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Music and Society-3:

The State of the Nation - a functional primer

This discussion took place in Manchester on August 30, 1977. We wished to contribute to Contact's continuing 'Music and Society' series by attempting to highlight the practical issues facing musicians and composers who deal with the repressive music industry that they detest and wish to change. We discussed the parallels between the apparently different 'popular' and 'straight' markets and the fact that our problems are really the same. (Tune in to Radio 1 at breakfast: that record is probably marketed by CBS or Polydor. Now tune in to Radio 3: that record is probably marketed by CBS or Polydor.) Economically, the entire range of music is reduced by the record industry to the same article: a disc, a 'unit'. We also discussed the ways in which we can aid social change through the industry in which we work; the 'tools' we have created and need to create to manage this.

Such 'tools' have been among the concerns of the British punk rock groups which have emerged in the last year or so and which are now generally known as the 'New

Wave'. Groups such as The Buzzcocks, Chelsea, The Fall, Generation X and the Sex Pistols consist mainly of young working class people and have a political awareness and a direct anti-capitalist stand that have scared the traditional rock world. The rock business is now trying, bit by bit, to 'absorb' the dangerous elements of punk rock, to 'absorb' these tools of social change. This situation also forms a part of our discussion. I showed a transcript of the discussion to Una and Mark of The Fall; three of Una's comments are inserted into the text below.

The magazine quotations in the example are intended to illustrate how close are the methods between the 'popular' and the 'straight' press: a point which underlines the discussion of the parallels between the two markets. The division of the discussion under headings is designed to focus attention on particular points in a suitably (or an unsuitably?) 'academic' fashion as well as to make the thing more readable.

(Dick Witts)

The Clash

LOOKING GOOD on or off stage isn't *just* down to wanting to play the rock star role. Is it, Paul?

"Even before the band I was always very into clothes."

At this very moment Paul sports his scarlet "frayed look" (sic) baggy mohair sweater, black multi-zippered pants, and black lace-up boots. The spiky hair is currently blond. One observes the twin scars, like an Indian buck's colours, on each high cheek bone. He looks very good.

Actually, Paul's life has changed considerably over the last 12 months. He looks quite blissful about the current position. "I think it's *amazing*. A year ago I couldn't even play a musical instrument. 'E taught me," he adds, pointing to "Poodle" Mick Jones slumped in his best outlaw chic pose on his guitar case in the middle of the flood at Brussels Airport.

The band are currently in the studio cutting a series of tracks from which two will be selected for a single due out by the middle of next month. By the time the next album is out — "It'll be at Christmas. We're gonna call it 'Clash's Christmas Turkey' and it'll feature 'Run, Rudolph, Run In Lewisham High Street'," Mick Jones tells me at least one more single will probably have been released.

He's not concerned about The Clash's having failed to join the other New Wave bands in the singles charts — "It'll come."

(New Musical Express, September 3, 1977, p.8.)

News

COMPOSER Bernard Rands, for the past two years professor of composition at the University of California San Diego, dropped in from his sunny exile to *CMW's* offices last week looking disgustingly fit.

Life there suits him well. Up at five each morning he manages to get in four or five hours' composition before starting the day's not-too-demanding academic tasks. Rands says his range is 'a good bit wider' than before and, himself enjoying and learning from much of the music of the past, deplors the common attitude in the US that you start with your own resources: 'it makes me nervous about the future of humanity'.

His latest major work *Magrigals for Orchestra*, commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra, was premiered last May in Washington's Kennedy Center. It is now in the hands of his UK publishers, Universal Edition, and Rands feels it would be ideal for the Academy.

'It's a good life', says Rands who will be returning to California after a trip to Australia for at least one more year. 'but I'm still very tied to Yorkshire.'

(Classical Music Weekly, September 3, 1977, p.6.)

The Structural Bases of System Transformation

DICK WITTS This constant absorption of new 'tools' by big business: that's what worries me about the New Wave. This new recording you're doing, Richard, merely creates other records. I don't see how you're going to get out of just making more units. You can do this in the *performance* of things with more ease, because you're directly related to the public. The public's *there* and you can do what you want with them. Though there is that divide: you're the people with the equipment, there's your audience over there — there's this big break between you and the audience. But that's up to you to try and get rid of it.

