Exploring Political Action and Socialization through Group Improvisation within the Music of Frederic Rzewski and Cornelius Cardew

Marcel Rominger
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EXPLORING POLITICAL ACTION AND SOCIALIZATION THROUGH GROUP IMPROVISATION WITHIN THE MUSIC OF FREDERIC RZEWSKI AND CORNELIUS CARDEW

by

MARCEL ROMINGER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Exploring Political Action and Socialization through Group Improvisation within the Music of Frederic Rzewski and Cornelius Cardew

by

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In the late 1960s, socialist composers, Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski, each established ensembles with the purpose of performing works consisting of experimental forms of improvisation. By employing group improvisation, and including untrained, non-musicians within their performances, they strove to use these ensembles as a model for society itself; this model includes a dissolution of the hierarchy among performers and the barrier between performer and audience. Improvisation helped music resist commodification by the culture industry or appropriation by authoritarian regimes for the purpose of propaganda. This dissertation aims to explore how Cardew and Rzewski constituted effective socialization and political action within two works: Cardew’s The Great Learning (Paragraph 1) and Rzewski’s Les Moutons de Panurge.

This dissertation explores the complex relationship between politics and art, particularly, how art maintains its autonomy while also being political. The political and compositional backgrounds of these two composers is examined in order to gauge their intentions within these works and evaluate the political efficacy of the resulting compositions. This is accomplished by examining the scores as well as various studio recordings and live performances. This dissertation proposes that it is only within performance that the relationship between improvisational choices and political efficacy is revealed.
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Introduction

We must improvise, and we must experiment, and we must do things that might go wrong, and everything we bring—the people and the equipment—must serve us in that goal.

~Flea

At the 2018 Grammy Music Awards, several musicians participated in a comedy skit titled “Fire and Fury.” The skit included such popular musicians as John Legend, Cher, and Snoop Dogg reading from the book Fire and Fury by Michael Wolff. The book gained notoriety by revealing the inner workings of the White House under President Trump and placed the President and his staff in a negative light. As part of the skit, the musicians are seen reading from the book as part of an “audition” in the hopes that they will win the Grammy award for “Best Spoken Word Album.” The content being read focused not on his political views and actions, but rather on the President’s eccentric personal habits such as how he reads, grooms, and eats. The skit concludes with former presidential candidate and Trump opponent Hillary Clinton reading from the book and “winning” the audition.

Negative criticism regarding the skit predictably ensued from members of the government. A particularly revealing response on Twitter (a forum made central to political discussion through Trump’s constant postings to it) came from U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley. Her tweet, “Don’t ruin great music with trash,” became the subject of multiple news stories and renewed the longstanding conversation concerning the role of politics in music.

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1 Rob Fitzpatrick, “Red Hot Chili Peppers: The Band That Couldn’t Be Stopped,” The Guardian, August 18, 2011. The article is primarily an interview with members of the band. It includes quotes from their bassist, Michael Balzary, notably known by his stage name, Flea.
None of the performers overtly or openly criticize the President as a political entity; the skit creates humor, in part, from the eagerness of each of the readers, including Clinton, to earn the Grammy. Some performers inject themselves into the narrative (Snoop Dogg’s assertion that he was not in attendance at the inauguration), others insist on the brilliance of their performance as a reader (DJ Khaled insists that everything he does works), while others express disbelief over certain of Trump’s habits (Cardi B has a hard time accepting that Trump goes to bed with a cheeseburger). The skit did not lend any support to the book, Fire and Fury, nor did it state that contents of the book were indeed true; such a conclusion is left to the audience. Yet the choice of the text itself was sufficient to anger certain officials and prompted vocal disappointment from a high-ranking member of the administration. The implication of the skit was clear: if Trump behaves in such a questionable manner, if his comportment is so outside the bounds of acceptability, should this not call into question his ability to run the country? If his personal behavior qualifies as delusional and bizarrely entitled, ought that not to delegitimize his standing in high office? Given this subtext, the skit could hardly be deemed politically “innocuous.”

Therefore, it seems that there is validity within Haley’s criticism. The question then becomes: is it legitimate to expect a clear line between art (and Haley seems to really mean “entertainment” more than art) and politics? Why should entertainment be segregated from the political environment? Some believe that politics has no place in art and that artistic venues, such as theatres, should be “safe places” that exclude any and all types of political statement. Conversely, there are those who believe that in order to achieve its proper social impact, art must embrace its political side or even that, insofar as politics is defined by Aristotle as the manner in

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which we deal with each other in a public forum (particularly through public communication),
art is inherently and ineluctably political.

Politics has always pervaded art to some degree. As far back as the ancient Greek
civilization, playwrights used comedy and drama to call out corrupt politicians within their
works. 3 Although politics within art can be found throughout the twentieth century, in the post-
war era, politically driven art found a revitalized urgency. Writers, filmmakers, painters, and
composers found inspiration in various fraught political controversies of the post-war era, and
believed that art could be marshaled forth for the purpose of social and political change,
including revolution against oppressive governments, promotion of socialist cultures, attacks on
labor unions by oppressive corporations or governments, addressing injustice towards the
working class, and ameliorating the rampant persecution of minority groups. Composers
inspired by this new political urgency grappled with the question: How does one express
political ideology through music?

Many of these composers found that the use of group improvisation provided performers
with new choices and freedoms that allowed political ideology to be expressed through concrete
musical action. Within group improvisation, such action came in different forms such as free
improvisation, interpreting graphic notation, the addition or elaboration of new melodies within
large scale works, experimentation with new timbres, the freedom to get lost in performance, or
even the freedom not to improvise. 4

This dissertation will investigate two pieces that utilized group improvisation to convey
socialist ideology: The Great Learning (1970) by Cornelius Cardew and Les Moutons de
Panurge (1968) by Frederic Rzewski. While both works are considered political, neither express

3 Ibid.
their political message with an obvious, one-sided viewpoint. Instead, the political element of the music is presented in a subtler manner, such as through the actions of the performers.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how group improvisation within the music of Cardew and Rzewski engages with political ideology and gives rise to political engagement and, concomitantly, social change. Additionally, I hope to show that the social dynamic that existed within Cardew’s ensemble, The Scratch Orchestra, as well as Rzewski’s MEV ensemble, helped serve as a paradigm for political and social interaction.

While politics is exhibited in these works utilizing more indirect means, this is not meant to imply that such art does not incorporate a clear political element such as the use of protest songs or revolutionary text. Instead, I hope to show that the manner in which autonomous political art is presented encourages debate and the sharing of ideas rather than single-sided argument. Furthermore, a strong argument can be made that such art seeks never to sacrifice its aesthetic value in lieu of its political message.

In assessing the highly improvised scratch music of his Scratch Orchestra, Cardew described the group as consisting of “a large number of enthusiasts pooling their resources (not primarily material resources) and assembling for action (music-making, performance, edification)”5 and deemed scratch music “halfway between composing and improvising.”6 Indeed, Cardew went beyond merely describing Scratch Music as improvised music; he acknowledged, “this ensemble and its music … will become a vehicle for experimentalism and social aspects of music.”7

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5 Ibid., 141.
While Cardew created music for the Scratch Orchestra, Rzewski was similarly creating improvised music with Musica Elettronica Viva or MEV, which he described as “Collective Music.” He considered this music “a form which provides a potential basis of unity for many different musical traditions.” Like Cardew, Rzewski was also concerned with the social aspect of music. He wanted MEV’s music to be a “widely-based movement” in which the “artist and intellectuals” would join their skills and talent along with everyday people in order to create “an ever-expanding wave of liberation.”

In order to support these notions, different aspects of the relationship between group improvisation and politics will be discussed in the ensuing chapters. In Chapter 1, improvisation will be defined and examined in relation to composition and various types of indeterminate music. Furthermore, different forms of notation, such as graphic and text notation, will be discussed. The use of these types of notation fostered a particular genre of improvisation and also endeavored to place trained and untrained musicians on equal ground.

Chapter 2 addresses the relationship between art and politics. I examine the ideas of philosophers such as Theodor Adorno, Clement Greenberg, Mao Zedong, and Jacques Attali, among others. The primary concern of this chapter is the issue of autonomy. In what sense and to what extent can a work be both oriented toward political thought and action and maintain some form of aesthetic autonomy? Is such autonomy a chimera, a pointless holdover from Kantian aesthetics, or does it serve a determinate function? By seeking answers to these

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 260.
questions, the elements that separate art from the imposing nature of propaganda will be clarified.

Chapter 3 will then examine the lives and thoughts of Cardew and Rzewski. Influenced by many of the philosophers and writers discussed in chapter 2, Cardew and Rzewski both desired to create new forms of experimental and avant-garde music that would manifest their socialist beliefs. Owing in part to their relationships to the music of Cage and Stockhausen, Cardew and Rzewski incorporated group improvisation within their works. But a crucial difference arose. For Cage, who was critical of the very notion of improvisation, indeterminacy connected the individual to a spiritual insight into one’s relationship to being. Group improvisation, for Cardew and Rzewski, involved a deep concern with pragmatics with the way in which the dialectical interpenetration of the group and the individual gets developed. In short, for these later composers, group improvisation modeled a manner of getting along with each other productively. This led to the creation of their respective ensembles: The Scratch Orchestra and MEV.

In the final chapter, two works written by Cardew and Rzewski, *The Great Learning* and *Les Moutons de Panurge*, will be analyzed and interpreted. As noted before, these works were chosen due to their political nature as well as their use of group improvisation. Furthermore, that the pieces were composed with the intention of including both trained as well as untrained musicians (non-musicians) through the use of graphic and text notation created a genre that is central to the arguments advanced in this thesis.

The inclusion of non-musicians helped eliminate the divide between performer and audience, and became a vital aspect regarding socialization within these works. The idea that these ensembles are meant to resemble an ideal socialist society is bolstered by the combination
of musicians and non-musicians improvising together. Furthermore, since improvisation affords new freedoms to the performers, the musical actions come to resemble political action.

In addition to a score analysis, various recordings of these works will be examined in order to determine if such freedom occurred and how it manifested. By scrutinizing the decisions of the performers, I hope to prove that group improvisation is indeed a catalyst for socialization and political action within these two pieces.
Chapter 1
Improvisation: A Background

*Improvisation is becoming sound. It is the only art in which a human being can and must become the music he or she is making.*

Alvin Curran11

Improvisation exists as a musical practice within many different ethnic groups and musical styles around the world. Indeed, in some instances, the failure to improvise is seen as insulting or inappropriate.12 In the case of praise singers or lamenters, these performers will use improvisation when singing and must spontaneously create music to show that they are receptive to the immediate needs of their audience. A pre-arranged performance would be seen as disingenuous and even dishonest.13 Ethnomusicologist Jeff Titon notes that, “perhaps at some deep level we prize improvisation not just because of the skills involved but because we think it exemplifies human freedom.”14 This notion of freedom is brought into particular focus when the resulting music becomes associated with political ideology.

In Western culture, improvisation is not always regarded as a serious musical activity.15 Often its implementation is seen as a failure to plan ahead and may have negative implications.16 This connotation comes from the association of the word “improvisation” with what is done “off-hand” and with minimal preparation, e.g. “an improvised shelter” or “an improvised solution.”17

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13Ibid, 27.
15Larry Solomon, “Improvisation II,” *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 228.
16Bruno Nettl, "Improvisation,“ *Grove Music Online* (2001),
Perhaps this explains why many improvising musicians dislike the term. Within this chapter, I examine the definition of improvisation alongside the criteria for determining what constitutes improvisation and provide a brief overview of the history of improvisation within Western culture. The chapter culminates in a discussion of improvisation as employed by Cornelius Cardew, Frederic Rzewski, and a selected group of their contemporaries.

**Defining “Improvisation”**

Defining improvisation can be problematic when examining its use in different works and styles. For instance, performers may spontaneously create music, which would initially be perceived as “improvised.” However, when that same performer decides to preserve that same music by either notating or recording it, the idea of the work being spontaneously created is called into question. If an improvised piece is recorded, then the piece may now be regarded as a set composition, and performances could be infinitely replicated by the composer or other musicians with little deviation. In many cases, it is impossible to discern if a performance is improvised just by listening to it.

Within the last century, there have been enormous challenges to the normative perception of classical music with the rise of improvisation, aleatory music, and indeterminacy. Such developments as the emancipation of dissonance, rejection of tonality, new forms of notation, and the emancipation of sounds themselves have challenged the traditional concept of music. The concept of improvisation has been a part of Western music since the late fifteenth century.

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19 An example of performing previously improvised music note-for-note is the recreation of Miles Davis’s album *Kind of Blue* at the BLU Jazz club in Akron, Ohio in February 2018, as well as in various venues and festivals around the world. The band, Mostly Other People Do The Killing, even released an album titled *Blue*, which is also a note-for-note recreation of Davis’s *Kind of Blue*.
Undoubtedly, improvisation existed long before this time. However, the idea of musicians “improvising,” rather than performing notated music, emerged in the fifteenth century with the concept of music as a fixed composition. By this time, improvisation had established itself as an integral aspect of western performance practice. However, by the early twentieth century, improvisation was not generally considered a fundamental part of the classical music tradition.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *improvisation* means “the action or fact of composing or performing music, poetry, drama, etc., spontaneously, or without preparation.” Some musicians see improvisation as dealing with unforeseen challenges or opportunities. Improvisation comes from the Latin word *improvisus* which is related to the Latin verb *providere*, meaning “to foresee.” Thus, *improvisus* is that which is unforeseen or unexpected. From *improvisus* came the Italian *improvvisare* and the French *improviser* in the early 19th century. At that point, the word began to be used in verb form. The definition of the Italian and French derivative was “to act without foresight or foreplanning.”

Eventually, the English *improvise* emerged, which is defined as “to perform spontaneously and without preparation.” Other terms, such as *extempore* and *spontaneous*, became synonymous with *improvised*. The term *extempore* derives from the Latin *ex tempore*, which translates as “extracted out of the moment.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *extempore* is defined as “at the moment, without premeditation or preparation; at first sight; off-

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23 Blum, “Recognizing Improvisation,” 27.
hand.”27 This notion most likely refers to improvisation as something free from the confines of a fixed chronological order.

When determining a balance between elements of a composition that might be notated and those that might be at the discretion of the performer, ethnomusicologist Stephen Blum posits that one must first discriminate “between more or less improvised aspects of performance.”28 While many see improvisation as a subset of composition, not all scholars agree. For instance, in his article, “Little Bangs: Towards a Nihilist Theory of Improvisation,” Rzewski explains the difference between improvisation and composition.

Composition is the result of an editing process in which one’s impulses are passed through the critical filter of the conscious mind: Only the “good” ideas are allowed to pass through. Improvisation is more like free association, in which ideas are allowed to express themselves without having to pass this test, somehow avoiding the barriers erected by consciousness.29

Generally, “improvisation” can be used to describe any type of musical performance that deviates from the idea of a fixed musical work. Of course, there is always some sort of variance when any type of musical work is performed more than once. Furthermore, if one equates improvisation with interpretation, then the result is that all musical performance contains some form of musical improvisation.30 The amount of deviation from a work required to qualify as “improvised” is arguable. Even a precisely notated score allows some freedom within

performance with respect to ornamentation, tempo, rubato, dynamic shading, articulation, intonation, and even qualities of timbre such as pedal, muting or dampening, etc.\textsuperscript{31}

Within a particular performance, a pianist may choose to take more time during cadences, change the voicing on certain chords or choose to emphasize one melody over another. It is precisely these variables that create unique performances of great works. However, additional facets, apart from understanding the technical aspects of the score, can play a role in producing an extempore performance.

However, when discussing the origins of improvisation, the main question is ultimately posed: How does a performer create music spontaneously? In his article “On Spontaneous Music,” Alvin Curran states that improvisation is generally based on something: a word, a set of fixed tones, a melody, rhythmic pattern, chordal sequence, timbral change, gesture (crescendo, diminuendo, fragmentation, drone, etc.), a reaction, a memory, a dream or any combination of these. All musical cultures employing forms of improvisation codify these forms around a specific set of sounds developed through a long historical process.\textsuperscript{32}

So then why do composers such as Rzewski and Cardew identify themselves as improvisers and not as proponents of indeterminacy or even aleatory music? Since indeterminacy simply means that which is “unforeseen,” this term is simply too broad. On the other hand, John Cage argued that the freest form of music is indeterminate and that improvised music was considerably less free. Cage believed that improvised music is limited compared to indeterminacy because improvisation reflects the will and intentions of the performer and not the music. He states:

Improvisation is something that I want to avoid. Most people who improvise slip back into their likes and dislikes, and their memory, and they don’t arrive at any revelation that

\textsuperscript{31} Noam Sivan, "Improvisation in Western Art Music: Its Relevance Today" (PhD diss., The Juilliard School, 2010), 10.
\textsuperscript{32} Curran, “On Spontaneous Music,” 484.
they’re unaware of.\textsuperscript{33}

However, it may be this tie to “likes and dislikes” and memory that allows improvisation to be seen as a reflection of the political ideology of the performers.

**Improvisation in relation to Aleatory Music & Indeterminacy**

Terms such as “indeterminate” or “aleatory” take on separate but similar meanings to improvisation and can sometimes be used when discussing works from a particular composer. These terms are sometimes mistakenly used interchangeably. The first purpose of this section is to elucidate the differences and similarities between these terms. According to *Oxford Music Online*, “aleatory” is a term applied to music whose composition and/or performance is, to a greater or lesser extent, undetermined by the composer. While some composers go to great lengths to pre-determine every aspect of a composition, there are still some aspects of a performance that the composer has no control over. Therefore, almost every performance contains some “aleatoric” element.

However, when describing music that is specifically labeled “aleatory,” the term applies to music where the composer has deliberately given up control and instead, relies on chance to make compositional choices. It originates from the term “alea,” meaning dice. According to author Paul Griffiths, this typically excludes certain “established usages”\textsuperscript{34} such as keyboard improvisation, cadenzas, the *ossia*, the *ad libitum*, unmeasured pauses, and alternative scorings. Some explanations of *aleatory* muddle rather than establish the fine line between aleatory music and improvisation. As a result, the terms are mistakenly treated as interchangeable.


Griffiths points out three different types of aleatory technique within composition. (Some pieces may exhibit more than one of these techniques separately or in combination.) This includes: “(i) the use of random procedures in the generation of fixed compositions; (ii) the allowance of choice to the performer(s) among formal options stipulated by the composer; and (iii) methods of notation which reduce the composer’s control over the sounds in a composition.”\(^\text{35}\) This third approach to the aleatory can include free improvisation. Moreover, the specific method of notation may range from a notated score, graph, or even text scores.

The first approach, which employs random procedures to attain a fixed composition, is also known as chance music or chance operations and is mostly associated with composer John Cage. Chance music is defined as a form of indeterminacy where musical elements are chosen by random, extra-musical processes during composition. Within his works such as Music of Changes (1951), musical elements such as sounds, dynamics, tempo, etc. were determined by the flip of a coin. Cage wanted to create a type of music in which sounds and other musical elements could be free from the influence and control of both composers and performers.\(^\text{36}\)

Cage discusses his use of chance operations when corresponding with Pierre Boulez as part of a famous series of letters between the two composers exchanged between 1949 and 1954. While expressing some admiration for Cage’s work, Boulez was unimpressed by the element of chance. In regard to Music of Changes, he writes:

> The only thing, forgive me, which I am not happy with, is the method of absolute chance (by tossing the coins). On the contrary, I believe that chance must be extremely controlled: by using tables in general, or series of tables, I believe that it would be possible to direct the phenomenon of the automatism of chance, whether written down or not…there is already quite enough of the unknown.\(^\text{37}\)

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\(^\text{35}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{36}\) Sabine Feisst, “John Cage and Improvisation.” 41.

While Cage’s interest in chance operations damaged his relationship with Boulez, it nevertheless inspired Boulez to employ a different kind of chance, one that offers “a sort of labyrinth with several paths,” “an evolving form,” a kind of “directed chance.”\footnote{Ibid., 19.} This resulted in Boulez’s \textit{Third Piano Sonata} (1955-57). The sonata nonetheless contains rigorously prescribed rules regarding the ordering of movements and sections, as well as which passages can be omitted. Despite this, the performer is more involved in the creative process with the freedom to “shape” the music.\footnote{William Harbinson, “Performer Indeterminacy and Boulez’s Third Sonata,” \textit{Tempo} 169 (June 1989): 20.} Although extremely controlled, this compositional style resembles a more limited form of improvisation or indeterminacy.\footnote{Griffiths, “Aleatory.”}

\textit{Indeterminacy} is another term which can be confused with \textit{aleatory music} and is defined by \textit{The Oxford English Dictionary} as “not fixed or established.”\footnote{Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Aleatory,” http://www.oed.com.exproxy.gc.cuny.edu/view/Entry/4795?redirectedFrom=Aleatory#eid} Any resulting music that is unforeseen by the performer may be defined as indeterminate, whereas when music is generated via chance operations, the result is unforeseen by the composer. Ironically, Cage preferred the term \textit{Indeterminacy} when describing chance operations whereas Boulez considered his \textit{Third Piano Sonata} a controlled approach to the aleatory. The clash of ideas between Cage and Boulez would eventually create a divide between an American style (indeterminacy) and a European style (aleatory).\footnote{Boulez and Cage, \textit{The Boulez-Cage Correspondence}, 17.} Similar to Cage, composers such as Morton Feldman relinquished compositional control through his use of graphic notation in his \textit{Intersection} and \textit{Projection} series. Other composers such as Stockhausen also ceded authority of the score to the performer in his \textit{Klavierstücke XI} (1957). However, like Boulez, Stockhausen and many other European
composers were not willing to withdraw as much influence over the score as their American counterparts.

Cage, within his essay, *Composition as Process: Indeterminacy* places indeterminacy and experimental music within the same category. He states:

An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not foreseen...A performance of a composition which is indeterminate of its performance is necessarily unique. It cannot be repeated. When performed for a second time, the outcome is other than it was.\(^{43}\)

Chance operations, which Griffiths considers a subset of the aleatory, are employed during the act of composition. Thus, in performance, all elements of the score are fixed as seen in *Music of Changes* where there is no marked improvisation or indeterminacy remains within the performance of the work. Hence what is indeterminate for the composer is determinate for the performer. Cage’s *Variations V*, by contrast, did not employ chance operations or indeterminacy within composition. However, since the sounds derive from the random movement of dancers, the piece is indeterminate with respect to the performance.\(^{44}\) In the eyes of the performer, the written score of an improvised work serves only as a spring-board for music with an ever-changing outcome.

It seems that Griffith’s second and third approach to the aleatory, which include choices granted to the performer among formal options stipulated by the composer, and methods of notation that reduces the composer’s control, certainly have an indeterminate nature during performance. As mentioned earlier, graphic notation fosters indeterminate music.\(^{45}\) As

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\(^{44}\) David Miller, “Indeterminacy and Performance Practice in Cage’s ‘Variations,’” *American Music*, 27, no. 1 (Spring, 2009): 61, 65; Within *Variation V*, sound was created by the movements of dancers being sensed by a theremin antennae. The movement also intersected light beams that when disrupted, were detected by photo cells. The output of these devices was then fed into a complex sound system consisting of tape machines and short wave radios.

\(^{45}\) Griffiths, “Aleatory.”
mentioned earlier, Feldman, a disciple of Cage, composed two series of pieces reliant on graphic notation titled *Intersections* and *Projections*. Within these works, notes are replaced with boxes which approximately determine pitch and duration. This feature results in the piece being indeterminate as with respect to composition (Feldman, or any non-performing reader of the score, cannot know in advance precisely how the piece will sound). However, the pitches could be determined by the performer *prior* to performance, or could be improvised *during* the performance, which further reveals the critical difference between indeterminacy and improvisation. The relative freedom of the performer during performance is crucial to an understanding of improvisation. This issue will be addressed later in the chapter when examining particular twentieth century works as well as the composers associated with these styles.

**Theories of Improvisation**

How does one spontaneously create music when prompted by a fermata in a cadenza or a verbal statement in a text score? These questions spark a number of ideas from performing artists to psychologists on how one generates improvised music. Some performers can easily describe their mental process during improvisation while others find chronicling their thought process through a cadenza or improvised solo arduous. This difficulty in expressing one’s navigation through a spontaneously created work could stem from the role that consciousness plays during this process.

Rzewski claimed that improvisation may be an attempt to avoid “the barriers erected by consciousness.” 46 Scholar and composer Larry Solomon similarly defines improvisation as “to

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create without forethought,” which, along with Rzewski, suggests limited conscious thought on the part of the performer during extempore performances. Subconsciously, the performer inevitably takes musical ideas and tools from past experiences and uses those ideas to create new music.

When asked to explain his mental process while improvising, pianist Robert Levin described it as being involved in a yin/yang relationship between the conceptual and the muscular. He warns that, “if the fingers get too much ahead of the mind—or vice versa—there is a calamity.” During a particular performance of Beethoven’s Concerto No. 1, Levin recalled that during the cadenza,

I hit a loud crisis in F# minor. I reared back from the keyboard and thought, ‘My God! What next?’ And I imagined, literally, the keyboard saying to me, ‘You got yourself here; you get yourself back!’ And I started to play again, slipped on the banana peel of a diminished seventh chord and in no time flat was in the C minor forecourt of the C major ending I needed. I couldn’t reproduce a note of it if my life depended on it.

Since the focus of extempore music is not on its preparation, most performers find it difficult to describe the actual process. When asked if he knew what he was going to do before an improvised performance, composer Christian Wolff replied “No. It’s better not to know. You have to jump in and see what happens.” In an interview with composer and performer Meredith Monk, she recalled improvising with Bobby McFerrin and the rehearsals that preceded the event.

During the process I realized that the more information Bobby has before a performance the less he likes it…It was funny because we had two or three days where we improvised

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50 Ibid.
51 Michael Hicks, et al., "Improvisation, Heterophony, Politics, Composition," Perspectives of New Music 45, no. 2 (June 2007): 138.
together and at the end of that time I said, ‘Well at our next rehearsal period . . .’ to which he replied, ‘what rehearsal period? I’ll see you at the performance.’"\textsuperscript{52}

The statements by both Wolff and Monk articulate the special nature of improvisation in performance that cannot be achieved in rehearsal. Composer and pianist Louis Andriessen, while not necessarily depicting the rehearsal of spontaneous music as fruitless, recognizes an obvious difference between improvising before an audience as opposed to improvising in private. He asserts that when spontaneously creating music alone, “you can try things out and look for solutions, just like a composer, whereas if you improvise in public it is like instant composing wherein you must directly make decisions.”\textsuperscript{53}

How one prepares to improvise is also determined by the nature and style of the improvisation in question. Performers such as Levin, who specialize in improvising cadenzas in the style of Mozart and Beethoven, must familiarize themselves with these specific styles prior to performance. This means being able to store a large amount of musical material within one’s memory and to recall that material instantaneously. Many scholars claim that musicians use long-term memory to memorize musical materials such as phrases or motifs.\textsuperscript{54}

Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl discusses how extempore music is based on a model. This model can be derived from musical forms such as the blues sequence of chords in jazz or a specific composition such as a Broadway tune employed as a jazz standard. The model provides the performer with something on which to base his/her improvisation. The improviser uses such models as “the ground on which he builds.”\textsuperscript{55}

These models can be divided into units or “building blocks” which are used by musicians during an improvisation. Nettl describes these various building blocks as “the tones selected from a tone system; they are melodic motifs, commonly referred to as ‘licks’ by some jazz musicians; they are harmonic intervals and interval sequences in improvised polyphony; they are types of sections (e. g., the exposition of sonata forms).” These sizable “building blocks” are extensive and can be used interchangeably when generating spontaneous music. Such building blocks are aspects of music that would have been learned over the course of a musician’s lifetime.

This manner of viewing improvisation can be applied to some West African drumming traditions where drum ensembles start with several percussionists repeatedly playing short rhythmic motifs that act as building blocks. One motif becomes juxtaposed with other motifs that grow into a large polyphonic texture. The master drummer mixes, combines, and draws on these motifs.

While most jazz musicians perceive improvised solos as a collection of different motifs, not all scholars agree about the importance of motifs within improvisation. Psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird was the first to develop a cognitive theory that differs from the “motif” theory. He relates improvisation, particularly that found in jazz, to unconscious mental processes. He claims that phrases within improvisation resemble the utterances of a sentence albeit without a specific linguistic meaning.

To better make this distinction, Johnson-Laird insists that music employs transformational grammar. This form of grammar, which was formulated by linguist Noam

56 Ibid., 13.
Chomsky, operates with the notion that language is a series of symbols. It is defined as any grammar that allows one sequence of symbols to transfer to another set of symbols. Essentially, this type of grammar involves a set of language rules that can be applied to an infinite number of different structures. This type of grammar, which combines basic elements of a system to produce more possible outcomes, is generative.\(^{58}\) An example would be applying an ordered sentence structure consisting of noun and verb phrases to a multitude of different sentences. Ultimately, Johnson-Laird suggests that the generative process used in this type of speech production is analogous to how musicians improvise.\(^{59}\) The relationship between language and the spontaneous, unconscious actions that musicians perform while creating extemporized music will be elucidated when discussing improvisation and political ideology.

Johnson-Laird developed a model that explains “the procedural production of possible patterns according to certain rules,”\(^{60}\) which is better explained with a series of multi-stage algorithms. These algorithms consist of generative as well as critical stages that allow musicians to both create and evaluate the music they are creating.\(^{61}\)

Certain aspects of a performance situation, such as the mood of the audience, aesthetic factors, or responding to musicians in a group, can affect the choices made by a performer.\(^{62}\) Many of these aspects will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Connection with Pre-Twentieth Century Improvisation**

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\(^{60}\) Ibid., 322-323.


\(^{62}\) Ibid.
In some genres that utilized a significant amount of improvisation, such as late Renaissance and early Baroque preludes and suites, improvisation had a specific function within performance. These forms were typically based on social ritual or ceremonies of performance (e.g. religious service or dancing). It was ritual that provided music with a defined social function. Polyphonic improvisation over discant plainchant melodies was commonplace throughout the late middle ages. Later in the eighteenth century, improvisation within Western music provided performers with increasing possibilities of varying and expanding upon relatively known and predictable forms. Mozart himself experimented with improvisation in a set of preludes composed for his sister, Nannerl. However, according to historical reports, lengthy and elaborate improvisation was becoming increasingly discouraged.

The nineteenth century saw a short but feverish burst in the popularity of improvisation which coincided with the rising popularity of the piano. Masters such as Hummel and Liszt would improvise on popular themes as a way to rouse and impress audiences. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, and as the roles of performer and composer diverged, the freedom offered to the performer was replaced by increasingly sophisticated notation with the musical focus moving from improvisation to virtuosity. Rather than a fundamental accessory to performance, improvisation became limited to a few virtuosic sections of music, such as cadenzas.

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65 Wegman, “Improvisation-II: Western Art Music.”
68 Mace, “Improvisation, Elaboration, Composition,” 223.
Twentieth Century Improvisation

As outlined earlier, many twentieth century pieces contained indeterminate, aleatory, or improvisational characteristics. Despite overlapping qualities, some pieces and composers seem more associated with one approach over the others. However, since the purpose of this section is to focus on the freedoms and decisions of the performer within these works, improvisational characteristics will be the main concern. Furthermore, it is improvisation and not the indeterminate style that is better associated with political action and ideology, whereas some composers of indeterminate music try to avoid any association with specific political ideas.

This section will examine improvisation in relation to: aleatory/indeterminate music, other styles of extempore and experimental music, John Cage’s chance music, varying forms of notation, improvisation within ensembles, the role of the audience, and free improvisation. We will examine each of these elements in order to discern the link between spontaneous forms of music and political action.

a) Early Improvisation and Controlled Chance

With the exception of music in jazz idioms, works in the first half of the twentieth century that used improvisation were quite rare; the overall view of improvisation resembled the ideas from the previous century. Pieces incorporating the word “improvisation” in the title were mostly fully notated and fit into Griffiths’s first approach (i) to the aleatory, that is, the occurrence of the unforeseen during composition. The performance itself was not improvised but traditionally determinate. Additionally, the work was meant to be performed in such a free way as to create the illusion of spontaneity. An example is Bartók’s Improvisations on
Hungarian Peasant Songs (1920). The piece is meant to exhibit an impromptu style while being completely written out.⁶⁹ Similar to how many nineteenth-century composers fixated on the virtuosic aspect of music, many early to mid-twentieth-century composers, such as those associated with the Second Viennese school, focused more on creating music centered on atonalism and serialism. The compositional control required for serialism and twelve-tone music made improvising within this new style basically impossible.⁷⁰

Although actual extemporized, indeterminate performance did not appear with much frequency within art music until the latter half of the twentieth century, it seems inevitable that some form of improvisation would still emerge as a part of the compositional process. These early forms of improvisation resemble Griffiths’s second definition (ii) in regard to aleatory music where the performer is given choices among formal options.⁷¹ This budding style of indeterminacy helped pave the way for improvisation within twentieth century classical works.

An example of early improvisation and aleatory style within performance is Ives’s Piano Sonata No. 2, “Concord, Mass., 1840-1860” (1915). The composer created many different versions of the piece with the idea that the performer could pick and choose among versions during performance. In regard to the different versions, he instructed pianist John Kirkpatrick, to “do whatever seems natural or best to you, though not necessarily the same way each time.”⁷² Additionally, Ives included optional repeats, notes, passages and even a flute passage that could be performed or omitted.⁷³ Ultimately, fourteen different versions of the “Emerson” movement can be realized.⁷⁴ Ives never preferred one version over another and chose to think of Concord

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⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁷¹ Griffiths, “Aleatory.”
⁷³ Ibid., 176-177, 185.
as a work forever in progress. In regard to performing the sonata, he wanted a musician that was “as much interested in the things of substance as [in] the notes.”

Improvisation in the form of choice between different versions of a complete piece led to many similar compositions. In his *Mosaic Quartet* (1935), Henry Cowell had musicians choose between different fragments from which to play. As mentioned earlier, Boulez’s *Third Piano Sonata* adapted this style with what he called “controlled chance” in response to John Cage’s chance music. Boulez explains the appearance of this new style within art music in his article, “Sonata, que me veux-tu?”

Why compose works that have to be re-created every time they are performed? Because definitive, once-and-for-all developments seem no longer appropriate to musical thought as it is today, or to the actual state that we have reached in the evolution of musical technique, which is increasingly concerned with the investigation of a relative world, a permanent ‘discovering’ rather like the state of ‘permanent revolution.’

