MOVING IN DEGENCY: THE MUSIC AND RADICAL POLITICS OF CORNELIUS CARDEW

BY TIMOTHY D. TAYLOR

One of the most memorable graffiti I have seen was a rubber-stamp message on a wall in the Music Library at Yale University:

NOT ART

Judgements about what is and what is not art are not easily made, of course, and they are seldom as clear-cut as this rubber stamp suggests. But the claim is made seriously from time to time that political art—art that overtly promotes a political message—is not art, or that it negates art.¹ Cornelius Cardew (1936–81) was a maker of radical political art, and the ways he negotiated the often obscure terrain of aesthetics and society are worth examining.²

Cardew wasn’t always a composer on the Left. Born in Gloucestershire in 1936, he attended the Royal Academy of Music, where he studied composition with Howard Ferguson. He gravitated to Stockhausen and Cologne, and his study there eventually led to his realization of the score to Stockhausen’s Carré (1959–60). ‘Realization’ is indeed the right word: as Stockhausen himself said, ‘I left the independent working-out of composition plans to [Cardew]’.³ Cardew eventually became the central figure of the musical avant-garde in England, a position recognized by other members of it.

In time, Cardew reacted against serialism, the most prestigious European method of composition in the 1950s and ‘60s. In a lecture delivered in 1967, he said:

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. The 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

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² Like most contemporary composers, Cardew has received scant scholarly attention. The two major sources on his music are Richard Barrett, ‘Cornelius Cardew’, New Music ‘87, Oxford, 1987; and John Tilbury’s extensive liner notes to Cornelius Cardew Memorial Concert (London: Impetus IMP 28204, 1985), a recording difficult to obtain. Cardew is also a significant presence in Michael Nyman’s excellent Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond, London, 1974. See also Paul Griffiths, Modern Music and After: Directions since 1945, Oxford, 1995.
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.4

On 12 September 1967 Cardew wrote in his diary:

From America Columbus brought us back syphillis [sic], 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—or Death through music. In the case of serialism the damage has already been done; Schoenberg is the bearer of that intolerable guilt.5

Retreating from serialism, Cardew pursued an interest in improvisation, which resulted, as it had for his former mentor Stockhausen, in the composition of prose pieces. A typical work is Sextet—The Tiger’s Mind (1967),6 which is as much a Confucian or Zen parable as a musical score. And his ‘Interpretation’ (notes towards the interpretation of the score, included with it) provides a discussion of the four characters as much as directions to performers.

Cardew’s alienation from European avant-garde music can be traced back to the mid to late 1960s, when, in 1966, he joined the former jazz musicians Keith Rowe, Lou Gare and Eddie Prévost in the improvisation group AMM (the meaning of these initials, if any, still isn’t publicly known)7 and, more important, in 1969 co-founded the Scratch Orchestra. Much of the impulse behind the birth of the Scratch Orchestra came from Cardew’s growing concern to liberate the performer and encourage amateur musicians to make music. He spoke of the importance of the Scratch Orchestra not just for his own work but because it allowed those who wished to express themselves musically to do so. This encouragement of musical expression formed the gist of much of his career to make ‘a musical life’ for himself and to facilitate others in doing so. In an interview for the BBC first heard in 1972 and re-broadcast in 1991, Cardew discussed the genesis and philosophy of the Scratch Orchestra:

The Scratch Orchestra came about in response to the demand of a lot of young people who weren’t trained musicians to get together to make what we called experimental music on a large scale. It has nothing in common with a conventional orchestra.

Nonetheless it is people capable of playing music in the ordinary way.

Well, not at all. These people may be visual artists, they may be people interested in theatre, they may be perfectly ordinary office workers or students or what have you. They’re not necessarily trained in playing any instrument at all. Some of them would perform activities of one kind or another, not necessarily producing sound, because scratch music was really a composite of people making their own activities, so that some of these activities would involve people playing conventional instruments like saxophones or flutes or this, that and the other. And other things would simply involve making motions with a hand or arranging a scarf, or all kinds of activities which would not necessarily make sound. The only limitation was that it should be fairly low-key, so as to allow somebody who wanted to express a solo to be able to do it on top of several people playing scratch music.

So, allowing for the fact that we can’t see what’s going on, can we hear what goes on?

Well, yes. Let’s listen a bit of this tape. (Plays) [Speaking over tape:] Yes, we don’t actually mean it as though it was a fully-composed piece of music, because the essence of

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4 Notes for a lecture delivered at the State University of New York at Buffalo, 1967, quoted in Tilbury, liner notes to Cornelius Cardew Memorial Concert.

5 Quoted ibid.


scratch music is that people are asked to write accompaniments, so each person writes accompaniments and plays these accompaniments and everybody else plays their accompaniments together. So in fact this whole body of sound that makes up a lot of people playing scratch music could be used as a background for somebody playing a solo, and in fact we can go on talking.8

'THE GREAT LEARNING' (1968–72)
During his time with the Scratch Orchestra, Cardew produced one of his most important scores, The Great Learning, based on a text by Confucius. This remains a noteworthy work of experimental music, combining verbal and musically-notated directions for performers with a prominent ritual element. The original text is divided into large paragraphs, a structural division that Cardew adopts in his score. The score calls, generally, for chorus, although other instruments and objects occasionally make appearances. For example, paragraph 1 calls for ‘chorus (speaking and playing whistles and stones) and organ’.

The Great Learning is virtually a catalogue of the experimental musical techniques of the 1960s, combining unconventional instruments and noises with conventional ones, and prose notation with standard. Cardew's quip about paragraph 5 is applicable to the whole work: 'I simply included everything which cropped up at the time'.9 Despite his move away from serial procedures and his espousal of a freer model of composition because of his work with AMM and the Scratch Orchestra, The Great Learning provides evidence of a highly orderly musical sensibility. For example, paragraph 2 consists of 25 collections of pitches for singing and 26 rhythms for drumming. Cardew's performance notes indicate that the pitches and rhythms are to be used freely but within certain boundaries: the pitches sung for the duration of one ‘very long breath’, the rhythms repeated for the length of one bar of the vocal part. On the surface, paragraph 2 is freely composed and performed (see Ex. 10).

Despite the seeming intuitiveness of the pitch material, a close analysis shows that it is tightly organized. The pitch materials of paragraph 2 are all pentachords or tetrachords, and the interval contents of all the pentachords are identical, as are those of the hexachords. Additionally, the pitch collections are meticulously, if not serially, arranged: six pitch collections (pentachords with a repeated pitch) or hexachords occur every five bars (in bars 1, 6, 11, 16 and 21—the first bar of each staff). As is clear in Table I, the six-note collections of pitches occur only in the first column. Also, Cardew's fastidiousness with pitch material is revealed since each pitch-class set raises one pitch class in the previous set by a semitone; Cardew is systematically working through the twelve different permutations that comprise a particular pitch-class set. The letters I have assigned to recurring pitch-class sets reveal the pattern: once Cardew runs out of pitch-class sets, he starts again, at bar 13. Cardew has applied his expertise in organizing pitch material, learnt from his study of serial procedures, to this work, which, on the surface, is completely intuitive.

