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*Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 33, No. 1/2. (Winter - Summer, 1995), pp. 10-27.

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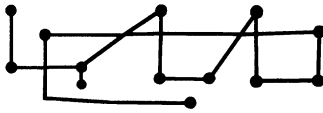
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# TWO INTERVIEWS WITH KENNETH GABURO



NICHOLAS ZURBRUGG\*

ONE: IOWA CITY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1983

*P*ERHAPS I COULD BEGIN by asking you something about your work with music and the voice, and with ensembles, and perhaps where it all began?

I can't say much about where the beginnings were, but I do remember that there were certain strange things that happened early in my life which I would now assume had considerable influence on me. For instance, my mother was a church organist, and used to sing all the time in the house. Now, that's a far cry from the work I do, but nevertheless I heard the "voice" a lot; and generally my family was ebullient with language. My very first class in the first grade was a music class. The teacher

\*Kenneth Gaburo, *Nicholas Zurbrugg*

began by playing the piano, and talking about Stephen Foster's songs, and she referred to him as a composer. At some point she asked if anyone in the class wanted to play duets with her. I went up there and banged around the upper part of the piano while she played in the lower register. When I came home that day my mother asked me how it went. I told her about the music class and said I made a composition, and banged something out on our piano and intuitively said "I want to be a composer." I have no idea where that impulse came from, but immediately she arranged for me to study the piano and to learn about composition from a local teacher who happened to be a graduate from the Eastman School of Music. From about age twelve to the end of high school I was encouraged to go to New York on weekends with friends. Somehow, I think, also quite instinctively, we enjoyed going to three diverse events: on Friday it was jazz; on Saturday it was Theatre; on Sunday the New York Philharmonic, or some new music event. At the time, I had no idea how these areas would become the central integrating components of my work, and how they opened up—sometimes by mere chance, other avenues of inquiry. For instance, I have always been involved in jazz, and put myself through college arranging for big bands. One night (1959), I got a gig as a pianist with a band in Champaign-Urbana where I was doing graduate study. During intermission I learned that the bandleader was a linguist, doing special studies in phonetic analysis and phonetic transcription. I was fascinated by this and, all of a sudden, the whole matter of music, the voice, and language began to vibrate in me! Shortly thereafter, circa 1961–62, I formulated the expression "Compositional Linguistics." It has gone through a number of transformations, but at the time it signified Music as Language—and Language as Music—to me. By this expression, I did not, and do not intend casual, informal, or expressionistic metaphors such as "The Music of Architecture." And so, at the core of my involvement with groups, as well as my work in general, resides continually evolving concepts of language and linguistics, and the notion that no particular discipline—let's say music in this case—was or is sufficient in and of itself to express that which is necessary to express. To be sure, there are reasons why one can make a distinction between visual art and music, or sculpture, or poetry. They are somehow, in their basic nature, distinctly different from each other. But at the same time I am aware that no particular "discipline" is bounded, as if an entity without connections—links, to other phenomena. And so it makes sense to me to be involved in as many diverse domains and kinds of processes as possible—of research, of inquiry, of searching out an answer to an agonizing question, and so on. And that began to happen early on. I used to drive my parents, teachers, and friends nuts with seemingly endless questions. While at the conservatory I pursued matters other than music. I

took courses in language, theatre, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, literature (e.g. entire courses on Stein, Proust, and Joyce for instance)—all kinds of stuff that I felt would have bearing on my desire to move in as many domains as possible, and to find a way of connecting them. I cannot say that I realized the full implication of such pursuits at the time. But the voice, and language—relationships and interactions were becoming connecting links to specific works, and to working with groups; the voice as primitive, basic; rich and extraordinarily potent as expression. The “voice” has evolved into a metaphor for humanness and diversity; as a crying out to be heard—and in a socio-political sense as antagonist to the increasing noise in the world and the violence done to all living matter; the continual devaluation of the human as subject—not as object—of our attention. And, necessarily, these concerns required that I needed—and need—to become more integrated within myself.

*Did you want to do everything yourself?*

Yes. But how else? For me these matters are needs, not wants. It seemed necessary to my growth to be involved in what I consider to be interactive states—with the actual acts of making. And these makings, necessarily required working with other people in diverse ways.

