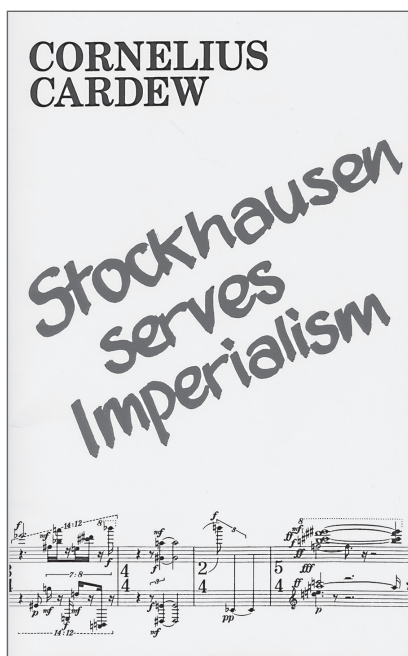


STOCKHAUSEN SERVES IMPERIALISM

Cornelius Cardew
Primary Information (\$20)



In case the title of *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, Cornelius Cardew's 1974 medley of articles and assorted documents, leaves any question of where he's coming from, the English composer affirms: "This book has been put together from a Marxist standpoint." Cardew unapologetically takes direct revolutionary aim at the celebrated heart of the avant-garde music scene, impugning two colossal (then as much as now) composers, German Karlheinz Stockhausen—out from under whose wing a young Cardew emerged onto the London scene in the 1960s to early academic success—and American John Cage. For the most avid appreciators, which for avant-garde music oftener than not equals the entire audience, it's likely to be seen as nothing short of a sacrilegious injustice.

Cardew's argument, however, is worth serious contemplation. Although he asserts that "obviously Cage, Stockhausen and the rest have no currency in the working class," he also admits that "though Cage and Stockhausen have no hold on the working class, they did have a strong hold on me." Cardew is offering an honest assessment of his own fervent past attachment to a particular musical practice as well as to two key figures who loom large in his creative imagination. Cardew's writings are evidence of his inner turmoil, brought on by deep concerns over his moral and ethical obligations to his newly formed political beliefs as a successful, then-still-fairly-young artist.

As a Marxist, Cardew unsurprisingly points to the evils of capitalism as the central issue facing any working artist:

in everything we do we feel the oppression of a social system that is inimical to the vast majority of mankind. Capitalism is anti-human, it puts things first and people second. . . . for the evils that we experience in society today, the capitalist system prescribes anti-consciousness, a suppression of those human characteristics that enable a man to reflect on his environment and judge what is good and bad about it.

He posits that for the artist, the only alternative to supporting the above imbalanced system is "the conscious road, in opposition to the anti-consciousness (or 'cosmic-consciousness') positions adopted by the various 'geniuses' of modern music who tamely—and some say unwittingly—allow their talents to be enlisted on the side of the ruling class." Obviously Cardew sees Stockhausen and Cage as falling into the latter category, and against what he believes to be their insouciance, he adamantly insists, "We must take our stand on the side of the working and oppressed people, the class that is in direct opposition to the ruling class and the state machinery under its control." Whatever work the artist produces must be forthrightly on the side of the oppressed; "if it does not support those struggles, then it is opposing them and serving the cause of exploitation and oppression. There is no middle course."

Many working artists may be taken aback by the forcefulness of Cardew's haranguing. Yet,

especially given the charged political times of the present historical moment, the issues he grapples with are palpably engaging. One needn't be Marxist to identify with the assertion that "when we genuinely confront the 'necessity for change' in society, a process of change begins in us, we begin to grow and develop. We begin to participate in changing society and our consciousness grows alongside this." This will ring true for many people, artists and otherwise. It would also be hoped that, as Cardew asserts, "the images of art should intensify, not falsify, our consciousness of the world," and it's hard for the non-egomaniacal reader to find fault with his position that "the artist serves the community, not vice versa."

For Cardew, the choice the artist has is between "following one's own inclination and fulfilling the needs of society," and he wagers somewhat over-simplistically that

if everyone in the avant-garde could bring these two forces into equilibrium—their self-centred delight in their own activity and the consciousness of being active on behalf of the community—such enormous energy would be released that the problems of the avantgarde would disappear overnight.

Any promise to vanquish a set of "problems" over the course of one night is suspect, of course, and at such points one wants to ask the composer: *Ultimately, isn't it the music that matters?* The music, after all, is what brought Cardew to his political convictions. It was during his time teaching the Experimental Music Class at Morley College in the late 1960s that his Maoist awakening to Marxism occurred, conjointly with the founding and ongoing development of the Scratch Orchestra. Alongside his own writings gathered here, Cardew appropriately includes Rod Eley's useful "A History of the Scratch Orchestra," as its work to bring together both trained and untrained players and to engage with the audience played a central role in the development of his thinking, leading up to his indictment of the avant-garde.

