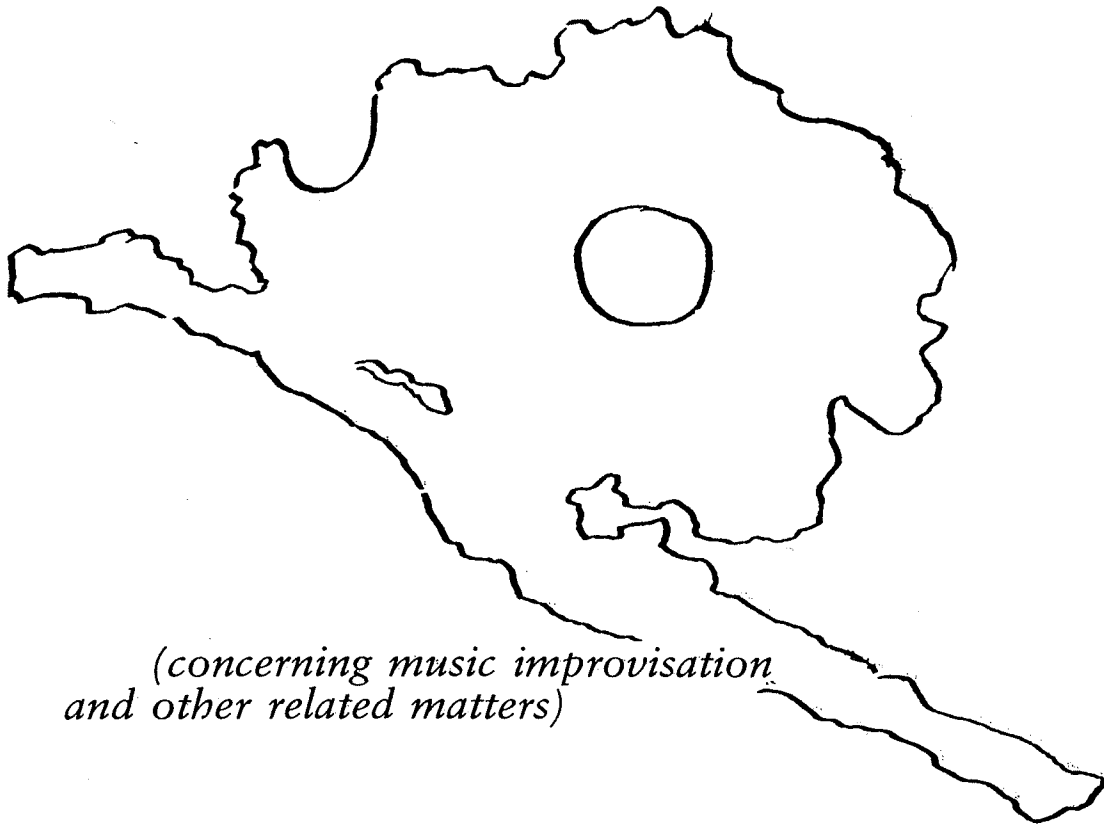


Sounding

the Full Circle



*(concerning music improvisation
and other related matters)*

Malcolm Goldstein

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“Unpremeditated music is the true gauge
which measures the current of our thoughts;
the very undertow of our life’s stream.”

Henry David Thoreau

(Breath of wind)”blowing on the ten thousand
things in a different way, so that each can be
itself—all take what they want for themselves,
but who does the sounding?”

Chuang-Tzu

Preface

The thoughts and perceptions collected in this book evolved out of my music making activities of the past twenty-five years, as well as from innumerable experiences of the natural world / environment. It is a very particular view of improvisation that is offered here: *the musician as one centered in the process of discovery, unfolding moment to moment, that is realized in the gesture of enactment / sounding.*

My concern, especially in these times of a world increasingly fragmented and compartmentalized, is directed toward the awareness of ourselves as whole beings, each with an abundance of rich and diverse energies, interacting within a complex and ever-changing social / political fabric, as well as within the natural environment that sustains our living. There are many implications that extend from this vision of improvisation; aesthetic, social, political, economic and educational value considerations become apparent and are touched on in these writings. Musical techniques (particularly "extended" performance practices) are discussed also, with some scores and study procedures included, but always as understood as an expression of the wholeness of our humanity (an ongoing process of finding ways to clarify what needs to be done), rather than as devices within themselves.

The book consists of articles, previously published in various periodicals, interspersed with excerpts from journals, interviews, letters, scores of music and program notes, that reflect my involvement with various aspects of improvisation. The printed articles outline some of the larger considerations, which the journals and other materials embellish and extend. The section focusing on performance practices, beginning with the article "The Gesture of Improvisation," emphasizes bowed string instrument techniques; as a composer / violinist, this has been my deepest source of experience. All of this, however, is clearly applicable to other instruments and to the voice, and can be adapted to them: each person, their own sound offering.

Malcolm Goldstein
September 12, 1987

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“Soundings” are free
improvisations
exploring the rich sound
possibilities of the violin.
There is no pre-set structure;
rather
it is the process of discovering
new qualities and relation-
ships, that is
the flow of the music.
Melodies of sound
(timbre / texture / articulation)
are created that
evolve out of the interplay
between the resonance
of the violin and the gesture
of the violinist.

Improvisation: People Making Music (1986)

People Making Music. To begin with, people: people doing something, interacting and through their play, music becoming. Improvisation as a social fabric, of people focused within a context; not a piece of music but the whole of our living tissue. A dynamic process; each individual unfolding, the breath expanding in gestures of becoming sound.

A shifting of focus, from the performance of sound-object (composition) to sound-play / enactment (improvisation), and other radical implications become apparent. The intention of performance changes; not an aiming at a preformed journey well done (image-goals of perfection, investments in the mastery of institutionalized techniques, fingerings marked with dynamics and phrasing prearranged and refined in rehearsals, echoes of recordings and other performances tangled within the image. . .), but rather the realization of form, ourselves finding / revealing on paths (perhaps) untravelled. ("Unpremeditated music is the true gauge which measures the currents of our thoughts—the very undertow of life's stream," reflected Thoreau in his journals.) . . . like a brook after rain pours through dirt, rock, trees and grass, finding new and subtle twists and turns as things move / are moved in the flow. Doors opening.

Improvisation as a process of focus, in touch with the needs of the present music ourselves within and with others (not a repetition of one's habits—learned behaviour from the outside or even one's own habits): aware of needs of the moment / sounding.

And as the intention of the music-maker is refocused (more upon one's own hand instant), so also is the attention (now as active participant / listening) of the audience revitalized. Nothing is prescribed for either; both confronted / dwelling within the immediacy of unfolding. (How different the hierarchies of through-composed pieces; all risks worked through, resolved by the prescriptions of the composer, to be realized by the mastery of the performer and appreciated by the sophistications of the audience—and with this all, an intricate network of evaluations before and after the fact.) Encountering each other in an open field, no paths as yet defined, we follow where the sounds lead, attention given to each nuance of sound activities and interactions each moment revealing. There is no correct way to listen, except to be present, hearing. (If improvisation were looked upon as a process of discovery by someone, shared within the moment with people, can an improvisation be unsuccessful?)

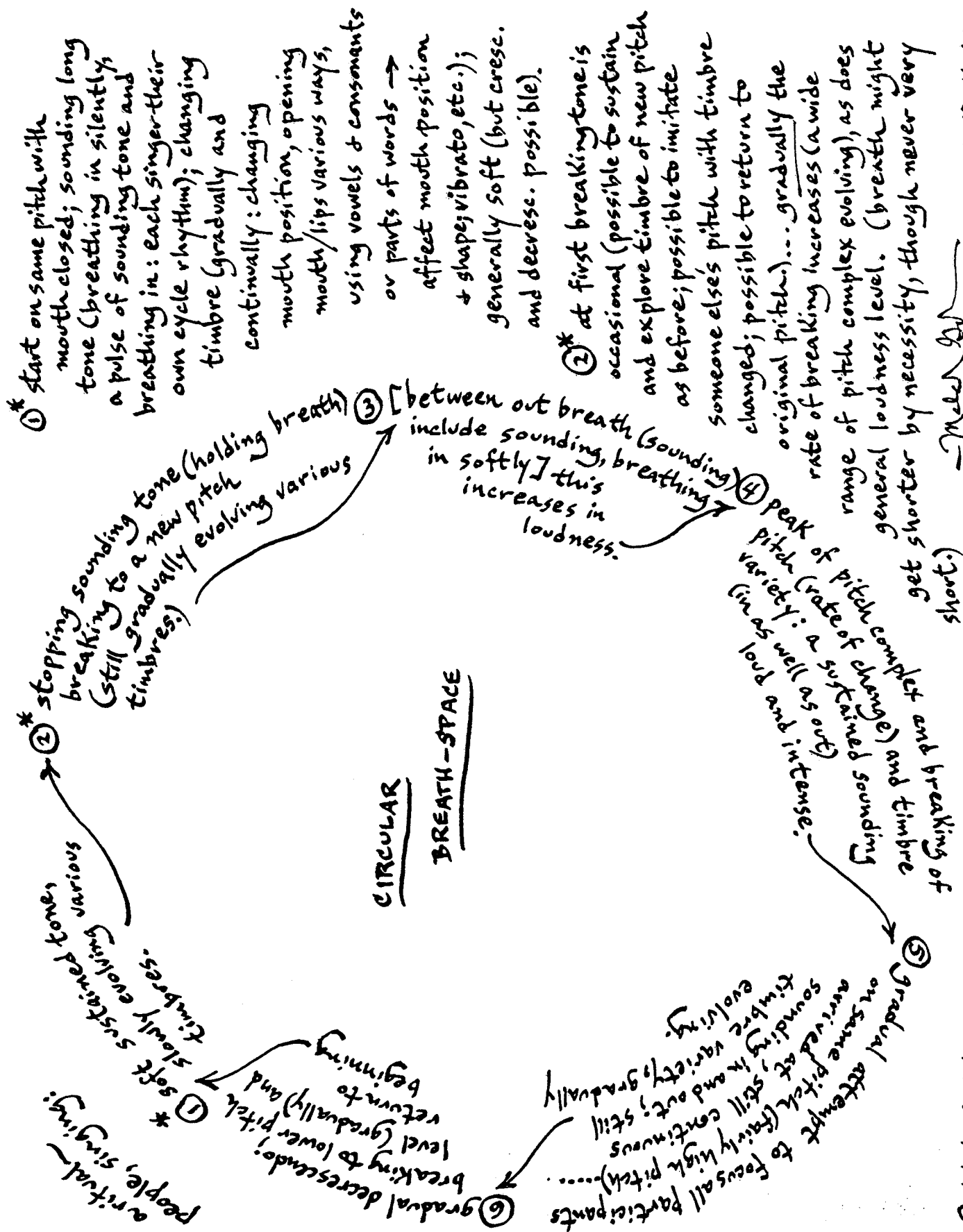
There is something radical, and perhaps truly subversive, in all of this (and especially within our contemporary object / goal oriented society); relationships of people and value systems to be reconsidered. (What would happen if, in an orchestra, a violinist—one of thirty or more—would get so carried away with a musical passage, so as to begin to express their own individual sense of that passage? What would happen to the violinist? . . . to the orchestra? . . . to the conductor? . . . to the audience? . . . to the music?) Improvisation as a meeting of people upon the common ground of unknown: the space fulfilling the resonance of gesture, sounding of person(s) moving the air. And the music, what is it, if not vibrations disturbing the air, moving us as we receive. . . touching upon the ears of our body, changing.

7/22/83

If we begin improvisation from a different edge
of listening, concerned
with learning more of larger possibilities
of sounding

(the European concert hall only one
of many; the full spectrum of world
music offering
a rich and ever more varied palate
of textures), we discover
the fullness of music/ourselves
expanding deeper into the sound,
expressive of what needs
to be heard.

We are the sounding
string, wind, object being
one.



SOUNDINGS: plumbing the depths of sound and in / of me. All sounds. Touch releasing things into motion; gesture realized / resonances of texture becoming song. (Music: the process of living, sounding.) Improvisations, my violin playing . . . an overflowing of myself in space. Sound as a physical reality, touching upon the ears of the body; ("upon the string, within the bow . . . breathing") . . . reverberations within the skull becoming a changing landscape—a new music.

I follow the line,
am molded by it, yielding, as I mold it
like a brook after rain pours through
dirt, rocks, trees and grass, finding
new subtle twists and turns as things move,
are moved in the flow.

improvisation: a process of discovering (though usually it implies inventing and demonstrating of one's imagination within a more or less given framework); here as a process of focus (the deeper the focus, so also the process of sounding the river, plumbing the depths) on a sound-texture / gesture and learning more and more of the nuances, details as well as the expanses and horizons to sound out.

melodies of timbre / texture / articulation: a new sense of melody of sound, rather than only pitch at root of the structure. Here the tree expands in various seasons of human growth: our awareness(es), feelings yielding upon the string and drawn across as the breath gathers in the roots of living.

gesture: (the bow upon the string, the wood, the metal, the tightness, heaviness, caressing, drawing out, pounding, digging in) hair of the bow.

I start from where I am (which is not the same as starting from nothing); there is a lot in all / around us all the time. (Nothing prearranged or anticipated.) It is just a matter of letting whatever is necessary come forth, to be heard (which is not the same as repetition of habits).

as one sound unfolds, I follow it with my bow
bent thick or thin upon the line;
gut and metal enfolding, stretched taut
full length the black wood
a pathway of no stepping stones
while fingertips find footholds and swaying,
sing a resonance of lush green.

Improvisation allows for the logic of our total selves to participate; what comes forth is the coherence of the sounding gesture.

. . . possessed of the sound / in the depths of its resonance; being at one with the performer through gesture; through practice (performance, meditation, listening) becoming more and more clearly a richness / multiplicity of one; not possessing the sound, i.e. thinking of the "best" technique to develop the "musical idea."

What happens to Art and technique in all this? The learned systems of Art music are but a manifestation of control to establish a seeming coherence that is already implicit in the material; but the illusion of order that satisfies is the same as the illusion of freedom that is in improvisation.

To be naked in the depths of sound and free to reveal our nakedness before people; to be as we are and offer our findings: Sometimes the line is more straight and sometimes more elusive, twisting and changing direction; very rich with the details of all of it / our richness. Sometimes I come to a dead end, suddenly stop and wait until something else transports me to a different place of song (singing way). Or sometimes my energy scatters, reaching out, contracting, swirls and I, going with it, like a meteor of free associations. And sometimes there are utterly black voids of such deep hued resonance...

Improvisations are transient; they come and go. Perhaps they should not be recorded (so I thought for a long time); or perhaps a record (a diary in sound) is the most fitting. Notation is no longer important here. Compositions, on the other hand, have become the "literature" of music (objects notated, analyzed, pillars of culture), whereas essentially they too are displaced in time, perceptible in that moment of passage beyond words.

Improvisation: so easy / so difficult depending on which angle you're looking from. Actually, it is neither, for those who engage *in* it. All angles converge on the present moment, touching and then, radiating from center and out into time, becoming song:

"Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces & ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like the ice floe sailing here & there in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when he feels sorrow. Thoughts can wash over him like a flood, making his breath come in gasps & his heart throb. Something like an abatement in the weather will keep him thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves—we get a new song." (Orpingalik) M.G. 11/1/79

7/21/83

Listening to the sound of a brook, a blur
of wind upon my face
my ears hearing it as I sit
still listening, the nuances becoming
apparent as my ears
open to details expanding a new
way. The bow upon string within
sounding, so also, like brook
each living moment the hairs catch
the string responds, snaps back
a shaking, vibrations of air as pebble
dropped into a pond.

Here,
now the music of both
in focus, the clarity perceived
within movement ever evolving
necessities of physical gesture:
the brook, each weight and turn
of pressure producing rhythms and pitch
variants singing subtle twists and turns
ever fresh; the bow humming
the string, a wind through
maple, spruce and popple leaves
shaking a soft or brittle
tune, as heat of season dictates
thickness or thinness of sound, so wind/the bow
moves air. A hawk
circles the sky waiting
the right moment to plummet
earthbound the quarry in talons.
The bow, so also, finding (allowed to find)
its place upon string, poised
within node flying the balance

of pure tone releasing. Within sky
blue hawk ascends
the current, wings tipped in circles arched
playing the line its path
follows; power revealed
in nuances of flight as it plays upon the wind
all edges
of sound the bow finding
partials of hues/qualities of tone bright
or dark within the beaked eye.

