

# Jems: Journal of Experimental Music Studies — Reprint Series

## Cornelius Cardew

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*Originally published in Contact no. 26 (Spring 1983), pp. 4–12. Reprinted with the kind permission of the author.*

**[Original authorial note:] This article is a revised version of the text of ‘Cornelius Cardew — a Memorial Lecture’, delivered at the Goldsmiths College School of Adult and Social Studies, in association with the Music Department of the college, on 26 April 1982.**

I first met Cornelius Cardew at the Dartington Summer School in August 1959 when we were both 23 years of age. My recollections of that month are hazy and of no particular significance, but some kind of rapport must have been established because soon after my return to London I received a phone call from Cardew. He had a project in mind, a concert of experimental music for one and two pianos (music by the Americans Cage, Feldman, and Wolff, and by Cardew himself), and asked me if I would like to be the other pianist. In January of the following year the concert took place at the Conway Hall, London. Cardew’s performances, in particular of the music of Morton Feldman, constitute to all intents and purposes my first lasting memory of the man as artist. Those floating, sourceless sounds, which he played with an unerring sense of timing and an artistry that was as convincing as it was unconventional, evoked an emotional response quite unlike any other I had experienced in listening to music, and which was intensified by Cardew’s profound identification with Feldman’s work.

How did Cardew’s preoccupation with the American avant garde come about? This is an important question in the light of the subsequent influence of North American culture on Europe, especially in the sixties: Cage, Buckminster Fuller, and the abstract expressionist painters, in particular Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns (to whom Cardew dedicated his *Octet ’61*). Cardew received his formal musical education at the Royal Academy of Music between 1954 and 1957. At this time the Academy was an extremely conservative institution and it did not look kindly on the music of Schoenberg, let alone Boulez or Stockhausen. So it was inevitable that inquiring, restless young souls like Cardew and his friend Richard Rodney Bennett should have reacted in the way they did, rejecting what they regarded as the narrow-minded and bland conservatism of the English musical establishment. The European avant garde, on the other hand, centred in Darmstadt, paraded some progressive slogans; serialism was associated with the scientific method, progress, and discovery, and some apologists, such as René Leibowitz, even claimed that serialism was the musical equivalent of the classless society. The music that Cardew wrote during his time at the Academy, notably the second and third piano sonatas, certainly owed more to Webern and Boulez than to his professors. And the performance that he and Bennett gave at the Academy of Boulez’s *Structures*, besides being a considerable technical and musical feat, was probably tantamount to an act of rebellion in the climate that prevailed there.

Under the circumstances Cardew's decision to continue his studies and, as it turned out, to work with Stockhausen in Cologne was not surprising, though the consequences were not without a certain irony. The conditions he found in Germany in 1957 were as oppressive as anything he had left behind — though in a different way: total serialism had achieved the status of a religion whose followers defended and counter-attacked with all the fanaticism and intolerance of true believers. It needed the intrusion of John Cage into those closed European musical circles to alleviate a situation that had become intolerable. Even Boulez, hardly an innocent party in the proceedings, commented: 'In Darmstadt between 1952 and 1958 the discipline of serialization was so severe it was ridiculous. Cage represented a liberation from this'.

In 1958 Cardew attended concerts of American avant-garde music in Cologne by John Cage and David Tudor. The radical content of this music, its freshness and audacity, coupled with Tudor's phenomenal musicianship, made a deep impression on both Cardew and Stockhausen and was without doubt the source of inspiration for Cardew's indeterminate pieces of the early sixties, and probably for Stockhausen's first 'moment-form' works. Cardew's *Two Books of Study for Pianists*, completed in the year of Cage's visit to Cologne, reflects the disruption caused by the American invasion. The continuing influence of Stockhausen is discernible in the application of a scale of six dynamics and in particular in the mobile character of the material (within the given space of time the sounds may be distributed freely by the performer), but the ideological source of the music is to be sought elsewhere — the isolation of tones, the feeling of discontinuity (which later Cardew rather harshly criticised as 'laboured spontaneity') and the wayward harmonic language (though still constrained by European considerations of structure) reveal that the new American aesthetic had taken root in European music.

In an illuminating diary entry on 1 September 1964, in which he looks back on *Two Books of Study*, Cardew comments:

What I composed in this piece — the image that hovered in front of my mind's eye — was a 'Musizierweise' (Mode of music-making). I invented a way of making music and limited it to such an extent that musicians without construction ideas of their own are in a position to adopt this musizierweise.<sup>1</sup>

The indication here is already of his moving away from music as object towards music as process, and of a concern for the problems of the performers. Cardew was one of the first Europeans to grasp not just the musical but also the social implications of the new American aesthetic. And this was because his response to the music was not merely a cerebral rejection of the predominant western European compositional method — total serialism — but a deep-seated reaction to content and meaning, to the new ways of thinking and feeling, to the idealism, both moral and philosophical, that seemed to inform the new American music. 'There is no room for the policeman in art', Cage said in one of his polemics against the Europeans. Cardew's originality was that he created out of the new aesthetic a kind of music utterly different from that of the Americans. The *First Movement for String Quartet* (1961), and in particular *February Pieces* (1959-61) for piano solo, perfectly exemplify this new departure, prefiguring the ideological content of most of Cardew's output in the early sixties. The influence of both Cage and Stockhausen is residual; the music possesses a strong improvisatory quality, but the dangers of excessive subjectivism (self-indulgence) are circumvented by the highly idiosyncratic and individual application of aleatoric principles. The result is a curious, compelling discontinuity; weird juxtapositions, irrational outbursts, fleeting references to other musics, past and present, create a kind of psychological disorientation, a hypersensitive music which haunts and disturbs the memory, reflecting a mysterious, impenetrable world in total disorder.

