

## Into Silence - The Poetics of Hearing in Experimental Music since Cage

Mark So

### *Foreword*

This writing is not any kind of historical survey, musicological analysis, theory, or even appreciation of the ongoing experimental music tradition after John Cage, nor could any such enterprise be undertaken in full (let alone begun) across the few pages that follow. Rather, the present concern is how that field of practice has *heard*: how it has oriented itself sensibly in the real situation of musical experience, and how that sensibility has developed amid continually changing circumstances of hearing. We will thus try to explore precisely that which evades analytic comprehension: the continuing phenomenological legacy of the experimental music tradition taken as a kind of loose whole, grasped not in the artificial division of individual composers and works but beheld in its fluid continuity, perception on the move, which has left its arcing impression indelibly across the considerable accounts that remain. We will proceed twice around this question of evolving hearing: the first time, compositionally, through Henri Bergson; the second time, more circumspect, through Martin Heidegger.

Part I gathers a loose fabric of passages—reports, statements, observations, conversations, notes, etc.—from experimental music's half-century history<sup>1</sup>, woven across the propositional outline of the last major chapter from Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*. This collected material, spoken or written largely by composers (but also by a handful of other artists: several poets, a philosopher, a filmmaker), is of a sort that typically invites intensive readings, geared to explaining a specific work or elaborating the aesthetics and method of a particular artist. We will instead treat these materials *extensively*, for the way they enter into perceptual experience—dipping into the flow of things, describing the situation, and perhaps surmising where it might go from here—and ignore the real estate that gets claimed along the way. In this light, we will consider these remarks not as statements of settled law but as views on an ongoing thing, which can't help but keep honest track, in all kinds of ways, of real movements in perception. We will receive them not as arguments but as witnesses: brought on by direct experience, they testify to perceptual facts. These accounts vary widely in tone and bearing, and are sometimes complicated and frustrating in their struggle to address what only the senses seem ready to grasp. But however offhand or oblique they seem at times, they remain genuine artifacts of sustained contact with reality, offering, as such, a spotty yet compelling record of an ongoing perceptual journey. In this regard, such observations may together serve to trace something more like the dynamic trajectory of hearing across the field of experimental music, as it has been lived and described by those who have partaken in it. After all, the real movement of perception is at hand, not some nascent theoretical conclusion, and it behooves us, firstly, to begin to listen to how we have heard. I have also reproduced a running sidebar of score materials from the history of music since Cage. These documents not only project potential musical action, but each stage their own assessment of the real situation of hearing at a given point in time: prior to any act of vision, they consolidate a perceptual footing, taking fresh bearings and logging winds and currents, so to speak, to form a preparatory base from which work once more sets out. When considering scores, one typically cares most about realization—what becomes of a score when it is acted upon. But surely, scores have another connection to reality, this strange and somewhat mute yet attentive starting out, quietly in touch...

Part II, *nearing/hearing*, wends a slight philosophical parable of the present around the “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking” from Martin Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*. We will consider the challenges that ingrained, common-sense ways of hearing pose to listening with what Heidegger terms “releasement,” and explore the bearing of mind that lets us hear past them. Taking the capacity to encounter and make sense of unforeseen situations as a central

---

<sup>1</sup> I refer here to the group of composers known as the New York School (John Cage, Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Earle Brown), and the generations of musicians that have come after. This tradition is largely characterized by a movement into experience, as well as a sustained involvement with the developments in perception which have taken place as a result of exploring the actualities of the sounding situation in their reality. Initially focused around chance procedures as a means of allowing unintended matter in unexpected arrangements to shape the musical experience, the field has blossomed into a wide range of independent yet complexly interrelated practices, carried on by small communities of musicians all over the world. A major stream of work, stemming from John Cage's *433* in 1952, has maintained a rich and productive engagement with silence—its nature and uses, meaning and consequences. Since the 1990s, an increasing number of musicians affiliated with the Wandelweiser Composers Ensemble have greatly expanded this consideration of silence. Our concern is with this trajectory, how it has advanced into and developed the situation of hearing through the question of silence.

condition of work that advances into experience, we will relate this to the musical project after Cage, in which judgment and action are “led by the ear,” hospitable to whatever happens in the musical situation, and to be potentially transformed by it—in effect, to *live* by it.

Finally, none of this is for the ages but for me and the rest of us, now.

---

...our perception being a part of things, things participate in the nature of our perception.<sup>2</sup>

---

How is it that we have gotten from a point where silence could be experienced as the cessation of what could still rather simply and unproblematically be termed “musical sound,” to the situation now, with which I and quite a few other musicians are familiar, where the perceptual setting in which things may be heard (including such things as music) has grown far subtler, for instance in the way action and environment are disclosed and distinguished, to the point that their phenomenological difference is complicated at best, no longer a simple given? Likewise, the sense of the boundedness and isolation of perceptual matter seems increasingly flexible, lending real play to the flow of continuity, in which all features of momentary centrality and significance indeed seem to arise and disappear (1) from and into an increasingly hazy, ultimately imperceptible border realm, and (2) in an increasingly nuanced manner, never simply there or not there, always somewhere along the way, and not entirely certain in their present course, only seeming to resolve with any clarity in the projection of an increasingly distant past or future. Having thus started with an explosion of perception to include all that was previously left out (the environment *per se*), we have, in the course of about three generations of sustained work and lived experience, found ourselves in quite a different present, where it is nearly impossible to name any substantial difference between the experience of silence and the experience of sound (or anything else), except to rather artificially, wishfully diagram their theoretical extremity. When in the fact of our perceptual reality, they have (nearly) become integrated into the same undivided field of continuity, two parallel courses from our audible past which have merged somewhere along the way, giving us a new kind of present. Not an unbiased merger at all: we have, indeed, moved into silence. And in this integrated, vastly complicated field of perceiving, we find a new diversity of hearable states and a way forward no longer predicated on the binary alternation between an antiquated sense of musical interiority and its being rent open, by silence, to all manner of incursion from the outside. Silence won this battle—handily—long ago, and the experimental practices of the last half-century may be said to have dwelt in the continuation of the peace that has unfolded since.

---

*Pure intuition, external or internal, is that of an undivided continuity.*

---

To begin to glimpse the arc of these changes in hearing requires an act, not of analysis but composition. For what we seek to render is, in the deepest sense, irretrievable. It can't be dug up, laid bare for the ages, for the simple fact that it has no past, nor any future to be postulated just beyond some elusive theoretical horizon; its only reality is its *present*, a reality embodied not in an infinitely divisible series of fixed points, but an indivisible *motion*. What remains of this unfolding present is a line, and it will be our sole endeavor here to distill that line.

---

...we start from what we take to be experience, we attempt various possible arrangements of the fragments which apparently compose it, and when at last we feel bound to acknowledge the fragility of every edifice that we have built, we end by giving up all effort to build.