While controlled chance later became associated with aleatory music or ‘alea,’ Boulez’s description makes this approach sound a lot like improvisation. Logically, improvising musicians typically engage in a “permanent discovery” of these works, which can be compared to a “permanent revolution” against unimaginative duplication of music. Although improvisation began to define itself as a separate style from controlled chance, this “relative world” was a movement toward more spontaneously performed music.

Depending on the composer, controlled chance is basically identical to what other composers referred to as “mobile form” or “open form.” According to Griffiths, mobile form allows the performer “some flexibility in realization by means of the provision of alternative

75 Clark, “The Element of Choice in Ives Concord Sonata,” 185.
76 Griffith, et al., “Improvisation.”
79 Paul Griffiths, “Aleatory.”
orderings.” In the 1950s, Karlheinz Stockhausen wrote *Klavierstücke XI*, in which the performer must choose a specific order among a series of passages. In finding alternate routes through the sonata, performers may also choose to omit certain passages as needed.

This aleatory style was adapted by composers such as Witold Lutoslawsky, Boulez and later on, John Corigliano. Despite many divergent qualities, aleatory music would have a strong influence on twentieth century improvisation.

\[ \text{b) John Cage and Improvisation, Intuitive Improvisation} \]

What sparked this sudden appeal of indeterminacy and improvisation? What effect did indeterminacy or the aleatory approach have in the music of Cage, Stockhausen, and later, Cardew and Rzewski? Improvisation and indeterminacy within performance were ways to reintroduce creativity back into a musical tradition; a tradition that centers on hallowed, fully-notated, and replicated scores. Some scholars such as Alvin Curran saw modernism and postmodernism as “a series of attempts to liberate music from various forms of tyranny—rules and traditions real or imagined: triadic harmony, memorable melody, the twelve equal-tempered tones, metered regular pulse, European orchestral timbres, ranges of instruments, standardized durations, fear of disorder and chaos, the fear of silence.”

Although composers such as Cage and Stockhausen had different views of improvisation, they nevertheless experimented with this approach to some degree. Their intent was to create forms of spontaneous music that would be aligned with their musical style and ideology. Around the 1940s, Cage began basing his compositional ideas on Zen texts and eastern culture. As

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80 Ibid.
explained earlier, Cage stood against improvisation to the extent that it involved the unconscious and possibly biased actions of the performer. Although resistant, Cage started experimenting with different forms of improvisation as early as 1935 with his work *Quest*, a piano piece written for dancer Martha Deane. The first two movements, which feature amplified sounds of mechanical toys and other small sounds, were devoid of score. Since no directions or parameters on creating this improvisation exist, Cage’s intention with the piece is a bit of a mystery and the work is typically performed with the notated movement only. Ultimately, Cage was dissatisfied and it took him an additional forty years to formulate other forms of improvisational composition.

As musical experimentation increased in the 1950s and 1960s, improvisation started to have a bigger presence in twentieth-century art music. Composers such as John Cage and Harry Partch were no exception. Cage’s philosophy, to “let sounds be themselves,” which emerged in the 1950s, was the beginning of a change of focus of indeterminacy from the composition to the performance itself. With the exceptions of jazz and blues, such a high degree of improvisation had not occurred in Western music since the Baroque era. While Cage is most famous for incorporating chance within his music, he also grappled with finding unique ways of incorporating some form of improvisation into his works at different periods of his life.

As mentioned earlier, Cage believed that performers fail to arrive at any new revelation while improvising. His assertion that improvisation “does not lead you into a new experience, but into something with which you’re already familiar,” reflected the notion that different degrees of freedom, even political freedom, pertained to improvisation and indeterminacy.

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83 Feisst, "John Cage and Improvisation," 38.
85 Feisst, "John Cage and Improvisation," 40.
86 Ibid., 42.
Despite his reservations regarding improvisation, Cage persisted in exploring freedom within spontaneous performance. His advocacy for experimentation in music, as well as his deviation from the modernist and serialist movements, helped pave the way for musicians seeking to create pieces utilizing “free improvisation.”

Following his first attempts at improvisation in 1935, Cage began to focus more on the four main parts of his compositional process: material, structure, method, and form. He realized that improvisation was compatible with all these parts with the exception of structure, as Cage believed that structure was the rational foundation of the piece. In the case of much Western music, structure is based on the harmonic aspect of the piece. Cage posited that structure should no longer be based on tonal harmony, but on duration and temporal divisions. Only after structure was organized could improvisation be employed as part of the compositional process.

Cage surmised that focusing on the temporal structure of improvisation could serve as the basis of group improvisation. In his text “The Future of Music: Credo,” Cage writes:

Methods of writing percussion music have as their goal the rhythmic structure of a composition. As soon as these methods are crystallized into one or several widely accepted methods, the means will exist for group improvisations of unwritten but culturally important music. This has already taken place in Oriental cultures and in hot jazz.

As early as the 1940s, Cage predicted the “phenomenon” of group improvisation later incorporated by improvising ensembles such as Music Elettronica Viva and Nuova Consonanza in the 1960s.

Although still set against most forms of improvisation, Cage nonetheless attempted to incorporate it into his works by struggling to free improvisation from “individual taste and

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87 Griffith, et al., "Improvisation."
89 Cage, Silence, 5.
memory.”91 This resulted in his composing *Child of Tree* (1975), *Branches* (1976) and *Inlets* (1977). The first two pieces are performed with amplified rattles made from poinciana trees and cacti. The idea behind the works was to make the performer so consumed with exploring the unfamiliar instruments that investing any memory or taste into the performance would be impossible. The improvisation within the pieces truly reflects Cage’s style since the temporal structure of these pieces and the instrumentation of each section was determined by chance operations ahead of time. While these pieces do not fall completely within the realm of complete improvisation owing to the use of chance operations, they do embody its etymological meaning “to bring forward the unforeseeable.”92

By 1970, Cage’s style of improvisation had evolved. A critical moment in that evolution was the composition of his piece *Mureau* (1970), the title being a combination of the nouns music and Thoreau. The work is a mix of syllables, words, phrases, and sentences drawn from Thoreau’s remarks on sound and silence. The piece is written for a narrator, who chants a form of “musicalized language.” Cage purposely developed his vocal skills to achieve the optimal performance of this work. While it incorporates the use of chance operations during composition, the piece is also indeterminate during performance and invites the performer to improvise during the piece. Cage further described this process:

> I discovered that I could improvise, but only along the same lines! ... When I improvised by myself, I used all the resources of my voice and all the elements of language without falling back upon known words or a syntax. I found this experience thrilling.93

> It was within this, and similar works, that Cage found himself spontaneously creating a performance from the text itself. According to Cage, this style of composition was indeterminate

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92 Ibid., 45-46.
93 Ibid., 48.
in that it became “what the words wanted, how they wanted to work.”94 While Cage perceived this type of improvisation as being freer than most, it most likely still reflected the unconscious biases of the performer (in this case Cage himself).

Other composers also searched for new creative avenues within improvisation. As a result, different styles of creating spontaneous music began to evolve. Stockhausen, who experimented with mobile form as a type of aleatory composition, began to establish a deeper connection with improvisation.

Following the *Klavierstücke*, Stockhausen decided to create his own style of extempore music known as “intuitive music.” Stockhausen, being well-known for his avant-garde electronic works, regarded “intuitive music” as an attempt at pure transcendentalism through improvisation.95 He composed two pieces in this style: *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968) and *Für Kommende Zeiten* (1968-1971). *Aus den sieben Tagen* is based upon a series of fifteen texts written for an unspecified number of players. Each of the movements require 4-60 minutes to perform. The piece consists of instructions, stimulating within the performers a certain attitude which should overcome self-control and promote creativity.96 According to Stockhausen, performing these pieces was “a technique for myself as composer and as interpreter to extend these lightning moments of intuition.”97 When engaging in improvising, he wanted the performers to extend self-awareness in order to gain new experiences within performance. However, the performer must also respond to the improvising ideas of others to better achieve these new experiences. He states that “he who has experienced nothing out of the ordinary, will

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94 Ibid., 49.
96 Kutschke, “Improvisation,” 149.
97 Ibid.
do nothing out of the ordinary. There is a direct relationship between the ability to respond and the ability to act.”

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c) \textit{Group Improvisation:}

Similar to much of the improvisation discussed within pre-twentieth century music, a good deal of improvisation that exists in the latter half of the twentieth century takes place in a group context. Many musicians agree that solo improvisation differs greatly from group improvisation. Christian Wolff aptly describes the dynamic that is created in group improvisation by noticing that “each of you sets the other off and you’ve got a kind of pin ball situation.”

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Composer and jazz pianist Fred Hersch observed that “each time one plays with a different musician, it changes not only the group sound and aesthetic, it affects my personal sound and approach.”

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While creating music spontaneously within a group has the benefit of musicians working collectively, there exists the possibility of disagreement among participants ranging from musical choices to even the underlying ideology of the given work. Larry Solomon points out possible dilemmas within improvising ensembles:

I recall experiences of improvisation ensembles where the music began to stagnate, and if this continued, the group disbanded or did something else, e.g., became a new music ensemble. In group improvisation there are opposing goals that may result in the demise of an ensemble. One is towards invention and the discovery of new ideas, new techniques, openness, diversity, etc., the essence of improvisation. The other is toward identity, polish, and refinement. These cannot last for long.

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Despite these issues, ensembles such as The Scratch Orchestra and MEV were able to pursue actions and choices of performers as explored within the works presented here.

Composers such as Frederic Rzewski and Cornelius Cardew experimented with improvisation and group improvisation in their works starting in the late 1960s. One purpose of such improvisation was, according to Alvin Curran, “the philosophical, political and economic liberation of music from itself.”\(^{102}\) The emergence of these improvising ensembles was not limited to one country or geographical area. Groups exploring group improvisation range from Musica Elettronica Viva or MEV in Italy, The Scratch Orchestra and AMM in Britain, The Sonic Arts Union, Gruppo Nuova Consonanza, Portsmith Symphonia, The Spontaneous Music Ensemble, to the AACM in Chicago.

Wolff’s *Exercises* (1973-1974) is written for an unspecified number of instruments. The score contains only one staff with specified pitches in the first fourteen exercises. Having the performers choose to read the staff in either treble or bass clef is, according to Griffiths, an aleatory component of the piece. This choice can be altered during performance, creating what the composer describes as an “improvised heterophony.”\(^{103}\) Heterophony is defined as the simultaneous variation of a melody and is a common musical tool within many of the extemporized pieces examined in this section.\(^{104}\) While performing the single staff in unison is certainly not required, it does serve as a “point of reference” for performers familiarizing themselves with the heterophony of the piece.\(^{105}\) Players are free to drop out and enter as they please. The number of instruments, as well as the manner in which those instruments can be played (pizzicato, col legno, etc.), is also the choice of the performers. There is no specified tempo; a player may choose to speed up or slow down given that the other players “agree” to the


\(^{103}\) Hicks, et al., "Improvisation, Heterophony, Politics, Composition," 141.


change in tempo. Overall, the piece serves as a kind of bridge between composing and improvising.\textsuperscript{106} Many of the musical decisions and actions must be determined by the performers during performance.

In the summer of 1970, Wolff began work on a piece, known as \textit{Burdocks} (1971), which was especially written to be performed by Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra. It was intended to be similar in nature to Cardew’s \textit{The Great Learning} (1968-1970) since both pieces contain graphic notation and employ group improvisation. The work was. The piece is written for “one or more orchestras;” the work’s performance notes define “orchestra” here to include as few as five players and allowed as many as ten orchestras to perform at once. In some instances, the choice of pitches is left up to the performer. The structure itself is very free: no set number of movements need be performed; movements can be played in succession, simultaneously, or even overlapping each other. The heterophony within the piece is inspired by recordings of Ba-Benzélé Pygmy songs from African field recordings that the composer first heard that same year.\textsuperscript{107}

The piece consists of ten different movements. Within the work, various improvisational techniques include musicians responding to each other’s pitches, having to create 511 different sounds, playing one to three soft sounds and coordinating them with the other players, interpreting graphic notation, choosing from a hundred different short melodic ideas (each devoid of clef), and finally creating music based on a single conceptualist prompt: “Flying, and possible crawling, or sitting still” that is presented in the last movement.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{106} Hicks, et al., ”Improvisation, Heterophony, Politics, Composition,” 141-142.
\textsuperscript{107} Hicks and Asplund, \textit{Christian Wolff}, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
In August, 1972, an infamous performance of the piece by the Scratch Orchestra took place in Munich with John Cage, Morton Feldman, and David Tudor in the audience. All three composers were extremely irritated by the improvisational choices made by the performers. This included a poem being read in the last movement (in response to “Flying, and possible crawling, or sitting still”) and a performer singing seven folk songs with banjo in response to a number seven written in the score. The latter action irritated Feldman to the point where he stood up and shouted that this was “not the music of Christian Wolff!” As Cage, Feldman, and Tudor came to realize, there are consequences to employing such free improvisation; this includes the possibility that performers may create music that may not align with the main idea of the work.

Another significant work that uses group improvisation is Changing the System (1972-1973). Also composed by Wolff, the “system” of the title has two meanings: 1) the dominating political organization of society within the 1960s and 1970s; and 2) the musical systems of the piece that change with the choices made by the performers. Written for a minimum of eight players that are divided into two quartets, the piece is split into two parts; the performers determine how these parts are assembled. Within the first part, players choose notes from the score and perform hocketts. The material in this section can be read in either bass or treble clef. The four players within the quartet will play the material sequentially (starting with player 4, then player 3, etc.). While the pitches are taken from the score, other musical aspects such as duration, timbre, and dynamics are left indeterminate and decided upon by the performers.

The second part of the piece consists of a score made up of numbers to be performed by simple percussion or everyday objects capable of making sounds of four gradated resonances (1

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109 Ibid., 51.
being of least resonance, 4 being of most resonance). The composer suggests four categories of sonic material: wood, metal, stone, and friction (such as guiro). Each member of the quartet will then cue a sound event as the players move through the material, improvising collectively and responding to the pace of the music as it is established.\footnote{Ibid., 147.}

Obviously, the question of group size impacts the effectiveness of group improvisation. For instance, Solomon claimed that ensembles that are too big will have a greater demand for pre-structuring and scoring, inhibit individual expression, increase demands for unifying elements, and increase demands for leadership. He states that the ideal size of an improvising ensemble should be between two and five people.\footnote{Solomon, “Improvisation II,” 232.}

Solomon also distinguishes between ensembles made up of trained and untrained musicians. He theorizes that ensembles made up of unschooled musicians are “less limited” and less restricted by learned conventional idioms than schooled musicians. He posits that the ideal ensemble would be made up of both trained and untrained musicians so long as the former do not carry a condescending attitude toward the latter.\footnote{Ibid.}

Critic and composer Kyle Gann also discusses the dangers occurring within group improvisation by explaining that performers sometimes “listened too much.”\footnote{Kyle Gann, “A Statement on Free Improvisation,” Contemporary Music Review 25, no. 5–6 (October–December 2006): 619.} Gann points out how a certain ideology developed around the idea that since improvisation is “courageous and risk-taking,” it is inherently “good.”\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, improvising groups fall into predictable patterns that are deceivingly categorized as “good” just because improvisation is being utilized.

When one person got faster, another would too. When one person got louder, another would too. The result was that nearly every improv set moved linearly to a big, noisy
climax, from which it slowly subsided until that thoroughly predictable moment in which everyone is extending, extending, extending, trying to find the right last note and inevitably going past it.\textsuperscript{116}

Gann points out that \textit{Cobra} by John Zorn defies this trend.\textsuperscript{117} Zorn created rules within the piece to prevent predictable clichés. The piece resembles a board game; throughout the piece, players may choose their own actions and musical decisions while abiding by rules that help regulate both. The unpublished score is meant to be loosely interpreted with the intention of serving as more of an oral tradition than doctrine. The instrumentation is open and calls for ten to twenty performers. These performers give signals by hand motions or displaying cards with different symbols on them. A list of complicated rules and instructions require different players to act as leaders who can interfere with the performance of other players or make requests of other players during a performance. Zorn himself explains how,

people can sneak in a downbeat, people can become guerillas and have squads, get people to imitate them, capture people, switch them . . . so it really becomes a game that’s fun to play. It creates real excitement on stage. The musicians are into it. They want to create a situation where they can be in control, where they’re the guerilla leader with their squad telling this guy to stop and this guy to play.\textsuperscript{118}

The musical outcome of these “games” was never the concern of the composer. Instead, Zorn was more preoccupied with form and the relationships between the players than with the resulting sounds.\textsuperscript{119} While he cites Stockhausen and Cage as composers that defined his style of composition, Zorn believed that he was “tying together loose strings left dangling by composers such as Earle Brown, Cornelius Cardew, John Cage and (Karlheinz) Stockhausen.”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 60.
d) *Improvisation and Notation*

Since the beginning of musical notation in western culture, musicians have developed a very close relationship with the written score. According to Solomon, it has become “the dictator of musical thought and performance.”\(^{121}\) He refers to how trained musicians today rely less on their imagination and don’t view themselves as creators of the music.

Trained performers are translators of a blueprint, the score, that they obey as if threatened with punishment of death. Some, realizing the impotence of this endeavor, try to take solace in the development of Paganini-like techniques. The purist approach to an appropriate musical performance of a period piece is the epitome of this attitude and is well known today in our academies.\(^{122}\)

Typically, the purpose of the score is to provide instruction to the performer so that the performance can be replicated as accurately as possible while the very nature of improvisation is to be indeterminate and unpredictable. In order to experiment with new freedoms associated with modern extemporized music, different systems of notation were explored.

One significant form of notation utilized in a number of twentieth-century scores was graphic notation. Anthony Pryer defines graphic notation as “a system developed in the 1950s by which visual shapes or patterns are used instead of, or together with, conventional music notation.”\(^{123}\) Aside from creating aesthetically pleasing symbols corresponding with the music, composers mostly incorporated this type of notation as a new way of communicating musical ideas. Graphic notation became a catalyst for both improvisation and indeterminate music, particularly with regard to the amount of freedom afforded to performers within these pieces.\(^{124}\)

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\(^{121}\) Solomon, “Improvisation II,” 229.

\(^{122}\) Ibid.


Due to its relatively ambiguous nature, graphic notation mitigated the divide between trained and untrained musicians. As a result, many ensembles employing graphic notation became more inclusive. The idea of an ensemble that could include a variety of different musicians with different backgrounds would eventually reflect the emerging socialist ideologies of composers and performers.

Graphic notation became particularly noticeable within the works of Feldman, Stockhausen, Cage, Cardew, and Wolff. Many of these composers used a combination of graphic and traditional notation. An example appears in movements II, V, and VII of Wolff’s *Burdocks* (1971). In movements II and VII, the composer divides the players into groups (3 groups for II and 5 groups for VII). Players must interpret the interconnected note heads and lines of the score in terms of pitch, duration, and form. Example 1-1 presents the two sequences of movement II. Within each repeated sequence, players choose their pitches. Filled in note heads designate short sounds while empty note heads indicate sounds of free duration. Notes with slashes instruct the performer to play with abnormal sound quality. The “2t” next to the note signals the use of two timbres played simultaneously, successively, or overlapping. Similar notation appears in Wolff’s *Changing the System*.

Example 1-1: Wolff’s *Burdocks* (1971) II.
In Sylvano Bussoti’s piano piece, *Five Pieces for David Tudor* (1959), graphic notation seems to erupt from the traditional staff. The notes explode into squiggly lines that must be interpreted by the pianist playing the piece. Bussoti explains this semi-improvisatory style by stating that the music written in the score “resta nelle mani del pianista” (remains in the hands of the pianist).\(^\text{125}\) He continues his explanation by stating that “the very use of familiar signs in unfamiliar circumstances leaves the performer wondering if such-and-such a mark is meant to be taken literally, as an abstraction, as an enigma, or as none of the above.”\(^\text{126}\) According to Bussoti, graphic notation is a musical problem and the improvisation is generated by the performer only when such a problem is solved.


A graphic score that contains no conventional aspects of notation is Feldman’s *The Straits of Magellan* (1961) for seven instruments including piano. The score consists of multiple boxes in rows. Empty boxes represent silence while boxes containing numbers and letters


\(^{126}\) Ibid.
symbolize certain actions to be performed. Numbers indicate how many notes the performer must play in succession or as a chord; pitches and chords are improvised by the performer.  


Other graphic works communicate very little information to the performer as how to interpret the score. This could elicit some frustration from performers who already experience difficulty interpreting less avant-garde, more traditional styles. One example is *Very Circular Pieces* (1970) by Robin Mortimore. The score merely consists of different circles with only one instruction to the performer: “repeat.”

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128 Ibid., 307.

A more familiar example of graphic notation is Cardew’s *Treatise* (1967). Cardew, who enrolled in a graphic design course to better understand and construct graphic notation, concluded that “the composer doesn’t conceive of a piece of music so much as a notation system, which musicians may then use as a basis for making music, or more likely (as I would evaluate it today), aimless manipulations of the system in terms of sound.”

Example 1-5: Cardew’s *Treatise* (1967).

In free improvisation, some sort of score or prompt is not necessary, but can be used to guide the performers a certain way. These prompts range from traditional notation such as a fermata to graphic notation and verbal directions. In text scores, composers sometimes list

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instructions and set parameters for the players during performance. An example comes from movement III of Wolff’s Burdocks, where the only directions that the composer gives is:

Orchestra of any number. Each Player makes about 511 sounds, each sound different in some way.

Verbal prompts can come as a line in a poem or a prose statement. In Paragraph 5 of The Great Learning, Cardew simply writes: “A dense forest that presents no obstacle to the mind or eye (or other sense).” The simple statement used in the final movement of Wolff’s Burdocks that was mentioned earlier, “Flying, and possibly crawling or sitting still,” is also an example of a text score. In each case, the performers are expected to spontaneously create some form of music with no other indication or guidelines on how the improvised music should be constructed.

The relevance of these types of notation relate back to the definition of indeterminacy and improvisation. Scores that are graphic or text in nature not only seek to create an indeterminate performance but an improvised one. That is, the performer must spontaneously create the music based on the given score. However, some avant-garde musicians like pianist David Tudor would prepare a preconceived realization of the score beforehand, thus changing an indeterminate piece to one that is determined within performance. Tudor first prepared a realization of an indeterminate score prior to the performance of Cage’s Winter Music; this quickly became his standard practice. Such an action changes the nature of the performance to one where the unforeseen no longer exists. Reifying indeterminate pieces so that they are no longer indeterminate can lead to the commodification of the work. How this process unfolds will be explored with Adorno in the next chapter.

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e) Role of the Audience

While the audience has always been an essential aspect regarding musical performance, over time, the role of the audience has changed. Traditionally, the participation of the audience, within a classical music setting, can vary from loud outbursts, clapping or singing along, to silent, deep listening. Typically, in Western art music, many pieces don’t include the audience in an active sense. However, the audience plays a decisive role in the active creation of the music. Elliot Sharp, a composer and performer, discusses how the audience is important for feedback. According to Sharp, how we listen during improvised music “is very much shaped by the ‘scene’—we’re in a constant state of pheromonal communications with our environment—positive audience feedback ‘smells good’ and makes us feel good about what we are doing.”

As the roles of the performers changed within experimental and avant-garde works, it became almost inevitable that the role of the audience would change as well. Performances consisting of silent audience members acting as spectators, while highly virtuosic performers recreated ancient works on an elevated stage, became incompatible with the ideological purposes of these new works.

When extemporizing, some performers don’t even imagine the conventional concert paradigm. When asked what the role of the audience is in improvisation, composer and guitarist Larry Polansky explained how he and members of his improvising ensemble “mostly don’t play for an audience. Our intention in forming was mainly to play for ourselves.” While Polansky considers himself and members of his ensemble the producers of the music, they also adapt the role of the audience. Psychologist John Dewey, suggests it is vital for the artist or artists to be

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133 Michael Hicks, et al., “Improvisation, Heterophony, Politics, Composition,” 137.
included as part of the audience. He points out that “even when the artist works in solitude...the artist has to become vicariously the receiving audience.”¹³⁴ The performance becomes an event not just for audience members, but for the performers involved as well.

Additionally, as ensembles became more inclusive and consisted of both trained and untrained musicians, audience members were not only permitted but also encouraged to participate within improvisational/indeterminate works. Such participation was meant to eliminate the divide between performer and the general public. Philosopher R.G. Collingwood stressed how “there must be an audience, whose function is therefore not a merely receptive one, but collaborative too. The artist stands thus in collaborative relations with an entire community.”¹³⁵ Composer Trevor Wishart also considered the role of the audience to be too limited.

The entire audience should, ideally, be an intrinsic part of the event from beginning to end, and when this is the case they cease to be mere audience and the event ceases to be a concert; they create the event, it is theirs, it is no longer done for them. They are no longer ‘the public,’ divided off from the ‘Artists’ by an unquestionable act of God which caused some people to be born with a ‘Creative Spark’, an ‘Artistic Gift’, destined to amuse the vast hordes of the supposedly unimaginative.¹³⁶

Many scholars and composers saw the social possibilities of including non-performers within performances. Durant discusses improvisation in relation to the “nature of desirable human relationships and interactions (e.g. co-operativeness, freedom from aggression, etc.). And such a view may perfectly well be shared by particular groups of improvisers or by any audience group.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid.
In 1967, Cage proposed that “Art, instead of being an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art’s socialized. It isn’t someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had.” These tenets arguably inspired Cardew and Rzewski and demonstrated how the interaction among performers and audience members are equally important to the sounds produced by the performers.

Rzewski, with the assistance of his improvising ensemble, Musica Elettronica Viva or MEV, devised a musical activity known as “Sound Pool.” The piece invited members of the public to come and spontaneously create music with very little structure or rules. In Rzewski’s words, the audience was invited to “bring a sound and cast it into the pool.” A vast number of people, sometimes as many as a hundred, attended and participated in these events. The result was a free-for-all which erupted spontaneously into dancing and typically streamed out into the street. In extreme cases, these events typically had to end with the aid of police and fire departments. Nonetheless, the objective, to reach out beyond the confines of the ensemble itself and to include the audience and non-musicians in the musical process, was achieved.

An example of a piece that is meant to employ audience participation is Wolff’s Looking North (1968-1969). Within the piece, performers are instructed to make their pulse evident when they hear “a sound,” or see “a movement or smell,” or feel “any sensation not seeming to emanate” from themselves. Cues could also emanate from the audience rather than just the

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140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
performers. Since these cues are subtle and highly subjective, it is possible that the audience won’t be aware of their involvement.\textsuperscript{142}

In \textit{Public Supply} (1966) by Max Neuhaus, the composer was able to manipulate sounds from phone calls made to a local radio station. Through ten phone lines, the piece consisted of speech from introverted and extroverted callers as well as feedback caused by the caller’s radios. While the piece is more indeterminate than improvisational, the work obliterates the old performer-audience notion as well as any conventions of a traditional performance. The piece could only exist with an audience actively participating to create the piece.\textsuperscript{143}

\textit{f) Free Improvisation}

Derek Bailey, in his book \textit{Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music}, divides improvisation into two categories. What he calls “idiomatic” improvisation involves works “within an overarching framework of generic expectations or conventions” as opposed to “non-idiomatic” works which do not contain these characteristics.\textsuperscript{144}

Groups such as AMM, MEV and Scratch Orchestra experimented with moving away from idiomatic expectations in various ways. In place of composed notes and phrases, one had rules, codes of behavior, and ethics. Guidelines for improvisation created by MEV include:

0) Any physical space is a potential musical space as is any time of day or night an appropriate musical time.
1) All music starts anew each time, as if there had never been any music before it.
2) Any member of the group may utilize any audible or imaginable sound at any time.
3) Musical remembering and musical amnesia are of equal value—in short, one could build on past or conditioned experience or try to forget everything ever

\textsuperscript{143} Ballantine, Music and Its Social Meanings, 111.
\textsuperscript{144} Bailey, Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music, 4.
known.

4) The requirements for musical participation are no longer based on purely musical skills, education, technique, experience, age, gender, race or religion but on an implicit code of universal harmony and mutual acceptance. This resulted immediately in a form of transnational music.

5) Each player provides his/her own instruments and sound sources.

6) The act of collective performance has no specified duration and performances begin and end by tacit (musically understandable) agreement.

7) Without leaders, scores, or any rules at all, the music should be based on the musicians’ mutual respect for and trust in one another, the public, and the individual and sum of all the sounds emitted into the performing space.

8) Because this music is fragile and dangerously based on almost nothing (ephemeral sounds and precarious human relationships), the players must cultivate extraordinary levels of attention, awareness and artistic efficiency—primarily through silence and rigorous listening, and appropriate action and reaction—so to prevent the music from becoming literally nothing. This form of personal and collective commitment endowed everyone involved (including the producers and public) with finely tuned ears and magnanimous attitudes.

9) No matter what transpires, a sense of transcendent unity is likely to be the unspoken goal of every improvisational event. (This sense of unity, though not always achieved, is very recognizable, almost tangible in certain moments. Especially when one cannot answer the questions: ‘did I make that/did we make that/did you make that/did they make that?’)

10) All members share equally in the promotion, economic stability and creative growth of the group—in return for an equal share in received proceeds.

11) This is a space for your own contribution.

When examining these MEV guidelines, much like Zorn’s *Cobra*, the increasing focus on the actual relationships between the performers becomes apparent. Some guidelines, such as #4 and #7, deal with a social aspect of music making within the ensemble itself. By basing the music on political ideals such as “mutual acceptance” and “mutual respect and trust in one another,” MEV seeks to make music making into an effective social practice.

While Zorn and the members of MEV concentrated on the performer’s connections that occurred within free improvisation, Alan Durant addresses the musical outcome itself. In his

article, Durant develops three arguments in favor of free improvisation which can be labeled as “improvisation as liberation,” “improvisation as discovery,” and “improvisation as dialogue.”\textsuperscript{146}

The first argument, “improvisation as liberation” refers to the freedom of the performer to choose and play material only limited by the human imagination. As seen earlier with Wolff’s \textit{Burdocks}, the freedom of the performers within the piece can cause conflict over aesthetics. If the composer intends the piece to be performed in a specific way, then having a large amount of indeterminacy within the work will certainly replace the intentions of the composer with that of the performer. On the other hand, some scholars claim that it is a misconception that liberation exists just because improvisation is being used within a work. Rzewski himself states:

A “free” improvisation might be no more than a mechanical repetition of maneuvers that have been executed so often, over a long period of time, that the performer can go through an entire concert without thinking.\textsuperscript{147}

As mentioned above, this is a common problem when employing free improvisation within a piece. In their article, authors Carol Gould and Kenneth Keaton claim that the problem of mechanical repetition occurs due to predictable patterns within the music itself.

[M]any improvised performances are carefully preconceived according to patterns and formulae known to be appropriate in a particular structure. For example, a player may return to familiar patterns within the chord progression of the song on which she or he improvises. Even within such a progression, certain modulatory patterns might invite common treatment of “improvised” phrases or patterns.\textsuperscript{148}

Since many pieces share similar chord progressions, the repetition of phrases based on those progressions may ultimately reappear. Typically, in free improvisation, such a problem would

\textsuperscript{146} Durant, "Improvisation in the Political Economy of Music," 269.
not occur since the chord progressions themselves would be free and thus unpredictable. Music scholar Panagiotis Kanellopoulos elucidates:

The term “free improvisation” does not imply absence of constraints, but wishes to draw a distinction between improvisation as part of extant musical forms and traditions, and collective improvisation which does not intend to belong to or emulate any particular musical tradition, striving instead for experimentation and countering hierarchical musical structures and music-making contexts. This stream of music-making practice sought to liberate itself from both the North American jazz tradition and the domination of the European avant-garde and its insistence upon radical innovation.149

Since free collective improvisation is not associated with any particular musical tradition, it then creates its own traditions and social context in regard to “freedom.” This freedom uncovers a social connection within music with performers now representing the members of a society. Through collective, free improvisation, we can better understand the social connections within these pieces.

Musicians who experiment with free improvisation face the task of separating “new” discoveries from repeated habits. Durant’s second argument, “improvisation as discovery” addresses this issue. Since improvisation is created from the performer’s experience, training and preparation, any repetition of musical material in extempore performance is most likely something comfortable or pleasurable to the performers. This refers back to the discussion concerning improvisation and the subconscious—Cage’s biggest concern regarding improvisation. Durant concludes that to help keep freely improvised material new, musicians must perfect the art of listening to better monitor the outcome.150 As mentioned earlier, author Johnson-Laird proposed algorithms that make it possible for musicians to both simultaneously generate and evaluate improvised music. If these algorithms were used as a means to avoid the

150 Ibid., 272-273.
repetition of preferable material, and compel performers to explore new sounds, then such a
technique would promote a truer sense of freely improvised music.

The importance of the third argument, “improvisation as dialogue,” will be continually
addressed throughout this project and helps to establish the connection between improvisation
and political ideology. The core of the argument deals with human interaction as found in free
group improvisation. Furthermore, improvisation provides a forum that reveals both community
and conflict among participants. Within this forum of improvised works, such music is no
longer perceived and enjoyed conventionally as “performer-audience,” but rather as a social
activity for all.\footnote{Ibid., 274-275.}
Chapter 2
Music and Politics

*It is not for music to stare in helpless horror at society. It fulfils its social function more precisely when it presents social problems through its own material and according to its own social laws – problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique.*
T. Adorno¹

In order to situate my subsequent analyses of the connection between group improvisation and socialist politics within the music of Cardew and Rzewski, the wider relationship between politics and art in Western art music must be examined. Affected by the 1960s political climate, as well as political history leading up to that moment, composers such as Cardew and Rzewski wrote music designed to effect political and social change. Obviously, this politicized composition was embedded in a larger field of thought which influenced these musicians and in which they participated with both their music and their writings.

The goal for this chapter is to investigate the link between music and politics. Specifically, I will explore the socialist underpinnings as well as the overt political action that occurs within group improvisation as deployed by Rzewski and Cardew. For the most part, these two composers strived to balance the musical and the political within their works. However, obtaining this balance is not always possible. Within this chapter, I will distinguish between works that, arguably, are more successful in achieving a balance between aesthetics and politics, and works that were unable to do so, thus devolving onto propaganda.

