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→ *The Beauty of Inrelevant Music*

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MURMUR

EXTRACTION

α NON-SGAT **0 0** GICAL SET *f* PRELIMINARY REMARKS *f* NMCE IV

**THE MUSIC IN SAMUEL
BECKETT'S :**

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TWO

It is difficult to maintain a system of irrelevance without appearing to be innocent, naive, bitter, cynical, defensive, or just plain stupid. However, I make no plea for the suffering composer, the undiscovered performer, or the musty musicologist. Unless we were born mindless, we are aware of what we do.

The creative act consists not only in the stipulation and formation of concrete structures, BUT in responsible maintenance of them. Furthermore, such structures demand of us the necessity to create and maintain environmental systems within which they can function properly.

The beauty of irrelevant music is that so little appears to be at stake from what it asserts which is to say that it can easily be dismissed which is to say that there are no watchdogs which is to say that thus, given this condition, one who wishes to create such music may encourage himself to do so freely and endlessly which is to say that therefore,

the assertion of every irrelevant music is that it has no larger function until a proper environmental system can be created in which it is to say that 'it can live', thus, Pirandello's "A Poet In Search Of A Theater" easily converts into a 'Music In Search Of A System'.

It's rather like asking: 'Who shall develop your home, A developer, or you?'

THREE

When asking students the question:
'Why do you want to compose?'

the best answer given to me thus far has been:

"I HAVE NO CHOICE!"

FOUR

GIVEN INVOLVED PEOPLE:

An important distinction between a musico-cultural system which specifies what a GIVEN musical structure might be,

and

A GIVEN musical system which specifies what a musico-cultural structure might be, may be found in the answer to the following question:

Would you do what you say you MUST anyway?

say, without profit, if necessary?
say, without performance, if necessary?
say, at the risk of socio-obscurety, if necessary?
say, without gratification of any kind beyond the realization of your desire to make concrete statements, if necessary?

If the answer to the question of each of these questions is YES, then:

you prefer answers to your own-GIVEN questions rather than questions to already-GIVEN answers.

FIVE

As a composer, the statement:

"a given system is the only tenable one", constitutes the only challenge necessary to disprove that statement.

THUS: the statement:

"it is *impossible* to have a theatrical situation today without nudity",

DEMANDS the statement: "it is *possible* to have a theatrical situation today without new-ditties".

To pursue the latter, which is prompted by the former, is to dispute the absolute essentiality of the former.

THEREFORE: music may be seen as an argument. One problem the observer faces is that he frequently doesn't know the argument, ---that is, the premise under which and for which a given work emerges. Thus faced with uncertainty, the observer frequently:

- [a] accepts that which he might have otherwise rejected;
- [b] rejects that which he might have otherwise accepted;
- [c] accepts nothing;
- [d] accepts everything.

SIX

The language of *relevant* music is interesting.

Here is a brief collection of terms extracted from an address to the National Music Council entitled: RECORDING CLASSICAL MUSIC: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS, 1970, by Norman Rascusin. Mr. Rascusin was then president of RCA records. I quote the terms:

"meaningful material
buyers
cost factors
high turn-over items
repertoire
market
current relevance
useful purpose
cater
ticket turnstiles
the product
supply and demand
non-elastic market
distribution
outlet
high traffic locations

titles
break-even points
lower rates
fierce competition
equalized cost basis
unit sales
loss
packaging
entertainment
growth
assortment
best value
exposure
business
industry
box office"

It is clear enough that unless one knew the report was addressing itself to so-called Classical Music, the language could just as easily have related to Educational TV, or prostitution. Thus, the primary determinant for the existence of this system is what will sell, and what will sell is already determined by the language and desires of that system. To express it more formally, one could say:

THE SYSTEM DETERMINES THE NATURE OF ITS COMPONENTS

In this system, all serious, subscribing musicians are guilty of: Prostitution.
In this system, all serious, subscribing musicians are guilty of: mutilating each other over the few scraps which are available.
In this system, all serious, subscribing musicians are guilty of: maintaining that system which they generally say they despise.

On the other hand, those who do not generally subscribe to that system are currently labeled elite, insular, unappetizing, contributors-to-turning-audiences-off, obscure, or simply: *irrelevant*. On the other hand, that is, the first hand, those who participate do not see that they are owned. In that owning-system, one speaks of performers, say, as good or bad property, and created works as good or bad material. If one is good property and finds good material one can become a package. If one becomes a package one can be managed. Once one becomes managed one can be sold.

Commercial companies appear to be upset because they cannot sell HEAVY music, thereby expressing their deep concern and perpetual interest. However, the BEAUTY of irrelevant music lies in the fact that its survival does not depend on their concern, or their interest. Equally significant is the fact that this unsalable music to which they persistently refer is not, and was not ever made to sell. Its structural nature resists selling, and thus it puts forth its own alternative. Expressed formally, one could say:

THE COMPONENTS DETERMINE THE NATURE OF ITS SYSTEM

So-called relevant music bases its premises on the co-joined systems of supply and demand, under which the supply influences the demand, and the demand influences the supply. The beauty of irrelevant music is that the music ITSELF supplies its own demands, and demands its own supply.