---

We can perhaps start to witness the development of perception in the linear continuity of its motion by composing something like a phenomenological history: an amalgamated record, of sorts, of the changes in the field of hearing as they have been underway, traced at the perceptual base of the history of experimental music practices—that knowledgeable contact with the world which has been the constant, changing companion of musicians and composers involved in this tradition, present in their responses and reflections upon their work as well as in their every setting-out-to-act. My supposition is that the line of this continuity, while never really unbroken or capable of being apprehended in full, nonetheless has been *exposed*, quasi-photographically, in the shards of observation—ranging from offhand statements to scores—that remain from this history. The philosophical project of Henri Bergson, while predating the onset of Cagean experimental music practices by half a century, nonetheless has extraordinary relevance in clarifying our understanding of this tradition's large-scale trajectory. Much like the experimental music composers of our age, Bergson proposed a new approach to the exploration of experience, grounded in the primacy of sensation and intuition in apprehending the true, continuous structure of reality. He also rigorously engaged the question of action—specifically, the necessary role of abstract representation as a platform for any action upon the real. But in emphasizing the *function* of abstraction and consolidation as artifice in service of a movement into experience (action), he effectively

---

<sup>2</sup> The italicized passages in this section come from Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1908), trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer.

underlined it's secondary status, just as the score in experimental music practices does not enclose a situation but attempts to advance a new opening into it. Using Bergson as a kind of lens, I will attempt to reconstitute the movement-image that the fragments of reflection from the history of experimental music collectively harbor. This pursuit will seem perhaps a bit whimsical in method, but necessarily so: any critical, analytic, or interpretive approach, if it didn't prevent this reality from being apprehended in the first place, would surely be fundamentally at odds with its basic expression. Thus it behooves us to venture out along a different line entirely if this vital record is to emerge.

---

*But there is a last enterprise that might be undertaken. It would be to seek experience at its source, or rather above that decisive turn where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes properly human experience. ... By unmaking what these needs have made, we may restore to intuition its original purity and so recover contact with the real.*

---

The compositional structure of this endeavor will simply constitute a smoothing-out of the collected accounts into a more continuous, more linear fluidity; an artifice, surely, yet one which at least serves to bring the sensible disposition of the image into closer line with the reality it describes. This will also, inevitably, constitute a next act, a new score as such, both measuring and being ruled by the present conditions, capturing amid the fluidity a kind of provisional "working image" of the situation as it prepares to bear further upon and into it.

---

*Homogeneous space and homogeneous time ... express, in an abstract form, the double work of solidification and division which we effect on the moving continuity of the real in order to obtain there a fulcrum for our action, in order to fix within it starting points for our operation, in short, to introduce into it real changes.*

---

I have thus tried to reassemble this diverse record of observations and other contacts into a single unbroken stream. I have not directly attributed the sources of the manifold parts that make up this new, flowing whole, so as to alleviate the usual barriers to its apprehension. But nor have I sought to erase identifying references, such as there are, within the body of the text. While many of these remarks are unquestionably personal in nature, inflected with all manner of bias, misgiving, agenda, and taste, we will insist on reading them with complete indifference to the investments of their authors, attempting, rather, to glean from them a register of the real shape and movement of hearing as it was, and run them together to the point of indistinguishability in order to establish not a succession of points, but the *trace of a flow*—the curving line of our collective present, as it has been.

---

*...there still remains to be reconstituted, with the infinitely small elements which we thus perceive of the real curve, the curve itself stretching out into the darkness behind them.*

---

The ensuing text constitutes a musical composition; one may simply read through it normally, but the point is very much to realize it as a score, in the following way:

read each line aloud in an unaffected manner, all lines in succession, each lasting about 30 seconds

distribute each line's text somewhat evenly across the line-duration

omit the propositions from Bergson's text (in italics); do not observe any duration for the space they occupy, but simply pass over them as a mute register, or horizon, of developing changes in space and time, located outside the flow of reading, not to interrupt it

(intermittent at first, becoming increasingly fluid)

*[Statements, scores, and other texts by John Ashbery, G. Douglas Barrett, James Benning, Henri Bergson, Antoine Beuger, George Brecht, John Cage, Oswald Egger, Morton Feldman, Jürg Frey, Lyn Hejinian, Eva-Maria Houben, Alison Knowles, Joseph Kudírka, Alvin Lucier, Radu Malfatti, Stephen "Lucky" Mosko, Pauline Oliveros, James Orsher, Adam Overton, Michael Pisaro, Mark So, Gertrude Stein, James Tenney, Tashi Wada, Manfred Werder, Christian Wolff, István Zelenka]*

\*

Ab-  
stract  
space  
is, in-  
deed,  
at bot-  
tom,  
nothing  
but the  
mental  
diagram  
of infi-  
nite divi-  
sibility.  
But, with  
duration,  
it is quite  
otherwise.  
Now  
there are  
silences  
and the  
words  
help  
make  
the si-  
lences.  
I have  
nothing  
to say and  
I am say-  
ing it and  
that is po-  
etry as I  
need it.  
This  
space  
of time  
is orga-  
nized.  
We need  
not fear  
these silen-  
ces—we  
may love  
them.  
Years ago,  
the radio  
was blaring.  
I think that  
there was  
just as many  
intrusions as  
there are to-

day, but I didn't hear them.  
Today I hear them. So  
there must be something  
there that seems to be  
competing with me. Or,  
let's put it this way:  
that my old role has been  
psychologically weakened. Well  
what was your role? The old-fashioned  
role of the artist, deep in thought.  
Well, this is certainly changing, I think.  
Since it's perfectly clear that  
you're a magnificent artist in  
that role, of being deep in  
thought, what I would like to see  
is how magnificent you are,  
intruded upon. What do you  
think of that idea? Isn't it true that  
once, when we had one of those  
conversations I'm sure each of us so  
remembers, walking through the  
streets of the Lower East Side,  
and the Village and whatnot,  
until late hours of night, I think  
I expressed once the idea that you  
had discovered a world, a musical  
world—because it

was your music, really, that opened up everything, your piece—what was it called? I think the first was for piano—? *Projection. Projection,* yes. And you wrote that at Monroe St., and David Tudor and I were in the other room, and you left us and you wrote this piece on graph, giving us this freedom of playing in these three ranges: high, middle, and low. Then we went in and we played the piece, and it was then that the musical world changed. Not just the musical world outside of you, but the musical world inside of you, in this role that you speak of, deep in thought. Nevertheless, the thing I think I said to you once, on that walk through the night, is now that you have opened up this world, let us see all the things that are in it. Now, among the things that are in that world is this situation of—granted, someone deep in thought, his being intruded upon.

---

*I. Every movement, inasmuch as it is a passage from rest to rest, is absolutely indivisible.*

---

Yes, but that's become the image. I mean for myself, it's become the predominant one: of someone who is thinking and always interrupted in this thinking.