TONY FRIEL It's difficult the way things stand to take away the distinction, whatever you do. The way things are, there's going to be performers and non-performers, and the way I see it, if you're going to have any alternative, you're going to have to start with the *people* and the people's attitudes to each other. If you want to start with music, if that option's open to you, you've got to start on a more personal level than the music, trying to put your ideas forward to people. You haven't got to make a 'music of society' in which music is just a reflection of social order. You've got to make a complete break to break down any barriers at all. You couldn't expect to use any system going to try and do that.

TREVOR WISHART You mean you've got to make a social change before you can do it ...

TF Well, they've got to go together. Obviously you can't have one without the other. You can't just experience a social change by yourself if you're a musician, and you can't wait for a social change before you can do something.

TW It's a practical problem. If you're looking for a practical solution you've got to say 'We've got to change society as well, then it'd be all right'. There are two sets of problems: what would music be like if the world were perfect (well, not 'perfect': *better*) and what do you do in the circumstances as they exist? I'm not quite with your implications, Dick. I think perhaps you're suggesting that you ought to set up an ideal situation in a relationship between performers and audience, because in microcosm it would reflect what it might be like in a socialist society.

DW I don't really know what *would* happen in a socialist society. The ideal thing for me is that there wouldn't be an audience. No! (Laughter) *Everyone* may be an audience, everyone performers. Concerning the stage, all you can do is make a statement that this stage exists. A lot of people don't even think about it: the reason why you're at the front there. So it would be useful to make a statement about this capitalist structure you're working in. It's interesting when you have concerts with seats and tickets for rock groups. Perhaps it's really lively stuff; then the audience can refuse to stay seated, separated from everyone else in regimental rows. So they disrupt it: they kick the place apart or crowd on top of the seats so that the seats no longer exist and the audience comes together. They try to destroy this capitalist institution. But this kind of 'physical criticism' is too limited, too contained. I'm not sure how you can operate in the market with strength, trying to raise the consciousness of people.

TF But if enough people did it and you tried to get rid of the superstars.... That's what appeals to me about punk music. When the Sex Pistols were very small they were saying 'Anyone can do it'. If it works at a grass roots level, most musicians could survive and make a living comparable to that of an electrician, a mechanic or a factory worker. That'd be a start to raising people's consciousness, because you could have lots of situations where everyone could have music and direct access to it.

RICHARD BOON What has happened to people who've said that, from Woody Guthrie to the Pistols, is

that others mimic them. These people don't see that there's a fundamental issue. They think 'We can do it if we're like *them*'. So they take their format and slightly change it, and now there are 50 groups that sound like the Sex Pistols, which is not what the Pistols themselves wanted. That's something fundamental in our culture.

DW How can the Pistols turn against that, though? What are they going to do? Any time anyone chameleon-like, for instance David Bowie, makes a turn, everyone does the same.

TW It's consumerism. If you're operating in the system it happens automatically. What you produce is a consumer product of a certain style, and people accept it as a consumer product. Even if you're making a strong social comment people unfortunately tend to think 'Ah yes, that is music that is making a strong social comment, file it under "Strong Social Comment", next to "Popular Classical"'.
RB Ideologies are commodities as well.

TW Precisely. I've got mixed feelings about this. My own 'participatory' work, the games that I do, gets hived off into 'Education' and loses its objective. It's nice that you can get people to participate, but it just reaches a smaller number of people. It might have a strong effect, but there are so many other things going on in society, so that what tends to happen is that its effect is negated by everything around it. Perhaps I'm getting too pessimistic now...

Diplomatic Relations: Games and Strategies

DW All right. But you do get *some* consciousness raising going on in your games, just as you do in those of Jean-Yves Bosseur and Christian Wolff: though 'games' is perhaps the wrong word as it suggests competition. You have this genuine interaction between people who are *using* sound. But you're not concerned — here we have to *talk* negatively — with sound as a product, nor are you concerned with glossy expertise. You tend to be lost in the job you're doing. All people's selfishness and bigotry is brought out and gradually transcended. This is possible: don't you find it?

TW Ideally. With the whole structure of sitting people in a circle and everyone having their turn, no-one feels suppressed. Though it's quite a manipulative situation in a way. I've heard kids sing perfectly in tune passing 'the sound of a bluebottle' around the circle, whereas if you *asked* them to sing in tune they wouldn't be able to because you've told them that's what they're supposed to be doing. So there are some nice things about it, but ...

