

Christian Wolff

Hygiene (8)

is a political question. (2) /

The bad old habits (3) are deep-rooted, (4)

but we're fighting them all the time, (1) and things are (5)

getting better every year that (2) goes by. (8)

This work we do during study, (1) meetings. To study and apply (2)

Mao (8) Tse-Tung Thought is a good method. (1)

Good things can be praised. (3) During these studies (3)

many people have come to realize that la- (1) -trines, too, are a po- (3)

litical question. (3)

Copyright © 1973 by
 C.F. Peters Corp.
 373 Park Avenue South
 New York, N.Y. 10016
 Reprint permission
 granted by the
 publisher.

(in the Harvard Square Wurst Haus, Cambridge, Bavarian music playing in the background)

Meeting you here now in Cambridge I remember a piece by MORTON FELDMAN called "CHRISTIAN WOLFF IN CAMBRIDGE". What is so remarkable about Christian Wolff in Cambridge?

Well, as I was saying before, I've lived a long time in Cambridge. And I think ah what FELDMAN had in mind was, ah, he's been here twice in Cambridge when I was here.... And the first time he met me, he came to my room. I was staying in one of the Harvard dormitories, in an old-fashioned building, old-fashioned room with a very high ceiling. And I was sitting at a desk sort of with books all around, and sort of my nose.... I'm short-sighted... my nose very close to the paper. And he came in, and he saw me there. And then we had a very nice time. I had organized a concert on which his music was played.

And then um, oh perhaps several, five, six, seven years later, again there was a concert. And FELDMAN again decided to come up. In those days FELDMAN very rarely left New York. It was very unusual for him to go anywhere. This was quite special. And my address was once again this very same place. And he knocked on my door, and there I was in exactly the same situation he had seen me five or six years before. And I think that sense of ah not changing over long periods of time is what gave him the idea of the title.

Beyond that, I don't know, like everything in FELDMAN'S music. It's extremely hard to verbalize it. Its techniques, its methods and all the rest of it. By verbalizing I also mean analyze. Like um there's no system. He works just by sort of sheer intuition, I think.

Ya.

And our own relationship has a little bit of that character. We don't ha ask too many questions. And um I think some of that also is expressed in the title of the piece.

Yeah, also I think FELDMAN has ah very strong emotional attachments. And I think he also has a strong sense of that period, when he and CAGE and myself were living in New York, and EARLE BROWN. And like always comes back to that. You know, it's a kind of um, it's like being in a

Garden of Eden. (LAUGHING) This is an area that, ah....

And I think he, I believe that he must have changed. I also saw him recently in June. He got a chance to see me where I talk now, and I don't think he likes it anymore. Because he, I think he regarded me for a long time, because I was the youngest also, as the surviving representative of that golden era, you see of the fifties.

Ya.

I like his music very much. There's no question about that. And I think I've learned

a great deal from it. It's affected my own music too.

How?

Well, for example, the one thing I can always put my finger on is, it's I think from FELDMAN'S music that I first had the sense that all intervals are equally accessible or equally useable or equally beautiful.... which is curious. I learned that from JOHN CAGE. All sounds are alike. But FELDMAN chose the Intervals, rather than allow them to happen by chance. Also, he restricted himself mostly to pitched sounds rather than using noises.

I've just read one statement of CAGE about your music in his article, "THE FUTURE OF MUSIC", where he says, "WOLFF'S works invariably reveal to both performers' and listeners' energy resources in them themselves of which they hadn't been aware, and put those energies intelligently to work." How do you relate to this statement? Do you think it's a good description?

It's a very nice one. (laughing). Well yes, I mean clearly if that's happening, then I think I'm doing the right thing, yeah.

Could you describe this process of revealing energy resources?

I think it has to do with two things. One is the fact that my music is often just material. But not raw material exactly. It's set up in such a way as to require anyone who wants to seriously deal with it to exert themselves in a particular way. Not just technically, to learn how to play it, but also imaginatively.... how to fill out what's to be filled out, how to use the material. And so that's just the individual in relation to the score. But most of my scores have to do with groups of people. And it then turns out that a lot of the music making, and this comes out of the score too, has to do with how the individuals relate to each other as they play. And that in turn opens up a whole other set of circumstances, which of course take on a special character, but which is focused by the music.