The chapter will discuss the connections between art and politics, politics and music, and, finally, politics and the music ensemble. This will involve exploring the ideas of some political

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philosophers and writers such as Lydia Goehr, Theodor Adorno, Clement Greenberg, Mao Zedong, and Jacques Attali. Some of these writers—specifically Adorno, Mao, and Attali—have had a strong and direct influence on Cardew and Rzewski and the works they created throughout their careers.

The ideas explored within this chapter generate two essential questions: 1) Can musical works be simultaneously political and “autonomous” as defined by Lydia Goehr? 2) If we agree that artworks can find an equal balance between autonomy and the political, and therefore be considered politically effective, how does one measure the political effectiveness of a work? In order to answer these questions, we must first define autonomy in relation to artworks.

Art and Politics: Goehr’s Crude and Critical Solutions

To help answer these questions, we must examine the multi-faceted relationship between art and politics. This involves the question of art’s relative autonomy vis-à-vis political life. One philosopher and writer who explores the relationship of autonomy and art is Lydia Goehr, particularly in her article “Political Music and the Politics of Music.”

According to Goehr, autonomy “connotes freedom, independence, self-sufficiency and self-determination.” This definition seems a bit vague and redundant since Goehr fails to elucidate the distinction between “independence” and “self-sufficient,” terms that appear synonymous. However, what I believe Goehr is suggesting is that autonomous pieces rely upon musical, as opposed to extra-musical, values. If an autonomous work contains any political

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content, then that content is not its sole driving force. An autonomous musical work with political content must also be successful on its own musico-aesthetic qualities, even if it were devoid of political content. In order to further clarify the issues surrounding the concept of aesthetic autonomy, she conceived two different categories of thought or “solutions” that characterize the relationship between the artwork and society: the misguided Crude Solution and the more enlightened Critical Solution. Both solutions originate from the Cold War era and draw a line between Western and Eastern bloc views on music.

Under the Crude Solution, art can either be autonomous or political, but not both. This solution depends upon the idea that art such as music is thought to be transcendental while politics is considered “ordinary.”\(^4\) When politics and art combine, either the political or the aesthetic will be compromised. Therefore, while some composers might endeavor to achieve a balance between the two, Crude Solution composers strive to avoid this balance.

Crude Western thinking proposes that only in free Western society can pure art be produced. Members of this society are not bound to any specific political message or ideology and are, in fact, free to create art in its ideal form: transcendent and apolitical. Furthermore, many composers and musicians like composer Richard Strauss insist that politics stop “at the doors of art.”\(^5\) In a 1935 letter to Stefan Zweig regarding the role of politics in art, Strauss concisely describes his criterion for artists by stating “For me, there are only two categories of people: those who have talent, and those who have none.”\(^6\) Meanwhile, Crude Eastern bloc theorists dictate that the optimal form of art, a politically committed expression of communal value, can only be taught within a communist society. In this setting, artists are not alienated but

\(^5\) Alex Ross, “As if Music Could do no Harm,” The New Yorker, August 20, 2014.
\(^6\) Ibid.
rather choose to serve society as “musical citizens.”

Hence, the Western view holds that music is autonomous because it is apolitical whereas Eastern theorists conclude music must be political and not autonomous.

Works that were interpreted via the Crude Solution had two categories of distinct characteristics. Soviet critics were wary of music that was devoid of text or program and was deemed formalistic. The main argument against formalist music was that it could never be understood by the general population and is therefore useless. This led composers living under the communist regime to be extremely cautious regarding the works they produced. From a Western, non-Soviet perspective, a major flaw of the Soviet approach is that it results in propaganda that offers indoctrination rather than debate. However, according to the Soviet point of view, if art must be political, and to be political is to uphold the proper Soviet doctrine, then such a flaw does not exist. Examples of what we would describe as propaganda include many works created under communist rule in both the former Soviet Union and China. One specific example is Prokofiev’s *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October* (1936) which tells the story of the Bolshevik revolution and was intended to bolster Soviet ideals through music. Another example is Cardew’s *Ten Thousand Nails*, which was not written under communist rule but follows Crude Solution thinking.

Such works as *Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism* (1972) or *There is Only One Lie, There is Only One Truth* (1980) can be criticized for being so steeped in political ideology and so myopically concerned with political efficacy that they seem to offer very little in

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the way of aesthetic value. No commercial recordings or scores exist for *Ten Thousand Nails*, a work musicologist Timothy Taylor describes as “the most off-putting kind of radical, proselytizing music.”¹⁰ In a recording of a live performance, one hears the work beginning with 30 seconds of hammering sounds followed by a spoken call and response between a soloist (probably Cardew himself) and an ensemble. A piano produces dissonant chords in the background, supporting the spoken text, which, while difficult to discern, reads as follows:

One thousand nails in the coffin of [inaudible]!
Two thousand nails in the coffin of property!
Three thousand nails in the coffin of oppression!
Four thousand nails in the coffin of sterling!
Five thousand nails in the coffin of Minister Health!
Six thousand nails in the coffin of [inaudible]!
Seven thousand nails in the coffin of [inaudible]!
Eight thousand nails in the coffin of capitalism!
Nine thousand nails in the coffin of war!
Ten thousand nails in the coffin of imperialism!

Following the call and response, the hammering begins again and the piano continues until the work ends.

The hammering sounds ostensibly represent the toiling of workers. However, if this piece is meant to appeal to the working class through a nod toward accessibility, then those dissonant chords seem misplaced. This leads to the conclusion that the work is politically ineffective, regardless of the piece’s pro-working-class message.¹¹ The work arguably has limited aesthetic interest due to its simple and repetitive materials. Taylor’s assessment of this piece is that Cardew paid little attention to “compositional craft” or “sonic beauty” when writing it.¹² Ultimately, it does nothing but preach to the converted and leaves little room for debate.

¹⁰ Ibid, 568.
¹¹ This might explain an arrangement created by British composer, Andy Martin, that excludes the piano. This version can be viewed on Youtube, https://youtu.be/jwOZPKJb8W8 (accessed June 4, 2019.
Contrarily, the Critical Solution answers one of the key questions posed at the beginning of this chapter by establishing that politically efficacious artworks must, in fact, be autonomous. A work of art must “fall between the poles of [the] musical and political.” However, compared to the Crude Solution, this idea seems contradictory. How can a work be autonomous and political?

Ultimately, the Critical Solution seeks to strike a balance between aesthetics and politics. It aims to prove that “although aesthetics is separable from politics, the ideals regulating each should be neither reduced one to the other, nor formed in isolation from one another.” This requires that music as an art form be equally musical as well as political but “without contradiction.”

The Critical Solution originates from the same cold war thinking that gave rise to the Crude Solution. However, some ideas that constitute the Critical Solution date back to the 1800s. According to Goehr, the notion of “art for art’s sake” or the formalist ideal of music for music’s sake centered around two concepts: “that the fine arts had at last been released from their hitherto servile and ritualistic, courtly and religious roles; and that now in their freedom, and newly emancipated state, the fine arts could help bring about political freedom in the world.”

There are two aspects to consider with respect to the Critical Solution. The first addresses the relationship between music and its external relationship to concrete political messages. The second centers on an internal, more abstract association between music and politics. Crude Solution thinking deals only with this first aspect. However, it is the second aspect of the

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15 Ibid, 105.
Critical Solution (not relevant to the Crude Solution) that not only allows music to be autonomous as well as political, but requires it.\textsuperscript{16}

Ultimately, the Critical Solution insists that music and art be both autonomous as well as political. As Goehr puts it,

Music is connected to society by an “and” as well as a “versus.” The solution recognizes in fact that musical autonomy is double-sided, two-directional, Janus-faced, dialogical, or dialectical: that music can be purely musical and politically committed without contradiction—“formally “perfect” and “heroically struggling” as we often identify the dualism in a Beethoven symphony.”\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, under the Critical Solution, music has a “relative” relationship with autonomy. Goehr claims that music “functions in relation to what it is not, to something against which it constantly asserts its independence.”\textsuperscript{18} Music asserts its independence by resisting the very social conditions under which it was produced. Since music responds to the conditions surrounding production by resisting it, music’s freedom becomes a form of resistance. If it were free while isolated from the ordinary world, it would cease to have any value. According to the Critical Solution, “music’s meaning and freedom \textit{is possible only in} the world.”\textsuperscript{19}

According to Goehr, of all the arts, music (specifically instrumental music) has the greatest ability to serve both the political and the aesthetic equally. This is because it lacks representational and conceptual content. Music is made up of pure sound (resistant to conceptual grasp) and is least likely to be confused with any ideological “causes.”\textsuperscript{20} Goehr’s Critical Solution not only alludes to the possibility that music can be both transcendental and ordinary, it requires it to be both.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 105-106.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 106.
Although Goehr’s Solutions help categorize how twentieth century political music is perceived, some problems emerge. While she never explains precisely what is meant by the labels “representational and conceptual content,” the implication is that these terms are referring to program music. Goehr claims that music lacking representational and conceptual content can achieve the dual heights of political and aesthetic meaning, however, there is no discussion of how vocal music (possibly containing political text) changes this dynamic. Furthermore, if “representational and conceptual content” does refer to programmatic music, how can programmatic music serve the political and the aesthetic equally if music is meant to lack this quality? One could surmise that the use of an obvious political text or program, would make the work more overtly political and thus less autonomous; thus, the piece would fall under the Crude Solution. Examples are discussed later in the chapter in regard to music produced in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, how does one evaluate the political-aesthetic balance within pieces to determine if political autonomy has been achieved? While some composers strive to achieve this balance, creating a standard to measure this aspect seems impossible since the political-aesthetic balance is subjectively based on taste and the political bias of the listener.

Critical and Crude Solution thinking can help elucidate the political nature of postmodernist and avant-garde music. While some experimental composers such as Rzewski and Cardew were interested in the abstract, they also blurred the lines between high and low art. This was accomplished by creating music that was inclusive, in which many could participate rather than merely a few.

Instead of fixating on the transcendental nature of the music, Cardew and Rzewski made their works more ordinary and sought to create “music for the people.” While their music

\[21\] Ibid.
sometimes still had a transcendent or spiritual quality, the focus was now on the social efficacy of their works. One may simply focus on the material reality of the music as a way of focusing on material reality in general. By bringing to light the social aspects of music, the composers drew attention to social reality itself.

This line of thinking is suggestive of the Crude Solution. However, these composers were also deeply concerned with aesthetics, with exploring and creating new sounds, and cultivating artworks. By placing their focus on the very fabric of music and compelling performers to explore new levels of creativity in performance, Cardew and Rzewski attempted to reignite the transcendent qualities of music while also holding to the ordinary (social) aspect of music.

Focusing excessively on material reality (i.e., the functional materials of music) and disregarding any hint of the transcendent, aesthetic nature of music, however, can also have its consequences. Cardew, within his last style-period, became concerned solely with the political message. So radical was his rejection of aesthetic autonomy that he eventually criticized the avant-garde style for its bourgeois, elitist nature, and later abandoned many of his former works. His abandonment of aesthetics and his turn toward overt political messages demonstrate how he eventually changed his view of music from a Critical to Crude Solution.

**Art as Propaganda**

Propaganda music has been defined by David T. Little as “ideology-serving music with purely political content, often devoid of ‘legitimate’ artistic value.”

While Goehr views musical propaganda as works that fail to achieve a balance between politics and art by leaning

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too heavily on the former, American philosopher John Dewey discussed the threat aesthetic propaganda posed to democracy. Dewey feared outside forces would interfere with a culture’s communication. Dewey describes these outside forces as “economic or otherwise—that tend to encourage slavishness, discipline, and uniformity in the subjects that are affected by them.”

It is possible to identify this interference when, as Dewey put it, the “same few and relatively simple beliefs asseverated to be ‘Truths’” usurp reality. This occurs when many possible ideas are replaced by a few. Such restricted one-dimensional communication, which interferes with our aesthetic experience, Dewey calls “propaganda.” He contends that as propaganda disseminates through society, and as mass opinion takes the place of diverse public opinion, democratic culture gives way to totalitarianism.

However, these concerns are not restricted to socialist and totalitarian states. Philosopher Theodor Adorno decries the proliferation of ideological controls in late capitalism through what he terms the “culture industry.” According to Adorno, the culture industry “tolerates no deviation and incessantly drills in the same formulas of behavior…[and it] arouses a feeling of well-being that the world is precisely in that order suggested by the culture industry.”

Individuals within the culture industry are no longer subjects but become the objects of economic interests. They are consumers controlled by outside forces. Adorno posits that the culture industry “impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide for themselves, [qualities that] would be the precondition for a democratic society.”

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24 Ibid., 181.
26 Ibid., 134.
27 Ibid., 135.
Additionally, Adorno asserts that the majority of what is produced by society and culture is what he calls “artifacts.” Objects that can be called artifacts are specifically designed for mass production. While true art can be reproduced, artifacts “exist merely to satisfy the artificially produced desires of the consumer;” true art resists the immediate needs of the consumer.\(^\text{28}\)

Finally, Dewey and Adorno create a distinction between true art and propaganda in relation to freedom and how we thrive within society. True art, according to Dewey, compels us to be more cognizant of our relationship with life and culture. Furthermore, Adorno posits that true art is an alternative to everyday, banal culture and promises new forms of freedom. Such art should encourage us more effectively at making informed decisions and thus foster political action.\(^\text{29}\) Unlike propaganda, it should affect subjects at a deeper, more cerebral level. Dewey was a firm believer that art could reach this deeper level of understanding. Ultimately, if done well, it “breaks through the crust of conventional consciousness.”\(^\text{30}\)

**Adorno’s Resistance to Society**

While Marxist and Maoist regimes were concerned with the balance of politics and aesthetics as a way to further their political message, Adorno builds upon Marxist dogma and concludes that art must serve a social function beyond aesthetics:

> Art…is not social only because it is brought about in such a way that it embodies the dialectic of forces and relations of production. Nor is art social only because it derives its material content from society. Rather it is social primarily because it stands opposed to society. Now this opposition art can mount only when it has become autonomous. By congealing into an entity unto itself—rather than obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself “socially useful”—art criticized society just by being there.\(^\text{31}\)

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\(^{29}\) Ibid., 47.


There is nothing in art that is directly social, not even when direct sociality is the artist’s express aim. (…) What is social in art is not its political stance, but its immanent dynamic in opposition to society. (…) If any social function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function.32

Herein lies the contradiction raised earlier with Goehr’s Critical Solution. When the artist strives to create pure art, the work will always stand in opposition to society insofar that it is art; its resistance is its social function. According to Adorno, “Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society.”33 The contradictory relationship between art and society is necessary to prevent art from being employed by institutions or even society itself. Art created under regimes such as Stalin’s and Mao’s serve as examples of art’s capitulation to social pressures. However, as Adorno shows with respect to capitalism, any society threatens to force art into the condition of a commodity, making it easily consumed and reinforcing the dominant and dominating ideology. According to Adorno, such works do not qualify as art.

Even prior to adopting any specific political message, art criticizes society by its autonomy and its very existence. The problem with this idea is clarifying how art can be autonomous as well as political. For this to be understood, Adorno’s paradoxical aspects of autonomous art must be explained by first looking at the matter from a historical perspective. By working with musical material, the composer is working with “historically sedimented conventions.” Strictly speaking, the fundamental aspects of music are effected by history. Adorno stresses that the musical material “is itself never purely natural material, but rather a social and historical product.”34

32 Ibid., 227.
33 Ibid.
In his essay, “On the Social Situation of Music,” Adorno analyzes the relationship between music’s commodity and autonomous natures. As alluded to earlier when discussing Goehr, Adorno asserts that around the rise of capitalism in Europe, Western high art music develops its autonomy by freeing itself from the previous bonds with religion and ritual. Although it successfully freed itself from one immediate function with respect to society, it attained another function due to the capitalist mode of production; it became a commodity.\(^{35}\)

Since the beginning of the bourgeois period, autonomous music has been cut off and separated from society owing to the same contradictions and fractures which cut through present day society itself (for example, the division of labor)\(^{36}\) which it represents in its own material.\(^{37}\) Such autonomy has allowed music to develop parallel to society, both converging with and diverging from its social context while developing an independent structure of its own. Although music is autonomous and separate from society, it nevertheless contains socially conditioned concepts and ideologies “sedimented” within its material; by engaging with this historically and socially conditioned material, by resisting its blandishments and challenging the weight of musical tradition, compositions reveal their social content or “substance.”\(^{38}\)

For Adorno, the conflict created by music’s autonomous and commodity characters results in a condition of alienation. He terms the process of art separating from society Entkunstung or “de-artification.”\(^{39}\) Art becomes alienated to the point where it becomes too foreign for the general public to understand and consume. This is a result of the tensions that


\(^{36}\) Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Division of Labor;” Britannica Academic, s.v. “Division of Labor.” Division of labor is defined as “the distribution of tasks among members of a group or to different areas to increase efficiency.” [http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=Division%20of%20Labor&i ncludeLevelThree=1&page=1](http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=Division%20of%20Labor&includeLevelThree=1&page=1) (accessed September 14, 2017)


\(^{38}\) Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 98.

exist between the forces of production and consumption. Adorno writes in “The Social Situation of Music” that “through the total absorption of both musical production and consumption by the capitalist process, the alienation of music from man has become complete.”

To better explain art’s relationship to society, Adorno acknowledges “antinomies” or contradictions that exist in society. These “antinomies” are an integral part of Adorno’s philosophy and are understood through dialectic thinking. He refers to his dialectical method as “negative” since there is no intended reconciliation between the opposing forces. According to sociologist Jürgen Ritsert, Adorno’s mediation is not in the middle ground but in the extremes themselves.

According to Adorno, the antinomies of society find their way into the musical material, indeed into music’s own “formal language.” This leads us to the epigraph that introduces this chapter, in which Adorno claims that music, “fulfills its social function more precisely when it presents social problems through its own material and according to its own social laws – problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique.” Since these problems exist in the musical material as antinomies, the radical composer of art music is tasked with responding to the demands of the material. Musical material, then, is not pure objectivity but rather the site of mediation between subject and object.

In order to track the progress of musical material through history, one must look at the relationship between the expressive subject and the “objectivity” of the tradition of musical composition. Thus, the driving force of the historical movement of musical material is the

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41 Jürgen Ritsert, Vermittlung der Gegensätze in sich: Dialektische Themen und Variationen in der Musiksoziologie Adornos (Frankfurt/Main: Studientext zur Sozialwissenschaft, Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften der J.W. Goethe-Universität, 1987); Paddison, Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music, 120.
43 Ibid.
44 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 168; Paddison, Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music, 100-101.
mediation between subject and object within individual works and against the handed-down tradition.  

Adorno’s sociology of music consists of different levels of mediation. The first level of mediation is productivity which consists of the subjectivity of the composer confronting the objectivity of the musical material. Subjectivity in this sense is already a social product made up of technical skills, expressive needs, spontaneity, etc. The objectivity of the musical material is the handed-down, changing set of musical customs that have now become social property. These customs have erased or obscured their partly subjective beginnings. This dialectic can also be interpreted as subjective spontaneity versus objective convention. The result of this dialectic is the musical work as score which is now understood as both an autonomous object and as process.

Additionally, Adorno likens the interaction between composer and musical material to the interaction between composer and society. He asserts that there is something in the art work that “in an unconscious way expresses its desire to change the world.” Authentic art separates from and criticizes the real world. This tension is always present and never resolved; if lost, then the art work falls prey to the assimilatory domination of the culture industry. When the work as score is actually performed, its alienation from society becomes apparent. Broadly speaking, performance mediates between production and consumption. Adorno calls performance “reproduction” and sees it as a dialectic between the performer and the musical

46 Ibid. 185.
47 Ibid. 188.
48 Ibid. 186 & 189.
work (a dialectic of subject and object that runs parallel to that between the composer and the musical material).  

The concern with historical context informs the relationship between performer and score, as it informed the relationship between composer and material. Adorno specifies that musical performance is not preoccupied with “an eternal work per se nor with a listener dependent upon constant natural conditions, but rather with historical conditions … the works themselves have their history and change within it.” Due to the continued alienation of the artwork from society, composers have been allowed a new measure of freedom over time within production. This freedom extends to the performer/interpreter of the works.

In regard to improvisation, Adorno avers that until the late eighteenth century, production, reproduction, and improvisation “intermingled without fixed boundaries.” However, Adorno claims that the rise of the bourgeoisie and the beginning of tempered tuning at the end of the eighteenth century put a halt to this interpretive freedom. From one perspective, through increasing rationalization, the musical work becomes fully autonomous. From another view, music as “a rational system of signs, defines itself as commodity in relation to society.”

Thus, the performer must mediate between the musical work as a rationalized sign system and the demands the market “within which the configuration of the work perishes.” For Adorno, the performer becomes “the last musical refuge of irrational reproduction within the capitalist process.” During the nineteenth century, a relationship based on mutuality between performer/interpreter and musical work was still possible since both performer and composer

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52 Ibid. 412.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 413.
57 Ibid.
shared the same social status. Nonetheless with the rise of industrial society, a void has developed between interpreter and composer as well as between work and public.\textsuperscript{58} Ultimately, it is the content of the works that decides the method of interpretation. In most cases the freedom of the interpreter is exaggerated. The requirements of the score limit the freedom of the interpreter and put restrictions on indeterminate or improvisational aspects.\textsuperscript{59} In earlier music, the interpreter was granted more freedom with respect to the handed-down forms. The harmony and tension that existed between these two forces gave way for what Adorno calls “play” (\textit{Spiel}).\textsuperscript{60} However, when this balance is disrupted at the level of reproduction, it is perceived as a lack of improvisatory freedom. Adorno writes that “the greater the structure of acknowledged objectivity in the musical work, the greater the freedom available to its interpreter.

Adorno gives priority to the score over the performance, considering the score closer to the idea of the work “in itself.” However, the objectification of the work as performance is also viewed as the reification of the work. According to Adorno, the work as produced by the composer is “an objectification of the Subject, while the work-as-performance although a further aspect of this process of objectification, can also serve to ‘fix’ the work – i.e. to reify it.”\textsuperscript{61}

Musical reproduction, in the sense of distribution and eventually consumption, is a process that can also be understood as a move from the musical work as an “in itself,” an objectification of the subject, towards the work as a “for other,” the reification and standardization of subjectivity in the form of the commodity.\textsuperscript{62} The concept of reification, the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Theodor Adorno, “Zum Problem der Reproduktion,” \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann und übersetzung von Max Paddison (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp Verlag, 1997), 441-442.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Paddison, \textit{Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music}, 198.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 198-199.
solidification of dynamic processes into something more concrete, is essential to Adorno’s sociology of music and explains his emphasis of production over consumption.

Since marketing and distribution is such an essential part of consumption, the musical aspect of production and the autonomy of the musical work fall under the influence of the culture industry—that is, musical works “become a part of the process of industrial production itself.”

Until distribution gets to the masses, it is subject to innumerable processes of social selection and guidance by powers such as industries, concert agencies, festival managements, and various other bodies. All this enters into the listener’s preferences; their needs are merely dragged along. Ahead of everything comes the control by the giant concerns in which electrical, recording and broadcasting industries are overtly or covertly merged in the economically most advanced countries. As the concentration and the power of the distributive agencies increase, freedom in the choice of what to hear tends to decrease; in this respect, integrated music no longer differs from any other consumer commodities.

Thus, the relationship, Adorno clarifies, is between the work as performance and the culture industry as institutionalized marketing and affects the freedom of what music will be exposed to the general public.

The mediation between production and distribution mostly applies to music that is currently being produced, specifically music geared toward entertainment. Adorno labels the entertainment music of the last century over more a “filthy tide.” Since popular music contains no genuine musical innovation, any basis for appreciation of such music disguises its “prescribed ever-sameness” of “standard devices.” Music for the purpose of entertainment simply reuses tonal structures from earlier times under different cultural conditions so that mass audiences can better resist challenging its own current social condition.

63 Ibid., 199.
65 Adorno, Introduction to the Sociology of Music, 22.
66 Ibid., 15.
While there is no doubt that popular music is certainly less autonomous, treated as a commodity, and a product of the culture industry, Adorno ignores any innovation or positive social impact of jazz and popular music. Adorno’s assertion that “there is nothing in art that is directly social, not even when direct sociality is the artist’s express aim,” shows how the direct social benefits of certain works were overlooked. Furthermore, Adorno mistakenly places popular music, folk, and jazz all in the same category. He posits that under culture industry influence, popular music is intended for distraction and entertainment with no artistic value. In his approach to music, some consider Adorno to be a bit of an elitist. However, composers such as Cardew and Rzewski incorporated popular and folk music within their works to better connect with the general public and convey a political message. Moreover, through the use of improvisation, these works were able to maintain their autonomy and resist falling under the sway of the culture industry.

Even significant, autonomous music of the past can succumb to the role of entertainment. This function then changes the meaning of autonomous music which was initially characterized by its separation from society. As a result, the meanings of past musical works are distorted and adapted for the market. In his essay, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” he specifies:

The new fetish is the flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus as such, in which all the cog wheels mesh so perfectly that not the slightest hole remains for the meaning of the whole. Perfect, immaculate performance in the latest style presents the work at the price of its definitive reification. It presents it as already complete from the very first note. The performance sounds like its own phonograph record.

He warns about a new type of collective listening caused by new technology such as recording and radio broadcast. With more and more works being recorded, artworks are becoming increasingly commodified. Since the performance of musical artworks are more accessible, they require less of the listener’s active knowledge and imagination.\textsuperscript{71} Listening becomes passive and reduces musical artworks to background music. This creates an opportunity to train the “unconscious for conditioned reflex.”\textsuperscript{72} What results, according to Adorno, is a false consciousness which becomes a substitute for confronting our social reality.

Additionally, Adorno explains the degrading effect of reducing autonomous works to a generalized musical language. An example of this would be the general characteristics of tonal harmony. As he mentions in \textit{Introduction to Sociology of Music},

\begin{quote}
In the spirit of our time the sole remainder of the autonomous artistic language of music is a communicative language, and that does permit something like a social function. It is the remnant that is left of an art once the artistic element in it has dissolved.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

In contrast, the autonomy of the avant-garde work rejects the function of communication and maintains its autonomy by integrating its elements within “the closed world of its form.”\textsuperscript{74}

The culture industry seeks to create homogenous, even identical works. Within both the Eastern and Western culture, Adorno saw this effort as a process of rationalization that absorbed all forms of art. Adorno claims that “culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system.”\textsuperscript{75}

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\textsuperscript{71} Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music.” 270.  \\
\textsuperscript{72} Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music,” 271.  \\
\textsuperscript{73} Adorno, \textit{Introduction to the Sociology of Music}, 220.  \\
\textsuperscript{74} Paddison, \textit{Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music}, 201.  \\
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As a result of this homogenizing effect, the gap between subject and object, individual and totality, reality and utopia becomes hidden. Furthermore, with the creation of monopolies, “all mass culture is identical.”

What Adorno identifies as the “culture industry” is a result of this trend, a cultural force that manipulates from above in contradistinction to an authentic culture that “arises spontaneously from the masses themselves.”

Even the term “industry” is not to be taken literally. Rather than a production process, it more likely refers to “the standardization of the thing itself—such as that of the Western familiar to every movie-goer—and to the rationalization of distribution techniques, but not strictly to the production process.”

Adorno alludes to the consequences of promoting uniformity. He writes that “the power of the culture industry’s ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness.” The culture industry thus stands against art that promotes thought and contains what Adorno calls “truth content.” Works that promote enlightenment and free thinking are shunned.

The alienation that gave art its autonomy and distanced art from society also reduced art to entertainment. As Adorno writes in his *Aesthetic Theory*:

Unmistakable symptoms of this tendency are the passionate urge to violate and meddle with the work of art in ways which do not allow it to be what it is; to dress it up; to shorten its distance from the viewer; and so on. The masses want the shameful difference separating art from their lives eliminated, because if art were to have any real effect on them it would be that of instilling a sense of loathing, which is the last thing they want. These are some of the subjective predispositions that make it possible to line up art on the side of consumer goods. Objective vested interests do the rest.

It is most likely at the level of the consumption/reception of art that the musical work becomes the object of musical experience. Since we primarily experience music by listening, it

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76 Ibid. 121.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 17.
is vital to understand different forms of musical experience and types of listening in relation to the musical work. The relationship between the musical work and the listener is not a simple one. Instead, it is a complex and heavily mediated relationship that is ingrained in the work as a commodity.  

In order to define the relationship between listener and musical work, one must first examine Adorno’s definition of a “musical work.” As mentioned earlier, he viewed such works as “sedimented history and society,” and insists that the historically and socially mediated “musical material” available to the composer has its own demands. Adorno focuses on production more than any other level since it is in the dialectic of composer and musical material that he is able to recognize most clearly “the objective social constitution of music in itself.” All other levels (reproduction, distribution, consumption) are dependent on production since it is only within the structure of the work that one is able to “understand” and decipher its relation to society. 

Adorno believes that each work makes its own structural demands upon the listener and by recognizing and responding to these demands it is possible to understand ways in which society is mediated in musical structures. He posits that “works are objectively structured things and meaningful in themselves, things that invite analysis and can be perceived and experienced with different degrees of accuracy.”

It is for the listener to recognize the work as an “in itself” and to demystify the work as a commodity. To accomplish this, a particular kind of active listening is required. Adorno

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81 Paddison, Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music, 207.
82 Ibid., 208.
83 Adorno, Introduction to the Sociology of Music, 197.
84 Ibid., 3.
85 Paddison, Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music, 208-209.
categorizes listeners into those who are fully conscious of what occurs in the music and those who merely listen for entertainment and emotional purposes. The idea behind categorizing different types of listeners is to comprehend how the listener experiences and perceives the inner logic of the work. This form of experience reveals the “social content” of the work operating “from the inside.”

To Adorno, the idea of experience is essential at each stage in the “social dialectic” from production to reception/consumption. While Adorno’s concept of the work as an “in itself” is central to his theory, the work is inseparable from various forms of experience and understanding, as well as perception and interpretation. He distinguishes between two types of experience which he refers to as Erlebnis and Erfahrung.

The first type, Erlebnis, implies a type of isolated experience with the ability to sense data but unable to go beyond it. Listeners engaged in Erlebnis experience music solely as a form of entertainment. Erfahrung, on the other hand, involves the ability to follow the “events” of the work in real time as they unfold as well as to grasp the work as a whole in terms of past, present, and future or “out of time.”

Erfahrung involves tracing the work “from the inside;” it incorporates a type of understanding relating to the object which is both critical and self-reflective. At the level of consumption, it is the task of the enlightened consumer to determine if the balance between all opposing forces within the art work has been upheld and if such works are truly autonomous. Works that fail in their autonomy thwart Erfahrung and devolve onto mere ideology; in essence,
such works are kitsch. In his essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” American essayist and art critic Clement Greenberg, in ways that strongly resonate with Adorno’s views, recognizes the discrepancy between pure art and works that merely cater to the masses.

**Greenberg’s Kitsch**

While making the distinction between works produced for the masses and those for a specific few, Greenberg defined most commodified popular art as “kitsch.” He described such works as “popular, commercial art and literature” and while it resembles true art, it is not art. This is primarily due to the conditions under which kitsch is created. He states that:

Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experiences and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time.

While Greenberg primarily describes kitsch from a Western, consumerist view, he does explain how this pseudo-art operates in a socialist-communist setting. Most artists who infused Marxist and Maoist ideology within their works felt they were being politically effective. However, Greenberg claimed that most of the art and music produced by the Soviet Union and China, particularly art that made sacrifices to appeal to the proletariat, could be considered kitsch.

Since kitsch requires no effort for enjoyment, it is easily consumed by the masses. The state, recognizing this consumption, aptly uses kitsch to curry favor with the people and to disseminate its political message. All culture is brought down to a simpler, lower level and the avant-garde is outlawed. Greenberg posits that avant-garde art and literature is banned not just

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., 39.
because it is generally more critical of society, but because it is too “innocent;” avant-garde and experimental composers are mostly interested in pure sound rather than overt political messages. Infusing propaganda into experimental and avant-garde works is difficult due to its freely experimental nature whereas kitsch is more amenable to outside ideology. Kitsch keeps a dictator closer to the “soul” of the people.

In his second period of composition, Cardew attempted to create music that balanced aesthetic and political qualities, a balance that Greenberg might have found acceptable. However, when he abandoned the avant-garde in his third period, most of the works produced would have easily fallen into the category of kitsch, owing to their pure propaganda-like nature. During this juncture, Cardew was solely concerned with creating political works that reflected society and spent little time discussing aesthetics. While attending a discussion in London entitled “The Composer, Performer and Audience,” he declared that the Darmstadt audience, “was fed on an exclusive diet of aesthetic music and was unable to kick the habit in favor of anything more human.”

As discussed earlier, when composing works such as Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism (1972) or There is Only One Lie, There is Only One Truth (1980), Cardew had little interest in aesthetics and was more concerned with disseminating his specific political message. While Greenberg might have appreciated the instrumental part of Ten Thousand Nails due to its dissonance, the propagandistic nature of the text and its manner of presentation demonstrate that this piece is meant to serve a specific political purpose rather than an aesthetic one. Creativity is purposely stifled and very little contemplation is required from the audience.

94 Ibid., 47.
95 Ibid.
Politics Mediating the High/Low Divide

Within the twentieth century, terms such as “formalism,” or “ivory tower,” have come to describe works that were created with the idea of “art for art’s sake.” While these terms are pejoratively used by communist regimes, they are meant to describe works of a higher order by writers whose aesthetics were developed outside such regimes. Works considered to be “high art” are intended to be and received as being more complex than more popular forms and thus appeal to a more restricted audience. It is within the space of such rarefied aesthetics that the avant-garde carves out a position—a position that seeks to stake out new territory, ever further removed from the mainstream and the commodified.

Neil Nehring, author of Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism supports Adorno’s views regarding the commodification of music. He agrees with Adorno that art must resist society in order to strengthen its autonomy. However, in his book, Nehring states that “through sheer intellectual difficulty...or deliberate abstraction and vagueness that blinds the common eye by demanding close study, the modernist achieved freedom (or ‘autonomy’) from commerce by making art inaccessible to popular taste.” Art that is difficult, abstract, or vague will not be easily understood and accepted by the masses. If certain artworks appeal only to a small few, attempting to commodify such works becomes difficult and counterproductive.

