

NO VAMPIRE

Travis Just

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What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?

Elusiveness in music, while often cited as a primary quality of the form, is in actuality rare to non-existent. As a practically tribal formalism has descended on all genres, the social and aesthetic codes that surround musical performance and reception have produced, on the official levels of the art, a deep-freeze of non-production, of anti-production. At the same time, there has scarcely ever been more pure activity in the field, at the very least in variety and quantity. As objective valuation has been rendered irrelevant by events and contemporary strategies of evasion, what is left is a self-affirming pattern of usefulness, of pragmatism. Of course, there is no generalized mainstream culture, that is a construct of other generations, outside powers, a historic anomaly to be ignored and scorned as the business model it has evolved into. Our work drives towards splintering: shattering majorities. True subversiveness, in art as in physics and medicine, has always existed on a molecular level. Speed, inconsistency, gaps, these are the textual and perceptive tools we need.

1

I'm gonna move through, or rotate through. Combined with a smooth surface, and some high pressure thrusts, the effect would be like moving behind it. Yes, we will have to be watched. We will have to put our bodies in the way, and begin the process.

Composition is an incitement to action (as Michael Pisaro said). Just like a piece/performance/event. This is fundamental. Notation is the lever, improvisation is parallel. Distinguishing between them is irrelevant, a discussion for past generations. Everything is on the table now, of course. This is why looking towards new techniques or technologies for the salvation of the art has been discredited. It went out with History, around the end of the 80s/early 90s (and good riddance). Time now to focus on what is to be done.

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In a genuine revolutionary breakthrough, the utopian future is neither simply fully realized, present, nor simply evoked as a distant promise which justifies present violence - it is rather as if, in a unique suspension of temporality, in the short circuit between the present and the future, we are - as if by Grace- briefly allowed to act as if the utopian future is (not yet fully here, but) already at hand, there to be seized.

Action producing thought, thought producing action: establishing situations where the distance between these poles oscillates freely and inconsistently - what would this sound like? New-ness and novelty is a 20th century strategy (and a tool in our current kit). But not one to be leaned on too heavily. Novelty is a mirage and always was, a surface reorganization that too easily masks deeper conventionality. New is no more inherently radical than loud is exciting or soft/silent is interesting.

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Revolutions are always verbose...

More art, better slogans.

24

It is necessary to listen harder.

The point is to re-orient the mind or allow the mind to re-orient itself. Better yet, allow for both at once. All methods, including boredom, must be available for this task. Stasis and motion are an illusion, the reality is a combination of elements of both. It is a matter of perspective, of distance and angle. A gesture in one direction is easily seen either way - better to allow for that, encourage it. Simultaneity is *inevitable*, now what? There is no edge to the picture, no frame - *enjoy that*. No system is as interesting or complex as the system that is perceiving the work, the system that surrounds it. Designs nested within designs, patterns that exceed identifiability - no object that is not in motion, no motion that is not objectifiable. Enough with the childish structures: time to smash some things and/or stare at them.

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It is an un-catalogued and unclassified residue of errors, defects, and limitations.

To encourage mistakes, to re-define this word as an essential and desirable mode of performance, has by now been well-established in other art forms. But music lags behind. Why? Perhaps composers/musicians still cling to outmoded ideas of virtuosity, of well-craftedness. *"That vocalist has a trained voice."* Training for what? Trained where? By whom? The answers to these are obvious, as are the consequences of those answers. Only music staggers forward with so conservative a core contrasted with such a variety of possible expressions (being employed by so many artists). Regularity and accuracy are delusions which deny the reality both of actual execution and perception. For written music, this demands a notation that embraces inconsistency.

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As fragmented as the available terrains of activity may be for the moment, we make the most of them. We treat enemies as enemies. It is obviously out of the question that we should pave the way for the revolution with asceticism.