Which, of course, is always a marvelous thing because you begin to see that what you're thinking about isn't that important to begin with. I always found there's something a little too pretentious about thought to begin with. Also, any given thought has an enormous potential. It gets into our heads and won't go out, for years and years and years. At the same time, just to simply state it, I can't conceive of some brat turning on a transistor radio in my face and say, "ah, the environment!" I know it's happening, though. I know it's happening for myself, where 15 years ago—where the perspective of the sound in the piece, even though it did try—and I did try!—to embrace that which would cast a shadow on my work, many of the pieces I wrote almost—actually, I remember once, I even wrote a piece just trying to capture the pulsating of the tires going in the rain on the drive. But it was all still distant, it was on the outer edges, so to speak, of the piece. And now what is happening is that the focus is different. I found myself right on top of all the things which, in the past, I found unaesthetical. Now, I still find it unaesthetical, but I'm on top of it, so a journey was made. What it was to be a composer doesn't seem to me any longer to be what it is to be a composer now. Unless—I don't even know what it *was* to be a composer! Well, you said earlier, and I'm agreeing with you, and I



remember doing it: it was being deep in thought. Yes, that's all I'm left with—I feel that this thought was taken away from me, that's it. But there could be another way to be a composer, surely. There could at least be this one we've already mentioned, someone deep in thought who is constantly interrupted. Like Bach. Or, there could be what I've suggested, I think, in some of my work: someone who doesn't have any thoughts, and so can't be said to be either shallow or deep, and who simply sets something going that either has sounds in it or doesn't have sounds in it, that enables not only other people but himself, too, to experience. I guess, in any case, that it goes out of thought, into experience. It's become clear that we can be, not just with our minds but with our whole being, responsive to sound, and that that sound doesn't have to be the communication of some deep thought. It can be just a sound. When I wrote *4'33"* I was in the process of writing the *Music of Changes*. In the case of *4'33"* I actually used the same method. And I built up the silence of each movement—the three movements add up to *4'33"*—I built up each movement by means of short silences, put together. It seems idiotic, but that's what I did. I didn't have to bother with the pitch tables, or the amplitude tables. All I had to do was work with the durations. I said [in 1947] that there should be a piece that had no sounds in it, but I hadn't yet written it. And the thing that gave me the courage to do it, finally,

was in '49, and that was seeing the white, empty paintings of Bob Rauschenberg, to which I responded immediately, not as objects but as... I've said before that they were airports for shadows and for dust. But you could say also that they were mirrors of the air. The marvelous thing about 4'33" is that it can be any length, and that should occur to anyone knowing that it was written using chance operations—it could have been some other length. So that we can listen at any time to what there is to hear. And I do that with great pleasure and often. And you can do it either in ordinary circumstances or in extraordinary circumstances, and it works very well. Feldman was doing those graph pieces and in some ways they're not at all indeterminate when you get back far enough because that's the way he just worked with sonorities, he didn't care about the pitches and, you know, he wanted a high flute, you know, you just make that little square high and that's a high flute. You didn't have to worry if it was an E-flat or an F-sharp. That was secondary. But it was, on the other hand—the notion at the time was very shocking to people. They were like, "What? You're not telling the flute what note to play?" Suzuki explained to us that the ego, or the mind with a little "m," has the capacity to cut itself off from its experience, whether that experience comes in through the day, or comes to it through the night. Or, instead of cutting itself off, it can flow with its experience, and Suzuki said that is what Zen wants, that the flow take place. I don't know how I came to decide upon the use of the *I Ching* chance operations, but they were for the purpose of freeing my mind from my likes and dislikes, in order that this flow could take place.

And so, a very few days after Morton Feldman showed David Tudor and me his first piece of graph music, I then called him up, and with excitement I went to him and explained how I was going to write the *Music of Changes*, which takes its name from the *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes*. In which the making of choices is not the principle of the work but rather the asking of questions, and the questions are arranged in such a way that numbers from 1 to 64, which are the numbers that the *I Ching* works with, can answer those

---

II. *There are real movements.*

---

questions. Feldman has dropped indeterminacy nowadays, and he must always have looked at it very differently from Cage. I think this interest had to do with his interest in painting. He used to put sheets of graph paper on the wall, and work on them like paintings. Slowly his notation would accumulate, and from time to time he'd stand back to look at the overall design. For him it had less to do with belief in chance: it was more function than anything else. He would talk about different weights of sound—and that was simply the easiest way to express them. Pitches didn't really matter, as there were so many other controls, and he used chance without its interfering with expression. What Cage admired in him and what they had most in common was heroism—trusting in performers, despite the risk that they might destroy the thing completely. Unless the performer committed himself to the pieces, they could be horrible, and it was their very dangerousness which made them so beautiful. Cage's were beautiful in the same way, just because you never knew what would come next. Feldman's music seems more to continue than to change. There never was and there is not now in my mind any doubt about its beauty. It is, in fact, sometimes too beautiful. The flavor of that beauty, which formerly seemed to me to be heroic, strikes me now as erotic (an equal, by no means a lesser, flavor). This impression is due, I believe, to Feldman's tendency towards

tenderness, a tenderness only briefly, and sometimes not at all, interrupted by violence. On paper, of course, the graph pieces are as heroic as ever; but in rehearsal Feldman does not permit the freedoms he writes to become the occasion for license. He insists upon an action within the gamut of love, and this produces (to mention only the extreme effects) a sensuousness of sound or an atmosphere of devotion. The very practice of music, and Feldman's eminently, is a celebration that we own nothing. Sometime in the year of its composition I heard Morton Feldman play his *Piano Piece 1952*. After he finished, Luciano Berio, sitting next to me, said something about the piece's "dialectic." I don't recall just what, but I was struck by the effort, which at the time seemed to me characteristically European, to say something, to conceptualize this passage of sounds, a soft succession, regularly paced, of single notes, moving almost without exception back and forth from right hand to left, somewhere in treble to somewhere in bass and back again. What is there to say? The music appears to be unanalyzable. I don't see any system, at least none which could account for the presence of one sound in relation to another in continuity. Each sound is simply itself, and even in the continuous, even rhythm of alternation—perhaps even because of this rhythm—erases, as Feldman might have said, the memory of what precedes, or, one could say, stills the impulse to connect and the habit of conceptualizing. You are, in the end, completely exposed to your own listening. Each sound (a single piano tone) exists for itself, and the piece as a whole is itself too, has a coherent presence. How does that happen? Complete concentration, I would guess, at the time of writing (he often wrote in ink, no corrections), without the distraction of any system of composition, but under exactly limited conditions: only single notes, all of equal duration (a dotted quarter—to make the player pay a little bit more attention), to be played very quietly throughout (but slight, unpredictable differences would result in performance if playing very softly is strictly attempted, differences in dynamics and so in the durations actually heard). The sound is simply present. It doesn't look back. That's what makes this music utopian. I remember going to the home in the country of some friends who have a large collection of records, as so many people do. We had had dinner. We had spent the day first looking for mushrooms, and then preparing them, cooking them, and eating them. And then they were going to add to our pleasures with the recordings. And I found that while the record was being played, the windows were open [and] a breeze was making a kind of light curtain move in a way that I enjoyed watching. Then I saw that records could be part of theater, and I could en-