Some scholars, such as Barbara Jenkins, assert that art is vital in comprehending the logistics of accumulating and consolidating power. She refers to the creation of high art that “emphasizes the importance of cultural production in legitimating, creating, and resisting global

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98 Neil Nehring, Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism: Anger is an Energy (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997), 36. (Italics are his.)
capitalism.”99 Jenkins explains that because high art is a product of our culture, it is only natural that such art also reflect our culture’s political nature.

If we consider the poststructuralist notion that culture is an ideological practice by which meanings and values are constructed, it would seem that there is ample space for politics in the production of art. Who makes the art, who buys the art, who decides what is “good” art all affect the significance and meaning of the art object produced.100

The commodification of high art can be traced back to the nineteenth century where it was assimilated into capitalist markets. A structural tension soon arose between efforts toward the universalization of the market, which is intent on commodifying everything, and those historical figures that strove to oppose this commodification and the “alienation” that it brings.101

While Adorno states that art is political due to its opposition to society, Jenkins states that art is political due to its reflection of culture. She identifies a connection between politics, “taste,” and global capitalism.102 “Cultural reality” is politically created by a small group of individuals who determine what art is “good” or “bad.”103 Writer and scholar Edward Said stated in his article “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community,” that when a work of art achieves approval by either a large or small group of select individuals, one must question how such a work was approved.104 We fall prey to the “cult of expertise,” in which small, exclusive communities of experts dictate which works should be accepted by society.

According to Said, artworks that, according to these experts, demonstrate “good taste,” should be viewed suspiciously. Typically, art critics and curators originate from a certain social class and thus reflect the interests of that class. Wealthy patrons create a market for art by

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 195.
102 Ibid., 199.
103 Ibid.
sponsoring concerts and art shows, as well as purchasing art and tickets to performances. Experts then identify which art is sellable. The critic’s choice of which art is the “best” art is supported because “dominant social groups buying the art found it relevant to their changing interests, experience, and ideological needs.”

Therefore, in the early twentieth century, famously wealthy patrons such as the Rockefellers and the Guggenheims were able to shape high culture according to their own needs. Today, many of these wealthy individuals and families have been replaced by wealthy corporations; however, the trend continues. In regard to the concert hall, wealthy patrons and concertgoers support standard classical works mostly ranging from the eighteenth to early twentieth century. When new works are commissioned and performed by major orchestras, they tend to conform to a certain stylistic makeup of composition which suits the needs of those of the typical concertgoer—generally a member of the upper middle class. Ultimately, it is the needs of the patron, negotiated by art criticism, that govern the codes of the art world.

Mao and the Aesthetics of Politics

While art developed under a Western capitalist setting was under pressure to engage a select few, communist authorities strongly urged artists to appeal to the masses. Mao developed a philosophical approach when addressing the balance between art and politics. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mao’s view had a strong impact on Cardew and his music.

Mao’s philosophy insisted that art and politics must be inseparable in order to achieve the “highest possible perfection of artistic form.” In 1937, a new academy of the arts was

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established at the central base of the Communist Party and Army at Yan’an. The purpose of this school was for the “rectification of people in the arts.”

Mao set up a conference which included workers in the fields of literature, art, and music to set forth objectives for Communist art and how to achieve them. Mao’s speeches during the conference were published as *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*. This publication would become a guide to artistic workers within the People’s Republic of China virtually up to the present day.

Mao insisted that artists adopt the correct attitude. He criticized artists for not grasping basic Marxist concepts. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mao famously asked, “Art and Literature for whom?” This question had already been partially answered with the help of Lenin, who in 1905, insisted that literature and art should serve the “millions and tens of millions of working people.”

However, Mao went beyond Marxist theory by specifically breaking down the intended audience as those of cadres, peasants, party workers, army soldiers, and workers in the factories.

Mao recognized a transcendent quality of the arts that almost mirrors nineteenth century western philosophy. When comparing the relationship between life and art, he recognized “while both are beautiful, life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.” Based on this statement, it appears as if Mao is encouraging artists to create works that resemble Greenberg’s kitsch.

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid., 7.
111 Ibid., 7.
However, Mao also recognized a dilemma in that raising the cultural standards of artworks could make it harder for such works to be disseminated and accepted by the masses. Therefore, he urged artists to find ways of popularizing their works. To do this, Mao encouraged them to spend time among the everyday workers and to go “into the heat of the struggle.”

A work of art, according to Mao, must be judged by its political and artistic components. A genuine balance between the two must exist. Problems arose when this relationship was disturbed. Works that were created simply for the sake of propaganda were not acceptable. Therefore, artists working under Maoist ideals must always take into account both the political message and aesthetic quality. As Mao stated:

The more reactionary their content and the higher their artistic quality, the more poisonous they are to the people, and the more necessary it is to reject them... Works of art that lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically. Therefore, we oppose both the tendency to produce works of art with a wrong political viewpoint and the tendency towards the ‘poster and slogan style,’ which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power.

One immediate result was the use of folk music within musical and dramatic works. When specifically addressing “music workers,” he emphasized the necessity for nationalistic music while simultaneously acknowledging the importance of incorporating “appropriate foreign principles and use [of] foreign instruments.” Ensembles such as MEV and the Scratch Orchestra that were clearly influenced by Mao’s views, adopted this idea. These groups endeavored to assimilate outside, foreign principles by inviting participants of various musical and artistic backgrounds to participate in their performances.

Politics and Music: Attali’s Noise and the Four Stages of Music

112 Ibid., 8.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., 9.
How powerful is sound? Philosopher Jacques Attali asserts that music has a prophetic quality. Music’s prophetic power manifests by both representing the world as it is as well as putting forward an alternate vision of the world.\textsuperscript{115}

Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future. …Music… is intuition, a path to knowledge. A path? No—a battle-field.\textsuperscript{116}

In his article, “Noise and Politics,” Jacques Attali concludes that noise, more than color or form, is powerful enough to create societies.\textsuperscript{117} Societies use noise to influence and control its members. Noise links the leaders of a community to its followers. When noise invades man’s time, it becomes sound, which includes speech. Sound then becomes music; therefore, music is a part of noise. Through its transformation into music, noise becomes the “source of purpose and power.”\textsuperscript{118}

Eavesdropping, censorship, recording and surveillance are now weapons of power. In a totalitarian setting, the state will ban noise it considers rebellious or destructive. The ultimate goal is to manipulate society, to control history, and to channel its hate and its hope, thus turning the state into what Attali calls a gigantic, monopolizing “noise emitter” while simultaneously eavesdropping on its people.\textsuperscript{119} Any theory of power today must include the control of noise and its relationship to form. He attempts to clarify the relationship between noise, sound and music when he states:

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men. Clamor, Melody, Dissonance, Harmony; when it is fashioned by man with specific tools, when it invades man’s time, when it becomes sound, noise is the source of purpose and power, of the dream—Music. It is at the heart of the progressive rationalization of aesthetics, and it is a refuge for residual irrationality; it is a means of power and a form of entertainment.\(^{120}\)

Although Attali explores how music is a part of noise and how institutions and governments seek to control such forms of noise, he doesn’t specifically define the parameters that separate noise and music. This is vital since there are noisy exertions of power (sirens, etc.) that we would not necessarily consider music. Nevertheless, music shares with noise the propensity to consolidate power. “What is called music today,” states Attali, “is all too often a disguise for the monologue of power.”\(^{121}\) Those in power use noise by exploiting the communicative qualities of certain works. Attali uses Muzak as an example, which he charges as a “monologue of standardized, stereotyped music”\(^{122}\) intended to restrict daily life.

While art is used as a tool for control under oppressive regimes, Attali points out how this also occurs in democratic society.

Here, this channelization takes on a new, less violent, and more subtle form: laws of the political economy take the place of censorship laws. Music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption like everything else, recuperators of subversion, or meaningless noise.\(^{123}\)

Attali concludes that all music or organized sound is essential for the creation or consolidation of a community. Political power becomes centralized by the control of sound and how that sound is distributed to the masses. Avant-garde artists like Rzewski recognized the potential power of sound. He points out how “sound is synonymous with power. It reaches everywhere. It is subtler than sight. Abraham does not see Yahwe, but hears only. The power

\(^{120}\) Ibid.
\(^{121}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{122}\) Ibid.
\(^{123}\) Ibid.
that spares him can also destroy him."\textsuperscript{124} This led some artists to create an environment where music and sounds could be free of such control and such power could be shared and enjoyed by all. In order for this to occur, the artist-musician must take up a special role within society.

Alan Durant, in his article "Improvisation in the Political Economy of Music investigates the relationship between improvisation as a participatory activity (for the musicians) and a representational activity (for the audience), and explores the social characteristics of improvised music.\textsuperscript{125} He shares Attali’s belief that “music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world.”\textsuperscript{126} He affirms that “what must be constructed, then, is more like a map, a structure of interferences and dependencies between society and its music.”\textsuperscript{127}

When discussing the association between social organization and music, most scholars turn to Attali as the authority on the subject. Attali claims that music is more than just a reflection of society but rather a “herald of modes of social organization.”\textsuperscript{128} This is because music provides society with the most efficient manner of generating structure out of differences. The structuration of these differences, such as differences among people and/or social roles, become a requirement for society.

According to Attali, music is then vital for understanding social organization. Attali considers music to be prophetic since it “announces forms of social organization before they are achieved in other, more resistant modes of materiality, that is, in social relations themselves.”\textsuperscript{129} In regard to music, the social relations that Attali refers to may be found in the orchestral

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 255.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Jacques Attali, Noise: The Political Economy of Music (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 5-6.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
performances of Mozart and Bach where there is a clear unquestionable leader in charge of subordinate performers. However, if social organization can be discussed within music, then it is entirely possible that the social relationships between the performers may be altered to eliminate a leader and make all players equal.

Attali focuses on the social benefits of music. In fact, his praise of music might be a bit superfluous and simply poetic at times. Music as a means of “perceiving the world” was an idea easily shared by Cardew and Rzewski. However, explaining how music is a “herald” of social organization and a predictor of the future is more debatable. In the case of group improvisation, music predicts the future by serving as a model for society in general. Nonetheless, in actual improvisation, the future is not and should not be predicted; it is undetermined and waiting to be discovered by all.

To better explain the relationship between social order and music, Attali divides music into four categories or stages. These stages are meant to coincide historically with significant musical periods. In the first stage, music accompanies ritual sacrifice and is used to help people forget “the violence entailed in structuring differences” and thus maintain the social order. At this initial stage noise is harnessed and transformed into music giving rise to the ritualistic function of music; this ritualistic element of music predates the industrial era. 

Attali labels the second stage the age of representation. It is during this stage that one sees a greater professionalization among performers and thus a greater separation between performer and audience. This stage is meant to make people believe in the “intrinsic harmony of the social order under the command of a leader.” In the third stage known as the era of repetition, technological advances, beginning with the invention of the phonograph, have a

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130 Attali, Noise, 27.
131 Attali, Noise, 46.
significant impact on music. Here, capitalist society is best represented since Attali believes that the music produced during this stage creates an entirely new economic system. Now music becomes completely commodified with the assistance of the top-40 hit-parades, grocery store/elevator Muzak, as well as the recording industry in general. This is reflective of Marx’s commodity fetishism which seeks to explain the relationship between the aesthetic and the market economy where it is commodified. Under repetition, Attali states “music becomes a monologue. It becomes a material object of exchange and profit, without having to go through the long and complex detour of the score and performance anymore.” Here music is not meant to make people believe, but to silence them. Such music is meant to be listened to silently and endlessly and to distract their attention.

Therefore, the last stage, known as composition, acts as a response to the earlier stages and provides an escape from the economic and political structures that have existed around music in the past five hundred years. Here, there is a resurgence of the deeply personal use of music. The purpose of this stage is not to recreate or replicate, but rather to create new music, instruments, and means of creating music. It is an escape from how music is produced in all previous stages, and thus marks the liberation of the self with respect to the repressive modes of social ordering. One particular effect of this stage is the impact it has on the audience by combining the roles of the producer and the consumer into one. As Attali describes it:

Composition, then, beyond the realm of music, calls into question the distinction between worker and consumer, between doing and destroying, a fundamental division of roles in all societies in which usage is defined by codes; to compose is to take pleasure in the instruments, the tools of communication, in use-time and exchange-time as lived and no longer as stockpiled.
Attali saw this stage as an explanation of the musical style of composers such as John Cage as well as such experimental approaches to music as free jazz, as both took shape in the 1960s. Such ideas also inspired Cardew and Rzewski to create ensembles such as The Scratch Orchestra and MEV that included trained and untrained musicians. It also opened the door to improvisation and avant-garde music of the 1960s and 1970s.

**Formalism in the U.S.S.R.**

Within the twentieth century, the message of politically charged works becomes more specific and thus harder to misinterpret. Some composers such as Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev created politically charged, nationalistic music—and not necessarily by choice. Other composers such as Hanns Eisler or Luigi Nono purposely sought to advance political arguments with their works.

Under the oppressive watch of the Soviet regime, composers such as Shostakovich were forced to compose pieces that conformed to the standards of the state. Richard Taruskin, in *Defining Russia Musically*, writes that "no one alive today can imagine the sort of extreme mortal duress to which artists in the Soviet Union were then subjected, and Shostakovich more than any other." Artists risked being labeled “too formalist” and were subjected to public shaming, criticism, and even political persecution. Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was quickly criticized in the communist publication, *Pravda*, with an article titled “Muddle or Music.” After two major government interventions in the arts, in 1936 and 1948, Shostakovich was stripped of his teaching job at the Leningrad Conservatory, his works were

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forbidden to be performed, he was publicly insulted and criticized, shunned on the street, and notified of his "errors." On more than one occasion, he was forced to publicly apologize or risk prison, exile, or execution. In response to *Lady Macbeth*, “party musicologists” instructed Shostakovich to write songs reflecting the glory of Stalin, the Soviet land, and the Soviet people.  

When writing his *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October* (1936), Prokofiev found himself with the difficult task of writing innovative, inspirational music to “dull political texts.” The run-through of the draft piano-vocal score in June of 1937 at the offices of the Committee of Artistic Affairs turned out to be a disaster. Platon Kerzhenstev, the Chairman of the All-Union Committee on Artistic Affairs asked Prokofiev, “Just what do you think you’re doing, Sergey Sergeyevich, taking texts that belong to the people, and setting them to such incomprehensible music?”

Describing this music as “incomprehensible” was another way of condemning it as “formalistic,” a label that many composers such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich had to bear. Formalism had a negative connotation because it promoted “art for art’s sake” rather than art with a condoned political message. The interdiction of formalism was codified in 1948 in a decree released by the Central Committee and spearheaded by committee member Alexei Zhdanov, which became known as the Zhdanov Doctrine. Zhdanov warns:

Soviet composers also have a theory that they will be appreciated in fifty or a hundred years. That is a terrible attitude. It means a complete divorce from the people…music that is unintelligible to the people is unwanted by the people.

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139 Ibid.
140 Morrison and Kravetz, “The *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October*,” 228.
141 Ibid., 248.
This decree would place heavy restrictions on how works were to be composed, including the use of experimental techniques, the use of dissonance, atonality, polytonality, contrapuntal complexity, polyrhythms, and allusions to American jazz.\textsuperscript{143} Naturally, vocal forms and the use of text were preferred because purely instrumental works were considered “reflective of western decadence.”\textsuperscript{144} The exception was instrumental music that followed the Beethoven model since it came to reflect social reality and personal struggle.\textsuperscript{145} While Shostakovich’s \textit{Lady Macbeth} and Prokofiev’s \textit{Cantata} both featured the singing of text, party musicologists would have preferred simple, socialist songs that could be easily related to and even sung by everyday working people.

\textbf{Politics within Popular and Folk Music}

How to successfully convey a message without preaching is a dilemma that is faced by many artists, both popular and classical. As Cardew discovered early on, most modern audiences will experience a greater political impact in music with popular forms. Writer and composer Kyle Gann in his article, “Making Marx in the Music,” notes that popular forms such as folk music tend to be simpler and easier to understand by most audiences while classical forms can be esoteric or complicated.\textsuperscript{146}

No one can doubt that music has a big role to play in the world of political protest. The controversial musicians we read about in the papers, though, are mostly from the pop and folk genres. It’s not only that those musicians are more visible, though that’s certainly true as well.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
Greenberg makes a distinction between folk and popular forms of art and claims the latter qualifies as “kitsch” but not necessarily the former. He accuses kitsch of migrating from the cities and wiping out folk culture, thus illustrating how folk and popular forms have separate origins and purposes.\textsuperscript{148} Although Greenberg mentions folk culture and its importance, he does not discuss folk music containing overt political messages and whether such music should be considered kitsch or not.

Some folk musicians such as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and Woodie Guthrie, are well known for expressing patriotic, socialist, and anti-government ideas within their music. A more recent example, from 2003, is John Mellencamp’s rewriting of the lyrics to an old 1903 protest song called “From Baghdad to Washington,” turning the song into a blatant criticism of George W. Bush. The lyrics are as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
A new man in the White House
With a familiar name
Said he had some fresh ideas
But it’s worse now since he came
From Texas to Washington
He wants to fight with many
And he says it’s not for oil
He sent out the National Guard
To police the world
From Baghdad to Washington\textsuperscript{149}
\end{verbatim}

In response to this overtly political message, many listeners called into a radio station where the piece was being broadcast and stated, “I don’t know who I hate worse, Osama bin Laden or John Mellencamp.”\textsuperscript{150} Greenberg would most likely categorize this work as kitsch not only because of its popular style, but also due to its overt and obvious political nature.

\textsuperscript{148} Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch,” 41.
\textsuperscript{149} Kyle Gann, “Making Marx in the Music: A HyperHistory of New Music and Politics.”
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
Cardew soon realized the effectiveness of popular forms when he formed his post-Scratch Orchestra ensemble, The People’s Liberation Music or PLM. Cardew felt that music should “become more class-conscious, that we should have songs about working-class heroes.”\textsuperscript{151} He described pop music as “a channel through which working class ideology is really influenced.”\textsuperscript{152} Cardew recognized that pop music loses its commercial clout when it’s infused with overt political ideas. However, according to Cardew, this was due to political music being suppressed rather than unpopular. He did not see this as a disadvantage. Cardew proposed:

If people (like Paul McCartney) occasionally write progressive songs and these are suppressed, then people see that they are suppressed and they have an incredible influence then. If it is known that they take a stand, this has an influence.\textsuperscript{153}

Cardew and Rzewski strove to eliminate the divide between classical and popular forms. In order to achieve this, they not only created works that the musically uneducated could understand, they created works in which the musically uneducated could participate. Such works became political simply by dissolving the divide between performer and audience even before any concrete political message or narrative was incorporated.

In his book, \textit{Rockin’ Out: Popular Music in the USA}, author Reebee Garofalo claims that popular music better connects with contemporary audiences since “it often serves as a lightning rod for the political controversies that invariably accompany change…popular music has been connected quite explicitly with social change and political controversy.”\textsuperscript{154}

Gordon Friesen, one of the founders of the folk song magazine \textit{Broadside}, suggests that music, particularly folk music, has become a narrative of reality.\textsuperscript{155}

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\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 243-244.
\textsuperscript{155} Street., 48.
that the biggest reason for creating political music is that “it is a response to ‘reality,’ and to the way the world is (or should be) changing.” Folk music’s political efficacy derives, in part, from its simple music and lyrics. Typically, folk music contains few harmonies and relatively clear, conjunct melodies; it describes working class issues using lyrics that employ simple and colloquial language. For this reason, Cardew and Rzewski, who also describe folk music as a reflection of reality, typically incorporate folk music in many of their political pieces.

**Music of Resistance and Music of Protest**

In his book, *Music and Politics*, John Street likens the communication used in politics to that used in music, specifically popular music. The social networks that help bring musicians together for collaborative purposes is likened to the social democratic process. Such a democratic process was realized by Cardew in the formation of his Scratch Orchestra. Street refers to Dave Laing’s article “Distinction and Protest” where he clarifies the difference between “protest music” and “music of resistance.” The first category is music that contains explicit statements of resistance while the political message contained within the music of the second category is more coded or blurred. A protest song will typically focus on a specific issue or enemy while the song of resistance may not. The resistance will come in the mere act of singing or creating music. Cardew’s *Ten Thousand Nails* or even Mellencamp’s “From Baghdad to Washington” would fall into the ‘protest music’ category due to their obvious political statements. “Music of resistance” does not have this barefaced nature. While Beethoven’s *Third*

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156 Street., 47
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 54-55.
Symphony might carry with it an anti-authoritarian/pro-democratic message, this message is not conspicuous during its performance. Cardew’s The Great Learning might contain some explicit political statements within the text. However, it is the social nature of the music that creates the political quality of the piece.

**Politics within the Music Ensemble**

There are many benefits to forming an ensemble or musical collective. Renowned political scientist Robert Putnam in his book, *Making Democracy Work*, discussed the impact of “civic associations” on communities and societies. These associations can take many forms such as a musical ensemble. He emphasizes how “taking part in a choral society … can teach self-discipline and an appreciation for the joys of successful collaboration.”

Cardew, who, like Rzewski, combined musically trained and untrained performers within his works, also used the term “self-discipline” when describing such works in relation to the improvising performers. Cardew defines “self-discipline” as “the ability to work collectively with other people in a harmonious and fruitful way.”

Putnam clarifies the relationship between civic association and society by stating that civic associations lead to good government and economic well-being. “Singing together,” Putnam writes, “does not require shared ideology or shared social or ethnic provenance.” Yet, this creates a sense of community among all performers, whether trained or untrained (members of the audience) that otherwise would not be possible. Within his book, *Popular Music in...

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161 Ibid., 167.
162 Ibid., 411.
England: 1840-1914, author Dave Russell agrees with Putnam. He adds that, historically, “choirs and bands offered endless opportunities for basic sociability, and sometimes more.”

Within the collective ensemble, one experienced the political freedom to communicate and create different forms of sound. While participating within such an ensemble was already a rebellion against traditional forms of classical art music, members were also free to rebel against the sound being produced by the ensemble itself. Political theorist Jane Bennett is one of a few individuals who seeks to define the connection between music and political reactions such as rebellion. For instance, she discusses music’s power to stimulate moral emotions through its rhythmic patterns. Unlike Adorno or Attali, who both emphasize the detrimental qualities of repetition in music, Bennett argues that repetition in music can politically engage people and create feelings of rebellion.

In his book, Acting in Concert, political scientist Mark Mattern enumerates different types of political action and assesses music’s changing relationship with action. He views music more as a form of communication and claims that what is communicated is determined by the political conflict rather than the character of the sound itself. He posits that music has the power to reveal aspects of a community’s “beliefs, assumptions and commitments.” In this case, music is more descriptive in revealing the political motivations of the participants rather than shaping such ideology. Eyerman and Jamison agree with Mattern regarding music’s capacity for political communication. However, these authors insist that collective action can be

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165 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
challenged and that there is also a political significance in not taking action. Pieces like MEV’s Zuppa encouraged participation but also encouraged performers to not play and to explore silence. Eyerman, Jamison, and Mattern make it clear that it is the larger political context or the social movement that takes precedence with music and serves as a resource to those participating in the social movement.\textsuperscript{168}

**The Political Role of the Audience**

Traditionally, the style of music dictates the function and level of audience participation during performance. Within Western art, or classical music, members of the audience are mostly passive observers who are expected to quietly accept any form of art. Bertolt Brecht was quick to question the classical status quo by focusing on the audience and how they are treated. He states:

Most advanced music is written for the concert hall. A single glance at the audiences who attend concerts is enough to show how impossible it is to make any political or philosophical use of music that produces such effects. We see entire rows of human beings transported in a peculiar doped state, wholly passive, sunk without trace, seemingly in the grip of a severe poisoning attack. Their tense, congealed gaze shows that these people are the helpless involuntary victims of the unchecked lurching of their emotions…It seduces the listener into an enervating, because unproductive, act of enjoyment. No number of refinements can convince me that its social function is any different from that of the Broadway burlesques.\textsuperscript{169}

Many musicians, particularly pop musicians, attempt to communicate with their audience now more than ever. However, according to Adorno and composer Hanns Eisler, in most cases, this communication is merely a form of self-glorification and a vehicle to expand an industry. Despite this, small numbers of musicians attempted to introduce new sounds and new forms of


music in an effort to break this cycle. Such is the case with experimental and avant-garde forms of music.\textsuperscript{170} Philosophers such as Walter Benjamin recognized the importance of experimentalism in forms of art such as film. He posited that film changed the habits of audiences and thus produced a change in perception. As Christopher Ballantine writes:

\textit{The audience on a mass scale now participates; the aura has been wiped out; and members of the audience now habitually see themselves and their relationships to each other and to the artwork in a new way… the audience is at once final critic and true coauthor. The very same is true about experimental music.}\textsuperscript{171}

If the audience can be considered a coauthor for a set work such as a film, then having the audience physically participate and contribute to the work as an equal collaborator within experimental and improvisational musical works strikes one as being even more politically efficacious.

In his 1993 book, \textit{Is There A Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom}, scholar Lawrence Grossberg discusses how the relationship between performer and audience is intrinsically political due to a sense of empowerment felt by the audience.\textsuperscript{172} This sense of empowerment is only enhanced when the audience is invited to physically become a part of the performance.

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino divides music into two categories: presentational and participatory.\textsuperscript{173} The categories are contingent on how performers and audience members relate to each other. With participatory performance, the barrier that separates the audience and performer is eliminated whereas in presentational performance the roles are clearly divergent. According to Turino’s view of participatory performance, new social relations are created by

\textsuperscript{170} Eisler and Adorno, “The Politics of Hearing,” 73.
\textsuperscript{171} Christopher Ballantine, \textit{Music and Its Social Meanings} (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1984), 131.
\textsuperscript{172} Street, Music and Politics, 60.
having the audience perform with the artist.\textsuperscript{174} Political action is now achieved through the inclusion of the audience within the performance.

Within any performance, the composer or performer has little to no control over the audience’s thoughts or reactions. If the audience is invited to participate to some degree within the performance, the audience’s role would have to be easily understood and simply executed by most members of the general public. Some musical works indicate a part for the audience within the score which is labeled untrained or “Nonmusicians.” As discussed in Chapter 1, other works simply use alternate styles of notation such as graphic or text scores, which can be understood by both trained and untrained musicians. This leads to the elimination of the audience in the traditional sense, insofar as everyone is a participant within the performance. This performance or ensemble, where both trained and untrained musicians are considered equally active and productive during the performance, resembles an ideal socialist society where all members are equal regardless of background. And with the ensembles of both Cardew and Rzewski, alternate styles of notation became a catalyst for improvisation, thus creating an opportunity for musical creativity and political communication.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
Chapter 3
Background, Influences from the Avant-garde, and the Development of Political Works of Cardew and Rzewski

Strong similarities, such as the use of improvisation and the merging of political ideas within major works, are found frequently in the music of both Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski. Both composers began their careers studying more traditional approaches to composing music and eventually incorporated experimental and avant-garde techniques, such as improvising based on graphic and text scores, into their pieces. The political ideology of both Cardew and Rzewski ranged from socialist to communist and these ideologies had significant influence on their compositions. In publications (e.g., Stockhausen Serves Imperialism), speeches, and interviews, Cardew expressed his thoughts on improvisation and politics. Similarly, Rzewski wrote extensively on improvisation and political music; many of these writings are collected in his Nonsequiturs: Writings & Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation.

This chapter will explore the political backgrounds and histories of the composers, including influences from other avant-garde composers, such as Cage and Stockhausen. Additionally, the chapter will explore how Cardew and Rzewski were greatly affected by non-musical influences such as various historical events as well as the writings of Wittgenstein, Adorno, and Brecht.

Cornelius Cardew:

Brian Cornelius McDonough Cardew was born May 7, 1936 in Winchcombe, Gloucestershire to Michael Cardew, an accomplished potter and Mariel Cardew, an artist. His
father’s side of the family consisted of many amateur musicians including his father, an amateur recorder player who had performed with the Dolmetsch Ensemble. Cardew proudly inherited some of his father’s non-musical qualities such as “an incisiveness of mind (a quality which in his later life he was to admire greatly in Lenin) and a determination to control one’s own destiny, to lead one’s life, to be true to one’s own nature and talents regardless of other considerations.” According to biographer John Tilbury, he obtained from his mother the “gift of being able to enthuse people to artistic creation and endeavor.” His mother’s family were pacifists and supporters of the suffragette movement who would lend their support by participating in demonstrations and marches.

Cardew’s parents fostered a liberal, free thinking environment which might have coincided well with the impoverishment that the family experienced during his early years. Tilbury describes the simple surroundings that Cardew grew up in.

The Cardew’s home was never a haven from the wilderness of the nature which surrounded it—rather it was a part of that nature, stark and uncluttered like the moorland that lay a few miles to the east. There was no electricity—candles were used and the family would often go barefoot.

This starkly contrasted the conditions surrounding Cardew’s studies, beginning at the age of six, at the Cathedral Choir school and subsequently, The King’s School in Canterbury. His transition from a liberal, secular environment to a strict religious one, consisting of rigid rules and schedules certainly left a lasting impression on Cardew. Although Cardew was certainly recognized as a musician of “brilliant caliber,” he was also thought of as “rebellious,” and had “collected a small gang who he made like-minded to himself.” At the King school, Cardew

175 Ibid., 11.
176 Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 5.
177 Ibid, 4.
studied piano, cello, and music theory. At fifteen, he began lessons with renowned pianist Ronald Smith. During performance exams, and at the chagrin of his examiners, Cardew would often request non-traditional repertoire such as atonal pieces by Schoenberg—a characteristic that would soon shape his initial style of composition.

Cardew’s compositional life can be broken into three distinct style-periods: 1) serial composition (1953-1960); 2) an avant-garde or experimental style (1960-1974); 3) a tonal and overtly political style (1974-1981). This schematic overview belies a deeper trajectory, however. As time went by, political ideas started to take a more prominent role even before his final works. In fact, it was during his experimental period that Cardew began to use improvisation to find new ways of incorporating political and musical ideas into his compositions.

Cardew hoped to express strong socialist values through the actions of performers. He concluded that certain actions promoted socialization through music. Cardew pursued this approach by incorporating graphic notation within his scores and establishing ensembles that were not limited exclusively to trained musicians. During the performances of these pieces, the participation of the performers and their actions within performance were key elements in creating a musical community. When describing what he termed “Improvisation Rites” within the Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution, Cardew posited that certain musical activity “may establish a community of feeling, or a communal starting point, through ritual.” Pieces such as The Great Learning are infused with ritualistic and ceremonial elements such as gestures, activities, songs, and games, as well as improvisation. Such elements gave Cardew’s music a

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sense of social function beyond mere aesthetics. This trend continued as he turned increasingly toward Marxism. His full and final conversion to Maoism ultimately led to self-criticism of his earlier style and works.

During Cardew’s early studies at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), the use of serialism as a compositional technique was emerging throughout Europe. According to many exponents of the European avant-garde, serialism was associated with the scientific method, with progress and discovery. However, the Academy, being a traditional institution, had little to no interest in the “overthrow of tonality” or any music that promised to be the “music of the future.” Although Cardew was praised for his talents as a pianist of pre-19th century music and a composer of mostly tonal pieces, it was obvious that he had a rebellious nature that materialized in his pursuit of new, modern works; RAM was not yet accustomed to incorporating serialist compositions into its everyday curriculum.

Cardew quickly joined the Academy’s unofficial new music ensemble, which sought out the music of Webern and Boulez rather than the more tonal music of Poulenc and Copland. At the age of 19, he and fellow classmate Richard Rodney Bennett gave the first English performance of Boulez’s Structures I (for two pianos). Cardew’s Second String Trio and Piano Sonata No.2, both composed around 1955-56, were essays in pointillism. According to pianist and writer John Tilbury, each piece “aspires to a Webernesque intensity and concentration of material and demonstrates Cardew’s mastery of an idiom which, at the time, incorporated the most advanced serial techniques.”

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5 Ibid., 29.
6 Ibid., 30.
7 Ibid., 30-31.
8 Ibid., 30.
9 Ibid., 43.
composition and experimentalism continued throughout his life; this led him to become one of the most renowned avant-garde composers in England.

Following his studies, Cardew moved to Cologne where he was hired as an assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen. During Cardew’s assistantship, his most significant achievement was the realization of Stockhausen’s large-scale serial work, Carré (1959-1960). Although Cardew viewed serialism as an exciting new musical pursuit, it was not long before he became influenced by the indeterminate music of John Cage. Cardew met the American composer during a visit to Darmstadt in 1959. Cage’s music exposed Cardew to new areas of experimentalism and influenced his ideas about the production of music. Cage’s influence led Cardew to reject serialism for a more avant-garde, experimental style of composing. According to Tilbury, “Cage’s aesthetics had opened up to him [Cardew]: the ‘autonomy’ of musical sounds, experiential as opposed to clock time, the aural perception of musical structure and, perhaps most importantly, the relationship between composer and performer and its expression through the adoption of new ways, radical and experimental, of notating music.”

While Cage’s ideas on indeterminacy and sound seemed progressive to Cardew, Cage’s ideas about chance operations diverged from Cardew’s opinions about how to properly leave the musical act to “chance.” Cage advocated that composers and performers should relinquish emotion and ideas within a composition, focusing the listener on the sounds themselves. Cardew wanted to differentiate between composers who gave performers a choice and composers who reasoned as follows:

Well, since any note will do, it doesn’t matter which one I write, so I’ll write this one thus denying the performer the possibility of choosing spontaneously, which might have

10 Ibid., 89.
served, by his hesitancy, or air of decision, or of seeking, to create the right atmosphere for the piece.¹⁹⁰

Cardew felt that the “choices” made by composers and performers, such as in group improvisation, were important because they epitomized personal and political freedoms within music.

To better guide performers in making these choices, Cardew began focusing on notation itself. He concluded that “the composer doesn’t conceive of a piece of music so much as a notation system, which musicians may then use as a basis for making music, or more likely (as I would evaluate it today), aimless manipulations of the system in terms of sound.”¹⁹¹

Upon returning from Germany, Cardew enrolled in a graphic design course, which inspired him to conceptualize new possibilities for notating sound.¹⁹² As Cardew continued to incorporate new avant-garde ideas, the use of graphic notation became a common feature within the scores of Cardew’s middle period. To further clarify his use of graphic notation, the composer wrote that “there is no intention separate from the notation; the intention is that the player should respond to the notation.”¹⁹³ Responding to notation, rather than to merely follow it, provides a new-found freedom for musicians to express individual ideas within the performance of this music.