The last twenty years has seen the absorption and transformation of formerly radical ideas into the mainstream - if not the mainstream marketplace, then at least the mainstream method of thinking, of doing. No one likes to witness this or acknowledge it, but it is by now undeniable. Much of the problem is selective editing of musicians'/composers' bodies of work and thought - making the square peg fit the round hole - sometimes with great effort and surgical precision/violence. What is most troubling about this otherwise inevitable process is not that it occurs at the festival/museum level, but that it has occurred at the grassroots level as well. Cage has become dogmatic and meditative, Feldman has become classically beautiful, minimalism has become minimalism, etc... . Some will have the task of unpacking this historical work, play the loud sounds *with* the soft ones, excise the faux-religiosity which is descending on these forms and structures. Others must leave these ways of working behind or incorporate them with great care. Our work is all of these things, it is none of them, it doesn't matter at all. What is needed now is productivity: aesthetic and perceptual. Art-work needs to move faster than the thought that observes it.

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Perhaps Godard formulated it best- the task is not to make political movies, but to make movies politically. What is political is the treatment of the material. In other words, it's the form, not the content.

"The sounds themselves..." no longer means, and perhaps never did mean, single events, single resonances. The sound itself is also the context, is the space between events articulated by the shifting and unreliable perception of the listener (this unreliability should be encouraged and maximized). This in-between space can expand and contract from a fraction of a second to the duration of the entire performance. The scope, speed and perspective of this space is quite beyond the control of the composer/musician, which is as it should be. Even when focus is directed somewhere, that is simply a stand-in for the *actual focus* which is the intermediary tissue hovering between aural objects and between listener and sound.

3

**And I am not being frivolous now, either.
It was very much like that it was
very much exactly like that, it was, you know,
like rock n roll nirvana.
You can imagine what it was like.
It was like drums and guitar.**

Musicians and composers are uniquely blind to developments in other art forms. It is telling the easily digestible, conservative tastes musicians profess and emulate. Many Agnes Martins, Stan Brakhages and John Ashberrys but never a Pipilotti Rist or Jason Rhoades let alone a Rauschenberg, Dieter Roth, or Godard. Sure, all are great, but why one and not the other? Why NPR and not WFMU?

This is not another nostalgic object. Anything can be used.

The question of means, of techniques and methods is irrelevant. It is a distraction from the essential question of what is being done and why. While this borrows language and attitudes from a moral discussion, morality does not enter into it unless we treat integrity as morality. But it is far more interesting to view integrity under a different lens, an aesthetic one. Integrity is all that counts as Richard Foreman pointed out. This work can look like anything, can sound like anything. The difference is in what it generates: in the listener, in the composer/musician, in the present, and in recollection.

If it is true (after Boris Groys) that we artists no longer produce work, but consume it (and have become curators/critics in the process) than the event, the piece, the switch from inaction to action, has been delocalized both temporally and physically from its usual place of immediate contact. Also the very presence, the naming of an event as such, becomes subject to the listener. In essence, the composer/musician provides tools which can be ignored or taken up as the listener sees fit. Specificity of usage is now a parameter which, depending on the artist or the piece, can be corruptible (in a desirable sense) from its intended initial placement. Corruptibility too is by design, or, it should be said, is formed by a gap left within the design. Navigating these gaps, charting their edges, this is the task. A desirable pleasure, if pleasure is to enter into it anymore. We delay immediacy now, postpone it. It becomes cumulative, personalized. Enters into the system and reprograms it. This creates a more potent immediacy, and redefines it as the point (or gradation of points) of impact on the mind as opposed to the body. Perhaps the distance between these two points (or collection of points) is what we can name structure or form.

With these current techniques, nostalgia is the enemy. The trouble is the recent history of contemporary music with all of its easy methods and vocabularies. While it is true that this music has been and continues to be resisted by the general body of musicians and audiences, the reception of this work has become codified to enough of an extent that it, too, must be bypassed and contradicted. This is not cheap contrarianism, but a productive stance as it forces engagement by artist and listener simultaneously. Engagement is the baseline for our work now.