So you put the musicians in situations where they are producing structures that they never thought of before.

Well, they are faced with things to do that they don't usually have to do, yeah, but which are still musical at least as a basis. So that it's not that you're asking somebody to do something like to play a game that they've never played before.

Could you describe this technique of laying out of material, and how do you give the musicians ways to actualize these materials?

Well, I suppose the simplest idea, and the one that keeps coming back in many of my pieces, is the idea of coordinating sounds.... which is really, you know, the basic idea of any music that's played by more than one person.... that you play together or you don't play together. And there are two extremes I think. One is that two people are

improvising more or less simultaneously, which you get say in jazz occasionally on the one hand. Or on the other hand you devise a structure with bar lines and strict rhythm. And then you assume that there's this sort of arbiter, or there's a conductor, which keeps everybody together. And everybody has to toe the line.

So I do away with both of those. Occasionally one or the other might in fact turn up. And instead I try to make the coordination, or the way people play together, depend firstly on not being predictable. That is to say, you can't lay out a whole map and know exactly the path you're going to go. So that means that you may be at a certain point in a piece where you suddenly don't know what's next until someone else tells you. That's the one thing. The other thing is that the other person may not know that they're telling you something. The point of that has to do with eliminating as much as possible total control by any one person. It's almost impossible to conduct my music, for example. Everybody has to conduct, not all at once, but they take turns. Or they do it unintentionally. And well the simplest way is where your coordination is say, one person plays a sound, and then another person has to play a sound which has to follow directly on the first person's sound.

Do you employ in your early pieces too this social relations of people, or are your early pieces strictly aesthetic? It seems like there is a kind of social situation you find in streets and everywhere mirrored in your music.

Yeah, I didn't have that notion in my head to begin with. I think I stumbled on it. I mean it's not entirely an accident, but I think I just had a chance to do that and stayed with it. But I didn't decide like ah, "Now I'm going to make a social kind of music, and this will be the right thing." It came about in musical ways, and just partly technical reasons. Originally it had to do with ideas about rhythm, which is that you produce a certain kind of rhythm by these kinds of coordination and these techniques of coordination, which I found you could hardly produce any other way. It's a rhythm that has to do with being surprised, and having to wait on other people to do what you want to....what you are supposed to do.

Ya.

In some of these it's the simplest coordination. Player one plays a sound. And as soon as he's finished, player two plays a sound. Now, however the duration of the player one's sound is indefinite. He can play as long or as short a time as he wants. And player two simply has to, as soon as player one starts to play, he knows that any minute, and second now, and fraction of a second, he's going to play. But he doesn't know quite when. And the rhythm produced by that situation is like no other rhythm. Especially if you imagine like more complicated versions of this, like say three or four players in different variations. So, it partly came out of something like that, to make a certain kind of rhythm. And it's clear that it's a

rhythm that depends upon feedback, rather than an idea about rhythm. And if you will, there the social relations come in.

So I know that BURDOCKS um played in London. I heard about this performance from someone who participated there. What are your experiences actually? Not to talk about the sophisticated techniques of conceiving it, but now what are your experiences in realizing it?

It depends on the pieces. I mean some pieces are, ah pieces in the sixties for instance like SUMMER, the string quartet, or DUOS. Those experiences are pretty consistent, because the musical demands are fairly precise, even though the pieces come out differently. It's like chamber music. BURDOCKS on the other hand is an orchestral piece. It's a large group piece. It can be done by fairly few players, but the London performance used about forty players. And that was a very different kind of situation. I thought it was fantastic. I mean it's one of the finest performances I've ever had. There also the techniques were quite different, because the piece as such.... Do you know the piece at all?

We made it once in Cologne, privately done.

But there are many different things to do. I mean certain things are quite precise, and there are other things that are....

