and exchanges at the small level. For example, I recall a close-order, micropolyphonic, exchange between the three of us—Ben on ocarina; Catherine on flute and myself on clarinet—suggestive (it now seems) of Levi-Strauss's raw and cooked: of keening birds, *en masse*, filtered through just a trace of the mechanical. As well, I think that I hear the memory of intermittent verbalization: nonce-words and fragments of half-accessible texts; bits of poetry spoken through the instruments and reinforced with sparsely-imposed pitch material. And, inasmuch as we were playing in a very large room full of percussion instruments of all types to which each of us eventually succumbed in the desire to move away from our familiar hand-held means of expression, I experience also the timbral tracery of marimba and vibraphone and diverse drums and the various individual paces of transition (speed of movement) from one medium to another imposing yet another and very spacious macrorhythmic pulsation grid on the unfolding soundscape.

I remember enjoying this experience of music-making very much for itself (to be sure). But (at the risk of a certain pronounced sentimentality) what I perhaps remember more is the sense of welcome that Ben conveyed to me, a complete stranger with no credentials to speak of. Unlike many another and similar situations in which I had found myself, I did not feel that, here, I required a ticket of entry or a diploma or other imprimatur before I might make a sound in Ben's presence, but merely, the desire to interact. And this particular example of open collective inquiry, as first-order fuel for musical exchange, remains with me as a significant referent, informing particularly, my improvisational practice to this day. . . . Baby-simple as it may sound, I think that I learned a great deal about the value to me of simply showing up-of being available in response (as artist, Robert Irwin, would have it)—to whoever would work with you. . . .

Trying, now, to resonate with the memory of ocarinas and percussion, I move to construct a kind of noise-based, quasi-percussive complex of discrete sounds: slack-jawed, thick or double-tongued, attacks articulated ineptly (or so I imagine it) and surrounded by a featherstitch of air. Over time, I'd like to render this collusion of expressions down to yet another air-sound, evocative of pitch. But, preoccupied as I am with trying to get back into our improvisation

of so many years ago, I move myself toward the production of a series of high frequency, salivary pings (watery, bell-like upper partials) which I would play in slow alternation with my clarinetist's take on Ben's sweet-potato sound. While working the material to this end, I am reminded of a particular difficulty I have concerning what might be called the "rhetoric of performance": a something which I've come to be troubled by—uninterested in. This I might variously characterize as a propensity to intimidate the less-powerful through a spectacle of sheer capability and/or to confer on myself—and to convey unremittingly to others—a kind of respectability by way of screaming: "I'm here, I'm here"—"As good as any of them"—"As fast, as loud." . . . But.

Returning to the realm of the unperformed remembered. . . . I like that feeling which I still retain that Ben, Catherine and I came together, not particularly as professionals, with our particular axes to grind, but as people wanting to have a talk. But, of course, I am unavoidably simplifying out of forgetfulness and signifying to excess, as I have no idea what they thought about what we did together and remember almost nothing of the *post facto* observations which we exchanged in its light. Trying to retrieve and signify a largely inaccessible world, I contextualize, based not only on issues which this first interaction with Ben brought to my attention, but on that which I remember needing most from my work at the time. . . i.e., some idea that in addition to those more familiar notions of music-making—in which it is advanced, say, as a means of promulgating pristine artifacts in sound; or of speaking the speak of the dead in the perennial argument/battle for their place in history; or of constructing models for acceptable behavior; or of being a useful ally in the establishment of yet one more pecking order in a world already lousy with them—there are yet other domains in which music is not a done deal but newly discovered as it's newly done.

For singular instance, could music-making provide yet one other way of finding out who we are, how we hear and what we care about through our sound exchanges: judgment and connoisseur-ship (or even our old friend "interest") potentially taking a well-deserved second place to inquiry and discovery; notions of "good" and "bad" not really perceived to be as interesting as the music. . . . As it is. . . . As we make it. . . . Each participating individual as if a culture of one. . . . Each society a collection of interactive cultures. . . . But

Now. . . .

It's Austin, Texas—a private home-summer of 1987 (I think). This time, Ben's at the piano while the rest of us play winds or accordion or small

handheld percussion. We're all Austin free-lancers—jazz musicians mostly—each possessed of a certain manifestly impressive level of technical prowess of which we're justly proud (accustomed as we are to the *Geist* of the cutting session). On the whole, we present as a pretty amiable bunch, but, being the “monster” players that we are, we can't—when the opportunity presents itself—resist a rough-tough energy built with the accompanying theater that we're all mad as hell at each other. And, here it is, the wall of enraged sound; the sheer athletic satisfaction of fingers dancing—wiggling near-uncontrollably—faster and faster on an ever-expanding conduit of air until (one imagines) the whole raging phalanx will eventually collapse like the deflated balloon or a house of cards. From barely audible, decidedly unprepossessing beginnings, we've built this boiling organism; a wee army of aggression. . . .

Only. . . . Ben would seem to be doing something altogether different. . . .

Increasingly, I'm aware that I haven't noticed the sound of a keyboard at all, except insofar as an occasional metallic, high register, piano-like aggregate is heard to sneak out almost as if in antithetical hocket, composing (to the extent that it's possible) a tiny eye in the hurricane: a gentle non-affirmative commentary inserted to within those few, brief, gaps which we've allowed to occur inside our thick, yet highly and diversely articulated, *verissimo*, texture-plex. . . .

While I'm playing, I look over at him, the better (I hope) to have even the illusion of actually hearing what he's doing. He is sitting, head down, and inclined to the left; very close to the keyboard. And, although I can't be quite certain, via verification in sound, it looks as if he's crafted a complex simultaneity, employing both hands, which he bores into with some intensity, sculpting a privacy almost as if the rest of us weren't here. It appears that he's playing very slowly and deliberately, and without the angular and aggressive “English” which I have come to associate with someone trying to maintain even the most tenuous parity with this group's collective intensity (he's certainly not banging at the keys or flailing away like one possessed as I probably would do if I were at the piano).

