



Page from a facsimile of Anna Magdalena Bach's copy of Johann Sebastian Bach's
Suites for Unaccompanied Cello

habit of propounding ideas which were the strict reverse of those he preferred. (One will remember his diatribe against Paul Valéry in the ephemeral journal of the surrealist Jacques Reboul.) The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say; but ambiguity is a richness.) It is a revelation to compare the *Don Quixote* of Menard with that of Cervantes. The latter, for instance, wrote (*Don Quixote*, Part One, Chapter Nine):

. . . *la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir.*

[. . . truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future.]

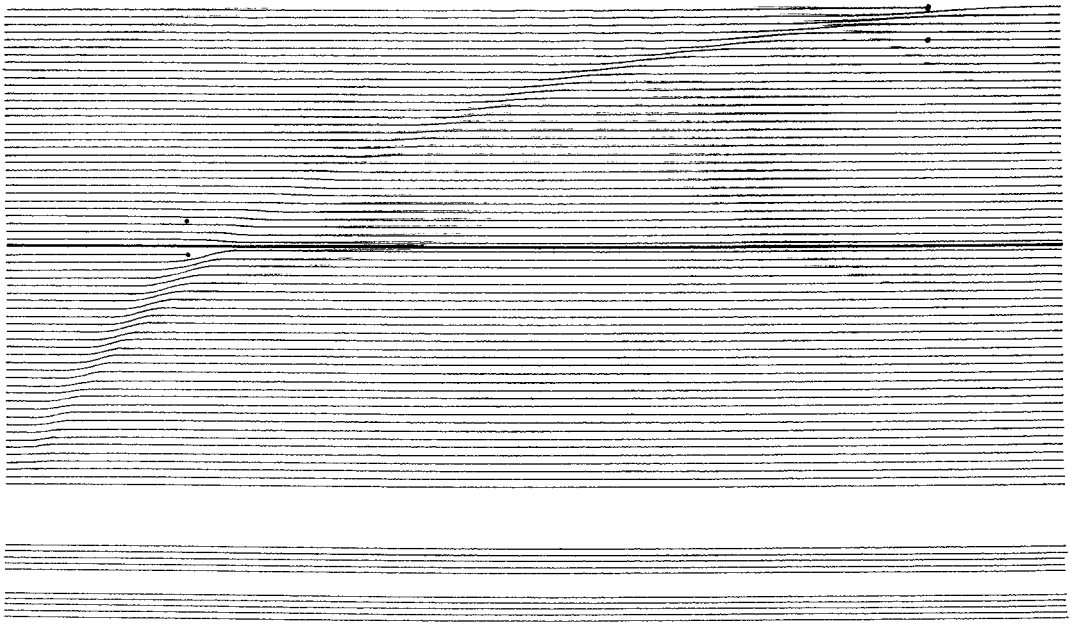
Written in the seventeenth century, written by the 'ingenious layman' Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical eulogy of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

. . . *la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir.*

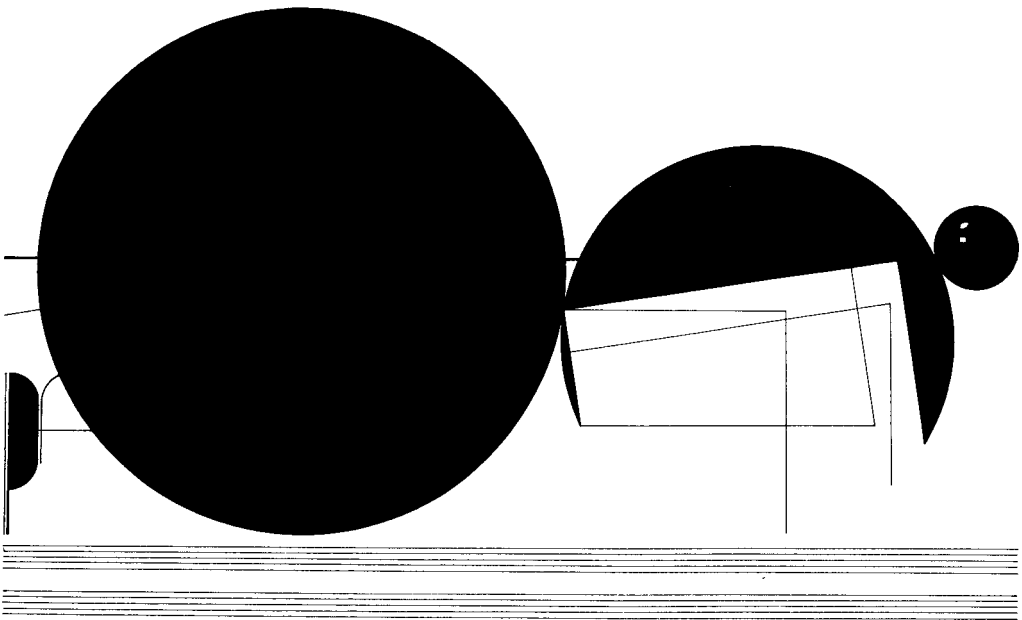
[. . . truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future.]