The archer could never hunt
such quarry. But to be there,
to see it and hear
its breath is
to receive a hugely, more vast
vision
of singing.

October, 1983

The discussion [Rencontre] performance at
the American Center in Paris: interesting to clarify
activities "par chance" and as necessity ~ that is,
to say again (and always, over and over), to understand
the organic nature of improvisation: a very intense,
focused event of listening/looking (that is, when with
dance) and putting it into form ("per-forming"):
to en-act? (At deepest of meanings, this too, truly,
is always chance; but such is also chance that has
created all that is in the world around us ~ "like
a tree"; all that is strong, beautiful, moving ~
that is to say, that which moves, changes and
moves us in nature.)

So, also, is the response of necessity ~ the

sounding, the gesture at one with "what needs to be done." (Seemingly a paradox, but in a world of appearances, so these two-in-one make perfect sense.) It is difficult to discuss this because of our "civilized" (here use the word: "arbitrary-imposed-control") demands/images — fear of chance and the natural world that leads people to all kinds of extremes of systems and order; anti-septic, plastic formations. (This, too, is of necessity, but of no interest to me.)

July, 1985

The garden is that space of continuity, lines over-reaching years — the past, future and present all embedded here.

Weeds ascending as I decline my years. Here, once a family succored and, before that, cows and later, then again, the grass will succeed.

A weed is an image by man defined as that which isn't wanted. But it forever asserts itself — and cows, unconcerned with labels, eat of it delightfully. The garden, in the eye of man, becomes civilization so defined by language, to be forever challenged by less sophisticated growth that needs no tending. So then, the precarious nature of this civilization that we tend/hold onto. Turn our back for a moment and all changes. So civilization is this pretense of continuity — in a much larger rhythm of pervading flow.

This year I have not yet planted the garden — it will be a month late.

Improvisation: Towards a Whole Musician in a Fragmented Society (1983)

How is it that we have so thoroughly omitted improvisation from the experience / musicianship / training of students in practically every college and music conservatory? . . . or perhaps it would be more accurate to say "excluded?!" And, if it has been excluded, then what does such an act tell us about our culture, attitudes, and value systems? What we choose to teach, what we choose to enact and share informs us as to what we consider valuable, to be perpetuated and socially acknowledged. Pieces of music.

. . . but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea, muses Thoreau. Walking.

How is it that many composers whose works are part of the European classical repertory were known in their time also for their talents as improvisers and that today it is rarely part of a composer's activities? Consider the training of a composer and performer: what was the difference between composer and performer in the past? What is the difference between composer and performer now?

Our systems of education encourage a splitting of the mind into intellect (a comprehending of things at a distance) and performing (an enacting of the rules of performance practice).

So often students first practice "the notes" (those tiny dots running upon the page) and then add "expression," like putting salt and spices into a dish that doesn't quite taste right. And so, also, we practice our scales and exercises as preparations for pieces of music, rather than as soundings: ascending ladders and enrichments of the muscles of our musical spirit. We separate the person playing from the object being performed and, in the process of realization, what often is expressed / experienced is the chasm that yawns between. How then shall a piece of music / the musician become whole?

A naming of things;
a pronouncing of labels;
a closing of doors and windows, shades down;
an assigning of tasks;
a limitation of possibilities;
a division of labor

the act of definition

is called efficiency;
is the way of study / technique
so defined, defining what is to be known
(accomplished) and how to arrive there . . . (not here);
is fragmentation

. . . so our theories (perhaps, even as-realized / as-what-should-be-known) divert us from full perception.

It would seem to me that improvisation is that instance of mind being whole, of weaving the fabric of many threads—music theory, compositions studied and rehearsed, ear training—into the present moment: the whole musician sounding.

Music is a synthesis of cognitive processes which are present in culture and in the human body: the forms it takes, and the effects it has on people, are generated by the social experiences of human bodies in different cultural environments. Because music is humanly organized sound, it expresses aspects of the experience of individuals in society. (John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?*, p. 89).

... in-culture / in-the-human-body (bodies): a continual dialogue of becoming. The human being as the central concern. "Soundly organized humanity."

What does improvisation ask of the performer that is so different from printed, through-composed pieces of music?

... perhaps, "Who are *you*?" "How do *you* think or feel about this moment / sounding?"

Not pieces of music; but, rather, people making music.

I watch orchestral musicians performing, eyes glued to the printed page, often with their ears (apparently) closed to the sound around them. But, then, how can an individual be responsive in a large corporation, when they are obedient to the beat of the conductor?

I have heard from professional musicians regarding my scores, which usually are improvisation structures utilizing a variety of new notation procedures and performance techniques, "Anyone can do them" (which is true); and then they add, "So why should I do them?" It is almost as if the accessibility to common touch eradicates the value of something. Isn't it true of our whole economy: precious metal and jewels, limited editions, antique string instruments, expensive cars...? Isn't the value so high because of the rarity of the object? Isn't it strange, that in commenting on modern art, an adult is heard to say, "Oh, my child could do that." A wonderful compliment to their child, but usually intended as a criticism of the painting: as if a child isn't also capable of a wondrous creation to open our eyes to whole new worlds that our sophistication has lost; or, as if it were necessary to go to school and spend years of training to arrive at some profound truth, some precious gem to be stored away in locked vaults. "Don't touch," the museum guard said, as my friend gently nudged the Calder mobile into motion. The air was so thick and stifling that the poor mobile hung inert and lifeless until that moment.

*Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness... At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable... We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. Spring: a time of rejuvenation in Thoreau's *Walden*.*

Improvisation: to begin with, listen. (Even in Western, concert-hall music it's important to take the eye off the printed page, and to put the ear into the sound.)

Improvisation: a process of discovering. Do we allow our students/ ourselves the space to fail? And yet, again, if an improvisation were looked upon as a process of discovery by someone, shared within the moment/ finding with other people, could it ever be unsuccessful?

Play two pitches, alternating back and forth—each sound always somehow different. Consider varieties of timbre/ quality (like on a bowed string instrument: bow speed, pressure, placement and articulation), dynamics, and duration. Hear each pitch experienced as within itself, sounding. Hear each pitch, also possible, as related to the preceding pitch. Juxtapositions, confrontations, extensions, suspensions, transformations. Hear the sound as responsive-to/ at-one-with the energy of the physical gesture, rooted in the body/ needs, in the presence of the person (you) at that moment . . . like walking the same path in the woods, all senses keenly aware and noticing more and more nuances and/ or relationships changing, and even something totally unheard before emerging. Practicing Bach and finding in-him/ in-me new, fresh/ refreshing soundings. (Gluck complained that the singers so heavily elaborated—improvised!—around his melodies, that the tune—his tune—was unrecognizable. Yet, did he really mean to encourage the dull repeating of skeletal melodies, backbones without flesh, as we endlessly hear now?)

Consider the glorious moment of the cadenza in a concerto: when the orchestra lingers, silently suspended, and the soloist has the opportunity to bring together the composed musical material in an enlivened musical moment, “Now, this is the way I see/ hear/ think about it.” Now: this moment, improvised, realized in sound. Each performance unique, responsive to the experience of the composed music as played by that particular orchestra, with that particular conductor, in that particular concert space on that particular day . . . Perhaps, sometimes, the soloist might even sit or stand in silence, when appropriate. And how would we, as audience, respond, being placed in the present? A new music unfolding that we would have to participate in, without expectations, if we, also, were to be present! Yet, what we teach our students is to perform, by rote, the jottings of some dead editor, seated away from the reality of a particular performance and working out a through-composed, for-all-times-to-come edition. What have we gained? What have we lost? Again (and again) what does this tell us about the society we live in?

...music can never be a thing in itself. . .all music is folk music, in the sense that music cannot be transmitted or have meaning without associations between people.

Blacking confronts us with radical insight. Who are the folk that attend concert-hall renditions? Associations only through past imprints, phonograph records over and over in the brain, or as rivers of continuity/ the score brought to life in the present moment “between people?” Consider all the student (and professional) recitals of Corelli’s *La Folia*: the melody played and then played again, unadorned! Carefully we program the computed music and evaluate the number of wrongly or imperfectly performed notes. Our educational process becomes a perpetuation of class values: an investment in the past, with payments in the future. In the process, we lose the present-moment/ finding.

Improvisation allows for the logic of our total selves to participate; what comes forth is the coherence of the sounding gesture.

My son, then about two years old, bent over, looking: the thin layer of ice-thawing bubbles and rivulets of Spring coolness. I learned to see again: his vision awakening in me green and purple limbs, as the earth brown tumbled all around us.

To see what is there (there is)
not what isn't there.

The basis of "education/training" [our schools
so vacant of fulfilling spirit] is to
indicate what is wrong

what is lacking

what must be improved

(in short, what isn't there)

to achieve the "perfect" condition
(an unknown state, at best, and so
the continual striving is inevitable;
never to rest

and never to be

in the present

Knowing what is within the sounding);
always a critical stance,
tearing apart endlessly.

Simply: is the glass half full or half empty?

(Practicing the Bach sonata, he suggested:

take the passage that you feel good about
and play it over and over; let it ~ that
understanding ~ reach out into and
teach the other parts of the sonata.

Truly experienced as a rite of passage.)

To drink what is there
is to enjoy the living.

To complain about what isn't there
is to see always what is lacking
and be thirsty, too.

August, 1968

— Blueberry Picking —

To build a house, never before having built one myself. We began with thoughts of a lean-to for summer living and that grew into a log cabin. How? So many questions (essentially, could I do it?) with no answers, except resolved in the doing.

Rabbi Nachman said: "there are no obstacles, except for their willing to be overcome; and in reality even these exist only in the mind." I learned of myself and became stronger for it ... and we enjoy our cabin now and love it.

But to build a house, a full house for year-round, cold Vermont winter living! seems like a fantastic undertaking, beyond my strength and capacities right now. (Images of self; destructive of doing ... the action is always simpler, itself being done.) It will take longer; no doubt of that. And already I am changing. We haul in rocks for the walls and daily I reach for the larger ones and enjoy their weight in my hands, moving.

I brought George to the abandoned granite quarry: huge cut and blasted chunks tumbling over into a deep pit, frozen in place now and the pit filled with rain water. When we got there, we realized it was impossible to record this: the whole presence of the gigantic rocks suspended in silence.

I wonder about concert halls and all the stuff called culture, as we drop tons of bombs on people in homes without flush toilets or con edison, the fires lighting the straw wind blowing mud over, while the plush seats and cold concrete of our moon reaching society, dozes

The sound of crickets is endless; each life pulsing its own music ... And the trees flowing in the wind: the total mass bending to an unseen weight; each branch, each tree having its own rhythm and, in its own way, responding. The old dead trees, limbs boldly outstanding, break and pierce the flesh in their rigidity — life and death make sense in the woods.

Why must concerts start at 8:30? — museum pieces of unfelt gestures in dressed tails without love. "I can't think of the tune now, but if I were bringing in the cows I could sing it without any trouble." There's no question of music out in the woods. It's all there, to listen to and sing with: an expression of myself overflowing. It's in the cities too, but I like space.

I imagine it's the way you look at things; and that can change, sometimes and even hopefully often, as things allow themselves to be seen. She suggested we turn the piano on its side and think of it as a ladder.

As the composition class moved out-of-doors and into the streets, our whole perspective changed. We were no longer musicians, but could now be charged with "disturbing the peace". Of course, if we got a permit from the city then it would be all right; but then again I didn't think that we could be too dangerous, compared to the organized murder that our government (silently, we) were inflicting all over the world. Music became something else; the concert hall only one of its outlets.

Ives writes of a music that is the expression

of the higher aspirations of the people. And he deeply believed in humanity, his own music over-reaching comfortable seats, leaving more to be said the listener participating.

I would have it that we allow things to grow and become of themselves. Schools would have to be quite different. And we can't be afraid of "failing" or not hearing the music the "right way". There are as many ways of loving as there are people. She showed us some watercolors of the barn wall. We looked at them and said they were nice. Then she pointed to one, the paint dripping the weathered textures, and said she liked that one the most. "It's the way I see the wall."

To simply sit down and make music, the moment being clear, is real to me. Later it will be different; my senses open: all sounds are of my hearing. My touch releases things into motion.

Was it that I didn't see these flowers last summer; or perhaps they weren't in bloom when I was present?

7/5/82

There are those who say that logic
is a straight line.

I say, let logic be
full circle of the self,
expanding slowly as the deep red tint
of the overshadowed moon reveals
more and more nuances
of inner sound.

9/82

Could it be that all learning (curiosity,
accumulating information, creative thinking, etc.)
is but an extension of the instinct to survive?
(Looking out of the bus, ongoing ~ observing the roads,
the environment, etc. so as to deal with situations better.)
We observe and so learn to cope with, to endure and,
possibly, a new vision, reveal. [Opening of clenched
fist; palm exposed: an offering.]

Everything has its own logic. The logic that
supposedly is "logic", is rather the working out of one
particular way that realizes the needs of a certain
organism (person, social group, culture) in its own
specific way. The need ~ urge to be realized/clarification
of procedure ~ is the source of energy which finds
its own logic/form (the brook flowing down hill between
rock and tree ----). Systematic, intuitive or whatever
label applied, is the outward manifestation of the
urge (the will) to be [is this Nietzsche's "will to power"?];
to become ----

The will to Know (information) related to survival;
as, also, art/culture related to coherence ("logic"/form)
of its own ~ as a kind of psychic survival.



[Greek virtu: each one's own excellence, unique energy form.]

4/87

We live in a society that stresses accomplishment ~ to achieve possessions so as to demonstrate and extend our powers, our capacity to control situations, people and things; to manifest "talent" as commodity and reciprocated as money-objects with techniques of "mastery" (virtuosity here as an image of apex, rather than as "virtu"/the clarity of power centered within each one self) — that leads us to exploitation of this talent (ourselves) and, beyond, to/and of others.

To sit still and listen ~ so as, at last, to hear ~ and be nourished by the fullness that is around us: the sounding world, the whole history of humanity (of musics of times before, as well as of now and in other spaces) coming together in ourselves, each one now (as musicians) in the moment of making music [we are the resonance of this fullness] here.

4/84

I am interested in the reality of sound ~ the full vocabulary of sound ~ (all aspects of sounding). To indicate a pitch as  is to delineate an image; to focus  on that (as in European concert hall music*) is to limit (by definition of the image given) the fullness of sound.

*(d = a history of implications ~ Western European music ~ with attitudes and value systems based on pitch and duration structure;

not the fullness of sound, but rather the organization of certain aspects to be worked with and focused on.)

To hear a sound ~ the physicality of a sound upon our body ~ is to experience much more than can ever be notated (nuances of texture, ever-changing spectrum of harmonic/noise balance, articulation, subtleties of dynamics, the arch of breathing/phrasing). Notation can only indicate aspects of the whole sounding gesture.

Images of things focus in with references to past experience.

What is needed, are points of departure/open doors to ever-evolving insights

: [outline for a lecture-demonstration]

7/87
.... so, also, the "soundings" improvisations as journeys into open-ended sound-spaces ~ to begin somewhere and arrive at some other place; the path(s) to be taken, unknown at the outset. How different are the pieces/improvisation structures (some more, some less) with the framework delineated beforehand!

Why the violin? (for me; and I play one of 19th century vintage!) ~ quite an archaic instrument in these days of electronics! (some humor here). [anachronism: ana-chron: out of time?!]

Images of what has been (as if static) — and even then, the violin of Bach and Paganini and of other cultures is quite different. (Images of performance practices.)

The violin is as deep and rich as the voice of anywhere/all time, is/can be anything; all touchings/resonances possible.

Images (pre-set habits) predispose us to what is; whereas what can be is always open-ended — a free improvisation, discovering.

Notice, the saxophone doesn't have this problem; it's too young still, not weighted with the history of performance practices and also associated with a music — jazz — that values the voice (the unique sound) of each musician (though in the hands of a classically trained, orchestral musician, it quickly takes on the faceless, bland quality, blending with all the others in the corporation).

I like the word "archaic". — It rings of a culture, deep-rooted; like the word "shaman".

