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Working from Scores, Ken Friedman

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Working from Scores

by Ken Friedman

The idea of musicality in visual art and intermedia has several implications.

It means that a work begins as an idea that is transmitted through a score. It means that the work resides in the idea, in the score and in the realized project. The work is equally present in each form, though present in different ways. It means that a realized project is only one interpretation of the work. It means that any work may have several valid realizations, each an interpretation of the artist who realizes the work, in addition to the many possible interpretations of those who experience the realized work. It means that a work may be realized by individuals other than the artist who creates the idea and embodies it in a score.

The score uses written notation of some kind to communicate instructions for realizing a work of art. The idea and use of the score is originally rooted in music. In visual art and intermedia, the score offered a way to transmit non-musical art forms. It became a method for encoding, recording and transmitting art forms.

The practice of using scores migrated across the boundaries of the several traditions of music, theater, daily life and visual art, and the forms of art that are sometimes summed up under the term intermedia. For some of us, this system of transmitting work became a standard working method. It has been

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put to use in editions and multiples, collections of scores, festival working sheets and other documents.

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A number of artists find common ground in the implications of this idea. Early definitions of concept art stressed the idea-based foundation of the work. This suggested the element that I term musicality, and the artists who worked in intermedia and concept art in the early 1960s understood this. The score became a prime characteristic of their work.



Artists of differing means and philosophies, some poetic, some socio-political, some oriented toward process or performance, adapted the idea of concept art to their work. Artists as similar and as different as Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono, Robert Filliou, Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, George Brecht, Ben Vautier, Ben Patterson Emmett Williams and George Maciunas practiced different kinds of concept art, even though relatively few used the term.

In 1966, George Maciunas presented the term to me and defined it as a way of working. It offered a useful framework for many divergent ways of making art. By the end of the 60s, the term concept art was conflated into and obscured behind the term conceptual art. The single-genre visual art background of most conceptual artists also obscured the intermedia background and musical involvement of the artists who had been engaged in this kind of work since the early 60s. Some had even been active since the middle 1950s, but in the late 60s, most of the pioneers defined their work without using the terms concept art or conceptual art.

The process of scoring, of musical notation, was a common feature linking the work of these artists. Some came from a direct background in music, such as Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, Eric Andersen, Philip Corner and Ben Patterson. Others also studied music like George Brecht, Alison Knowles or Al Hansen, some -- like these three, in John Cage's famous course at the New School for Social Research. The musical milieu and the need to make it possible for others to realize the experimental pieces they were creating made the use of scores necessary.

Some artists came to see the score as a primary working method in visual art. George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Ben Vautier and Yoko Ono were pioneers in this field. They had all compiled and published collections of scores or annotated proposals by the late 1950s or early 1960s.

From its basis in music in the strict sense, the idea of score in its extended form gave rise to the issue of musicality in an extended sense. This extension has important implications.

The first of these implications is that the work may exist as work in several forms:

- as idea
- as score
- as process
- as object.

Each of these forms has its own value and meaning.

The idea is pure, simple and inexpensive. It is easy to store, but difficult to preserve. Ideas are subject to change, to memory loss, to message failure and to interference. For the vast majority of human beings not gifted with telepathy, ideas require a physical medium for transmission -- if only a voice, a pen or a telephone.

The score reduces the possibility of change, memory loss, message failure and interference, while retaining many advantages of cost effectiveness. At the same time, storage adds a modest physical task as the price for exact preservation. And preservation does not affect the problem of interpretation - the possibility of multiple interpretations or even of misinterpretation.

Process offers yet another way of understanding work. In orchestral music, theatrical or time-based arts, process is the preferred way to experience work, through live or recorded performance. The advantage here is the most complete possible realization of an interpretation. The disadvantage is linked to the time-bound features: prior to the age of recordings, no experience could be repeated. Even in the age of recordings, the ability to experience several aspects of a piece at once or in comparison -- as is possible with ideas, scores or objects -- remains difficult, linked to expensive equipment. Creation of live performance is time-consuming and often expensive. Creation and storage of process in recorded form is an expensive, capital-intensive medium: though individual recording, storage or playback units are no problem in the industrial world, making them demands a certain kind of society to spread the investment and effort over thousands of financiers and industrialists, millions of producers and billions of consumers. Logistics, transportation, storage, presentation and related issues provide their own difficulties for art forms not traditionally seen as time-based. These include the forms of object-making and presentation now summed up under terms such as process art and arte povera.