joy it as something that was happening uniquely. I have a tendency, I think, that distinguishes my work from Christian Wolff's and from Morton Feldman's and from Earle Brown's—we were at one time so close together, and the thing that distinguishes my work from theirs is a tendency, I think, toward theater. Shortly after receiving the gift of my tape recorder in 1953 I placed the microphone in the window of my San Francisco apartment and recorded the sound environment. Little did I realize the extent of the impact this simple act would have on me. Although I thought that I was listening while recording, I was surprised to find sounds on the tape that I had not heard consciously. With this discovery I gave myself a meditation: "Listen to everything all the time and remind yourself when you are not listening". Forty-five years later I am still doing this meditation as the core of a practice that I call Deep Listening. Sustained listening is quite a task. Though hearing if ears are healthy is a continuous physical phenomenon and happens involuntarily when sound waves enter the ears, listening is intermittent and has to be cultivated voluntarily in its many forms. Though it may be surprising many unenlightened musicians are hearing but not necessarily listening when they perform or compose—at least not to the sound of the music. Listening is processing what we hear—for meaning, understanding and direction or action. One day when the windows were open Christian Wolff played one of his pieces at the piano. Sounds of traffic, boat horns, heard not only during the silences in the music, but, being louder, were more easily heard than the piano sounds themselves. Afterwards someone asked Christian Wolff to play the piece again with the windows closed. Christian Wolff said he'd be glad to, but that it wasn't really necessary, since the sounds of the environment were in no sense an interruption of those of the music. I don't need the silent piece anymore. Besides consciousness and science there is life. Beneath the principles of speculation, so carefully analyzed by philosophers, there are tendencies of which the study has been neglected, and which are to be explained simply by the necessity of living, that is, of acting. In 1970 I began a body of work called Sonic Meditation. Sonic Meditations are recipes for ways of listening and sounding and are scores transmitted orally without conventional musical notation. I found that I could involve all kinds of people in Sonic Meditations whether or not they had any musical training. What mattered was an interest in participation, the cultivation of listening strategies, and willingness to explore sound. My interests turned to the field of consciousness and the study of attention. Listening involves the direction of attention. There are two modes of attention: focal, which corresponds to an all-or-nothing state—attention to a point; and global, which corresponds to an open, receptive state—attention expands to a field. Focal attention is sharp and clear. Global attention is warm and fuzzy. The two modes work together as expansion and contraction. In 1973 at the new Center for Music Experiment and Related Research at UCSD I conducted an experiment with my Sonic Meditations with twenty people four hours a day for nine weeks. I invited guests including Lester Ingber. We explored meditation, relaxation and body disciplines and performed Sonic Meditations. It was clear to me that listening was locked up by more exclusive attention to reading and writing. Simple as the instructions for Sonic Meditations were, it seemed necessary to do relaxation as a bridge for people to let go enough to participate. Why in

many of [Feldman's] pieces (such as *Structures for String Quartet*, *Crippled Symmetry*, *Coptic Light*, *For Samuel Beckett*, and even his arrangement of Kurt Weill's *Moon over Alabama*) did every system on every page have exactly nine bars, each of equal dimensions? Each line [in *For Christian Wolff* (1986)] is 9-7/8 inches long. Each bar is 1-1/16" long, except for the first bar, which is 1-3/8" (to allow extra room for the clef sign at the beginning). A bar can range from 3/8 to 3/2 with the quarter = 63-66. In time, one bar that is 1-1/16" can vary between a little over a second to about six seconds. So why are space and time detached in the notation? Perhaps for Feldman, space is an enclosure for sound—

---

III. All division of matter into independent bodies with absolutely determined outlines is an artificial division.

---

the sound that occupies its measure. However, time is elastic, so that a measure in time can become expanded or contracted independent of its elements. Frequently the same figure will be presented on vastly different scales; a three-note ascent might be presented as grace notes occupying almost no time, or evolving very slowly over a half-minute. Space and time are constantly interrelating but seldom coupling. There becomes an intense intrigue in the possibilities of intersection hovering in constantly vanishing illusions. Feldman began earning a living making children's clothing. He was obsessed with fabrics and weaves (from Brooks Brothers clothing to Persian rugs). He once said his music was about "Time Undisturbed." If time is ultimately controlled by visual space on the page of a composition, then it is indeed disturbed and subservient. Space creates history contextualizing events. Instead, for Feldman, each page is like a grid for an aural weaving slowly evolving in extended dimensions of time floating without perceptible barriers. The calligraphy is consistent with [Feldman's] compositional idea of always "crippling symmetry." Each page is five systems of two lines, all nine bars, and all exactly the same spatial length. Each system (one line for the flute and another for the keyboards—the piano and celeste are combined on one line) uses only treble clefs. It would seem convenient to make one page, Xerox it 62 times, and use it for the master. Each page is exactly identical with respect to format, clefs and bar length. The pages have 16 staves, six left blank surrounding the five systems. However, Feldman draws every clef and bar line. Although almost completely identical at first glance, every detail has slight variances within the apparently rigid structure. Feldman's clarity is amazingly rigid, but always with minute details of variance, and this applies to every level of the composition. Each dimension, from the look of the page and its notation, to the orchestrational voicing, to the obsessive writing of a note spelled c-flat, is compositional. He also said that much of writing music was the feeling of the hand on the paper. The disorientation of memory that dissolves sequential time requires the stability of a context continually in the state of redefinition. Feldman talked about his music being nothing more than rearranging the furniture in his room (without ultimate purpose). Normally, repetition in music establishes structure and continuity on a temporal level. Repetition in his music becomes a fetish void of directional intent. His brother once told him that what made his music seem "Jewish" was that it was so obsessive. Inconsistency becomes the directive, but if inconsistency is perceived it is impotent. Hierarchies of many sorts always linger almost sentimentally in the foreground of his music, but not in the background. He told John Cage, in the hospital the day before he died, that he was sorry to die young, but that he had no regrets. Any time there is a surface there is a surface and every time there is a suggestion there is a suggestion and every