I remember these wheels where you can change from one to the other.

Well, that one you see is fairly, that's really fairly restrictive. I suppose that the most unrestricted one is the one at the very end, which simply says "flying". Anyway, it's just a few suggestive words. Nothing else is said. And of course there are many ways you could do this. You could make sounds that suggest flying. And in the BURDOCKS performance one fellow came in with a pair of little wings tied to his shoulders. That was his representation of that one. There was also in the course of the performance a little lecture about the history of flying. And of course all of these things, some of which I'd thought of, some of which I hadn't, you see are available.

The thing that interested me in BURDOCKS was to make many different things go on at once, and really make a kind of MESSY situation. It's an idea close to CAGE I think. You know, you have many different things happening. But I was also interested that each should have its own distinct character. In other words, you could go through the performance of BURDOCKS, and you didn't know anything about the piece yet. You knew just what everybody was doing at the time. Again, that was nice about the performance. I mean one reviewer had taken the trouble to look at the score beforehand. And then he just sat back. I mean he didn't know what our plan was, because you don't need to do it in the order of the score. You can just make any arrangement that you want....And he simply described what had happened. That sort of clarity remained. But at any given moment, at the same time, it could be like ten different things, totally different things, going on.

In writing the piece did you have the texture or the character of the plant, of the burdocks, in mind?

I don't know if you have much experience with burdocks. They're a weed. And they're messy. People who do gardening hate them, because they get into everything.

"Unkraut", like we say.

Exactly, exactly, although they have medicinal properties, for instance. And you can make tea out of it and things like that.

Ya.

It was also related to a music festival that I organized in Vermont, which we called the BURDOCK FESTIVAL. That existed before the piece did. So that was called BURDOCK FESTIVAL because we played the music outdoors, and we were involved with burdocks quite a lot. Because it was just in an area where there were a lot of burdocks.

One of the next pieces that you wrote after BURDOCKS is ACCOMPANIMENTS. I see it as an example of music which strengthens the attention to social facts. Because there is first a text involved. Also the title points to it. How do you relate like in the first movement the music to the text CHINA: THE REVOLUTION CONTINUED ?

hm hm, hm hm, um it's very difficult. The summer before I wrote that piece.... I mean I had always been interested, but not very vigorously, in um more or less political questions. But then that interest was strongly intensified, partly by my friends, through CARDEW, RZEWSKI. And so I began to read a lot. And I decided that I would like from then on as much as possible to associate text with my music. So one of the books I read was this one about China and the cultural revolution, and I was struck by it, and moved by it. And I thought people should know about it. And so I thought I would try to.... And the same time RZEWSKI had asked me for a piano piece. So that it seemed appropriate to put those two things together since he's interested in political music.

Then you asked me a technical question. You wanted to know how the music goes with the words.

Epecially since it's a very realistic description of the hygienic situation and its political implications. And so this very concrete, realistic text and these chords are going along? How do you relate it to the words?

Well, I guess the chords are, like the title of the piece says, are accompaniment to the text. And what I wanted was something that was not a song, since there is a great deal of text. There are far too many words. They are far too concrete to make a lyric, like a "Lied", out of it. You couldn't do anything like that. On the other hand, the thing that comes to mind with that kind of text is like a recitative. And that seems to be musically not so interesting. So, why not try to do something in between? And it is a kind of

recitative, really. Except that instead of having one chord and then a sentence you have a chord with every syllable of the text.

The other thing I wanted to do is preserve the prose text. On the other hand, I did want to give it a certain amount of structure. Because it was appearing in a musical situation. And so the chords are intended to do that. (You don't use them all.) They come always in groups of sixteen.

And there are always four notes, which is astonishing.

Well, that's a very simple-minded device, I'm afraid. But it's one that I stumbled on, and it worked out very well harmonically. What it is simply is each sequence of chords is based on one chord. And if you wrote four notes, and then allow any note to be either base or treble clef, you will generate fifteen more chords.

And that explains the shifting of ranges.