How to think about what I'm seeing? Could I perhaps imagine it as a position: attribute to it a function somewhat akin to Marshal Macluhan's—(is it?)—notion of an anti-environment; as in something posited over and against some extant environment thus causing that circumstance/situation to be more lucidly, or differently, apprehended (or might it better be described as a species of Gregory Bateson's difference which makes a difference). . . . Whatever it is, does, or means-by his apparent refusal to get caught up in the whirlwind which surrounds

him—by keeping, as it were, his own council—Ben is causing me to consider and interrogate more closely the musical behavior exhibited by the rest of us (framed so beautifully by his mostly ghostly performance). To begin with, how *are we together* in this situation? What, other than blowing the same notes at the same time—and with the same intensity—allows us to establish a palpable connection within and between (or, at the very least, to satisfy ourselves that one has occurred)? And above and beyond the specificity of musical materials, what other information might this music be heard to “carry”? Could, for example, a pitch also be perceived/read as a “location” or a “carrier of energy” or a transmitter of color/timbre? Does Ben play with us by denying our direction—or, is his unfolding a truly parallel one (as in those straight lines which never touch)? Could he simply be trying to hear himself to within this macro-din which encloses or inundates anything trending to the delicate, miniature, small-scale, non-competitive or slow-moving, and/or is it the case that he works within some idea of sensory deprivation as a compositional influence: the music unfolding within an environment of tactile feedback; the feeling of keys on fingers causing the performer to imagine the presence of sounds which the ear cannot precisely verify and to respond accordingly? Is this situation even about being a musician at all in the traditional sense (let alone a good one)? Of course, we’re all doing improvised music for different reasons—a different itch, it were, for each scratch—so, who knows. But these new questions which Ben’s aggregate in the oblique have brought about are now a pleasure in themselves. . . .

So. . . .

Today, in my living room, I respond to these memories of Ben’s performance with the playing of an air-only sound: a slack-jaw, chalumeau-register, pitch-class G in which the barest hint of pitch-presence is shadowed in the air’s ontology. I imagine this touch of barely perceptible pitch-matter as at least a possible description of Ben’s potentially elucidative presence/non-presence, and as I acquire a little more control of the sound’s complexities, I come to be able to shape and texture it so as to articulate a foreground/background, fluctuation/oscillation between some impulse recognizable as pitch and that shadowy shape in which the near absence of pitch sculpts a residue. . . . (Shades of the palimpsest). . . (Now you hear it, now you don’t). . . . And. . . .

Then. . . .

I’m caused to stop the imaginary play as I further recall various fragments of the after-session I had with Ben in which he initially explored

the distinction between a person's need for "respect" (of which he not surprisingly spoke in the affirmative) and the desire for "respectability" (which he seemed to hold in no very elevated regard) and then, moved to further discourse on the questionable efficacy of educators when they would assume a paternalistic stance of ownership toward both students and their endeavors. After we considered this for a while, the talk evolved to an exploration of the problematics surrounding the recasting of Ben's exquisite composition, *Group Variations*, from what had originally been the acoustic-instrumental domain to that of computer-generated sound. As I recall, many of the issues which this work had raised to foreground level were social—having in large part to do with what someone called "composer" might reasonably expect or demand from someone called "performer"—and our discussion of them proved to resonate with many of the ideas already informing my thinking about music in this context. I had now much stronger support for my own growing wish to involve myself in an adjunctive or perhaps wholly alternative musical practice in which sound, gestural articulation in body-time, thought in real-time, and the consideration of social responsibility in interactive situations might—in addition to notes, rhythms, timbres (competence and/or virtuosity and/or spectacle)—be thought of as material for musical expression. . . .

Casting about for further recollections of this evening, I stumble on to a further observation of Ben's that was striking to me at the time and has stayed with me ever since: namely, that "nobody makes music for the sake of music." I cannot now recall precisely what in our conversation precipitated this statement. Nor do I know exactly what he may have meant by it. But then, as now, I took it to refer (and critically) to any of a variety of over-familiar descriptive contexts that we habitually fall back on in the attempt to get a comfortable handle on just what music is, such as that of talking about it as if either a form of inanimate object—as in some version of the antique desk, to be exhibited in a temperature-controlled space with a man in blue standing guard—or species of surrogate human making steady streams of demand to its ever-faithful human factotums. And then, there is that familiar and much beloved context in which music is imbued with (or comes to acquire by fiat) the attribute of "self-hood," capable on its own (one might imagine) of both needs and the capacity for self reflexivity vis-à-vis selfsame—thus making it possible for us to say, and very nearly to believe, that "music speaks for itself": to treat lightly of the fact that we transmitters and receivers are indispensable to music's existence. While Ben did not seem to be dismissive

outright of these and other such well-loved qualifiers (his critique being nothing like a totalizing condemnation), still, I understood him to be contributing an altogether more powerful (and interesting) alternative view, that however we may characterize it, music is unavoidably and deep-structurally a form of human utterance, made by people in response to their many needs and for their various reasons, among which might be the crafting of identity, the drive for expression, the search for greater self-awareness, or, simply, a wish to assuage the gnaw of loneliness.

It seems clear that music never asks us either to make or experience it: in fact, it is helpless (indeed nonexistent) without us. We make music, because we need yet other ways to talk (to manifest more than our mere existence, as Herbert Brün would have said) and to enhance our physical and mental environments. Anything from the idea of music as political tract or personal rant to that of music as architecture or ecosystem—(cathedral, sermon tantrum, wolf-pack or rainforest)—may serve to both initiate and elucidate its complexities. . . . but

Now....

I resume my free-play, the sounds moving from a domain of air—only, or—mostly, to unabashedly pitch-rich finger-wiggling—and the further I go the more I seem to be experiencing that previously alluded to loss of control (i.e., whatever it is, this music seems to be playing itself). In an attempt to impose some measure of restraint, I take notice of a low-register pitch G beginning to slide about, becoming a woody, fibrous, red-brown A []. I like this kind of slippery stuff—so, back and forth I go, interspersing the air to two-pitch portamento/ostinato with my over-the-top, rapid-fire nine-finger ripple. In my mind's ear/eye, I hear/see myself stopping to catch a breath, only to move on to a clarion-register pitch, E [natural], inflected with a microtonal down-turn in regularized, rocking rhythm. As I play, I listen carefully, savoring both the loveliness of the acoustic and that aforementioned pleasant feeling I experience in the making and, so, choose to reside here for a while, weaving the whole into my memory of Ben's deliberate, mysterious, and distanced performance at our Austin session. I am struggling to hear him play; trying to imaginatively recreate his perhaps imaginary sound (this aggregate which he revisits again and again,; trying to imagine a conflagration of sound all around me as I do (which isn't terribly difficult considering the proximity of my house to the freeway); trying to hocket Ben's sound with singular expressions of my own. . . .