DW I've never found much feeling of solidarity in a rock group. You would have thought that with four or five people you'd get this feeling, especially over a long period of working intensively with communal pressures on you. But in a lot of groups you can just replace any individual player, any 'unit'. You can stick a more efficient player in, take one out ...

TF When I'm in a group I don't think of people as instrumentalists. As long as someone was doing something to the best of their ability I wouldn't care if they played really badly. You've got to think of them as human beings and not as musicians, robots.

DW But as soon as you get into a studio that's lost, because you're making little black discs ...

TF Yes: it's not a group of people then, it's a 'sound'.

DW They can isolate one from the other.

RB But that irritates you because you're talking of using a musical group as some sort of model for collective practice. It's all very well for the people who are doing it, but there are only four or five of them. They can have a great time working out their wonderful human relationships. But what does it do for the others? It just leaves them with the sound.

The Dynamics of Classification

TW It's all to do with presenting an image. If you say 'presenting an image' in rock music, it's pretty obvious what you mean. You package this group: they all dress alike, perhaps, they have similar hairstyles and they get their pictures taken. Well, it's the same in 'straight' music. It's packaged to be 'straight', 'serious'. It's 'difficult' and you read about it in certain sorts of journals. Performers dress in a certain way, and composers deliver lectures on their works in which they say certain accepted things and relate their music to that of the past. It's a form of packaging, a 'sell', and people tend to accept it as normal. Ultimately there's no real difference. It's just a different sort of commodity for a different market. There's the 'Up Market' and the 'Down Market', as some would say. The 'Up Market' has this sort of dress and these sorts of manners, uses vibraphones, funny voices and lots of percussion but no regular rhythm; the people involved meet in certain sorts of institutions, sit in neat rows and drink sherry or Campari. Then there's the 'Down Market', but there's no real difference and it doesn't have any separate effect. The audiences for 'straight' music have consumed this commodity which gives them status. It hasn't made them think about anything. It's the same with the average rock music as with 'straight' music. People consume this commodity, they enjoy it and it might make them feel 'masculine' or something like that, since a lot of it is very sexist ...

UNA Women have to conform to the sexual stereotype in order to take part as musicians. They're tolerated as a novelty. Even those like Joan Baez, who as composers are allowed a status beyond that of mere sexual allure to promote their records, have a secondary role: Baez is presented as a second-level, feminine Bob Dylan.

TW Both commodity situations are like eating sweets really.

RB Except that certain aspects of the commodities are not reproducible. There's the possibility of a unique commodity, especially when people are into randomness.

TW That's what makes chance music a high status commodity.

RB Whereas rock music is disposable.

TW Let's actually examine, say, '4' 33"', Cage's 'silent' piano piece, let's look at what it actually is. Actually it's nothing. Nothing happens. That's what it actually is. But it takes a fantastic mystique from its packaging. Cage might not have wanted it to be like that, but that's how it works. Packaging without content.

DW Four minutes and 33 seconds of packaging. A lot of contemporary composers — though not, I think, Cage — want their audiences to be confused ...

TW They want people to think, but not about anything in particular.

DW Yes, but they don't want the enjoyment bit.

TW We could soon subvert that! I think the problem in 'straight' music is that people come along expecting to think about nothing important. They get a big thing about how serious it is, and how intellectual, but not about anything that *matters*, about anything that's going to change them. I think that in that situation it's necessary to involve people and then try to force them to think about something that matters. Take my piece called *Fidelio*.² The audience start off laughing because it's funny, but it's not funny in the end and somehow you've drawn them in. When they laugh, they laugh as a social group and in a way that brings them together. But then the whole thing turns. It's not actually just a funny piece, it's making a political point and at the end you hope you've communicated something that matters, rather than just 'Oh, that was a nice performance and those are very nice suitcases', which is how middle class people react to concerts. It's breaking through that barrier ...

DW When I play something I like to ask people what they thought about it, but they always give very general remarks. I get the impression that some of the audience have got a film that they want to have running in their mind, a film without content. They only want me to provide images for the film by aural suggestion. All they tell you about is how they *saw* the music, in a banal Walt Disney way.

TW I'm sure it's the same in rock concerts. If you're doing some pieces with fairly political lyrics people come out and say ...

RB People come backstage, or the group's in the bar and people say 'That was great!'. Then you ask 'What did you think about it?' and they've been too busy drinking to notice.

Nongovernmental Institutions and the State: Trends Analysis

TW People don't expect to have their assumptions threatened, and people expect to receive a commodity. Bearing that in mind, you hope that you might reach 10% of the audience.