The rhythmic material shows a similar ingenious organization. Despite an initial


10 Despite persistent efforts, I have been unable to locate a copyright holder for the quotations reproduced in Exx. 1 and 2; the Performing Rights Society Ltd., London, have no record of a 'publisher assigned to [Cardew]' (private communication).
impression of discrete, independent patterns, even a cursory analysis reveals the similarities between the various groups of rhythms. In Ex. 2, the pairs Castor/Pollux and Romulus/Remus, for example, are the only patterns with fermatas. All the patterns in the playing-cards tetrad begin with two simultaneous notes; the Romulus/Remus pair begin with two grace notes; and so on.

Each of Cardew’s drumming patterns comes with a label, apparently randomly chosen and organized, but turning out to fall into regular patterns: the Great Lakes, the five senses, the suits of cards, mythological characters. Arranged on a grid in Table II, they, like the pitch material, make patterns: the pairs are arranged vertically in columns 1 and 2; the Great Lakes and the senses are arranged vertically in columns 3 and 4; the suits of cards are arranged in column 5; and the uniques fill in the blanks. Within columns, the elements are always reversed alphabetically, except in the case of the Great Lakes, which are instead arranged geographically, from north to south; there is no alphabetical organization in the pairs and uniques, although the uniques always come in the conventional order (except White/Black).

Cardew’s fascination with Chinese calligraphy—which may reflect his earlier work
as a graphic artist—informs other portions of *The Great Learning*, in paragraph 7 for example. It is as if he were following the ‘orderly mode of procedure’ and ‘careful deliberation’ of the original Confucian paragraph in the making of the portion of the piece I have highlighted. No other paragraph in *The Great Learning* reveals such tight organization. Perhaps no other work is so rigorously organized while simultaneously allowing the performers so much freedom. In this longest and probably most respected of his works, Cardew has not completely abandoned form-orientated 'academic' music, however. His control of pitch and rhythmic material in paragraph 2, for example, is total. The other paragraphs of *The Great Learning* show many other kinds of compositional process at work, including improvisation, graphic notation and prose directions.

The late Brian Dennis wrote that Cardew derived the rhythmic patterns in paragraph 2 from the original Chinese characters, the short strokes interpreted as quavers, the long strokes as crotchets. Like the drum rhythms of paragraph 2, Chinese calligraphy plays a role in paragraph 7. On the other hand, in paragraph 7, the

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**TABLE I**

**Cardew, *The Great Learning*, paragraph 2: Grid of Pitch Class Sets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1*</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0,2,4,7,9] [6-0]</td>
<td>[0,2,5,7,9]</td>
<td>{0,2,5,7,10}</td>
<td>[0,3,5,8,10]</td>
<td>[0,3,5,8,10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>{0,2,5,7,10}</td>
<td>{0,2,5,7,10}</td>
<td>{0,2,5,7,10}</td>
<td>{0,2,5,7,10}</td>
<td>{0,2,5,7,10}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1,2,3,5,8,10] hexachord 1</td>
<td>[1,3,6,8,10]</td>
<td>[1,3,6,8,11]</td>
<td>[1,4,6,8,11]</td>
<td>[1,4,6,9,11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[2,4,6,9,11] [6-2]</td>
<td>[2,4,7,9,11]</td>
<td>[0,2,4,7,9]</td>
<td>[0,2,5,7,9]</td>
<td>[0,2,5,7,10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0,3,4,5,7,10] hexachord 2</td>
<td>[0,3,5,8,10]</td>
<td>[1,3,5,8,10]</td>
<td>[1,3,6,8,10]</td>
<td>[1,3,6,8,11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1,4,6,8,11] [6-4]</td>
<td>[1,4,6,8,11]</td>
<td>[2,4,6,9,11]</td>
<td>[2,4,7,9,11]</td>
<td>[0,2,4,7,9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Bold numbers indicate bar numbers.
** Bold letters indicate labels given to non-unique pitch-class sets. A letter with a prime symbol (') indicates that that particular set has a repeated pitch; this is indicated immediately above with a 6 (to indicate the number of pitches) followed by the pitch class that is repeated.

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12 Dennis, 'Cardew's *The Great Learning*', loc. cit.
Ex. 2 Cardew, *The Great Learning*, paragraph 2, 'Drumming'

Mary

Polaris

Touch

Superior

Imek

Castor

Pollux

Taste

Michigan

Spades

White

Black

560
TABLE II
Cardew, *The Great Learning*, paragraph 2: Grid of Drumming Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1*</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Polaris</td>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>Imek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unique 1</td>
<td>unique 2</td>
<td>pentad 1.1</td>
<td>pentad 2.1</td>
<td>unique 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Castor</td>
<td>Pollux</td>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pair 1/a</td>
<td>pair 1/b</td>
<td>pentad 1.2</td>
<td>pentad 2.2</td>
<td>Spades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>Huron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pair 2/a</td>
<td>pair 2/b</td>
<td>pentad 1.3</td>
<td>pentad 2.3</td>
<td>Hearts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Romulus</td>
<td>Remus</td>
<td>Sight</td>
<td>Erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pair 3/a</td>
<td>pair 3/b</td>
<td>pentad 1.4</td>
<td>pentad 2.4</td>
<td>Diamonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pair 4/a</td>
<td>pair 4/b</td>
<td>pentad 1.5</td>
<td>pentad 2.5</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Brabazon</td>
<td>unique 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Bold numbers indicate pattern numbers.