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But the essentials are reported truly and with remarkable vividness: the masses will no longer retreat, they resist with optimistic brilliance, they stay on the street even after murderous volleys, they cling, not to their lives, but to the pavement, to stones, to pieces of ice. The crowd is not only bitter, but audacious.

25

I don't think you can escape the primacy of the rectangle. I always see myself thrown back to the rectangle. But that's where my things don't offer any kind of freedom in terms of endless vistas or infinite possibilities.

Professionalism has become the stated goal now (and the enemy). Professionalism in the sense of executing an image: a dead maneuver producing immobility in performer, object, and listener. The problem is not in the presenting of an image, the problem is in presenting an image as an object, as the actual event. This deception functions as a hard limit on the listener and it is an *audible phenomenon*. Memory kicks in, not memory of other music but memory of an expected coded response to a well-defined stimulus: shutting down thought in favor of a pre-determined, nostalgic gesture. Thought and perceptual presence are to be generated, not hindered. The anti-aesthetic, look-back ritual of presentation-consumption-affirmation must be rejected and replaced with something more tenuous, more dangerous, more unpredictable.

9

We cannot go and see cathedrals. We cannot spend summer evenings strolling up and down a "corso" like the Italians do. Our cities are not designed for that purpose and the country is not easily accessible. Anyway, wandering in the open country is really depressing.

No memories but the memories we make.

4

Nothing's happening. Now's the time for the flares or the fires.

Our political reality is one of hysterical simulated events: a permanent sense of developments, news, progressive movement. Of course, the actual state is one of immobility, of stasis, and a defused population that can be more easily measured, marketed to, and controlled. Post-industrial production is maximized to create a political, social, and cultural climate of non-production. Motion is here presented as an image, as a dead thing which is to be desired and owned. What is to be done in the face of this? Redefine and out-produce their simulated productivity. Create right-angles and parallel actions to their static fields of inactivity. *Hover* between vocabularies and languages, between 'correct' and 'incorrect' methods. *Make things happen*, don't happen to make things.

27

Well..... we won't be way out next week, cause we'll be even further out next week.

Rhetorical content is made and destroyed even within a single event. This necessitates an approach that combats meditateness and passivity, that replaces this soporific method with agile action. (Sleep can come after the concert is over.)

30

For me, being an innovator doesn't mean being more intelligent, more rich, it's not a word, it's an action. Since it hasn't been done, there's no use talking about it.

From a polemicist's standpoint, it is a shame it is not a clear-cut situation anymore (Schönberg vs. Stravinsky) but what can you do. No choice but to find or force productivity out of the current environment.

7

I never saw him with a weapon.

He's a quarterback.

We are all quarterbacks.

You've got to be a cop.

It goes without saying that there is a nearly complete absence of critical writing and thought in music. This is the old 'Desert Plants' idea, now gone world-wide. Critical writers have always either ignored or had miserable taste in music, always missing the good stuff. Maybe the work is enough and no critical apparatus is necessary (or the work itself *is* the criticism or negates it). But surely the current situation of bland description or provincial fandom isn't working.

20

It goes back to this whole thing of this desperate urge of everybody..... and this is what frightens me... is that everybody in the country is desperately trying to achieve mediocrity.

**Because you know.... and so....the "best" wasn't sent.
Uh..... some mediocre "entity" was sent.**

These days the waters have become significantly muddier as recently radical techniques have been turned towards conventional application. Diagnosing this is simple: no *actual* response is generated in the listener, rather an image of a response, one that has been vetted and tested and trusted and thereby robbed of any potency. This is how Experimental Music has become a laughable term, another genre with clear rituals and membership regulations. When the language of the thing is used against itself, the hour has definitely become late.

No more new mediocrity.

The desire here could be commercial (or read as political) but is at the very least institutional, namely the survival instinct of either old and obsolete or newly created institutions. (It is interesting how the tactics of the very old and the very young have become one and the same.) The appropriation of radical techniques by those who would make jagged lines straight is not new. What is new is the rapidity and brazenness of this appropriation. Time for different strategies.

