

Credo Unreliable Processes

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Any enunciation of an aesthetic has by definition to be more of a "snapshot" or "time-slice" through a continuum than a statement of dogma.

What is extraordinary in music making today is that it is more common for musicians to try to reproduce the ideas of people from other cultural and political climates, other eras, than to engage in a discourse of the present. As we all so casually consume those past works of "creative genius" in the comfort of our concert halls, we distance ourselves from their essence - the social relevance that fueled the creative fire that produced them.

I have often wondered why it is that today so many people find new music objectionable. One explanation is that there is a lack of commitment to our own culture - we don't believe in ourselves or what we are doing. Rather than listen to the voice of our time we prefer to bury our heads in the sounds of the past and pretend that our cultural and aesthetic world is the same as yesterday's.

This attitude is not entertained in other aspects of our lives. How many of our social "leaders" would travel to work in a horse and buggy, do business without a telephone or computer, hunt for their evening meal etc? To do so today would at best be considered quaint and impractical. Yet they somehow remain perfectly serious about living their day to day emotional lives in the past.

It goes without saying that a culture so dominated by the past as ours is - one that crawls backwards into the future - is an atrophied culture, devoid of direction, a culture fearful of the present. It is this fear of the present that leads to mystification of the past.

The difficulty for creative artists in such a culture is that their day to day lives are concerned with coming to terms emotionally with living today. (It is in this way that they reflect the age in which they live.)

The past is not for living in; it is a well of conclusions from which we draw in order to act. The first step in this direction is to begin to think for oneself. Simple as this might sound, it is actively discouraged by western society as it is presently constituted:

"Darling, never mind what you think. Listen. We are trying to teach you!"

My mother said it. My schoolteachers said it. All grown-up authorities of any kind - the policeman, the druggist said it. "Thinking" was considered to be a process that is only teachable by the elders of the system. "That is why we have schools, dear." "Thinking" was considered to be an utterly unreliable process when spontaneously attempted by youth."

A part of this "search for coherence" is a need to continually redefine the nature of being:

"Where do you live?" and "What are you?" are progressively less sensible questions. "At present I am a passenger on Spaceship Earth" and "I don't know what I am. I know that I am not a category, a highbred specialization. I am not a thing - a noun. I am not flesh. ... I have taken in ... air food and water, which temporarily became my flesh and which progressively disassociated from me. You and I seem to be verbs - evolutionary processes. Are we not integral functions of the Universe?"

Being occurs in both local and global dimensions. Whether my music can be identified as intrinsically Australian as such is no concern of mine. Although I think of myself as Australian, I have no time for the jingoistic jindywarrabackisms that so dominate the public definitions of ourselves in the present social and political climate. It is the natural landscapes of Australia that attract me. The essence of this attraction, through its colours and sounds, its forms and its strong psychic power is not overtly emotional, it is almost abstract. How this happens or why I cannot say but in some way I feel a sense of ownership - of me by it. This is so even though my cultural roots in this land are not very deep. How much more so must it be for those of us who have been here for so much longer. It is very easy to understand the sense that aboriginals have of the land owning them, of them being of the land. Interestingly, this implies a commitment to actively protecting it, thus always ensuring a contemporary relevance.

Until now, the earth's abundance of immediately consumable resources has been sufficient to allow us to carry on consuming its wealth despite our ignorance of the effect. The earth's storehouse of essential resources has provided a "cushioning" for our sustenance by trial-and-error, just as a chick inside an egg is provided with nutrients for its early development. These nutrients are exhausted at the same time that the chick is large enough to be able to move around and forage for itself. By pecking at the shell, the chick, in seeking to consume more and more shell enclosed nutrients, breaks open the shell and thus emerges into a new phase of sustenance/existence.

We are at a point in human history where our pecking at the all but exhausted natural resources of the planet is forcing us to develop an entirely different relationship to the universe. We are going to have to spread our wings and fly or perish. This will entail applying generalised principles governing the universe and not the "ground rules" of yesterday's superstitions and reflexes.

"The most important and least boring challenge facing humanity is to prepare ourselves neurologically to meet the Einsteinian "relatives" with whom we share the galaxy. The highest priorities - intellectual, social, economic - should be assigned to extra-terrestrial communication and migration.

"Some among us will protest that human intelligence and human resources should be used to solve the agonizing terrestrial problems of unequal distribution.

"These larval protests, however sincere, are historically wrong and genetically futile.

"The cause of suffering and scarcity which now threatens humanity is not material. It is neuro-political. Does not the current malaise of affluent nations demonstrate clearly that material rewards are somehow not enough?

"The crisis which the human race now faces has been called spiritual, psychological, philosophic. It is best described as navigational. Humanity has lost the map, the compass, the guide-book; misplaced the genetic code.

"When humanity begins to work for extraterrestrial migration, the competition for material acquisition will gradually diminish because unlimited space, unlimited energy, unlimited resources await in the extra-terrestrial solar system.

"Migration is nature's classic solution to the problem of over-population, scarcity and competition."

If all this seems a little far-fetched, I would remind you of the parable of the five caterpillars who, just before their own metamorphosis, see their first butterfly.

"The conservative caterpillar sniffs and says, "That's illegal and immoral. They should arrest that irresponsible individual and cage her down here on the ground where she belongs."

The technical caterpillar sniffs and says, "They'll never get me up in one of those." The liberal-progressive caterpillar shouts rhetorically, "How dare that frivolous creature float free when there are caterpillars in Bangladesh who don't have color T.V.'s."

The Hindu-Buddhist caterpillar chants "Ohm" in a superior manner and says, "Why bother to build those wings when I can just sit in the lotus position and fly by means of astral travel."

And the religious caterpillar murmurs piously, "If God had intended caterpillars to fly he would have given us wings."

In view of the foregoing it is probably not so surprising that I should be absorbed in the search for a spatial language for the integration of music and image.

"Most people visualise music as two-dimensional, with time represented by the horizontal lines and pitch by vertically arrayed symbols, as is the convention on paper. The ear resides at the centre of a spherical domain. We hear from all around. We hear music as patterns of ups and downs, to and fro in a distinctly three-dimensional space - a space within. The eye, more outwardly oriented, perceives objects and events outside at the point where the eyes focus. Yet the eye enjoys design equally as well as the ear. The mind's eye shares with the ear an inward experience of architectonic spatial constructions and would

perceive them with the same pleasure, were they to exist."

As a composer, moving from a purely sonic world to a world in which both sound and light synergetically interplay in space, is proving to be an interesting and deeply satisfying experience.

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