This expression of human agency at large, the spontaneous quality in the music — albeit in a chaotic, incomprehensible environment — constituted Cardew's bourgeois humanist world outlook at that time; the thrust of his creative work throughout the sixties served to sharpen the various facets of the contradiction, the subject/object dichotomy, and this continued until he espoused dialectical materialism in the seventies. The late Bill Hopkins, that most perceptive of critics, made the point in his review of *Three Winter Potatoes* in the *Musical Times* in 1967: 'Cardew was compelled to weigh up the claims of artifice (selection and ordering) against those of the spontaneity which for him represents musical truth'.<sup>2</sup> Cardew himself expresses the dichotomy with reference to improvisation in a diary entry of 1967:

I compose systems. Sounds and potential sounds 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 (you too are a system of sorts after all) and see what action that suicidal deed precipitates.<sup>3</sup>

For a short period serialism had been a source of intellectual fascination for Cardew and had acted as a 'logical construct' in his student works, but in the last analysis the mechanistic philosophy that underpinned it was anathema to him and he rebelled to free himself of it. This dualism — on the one hand asceticism, the desire and respect for dogma and purity (which also expressed itself in his preoccupation over a lengthy period from the age of 23 with Wittgenstein's writings and later with Marxism-Leninism), on the other hand the spontaneous and libertarian actions that characterised his life-style — is the key to an understanding of Cardew's motivations and achievements, both musical and political.

The references to serialism in his diaries are mostly negative and occasionally humorous. In 1967, by which time, of course, serialism was for him very much a thing of the past, he wrote:

Since the war Folk music has become dissipated and internationalized (at least in Europe and America) to the point that one can hardly call it folk music. This fate can be compared to the heroic pseudo-scientific universalism of serial music in the early 50s; at that time you were quite likely to hear serial compositions by a Bulgarian, a Japanese, or a South African on the same programme and be virtually unable to tell the difference between them. At that time serial music was not available on disc, so we may attribute the effect to the pervasiveness of the idea. However, death in a vacuum is not a happy thought and around 1960 many of the reputable composers were beating a hasty retreat, taking with them just as much of the original idea as they were able to carry. Nono went into political music. Stockhausen into the grand operatic tradition. Boulez into impressionism and a glorious career as a conductor.<sup>4</sup>

In a related entry, on 12 September 1967, he wrote:

From America Columbus brought us back syphilis, or Death through sex; there is no reason why the compliment should not be returned with myself as the humble vehicle, in the form of total serialism — of Death through music. In the case of serialism the damage has already been done, Schoenberg is the bearer of that intolerable guilt.<sup>5</sup>

Having rejected both tonality and serialism, it was not surprising that a radically minded young composer should have felt attracted to the American avant garde. But in fact Cardew's admiration for Cage had little to do with Cage's compositional techniques (though he once described the notation for Cage's *Variations I* as a 'giant step forward');<sup>6</sup> what he admired was Cage's rejection of the commodity fetishism that had invaded musical composition, for which the super-objectivity of serialism and its corollary, the preoccupation with the perfection of the ideal object, was largely to blame. What also impressed him was Cage's liberation of the performer from the constraints of oppressive notational complexities, and perhaps most of all the 'democracy' inherent (at least in theory) in Cage's scores. And here is the crux, because this concern for freedom and democracy, displayed in a number of highly sophisticated indeterminate compositions from the early sixties, though in an abstract and intellectualised fashion, informs Cardew's entire musical career. With him 'indeterminacy' was not simply another compositional technique, displacing a previously discredited one, it was a logical musical expression of his humanism: humanism is the vital thread that runs through all his musical activities, making for a continuity that overrides even the most radical stylistic changes in his work. His rejection of total serialism freed him as a composer; with his espousal of indeterminacy, creative freedom was also extended to the performer.

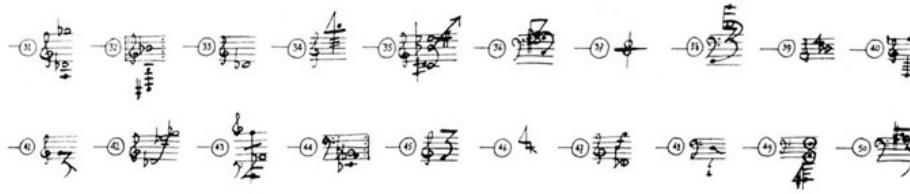
In the magazine *Performance* the composer David Bedford described his experience with Cardew's indeterminate pieces:

Speaking as a performer in many of Cardew's early works it must be said that the experience was totally rewarding. Our creativity was constantly being challenged, and the empathy of the performers, channelled into producing a coherent piece of music despite sometimes sketchy and sometimes paradoxical instructions, was often remarkable. It should be pointed out that none of Cardew's works ever gave total freedom to the performer. The instructions were a guide which focused each individual's creative instinct on a problem to be solved — how to interpret a particular system of notation using one's own musical background and attitudes.<sup>7</sup>

These comments highlight the all-important difference between Cage's and Cardew's applications of aleatoric techniques. Cage's notational systems presuppose a denial of the influence of musical background (that is, history), whether Cage's own or the performers', and moreover generally allow for no spontaneous expression during performance. The thrust of Cardew's musical development, already evident in the indeterminate scores of the early sixties, was in precisely the opposite direction — towards an ethnic, spontaneous music making, which found its ideal expression between the years 1966 and 1971 when Cardew was a member of the improvisation group AMM.