.... to write of improvisation as travels of concert tours — peoples and places encountered: the human counterpart to brooks and trees growing, and clouds.....

a summoning of focus

~ by Malcolm Goldstein
(for Joseph Celli)

a ritual (internal process realized in sound);
a very gradual process of transformation (always
some aspect of sound changing ~ loudness, quality,
pitch, etc. ~ very slowly) exploring:
varieties/different degrees of transformation;
alterations of key levels, allowing for multiphonics,
buzzings, raspings, etc.; alterations of embouchure;
sometimes changing several parameters simultaneously,
as well as overlapping ~ using circular breathing
(that is, always a continuous sound).
... all this from a point of simple focus, transformed
into a richness, full in the exhilaration of sounding
and dwelled within: encompassing a new focus,
expansive and yet centered.

for wind instrument (preferably english horn or oboe)
(also saxophone, bass clarinet, clarinet,
bassoon, or flute)

solo (or, if performed with multiple instrumentalists,
then each to center upon their own process.)

a very gradual process of transformation

- (always some aspect of sound to be changing):
- explore varieties (different degrees) of transformation
(from slightly perceptible to very large changes,
within the full range of nuance/degrees of
change possible).
 - explore very gradual altering of key levels, singly
and in combination(s), allowing for multiphonics,
buzzings, raspings, etc. to occur.

- explore a very gradual alteration of embouchure (possibly include slow changes of position of the upper torso, like a very slow dance).
- explore changing several parameters simultaneously, as well as overlapping, etc. like:

(a) Key change level → and return to position →

b)
c)

... begin embouchure change →

- possible to use electronic amplification, with gradual changes of wind instrument position in relation to microphone, and other electronic modifications of the sound.

using circular breathing, that is, always a continuous sound. (If this is not possible, see below.)

a ritual (internal process realized in sound):

the process begins ppppp ---; a very slow crescendo --- and then gradually introduce other parameter changes ---

eventually, after a minimum of 12-15 minutes, the dynamic level should be fff

and the tonal quality be rich in harmonics and noisy

(rich in the full exhilaration of sound) --- this moment to be dwelled within for some time.

[the graphic score page can be used: as a general visual point of meditation, or as a more specific score to be realized aurally;

the quality/texture of the lines, thickness, placement on the page, etc. to be expressed as timbre/texture, loudness, pitch, etc. ~ starting from the center and working toward the outer lines.]

the piece can end in one of two ways:

- 1) if the focus has truly been arrived at, there is no need to go further; dwell within that sound, constant for some time, and then stop.
- 2) if the performer feels that the indwelling has not occurred, then stop the last sound abruptly and immediately articulate:

f' $\text{'f}'$ $\text{'f}'$ $\text{'f}'$ etc. 50 or more times.

(f = the rich, noisy fff "focus" sound;

f' = a high piercing pure pitch fff;

' = fast in-breath) — all of these elements and their repetition to be performed exactly constant, as to pitch, loudness, duration, etc. (though the performer can let f equal any "metronome" indication felt appropriate).

[Addenda: If the performer is not capable of circular breathing, then: all out-breaths should be long, though not necessarily the same duration, and all in-breaths constant, in duration about 2 seconds; the sound heard after the in-breath should be the same — pitch, quality, loudness, etc. — as when the sound stopped, previous to the in-breath; sounds should not always end with a decrescendo; the sense should be, after a while, almost as if the in-breath is not an interruption of the sounding — rather more the sense of line of sound carrying through it.]



January 22, 1977
Norwich, Vermont



4/18/77

Driving back to Vermont ~ a lot of time to think about our conversation regarding failure [as concerned in "a summoning of focus"]. I realized there are several things involved here:

First, the wind player is involved in an internal process (ritual) realized externally (performance). The first part of that condition [internal] implies a spiritual state (process of reaching to) which manifests itself, but is not concerned with the physical (technique) sounding. It is realized and immersed in the ever-expanding consciousness: a deepening within the broadening horizons simultaneously.

In this aspect/condition, failure is not a threatening or debilitating thing since there is no ego involved, but rather a process of learning more and more, and of becoming one with the physical transformation sounding ~ expanding and enlightening. Technique and effectiveness have nothing to do with all of this ~ but I believe that it will also be an enlightening experience to the "audience".

The second part of the condition (i.e. realized externally) has to do with images of ourselves ~ as musicians: people who cultivate music making techniques ~ that are directed toward successful realization of sound articulations. In this ~ the image ~ for most of us, the ego is very definitely involved and fearful of failure.

To admit failure in the first condition means simply: "I've gotten only so far and you've shared

that with me." (No condemnation here.)

To admit failure in the second condition means: "I can't do it". (A spanking and shame.)

My piece is involved with the first condition [attitude concerned with performance and improvisation] as a prerequisite to the sound realization — though I also perceive how, as complex beings, the two are so entwined in our human-all-too-human selves.

The Politics of Improvisation (1982)

these words
written, black upon white
heavily indelible within the mind's eye
should be heard,
sounded out as wind articulating
utterances, leaves fluttering in Autumn
to sign the presence of something passing, unseen but felt
within the spiral of the ear.

"The Politics of Improvisation" was first presented as a talk at the "Alte Schmiede" in Vienna, in May, 1982. Alte Schmiede: the "Old Blacksmith Shop." A place to forge, out of red hot metal, new ideas with which to tread upon paths as yet untravelled. A place of renewal: fire, of endless becoming and transcendence, and metal, of being and prescribed form, coming together in the passage of redefining. Now a place of meetings and exchanges/ changing.

The original presentation consisted of walking to various individuals and places in the room, posing a question and pauses for discussion. (The questions were written on separate cards and could be read in any sequence.) At the end, the audience was asked to submit their own questions which were read aloud and stimulated more discussion. I welcome such a continuing dialogue from the readers of this article.

Once upon a time, I imagined a piece of music in which I invited several musicians to my house to play some music. When they sit down to begin, and finding no music, they ask, "Where is the music?" . . . to which I respond, "*You* are the music!"

At the time I smiled at the idea, but later, as it lingered in my mind, I came to recognize the radical implications even within its simplicity.

(and so the story begins.)

What would happen if, in an orchestra,
a violinist (one of thirty or more) would get so
carried away with a musical passage, so as to begin
to express their own individual sense of that passage?

What would happen to the violinist?
What would happen to the orchestra?
What would happen to the conductor?
What would happen to the audience?
What would happen to the music?

Can you possess a sound?
Can you possess an improvisation?
Does the improvisation become more valuable if it is recorded
and copyrighted and sold?
Would you listen to a live performance differently if you knew
it was being recorded and was to be released as a phonograph
record?

How do you judge a concert of improvised music?
How do you judge a concert of classical, European music?
Is there a difference?

How does a music conservatory student judge a concert of
classical, European music?
How do you judge a concert of new (never heard before by you)
contemporary music?
How do you judge a concert of music from cultures outside of
the European tradition?

Why do we judge concerts / pieces of music?

Tell me please, do you judge each tree so critically?

Does the training of a musician, of a professional
musician, reflect the value attributed to the music?

Does the value differ from the "unschooled"
training of a folk musician?
... of a jazz musician?

Is it more valuable, less valuable or just different?

Can you copyright an improvisation?
Can you copyright a music composition?
Can you copyright an edition of a music composition?
Can you copyright a book discussing or analyzing the music composition?

Which is more valuable? . . . Why?

(Wind upon my face
coming and going.)

Is a composition by Bach or Beethoven
(or name your favorite composer) "perfect?"

Can an improvisation be "perfect?"

How is it that many composers who performed in the European classical repertory
were known in their time also for their talents as improvisors, and today
it is rarely part of a composer's activities?

Consider the training of a composer and performer:

What was the difference between composer and performer in the past?

What is the difference between composer and performer now?

Have we become so specialized as to narrow each spirit into the appropriate
slot for the final accounting?

How is it that as the price of printed music
goes up so also it seems that the value of living
people becomes more and more worth-less?

(music as rooted in the living experience)

Could the decline of improvisation have anything to do
with the development of the orchestra as a major institution
in classical European music?

Could the decline of improvisation have anything to do
with the establishment of large businesses printing music
available at a reasonable price?

What happens to the individual (performers and composers)
in the context of these larger institutions?

Have you ever, in the act of doing something,
realized it would be more meaningful
to be doing something else?

What would happen to a classical musician
at that moment performing a sonata?
What would happen to an improvising musician
at that moment playing music?

What would happen to your life?

When listening to some favorite piece of music,
performed by a different person or ensemble, do you recall
previous realizations?
Do you compare them? . . . at the moment of listening?
. . . afterwards? ever?

How is this different (if it is different)
from listening to an improvised music?

Why, in classes of musical
analysis, is the object
of study dissected in terms
of harmonic structure but
the *sound* of the living
music omitted?

In an improvisation, can you anticipate
anything that will happen?
. . . How does that make you feel?

In an often-heard piece of music, do you
anticipate anything that will happen?
. . . How does that make you feel?

What does this have to do with the musical experience?
. . . with the social/historical experience?
. . . with the personal experience?

Why are limited editions more valuable than unlimited editions?

What does "valuable" mean in this context?

Would the print be less an aesthetic experience if there were more of them?

Does that make each human being, uniquely one, the most valuable edition of all?

Singing a tone on each out breath,
over and over, the same tone for a very long time . . .
what do you hear?
What is constant? What changes?

Do you attempt to make the tones (dynamics, articulation, duration,
quality, intensity, etc.) all uniform?

Do you allow for differences to occur? Do you enjoy them?

If this were part of your profession, would your attitudes, of above, change?

How do you feel about a person who is illiterate?

Could you respect such a person?

Could you imagine working under such a person if he or she were
your director?

Do you think them capable of conceptualizing as subtly as you?

What do you think about a musician who cannot read music?

How is it that every school in the United States has a music appreciation course with major attention given to the European tradition of classical music?

How is it that very, very few schools in the United States have a similar class in the history and appreciation of jazz?

(Or is the issue here not only of class/ culture attitudes, but also of racism?)

Why is the musical “expression” separated from the piece of music? Why do students practice the notes and rhythm first and then add “expression”? - add it like spice on top of a cooked meal, rather than worked into the process of cooking.

How would you respond if a soloist, performing an 18th or 19th century concerto, would really improvise the cadenza in the midst of the concert?

How would you respond if a musician embellished and improvised around the melodic-harmonic structure of an 18th century music repeated section (as was done then) rather than simply to play it through again, but softly (as is done now)?

Could that moment ever be captured?

Would you want to capture it?

Have you ever observed the facial expressions
of a musician performing in an orchestra?
of a musician performing in a string quartet?
of a musician performing in a jazz ensemble?
of a musician performing in a rock concert?
of a musician performing in the street?
of a musician performing on a hillside?

What are some of the differences?

Do these have to do with the music being performed?
...with what you experience?

Who is the architect
that laid the foundation
for concert halls: seats all lined up,
nailed to the floor, rigidly
facing one way?

Do you ever feel the strait-jacket
or urge to stand up stiffly
at attention while the orchestra
performs as if
on military parade?

When an improvisation is said to be free
what does that mean?

Free from what?
Free to do what?

Can you listen this way also?
Free from the images and expectations?
Free to receive and participate?

When confronted with music that incorporates improvisation,
why do most professional musicians feel threatened and often
say, "anyone can do that."?
Because anyone can do it, does that make it less valuable?
And if anyone can do it, would each person do it the same way?
And, if the professional has lived with and played their instrument
for many years, would their realization be different and, if so,
in what way(s)?

And besides, do you really believe anyone could do it?

Why do students of music study editions in which the figured
bass (the standard 18th century improvisation shorthand) is
totally worked out, note for note, and often poorly realized
by the editor? . . . (What's his name?)

Who gains by this?
Who loses by this?

Is a musical improvisation a piece of music
or the whole of music?

(Why are selections of music called "pieces?")

If an individual were to realize the raga Bhairava every morning,
would it be the same "piece?"

If two individuals were to perform Bach's E Major Partita in
different eras, would it be the same "piece?"

If an individual were to improvise upon the chord changes of "Body
and Soul" in different countries, would it be the same "piece?"

How would you hear them? . . . listen to them? Would you be the same
person afterwards?

What does improvisation ask of the performer
that is so different from printed, through-
composed pieces of music?

...perhaps: "Who are *you*?"; "How do *you*
think or feel about this
moment/sounding?"

If an improvisation be looked upon as
a process of *discovery* by someone shared
within the moment with other people,
can an improvisation be unsuccessful?

Is it possible to teach music composition?
Is it any less possible to teach improvisation?

If composition is included in the curriculum of most colleges
and every music school, how is it that practically no school
includes improvisation in its course of study?

If improvisation were taught in every music school,
would that make it more valuable? or less valuable?
to whom?

Can you name the 2nd flute player in the . . . orchestra;
or the 4th horn player, or even the lead viola player?

How is it that devoted listeners to jazz can name all of the instrumentalists
in an ensemble?

Why is the capacity to name the people so different in these two situations?

When you go to a concert, do you hear the piece of music as an object
(Symphony No. 5) or as the sounding of people, for people of the moment?

How much do we think of a label,
which identifies an object,
which conjures up a sound image
of a recorded rendition

. . . while we sit and listen to a live performance?

Can improvisation ever be heard this way?

Why is "improvisation" a special word? . . .
when, in fact, we improvise all day long and
in everything we do.

Do other cultures in the world include
such a word in their language?

Consider what I am doing here/now; what you are doing-
the way we are relating: You, listening to what I have to
say and I, talking and wondering who you are and what you
think about all this.

Consider:
the difference between a lecture and a conversation;
the difference between an orchestra with a conductor and
a chamber ensemble without one.

How many words do you read each day?

How many sounds do you hear each day?

How many new thoughts do you think each day?

What do you do with all this information received each day?

6/12/83

I find myself writing about improvisation again ~ reading Rothenberg's comments on translation (see "Technicians of the Sacred", preface and commentaries) and reflecting on my own interview touching on oral tradition. How strange!: music, a phenomenon of sound, now predicated upon the written page, and all of its studies having to do with techniques, etc. from the printed page (with a little ear training thrown in). It's all moved to the frozen page tradition, at odds with the lively ("once upon a time") tradition.

Not to be forgotten, though, is the music culture of most of the world (by contrast to the Western European classical tradition). Oral/aural tradition: music of the educated ear, eye and fingers (the whole body perceiving) of the musician and released through/from fingers to ears, within the social setting of enactment (performance), and so completing the continuity/flow of culture.

7/21/86

... spirituality and politics, as reflected in the work of an artist. For myself, within my work I understand that clearly ~ as tied together within the relationship of the natural sounding of the world (including people) and expressive within the context of improvisation (people being the valued center ~ improvisation being thought of as the process/in-the-act of discovery ~ to other people, sharing). The mutual touching of it all is a discovering and focusing in the moment of the sound coming forth, rather than an imposing or demonstrating (either by compositional structure or relationships of

people). How then can improvisation not be discussed? It is integral with the sounding of the environment and at the root of my spirituality/politics coming together.

10/7/85

I sit alot in La Place des Vosges, quiet rest place in this too-much-rushing city. Reading about Varèse ~ slowly, the French words improving with the reading ~ and thinking about the meaning of percussion music for him and Cage: to free them of the tempered scale and eventually to lead to an interest in sounds of the environment ~ the "timbre of sound, itself the object" (or, as Jim would say, "Klang"). But we (some very few!) have gone beyond this (and Cage, too) and can return to instruments ~ possibilities with new ears (but can conservatory trained musicians follow with us??) to create a new music of sound/texture with pitch-noise of any and all complex overtone structures (not just the piano black and white twelve tones ~ Schoenberg creating a system to hold it all together, when the air was circulating in the palm of hand opening to fresh possibilities). It's possible to use these set pitches (nothing need be discarded), but all the rest is more interesting to me. And so, for me, there are no microtones; this word implies a hierarchy of set tones, which are the points of reference for the microtones. (And so we can push Schoenberg further: all tones and tonal complexes are equal, not just the black and white 12 tones. We can have the full spectrum: yellow, orange, red, blue, green, purple, etc..)

In my violin playing of "Soundings" all is possible,

the violin leading me to learn new possibilities, as I keep my ears open. (Oh, I think so much in Europe! where systems, logics, ideas and structures pre-meditated are so at the source of art work, culture, etc. ~ and what I see is it all as logics' to hold together each own culture's way, to allow/reflect in art "language" ~ clarification by focus and intensification, release of energy through form, ritualization of experience, etc.. And even in this, each culture and country has its own needs and ways.) And then it gets pushed further and becomes "high culture" (art) separate from "people" (for them, commercial pop forms to entertain in cities ~ but then, as Blacking says truly: isn't all of this folk music; it just depends on who the folk is!), and away from the dirt of daily experience (that which interests me the most: our fragility on this earth, all the nuances of things passing as heard in the breath of bow upon string; every detail and never exactly so again.) Not objects to be sold and museum pieces pinned upon the wall, but our naked selves.