RB Culture is a commodity that justifies our role.

DW Did you start your record label with that ideology in mind?

RB No, there was a certain amount of necessity, in that it'd be nice to have the record, nice to have the songs recorded. At the time we just wanted to do it ourselves, to retain control. As it happens it was profitable and each artist received as much of his due as possible. But if that hadn't happened it would still have been good to make a record and get it out to some people, and to do it ourselves, seeing the process through from start to finish. It's our attempt to be involved in the production. But now, of course, it's grown out of our hands.

DW The Buzzcocks have signed to United Artists. You end up being a feeder to the big companies.

RB Yes, we're nailed by the contradictions. If we had continued as we started, there'd be a lot of frustrated customers around, which would obviously affect the performers.

DW The only way out is to become a big company yourself. Where was the break when it became impossible to carry on?

RB By the time we'd sold 5,000 records it became an impossible demand.

DW Did it become impossible because you were relying on big business companies for your pressing?

RB Yes, partly, and because each pressing financed the next and we just couldn't meet that demand immediately.

DW Cash flow? The money from sales comes back too late to ...

RB Yes ...

TW It's a lot of hassle as well, presumably, to press it more than once.

RB We'd get an order for 1,000 but we'd have to wait for the money to come back from the shops and other people before we could meet later orders from the same shops. People aren't very good at paying you: some have quarterly accounting systems. There's even a problem with monthly payments.

DW But surely you're capable of going through the process again with another record?

RB I don't know. The cost escalates: it's one of those financial curves. If we did another record, the market for the first one would want the next, and then more people. So we have to go to a major company whose job it is to sell on that level. You have to deal with them as merchants, but to try and retain the way of working where the artist has as much involvement as possible with your merchant

at every stage: selection of material, the way it's released, the packaging, how it's promoted.

DW Both markets seem to me like a spring. The classical market is basically the same, but the rock market is very intense, compressed, compared to it.

TW In 'straight' music, if you actually write scores, you're dealing with a situation in which there are a certain number of international publishing houses. You get on their lists and they pay you a retainer, and they take your works up and print the parts and promote the pieces. They go round to people and say 'Play this piece'. Their profits are a long way off in the future. If they can make you a big international success when you're dead, they'll make large profits from selling your scores. You usually have to sign a contract giving them the rights to publish your music, and if they don't like what you're doing, you don't get in on it. So they have a complete monopoly of taste: certain music is considered to be 'serious' or 'acceptable' and the publishing houses define what it is.

DW I'm sure that sometimes the publishers will print composers they're not totally sympathetic to: if a profit is likely and to ensure an absolute monopoly of access. Guiding the way people are going to experience music in the future. The means of production is not going to be modified by one or two 'risky' composers. If you've got a radically different way of treating music and treating your potential audience as consumers, then that's where the 'alternative' or parallel market enters. For instance, Universal Edition will take some of your stuff even though it's not marketable in the same way as ...

TW Yes, but I've had the same sort of history as Richard with my scores and discs, only at a slower pace. Take the *Sun* books I sent to Universal Edition. They were 'very interested', but then it turned out it cost too much and they couldn't print photographs and that sort of thing. After about two years I got fed up and published some of the material myself. For the complete book I found a printer and got a quote: one sixth of the UE estimate. Then, after all that, UE finally agreed to print the entire book. It's so much of a hassle. I still print my own scores: I found a small distributor for those. And I press and sell my own discs. I make about 2% on what I paid for them, and the amount of work involved in distributing is impossible. But I like the feeling that I'm in control of it and promoting my own music even though the big companies won't take it up. So what: I can succeed anyway. On the other hand, there are so many advantages in working through a big company. It's a matter of how much you compromise.

RB It's also a matter of how you live. If you want to live off what you do, you'll find trouble, like from Social Security. For instance, the group got their photos in the papers, and instantly the SS recognised them when they signed on and assumed they were making a vast amount of money, which they weren't. Now, signed to United Artists, the group have a wage of £25 a week each.

TW That's interesting, because my wage up to this year was £25 a week too.

TF I've got a job now. I'm only on £23. I think I'll become a recording star. (Laughter)

RB There is that old class thing: the way out for working class kids is to become a footballer or a recording star.

TW Or a 'straight' composer like me.

TF You were talking of starting an independent record distribution system, Dick.