What Cardew did share with Cage was the ability to take calculated risks: risk taking is part and parcel of both indeterminacy and improvisation. *Octet '61*, for example, is an indeterminate piece, that is, the performer has an active hand in determining its form; it consists of 60 signs derived from conventional musical notation, each of which

constitutes a single musical event. The task for the performer is not only to interpret each sign but to join the signs together to create musical phrases, musical continuity (Example 1).



Ex. 1: *Octet '61 for Jasper Johns*, events 31–50.

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Of the *Octet* Cardew wrote:

The greatest music is always explicit — like Webern, if you dig him. In *Octet 61* I realise that explicitness has been sacrificed. In this research it is always necessary to sacrifice trusted concepts. Afterthought. As long as there is no blur in the thinking . . . .<sup>8</sup>

During the next five years, from 1963 to 1968, Cardew made two such sacrifices: the first was of traditional notation in favour of graphic notation; the second was of notation in favour of improvisation. Two activities tower above all others during this period: his mammoth 193-page graphic composition *Treatise*; and the improvisation group AMM. A diary entry on New Year's Day 1963 anticipates this radical development:

A good man watches, experiences, the complete devastation of his private world and survives. Then he moves back into the real world and grasps it with his mind. So he recreates it, and it is no longer private. It is everybody's world.... To do something constructive you have to look beyond yourself. Humanity in general is your sphere (not people). Self-expression lapses too easily into mere documentation.

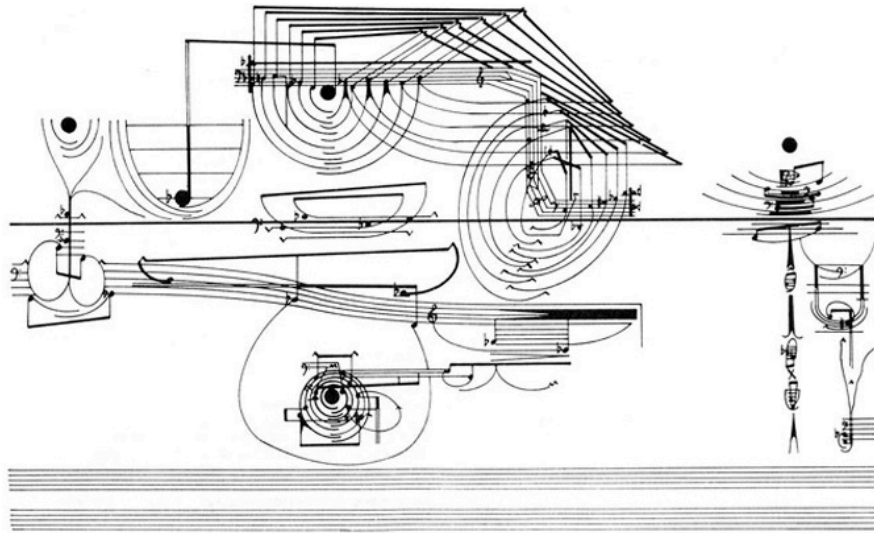
Later in the year, on 4 September, there is another philosophical entry, but now containing a direct reference to *Treatise*:

My age of romanticism is over. Sensations, moments drop away. My desire is to experience long-term continuities as beautiful. — In *Treatise* to create the coherent code which expresses the truths we do not know and cannot live up to... To be aware of the psychological groundings of your musical strivings (being, timid physically, as a boy, I became bold in spirit) and still leave the ground.

In Buffalo in 1966 Cardew described the genesis of *Treatise*:

I was 23 when I first came across Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: right from the first sentence, handwritten by Slad [David Sladen, an old school-friend] as a foretaste before he gave me the book. 'The world is everything that is the case.' It made a deep impression on me. The name *Treatise* (from *Tractatus*): a thorough investigation. Of what? Of everything, of nothing. Like the whole world of philosophy. I started work on it in 1963 and have worked on it inconsistently ever since. In that time it has lost some of its abstract quality, autobiographical aspects have crept in. But then there are autobiographical wisps to be read into Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* — the whole takes on a slightly different autobiographical slant in view of his later rejection of part of it.<sup>9</sup>

*Treatise* finally appeared complete in 1967. It is a continuous weaving and combining of a host of graphic elements (of which only a few are recognisably related to musical symbols) into a long visual composition, the meaning of which in terms of sounds is not specified in any way. Any number of musicians, using any media, are free to participate in a reading of the score, and each is free to interpret it in his own way. The graphic subject matter appears in various guises: triangles, circles, circle derivations, squares, square derivations, irregular shapes, etc. (Example 2).

Ex.2: *Treatise*, p. 183.

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One way of interpreting *Treatise* might be to match these graphic symbols with musical categories — triads, trills, irregular tremolos, periodic rhythms, etc.; shapes and positions of symbols could be used to determine, for example, dynamics. This might be the method of interpretation that a conventionally trained musician would adopt — a non-reading musician might take a much freer, more spontaneous approach. What Cardew wanted was that in playing *Treatise* ‘each musician will give of his own music — he will give it as his response to my music, which is the score itself’.<sup>10</sup>

The history of *Treatise* is documented in detail by Cardew in the *Treatise Handbook*, which appeared in print some years after the completion of the score. The first part of the *Handbook* consists of working notes, which shed light on many aspects of Cardew’s musical thought.