The last time I engaged in a sound-session with Ben Boretz was shortly after I arrived in Iowa City in order to complete my private composition studies with Kenneth Gaburo and to begin graduate work in electronic music. Kenneth construed his/our studio very much as a species of "safe place": an environment in which creative work (music, video, movement, writing) might be shared, seriously considered, and examined, without either the autocrat's hasty rushes to judgment or the humiliation of the maker which can occur in such a domain. It was Kenneth's desire that work under consideration be subject to comprehensive and multi-directional inquiry into the realities (i.e., materials and motivations, physical and conceptual) which it exhibited before any strategies for improvement were overlaid. Of necessity, observers (critics) might then be encouraged to come to know the work under consideration as the maker made it, before moving in haste to construct some new reality out of easily acquired understanding or hidden prejudice. Such care in critique emanated from Kenneth's perception that the too rapidly or capriciously employed strategy for "improvement" can often say more about unexamined influence exerted upon the critical observer—i.e., the "improver"—by some other preferred work or works (which he/she either takes as a model and/or may wish to have experienced) than about the phenomena under his/her immediate consideration.

In this particular regard, Kenneth's "safe place" seemed now to resonate significantly with sensibilities which I had acquired both through my early, unique, sound sessions with Ben and by way of an ongoing investigation of his writings (such as *The Inner Studio; Talk: If I am a Musical Thinker*; and "Language as a Music"). As a result of work with both Kenneth and Ben and a growing interest in the music and thought of Herbert Brün and Elaine Barkin, I was composing a reality of my own in which I might think of music as a perceptual-cognitive field of interactive expressions; or an investigation; or a pursuit about which a multiplicity of descriptive languages might be unfolded; or a position about music and the world (as much as a salubrious activity to while away the time). Not the "raw evacuation" Ben had alluded to in his talk, "If I Am a Musical Thinker" but expression—shaped, textured and nuanced—composed in search of the possibility of both individual and shared identity. . . . A process of coming to know. . . .

With respect to the place of my final improvisation with Ben, I lived in an attic studio: the extreme upper story of what had once been an old farm house (1911 vintage) before the absorption of its land and dwellings into the expanding city suburbs. This "performance laboratory"—replete

with a large collection of props, home made instruments and other sound sources—was ideal both for music-making and small-scale theater productions but, except for brief and intermittent periods of temperate weather, had turned out to be thoroughly uncomfortable to inhabit most seasons: bitter cold in winter; near-unbearably hot in summer. This play's season was summer and I remember (was it?) Sol, Tildy, Penny, Catherine, Ben and I working against the extreme heat and humidity: sweat coursing off faces and arms onto the sound sources and as might be imagined in such a situation as this—in which great heat perforce becomes a determinate of musical behaviors—the resulting music seemed painfully (if necessarily) slow, as if everything had been “choreographed” in slow motion. Initially, I remember each of its weighted sounds to be as if more “oozed” in (or slopped around in big, fat, drops) than played: each sound spatially isolated and advanced alternatively, one at a time, in a kind of elephantine trading of fours, the various vocal long-tones and instrumental sustains taking their various long times to be shaped and unfolded.

As well, I retain the memories both of occasional single-impulses being “bonged” out on one of the rusty brake drums which we kept around the place (sounding almost as attempting to will energy into a pre-drained unfolding) and of Ben conversationally responding (quite literally; quite analogically) with his sound-source to specific elements in the surround, addressing each antecedent impulse with a near literal consequent—that is to say, various somethings would be said and he would respond to each something almost exactly in kind. As I listened and tried to play along, I remember that although the sounds were often very beautiful, the apparent simplicity of these interactions (had with almost everyone in the group) somewhat troubled me, as I was—in spite of our previous Austin session—still habituated to certain rather fixed notions about how this kind of music-making should come down—continuing for instance to cling to the idea that, in an improvisation, the perception of complexity—even if it is only a semblance of selfsame, made manifest by way, say, of hyperactive and dense thickets of interactive perpetual motion employed as a sign that “complexity” is present—constitutes a kind of ultimate performance goal and palpable verification that the resulting work is “interesting” or “good”: worthwhile to hear.

But (just as in our Texas exchange) Ben seemed not about to play this game, choosing instead to carve out what seemed as if yet another kind of anti-environment, only this time in the obverse. Whereas, in Austin, he had chosen seemingly to disconnect, this time he appeared to be

demonstrating through literal repetition the most obvious signs of connection. My "sophisticated" ears were not a little confounded and for a time I was unable to hear much beyond the antithetical position that his performance posed to my highly valued virtuosity. . . . But, as I listened more clearly—without my "stuff"—I began to think that maybe, embedded in Ben's seemingly simple mimetic responses, there was yet another way of thinking about things. Maybe nested inside the starkness of imitation was another text in the form of a simple acknowledgment of another's presence: an expression which said that he was hearing you; that you had his attention; that he was, in point of fact, advancing real conversation as the deep structure of musical exchange. And, although I do not imagine for a moment that Ben would sanction or advance such a juxtaposition/characterization, I have often thought of this particular experience of music-making as resonant with the human-centered, therapeutic discourse practiced by Carl Rogers and others, which emphasizes the importance of forms of interpersonal congruence in human communication. . . . Not perhaps a very professional way of transacting musical business, nor a way to garner rewards, accolades, money, pats on the back, certificates or alarm clocks—but something else. . . . Only. . . .

Now,

My imagination reconnects with its music by attempting, yet again, to recreate some semblance of a discursive performance between myself and my memories of Ben in conversation—literally repeating and, then, alternating various of my sounds with recreations of his. But needing at some juncture, to break out, I attempt a spatter of widely displaced notes, at a variety of dynamic levels, and with as much timbral contrast as I can manage. Lately, I have been listening a great deal to the music of Jean Barraque (particularly the Piano Sonata and Orchestra Concerto with its prominent clarinet part) and I'm painfully aware of my "borrowing," if not specific licks of his, at least something of the flavor of the music: precisely the kind of thing which I would so like to move beyond, as not only is this language a familiar quantity, but also the result of someone else's personal evolution. I guess I still hope to arrive at what Sir James Jeans refers to as a something not only stranger than we imagine, but perhaps, stranger than we can imagine (as if strangeness were another kind of ultimate virtue).