There's more to it than that. The thing has been very carefully put together. There's a sequence of perhaps fifteen chords, right? Then what happens next is I think the sequence may be repeated. Then it repeats. It's transposed up maybe a minor third. But then there's a section that you get thirty-two chords, where you get both the original and the transposition. And then finally you get just the transposition in the last run through the cycle. That's a rather simple-minded idea, but it suggests a movement upward, (laughing), gradual but distinct.

That's one relation to the text.

Yeah, progress if you will, or something like that. Um, the other one that I've noticed is just in the look of the music, which is just purely subjective. But China of course is a very large country. It has many many people in it. And if you look at the pages of the music, they're very crowded and populous. I mean, I hadn't written so many notes I don't think.... There are more notes in that single movement of the piece than all my previous pieces of music put together. As I say, that's trivial, that's not serious.

How is the performance of the text related to the chords?

For each syllable of text you play one chord. And you have again, like my earlier music.... some people criticise that.... you have the performers left with the choice, because you can use the entire text and make selections from it. So as long as they make sense.... You can't make arbitrary selections. They still have to be intelligible....

Because that's partly, that's a practical problem. Because if one did the whole text, just that part alone would take half an hour. Any normal audience wouldn't stand that. In other words, the effect of the text would be lost, because people would be irritated by the length of it.

Well, the other thing is, for each run of chords there is anywhere from one syllable of

text to sixteen syllables. If it's sixteen, there are just enough chords for every syllable of the text, yeah? If there are fewer numbers, then you can, you're allowed to repeat the text until you've used up the chords. But you don't have to. So, if you have a one-syllable word, you could repeat that word sixteen times. What happens there again is the text is turned more into a song, when you suddenly lose sight of their syntactical continuity and it becomes a purely musical one.

And strengthens the remembering to certain words?

Yes. There's an element of that, right. But there, that's the point where I could be criticised, because I don't specify.

You mean where you go to propaganda?

No, no it isn't that so much. It's where the performer goes to propaganda without my having told him one way or the other. So in other words, the text could be done, I mean one could emphasize parts of the text to make it sound ridiculous, which is not my intention.

Like MAO Mao Mao Mao Mao Mao.....

For instance, exactly. And I guess I fall back there on something that I've fallen back on all along, the assumption that people who come to this music come to it seriously, with good will, and they will just do the right thing. Sometimes they don't, and that's the problem. Well, it's my problem too. I mean I have set up a situation. In other words I've become much less optimistic in that way.

But you offer the performer the responsibility.

That's true. But I also thereby no longer take it. And yet I still have it.

Think of a concrete example. Say you have a rather large audience, which is politically well-disposed with what you're doing. And a performer comes along and plays that piece in a politically irresponsible way. Well that's a very bad situation. And it's one for which I'm basically responsible. I mean that's something which I have not yet resolved. I'm still, I suppose, interested in that question of ah well that thing of energy we talked about earlier, which stems to mind from the fact that the performer does have to make some of those decisions.

I mean, it's difficult to play that piece if the words mean nothing to you. In other words, the performer can't function as in our sense a professional performer. Say you hire a musician, and you put a score in front of him, and he's agreed. He's signed the contract. You give him an advance, or whatever. He knows he's going to get paid, and he knows what he has to do, and he will do anything which you give him to do. It could be about MAO. It could be about KISSINGER, right? It doesn't matter, right? OK. Well that situation seems to me almost impossible. I mean that's what I'm trying to avoid. Ah, it's true that you might get someone. My problem if you will, is that

let's say the man who is sympathetic to KISSINGER, I assume that he would not do that. He would not play that piece. I mean, that's my naive assumption.

How did you implement social reality into pieces like CHANGING THE SYSTEM?

That's a very abstract question.

The title implied more to me than changing just MUSICAL systems.