---only that.

SEVEN

*experience music as though you were:
experiencing the organic structure of
a snowflake; or
the performing technique of NAMATH or
the sound of your own thoughts.*

EIGHT

[TWO] was recorded and issued at TWICE the proper speed. ONE SUPON A TIME:

NMCE-ONE gave a performance of TWENTIETH Century Choral Music at Expo' SIXTY-SEVEN. It took TWO years to prepare the program. We flew SIX-THOUSAND miles. It cost FOUR-THOUSAND-FIVE-HUNDRED dollars. No ONE came. ONE SUPON A TIME:

The Chicago Symphony performed Elegy. It was given ONE TEN minute rehearsal. Elegy is TWELVE minutes long. ONE SUPON A TIME:

NMCE-THREE performed some of my linguistic compositions in NYC. Because of the musico/theatrico nature of the works, a drama critic came from ONE paper, and a music critic came from another ONE. The drama critic didn't re view because he thought the program too musical to appear in his column. The music critic didn't review be cause he thought the program too theatrical to appear in his column. ONE SUPON A TIME:

I made an electronic composition for an educational TV program entitled: The New Experimental Music. The composition was brutally censored in order to accomodate a FIVE minute plug for the next New Experimental Music program. ONE SUPON A TIME:

When we were on tour and made it to SUNY-Albany, during ONE March, we discovered that no publicity was allowed until the very day of a given concert. However, words-of-mouth got around. The performance went very well. There was an audience of THIRTY people. THIRTY is a nice number. ONE SUPON A TIME:

NINE

IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT
IRRELEVANT MUSICIANS MAY
BE ONE OF A LIMITED NUMBER
OF GROUPS TODAY WHICH TRULY
MAINTAIN SYSTEMS OF FREE THOUGHT;

---who else would have the audacity to construct and maintain
structures which can be demonstrated to not have any provable
value?

TEN

The only reason for studying music is because
it must be studied;
studied, in order to be perceived;
perceived,
in order to be studied.¹

It is therefore an erroneous assumption that
since music seems to 'fill' us, i.e.
to 'invade' our mind/body, all
we need do is to sit, and 'let it happen'.

However,
it is possible to draw a distinction between
recognition and perception. Thus, recognition-
facility could easily distinguish music from
eating celery, while
perception-facility could not easily do so.

1

If these statements are not true, then that which is 'observed' may indeed be relevant to that which can be observed. If these statements are true, then that which is observed may indeed be irrelevant to that which can be 'observed'.

ELEVEN

ANY ATTEMPT
TO BE AU COURANT
COMPOSITIONALLY
I.E.,
TO WRITE FOR AN AUDIENCE
IS TO SAY
THEREFORE
'AUDIENCE, WRITE MY MUSIC!'

[with a pleading gesture]

---SIR?

TWELVE

A recent memo from a local museum states, and I quote: "Are YOU a member of the 20th century? YES, when you belong to the (da da dee da) museum of (da da dee da) art. You will be aware of the best creative and innovative work by today's artists.

Some of the works you see you will thoroughly enjoy. Some you may even dislike. Some may strike you as strange. And some may open your eyes to a new way of seeing. Just as all art has MIRRORED ITS PARTICULAR TIME, contemporary art reflects the images and ideas of our world to us as no other form of expression can."

---if music (say) is so reflective of its time, i.e. presumably out of our age, then why is it that serious new music (more properly, experimental music), which explores such phenomena as electronics, lasers, computers, kinetics, perception, notation, biological feed-back, linguistics, environments, meditation, timbre, acoustical resources, serious communication, artificial intelligence, sound-touch, awareness, and silence, is so frequently *unrecognized* as such by its viewers?

---if music (say) presumably reflects (MIRRORS) what we otherwise see, then why is it so difficult to see what music mirrors?
WELL,

---either experimental music is out of its time, and viewers are not, or viewers are out of their time, and experimental music is not.

---HOWEVER, until we can precisely specify which of the above situations is true, it is pointless to discuss the notion of ART MIRRORS ITS PARTICULAR TIME.

