

FREDRIC RZEWSKI: Plan for SPACECRAFT (1967) for large ensemble or orchestra ad lib.

Form for a music that has no form. We begin with a group of performers and an idea. The idea is two kinds of space: occupied, and created space. Each performer occupies a part of the space (which can be a theater, concert hall, radio station, or whatever). This space is corporeal, and has limits defined by those of his own body. His medium is the vibrating atmosphere. His object is, by means of concentrated energy, excitation of the air, to create a situation in which lines of force are set up between himself and other persons, whose alternating rhythms produce a sense of liberation in those whose ears they reach.

Each performer considers his own situation as a sort of labyrinth. Each begins by making music in the way in which he knows how, with his own rhythms, his own choice of materials, et cetera, setting up some kind of simple ensemble situation, without particular regard for the others. This primitive ensemble, however, is superficial, and has nothing to do with the fundamental unity which is the final goal of the improvisation. He begins by making music in an already familiar way. He does not transcend himself; he does not consider that he is creating anything, or doing anything that he has not done already at one time or another.

He sees himself as imprisoned in a labyrinth with many corridors. At the center of the labyrinth he imagines a sort of movie screen with a loudspeaker. Images flash constantly across the screen, and sounds emanate uninterruptedly from the speaker. These images and sounds are incomprehensible orders snapped at him by an unknown master, which he feels compelled to obey. They are archaic runes, magic symbols, whose meaning is unknown. All he knows is that action is required of him. The only action he knows is that of moving from one place to another within the labyrinth: left, right, forwards, and backwards, all the time with the more or less vague intention of getting out.

The images and sounds which are flashing at him are formulas, drawn from the reservoir of tradition: what he knows as "art," which has been transmitted to him in various ways, and is registered in his mind. They are like dream-images. They appear to have a certain meaning, expressed in the form of command; but they also seem to have a deeper, secret meaning, which is incomprehensible. The commands are not specific; they are only commands. The response to them is to move spontaneously, executing already learned actions, empty gestures, mechanical repetitions of the past.

His mind is like a complicated organ with many keys. There is an "inspiration" key, a "composition" key, a "communication with God" key, a "Stockhausen" and a "Cage" key: one for every myth. This is all right. He is a practiced musician and knows that he has a battery of arms at his disposal. He knows that, if one thing he does not satisfy him, he can immediately flip a switch and turn on something else. This is his virtuosity. But he has done nothing to escape from the labyrinth. He is still reading images flashing across his individual mind. He has not transformed the space in any way.

Each performer begins by making his own music in his own way. The result is chaos: a great tumult and confusion of sound, sometimes with chance harmonies, which appear for a moment and then vanish; sometimes with clashing forces, sounds battering against each other, trying to push each other out of the

way. Each person is contained within his own labyrinth. The object of the music-making is to escape from the labyrinth. The secret of the labyrinth is that the way out is not forwards or backwards, to the left or to the right, but up. To go up it is necessary to fly. The musician must grow wings and enter into someone else's labyrinth.

Now two things can happen: Either this event will take place immediately and miraculously, by magic, and music will result; or else, as is more likely, it will not happen. The tumult will continue, tending to grow worse; and the harmonies will become more superficial. This is because it is difficult to make music. If the magic takes over, and the music happens, the entire space and everything in it will be transformed. The audience, too, will be drawn into the music, and eventually contribute to it, either by producing sound, or by reemaining silent.

In the event that the magic does not operate, the performer finds himself confronted with a heavy task. He begins to search the atmosphere for lines, which may unite his rhythms with those coming from other sources. He begins to examine his own rhythms, searching for those which he can cast out, with the hope that someone may catch hold of them, and attach himself to them. It is as if each man were an atom, floating isolated in space; and each atom were to begin to emanate feelers towards other atoms. Manifold tentacles of rhythm begin to creep out from each vibrating body, catching hold of each other. Very slowly, a single, fundamental rhythm, with which, in one way or another, all of the musicians can join, begins to emerge from the chaos. As each person lends his weight to his rhythm, as if to a central pendulum, its force increases, and a general oscillation sets in, which forms the tonic for everyone's individual music.

It is as if a giant molecule were taking form out of Nothing. The manifold relations between the individual parts of this structure make it as a whole infinitely richer than the individual musics with which the process began.

The performer finds that he has been transported into a new situation, in which there are other laws of gravity. He discovers a new economy of energy; he is almost weightless, and able to move with fantastic ease. The energy which had formerly been expended in the general tumult and conflict is now used more efficiently, to move the giant pendulum. Placing his balance upon this fundamental rhythm, he finds that he can devote his energies thereby saved to the adornment of this rhythm, and to its enrichment with smaller and more complex sub-rhythms. Ultimately the sound of many persons oscillating in a harmonic relation with one another will acquire an unimaginable richness and fineness, which will completely transcend the individual musics. The spirit, endowed with grace, will ascend from the body, escape from the spatial limits of the body, and become one with the atmosphere in vibration. The spirit will be everywhere that the sound is. The space will no longer be occupied, but created.