Of course. Well, the text in that piece CHANGING THE SYSTEM, which is where the title comes from, and that's what it's about, says very simply.... Ah, it's the same idea which is also in the ACCOMPANIMENTS piece, which is one that I'm sort of "stuck" with, is about specific social and political and human problems, which cannot be treated in isolation. But they have to be related to the entire society in which you live. And if there's something locally wrong, you can't change it properly unless you change everything. Which is, it seems to me, what is now being demonstrated by the various communist revolutions, or has been in various ways. And it's really that idea that is in the text. It's put much more modestly than that. But I try, I think, to avoid in the pieces too abstract statements. That's why I like the Chinese text, because it's about a very specific practical problem, which is dealt with on both that level and on an ideological level. I mean, these people are aware of that. We may think that they're very simple people. But they realize that in order to make their sanitation system work, they relate that to the thought of MAO TSE TUNG. And that's perfectly natural. To us it seems bizarre, you know, to us, that's a technical problem and not an ideological Problem. But they understand it as being coordinated. And it's that idea that I'm trying to get across, to get people to be aware of.

um now, you talk about social reality. What you do is raise another problem, which is this. You might say from a political point of view a defect of my music, of my so-called political music, which is that it is too general. In other words, to that sense it doesn't address itself to social reality at all. Social reality is specific problems, which can be analyzed in a general way, say in terms of class conflict. But it's also exploitation that you can, you know, actually document, put your finger on.

Now, to take that kind of thing and put it into music seems to be difficult. You need the specific event or moment in order to be there in a revolutionary-historical situation where something is happening. And then you will make usually a song about it. And that song will be appropriate to that time, and then become part of the history of that time....which is very different from my usual „Einstellung" to music, "ja"? Namely that we make something that can be played a number of times, and each time the piece will be unique. I mean it would somehow not have a historical character.

So, as I say, I don't know what to do about that. There are two kinds of political

music. Let's put it that way. There's the kind that is generated directly by your own political experience in a given situation. The best thing I probably can think of. You see, the thing is there are not that many, right? Most of our lives we don't run into.... Maybe you take part in a demonstration or something like that. Or you go to Cuba or drop out or do something like that. But in most of our lives there isn't much directly happening, at the moment. (I really should just speak for myself, my rather safe, middle class situation.) So we can't write music about it.

I don't know if what I'm going to say now is in my music or not. But, I think we have this notion that there is propaganda music, political music, and then there's the other kind of music which has these humanistic values and this universal hm and so forth. But I think that's wrong. I think ALL music is propaganda music. Ah, the humanistic, so-called universal music is propaganda for that kind of music and for the society which produces it. And first of all I think we all should become aware of that. I mean, any piece of music expresses something, even those pieces that deliberately try to express nothing, sort of like certain pieces of JOHN CAGE'S.

That too, ah, nothing is something. There is no such thing as nothing. And I don't see at the moment why that should be any less a kind of propaganda, even when it's unconscious. Although in a sense, I mean in the case of CAGE it's quite conscious, because he knows exactly what, you know, he has a whole philosophy of life he means to express by his music. And his music is a perfect example of propaganda music. It expresses a way of understanding the world, which implies a whole way of acting in the world.

Most composers don't get that far. I mean they don't think about those things very much. But you know they do it more instinctively if you will. Or, so, I guess, well mostly what I'm saying is that I'm objecting to this distinction. And then, so the aesthetic value of say the so-called humanistic music as opposed to music that supports the Chinese Revolution. um, it seems to me ah that's what we mean by one being aesthetically more limited is simply that we have accustomed ourselves to the one rather than to the other. I mean, yeah, it's a very large question. (laughing) I don't think that I can solve it. but um....

I don't know if I can express really my thought in English, but I just want to say that....

So, say it in German, because you know I understand.

Okay, ham hm heh, was ich meine ist, dass es sich ausschließt, nein, es schließt sich nicht aus. Aber es ist sehr hart zusammenzubringen, dass....Musik die man ah....It's oh my so hard to speak German now....

I see that it's like, you know....on the one side, you have um music which is so precisely directed politically that it has to limit

itself in its own variety to realize political goals. On the other side, you have um um new music which is related politically too, but which beyond that tries to realize in its genuine structure the ideal state this music wants to establish.

Okay. Yeah.

I see you tried to realize both in your work.