Notation is a way of making people move. If you lack other ways like aggression or persuasion. The notation should do it. This is the most rewarding aspect of work on a notation. Trouble is: Just as you find your sounds are too alien, intended ‘for a different culture’, you make the same discovery about your beautiful notation: no one is willing to understand it. No one moves.<sup>11</sup>

Visually *Treatise* is sensational, so beautiful as to be inhibiting for all but the boldest spirits — its visual impact disconcertingly puts most performances of it in the shade. *Treatise* releases music from the constraints of conventional notation; it demands new concepts of time, new sounds, and new attitudes to old sounds, which many classically trained musicians seem unable to bring to it.

In 1964–5 Cardew worked on a number of pieces concurrently with *Treatise*. But *Treatise* was the dominant activity to the extent that at least two of these pieces, *Bun No. 2 for Orchestra* (1964) and *Volo Solo* (1965), are versions of *Treatise* in some form. Why ‘Bun’? He gave me two off-the-cuff reasons when I asked him: a bun is what you give to an elephant at the zoo, and that was how he felt when he gave the work to an orchestra to play; and the piece is like a bun — filling but not substantial! Of the other works of this period *Material* (1964) is a transcription for any ensemble of harmony instruments of the *Third Orchestral Piece* (1960). *Three Winter Potatoes* was completed in 1965 and *Bun for Orchestra no. 1* was written for Petrassi’s composition course, which Cardew attended in Rome between February and June 1964.

David Bedford remarks that Cardew ‘brought a typically English elegance and wit to even some of his apparently more eccentric compositions’. *Memories of You* and *Solo with Accompaniment* (both 1964) are two cases in point, but an ironic gloss conceals their true significance. Both these works seem to be nostalgic reflections on Cardew’s musical past, referring respectively to the two composers whose influence shaped his early career. *Memories of You* is a homage to Cage. The score consists of 22 diagrams of a grand piano with instructions to make sounds at specific points in and around it; Cage’s *Concert* for piano and orchestra (1957–8) contains virtually the same notation. The accompaniment part of *Solo with Accompaniment* consists of a number of ‘matrices’; the parameters of the basic elements in a matrix wax and wane according to the composer’s complex system of notation, which seems to allude to Stockhausen’s *Plus-Minus*. The relatively simple solo part is thrown into sharp relief by an extremely busy and complex accompaniment so that an ironical comment is made on the traditional relationship between the two.

In AMM Cardew encountered, perhaps for the first time, musicians as uncompromising as himself, who had already entered the uncharted territory of improvisation and who would risk all in the making of each performance. A short entry in Cardew's diary for 1965 reads like a prophetic description of AMM music:

Music is a vagrant; it has no fixed abode. It's a menace to society. It needs cleaning up. The impossibility of abolishing music. Its omnipresence. Its uncatchability. Perhaps after all we have to step down and let music pursue its own course.<sup>12</sup>

The importance of AMM for Cardew cannot be overestimated, as he acknowledged himself. Mutual understanding within the group reached a depth that he had never experienced in concert-hall music. The four original members of AMM were Keith Rowe, Eddie Prévost, Lou Gare, and Lawrence Sheaff, all of whom came from a jazz background. They met regularly for sessions that generally lasted about two hours, with no formal breaks or interruptions, though there would sometimes occur extended periods of near silence. In an essay entitled 'Towards an Ethic of Improvisation' Cardew wrote:

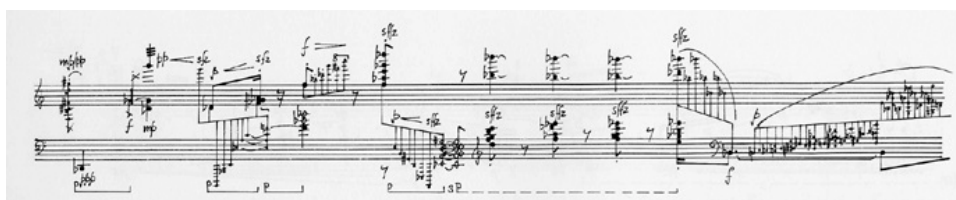
It is not the exclusive privilege of music to have a history — sound has history too. Industry and modern technology have added machine sounds and electronic sounds to the primeval sounds of thunderstorm, volcanic eruption, avalanche and tidal wave. It is to the 'history of sound' that AMM tries to contribute something. 'Informal' sound has a power over our emotional responses that 'formal' music does not, in that it acts subliminally rather than on a cultural level. This is a possible definition of the area in which AMM is experimental. We are searching for sounds and for 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.<sup>13</sup>

It was the humanising component of spontaneity in improvised music, which finds expression in the creative dialogue between musicians at the point of music making, that Cardew valued so highly. In AMM he found the embodiment of his ideas and feelings about music and freedom taken a stage further. On the relationship between *Treatise* and AMM he wrote in 1970:

I now regard *Treatise* as a transition between my earlier preoccupation with problems of musical notation and my present concerns — improvisation and a musical life. Joining AMM was the turning point, both in the composition of *Treatise* and in everything I had thought about music up to then.<sup>14</sup>

The latter part of the sixties and the early seventies parallel the immediately preceding period: *Treatise* and AMM, the related dominant preoccupations of the earlier period, are matched in the later one by two mutually determining activities — *The Great Learning* and the Scratch Orchestra.

The monumental *Great Learning* (1968-70), Cardew's masterpiece, incorporates experimental techniques into tonal and even modal frameworks. Indeed, it is a significant feature of many of the pieces of this period, including *Volo Solo* and *Three Winter Potatoes* (both 1965; for the latter, see Example 3) — brilliant virtuoso piano works and compendiums of avant-garde pianistic techniques — that they contain paragraphs that lend themselves easily to tonal analysis; the tonal references here go a good deal further than the fleeting allusions in, for example, *February Pieces* of 1959-61.