In Treatise and The Great Learning, graphic notation becomes a tool to eliminate the divide between trained and untrained musicians. Cardew was fully aware that by using graphic notation he now put the musically educated “at a terrible disadvantage.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Cornelius Cardew, “Notation – Interpretation, etc.,” in Cornelius Cardew: A Reader, 13.
The idea to explore graphic notation also came from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and his book the *Tractatus* (1918). Cardew began reading the *Tractatus* at age 23, and it became a strong influence throughout his middle period works. Cardew’s reading of the *Tractatus* had its greatest impact on his large-scale graphic work, *Treatise*, the title itself being an homage to Wittgenstein’s masterpiece. The goal of the *Tractatus* is to reveal the relationship between language and the world through the use of a pictorial theory. Cardew decided to incorporate this ‘picture theory’ in his approach to music through the use of graphic notation; hence, *Treatise* contains mostly graphic notation and very little traditional notation.

Wittgenstein’s second book, *Philosophical Investigations* (1945), which was written much later and continued to address the problems of language, also proved to be a great influence on the composer. Cardew himself stated, “In his later writing, Wittgenstein has abandoned theory, and all the glory that theory can bring on a philosopher (or musician), in favor of an illustrative technique.” As colleague and composer Michael Parsons stated, “Cardew, like Wittgenstein in his later work, became increasingly concerned with the activity of interpretation, rather than with the notion of a literal, fixed meaning for each sign.”

Cardew viewed participation and the actions of performers as the true production of music and he saw graphic notation as a conduit to these ends. Similar to his days studying at RAM, he sought out groups of musicians that shared his new ideas about music making. Except now, after being influenced by Cage and other members of the American School, he hoped to further develop new avenues of sound production into his avant-garde music. In 1966, Cardew joined a free improvisation group known as AMM. AMM was initially started by three jazz

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196 Ibid. 125.
197 Parsons, “Introduction,” xi.
musicians: Keith Rowe, Eddie Prévost, and Lou Gare. Cardew himself had no experience in jazz but enjoyed the emancipation that came with free improvisation. According to Prévost, Cardew used AMM “as a vehicle in which to test his ideas, e.g. indeterminacy, and interpretation of non-musical symbols in composition.” 198 In his essay, “Towards an Ethic of Improvisation,” Cardew wrote, “we are searching for sounds and for the responses that attach to them, rather than thinking them up, preparing them and producing them. The search is conducted in the medium of sound and the musician himself is at the heart of the experiment.” 199 During some sessions, the group explored small sounds made by striking glass, metal, wood, as well as drumsticks and battery-operated cocktail mixers. 200 Similar explorations of small sounds are heard in Cardew’s work, The Great Learning.

With The Great Learning, Cardew started to infuse his new improvisatory style with his expanding political ideas. In his book, Stockhausen Serves Imperialism, Cardew discusses the melding of politics and art. To explore this connection, he posits that one must first look at the score itself to try to “uncover the ideas that it embodies, expose its content, and see whether these ideas are right or wrong, whether they truly reflect what we know about the real world.” 201 Cardew urged others to examine the cultural environment of the avant-garde and the place of the avant-garde within the general production of music today. He emphasized that one must recognize the social and economic factors that mold that cultural environment. According to Cardew, these social and economic factors:

are not standing still, they are changing and developing. A result of this is the conflict between progressive forces, which recognize the inevitability or the necessity for change and actively promote it, and reactionary forces, which oppose change. This conflict is

200 Ibid.
fought out in the realms of politics. The decisive thing is, who holds political power? And here I don’t mean which political party but which class holds political power?\textsuperscript{202}

In addition to thinking of social and economic factors, he pondered his role and the role of the artist in contemporary society. Cardew found inspiration in an essay by English Marxist Christopher Cauldwell known as \textit{The Concept of Freedom}. In it, Cauldwell states that:

The commercialization of art may revolt the sincere artist, but the tragedy is that he revolts against it still within the limitations of bourgeois culture. He attempts to forget the market completely and concentrate on his relation to the art work, which now becomes further hypostatized as an entity-in-itself. Because the art work is now completely an end-in-itself, and even the market is forgotten, the art process becomes an extremely individualistic relation. The social values inherent in the art form, such as syntax, tradition, rules, technique, form, accepted tonal scale, now seem to have little value, for the art work more and more exists for the individual alone.\textsuperscript{203}

Cardew heeded Cauldwell’s warning and strived to create art that would not just serve the individual, but society itself. He felt compelled to create music that retained inherent social values by revolting beyond the confines of bourgeois culture.

Cardew’s response was a conscious effort to create music that would resemble, at least according to his own ideology, ideal social practices. By promoting equality among performers, this balance of power is addressed in the structure of his pieces and ensembles. In 1969, Cardew created a new performing ensemble, similar to AMM, known as the Scratch Orchestra, with musicians Howard Skempton and Michael Parsons. In \textit{Tempo} magazine, composer Michael Nyman contrasted the Scratch Orchestra to the music of Cage. Due to his “evident isolation as a composer, Cage is still taking steps towards the socialization of music. For Cardew, these steps have already been taken; the Scratch Orchestra, a successful experiment in such social music

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.

making, lived and died while Cage was still scratching his head.”

This socialization within music making is a key component in the works created and performed by the Scratch Orchestra such as *Treatise* and *The Great Learning*. To outline the purpose of the orchestra, he wrote a draft constitution, wherein he defines the Scratch Orchestra as “a large number of enthusiasts pooling their resources (not primarily material resources) and assembling for action (music-making, performance, edification).”

In an essay describing Scratch Music, Cardew writes “It is this ensemble and its music that will become a vehicle for experimentalism and social aspects of music. Scratch Music creates balance between composing and improvising.” These “social aspects” not only deal with the actions of the performers, but also with connections created among individuals during each performance. Cardew appropriates Cauldwell’s ideas on how “art is in any case not a relation to a thing, it is a relation between men, between artist and audience, and the art work is only like a machine which they must both grasp as part of the process.” It was this idea that inspired Cardew to create such relationships within the Scratch Orchestra and its music and also to foster a feeling of community.

In order to cultivate such relationships, Cardew went beyond preparing traditional “pieces” when composing for the Scratch Orchestra. Categories outlining different forms of spontaneous performance are listed within the draft constitution for the Scratch Orchestra. The categories of extemporized performances include: Scratch Music; Popular Classics; Improvisation Rites; and Compositions and Research Projects.

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207 Gann.
The first category, Scratch Music, consists of a member writing a piece with accompaniments for each member of the orchestra. The notation for Scratch Music can consist of any means including verbal, traditional, graphic, etc. According to Cardew, an accompaniment is defined as “music that allows a solo (in the event of one occurring) to be appreciated as such.” One of the accompaniment parts could become a solo and any part previously regarded as a solo, could be altered back to accompaniment. Thus, the purpose of such music is to continually serve as background and support for a solo part that may or may not exist. Also, due to all parts serving as an accompaniment, most performances of Scratch Music consisted of soft dynamics which forced performers to continually listen to each other; this assured that none of the accompaniment parts would overwhelm a soloist during performance.

If such a solo part does emerge, the implication is that it would not be substantially different from the other parts; the differentiation would be in the mode of playing. Cardew would have rejected the traditional solo-accompaniment schema that typically occurs in music. Having one performer or melodic line in the spotlight while the other supporting parts quietly try to stay in the background is the antithesis of what the Scratch Orchestra was trying to achieve musically and socially. All members were to be on equal footing, continually serving each other, and creating a more socialist rather than the traditional elitist atmosphere of the soloist-accompanist relationship.

Despite Cardew’s definition of Scratch Music within his Draft Constitution, many chose to classify it by its unique sound world. Tilbury remembered its softness and qualities of “hesitance, diffidence and reserve.” He described performances consisting of “strange things...”

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210 Ibid., 114.
coming out of nowhere, a little wail, or the beat of a drum.”\textsuperscript{211} Composer Hugh Shrapnel remembered the delicate nature of the sounds generated by Scratch Music. Carole Finer, a visual artist and Scratch Orchestra member, referred to its ambient nature as an “all over sound” and the feeling that “you were in the middle of it. It was atmospheric.”\textsuperscript{212} Speaking as a performer, Tilbury added that Scratch Music was an environment filled with performers “doing something whose presence was recognized, tolerated, enjoyed, whatever.”\textsuperscript{213}

The next category, Popular Classics, consists of a member playing a “particle”\textsuperscript{214} of a well-known work that is chosen from a list. A particle could be a page of score, a page or more of an arrangement, a thematic analysis, a gramophone record, etc. The member initiating this activity must be familiar with the piece in question. The other members help to complete the piece using memory alone. While Cardew doesn’t specify, it is implied that the members not strive to create an exact duplicate of the original work, but an improvised elaboration. Even if the pieces were somewhat familiar to the performers, Cardew asked that the pieces not be performed in their entirety, rendering the performance somewhat bewildering.\textsuperscript{215}

Performers were free to choose from the original piece the section or particle that would form the basis of their new interpretation. Cardew then urged the rest of the orchestra to “join in as best as best as they can, playing along, contributing what they can recall of the work in question, filing the gaps of memory with improvised, variational material.”\textsuperscript{216} They were also encouraged to perform in a manner “appropriate to the classics.”\textsuperscript{217} Namely, he wanted

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{214} Cardew, “A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution,” 91  
\textsuperscript{215} Pisaro, “Music from Scratch,” 120  
\textsuperscript{216} Cardew, “A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution,” 91.  
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
performers to “avoid losing touch with the reading player, and to strive to act concertedly rather than independently.”

Some examples, resembling a post-Dadaist style, include playing Tchaikovsky’s *Piano Concerto No. 1* with the orchestra, but with the pianist’s hands tied behind his back (thus playing the piano part with his backside) and a complete performance of Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* played in a tent while orchestra members shouted poetry outside. While many performances could be perceived as humorous, the objective of this type of music making was the recognition of the Popular Classic piece by the listener as well as the reaction to the orchestra’s new interpretation.

Like Cardew, there are a number of composers who were known to have incorporated fragments of well-known classical pieces into their modern works. One example is Cage’s work *Credo in Us* (1942). In *Credo*, “popular classic” music is incorporated through the use of recordings (phonograph) and radio. Within the score, Cage encourages the phonograph operator to “use some classic: e.g. Beethoven, Sibelius, Shostakovich, or Tchaikovsky.” Cage anticipated the use of these “popular classics” to generate a sense of confusion. However, certain classic pieces such as a Beethoven symphony could be used to represent “high class life” within a collage of different sounds and melodies.

Improvisation Rites, as mentioned above, is meant to promote a sense of community through ritual. Cardew clarifies that an Improvisation Rite is “not a composition; it does not attempt to influence the music that will be played.” Beyond this, Cardew gives little more

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218 Ibid.
220 Gerald Cox, “Collaged Codes: John Cage’s *Credo in Us.*” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2011), 104.
221 Ibid., 137.
description on Improvisation Rites and how to create any such rites. He does mention that free
improvisation is allowed and that it encouraged the creation of more rites by members of the
Scratch Orchestra. In the appendix of the draft constitution, Cardew provides two examples of
rites written by fellow members. One rite by Howard Skempton, known as *Drum No. 1*, consists
merely of

- Any Number of Drums
- Initiation of the Pulse
- Continuation of the Pulse
- Deviation by means of accentuation, decoration, contradiction\(^{223}\)

*Drum No. 1* seems rather ambiguous and could very well describe almost any type of
music in existence. Furthermore, there seems nothing obviously political in Skempton’s text; at
least, nothing on the surface that would automatically instigate a political reaction in the
performer. However, it is the ambiguity of graphic notation or text scores that allows the
freedom of the performers to act together and create a spontaneously original performance.
Skempton himself claimed that *Drum No. 1* was not a musical piece in the traditional sense, but
more “just a way to get people to play.”\(^{224}\) This idea of bringing all different kinds of performers
together is the “socialization” through music that Cardew encouraged. The ensemble parameters
established by the composer combined with politically motivated performers interacting with
each other creates the ideal environment for the political nature of this music to emerge.

Initiation Rites, Scratch Music, and Popular Classics all involved some element of free
improvisation. While this was an important aspect to the Scratch Orchestra, the idea of retaining
some elements of traditional music composition was still valued. After all, it was Cardew’s
written composition *The Great Learning* that started the Scratch Orchestra. Some members

\(^{223}\) Ibid., 94; Pisaro “Music from Scratch,” 136.
rejected composition outright, seeing it as too closely tied to the elitist music establishment.\textsuperscript{225} However, Cardew sought out works by contemporary composers such as La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Stockhausen, Cage, etc. and listed them in the appendix of his draft constitution. He also encouraged other members to add to this list by finding pieces or composing works themselves.

The intellectual exercise known as Composition and Research calls for members to create pieces based on some sort of research project. This research project involved travel or a journey of some sort. In his draft constitution, he describes this category in abstract terms.

The universe is regarded from the viewpoint of travel. This means that an infinite number of research vectors are regarded as hypothetically travelable. Travel may be undertaken in many dimensions, e.g. temporal, spatial, intellectual, spiritual, emotional. I imagine any vector will be found to impinge on all dimensions at one point or another.\textsuperscript{226}

The “research” that Cardew is referring to differs from academic research. He viewed research as a journey rather than a series of activities leading to a single answer. Additionally, he viewed other elements, such as emotional and spiritual aspects, as equally essential.\textsuperscript{227}

Research could take many forms, and Cardew gives an example on how such research could be conducted.

For example, if your vector is the Tiger, you could be involved in time (since the tiger represents an evolving species), space (a trip to the zoo), intellect (a tiger’s biology), spirit (the symbolic values acquired by the tiger) and emotion (your subjective relation to the animal).\textsuperscript{228}

These works were intended to reflect everyday life in some way. A composition by musician and visual artist David Jackman involved a study of birds known as \textit{Bird Project}. To create the work, Jackman did secondary research by looking up bird songs in a book about birds,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 149.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Cardew, “A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution,” 92.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Pisaro, “Music from Scratch,” 185.
\item \textsuperscript{228} Cardew, “A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution,” 92.
\end{itemize}
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but also completed primary research by noting the presence of birds at different times of the day. He also contributed a unique memory by combining the experience of watching the first man walk on the moon while listening to the birds outside his window.\(^{229}\)

While some composers such as Psi Ellison felt that concerts featuring this type of music were “kind of pretentious somehow, kind of stupid,”\(^{230}\) others considered works of this kind to be some of the most complex and fascinating works that the Scratch Orchestra ever performed.\(^ {231}\)

As seen in the Improvisation Rites, Treatise, or The Great Learning, a group of performers participating in spontaneous, free improvisation is a form of political action for Cardew. This is not to deny that Cardew was keen on providing clear structures and systems within his music. However, improvisation is a separate undertaking from the musical systems that are familiar to musicians.

I compose systems. Sounds and potential sound are around us all the time – they’re all over. What you can do is to insert your logical construct into this seething mass – a system that enables some of it to become audible. That’s why it’s such an orgiastic experience to improvise – instead of composing a system to project into all this chaotic potential, you simply put yourself in there…and see what action that suicidal deed precipitates.\(^ {232}\)

The composed system was as vital to the political effectiveness of the piece as the free improvisation itself. Cardew considered free improvisation to be the closest representation of real life and also the most naked representation of the performer who must boldly create music ex nihilo. Within Cardew’s compositions that employed improvisation, he himself did not create sounds but rather allowed “sound and potential sounds” that already exist to be amplified by the

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230 Ibid., 184.
231 Ibid., 190.
performers. With regard to the improvisation in *Treatise*, Cardew hoped that “each musician will give of his own music – he will give it as his response to my music, which is the score itself.”

Referring to improvisation as a “suicidal deed” simply acknowledges the risks we take when we improvise. As discussed in Chapter One, we are unaware of the musical outcome when performing spontaneously. Some might find this degree of unpredictability unnerving. When discussing improvisation, Cardew doesn’t dwell much on the daunting elements. Rather, in the chapter “Towards an Ethic of Improvisation,” in his *Treatise Handbook*, Cardew discusses what he calls “Forbearance.” He explains that when improvising within a group, “you have to accept not only the frailties of your fellow musicians, but also your own. Overcoming your instinctual revulsion against whatever is out of tune (in the broadest sense).”

Cardew believed in the importance of what he deemed “self-discipline.” Cardew found an emphasis on self-discipline in Confucius’s text, *The Great Learning*, which was the main inspiration for Cardew’s piece of the same name. Paragraph 5 of Cardew’s piece consists mostly of free improvisation while the text mentions how “they disciplined themselves.” Cardew emphasized the importance of self-discipline in regard to improvisation:

> I see self-discipline as the essential pre-requisite of improvisation. Discipline is not to be seen as the ability to conform to a rigid rule structure, but as the ability to work collectively with other people in a harmonious and fruitful way. Integrity, self-reliance, initiative, to be articulated say on an instrument in a natural, direct way; these are the qualities necessary for improvisation.

This “harmonious collective” that existed in the form of the Scratch Orchestra consisted of anywhere from 30 to 100 members. Although Cardew was undoubtedly the leader, ready to

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234 Ibid., 132.
guide the orchestra and help define the boundaries of Scratch Music for the orchestra, he also
wanted to keep all members of the orchestra equal. He was more than willing to relinquish
control to even the newest, youngest members. In the Draft Constitution, he writes, “In rotation,
each member will have the option of designing a concert. If the option is taken up, all details of
that concert are in the hands of that person or his delegates; if the option is waived the details of
the concert will be determined by random methods, or by voting.” Cardew posited that by
structuring pieces and ensembles based on equality and openness, new original musical actions,
sounds, and ideas could be explored.

The contradiction of Cardew’s leadership versus the dissemination of power amongst
other members of the Scratch Orchestra was noticed by some members who proposed setting up
a Scratch Ideological Group. The purpose of this group was to investigate possibilities for
political music making and to study the revolutionary theories of Marx, Lenin, and Mao.
Additionally, this group aimed at building up, according to Cardew, “an organizational structure
in the Scratch that would make it a genuinely democratic orchestra and would release it from the
domination from my subtly autocratic, supposedly anti-authoritarian leadership.”

While Cardew strived to relinquish control of the Scratch Orchestra to its members, his
leadership was inevitably felt. Some members tried to steer the orchestra in a direction of a
simpler folk style until Cardew insisted that rock music would better connect with the general
audience. Cardew’s intervention in this and other matters contributed to a ‘discontent file’
that would be addressed at meetings. While not the sole reason, such tension certainly
contributed to the Scratch Orchestra’s demise.

Members of the Scratch Orchestra consisted of both trained and untrained musicians. One member, Psi Ellison, was not a trained musician but rather a visual and performance artist. Performance art played a crucial role in the music of the Scratch Orchestra and was a key element in works written for the ensemble such as *The Great Learning* and *Treatise*. Cardew was not just concerned with composing or improvising sounds, but also with the visual aspect of his compositions. This influence came from fellow avant-garde composer and conceptual artist George Brecht, who proved to be an important influence on Cardew’s music.

Cardew became familiar with Brecht’s compositions around 1963 and with Brecht himself when they taught together at the Leeds School of Art in 1966. Brecht was interested in ‘participatory art’ and wrote pieces known as Event Scores. Brecht described the ‘event’ as being “a scene before an audience containing an activity ranging from an exercise in perception to the enactment of a basic metaphor.” In essence, his pieces contained various theatrics or games. While not a member of the Scratch Orchestra, Brecht helped organize one of its first concerts and may have influenced actions and ritualistic elements in pieces such as Paragraph 5 of *The Great Learning*.

The Scratch Orchestra slowly began to disband around 1972-1973, signaling the end of Cardew’s experimental middle period and the beginning of his full conversion to communism. A few years following the breakup of the Orchestra, Cardew formally joined the English Communist Party and was one of the founding members of The Revolutionary Communist Party [Marxist-Leninist] in 1979. Many former members blamed the burgeoning display of communist extremism within the Scratch Music as dividing the membership. Cardew not only

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defended this trend, but also discussed the importance of organizing a formal communist party in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*:

The study of “Marxism and society,” which Mao Tsetung places alongside the question of integrating with the masses as an essential part of the work of class-consciousness artists and intellectuals, leads swiftly to the realization of the necessity of building this proletarian party. It also makes it clear that a genuine proletarian and revolutionary art will only develop under leadership of such a party. Without such a Party, every effort on the part of progressive artists to produce revolutionary art is bound to be relatively isolated and relatively ineffective.242

Cardew found himself writing music that would not only serve the revolution but would also be accessible to those “disenfranchised in his own society: the workers.”243 Throughout the 1970s, Cardew’s late period of composition focuses mostly on creating music for the working class. Indeed, after the breakup of the Scratch Orchestra, he joined a group known as the People’s Liberation Music; the purpose of the People’s Liberation Music was to create a type of popular music that was more “class conscious, anti-capitalist, and would sing of working-class heroes.”244

Gradually, Cardew not only criticized but also rejected the experimental, avant-garde style as “too elitist.”245 In the program notes for his *Piano Album 1973*, Cardew explains his new conversion by writing, “I have discontinued composing music in an avant-garde idiom for a number of reasons; the exclusiveness of the avant-garde, its fragmentation, its indifference to the real situation in the world today, its individualistic outlook and not least its class character (the other characteristics are virtually products of this).”246

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243 Taylor, “Moving in Decency,” 564.
244 Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 783.
246 Ibid.
Cardew’s own compositions were now primarily “tonal piano pieces based on folk tunes” as well as “revolutionary and worker songs; Gebrauchsmusik.” For example, the Piano Album, consists of pieces that are mostly based on simple Irish and Chinese folk melodies. Another early example is Soon (1971), for unaccompanied voice(s). The text, which claims “soon there will be a high tide of revolution in this country,” is taken from an open letter written by Mao in 1930. Although these later pieces contained highly political texts, their political effectiveness becomes questionable, particularly, if one basis this effectiveness on the aforementioned criterion put forth in the previous chapter. When viewed alongside Adorno’s resistance to society or Greenberg’s kitsch, one can see how the lacking artistic quality compromises the overall autonomy of these works. Even Mao himself warned that “works of art that lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically.”

Regardless, Cardew gained inspiration from Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art, which served as his guide in the later part of his life. In the essay, Mao poses the question, “Literature and Art for Whom?” Mao insists that “There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics.” On finding a balance between art and politics, Mao explains, “what we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form.”

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247 Gann, “Making Marx in the Music.”
248 Tilbury, A Life Unfinished, 636.
249 Taylor, “Moving in Decency,” 564.
251 Taylor, “Moving in Decency,” 563.
253 Ibid., 30.
As Cardew began to adopt these ideas, he came to view Cage’s works as irrelevant to the various liberation struggles raging in the world.\textsuperscript{254} Like Mao, Cardew, too, began to see art and politics as synonymous. Elements of this synthesis were already evident in his earlier works, those that incorporated improvisation fused with socialist ideology. However, his third style-period consisted of works that abandoned any semblance of the avant-garde in favor of popular sounding, tonal works with overt propagandistic messages.

Following Mao’s precepts, Cardew began to criticize works by avant-garde composers including Stockhausen and Cage. Cardew explains the dangers such composers represent:

The bourgeois ideologist today can only earn the title “genius” by going to extreme lengths of intellectual corruption and dishonesty and this is just what Cage and Stockhausen have done. Inevitably they try and lead their ‘schools’ along the same path. These are ample grounds for attacking them; it is quite wrong to think that such artists with their elite audience are “not doing anyone any harm.”\textsuperscript{255}

Instead, he felt such composers should be focusing “their attention on to the problems of serving the working people.”\textsuperscript{256} He even critiqued his own earlier works and explains this self-criticism and conversion to his new style:

When, through the social activity and circumstances of our lives we, as individuals, became conscious of the “necessity for change,” we experience the dialectical unity of being and consciousness. At that moment when we genuinely confront the “necessity for change” in society, a process of change begins in us, we begin to grow and develop. We begin to participate in changing society and our consciousness grows alongside this.\textsuperscript{257}

As part of this self-critical phase, he decided to revise many of his past avant-garde works such as \textit{The Great Learning}. In his revision, he doesn’t change any of the actual music but revises the text in the first two paragraphs using more politically charged language. Cardew clarified his position as follows: “My standpoint in criticizing \textit{The Great Learning} is the standpoint of the

\textsuperscript{255} Cardew, “Stockhausen Serves Imperialism,” 155.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., 183.
working class. For the working class *The Great Learning* is – or would be if they ever got to hear it – a piece of inflated rubbish which obviously has no role to play in their struggles.”

The original text is from Confucius’s *The Great Learning* as translated by Ezra Pound. While Cardew was fascinated with calligraphy, his knowledge of the Chinese language was probably quite limited. The revision of the text, which he considered a new “translation,” was most probably simply a reinterpretation; following Mao, the text acquired a more socialist tone. The text of *The Great Learning* and its alterations will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Frederic Rzewski:**

Although Rzewski and Cardew come from different countries, they expressed many of the same views and ideas. Eventually, both composers came to know and respect each other, even corresponding and collaborating on various projects. In 1976, Cardew described Rzewski as “one of a number of unpublished American composers who are beating a path out of the cliquishness and formal aridity of the established avant-garde towards a politically conscious mass audience.” While some differences would eventually emerge between the two composers, they shared many of the same goals throughout most of their careers.

Rzewski was born in Westfield, Massachusetts in 1938 and from a very early age he was exposed to strong political ideologies. His parents were Republican conservatives while his first piano teacher, Charles Makey was an outspoken leftist. Rzewski recalled in an interview how his first piano lessons:

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258 Ibid., 210.
were not just about music. They were about life, about history, about philosophy, about world views. Certainly, his particular political orientation had an influence on me – yes, of course. He got me interested in Marx and Engels.  

Eventually, these Marxist political ideas would coincide with Rzewski’s interest in new music. At Harvard and Princeton, his most significant teachers included Walter Piston, Randall Thompson, Roger Sessions, and Milton Babbitt. In 1960, he accepted a Ford Foundation Fellowship, allowing him an extended stay in Italy studying with Luigi Dallapiccola. Similar to Cardew, his education was more along traditional lines. He studied modal counterpoint with Thompson and orchestration with Dallapiccola as well as composition with Babbitt. However, it was through friend and fellow avant-gardist Christian Wolff that Rzewski became acquainted with the music of John Cage and David Tudor. Immediately, Rzewski became inspired with this new style of avant-garde music, which he would later adapt as a performer and composer. Rzewski first heard the music of Cage at Harvard in 1956 when Rzewski attended and helped to organize a concert for Cage.  

In Vinton’s Dictionary of Contemporary Music, Rzewski stresses the importance of Cage within his music and in general by stating:

> Around 1960 the influence of improvisational concepts as practiced in jazz and in the theater, as well as Oriental ideas of time, began to be felt very profoundly by composers of concert music. Most of these influences were transmitted, whether directly or indirectly…through John Cage.

He admired how Cage, within his works and through techniques such as chance operations, allowed the surrounding environment to play an active role within the music. The surrounding environment itself became a part of the musical experience. As Rzewski stated:

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261 Alburger, Ibid., 5, 12; Cardew, “A Note on Frederic Rzewski,” 245.

One result in the shift in the center of musical gravity from composed relationships to fortuitous ones, from linear scales of finite values to indeterminate ones, or as Cage puts it, from “object” to “process,” has been to transfer the locus of musical activity from the score, performer, or instrument to the listener.263

Rzewski admired Cage’s thoughts on indeterminacy and his penchant for the abstract. He also respected Cage’s ability to adhere to a system. As Rzewski stated, “even John Cage, who did more than anyone to liberate music from orthodoxy, remained faithful to the end to such systematic thinking.”264

In the fifties, indeterminacy granted performers certain freedoms while the composer still remained firmly in control. However, the sixties saw a reversal where the performance itself became the art form or the “happening.”265 When Rzewski posed the question regarding political ideas within avant-garde works, Cage’s response was two-fold:

Either one chooses a text or some other semantic form adequate for the communication of a concrete content; or one looks for a specifically musical form which is capable, for the duration of the performance at least, of creating a new type of social relation among those present: a new relationship of performers and audience, for instance.266

This would have a strong influence on Rzewski since many of his pieces employ one or both of these methods. While Rzewski recognized and became influenced by Cage’s thoughts on musical indeterminacy, he also embraced Cage’s political thought. He admired how Cage, along with many other composers, moved away from political complacency within their works. John Cage was considered by many, including himself, an anarchist.267 As Cage said in a 1985 interview with Stephen Montague, “I'm an anarchist. I don't know whether the adjective is pure

264 Frederic Rzewski, "Inner Voices: In Search of a More Spontaneous Form of Writing," in Nonsequiturs, 84.
266 Frederic Rzewski, "Listening to the Sounds of People," in Nonsequiturs, 236.
and simple, or philosophical, or what, but I don't like government! And I don't like institutions! And I don't have any confidence in even good institutions."

Cage mostly spoke of politics in a general, philosophical way. Although Rzewski praised Cage for his political candor, he did not follow Cage’s fully anarchist ideas. However, both composers did share a distrust of large institutions and organizations. Rzewski, frustrated at the state of his career, came to Cage for advice. As an exception to his usual thinking, he urged Rzewski to “find some organization whose function is to fight the things you don’t like in the world, and direct your energy positively toward that organization.” However, such organizations did not exist and what Rzewski ironically disliked about the world, was “its organization, and its organizations.”

By the 1960s, Rzewski was already a committed and militant Marxist. Even his college thesis, “The Reappearance of Isorhythm in Modern Music,” had a heavy dose of Marxist themes. In one instance, he associates tonality with the “bourgeois order.” He exhibited interests in the philosophical teachings of Georg Hegel, Max Weber, and Theodore Adorno. Adorno became an important influence particularly after Rzewski read the philosopher’s *Philosophie der neun Musik*. Additionally, he also came under the influence of poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, particularly within later compositions such as *Antigone-Legend* (1982) and *Force* (1983).

Adorno, in *Philosophie*, predicts that one possible development from Schönberg’s dodecaphonic system is a form of music designed to be read in silence without any sort of actual

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270 Ibid.
Rzewski felt that this idea may have spurred advances in experimental form of notation. Rzewski posited that the use of “prose format” or text scores in place of traditional notation would “generate a process of musical communication involving the eye or mind of the observer directly.” This goes beyond the use of conventional notation, which merely communicates instructions to the performer. Many of Rzewski’s early pieces consist of a text score or text combined with traditional notation. Rzewski immediately noticed the benefits of text scores in regard to group improvisation in part by “the relative ease of publishing new ideas in a prose format and the relative difficulty of doing so with musical notation.” Many composers by this time had begun to employ text scores. Within group improvisation, Rzewski acknowledged that “prose is often used as a means of communicating basic performing techniques applicable to various unpredictable situations.”

Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous chapter, such notation would become useful when inviting non-musicians to participate in various group improvisational works. Within *Force*, Rzewski tried to incorporate the idea of “Misuk” from Bertolt Brecht, which Rzewski explains, is “an organized, semi-musical activity, somewhere between music and theatre, but not really belonging to either category.” While there is no concrete definition or documented performances of Misuk, it is described as “fundamental to the very nature of music.” The term was invented by Brecht in the 1950s to describe the extreme rethinking of composition and performance that he envisioned. Friend and composer Hanns Eisler recounted how Misuk was

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275 Ibid.
276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
279 Rzewski, "Force," 492.
“not decadent and formalist, but extremely close to the people.” Composer Marc Blitzstein described the style as “the kind of untrained singing that could be expected from washerwomen and laborers.” Based on these descriptions alone, it is clear how Rzewski would have valued the socialist qualities within this style of music.

While *Force* was written in 1982, Rzewski wanted to write a piece that encompassed the musical ideals and techniques featured in works from the 1960s.

I wanted to pick up some of the vital threads from the sixties which I felt had been left hanging—those simple, transparent ideas, for instance, which appear in some of Cage’s more radical experiments…and that of the Scratch Orchestra.

In addition to Rzewski being influenced by Adorno and Brecht, he also became familiar with the music of Stockhausen early in his career. Similar to Cardew, Stockhausen became an important influence and created the first sparks of interest of the avant-garde within Rzewski. At the Palermo Festival, he performed a new version of the *Klavierstücke X*. His performance of the piece became widely known and he eventually recorded it. While at Harvard, Rzewski received a copy of the *Klavierstücke XI* which began to give Rzewski new ideas in regard to composing music. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Klavierstücke XI* employed a basic form of improvisation/indeterminacy that was new to 20th century composers and performers by having the performer move through different sections of the piece at random. Rzewski later became inspired by Stockhausen’s use of symbols to represent different kinds of relationships between improvising performers. In 1963, Rzewski used similar techniques to write a series of compositions. As Rzewski mentions, “these things were floating around in the air at that time,

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281 Ibid.
282 Archie Green, “Vernacular Music: A Naming Compass,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77 (Spring 1993), 44.
283 Ibid.
and these ideas then showed up also in certain pieces of Stockhausen, for instance, because
Stockhausen also then got into improvising."\textsuperscript{285}

One work in particular that influenced Rzewski was \textit{Kurzwellen} (1960). This piece is
one of a series of “process” compositions that separate form and content through the
implementation of plus, minus, and equal signs presented to the performers. The signs indicate
the process to the performers while the content, according to composer Michael Nyman, consists
of shortwave radio sounds as an “impulse for musical activity.”\textsuperscript{286} A small ensemble made up of
electronium, electric viola, piano, and tam-tams would create music based on what was being
broadcast on the radios. Rzewski would also use similar signs within such compositions as
\textit{Composition for Two Players} (1964) and \textit{Speculum Dianae} (1964).

Inspired by the bold freedoms employed by Cage, as well as the improvisation used by
Stockhausen, these works incorporate controlled improvisation along with structured
compositional elements. It was important for Rzewski to create works “at least partially
dependent on unpredictable free decision by performers.”\textsuperscript{287} He continued to foster free decision
with many of his group and solo works throughout his career.

In a lecture given many years later, Rzewski discusses the importance of improvisation
with regard to the performer.