*When did you form your first ensemble, and what were its successors like?*

My first group—I’ve now had five—was formed during the period of 1950–54, when I had my first job, teaching in a small obscure town. In that context the only thing that made sense was for the few people who were there to make music together. So I started a choral group, and we began to do experimental work with the voice. So what began there was the idea that a group could actually develop diverse language, in a certain anonymous sense, and clearly to not map onto performed works a predetermined choral style. The second group was formed at the University of Illinois in 1962–67. NMCE2 performed work not written for the group; work written for the group; and work written by members of the group. We began to experiment with multiphonics, movement, theatre, and interactions with electro-acoustic sound. As I remember, many composers who composed both choral and instrumental music put forth a different “style” for each. It was assumed that voices could not do the complex things that instruments could. So we turned that around. The conceptual barriers of whether work was inclusive or exclusive began to break down. By profoundly regarding each work NMCE2 did as unique, it became clear that each work required a different “voice.” In a presentation of say eight works, one could easily imagine that eight different groups—one for each work—had been on stage. It was also the case that the various members came from different disciplines—composers, a librarian, trained singers, and some who had no vocal training at all. But opera singers

were never flexible enough. NMCE3 was formed when I began teaching at UCSD. We threw away the music stand, and mostly worked on a large gym mat in my garage, or at the beach. We worked with our bodies—tactilities, text-sound poetry, sound-music, talk-music, speech-music, sound-movement, improvisation, gesture, and developed an extraordinary range of multiphonic techniques, and toured only when each member of the group felt ready. There was a lot of talk about talking and much introspective thinking, for instance “what *is* a group?” Many works were created by the group for instance, *The Quality of Soft Is Not Straining*, and work made by others, for instance, Brün’s computer-graphics *Mutatis-Mutandis*, Kagel’s *Pas de cinq*, and the first two parts of my *Lingua One: Poems and other Theatres*, and *Maledetto (for Seven Virtuoso Speakers)*. During 1972–75 NMCE4 was formed as a resident group within the UCSD Center for Music Experiment under a three-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. NMCE4 went through three transformations. In the first year, a stretched heterogeneous group was formed. It consisted of three singers, a mime, a virtuoso speaker, an actor, an acrobat, a ’cellist, a dancer. It was the most idiosyncratic group to date. Because of the group’s make-up, the major task was to explore avenues by which the diverse membership could be linked, connected, as an interactive whole. One approach was to pursue the notion that the group could be regarded as a kind of generative and transformational grammar, in the Chomskian sense. There was no literature, or yet a group language. Early ensemble developments led directly to more rigorous research-performance concerns along physiological, acoustical, and structural-linguistic lines. My earlier postulate of Compositional Linguistics (music as language, language as music), became transformed into a more profound notion of “composing language by language.” There was also active involvement with computer, video, film, optical, laser, and electro-acoustic technology. But, most significant was the transference of talents. The mime began to learn from the virtuoso speaker, the virtuoso speaker began to learn from the mime, and the singers began learning from both mime and virtuoso speaker, who would teach them vocal techniques, et cetera. By the end of the year, everyone was quite facile with each other’s particular talent. The elasticity was not merely a function of number, but the degree to which each member could perform multiple tasks—as many as possible at the same time. This complexity is also found in my work for single performers. In this sense, it becomes extremely difficult to reduce a made work to music, or theatre, or text, or whatever! It becomes free of classification. The second grant year provided for four performers who devoted themselves to such matters as fine-tuning, multiphonics, video-composition, translation, noninterpretive states, focus, awareness, attention, and sound as a means for generating movement.

The third grant year provided for five dancer-acrobats who embodied elements from all previous groups, and viewed movement as a means for generating sound. All three phases of NMCE4 worked every day of the week. The amount of creative work made, and well-documented in various ways, was and is astounding.

As we speak, NMCE5 is developing here at the University of Iowa, where I am currently director of the Experimental Music Studio. The classes are beginning to become a group; an ensemble. Individual work is made; group work is made. Each member is encouraged to find his/her own voice. The studios are interdisciplinary. Our concerns are with psycho-acoustic perception, hearing-listening, interactive states of live performance with technology. It is taking on a more political-aesthetic-philosophical bent, on the way to cognitive growth. Our seminars focus on discourse about a work being put forth. The seminars last for hours. Individual-group discourse generates a language of its own—a macro-voice which speaks to, for, and about the work held in view, and speaks to, for, and about each member. The discourse, in the light of the work (the subject of our attention), becomes a grand performance, and the members-plus-work form the ensemble. It's getting to be elegant, and more complex all the time.

*What sort of performances did this complexity lead to?*

Well, for instance the subject-matter could no longer merely be let's make or perform a work based on notes, movement, or, say, sign-language. Gradually it became more necessary, and compelling, to address subjects directly—topics which were in fact metaphors, by performers who were also subjects. As I'm saying this, I'm thinking it sounds like a kind of literary approach to writing. So, for instance, NMCE4—the dancer-acrobat group, was sitting on the mat one day, quietly meditating and paying attention to each other's breathing, and someone said, "Let's fall," just, "Let's start falling." So we began to fall—we always worked on the mat—and pretty soon, two things happened. First, we were hurting each other badly, and secondly, we realized as a group that we didn't have the foggiest notion of what falling was all about. So we felt we needed to do research on historical reports and testimonies that had to do with falling, including psychological inquiry as regards falling in dream-states. At the same time, we tried to find a process by which we could actually fall. We finally discovered that in terms of what we had in mind, nobody knew anything about falling. So we proposed: "Let's imagine that falling down is falling up, and falling up is falling down." Immediately, the movement became a continuing cycle, where direction of fall became a mere illusion. This ended up nine months later as a work called *My, My, My, What a Wonderful Fall!* It