History, *mother of truth*; the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an investigation of reality, but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what took place; it is what we think took place. The final clauses – *example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future* – are shamelessly pragmatic.

Equally vivid is the contrast in styles. The archaic style of Menard – in the last analysis, a foreigner – suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his precursor, who handles easily the ordinary Spanish of his time.



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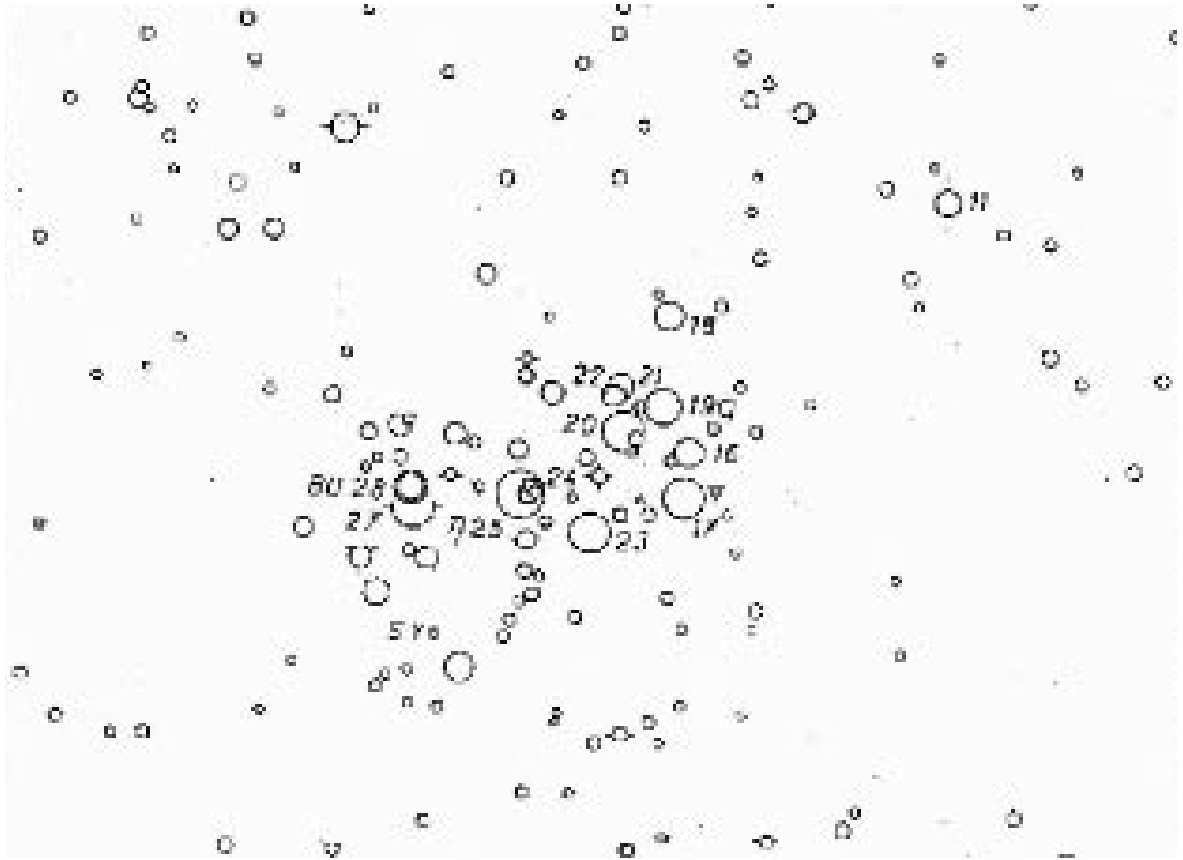
TRIO I - All players should read from this score. One player should assign the three matrixes arbitrarily among the trio. Top-left numbers are read in any combination of complete horizontal lines; central numbers are read in any combination of complete diagonal lines; bottom-right numbers are read in any combination of complete vertical lines. Each number represents a duration for a single pitch-timbre, measured in counts of approximately one second. The performer should go from one of these notes to the next as quickly as practicable, but every note should sound for the full count; decision-making and instrumental preparation are not part of the note's duration. Every note must differ from the preceding one, either in pitch or timbre, or both: odd-number durations must differ from the preceding one in pitch, at least; even-number durations must differ from the preceding one in timbre, at least. Zero durations are rests of any length. Every note is played as loudly as is intrinsically possible, with a minimum difference between the attack and the sustained sound. Only instruments that are able to produce an undiminishing, sustained sound should be used.