In following his convictions, Cardew forces himself to face the irresolvable dilemma of balancing his art with his politics. It's understandably difficult for him to frame a fully successful argument. He remains committed

to arguing for the value of political activism in music even as he notes “this whole polemical attack, including this book, takes place outside the working class movement and is therefore politically relatively insignificant.” Meanwhile his broader cultural criticisms,

such as that “Hippy communes, mysticism, individualism . . . led us straight into a number of cul-de-sacs of bourgeois ideology that are being widely promoted today,” or that “The bourgeoisie would like nothing better than that the evil symptoms of oppression

and exploitation would disappear while the facts of oppression and exploitation remain,” continue to hold up in the present. Such pointed critiques certainly do not require outright acceptance of Marxist ideology to be well heeded.

— Patrick James Dunagan

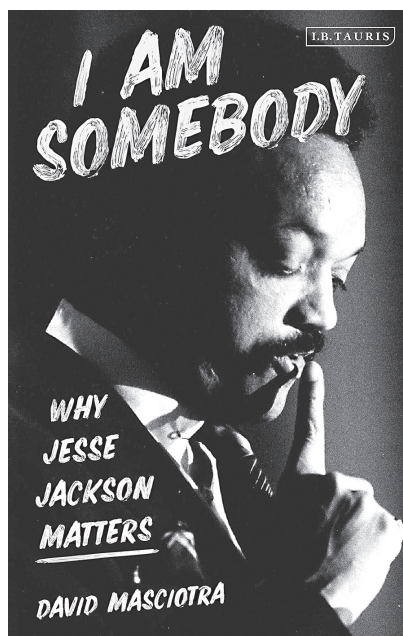
I AM SOMEBODY

Why Jesse Jackson Matters

David Masciotra
I.B. Tauris (\$27)

David Masciotra—author of biographies of heartland rock icons John Mellencamp and Bruce Springsteen—reads Jesse Jackson as a keeper of Walt Whitman’s “genuine belief” in America, a lyricist whose most soaring oratory is simultaneously rooted in real attention to human lives and aimed at transforming society through changes in law. Masciotra locates Jackson, moreover, as a counter to an American left which has abandoned commitment to justice for a “paralytic ideology” like Afro-pessimism (represented here via a surface reading of Ta-Nehesi Coates and Imani Perry) and a Democratic Party in the thrall of “corporate hegemony.”

Jackson’s criticism of Democratic policies at odds with his own moral commitments—Bill Clinton’s 1994 crime bill, for instance—led to a kind of outcast status. This is in contrast to loyalists like Al Sharpton, who, after announcing that “he would never publicly criticize Barack Obama or members of his administration” became an MSNBC star and “kingmaker within the Democratic Party.” But Masciotra’s book is a bit too concerned with locating Jackson within Democratic Party politics. His argument is well summarized when he writes:



Without Jackson’s jeremiad, populist politicking, and revivalist crusade, the Democratic Party would not have seized control of the Senate in 1986, it is unlikely that Bill Clinton would have become president in 1992, Barack Obama would not have become the first black president in 2008, Bernie Sanders would not have entered Congress or run for president in 2016, and dozens of history-making black, Latino, Native American, gay, and liberal white officials would have never held office.

The problem here isn’t the scale of appreciation but the focus. Jackson’s vision of “the moral failure of America to care for the poor, give respect and opportunity to workers, and honor its promise of racial equality” is certainly not the vision of centrist surrender enacted by the Democratic Party, but it is the rhetoric that party largely espouses. Mascio-

tra sets up an unfair comparison of statements (by the activist Jackson) versus actions (by elected politicians). If pessimism, Afro- or otherwise, isn’t the appropriate response to then-governor Clinton leaving the campaign trail in 1992 to oversee the “political theater” of executing a mentally disabled Black man (let alone to Trump’s flurry of executions of Black men in the final month of his presidency), then what is?

Much is made by Masciotra of Jackson’s reaction to Hillary Clinton’s popular vote victory and electoral college loss (“I would have destroyed the electoral college . . . I would have led a movement, with all of my voters marching in the streets, pressuring their Congressmen and women, their Senators, to end it.”) This is an expression of faith both in the fact that citizens taking to the streets can change the law and that the majority of citizens are committed to, in Jackson’s words, a society in which the “playing field is even, rules are public, goals are clear, referees are fair, and score is transparent.”

In our current moment, characterized by protests of armed citizens and talk of civil war, it can be hard to keep hope alive. But while Masciotra stumbles, Jackson’s legacy and vision is worth reconsidering. Hopefully, future biographies will give more attention to Jackson’s global context, not just his commitment to and skill at negotiation (gaining release of hostages from Castro’s Cuba, Syria’s Assad, and Hussein’s Iraq, for instance) but also his role as an international ambassador not for the U.S. as-it-is but for American possibility—Jackson as icon of “genuine belief” in democracy and the transformative power of grassroots organizing.

—Spencer Dew