This morning, 11 a.m., light like halo upon the heads, hair and bodies of people; edges of contours brilliant and slowly, imperceptibly changing as the sun moves through the sky, we moving/becoming forms perceived/perceiving the joy of living moment. I smile. This morning, earlier, I had thought of "high culture" in this city of "high culture" (haute cuisine), filled with tourists and my hotel room (even as at Notre Dame last night) enveloped in the smell of latrines, etc. (perfumes and body deodorants make sense in such places of "high culture"). But morning light and trees, with children and I think of/feeling "joy of living moment!": the space of a park versus the concrete

of cars and people rushing. Ah! so I have preferences for a specific kind of "dirt", as of trees and brooks and earthen dirt; I make choices ~ at least for living. City dirt, gas fumes, latrines and garbage ~ yes, we must deal with these too (they are here); but always the wilderness (the wild places Thoreau talks about) is important ~ I need that most of all.

"to carry through in the form"

[reflections on a performance of John Cage's "Theater Piece": twenty nouns and/or verbs; actions to be realized in time—a new theater inviting participation.]

We all had questions. Some had answers, even before the questions occurred—but what had to happen was that answers had to be worked out; that something be *done*, when and even sometimes how and where. Again I learned (again & again, the teaching comes and when will it be *learned?*): no answers, except as resolved in the doing.

Twenty cards, each with a noun or verb; each separate on its own card. (Unrelated as yet, to meet in a field of time/ defining the unfolding of actions.) What shall the words be? "Anything goes—only when nothing is taken as the basis. In utter emptiness anything can take place." . . . So I tried a chance procedure of having the dictionary give me a list of words. Amazing results! . . . Words I've never heard of, whole new possibilities of ways/ of kinds of actions. And in working out the time score—whole new relationships of things became. Continually, new doors opened.

[Later I would try other ways: lists of objects that might be sounded and ways of articulation; definitions of space and movement; focuses on people—various explorations that illuminated always new aspects of doing.]

The group of performers met: musicians, dancers, actors, sculptors, video & film makers—all overflowing with ideas, possibilities, imagings, desirings—but none with a score worked out! Mind had leaped out beyond body, frozen in anxiety. Longing and fear confronted. . . The questions became more passionate. An impassive score, allowing so much; could it hold all these dreamings together?

per/form: "to carry through in the form"

or "to accomplish entirely, achieve, complete."
"to carry through to completion; to complete
finish, perfect (an action, process, work, etc.);
to bring about, bring to pass, cause, effect, produce (a result),
to carry out in action (a command, request, promise,
undertaking, etc.); to carry into effect,
execute, fulfill, discharge;
to carry out, achieve, accomplish, execute (that which
is commanded, promised, undertaken, etc.
or, in extended sense, any action, operation,
or process undertaken or entered upon);
to go through and finish, to work out, do, make;
to do, go through or execute formally or solemnly
(a duty, public function, ceremony or rite;
a piece of music, a play, etc.);
to act, play (a part or character); to act in a play;
to perform music, play or sing;
go through a performance."

"prepare a 30 minute program of action"
(Theater Piece, 1960)

We act, but the results are always in our head: Confusion of presence (present *and* future, and, also, the past clinging to us) . . . “anything goes—starting from nothing” . . . no premises, or patterns of behaviour clinging to present acts, fears of execution (success and even perfection) and always judging/being judged . . . is it effective? (a result)—and so the act is not so simply doing, within itself being done.

. . . which is what “Theater Piece” asks to be enacted.

And what if I choose as one of my words, ‘Kill’? an actor asks. (Why need to choose the word?) I think of similar situations in the past: given the freedom of choice, people ask if they can smash my violin—of course not! Why does freedom from restraints unleash inclinations to destroy, rather than freedom to create? . . . The answer is all around us.

Our dictionaries reflect us; dictate us our society mirrored in its confusion, attempting to clarification. We are a capitalist society, laying away nuts like a squirrel—but also with the dream that what we have stored, will multiply. Always there is the question of effectiveness; the question of the right investment with the most returns (the act of investing, itself not so much a thing in itself but something that has roots tangled in the future): the rehearsal to “improve” things; the schooling for a “better” life. John Cage’s Theater Piece places us where we are: an illumination of the *present*.

So also the performance: concern with the *act*, not with oneself. More questions; (the encounter with this piece has reached to the depths of ourselves, stirred up). The thought (the fear): how am I expressed in all this? (and appreciated for my efforts).—Clearly, in the doing, how cannot we be but expressed, being at one with the action?! A dancer sounding the space. What is important is the *clarity* of participation; (neither self assertion nor denial of self, but rather a commitment to performance): the focus (might I say, even, love?) within the event, present.

And in the process, of choosing words/material to create situations as yet unknown, we found ourselves in unseen circumstances, forced to be inventive. Multiple activities, simultaneously realized, becoming a new gesture—uniquely expressive. Or a succession of events evolving a new sense of phrase, as yet unbreathed. (It became clear that though each person identified themselves as a musician, dancer, or whatever, we were in a situation in which all aspects of our total presentation participated in the experience. All gestures were dance/movement, music/soundings, visual images in space.) . . . And in performance, the audience moving around and through us, the imagined line between “actors” and “spectators” blurred, creating an even more rich fabric of living relationships (without intention, but *there*).

Upon roads intersecting, occasionally, participants meeting in a space of time. (Theater) And departures, too; though no timetable dictating which way, where or how . . . and things were transformed of themselves and people, too, in the doing, so were changed.

August 20, 1977—Sheffield, Vermont

Two Program Notes:

"a breaking of vessels, becoming song" by Malcolm Goldstein (1981)

The music has to do with reflections on the breaking of the vessels/shells ("kelipot")—with the release of sparks of creative energy—as referred to in the Book of Zohar, and on the "Perennial Question" of existence as posed in Charles Ives' "Unanswered Question." It is the process of sound events becoming articulate as phrase gestures, of a "larger" melody implied.

It is an improvisation structure in which all of the participants (orchestral instrumentalists, conductor and flute soloist) play an active role in creating the dynamic flow of the music. The orchestra, working from a specially devised notation, progresses from a gamut of specified events to more tonally designated timbre modulation phrases. The flute part has no prewritten material at all, but rather uses the living sounds of the orchestra as the basis for the solo improvisation. It is a concerto, a "working together," in which the soloist, responding, extending, combining and molding the orchestral performance, creates, within the ever-fleeting moment, the vision of communal song.

"Cascades of The Brook: Bachwasserfall" by Malcolm Goldstein (1984)

"Cascades of The Brook: Bachwasserfall" is an improvisation structure for chamber orchestra with solo violin. The music is conceived of as an extension of the first movement of Bach's Sonata in G minor for Violin Solo, itself an elaborate, through-composed improvisation. The notation of the original manuscript serves as the basis for the notation of the chamber orchestra realization. It is transformed through collage and other graphic devices, overflowing with nuances and implications, as it elaborates upon the melodic and harmonic structure of the original prelude. While the orchestra performs from notations of performance possibilities, the violin soloist improvises freely, expressing the lines as tonal/sound-texture qualities with a new vision of violin sounding.

At the core of Baroque music was the integration of composition and improvisation: the composer/performer, the realization of improvisation structures notated as figured bass lines and the practice of rich embellishments to give life to melodic skeletons. It has been said that Bach was not just a brook, but an ocean. This music attempts to sound some of the depths of this vast ocean and places the performer/artists in a continual process of creative discovery. "Cascades of The Brook" was composed in 1984 for this premier occasion, to celebrate Bach's 300th birthday.

The Gesture of Improvisation (1982)

(some thoughts, reflections and questions regarding percussion music)

What does improvisation ask of the performer
that is so different from printed, through-
composed pieces of music?

... perhaps, "who are *you*? How
do *you* think or feel about
this moment/sounding?"

Origins of gesture:

percussion: the striking of one object against/with another
with some sharpness; impact.

percuss: to strike (something) so as to shake or cause
shock to.

Extensions:

to strike: hit, smite, beat, thump;
affect, touch, impress, occur to;
collide, bump;
attack.

Nuances:

strike: knock, hit, tap, rap, slap, pat, thump, beat, bang,
slam, dash; punch, pound, whack, batter, pelt, buffet,
belabor, club, belt, lambaste, clip, swat, wallop, throp,
pulsate, bruise;
also, give impetus, impel, push, thrust, prod, elbow, shoulder,
jostle, hustle, shove, jolt, bump.

And another aspect:

touch: feel, palpate, handle, finger, thumb, paw, fumble,
grope, brush, glance, stroke, caress, rub, scratch, shake,
scrape.

Consider the differences between a technique that is unconscious and one where each gesture has an awareness of its own quality.

What would happen to the performer?

What would happen to the music?

Consider the usefulness of a technique that is “automatic” to “do the job,” that is, a learned behaviour, and the significance of a technique that is “discovered” or “invented” to realize needs as yet unheard.

What is accomplished with the learned technique?

What is lost?

to experience and feel the impact of each stroke,
to have it reverberate in our own body,
to resonate, in outward thrust, another response/
gesture, to continue the dialogue.

Consider the possibility of creating a technique that is the realization of necessity (what is needed to be expressed; what is needed to be done—needs of the performer and the music being done/enacted), rather than only the unconscious physicalities of some other music (time and place).

Improvisation as a process of focus, in touch with the needs of the present music (not a repetition of one’s habits—learned behaviour from the outside or even one’s own habits); aware of the needs of the moment/sounding: a dialogue of discovery.

Improvisation as a process of defining a technique that is itself always evolving.

Why have certain standard performance techniques evolved?

Could these have reference to specific needs of a specific time and place?

What do these have to do with *your* specific needs as a percussionist/player of other people’s music?
of your own music?

What is the difference?

The function of a single stroke: to sound something.

The function of repeated strikings: to extend the sounding of a single stroke; perhaps to modify and give variety of articulation, dynamic and, possibly, timbre.

Explore the sound of a single stroke. Hear clearly
the sound—its articulation,
the overtones of its center and
the resonance following—
to experience its particular
presence;
with awareness of the physical gesture
that creates/is at one with
the sound.
Hear the silence after the sound,
with awareness of your body
within that silence.
Then another stroke, etc. . . .

Use various objects/
instruments (wood,
skin, membranes,
metal, paper, etc.)
to be sounded
using various objects
to articulate the
sound, including
your own hand(s).

Hear the sound as responsive to/at one with the
energy, of the stroke rooted in the body/needs
in the presence of the person (you) at that moment.

Explore trying to make the sound always the same
(what is necessary for this to happen?); and, also,
always slightly different, as well as radically
different (what choices are necessary in these
changes? what aspects to focus on to alter?
how does the body gesture participate?).

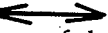
To improvise in this manner one would have to be
always responsive to this continuity of dialogue: the quality
and duration of a single sound suspended in silence.
Improvisation as a process of discovering (though usually it
implies inventing and demonstrating of one's own imagination
within a more or less given framework); as a process of
focus on a sound-texture/gesture and learning more and
more of the nuances, details as well as the expanses and
horizons to sound out.

Explore the gradual, very gradual transition from
the single stroke, with pause, (allowing for the
resonance to complete itself and even then
some silence after)—to the articulation of
a sound repeated as fast as possible (extended
by its repetition).

Explore with one hand sounding (left only; right only)
and then with alternating hands, to arrive at a
“roll,” with awareness of changes of nuances of sound—
the articulation, the overtones of the resonance, the
partials that are evoked by overlapping through
repetition—and your own body vibrating in
participation of the developing sound.

Consider the differences of a sound evoked (like by rubbing, brushing, etc.) from the sound source (skin membrane, etc.).

Percussion: to strike a stroke: to hit (sound by impact)
to stroke: to rub (sound by friction)
[awareness of the physical gesture]

Explore the gradual, very gradual shifting of emphasis of
a stroke  to stroke
being aware of the nuances of change in your
body/the sound: they are one.

Perhaps each percussionist should construct their own instrument(s),
to be able to realize what is their own sense of sounding to
them (and that would change, as one lives, also).

Once again, the thought that the choice of material objects/
instruments and the spacial arrangement of the instruments
relates to the music that is desired/needed, as expression of
a particular person, people, place, time. Compare Indonesian
gamelan, Japanese gagaku, Ghanian drumming, European
orchestra, Jazz ensembles, etc.—music of the whole world.
Compare the changes in instruments of the so-called jazz
drum set over the past sixty years and how these changes
relate to the sound of the music/the ensemble, the need
for and, at once, the development of techniques appropriate
to realize the sound expressive of a person or people
in a music making situation.

Consider the marvelous work of Harry Partch.

Images of what an instrument can do:

images from outside of the instrument since it is always
the human being/culture that defines the image form and
makes it to sound and in what manner (technique).

Images as limitation(s) of possibilities;

images, also though, as beams of light to be extended
out into the present moment.

Percussion music as means of communication

of transferring information over long distances

Percussion music as a dance of one object upon another

and of the percussionist as dancer:

the breathing of the dancer to make for a phrase;

(the temptation of “technique” to keep the music at

our fingertips and not within the core of our body/our being).

The rich and complex vocabulary of the percussionist's
body/gesture:

using one hand only,
hands alternating,
using two different kinds of strokes simultaneously,
single or double notes: the stick rebounding and
repeating the note,
upward or downward glancing blows,
striking alternately with butt and head of stick, or
using different sticks in each hand,
striking near the edge, or center, or,
muffling the sound by touching the head of a drum
with finger tips,
by slackening the tension of the heads with and
immediately after the stroke,
thumping with fingers,
clashing together with a swinging motion,
a face to face blow,
damping by touching the vibrating object to the chest,
shaking the instrument in the air,
changing the angle of beating with fast alternating strokes,
rubbing objects together to make a shuffling sound,
a rustling sound,
jogged by the hand,
struck with the knuckles, fist, fingertips or back of
the hand, or struck upon the knee,
clapping together two objects,
scraping a stick over a series of notches,
throwing one object at another,
turning a crank to make a whirring sound,
pulling an object through or along another,

and all the techniques described in orchestration textbooks:

the roll,
the flam,
the drag or ruff,
paradiddle and
rim shot.

Think about sources of
percussion music:
in dance and play,
in military activities,
in language, etc.

How does the percussion element function
in these? What does it have to do with
you (the percussionist) now?

Consider the pitch \longleftrightarrow noise spectrum possibilities of
percussion music; the harmonic overtones of each sound
("definite" \longleftrightarrow "indefinite" pitch).

It is at edges of the unknown, at moments of transition,
that we are enriched with new insights. Difficult times,
perhaps, but times of discovery to help clarify/focus
in on the manner of articulating a gesture/one's own
sound.

The rich spectrum of objects:

hard metal of a vibraphone plate,
craggy edge of a calf skin drum head,
warm glow of a marimba key,
spongy softness of a cotton or flannel beater,
lacquered brightness of wood blocks.

to experience a response (the rich complexities of
a human being) to the fullness of this variety.

Explore a variety of arrangements of objects/instruments
to be played upon/with.

Explore a variety of distances between the objects to be
sounded;
hearing the resonances within the room;
moving through space at varying speeds;
staying at one place for a while, defining that
particular space and then, gradually, learning
to define the whole space of that room
(that day, that arrangement, as you, then);
playing on the run and
stationary, for a moment.

Change it some other day
as is necessary.

The Gesture of Sounding

Sound as a physical reality, touching
upon ears of our body. The gesture
of musician (shaper
of sound) moving
and molding the air, extending
through voice and finger-
tip to release
the vibrations within, shared,
through performance (to put in-
to form) in outward space,
for audience to receive and so
be touched.

Gesture of breath and contact
in motion, touch
of wind and finger upon
wood, hair, skin and metal,
gut, ivory and felt
bodies/objects transformed in their sounding,
as mouth releases, impressing,
the air within
outwards,
and fingers and wrist articulate
from root of spine (and deeper)
the totality of who
we are, that moment resonating
both inward impulse and outward
realization being
one.

The musician as dancer : one who moves
space, sounding.