The object is another form. We all understand objects or we think that we do. We feel that the interpretation frozen in an object is the interpretation chosen by the artist but the object obscures the myriad possibilities that are rejected when the object takes final form. The object suggests an aura of permanence. It hides the process of its own making and it evades the issue of process that it requires to find its final shape. Storage, transportation and -- even for the object -- physical change remain problems. This is also true of the objects left behind by process, such as recordings.

Many artists now use scores in works that are touched by the spirit of musicality and many of them find these basic implications acceptable. I assert that musicality has richer and deeper implications.

To understand the potential of score-based work, it's useful to consider how music is transmitted and performed. The composer creates the score. Once the score leaves the composer's hand in published form, the composer has little control over the way that the music is realized or interpreted. During the period covered by copyright, anyone has the right to perform the music with proper notification and on payment of fees and royalties. Not even that much is required after the copyright expires.

The performer determines the interpretation and the composer is obliged to acknowledge authorship even when he or she despises the realization. No matter how good or bad a performance of Don Giovanni, it is always Mozart. The thinnest Ring Cycle is still Wagner. Everyone within reach of a radio has heard some of the more than 200 versions of Bob Dylan's Blowin' in the Wind, ranging from Dylan's own protest-inflected ballad to the saccharine orchestrations created for Muzak and elevators. There have been disco versions, blues versions and even a pompous and inflated symphonic orchestration. Beethoven done for disco and Beatles gone baroque are still the work of their respective composers. The royalties on Beatles tunes must be paid to the rights-holder -- Michael Jackson. Neither Jackson nor Paul McCartney can forbid Eleanor Rigby from being used as a marching tune for an armored infantry division. McCartney had little luck when Jackson granted permission for an automobile company to use one of McCartney's songs in an advertising campaign.

To compose is to give up certain rights. One right that a composer loses is the right of absolute control over the use and interpretation of the work.

In score-based work, I assert that the artist must naturally give up a certain element of control. Certain issues fall under the scope of moral rights in copyright jurisdiction or art law. Barring violation of those rights, score-based work inevitably opens a wide opportunity for variant interpretations. The only right that cannot be stripped away is the right of authorship. While the creator may wish to disavow badly realized work from time to time, the work must be acknowledged even if only to acknowledge a bad realization as a bad realization.

Artists have long used assistants in the realization of their work. In recent years, the use of fabricators and amanuenses has become almost as common as the use of assistants. In certain forms of proposal pieces and projects, the creation of work at a distance through other hands than the artist's own has become the standard practice. In all these cases, assistants, fabricators, amanuenses and long-distance collaborators act under the supervision and signature of the artist. It is the artist's work and the artist retains control. There resides in the physical object an aspect of the personal aura of the creator. This aura resides in the physical object, guaranteed by the signature. This aura is quite separate from the visual and tactile quality of the work, though they are related.

From the standpoint of visual art, of collecting or of connoisseurship, a simple series of thought experiments can illustrate the issues. Imagine a suite of Picasso prints. All were struck under the artist's eye. 100 prints were pulled for signing and numbering -- together with a few extra to allow for problems during signing. All were accepted by the artist in terms of quality and realization of artistic intention. During first part of the signing, half the prints were signed and numbered. Picasso stopped at number 50 and went for coffee. While the artist was out, a printer's assistant mistakenly included one unsigned print in a stack set aside in storage. The second part of the signing started at number 51. No one was aware of the missing, unsigned print between the signed prints numbered 50 and 51. Now, years after Picasso's death, that unsigned print emerges. Imagine that by every known analytic technique, it can be shown to be one and the same with the other prints in the edition. Imagine, further, that though a technique recently discovered, it can even be shown to be pulled exactly between the number 50 and number 51. In every respect other than the signature, it is the same. Will it have anything near the market value of the prints before and after? If not, why not? If so, why?

Imagine a stack of industrial bricks. Carl Andre selects 100 of them for a piece. He instructs his assistant to arrange the bricks in a certain way. He doesn't sign the piece. Andre's assistant buys another 100 bricks from the same batch and -- without the artist's approval -- arranges them in the same way. One is an Andre, the other isn't. Both are stored in adjacent warehouses. One warehouse is filled with Andre's art. The other warehouse is filled with the assistant's tools.

A collector buys the Andre. The movers, not knowing the difference between experimental art and anything else they might be hired to transport, walk into the wrong warehouse. The bricks they see look like the photograph they have brought with them for identification. They take the assistant's unapproved simulation of an Andre. After the work is installed, the artist comes to sign documentation. Just prior to signing, the artist and collector go to dinner. The night grows late and they agree to sign in a few days.

Case one: The next day, the artist returns and signs the documents. He never discovers the mistake. Is the piece an Andre?