Improvisation has established itself once again as an important element in the
development and maintenance of a common musical language. The composer of the
future must learn to make rapid decisions of a spontaneous nature, whose consequences
may vary according to changing circumstances. He/she must study the techniques of
improvised music, both in order to become familiar with the principles governing much
of the world’s music, and in order to acquire the know-how necessary for today’s
/tomorrow’s conditions of production.\textsuperscript{288}

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{288} Frederic Rzewski, "Inspiring the Love of the Art: Teaching Composition Tomorrow," in \textit{Nonsequiturs}, 124.
As Rzewski said in his essay, “Interpreting the Moment,” “improvisation is interesting because it resembles real life, more than a written or carefully rehearsed performance does.”

In fact, creating music that resembled real life affected his viewpoint on what it means to be “political.” He clarified this viewpoint when asked in an interview about his political thoughts:

I don’t think of myself as being an especially political composer. I am in the habit of trying to relate my work to the world around me, and if this means being a political composer, then I suppose that’s what it has to be, but I don’t think there’s anything especially unusual about it.

At first glance, it seems that Rzewski is recusing himself from any association with the political. However, like Cardew, Rzewski recognized class struggles and wished to do more than tell a story. He wanted to demonstrate how people could be brought together and how new relationships are created. With regard to his politically charged work, The People United Will Never Be Defeated, Rzewski states

The movement of the whole piece ... is towards a new unity—an image of popular unity—made up of related but diverse, developing elements (not to be confused with uniformity), coordinated and achieved by a blend of irresistible logic and spontaneous expression.

These pieces are constantly being created through improvisation and constantly changing with each performance, similar to the constantly changing nature of the world as Rzewski saw it. “The main appeal of improvisation as an art form,” he insists, “lies in its resemblance to real life. It is somewhere between art and life.”

Rzewski considered improvisation “real-time composition.” In an essay titled “A Fresh New Wind,” he states that the “two terms ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’ are no longer

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292 Frederic Rzewski, "On Improvisation," Contemporary Music Review 25, No. 5-6 (October 2006), 495.
perceived, in the age of digital synthesis, as opposite poles of music, but rather as complementary aspects of a single creative process, one in which compositional decisions and their execution can be made simultaneously.”

He considered composition an act of accumulating and storing information from the past. This information can be edited and analyzed for as long as the composer pleases, whereas Rzewski saw improvisation as a means to disrupt this system. Additionally, he saw this as an opportunity for ideas to surface without any filter or immediate judgment or as Rzewski suggests, ideas are allowed to “express themselves…somehow avoiding the barriers erected by consciousness.” Furthermore, within his essay, “Interpreting the Moment,” he asserts that “we must trust the unconscious.” The key is the act itself. According to Rzewski, “when we act, we momentarily free ourselves from reflection. We simply act.”

Throughout his writings, Rzewski makes many attempts to explore the boundaries of free improvisation. Within his essay “Little Bangs: Towards a Nihilist Theory of Improvisation,” Rzewski discusses how the concept of “freedom” is variable. He claims that the typical notion of freedom is the “absence of structure and preparation.” However, this is not to say that improvisation necessarily gives rise to freed acts. It is equally possible for someone participating in “free” improvisation to mechanically reproduce something that has been replicated many times. Improvisation, according to Rzewski, “is a controlled experiment with a limited number of unknown possibilities. It always has rules and a framework.” He suggests that even with guidelines allowing performers to create and explore new sounds and new

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297 Ibid., 50.
298 Rzewski, "Interpreting the Moment: On Improvising and the Art of Forgetting," 104.
relationships, performers may still gravitate to what is repeated or familiar by stating, “There is no such thing as a ‘free’ improvisation.” 299

While Rzewski calls into question this concept of “freedom,” he nevertheless decided to experiment with creating free, group improvisation, which he referred to as “Collective Music.” He hoped that this music would serve two very important purposes: to bring together many different musical traditions and exemplify a revolutionary spirit that was alive, particularly during that time. As Rzewski stated in a 1986 lecture, “the notation and execution of a creative idea, and in some cases the inception of the idea itself, are more frequently influenced by the collaborative nature of musical production.” 300

Rzewski believed that the collective aspect was as essential to this music as was its freedom. Furthermore, he believed that breakthroughs to higher stages in the creative process can only be obtained by the free association created by large groups rather than the domination of a few.

To create this music, Rzewski stated that “groups of people acting freely together constitute the true source of artistic creativity, and not solitary ‘stars’ or ‘masters.’” 301 Therefore, in forming these large groups, Rzewski believed in not only including conservatory trained musicians, but all manner of people, including non-musicians. He envisioned musical artists and intellectuals combining forces with the general public in an “ever-expanding wave of liberation.” 302 The purpose was not to add to the avant-garde, but to create a collective anthem

299 Ibid.
300 Rzewski, "Inspiring the Love of the Art: Teaching Composition Tomorrow," 124.
302 Ibid.
for “people that struggle, everywhere.” While studying in Italy and with the help of fellow composers, Rzewski was able to begin putting these ideals into practice.

In the spring of 1966, while in Italy, Rzewski helped form an improvisatory group known as Musica Elettronica Viva or MEV. Incidentally, this was not Rzewski’s first experience with group improvisation. He had been active in Franco Evangelisti’s group known as Nuova Consonanza since 1964. Rzewski and composer Alvin Curran had organized a concert of new experimental music in Rome. Following the success of the concert, other composers, such as Richard Teitelbaum and Steve Lacy, became interested in producing more concerts as well as pursuing a common interest in electronics. The founding members of MEV participated in group composition or collective music as described above which resulted in group improvisation, games, and participatory interaction in most performances.

Avant-garde groups such as MEV, Nuova Consonanza, Scratch Orchestra, etc. had adopted left-wing ideologies that expanded beyond the music they produced. Some, like MEV, participated in communal living and followed the writings of Marx and Mao. MEV became a traveling commune moving across Europe, constantly changing its size and roster of performers. While on the road, the ensemble brought along an entourage of friends and families, furthering its collective spirit.

According to Rzewski, when creating collective music, the improvisation of MEV could fall into one of three categories: 1) a collage of compositional structures contributed by individual members; 2) a continuous group improvisation based on a conceptual framework.
(Spacecraft, 1967); 3) an audience participation event in which the group used simple techniques for guiding the music toward order or disorder (Sound Pool, 1969).  

Much like Cardew’s Scratch Music, the focus was not on the musical product per se, but rather the style of music making. Rzewski theorized that the success of the group and this music was due to its potential to draw different styles and music traditions together. He clarifies further how such music:

responds to the increasingly revolutionary spirit of our time: it expresses a state in which masses of people act collectively on a basis of freedom and equality, moving swiftly to make decisions of vital concern to them, doing away with older established conventions where these are not needed, and abolishing the hierarchical and authoritarian relationships which have been imposed upon them from above, where these restrict necessary progress.

Rzewski states that the freedom of this music should be seen as a higher form of order rather than an absence of order. Even errors made by performers should be viewed as essential elements of that system. He believed not only that free improvisation leads to a higher social order, but also that improvisation is an impetus to freedom and liberation within music.

MEV began this endeavor with Plan for Spacecraft (1967). While Rzewski’s description of this piece is extremely abstract, there are two prominent goals that emerge within the work: to find a new way to create spontaneous music and to create such music by creating deep musical connections with other performers. This abstract work consisted of free unstructured music but became an exercise in communication. Music making is no longer thought of as initiated by instruments or the voice, but rather by the idea that the performer “creates concentrated

308 Ibid., 268; Rzewski, "MEV-Reflections on Its Tenth Anniversary," 264.
310 Ibid.
energy...he excites the air, creating a situation in which lines of force are set up between himself and other persons.”

Performers start by creating music that they are familiar with and must visualize themselves as imprisoned within a mental labyrinth. These labyrinths are structures that restrict the performer from the deep musical connections with the surrounding performers. The performer is caught in an illusion where she believes new original music is being created. According to Rzewski, the secret to escaping the labyrinth “is not forwards, or backwards, to the left or to the right, but up. To go up it is necessary to fly. The musician must grow wings and enter into someone else’s labyrinth.” New music is created and discovered only with the connections to the surrounding performers.

Such a metaphorical description causes problems in trying to recreate the piece in performance. There is little explanation beyond what the composer offers above. One can only surmise that Rzewski is trying to explain the dangers of improvising; these dangers arise from the performers thinking that they are creating new music and sounds while improvising, but instead simply end up reproducing sounds they have played in the past. Rzewski mentions this problem above where he defines the essence of “free” improvisation. “A ‘free’ improvisation,” he writes “might be no more than a mechanical representation of maneuvers that have been executed so often, over a long period of time that the performer can go through an entire concert without thinking.” What better way to confront such a problem than in the most natural way possible, through a work of free improvisation such as Spacecraft. Since the problem lies within

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311 Ibid.
the subconscious, the metaphor of escaping a mental labyrinth could help coax the improviser to move past familiar playing habits.

Freeing oneself from habit is often met with some difficulty on the part of the performer. Therefore, Rzewski speaks of a conflict or tumult occurring within the piece, caused by the difficulty of making music. As he states:

The energy, which formerly had been expended in the general tumult and conflict, is now used more efficiently, used to move the giant pendulum. By placing his balance upon this fundamental rhythm, he finds that he can devote his energies to the adornment of this rhythm, to its enrichment with smaller and more complex subrhythms. The space will no longer be occupied, but created not by magic (which should have happened immediately) but rather the creating of conditions where music becomes possible at the end of a long process. It will be work. The difference between magic and work is one of duration.314

According to Christian Asplund, a strong political aspect of the piece is how it models the experience of oppressed individuals engaged in “tedious and pointless drudgery.”315 Participants in the piece believe that their actions will result in liberation and freedom by creating music in the same way they always have. However, as mentioned earlier, this leads nowhere and creates what Asplund calls a “closed labyrinth.” Only when the labyrinth is abandoned does the performer find the correct path and connections are established.

In 1968, Rzewski and MEV explored different approaches to improvisation that increase the participation of the audience in order to create musical connections with non-musicians. The first attempt was Free Soup or Zuppa in Italian. The group chose Zuppa as a title because it conjured up pleasing images of something hot, good, and available to everybody. It is not the title of a composition or a type of form, but rather an experimental activity.316

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314 Rzewski, "Casting Lines to Another Soul," 246.
315 Ibid, 426.
This activity was partly spontaneous and initiated by participating musicians. Non-musicians that were present were invited to create music with some of the many instruments available and in doing so, momentarily became a part of the performance ensemble. The invitation was made through musical sound, arrangement of objects within the given space, movement, and gesture, as well as verbal communication.\textsuperscript{317}

Similar to \textit{Spacecraft}, the improvisation involves the performance space. Within the MEV studio, one half of the room was filled with chairs for the audience while the other half was empty and filled with various instruments. Whereas \textit{Spacecraft} is a very subjective and intellectual exercise in creating connections among performers, \textit{Zappa} is more physical in achieving its purpose. It begins with members of the audience being invited to physically move to the performer’s side in order to participate in the performance. The spontaneous music is then created based in two directions:

- Direction 1: Invasion of the performance space by members of the audience.
- Direction 2: Invasions of the personal space of individuals in the audience by the performers.\textsuperscript{318}

The available text score elaborates on the two directions, but ultimately defines the objective as “the penetration of the barriers which the individual has brought with him into the space-formulas, images of what may be expected or required of him.”\textsuperscript{319} Similar to \textit{Spacecraft}, the performer struggles to break from traditional music making. The separation of performer and audience in the creation of concert music is transgressed to achieve something that moves beyond the sounds that are produced to focus on the process itself.

\textsuperscript{317} Ibid., 302.
\textsuperscript{318} Ibid., 310, 312.
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 312.
During the performance, no other instructions were given to participants. Music was allowed to unfold as participants saw fit until an arbitrarily chosen hour with no other limitations imposed. At some performances, there were as many as thirty-five people performing at once, which was the limit capacity of the MEV studio. The performance was repeated each night and ranged from extremely loud volumes to “sustained periods of magical softness” and was open to whomever wanted to attend.320

Sound Pool (1969) was a more structured form of Zappa also with the general idea of involving the audience to participate in the performance. Here, the audience was encouraged to bring their own sounds and “throw them into the pool.” Those participating in Sound Pool could discover and create sounds in orthodox and unorthodox ways such as singing, using hands and feet, banging on the floor, walls, and furniture while taking care not to damage anything. Those with instruments were asked to find new ways of playing and to explore unconventional ways to create sounds.321 The result proved to be even more successful than Zappa with performances involving hundreds of people. Dancing and theater games would break out from the music and sometimes move out of the space and into the street.322

Most likely due to problems that occurred within Zappa, Sound Pool includes suggestions that address all performers performing at the same time or the constant blaring of loud sounds. Rzewski states that “if everybody plays all the time, the result will be boring, or unpleasant. On the contrary, a general silence can be interesting.”323 He distinguishes between three kinds of activity: 1) Silence: listening to, and reflecting on the sounds around you while thinking about what you are going to do; 2) Accompaniment: providing a background, or

320 Ibid., 302.
323 Rzewski, "Play the Room: Sound Pool," 324
support, for a sound made by someone else, producing any sound over which someone could play a solo; 3) Solo: a prominent or leading sound, a thematic statement.  

Performers of loud instruments were encouraged to experiment with sound and volume making it possible to accompany softer sounding instruments. Additionally, within the large ensemble, performers were encouraged to form smaller subgroups and move around the performance space interacting with other groups and performers. Stronger, more skilled musicians should assist and accompany those participants that are musically less skilled. Furthermore, if a participant is making too much noise or “taking up too much space,” then this should be communicated to that performer in a non-verbal manner. Rzewski in his essay “Play the Room: Sound Pool,” encourages passive, more musical means such as suggesting the other participants cease to play. Since no other description or example is offered, the performer must be creative. Non-verbal communication would most likely occur using physical gestures such as hand signals and head nods.

Ultimately in 1970, MEV split into various groups based in Rome, Paris, and New York. These MEV factions continued to create the same type of improvisation activities albeit with different variations of control depending on the musicians guiding the performance. Similar to Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra, the increased politicization of the group had creative advantages as well as destructive consequences and ultimately led to its break-up.

Initially, it was the politicization that drove the group. In an interview, Rzewski clarified how the experiences of the members of MEV were defined by “our direct contact with students and working-class audiences in Italy, France, Holland, Belgium, and also England, where

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324 Ibid.
325 Ibid., 324, 326
326 Rzewski, "MEV-Reflections on Its Tenth Anniversary," 266.
Cornelius Cardew had started his Scratch Orchestra, which was also an outgrowth of similar thinking.\textsuperscript{327}

After the dissolution of the group, Rzewski created pieces that would continue the political and musical ideas that he had developed with MEV. Indeed, Rzewski became increasingly sensitive to contemporaneous political events such as the Kent State shootings, the Chilean Revolution, various labor and union protests, as well as demonstrations around the world; these became the subject matter of his music.\textsuperscript{328}

Rzewski’s most famous political works are \textit{Coming Together} and \textit{Attica} (1971-1972). Both pieces are based on historical events that occurred at Attica prison. In September of 1971, inmates of the Attica State Prison in upstate New York gained control of the prison and took many guards as hostages. One of their demands was the right “to be treated as human beings.” After several days of failed negotiations, Governor Rockefeller ordered the state police to retake the prison by force. As a result, forty-three people, including some of the hostages, were killed, with many more wounded. One of the inmates killed was Sam Melville, an organizer of the rebellion with a history of politically-based crimes.\textsuperscript{329}

Melville had written a letter to a friend describing his experience at Attica. After his death, the letter was published in the leftist magazine \textit{Ramparts}. It was the letter that attracted Rzewski’s attention and compelled him to compose a work based on the event. Rzewski uses the text from Melville’s letter within the piece.

\begin{quote}
I think the combination of age and a greater coming together is responsible for the speed of the passing time. It’s six months now, and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. I am in excellent physical and emotional health. There are doubtless subtle surprises ahead, but I feel secure and ready. As lovers will contrast their
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{327} Rzewski, "Conversation with Vivian Perlis," 184.
\textsuperscript{328} Alburger, “Coming Together For an Interview with Frederic Rzewski,” 8; Rzewski, "Conversation with Vivian Perlis," 184; Pollack, \textit{Harvard Composers}, 379.
\textsuperscript{329} Frederic Rzewski, "Coming Together/Attica," in \textit{Nonsequiturs}, 448.
emotions in times of crises, so am I dealing with my environment. In the indifferent brutality, the incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men, I can act with clarity and meaning. I am deliberate, sometimes even calculating, seldom employing histrionics except as a test of the reactions of others. I read much, exercise, talk to guards and inmates, feeling for the inevitable direction of my life.\textsuperscript{330}

Rzewski was clearly affected by Melville’s words and how those words similarly described both the improvised and political aspects of music making. It begins with the idea of “coming together,” both referring to performers within a group improvisation working together as well as all individuals coming together to create an ideal society. Just as Melville found himself “dealing” or reacting to his environment, an improviser must do the same. Additionally, performers must navigate “with clarity and meaning” through a sometimes erratic landscape within a free improvisation. Throughout his struggle for recognition, Melville is clearly optimistic, attempting to enact evolutionary/revolutionary changes for himself. This aspirational attitude informs Rzewski’s approach to creative self-expression and discovery in music.

The next piece, \textit{Attica}, is meant to immediately follow \textit{Coming Together} and is made up of the same instrumentation. The narrative follows a survivor of Attica named Richard X. Clark. Clark was paroled a few weeks after the riot. When asked by a reporter what it was like to leave Attica behind him, he responded, “Attica is in front of me.” This quote became the text of the piece.\textsuperscript{331}

Rzewski recognized the importance of creating pieces that contained elements of freedom. Freedom becomes an important topic, particularly when telling the story of Melville and Clark. Both men struggled with freedom in different ways; Melville found ways to cope during incarceration while Clark strived to find freedom away from Attica.

\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid., 450.
Within the score of *Coming Together*, Rzewski specifically indicates certain aspects of the piece including the dynamics, how the vocal part should be spoken, and the bass line, which is completely written out. For the remainder of the music, Rzewski leaves instructions on what is to be played; however, he grants performers the freedom to choose how it is to be played. Performers are allowed various freedoms within the piece such as the flexibility of choosing the size and instrumental make-up of the ensemble. One notable example occurs when the score instructs performers to create original melodies “ad libitum” by choosing random notes from a continuous stream of sixteenth notes. This creates a hocketing effect that is determined by the performers and can vary in sound depending on the size of the ensemble.

Although free improvisation is not employed within either *Coming Together* or *Attica*, the composer was careful to portray freedom with some elements of indeterminacy. Despite these elements, the composer remains marginally in control so as to maintain the integrity of the work. Additionally, the composer might have thought it inappropriate to use free improvisation due to the overall theme, which revolves around the struggle to find one’s personal freedom. In the mindset of a socialist-Marxist composer, free improvisation might have been too limited of a struggle for the performer, who now must work a bit harder to find freedom within the confines of the piece. To this day, Rzewski continues to compose and perform improvised, politically motivated compositions. Additionally, he continues to remain active as a writer and lecturer, disseminating his ideas on music.

Upon examining the biographies of Cardew and Rzewski, one notices many similarities between the two composers. Both were pianists who began their studies performing traditional, pre-twentieth century repertoire and composing standard serial compositions. Yet significant changes in their composition styles occurred when they became inspired by the experimental and
avant-garde music of Stockhausen and Cage and as a result, began to experiment with improvisation. Additionally, Cardew and Rzewski both found inspiration in the writings of Marx, Mao, Wittgenstein, Adorno, and Brecht, which reinforced their socialist views and ideas. They became affected by current and historical political events that led them to compose works that resembled the real world. In order to create these real-world compositions, both composers employed group improvisation, graphic/prose notation and the incorporation of trained and untrained musicians within their works. Performances such as Cardew’s Improvisation Rites and Rzewski’s Sound Pool not only experimented with the exploration of sound, but also with the socialization in music. These compositions became precursors to such seminal works as The Great Learning, and Les Mouton des Panurge.
Chapter 4
Analyses of The Great Learning and Les Moutons de Panurge

It was impossible to hinder them; for you know that it is the nature of sheep always to follow the first wheresoever it goes ... ~François Rabelais

While in previous chapters we have been concerned with the structural connections between group improvisation and political action, the political efficacy of group improvisation can only truly be assessed by examining real-world instances. Thus, this final chapter turns to two case studies: The Great Learning by Cardew and Les Moutons de Panurge by Rzewski. By analyzing these pieces with respect not only to their political ideals but also, and more importantly, with respect to their practical political impact on performers and audiences, I hope to demonstrate how group improvisation contributes to the autonomy of the works.

These pieces were selected owing to the manner in which they bring together group improvisation and political action. Both compositions are considered avant-garde and display anti-formalistic traits despite the incorporation of text and an obvious program. Each piece (to varying degrees) incorporates non-musicians into the performance, thus blurring the line between audience and performer. Politically, the socialist sympathies of the composers are reflected in both compositions. For instance, both pieces incorporate certain Marxist ideas such as the celebration of working-class values. While the works are determinedly political in nature, I shall argue that they successfully avoid being labeled as mere propaganda or succumbing to commodification by the culture industry owing to the inclusion of group improvisation.

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Method of Analysis

Both analyses will follow the same procedure. First, I will examine the contexts surrounding the creation of these works. I will clarify the social/political situation and postulate some of the causal forces that may have impelled the composers to produce these works at this time. Second, I will provide a technical analysis of the score, paying particular attention to the deployment of group improvisation and any other material aspects of the piece that bear on our political understanding of it. Third, I will discuss existing studio recordings of the work as well as videos of past performances in order to provide some “real world” accounts of how the work actually manifests in performance (insofar as a score asking for group improvisation is necessarily under-prescriptive of what actual sounds will emerge). Here I will be concerned with how performers actually responded to these instructions.

Finally, I will interpret the technical/material apparatus of each work in light of both the political context surrounding its creation and the political ideals set forth by its composer. There will be an evaluative element in this reading; that is, I will offer some ways in which we might assess whether or not the score succeeds in its attempts to create or encourage politically viable agents making a registered difference in the political landscape. If the point of a political work is to effect change (even if that change occurs internally among the participants in the production of the piece), then the only means to evaluate its efficacy is through careful and critical analysis. Before we turn to the analyses themselves, however, some words on the role documented recordings of these pieces will play in our discussion is warranted.

In Chapter 2 we saw that Adorno considers the score to be closer to the idea of the work “in itself” than any single performance of it. However, it is the performance or reproduction of
the score that gives life to that work.\textsuperscript{2} Particularly with respect to improvised works, composers such as Cardew stressed the importance of connections created among performers during live performances. In the absence of a live performance, and to fully examine musical events that occurred during a particular improvisation, one turns to available recordings. Through recordings, one can experience the different ways performers improvised. In some cases, the improvisation is performed by, or under the auspices of, the composer themselves.

Often, as in \textit{The Great Learning}, the original intent of pieces involving group improvisation was to abandon the traditional performer-audience schema along with what was felt to be the stultifying formality associated with the concert stage. This, along with the incorporation of performance art, transforms the performance of the work into something more of an event or social exercise. In short, one’s \textit{presence} at the event was proclaimed to be an integral part of the meaning of that event. Therefore, restricting one’s experience of the piece to a studio recording would seem to counteract altogether the political force behind the immersive, \textit{presence-ing} interaction among political actors that these pieces intend to foster. \textit{Being present} with the other is often stipulated as precisely the necessary condition for the political efficacy of these works. And yet, a dogmatic adherence to such ideology leaves our understanding of this music stranded on the shoals of an immediacy that may serve to deflate the political efficacy such works seek to achieve. In other words, without the capacity for reflection, any viable political change is doomed from the outset.

Short of experiencing a live performance, examining both the score and available recordings (preferably of markedly varying performances) can help elucidate the ideas and ideals of the composer while measuring them against their realization (or failure to materialize) within

\footnote{\textsuperscript{2} Max Paddison, \textit{Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 198.}
the interpretations of the performers. Furthermore, by analyzing and discussing different recordings of improvised works, not only can the different improvisational choices made by the performers be explored, but also the interactions and relationships among the performers will be revealed under varying conditions.

Available recordings of the pieces, particularly *The Great Learning*, are rare. This is most likely due to the length and breadth of the piece as well as its avant-garde nature. For both works, the relative paucity of recordings might involve the generally apprehensive attitude toward improvisation among performers of so-called “concert” music. Nevertheless, performers must be wary of turning a performance into a mere document by recording and distributing the piece. As stated in Chapter 1, when an improvised work is recorded, it becomes, at least to some degree, a set work. The idea of improvisation is lost and the recording can be endlessly replicated.

This relates to Attali’s third network, Repetition. With Repetition, music is commodified, removed from time and space and stockpiled for future listening. By recording and playing back music that is meant to be improvised in the moment, the work loses its artistic originality and thus the social and political impact of the individual performance is diminished. However, group improvisation more closely adheres to Attali’s fourth network, Composition. Thus, recordings of group improvisation threaten to contribute to a regression from the emancipatory verve of Composition to the reified condition of Repetition. Adorno’s ideas on commodification also pertain to these pieces. The improvisational aspect within these works adds a constant element of originality to each performance. Thus, the likelihood of the works becoming a commodity is diminished.
According to Adorno, the autonomous nature of the work depends upon an adequately calibrated and politically progressive balance between the subjectivity of the composer versus the objectivity of the handed-down tradition. However, the subjectivity of the performers also bears a dialectical relationship to the handed-down tradition and must be taken into account in the evaluation of a work as manifested in performance. This balance must strongly figure as a central aspect of the assessment of recordings/performances of these works. In one sense, this is true of the performance of any work (see Adorno’s discussion of performance in “The Social Situation of Music,” for example) but the stakes are particularly high in works such as those examined here, where the variability of performance figures into the ontological nature of the works per se. Ultimately, it is the task of the listener to determine if the balance between the subjective drive of expression in performance and the objective weight of performance tradition is maintained and if the ideal experience has been achieved. In works such as those discussed below, that “ideal experience” determines the political efficacy of the piece.

Problems Encountered During Analysis

The analysis of recorded improvisation presents several intriguing challenges. In the case of The Great Learning, transcriptions made from the recordings are an approximation due to the nature of the instruments (stones, whistles, etc.) as well as the spontaneous improvisational choices made by the performers. Additionally, musical aspects such as prolonged dissonances make it difficult to detect subtle changes within the music. In regard to the organ solo, the combination of dissonances, stops, and manual changes made certain subtleties of the solo difficult to discern at times.

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3 Paddison, 198-199.
4 Ibid.
Finally, another looming issue in regard to analysis concerns determinacy. In many instances, such as in the studio (audio only) recordings, it is almost impossible to determine if what is heard in the recording is performed spontaneously or predetermined before the performance. With some obvious exceptions, this chapter will proceed under the assumption that at points when the score calls for improvisation, the performers are indeed performing spontaneously.
Background

During the introductory discussion that preceded the premiere of paragraph 1, Cardew remarked:

If music was a purely aesthetic experience I don’t think it would occupy the central place it does in our affairs. It must make waves in the environment and have repercussions beyond the concert hall.5

The work was created in response to a commission by the MacNaghten Concerts in 1968 to write a piece for the Cheltenham Music Festival.6

_The Great Learning_ is a multi-movement piece based on an ancient Chinese text by Confucius of the same name and translated by Ezra Pound. The text itself is divided into seven paragraphs which the composer used to create seven different movements (referred to as paragraphs). The work would prove to be Cardew’s magnum opus and was written for and performed by Cardew’s ensemble The Scratch Orchestra. The first paragraph, for which Cardew received the MacNaghten commission, was actually written before the formation of the Scratch Orchestra, and most likely inspired Cardew to create his well-known ensemble.7

Many important factors influenced Cardew while deciding on the concept of the work. For instance, Cardew had previously experienced frustration after hearing a number of performances of his previous large-scale work, _Treatise_, by trained, professional musicians.8 He viewed such training as detrimental rather than beneficial. Mirroring Cage’s thoughts on improvisation, he concluded that musically educated musicians relied more on their training rather than on exploring and creating new sounds. He expresses his dilemma with the music profession in an extract written sometime in 1967.

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6 Ibid., 470.
7 Ibid., 474.
8 Ibid., 479.
I see no possibility of turning to account the tremendous musical potential that musically educated people evidently represent, except by providing them with what they want: traditionally notated scores of maximum complexity. The most hopeful fields are those of choral and orchestral writing since there the individual personality (which a musical education seems so often to thwart) is absorbed into a larger organism, which speaks through its individual members as if from some higher sphere.

This inspired him to create a work that would include trained, as well as untrained, musicians. Cardew was considered an enfant terrible of contemporary music. Despite this, Cardew didn’t want to dominate, but preferred to have “an affectionate attitude to the audience, not a lecturing attitude.”

The reinterpretation of classical Chinese texts was a common Maoist trend, and even today, the philosophy of *The Great Learning* continues to influence Chinese politics and education. Other composers, such as Cage, have incorporated such Eastern philosophies into their works. While Cardew certainly was drawn to the writings of Mao, the beginnings of his sinophilia could have been sparked by his father Michael Cardew, who also had an interest in Confucian texts. In fact, there were likely additional aspects of Chinese culture that Cardew wanted to incorporate into his work. Joseph Needham’s book *Science and Civilization in China* (parts of which Cardew had photocopied from fellow AMM performer Keith Rowe) provided much insight into Chinese attitudes regarding sound and the social function of music. For instance, one practice that Cardew shared with Chinese culture was the use of everyday objects as instruments. Cardew biographer John Tilbury found the work to be a “(Taoist) celebration of sounds, sights, smells, and touches.”

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9 Ibid., 476-477.
10 Ibid., 470.
11 Ibid., 471.
12 Ibid., 507.
Tilbury posits that many aspects of Confucianism and Taoism could be found in Cardew’s personality. He describes this balance as follows:

On the one hand his propensity for dogma and authority, purity and orthodoxy (Confucianism), to which his preoccupation with the writings of Wittgenstein and later the political doctrines of Marx and Lenin bear witness; on the other hand his visionary spirit, his passion for the writings of Blake, Burroughs and the Beats, for the spontaneous, the intuitive, the poetic, his music-making with AMM, and his delight in the carefree flight from respectability and responsibility (Taoism).\(^\text{13}\)

Composer and critic Michael Nyman touched upon similarities between The Great Learning and Cage’s *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-8) in that both pieces “accumulate a rich multiplicity of notations.” However, Cage’s notations, particularly in the piano part, demonstrate ways of organizing the production of sounds, whereas Cardew’s notations demonstrate ways of organizing the people to produce those sounds.\(^\text{14}\) Nyman also contrasts the goals of Confucius and Cardew in his analysis: whereas Confucius wanted to unite a kingdom, Cardew wanted to unite people in an aesthetic political act.\(^\text{15}\) Hence, The Great Learning is infused with ritualistic and ceremonial elements such as gestures, activities, songs, and games.\(^\text{16}\) Nyman explains that with the aid of notation, particularly graphic and text notation, performers of the piece are “immediately and directly stimulated to musical action.”\(^\text{17}\)

As a socialist and Maoist, Cardew was trying to steer away from elitism in Western art music, and The Great Learning was his first overtly political work. According to Tilbury, the piece represents an important milestone for the composer, and his accomplishment was due to

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., 479.


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 507.


\(^{17}\) Michael Nyman, “Cornelius Cardew’s The Great Learning,” 288.
his ability to “communicate his belief in the power of music not as an abstract and specialized pursuit, but as a vital social activity.”

The music of the first paragraph features three relatively extended sections: the striking of stones; an organ solo; and a group of whistlers sustaining notes. Each whistler performs a solo based on the graphic notation and each solo alternates with chanting of the Confucian text. The text is repeated throughout the final section of the work until all the solos are performed.

The first paragraph of The Great Learning, as translated by Ezra Pound, is as follows:

The great learning takes root in clarifying the way wherein the intelligence increases through the process of looking into one’s own heart and acting on the results; It is rooted in watching with affection the way people grow; It is rooted in coming to rest, being at ease in perfect equity.

One crucial point that must be addressed is why, out of various ancient texts, he chose one by Confucius. Confucius’s text focused on the idea of good government and therefore was directed toward the rulers of the people whom ordinary citizens were meant to follow and emulate. The “virtuous” man was essentially an aristocrat and not a working-class person, which thereby contradicts Cardew’s socialist beliefs.

Even more to the point, why did Cardew choose a translation by poet Ezra Pound since Pound was known as a fascist? Most likely, Cardew had been familiar with Pound’s translation years before receiving the MacNaghten commission. In all likelihood, he appreciated Pound’s knowledge of Chinese culture. Howard Snell, a former friend and colleague from his time at the Royal Academy, wrote to Cardew trying to downplay Pound’s fascism as a response to any reservations he might have expressed to Snell:

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19 Ezra Pound’s instructions for the text is “to keep re-reading the whole digest until he understands.” (Tilbury, 481.)
Ezra is a good deal better than most people will allow. Also he’s not a fascist. All he did was read bits of Cantos over the Italian radio in 1939 and 41, also saying that Mussolini’s economics were better in some respects than Western capitalists’ were.\textsuperscript{20}

Although Cardew had issues regarding the use of Pound’s translation, other members of the Scratch Orchestra expressed their reservations with the text’s overall authoritarian nature. This included its depiction of the hierarchical structure of the family, or the virtuous aristocrat, wielding power over the populace for their own good. Scratch members such as Phil Gebbett, recognized the “reactionary” nature of Confucianism. Eddie Prévost once remarked “you can’t be a Confucian and play in the AMM!”\textsuperscript{21}

Tilbury sums up the orchestra’s doubts:

Such “freedoms” – and in any case “freedom” is arguably a misnomer in the context – could not be attained within the rigid, hierarchical framework of Confucianism in which texts are obeyed and rules are followed; a certain comfort and security yes, but not individual freedom – western, “bourgeois” style, with its latent associations of guilt and anxiety.\textsuperscript{22}

Nevertheless, Cardew persisted with Pound’s translation of the text with all of its inherent challenges to a socialist position. The question then remains as to whether and how Cardew managed to create a well-balanced socialist work employing this text through the aid of group improvisation.

Rather than just serving as a vehicle for left-wing propaganda, the improvisation within the piece provides freedom of choice and invites ideas from the performers in addition to those of the composer. Cardew himself writes, in Stockhausen Serves Imperialism, “How can a composer truly reflect society if he ignores the lessons of that society? If a composer cannot or

\textsuperscript{20} Tilbury, 473.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 477.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
refuses to come to terms with such problems then the matter should be thrown open to public criticism. The artist serves the community, not vice versa.”