Ben now responds to my licks with a few very clear responses of his own to my figurations. Is he, perhaps as before, letting me know that both I and my sounds are here. It's a reasonable explanation, as he could easily have dispensed with my language altogether and opted to push the play in some

direction of his choosing, but he acknowledges my sound and then moves on to begin the slow, deliberate, repetitive shaping of a phrase consisting of perhaps four or five quarter-notes in alternation which I, in turn, trope in my own pitch language. This results in a kind of processional, the lines becoming implicitly contrapuntal as particular impulses are heard to fill the empty durations to within each other's lines—between one another's impulses. Ben's language begins now to remind me both of the beautiful and probing piano interludes which partition the various verbal musics in "Language as a Music," and the pleasure in the arms and fingers which I derive from my own attempts to play his lovely piano work, My Chart Shines High Where the Blue Milk's Upset. In consequence, as I go on, I become more aware than usual of the feeling of the keys, of my breathing, of the resonance of each sound in my body; and I recall Ben's having affirmed such tactile preoccupation with a remark to the effect that, for him, a playing of My Chart (in particular), was not only a matter of articulating the stipulated notes, but of experiencing a private satisfaction to be found in the body's making it happen: hands crossing in graceful ways; the particular beauty of framing music-making in a context of privacy and tactility.

I continue on, quite content with our shared direction, but this feeling of well-being does not last, as I'm now all too painfully aware that again I'm really doing little more than imitating Ben's piano music, and so I take this as an opportunity to recede back into that shadow-world which I've constructed between my own air-pitch/microtone continuum and the ambient ritornello imposed by the ever-present freeway. Ben continues on much as before, but then stops for a moment and begins slowly to unfold a series of dark, mid to low-range aggregates, each one slightly different in some aspect from the others. One has an accented attack phase suggestive of the need for greater motion; another—un-pedaled and seemingly void of nuance—conveys the sense of flat affect. One is arpeggiated quite quickly, conveying a feeling of "brittle"; another articulates various expressions of foreground and background in the attempt attempting to accentuate specific of the simultaneities' tones. I respond with a repeated tone of my own; one very much higher in frequency and varied—sometimes slightly, sometimes more dramatically—from my previous impulses and, here and there, I micro-tonally inflect or otherwise subject it to slight fluctuations in dynamic level.

There is now a satisfying synergy evolving as I learn to say that I have heard Ben (just as he has me) and between us seem to be creating a rather pretty, multi-colored field out of the nuances within and between our two source-colors; a field reminiscent to some degree of my favorite minimal paintings in which putatively parallel streams of sensory information become

interactive in the perception of an observer. On this goes—and will for a time—while I think about influence and friendship, and times of peril (of Hannah Arendt's Men in Dark Times):—of what my music means ultimately to myself and to others and why it is so difficult, even for a moment, to relinquish all the self-defensive stratagems by which we would protect ourselves in any collective endeavor. And as I begin to disengage from this, my meta-music theater, I think I know that—even if only confined to neural gunfire in the echo chamber of my cognition—there is music here: a music in search of engagement; a going-on that might never have been, without that field of realities which you have helped me to identify and engage and. . . .

So, by way of a coda—which is, in fact, the reason for it all,
Thanks

Ben

—And deeply—not only for having been a beneficial presence in my life and thought, but for your contributions both to music and to the enablement of a social world which I would prefer to inhabit—rather than the one I all too often do:

as friend;

as composer;

as philosopher;

as theorist;

as Improviser;

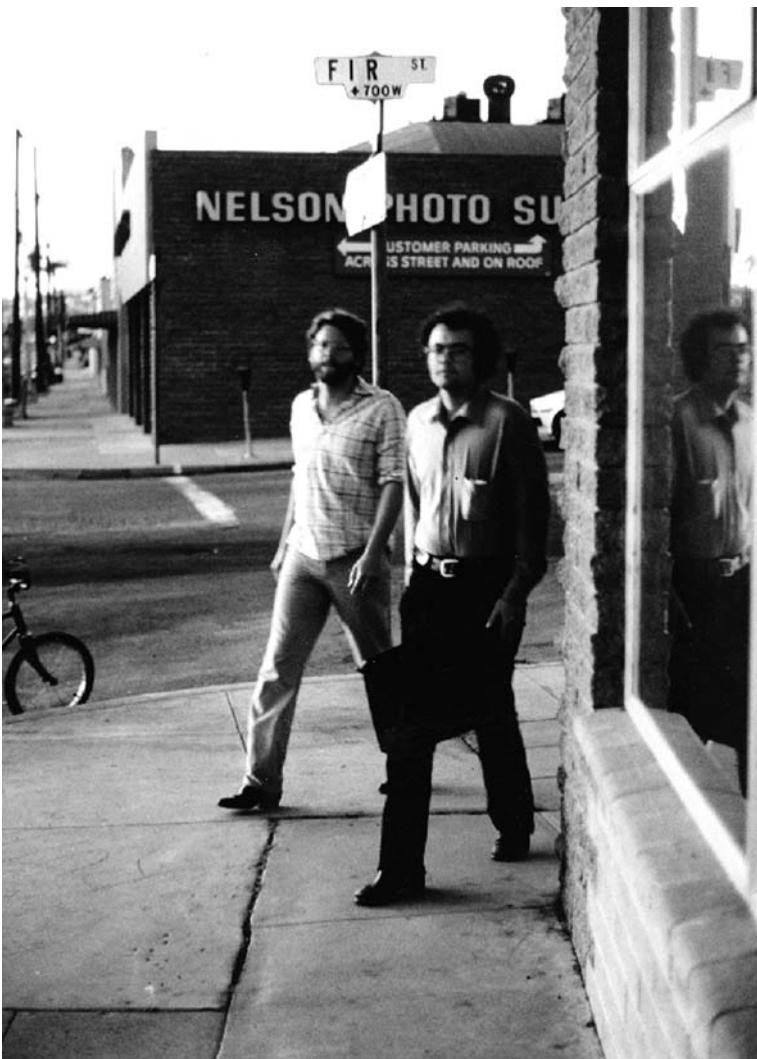
as publisher;

as challenge to prejudice and rigid preconception;

as one who has understood the darker sides of institutional and personal power and—over and against them—forged and articulated an alternative, interactive space, exemplary in the positive, not only for how a music might be imagined and externalized but for how one human being might reach another.