included five dancer-acrobats falling in such a magnificent way by this time—on this mat, fifteen by fifteen—such that never once did they hurt each other. They could fall in any direction at any time and actually change their trajectory—while in motion—so that if there was a person at some instant coming in another’s direction, it became possible to switch to another direction—without losing the trajectory of the gesture. There were no longer any collisions—they were able to fall over each other, inside and around each other. Each stage of the work was questioned in the light of what else was needed. Over the nine-month period the performers were able to push the work—in terms of endurance—to about twenty-five minutes. Somewhere during the falling process, someone made an utterance, and the utterance felt good; and out of that poems began to be generated. Not just abstract sounds that one learns to formulate, and then repeats in performance in some way, but the language of the body in a state of falling—different each time, which everyone was experiencing, becoming falling language—sounds which never could be made by people other than when they were in states of falling—and the breathing was different. Out of this also came a four-channel speaker (acoustic), output which the group contributed to that consisted of falling sounds picked up by contact mikes under the mat which are played back in performance against their current falling—against the sounds being made as they fall. Out of the utterance texts they generated, I found texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth canti of Dante’s *Inferno* which roughly—in terms of my sense of medieval Italian—corresponded to the acoustics of falling sounds—and the general contextual metaphor. The interlocking—seemingly random—text (actually four structured subtexts) are read during the course of the performance. A next step of making was by an optical engineer who was involved in the falling as an observer. From his vantage point he began to imagine what the lighting must be like. So the lighting was formulated on the basis of how falling needed to be lit—not for some outsider—but to someone who is falling. He generated huge shadow-reflections in the entire space of the motions the performers were making. Among other matters, this provided them with an antagonist which urged them on. Everything became intrinsic and organic. When it was done it couldn’t merely be called dance, it couldn’t be merely called text-sound. The work included these properties, but couldn’t be reduced to them. Rather it was our collective testimony to *falling*. This is what fascinates me: to take some word, say, *as* “text”—atypical of those which one has worked with before by way of a new social, political, literary, or whatever concern—and to actually translate that word—maybe even more than that, to actually vivify it—by participating in making “sense” of it, by actually doing (“becoming?”) it.

*What do you like best about working with a group?*

Well, other than what I've just mentioned, I think it's the integrating, interactive sense of developing a work which wants to become whole, such that the multidimensional parts cannot be separated from each other—a wholeness, rather than putting forth pieces of pieces. Clearly, the necessary integration that I work with must include endless questioning, research, and change—a transformation from that which was, into a new circumstance not yet experienced.

*Given your interest in making integrated work, how do you distinguish between multimedia and multidimensionality?*

Ah! Well, current multimedia works are not so different from those art and technology works made in the sixties—except that the gadgets are more sophisticated. My perception is that multimedia generally involves a collection of elements—technical and otherwise—which occupy the same space and generally create a kind of aura of belonging there. But this is often a deception. That is, they exist in the space as parallel structures. By definition, parallel structures don't talk to each other—although there is a kind of mechanistic mixing going on. Multidimensional structures, in my sense, are intrinsically linked. The elements are indispensable to each other—talk to each other, exhibit properties of each other. These are some of their many dimensions. Obviously, one has to question the very language used to describe a work. These notions, by the way, have a certain conceptual resonance with the work of Harry Partch.

*How exactly?*

Well, he went so far as to ponder: okay, I've got this musical idea, but there are no instruments to play the idea, so he made instruments. So, after having made instruments, he argued, I need people to play the instruments—what kind of musicians shall I have? Well, I want musicians to be on stage, and not in the pit. Once on stage are they really there only to play the music, or must they also move? Well, of course, they've got to move. Well, if they move, are they just going to move as any instrumentalist would move? No, they can't just do that—performing the music while moving is not the same as movement—so they must also be dancers, they must also be acrobats, they must also be actors, they must use their voice. Why? Because I want them to be as full of life as possible. So Partch's concern was for kinds of assimilation-integration, such that the parts become inseparable. Those things which one recognizes as discrete elements elsewhere—like light, movement, dance, acting, music—are not discrete in his work. If you take any one of the parts out, the work becomes insufficient. Contrarily, all the needed elements depend on each other. Partch's stage works are absolutely magnificent;



they are systems of dependencies. As you know, he had two main operating terms: one was “corporeal,” and the other was “whole theatre.” The two concepts had to be integrated in such a way that one—having observed a stage work—couldn’t come out saying “Well, I sure liked the music, but the dancing was lousy.” If an observer and performers were really involved there’d be no way in that situation to make such a partition.