For both Confucius and Cardew, music was moral training and should be morally beneficial. One way Cardew accomplished this was through notation, wherein performers were encouraged to adopt certain attitudes towards the sounds they produce and towards each other.

As Michael Nyman states in his description of The Great Learning:

Such is the incorruptible latitude of the score (The Great Learning) that each participant ideally fulfils the roles of performer, listener, critic and composer. This incorruptibility, which is coupled with a meticulous generosity, derives from Cardew’s personal acceptance of the principles laid down in the Confucius text on which The Great Learning is based and the way in which they are translated into direct, non-symbolic musical terms (on a more profound level than the accepted banality of “expressing the text in music”). Not only does this subtly help one along the road of “correct behavior” during a performance, it beneficially affects one’s mode of procedure in everyday life.

The first paragraph was premiered at the Cheltenham Festival on July 9, 1968 by the Louis Halsey Singers. Ironically, the singing group wasn’t required to sing at all, but rather to hit stones, to whistle, and to chant the text. While the organ solo is a central part of the piece, it is unclear if this was played by the composer or another performer. The audience’s response to the piece was mixed, with some members applauding the music, and others expressing displeasure with it. Cardew commended the audience’s lack of “politeness” and felt they had every right to express their judgment of a piece of music:

It was evident from the behavior at Cheltenham of the rowdy minority who, taken unawares by the absence of a programme note and the customary explanations, felt obliged to believe themselves the victims of some sort of hoax. They reacted readily enough, but with anger born of incomprehension rather than with enlightenment proceeding from understanding of the situation. They accordingly modified the nature of the piece itself by superimposing upon its slow circular motion certain infinite gestures, such as indignant and noisy exits, sporadic handclapping, and bursts of angry

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24 Tilbury, 506.
25 Nyman, 288; Tilbury, 506-507.
26 Tilbury, 479.
conversation. By thus adding to the work spatial and timbral dimensions which served to emphasise their initial judgement that it was insufficiently “interesting,” they were able to re-compose the piece while at the same time giving expression to their feeling that its very passivity was a function of their mounting aggression towards it.27

Cardew alludes to the significance of the audience by highlighting their ability to “re-compose” the piece through their negative responses. It appears that he not only accepts the audience’s reaction, but insists it is vital to the work itself. As Cardew mentions in the original liner notes, his purview of the piece revolves around the idea of “failure.”

Failure exists in relation to goals. Nature has no goals and so can’t fail. Humans have goals, and so they have to fail. Often the wonderful configurations produced by failure reveal the pettiness of the goals. Of course we have to go on striving for success, otherwise we could not genuinely fail. If Buster Keaton wasn’t genuinely trying to put up his house it wouldn’t be funny when it falls down on him.28

This unconventional thinking seems odd at first since the typical intention of any piece is to elicit a positive reaction from the audience. In this case, the notion of “failure” should be understood not only as an inevitable outcome, but also the accepted outcome of the work.

Throughout the 1970s, the period of his full conversion to Communism, Cardew limited his composing to strictly tonal works and completely dismissed his previous avant-garde style, disparaging it as “too elitist.” At that point, The Great Learning became the subject of harsh criticism from the composer himself.29

As his beliefs became more and more extreme, he decided to return to and edit earlier works to make them more acceptable for the socialist cause. In fact, Cardew reinterpreted the translation of The Great Learning to make it appear more strikingly socialist and revolutionary. In the original text, The Great Learning is “rooted in watching the way people grow” and “being

27 Ibid., 509.
29 Ibid., 596.
at ease in perfect equity.” This is later altered to “being rooted in love for the broad masses of the people” and “justice and equality.” Despite the change in text, Cardew keeps the music the same. Insofar as the music itself was already a strong reflection of socialist ideas, Cardew seems to have believed that he was bringing the Confucian text (the subject of so much political criticism among his group) into line with his socialist vision.

Here is the translation by Pound of the first paragraph of *The Great Learning*, followed by the retranslation of the same paragraph by Cardew:

> The great learning takes root in clarifying the way wherein the intelligence increases through the process of looking into one’s own heart and acting on the results; It is rooted in watching with affection the way people grow; It is rooted in coming to rest, being at ease in perfect equity.

> The Great Learning means raising your level of consciousness by getting right to the heart of a matter and acting on your conclusions. The Great Learning is rooted in love for the broad masses of the people. The target of the Great Learning is justice and equality, the highest good for all.\(^{30}\)

Notice the details of the alterations. Whereas in the earlier version the reader was told to look “into one’s own heart” (a turning inward), now she is instructed to get “right to the heart of a matter” (the focus remaining always on external action). The emphasis on the distanced view (watching “the way people grow”) is replaced with a commitment of the “broad masses” (a phrase reverberating with Marxian ideals). Finally, and most importantly, the ultimate goal of the Great Learning is completely altered in the revision. Whereas the Pound translation recommends quiescence (again a turning inward, a coming to rest), Cardew’s revision insists on “justice and equality” (social values superseding Pound’s personal values). There’s even something rather clever in the replacement of Pound’s “equity” (meaning the balanced repose of personal

\(^{30}\) Taylor, 565.
quietism) with “equality” as the “highest good for all” (clarifying the urgency of political action for change over personal acceptance of a “natural” hierarchical power).

This new translation of *The Great Learning* would be a source of tension when the composer was approached by the BBC to perform paragraphs 1 and 2 at the 1972 Promenade Concert in the Royal Albert Hall. The BBC was unaware of the newer, more political version and sought to limit its political content through a series of letters and meetings with the composer. Moreover, Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra wished to display a series of banners featuring political slogans. These slogans, ultimately banned by the BBC, were as follows:

First Slogan: “Make the past serve the present”
Second Slogan: “Revolution is The Great learning of the present”
Third Slogan: “A revolution is not a dinner party, it is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.”
Fourth Slogan: “Apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought in a living way to the problems of the present.”

Despite the increased fervor of Cardew’s socialist beliefs, he later viewed this revision as a mistake and the performance was never duplicated. Cardew made it clear that he preferred “the original” since the performance with the original text was a “genuine real life situation and in no way artificially constructed.”

**Paragraph 1- Analysis of Score**

As stated earlier, the first movement, or paragraph 1 of the piece, is divided into three sections. These sections are defined by distinct musical events such as (A) striking stones, (B)

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31 Tilbury, 592
32 Ibid.
an organ solo, and (C) chanting and whistling. The instructions for the first section (A) are as follows:

All members of the chorus provide themselves with two stones. The phrases at the beginning are to be played with these stones, each member interpreting the notation as he or she sees fit. Each phrase may begin at any time after the conductor’s beat and may overlap into the next beat, but not further. The sounds should be produced by the two stones together, not by bringing the stones into contact with other objects.

Example 4-2: The stone rhythms in the A section.

The A section is not an extreme form of graphic notation compared to Cardew’s earlier work, *Treatise*, or even some of the other examples from other composers discussed in the first chapter. Nevertheless, it serves the same purpose—a new type of ambiguous notation that can be equally interpreted by both trained and untrained musicians.

While the notation resembles actual notes, it can still be considered graphic due to the absence of a traditional staff, clef, time signature, etc. Each rhythm is written vertically as well as horizontally on a single-lined staff. The vertical placement of the notes would seem to imply differences in pitch. However, two stones being struck do not produce any discernable pitch difference. Therefore, notes written higher or lower on the staff would have to be interpreted using other means such as speed, dynamics, etc.

Having these musical aspects open to interpretation makes it easier to create something new every time this section is performed. While the score calls for a conductor to signal the beats, this should not be taken literally and it in no way interferes with a semi-improvisatory approach; this is due to the conductor’s beats being “irregularly placed.” How irregular (or regular) the beats are, is at the discretion of the conductor. In a way, the conductor is
improvising alongside the performers. The dictatorial effect of the conductor is eliminated since the performers need not play on the beat, but “at any time after the conductor’s beat and may overlap into the next beat.” Therefore, the improvisatory approach taken by the conductor, as well as the performers, assists in creating the desired effect.

While sections A and C can be performed using trained and/or untrained musicians, section B requires a trained musician performing an organ solo. A trained organist is required in this section to interpret the traditional organ notation. The organ part is divided between two manuals which are labeled the “Great” and the “Swell” in addition to the pedalboard. Various liberties are afforded to the performer. For example, the composer specifies that the “rhythm is free” and that “given actions should be performed in any order” when encountering note stems with question marks. If certain actions seem impossible to perform simultaneously, then they may also be performed “successively in any order.” In his final instructions in the score, Cardew emphasizes the importance of the impression of spontaneity in performance:

Avoid the impression of continuous and labored concentration. Actions are to be performed briskly in groups, separated by pauses for relaxation and listening. Such pauses are generally not indicated and are at the discretion of the player.

Despite the leeway granted to the performer by the score, the B section is seemingly devoid of overt improvisation. The performer is free to execute “pauses for relaxation and listening.” Additionally, the performer may change the order of any musical action “where it proves impossible to perform simultaneously a number of actions that are so indicated.” Regardless of such latitude, the expectation is for one to hear a close approximation of what is presented in the score, with regard to pitch.

Within the organ part, Cardew makes use of large ranges as well as the sustaining nature of the instrument. The organist is expected to keep notes sustained for extended periods of time.
by using a “weight or wedge” on the keys. While some half-step dissonances occasionally appear, the section is mostly dominated by consonant intervals, mainly perfect fourths and fifths. While there are no formal measures, Cardew employs bar lines in a seemingly sporadic manner. These lines do not appear to mark out metrical considerations insofar as they often go through only one or two manuals; it is only at the end that a bar line traverses all three registers. Cardew’s instructions indicate that the lines direct the performer to make a “fresh start” with respect to the register through which the line runs. This is most likely to be executed through a brief lift (or pause, or breath) in that register. In many cases the bar lines isolate a single sonority; however, they might also serve the more significant purpose of delineating phrases.

The last section, section C, is defined by the use of chorus chanting and whistle soloists while the organ continues to sustain its notes. The instructions for section C are as follows:

The chorus is divided into two nearly equal groups: speakers and whistlers (ideally the numbers of speakers should be greater by one than the number of whistlers). Whistlers provide themselves with the wherewithal to whistle; all natural and mechanical means are permissible, from a broken tooth to empty bottles. The notation of the whistle solo is to be interpreted by each whistler as he or she sees fit. The whistle solo should begin each time as follows: When the speakers finish speaking, the soloist whose turn it is should continue holding his note until his current breath runs out, and then begin the solo with a new breath.

While Pound’s translation of the text is chanted in unison, the organ and the whistlers sustain notes. This is repeated following each whistle solo. After the last recitation of the text, the notes sustained by the whistlers end “at the end of the current breath.” When the sustained notes in the organ is the only sound, an optional Chinese bell rings in conjunction with the organ switching off. The piece is over “when the sound has died completely.”

Similar to section A, the graphic notation is divided into phrase patterns; several “notes” are barred together like eighth notes. Furthermore, the graphic notation element appears with the note heads having been replaced by curved and angled lines. Like the rocks in section A, whistle
sounds can vary in speed and dynamics. However, many whistles can also change articulation and pitch. Despite the variable use of musical elements, and with the assistance of the graphic notation, the whistles can be performed by either trained or untrained musicians.

The graphic notation provides an opportunity for the music to reflect the personal choices of the performer. Additionally, when deciding what kind of whistles to use in this section, the composer states that “all natural and mechanical means are permissible.” Therefore, choosing the instrument becomes an indeterminate factor and can also affect the spontaneous music created by the performer.

When not soloing, the other whistlers sustain notes. The score states that the whistlers may sustain “any notes” and should keep sustaining the “same note.” Similar to the organist in the B section, and assuming that the whistle is able to change pitch, the whistlers are granted the freedom to create dissonant or consonant harmonies. This will be further elucidated when examining the recordings in the next section.

Lastly, the importance of the text and its effect on the music must also be addressed. For example, the phrase “the way people grow” reflects the morphology of the overall structure of the piece. Throughout the paragraph, there is a seemingly natural evolution from one section to the other as well as within the sections themselves. The pitches and harmonies within the organ in section B slowly evolve out of the wash of stones found in section A. These sustained intervals in the organ give way to the light floating sounds of whistles in section C. Finally, music which had originally begun in section A as rather watery and transparent with the sound of stones, becomes more structured in section C with unified chorus and organized solos. The overall motion strikes the listener as progressing from the inchoate and ambiguous through the more determinate harmonies of the organ to the concretion of the text in the final section.
Additionally, the image of *The Great Learning* “being at ease in perfect equity” is exemplified by the last section. The idea of “perfect equity” is finally achieved when all musical parts (chorus, organ, and soloists), are finally playing together and are all equally balanced.

The text even alludes to how improvisation is executed within the piece. The poetry describes the “process of looking straight into one’s own heart and acting on the results.” This could very well describe the process of improvisation itself where one uses unconscious feelings, thoughts, experiences, etc., to spontaneously “act” or create something new. Additionally, the idea of “watching with affection the way people grow” supports the idea that the spontaneous element of this music is not meant to be done individually, but with others. Within group improvisation, performers have the opportunity to base their musical choices on the musical choices of other performers. For instance, in the C section, it is highly probable that the whistle soloists will be affected in some way by experiencing the other solos. This experience will therefore affect the choices made by each soloist during performance. This relationship among performers during group improvisation is what contributes to and improves the overall musical experience. Therefore, the many, rather than the few, improvising together creates a “great learning.”

Hence, there is a close association between the text and improvisation. In fact, while different forms of graphic and traditional notation provide an impetus for improvisation, I believe the final prompt for improvisation is the text itself. The thoughts and ideas put forth by Confucius’s words should serve as an overall guide to the performers for spontaneously creating music throughout the piece.
Paragraph 1-Analysis of Performance

In order to fully understand the use of improvisation within the paragraph/movement, the two available recordings must be analyzed in relation to the score. The first one is of the Scratch Orchestra at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on May 16, 1982, recorded a year after the composer’s death. The second is a Polish recording that was released twenty-eight years later in 2010 under Iranian conductor Nima Gousheh. While there are many similarities between the two recordings, the improvisational aspects of the piece help create two vastly different performances.

In Cardew’s original liner notes, which are included with the 1982 recording, he states that the “rhythms start to cohere, waterfall becomes ordered and unity of tempo is established.” The “waterfall” that Cardew alludes to in the liner notes is most likely the overflowing sounds of the stones heard in section A, which, owing to the use of graphic notation, are easily performed by untrained musicians. In the 1982 recording, this section lasts approximately 1:20 and one can hear clear pockets of silence between each phrase. This reflects Cardew’s instructions that “actions are to be performed briskly in groups, separated by pauses for relaxation and listening.” This effect occurs most likely due to the actions of the conductor.

The A section in the 2010 recording spans only 1:04 and the conductor’s beats seem steadier and faster. As in the case of the 1982 recording, clear pauses can be heard between each phrase. However, the pockets of silence between the phrases seem shorter, and the pause between the last two phrases is nearly absent. Like the 1982 recording, the conductor’s insistence on designating clear pauses between the phrases detracts from the overall free and spontaneous nature of the section. In both recordings, the continuous “raining” sound of the section is caused by the performers striking the stones at indeterminate times. However, in this

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33 Cornelius Cardew, Liner Notes for The Great Learning.
recording, at least one performer with large stones (perhaps the conductor himself) stands out and closely performs the rhythms as written, thus making the phrases much easier to follow. In addition to the conductor, this literal interpretation might have also helped the other performers “stay together” within this section. While this sound might serve as a beacon to help keep the musicians together, it might also detract from the overall sense of freedom.

The B section provides a strong contrast to the opening by employing traditional notation performed by a trained musician. As stated above, while there is some freedom allowed to the performer in regard to rhythm and note order, this section is intended to be largely devoid of improvisation. However, it seems that the organists in both recordings go beyond the liberties afforded by the score. In fact, at various places in the B section, both performers completely rewrite the pitches of the score.

In the 1982 recording, the first instance of such recomposition occurs at the outset of the B section with the tremolo. In the directions, the composer states that “tremolo is to be understood in the widest sense to include all speeds and articulations (fast, slow, staccato, legato, overlapping of the two elements irregular and regular tempi and combination of those).” These directions certainly don’t mention the alteration of pitch material. However, in lieu of the tremolo, the 1982 organist executes a series of chromatic, disjunct notes emphasizing intervaller sixth and seventh in accelerando.

Example 4-3a and b: (a) The tremolo as written in the score. This tremolo is replaced by a series of chromatic notes (b) in the 1982 Scratch Orchestra recording.
The most prominent example of the organist changing pitches occurs toward the end of the first page of the score in both recordings. Neither of the two organists plays exactly what is written on the page, thus giving rise to three different versions. Since the nature of the music in all three versions resembles a complete musical thought, it seems fitting to view this part of section B as a phrase. While the function of the bar lines is not necessarily to delineate the beginning and end of phrases, such an effect occurs here by offering a “fresh start,” clearing the way for the beginning of this phrase. Additionally, a second bar line traversing the swell and bass at the end of the first page, creates a divide between the end of the phrase and the music that follows. Example 4-4 shows the phrase as seen in the score and examples 4-5 and 4-6 show a transcribed version of the improvised phrases as heard in the 1982 and 2010 recordings, respectively.

Example 4-4: The last part of page one as written on the score. The round note-heads indicate new pitches to be played while the diamond note-heads indicate that the notes are to be cut off. In the pedal, the E, B and G# are diamond heads indicating the stopping of notes that were initiated earlier (not indicated in the example).
Example 4-5a: The first part of the phrase as improvised in the 1982 recording. In the bass, the E and B in parenthesis are sustained from earlier in the piece. The diamond note-head E that follows, indicates that the note is to be released. The same is true of the Eb in the Great.

Example 4-5b: The second part of the phrase from the 1982 recording.
Example 4-6: The last phrase of page one as improvised in the 2010 recording. In the bass, the G# and the B in parenthesis are notes that started sounding from before the phrase in question.

The opening eighth note G# and F# motive in the Great appears in all three examples. In addition to distinguishing the phrase being improvised, it serves as a musical landmark and point of departure between the score and both improvisations.

While the score contains some half-steps, it seems relatively tonal. The sustained pedal E, B, and G# from the previous phrase creates an E major chord along with the perfect fourths C# and F# as well as A and D. The phrase technically ends at the bar line with the octave trill on the A, which functions as a pickup to the next phrase.

In example 5a and b, you can see how the organist in the 1982 recording improvises new music based on the written score. At around 6:02, the organist begins with the G#-F# motive in the Great accompanied by the sustained harmony in the pedal. At the end of the phrase, all the notes are stopped and the pick-up A is now in the Great rather than in the Swell. The performer
expands on this by adding more sustained pitches after the initial motive thus slowly increasing the dissonance of the phrase. In addition to making the phrase longer, this increased dissonance also raises the tension and volume (through the addition of notes) of the phrase’s high point. Nevertheless, the organist maintains the overall structure of the phrase, in part by releasing the notes at the end of the phrase and performing the A in the manner of a pickup to the music that follows.

In the 2010 recording, the organist begins the phrase similarly with the G#-F# motive in the Great at 11:00 in the recording. The perfect fourth, C#—F# that occurs as part of the opening motive follows from the score. Unlike the 1982 recording, the organist avoids a loud dissonant build-up following the opening motive. The frequent sustained notes followed by extended pauses maintains a feeling of “relaxation and listening.” Between the two recordings, this improvisation has a more anti-climactic air. It simply focuses on G# moving to G and then back to G#, most likely with the intention of exploring the different tunings between the G# and the G. In support of “exploring the instrument’s idiosyncrasies,” Cardew himself instructs the performer to bring out the “false tunings obtained by gradual pulling out or pushing in of stops,” which most likely occurs here. Additionally, much like the 1982 recording, the performer maintains the structure of the phrase by releasing most of the notes at the end and clearly featuring the A pickup to the next phrase.

An analysis of the C section must focus predominantly on how the performers of both recordings responded to and interpreted the graphic notation of the score. Indeed, both sets of performers interpreted the notation in rather different ways. If, as discussed earlier, graphic notation strives to eliminate the hierarchical distinction between trained and untrained musicians, an analysis of this section should help reveal that effort in action.
Within the 1982 recording there are six solos ranging from 1:15 to 1:40 in length, with the first solo occurring at 9:51 in the recording. With the exception of the last solo, each solo is slightly longer than the previous one. Each soloist responds to, and builds upon, the solo of the previous performer, and yet each solo also provides contrast with the previous solo in some marked manner. For instance, the soloists alternate between playing fast and slow notes or small and larger intervals. In essence, each soloist responded as much to her predecessor as to the graphic score. A description of the solos can be found in table 4-1.

A variety of whistles were employed. Some whistles are easily identified, such as pea whistles and slide whistles. Others prove more difficult to identify and can only be recognized by their capacity for changing pitch, relative ranges, etc. For whistles with a relatively fixed pitch, such as the pea whistle, the performer may interpret the graphic score as indicating alterations of speed, dynamics, intensity, or ornamentation (trills and tremolos). Even on the pea whistle, trills are possible insofar as the performer is able to slightly effect the pitch/intonation by blowing harder or softer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solo</th>
<th>Possible Instrumentation</th>
<th>Time Length (Time on Recording)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4-1: Description of the whistles used in the 1982 recording.
Discerning whether any of the soloists were trained or untrained seems to be impossible, providing strong evidence that this performance may have succeeded in dissolving the hierarchy implicit in professionalization. Irrespective of the performer’s background, each was free to create new effects and sounds conducive to the instrument they were playing.

In the C section of the 2010 recording, there were ten solos, featuring more variety in duration, ranging from 00:45 to 1:56. While each solo increased in intensity and length in the 1982 recording, here the solo times seemed to differ without clear structural patterning. Furthermore, there was greater diversity in terms of “whistles,” which likely included recorders, a train whistle, and what sounds like a harmonica. Furthermore, certain solos were more deliberately tonal in comparison with the 1982 recording, which featured less tonal structuring. For instance, one can discern a tonal melody in the harmonica solo. Nevertheless, as in the 1982 recording, the hierarchy between trained or untrained musicians was obscured.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solo</th>
<th>Possible Instrumentation</th>
<th>Time Length (Time on Recording)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recorder</td>
<td>1:29 (24:54-26:24)</td>
<td>Overblown/squeaking to sound like whistle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Electronic Sounding Whistle</td>
<td>0:45 (32:55-33:40)</td>
<td>Electronic sounding high sounds. Pitches difficult to discern.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Train Whistle  
1:03 (35:41-36:44)  
Slight pitch variation when blowing harder or softer.

Table 4-2: Instrumentation, duration, and description of the solos occurring in the 2010 recording.

Discussion—Cardew

Improvisation plays a vital role within the politics of this piece. The most important political element of the work is the elimination of the hierarchical divide between musicians and non-musicians. The work was initially performed by Cardew’s ensemble, The Scratch Orchestra, renowned for its inclusion of anyone from dancers and artists to housewives and civil servants performing alongside trained performers. As discussed above, Cardew envisioned The Scratch Orchestra as an ideal model of society that championed the equality among individuals rather than the elitist celebration of the privileged few.

Additionally, while The Great Learning was performed in formal concert halls, it has also appeared in other venues such as classrooms, churches, and even town halls. The emphasis on non-traditional performance spaces further contributes to the elimination of an institutional divide between musician and non-musician in the performance of the work—that is, by removing the work from the formal venue of the musical event, the site of performance no longer confers a sense of privilege to the trained musician over other participants. This will be explored further when discussing Rzewski’s Les Moutons de Panurge.

The equal treatment of musicians and non-musicians is facilitated by the use of graphic notation in sections A and C. Due to the ambiguity of the different shapes and patterns of the notation, both sections could be performed by anyone willing to grapple with the possible

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meanings of the signs. Additionally, the simplicity of the instruments (stones, whistles) and chorus part (chanting of text) contributes to the accessibility of the music for non-traditional musicians. Even the role of the conductor is reduced to that of a guide rather than a dominating figure on a podium. By working to dissolve the divide between musicians and non-musicians, *The Great Learning* endeavors to present a non-hierarchical model for society as a whole.

At first glance, one is immediately drawn to the graphic notation within the A and C sections as a new and experimental feature. The B section is notated in traditional notation and, thus, doesn’t appear to offer the same freedoms allowed in the outer sections—although some liberties are afforded to the performer with respect to rhythm and note order.

Despite the use of graphic notation, the C section is actually quite structured with a strict alternation of chanting and solo whistling. The effect of group improvisation is reduced since the performers are now playing successively rather than simultaneously. This format makes it difficult to “respond” immediately or “in the moment” to other performers; instead, response involves a soloist reacting to previous solos.

Improvising with whistles is another way to increase the inclusion of non-musicians owing to the simplicity of the instruments. Many different instruments qualify as “whistles,” thus providing the performer with an array of instruments from which to choose. However, like the rocks in the A section, many of these instruments are limited with respect to pitch and timbre, thus restricting the freedom of the improvisation. Moreover, while the opportunity to create music spontaneously exists, determining beforehand many seemingly indeterminate elements remains a strong possibility. For example, the choice and order of whistles is an aspect that can be easily pre-determined in rehearsal. Hence, while the piece is clearly meant to be understood as having a great degree of indeterminacy, it is an indeterminacy placed within determinable
limits. There may be a social message here as well; Cardew is recommending a socialist form of responsive and responsible interaction, not mere anarchy.

While the B section of the score seems merely to afford the performer relatively circumscribed freedom with regard to rhythm and note order, the recordings paint a much different picture. In some places, both organists completely created from scratch parts of the B section. While the composer does offer the organist some leeway with respect to rhythm and note order, in no way does the score indicate that the performer is to render the music unrecognizable to what is written on the page through the addition of new notes and the omission of certain pitches indicated in the score.

As a result of the performer’s actions, the B section emerges as the point in the movement where the most spontaneous musical freedom is achieved. This occurs since the organists in both recordings freely improvise beyond the parameters presented by the composer and thus, there are no limitations in the score that specify to the performer how the improvisation should unfold. Additionally, there was no conductor signaling the beats, when the soloist should pause, or when the chorus should enter.

The specific role of the organ solo is never fully explained. If not for the slow-paced, unexpected improvisations by the organists, the movement would almost come across as an organ concertante, and subvert the political agenda. Of all the performance roles within the movement, the organist is the only part where a specifically trained musician is required. There is no record of a professional organist being a part of The Scratch Orchestra, and all performers who participated in the 1982 recording of paragraph 1 are unknown. The nature of the solo leads to two possible conclusions: the anonymity of the organist furthers the idea mentioned earlier of placing all performers on an equal plane, or that the original organist was most likely Cardew.
himself. Cardew, an experienced improviser, could have taken liberties with his own score. Additionally, due to the limited role of the organ within the A and C sections, Cardew would have been able to “conduct” from the organ within those sections. The organist in the 1982 recording, made soon after the composer’s death, was most likely a colleague of Cardew and therefore familiar with the composer’s style; she would have had insight as how to better emulate the ideas of the composer within the performance.

Furthermore, since the free improvisation occurring within the B section was not indicated in the score, it could be considered a resistant or revolutionary act against the score. Within socialism, and therefore within socialist works, criticism, even self-criticism, is an integral practice. This most likely stems from the socialist philosophy regarding evolution and revolution. In a way, the unexpected improvisation that occurs within the B section acts as a form of “criticism” to the score. During its first performance, when audience members openly expressed criticism of the piece, Cardew embraced this as an essential part of the work. If we are to view the organ improvisations as a form of criticism, then suffice it to conclude that such deviation from the written score remains true to the work as a whole.

The improvisation that frees the organist from the score also mirrors Adorno’s subject-object dialectic. In this context, what is being mediated is the subjectivity of the performer versus the objectivity of the composer/handed-down tradition. Thus, the resulting improvisation in this section creates the most authentic experience for the organist as well as those listening. The experience is more authentic because of the improvisation as opposed to a B section that is exactly replicated every time it is performed.

Be that as it may, while the organists in each of the recordings changed pitches and harmonies in some parts, they were still able to maintain the overall structure of the altered
phrases. Since this improvisation is not fully authorized by the score, no parameters are given to the performer on how the improvisation should unfold. However, the improvisation still maintains a structure that somewhat resembles the underlying idea of the work. Performers recognize this structure by using motives and musical gestures as landmarks while improvising. This reflects Attali’s ideas regarding how structures in music resemble structures in society.

According to Attali’s fourth network, there is no distinction between producers and audiences; a new appreciation of originality and a return to personal usage emerges. According to Attali, the fourth network or composition, “is not a return to the ritual of the past, however, but an escape from all prior codes, when music, extricating itself from the codes of sacrifice, representation, and repetition emerges as an activity that is an end in itself, that creates its own code at the same time as the work.”

Attali felt the fourth network was directly applicable to the experimentalism of the 1960s and helped contribute to the political nature of the music of this time. Since Attali deems music to be a “herald of modes of social organization” as discussed previously, the structures that typically appear in most political artworks represent the structures within society. The interactions occurring within the group improvisation dynamic thus begin to represent and reflect an ideal socialism.

Example 4-7: The score to Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge*. Used by permission from Zen-On Music Co., Ltd.
Background

The title of the piece comes from the pentalogy of novels known as *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* written by François Rabelais in the 16th century. The story centers around two giants who are father and son. They befriend a character named Panurge, “an exceedingly crafty knave, a libertine, and a coward.” The title of Rzewski’s work refers to a moment in the first book, *Pantagruel*, where Panurge devises a scheme to get back at some cheating merchants. In the story, he throws the lead sheep of their flock into the water which causes all the other sheep to follow blindly after it, dragging their owners with them. As the merchants try to climb out of the water, Panurge pushes them back in, recommending “the pleasures of the afterlife.”

The quote from the novel is as follows:

> Our friend Panurge, without any further tittle-tattle, throws you his ram overboard into the middle of the sea, bleating and making a sad noise. Upon this all the other sheep in the ship, crying and bleating in the same tone, made all the haste they could to leap nimbly into the sea, one after another; and great was the throng who should leap in first after their leader. It was impossible to hinder them; for you know that it is the nature of sheep always to follow the first wheresoever it goes …

The episode inspired the French expression, “les moutons de Panurge,” similar in meaning to “jumping on the bandwagon.” It derides an idea that lacks originality.

In his book, Rzewski recalls how he improvised the melody of the piece while walking through the streets of Paris in the summer of 1968:

> I remember I was walking down the street in Paris near the Ecole Militaire and I had just bought one of these Philips micro-cassette recorders. They had just come out. And I was having fun, just, you know, playing with it. And I was walking down the street and I just

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39 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 75.
whistled this tune, and recorded it on this machine and then I played it back and I liked the tune and I was trying to think how can I make a piece out of this…  

Then, to the best of his abilities, he created a “literal transcription of that moment.” While Rzewski doesn’t specify, one can imagine the actual transcription process (playing a few notes, writing it down, then playing a few more notes, etc.) playing a large part in the compositional process. According to Rzewski, “while studying my tune, I realized I could enlarge it as if through a microscope, and thereby focus on the slow tonal migration that took place in it.”

The composition as a whole came together a week before its premiere. The composer had been previously commissioned by conductor Frans Brüggen to compose a piece for him and his students. The piece was intended for an ensemble of any size and unspecified instrumentation. “I just thought,” Rzewski remarked, “well it might be interesting to apply this completely mechanical procedure to it.” The premiere was given at the small hall located in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam by Brüggen and his ensemble of 7 or 8 musicians with little to no rehearsal.

Before the performance, instruments were distributed to members of the audience who Rzewski described as “mostly hippies.” As the piece developed, Rzewski asserted, the performance made “quite a bit of noise.” Rzewski describes the performance’s break from tradition as becoming most evident during the concert’s intermission:

And the funny thing was also there was a real classical concert going on in the large hall next door. . . I remember also the intermission of the two concerts happened to coincide and the two audiences came together in the bar and it was very interesting this combination, because there were these very bourgeois Dutch people who had gone to the straight concert, and then there were all these hippies who were smoking dope, and they were all together. You know that was quite an unusual scene. . .

40 Frederic Rzewski, "Les Moutons de Panurge: For Any Number of Melody Instruments (1968),” 442.
41 Ibid.
Analysis of Score

Rzewski applies a simple additive procedure to the melody by having performers start with the first note, then play the first two notes (hence reiterating the first), then the first three notes, until reaching the last note (note sixty-five, when the entire melody is played). After that point, he shrinks the melody using a subtractive process (the inverse of the first half of the process) by leaving out the first note, then the first two, then the first three, etc., until reaching notes 63-64-65; 64-65; 65.

Rzewski felt that to write out these notes would be a waste of time. Instead, it was more interesting to have the performers go through the process themselves. While the melody is written monophonically, it was expected that around note 25, players would most likely get lost. The score specifies that if you become lost to “stay lost” and not to try and “find your way back to the fold” but to “continue to follow the rules strictly.” When this happens, the monophonic melody erupts into chaos.

Rzewski describes the melody as centered around F, not being set in major or minor mode, but rather navigating back and forth between the two. Upon further analysis of the melody, one is able to distinguish its melodic/harmonic evolution through the use of three hexachords. The first hexachord, which is used in the first 32 notes, resembling an F melodic minor scale, is made up of pitch classes F, Ab, Bb, C, D, and E. The second hexachord, a slight variation of the first, replaces the F with the missing G. Its pitches are used in notes 33-45. The last hexachord, consisting of notes 45-65, is derived from the first six notes of the F major scale (F, G, A, Bb, C, and D). Harmonically, there is a natural progression that occurs with the three hexachords. The minor collections of the first two hexachords seem to “resolve” into the F
major collection of the last hexachord. The listener becomes familiar with the harmonies produced by these hexachords, owing to the constant repetition of the melody. Due to the additive process, the listener also gets to experience the gradual evolution of one harmony leading to another.

The first three notes of the melody (F, Ab, Bb) seem to form the basis of a motive (A) that recurs throughout the melody such as in notes 9-11, 13-15, 21-23, etc. Upon further analysis, one can find transposed and inverted versions of this motive as well, such as notes 7-9, 33-35 and 45-47. Since this motive plays an important role within the melody, this prompted the search for other reoccurring motives, B-D. These motives also appear in transposition and inversion. The placement of these motives within the melody can be seen in example 4-9a and b.

Example 4-8a: Line 1 with trichordal motives indicated.

Example 4-8b: Line 2 with trichordal motives indicated.