numbers 8, 5 and 13 from the following passage are derived from the number of strokes in a particular character:

```plaintext
  == == >  sing 8  IF
   sing 5    THE ROOT
    sing 13 (f3) BE IN CONFUSION
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The meaning of the characters sometimes affects Cardew’s choice of borrowed characters; at other times it does not, as with the example just quoted. Linda Dusman has also considered the role of Chinese calligraphy in this particular paragraph, concluding that Cardew achieved a perfect balance between the individual and the whole, the compositional process and the philosophical message.13

THE SHIFT TO THE LEFT
Following the composition of *The Great Learning*, Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra increasingly took a Marxist–Leninist–Maoist turn. This was precipitated in part, according to Cardew’s friend and fellow Scratch Orchestra member John Tilbury, by a quotation from *The Concept of Freedom*, by the Marxist writer Christopher Caudwell in which he criticizes the distance of an art work from its creator and its audience, the fetishization of the work by both artist and audience, the reification of the individual

artistic creator and the individual interpreter. Keith Potter writes of a more gradual shift away from positions associated with Stockhausen towards those of John Cage.

Cardew’s study of Marx and his long-standing interest in Chinese culture eventually led him to Mao Tse-Tung’s ‘Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art’ from 1942. His *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* is filled with quotations from Mao. Much of his earliest music protesting against contemporary ‘academic’ compositional values consisted of attempts to infuse music with use-values in the Marxian sense, such as the functional values of ritual and ceremony. He was similarly concerned with convincing his public that the point was not the final ‘object’ but the process of making music, or, in his own words, of ‘making a musical life’. Such ideas appear in Mao’s writings; a passage from the Yenan talks that speaks to Cardew’s new attitude reads: ‘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. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine.’

Cardew’s study of Marx, Lenin and Mao brought a dramatic repudiation of his mentors and a revaluation, if not outright denial, of his own earlier work. He shocked an international gathering of musicians in Rome in 1972 when, in a paper on the problems of notation, he disavowed his earlier compositions. ‘As Marx said of philosophy’, he told his audience, ‘“It is not enough to understand the world, the point is to change it”, so we should say to artists, “It is not enough to decorate the world, the point is to influence it”.’

Cardew’s programme notes to the score of *Piano Album 1973* contain the most forthright and succinct statement of his change in ideology and composition:

> I have discontinued composing music in an avantgarde idiom for a number of reasons: the exclusiveness of the avantgarde, its fragmentation, its indifference to the real situation of the world today, its individualistic outlook and not least its class character (the other characteristics are virtually products of this). I have rejected the bourgeois idealistic conception which sees art as the production of unique, divinely inspired geniuses, and developed a dialectical materialist conception which sees art as the reflection of society and at the same time promoting [sic] the ideas of the ruling class in a class society. At a time when the ruling class has become blatantly vicious and corrupt, as it must in its final decay, it becomes urgent for conscious artists to develop ways of opposing the ideas of the ruling class and reflecting in their art the vital struggles of the oppressed classes and peoples in their upsurge to seize political power.

Cardew goes on to wonder what kind of musical material can fulfil these goals, and proposes the ten movements in *Piano Album 1973* as examples: his arrangements of music from China, ‘the most advanced socialist country in the world’; Ireland, because of the Irish people’s ‘heroic efforts to achieve liberation from the British colonial yoke’, and other movements drawing on or praising Mao Tse-Tung.

Cardew’s earliest anti-bourgeois music addresses the dilemmas involved in making

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14 Quoted in Tilbury, liner notes to *Cornelius Cardew Memorial Concert*.
19 This is a strange choice of word: rather than ‘promoting’ the ideas of the ruling class, Cardew was interested in ‘opposing’ them, as the next sentence makes clear.
21 Ibid.
political art works, and marks a turn to writing music that would not only serve the revolution but would also be accessible to those disenfranchised in his own society: the workers. An early example is 'Soon' (1971), for voice and piano; Cardew’s note to the score says that the text is based on Mao’s injunction that ‘A single spark can start a prairie fire’. (This is a well-known example that is reprinted in its entirety in Michael Nyman’s Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond.22)

While the song’s text carries the political meanings, the music illustrates clearly Cardew’s reliance upon many of the formal aesthetic values of contemporary ‘academic’ music that Cardew was committed to leaving, especially complexity and virtuosity. What untrained (i.e., proletarian) or even amateur musician could make sense of this song? The metre changes almost every bar. Fermatas break up the flow. The key (D flat major) would be difficult for amateurs to read. And the second phrase is a contrapuntal inversion of the first. The complexity of this piece forces a consideration of its intended performers and audience. The difficulty of the music plus the recurring first person would seem to indicate a trained musician.23 What, then, about community music? Cardew suggests that his piece may be used as such, at least in part: his note at the bottom of the score says ‘Bars 6, 12–18, 35 may be omitted in community singing’. Is this supposed to be a neo-folksong? Perhaps, rather than being for someone else to perform, this is Cardew writing down his own singing, his own thought.

Cardew’s mixture of Eastern and Western musical idioms in Piano Album 1973 and in works such as The East Is Red (1972)24—elaborations and arrangements of Chinese pieces—is paralleled by a troubling confusion of philosophical assumptions. Cardew conflates the Chinese individual as representative of a collective self with the capitalist conception of an autonomous individual, a product of the composer’s marriage of convenience between Chinese traditional thought and the Western avant-garde in general. This confusion helps highlight a problem in Western revolutionary thought: criticizing bourgeois culture from within the system requires the critic to adopt some aspects of that system. So while Cardew may well have understood that his conception of self was bourgeois, he nonetheless kept it, for he remains the singular presence behind this work—and indeed all his works. There is no similar transformation of the figure of the bourgeois composer-individual, or, as Foucault might have it, the composer-function.25 Unlike the Chinese arranger of ‘The East in Red Glow’26 (the source music for Cardew’s The East Is Red), who goes uncredited save for his/her collective identity as a member of the Union of Chinese Musicians, Cardew never relinquished his compositional identity in The East Is Red.

Cardew was dissatisfied with this and other music from this period, believing that it did not go far enough in critiquing bourgeois culture and providing alternative visions of society. This dissatisfaction eventually turned to criticism of the avant-garde in general. In a 1976 essay entitled ‘Wiggly Lines and Wobbly Music’ Cardew identified graphic notation—which he had explored exhaustively in his Treatise (1963–7)—as a trend representing the increasing embourgeoisement of ‘art’ music. Graphic notation in his view had become an aesthetic object in its own right.27 Cardew argues generally

23 And it is a trained soprano (uncredited), with an operatic voice, who sings ‘Soon’ on Thalpmann Variations (London: Matchless Recordings MR10, 1986).
27 The most prominent example is Cardew’s own Treatise, which Paul Griffiths has called the Ring of graphically