$V = 120$ $D = 120$ $h = 30$ $v = 30$ $l = 21$

The grid consists of 12 rows and 12 columns of numbers. The numbers are arranged in a way that they can be read along three sets of lines: horizontal, vertical, and diagonal. The numbers are as follows:

9	2	4	7	0	2	0	8	5	9	0	2	5	1	0
0	1	2	3	5	8	3	1	4	5	6	8	7	8	9
6	9	8	9	5	9	2	9	8	2	7	1	2	5	7
5	6	4	7	8	5	9	4	1	4	9	7	6	0	9
8	7	4	9	8	7	4	0	3	8	2	7	4	3	0
6	1	8	9	2	3	4	6	9	4	2	7	6	5	0
1	2	0	3	7	5	2	1	3	1	7	7	6	9	3
8	3	0	1	8	6	4	4	5	6	8	1	1	2	6
6	5	2	1	5	6	5	4	4	3	4	5	2	7	6
1	7	8	9	0	1	4	9	7	4	0	3	1	9	2
4	6	5	4	7	0	5	1	0	5	6	0	8	5	1
3	2	0	3	4	5	7	0	8	5	3	4	6	2	5
3	7	7	0	7	9	8	3	6	9	1	3	4	0	9
6	1	3	6	1	9	7	5	7	8	9	1	4	9	0
2	5	3	8	8	2	1	5	8	6	4	9	4	9	2
4	0	1	2	4	7	3	2	0	3	4	8	5	7	1
3	8	7	1	9	7	2	3	1	6	7	5	8	6	0
5	5	3	6	7	8	0	3	8	6	5	6	9	8	4
4	4	7	2	1	5	3	6	0	5	7	6	2	6	3

Notation study towards a performance of Robert Ashley's *Trios WHITE ON WHITE* (1963) by Alex Waterman (2006). The lines map three sets of numbers (horizontal, vertical, diagonal), which are intended to be printed on top of each other in white ink



Star map of *Atlas Ecliptical*

RES FACTA

by Alex Waterman

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deed, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

(Pierre Menard)



Since sound is a thing of sense it passes along into past time and it is impressed upon the memory. For unless sounds are held in the memory by man they perish because they cannot be written down.

(Isadore of Seville c. 560–636)

Prior to the notion of the 'res facta' or 'made thing' there existed only memory. If the 'perceived' did not become impressed upon the memory of the subject through the senses, then the thing perceived would cease to exist. The embodiment of music through its performance involved a process of memory storage: the material gets suspended in animation, held on its travels into the past (on its way to oblivion) its transience is lent the quality of permanence through becoming memorized and internalized.

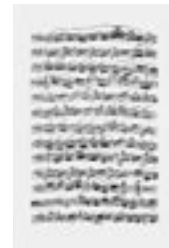
The hand was the accepted transmitter of musical information; a place of temporary storage of material for the conductor, through which all melodies and motives were conveyed to the chorus and ensemble. The transmission of music through hand gestures was perfected by the Medieval music theorist Guido of Arezzo (c. 1025), whose 'Guidonian Hand' was a mnemonic device initially used to assist singers in learning to sight sing, and later transformed into written notation. Through these developments, the internal (abstract memory) was replaced by the external (representational symbols) and one key implication of this was limitation: the composer

and his sounds were suddenly bound to the surface of the paper. The Guidonian Hand is visually referred to in notational practices as an 'arche-typographical' sign, the forerunner of the five lines that make up the standard musical staff used today.

So music became a 'made thing' and a means to control memory by linking a network of common liturgical practice. Through this process, the printing of music radically altered how the ritual of institutional power could be transmitted to the masses.