8/26/84

releasing sounds/ our voice through objects

by Malcolm Goldstein

To play the piano, or any instrument [technology], at the end of one's finger-tips or the playing (we being played) from within our center [root of spine, navel tree rooted in earth unfolding in heavens, our breath expanding] --- Human being with thumbbed hand, has the capacity to reach out --- with closing hand --- grasp, contain, fashion in form, control --- or --- with opening hand ---

Technology as realization of what needs to be done: combining form, meaning and skill; so also, technic: pertaining to art, made by art, skill; and technique: manner of artistic execution or performance.

The ink upon this page (all technology) as a means of communicating my voice/ thoughts in a new form. Technology as an aspect of technique: Consider the outward realization of what needs (inner) to be done (rather than as a reiteration of someone else's, someone else's needs and practices.)

The cog wheel found rusting in the street, crumbling (flower-like becoming) as I outline it touching as it rolls its new path of possibility upon this page, becoming renewed.

Graph the detailed contours of a road --- that which we travel on, go somewhere with --- the top surface and its directions in space: of a path in the woods and in the mountains, of a dirt country road, a city road, a super highway, of a jet-plane trajectory and find the appropriate means of sounding this in space, using voice/body, instruments, any up-to-date means of technology.

How different to project our voice or an object: the speed of sound and the speed of light.

Malcolm Goldstein 11/2/83

The music (means of production) as an outward sounding revealing, through each appropriate media, the inner vision.

Compare our travels driving on a super highway and on old country roads: what we experience of the landscape differently --- and if we walked, what would be different. To get from place to place or to be in each place, travelling.

upon the string, within the bow... breathing

~by Malcolm Goldstein (1972)


for string quartet (or any string group allowing for ensemble possibilities; no less than a trio, maximum possibly an octet; or even a string orchestra separated around the environment ~ the performing/listening space).

sound material:

- 1) nine phrases, as notated on two pages of the score.
- 2) improvised interjections, as explained below.

(i) performance instructions and notation explanations for the nine phrases:

- : all bow beginnings (even loud ones) to be supple;
no audible articulations of bowing; full slow bowings.
- : duration of each phrase (bow breathing) quite long;
minimum of 10 seconds per phrase to about one minute
or possibly more, dependant on ~
 - a) bow control (always a continuous, legato sound;
no bow direction changes being audible);
a gradual evolution of timbre dynamics.
 - b) explore variety of duration of bow breathings.
 - c) possible to fit a phrase into one bow length or several.
- : choice of pitches: A, B^b, C, C[#], D : any octave register;
any finger (string) position; harmonics possible ~
up to the discretion of the performers.
- : notation (graphically indicated):

- vibrato quality/speed
 - bow placement, timbre quality
 - 
 - dynamics
- (set pitch constant)
- (irregular pitch, "bendings", etc. ~ fingertip below and above set pitch)

© Malcolm Goldstein . 1975

abbreviations:

norm = normal (i.e. position of bow)

fgbd = on fingerboard

brdg = on bridge

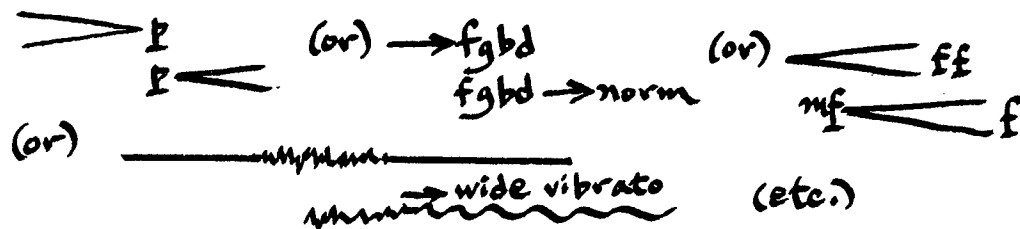
nr = near

→ = motion from one toward another
indication (position, tone quality, etc.)

- duration and rate of changes of bow positions, vibrato quality, dynamics, etc. are proportional to their place indicated along the pitch line. (the actual total duration of a phrase varying, from one realization to another in the course of playing the music, but the proportions of its components being constant as notated) ~ always a phrase, once begun, is to be played completely.

: one player begins and the others enter thereafter, within the next minute; possible ensemble relationships for the phrases:

1) choosing a phrase whose beginning evolves out of an aspect of the sounding phrase of some other player; for example:



2) occasionally choose a phrase which will gradually (possibly) change the direction or the immediate sound material of the total ensemble.

- 3) about 7 seconds after the completion of some other player's phrase (never more than 30 seconds pause between phrases) perform a phrase in response to some aspect heard at the end of the previously completed phrase.

(2) performance instructions for the interjections:

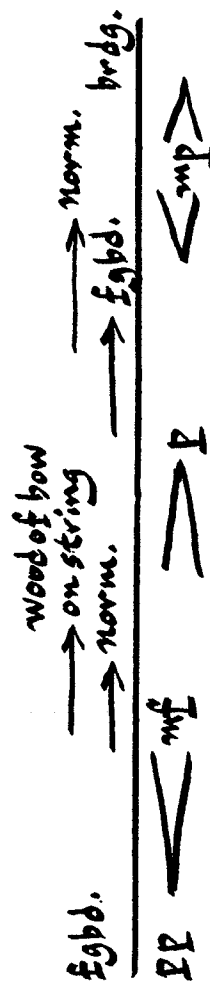
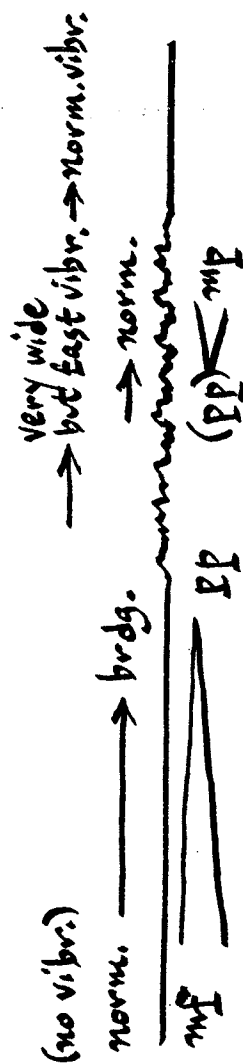
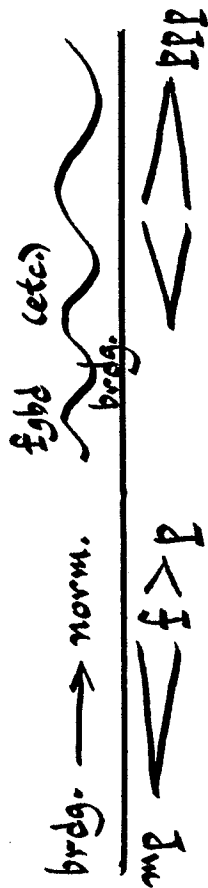
- : interjections should occur only occasionally; should be special events of sparked energy (though not necessarily loud).
- : very short; never more than 2 seconds.
- : choice of pitches: all possible pitches, but emphasizing pitches excluded from the phrase gamut.
- : use of staccato, jeté, collé, tremolo, col legno battuto, other side of bridge, pizzicato, body of the instrument, etc.



: articulation relationships for interjections:

- 1) possible for two or more players to cue each other and perform their interjections together (though each decide their own specific realization of the interjection, improvised).
- 2) cued at the beginning of another musician's phrase.
- 3) evolving out of, or within, the shape/quality of another musician's phrase.

total duration of the process: no less than 15 minutes; performers can arbitrarily decide the length of the performance time before starting, or allow for



(no vibr.)

wood of
bow on str. → norm. → brdg. vibr.
p < mp > mf > p

vibr. → very wide
norm. → but fast vibr. → no vibr.
pp → brdg. → nr. brdg. norm.
f p

(no vibr.)

brdg. (etc.) → vibr.
egbd. → norm. → brdg.
mp < > < > < > (mp)

(no vibr.)

brdg. → vibr. very fast
wood of bow but wide vibr. → intense vibr. → no vibr.
→ on string → nr. brdg. → brdg.
f mp p p

norm.
vibr. → intense vibr.

nr. brdg. → brdg. → norm. ||: brdg. norm. brdg. norm.:|| → no vibr.
ppp f mp

an organic sense (after the 15 minute minimum)
of an ending to happen — or have no concert
hall ending (the process in an open field).

the total sound-texture of the music should generally
be a gradual evolution of timbre dynamics; a mass
of varying density (varieties of performers at any one
time and in various registrations); sounds to grow
out of sounds and then be transformed along their
own path; a smooth flowing and breathing
maintained throughout. — occasionally this is
broken by articulated interjections (by one or more
of the players) cutting into the flowing mass; these
happenings to be as an outgrowth of something implied
in the phrase soundings or by arbitrary decision.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of connected, somewhat abstract strokes that suggest a name.

June, 1972 Sheffield, VT.

3/11/76

thoughts about "upon the string, within
the bow --- breathing":

... a kind of sound landscape; the ebb and flow of breathing sound ~ Kind of like sitting in a field and allowing for the space (changing) to enter into us or for us to overflow beyond ourselves and into it, as our senses expand to the life processes taking place around us (in ourselves). It is not that anything is being expressed (no thing; no specific projection; nothing to be projected) but rather that things speak to us with the voice of their own presence ~ and our body (ears and all) are open to receive whatever and, perhaps, respond. In such moments we are changed ~ like those moments walking in the woods when we stop and, centered, hear the subtleties of a new language breathing, with occasionally a leaf falling or a bird call breaking through, or a sudden shift of light momentarily recalling something else, more tangible ~ but always the breathing of life, endlessly transforming (being transformed), gradually becoming a song without beginning or ending.

After seeing a recently published string trio, in which there are many aspects of my string ensemble piece (though in the published trio there is no attention given to really getting into the sound material and allowing it to evolve of itself; rather it is a using of it as "interesting" material in an "artistic" structure), ~ I realize a profound difference of attitude towards the sound material and its "use" in music.

... like the relationship of the players to the material performed: In my "piece" (hopefully) there is

a whole revitalized relationship to sounding ~
an intensification of the awareness of bowing and breath
~ rather than performance practice/techniques of
ponticello, etc. ~ in which the string player becomes
(hopefully, again) something more than one performing
techniques, but rather someone who is exhilarated
in the moment of discovery (of the living relationship
of the bow and its sounding the string, centered
in his own breathing) ~ and in the moment of
discovery of the sounding between/within the ensemble
~ a kind of living sound in which each one
flows within the total sonority but is expressive of
his own breathing, his own way ~ being sensitive
to oneself and yet discovering a new sounding coming
forth, transcendent of each individual ~ getting
into this, and, again, overflowing into it and beyond
(like a listener, but also a participant).

: the necessity of ways of rehearsing and exploring
"upon the string":

- ~ listening and specifically choosing an aspect of
someone else from which to start one's own
phrase ~ and always, each phrase, from
someone different each time. (And, in the
beginning, focus on one clear aspect: pitch,
timbre/quality, bow technique, dynamics, etc.)
 - ~ using only one pitch for all; also, later, limited
pitch groups.
 - ~ starting from one pitch; expanding the gamut
slowly.
 - ~ different rates of change of pitch choice (one
every few bowings; one every bow/phrase; etc.)
 - ~ static pitch areas with different phrases.
- (introduce "sparks" articulation later in the rehearsal
process.)

3/1/85

...rehearsal procedures for "upon the string..."
(some suggestions to a conductor of a string orchestra):

The essential quality to focus on is the awareness of their own body/breathing and that relationship to the sound: drawing a bow across the string (down bow with out-breath) and hearing the nuances of change (to accept and enjoy; not to reject as "imperfect", but to understand as related to their own body/arm breathing). They should probably separate out into the space, so as to be able to hear themselves well and with detailed, careful listening ... and then come together in a group. — a kind of meditation-in-action, in which they are the mover-being-moved.

Then go on to explore bow placement, bow speed, nuances of crescendo and decrescendo (as related to bow pressure and speed) on open strings, with awareness of the relation to body/breathing = PHRASING. (Always the phrasing-shaping of breath/gesture is the Key.)

Then go on to stopped notes (any one) and add varieties of vibrato (the finger expressive) to the bowing studies, for more nuances of phrasing; explore varieties of concurrence and independence of different energies (like increase vibrato rate while decreasing bow pressure, etc.).

(I forgot to emphasize how much detail should be given to bow placement, earlier mentioned: A lot!!! Nuances, always, of timbre change. On fingerboard and near and on bridge. Hear the quality changes: nuances and gross changes; varieties of overtones sounding; varieties of scratch. What their bodies are doing/how they breath, etc...)

Doing all of this as individuals; then listening to the others and trying to imitate:

- 1) exactly as possible;
- 2) with some aspects the same, others intentionally changed;
- 3) beginning with some aspect exactly the same and then taking the sound (phrase) somewhere else.

(This is to be done always with silence in between each phrase; to sit and LISTEN before playing = different densities/areas of people are playing and new ones entering, overlapping, etc.. Always one pitch sustained and a new one, possibly, for a new phrase.)

(You might also try separating them as trios, quartets, etc. throughout the hall, shifting them around after a while, and bringing them together as a complete ensemble; and then separating them again ...)

(Also, phrases should be developed to extend over more than one downbow length, but with as little as possible break in the sound between bow changes, to effect one long breathing bow.)

So far this has all been done without reference to the score! ~ all done aurally/physically. Now it is time (hours later/personal awareness and interaction, ensemble awareness developed) to go to the score and work on the nine phrases, using the specific notation and pitches given, etc. EACH ONE IS TO BE THOUGHT OF AS A MELODIC PHRASE, though using only one pitch for each phrase as notated.

(Separate groupings out into the hall again ~ listening to that group, within, and then, as well, including relationships of sounding to other individuals across the hall, etc.) In working on the written out phrase/melodies, the proportion of duration aspects shaped

(indicated in the score) should remain about the same proportion of time, whether the realization of the phrase/melody is 10 seconds (like one bow length) or one minute (several bow lengths). This sense of proportion will have to be practiced, so as to feel and sound comfortable/natural.

Then go to the interjections (different pitches) and explore the possible groupings, solo, density and with variety, etc. : as a different kind of breathing/articulating. — and then put it all together (still going between small groups spaced out in the hall and, again, the whole ensemble together).

(Someday, I will have to get my book on improvisation together, to make this kind of working format/awareness development available. The moment-to-moment need-to-be-explored/clarified is always there/to be done = technique.)

12/20/81

The Key to the idea of timbre modulation (in "The Seasons: Vermont / Autumn") is found in the second third (middle section) of the tape collage. This can be heard (naturalistically) as a shifting of attention between wind (as realized in the shimmering of the leaves), tractor, truck, dropping of leaves and sometimes wind/distortion in the microphone.

But I like to hear it as one sustained sound in which different qualities become more apparent and in which the balance of qualities is always shifting — most often gradually, but sometimes surprisingly sudden. It's all coming out of one speaker — one sound within many nuances evolving.

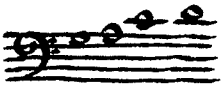
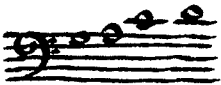
And then again, it's nice to allow the mind its capacity for imagistic fantasy — and to break away from the one sound, and to fill it with the many sources (almost to relive, now in a new context, the original moment of recording it all).

Actually, nothing of it is "natural" anymore (though it can evoke images by its having been of the environment — its "seeming" to be). In the process of collage, it is now something new: a sound construction. And so, I enjoy obvious mechanical noises and distortions and even some awkward breaks in the sound, to make clear the hand of the making / the machine intervening and the transformation — the remaking, to establish a new sound environment.

Jade Mountain Soundings

(for bowed string instrument, solo) ~ by Malcolm Goldstein
(for Robert Black) (1983)

The music focuses on aspects of sound-quality/texture expressed through the performance of a bowed string instrument: the physicality of generating the string to sound. Bow pressure, bow speed and bow placement are fundamental considerations in the sound of this music. The graphic score indicates, by thickness and curve of line, changes in these aspects of performance technique. The lines, similarly conceived of as phrases, are always realized as sustained (legato, lyrical) bowings — as varieties of breathing (the bow upon/within the string). The music can also be conceived of as a kind of meditation.

The instrumentalist determines four pitches, prior to the performance, which will be the total gamut of the piece. For example, the gamut can be as simple as  (i.e. for string bass), or as complicated as  desired. Each pitch is fixed in its specific registration but, as indicated with the Roman numerals in the graphic score, can be played on any of the four strings ~ another possibility of expressing variety of sound-quality/texture for each pitch. (The Roman numerals indicate specific strings, (I, II, III, IV) the highest to the lowest.) Harmonics (natural and artificial) are also possible, as long as the sounding pitch is within the same specific registration as the fingered pitch gamut.