*Thinking of present avant-garde practices, I suppose I would say that poets are trying to get away from language and are thinking musically, whereas composers are trying to think about language in a way that isn’t explicitly musical. Perhaps there might also be some other area in between, which in its own right is different from both points of departure?*

That’s what I hope for. But I have already mentioned that all work is informed by language and becomes language. I think this *is* the area in between which you speak of. What I think is necessary is to make distinctions between *kinds* of language. Poetic language is not musical language in the contextual sense of music. That crossovers are taking place is only possible by acquiring new language integrated with what was a particular discipline’s language. What I abhor is to be referred to as a musician, or a composer, as if that’s *it* in some academic sense.

*Because the terms are too restrictive and too purist?*

Yes—and it’s too separatist, which, when one ponders it, is not possible anyway. No work is that context-bound, that “area-specific.” People do make assumptions, and classify—always trying to get a fix on something. But these kinds of evaluation do not hold up under scrutiny. They are insufficient. A work will always defy such approaches to understanding and knowing. It seems to me that one of the things that poets do is to create language which didn’t really exist before they created it. Otherwise, what’s poetry all about? Street language—jargon, colloquials, rap, whatever one wants to call them—stem from some deep urge to express and to find a way to do it—by language. But poetry is not a special case: that’s what composers do too—that’s what all genuinely creative endeavors do—a search for sense that didn’t exist before. Profound creative acts create new language. That’s what I think a number of people are doing. That’s the ideal. They’re beginning to go beyond the boundaries of their own speciality, so to speak. I’ve been doing that for a long time, because I found the so-called language of music insufficient. What does one do? I’m disenchanted with the conventional notion of finding a style, a technique, a concept, which satisfies a compositional process say—held in the mind of a maker—and then for the rest of that someone’s life beats them to death in the name of development. I’m not interested in that. Contrarily, I’m interested in growth, in exploring unknown—and perhaps

unthought of—domains. I continue to deconstruct a previous work made in order to construct new steps. So, that's it. While the traditional separation between arts has certainly been clear enough, and I suppose has academic value, and thereby I can see no reason why visual art should do what music does. But I think all traditional concepts by categorization in this day and age are insufficient. I think there's not much left to be done with a so-called "specific" discipline. I like very much the notion of beginning a work with *no* idea (of course that, too, is an idea, isn't it?), as if it is a first work each time. I hold discourse with myself all the time about these matters. Sometimes I have begun work in some state of sensory deprivation in order to move on.

*To what extent does technology become important as something which might facilitate this sort of fusion? When we began this interview you suggested that the human voice was the last bastion of values against technological culture. What values do you see in technology as a catalyst of this sort of fusion?*

Well, I think that's a very interesting one. In terms of music, in the mid fifties to the early sixties, composers who were not merely interested in writing acoustical music made a big jump and went into electronic music. I did it—a whole bunch of people did it. My first "solo" tape work was made in 1959. But I also found that there were things about the acoustical side of music—not merely the electronic side—that were still very compelling. So it seemed a natural thing to say, why not try to use the two? When people who brought studio technology, and the necessity of thinking about music differently, back to the human performer, the human performer was asked to do things that they could not have done before—influenced by processes, sounds, et cetera which came from studio work. And, correspondingly, there was a sort of "intrafusion" in my work as I began to do studio work as if it was a human performer on tape. My collection of *Antiphonies*—integrations between technological outputs and human performer interaction—are instances of this fusion. My first *Antiphony* was made in 1958: a work for three string groups and tape. Interestingly enough, the work is called *Voices*.

*In that respect, there seem to be two main modes of change in the new arts. One is technological change—people can now do things technologically that they couldn't have done before. The other seems to be modes of conceptual shift, in the sense that people now think of producing things in a new way. You've just mentioned the way in which experiments with technology lead to a new sort of real-time performance attitude. Perhaps the other thing which might prompt this kind of conceptual shift is experiments with group activity? Maybe one could distinguish between poets and creators who investigated solo experiments with studio work, live work and mixtures of the two, and*

*work with groups—something which seems predominantly American in spirit, insofar as it's not often seen in Europe. There seem to be quite a number of American groups exploring a new sort of competence across the arts, and a new sort of group performance.*

Well, it's really quite extraordinary, and it's hard to know where the mind-body will take you until one lets it!

