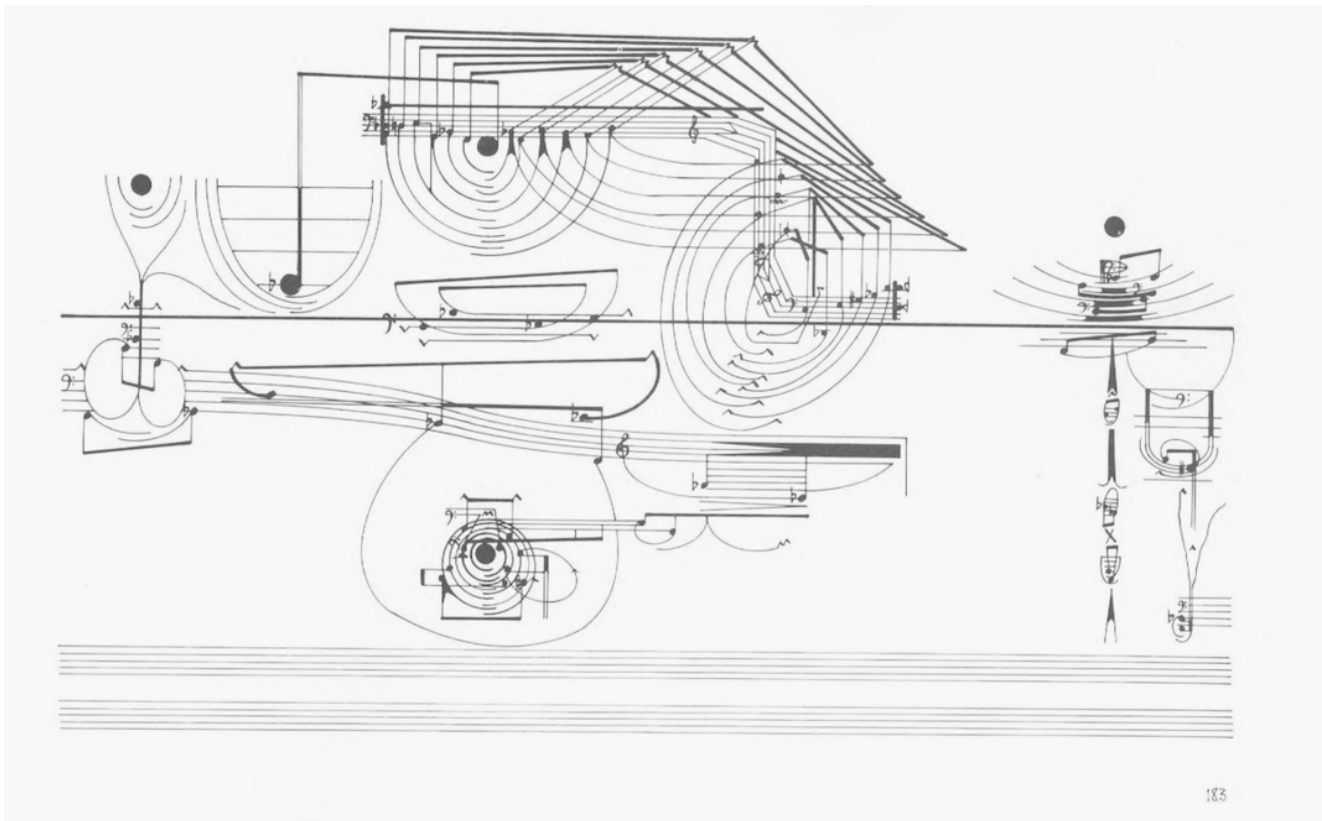


Red Score

AF artforum.com/books/canada-choate-on-stockhausen-serves-imperialism-82947



TreatisePage from Cornelius Cardew's score for , 1963–67.

STOCKHAUSEN SERVES IMPERIALISM, BY CORNELIUS CARDEW. New York: Primary Information, 2020. 126 pages.

CORNELIUS CARDEW'S SOLO PIANO INTERPRETATION *Four Principles on Ireland and Other Pieces* of the Chinese Cultural Revolution anthem "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman," from his 1974 record , is spry and cheery, a toe-tapping minute-and-a-half frolic across the ivories. Though its folkly character shines, Cardew's featherweight playing belies the song's heavy ideological underpinnings. Its lyrics: "The revolutionary masses cannot do without the Communist Party / Mao Zedong Thought is the sun that forever shines."