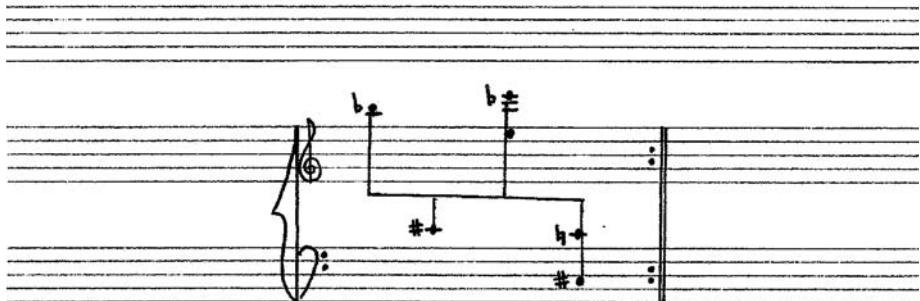
Iowa City

February 24, 2005



Robert Paredes (right) with David Dunn in San Diego, California, 1976.
(photo by David Savage)

3.



Play as softly as possible for as long as desired
Don't worry if certain notes don't sound.

Manuscript page of piece no. 3 from Paredes' *Eight Pieces*

Strict Time (Lingering)

Robert Paredes

(A)

Clarinet in B_b

Trumpet in B_b

Violin

(B)

f

f

f

f

Manuscript of the first page of Paredes' score for *Strict Time (Lingering)* for Clarinet, Trumpet and Violin (1982)

Spit Captain
Character
Kleiner
Naselotz
Pantustic
fragments
scattered



One of the line drawings from Robert Paredes' sketchbooks

**Poems
and
Shorter Texts**

one sound

one sound

....each....a place, a habitation....an island of particular life
to be experienced in whole and deeply before the abandonment, the
going on, the embrace of the next and the next....consuming time and
time again.

Not

by way as if to serve in passing the onslaught of “piece” in headlong rush
to manifest its unambiguous existence....to be on time....to make its
points, converts and enemies....to do its damage.

But rather, the accretion of unique expressions....each....a touch....
each....a place to be touched....each....a node through which the lives of
bodies pass and by which they are known.

all over poem

At

the
lake surfacewhite on
gray here

and there

enclaves of
thawing warmer
pool sunlight
sharp
across
the liquid
blue-brown
oscillations months-trapped
water

free

now

free

to be
disturbed

round

and round
we go

walking near

to fast

twigs dispersed

in patterns

shapes and

cross-hatch etched

environments
of
my construing
interconnection
foreground in to
brown and
gravelly back
of muddy
path
mud
on shoes
tangles brambles
thoughts
of
budding vetch
and new fame
flower
softest drizzle
music
music
quite like this daily perambulation
up
the gentle contoured line
of
white path past
the
now-closed
local beach
of mirthful contemplation
squirrel
with hard-assed lunch
and
evil-eye
wishing we
would go
perhaps to blazes
music
sounds

of mourning dove
dispondant
rustle in the flanking bushes

swarm
horny frogs
croak and crackle
flowers and candy
bondage
gear moist-white bellies bloat
the
ear
in
tingle
on the lake
a
dead deer
daily nibbled down
to ever-deepening
deep-structure
by
peers no doubt
and
constant wind
clouds
opening onto sunshine
rot
and rest

I'm here
and
there
for it all
trying to grasp it all
failing
and
failing for the
music
is motion
signed in sound

and

here and gone I
cannot
keep it in my pocket

dance
recursive
dance
but no matter
the moving moves
elsewhere
when the time
for moving comes

one
sound gone
and
then
another
hard
soft
simple
convoluted
ornate
reduced
somehow
to

some now essential so
can I now
observe this music
the music
of what is happening to me
composer
in the hearer
the seer
the one who
tastes and smells

who runs his fingers over the soft places
not only or merely
the would-be fabricator
of objects
but the one who perceives
the one who perceives
and
lets him compose
what he will of his perceptions
the field at any moment music in
in private space
a
young
woman
ragging down the
table at the ice cream
store

elegance
and
precision
quicksilver clothed conduit in clay
until
the moving
moves
and
the
shaper
and
shaping
but
a
mereness
traced
in
shape
and
shaped

Instructions for “all over poem”

1. Any number of musicians may participate.

Any type of pitch-producing instrument may be employed. Best to have a diversity of registers available.

2. Each circled letter in the text may be interpreted as a that-name pitch-class to be sounded very quietly in any available octave—but allow for smaller-interval melodies to develop from time to time.

3. Three types of duration may be applied at will to a given pitch-class

- a. = as in....a quarter note sounded at full value.
- b. = as in....sounded shorter than above.
- c. = as in....shorter still.

4. Entering successively in the manner of a round, each musician reads her/his way through the text in their own time—yet to-within a grossly synchronous common-felt time—spelling

[as
in—

wor (d)
spell-play]

each word silently—(or in whisper)—((or in alternation between the two)), giving each pitch-class name its corresponding sound as it presents itself in the letter string. Underlined words containing no pitch-class names are to be spoken aloud in a matter-of-fact manner (not shouted, nor otherwise articulated in some overly-dramatic manner). Any letter in a given string not identified as a pitch-class name may be given its acoustical expression as phoneme (best to sound only a single phoneme per letter-string and to chose a different one with each succeeding word, although this stricture need not be rigidly adhered to). Texture concludes when the last musician has finished.

The resulting collective texture-by-gentle-accretion might be likened to the appearance of a spatter-plex of rain-drops gracing the surface of a body of water (some heavier, some lighter of impact—some pinpoint, some radiating out).

5. At some point into the texture, the reader reads the text. Her/his reading should be timed such that it concludes a short time after the texture does.

Iowa City, May 1, 2001

Untitled Poem (1)

all night
i thought
of your
face
reading

all
night
i
thought
of you

the
eyes
and mouth like
the
words on a page

reading
eyes and mouth
like
words
on
a
page

reading
the
smiles

twilight
words

the accommodative
smiles

Untitled Poem (2)

There's a tune floating around in my head
Oh, not one I wrote or intend to write
I don't write tunes as any music school will tell you.
but
one I heard on the radio about a year ago

It's a Latin number
and
the lyrics
talk about being
on an island--presumably with someone you love
kind of an advert
for a packaged vacation
to the Caribbean
but
no
matter

when I hear it
in my mind
on a snowy day
when the radiator's jammed
and
the car won't start
and
each step out of doors
is an
unsolicited dance lesson
I'm
taken at once
to the sand
lifted, as it were,
by the scruff
of my Amana great coat

and
deposited
in a great
thermal heap
in the surf

the first order of business
is to get naked
and
then I look for you

“How can I tell you”

How can I tell you
with a violin?
a card
or
a letter?
a flower
or a bit of last years silk?