Ex. 3: *Three Winter Potatoes*, no. 2 (excerpt)

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The reason for the adoption of a more traditional language in his compositions is clarified by a consideration of the direction Cardew was taking socially and even politically in the latter part of the decade. Throughout the period he was becoming less and less concerned with beautiful artefacts and more and more involved with people and their ability to make their own music. He began to assume a more educative role — to which he was perfectly suited through his strong democratic sentiments, his ability to teach by example, and not least his genius for improvising. Musical education is what *Schooltime Compositions* (1967) is about. The work is a notebook of observations, ideas, notations, hints, diagrams, concepts, scientific experiments, geometric analogies — some direct, some oblique, but mostly presented as 'facts' with no covering instructions. For Cardew each composition was a matrix to draw out the interpreters' feelings about certain topics or materials. Here the different matrices grew around such things as words, melody, vocal sounds, triangles, pleasure, noise, working to rule, will/desire, keyboard. Some of the matrices serve as a

measure of virtuosity, others of courage, tenacity, alertness, and so on. They point to the heart of some real matter, mental or material. The score tells the interpreter the general area of his potential action — he may wish or have the talent to play, or sing, or construct, or illumine, or take exercise of one sort or another, and can draw out his interpretation in that direction.

For Cardew there were no two ways about it: people could be encouraged, inspired, or even cajoled, but ultimately they had to be trusted to make their own music on the basis of their own background, experience, and attitudes. In these new compositions he subtly defines the areas — emotional, physical, psychological, and historical — in which the performer operates, but there is no question of controlling the interpretation, either directly or by some back-door method involving ‘chance operations’. At the same time, however, he was still grappling with the idea of involving musically educated people (people trained in musical establishments) in his compositions. In 1967 he wrote:

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.<sup>15</sup>

*The Great Learning*, a large-scale choral work in seven movements (the duration of the whole is around seven hours), based on one of the Confucian scriptures, is the magnificent realisation of this projection. As Michael Nyman points out: ‘The ethical purity is mirrored by Cardew’s use of sound resources. *The Great Learning* appears to come to rest at a point of redefinition of the natural, concrete, real physical properties of (sounding) things’.<sup>16</sup> The ‘sounding things’ are of every sort: stone struck against stone, metal against metal, wood on skin, bow on string, whistles, drums, voices, reciting, shouting, singing, chanting, howling, laughing, güiros, rattles, jingles, musical boxes, toy pianos, jew’s harps, water drops. *The Great Learning* includes games, improvisation rites, dumb shows; there are single-line extended melodies (odes) written in conventional notation, and graphic notation as the basis for improvisations. But each of the seven paragraphs has a clear-cut image, such that it would be impossible to mistake one for another.

Despite his reputation as a controversial figure, as the *enfant terrible* of the English musical scene, Cardew never insulted or abused his audience, he never subscribed to the theory of *épater le bourgeois*; his music, even in the later political and militant works, is never in the least aggressive. But he was marvellously unpredictable and original: the music sharpens social and psychological contradictions so that, from confronting the music, the audience finally comes to confront itself. This unpredictable music naturally produces unpredictable responses. At a performance of the first paragraph of *The Great Learning* at the Cheltenham Festival in 1968 the audience split into two factions, one supporting and one opposing the music, which because of the uproar could hardly be heard. In the artists’ room after the concert an elderly gentleman, who looked like a retired colonel, pushed through the crowd to confront the composer; he grabbed Cardew’s hand and said: ‘Thank you Mr Cardew, what a relief to hear your music after all this horrible modern stuff.’

The Scratch Orchestra, to whom *The Great Learning* is dedicated, was founded by Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton and Cardew himself, and emerged out of Cardew’s composition class at Morley College in London in 1969 (in fact at least two paragraphs of *The Great Learning* had been completed before the Scratch Orchestra was formed). It was an enterprising body of around 40 performers of varied skills, who played all kinds of experimental music — by Cage, Cardew, Wolff, Riley, Young, Rzewski, and themselves — in all kinds of situations and for all classes of people: for Cornish farm-workers in village squares, for the young industrial workers of the north-east, and for both urban and rural communities on the Continent, as well as for music lovers who frequented the Royal Festival Hall. The Scratch Orchestra consisted of an assortment of people from various walks of life, some of them with considerable artistic talent, who loved and needed music. There was no more enthusiastic, more committed collection of individuals working in the field of contemporary art at that time.

Despite the ultra-democratic procedures that the Scratch Orchestra evolved for every aspect of its activities, Cardew was very much the unproclaimed authority, a father figure to whom people looked for guidance and inspiration. The Scratch Orchestra bore his stamp, and in fact it was the embodiment and realisation of the ideas he had formulated about musical life over a long period. The first two years of the Scratch Orchestra’s existence were idyllic, and the performances and compositional output were prolific. But the nature and intensity of its activities created problems, and complaints and disillusionment began to surface. Cardew opened a ‘discontent file’, which functioned therapeutically for a while but did not relieve the underlying tensions. The situation eventually reached crisis point. At one of the meetings two members of the Orchestra presented an analysis of the predicament, which

pinpointed a fundamental disunity of theory and practice as the principal source of discontent and frustration: in theory the Scratch Orchestra believed in integration and gregariousness, in practice it was isolationist and parochial; in theory it rejected the musical establishment, in practice it asked for support (Arts Council grants, BBC television and Festival Hall appearances); in theory it wished to be an instrument of inspiration, in practice it appeared to many as a pessimistic symptom of a system in decay; and so on. The Scratch Orchestra was trapped in the classic anarchist's dilemma; it willed one thing and caused its opposite. The cornerstone of the analysis was a lengthy quotation from the English Marxist Christopher Caudwell, which generated considerable discussion. The passage concerned, which comes from Caudwell's essay on D. H. Lawrence, deals with the function of art and the role of the artist in bourgeois society:

But art is not in any case 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. The commercialisation 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 still 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.<sup>17</sup>

The Caudwell essay made (I believe) a profound impression on Cardew, not because it imparted new thoughts, but because it crystallised his own thoughts and feelings, and he began to identify with Marxism. The formation of the Scratch Orchestra was the culmination of Cardew's career within — or at least on the fringes of — the musical establishment. His profound commitment to the democratic ideals of the Orchestra led inevitably to his, and several other members', politicisation. His socialism was the logical consequence not just of his involvement with the Scratch Orchestra but of the experiences and direction of his life up to that point. His deeply rooted morality and tenacious humanism finally found a political purpose, which embraced and broadened previous preoccupations and achievements.

Inevitably Cardew's music changed, but not as violently as some critics have tried to make out. *The Turtledove* for voice and piano is an interesting product of a period of transition. Written in 1973, it is the third of *Three Bourgeois Songs*, settings of Chinese poems from an anthology selected by Confucius, and is an arrangement for voice and piano of a melody from Paragraph 5 of *The Great Learning*. In an introduction to a performance of the songs Cardew wrote:

The reason for presenting these songs is to get to grips with bourgeois thought, bourgeois emotions. In short, what is bourgeois ideology? . . . The third song, *Turtledove*, purports to have been written by a woman, this time in praise of her ruler. He is depicted as the wise, benevolent, generous and modest ruler; above all he is the mirror of nature — his way is natural, therefore destined to survive 10,000 years. It is not hard to see who these sentiments serve. In the first poem they serve the man, and in this one they serve the ruler. Further, they glorify the social relations that put the man or the ruler in the position he's in. For this reason, no matter whether written by the lowest serving-maid, these poems are ruling-class ideology. That's the intellectual side. What about the emotional side? Basically ecstatic submission, either to the power of the man, or to the eternal processes of nature whereby the master knows best just like the mother turtle over her children.<sup>18</sup>

In the early seventies Cardew spent considerable time and energy criticising and repudiating his earlier works, including *The Great Learning*. In China the Communist party had initiated an anti-Confucius campaign in which, as a European supporter of Mao, Cardew participated vigorously. His subsequent repudiation of Maoism may invalidate part (but certainly not all) of his fierce polemic against the avant garde in his book, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (1974), which was written during his Maoist period. He claimed that the aspirations of the avant garde, which had attracted young composers like himself, had turned into their opposites. Scientific investigation had become mystical pseudo-science — for example, in Stockhausen's *Gruppen* investigation of the structures of vocal sound had been applied in a totally unscientific way. Consciousness and sensitivity had become super-consciousness in an ever-narrowing sphere — for example, the human ability to cope with mathematical relationships and other complexities of performance had developed at the expense of social consciousness and the ability to communicate. And consciousness of the formal problems had increased so much as to exclude consciousness of the content. Progress and discovery at the frontiers of a new kind of music had become detached from the source of all progress and discovery, namely the life of the people; cut off from this source the new music had withered and died, and inevitably become a reactionary weight holding back further development. The avant garde had finally made the transition from illusion to disillusion.

At the time of his death I think it is true to say that Cardew's position on the avant garde and modernism had not changed. But he had shown a renewed interest in improvised music, and on Keith Rowe's invitation he had agreed to



take part in an AMM performance of *Treatise*. The blanket repudiation of the past was associated with the discredited Mao, and in a speech on ‘Culture’, which Cardew delivered at an Internationalist Youth Concert in London on 9 August 1980, as representative of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), he said: ‘When we say “new culture”, “proletarian culture”, we mean, as Lenin said, a culture which must assimilate and rework the best of all previous cultures.’ Cardew’s position may have begun to approximate to Brecht’s who remarked that there was no need to worry about presenting bold and unusual material to a working-class audience as long as the members of that audience felt they could relate to the content of what was presented to them, as long as that content corresponded in some way to their reality.

Hanns Eisler, a composer whom Cardew greatly admired, once said: ‘I have always striven to write music that serves Socialism. This was often a difficult and contradictory exercise, but the only worthy one for artists of our time.’<sup>19</sup> Throughout the last ten years of his life Cardew grappled with this ‘difficult and contradictory exercise’ and it is part of the tragedy of his death that, in the opinion of many, he was on the brink of achieving a valid and meaningful result. Initially he made what he himself regarded as bad errors, such as his commitment to Maoism, but his active involvement in politics gave his artistic work a new focus and direction. In 1980 he organised and directed an international choir at the International Youth Camp in Germany.

I’m convinced [he once wrote] that when a group of people get together and sing the *Internationale* this is a more complex, more subtle, a stronger and more musical experience than the whole of the avant garde put together. This is not a pseudo-scientific fantasy but represents real people in the real world engaged in the most important struggle of all—the class struggle.

Cardew took up the struggle in the field of music and culture, performing and singing at May Day and anti-fascist demonstrations, and in support of the Irish people’s struggle for national liberation. He played in many parts of Ireland, including the Andersonstown Community Centre, a Republican stronghold in Belfast, where during his performance of *Lid of me Granny’s Bin* four armed British soldiers entered the hall and began to harrass the audience. Later Cardew and his musician colleagues were arrested by the RUC, held and questioned for several hours.