Case two: The next day, the artist returns and signs the documents. Later

that day, he discovers the other Andre in his warehouse. He can't account for the discrepancy. Has he signed an Andre? Should he tell the collector? Should he exchange the two pieces? Does the collector own an Andre? A few days later, the assistant tells him what has happened. Should this knowledge change the situation?

Case three: The next day, the artist returns and signs the documents. Many months later, Andre goes to his warehouse to discover the piece still in the warehouse. He doesn't know how it came into existence so he destroys it. Does the collector own an Andre?

So much rests on intention that the only outcome of these debates is the opportunity to reflect on intentionality and meaning. For me, the issue of musicality moves beyond that.

There are works of mine that are signature pieces. Drawings, watercolors and first-draft copies of original scores are signature pieces. So are the objects and relics of processes activated by personal engagement. Still, the pieces built from scores are a specific and interesting body of work. Several factors account for the large number of works I have created using scores.

Prior to 1966, I wasn't an artist. I built things, made objects, undertook actions. I engaged in processes, and I created and enacted events in the physical sense of the term. These were simply things I did. I didn't have a specific term for them. I didn't call them art. They were philosophical explorations or spiritual quests.

George Maciunas introduced me to the idea that what I was doing was art and he introduced me to a vocabulary for the kind of art I was doing. He suggested I score and notate the projects, actions, objects and constructions I described to him. This brought about the first large group of my scores.

In the 60s, I lived and worked in places far from the centers of activity where my work was shown and performed. It was an era when few people made this kind of work and very few were interested in realizing it. Often, the people who wanted to realize exhibitions and projects didn't have transportation money or project funds. My work had to be done at a distance, with others realizing and interpreting my pieces. This, too, occasioned many scores.

The introduction to a new medium was one reason I began to work from scores. The need to create work for realization at a distance was another. The opportunity to create work in an experimental way, to take part in the way others might interpret my work, to see what would evolve was a third.

Many scores were published in the various compilations of my events. Some were exhibited, presented in simple form, as notations. Some were realized in projects or installations, and some led to objects such as the multiples published by Fluxus or Vice Versand. Other scores led to collaborative projects with colleagues such as Joseph Beuys or Jack Ox.

A large body of the scores were identified as events. These tend toward process orientation, often performable. In his essay on my event structures, Peter Frank elaborated a taxonomy in which he identified seven types of events, almost all process oriented. (He also coined the useful term "proposal piece" to cover the wide range of scores, events and notations that my colleagues and I developed over the years.)

Many scores created for realization of physical work were not included in the compilations of events. The one aspect that all of the scores have in common is that anyone can realize the works they propose. In this, the performance scores and the object scores share the quality of musicality.

While I have worked with the issue of musicality since 1966, it's only been in the last few years that I have come to articulate the term. The issue of musicality was implicit in my work, but I didn't set out to achieve musicality. It grew from the conditions. In an interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, Nam June Paik said, "artists ...don't really set out to do any concrete objective. So, in my case, when I make an art work, we start from a few given conditions." For many years, the conditions that led to the creation of scored works seemed so apparent to me that I had no reason to articulate the issues. The issues were there. They were so obvious it didn't seem necessary to discuss them.

The obvious often hides the significant. In recent years, changing conditions have sharpened my focus on the issue of musicality. There are many reasons:

I am often invited to create projects far from my office in Oslo or my loft in New York. People invite me to come these days, but I still do a great deal of work at a distance. Scores allow for work from a distance, enabling projects to be realized as I travel between hotel rooms and borrowed studios. The fact that I go to many of my shows now gives me the chance to experience my own work. There are pieces of mine that I've never seen and now it's possible. The opportunity to examine and to contemplate the scored pieces offers a new opportunity for philosophical exploration.

Growing interest in my work and a catalogue raisonné provided the first occasion to reconsider the scores. Old scores and notes came to my attention. It seemed natural to think through many of the works in a new light. Would I interpret a work today as I once would have? Does it interest me to work with a piece again? Is there some issue or quality in a work that I want to explore?

The conditions affecting my work now make realizing the scores an interesting project.

In earlier years, I was rarely able to save and store realized interpretations of the scores. I traveled too much. My work was considered extremely experimental. I considered myself lucky to see a piece completed. Many of the works were too big to ship and store.

Even so, I was often able to save fragments. I thought of these as a kind of yeast for regrowing the work: the fragments and the score would permit me to create the work again. Some fragments still exist in New York, and some work is stored around the world -- in Switzerland, in Norway, in California, in the Netherlands. I want to finish those pieces. As I found notes for pieces whose fragments were gone, I realized that the works still exist. The score is the work, and just as I might perform a music score, so I can perform an object score. It became necessary to focus on the implications of musicality in my work.