*But in your case wasn't it also partially the consequence of your work with ensembles?*

Of course. But also the interactive work done with technology and groups, as in the *Antiphonies*, easily mapped into the question: "Could I ask the solo performer to be a group?" In this respect considerable ground had been done with the experimental groups during the UCSD period. For example, in *Mouth-Piece: Sextet for One Solo Trumpet Player* (1970), for Jack Logan, the performer has to execute six discrete, but integrated functions, including covering the entire range of the *piano*, a task beyond the ordinary range of the trumpet. Early on, if I had worked that composition for an ensemble, I probably would have passed out each of those functions one for each of six people. So Logan had to manage the extraordinary demands of the frequency range of the instrument, do a multiphonic "dance," articulate a poem through the trumpet, make specific gestures with his body, breath ingressively (extraordinarily difficult for him since he had a gag-reflex problem), and move in the space of the score which consisted of a set of slides projected onto a ten-by-sixteen-foot surface. In *Cantilena III* (1967), for soprano and violin, each performer has six nonintersecting functions to execute. *Inside (Quartet for One Double-bass Player)*—for Bert Turetzy, 1969—requires some forty different kinds of articulations—also to sing—to use the bass as a drum and to move in the space with his instrument with certain given gestures; and in *Subito (Theatre for Four Instruments)*, for viola, double-bass, voice, and trumpet (1977) each performer has eight discrete parts—all nonintersecting—to articulate. This work, among other matters, involves theories of complexity to the *n*th degree.

*So in a sense, all of your work has led towards modes of integral performance—you're addressing the concurrent potential of lots of possibilities.*

Yes, that's what interests me. It's not only potential though, but actual. The case! I think that I'd be bored to death if I condemned myself to a life of just writing notes, or words, or whatever. There's always another level—perhaps as yet hidden from view. I think there are now many artists who are taking on many more parameters in their work. Of course this means taking chances—putting forth change in a world of making, which at the same time is drawing more and more from historical precedent.

*Would it be fair, then, to say that you're orchestrating lots of different things in a more complex, thoughtful manner?*

Yes, but I wouldn't call it "orchestrations," since from a musical point of view orchestration signifies that one does something to something that already exists. Whereas, to me, it's composing that I'm doing. It's making it as it goes; it's questioning as one goes; it's becoming as one goes—and it's kicking ass a little bit, here and there as it goes.

TWO: IOWA CITY, 5 NOVEMBER 1990

*Several times in our earlier interview you have used the expression "socio-political." Can you elaborate on what that means to you?*

Firstly, as an artist who continually puts forth the desire for change, I'm continually going against the status quo. In some sense, given general conventions, such as so-called concerns about the relationship of work vis-à-vis an audience, I make work which is, by desire, antagonistic to what is imagined to be what an audience wants. That makes it socio-political, that is, I make the work *I* want. I frankly don't know what an audience *is*, so I can't possibly imagine writing for one. Secondly, when quite young, I held the notion that I was firstly a composer, who was in the world. During my living in the desert years, a radical shift took place. In sum, I now regard myself as someone in the world who happens to compose. It has been clear for some time that there is no way to escape, or to hide from, the increasing level of violence, corruption, and *noise* all around us. And so, what were topics of interest such as in the work *My, My, My, What a Wonderful Fall* (which, by the way, was a metaphor for the "fall of the University"—written at the time I resigned from UCSD, and premiered at the Mandeville Center for the Arts in 1975), have now become topics of another kind of necessity which address states of affairs in the world. My *Scratch Project*, begun in 1982, is one such. When we had our first interview, I was only at the beginning of it.

*How did this project begin?*

Well, as I recall, the project was begun during a week-long seminar with students in the Theatre Department at Union College in Schenectady, New York. We began working on some "sensing instruction compositions" which had been formulated with and by the NMCE groups at UCSD. I had asked for a gym mat. We began with *Count-down*. The instructions were to lie down on the mat in some "scattered" array, get into a state of deep, quiescent breathing, and then focus on some profound experience in your life. When your image is focused clearly, begin a count-down from one hundred to zero, at your own rate.

Gradually, as you approach zero, begin to imbue your count-downs with the quality of your image such that reciting numbers becomes an *expressive* act. Timbral colors began to appear here and there—everywhere. Once zero had been reached, each member was to remain in a quiescent mode, continuing their deep breathing until the last person sounded “zero.” Then they were asked to rise to a sitting position. I had heard a lot of agony, anguish, and tension in their expressive transmissions. They all seemed to want to talk about their image. It was the time of the Cold War, the Arms Race, and the beginning of SDI. Over a very long time span, these matters were vigorously discussed. I learned that the parents of each of the students were engaged in factory work which entailed assembling components of nuclear warheads. The students were doubly distressed, not only about the possibility of nuclear war, but because their parents were involved. There was considerable uncertainty about how to square these matters off. Most of them had simply concluded that they were powerless to do anything about it. And so I began to talk about the “Voice”—the power of it; the necessity to have their voices heard. They were not interested in creating an acting project, as I had originally planned. Instead, a video project was discussed—a kind of oral history on the topic of nuclear war—and we would present the project as our production, publicly, on the last night of my residency. Together we formulated the following question (the beginnings of the *Testimony Project*): “In the event of a nuclear war, humans would be sacrificed. This sacrifice could not take place unless human life was thought to be expendable. In this, your life is included. How do you feel about being expendable?” Now the environmental circumstance for *Testimony* began as follows: Before a fixed video camera, monitor, and VCR, individuals, one at a time, are asked to respond as they please to the above question. They are assured that there will be no editing or tampering with their testimony. The testifier is asked to look directly into the camera, placed about two feet from where a testifier is sitting. The monitor helps to keep the person centered, so as to not go off camera. The question is always read audibly off-camera by someone. Often, the reader of the question is one who has just completed a testimony. The “reading”—vis-à-vis expressive quality—is almost always different from the manner in which the testimony was given. So, in this sense there are two “takes.” It turns out that most men “misread” the word “feel” in the question and provide testimony about how they *think* about the issue. Women, almost invariably talk about how they “feel.” Also, in many instances the proximity of the camera to the person—a distance which fills the monitor with a full close-up of the face—seems like a metaphoric “gun” to many. There have been several variations of the procedure since then. On tours I often have a