that the artistic avant-garde is part of the imperialist superstructure. The values implicit in avant-garde art, he contends, help ‘to protect that [imperialist] society against radical social change’.28

Composers who adopt such approximate graphic indications of what their music is to sound like have lapsed ideologically into the fallacy that music can consist solely of a series of doodles, textures, outbursts, stops, and starts. Never mind how artfully arranged, this amounts to adopting the attitude that your score can be used by anyone, to express any ideas, in any context.29

Later Cardew writes: ‘a number of people with relatively progressive ideas were swept into the avant-garde and dallied for a shorter or longer time with the manipulative techniques and pseudointellectual ideologies that were currently on show [in the 1950s and '60s]. But where could they go? Their subjective rebellion against the establishment left them in limbo.’30

One of Cardew’s musical activities after his ideological conversion was to refashion The Great Learning. Cardew explains that this change was brought about by Mao’s ‘Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art’, in which he said that art works that did not serve the masses can be altered to do so. In Mao’s words: ‘We must take over all the fine things in our literary and artistic heritage, critically assimilate whatever is beneficial, and use them as examples when we create works out of the literary and artistic raw materials of the life of the people of our own time and place’.31

Cardew left the music in The Great Learning unchanged, but he altered the translations of the original text by Confucius. The original version used a translation which began: ‘The great learning takes root in clarifying the way wherein the intelligence increases through the process of looking straight 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’.32 The new version reads: ‘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.’33 The revolutionary content of the new version is clear.

Eventually, Cardew criticized even his need to ‘reform’ The Great Learning, as he came to believe that intentions to reform are bourgeois and thus unacceptable: ‘Bourgeois ideology cannot be reformed, it must be smashed’.34 Cardew now thought that The Great Learning, from the worker’s standpoint, was ‘inflated rubbish’ (he himself put this phrase in quotation marks), and only continued to perform and discuss the work because it was ‘a carrier for its criticism’.35 His view of the work became highly ironic; in a footnote to Stockhausen Serves Imperialism he described the

notated works: see The Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of 20th-Century Music, London, 1986, p. 84. Also see Brian Dennis, ‘Cardew’s “Treatise”: Mainly the Visual Aspects’, Tempo (1991), No. 177, pp. 10–16. Composers who employed the kind of notation that Cardew decried include Robert Ashley, Earle Brown, John Cage and La Monte Young.

29 Ibid., p. 241.
30 Ibid., p. 247.
31 Mao Tse-Tung, On Literature and Art, p. 18.
33 Cardew, Stockhausen Serves Imperialism, p. 99.
34 Loc. cit.
effect of the first paragraph as 'extremely solemn and ritualistic, provided, that is, that it
is not disrupted by justifiably irreverent laughter'.

Just as The Great Learning represents Cardew’s mature experimental-music phase, his final repudiation of it marks the beginning of his mature radical political phase. His associates, the composer Howard Skempton and the pianist John Tilbury, summed up his radical musical aesthetic in the above-mentioned BBC interview. They thought that, for Cardew, music must be essential to one’s everyday life; it should never be merely an embellishment but, rather, a menace, a challenge. Music, as Cardew himself said, ‘must make waves in our environment’. The problem he still faced was how to turn sound waves into political ones without simply reverting to soapbox oration. And the problem with repudiating any dominant ideology is that you have to replace it with something else. Ideology is, as assumed here, more than beliefs, it is a world view, something that, in the Althusserian sense, constructs us to a large degree. Once you become conscious of your ideological predispositions you cannot simply get rid of them; you cannot avoid ideology in some form or another. Particular structures of bourgeois ideology are tenacious, as we saw in the residual avant-garde musical ideas appearing in Cardew’s ‘Soon’. Yet ideology is susceptible to alteration by individual subjects: one can, within limits, choose to adopt an alternative ideology. But even if an individual succeeds in this, any new ideology will prove to be as binding as the jettisoned one, and still permeated by it.

The analogous situation in the realms of ‘art’ or ‘government’ is similarly difficult. Marshall Berman, in a discussion of Michel Foucault, writes of trading in one ideological structure for another. He points out the virtual impossibility of criticizing ideology, since the critic must approach one ideology from the position of another. This point also surfaced in a discussion between Foucault and a couple of ‘Maoist militants’ in June 1971, in which Foucault spoke at length of the necessity of not reinstating bourgeois structures of power after the citizenry had been proletarianized. One of the students asked him where the new bureaucracy will come from, and Foucault admitted that he didn’t know.

THE PROBLEM OF RADICAL AESTHETICS
Cardew’s attempts to write political music raise powerful questions about the roles of art and artists in society and about meanings in art. A few avant-garde (or ex-avant-garde) composers preceded Cardew in their turn towards revolutionary or anti-bourgeois music, notably Hanns Eisler and Hans Werner Henze. But, as Paul Griffiths has noted, approaches to Leftist musics vary as much as in the wider

36 Loc. cit. n. 63.
37 Nash, interview (see n. 8).
38 Quoted in Dennis, ‘Cardew’s The Great Learning’, p. 1066.
39 The term ‘ideology’ is used here as it is in Marxian theory: ‘the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group’. This is the summary that Louis Althusser offers: see ‘Ideology and the State’, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster, New York, 1971, p. 158. In addition to Marx’s writings, other useful sources on this concept of ideology include Terry Eagleton, Ideology: an Introduction, London, 1991; David McLellan, Ideology, Minneapolis, 1986; and Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, 1977. For a particularly cogent recent discussion of music and ideology (among many other issues), see Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music, Minneapolis, 1991.
42 Alan Bush is another British composer whose music expresses his radical Left political beliefs.
‘bourgeois’ musical field. Stylestically, Cardew is closest to Eisler. Both repudiated what they considered to be bourgeois music and adopted accessible musical styles, writing straightforward songs that would, they hoped, further the revolution. Given the similarity of their polemics and music, it is odd that Cardew rarely mentioned Eisler in any of his writings or interviews; perhaps, like so many composers, he was simply asserting his originality as a reflex conditioned by his involvement in a Western tradition that valued it.

Cardew’s aesthetics

Cardew said and wrote very little about aesthetics, although it is clear that he recognized its existence. In 1971 he participated in a composers’ discussion in London entitled ‘The Composer, Performer and Audience’, and seemed to provoke the other panellists (Sven-Erik Bäck, Alexander Goehr and Witold Lutoslawski) with his comment, reported by Music and Musicians, that the Darmstadt audience was fed ‘on an exclusive diet of “aesthetic” music and [was] unable to kick the habit in favour of anything more human’.

Several years later Cardew’s comment, in an interview with Adrian Jack, that he did not think there could be a unified, standard aesthetic, led to an interesting exchange. Jack espoused the viewpoint common among some contemporary composers that if you expose audiences to enough of a new style of music they will appreciate it and learn to discriminate between good and bad. He then proposed an analogy: ‘It’s not until you have lived in a country for some time that you can discriminate between buildings with similar architecture’. Cardew replied: ‘What you say is quite right from the aesthetic point of view, but I maintain that the main thing will be whether the building is a palace or a wash house’. In other words, what the building was for and who used it were more important than its form or appearance. Much of Cardew’s energy was directed, as this quotation indicates, to wresting art away from conceptions