DW Most of the material that needs that at present is either free improvisation or stuff like Trevor's: generally 'avantgarde' music that isn't reactionary, but not particularly rock, though it could include middle class composers who are moving to that area — seeking a bit more cash! The major record labels aren't going to take these kinds of music.

TW When I put out *Journey into Space* perhaps I didn't try hard enough, but I couldn't get shops to accept a private-issue label. It was a double LP of 'weird, out of the way' electronic music. Perhaps they still wouldn't accept that record?

RB But now that the New Wave and punk rock have developed, there is a climate in which shops will stock something that isn't necessarily a commercial proposition: they seem to need to support that kind of activity.

TF There's a mystique now about independent records. Even Rare Records in Manchester has a window display of independent singles. Lots of people buy the latest independent label for the status.

RB But the New Wave has certainly demystified some of the workings of the rock business.

DW True. You'd never have got articles in *Melody Maker* three or four years ago like the one we had the other week on how to market independent labels, as in The Drones story.

RB A lot of deals are more in the open. You even know now that Tom Robinson has signed for a vast amount of money to CBS and how much he got. A new development.

TW You now see the money and the politics behind it. And there has been this development in photo-direct printing in the last seven years or so, which means you can get things printed incredibly cheaply. Record presses at present are still different, in that you still have to go to an enormous plant. It may soon be possible to find that people will be able to press independently, cheaply.

RB Yes, major companies own all the presses.

TW Why has the market opened up?

TF It's because of the New Wave. There's a new market...

RB Because the old stuff didn't relate to anyone in a direct way.

TW And now they're actually saying something important in the lyrics.

RB A lot of New Wave bands aren't saying anything. Now there's a growing elite of 'professional amateurs'. People no longer object to musicians who can't play actually playing. Whereas if you go to a highly organised large rock concert, there's an incredible technology involved that you just can't relate to. But now, because technology accelerates, a cheap guitar at £30 today is as good as one that cost £200 four years ago.

TW Yes, it's like synthesizers ...

RB And just like printing. Or community video: the next big thing. There is more access to tools.

TW And, incidentally, it'd be good to have communalised electronic studios now that you can get cheap integrated circuit electronics. In the community, instead of the universities.

TF There's no reason for not carrying it further. Access to instruments, practice rooms, performance space.

RB You can make records cheaply in cheap recording studios. They don't have the latest 32 channel with flanger, they've only got eight track and are possibly technologically outdated, but they do their job. So the New Wave comes out of general disaffection. People don't like what's offered to them and find that they can make their own quite cheaply.

TW But is it a question of supply or demand? Is it that people have suddenly become politically conscious and that they want this new music which relates to them either in an aggressive way or in an openly political way? Or is it that record shops can't sell the old records, therefore they're prepared to take anything that comes along, and so you find that you can get your records into the shops?

DW I went to a People's Liberation Music concert in Manchester a while ago. Their Maoist line was that in London there are thousands of different musical things going on at the same time, hoping for a break, and it's always in turmoil at the bottom. There's punk rock and probably its opposite all happening at once. Big business will take up one or two different musical styles for a try-out, and if one of these grows or catches on, big business will put everything in to promote it.

TW Suggesting that the market generates demand.

RB It does happen on a very basic level and the business exploits it. But I think that a lot of the New Wave wasn't generated by big business. Now the business is really getting into it. It grows as they cultivate it, and now it's all you can read about in the rock papers, though it's not all you can hear on the radio. That in itself shows it wasn't some planned promotion: it took the business by surprise. It's now becoming absorbed and institutionalised.

DW But PLM are saying that it's big business that generates and grooms new forms from the start, and I don't think they're correct. I think the New Wave is due to the economic climate: because of the one and a half to two million unemployed or those trapped by menial tasks after comprehensive education. Reggae was an influence. Big business will groom a bastardised, 'cosmetic' form of *that* as a deflection, but not what we've seen from a year ago up to now. I wonder how long this dynamic openness will last. How many months?

RB The lifespan of the New Wave will probably be shorter than those of psychedelic music or traditional rock 'n' roll. Technology also accelerates lifespans.

DW Is there a chartable cycle? Something exploited, then cold-stored?

RB There are a lot of carefully-plotted artificial cycles for a start. Disco music was very much the business fostering a concept — a presentation, a mode, a style of music — onto people. It was a factory thing. They had all these things on tape and just mixed them up every now and again. (Laughter)

DW Just like Berio. The classical market operates entirely on such planning, tied to anniversaries.