Now I recognize that, and it's probably true. I do just what I can, and what I have to fall back on is at the moment the very um restricted character of my political experience. And therefore I can't do very much of this kind of activity, of ah what you would call „propaganda music“.

Let me give you an example from CARDEW. There is a very clear case. When he was in Berlin he was involved in a ah political agitation thing, right?having to do with a hospital. He simply did that. He joined this group of people, Communists, and they you know they did demonstrations, and they canvassed and so on and so forth. And in the course of this the people he was working with didn't even know that he was a composer. Ah but somewhere somebody along the line found out that CARDEW was a composer, and said, "Well listen, why don't you write a song that we can sing at the demonstration?"

So he did write a song. Other people helped with the words. And in fact at one point in the song one of them suggested a change which he put into the music. So they wrote this song, and they sang at the demonstrations, and it caught on. So, that's a good example of how to express precisely the needs of that moment. And that's a very good song and is now part of the folk music of Berlin. You'll find it in little books, right? So, that's one kind of music. Right?

Now, that kind of music can only arise through a specific political experience such as that one. Um, I would be delighted to devote my life to writing that kind of music, but honestly can't do it, at the moment anyway, unless I'm willing to you know give up everything and go.

And I think the United States is not provided for this type of composing.

Well, not entirely. I mean we have a tradition which is somewhat submerged of political music. I've just been learning about it, and it's very beautiful and very extensive.

The music of the South somehow?

Well the South. And then there's the labour movement, which has a tremendous amount of music associated with it. much of which, as I say, you don't hear much. And occasionally it surfaces through somebody like DYLAN, who makes it very personal and makes it very subjective. But he is ultimately related. His great master is a man called WOODY GUTHRIE. Well, I'm just learning myself. But ah, there's a lot of stuff there. So that there is a tradition that exists. It gets submerged and is completely submerged now

commercially by the rock and roll scene and by the whole rock business.

But there are some, oh, PETE SEEGER, a famous example of somebody who is a folk singer who is involved in political causes. You have your equivalent in Germany with EISLER and that whole tradition you know. He's having a kind of renaissance, and so that's that side of it.

Ah, in the meantime, and also in my case because of my background and my experience and what people want me to do, I still want to write my music. You know, I can't sit around and wait. So I do the other things. And in the other things I try to..... (And that's what you were talking about over here)..... I try to possibly relate them at least to a political orientation that seems to be progressive, and that of course is much more generalized.

FREDERIC RZEWSKI wrote a song called APOLITICAL INTELLECTUALS. And I think it belongs to a lot of the American artists. Why are they so apolitical?

Well, I don't know all the reasons. But again it's a political position that they're maintaining. Because for them to be apolitical is a kind of protest. Avant-garde musicians imagine themselves to be in a protest situation. I notice that in a sense, although they will not say it. But that to them is.....that's their politics.

The other thing I think is that the tradition is not weak, but it's submerged. It's something that we're simply not exposed to....which is not accidental, I think. That is to say, for us political music has invariably an element of popular music going on. It has....music that repeats has larger groups of people, whereas avant-garde music has a very, very small audience. I mean, even CAGE has a larger audience, but really more for himself, his personality and for his ideas and for his books and his presence than perhaps for his music.

Ya, true.

And the other people, they have their audiences, but they're concentrated in New York or a few spots on the West Coast. And well, it's very tiny. It's a very esoteric movement, whereas any kind of political statement assumes you know a group, a realistically sized group. Now, that automatically suggests you know music made for masses of people. And that immediately to a composer suggests either commercialized pop music, which is regarded as essentially degenerate or in any case manipulated by commercial interests. Well, you know there's some very interesting music there. And I think people like REICH and GLASS are aware of that. There's a certain relationship between the way they present their musics and the way rock and roll music is presented. But still, generally speaking, that music is regarded with some distrust.

And then the other kind of music that's sort of for large groups of people is the old bourgeois music, which some of us like, some of us don't, but we all agree that we don't

want to write BEETHOVEN or BRAHMS or that kind of thing.