43 Griffiths, The Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of 20th-Century Music, p. 140.
44 Henze, for example, while committed to the Left, consciously decided to write music in the bourgeois style: ‘I have taken the decision that in my work I will embody all the difficulties and all the problems of contemporary bourgeois music, and that I will, however, try to transform these into something usable, into something that the masses can understand’: Hans Werner Henze, Music and Politics: Collected Writings, 1953–81, trans. Peter Labanyi, London, 1981, p. 180.
47 In addition to precedents, there have been followers, such as Frederic Rzewski and Christian Wolff; of these two, Rzewski has been the more assiduous in pursuing the kind of explicitly political agenda and deliberately simplified music associated with Cardew, in works such as The People United Will Never Be Defeated! (1973), virtuoso piano variations on the Chilean—now pan-Latin—protest song ‘¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!’ (recorded by Ursula Oppens on Vanguard VSD 71248, 1978). For a discussion of Rzewski’s music and politics, see Christian Asplund, ‘Frederic Rzewski and Spontaneous Political Music’, Perspectives of New Music, xxxiii (1995), 418–41; this article, however, curiously omits all reference to Cardew, whom Rzewski himself has frequently credited as a significant influence.

There have also been fellow travellers, such as Louis Andriessen, who has taken a somewhat different route in his espousal of a wide variety of musical styles, including those from the popular realm, nonetheless rooted in avant-garde musical idioms that refuse to pander to audiences, in works such as De Staat (1972–6) (recorded by Reinbert de Leeuw and the Schoenberg Ensemble on Elektra Nonesuch 9 79251–2, 1991). See David Wright, ‘Louis Andriessen: Polity, Time, Speed, Substance’, Tempo (1993), No. 187, pp. 7–14.
that ignored its social effects. As he said elsewhere, 'If music was a purely aesthetic experience it would not occupy the central place it does in our affairs'.

Cardew summarized his new views on the role of music in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, where he asks: 'How can a composer truly reflect society if he ignores the lessons of that society? If a composer cannot or 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.'

In the Rome talk in which he repudiated his earlier music, Cardew spoke of the requisite overtness of political art. He ended his talk with these words:

The ideology of a ruling class is present in its art implicitly; the ideology of a revolutionary class must be expressed in its art explicitly. Progressive ideas must shine like a bright light into the dusty cobwebs of bourgeois ideology in the avantgarde, so that any genuinely progressive spirits working in the avantgarde find their way out, take a stand on the side of the people and set about making a positive contribution to the revolutionary movement.

Some of Cardew's earliest political music was for the Scratch Orchestra, which he was attempting to lead in a political direction. Believing that the 'end-product' of an artist's work was 'ideological influence', he began to think that the role of the artist was to promulgate this influence. Such a stance produced some forgettable music. One work, entitled *Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism* (1972), is an example of the most off-putting kind of radical, proselytizing music. This piece has not been commercially recorded, and no score appears to be extant, but the British Music Information Centre, London, has a tape of a live performance by the Scratch Orchestra. The work begins with roughly 30 seconds of hammering sounds, then a call and response begin between a solo voice which is probably Cardew's, and a group which repeats what the soloist says, with a piano playing dissonant chords in the background. The spoken parts go something like this:

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 Heath!54
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!

More hammering sounds follow, the piano continues, and then the work stops.

In addition to offending some listeners because of its overt message, this piece fails because a clear aesthetic function is nowhere to be found. This, given the general elevation of form over content in modern musical aesthetics, is another in a string of ironies surrounding Cardew and his output. *Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism* shows an interest in a message but little in composition. If the range of meanings of art contains, at one end, form and, at the other, ideology, this work is

50 From an introduction he gave to a performance of *The Great Learning*, quoted in Dennis, 'Cardew's *The Great Learning*', p. 1066.
52 Ibid., p. 86.
53 Ibid., p. 7.
54 Edward Heath, Conservative MP, and British Prime Minister from 1970 to 1974.
probably too close to one pole to be effective. Rather than uniting aesthetics and ideology as Mao would have artists do, it ignores one end of the spectrum. Of course, ‘aesthetic function’ does not refer to the aesthetics critiqued here but, rather, to an attention to compositional craft, to sonic beauty as well as to ‘ideological influence’. If an unthinkable and exclusive devotion to compositional form is open to criticism, Cardew’s single-minded interest in ideology seems equally problematic. As Adorno said about Brecht, ‘Whatever is educational in Brecht’s plays can be taught more convincingly by theory—if it needs teaching at all’.

Offering an ‘aesthetic’ criticism of *Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism* does not necessarily mean that it would be a ‘better’ work if it somehow achieved a ‘balance’ between form and content, composition and ideology, or whatever sort of binary opposition describes this polarization, if ‘binary’ describes it at all. Adorno points out that these poles, usually labelled ‘formalism’ and ‘socialist realism’, are not useful, for they make it appear as though there were a clear-cut distinction. He says that the real way to deal with formalism and socialist realism is not to find ‘some spurious middle ground’ between them but to point out the distance between them.

The main problem with *Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism* is not that it lacks a ‘balance’ between socialist realism and formalism, or that the distance between these poles is not highlighted, but simply that there is little attention to the form. The work proselytizes, appears to preach only to the converted, the music comes wrapped so blatantly in political language that the message probably will not get through. This, of course, is the problem faced by all political artists: how to convey a message without preaching. But most overtly political musicians have been popular musicians, and the most enduring of such messages have been packaged in memorable melodies and compelling lyrics by the likes of Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan and, more recently, the English rock musician Billy Bragg and the American band Rage Against the Machine. All these musicians have other attributes that help promulgate their message: they are witty and self-reflexive, and their brand of politics, while leftist in some sense, is more populist than identifiably Marxist or Maoist.

Cardew may well have realized the foregoing limitations. In abstract or experimental music, the problem is that listeners have nothing to hang on to but the words, since the music is not appealing in the way that much pop or folk music is. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Cardew wrote for Peoples’ Liberation Music, a rock band consisting

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55 ‘Aesthetic function’ is a term used by Jan Mukarovsky in *Aesthetic Function: Norm and Value as Social Facts*, Ann Arbor, 1970. Mukarovsky, a Czech sociologist whose brand of literary theory owes much to the Russian formalist critics, thought that all cultural forms contain aesthetic properties, but only those in which the ‘aesthetic function’ is primary should be considered as art.