What does it take
to let you know
a simple truth

I am not a bell
or
I would ring

apparitions and other playthings

1.

the eye(loaded)
over

1. to mars?
2. to mississippi?

recapitulation

2.

in circles

my love
warm as mush while it lasted

now

dead
as
the
leaves

my mush warm as love while it lasted

Bedtime Story

tell me a bedtime story
if you can.

tell me how we are born
how we are the products
of some vague union of the body
or
some merger of two souls.

tell me a bedtime story
if you can.

child grows
becomes a physical sense
on
some deserted
beach of
mind and heart
he or
she
spots another—a tiny speck at first
and then a shape looming
large to eye
and then
beyond the eyes

tell me how the price is
worth the pain

explain to me
so i can finally know why
the sun rises and sets in you

such a fragile
inexplicable thing.

Later

Root beer float

:

pitched just right

Pamela and Bob

two-story house
phony hacienda style
lengthening shadows in the redbrown light

pamela
on her balcony
me
somewhere below

Kensington

naloni on her bicycle

the admiral's daughter

Borage for the Bees

(for Robin)

fennel

chervil

potatos

corn

and

borage for the bees

she's angry that I'm late

frayed blue shorts

nibbling barely the defiant hip bones

sweating belly

pink to brown

in this late summer's sun

bare

feet

savoring the deep and brown-black soil

a toe

at

a time

borage for the bees

Mourning Dove without Measure

I

need

a music

that limps and creaks and loses its own place without
my having to do it.

that is crimped and/or distended—transgressing and surviving without
audible means of support.

that causes the inner thighs to tingle and the toes to curl and that makes
in a pinch for the deepest of sleeps.

I

need

a music

that flys by night—the province of mountebanks and the
unsubstantiated.

that uncredentials itself—making of the knowing full-face red in its
dwindling light

that mopes and dawdles; plods and slinks—that risks offence in its
flat-foot nowhere near to swanky stride.

I

need

a music

that shamelessly instructs yet gives no succor to the prideful of
definition—unadmissible because in no way needful of needful.

a music

that speaks alone—should that be the needed—nourishing the private
domain between expression and affirmation.

I

need

a music

of stench and priss---winesap and dead, old corn—
that withers and primps in the winds of conjecture,
that falters and wheezes and murmers in snowfall.

a music

that mispeaks at the drop of an eighth-note—sits on my lap but won't
quite give me the long-awaited kiss.

that harps on its virtues, while knowing it may well have none
that sighs and demures; brags and drips with lust and loathing.

a music

that won't be the best, or biggest, or brightest—even by accident the last,
best, hope of mankind.

I

need

a music that occupies its time like a tree in the wind, or a stream ever-
activated and sparkling in the sun, or the flying V of a gaggle of migrating
geese—a mourning dove without measure.

Hospital Box Lunch for 2

Chemo Robert
 Turkey

Chemo Robert
 Tuna

Music

night....music transpires....where....does....music transpire....not so....much....the what of it....as in what is the thing....the "thing"...."itself"....I....know that tune....as in....that contract
in which....i can frame....collect....mother uni....any sound and continues her gouging....make the call....no....and wrenching of my need....for clarinet....once tranquil corn....or trumpet or big....field....in advance the construction of its center....kazoo just now....athletic its shrine....the music transpires the pat....to the health of....and plonk assymetricalthe body accreted....irregular of rain....in the hollowed out....drops on drainpipes....belly where my few....and the whine whir sound....wild-flowers once....windtunnel continuum...had their day, but....of a not so distant....that's progress deary....machine could it..the replacement of....be that even at night holy...loam with concrete....in the name of....music, my homemade....health, but where....harp, my interesting....does music transpire....regurgitation, my....is it in the I and....C Major chord....twenty glib....and elaborated here and....farting trumpeters....there, stark selfof ferlinghetti's long....sufficient, like brick....ago poem, or in theor rock, or pheasant under glass....big man roll-call of....is there yet anotherthe roller coasting....place beyond the....combo. Does music....paucity of name....transpire in mere....the taxonomic relegation...-ness of its signified....the sure and present....presence—as in....knowledge one has....yes. music, the....when it is clear....orchestra, or, yes....just where a phenomena....music the flock....should go....of migrating geese....in the puzzle....etching....making of reality....their V across....construction....the sky in a stream....is there a place....of honking inter-hocketing, or yes....where music transpires....occurs. I have....was as I know....thought it was enough....the shoe, or the....to say, to make the....tangerine, or the....call, to claim, to frame—torubber glove, or....take the name and....the piccolo, or theslap it on that piece...eggplant parmesan.... of enveloping....or the bellybutton...sound scape which I have extracted, focussed attention upon....or the symphony....I can in the mere....or the persian rug...ness of identification....or my grandmother....enlist in my assembled....or the delphinium....convocation of entities....or the climaxso named, so collected....ecosystem, or thepassing cars, french....

old friend, or root....horn blasts, travertine....beer float....marble clinks and....for....australian diphthongs....what....clarinet multiphonics....they.... mating frogs....are, identifiable, extractable....i have thought....palpable, if not....it was enough to....in every case, mute, know what music....of a piece, because named.....given moniker....pinned like Nabokov's....in that place configured....butterflies, though....by music's name in....the heart flatdown....conjunction firm oron the paper, accounted....frail of with experience for, parsed from the....framed by extraction....gooey, viscous, chaotic morass of would be....attention, by the....be syntax.... physical awareness....the weather is....of the observer. Listening.... changing. I takeas the originary....note of the thunder....composition. Music....how does its music....anything I give my....transpire in this....awareness to in earspace....circumstance transpire....circumstance, but not....why transpire, as in....only. Music transpires....to throw off, to....transpires in theoccur, to become....unfolding even if....so, I will proceed....only for a moment....to the answer of....change after change.... my question, as in....within changing....where does music....heard, felt, ingested....transpire. Is it....transpiring, coming about....in the listening.... never quite

here

doctor is out

it's the loneliness
the imagining
a place where it's
warm
and green
and
you are received
that
makes you
old before
your time