TW Yes, it's just the same in the 'straight' market. Someone like Schoenberg comes along and is terribly unacceptable, then suddenly everyone's doing pastiche Schoenberg and now there's background music in that style. The next cycle must be Webern ...

RB Just because it's institutionalised doesn't deny that there's some driving force at the source.

DW I reckon that the most potentially revolutionary part of this cycle comes just after the start. Like the whole thing with the Sex Pistols. It really showed up the market's contradictions: these companies taking them one day and dropping them the next. We saw all the hostility and paranoia of the capitalist media. They didn't know what to do! If that point can be prolonged, strengthened and driven further, then that's a most important tool.

TW There's that parallel, you see, with something like the case of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. It involuntarily attacked the audience's values at an economically unstable time. What happens in rock music is that it eventually gets arranged by Mantovani and put on Radio 2, while Webern's music gets put into 'The Past' and people write books about it and analyse it and it becomes part of our museum culture. Structurally it's the same process of assimilating and institutionalising.

RB Sure. They may have tamed Elvis, but they're still scared of rock 'n' roll.

TW The same thing as reading these articles in journals like *Perspectives of New Music*, such as an analysis of the rhythmic structure of *The Rite of Spring*: incredibly academic with lots of diagrams. The reaction of the first

audience was to walk out!

Security and Codification

DW It gets to that position where the music becomes the last thing. The circulations of the weekly *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *Record Mirror* and *New Musical Express* are huge, even though people don't hear even half the stuff that's being written about. People adopt clothes, mannerisms based entirely on photos, articles and gossip columns. I used to think — I'm not sure that I still do — that the reason behind this is that some music is potentially more dangerous to capitalist forms of control than the industry likes to pretend. So they isolate and screen it, camouflage it and replace it by all this secondary, fetish material that's equally profitable. So that this other, non-aural stuff isn't mainly a way of maximising profit but a method of transferring attention, of deflecting from and weakening the real tools of consciousness raising.

TW In the 'straight' music world you can only sell yourself by quoting your reviews. It's no good playing to promote your music, they want to see whether a review says it's good. (Laughter)

DW I'm trying to help four foreign groups to visit Britain next year. I've so far written to over 60 promoters about these groups and I've said 'There are tapes of these groups and if you want to hear them I'll send you a cassette'. People have replied to say that they're interested, but only one has taken up the offer of hearing their work to check them out. These groups could be anything!

TW There's this big myth in the 'straight' music world, from extremists, that pop music is just 'image' and the music is, without exception, totally crap. Its image is what sells it. But if that's true of anything, it's true of 'straight' music, because there it's *only* the image that matters.

DW There's far more secondary material on, say, late 17th century opera than available 17th century operatic music itself ...

RB I wonder how someone like Brian Eno stands in the 'serious' music world. Does he lose credibility because he's been a rock star?

DW He's patronised like hell, seen as very naive. He's picked up a few ideas, they say, from *real* composers.

RB Because he gets an audience that they don't consider serious? Maybe he *has* ripped off Terry Riley or whoever, but teenagers hear of him and are possibly getting something out of his music.

TF I suppose these people think Eno's deflecting them from 'real' music.

TW It's simply a question of markets. If you sell your music to the wrong market you've had it. Like the stuff I did recently for the Palm Beach Orchestra: I could package that as 'Popular/Novelty/Serious/Educational'. I could package it in any of these ways and sell it to different people. I could call it 'Important Environmental Conceptual Art' and sell it to art galleries. Actually I find it annoying that there are these distinctions, because I tend to work in varied areas. People who've bought my music because they think it's 'Music Education' don't know that I make tapes, and vice versa. If I admit that I work with kids, people think 'Ah, he's not a serious composer'.

RB It's a supermarket mentality. People wander down the aisles and pick up a can. It's rarefaction.

Evolution of Goal Conflict

TW It's horrible to be in the position where you can see that, but you realise the consumers around you haven't latched on. When you realise that there's no difference between the rock world and the straight world, you expect

others to understand. But because you haven't built up a theory to explain it, but experienced it directly, you spend all your frustrated time going over the same ground, because you can't move on alone.

TF It's very difficult to keep going over the same ideas, to dig out all the same arguments, even when your thinking about it has moved on. This shows up directly in the music too.

RB Yes. If you're playing to audiences who know some of your material, they expect you to have progressed in a way that they can follow, which usually means not at all.