In many ways this is an important argument, for it is premised on the pervasiveness of an aesthetic sensibility: anything people make has an aesthetic value as well as a functional one—we look for beautiful stones on the beach, we make our living spaces more than merely liveable in. But problems with Mukarovsky’s ideas enter when abstract qualities such as ‘aesthetics’ or ‘beauty’ become even more abstracted (into ‘aesthetic function’) and are subject to quantification. (It is here that his debt to the Russian formalists becomes clear, since they were less interested in what is literature than in what is literary. So he removes his critical lens from the cultural form and asks not what is aesthetics, but what is the aesthetic function.)

An example of how wrong-headed quantifications of art works can be is provided by Guy Sircello, who puts forward a theory of PQDs (‘properties of qualitative degree’) in his *A New Theory of Beauty*: ‘A PQD of an “object” is beautiful if and only if (1) it is not a property of deficiency, lack, or defect, (2) it is not a property of the “appearance” of deficiency, lack, or defect, and (3) it is present in that “object” in a very high degree; and any “object” that is not a PQD is beautiful only if it possesses . . . at least one PQD present in that “object” to a very high degree’. Quoted in Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Emotions and Music*, Princeton, 1980, p. 123 (italics in the original).


57 He singles out Schoenberg, Klee and Picasso, who, he believes, have best accomplished this: ibid., pp. 362–3.
of John Marcangelo, Laurie Baker and John Tilbury, whose existence must have been short and obscure, since, except for an introductory article when the band was first formed, it is virtually unmentioned in the leading British music press.\(^{58}\) The other reason could be that Cardew wanted to reach listeners other than 'the same old audience'. Herein lies yet another dilemma for political art. If it departs from the dominant aesthetic, it will appeal to no one but the converted. But if it tries to mix this aesthetic with a radical political content, it risks being co-opted by the ideology underlying that aesthetic and hence becoming another commodity of the bourgeois culture industry. In the terms of Walter Benjamin in his famous essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', the impact of the art work shifts from 'cult value' to 'exhibition value'.\(^{59}\)

From a strict revolutionary standpoint, seemingly the only alternative to bourgeois art is to give up capitalist conceptions of the individual self and of 'art' and to turn the production of music from a professional to a community activity. Cardew, however, talks frequently of 'working musicians'—those who are paid for their services—so it is clear that he does not think that all music-making should be amateur. Yet the thrust of the Scratch Orchestra was community music-making, by both 'professional' and 'amateur' musicians. After repudiating avant-garde music, Cardew devoted much of his compositional energy to finding ways of bringing music-making to everyone. He retained notions of music as 'art'. Music remained something special, with its own distinct place in the world. Cardew never advocated getting rid of art; rather, he only questioned and sought to redefine its role in society. Marx himself, in fact, strongly believed in 'art'.\(^{60}\) In practical terms, even the most radical positions leave some room for art, despite its bourgeois history.

Like Marx, Mao Tse-Tung had a use for art, as well as the art of the past, ideas that for a time were extremely influential on Cardew, as is shown by the quotation applied to his revision of The Great Learning. In his 'Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art', Mao spends a great deal of time discussing the role of art in a socialist society, and the importance of making art for the masses—art that serves the cause of the proletariat. Here he poses the question 'literature and art for whom?' as his first, and evidently most fundamental, problem.\(^{61}\) He then notes the two criteria for judging art, the political and the artistic, and argues that all classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second.\(^{62}\) However, he stresses again and again the compatibility of aesthetic and political values: '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'.\(^{63}\) For him, art is inherently neutral; its reception and interpretation determine its political meanings.

In addition to viewing aesthetics as a bourgeois construct, we could also see it as inherently conservative, helping to maintain the status quo. Not only does art encode the values of the dominant culture, in the Western tradition it does so while at the same time appearing to have no overt values other than formal ones. This function of art

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\(^{58}\) The one article I have found is Richard Williams, 'Up against the Wall', Melody Maker, xlviii (25 August 1973), 27, which does not mention Cardew as a composer for the group. Williams praises their music, calling it a cross between Stevie Wonder's 'Superstition' and Terry Riley's A Rainbow in Cursed Air.


\(^{60}\) As did Trotsky, who is better than many early Marxians on art and the use of art in society: see Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art, ed. Paul N. Siegel, New York, 1970.

\(^{61}\) Mao Tse-Tung, On Literature and Art, p. 10.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 30.

\(^{63}\) Loc. cit.
tends to turn anything overtly political in it into a self-marginalizing mechanism. But this is not to say that art itself must reflect a conservative view. Although ‘official’ discourses about art—the various academic disciplines, mainstream criticism, aesthetics—tend to reinforce dominant cultural norms, art remains more than a product of the dominant culture’s ideology. It is too complex to be reduced only to this means of signifying, no matter how broad. Ironically, the common effort of political art to impose a unitary interpretation on its audience ultimately undermines its effectiveness. Put another way, one of the qualities present in overtly political art is its lack of ambiguity. This is one of the reasons why political art often seems not to act like art: historically, modern artistic forms have never made any attempt to develop the techniques of maintaining stable and hegemonic interpretations.

The earliest formulation of modern aesthetics was an attempt to wash ideology out of art, thereby making it susceptible to many interpretations, as long as they were non-political. Ambiguity has become one of the most valued of all aesthetic criteria with the onset of modernity. Umberto Eco, for example, seconds Roman Jakobson’s notion that one of the functions of language, the ‘poetic’ function, comes into play when the message is ambiguous and self-focusing. For Eco, ambiguity appears to be the first prerequisite of art: ‘ambiguity is a very important device because it functions as a sort of introduction to the aesthetic experience; when, instead of producing pure disorder, it focuses my attention and urges me to an interpretive effort’.

Related to ambiguity is Pierre Bourdieu’s term ‘facile’. He argues that aesthetics has a disgust for the ‘facile’, the cheap, the easy. If the meaning is too near the surface, then the work is, in effect, ‘Not Art’. In Bourdieu’s words, ‘it could be shown that the whole language of aesthetics is contained in a fundamental refusal of the facile’. Adorno identified the lack of ambiguity in what he called ‘tendentious’ works, and he used the phrase ‘preaching to the converted’ when discussing some of Brecht’s work. He recognized that ‘Brecht’s didactic posture reflects intolerance of ambiguity, the sort of ambiguity that touches off thought and reflection’. But Adorno’s real interest is in the work itself—he celebrates art’s autonomy, and views people’s reactions to it as unimportant: ‘. . . the subjective experience of art in itself is meaningless, and . . . in order to grasp the importance of art one has to zero in on the artistic object rather than on the fun of the art lover’. So while he identified this problem of political art, he did not see the fundamental reason why political art appears to fail, and fail ineluctably.

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67 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 344.

68 Ibid., p. 20.