camcorder with me, and have gotten many testimonies this way. And in 1987, as I remember, Andrew McLennan—ABC Radio (Australia)—asked if it was possible to have a call-in response to the question, to be aired on Hiroshima day, on his program *Surface-Tension*. As it turned out the staff thought it wise to announce the call-in two weeks before on a program called *Earthworm*. Well, whether people misunderstood, or couldn't wait, there were some two thousand call-in responses by the time Hiroshima Day came up. So Andrew decided to make a collage of all of those testimonies for the August 8th program. Fantastic! I should mention that *Testimony* forms part of a much larger work called the *Scratch Project*.

*Can you say something about the project in general?*

The *Scratch Project* is to be a massive four-act theatre, based on the subjects of war-making, male sexuality, violence, and the social nature of argument. Initially it is to be presented in the form of an installation; and subsequently as a two-hour broadcast-quality videotape. Prior to its completion, segments of the *Scratch Project* have been, and are being presented when and wherever possible. The acts of *Scratch* are entitled: *Testimony*; *Antiphony VIII*; *Pentagon/y*; and *De/bate*. Act One (*Testimony: (How It Is), Videotape*), is a vital part of *Scratch*. It is its centerpiece. The initial installation will consist of at least five hundred unedited, uncensored, individual testimonies from as many areas of the world, and from as many different people (ethnic, young, old, rich, poor), as possible. The testimonies will be distributed among thirty one-hour cassettes. Each cassette will have its own video playback system: roughly sixteen testimonies per tape. These systems will be placed around the perimeter of the installation space, in such a manner as to allow for discrete viewing. All systems will transmit at the same time, thereby encircling all viewers. The cassette tapes will recycle continuously, except for scheduled times during which the other three acts are to be presented.

*What are the other acts like? Do you have any idea when the entire work will be presented?*

Well, Act Two (*Antiphony VIII: Revolution*) is for one percussionist, four-channel audio tape, and stage lighting. I regard *Antiphony VIII* as a theatre in which a percussionist functions as performer, acrobat-dancer, and actor. A complex score is played from memory on forty percussion instruments made of steel and skin. Steel and skin represent death and life respectively. The performer is asked to experience five changes of being, namely: indifference, distraction, denial, fire-with-fire, uncertainty. These states reflect certain current societal attitudes toward nuclear war. *Pentagon/y (Act Three—Concerning Guns and Cock-Fighting for Solo Reader)*

consists of ten writings in literary-poetic form which explore the substantial interconnections between traditional concepts of manliness and male sexuality; and those of power, force, violence, and war-making. In these writings, one can “hear” the result of extensive historical research, complexly interwoven with the author’s raw—and often painful—self-examination. Ever so gradually, an extraordinarily sensitive alternative view is beginning to emerge. Act Four is called *De/bate: (Conversations between Or, Da, and Ip)* for two actors, one mime, two video cameras, monitors, and VCRs. It is to be a stage work based on a nuclear disarmament confrontation between a Philadelphia lawyer and a spokesman for the Pentagon, witnessed by me in 1983. Ultimately, the issues cancelled each other out due to the elegance of argument on both sides. The debate became mere noise; the noise became a kind of violence; the violence became a metaphoric gun; the metaphoric gun served the conditions of the debate, and not the issues. The audience, stunned by this turn of events, left in silence. But soon, mutterings began to occur, here and there. Some seemed to be thinking, “With the very real fate of life on this planet at stake, how could there be any argument concerning what needs to be done? Arguments act as if there really is a pro and con; an either/or. But in this case, there is no choice: there is no alternative to life. That’s it!” The debate, thus having turned on itself, unknowingly provided a wonderful message in disguise. Some of us began to smile a little. Concerning the completion of the project, there are no set dates yet. Some work has to be completed; perhaps it will be ready in a year or two. The main task will be to find a good space for the premiere, and, of course, seek funding. In any event, a booth will be set up on site to continue to gather testimony. In some sense, this part of the project may never end.