Cardew’s commitment to socialism during the last decade of his life is awe-inspiring. His notebooks reveal the depth of his study of Marx and Lenin and, most important, the way in which he applied these principles to every situation. His activity reached heroic proportions: he was involved 24 hours a day, composing, performing, touring, organising, writing, lecturing, analysing, meeting, discussing, demonstrating on the streets (for which he was imprisoned), and militantly opposing a decadent exploitative system and its ugly, ever growing offspring, racism-facism. An entry in his diary reads:

The artist should think to himself do I really want the revolution to come? Or is it simply an ‘inspiring’ possibility to juggle with? Genuinely desiring the revolution, this implies the correct class stand and the proletarian world outlook. Only from this position can the ‘benefit of the people’ really be considered. The people will benefit (in the long term) only through revolution. Making the revolution = serving the people. Two questions that occupy me at present. The necessity of building the Party. The necessity of building revolutionary culture.

He recognised that these tasks were enormous. On the problem of presenting political music, revolutionary music, to an audience, he wrote:

Music backs up, supports the social conscience of its audience (which is also its indirect producer). Thus when we try and write revolutionary music for the usual audience we’re faced with the insurmountable problem of giving it a form that backs up the bourgeois class consciousness of the audience. If we succeed then the revolutionary content is turned around to serve the bourgeois audience in its ideas and prejudices. If we fail, then the revolutionary content remains but does not touch the audience — you get the negative reaction either on the grounds that it’s bad music, or on the grounds that it is an attack on the audience (on their bourgeois consciousness).

Elsewhere Cardew gives a concrete example of this complex composer-audience relationship. A diary entry in 1973 reads:

*The East is Red*, for violin and piano, is a virtuoso piece, depicting the transformation of a simple folk tune into a solemn national anthem and then showing the lilt of the folk tune within that; it was played in a concert of modern music in the British Centre Berlin on Feb. 10th. The audience responded enthusiastically and the piece was played again; the other pieces were received with sighs and groans. The critics could make nothing of it; one could not make out whether it was ironic, and another could not detect any critique of socialism in the piece. Was I backward to compose it? Were the people backward to enjoy it? This is nonsense. There is nothing to be gained by restricting the productive activity of artists.<sup>20</sup>

The majority of compositions during this period were political songs, written usually with a specific function in mind. He collaborated on songs with his American socialist composer friends Wolff and Rzewski; songs for Brecht's *The Measures Taken* (1976) were written in collaboration with the 'Songs for our Society' class at Goldsmiths' College; and *Resistance Blues* (1976) was composed for a concert at Brixton Prison. *Bethanien Song* (1974) exemplifies Cardew's internationalism; it was written for a campaign (in which Cardew himself was active) to save a children's hospital in one of the poorest quarters of West Berlin. The authorities had planned to pull down the hospital and erect an 'artists' centre' in its place. In an introduction to the song Cardew explained:

It [*Bethanien Song*] embodies our demand for a children's polyclinic in Bethanien, not an artists' centre. It sings of our children's future, threatened by the myriad abuses of capitalist society. It derides bourgeois art, exposes the politics of the urban planners, and indicates the perspectives of revolutionary change, with the working people of all nationalities uniting to take their destiny into their own hands.

Bethanien Song was taken up by the people and became the rallying song for the huge campaign.

As well as some instrumental solo pieces — *Mountains* (1977) for bass clarinet, and *The Workers' Song* (1978) for violin — Cardew produced several large-scale 'concert' works for piano during the seventies: *Piano Album* (1973), *Thälmann Variations* (1974), *Vietnam Sonata* (1976), *Boolavogue* (1981) for two pianos, and *We Sing for the Future* (1981). The pieces in *Piano Album* are the first essays in a new piano style. In the accompanying notes Cardew wrote:

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).

Cardew's concern for the English national tradition became increasingly evident in the later years, not only in his speeches and conversations but also in his music. Arrangements of songs such as *Watkinson's 13* and *The Blackleg Miner* reflect his commitment to folk and popular music, while both *Boolavogue* and *We Sing for the Future* clearly reveal a debt to 16th- and 17th-century art music — the influence of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, for example, is apparent in sections of *Boolavogue* (Example 4).

Ex. 4: *Boolavogue*, movement 3, bars 126–140 (composer's manuscript).

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At the same time there are textures and rhythmic devices which, in an interesting way, betray the influence of Cardew's earlier, avant-garde music. He was still an 'experimentalist', but now the music is imbued with a spirit of passion and drive which reflects the intense political life he was leading. Cardew did not really begin to write 'different' music in the seventies; it was always his music, which developed and changed inexorably on the basis of his activity as a committed revolutionary.

In his obituary in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 29 December 1981 Dieter Schnebel wrote, ‘Cardew’s originality lies in his abandonment of originality’; he went on to remark that whatever influences Cardew quite openly embraced — whether Cage, Stockhausen, Petrassi, or even Tchaikovsky — all his music bears an unmistakable, individual stamp. What Cardew renounced over the last ten years was the market mentality, a corollary of which in the West has been an obsession with ‘originality’, the often unconscious need to produce something ‘new’ at all costs. In this sense he abandoned originality, but never his individuality, which he consciously placed in the service of the socialist collective.

The composer John Paynter quoted a letter from *The Guardian*:

Having sat through most of Act 1 of a ballet at the Royal Opera House while two ladies next to me talked incessantly I risked a polite remonstrance. One of them replied, ‘But it’s only music’. Is there any reply to this?<sup>21</sup>

Cardew would have relished such an opportunity more than most. Over the last ten years of his life he came to see the development of music as inseparable from man’s struggle against privilege, injustice, systematised greed, and exploitation. He believed that it was only through the combination of artistic and political action that contemporary music could be dragged out of its isolation.