If this desired transformation of space takes place, it will not be by magic which should have happened immediately- but rather by creating the conditions under which music becomes possible, at the end of a long process. It will be work. The difference between magic and work is one of duration. This work may also, for some reason, not take place. The tumult and confusion may grow worse; or the performer may find himself with nothing to do, nothing to say; he is surrounded by Nothing, and in him there is Nothing. In both cases, it is possible to transform a negative condition into a positive one.

The first negative case is that of conflict. Here the performer's task will be to give vent in his music to violence in an extreme form: to push the conflict further, to let it break out into open war. He must localize and isolate the sources of resistance to the music, the inertia which interferes with the oscillation

of the pendulum, and direct his energies aggressively toward the breaking-down of that inertia. Everyone must become aware that the music is not taking place, aware of where the resistance lies. It may be in the musicians, or in the audience, or both. The experienced performer's secret knowledge is that the resistance is normally within himself, and that the imagined hostility of the audience, or of the other performers, is a projection of his own negative state—a hallucination which he has manufactured to prevent strangers from entering into his labyrinth. In this case, he is already at war with himself; it is too late for negotiations. One side must win, the other must lose. Before there can be peace, there must be a clash of arms, a total thrust of the self into the struggle. An extreme state must be demanded of the body, in order that the body may accept other terms. The warlike situation is merely another form of work.

The second negative state—drifting in nothingness—is more critical, because the body lacks the energy to plunge itself into conflict. It is a situation of silent hatred. The performer has been, or is being destroyed. Four courses of action are possible:

A. *To continue to be destroyed* = To do nothing; B. *To destroy* = To make a gesture of total negativity: to produce a change, any change, which will transform the state of things; C. *To put on a professional mask* = To conceal, to falsify, to draw upon the reservoir of formulas which constitute one's virtuosity, to save appearances; D. *To go back to point zero* = To wipe the slate clean, return to the original situation, begin the piece again.

These courses of action are the results of different interpretations of Nothing. Although they may all be necessary at different times, and may (at least within the limited frame of music-making) have no lethal consequences, are to be considered as arranged within a scale expressive of an ascending order of truthfulness, and therefore of desirability:

A. *To be destroyed* is to deny the possibility of creation, to interpret Nothing as Absolute. This is the state of "drifting," whose duration must be minimized.

B. *To destroy* is to interpret Nothing as if it were Something, out of which something else is to be formed. Creation is mistaken for a negative force: The mind cannot see beyond the possibility of a single, blinding act, which would bring nothingness in its wake.

C. *To put on a mask* is to interpret Nothing as if it were a vacuum, to be filled with something that already exists. It is to transfer something from one place to another, like the convict who is punished by being made to dig a hole and then fill it up again. It may save appearances, but it perpetuates a lie; it is not creation.

D. *To return to zero* is to identify with Nothing. It is the only creative attitude. It is to take zero as the common denominator between oneself and all other creatures, to admit the possible identity of oneself and all that is and is not.

By returning to zero, the performer reaffirms the possibility of accomplishing his original task. The music continues to live. He may have to go through this experience once, twice, several times during the course of a performance. But, as everything which has a soul is mortal, this cycle must also end. There may be insuperable obstacles which bar the way to music. The obstacles may never be overcome, and the piece will end in exhaustion.

Three possible courses of the music have been described: The goal was achieved instantaneously, through magic; it was arrived at after a natural and necessary duration, through work; it was never found at all.

The third result will be as acceptable as the first two, because of its excellence; but with the difference that it communicates sadness, whereas the others were JOyous.

A final note with regard to the situation at the beginning of the piece:

Here the performer is not entirely without responsibilities. He does not merely begin to play in any way whatsoever. Since this piece is based on an idea-although it has no necessary form-and since this idea is the transformation of space from one state to another state, the music at the beginning must express what state it is that exists at the moment when this transformation is about to be attempted. We consider the audience as being in a state of ignorance. The space in its present state is non-musical. It is merely occupied. The people, including the musicians, are merely what they are and always have been: flesh, bound and finite, imprisoned in labyrinths, repositories of the past, automata. There is a general state of numbness. There is neither pleasure nor pain, memory nor hope; there is no obligation to move in one direction or another. Life is imprisoned within a shell of immobility and paralysis. There is, however, a state of expectation, of general anticipation that an attempt is going to be made to bring about another state of things. What the musicians have to make clear is that this change is not just any change, but a fundamental one: the redemption of the space and of everything in it.

For what the audience does not yet realize, before the beginning of the music, is that the space which it occupies is profane, dominated by demons; and that these demons are they themselves. Each individual is a worshipper of images. What is going to happen now is that images are going to be smashed, and meaningful rituals created in their place. The air is charged with stupidity, complacency, inaction, slavery; it is poisonous, and we have to be fully aware of its loathsomeness. The music which sets in now must necessarily be demonic, because demons are everywhere, also in the musicians, which is where they are now acting. The musician is possessed; the first sound that he strikes must be one of terror. The breaking of the silence is a breaking of the spell of stupidity which shrouds the soul. This sound, which may be called "antisic," awakens the soul to its demonic state; and only then may the exorcism begin, the struggle to cast lines through the tumult to another soul.

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