time there is silence there is silence and every time that is languid there is that there then and not oftener, not always, not particular, tender and changing and external and central and surrounded and singular and simple and the same and the surface and the circle and the shine and the succor and the white and the same and the better and the red and the same and the centre and the yellow and the tender and the better, and all together. Rectangular ribbon does not mean that there is no eruption it means that if there is no place to hold there is no place to spread. If there could be that which is contained in that which is felt there would be a chair where there are chairs and there would be no more denial about a clatter. A clatter is not a smell. All this is good. The Saturday evening which is Sunday is every week day. What choice is there when there is a difference. A regulation is not active. Thirstiness is not equal division. A sound, a whole sound is not separation, a whole sound is in an order. Claiming nothing, not claiming anything, not a claim in everything, collecting claiming, all this makes a harmony, it even makes a succession. To bury a slender chicken, to raise an old feather, to surround a garland and to bake a pole splinter, to suggest a repose and to settle simply, to surrender one another, to succeed saving simpler, to satisfy a singularity and not to be blinder, to sugar nothing darker and to read redder, to have the color better, to sort out dinner, to remain together, to surprise no sinner, to curve nothing sweeter, to continue thinner, to increase in resting recreation to design string not dimmer. Cloudiness what is cloudiness, is it a lining, is it a roll, is it melting. A sentence of a vagueness that is violence is authority and a mission and stumbling and also certainly also a prison. Calmness, calm is beside the plate and in way in. There is no turn in terror. There is no volume in sound. I grasp the reality of movement when it appears to me, within me, as a change of *state* or of *quality*. But then how should it be otherwise when I perceive changes of quality in things? Sound differs absolutely from silence, and also one sound from another sound. Between light and darkness, between colors, between shades, the difference is absolute. The passage from one to another is also an absolutely real phenomenon. The essential character of space is continuity. We must not confound the data of the senses, which perceive the movement, with the artifice of the mind, which recomposes it. The senses, left to themselves, present to us the real movement, between two real halts, as a solid and undivided whole. 50 years ago this August [2002], David Tudor performed a new piece by John Cage, “four minutes and 33 seconds,” in which no sound is intentionally made. I thought because we’re surrounded by such an interesting sonic environment, that it would be a wonderful way of getting into that and preparing our ears. In the original version, there were three movements. I fully intended to perform it in the way David Tudor did, apparently, in Woodstock, NY, where he closed the piano lid as the beginning of the movement, then opened it again, closed it again, and did this three times. But when I tried that out here, I thought, I don’t really need to do that any more. When it was first done, people had no idea of what to expect, and they were not just surprised—a lot of them were shocked, and angry! Now, in 50 years, I think the shock aspect is gone, but there was something—the really important aspect of this piece was not that shock aspect, but the idea of tuning ourselves in to environmental sounds. And so I don’t feel the need to go through the motions of three movements. So I’m just going to—we’re going to experience four minutes and 33 seconds of what Cage called silence, but what he meant by that is unintended sounds. [Silence] has nothing to do with calmness or quietness. It cannot be found in nature. It occurs as an event, as a rupture into the situation one is in. It’s not necessarily nice or beautiful, it may well be quite horrifying. In any case it evokes a strong awareness of what is taking place at all, a direct—not symbolic or imaginative—encounter with reality, which means with contingency, singularity, emptiness. Silence in my music always is encounter with reality, enforced by the event of a situation being disrupted without any reason. We become aware that each moment is completely

filled with sensations and thoughts. Silence is (for me anyway) far more packed with experience, far more complex than anything we can produce with sound. Paradoxically, it is sound which is (or at least can be) empty. For example, a sustained sound, just barely audible, can be forgotten. It hangs around so long that we get used to it and stop paying attention. At the same time there is just enough to cover much of what would be revealed by a silence. So the sound is there acoustically, but not always mentally. Its presence is finally noticed again only when it disappears. And it leaves a trace—not really a specific memory, just an awareness that something was once there. There is nothing (that is not) and nothing, that is. Nothing vanishes, nothing remains, nothing follows. Lively, smoky passage from what is not to what is: Anything can happen, as not. There is (a) nothing, that *is*. It gives a certain feeling to things, that they could really be anything, not just “something like...” Here we are, in this time, this place. Not announced in any familiar gesture of salutation, but in the immanent expression, the *phenomenon of what it is*. Here, now. In the unforeseenness of its 'ness. Seemingly mute, were seeming what we are after. But this is music, where the silences are rich, not blank. It *is*: something to be heard, and behold. There is indeed the feeling that the music is already gone. At the same time we sense that this music has not left behind the customary impressions. In place of the memory of individual events we sense rather a direct manifestation of life, a richer experience of life. It is not simply an idea; an idea appears to me as a lower category in our consciousness. It is the reality that one is alive that makes us joyful in this moment. It is the feeling that I am here and life is present. This is an unambiguous sensation, but at the same time it is very complex because it is so encompassing. With a music that we perceive in this way, it becomes clear all at once that something is there: time. It is a music that speaks with itself and is its own audience. In this silent dialogue with itself, the music and the audience are connected. Therefore, it does not remain or turn in its own circle. In this silent dialogue with itself, the music is interwoven with silver threads. And it is with this sense of living that the room, often with a minimum of sound, is completely filled. One of the possibilities with this experience of time is *The Expanse*. Music stretches into the future and into the past. It allows a plain to appear, spreading out in all directions. The questions are: Where are the boundaries? What are the boundaries? Another possibility of experiencing time is *The Path*. With this we have the beginning in front of us, and the longer we stay with the piece, the more it lies behind us. In the moment when the music begins, it is heading for the end. The question here is: What holds the piece to life? Yet another possibility is *The Strophe*. Now the music repeatedly pulls past us, and we are challenged to deepen our observation, to penetrate the music by listening and to hear similar music always from another angle. One of the fundamental questions asked by the music of the 20th century (and I see no reason for this to stop) is whether there might be alternatives to the tuning systems of the past—which will call hitherto unknown realms of expression into being. Lest one think this applies only to the questions of consonance and dissonance, we should recall that what is called “noise” (and therefore also “silence”) has an (indeterminate) tuning as well. *In a large, open space* (1994) is a piece for sustained tones of 30 to 60 seconds. It represents James Tenney’s large-scale examination of the infinite possibilities contained in a single harmony. Unlike some of his other work for sustained sound (*Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*, pieces from the *Harmonium* series, *Critical Band*), this has no particular instructions for any kind of dramatic arc (i.e., it does not have to “swell” or develop in any particular way). But some kind of structure does emerge, different every time, depending on those playing and those listening. There is a single chord whose root is a very low F and whose members include the first 32 partials of that F. The performers move from one to another of these notes over the duration of the piece. Those in the audience are encouraged to determine the precise harmony they hear by moving through the space and experimenting with the various combinations and balances. As a composer, James Tenney never stops in one place for very long. He has an unquenchable thirst to try out new ideas, new sounds, and new harmonies, and to hear them in a