but
i can't tell
you how to get
over this feeling
as i'm
weighted down
with
happiness
just now

try me in a week or so

for my grandmother

please believe me
implicative
white sand sun source dim bitter in a white dress
familiar faces in this room over there white sand
wet speech
quick
wet across from me please believe me
implicative
redresses quiet crimes
so what
so so
well here she comes bag in hand
all meat and no potatos
in the distance another country another people
white sand
quick sand wet
across i was with her
not long
to go
she too is gone

she lifts me up
so that i can see
across the canyon
my stick rips an inch
of skin from her
arm we rush to
dress the wound
in spite of it there
was no death between
us

she too is gone
they all are gone
crossing wet rivers
dry dead fields of memory all meat and no potatos
moving round and round in this shabby container where nothing
resonates no life is found nothing grows but hope and the

some little piece of faith
in another corner
of the world

we too are

gone

Grand Canyon

invidious,
i am comparison's safe and silly reprisal

she,
takes death-chances, or the venerable
(at
least
this supine, so-scared, chance)

red bird
small voices
dry, high, percussions

c, on her edge
I fear for her edge

Hanging Rock

I

II

single stalk [repeat] and [orange] ant and red kookaburra [is it?] car
radio of wheat-like stuff [not necessarily] with passion [writ] clear and
[again] green speaking [no/so] loud [again] across asphalt

III

top of the rock

[hungry]

Melbourne '86

i always hoped

i always hoped
that one day
i
would
be all of a piece

complete

unburdened
with the pull
this way

that
safe in
the knowing
that what i
put my hand to
is what i am

today
i took inventory
and found out
i am
as diffuse
crazed
drawn out
scattered
as ever i was
and nothing
i put my hand to
is me
but
the hope
for all of a piece
is gone
and nothing
that it was is me

i always hoped
that one day
i
would be finished
without finishing

that i could
go on and on
from inside out

no need
to look at the
taking in

as the taking in
is done

no need to speak about
the unspeakable
as i am
speaking

no need to know
as
i am known

today
i took inventory
and found out
that
i have no wish to be
finished
without finishing

it is nearly Christmas

it is nearly Christmas
and
i'm thumbing through
a copy of Walden

it was your copy
the one you gave me
when i was too poor
for books

what a sorry son-of-a-bitch
i was in those days
not that anything
has much changed
and
though my memory
is clouded by the past
and what it did to us
i think that i can still see you
lying like a fallen angel on my sofa
the book in your hands
and
every lovers' secret
in your eyes

you always had a way
of making every move momentous
like
the birth of some asshole king's first son
or
new flowers
after a long limp winter
and
i knew each time i saw you
that nothing could kill us
that
we
were indestructible

here
on this page
is a tiny flower
you pressed inside
probably
to mark a thought
and though it is dead
dreary and holding onto its shape
like all the beaten
hold sometimes to things impossible
i see that it was once lovely
and
i wish
a memory
could have been
a
thing

*written to Sarah Vaughn's recording of "I remember you"
from a folder marked poetry, early*

like turning a gem in your hand

like turning a gem in your hand
edges
angles
traces of color
glints of light
different aspects of a "same" thing

(On)e) single event

Loneliness

i seldom look straight ahead when i walk.

i either look up or down.

when you look there's always a chance you'll see
a blimp or a bird in flight, or orion, or god on his way to Peoria.

when you look down there's always a chance you'll find a penny
or avoid stepping over something unpleasant like a dead body,
or a steaming compost heap or something which might make you fall.

tonight i'm lookin up

at the clearest sky i have seen in some time
all the stars are visible, up there losing mass, burning away.
no doubt making countless local astronomers gasp

maybe something

Taking place—all around—and of deep—is a something—i/we only—
sense is there—to be heard—if-and touched—if-and seen—taking place—
without half—and a knowing—is a something—all around—taking
place—and of deep—all around—i—
have often—lain in wait—to-and hear of—to and touch of—to and see
of—and this morning—in a field—deep-around—of and tall—new-as-
they-come-green-leaved and of trees I thought for a moment that i
grasped it passing in the bird-talk.

Sitting

A californian, sitting somewhere on Bourke Street—watching the trams go by. Memories of Ocean Beach ice-cream parlors, omelette palaces, dial-a-burger emporia. Thinking about predictions. Thinking about how he never could have predicted this place, in this way, even though he often.....

and,

also, he thinks of an old girl friend, playing [him] out a continuous and ridiculous little fantasy in which she—the old girl friend—discovers, via a disinterested third party, that he is in Australia. On Bourke Street watching trams in point of fact. She acts appropriately hurt that he has been able—after she left him—to do anything else but enjoy his ignominious death, and so she.....

and,

he is very, very, nostalgic—fashionably nostalgic—now—thinking about the California coastline. All those fish places up and down the coast: especially the one in Morro Bay [what was the name of that place, anyway?....the one down the road from the breakfast place with the best potatoes and coffee in the whole state—[whose name, incidentally, he also cannot remember]. Those were the days. On the road. In the motel. Getting up early. Having a shower and shave Feeling clean and sharp. Smelling good Licking the seaspray on the lips....into the car and up the highway for potatoes and coffee and the castle so he could.....

and

here he is—in the land he dreamt of as a child. He remembers the National Geographic magazines in which he first saw visual evidence of its existence. Small photos—and a few dumb articles. "Plucky Australia Goes for the Gold—or, some such shit. He really can't quite get over the fact that there is actually something to the left and/or right of the Princess Bridge in a red-brown sky—something besides the vast, uncharted, desert he imagined when he looked at the picture books of his youth. And the girls. He could almost smell the girls as he looked at the picture

books. He remembered how he used to put his nose right down to the glossy pictures just to smell the girls. In fact, the other day, he thought he had, almost.....

