Treatise - Cornelius Cardew

Programme Notes

Treatise, once described as the 'Mount Everest' of graphic scores, was written from 1963-1967 and consists of 193 pages of numbers, shapes, and symbols (some musical) whose interpretation is left up to the performer. While the composer, Cornelius Cardew, has never given explicit instructions on how it should be performed, he has suggested that interpreters devise rules for themselves in advance.

In the "Treatise" handbook, Cardew offers additional, cryptic advice such as "Remember that space does not correspond literally to time" and "There is a great difference between: a) doing anything you like and at the same time reading the notations, and b) reading the notations and trying to translate them into action. Of course you can let the score work on previously given material, but you must have it work actively." The only constant throughout "Treatise" is the thickly drawn "life line" at the center of the score. It has no intrinsic value but is often used by performers as a baseline reference for pitch or some other musical value. Ultimately, "Treatise" is notation as art form. As Carew says, "The notation is more important than the sound. Not the exactitude and success with which a notation notates a sound; but the musicalness of the notation in its notating."

In his essay "Towards an Ethic of Improvisation," written shortly before the formation of the Scratch Orchestra, Cornelius Cardew said of performances of his graphic score: "Ideally such music should be played by a collection of musical innocents [people who had no formal musical training]"; he continued, "My most rewarding experiences with *Treatise* have come through people who by some fluke have (a) acquired a visual education, (b) escaped a musical education and (c) have nevertheless become musicians, i.e. play music to the full capacity of their beings" [1].

The formation of the Scratch Orchestra in 1969 may be seen as the culmination of Cardew's search for new types of performer, from backgrounds other than that of a classical training. Performances of *Treatise* had taken place in art colleges during the 1960s, and more recent works such as his *Schooltime Compositions* (1967) also offered opportunities for visual as well as musical interpretation. Cardew's own involvement with the visual arts was close: during the 1960s he worked as a graphic designer, his wife Stella was a painter, and his circle of friends and colleagues included conceptual and performance artists such as George Brecht and Robin Page (both teaching at Leeds College of Art in the late 1960s), Mark Boyle, who was working with light projections, the painters Tom Phillips and Noel Forster and many others.

This was a period of far-reaching change and innovation in British art schools. The academic disciplines of life-drawing, figurative composition and illustration and the traditional craft-based skills, which had been central to art education since the mid-nineteenth century, were being challenged by new attitudes and policies that reflected some of the more radical tendencies in twentieth-century art. Leading artist-educators

such as Victor Pasmore and Harry Thubron introduced enquiry into fundamental aspects of perception and expression, structure and method, and students were encouraged to experiment freely with materials of all kinds. Boundaries between disciplines were questioned and redefined, and there was a shift from the object-based practices of painting and sculpture to an emphasis on process and context, environmental activity and time-based work in film, sound and performance. These changes began to take effect in the early 1960s following recommendations for the liberalization of art education included in the Coldstream Report [2]; a generation of artists emerged whose work extended into new material and conceptual areas.

VISUAL INFLUENCES

The breaking down of barriers between different disciplines and the growth of interest among visual artists in sound and performance created a favorable climate for the development of experimental music. Cornelius Cardew, John Tilbury, David Bedford and other musicians were regular visitors at art colleges in and around London, in Leeds, Liverpool, Maidstone, Falmouth, Portsmouth and elsewhere. They not only performed and discussed the new music but also involved students as active participants in works by John Cage, Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Cardew, George Brecht, LaMonte Young, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Takehisa Kosugi and other Fluxus-related composers. As a result there soon arose an extended network of visually aware performers, for whom the lack of conventional musical training was no obstacle to participation in experimental music; many of these were among the original members of the Scratch Orchestra [3].

Cardew's particular achievement at this time was to bring together visual artists and musicians from diverse backgrounds in situations to which all could contribute equally, regardless of skill or experience, with aural and visual aspects of performance coexisting in heterogeneous juxtaposition and interaction with each other. This diversity is reflected in the Draft Constitution, where Cardew notes: "The word music and its derivatives are here not understood to refer exclusively to sound and related phenomena (hearing, *etc*). What they do refer to is flexible and depends entirely on the members of the Scratch Orchestra" [4].
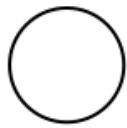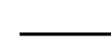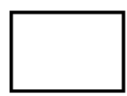
In my interpretation of this magnificent score, I opted to prioritize the spontaneous attitude that Cardew seems to encourage in his work 'Towards and Ethic of Improvisation'. Rather than thoroughly analyze and construct an erudite rendition of the score, I emphasize "musicalness of the notation in its notating", shunning a precision-based, musically dogmatic attitude. My goal with the use of electronics is two-fold; the first is to realize a truly polyphonic version of the work, adhering to the score's plurality of events unfolding in time, and the second is to depersonalize my thought process in order to embark into a mediation between structure and chaos; the unpredictability of the technology at hand generating its own rules of engagement, hence becoming a willing partner in the unfolding narrative.
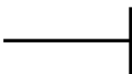
References and Notes

1. Cornelius Cardew, "Towards an Ethic of Improvisation" (1968) in *Treatise Handbook* (London: Peters Edition, 1971).
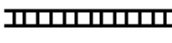
2. First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Of- fice, 1960).

3. The Scratch Orchestra grew out of Cardew's experimental music class at Morley College (an adult education institute in South London). In addition to musical colleagues and students of Cardew, among them Michael Chant, Christopher Hobbs, Richard Reason, Hugh Shrapnel, Howard Skempton, John Tilbury and John White, and improvisers such as Lou Gare, Eddie Prévost and Keith Rowe, the original membership included many participants from the visual arts: Greg Bright, Psi Ellison, Judith Euren, Carole Finer, David and Diane Jackman, Tim Mitchell, Tom Phillips and Stefan Szczelkun. Among those who joined later were visual and performance artists such as Birgit Burckhardt and Catherine Will- iams. For its first two years the orchestra flourished as an anarchic and loosely structured collective. In 1971 an ideological group was formed to study Marxist ideas, and after a struggle between opposing "experimental" and "political" factions, the orchestra abandoned experimentalism and devoted itself to specific political aims, in support of the British working class movement and the cause of Irish independence. It finally disbanded in 1974.

4. Cornelius Cardew, "A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution," in *The Musical Times* (June 1969); re- printed in Cornelius Cardew, ed., *Scratch Music* (London: Latimer, 1972).

Michael Parsons - The Scratch Orchestra and Visual Arts, LEONARDO MUSIC JOURNAL, Vol. 11, pp. 5–11, 2001

Objects

Symbol	Meaning
○ (open circle)	Light loop
● (filled circle)	Dense loop
)	Line (follow shape)
— (thin line)	straight tone pp
▬ (thick line)	straight tone ff
□ (open square)	Idea pp
■ (filled square)	Idea ff
●	Short note
○	Longer note
△	Short multiphonic
///	Repeated figure pp
≡	Repeated figure ff
(lines with dots)	Lines with slap tongue or accent
⊣	abrupt cut off
⌒⌒	Bird sound
,	Breath
▭▭▭▭	Active repeated pitch set
P	Piano