And then finally there's something that I guess in my education has simply been..... you're just not exposed to it, neither at school or at university, which is the folk music of this country. There were people in college that were sort of devotees of it. They had their guitars and so forth and played this music. But on the whole, it was a minority. And people seriously interested in music were not interested in that. It's a kind of cultural ah.....

Ya, and to really try to function here as a political musician goes right into the commercial mechanism.

Well that's the danger.

That's one reason possibly for the apolitical intellectuals. It's just resignation in not having access to the political scene.

There's something like that. But I think that RZEWSKI'S song is meant to be an attack on that. And it is certainly a position that can be questioned, that you assume that there's nothing to be done.

Then I think beyond that. It has something to do with "the" American too, and in CAGE because it's somehow in the SONG BOOKS and this THOREAU statement that the best government is the government which governs least, and that every American is somehow a stubborn, independent.....

That's it, that's it, an anarchic individualism, yes.

So this kind of socializing is only possible under high social pressure.

Yeah, I mean America has a tradition of Utopian communities. But they all are..... But that's in a sense a positive side. But it's again a very small and isolated thing. Yeah, now your point is right, that we have a very strong tradition of independence.

What are your projects now to realize yourself as a socially conscious composer?

I try to do most of the things that I do with other people. That's quite a practical consideration, because I'm not that good of a performer. So it would be difficult for me to carry anything off by myself. But I try wherever possible to encourage group activity, ah to involve as many people as possible with other composers, discourage competitive sort of careerism if you will.

It's something I learned from CAGE long before I was interested in communism. He always, I mean, that was what was so beautiful about the early fifties, that it was really a group. To be sure, it was just these four people, and each has gone his separate way. But the idea was that we would appear together. And everything was done so that all of us would be involved wherever possible. And there's quite a bit of this I think that goes on, and it's true you got to say with REICH and GLASS, it's REICH and GLASS. GLASS really means an ensemble of

four or five people. And this whole movement of making up groups, I think that can be useful.

This community feeling is one of the best moments you get from his music.

FREDERIC is very strong on it, and GARRETT LIST is very strong on it.

So they all reestablish somehow a tribal feeling with their music.

Okay, yeah, something like that. Or just give, communicate a sense of cooperation, and above all the pleasure that it gives. In other words to satisfy yourself you don't need to be a winner, but that a whole group of people, first the musicians, and eventually presuming musicians and audience, who make a community that enjoys itself together. That's what CHANGING THE SYSTEM is about too.

So what are you writing next? Do you integrate these kinds of folk music experiences you're making at the present time?

That's extremely difficult to do. That's because partly my own musical background is limited.

That's the background where we are, here at Harvard.

Yeah, right now, I didn't learn anything musical from Harvard at all. (laughing) But, well what I'm doing right now for instance, I'm just finishing a piece that I started doing in Berlin, which is a string quartet, which is not exactly peoples' music. But here you can see the various forces at work. Ah, where I am at Dartmouth we have a resident string quartet, and it seemed nice to do a piece for them. And then it turned out they wanted a piece. And then there's a decision I came to. I decided two or three years ago not to include text in my music.

I suddenly came to the realization that my music is really very esoteric in its character. It's very introverted, and very sophisticated, and I got tired of that. For instance, I just noticed that I have many friends to whom my music means nothing.... FRIENDS, mind you, not just people out of the street, but people with whom I in other

respects communicate very well. That's ridiculous. I mean that, I, everytime I hear them say, "Ooooh, come, let's hear some of your music!" I feel apologetic about it; I mean like, "You're not gonna like it". You know.

It's just a burdock, your music.

Ah, well BURDOCKS is already a step out of that, because BURDOCKS can be done in a way that a lot of people enjoy it.

I'm thinking of the plant burdock now, that it hurts.

Oooh, okay. Yea, um.... no, they really don't hurt so much. They stick. They're a nuisance, an irritation rather than a pain. ANYWAY, so that bothered me. And so I felt quite simply to try to do something that would be more successful to do, that people might like to listen to without, you know, being meretricious about it.