A former assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen and one of England's leading experimental composers of the postwar period, Cardew arrived at Mao by rejecting Zen anarchist John Cage, whose theories he followed from 1958 to '68. During this pre-Marxist period, Cardew created indeterminate compositions whose graphic notation challenged their interpreters to produce sounds that were "a picture of the score, not vice versa." In 1969, while teaching at London's Morley College, he cofounded the Scratch Orchestra, a group of both trained and amateur players who carried out Happening-like concert-events until a 1971 schism shattered the collective. Out of the crucible emerged a new Cardew, an apostate avant-

gardist and member of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), whose dedication to Cagean chance operations gave way to a commitment to class struggle. From 1974 until his death by hit-and-run in 1981, he reoriented his production entirely toward music with “revolutionary content.”

Stockhausen Serves Imperialism Refrain The short book of collected essays (1974), reissued last month by Primary Information, lays bare the terms of Cardew’s remarkable political transformation. Following collective member Rod Eley’s “History of the Scratch Orchestra 1969–72” (a primer on the group’s pre- and post-rupture activity), chapter two, “Criticizing Cage and Stockhausen,” delves into the substance of Cardew’s anti-avant argument. In his 1972 article “John Cage: Ghost or Monster?,” Cardew charged his former mentor with creating music that only “presents the surface dynamism of modern society” while “ignor[ing] the underlying tensions and contradictions that produce that surface”—that is, celebrating personal liberation while denying individual responsibility for the social whole. His critique of Stockhausen, centered around (1959), a piece Cardew himself helped premiere, is more straightforward but equally relentless: By composing music for a bourgeois audience with a “mystical atmosphere” and predicated on the “pseudo-scientific” relation of tones, Stockhausen reified his status as a genius and thus dignified unequal class relations. Cardew devotes much of the book and draws large portions of his analysis from long quotations of Mao’s 1942 “Talks on Literature and Art,” firmly toeing the party line. The sections of musical and political analysis allowed by his intimate knowledge of the two older composers and their oeuvres, however, are nonetheless enlightening, legitimated not by orthodoxy, but by decades of collaboration and study.



Cornelius Cardew at Alexandra Palace, London, 1971. Courtesy of Horace Cardew. *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* Picket *Stockhausen Concert!* "Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture" *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* Though certainly incendiary, Cardew's argument against Stockhausen was far from the first of its kind. Ten years prior to the publication of , American philosopher-composer and Fluxus artist Henry Flynt published copies of his "manifesto in conjunction with demonstrations he called "Actions Against Cultural Imperialism" (Tony Conrad, George Maciunas, and Ben Vautier also participated; Amiri Baraka watched from across the street). Buoyed by the context of the civil rights struggle, Flynt's text references a Stockhausen talk he attended at Harvard in 1958, in which the German composer supposedly characterized jazz as "primitive" and "barbaric" or used "words to that effect," in line with what Flynt perceived as his general tendency to ignore or dismiss non-Western, non-European musics. Flynt followed this first screed with 1965's broadside , in which he argued that anti-imperialists must fully integrate "street-Negro music," a miserable term he used to describe black popular music, into their lives. His 1980 essay "The Meaning of My Avant-Garde Hillbilly and Blues Music" cites John Coltrane, Robert Johnson, and field recordings of African tribal music as instrumental to the development of his theories. The Flynt-Cardew comparison is helpful insofar as it illustrates Cardew's relative conservatism, his inability to understand what was actually popular music in the mid-1970s: When asked in an interview about involving his reggae-loving Hackney

community in his People's Liberation Music band, which played exclusively Chinese and Irish folk songs, Cardew responded, flatly, "those rhythms will have to go." Such unwillingness to engage with his neighbors is frankly irreconcilable with his insistence that "the artist serves the community, not vice versa." Though advocates for a break from the modernist avant-garde, Cardew's continued striving for ideological purity suggests the opposite—continuity.

Treatise *The Great Learning* *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* The fourth and final chapter, "Self-Criticism: Repudiation of Earlier Works," reveals the Maoist principle of self-criticism as the engine that drove Cardew's state of permanent revolution. Contradiction and flux being the nature of life, Cardew "make[s] no bones about having produced music just as backward as anything a Cage or Stockhausen is capable of." The composer then lays out a seven-step schema for evaluating avant-garde art and applies it to his own output, renouncing his earlier experiments with graphic notation in , 1963–67, and disavowing his Confucius-inspired , 1968–71, as "reactionary ideological content." Why, then, did he allow the continued performance of these pieces? "The aim," he wrote, "is to use the work . . . as a carrier for its criticism," as apt a description of the modernist project as I've heard, though Cardew's solution—to hang banners with Maoist dicta above the musicians at each concert—is supremely literal-minded. Though Cardew's mysterious death at age forty-five (the driver who hit him was never identified, and some hold that the accident was no accident at all) forecloses the chance to evaluate his work's further development, enlightens the Cardew-curious to the composer's rigorous commitment to following ideas to their very end. Contra Cardew's protestations, perhaps naively so, I am reminded of the gnomic conclusion of Allan Kaprow's 1966 essay "Experimental Art": "Experimental art is never tragic. It is a prelude."

Canada Choate —