*In your use of material in the Scratch Project would you say that your work has taken on a historical or biographical direction—in the sense that it has addressed the future of mankind, and people’s personal responses?*

Yes I would say so especially since the *Scratch Project* so intensely focuses on history and biography. Since we last talked, other works have emerged—works which continue to probe these areas, and which continue to be socio-political as well. For instance, I’ve just completed *Antiphony X (Winded)* for solo organist and eight-channel tape. Essentially, the metaphor “winded” is about my (our) recognition that I (we) are a part of history, and come from it. Now, I acknowledge it, but have no reverence for it—nor am I sustained by it. Given the continual noise—violence—about us, it is clear to me that Aristotle (*et alia*) can no longer help resolve our problems for us. History has to be deconstructed—supplanted by new voices in, from, and for our time.

Perhaps I should also mention an ongoing series of writings which I call *Essays on Damage—and Other*. The three essays so far are “ISIT,” “LA,” and “AH DIO.” Each is made as a kind of “weaving” of historical events, and of shifts in the way people began to think and behave—pitted against current circumstances and the omnipresence of historical influence and precedence. The texts work as a kind of contrapuntal collage, with various subject-matter appearing, disappearing, et cetera. And, of course, language, per se, continues to be questioned—mixing in with various other unfolding matters. The issues of subject-object; I-Self; What’s an *it*?; What’s a *thing*?; on and on. And in text, I use codes for particular “characters.” For instance, in “AH DIO,” I have used: *Loquendi* (Latin gerund for “speaking”); *Sits* (citizens); *Other* (*The Other*; always hidden from view); *Raw* (war going backwards); *Noise* (no-eyes); *US<sub>2</sub>* (Guv in all its fullness—including *milit*, *univ*, *indust*, *corps*, *agens*, and all other fellow-travelers); *Thing* (an empty, null set).

*Have you also pursued work with the idea of asking individuals to perform virtuoso pieces and to perform, as it were, as a one-person group?*

Well, I’ve made certain sketches; but as you can see, there have been other preoccupations. At some point this approach will return, hopefully with a new twist. Meanwhile, *Subito* (Theatre for Four Instruments), has not yet been possible to perform. Perhaps I reached the limit there. I may not have mentioned that the desire in this work was not only to increase levels of complexity, but, in fact, to free myself from any particular instrumental built-in constraints (e.g. such as instrumental range). So I wrote a composition I *heard*, *in free space* so to speak. For instance, the voice part (either male or female) extends to the entire range of the piano. To perform this “part” would require taking in—at the high end—extraordinary feats of falsetto, ingressive multiphonics, et cetera; and at the low end, Tibetan chant techniques, and I don’t know what. Philip Larson can almost do it. There are similar problems with the other instruments as well. We’ll see! Meanwhile, I have composed *Enough!*—(*not enough!*) for forty voices and solo percussionist. With respect to the group as a whole, some forty different kinds of articulation are required. As well, the whole group forms eight subgroups of five each. Within these, there are distinct articulations required for each group. As well, each member was asked to make a small, “tinkly” percussion instrument, which they use here and there, and also make gestures with. Each made instrument has a different sound quality. The solo percussion “part” is equally complex. The text comes from a speech Benjamin Franklin made to the constituency prior to the signing of our constitution. In this work it could be said that there is a kind of polyphony between individual groups performing multiple tasks, and the group as a whole which performs other multiple tasks. The sounds are fantastic!



*Do you have any further thoughts on the relation between composing and technology?*

Well, I continue to do works for tape only. For instance, there is an ongoing series which explores “muted” voices generated either by analog or computer techniques, or combinations of both. *Re-run*, *Of Metal* and *Tapestry* are three such. Currently, I prefer working with “knobs” (i.e. analog systems), rather than with “terminals” (i.e. computer systems). Perhaps one day I will be able to buy, or construct, a touch-sensitive device of huge dimension which will drive the computers. While I need to continue my work with both technological and human interactions, I still feel a friction between them; sometimes that is good, sometimes not. Certainly I have, say, no problem with a beautiful video work, i.e. as an observer. But I, at least, have had great difficulty as a composer-performer, or with performers interacting with video when it is a component. There’s something cybernetic about it. Perhaps it’s because of the “frame” of the video system itself. Dunno. But so far there seems to be a void which cannot be breached. Video is a kind of visual radio. *It* doesn’t know; it doesn’t know who is listening, looking, or present. To attempt two-way interaction becomes a kind of narcissism—a pseudo-interaction with a non-other! And much computer music still sounds like a demonstration of the machine—not the other way around. So that’s where I am at the moment.