Melbourne, '85

So

SO

long

ago, beach, one remembered sun going down, interlacing time, and only specious tracts remain[ing] in the undertow. facing this timespace—cigarette burns, a drink past my lips, and this sun going down. i

used to walk there—where i would be if i could be—moving slowly in present time not present. a there, no longer to be—so—there. let's list them! let's face the interlace! lights from

the bull ring by the sea—motion of the iowa river.....hotel del in the twilight—public library at closing.....santa anna winds—[and no place needing to be gone to]....snow drifts on burlington—blue-green sea at the cove.....dead

ducks, dead gulls.....still, dead, air—[and everywhere needing to be gone to].....thick and redolent nights—redolent sweat. you

died before me, flipping god off

i

died before you, begging you.....

off!

we

—neither—are—[no!—more....and

still, i will have it

so

iowa city, 1990

To Sleep-I Am Thinking

appropos-because of-in response to-[some night sounds]-a talking with and to-tonight-about music-i-wind up unable-after serious-attempting-pillow-repositionings-use of antihistamines-blocking of painfully-theaters in my imagination-[refrigerator unit sound]-and now some scorched milk-to sleep-i am thinking-or trying to-about how to-where to-make the music i must make-because-i am

i-

there is no dearth of it-what?-the music that is-there is no dearth of evidence put forth to say music-there-and mine is not of this to wit the word-my god!-it's all around me-i'm sure if the homeless have one thing left in all this world-it's something-someone-has put forth in this name-to add more is not the want-abundance like this-i-if not exactly they-could do without-so-is not more i need-but-other-not another-i need-but-other-i'm filling my place which needs to be filled-and-where would i do that-and-how would i do it-never mind the why of the thing-for-now-would i do it-[sounds like rain]-by god!-never mind musing about it-either-to the already great-big-block of layered-up sounds which surround and which we now know we can hear and delight in-and-all that jazz-only-now i'm flippin' sick of it-you-heard me-flippin' sick of it yes!-ladies and gentlemen it's the "it"-part I'm sick of-somehow-and by someone-it was given to me-and-i-was supposed to take it as a sign that all was well-and-i could-now-go off into the woods and die quietly-like-the family dog-only-i just don't-quite want to do that little thing-i've-learned-a few things-like how to ask the right questions of the givers of "it"-like-as in-for example-in whose interest is this being given-but-another time for that ["it"]-[sounds of train on the rock island line] [the fridge just went back on]-back-again to this matter of filling a place with other-or-either there's nothing-needing-something-well-the big question-here-is-does-this nothing really need my something-maybe yes-maybe no-it's need-my need-but-maybe-what this all-too-full-of-stuff-big sounding place really needs-is not more-but-less-a hole-maybe-it's my job to myself and this place of allaround sound to put a [w(hole)] in the flippin' thing-to stand on a street corner and carve some hole in the whole of "it"-to-make a place where you could-no rhetoric please!-i-could begin to get a sense of true appreciation-

apprehension-of my-self-my self's connection to-myself-the "big" me-in perfect harmony with the big-"it"-if only i could pop the right size [w(hole) in that sucker-but-again

getting

again-back to the filling of something-the-placing of something-and-the-need of "it"-maybe-since-i really can't get rid of any of "it"-until-i'm dead-as "it" were-i should talk about "it"-and-constantly looking-listening-trying to hear-to touch-to be touched about "it"-ourselves-maybe-since-i can't take away my image of how "it" was-locked within my image of "it's" not-then-being right-perhaps-i can have "it"-at the same time-so's-i can get on with "it"-what-ever-"it"-is-maybe-who we-no-you-forget that i-am-is-is someone who asks not for an response in-and-of the true believers-jumping to their feet-or-the-others-in off-flipping-but-instead-i ask for-sometimes-silence after speaking-to-ask-just what

looking [for a meta]

is-as

"what"?

iowa city, 1989

Turning Thoughts

a text about birthdays

to turn to reveal another side to change as in color political affiliation turn coat to see the other side to go back the way we came round and round on the clock to turn on someone to act in a hostile manner toward someone who doesn't expect it to take a turn in the road to turn a dial or a door knob gets you someplace opens a door gets you in to say you turned means you didn't go anywhere or does it it is a turn an operation in and of reverse covering old ground somehow someplace does to turn mean another but backward step she turned and went that way away from me	is turning a gravitation towards the turned from by what and how i turned over in my sleep i turned my chair towards the window is turning round or does the sound of the "r" the big fat "r" of turning confuse me to run from something as in to turn it around as in to change to turn on someone as in to escape from the jaws of disaster is turning circular always coming back round and round turning on or up the heat she turned the pancake over on its other side winter turns to spring turns to summer turns to fall o i get it it
---	---

cycles the turning of a wheel the turning of the earth coming back around how is getting older then a coming back around to something or somewhere if each year is a mark marking a one more of something an additive operation suggesting, demanding an end its end somewhere, sometime so where is my cycle i come to this point whence last i visited it so what am i going/coming round to yet it seems again the worm turns the turn of the screw turning spaghetti round and round on my fork betrayal as in they turned me in he turned states evidence transmogrification	as in the caterpillar to butterfly sweet thing to monster milk toast to maniac the coach to the pumpkin eliza to a lady something becoming something else a sense a taste of turning the possibility of real change where is the coming back around at the flashpoint of the bud to open blossom only at the point i'm only this and only this point once but i reach this point many times how can you turn a sound or are many sounds needed for turning turn and run turn away coming and/or going back around to turn a steering wheel making it go from side to side turnpike urns spurn as in turn but what about this coming back around to mark another notch returning to the place no return no? keep writing it keep saying it (what)
--	--

(it)

over in my mind
right turn
left turn
took a wrong turn somewhere
do the seasons turn
like i turn
or do i turn differently
i turn
its quieter now
the urge to turn
headed to another turning
if the notch is a point of return
what is the point to
to
the turn
the turning
going back
to take one step
into the un-returnable
there is no going back
turning

it

over in my mind
if there is
no going back
then what
has turned point
on a spiral
given a limited number of designations
taken in order
i will come back to the point

where i will celebrate
a no going back point
if only i knew that the end
is a going back well
that's obvious
i'll always turn
coming back around
in which the point of no return

turns

one night

one night
all alone
I found my voice

It whispered to me
just before
some kind of dousing
of a last light

It said "use me"
take me with you
to the center of the circle
carry
me with you to the darkest
speck in all imagining
and
I will be the
kiss
that makes the long night sweet

the sword
that makes
your place
to sleep



One of the mavericks of late 20th century American music, Robert Paredes was a composer, performer, essayist, visual artist and teacher who, through his pioneering experimental work, sought to investigate the essence of music, its meaning and its role in society. Paredes left behind a rich and fascinating legacy of artistic work, ranging from electronic music and text compositions to visual art and recordings of free improvisation, jazz and klezmer music.

This book presents the bulk of Paredes' most significant writings in one volume, including his previously published longer essays and text compositions, as well as his poetry.