Cornelius Cardew was a complex man. If we neglect or ignore aspects of his character because they are uncomfortable, we are in danger of doing both him and ourselves a disservice, and we shall neither understand nor appreciate his life. Cardew became a revolutionary; he was always a poet. Soon after his death an American composer friend, Alvin Curran, wrote in a letter to me, ‘Cornelius was always a true revolutionary, but his poetry was far more interesting and natural.’ In the heat of the last ten years it has been easy to forget the poetry. (He had put it aside himself, though it always emerged.) His best music and music making had a floating, poetic quality: the inscription at the beginning of one of his last pieces, *Boovalogue*, reads ‘try and make it float’; the same quality characterised his performances of Feldman’s music in the early days, and his bold but sensitive piano playing is turned to great advantage in his recordings of Ives’s violin sonatas with János Négyesy.

In his essay ‘Towards an Ethic of Improvisation’ Cardew includes seven virtues that a musician can develop. The seventh virtue is the acceptance of death. The essay ends with these prophetic lines:

From a certain point of view improvisation is the highest mode of musical activity, for it is based on the acceptance of music’s fatal weakness and essential and most beautiful characteristic — its transience.

The desire always to be right is an ignoble taskmaster, as is the desire for immortality. The performance of any vital action brings us closer to death; if it didn’t it would lack vitality. Life is a force to be used and if necessary used up. ‘Death is the virtue in us going to its destination.’ [Lieh Tzu]<sup>22</sup>

My last memory of Cornelius Cardew is of an anti-fascist concert, which he had organised himself, only a week before he was killed. He was playing the piano, accompanying, and singing to a packed audience in a community hall in Camden. Many members of London ethnic groups were in the audience and participating. It was a far cry from the international festival of contemporary music where he had begun his career, but it was the destination he had consciously chosen, and which he had reached by forcing his music into life, by making the act of composition something more than the mere manipulation of sound.

#### **2004: Links to the pieces by Cornelius Cardew mentioned in this article:**

Available from Peters Edition (<http://www.edition-peters.com/home.html>; numbers following date are edition numbers):

*Two Books of Study for Pianists* (1958; published 1966; Hinrichsen Edition no. 822b)

*First Movement for String Quartet* (1961; edition no. H824)

*February Pieces* (1959-61; edition no. H771)

*Octet '61 for Jasper Johns* (1961; no. H771a, with *February Pieces*)

*Treatise* (1963-67; no. EP7560)

*Bun No. 2 for Orchestra* (1964; no. EP7129b)

*Volo Solo* (1965; no. EP7129a)

*Treatise Handbook* (1971; no. EP729, including *Bun no. 2 for Orchestra* and *Volo Solo*)

Available from Universal Edition (<http://www.universaledition.com>):

*Three Winter Potatoes* (1965)

*Material, Autumn 60, Solo with Accompaniment, and Memories of You* are published together as *Four Works* (1967)

Available from the Experimental Music Catalogue (<http://www.experimentalmusic.co.uk>):

*Schooltime Compositions* (1967; reprint forthcoming)

*Three Bourgeois Songs* (London Experimental Music Catalogue, 1973; reprint, London: Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1991)

*Piano Album 1973* (London: The Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1991)

Versions of *Bethanien Song* and *The East is Red* for solo piano are published in Cardew's *Piano Album 1974* (London: The Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1994)

*Thälmann Variations* for solo piano (1974; London: The Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1989)

*Boolavogue* for two pianos (1981; London: The Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1994)

Available from Matchless Recordings (<http://www.matchlessrecordings.com>):

*The Great Learning* (1968-71)

*Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Edition Peters, Universal Edition and to Horace Cardew for permission to reproduce the examples in this article.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 2004: Cardew kept working diaries until about 1976. Two of his best-known published writings, 'Notation, Interpretation, etc.' (*Tempo* 58 (1961), 21-33) and *Treatise Handbook* (London: Hinrichsen, 1971), contain extracts from these diaries.

<sup>2</sup> *The Musical Times*, 108/1494 (1967), 739.

<sup>3</sup> Diary entry, 18 January 1967, headed 'Lecture for Univ. of Illinois 25.11.67'.

<sup>4</sup> Notes for a lecture delivered at the State University of New York at Buffalo, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Diary entry, 1 September 1964.

<sup>7</sup> 'Cornelius Cardew: An Appreciation', *Performance*, April-May 1982, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Diary entry, 17 February 1963, headed 'or lecture on Indeterminacy'.

<sup>9</sup> Diary entry, headed 'Nov 18th 66 Buffalo'; Cardew was living in Buffalo at that time.

<sup>10</sup> *Treatise Handbook* (London: Peters Edition, 1971), x.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>12</sup> Diary entry, 25 February 1965.

<sup>13</sup> *Treatise Handbook*, xviii.

<sup>14</sup> From the introduction to a BBC broadcast of *Treatise* on 8 February 1970.

<sup>15</sup> *Treatise Handbook*, xix.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 104.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Caudwell, *The Concept of Freedom* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965), 11–13.

<sup>18</sup> Diary entry, headed 'Concert, March 5th 1973'.

<sup>19</sup> Address delivered to a conference of delegates from the German Composers and Musicologists Union, Berlin, 23–4 February 1957.

<sup>20</sup> From an article entitled 'Propaganda through the Medium of Art', handwritten in the diary; the entry is undated but was made between January and April 1973.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Derek Parker, February 1980; quoted in John F. Paynter, *Music in the Secondary School Curriculum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 133.

<sup>22</sup> *Treatise Handbook*, xx.