Not just self- but social-realization.

(John Cage)



The *Suites for Unaccompanied Cello* by Johann Sebastian Bach are an example of a 'res facta' which survives only in various translated and altered forms. There exists no definitive master, only several copies that were either transcribed from the original 'autograph' manuscript or a 'fair copy' (also by his hand). All of the subsequent copies are known to have their own idiosyncracies, mistakes or interpretive bent.

The copy by his wife, Anna Magdalena Bach, copied sometime between 1727 and 1731 is the closest to her husband's 'autograph'; her noteheads and the flow of her musical script are particularly similar to those of her husband. The single greatest difference is her copying of his phrasing and slurs (the small lines above the notes that give the indication for articulations and movement of the bow as well as an idea of where one can 'breathe' within the phrase): they are so different from Johann Sebastian's style that critics suggest that they were either written out carelessly, or are symptomatic of her 'lack of education'.

The English word 'copy' is derived from a Middle English conception of the act of transcribing; 'transcribe' means literally to 'write across'. And yet 'copy' sounds most like—and

is indeed also linked to—the Latin word ‘copia’, which means ‘plenty’ or ‘abundance’. The word is, then, loaded with implications of both transcription and quantity.

Anna Magdalena was a singer at the church as well as an amateur instrumentalist. These copies were not just a mechanical graphic reproduction (like a photocopy) but informed by her life in music. Her copies are full of abundance and diversion: her phrasings travel across the page in a manner that suggests her reading of the original engendered movement and that she was intimate with the both the original page and the hand that originally wrote it. As she wrote in the *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*:

Sebastian felt in his own soul all that anguish and that beauty before he wrote a note of that music.

Furthermore, being a singer, it is a fair assumption that the pieces were internally sung in Anna Magdalena’s head. The phrases she wrote were, then, an act of interpretation; a transcription of her ‘sung reading.’ The other existing copies of the *Suites* are similarly full of deviant phrasing and harmonies, and some divergences from the ‘missing original’ are much greater than Anna Magdalena’s ‘errata’.

Was a copy made with the idea that it would be different? Was there an unwritten social code that justified the copyist’s hand making changes? Are the changes left as a document of the copier’s unique eye, a choreographic notation of a reading? If so, these ideas would affirm the notion that music could not be copied until it had ‘passed into the memory, saved from peril’ and finally recorded on the page; the act of copying that involves a ‘writing across’, an entering into, an internalization of the sound of the music inside the memory. All of which describes a double act of mimetic production: the first as the sounds enter the memory and are impressed upon it, followed by the act of representing those memories by means of notating them.

A similar issue resurfaces, somewhat ironically, in the posthumous production of the aforementioned *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. When originally published, the book appeared without the author’s name, immediately suggesting that it was an autobiographical text. Later it was revealed to be the work of the writer Esther Meynell, who also wrote a biography of William Morris. The historical facts in the book are, however, largely verifiable

and unexaggerated, avoiding the lineage of fake historical autobiographies such as Clifford Irving’s infamous account of Howard Hawks (further documented and happily confused by Orson Welles in *F for Fake*). Instead, Meynell lovingly crafts a text which imagines the inner thoughts of its main character through acquired historical information. Just as this intimate biographer had no direct connection with her subject, a later film with the same title by Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huille has no direct connection with the book. So Anna Magdalena’s shadowy life has become posthumously ghost-written onto the page, and projected onto the screen, both liable to the same errors in ‘writing over’ as her own copies of her husband’s work.

Art is criminal action
(Cage)



This process of internalizing a work in order to reproduce it calls to mind Jorge Luis Borges’ classic fable ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote’. In this story the exact copy of a work of art is created perfectly without the protagonist ever having seen the original. This is achieved through ‘living through the writer’s life.’ Copying not the work, but the life! This is a case of *over-abundance*: the life of the author is devoted to adopting the life of another in order to speak his words, see through his eyes and write his prose.