Each pitch is sustained until, following a line

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on the graphic score, another Roman numeral is arrived at — at which point the string player changes bow direction and plays another pitch (or the same pitch is possible if a different string is indicated). Bow direction changes, that occur at these points, should be as smooth as possible.



Duration of the sustained pitch — always to be fit into one bow duration — is thus determined by the proportion of length of line transversed from numeral to numeral. (As a guide, 1 inch = 3 to 5 seconds, but this will depend on the string player's bow control and facility.)

Choice of pitch to be played is up to the choice of the performer; to be improvised. (It is possible to use one or two pitches for a while; also, it is possible to change pitch with every bow change — at the discretion of the performer. Note that the apparent structure of the piece relates also to this process of time/spaces, of various rates of change, of pitch focus.)

Dynamics, also, are improvised, from *ppp* to *f*, though never excessively loud. It will become apparent that, to a certain degree, the dynamics, as well as the articulation and decay of a pitch, will be controlled by the bow pressure/speed as indicated in the graphic score. (But dynamics and bow pressure are not synonymous.)

A wide range of non-vibrato → varieties of vibrato should be used, with each pitch having its own quality. (It will happen that a heavy bow pressure and slow bow speed, without vibrato, will sound one way; whereas adding vibrato will radically alter the pitch/noise balance of the resulting sound. So, also, slight alterations of bow speed will alter the balance. In fact, any slight or gross alteration of any aspect of the

total physical gesture ~ relationship of the string player through the bow to the string ~ will be expressed in the sound being generated. This should be explored in the process of preparing the music for performance.

The lines of the graphic score should be thought of as phrases which are expressed as much by varieties of bow pressure, bow speed and bow placement, as by pitch and dynamic changes. The thickness of the line indicates the amount of bow pressure and/or bow speed: thick = more pressure and/or less speed; thin = less pressure and/or more speed. (However, the bow speed, at times, can be interpreted the reverse of the above, since it will also be conditioned by the duration of the sustained pitch.) The notation also indicates manners of articulating and performing these bowing techniques: sudden changes of pressure, ; gradual changes, ; a constant, sustained condition by constant thickness; gradual changes and/or irregular changes by analogous indications in the graphic line, to be expressed literally in the performance technique. (Heavy bow pressure, indicated by the thickest line, should be almost at the edge of noise ~ but always with pitch clearly perceptible.)

The curvature of the line indicates changes of bow placement: from on the bridge to on the fingerboard and anywhere in between. When the line curves more gradually, so also the shift of bow placement is more subtle; when the line curves more suddenly or extremely, so also the bow placement should change accordingly (but always legato). In what direction these changes take place is up to the choice of the performer. (Other possible interpretations of line curvature include use of bow wood to varying degrees and variety of vibrato ~ but these are secondary to bow

placement.)

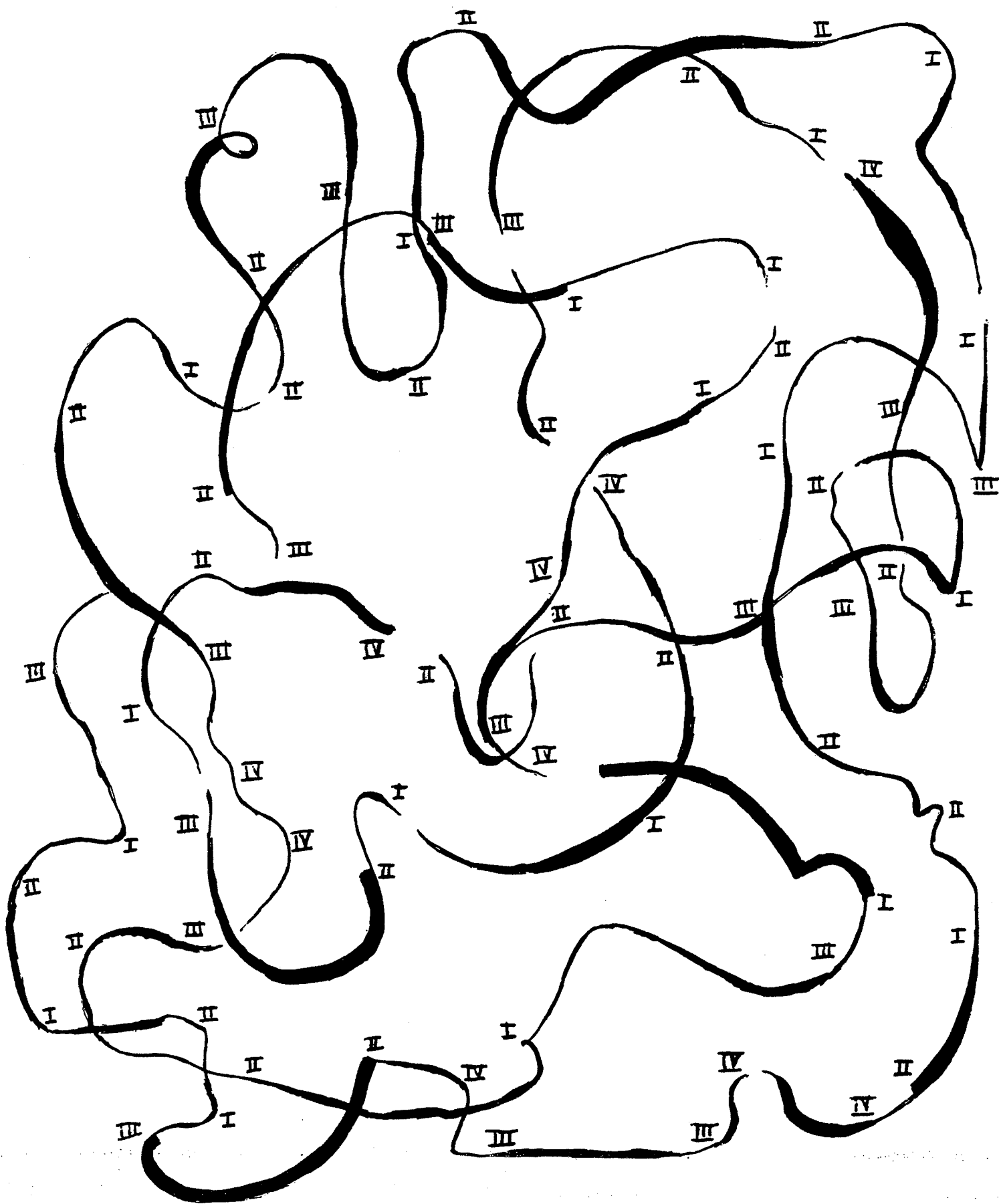
Some phrases (lines) are quite long and might last several minutes. Some sustained pitches might last a very long bow length; possibly 30 seconds. The instrumentalist will have to practice so as to be able to experience and thus express these lines as phrases, that is to say, related to the physicality of breathing, rather than as abstract durations. Silences, at the ending and beginning of phrases, are indicated by breaks in the continuity of the line(s). (Occasionally a phrase can be ended with a plucked note.)

The performer starts at the beginning of any line and follows it in any direction. (In the course of the performance, the same line might be read in the opposite direction.) Lines that are crossed can, as well, sometimes be shifted to, so as to create a new phrase. (At points like this, as well as at any times when pitch/string notation is ambiguous or unclear, the performer can choose which string and/or pitch to play.) The performance path is always one of following a line to its end and then proceeding, after the appropriate silence indicated by empty space, to the next line that is suggested by the linear continuity. In the course of the performance, lines may be repeated. However, always allow for unique sound-quality/textures to occur, rather than attempting to repeat exactly or attempting to create patterns of material.

The music lasts as long as desired by the performer, but no less than 10 minutes duration. (More probably, the music will evolve over a long span of time.)



July 4, 1983 Sheffield, Vermont



Jade Mountain Soundings - *W* *h*
1983

10/3/85

Trying to play music (the violin) is not the same as playing music; so even true with my music (recording "Jade Mountain Soundings" at Hessischer Rundfunk). Given something to do, specified, we aim at accomplishing it ~ outside of it, rather than doing it ~ and we learn little, except the evaluation of degree of success or failure. I was intent upon editing out of the recording the graceful arch of tones leading to the set pitch (determined in the structure of the piece); but the Tonmeister heard the beauty of gesture and opened my ears to recognize it: a natural breathing of line. In the process of aiming I missed the mark and my sounding was out of touch with discovery (to hear what was). ~ Some special moments though, like the high A and G on the fourth string/fingerboard, slightly audible though with every nuance exposed and the pitch wavering with ever-so-slight shift of bow pressure and placement. Truly, this was the essence of "Jade Mountain".

"Jade Mountain" must be practiced (experienced-in-doing) with longer durations; hearing what is, to learn more of myself and violin sounding. Not to try to shape so much (even in such structured pieces) ~ to really "play"?

To play sounds! not pitches. Therefore, also, there is no such things as microtones in such a music; these can only be so-called in a pre-determined pitch/tonal music. All pitches (frequencies) are possible, equally so in an open framework of sounding.

The pitch changes that occur by chance, with varying bow pressure and placement and speed ~ I like them. So also, the slight pitch changes by accident, when changing strings: a bending of the ear (from one point of view); a lack of technique (from a less interesting point of view); a new, unique tone/timbre quality (from my point of view) that is integral and expressive, drawing us in to listen.

3/16/86

"extended" performance techniques:

... only by reference/comparison to the more constricted performance techniques of "classical" European music tradition, which are predicated upon a specific image of sounding (pitch and duration) — so called "pure" tone [controlled, evenly sustained quality, without blemish or dirt] which omits (or rather rejects) the full sound spectrum of the instrument.

... "extended" performance techniques encourage and cultivate possibilities of sounding and instrument: nuances of noise, hair of the bow, breath, screech, etc. [Comparison of garden and weeds.]

All sounds as integral to the sound-quality texture of the music. 19th - early 20th century special effects, to achieve an intended effectiveness (like string instrument techniques of ponticello, sul tasto, pizzicato, col legno, etc), now incorporated so as to become normal — as a new sense of melodic line in which all aspects of the sounding are integral. [Is this what was referred to as "re-inventing the violin"? as in Sadow's Village Voice review.] — a shift of focus (and therefore, value) to have all sound qualities as valuable/significant of the expressive human gesture (signifying the particulars of what is being expressed — the sound and the gesture being one).

It's necessary to value the varieties and nuances of human being in all of this; not just the "good" and "best".

[To dwell within rather than to shape/impose from without.]

All sounds are real/available to be enacted and to be heard ~ each gesture (enacting sound) has its clarity, its uniqueness of being ~ its virtue (!); that is to say, "power"! [VIRTU]. "Extended" performance technique then, for me, has to do with an embracing (!) of all virtues/qualities ~ being present and focusing on the enactment, rather than the image of an implied or anticipated realization. (For some people, though, this has become a technique to be achieved ~ the new virtuoso ~ "techniques" to be added onto the older techniques, for new sound techniques ~ all impressive! ... but this is not what is important to me.)

What of technique in all of this? (again involved with value systems of images ~ achievements of control systems). As I think of it: technique as the realization of what is necessary/what needs to be done (rather than the putting into form of someone else's necessities, formed perhaps a hundred or more years ago). ~ A living with and within our sounding and facilitating the whole gesture.

Accepting who we are; the body knows more clearly than the intellect that imagines/rationalizes the controlled gesture. ~ To hear the whole mind singing!

A [violin] instrumental/vocal technique that incorporates performance techniques/aspects that were special effects in the older music ~ now as an integral part of the performance practice: the extra-ordinary becomes common practice/ordinary.

1983
string instrument improvisation/technique/listening
(notes for a lecture-demonstration):

(the line) (the point/edge)
legato ←————→ spiccato (and staccato)

variety of bow: pressure, speed and placement.

tensions (that is to say, both closings and openings)
in body — focus of energy, released
through articulation.

from spine and radiating through shoulders/arms
and extended into hands, fingers and tips
touching — bow and strings.

listen to the quality of harmonic spectrum.

relate to expressive possibilities:

(the body — gesture — sound/expression)

for example:

vibrato — vibrating

tremolo — trembling (expressive of
the music rather than
automatic techniques)

... to put these
musical designations
into English, to understand the expressive
meaning/origin of these words: vibrato
(everything is vibrating; the string, etc. —
but now it is the finger/the hand that
participates in the motion, bringing it out
more extensively, expressively intensified
and heightened.)

relate to traditional European classical music, also. (choice
of fingerings, particular strings, articulation, etc.)
— refer to Szigeti's excellent, "A Violinist's Notebook".

The Fragility of Line / Points Extending

(for violin and piano)

— by Malcolm Goldstein

(for Roger Zahab)

(1982)

The music explores the difference between violin "line" (legato, horizontal sounding) and piano "points" (staccato, vertical articulation)*, as well as the simultaneous sounding of line and point to create a new dimension (harmonic spectrum) of that moment.

The emphasis of focus is on the unique sound gesture (as outlined in the preparatory studies for performance practices/techniques) and the resultant sounding, with considerations for articulation and shaping of a tonal/texture (harmonic spectrum), and the constant affecting of one another's sound.

*(The difference of the instruments is reflected in the graphic scores.)

Each sound(ing) is to be always in the process of evolving (some one or more aspects) by choice and by accident — since some things will always be not able to be controlled, in part or even a substantial amount — and surprises, within one's own sounding and even more between the two instrumentalists, are part of the process that will have to be dealt with always and continually; nothing is static. Each performer must listen closely to the sounding moment and be sensitive to the possibilities of direction, within their own part and between the two musicians. The music making situation is, simultaneously, an awareness of one's own sounding and the line of development inherent within the sound (especially essential to the violin part) and the interplay/effect of the composite sounding. (The piano is more a responsive and stimulative sound source in this situation — extending, transforming, intruding, etc. by its "points" of sound, the "line" of the violin.)

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Graphic score and the performance framework:

Each instrument has one page; its own graphic score. The score is not so much a detailed outline or sequence of events (though it can be used as a guide to this purpose), as it is a graphic indication of sound quality, with focus on the endlessly different sounding articulations (each instrument, its own) and with attention to nuances of the unique sounding (never repeated event) — always some or many aspects different. It is not a literal depiction, but a reminder of possibilities of variety within the framework of sounding.

The violin score (lines) suggests changes of (left hand) finger pressure on the string (from fully stopped to barely touching), bow pressure, etc. or any combination of qualities as explored in the "preparatory studies" — to create a continually evolving harmonic spectrum: timbre/texture/dynamic. Also possibilities of double stops are suggested (lines close together or more spread apart indicate interval relationships).

Though most of the performance is without vibrato, occasional use of it is possible when appropriate — perhaps, as part of the shaping, at the beginning, within or at the end of a stopped note.

Dynamics are generally soft, but always allow for the full dynamic range when appropriate.

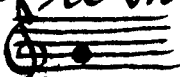
Choice of pitch and registration is up to the discretion of the performer. Consideration should be given to the sounding pitch(es)/harmonic spectrum of the piano (response includes being imitative, slightly modifying and extending, as well as introducing a completely different "tonality"), as well as attending to the rate and density of change of pitch (the range being from more or less static to often changing pitch activities — static, evolving and suddenly intruding; slowly and/or often, quickly).

Bow durations are generally long (from 15 seconds to several minutes, with inaudible bow changes); centered on one finger position and harmonic spectrum changes and/or gradually evolving with double stop relationships.

The piano score (points) suggests the variety of alteration of a single articulated pitch (or small cluster) in ways outlined in the "preparatory studies" — so as to create always unique events (harmonic spectrum: timbre/texture/dynamic soundings) to interact with the violin. Each sound should be carefully shaped. The size and shape of the form on the page, suggests variety and the degree of alteration (a circle/form being a simple, unaltered piano tone) which is also possible occasionally within the sound matrix.

The full dynamic range is possible (quite different from the violin part) from very soft to very loud, as is suggested in the graphic score.

Choice of pitch ~ see violin instructions.

All pitches chosen are from  and above, to the highest piano note. The sustain pedal is always in use, to extend the resonance of each articulation.

(The duration of the occasional tremolo event(s) is suggested by the size of the form.)

The spaces, between the forms in the graphic score, suggest a variety of silences between the sounded events; some very long and some shorter silences (30 seconds - 5 seconds).

