

Discovering and Composing with Logos

by John Campion

Text insists on bringing its high-mindedness into the daily grind of the social, political, topological—the conscious. Divested of its music and image, poetry is an exploration of the logos oriented towards the *whatness* of things—held by the four-corned architecture and holding a mirror to a lived-in world. Often understood to be without logos and operating outside these rude concerns, the art of music is thought to inhabit the more essential zones of the unconscious—*not really about anything at all*—something to bring us back to what we lost. This is a good thing.

Nevertheless some compositions do strive to run counter to these proclivities and this very short paper will try to shed some light. In our times, consider the myriad attempts at collaboration with poetry.

1. Engagements in descriptive subservience—troves of seemingly inauthentic pastoral images, replete with trickling brooks, breeze, and occasional thunder! (Certainly a disservice to the power of music to fly under the radar of our overzealous and defensive rationality.)
2. Non-engagement with one kind of question (as in Cage)—where the arts present themselves indifferently in the same space only—leaving collaboration to occur within the listeners.
3. Engagements as receptive holders—where through pulsation, phases, and additive processes, music presents a kind of medium or screen for the text to float on (as in Glass).
4. Engagements of dominance. Sometimes this involves a conflict between the two; sometimes it involves ignoring the logos of poetry altogether—where language is presented as a string of non logos-bearing utterances.

(All have aesthetic and some of the above may have existential and spiritual value, but can not truly lead to a hieros gamos of the forms, a genuine collaboration and unity—since the difficulties and differences between the two arts are exaggerated, ignored, neglected, and sublimated. (Moreover, when these methods are used, there is rarely an attempt on the part of one art to find itself in the other.)

Understanding the *why* of these systemic problems and failures of a kind has profound implications for music.

Music composition presents a sonic inflorescence of thinking, a course that reveals the lotus. Its mirror to nature is embodied in its own movements—not in the capacity to argue. Nevertheless, through it, listeners experience the fields of forces of nature at work—symbionts of ideas encountering, targeting, colonizing, acquiring, absorbing, engaging, reforming, ejecting, reattaching, dying—all manner of polyvalent consortia, with varying degrees of intensities, velocities, vectors, flow—moving still through embodied states of becoming. Its exploration of the logos is concerned with the *howness* of process, the organization of coherences and their co-evolution. In short, the logos of music is inherently ecological and participates in the formation of that world of thinking—the most important.

HOW the composer works is *WHAT it is about* and registers as such in the receptors of an attentive mind, which is itself stimulated thereby. The logos of music becomes manifest through the actions of its chief architect of boundaries and frontiers, *time*—but NOT exclusively. The materials of composition, selected both before, during, and after presentations of its organized sounds, are in a sense, outside time, but nevertheless advance the works' logo-poeic rhetoric—its dance of ideas among sounds. What a composer uses to create effects forms a feedback into the processes of the logos of the *how* and IS part of its meaning making. All of this is part and parcel of the quality of the affection, the unconscious made manifest.

How can a different kind of collaboration transpire between these two arts? AND how can this understanding lead music to create itself in a way that liberates it from the sense of being unhinged from the world, a non-participant in the construction of the city of awareness?

I have had the pleasure to collaborate with some wonderful composers and my musical education takes its deepest draught from them. (For the sake of brevity, I will oversimplify an experience.) With one of these composers, say *E*, I wrote a text whose logos was concerned with the megalomania of the patriarchal ego in modern political times. To embody the historical critique and to rhyme the particular logos of music with the logos of text, the composer deployed a single male (baritone) voice and a computer interface that accumulated the spoken text in its memory banks. This growing assemblage was intentionally triggered and reused during the performance with varied permutations—accruing more and more language material with ever larger and more various zones of release and intensity. Over time, the single voice appeared to be the sole architect of his solipsistic history and universe—mirroring ours, alas. Here the composer engaged the logos of the other art with his own and forwarded the power inherent in the music itself. In the middle of composing, the name of the thing began to take shape—*let it be what it does*. The name of the piece is *ME*. It was a genuine attempt at collaboration—and like a wasp before an orchid, through procedures of becoming, part of each was embodied in the other. To collaborate, music must find approximations *within its own nature* to the logos of poetry—not imitations of it. Perhaps, while composing a new work, in medias res, in their search for a name, composers can discover the driving logos already shaping the work; this realization through naming will abet its unity on through to completion. (No doubt, of course, a sympathetic and contrariwise progress for poetry is required as well.)

Shakespeare demanded more matter and less art, but the matter of music lies in flow itself—caught moving. On such a path, to crib Creeley and Olson, the form IS the shape of content. Because of the nature of the thing, and more than other artists, composers are connected with *the how of it*, making them ecologists of sound—makers of ecosystems—embedded in their deep coherences of time, their wired connections, their plangent, meaningful signals.

This is a discovery. An opening for the future of music composition lies in the logos. But the prospect of affecting the social, political, and ecological aspects of the audience with music's power to enter the deeper grades and levels of the human universe without tripping the protective alarms of the rational censor calls for a new ethics for composers—now grappling with the responsibility to help shape the planet through the logos-forming work. This will no doubt lead to different kinds of inherently relevant work open to endless collaborations, creating many places for the divine to dwell within the commons.

CODA WRITTEN ON A CHUNK OF WOOD:

Unafraid that compelling our unconscious spirits to break bread with the mere makers of it will cause the divinities to stay away from our vulgar community, we craft our Kanteles from the jaws of fish and place our ears to them—inducing them to speak their oceans that we may listen and learn the things it carries to us, oh so necessary for the continuation of the world.