---

IV. *Real movement is rather the transference of a state than of a thing.*

---

kaleidoscopic array of structures and situations. In the best performances, one gets the sense that some kind of ineffable poetry is at work. This expressive character does not announce itself in



traditional ways, and is, in my experience, also not the expression of some specific “emotion” (happiness, grief, anger, etc.). This *poetry* is that of sound itself, in all of its indescribable richness and complexity; and proof, perhaps, that even for the greatest of artists, beauty is not made but found. And some day perhaps the discussion that has to come/ In order for us to start feeling any of it before we even/ Start to think about it will arrive in a new weather/ Nobody can imagine but which will happen just as the ages/ Have happened without causing total consternation,/ Will take place in a night, long before sleep and the love/ That comes then, breathing mystery back into all the sterile/ Living that had to lead up to it. Moments as clear as water/ Splashing on a rock in the sun, though in darkness, and then/ Sleep has to affirm it and the body is fresh again,/ For the trials and dangerous situation that any love,/ However well-meaning, has to use as terms in the argument/ That is the reflexive play of our living and being lost/ And then changed again, a harmless fantasy that must grow/ Progressively serious, and soon state its case succinctly/ And dangerously, and we sit down to the table again/ Noting the grain of the wood this time and how it pushes through/ The pad we are writing on and becomes part of what is written./ Not until it starts to stink does the inevitable happen. I also reached a point where I can't do things arbitrarily, I can't push it. I may just continue working the way I do now. I mostly don't think too far into the future, I just take it day by day. One thing I enjoy is having new ideas. On a small scale, I try to discover something new to do with every piece. Finding a different way of proceeding in general, some kind of break with what I've been doing. I'm trying to stay alert for that to happen. Eva-Maria Houben's compositions exist in the space around and within musical sound—a sense of space that fills-out with each passage between sounding and not sounding, appearance and disappearance, and the evolving horizon of what could happen next. Somehow, very simple musical actions (when to play, how much to play, in what groupings...) take on an elevated and uniquely intimate character in our consciousness, until an intense atmosphere of possibility and uncertainty comes to imbue every sound, and not just the interval between sounds. In *some tunes* (2006), Houben explores melody as a linear medium whose every successive point both reiterates the disarming simplicity of the form as well as opens ever new possibilities for continuation. This happens in a sense “silently,” in the simple, unannounced and unadorned passage of one note to the next, and in the sounding of each tune amid—and within—its not sounding. Each volume of *some tunes* approaches the possibility of melody differently. Silence is not an acoustical phenomenon. There is silence, where depth disappears and expanse emerges: on the surface. Still waters are said to run deep, but in reality it is the imperturbability of their surface that impresses us. And a quiet person's silence hides nothing deep—it hides nothing at all. The world is sounding infinitely. There isn't any silence without sounds. There isn't any sound without silence. I would say that the composition “4'33” is historical, but its experience is certainly not. I make a change of its context now, by my composition *2006I*. It's not about exploring new sounds, but exploring a new relation to what the world sounds—as we actually are part of the world [and] the very phenomena itself. What could a new relation to what the world sounds bring forth? In my work I try to describe a general situation where the fact we are part of might already [be] the whole of the world. The fact that it sounds. Ashbery's discourse is “soft,” a gentle conversation with the world; I suppose I am trying to engage in a similar conversation. I enjoy the clarity and familiarity (“hardness”) of the various elements and forms involved, yet the precise subtlety (“softness”) of what (might) happen. In this regard, I have felt a deeper and deeper fondness for your quieter pieces, the rigidity of the timing scheme, yet the perhaps-imperceptible, or barely perceptible, result—which is more a “place” that takes place, than specific sequences of sounds (they simply add “atmosphere” to the place). A great number of your scores seems to me to be a kind of instantaneous vision of a single specific and often simple (not simplified) idea/situation/configuration you notice/describe rather than develop; these scores remind me the direct manner (not the colors) of watercolor drawing, as opposed to the progressive process, with corrections and modifications, of oil painting, for instance. You very often use sustaining sound sources, instruments, and/or oscillators which, among other sounding/harmonic qualities, might/could sustain(!) the desire for extended time dimension (duration), while the repeatedly integrated field recordings give a new dimension to space. I appreciate the fine/subtle balance between precise elements and invitations addressed to the performers to make choices, in the given context, on their own. After having scrutinized 100 of your scores, I think that an important number of your pieces is conceived much more for performers who are intensely and personally involved in the adventure, than the audience, whose experience is much less dense/rich, potentially experienced as though in two dimensions, rather than the performers' three. I would like, still, to tell you of my umbilical attachment to reading. The relation the reader could develop to a book seems me a very rich one: the

reader spends weeks or months with “his” book, which becomes a part of his everyday life; the reader chooses each time the length of his daily reading, the tempo and expression of it, and could return to already-read passages of the book, structuring his own personal interpretation. This widely active relation of reader and book is somehow a model in my mind to musical, sounding, physical or mental projects. [Reading is] ideally a chancy proposition. Undertaken with joy, not for rupture but *reality*: the chaos that continues continuity, organizing the spreading stuff of logic, like a fungus, across a surface or plane for which the page is only metaphor. Duration has been a part of my work from the very beginning. But it wasn't until making the California Trilogy [*El Valley Centro, Los, Sogobi*] that I really began to appreciate that place can only be understood over time; that is, that place is a function of time. As for audience, this new strategy is asking them to work harder; you can't experience something subtle if you don't look more closely than we're accustomed to looking, and looking more closely isn't easy. At first, I was worried that audiences would be bored, but the contrary seems to be true. There is always more world than a writer can create, or represent, or speak of, or, even, reject. The desire that propels poetry propels us away from our “possessions” and forth into the world, replete with realities, from the rocks underfoot to our dreams. In appearance, the score for *Berlin Exercises* (2000) resembles much of Christian Wolff's recent music, employing various quasi-open notation in conjunction with extensive text instructions. Much in the spirit of his long-running series of *Exercises*, performers use what is given in conjunction with what is not, continually producing new, often unpredictable musical decisions (as often conscious as coincidental), often emerging entirely in the doing. The unique continuity of this musical situation bobs along on a constant horizon of chaos, both evident and not. The simple materials and structural formulas—now metric; now unmetered; now linear (contrapuntal); now vertical (chordal); now melodic with percussive accompaniment—all serve to activate and intensify the real music, which arises again and again with crazy constancy, often exquisitely fine and fleeting, in all the vast wilderness areas these signposts somehow engender. Mallarmé's talking about the ideal art form (the Ode, i.e., poem) and feels he is in direct competition with Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk. It's also clear that Mallarmé took music very seriously (how rare). But I'm amused by how he felt the need to have poetry defeat music (as well as theater), and am fairly certain that he would disapprove of all of our re- (or mis-) appropriations of his work. We'll do it anyway, of course. Mallarmé also wants chance to “have taken place” (and to “keep taking place”), but doesn't seem to be ready for the chance that “is taking place” (as it seems to do in so much of our work). Maybe the problem is that his (coming, i.e., 20th) century was one of grand (and mostly failed) answers, and that ours (this one) might (optimistically) be one of small, conspiratorial, hidden networks or constellations: subversive, of course, but also grand in their way. We eat things (including poems) out from the inside and turn them into swiss cheese; inviting, one by one, the “foule” to follow us through those holes. Gun shots, train cars rolling over tracks, people talking and singing, wind, water, cars, helicopters, birds, radios. Green, yellow, grey, aquamarine, brown, blue, pink. Skies, roads, lakes, dirt, cars, trees, the horizon. *Ce qui passe*: what happens is what is recorded. When change (over) fixed duration (equals) a temporal plane. Flows and interruptions: cuts, the time between, the layering of shots, evolving patterns of light, color and sound. A work of preservation and a challenge to vision and visual memory. A composition of definite stillness.