*Have you been working on any new collaborative works?*

I’ve recently completed a collaboration with video artist Hans Breder. It’s entitled *La coro*. In our next collaboration we propose to exchange roles. And, somewhere in 1985, Henri Chopin and I did a neat work which he named *Few*. In process is *Antiphony XI (You!)* for guitarist, alto-flutist, and dancer (Patricia Hruby—we are co-collaborators) on a text by Lizbeth Rymland. Most of the *Antiphonies* have been quasi-collaborations; but *XI*, *X*, and *VIII* have been collaborations at every level of work. I think there is a link between working with NMCE ensembles, certain of the *Antiphonies*, and with solo performers as group. While the processes and “outputs” vary immensely, the necessity for a certain kind of intimacy, creative interaction, and cognitive awareness in the making is constant. They always take whatever time is necessary in preparation, and therefore the history of these makings is biographical—autobiographical, as well. These attributes are almost never the case when one makes a work alone, so to speak, in the absence of any referent. And there are two more kinds of collaborations in the making—subtle as they might seem. One is the making of a two-volume set on Compositional Linguistics, *Composing Language by Language*, which, after forty years, I’m finally ready to do. It’s a collaboration with the *I* and the *Self*. And,

recently, I have been invited to participate in an International Humanitarian Forum at Baku, Azerbaijan. It is being sponsored by the Representatives of the Baku Arts Center and the Azerbaijan Cinematographer's Union. The general subject is: "To bring closer the new spirituality of the world where the separating boundary between the great and the small, the enlightened and the uneducated, the adapted and the lost, the advanced and the backward, the black and the white, the white and the yellow will cease to exist." And the proposal has a magnificent twist. "At the forum, we intend to voluntarily accept a system of bans (taboos) on the following: mutual recriminations; political or nationalistic propaganda; direct or indirect limitations imposed on the opponent's views; intentional lies in the name of any good purpose." Now, if the gathering can bring this off in the form of a document which addresses the value of *all* humans, it will be an astounding collaboration, indeed!

*Do you have any other plans at present?*

Well, there is a group in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I expect to take residence very soon. Among them are video artists and composers Steina and Woody Vasulka, environmentalist-composer-philosopher David Dunn, and David Muller, computer designer and programmer extraordinaire. The tasks which are being worked on include the creation of a multidimensional theatre based on concepts of actual-virtual space. Technology will include computer-controlled robotic cameras implementing transmissions via complex arrays of video systems and audio—including ambisonic techniques. These technologies will require interaction with a number of live performers, who may be involved with other technologies as well. I hope to be actively involved. There has been some discussion of "stagecraft"—texts, movement, and other theatrical matters. Hopefully, an illusion may be created—for me anyway. It could become a work which addresses the nature of multimedia and that of multidimensionality at the same time.

*All of this work seems like an immense set of tasks to me.*

Yes, the tasks are immense; but then I expect to live a long while yet. So, there's a bit more I can tell you about. I've said a lot about interactions, collaborations, and so on—including the integration of people with people and work. But the elements of the works themselves, e.g. the *Lingua I* series, are not necessarily intraconnected. That is, the works which comprise *Lingua I* are put forth as successive works, within a general context in which they "fit" as a collection. But recently I've been thinking about differences between an individual as such—that is as "unique, distinct, and complete"—and the extent to which these properties give way to another kind of uniqueness when one (also a work) becomes a member of a group. Each state is a difference *in kind*. This is

the way eco-systems work: there exists both the individuation of a species, and a *connectedness* with all species. So, I have begun to work with what I call *eco-clusters*. Each work in a cluster is complete, and can stand on its own, and, at the same time—in one complex fashion or another—holds membership in the group. Resonances abound between the one state and the other. *Cluster I*, in progress, includes this membership:

(1) *Locus -a text*; (2) *Antiphony IX (a dot is no mere thing)* for Orchestra, Children, four-channel tape; (3) *Discovery of the Karen Sect (Asia, Tibet?) and their 'Doctrine of the La', (i.e. their La-soundworld)*; (4) *Research in Spin-Resonance-Particle Theories, and the Holonomic Metaphor*; (5) *Collage III, (composition for radio)*; (6) *LA → "Sound As Spirit" a text*; (7) an in-process series of writings entitled: *Essays on Damage—and Other*.

*Looking back, how would you summarize your work? It seems to me that the progression from your early pieces to Voice, Composition, and Composing Language by Language represents quite striking sequences of transformation and conceptual complexity.*

Well, from a conceptual point of view I think my work began as work in the domain of *relationships*, then became transformed into domains of *interactions*, then into domains of *interconnectedness*, and recently transformed into *ecological domains* (ecological clusters). From an aesthetic-philosophical point of view, my growth has consisted of a motion from *relativistic* modes of thinking to *phenomenal* ones. I suspect I shall continue to reside in the latter domain.