31

I'm beginning to like landscapes. I think I am getting old.

Speed here does not mean velocity, the simple rate of change of sounds and events, but instead the activeness of the listener. This can be aided and hindered by the musician/composer, by their selection of material. But more than the material (and outside of the old form vs. content discussion - we *are* outside that now) is the question of attitude, context, and aura. Again (*again, always*) the matter is active or passive and what is being done to encourage one and combat the other.

10

In recent years, we have examined and studied the emotions as much as possible, to the point of exhaustion. That is all we've been able to do... But we have not been able to find anything new, nor even glimpse a solution to this problem. First of all, I'd say that one starts with a negative fact: the exhaustion of current techniques and means.

The old hierarchy of a score as a completed object that the performer hopes to attain has proven lifeless. The written mark, the text, is not the end-goal but instead an impetus towards activity (a request for non-passivity?). This re-evaluation of the 'word' puts the entire system into motion, creates a dynamic field of possibilities instead of a dead one. Increases the odds for a spark, so to speak. Maximizing potentiality in every given moment should be the aim of any composer/musician.

19

I'll designate points on a line and stabilize the chaos between the two points. Like stepping stones.

As the fiction of music as 'sounded mathematics' retreats with other historical myths, the geometry we are left with covers exponentially more complex and broader areas. (Musical number games never advanced beyond a 4th-grade level anyway...maybe that explains child prodigies in the 1700s.) What's left? Theater, as Cage suggested? That was 30+ years ago and precious few have followed that lead. Though yes, of course, theater. That's one. But this option has been present since at least 0'00", if not since Dada. The archetypal bourgeoisie/romantic has been played out, as has the mid-20th century reaction to it. Now the detritus of these stale battles litter the landscape, building blocks for the current music.

22

Let me explain. Hanns Eisler was once asked whether Bertolt Brecht had really read Marx's Kapital. Eisler replied that Brecht had of course never read it, but that Brecht had the extraordinary capacity to find exactly what he could use at the time in every book that he read.

For decades, history in the old thinking has ceased, and it feels like everything but music has adapted to the new reality. Maybe it is because we are just making music and there is little that is concretely at stake. But it may also be a symptom of a wider pacification of thought, an acceptance of (and aspiration to) systems of power - academic, aesthetic, and institutional.

23

I'm not doing the scattering, the scattering has already been scattered. I'm consolidating the scattering and heightening the loss of focus. It's that loss of focus that interests me, you know, the perception always evading.

Too often we are told we live in a conservative era, too often told stories of the good old days. We reject this as the nostalgic, retiring stance that it is. Historical lineages have vanished, time has flattened. This is a largely a recognition of the empty and false creation of narratives that persisted for too long. World powers are gone, now we just have the world. Leave the pieces where they are. Wake up, time to get to work.

ALL TEXT IN BOLD WRITTEN BY KARA FEELY FOR OBJECT COLLECTION'S
"PROBLEM RADICAL(S)" (2009) AND "INNOVA" (2011).

TEXT IN BOLD COLLECTED FROM:

JACQUES DERRIDA (29)
KARA FEELY / LINDA HAGER (1)
SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK (26)
LEON TROTSKY (15)
CECIL TAYLOR (24)
SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL (13)
SI (14)
HEINER MÜLLER (21)
K. FEELY / JAMES BALDWIN (3)
K. FEELY / TOYO ITO (8)
L. TROTSKY (16)
ROBERT SMITHSON (25)
K. FEELY / SI (9)
K. FEELY / CHICAGO 7 TRIAL (4)
ORNETTE COLEMAN (27)
O. COLEMAN (30)
K. FEELY / ABBIE HOFFMAN (7)
C. TAYLOR (20)
H. MÜLLER (31)
MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI / SI (10)
R. SMITHSON (19)
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