\*

## II. *nearing/hearing*

A scientist, a teacher and a scholar take an evening walk together, conversing about the nature of thinking. That in a nutshell is the premise of Martin Heidegger's "Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking," a text taken from an actual conversation written down in 1944-45 and subsequently published in *Discourse on Thinking* (1959). The text begins as the three minds meander around the issue of will, noting its centrality to the traditional understanding of thinking as re-presentation. They find this formulation inadequate and proceed to reconsider thinking in the context of non-willing. Suddenly, an idea flares:

*Scientist:* Am I right if I state the relation of the one sense of non-willing to the other as follows? You want a non-willing in the sense of a renouncing of willing, so that through this we may release, or at least prepare to release, ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not a willing.

*Teacher:* You are not only right, but by the gods! as I would say if they had not flown from us, you have uncovered something essential.

*Scientist:* That I succeeded in this was not my doing but that of the night having set in, which without forcing compels concentration. Ever more openly, I am coming to trust in the inconspicuous guide which takes us by the hand – or better said, by the word – in this conversation.

*Scholar:* We need this guidance, because our conversation becomes ever more difficult.

*Teacher:* If by "difficult" you mean the unaccustomed task which consists in weaning ourselves from will. If only I possessed already the right releasement, then I would soon be freed of that task of weaning.

*Scholar:* To be sure I don't know yet what the word releasement means; but I seem to presage that releasement awakens when our nature is let-in so as to have dealings with that which is not a willing. Perhaps a higher acting is concealed in releasement than is found in all the actions within the world and in the machinations of all mankind...

*Teacher:* ...which higher acting is yet no activity.

*Scientist:* Then releasement lies – if we may use the word lie – beyond the distinction between activity and passivity...

*Scholar:* ...because releasement does *not* belong to the domain of the will.

*Scientist:* The transition from willing into releasement is what seems difficult to me.

At the moment this flourishing new concept of thinking emerges, disclosing a wholly new path forward, the trio is beset by an almost overwhelming sense of difficulty. "If only," the teacher laments, "I possessed already the right releasement"—the word not yet comprehended, but already, the certainty that what it names is *called for* in the new enterprise. It is as though the three have fortuitously come across an unknown trail whose head happens to be marked by a great boulder, which, by all appearances, stands in the way of all forward movement. And yet they have already begun to surmount this obstacle—they have already embarked upon the new course—merely in *letting themselves be led*, "by the word," out onto *terra incognita*. What they discover, the instant the familiar course of reason encounters its limit and begins to turn back on itself, is another function of discourse entirely. From the point of view of this other function, named "releasement," nothing is more plain than the absolute enclosure of the terrain of the will, constrained in its capacity to understand—or literally, to *grasp*—by what it can take, by force, for its own. This constitutes the back yard of reason, the realm of acting (planting, cultivation) and passing (weeding, extermination), where only objects appear. Releasement, then, is perhaps the name for a break in the fence at a forgotten, untended segment of the property line, where trespass and escape no longer apply, at which margin a certain beyond, containing not the taxidermy of ruled Franken-things designated "own" and "invader" but *living things*, becomes imaginable. The undertaking of a thought past the limit and leading into this night-like beyond confronts Heidegger's trio as a burdensome impasse. Gradually, however, it becomes clear that the real burden lies not in the unknownness/unownedness of the virgin terrain but in relinquishing the methods of will, whose rule, after all, this new-found course into a margin beyond its property absolutely undermines. As the scientist declares, "the transition from willing into releasement is what seems difficult to me"—undoing the master-ly habits of reason is the hard part; releasement and the capacity to be led by what one encounters (rather than appropriating it) are somehow the felicitous remainder. In place of the tedious labors of sophistication—into the very space of their relinquishment—falls a discipline which, like the night, "without forcing compels concentration."

This special attentiveness, conceived by Heidegger as the basis for a new trajectory of thinking, also serves us well as listeners, and the correlation is not far-fetched. Listening, as with thinking, turns on its relation to will, in Heidegger's broad sense. We (typically) learn to listen with communicative purpose—that is, with expectation and memory. We train ourselves to hear in terms that will make sense within the machinery of meaningful symbolic reference that governs our world, and this holds as much for our experience of language as music. Heidegger's trio wants to initiate a thinking that ventures out of these confines, and what this venture ultimately entails is learning how to listen. Indeed, their adventure begins only when they move beyond merely accounting for the words of their discourse and start listening to them directly, hearing the utterances of thought that the words are literally *becoming*, right before their ears. Thus, we must realize that we are not really listening until we have opened our minds to hearing what is actually before

us—a sound in itself; a musical organism of sounds—and the unforeseen ideas it may project and allow us to follow within the structure of a strictly contingent function.

It seems obvious that rigorous listening and thinking should involve careful attention to what is at hand, whether a sounding music, a philosophical discourse, or anything else. Yet, what does paying attention usually entail? Do we approach the subject of our attention as a chance to flex our knowledge, identifying what traits and terms appear familiar, inferring from them a categorical unity, and interpreting anything else through this prism (or dismissing it outright; basically, the same thing)? Or perhaps we take it apart, analytically, and conduct a statistics of its quantifiable components, sorting as much as possible, in the greatest possible detail. Or maybe we supplant it with a fanciful association or metaphor, that strange method by which we understand something by replacing it with an image of something else entirely. All of these approaches and more comprise the varied arsenal of a metaphysics of will, and they are always more pernicious than we think. For instance, we may well succeed in listening past the “symbolic” content of a music (style and genre, and the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic rhetoric which characterize them, etc.), only to settle upon reading its phenomenological characteristics (pitch, timbre, duration, dynamic, etc.) through, and thereby subjecting them to, a comparative, relational accounting. We tend strongly, semi-automatically to fix and subordinate everything within a comprehensive sphere of reference, but as mentioned before, this constitutes a taxidermy of dead objects, terminally insensitive and closed to what unknown worlds sounds themselves may name for us to hear, and an altogether different pursuit from listening with releasement. We seek, along with Heidegger’s trio, to be led *by the ear*, but much has first to be undone: we are well-equipped to be accountants, but this, it turns out, has not prepared us for listening. We therefore have the task of recognizing and suspending the procedures of will which customarily have comprised listening as we have known it, but which have actually *prevented* listening. By relinquishing the habitual imperative to hear only what makes sense *to us*, we prepare ourselves to hear what leads us by the ear to another kind of sense.

