

In what has become an oft-quoted passage, the British composer and improviser Cornelius Cardew wrote that "it is impossible to record with any fidelity a kind of music that is actually derived in some sense from the room in which it is taking place - its shape, acoustical properties, even the view from the windows. What a recording produces is a separate phenomenon, something really much stranger than the playing itself, since what you hear on tape or disc is indeed the same playing, but divorced from its natural context". This text is usually cited as evidence of the artificiality of recorded improvisation and the superiority of "the real thing", the live concert happening in real time.

I love "the real thing", but it seems to me that recorded improvised music at its best deliberately exploits the strangeness to which Cardew refers. We are not forced to choose between either experiencing the "natural context" (if one is there in the room when the improvisation is taking place) or having no inkling of it (if one only hears a recording of the improvisation later). Rather the recorded sounds can give greater or lesser hints as to the nature of that context, depending on the way the music is recorded, and the particular sensitivities and sensibilities of each listener. These hints can be accurate or misleading in any degree and any combination, and the activity of the listener's fantasy in relation to these hints comprises one of the great pleasures of listening to recorded improvised music.

The same is true for "field recording" in its widest sense, and so the recent proliferation of work that deliberately examines and blurs the boundary between the field recording and free improvisation is - if only in retrospect - an unsurprising phenomenon. "Criggion" is a recording of a natural context with its own unity, a mix of sounds intentional, quasi-intentional, unintentional, artificial and natural. A whole, but a variegated whole whose specific parsing will be up to each listener. It is an "improvisation", and yet a compositional arrangement of uncomposed elements. Technical, emotional and evocative elements are not pre-divided and pre-interpreted for us.

"(can never exceed unity)" is a "composition", represented here in three different versions. Apart from the first player, who is instructed to "play a continuous tone or sound", the musicians are instructed to play "freely", yet the freedom exhibited on these recordings is very much a "freedom to" rather than "freedom from": a method of improvising informed by reductionist trends in the music and the performance practices that have grown up around the Wandelweiser group, using a mixture of acoustic and electronic means of sound production, with the sustained tone (albeit with internal differentiation) the rule rather than the exception, and evidently gestural interaction the exception rather than the rule.

The score of the piece specifies abstract divisions of time: one player plays for half the total duration (in an unbroken block), while four more players each play for a total time of half the length of the player before. Thus the time when the players are making sound comprises, in total, $1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8 + 1/16 + 1/32 = 31/32$ of the length of the piece as a whole. (Though because they may play simultaneously there will almost certainly be more silence than this might seem to indicate.) Were this pattern to be continued with an infinite number of players the total length of their combined contributions would equal the length of the piece as a whole, and could never exceed unity.

Henri Bergson objected to considering time as infinitely divisible in this way. He wrote in Matter and Memory that "abstract space is, indeed, at bottom, nothing but the mental diagram of infinite divisibility. But, with duration, it is quite otherwise. ... In reality there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being." In fact, Bergson may have conceded too much in his characterisation of abstract space. Zeno's paradoxes indicate that actual space cannot behave like abstract space in this way. Ultimately we are confronted with the profound question of the relationship of the continuum with the whole made up of parts (however many parts there may be). Is the continuum, in some sense, actually indivisible?

This could be what dimension s whatever. Infinity does not exceed rationality - we can distinguish a n d such world s . This recording represents an invitation to four such worlds . D o m i n i c i n n o c u l a t e u s a g a i n s t t h e i n f i n i t e . B r i a n F e r n e y h o u g h e m p h a s i s e s t h i s a s p e c t o f u n i t y i n n o t e s o n h i s s o l o f l u t e p i e c e U n i t y C a p s u l e , r e f e r r i n g t o ' a s p h e r e w h o s e b o u n d a r i e s (i n t h e f i n a l a n a l y s i s) w e r e p e r m e a b l e t o i n t e r p r e t a t i o n a t a l l p o i n t s . A f i n i t e b u t u n b o u n d e d e x p r e s s i v e w o r l d . ' (c a n n e v e r e x c e e d u n i t y) , b y s e e m i n g t o p r o p o s e t h e o p p o s i t e , a c t u a l l y s u g g e s t s . (A s , i n a d i f f e r e n t w a y , d o e s t h e i m p r o v i s a t i o n " C r i g g i o n " .) T h e a b s t r a c t t e m p o r a l s t r u c t u r e c h a l l e n g e s t h e m u s i c i a n s b y l i m i t i n g t h e i r c h o i c e s , b u t t h e s p e c i f i c s o u n d s c h o s e n a n d t h e a c t u a l c h o i c e s o f t i m i n g a r e w h a t g e n e r a t e t h e t e n s i o n a n d r e l e a s e i n a n y g i v e n p e r f o r m a n c e , a n d c a n h a v e m a r k e d l y d i f f e r e n t q u a l i t a t i v e e f f e c t s , a s t h e t h r e e v e r s i o n s o f t h e p i e c e h e r e a t t e s t . T h e c o m p o s i t i o n a l s o s t r e t c h e s t h e l i s t e n e r - i t a s k s u s t o h e a r t h e o v e r a l l l e n g t h a s a w h o l e , r a t h e r t h a n a s a r e s u l t .

Georg Cantor showed in the late nineteenth century that there are more real numbers between 0 and 1 than there are positive integers; and yet that there are as many real numbers between 0 and 1 as there are coordinates of real numbers in the plane, in three dimensional space, or in fact in 'space' of any number of

One material affects the next

(can never exceed unity) Convergent Series

leads to atom

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-------------|-------|
| 1. | Criggion | (after | Only) |
| 2. | (can never exceed unity) | Realisation | #1 |
| 3. | (can never exceed unity) | Realisation | #2 |
| 4. | (can never exceed unity) | Realisation | #3 |
- All compositions by Sarah Hughes

- 1 Recorded at Criggion transmission station, Powys. Recorded by Patrick Farmer
 2-4 Recorded at St Paul's Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Recorded by Simon Reynell
 1 Solo improvisation by Sarah Hughes (zither)
 2-4 Performed by Rhodri Davies (harp), Neil Davidson (guitar), Jane Dickson (piano)
 Patrick Farmer (electronics), and Dimitra Lazaridou-Chatzigioga (zither)
 Suppedaneum Number One • 2012 • suppedaneum.com