69 Elsewhere Adorno discussed the ambiguity of music. ‘Music points to true language in the sense that content is apparent in it, but it does so at the cost of unambiguous meaning’: Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London, 1992, p. 3.
Cardew's attempt to imbue his music with political values is contrary to bourgeois aesthetics, whose main purpose is to remove politics, hence defending art from claims that it must demonstrate functionality. The question faced by Cardew and other radicals, then, is: Can there be such a thing as radical aesthetics, since aesthetics was invented by the bourgeoisie and propagates its values under the guise of ‘art for art’s sake’?

It could be, too, that Cardew’s notion of the power of art is untenable, for it assumes that art and society are separate, and that the one can thus influence the other. Yet this cannot be so, since they are not separate to begin with; any society and its forms are inseparable. The assumed separateness of art and society could be another way in which the dominant culture attempts to circumvent any concept of subversive content in art. Terry Eagleton writes that teaching English literature became a way for the waning aristocracy to inculcate its values in the burgeoning middle class. As the rising bourgeoisie began reading, it would have been useful for the aristocracy to teach them that literature and the real, social, lived world are unrelated, and that literature is formal, not social or political. This certainly happened in music. So dominant cultural values can be promulgated covertly, and universalized, and overtly political cultural forms become self-marginalizing, as are people who insist on reading art in overtly political ways.

Alongside this argument one must ask whether popular culture is unambiguous, since its assumed lack of ambiguity is the reason why it is subjected to criticism by people who have invested in art: straightforwardness makes it banal. But there are ways of looking at popular arts other than those once validated and practised by the academy, ways in which the underlying meanings can be uncovered. There is no reason why Fredric Jameson’s concept of the political unconscious cannot apply to popular works as much as to literature.

In political art, however, the political is conscious. There is no need for a critic to argue for the primacy of a political response, since the works themselves request, even demand, such a response. This means that they simultaneously force aesthetic considerations and the whole structure of Western interpretative conventions into second place. In a way, therefore, political art cannot work, because it tries to pre-empt interpretation, which helps to explain why much political art is unpopular with audiences: it allows them no room for interpretative manoeuvring. They are being told what to think, or do, and there is hardly any, or indeed no other, way to interpret the material, as in Cardew’s Ten Thousand Nails in the Coffin of Imperialism.

But interpretation is arguably the primary way in which we define ourselves as individuals, staking out a semiotic territory of ‘our own’. Put another way, interpretation of art works allows us to reinforce the Western bourgeois ideology that encourages us to believe that we are all autonomous individuals with specific, unique, complex reactions to every cultural form we encounter. In the last chapter of Musical Elaborations, ‘Melody, Solitude, and Affirmation’, Edward Said implies a similar

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70 This point is made most forcefully by Raymond Williams in Marxism and Literature, where he insists repeatedly that cultural forms are caught up in dynamic processes, never fixed or apart from the culture in which they are made and consumed.

71 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: an Introduction, 2nd edn., Minneapolis, 1996. Adorno talks at length about the ‘neutralization’ of art that can occur if it is not understood properly. He invokes Sartre at one point, writing that Sartre thought that the principle of l’art pour l’art ‘was perfectly acceptable to the bourgeoisie because it served as a means to neutralize art’, and goes on to say that, in Germany, the ‘bourgeois appropriated art by assigning to it the role of an ally in its attempt to institute social control’: Aesthetic Theory, p. 336.

argument concerning the ambiguity of music and its ability to individuate listeners.\textsuperscript{73} For Said, listening to Brahms evokes a set of meanings and associations so complex and individualizing that no one but Said himself could have experienced them. This outcome accords with the tenets of Western culture. When one does not make music oneself but instead pays others to do so, one gives up group identity and participation for a heightened sense of one’s own individualism and that of the great artists whose commodities one consumes. But interpretation, like ambiguity, is something we all exercise regardless of our political inclinations. While reinforcing bourgeois notions of individuality occur, many other interpretations are possible: some might even be anti-bourgeois.\textsuperscript{74}

Cardew thus found himself in an ironic situation. Much of his compositional career was invested in freeing the performer from the shackles of conventional notation as he saw it and encouraging everyone to make music. But his political music, in its proselytizing, actually denies his audience the chance to participate unless they are already converted to his message; and in that case no new belief or activity is produced—he is merely reinforcing what his listeners already believe.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, while his music provides a systematic critique of bourgeois culture from a socialist/communist position, it fails to offer a vision other than a familiar notion of a socialist Utopia. Nothing wrong with that, but ‘socialism’ as a concept has become so debunked by the powers-that-be that most people will not be convinced.

\textit{The marginal revolutionary}

If you go carryin’ pictures of Chairman Mao
You ain’t gonna make it with anyone anyhow.

The Beatles

As would be expected, Cardew’s ideological shift marginalized him almost out of sight. He is never mentioned in \textit{Composer}, the journal of the Composers’ Guild of Great Britain and the British Music Information Centre; Peter J. Pirie devotes one paragraph to him in \textit{The English Musical Renaissance} and calls his music ‘simple-minded’.\textsuperscript{76} Cardew is not mentioned in \textit{British Composers in Interview}.\textsuperscript{77} And his appearances in the \textit{Musical Times}, to which he had been a regular contributor early in his career, drop noticeably after his turn to writing political music.

Before his embracing of Maoism, many of Cardew’s works had been published by leading European music publishers such as Peters and Universal Edition. Thereafter, his works were published by small, unknown firms. One of these, Experimental Music Catalogue, seems to have been run by Cardew himself, for they published only his music, all in his own manuscript. Like all of Cardew’s political music, this is extremely


\textsuperscript{74} Popular culture is no less active in the construction of our individual identities. Unlike much political art, it simultaneously provides us with material that is attractive according to traditional norms. \textit{Melody Maker}, interviewing fans at a Billy Bragg concert in England, discovered many who did not share Bragg’s democratic socialist politics: they go to his concerts just to hear the tunes. For a discussion of this and other issues relating to Billy Bragg’s music, see my ‘Re-Signing Mass Culture: Billy Bragg’s “There is Power in a Union”’, \textit{Popular Music and Society}, xv (1991), 33–48. For an excellent discussion of the popular culture and left politics, see Tony Bennett, ‘The Politics of “the popular” and Popular Culture’, \textit{Popular Culture and Social Relations}, ed. idem, Colin Mercer & Janet Woollacott, Milton Keynes, 1986.

\textsuperscript{75} The denial of individuality is a criticism that Cardew himself made of John Cage’s \textit{HPSCHD} (1967–9), saying that, among other things, it reduces the listener as individual ‘to the position of a mere spectator’: \textit{Stockhausen Serves Imperialism}, p. 84.