But what would it be, then, to engage in this listening that does not also constitute a willing? What is it to listen with releasement toward things? It does seem difficult to fathom at first, listening to unknown sounds as though in the dark of an alien wilderness, where all the accustomed tools of making sense don’t apply. And yet: we have named the comportment that is called for—releasement; we have begun to carefully disentangle the functions of will from our efforts at listening. This primary work is by far the hardest, and while it will comprise an ongoing task as we acquire both an increasing sensitivity to the obstacles to listening and a deepening releasement toward things, the greatest labor is already past. What now, becoming thus unburdened of our metaphysical bulk, have we left to do? What assurance is there that we will hear something, and when will we hear it? There are no assurances—encounters must be *risked*; after all, the discovery of this new thinking that is also a listening was in no way assured to Heidegger’s trio, nor is it for us. It happened, and it happens, only when, looking back, the project of the new thinking had already been silently and inconspicuously underway, and so it will be with any further insights—they will not be visible on the horizon of our window of appearances, but will only have led us, seemingly inadvertently, into their hearing. We have only *to wait*:

*Teacher:* Waiting, all right; but never awaiting, for awaiting already links itself with re-presenting and what is re-presented.

*Scholar:* Waiting, however, lets go of that; or rather I should say that waiting lets re-presenting entirely alone. It really has no object.

*Teacher:* In waiting we leave open what we are waiting for.

*Scholar:* Why?

*Teacher:* Because waiting releases itself into openness...

This waiting, to be sure, also bears with it some difficulty: we could be waiting for a long time, and a certain constant vigilance is also implied. It is hard to sustain waitfulness, hard not to fall back into old habits; we must consciously foster an open space for its unfolding, without imposing any mastering condition upon it, if it is to garner us anything at all, just as the trio had to *decide* to wend their way openly into the night, unconcerned with a time of return, nor pace of progress: there is abiding in their method a certain faith that whatever they will encounter will provide all that is needed.

*Scientist:* Then we can’t really describe what we have named?

*Teacher:* No. Any description would reify it.

*Scholar:* Nevertheless it lets itself be named, and being named it can be thought about...

*Teacher:* ...only if thinking is no longer re-presenting.

*Scientist:* Then thinking would be coming-into-the-nearness of distance.

*Scholar:* That is a daring definition of its nature, which we have chanced upon.

*Scientist:* I only brought together that which we have named, but without re-presenting anything to myself. Or, really, waited for something without knowing for what.

*Scholar:* But how come you suddenly could wait?

*Scientist:* As I see more clearly just now, all during our conversation I have been waiting for the arrival of the nature of thinking. But waiting itself has become clearer to me now and therewith this too, that presumably *we all became more waitful along our path.*

*Teacher:* If I have it rightly, then, you tried to let yourself into releasement.

*Scholar:* We can hardly come to releasement more fittingly than through an occasion of letting ourselves in.

*Teacher:* Above all when the occasion is as *inconspicuous as the silent course of a conversation* that moves us. [Emphasis mine.]

Somehow, this radically patient waitfulness will by itself comprise the discipline needed to listen to what we have never heard before. This is difficult to both accept and accomplish. The difficulty resides, somewhat paradoxically, in the attainment of pure leisure. On the one hand, in order to remain waitful, we must not resign ourselves from the open attentiveness of listening—leisure is not merely a respite from the taxing involvements of our world, but moreso, the chance to reengage with the life beyond our world. On the other hand, encounters do not occur on command, by force of will; they cannot be hurried along, but occur only in their own time—at leisure, we lose track of time. Therefore, we must take an open-ended vacation from the estate of reason and will, and stroll without itinerary out onto foreign shores. This goal-less wandering is not a drifting; with each step, progress is made, and our releasement deepens; we grow more waitful; we find that in going nowhere, we have already been going someplace, and this someplace that is also nowhere goes on forever, leading us along its course infinitely, or for as long as we can abide in going nowhere. This someplace/nowhere is not indefinite or generic; it is not just *anywhere*. To the will, it can only appear as a blank, a non-place designated by a placeholder. But to us, once there, this place—its expressive surface, the trajectory of its native idea—has the fullness and distinction of a being in itself, bearing the character of the proper name—it is the singular, self-defining Named.

*Scientist:* Whatever we designate has been nameless before; this is true as well of what we name releasement.

*Teacher:* But is it really settled that there is a nameless at all? There is much which we often cannot say, but only because the name it has does not occur to us.

*Scholar:* By virtue of what kind of designation would it have its name?

*Teacher:* Perhaps these names are not the result of designation. They are owed to a naming in which the nameable, the name and the named occur altogether.

We are open to hearing within the realm of this special naming only when we listen waitfully. What we then may hear is the Named making itself nameable in giving its name to be heard. When we listen with releasement to sounds or music, past the point where they cease to remind us of anything (even themselves), we begin hearing what is proper only under their names. Allowing ourselves to be led by the ear, we come progressively into the nearness of things in the distance of being as they are: the realm of sounds themselves. Thus, we may encounter a sound or a music as an entity pronouncing its own name, in its own voice. Such a radical but simple *nearing* is all that would be entailed in an art of “sounds heard,” yet it is no less elusive nor less difficult to attain now, over a half-century after John Cage named the new course. But nor could we ever exhaust its infinite trajectory.

*Scientist:* It seems to me that this unbelievable night entices you both to exult.

*Teacher:* So it does, if you mean exulting in waiting, through which we become more waitful and more void.

*Scholar:* Apparently emptier, but richer in contingencies.

Becoming more waitful clears the path into the expansive wilderness, opening that opening infinitely, a becoming-void which makes place for infinitely more to come. Led by the ear down the difficult path, far from losing our bearings to the night, we become ever greater listeners. As we refine our capacity to hear what had been unnameable, we find our legs and our travel becomes joyful and light – we really *are* on vacation.

*Scholar:* 'Αρχιβασίη

*Scientist:* What does it mean?

*Scholar:* The Greek word translates as “going toward.”

*Scientist:* Indeed, waiting is really almost a counter-movement to going toward.

*Scholar:* Translated literally it says “going near.”

*Teacher:* Perhaps we could think of it as “moving-into-nearness”?

*Scholar:* Then this word might be the name, and perhaps the best name, for what we have found.

*Scholar:* 'Αρχιβασίη: “moving-into-nearness.” The word could rather, so it seems to me now, be the name for our walk today along this country path.

*Teacher:* Which guided us deep into the night...

*Scientist:* ...that gleams ever more splendidly...

*Scholar:* ...and overwhelms the stars...

*Teacher:* ...because it nears their distances in the heavens...

When we listen with releasement, our ears can name any unforeseen harmonies, any unexpected and unknown entities in sound as surely as our eyes name the heavenly constellations. In the end, *there is no difficulty*—

*Teacher:* Ever to the child in man, night neighbors the stars.