How?

Well like for instance in ACCOMPANIMENTS. The only reason for those chords is just sonority, you know? And the chords have a certain harmonic consistency. And they're nice to listen to.

I think you can reestablish it from the side of rhythm and what you call continuity.

Simply, I don't want to write sonatas again. I don't want to lose the ground we've gained the last twenty years.

Like, probably CARDEW does, whose courage to make tabula rasa is astonishing.

He raises the problems in a very acute way, because he writes in a neoromantic style. And I don't quite understand that. Whereas I'm trying to make a sound which is ah....Well, I don't do this consciously.... I've been noticing my music now as a kind of.... if it's related to sound of some other music... probably most to a rather odd combination, of SATIE and IVES.

(I thank CORNELIUS CARDEW, who sent me his arrangement of CHRISTIAN WOLFF'S song "AFTER A FEW YEARS", (Words by ROSA LUXEMBURG) which I am presenting together with Christian Wolff's original version.)

After a few years of prosperity the disquieting news of a few bankruptcies;

the national bank increases credit rates prices rise and/or money's scarce;

unemployment rises the crisis is made to appear as something beyond

human control, an ordeal from heaven, a storm, earthquake or flood.

But what is a modern crisis? The manufacture of commodities,

the production of food— their sale, trade, industry-- all

these are relations of human society. It is people who produce

these commodities, who buy them. Exchange takes place from one person to

another, and you will find in the factors which make up a modern crisis

not a single circumstance which would fall outside the sphere of human

activity, your activity. Who, now, where, now, is your enemy, your friend?


Copyright © 1975
 Christian Wolff

After a few years

flowing persuasive



After a few years of prosperity the disquieting news of a few bankruptcies

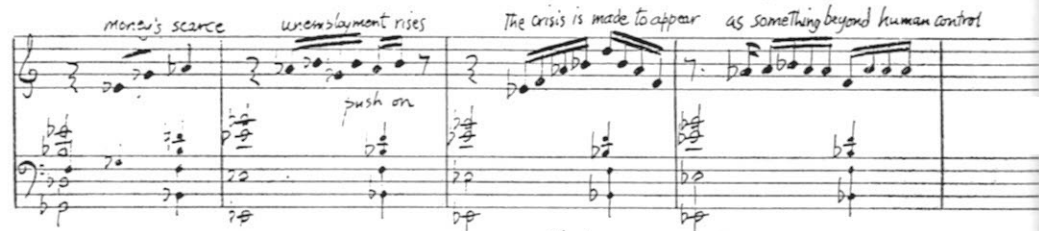


The national bank increases credit rates prices rise and/or



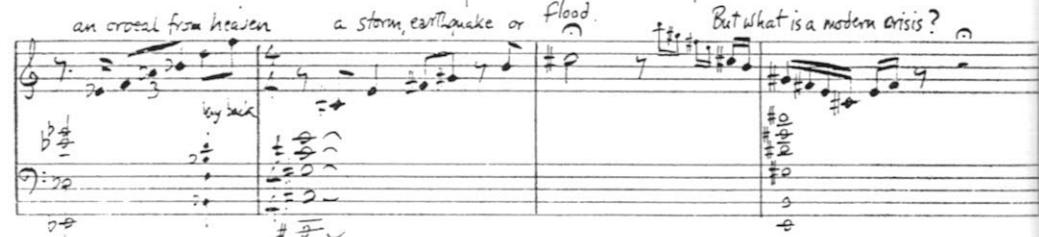
money's scarce unemployment rises The crisis is made to appear as something beyond human control

push on



an ordeal from heaven a storm, earthquake or flood. But what is a modern crisis?

by air



The manufacture of commodities. The production of food, their sale, trade, industry, all These

a Tempo



are relations of human society. It is people who produce these commodities who buy them. (C)

Exchange takes place from one person to another

and you will find in the factors which make up a modern crisis

not a single circumstance which ^{would} fall outside the sphere of human activity, your activity.

Who, now, where, now is your enemy, your friend?