After a biographical intro and short list of other works, the author tells us of Pierre Menard’s greatest achievement, that of ‘writing the *Quixote* of Cervantes’. In order to take on this task, Menard must learn 16th century Catalan, fight with the Moors and follow other biographical ‘facts’ of Cervantes’s life; in so doing he will be able to write the *Quixote* word for word, exactly as Cervantes himself. However, as the author points out, this is *not* merely a copy of the *Quixote*, but rather a truer version by default that Menard did not read the original. His version is derived from

living aspects of Cervantes' biography in such a manner that the production (but not reproduction) of the original becomes possible. This is then followed by comparisons of various passages and a literary critique. The textual analysis runs:

It is a revelation to compare the Don Quixote of Pierre Menard with that of Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes, for example, wrote the following (Part I, Chapter IX):

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deed, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

This catalog of attributes, written in the seventeenth century, and written by the 'ingenious layman' Miguel de Cervantes, is mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard on the other hand writes:

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deed, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

Like Anna Magdalena and Esther Meynell, Pierre Menard and Cervantes cannot be separated by history: the historic is exemplar and adviser to the present. The author/biographer/Borges continues:

The Cervantes text and the Menard text are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say—but ambiguity is richness.)

Menard has (perhaps unwittingly) enriched the slow and rudimentary art of reading by means of a new technique—the technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution.²

—'proof' that the text becomes richer once it has been lived through another body, written in another hand, spoken through other lips, at another moment in time. In the example of Menard, the copied, reproduced version is elevated to a higher plane even than the master. The new work—with its visible or invisible annotations, its notations of reading—becomes more complete, more abundant than the original; a gain of aura rather than a loss.

Sylvère Lotringer, cultural theorist and editor of *Semiotext(e)* publications, discusses the dilemma of language and interpretation, asking whether there is a way to deal with copied language that does not result in 'difference':

Language in itself is relational; it equalizes everything. A 'science' of literature codifies these relations in terms of a particular system, itself part of a more general mechanism. This in turn functions as a repertory of possible forms. The original text returns as a measurable 'difference'. Was it worth the trouble?

If interpretation is appropriation and appropriation the inevitable outcome of the will to power, are all interpretations on the same level? How is one to choose among them? What happens if I reject them all?

But is it impossible not to interpret?³

As John Cage would say, the thing we observe before assigning it objecthood is already undergoing continual change even without our observation and naming of it. Interpretation is a form of appropriation that can be avoided when viewing reality not as a collection of parts, but an interpenetrating, vital and changing condition. A 'res facta' need not represent reality, but may act like it. As he says:

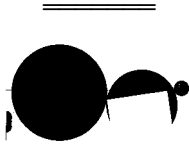
I can accept the relation among a diversity of elements, as when we gaze at the stars and discover a group of stars which we baptize 'Ursa Major.' Then, I create an object. I have nothing more to do with the thing itself, designed as it is of elements and separate parts. I have before me, at my disposal, a fixed object that I could vary or play with to the end. In this, I obey that which Schonberg expressed: variation is one form, one extreme case of repetition. For that, I must return to reality, to the thing itself, to this constellation which is not really altogether a constellation. It is not yet an object! The constellation becomes an object by virtue of the relationship I place on the parts. But I can refrain from positing this relationship; I can consider the stars as separate but proximate, almost gathered into a unique constellation.⁴

In his introduction to *Themes & Variations* (1982), a book of mesostic poems, Cage sketches out poetic aphorisms that include phrases such as 'purposeful purposelessness', 'nonintention', 'process instead of object', and so on. All of these states have no goal; they are essentially non-teleological. Cage's earlier works in this area, such as *Music of Changes* (1951), were 'indeterminate in regards to their composition'. As his work in the area of chance and process-based work progressed, he realized a more radical approach would be to make the works 'indeterminate in regards to their performance'. This notion, which

later became one aspect of the concept of the 'open work' is fully compatible with the anarchist ideology Cage was developing through his studies of Henry David Thoreau and Eastern philosophy.

Generally, graphic notations present work as an incomplete object. The 'original text returns as a measurable difference': the author gives over co-authorship to the performer, the work is 'made' and then returns to its original state. Indeterminacy as a practice does not allow for a final point of reference or a definitive interpretation, but rather demands constant reconstruction, new approaches to process and interpenetration with the text. In this manner, Cage states, 'nothing is achieved'.

Giving up ownership, substituting use.
(Cage)



Treatise by Cornelius Cardew, completed in 1967, is one of the most stunning examples of graphic music notation. This score of nearly 200 page consists purely of graphic signs, including references to standard musical notation playfully interspersed with more scientific-looking symbols, and what appear to be geometric shapes from a child's puzzle, all knocking around on the page, happy in their objecthood: they do not appear to be asking to be interpreted.