Each performer chooses when and how to sound in relationship to their own score, but with close attention to what is happening within the other musician's performance; possibly to place something with the beginning of the other person (and be surprised), or within their sounding

and responsive to it (imitating, altering, extending and interrupting — all possible), or at the end of their sounding; or in the midst of a silence. (Allow for total silences to happen within the music.)

The duration of the piece should be a minimum of 15 minutes or as long after that as seems appropriate to the music, evolving.

Violin preparatory studies: These studies are essential in order to give the violinist the experience, and thereby the knowledge, of the nuances possible in the innumerable situations of fingering and bowing of the sound, as conceived of in this music. The more attention given to these studies, the more the violinist will be capable of shaping the sound as intended — very subtly or abruptly intruded upon as the moment of performance necessitates. Though at first it might seem to be a huge task, in practice certain aspects will become apparent as guides to the unknown: finger placement on harmonic versus non-harmonic nodes; bow placements in relationship to finger placement in higher or lower string positions (which also relates to vibrating string nodes); bow pressure as relates to bow speed and placement; etc. This knowledge will be the foundation for the techniques necessary for the performance of this music.

However, there will always be surprises — moments to catch your attention. These are the times of learning, to be dealt with in the process of performing, to lead, perhaps, to the awareness of new possibilities. These should not be rejected, but rather encouraged; they will happen irregardless of any rigid intentions. They extend our sensitivities to new horizons of

expression/sounding. This is the "fragility of line".

With legato bowing, always (bow changes inaudible or audible as little as possible):

1.) — explore the very gradual changing of finger pressure, in left hand, from a fully stopped pitch to barely touching the string and back again ~ in between allowing for the changing of harmonic (overtone) spectrum, including rich and noisy complexes and pure harmonics (if at a harmonic node) — all without vibrato.

2.) — explore very gradual changing of bow positions (from finger board to bridge and back again) with left hand finger positions at first constant and then changing pressure (as in #1) ~ to learn of the possibilities of harmonic spectrum as related to bowing.

3.) — explore very gradual changing of bow pressure on the string; at first with constant bow speed and #1 and #2 constant ~ and then with #1 and #2 changing.

4.) — explore varieties of bow speed (as in #1, #2, #3).

5.) — explore left hand finger placement on various strings and various registrations on each string; try with different bow techniques.

6.) — explore using double stops (and triple stops in higher positions) as above; then also with independence of the two left hand fingers: (a) one finger pressure constant and the other changing, and the reverse; (b) finger pressure on each string evolving in different directions or same direction, at different rates of change; (c) adding to (a) and (b) changes between bow position, pressure and speed; (d) adding variety of bow pressure and even bow placement* on each of the two strings being sounded.

*(the bow at an angle to the strings; like in bridge position for one string and mid point for the other string.)

Piano preparatory studies: The piano, being an instrument of percussion ~ that is, the sound is generated by the hammer striking the strings ~ the studies are intended to draw attention to the manner of shaping the usual piano sound by modifying the sounded note and/or the resultant vibrating string. (Read the introduction, the first two paragraphs, to the violinist's preparatory studies.) As with the violinist's technique, experience and practice will clarify certain guides to practice: touching of objects to harmonic versus non-harmonic nodes; the harmonic spectrum created by specific materials (a specific piece of metal versus another one, etc.); the relationship of pressure on the string to affect sound quality and duration; etc.. As with the violin, there will be many surprises ~ intentions that become something else in the sounding. (Review second paragraph of Violin preparatory studies.) These are the moments of "points extending".

Explore a variety of glass objects, metal objects and hard rubber objects, by touching them to the strings inside the piano after a staccato articulation of a single key (or small cluster of keys), with the sustain pedal always down. (In the middle register, with three strings to a note, explore affecting all three, as well as one and two strings of that particular note.):

- 1.) ~ the object making contact immediately after the string is made to vibrate.
- 2.) ~ the object already on the string, held constant as the string is sounded, as well as moving the object slightly along the string in one or another, or in both directions ~ and exploring the effect of the length of movement, though never more than an inch maximum.
- 3.) ~ the object on the string and, after being sounded, removed.

- 4.) ~ the object moved, as in #2, and then removed.
- 5.) ~ the object on the string and then pushed gently into the string after the string is sounded.
- 6.) ~ allowing the object to rattle and/or bounce on or alongside the vibrating string after the string is sounded.
- 7.) ~ stimulating harmonics of the sounded note, by silently depressing the harmonic(s) keys, before sounding its fundamental; also extending with techniques as in #1 - #6.

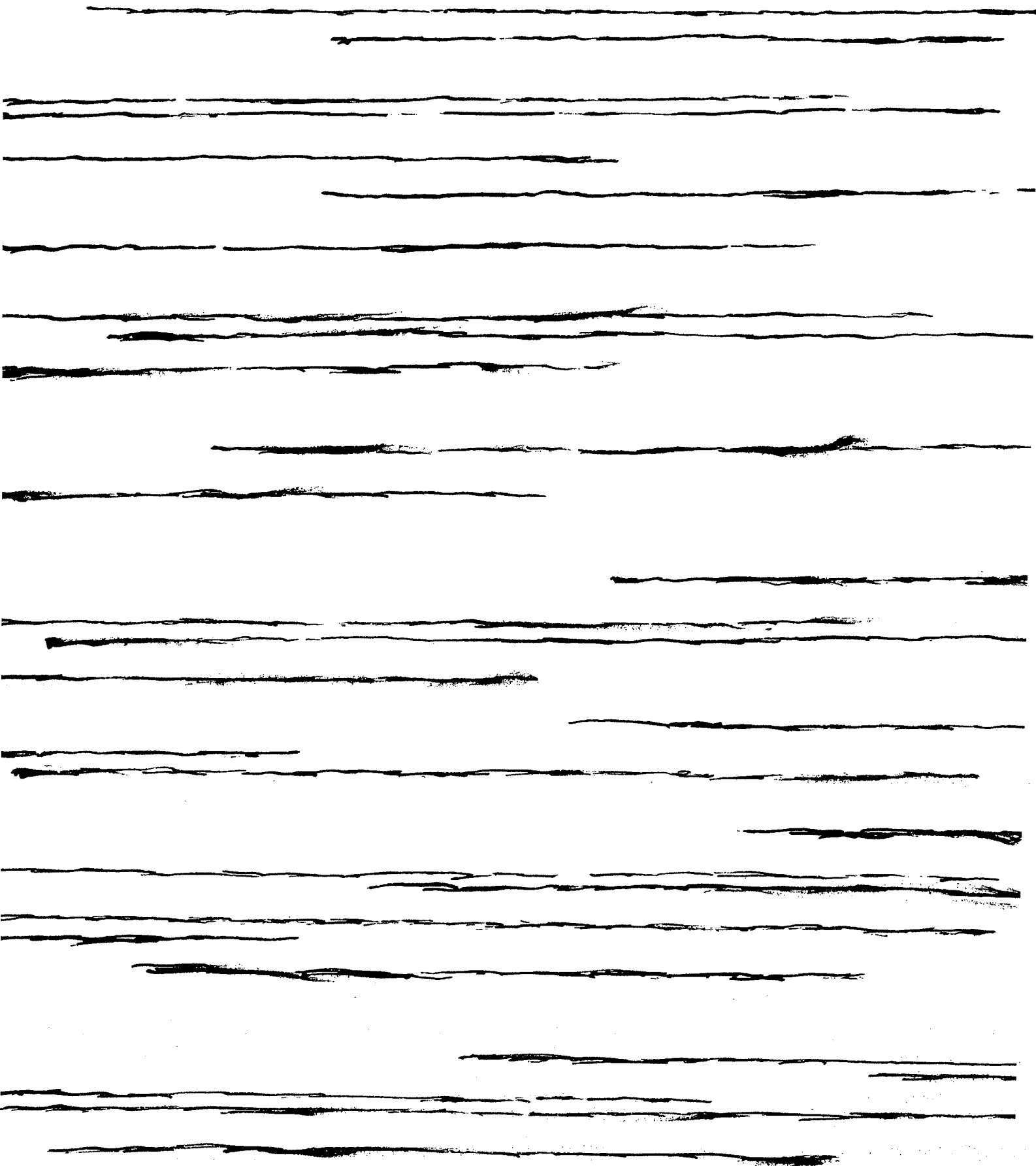
Explore a wide range of dynamics; note the effect upon the timbre. Explore with the object in a variety of string position placements. Explore the sound generation by using the object itself ~ rubbing and striking ~ and then modifying the sound as above.

Also explore performing a tremolo on the piano key (one pitch, with single and/or alternating fingers ~ as fast as possible, evenly and unevenly) making contact with the object on the piano strings, in ways listed above, with constant dynamics and changing dynamics.



9/29/82 Brookline, Mass.

The Fragility of Line (violin score)



...Points Extending (piano score)

Interview:
“...like a vibrating body/that landscape of sound.”

December, 1982

Grita Insam: Malcolm, you finished “The Seasons: Vermont” this year, a piece you composed during the last two years. Can you explain what the piece is about and how it is related to the concert of the Karlsplatz project? [“Karlsplatz Resonanz” premiered at the Wiener Festwochen, 1983.]

Malcolm Goldstein: All the sounds around us are very exciting to me. And not just the sounds, the texture of the sounds, the interplay of the sounds, the whole experience of the sounds; not just the sounds within themselves, but also how we experience them. It is a process, a kind of dialogue between the reality of the sounds themselves, which are not expressing anything (they just simply are sounds and they are very strong in their own presence), and then the way we experience them, in the sense that we shape, we filter out and give different emphases to different things in listening to them. In trying to create “The Seasons: Vermont” I had to think over and arrive at what was the essential sound quality of each season. And that is what I mean by referring to a dialogue: the sounds by themselves and the human being who filters, who gives attention and who becomes aware of, gives meaning to, the experience of those sounds. And so I had to listen very closely and become attuned to what was that particular sound quality of each season. I then took the sounds that I had recorded in Vermont (another way of listening to all those varied sounds) and made a tape collage which, for me, arrived at that particular, essential quality of each season. Then I had to think about what kind of notation could be created, a unique notation, that made clear to the performers what they had to focus on, in terms of their sound: how to make their sounds, what kinds of sounds they could perform in that particular season. And so, this kind of very focused way, of listening and thinking about the sounds of an environment in a specific time, is what I present in “The Seasons: Vermont,” and with the Karlsplatz it is exactly the same. The piece will be different, but the attitude is the same. That is, there are different parts of the Karlsplatz, each that have their own sound presence: parts that are near the trolleys, parts that are near the church, near the trees... and what I want to do is to focus on this rich environment and structure and interplay, creating a sense of the soundings of the Karlsplatz.

Grita: May I go back to “The Seasons: Vermont?” I’d like to know, how were you relating to the qualities of the sounds of each season in your composition and how is the composition constructed.

Malcolm: Each season focuses on a specific quality. Summer focuses on specific sound materials which are endlessly varied; an experience rich in sound-texture. Looking at plants and trees or clouds, you obviously see what they are; but, looking closely, you see the endless variety of detail and endless richness of texture of each unique physicality. So, also, hearing the sound. The notation for Summer is calligraphic and graphic representation of four kinds of sound materials (phrase patterns; repeated pulses; internally evolving sound textures; elaborate timbre melodies), which the performers see visually—several pages of these basic materials—and use, in an improvisation structure, to relate to each other and the tape collage. The constant listening to each other and the

tape, and the choosing which material to play and how to do it, becomes a process, a kind of kaleidoscope and variation/repetition of these materials.

Autumn focuses on the nuances and gradual modification of a sound. The actual performance technique is given in a notation which shows how to take a sound and gradually modify it; and also how to listen to the other musicians and the tape collage and to shape that relationship. There are numerous phrases that are given, with indications that shape the dynamics, timbre/overtone nuances, vibrato, etc. . . like looking at a leaf changing from green, through processes of disintegration, and becoming brittle. The sound of Autumn, for me, is this process of modulation of sound, of transformation of material, and everything is based upon that kind of experience.

Winter focuses on time, on some sound being sustained: the duration of sound and silence. The musicians are given a map of the townships around Sheffield, with various size areas marked with timings, and another page with suggestions as to different kinds of materials to perform. They realize the details of these materials, which are sustained as varieties of sound masses and silences. Winter is very long in Vermont and not too much happens; and so this whole sensation of time and long spaces of things is what is experienced.

Spring is very short. Spring focuses on the energy of rhythm and the notation is the brooks that begin in Sheffield and feed into the Passumpsic River. The interplay of different brooks and their contour is realized in developing complex material from very simple material. The performers, listening to each other and the tape collage (which in this section is mostly a collage of the rhythm of water and the sound-textures of various brooks) improvise and build more and more complicated pitch/rhythmic patterns, as they follow the line of the brooks flowing downstream.

Grita: Could this music be performed endlessly and would it turn out differently each time?

Malcolm: Right now the tape collage for each season is set, and it is set on the basis of the complete set of four seasons being an hour long: Summer is 15 minutes; Autumn is 12½ minutes; Winter is 25 minutes; Spring is 7½ minutes. Those timings are worked out proportionate to what I experienced as the season length in Vermont. So that would stay constant, but actually the seasons are cycles. It would be wonderful, after the hour, to go back—because Spring does lead to Summer, even in terms of a conception—to go back and perform the seasons all the way through again, and you could keep performing many times, all day long. What would happen is like our experience of life, of each season: the tape collage would stay the same, but the performers would respond differently each time, because they can never repeat themselves exactly, since all of the structures are improvisation structures. You would know that it is Summer, but Summer would somehow be uniquely different because the performers would be listening differently and performing differently. And maybe the audience will be listening differently. And so each time it is done, the framework stays the same just as in your life you know that it is Summer, but that particular Summer has all these nuances of being different. Each season is thus an unique experience, but at the same time, you know it's that particular piece of music. The materials that are given to the performers, the improvisation structure/framework that they work in, stays set, but the way in which they realize every particular moment changes. It is sort of like looking at a group of trees, and you could see those trees even at the same time of day, but maybe it's a cloudy day, so you perceive them differently . . . but you still recognize them as the same group of trees. And so "The Seasons," as I composed them, are pieces of music; but they are organic in the sense that they are modified by the real performance situation.

Grita: Does the Karlsplatz piece use this sort of different perception of one environment within one day, for the musician and the audience?

Malcolm: The Karlsplatz piece will consist of my going around to different parts of the Karlsplatz, at different times of the day; and gradually, throughout the day, building up a tape loop that is repeated. And later I will record a different place and add that onto the tape loop . . . throughout the whole day. It will be like a diary of that day in the Karlsplatz, at a specific moment. And then, at the end of the performance (if it ever ends; it could go on forever) it has been a diary of the day of the sounds, of those sounds in the Karlsplatz. The performing musicians will also be moving from place to place, at certain times and responding to the sounds of the Karlsplatz environment. They will create a musical vocabulary that responds to particular locations and expands throughout the course of the day, like a diary of sound-language. So, both hearing each other as musicians, but also hearing the sounds of anything—the birds, people walking, the trolleys, the church bells, the water . . . The whole root of this is, for me, the importance that I don't separate my living from my work as a musician: that the way one lives both physically, the way one is affected by the awareness (*my* awareness) of my life, and how I live and where I live . . . that is a very important part of my music. Living in Vermont was a fantastic experience for me, opening me up to a whole different sense of sounds and the space of the sound. So also, my having children. Both my children made me aware of the uniqueness of individual life of each of them and of their own particular sound qualities. So that it's not just a matter of writing a piece of music; it really is more a matter of focusing through a composition, a music composition, a specific experience which has heightened my awareness of my life experience. The Karlsplatz piece will be the same thing. I can't imagine writing the Karlsplatz piece without having experienced the Karlsplatz; having walked through it, sat in it . . . It is not an abstract piece of music. It is writing about something that focuses on, that tries to heighten my sense of what that sound-space is about, and to offer that to other people to heighten their experience . . . so that they hear it differently, and they may respond to it differently and may become different people.

Grita: That all sounds to me based on an individual point of view; even when you talk about communication—via music and sound—with other individuals, like people in the audience. But I heard a lecture, or one might call it a performance, by you that presented a series of questions: "The Politics of Improvisation." Do you also see any connection, any relationship between what you are doing there and society?