THIRTEEN

THERE IS A WIDE-SPREAD ATTEMPT TO BREAK DOWN ALL MUSIC BOUNDARIES IN THE NAME OF EQUALITY/ THAT IS TO MAKE SERIOUS MUSIC POPULAR AND POPULAR MUSIC SERIOUS BY CLAIMING THEY ARE THE SAME THING/ TO SAY THAT EQUALITY IS A VALUE SHOULD NOT SIGNIFY THAT DISTINCTIONS ARE NOT A VALUE/ THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT POINT TO ARTICULATE IS THAT NO PEJORATIVE STATEMENTS OBTAIN WITH RESPECT TO DISTINCTIONS AND NO LOSS OF IDENTITY OBTAINS WITH RESPECT TO EQUALITIES/ TO NOT MAINTAIN THESE DISTINCTIONS IS TO MAKE REALITIES OUT OF ANALOGIES/ THUS THE FUNCTION OF AN ELECTRONIC CIRCUIT CAPACITOR IS ANALOGOUS TO MY HUMAN CIRCUIT-AS-CAPACITOR IN OUR RESPECTIVE ABILITIES TO STORE ENERGY AND TO DISSIPATE IT GRADUALLY/ BUT WE BOTH HAVE AGREED THAT IT CANNOT DELIVER MY LECTURE AND I CANNOT BE SOLDERED INTO ITS CIRCUIT.

FOURTEEN

The beauty of irrelevant music is that no authority exists except for the subject (i.e., the music) itself. OF COURSE, there may be temporary authorities: a conductor here, a musicologist there, a composer here, a performer there, a viewer here, a critic there. BUT, ultimately, only the music about which we all necessarily speak, remains. It is that, not even what we say about it which should entice, seduce, capture, and transport us into structures for which there are no like-models in the world.

However, although music stands alone, I don't mean that it is defenseless, --- that it can be interpreted freely. It is necessary to stipulate that each music puts forth its own language. It is necessary to stipulate that each music desires its own context. It is necessary to stipulate that each music prepares its own ground from which all external articulation becomes possible.

meta-language, such as viewing music in its broader historic context, or such as an informal discussion after concerts, seems necessary; not so, however, in order to replace a music, but in order to support it. A It is unfortunate when one's attempts to articulate a music only serve to replace it.

FIFTEEN There are certain "fringe benefits"
 [if I can borrow a term from another
 system] to composing irrelevant music.
 In my case, it allows me to:

seriously consider runcophobia [which
 actually doesn't frighten me anymore]
 OR to:

wonder why it is that butterflies can't trill;
 OR to:

determine if bees are incestuous;
 OR to:

speculate about when it was that man first learn-
 ed to laugh [OR when he stopped]

While the world-at-large can move century after century, considering whether to embrace culture, or to dismiss it as another of man's fantasies, (and in this more specific case, music), or even if, in this ambivalence, the answer is still: "yes, let there be music", (which generally translates into: music-as-luxury, music-as-entertainment, and music-as-utility), SOME composers, performers, theorists, aestheticians, historians, or just plain kooks, have been seriously creating their own systems of: irrelevance. They are, and mostly always have been, part of a substantial underground network. Thus, by their own design, they could easily be classified as creative revolutionaries and experimenters.

If the world-at-large never awakens to the incredible structures which some have given it, but could never *demand* that it accept, the beauty will never-the-less, remain.

If the world-at-large will one-day awaken, it will need something to awaken to.

In either case: temporarily useless, irrelevant music continues to be generated. Its greatest reason for being is its irrelevance. Insofar as its mere existence is concerned, it serves to indict the world-at-large by pointing out what still needs to be done.

This music can wait a long time for us to make up our minds as it appears, and disappears in our cognition. Now we hear/see it. Now we don't. Now it hears/sees us. Now it doesn't.

---a very long time waiting, because it wants to become: ours.

In a very [oh]pinioned, highly verb[oh]se s[oh]ciety, which claims to be an authority on all things, it is a compliment to my music when one cannot speak; ---when, to a typical, ---usually [oh]ver cocktails question,--- such as: "and what do you do, sir?", I simply reply: "comp[oh]se", the reaction is either:

"OH?", or

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh", or

"oh", or

"[]!", ---

in which case, a few profound questions usually follow, such as:

"whatever happened to th[oh]se simple mel[oh]dies?", or

"why d[oh]n't comp[oh]sers write something I can understand?", or

"you're not really one of th[oh]se, are you?",

---to which:

n[oh] answer is delicious, and silence announces a supreme m[oh]-ment of mutual irrelevance, and where, clearly, n[oh] performance is better than a medi[oh]cre one, and I try, as my wife suggests: ---to get down to the olive, which afterall, is where it's at.

The beauty of irrelevant music consists of its existence and its search for a context. the beauty of an interpreter (performer) rests in a desire to realize a context for this discovered music which wants one.

NEVER

is not a context.

As soon as you or I supply either mentally or verbally, something like:

NEVER (what)?, ---the
what becomes an expressed desire to put
never in a context.

AND: what if these slides had something to do with my lecture?

AND: what if my lecture had something to do with these slides?

AND: what if a given composition was in your life?

AND: what if your life was in a given composition?

AND: what if the object to which you addressed yourself would be a subject which addresses you?

AND: what if we converted every either/or statement to an: and statement?

AND: what if irrelevant music remains irrelevant?

AND: what if irrelevant music became relevant?

AND: what if relevant music became irrelevant?

AND: what if relevant music remains relevant?

AND: what if it became irrelevant to even consider whether music is irrelevant or relevant?