The score is also remarkable in that it bears no apparent claim to be a piece of music. There are no suggestions of groupings of musicians, or any other regular explanations. The only indications are those 'arche-typographical' references to the hands, the five lines that comprise the staff, plus some other idiomatic symbolic references to music. Cardew did, however, publish a separate volume called the *Treatise Handbook* which contains notes and ideas on possible interpretations.

Entering into the work is daunting, and without the *Treatise Handbook* or the guidance of an experienced player versed in the work's performance history, there is little to facilitate a reading of the piece. All elements of musical composition—duration, pitch, intensity, quality, structure, and so on—are only suggested through an accrued logic of associated visual cues. This

logic arises out of one's own response system and memory of these responses. When one starts the process of working on the piece and gathering knowledge about its interpretation, the work opens up and becomes not only 'readable', but also full of narratives that run on multiple levels throughout. The connection of the work's visual iconography to a prolific history of aurally-transmitted performance traditions surrounding it ultimately make the engagement with *Treatise* an incredibly rich and varied experience. An attempt to play the visual turns into a dialogue about notations and what they can and cannot say or offer the reader. It is precisely because of *Treatise's* 'deficiencies' or lack of traditional communicative norms that the notation offers the reader the freedom to compile their own interpretation and, in turn, gather together a social body that can act collectively to distribute meaning and sense.

In short, the piece carries a wonderful optimism. No measure is offered to the audience in order to critique their reception of the work, but the experience of listening is infused with a sense of intensified reading. The score itself has often been projected or shown to the audience in order to further democratize the experience and break down the separation between performer and audience. Keith Rowe, an original member of the improvisation group AMM together with Cardew and others has, however, rejected this way of presenting the work as it purportedly takes away from the act of listening. Apparently, a 'too active' visual cortex means that over eighty percent of brain function is going into watching and interpreting visual information, leaving very little left over for the experience of listening.

This issue of separation elitism became a major factor in Cardew's later rejection of his own ideas. His pointed self-renouncement in 1974⁴ is the kind of artistic *hari-kiri* rarely encountered, renouncing his work on *Treatise* as well as with The Scratch Orchestra, a group he formed in the early 1970s comprising both professional and amateur musicians. The group would write and perform their own works, improvise, research new methodologies, and each member (starting from the youngest up) would each curate a concert. It was a socially progressive group fully democratizing various elements of music production. Cardew's rejection of this work reads:

Let's start with the idea very widespread in the avant-garde and implicit in the score of *Treatise* that anything can be transformed into anything else. Now everybody knows (not only Marxists and farmers) that a stone, no matter how much heat you apply to it, will never hatch into a chicken. And that even an egg won't hatch into a chicken without the right external conditions. And yet in Cage's work *Atlas Eclipticalis* patterns of stars in a star atlas are transformed into a jumble of electronic squeals and groans. This transformation is carried out through a system of notation (a logic) that has no connection with astronomy and only a very sketchy connection with music.

It is, if possible, even more incorrect to say that musical notation is a world of its own, developing according to its own internal laws. And yet this seems to be the premise on which *Treatise* is composed.

The passage quoted above runs in total contradiction to a decade of work in which he created a visual music that critiqued and replaced the traditional model of 'composer' and 'performer' as separate and autonomous entities. He subsequently moved into far left politics, embracing Maoism, popular folk music, and forming the rock band People's Liberation Music.

Cardew's further comments elucidate his views on why he later saw visual music as decadent and elitist:

Behind that obstacle the musicians improvise, but instead of improvising on the basis of objective reality and communicating something of this to the audience, they preoccupy themselves with that contradictory artifact: the score of *Treatise*. So not only is *Treatise* an embodiment of (not only irrelevant but also) incorrect ideas, it also effectively prevents the establishment of communication between the musicians and the audience.

Here, interpretation's 'will to power' and its 'return of a measurably different text' that Lotringer mentioned is considered an ineffectual mode of communication. An egg is an egg. A chicken is a chicken. The 'heat' of the engagement with the material cannot transform an implied conditioning that Cardew saw as the bane of the Western avant-garde. From this point of view, Pierre Menard is merely a fake and Anna Magdalena is just plain sloppy with her phrasing.

When one stops attempting to read even the most obfuscated and difficult surfaces, we end up with maxims and kitsch. Cardew's rejection of his earlier work and embracing of Maoism was well-

meant but propagandistic. It too does little to reverse Henry David Thoreau's claim that 'The mass of men serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies.' The redemption of the mass can, however, be sought by giving voice to the individual. Dismantling elitism is a means to an end: one heart communicating to another receiving.