In 1989, writing on central issues in Fluxus, I summarized twelve key issues in essays for Fluxus exhibitions at Emily Harvey Gallery and the Venice Biennial. One criterion is musicality. I'd like to quote the definition of musicality from my essay in the Venice catalogue:

"Musicality refers to the fact that many Fluxus works are designed as scores, as works which can be realized by artists other than the creator. While this concept may have been born in the fact that many Fluxus artists were also composers, it signifies far more. The events, many object instructions, game and puzzle works -- even some sculptures and paintings -- work this way. This means that you can own a George Brecht by carrying out one of Brecht's scores. If that sounds odd, you might ask if you can experience Mozart simply by listening to an orchestra play one of Mozart's

scores. The answer is that you can. Perhaps another orchestra or Mozart himself might have given a better rendition, but it is still Mozart's work. This, too, is the case with a Brecht or a Knizak or a Higgins that is created to be realized from a score.

"The issue of musicality has fascinating implications. The mind and intention of the creator are the key element in the work. The issue of the hand is only germane insofar as the skill of rendition affects the work: in some conceptual works, even this is not an issue. Musicality is linked to experimentalism and the scientific method. Experiments must operate in the same manner. Any scientist must be able to reproduce the work of any other scientist for an experiment to remain valid.

"As with other issues in Fluxus, this raises interesting problems. Collectors want a work with hand characteristics, so some Fluxus works imply their own invalidity for collectors.

"Musicality suggests that the same work may be realized several times, and in each state it may be the same work, even though it is a different realization of the same work. This bothers collectors who think of 'vintage' works as works located in a certain, distant era. The concept of 'vintage' is useful only when you think of it in the same way you think of wine: 1962 may be a great vintage, then 1966, then it may not be until 1979 or 1985 that another great vintage occurs.

"If you think of the composers and conductors who have given us great interpretations of past work, say a complete Beethoven cycle or a series of Brahms concertos, then, a decade or two later, gave a dramatically different, yet equally rich interpretation of the same work, you will see why the concept of vintage can only be appropriate for Fluxus when it is held to mean what it means in wine. You must measure the year by the flavor, not the flavor by the year.

"Musicality is a key concept in Fluxus. It has not been given adequate attention by scholars or critics. Musicality means that anyone can play the music. If deep engagement with the music, with the spirit of the music is the central focus of this criterion, then musicality may be the key concept in Fluxus. It is central to Fluxus because it embraces so many other issues and concepts: the social radicalism of Maciunas in which the individual artist takes a secondary role to the concept of artistic practice in society, the social activism of Beuys when he declared that we are all artists, the social creativity of Knizak in opening art into society, the radical intellectualism of Higgins and the experimentalism of Flynt. All of these and more appear in the full meaning of musicality."

As George Brecht says, "Fluxus has fluxed," but the issues are quite alive. This issue of musicality remains among the most interesting.

I take a more radical view of musicality than many of my colleagues: I assert that anyone may realize my work from the score. I will acknowledge it, though there is a difference between acknowledging the work as mine, however, and approving every realization. Some directors work closely with the playwright. Some conductors consult the composer. Someone who wants to realize my work may find it useful to consult me. At the same time, I recognize that someone may develop a wonderful interpretation of my work that I hadn't created in my own interpretation. There is always the possibility that someone may realize a work better than I have done. Musicality implies all these possibilities. My intention is necessary to the work. My interpretation may not be necessary to the work in the same way. My interpretation -- or, more often, a fluid constellation of multiple interpretations -- interest me and shed light on the intention of the work. On the other hand, some might say that my specific interpretation of any given piece is primarily important to those who want to know how Friedman realizes Friedman.

There is value in experiencing the creator's interpretation. What would it mean to us today to have a method for looking back in time so that we could hear the Brandenburg concerti played by Bach or see Henry V directed by Shakespeare? Would it awaken us to new facets of the work? Would it merely shed historical, academic light on the creation of the work? Would it open up entirely new understandings? Perhaps Shakespeare's own actors were wooden, pompous and hollow. Perhaps they were profound and astonishing. Either way, a recording pulled forward from Shakespeare's time would give us a new understanding of Olivier's Henry V and Brannagh's. Perhaps all three would rise in our estimation for the comparison.