Malcolm: Actually all the questions in "The Politics of Improvisation" are not abstract questions. They all grew out of experiences dealing with either professional musicians or academic situations; and so they were not abstractions about "what would it be like if" situations, but rather "this is what happened," and this is what made me aware that improvisation has taken on, for me, a very specific kind of meaning in its relationship to our whole society. Improvisation is very important to me, in terms of my composition work now, and since 1964, when I wrote the music, "Illuminations from Fantastic Gardens," for Elaine Summers. That was the first large-scale piece of mine, that incorporated improvisation, and since then, there have been made many different pieces. Each one is written differently in terms of notation; each one has a different conception, but basically there are certain things that I am interested in. One is that the piece, though it will be recognizable as that piece of music, instant by instant will have endless varieties in it. And so, it is a unique experience that will sound in them and in that kind of transitory, fleeting quality. It is, to me, like the human experience, and you have to be there and to listen to it, at that instant. It is not like a recording that you can listen to, over and over. It makes us focus on being very much present and with our heightened awareness of the moment: really, hopefully, being moved by the experience; really hearing sounds rather than thinking, "I'll listen to it later, when I feel better or can concentrate better, etc." So also for the performers, it heightens their focus, because they have to listen very carefully to each other and make instantaneous choices . . . and their

choices to me are very exciting, because, even if I have given the framework in which to make choices, they always will shape things in their own particular way. And so then, the specialness of every human being, which is important to me, is, in a sense, demanded by me of the performers. And then, what you get is a moment in which the performers are really very focused in saying, "this is what I have to offer about sound, myself sounding in this context, here at this moment." And this is one of the important implications of "The Politics of Improvisation."

Grita: Can improvisation be conducted; and, if not, what does that mean?

Malcolm: It can't be conducted. There can be an interplay with someone, like in my flute concerto ["a breaking of vessels, becoming song"], who suggests things to do. But it can't be dictated. That would be contrary to the idea of the importance of the individuality of each performer. What I try to arrange is a context of democratic anarchy—the real interplay of different personalities—as in the flute concerto. The conductor I envision as being different from the other musicians; one who stands back at a distance and can hear the overall interplay of the orchestra. The individual performers can hear the people around them; but they can't hear the whole thing. So the conductor's job is unique (just as the flutist's part is unique, and the violin part is unique...). The conductor can hear the whole with perspective. So in the flute concerto the conductor can suggest and try to mold different kinds of energies and dynamics between the players. On the other hand, in the flute concerto, they can choose to ignore the suggestions... And so, it is that kind of anarchical or democratic situation that I enjoy arranging. The conductor, for me at that moment, is playing the role of someone who can only do that kind of thing—that is, hear things at a perspective and balance things—but is not the dictator to tell everybody what to do. Just like the relationships in a string quartet... You usually think of the first violinist as being the leader of the quartet; but, in fact, in some quartets, the strongest personality might be the viola player. So the dynamic of the group is very important; and there are some people who like to lead and some who like to follow. But to have one person prearranged to conduct and dictate and tell the other people what to do, would be against my aesthetic.

Grita: In what way do you find the uniqueness in each person in music?

Malcolm: Well, first of all there is the inclination to like certain kinds of sounds. But that's not actually so interesting. That could be their habits, which could be more or less interesting. But more so, it is a kind of focusing on, making them focus on what is necessary to do, to make a sound; that is, upon their own physicality, upon the way they move, to become aware of the gesture of their sounding. Whenever a musician makes sounds, he has to move to make the sound. Actually, all sound itself is a matter of moving the air; so that every environment also has its own physicality and the uniqueness of each space is what gives it that sound quality... just as we know, walking into a certain room, that the sounds feel thin or that it seems to have a fullness, of lots of echo. Sound itself, then, is a physical phenomenon... And when you think about a musician, that way in which they move, actually every specific sound can only be made in that specific way in which they move. If they move stiffly, the sound will have that brittle quality. If they move in a full, smooth gesture, the sound will be rich and probably project very far. So it's this kind of physicality that sound itself, when we hear it in the air and upon our ears, comes from that gesture of the performer. I was very fortunate many years ago, to have participated in the Judson Dance Theater, where I perceived, by working with dancers, the physicality of their moving; but also having them ask me to do certain things: to make certain sounds and to move in certain ways, while making sounds. Actually, I have had choreographed pieces of music for me, where I was told not what sound to make, but to make a sound while I jumped or while I was

running or leaning over . . . And that obviously turned me upside down, because when you study music, both in music schools and when you study violin, you don't do things like that. You are learning mostly, not about your body, not about space or anything like that, but about little black notes running around on the page, which you have to realize as specifically as possible. And you are not thinking about anything except how to get those notes to sound the way you heard on some recording. So this physicality comes across in my music by making each performer focus on sound and on what is necessary to make that sound. And then you have a very unique moment, in which they become aware of themselves as people who move, as people who make gestures . . . which, for the most part, musicians are not trained to do.

Grita: You are trained as a musician based in traditional European classical music, but you seem to be very much concerned about the music of the 20th century in America.

Malcolm: When I studied violin, I studied traditional music; not contemporary music, but Bach and Beethoven and the European tradition. But then—actually, I studied when I was a child—I stopped formal lessons, though I kept playing violin and playing Bach, because I enjoy Bach. I became interested in composing, but what one mostly studied in contemporary music was Schoenberg and Berg and Webern and Bartok and still the European tradition. At the same time, I experienced the music of Charles Ives and then I heard the music of John Cage and these were very different awarenesses of sound; radically different from the kind of aesthetic of the European composers . . . and this made me reflect upon the society that I lived in, which was radically different from the society as I now experienced even in contemporary Europe.

With James Tenney and Philip Corner, in the 1960s we formed an ensemble [Tone Roads] to perform the music of those we thought were the outstanding visionaries of 20th century music and people that we found meaning in, to clarify for ourselves what our world was about. And, at that time, obviously I had never been to Europe. So the music that we performed was of Charles Ives, John Cage, Edgard Varese, Carl Ruggles, Christian Wolff and Morton Feldman. Only, after several concerts, did we even begin to think of performing younger contemporaries, including our own music. We were interested in making available to the public music that they had never heard and was not available, because at that time not much contemporary music, of any kind, was being performed. And then what happened was that the music that interested the composer in me, sort of circled back and made me deal with it as a performer . . . and then, as a performer, I have devoted myself to performing a great deal of music by contemporary Americans, not so much as a chauvinistic statement to reject the Europeans, but just to perform the music of friends and of people whose music I am in contact with. Now there is much more contemporary music being performed of all different kinds. But the initial impulse grew more out of a composer's point of view, being excited about the music and wanting to make it available to other people.

Certain of these composers were very important to us, because they had certain special attitudes. Charles Ives incorporated a very wide panorama of American music; that is both church hymns and ragtime, which was the precursor of jazz. He used the natural environment. He used collage techniques. He used a certain amount of improvisation and he made a whole different sound in music. He was the first uniquely American composer, who did not go to Europe to learn how to compose. Ives learned from the environment here, from the sounds and from the music of the people and incorporated that . . . and that was important to us.

John Cage is also very important, not just because of the amazing sounds that he made and his unique notations that made performers think about organization of sound differently . . . but for me he made a statement about imitating not nature, but imitating the processes of nature. And that was very important to me. As I mentioned, with "The Seasons: Vermont" and "Karlsplatz Resonanz," I am not interested in making something that imitates the environment, but rather makes for a sound-structure which focuses on the essential quality. The way I compose is very different from Cage, but the idea of the validity of all sounds around us and the importance of every sound being equal, is

typically American. Every sound has its own essence and by its own quality expresses itself. That is very important to me. Varese was important to me in his awareness of the real acoustic awareness of orchestration, in working with time and space. So each one of these composers were very important to us.

We were just talking about what is so different in these kinds of scores that I give to the performers. The whole sense of improvisation is something that has been very much a part of the American tradition, most obviously, in jazz. One of the most important experiences, for me, was hearing Ornette Coleman on a record of his that came out in 1959 called "Free Jazz," in which there was no written-out score or prestructured framework. The performers played freely and listened to each other; nothing was to be expected. There was a kind of revelation in the interplay of the musicians of that moment. So, in those kinds of experiences in jazz improvisation, they made me aware of the importance, as in chamber music, of musicians listening to each other and making music of the moment. But the difference has been that I was interested in a much wider range of sound. I wanted to make a kind of music in which whole new sound-textures would be created and this way I had to, by my notation, make available to performers wholly different performance techniques: ways of playing things, physically ways of articulating sounds, and through their gesture to arrive at new sound textures that have never been created before. So also my notation had to be created to make this clear to the performers. And this grew out of working with performers and, in that sense, making a new music which is based upon sound: the real sound quality of a particular sound; not an idea of what music should be. If you've heard the sound of a bow on a string... that is exciting to me, rather than the image of playing a note (in which you don't think about the bow on the string; you think about the note... which is an abstraction).


Grita: So, is the landscape of the Karlsplatz in a relation to the musicians?

Malcolm: The relationship is the sense of the sound in the Karlsplatz and the performers have been given a score of possible ways of responding to that. It's an interplay, a dialogue between their physicality and the physicality of the Karlsplatz.


Grita: So you are also making compositions for yourself and you are playing the violin...

Malcolm: So far, we were talking about compositions. The difference between composition and the "Soundings" [free improvisations for solo violin] is that the compositions are always structured improvisations. Each piece of music has a framework, which will always be its framework. The details of it are worked out by the performers, improvising at that moment, so that the moment is made alive. But the framework is always there. All the pieces are such structured improvisations in which the framework of sound activity is made clear through the notation.

The Soundings, that I perform as a solo violinist, are different in that nothing is worked out beforehand and I take myself, my own sense of flow of sound, my own listening to the sound of the violin as it is playing... my own physicality of gesture. That all becomes the landscape of sounding. In fact, then, it is a dialogue. It's a continuous dialogue from the moment I put the bow on the string, from my gesture which makes the sound, to the sound itself in the air, of whatever has happened... and that to affect the physicality of my gesture, back and forth. It's a dialogue between the sound itself, which I follow with and how that affects me and guides me making my gestures. So it's back and forth, a dialogue between gesture and sound. The landscape then is this place in which I am sounding myself. In this situation there is no preset framework at all. Anything can happen, because we go into ourselves and touch on different things in ourselves, as the bow moves in different ways on the string. I am sort of like a vibrating body, in which I am that landscape of sound.



"Soundings" are free improvisations exploring the rich sound possibilities of the violin. There is no pre-set structure; rather it is the process of discovering new qualities and relationships, that is the flow of the music. Melodies of sound (timbre/texture/articulation) are created that evolve out of the interplay between the resonance of the violin and the gesture of the violinist.



April 9, 1984

... You have touched upon many aspects of my work that concern me and so I respond to your writing in an attempt as much to clarify myself to myself as to you; to share with you these thoughts.

A piece of music is always a piece, not the whole. The "Soundings" improvisations are a completely different experience for me than performing compositions and, I imagine, so also different for the audience. It is a continual process of discovery, and therefore renewal, shared with those who are present. It is not a statement of something, but a process of unfolding. And so, when I stop playing it is not an end/a closing of the statement, but an open space... and so, paradoxically, the moment remains whole. The logic is of the total self, present; not the "undeniable fact" of two times two is four, but, in the delightful insight of E.E. Cummings, the "irresistable truth" that is 5. I am not concerned with accident or control or demonstrating techniques or intending; and so my "point" is no point at all. Simply, rather a gesture resonating in space and following the line of sound; being present, the dialogue of gesture and sounding creates a spiral of relationships, at the same time unfolding and yet needing to go nowhere. Anything can happen... and, as you say, "that's why his playing sounds so free."

A composition, on the other hand—a putting together or rather having been put together—is a noun, a statement; and, as such, a definition of the piece/the object. Though it is brought to life in the act of performance, its roots are in its past, having been defined... whereas improvisation is from a verb whose focus is in the present moment, sounding.

Each composition is a concern of intention; something intended and clearly expressed through its notation. Each piece of music establishes a framework of sounding/performance that includes specific possibilities of sounds, placed in a space of time. By its being, its focus is exclusive. I recall an insight of Merleau-Ponty, commenting on vision and seeing (art), specifically paleolithic cave drawing: that it is not that we see it but that is through it we see the world. So also with music composition. Each piece is a statement, a way of hearing/perceiving in that moment, and, being as such, it is confined to its own logic: a fact that ends with a period... but whose existence also grows outward through experience and transformation in the life of the participant/recipient.

My compositions walk the thin line of finding and statement—improvisation and composition; revealing of the moment within a preconceived framework of possibilities. Each is an improvisation structure created to meet the needs of the music; from the insounding to the outward gesture. (The structure can be as open as in "Vision Tree Fragment," the specific limb of a tree, the way I predispose it will be sounded and the manner of singing that has been learned from the resonance of the tree. Or it might be, as in "el nino rojo," the premise of two materials: an energetic, rhythmically complicated line, dancing up the E string, and a sustained double-stop high E on the E & A strings. From there on anything can happen—and I was amazed at what did come forth—though the presuppositions of this music is very different from the "Soundings." Or the framework can be much more defined, as in "The Seasons: Vermont" and other pieces.)

The music as statement is continually enlightened by such moments of renewal and revealing through improvisation; in compositions, or should I say improvisation structures, some moments are of demonstrating (talent, technique and musicianship) and some are of discovering. In ensemble pieces, I delight in the insights of other musicians, ever expanding the horizons of the music; enriching the fabric of sound, each in their own way, within the framework of activity: an ongoing process of sounding within that which has been defined, now, though, placing us in the present, each realization anew.

So also, the notation for each piece is carefully worked out, unique to that specific piece. Whether graphic, calligraphic, verbal, collage, "traditional" European, conceptual or whatever else, the specific notation is created to convey to the performer the intentions of the music; possibly the manner of articulation of sound and/or the focus of listening and responding, creating relationships, and/or the tonal/sound-texture resonance to be explored, and/or the activity (placement and density) in time, etc. . . . And so the notations for each season, in "The Seasons: Vermont," is a realization, a clarification of the intentions of sound activity for each season. As well, they are like visual metaphors, guides into the soundscape; and each is accompanied by pages of instructions and explanations.

Each season is a movement (a way of moving): that you "see"/perceive through it the world. The focus of each is exclusive and particular to that piece of music; clarified in notation and realized in performance. The instructions specifically state: "It is not intended that the instrumentalists try to imitate birds, insects, wind, etc., but rather that they create materials parallel in richness as extensions of the soundscape into the sound/space of human gesture." There is no attempt here to create (recreate) Spring as "it is *supposed* to be," or to "evoke any of the feeling boots and snow *ought* to suggest." There are many, many different kinds of snow and also boots that walk upon them. The Eskimos have many words to express the subtle realities of our single word, snow. (And, ironically, anyone who has lived in Vermont would know that particular snow.) As a composer, I offer a way of perceiving, a framework of experiencing in sound; my way, not your way.

It was quite amazing to me when I completed "Summer," the first piece that I composed in the set: it seemed to me, also, too rich with variety; as you say, it is "a mess." I had always thought, at least on the surface, that Summer was a pleasant time with a certain quality of quietude. But the music put me in touch with another reality: of the richness, almost extravagant overflowing abundance of that time—Winter is so long!—of the energy of living and becoming. And so I learned of myself, my deeper artistic intuitions revealing to me and therefore making me more sensitive to the daily living in this time/space. (What I write to you here/now are words upon reflection of what has happened. I am not concerned with ideas. I am a musician: a "sound thinking person." The words come afterward to communicate to another person, through analogy and metaphor. In truth, the music says it much better, being it.)

In an earlier review of my "Soundings" record, you commented that my "music ends up sounding more natural to the instrument than traditional playing does." Thank you. It has grown out of the experience of listening to what is; not from images of what the violin should be, which is usually defined by what it has been, but rather by allowing the full spectrum of the violin to sound forth. My inclination in composing music is similar: to create frameworks that reveal rather than statements that dictate. The sounds and spaces of Vermont/of the environment that we live in, is an essential ingredient in all of my work. It has been, and still is my listening ground of the world/living process: becoming in what is; a sauntering upon paths that expand at the horizon, glimpsed in Thoreau's essay, "Walking." An offering to be shared.

"You give us a dictionary and expect us to write a poem", he said, with an edge of humor in his voice.

"Yes", I agreed, "that's it exactly. You understand perfectly!"

"No, no", he responded;
to which I offered,

"Well then, would you like me to play some more violin for you?"