Music is permanent, only listening is intermittent.

(Henry David Thoreau)



In all the examples mentioned above, the act of notation is central to the discussion of how a work is transmitted, then read by a social body. New models of artistic production arose alongside (or in some cases directly out of) these attempts at creating alternative forms of notation. Those propositions in which the act of reading became as creative as that of composition—so the work was actually co-composed by the interpreters—anticipated the consolidation of composer and performer into a single body.

The term 'consolidation' is drawn from the writings of Robert Ashley, who not only coined the phrase, but whose work embodied the idea of a collective social process. Ashley saw that the 'act of reading and interpretation' was being replaced by simple 'sight-reading'. His 'scores' are projected off the page and into a dynamic group action whereby the music is collectively composed by his band. His work of the 1960s demonstrate the basic model of his present day network model of collective composition. In *Trios WHITE ON WHITE* (1963), Ashley effectively creates a work that cannot be 'sight-read'. The surface of the score is typographically rendered in three different white inks on an off-white page. The trio must then perform each of their parts from the same page, forging their own pathways through a work written in a process that is apparently disappearing. The page becomes a screen of white noise: television-like.

Let's return momentarily to Cardew's renouncement of visual notational systems, and in particular his comment about Cage:

... in Cage's work *Atlas Eclipticalis* patterns of stars in a star atlas are transformed into a jumble of electronic squeals and groans. This transformation is carried out through a system of notation (a logic) that has no connection with astronomy and only a very sketchy connection with music.

Cardew is concerned here with the nature of a work's representation of reality. A star chart does not describe music, but neither does music represent a constellation, and in fact Cage and Cardew can agree perfectly on this point, because the argument is at cross purposes: Cage is merely 'using' the star chart to generate material, not to transform one into the other or create a 'connection'. At no point does Cardew's Maoist view of materialism intersect with Cage's anarchist ideology. Cardew would have a star map describe a constellation and a score describe a music. Cage would reply that an object's function does not necessarily *describe* its use at all. For Cardew, the object's value is tied up with its production and value. For Cage, use describes process and process replaces the object. The fault lines between their individual logics describe the fundamental differences between a utopian socialist model and an individualist anarchistic vision. The works of both composers challenge how readers approach, interpret, and reassign value to the work, both project a new form of the labor process to replace former models, and their ideological differences do not discount their shared concepts of new forms of readership and action.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Cage composed graphic scores, generated methods of deriving sounds from chance processes, and created a music whose concept of incompleteness was explicitly dependent first on the reader/interpreter to complete, then the audience to perceive. There is no singular performance, no ultimate rendition, as there exists no point of comparison. *The work returns to its original state of incompleteness*, and Lotringer's question—"Was it worth the trouble?"—becomes rhetorical.

Indeterminacy will generate relationships between any group of things. The 'open work', as Umberto Eco calls it, is dependent upon the integration and interpenetration of meanings through the process of construction and

interpretation. The work is incomplete until read.

How can stars become sounds? Because they are not transformed one into the other, but are always in the process of transforming! They do not become fixed signs or objects. At best they describe an imaginary state of being. As Brian Rotman states:

If mathematical signs are to be likened to maps, then they are maps of a purely imaginary territory.

What a graphic notation describes are *relationships between things*. The notation of music can describe time and mobility, form and function, a prescribed expressivity or an open-ended process. What notation engages is a 'reading' that needs witnessing. The audience gathers to witness this reading. Until it is performed, a notation is only a map of a purely imaginary territory, outside of time.

The copy and its 'abundance' are like the constellation of stars. The copy contains documentation of change, the work is returned different. 'The electronic squeaks and groans describe nothing in particular in relation to stars'. The constellation remains unbound until mapped, and even then does not become fixed. Stars will twinkle from a distance that describes millions of years of travel in order to shimmer in our eyes. Moving always moving, changing, like the sound that will perish unless we have held it in our memories. We have the possibility to hold in our senses an abundant flow of change traveling through space and time.

Earth has no escape from heaven
(Eckhardt)

All the examples discussed here are attempts to gather a social body and read together. The text, the page, the surface, mirrors life and changes itself. It will not remain the same, but neither will it achieve anything else. We, however, have been changed and will continue to change together.



Keep thy shop, & thy shop will keep thee.

Poor Richard's Almanack, Benjamin Franklin, 1735