Other issues arise from the concept of musicality. I am, among other things, an artist. Those who are interested in my work may wish to have access to my interpretation of the work. Even so, the concept of musicality challenges the notion that there is one authentic interpretation. There is no philosophical contradiction inherent in the idea that people have preferences. I prefer chamber orchestrations of Handel's Water Music based on the original instrumentation superior to what I feel to be the bloated sound of a symphonic rendering. Others feel symphonic orchestration far superior to what they consider the thin, weak sound of the early music chamber orchestra. I'm used to Dylan sung by Dylan. It suits my taste. Some may prefer a Ken Friedman that I have done.

The art market is based on physical objects. One of my Friedmans may have greater value than another interpretation. These are open issues. Some may find a Ken Friedman realized by John Armleder for my 1974 Geneva show far more interesting than a Ken Friedman that I realize in 1991. Someone else may believe that my work is usually quite dull and feel that only John Armleder was ever able to make anything interesting out of it. Still another person may believe, as one artist recently said, that my works of the 1980s and 1990s are superior to my earlier projects.

Not all artists involved in Fluxus agree with me on the issue of musicality. Interesting enough, some of the strongest objections come from artists trained as composers. The artists who might particularly be expected apply the criterion of musicality to their work on theoretical grounds reject the concept in practice. There are two main reasons.

One is control. La Monte Young now refuses to publish his scores. He believes that his work can be realized in only one interpretation, his own. Even though that interpretation may change frequently, Young stresses very specific notions of intention that must be brought out in each realization of the work.

The second issue is the market. Many artists feel that if anyone can realize authentic versions of their work, they will have nothing to sell. I have confidence that my interpretations are lively, valid and interesting enough for people to want them. Artists who have pieces fabricated by precise, industrial means may have more to worry about.

Jack Ox, a painter whose works are direct realizations of musical scores, once suggested an elegant solution to the problem. She thought I ought to join ASCAP, the rights and royalties organization for composers. By publishing my scores as music scores, anyone would be permitted to realize, perform, my work in the same way that anyone may record and sell musical works on payment of the fees and royalties. Ox suggests that an artist can grant realization rights through ASCAP to earn money on scores without the necessity of physically realizing the works.

This seemed to be an interesting idea, so I explored it in Norway through the organization known as Tono. There were some possibilities, but there were also difficulties. Far greater difficulties emerged in the problem of rights and

royalties permission for non-profit and scholarly performance and realization of the work. Philip Corner told me of his experience with the problem. There seems to be no way for the rights and permissions organizations to make simple, sensible exceptions to royalty-based permissions for performance in academic situations or for small organizations whose royalties can be set based the ability to pay. After consideration Corner's ideas on the issue, I decided against structuring my work in that way. I am still looking for an appropriate solution, but at this time, selling rights through a royalty collection organization doesn't seem appropriate for me or for the intentionality of my work.

While new approaches to the realization of the work may become valid, I retain the copyright on my work primarily for the purpose of credit and moral right. The work is a philosophical contribution. It is freely available for realization and consideration as idea, as spoken word or as realized project.

Musicality in art raises interesting, profound questions. The issues are even more intriguing now than in the 1960s. Global politics and world economies are undergoing transformation, and with them, global culture. The art world has moved from the rebirth of painting to the birth of a grotesque new materialism at exactly the same moment that a new humanism is blossoming. The boundaries between art and many other fields of endeavor -- music, design, politics, to name just a few -- have dissolved. More and more people have come to understand the useful distinction between the valid concept of experimentalism and the reactionary concept of avant-gardism. In these exciting times, the implications of musicality, the consideration of meaning, intention, realization and interpretation that musicality raises, are among the most lively and interesting.

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THURSDAY, MARCH 06, 2008

Pip Chodorov published Fluxus Films

Speaking of which, why are the Fluxus films published on DVD?

We've only made a special edition for the FIAC, limited to a hundred numbered copies for €100 each. We could have made a lot of money with it, but didn't want to put thousands of copies in circulation. We just wanted to make €10,000 with this project in order to implement Blu-Ray. For the time being, we've sold forty and are a bit behind on production. There are very few of us and we've got very little cash flow; it's always difficult to put money up for each project. We're struggling with five titles we should have released two years ago.

from an Interview with Pip Chodorov

Born in New York in 1965, Pip Chodorov is both a director and a film music composer. After studying cognitive science in the United States, he studied semiology in Paris. A member of Light Cone, the distributor in charge of videos that led to the creation of Re:voir in 1998, he specializes in experimental, historical and contemporary films. In 2003, he received the Anthology Film Archives award in New York for his work as a publisher.

source: <http://en.blogs.dissidenz.com/2008/03/06/interview-with-pip-chodorov/>

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YOKO ONO reading from GRAPEFRUIT



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Grapefruit by Yoko ONO



Book with instructions by Yoko Ono

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