The second most common motive in the piece is B, which begins with notes 4-6, and seems to follow motive A each time it occurs in the first line. Similar to motive A, motive B also appears in both its original form as well as in transposition. Indeed, motives B-D may be understood as slight variations of motive A. Table 4-3 uses a voice-leading space to show how closely related the motives are to each other. After reducing the trichords to their set classes, motives A-C are separated from the next one by one semi-tone, and with motive D separated by a whole-tone.
Regardless, the mapping seems to focus on the main, central role of motive A in relation to the other motives. Later in the chapter, when examining recorded performances, we will see how some of these motives become the basis of improvisation.

Table 4-3: A voice-leading space for the trichords that make up the four motives used in the piece. Motives A-C are separated from the next motive by a semi-tone while motive D is separated from A by a whole tone.

The close proximity of the intervallic relationships within the various trichords, as well as the similar nature that exists between each of the diatonic hexachords mentioned earlier, suggests one way in which the piece is able to sustain its sound world. The close relationship between these musical elements create agreeable sounds even when performers are performing the
melody heterophonically, by getting lost and staying that way. Heterophonic performance is commonplace in various styles such as folk and certain sub-genres of jazz. Within many types of folk music, performers are required to improvise and play independently on pentatonic, hexatonic, and diatonic scales; this fact is worth noting due to the great influence of folk music on Rzewski.

Rzewski includes instructions for a non-musician part. They are provided a leader whom they may choose to follow “or not.” The leader is instructed to begin by establishing a consistent eighth-note pulse. The composer encourages participants to explore any and all variations and to “make sound, any sound, preferably very loud.” If possible, these non-musicians are to be “provided with percussive or other instruments.” While the score merely designates this a group of non-musicians, it is implied from Rzewski’s account of the piece’s premiere that he expects them to be members of the audience. Finally, Rzewski provides a guide for the non-musicians in their music making with the rather cryptic statement: “The left hand doesn’t know what the right is doing.” The final prompt seems to imply a great deal of freedom with respect to the individual parts (among the performers on stage and among the audience members), resulting perhaps in a multi-metered and certainly a multi-rhythmic performance. Rzewski most likely made the prompt purposely ambiguous to ensure a multitude of simultaneous individual (and in-the-moment) interpretations rather than some consensus among those in attendance; the cryptic utterance may have been designed to keep the sheep moving in all different directions.

Analysis of Performance

Turning to the studio recordings of the piece, we find that many performers/ensembles made changes to the score when recording the piece. Since these recordings are mostly studio
(audio only) recordings, it is difficult to determine if these alterations are pre-determined or spontaneous. These alterations include having instruments enter and drop out at different times, playing the melody in diminution or augmentation, and, typically, the omission of the non-musician part. Nearly all of the recordings omit the final improvisation that Rzewski indicated should occur after the final note of the written melody has been performed (that is, at the end of the subtractive cycle). Table 4-4 is a summary of these aspects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ensemble/Performers and Instrumentation</th>
<th>Brief Description/Changes to Score</th>
<th>Inclusion of Non-Musicians</th>
<th>Final Improvisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Alter Ego Ensemble: Orchestral instrumentation</td>
<td>-Taken from a live performance. -There is an obvious accent on note 1. -None of the instrumentalists become “lost.”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Eighth Blackbird: Flutes, Clarinets, Violin, Cello, Percussion, Piano</td>
<td>-Performers become “lost” (no longer playing in unison) at note 65. Once lost, the performers begin playing an augmented version of the melody. -Instruments randomly entered and dropped out.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Joergen Brilling: 5 Electric Guitars and 4 Electric Basses</td>
<td>-The performer never gets “lost.”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Jeroen van Veen: 4 Pianos</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Included.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-4: A list of studio recordings of *Les Moutons* along with changes in the score.
Inclusion of the non-musicians on these recordings is rare. The only exception is the Alter Ego Ensemble, probably owing to the fact that this recording was taken from a live performance. At around 1:00 (note 19), a light maraca is heard playing the eighth notes of the non-musician’s part. This was likely an aural prompt geared toward the non-musicians since at around 1:20, other noises such as clapping emerged from the audience. Since these are audio recordings, there is no way to know if a conductor is present and if so, how much this individual participated within the performance of the piece.

Whether there was a conductor or not, most of the recordings (including those by Eighth Black Bird and van Veen), feature a lead musician playing at the forefront while the other instrumentalists played in the background. This approach was also employed in the 2010 recording of Cardew’s The Great Learning-Paragraph 1: in the A section featuring the stones, one performer was markedly louder than the others, making it easier to follow the score. In the Rzewski, the emphatic delivery of the lead performer made it easier to hear where exactly the group as a whole was in relation to the score, thus short-circuiting Rzewski’s goal of allowing performers to get lost and remain so.

In several of the recordings, performers became lost anywhere between notes 32 and 45 (see example 4-9a and b). Others, such as Alter Ego or Brilling, never became “lost” at all. While there are various factors that may have contributed to this, such as the inclusion of a conductor or lead musician, the Alter Ego recording contains an interesting device to prevent Rzewski’s desired drift: a loud bass drum/timpani strikes every time note 1 is repeated, signaling the repetition of the melody. The loud sound on note 1 is similar to an accent on a downbeat, keeping the other musicians aligned.
Some ensembles, such as Blackearth Percussion Group and Eighth Blackbird, experiment with color and timbre by having instruments sporadically enter and exit the texture. In their performance, Eighth Blackbird experiments with the melody even further. After reaching note 65, the piano and marimba proceed *a tempo* with the subtractive process in the higher register, while the other instruments softly perform an augmented version of the melody. Additionally, the performers playing the augmented melody continue with their own subtractive process. At around 9:00, instruments gradually dropped out and re-entered as the augmented melody slowly returned to the original tempo sustained by the piano and marimba.

Furthermore, with the exception of the recording by van Veen, all the recordings omit the final free improvisation. A description of van Veen’s improvisation, as well as possible explanations as to why the free improvisation was omitted from the other recordings, appears later in this chapter.

In addition to the studio recordings, there are a series of live performances that were recorded and then posted on YouTube. While a larger number of YouTube posts of this piece exists, the selection was narrowed down to five. These selections were chosen due to the background and experience of the performers, quality of the recording, and lastly, the popularity of the post. The chosen performances range from 2009 to 2017 and are made up of ensembles of various size and instrumentation.

As we saw in the studio recordings, a range of interpretive strategies appear. Some of these performances share similar aspects with the studio recordings. For instance, ARTefacts, TAC, and Chelsea Tinsler Jones Ensembles all feature instruments starting and dropping out at different times—a feature of the Blackearth and Eighth Blackbird recordings.
Furthermore, all the ensembles became and stayed “lost” keeping more to the spirit of the piece. While ARTefacts only become “lost” late in the subtractive process, most of the other ensembles become lost relatively early, such as around notes 16-22. Getting “lost” occurs earlier than in the studio recordings most likely due to the fact that the studio is a more controlled space than a live performance, offering more chances to rehearse and re-record. Thus, live performances typically offer more opportunity for spontaneity.

Additionally, these videos offer a visual component to the performance not available in the audio-only studio recordings. This element provides greater clarity regarding the performance of the piece.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performers/Ensemble</th>
<th>Changes to Score/General Description</th>
<th>Conductor</th>
<th>Inclusion of Non-Musicians</th>
<th>Final Improvisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARTefacts Ensemble</td>
<td>-changes note 7 in melody from E to Ab. -Audio/visual elements was used within performance.</td>
<td>No. Led by an instrumentalist playing at the forefront.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taller Atlántico Contemporáneo (TAC) Ensemble: violin, piano, flute, saxophone, drumset, trumpet, and string bass.</td>
<td>-Instruments randomly entered and dropped out. -The subtraction part is omitted.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Far Cry Chamber Orchestra</td>
<td>-Gave specific rhythmic prompts to the audience/non-musicians.</td>
<td>Yes for (non-musicians)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea Tinsler Jones Ensemble Flute, clarinet, alto saxophone, cello, bass, piano, and marimba</td>
<td>-Instruments randomly entered and dropped out.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incessant Noise Ensemble: Voice,</td>
<td>-The subtraction part is omitted.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Included.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Viola, Piano, Cello, Tenor Saxophone, Drumset, Vibraphone, Electric Guitar, Marimba

Table 4-5: Selections of *Les Moutons de Panurge* video recorded and posted on YouTube from live performances.

While a performance before a live audience readily allows for the opportunity to include non-musicians, this is not always the case in practice. Chelsea Tinsler Jones and Incessant Noise both opted not to include their audiences as the non-musician part. In the videos where the audience was included, the video panned to the audience and in the case of TAC, showed the conductor walking through the audience/non-musicians. In the video where the non-musician part was eliminated, the camera stayed fixed on the performers.

The video also provided the opportunity to show which ensembles featured a clear and present “leader” or conductor such as TAC, A Far Cry, and Incessant Noise. Others, such as ARTefacts, had no conductor or lead musician, which helped create a more balanced sound when they became “lost.” However, they did have instruments accenting note 1, similar to the recording by Alter Ego. This might explain why ARTefacts became “lost” much later than the other ensembles.

In the video featuring TAC, the role of the conductor initially seemed quite minimal. He begins the piece and sets the tempo by striking together a pair of drumsticks. Throughout the piece, he sporadically plays the straight eighth notes of the non-musician part. At around note 55 (approximately 6:10), he turns his attention towards the audience. By playing the eighth notes with the drumsticks, he signals members of the audience to join in. As the audience joins in, he
signals them to increase their sound and then physically goes into the audience with the percussionist.

As the camera follows the conductor moving through the audience, the non-musicians continue to create sound using small percussion instruments, vocal sounds, and clapping. Upon returning to the stage, the conductor encourages them to continue playing and even signals dynamic and rhythmic changes, while keeping the audience engaged. At 11:38, he turns his attention to the ensemble and signals the end of the piece. He brings a halt to the music before some instrumentalists have had a chance to finish the melody organically.

In the performance by A Far Cry, a percussionist plays constant quarter notes on the tambourine, establishing tempo and signaling the audience (non-musicians) when to join in around note 31 (approximately 3:18). This “leader” invited the audience to start clapping in half-notes. The choice of having the non-musicians play half notes rather than the eighth notes as indicated in the score, provided a unique rhythmic opportunity. Due to the additive process of the melody, the half notes played by the audience emphasized different notes of the melody every time a note was added. For instance, if one were to examine the first 11 notes, the clapping of the audience would fall on notes 1 and 4. However, when you add note 12, the claps would then fall on notes 7 and 9. When the leader signals the audience to switch to quarter notes at around note 36 (approximately 4:17), the same on beat/off-beat relationship occurs with the notes in the melody. At around note 41, (approximately 5:20), he instructs the audience to clap what can be best described as quarter-note triplets. Most likely derailed by the rhythm being clapped by the audience, the ensemble “falls apart” even more. Later in the performance, the “leader” performs half notes on a noise maker (approximately 7:35) and signals members of the audience (non-musicians) who also have noise makers to follow him.
At around 8:30, he prompts the audience to begin clapping quarter notes again. While the noise makers and clapping continue, he returns to eighth notes, and then a variety of other rhythms, on his tambourine. He prompts the audience to clap eighth notes again around 10:03. At approximately 10:48, the audience starts “getting lost” with irregular clapping and noise makers being played at different times. Soon after, the leader unifies the non-musicians through clapping, and toward the end of the piece, even conducts dynamic changes. Finally, at 14:40, after the last performer reaches the last note, the leader ends the piece.

Incessant Noise was the only ensemble to include the final free improvisation. Even so, the improvisation was kept extremely brief. Similar to the studio recordings, most of the ensembles on YouTube opt to omit the free improvisation.

**Description of Free Improvisations**

Only two recordings performed the free improvisation. The first was the studio recording by van Veen. The pianist’s improvisation is calm and sparse with C octaves in the left hand and motives taken from the melody in the right hand. He opens the improvisation by slowly playing the first thirteen notes of the melody without any repetition. This was somewhat reminiscent of the additive process of the melody. He then divides this main melody into two motives. In this analysis, motive 1 consists of notes 1-7 and motive 2 notes 7-13. As the improvisation started to develop, he explores and implements different variations of motive 2.
Example 4-9: The second half of the main melody, labeled motive 2. When improvising, van Veen varies the motive rhythmically and by transposition.

Example 4-10: Motive 2 as it appears at 17:02 in the recording.

Example 4-11: Motive 2 as it appears at 17:10.

Example 4-12: Motive 2 as it appears at 17:15.

Example 4-13: Motive 2 as it appears at 17:25.
He does not limit himself to these two motives, but continues to use motivic material based on the melody. For instance, he performs the motive taken from notes 46-50 in octaves at 17:41 and then again at 18:03.

Example 4-14: A motive formed by notes 46-50. Van Veen uses this recurring motive during his improvisation.

Example 4-15: A short motive in the melody later used by van Veen in his improvisation. This could also be interpreted as motive E from the initial score analysis.
Example 4-16: The motive, created from notes 46-50, is played in the left hand while another motive (E), created from notes 43-45, is repeated in the right hand.

Overall, the improvisation seems to remain in the key of F and almost resembles a slow blues with free sparse rhythms. Van Veen experiments at times with two-voice polyphony using a different motive in each hand. He builds up to the end of the solo by repeating motive A accelerando before stopping on a sustained C dominant chord. The piece ends with the entire melody being played quickly once more in unison.

The short improvisation by Incessant Noise begins around 8:30, lasts less than a minute, and is quite different from the one by van Veen. While seemingly based on the last note, it appears to begin even before all the performers finish the last note. While the last note is being sustained, one can hear performers experimenting with intonation and slight changes of pitch. For example, the vocalist switches from C to G then slides between G and Ab as well as G and Gb. This type of improvisation was similarly used in the 2010 recording of Cardew’s The Great Learning—Paragraph 1. While improvising the last phrase of the first page, the organist experimented with tunings by pushing in and pulling out the stops. During the sliding between the notes by the vocalist of Incessant Noise, the piano freely repeats a motive that consisted of notes 4-11, similar to van Veen’s motive 2 discussed earlier. If this improvisation were to
continue, performers would most likely build on this idea using sustained notes as well as additional motives taken from the melody.

**Discussion- Rzewski**

While Rzewski’s *Les Moutons de Panurge* shares many common elements with *The Great Learning*—such as group improvisation, the inclusion of non-musicians, and the expression of strong socialist views—many obvious differences emerge. First, Rzewski’s piece has enjoyed far more performances than Cardew’s and many of those performances have been preserved on recordings. From a socialist standpoint, this makes the Rzewski piece seem more effective since it is more readily accessible to musicians and the general public.

Many of the live performances were recorded and uploaded onto YouTube. From an analytical standpoint, these video recordings allow one to see the interaction among performers as well as the interaction between performers and the audience or “non-musicians.” This element was lost when analyzing *The Great Learning*-Paragraph 1 since no video performances of the movement exist. Additionally, in some live performances of the Rzewski, performers added a visual element that involved lights and stock video that cannot be experienced by merely listening to a recording.

Much like the Cardew, this piece seeks to include “non-musicians” thus attempting to eliminate the performer-audience divide. Cardew is seemingly more successful at eliminating this divide than Rzewski. While Rzewski specifically includes a part for the non-musicians, a hierarchy between musicians and non-musicians still exists within each performance. This can be seen even in the YouTube videos where the camera focuses mostly on the performers on stage, mostly ignoring the audience. The score indicates a leader or conductor for the non-
musicians; however, Rzewski insists that non-musicians are in no way obligated to follow this person. To help liberate the non-musicians from this leader and promote the independent nature of the non-musician part, he includes the following prompt in the form of an aphorism: “The right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing.” As stated earlier, this statement is meant to inspire multiple rhythmic interpretations by the non-musicians. However, in the majority of the performances, when the audience is invited to participate, they mostly end up following the leader throughout. In the performance by A Far Cry, the leader invites the non-musicians to play rhythms that counteract the rhythms played by the musicians, resulting in various rhythmic variations. However, as fascinating as the result is, it is not in the spirit of the piece.

The central idea that sustains the work is that every performer should resist conformity and try to create and/or sustain something separate from the surrounding music. This makes for a difficult and delicate situation for any person designated “the leader” during the performance even while the existence of a leader is a contradiction. The leader is tasked with inviting non-musicians to perform alongside the trained musicians without exerting too much influence and dictating specifically what the non-musicians should play. In the score, Rzewski specifies that the non-musicians have a leader “whom they may follow, or not.” However, it is simply natural and somewhat comforting to follow a knowledgeable individual in a position of power.

Additionally, during performance, a conductor or lead musician can give visual cues to direct the musicians such as was the case with TAC or with A Far Cry. With other ensembles, a conductor is absent; however, there is one performer at the forefront who can be easily followed. This performer is prominently placed in the performance space in order to communicate to the musicians and audience where they are in the piece. This occurred in the studio recordings with Eighth Blackbird and van Veen. While van Veen used multiples pianos in his recording, there is
one piano that played in the foreground throughout the piece. This robbed the performance of the true “chaos” that was intended to arise. Rather than the performer or the listener seeking their own melody, the leader dictates what is to be heard.

In the case of TAC, the conductor interrupts the process by stopping the piece in the middle of the subtractive process. When this occurred, the ensemble dutifully followed him. However, as mentioned in chapter 1, one vital rule employed by MEV states: “without leaders, scores, or any rules at all, the music should be based on the musicians’ mutual respect for and trust in one another, the public, and the individual and sum of all the sounds emitted into the performing space.”\textsuperscript{43} If followed, such a rule would not only prevent ensemble directors from interfering with the natural unfolding of the performance, it would eliminate the need for a formal ensemble director within the performance of the piece.

In the absence of a conductor, some other musical aspects kept the ensemble from becoming lost. For instance, some ensembles featured an instrument such as percussion, or any group of instruments, consistently playing on note 1. If any musicians started to get lost or confused concerning their whereabouts in the piece, this signal alerted them every time note 1 was being repeated as to ensure the ensemble stayed together.

During the A Far Cry’s performance, the true essence of the work appeared at one point when the audience was unable to follow the leader. The leader tried to get the audience to play a rhythm that was simply too complex for the non-musicians to follow. As a result, the audience became “lost” and thus fell apart. For that brief moment, what was organized and uniform became chaotic and unplanned; the non-musicians were following no one but themselves. They experienced a new type of freedom compared to what was occurring previously, albeit for only a

brief period of time. This free moment lasted until the leader asserted a new rhythm which brought the non-musicians back into order and all playing together.

In most of these performances, it seemed natural for non-musicians to follow and take cues from one or all musicians on the stage. One underlying cause that places non-musicians in a subservient role to the trained musicians is related to the performance space itself. These performances all take place in a traditional concert space with the musicians on an elevated stage and the audience/non-musicians watching from below in their seats. When reviewing earlier performances of MEV and previously discussed performances of The Great Learning with the Scratch Orchestra, the most effective performances took place in spaces where musicians and non-musicians were on even ground and were sometimes even free to move around the space while performing.

A good example would be the studio that Rzewski’s MEV used to perform pieces such as Zuppa. While the room was initially set up with the audience on one side and musicians on the other, this aspect of performance was never constant. During performances, individuals from either side were free to move about the space and exchange roles. Aside from a set ending time, no other parameters were imposed upon the performers while improvising.

Within this setting, it is likely that the non-musicians would have a different approach to the piece and feel more empowered to freely and spontaneously express their own ideas through sound. This issue surfaced during an e-mail interview with Chelsea Jones of the Chelsea Tinsler Jones Ensemble, who performed the work in 2016, yet omitted the non-musician part. She claims she would have preferred to include the non-musician’s part within her performance of

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44 As previously discussed in chapter 3, Performers were invited to create music spontaneously based on two directions: invasion of the performance space by members of the audience, and invasions of the personal space of individuals in the audience by the performers; Frederic Rzewski, "Friendship and Trust: Zuppa Description and Analysis of a Process," in Nonsequiturs, 310, 312.
the work. However, in order to have done so successfully, “it would need to be set up in a different environment.”45 Additionally, she claims that in future performances she would like “for the audience to move around and experience the evolution of the piece more fully.”46

The idea of creating sound independently and very spontaneously, without regard to what is being performed by others in the same moment, is an issue not only with the non-musicians, but with trained musicians as well. This is particularly true with the prospect of “staying lost” within the piece. As trained musicians, we work tirelessly to ensure that we do not “get lost.” When performing repertoire, our objective is to keep the ensemble together, not get lost in the score, and always follow the conductor or lead performer. This is reinforced though multiple rehearsals and years of performance experience.

The purpose of rehearsal is to increase familiarity, starting with the score and extending to the performance decisions of the other performers. Rehearsal helps us eliminate the unpredictable so as to ensure an ideal performance/outcome. Unfortunately, this idea is the antithesis of improvisation and excessive amounts of rehearsal eventually eliminate the spontaneity of improvisation. Rehearsal helps administer control whereas improvisation relinquishes it.

Rzewski’s *Les Moutons* now forces the performer to confront and resist one’s musical training and what we consider the musical norm by allowing oneself to “become lost.” Upon examining recordings and performances, becoming lost proved to be a daunting task for most musicians and most took measures to prevent this from occurring. For instance, Brilling chose not to get lost at all, thus subverting the entire purpose of the piece. In other performances, the musicians only became “lost” half-way through the melody. One can surmise that this doesn’t

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45 Chelsea Jones, e-mail message to author, February 11, 2018.
46 Ibid.
happen earlier due to multiple rehearsals or even to the fact that experienced musicians are skilled enough to easily avoid becoming “lost.”

The idea of being “lost” becomes a harrowing ordeal for the performer. However, one can easily equate being “lost” as something that also happens during free improvisation. In such a setting, one is not following a score and must spontaneously make music with few parameters or specific directions. The only predictable occurrence one can rely on is, in fact, the unpredictable.

In his description of the piece’s premiere, Rzewski mentions how the ensemble had little to no rehearsals as well as the audience being made up of “hippies” making “quite a bit of noise;” most modern ensembles, particularly professionals, would not feel comfortable with such a situation. However, as was the case with the work’s premiere, a reduced amount of rehearsal and formal preparation is most likely essential to the ideal freedom meant to be achieved during the performance. I believe that is the point that many of the contemporary performers were missing. The intent is not to stay together, it is to become “lost.”

If one gets lost in the additive/subtractive process of the piece or lost within a free improvisation, Rzewski’s goal is for the performer to find comfort within a state of being “lost” and to be able to maintain one’s individuality within the surrounding noise. In fact, it seems that the independence achieved by being “lost” within the additive/subtractive process is a springboard to the independent freedom exerted during the free improvisation.

There are many factors that can explain why musicians resist the urge to become and “stay lost.” For instance, we might refer back to Greenberg and his idea of kitsch. While this piece certainly doesn’t fall into the category of kitsch, it is possible for the piece to be performed in a way that can embody its qualities.
Greenberg describes kitsch as something that demands nothing from its customers and is easily consumed by the masses. Kitsch is created and implemented in a way that provides an easy comfort to the consumer. While we think of kitsch as something geared to the consumer or audience, here it is also geared towards the producer or performer. If one accepts Adorno’s idea that established works of art can become commodified, then the idea of artworks devolving into kitsch is also conceivable. Therefore, *Les Moutons* can become kitsch if, during the performance, performers choose to resist improvisation and experimentation; in lieu of improvising, musicians and non-musicians opt to mindlessly follow the conductor or lead musician. However, it is the political obligation of both the musicians and non-musicians to resist this temptation and develop their own independent musical ideas. In this way, *Les Moutons* resists the idea of kitsch and establishes itself as an autonomous artwork.

This notion also mirrors Adorno’s concern with art’s resistance to society. While this concept mainly focuses on the composer’s resistance to the handed-down tradition, it can also be applied to the mediation between the performer and the work. When the performers choose to resist the free nature of the piece, they conform to the handed-down tradition. Instead of a new, original experience with each performance, the work will produce the same or similar effect each time it is replicated, thus making it susceptible to commodification by the culture industry.

Much like *The Great Learning*, many performers of *Les Moutons* took liberties with the score. The most common change was to omit the free improvisation at the end of *Les Moutons*. While Rzewski does not make the final improvisation optional, it is easily disregarded. Practical factors, such as the placement of the improvisation after the “last note” of the piece, make it eminently excisable. In this way, the final improvisation functions as relatively extraneous rather than integral to the work. However, the omission of the final improvisation could also be
explicated by the idea that the freedom to improvise also includes the freedom NOT to improvise.

  Furthermore, most classical musicians do not feel comfortable or experienced at improvising. With the exception of some modern works or jazz, improvisation is not at the core of conservatory training. Therefore, just as most classically trained musicians choose to avoid becoming lost, most decide to avoid improvisation when given the opportunity. When confronted with free improvisation, many musicians might be completely baffled as to how this should be approached.

  Chelsea Jones discusses her omission of the final improvisation section in a way that illuminates this discussion. Jones recognizes that while she had some experience through a previous free improvisation class, members of her ensemble lacked such experience “so it was out of everyone’s comfort zone.”

  Other practical factors, such as time constraints imposed by venues and audience expectation, can also contribute to the final improvisation being cut. Many contemporary audience members are not prepared to sit and listen to uninterrupted experimental music, improvised or otherwise, for an inordinate amount of time. As Jones mentions in her interview, “I had a particularly [set] program time I needed to fill and the hall [was] reserved by another student after my recital.” These practical factors can also be related back to the concerns regarding traditional classical performance and traditional classical performance spaces and how the essence of this piece does not comport with the expectations of a traditional classical concert.

  Furthermore, Jones asserts that despite the inexperience of the other musicians, she actually intended to include the free improvisation at the end. However, one of the musicians

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47 Jones, e-mail.
48 Ibid.
stopped playing in order to rest, which she accidentally interpreted as the performer playing the final note. As a result, she chose to abruptly end the piece:

They took occasional breaks to rest and by the time I finished subtracting my part, it sounded to me like everyone was holding the final note, so I went along with that. It turns out that the clarinetist had been taking a break. We had not specifically planned the ending as we did not want it to be contrived, but this led to not including much improvisation in the piece.49

Jones’s explanation offers insight into a common trend occurring in other recordings and performances: some musicians sporadically stop and start in different places—a practical concern thus becomes another aspect of freedom in the piece, but may also serve to derail that freedom (in Jones’s case, by dissuading her from pursuing the free improvisation).

Additionally, while it might seem disappointing that the final improvisation was cut, the manner in which it was omitted is in line with the spirit of the piece. During the performance, Jones responded to the clarinetist and acted in a way she thought was necessary for that performance rather than to slavishly follow the written work itself. On the other hand, one could argue that she blindly followed the performer rather than follow her instincts—the sheep following the other sheep into the water.

Van Veen and Incessant Noise chose to include the final free improvisation, but the spontaneous music certainly didn’t come out of “nothing.” Rather, the improvised solos at the end emerged from some element of the work itself. Van Veen created an improvisation from parts of the melody while Incessant Noise uses the last note of the piece. While this section is meant to be free, these musicians employed previously played material, such as the motivic material from the melody, as the basis of their improvisation.

49 Ibid.
In any case, the piece is very much a process work that goes beyond adding and then subtracting the notes of the melody. The process also involves the performer becoming lost, staying lost and exploring the liberation that accompanies that process. This “staying lost” is then only a prelude to the final free improvisation where the performer is truly free from conformity and all musical and social norms. Here, the performers can truly explore sound with no urge to conform or be found.
Conclusion

By examining the history of performances of “Paragraph 1” of *The Great Learning* and *Les Moutons de Panurge*, distinctions quickly emerge between how the original ensembles treated the material and how more contemporary groups approach it. When these pieces were conceived, avant-garde ensembles such as The Scratch Orchestra and MEV were thriving. Additionally, during this time, composers and performers felt compelled to experiment and improvise as a form of resistance to traditional forms of music-making in Western art music. An integral element of this resistance involved the inclusion of non-musicians in performance.

One of the most significant aspects of this project was not just in the examination of the improvisation, but how performers confronted unexpected and spontaneous aspects within the music. The results range from some embracing the idea of spontaneous performance while most avoided it altogether. Today, ensembles in the mold of the Scratch Orchestra and MEV are all but extinct, and the types of freedom that composers and performers sought during the first performance of these pieces are all but forgotten. Based on contemporary recordings that were surveyed, musicians that performed *Les Moutons* seemed wary of improvisation. Generally, most musicians will improvise when prompted by graphic or text notation. However, when confronted with free improvisation, those same performers will simply avoid it.

In many of the recorded performances examined, performers preferred following a lead musician or conductor rather than playing spontaneously or even, independently. As stated previously in chapter 4, the freedom to improvise includes the freedom not to improvise. While the freedom to do something implicitly includes the freedom not to do something, the failure to avail oneself of the opportunity to improvise limits the freedoms afforded to performers. Indeed,
failure to improvise in the pieces under consideration alters their ontologies, or rather the way in which they produce their ontologies. That is to say, one of the ontological characteristics of these pieces, when performers carry out their improvisatory elements, is that they are less likely to be copied or reproduced from performance to performance. Whereas the same notes and rhythms and structures are articulated during each performance of, say, a Classical symphony (excepting minor details, conflicting sources, and mistakes), these pieces should be starkly different from performance to performance, giving rise to different experiences, partly reflective of their differing political/social contexts. The context itself operates on three levels: intra-performance (that is, among the performers of the work), inter-performance (between the performers as such and the performing audience members), and extra-performance (between the performative moment and its wider context in the world). Avoiding improvisation makes all performances more or less equivalent, in the manner of the Classical symphony. This readily and inevitably steers the work towards commodification and negatively impacts the autonomous nature of the work. As discussed earlier, Greenberg and Adorno decried kitsch and the commodification of art. As evidenced by these recordings, succumbing to these dangers is indeed a real and typical occurrence.

This line of thought extends to the performer-audience divide. The employment of non-traditional notation such as graphic notation was meant in part to eventually dissolve the barrier between performer and audience. However, many trained musicians and classical music audiences favor aspects of performance tradition that champion the trained musician and leave the audience member in silent awe. The image of a traditional performance being presented on an elevated stage supports the pure and transcendental notion of music. Those who follow this
reasoning typically oppose the combination of politics and music, as outlined in Goehr’s Crude Solution.

Similarly, some scholars such as Cage strived to find the purest form of sound and considered improvisation to be a hindrance. As discussed earlier, he believed that improvisation limited music to a form of self-expression since it stems from the performer’s past experiences. Thus, performers “don’t arrive at any revelation that they’re unaware of.” While Cage may have a point, individual improvisations may be tailored in such a way that they foreclose an over-reliance upon learned patterns and thus open the performance on to unforeseen and unpredictable experiences (musical and political/social). I believe that this is precisely what occurs when improvisation is considered an integral part of the ontologies of *The Great Learning* and *Les Moutons de Panurge*.

As seen in these particular pieces, performers spontaneously created something new based not on experiences that predated their encounter with these scores and their demands but rather that depended upon and was circumscribed by the musical material found in the score. Additionally, the ambiguity of the notation, such as the graphic notation in *Paragraph 1* or the instructions to non-musicians in *Les Moutons*, assured that both trained and untrained musicians could share similar experiences while performing these works. Therefore, what is being created by the performer is not just derived from the performer’s musical background and experience, but also from all the musical material surrounding the work, i.e. the score. This results in a unique experience for each individual involved in that particular performance and aligns with Adorno’s object-subject philosophy of music and art. In this case, the objective material consists

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of the written score and the subjective material would be the approach to improvisation itself. The mediation between these two poles (the subjective qualification of the material through improvisation and the objective qualification of human freedom through the circumscription of the instructions and limits of the graphic scores) is what supports the autonomous nature of the work.

In regard to the organ solos of Paragraph 1, the improvisations were also based on material from the score. However, what makes these improvisations unique from other styles, such as jazz, is that the performers created extensive free improvisations when there was no impetus to do so. In jazz, many of the guidelines that accompany improvisations are implicit, i.e. harmonies, scales, number of measures, etc. Since there was no indication that an improvisation should occur within this section of the movement, any protocol on how it should unfold is absent. Nevertheless, recognizable features emerged within the improvisations such as maintaining the concept of the phrase, the G#-F# motive, etc. While each improvisation was significantly different from what was written by the composer, the score served as a basis and model for each of the performer’s improvisation. Additionally, the performer’s background and knowledge regarding music and the instrument served as an additional factor in creating the improvisation. Therefore the score versus the individual musical background of the performer could also serve as an object-subject mediation within the work.

At the end of Les Moutons, the composer instructed the performers to “begin a free improvisation using any instruments.” However, much like in Paragraph 1, there are no parameters as to what should or shouldn’t be included when creating the music ex tempore. The free improvisation created by van Veen employed motives from the original melody. During the improvisation, van Veen relied on his knowledge of the score, combined with his experience
with music in general, to carve the melody into various motives and micro-melodies as he saw fit. Based on their own experience and background, anyone else approaching this piece would most likely divide the melody differently.

From an analytical standpoint, the investigation of the score as well as the recordings brings to light the link between improvisation and politics. However, more research is needed to help further explain this connection. This is particularly true in pinpointing the political effectiveness of various musical works in addition to *The Great Learning* and *Les Moutons de Panurge*. Pursuing such research would assist composers who wish to create politically autonomous works and to better avoid creating works that are simply propagandistic in nature. Moreover, it would emphasize the importance of improvisation to those performers who typically avoid this activity.

Furthermore, additional insight into the practice of improvisation can be provided by studies of performers and their approaches to and beliefs concerning improvisation in concert music. While this kind of literature is common in jazz studies, it is woefully lacking in connection with scholarly approaches to concert music. Additionally, in regard to the statement made earlier in this Conclusion regarding contemporary performances of the works versus original performances, more research should be done to further explain the social history surrounding the original performances of these pieces.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this project will assist performers in exploring new sounds, better understanding the material written in the score (assuming there is a score), and thus, better support the autonomous nature of the work while improvising. The Scratch Orchestra and MEV were ensembles that not only strived for new ways of sound production, but ways of organizing
the people to assist in making those sounds. It is the hope of the author that this notion is adapted and explored by contemporary improvising performers and ensembles.

Additionally, while there has been much discussion regarding the use of improvisation in regard to political action, it is the opinion of the author that in order to fully understand this relationship, one must actively engage in improvisation. It was the original intention of these works to bring people together and to create a better society through group improvisation. If, during the performance of these works, one truly strives to improvise while supporting the autonomous nature of the music, then one will be closer to achieving this overall goal.


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