TF We've only done a handful of concerts, but already we're bored by the same material. You've got to put the same thing across to a different audience. It's so difficult to ...

DW Unless you're playing to other musicians who've been through the mill themselves, people who accept that you can change on different occasions.

RB It's because the dominant kinds of consciousness in our society are ones of repetition, categorisation, predictability. Spontaneity doesn't enter into it. That's what I find with The Buzzcocks. Their soundchecks are much more interesting than their shows because all sorts of things come out then. Bits and pieces later on work into songs, but their concert material isn't allowed to alter.

TW I get the same. Because people have seen me do 'X' they expect 'X' again. I just can't be bothered.

DW It's important to make a stand and do something else, otherwise you get trapped into the instant nostalgia thing.

TW I did a piece about this at a New Music in Action conference for teachers last year. Everyone expected me to do these participatory events. People made these environments in rooms, so we relabelled them. One room was called 'Sinister' to begin with, so we changed the label to 'Bureau of International Co-operation'. They came back to be shown around after tea, and the guide leading them round took his information from the Watergate transcripts. They were pissed off about this at the 'hearing' two days later.

RB That's good because it's about the labelling process. It's a tactical thing of what you do with your material, how you generate different things.

TW Must be very problematic if you're relying on a mass sale!

RB The Fall are beginning to have this trouble with 'Repetition' which has a four-note guitar figure, and The Buzzcocks have got it with 'Boredom' which has a two-note guitar solo, a demystifying and sending-up of the tortured guitar solo. But it's become a cliché itself now.

TF The funny thing about it is that 'Repetition' has never been quite the same twice. The bass to begin with was three notes, now it goes up the octave with five notes. The words say 'Repetition on the drums and we're never gonna lose it', but there's all this fancy drum-work.

DW It's bad now that even in the New Wave audiences don't realise that musicians have the right to alter their own material.

TF Yes, people say 'That was really good, just like the record'.

DW They want the content to be nostalgically fixed, to be incapable of change. In that way we're all contributing to a reactionary perspective.

System Analysis

TF But the content for us is mainly the words, and

changing the music isn't as important to an audience. They don't notice.

UNA I don't agree with Tony, because a lot of people we play to don't get all of the lyrics, so it must be the music that they're concerned with.

TW I've just done a book with three others, trying to figure out whether music without words does convey content by itself.³ Trying to show that medieval music is different from tonal music of the Renaissance and music of the modern period because society is different. Or rock music is different from avantgarde music only because the audience is different: they have different assumptions, different values.

TF I've always thought that music without words is so ambiguous. You can't express something without the ambiguity of it. Different people put different associations on it.

UNA But words can also be ambiguous. Every existing syllable is ambiguous, as its meaning is a totally individual interpretation, this being socially conditioned. Even dictionary definitions have to be interpreted.

RB Associations are culture-bound, too.

TF Yes, but that's an ambiguity in itself ...

TW I don't agree with *all* of that. Our theory is that if you look at a musical language, say tonality, with a series of keys that you can modulate to, and come back to the tonic, it's all hierarchically organised. If you look back at medieval music, it's not like that at all, and these languages reflect the different structures of society: nationalistic centralism and feudalism.

RB The words and the music are similarly subject to dominant ideology.

TW Yes.

RB You said you didn't agree.

TW No, I meant: even *more* so. The structure of the language itself is as important.

RB There are people, though, who attack the language and not what the language *says*.

TW Precisely. The actual language can say something that so offends ruling class values that they attack the whole musical language. You're not allowed to just use three chords because it doesn't express the spirit of progress and a subtle, controlled exploitation of form which is what the ruling class ideology is about.

RB Minimalist?

TW I don't think punk is minimalist ...

TF I don't know, what about all those staccato cymbals we use? (Laughter)

TW Minimalism is actually *conceptually* minimal.

RB I don't like minimalism. It's 'rich in reference to pre-existing forms'.

TW It's supposed to be clever because it relates to something in 'The Tradition', therefore it assumes all sorts of values. I'm for maximalism.

NOTES:

¹ For the previous articles in this series see *Contact 14* (Autumn 1976), pp. 3-10 and *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-77), pp. 23-27.

² For a review of this see *Contact 17* (Summer 1977), pp. 28-29.

³ John Shepherd, Phil Virden, Graham Vulliamy and Trevor Wishart, *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1977). This will be reviewed in a future issue of *Contact*. (Ed.)