difficult to find, although the small English publisher Forward Music is currently issuing some of his political works. Some of his friends and colleagues reacted to his conversion with the sort of scepticism and discomfort with which the non-religious treat the openly devout. Howard Skempton, for example, said that he ‘lost touch with Cornelius for political reasons in the early seventies’, although he continued to acknowledge Cardew’s influence, especially through the tonal works, on his own music.78 Part of the problem is that bourgeois culture offers no viable ‘middlebrow’ cultural space, cultural space; cultural forms are categorized as ‘high’ or ‘low’, political or not political, aesthetic or not aesthetic; little space exists between any of these binary oppositions. So while Cardew was no longer accepted by most ‘highbrow’ composers, the nature of his music did not allow his acceptance in ‘lowbrow’ musical circles. Neither, it seems, did Peoples’ Liberation Music.

The marginalization of overtly political art also estranges composer and audience.79 Cardew believed that a composer’s access to a mass audience was controlled by the State and was thus severely limited. The BBC is a ‘national’ organization, and musicians are ‘in the employ of capitalists (publishers, record companies)’ who attempt to profit from the musicians’ work.80 Furthermore, Cardew probably realized that he continued to be a part of the State’s hegemonic structures himself: his shift in ideology did not remove him from the bourgeoisie. Even in his overtly critical works he could not escape what he condemned, for, as Roland Barthes writes, criticisms of the bourgeoisie are bourgeois themselves:

True, there are revolts against bourgeois ideology. This is what one generally calls the avant-garde. But these revolts are socially limited, they remain open to salvage. First, because they come from a small section of the bourgeoisie itself, from a minority group of artists and intellectuals, without public other than the class which they contest, and who remain dependent on its money in order to express themselves.81

Barthes’s observation resonates with Adrian Jack’s criticism of some of Cardew’s music. Cardew admitted: ‘We simply don’t have access to a working-class audience’.82 He said later in the interview that his music should be simpler, that he is not interested in breaking new ground as he once was:

I would be much happier if music were much simpler, more straightforward and communicated about something in the real world.

*Whom do you communicate with?*

The same old audience.83

Cardew’s music was thus susceptible of becoming re-aesthetized: judged, that is, purely by standards of form, complexity, originality. And in these terms it was ‘bad’ music and therefore unimportant; or, as Peter J. Pirie said, ‘simple-minded’.84

Many critics who wrote about Cardew’s music mentioned his audience. Steve Lake,
writing for Melody Maker, noted that Cardew seemed like a ‘cartoon revolutionary’ and that if he really wanted a working-class venue (instead of the ‘highbrow’ St Pancras Assembly Rooms in London) he should ‘play the Reading Pop Festival’. In a feature on contemporary music in Melody Maker—usually a chronicle of popular music—the unnamed author makes a similar observation: ‘The irony of Cardew’s situation is that for all his theories about the artist functioning as a member of society, he continues to present his music in “bourgeois” (to use his terminology) concert halls, and his audience remains as of old, willing, apparently, to be outraged both politically and musically.

These tensions began to tell on the musicians themselves. Rod Eley, in his history of the Scratch Orchestra included in Stockhausen Serves Imperialism, describes the growing tension within the orchestra as its members delved further and further into Marxist and Maoist thought. He quotes John Tilbury’s summary of the problem: ‘After two years of activity, during which the whole gamut of contemporary bourgeois art has been explored, the Scratch Orchestra has reached an impasse. Either you sell your product on the market, or you drop out; this constitutes the dilemma of the bourgeois artist.’ Tilbury went on to echo Mao’s question of art—whom does it serve?—answering: ‘clearly the ruling class of the bourgeoisie’.

The binary choice Tilbury poses here is of course over-simplified. As Jacques Attali has written, one way of regaining control over one’s own music is, in the classic Marxian way, to seize the means of production. Attali cites the free jazz musicians of the 1960s who founded their own recording and publishing company. This is also an option that the English socialist rock musician Billy Bragg has considered. With the advent of cassette recording, producing and marketing one’s own music is easier than ever before and is something that the Scratch Orchestra could have considered. But their decision to play music that was attempting to be ‘art’ severely limited the venues at which they could appear. They couldn’t ‘play the Reading Pop Festival’, as the anonymous Melody Maker critic suggested, since few at that festival would have wanted to hear them.

Rod Eley notes the point at which the Scratch Orchestra realized its ineffectiveness. In June 1971 they gave a concert in a club for young immigrants where there had been a riot and several arrests the previous week. They played the ‘Toy Symphony’. ‘We experienced at last the true nature of our almost total incompetence, and the total irrelevance of the Scratch Orchestra in its present form in the modern world.’ But Cardew refused to be silent. He went on composing, never moving from his political stance, although there are a few works with odd titles, such as Three Bourgeois Songs of 1973. These songs are settings of Confucian odes that Cardew also employed in The Great Learning, but they are written in a fairly complex, barely tonal idiom. It is as if Cardew were longing for his old avant-garde values, just as Schoenberg longed to write, and occasionally did write, tonal music after beginning to compose methodically with twelve notes in the 1920s.

And it may be that he was on his way back to these earlier, more recognizably avant-garde musical values, which, as we have seen, left traces in ‘Soon’. He enrolled on a Master’s Theory and Analysis course at King’s College London in the autumn of 1981.

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85 Steve Lake, ‘Rzewski/Cardew’ (concert review), Melody Maker, li (7 February 1976), 47.
87 Cardew, Stockhausen Serves Imperialism, p. 28.
89 Presumably Leopold Mozart’s. The Scratch Orchestra did occasionally play popular classics.
90 Cardew, Stockhausen Serves Imperialism, p. 22.
just before he died; and Susan Bradshaw, in an obituary, wrote: 'What a tragic pity that he should have been torn away just as he appeared to be on the verge of returning to the world of a more self-demanding kind of music-making . . .'\(^9\) At the bottom of a recording of some of Cardew's piano music, a message appears: 'The Cornelius Cardew Foundation would like to make it clear that later in his life Cardew rejected Maoism'.\(^2\) But there is no evidence for this turning back in Cardew's own writings, of which there are few from the last few years of his life.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Cardew occupies an extreme position—one not currently represented so visibly by anyone else. What is more, despite the marginalization brought on by his shift in ideology, Cardew's presence on the English contemporary music scene over a decade after his death remained surprisingly strong. In the span of less than a week in May 1992, he appeared twice in the British press. In a weekly feature called 'Notes & Queries' in the *Guardian* newspaper, a reader asked: 'Can a person like Wagner's music and still be a socialist?' There were a variety of answers, including this one from a Liverpool reader: 'Try listening to the works of the right-on composer of revolutionary people's "music", Cornelius Cardew. You'll be desperate for the politically dubious pleasure of *Parsifal* in no time.'\(^3\) Also, a full-scale article about his mysterious death appeared in the *Independent* newspaper.\(^4\) Many of Cardew's friends believe that the hit-and-run accident that killed him was not an accident but that he was murdered by the government for his political views and activism. This is doubtful, for he had so successfully marginalized himself that he was not a real threat to the *status quo*. But his was a restless spirit, and he continues to define, if only by his absence, a crucial role of music in society today.

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