

A further loose-leaf chapter for my ongoing personal and polemical memoir—*An Uncommon Music for the Common Man*.

[note: a slightly modified version of the essay below was published in the March 2025 edition in the on-line platform: 'Point of Departure'.]

The following essay was prompted by reading: Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Verso, 2010. In particular, the chapter: 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', which was written c.1944. Like others, though, I found attendant chapters unreadable!

Style is a surrogate identity —Where are we now?

After the initial positive response to the essay: 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', I found myself being gradually ground-down by its relentless, pitiless logic. It wasn't that the analysis was wrong—far from it. It was difficult, though, to identify a possible positive response. In the light of Adorno's argument, any counter-cultural plan seemed inevitably to be feeble, ultimately futile, and self-defeating.

Adorno's deep seam of pessimism is rational but paralysing. How can this austere realism serve the emergence, and support alternatives to the current human physical and socio-economic condition? The only answer may be the complete dismantlement of the capitalist

settlement. But this, though, does not look likely in the short to medium term.

In 1944, when the Adorno essay was written, there was not much (particularly about the German experience) to be happy about. Nevertheless, (never-say-die, and all that) without dismissing, disregarding, or wishing-away the obvious (geo-political and likely earth-extinction) outcome of capitalism, Adorno's bleak prognosis does not seem much of a guide to action. 'It's too late to do anything—so let's have a party' might be the only plausible response. And, maybe this is happening. For even those of fairly modest means (by west European and US standards) seek-out cruise holidays, and mass entertainment extravaganzas—temporary forms of psychological escape—all of which exacerbates the condition they seek to sublimate.

I am just a drummer, so what can I do? Would it be best to simply stop playing? Or, cease thinking? As it is, these practices are two (of albeit few) experiences that make my life worth living. Ironically, even reading Adorno is part of that life-affirming experience. Are these masochistic tendencies?

However, one of Theodor's remarks which struck a chord of curiosity is his suggestion 'that style is a surrogate identity'.

Thesis-antithesis-synthesis

Adorno suggests that much opposition to capitalist culture is no more than a reverse reflection: negating a negative. This—as a working model of opposition—seems to be no more than a dangerously incorrect assumption. Such

reactions are just one of many possible alternative choices. Choices, though, are likely to be shaped by prevailing conditions. Which, I feel, is a probable interpretation of Adorno's proposed 'negative dialectics'. Life cannot be ruled by the will. There is nothing determined simply by having 'progressive ideas'. There is no automatic development. This is the deluded domain of teleological dreams. Progressive possibilities, though, only nestle within the realm of 'possible' outcomes.

A case study

Within popular culture, the most aggressive response within music is Punk. By the 1980s though, flower-power had not only been dead-headed, but any residual blooms had wilted. Their enervated seeds (its naive utopianism) strewn upon poor soils, or fried to a crisp in Thatcher's 'Friedmanite' furnace.

Until the advent of punk-rock, the term 'punk' had more common currency in the USA than elsewhere. Referring (generally) to low-life, and socially disruptive behaviour. Punks were thought of as misfits, and perpetrators of low-level criminality. In the late 1970s it had emerged from the stereotypical imagery perpetrated in earlier 'gangster-movies' featuring the likes of James Cagney, and Humphrey Bogart, to achieve a certain glamour, or shabby chic, in oppositional literature. So, Malcolm McLaren, while not inventing the term, certainly keyed-into its contemporary ethos—as an expressive manifestation of the new socio-economic reality.

Punk music—at its best (!)—is pugnaciously oppositional. It is a fierce challenge to market driven capitalist anodyne pop music. This, though, is surely the epitome of the negation of a negation. Its emergence was exciting for many. It was both a tangible scene of working-class youth backlash, and controversial copy for an alternative social narrative for young, radically ambitious, writers.

Punk, even if only in an ironic way is, though, but a primitive parody of the genre it abhors, i.e. a counter-stomach-punch to bland commodity music. Which of course, is expressive of all the entrepreneurial, and the passive complicit consumer morés, associated with the ever-hyped commodity culture. However, Punk music uses the identical technology of the loathed parent genre it derides—but grunged-up a bit. Its dress-code likewise is a threadbare contrast to Carnaby Street. Sweat-soiled T shirts supersede flares and tank-tops. Mullets are replaced by rainbow Mohicans, or severe ill-cut skinheads. This is, allegedly, a self-professed rude philosophy, reversing and, undermining the complaisant anodyne peddled by the market, with spates of spiteful angular atonality, and phlegm-ish anger.

While all the above was manifestly identified as an anti-establishment movement, with which disaffected youth could identify, it was of course, cleverly (opportunistically) manipulated to become a new avenue for profit streams. For whereas safety-pins and patches were badges of shame for the impoverished, the new fashion gurus (e.g. Westwood and McLaren) not only made grungy-clothing fashionable and ‘expensive’ (and, ultimately out of reach for the poor!), they even dispensed with patches, and created bespoke jeans with ready-made, fashionably-located, sexily

glamorous, tears and holes. The ragged trousered prolificacy elbowing the under-classes off mean-street for a voguish photoshoot. [Declaration: long before high-fashion hijacked punk, a feature and photograph of early AMM was published in May, 1966 by the British edition of *Vogue* (a high-fashion) magazine. It is hard to believe the editors had an interest in the aesthetic priority of improvisation. More likely a desire to be associated with the then general appeal of things perceived as avant-garde.].

The effect Punk-music achieved was a scary distorted funfair-mirror-image. Which itself is only a contrary proposition: one which is logically wholly dependant upon the commodity model it sought to unseat. The counter-cultural effect only served to recall the parent genre with which Punk is embroiled. Arguably, punk-gigs were sanitised scenes of revulsion and revolt. Where audiences could vicariously play-out the perceived socio-economic frustration they sensed personally, or empathically. This surely, reveals the pernicious impact of the ever-mutating force of capitalism. As Adorno warned: The culture industry is a vehicle for mass-deception.

Hence, if Punk-rock is in thrall to its nemesis, it is also unconsciously accepting itself as a capitalist subjugate. Is it, therefore, anything more than just a satisfyingly indignant, and irrelevant (if understandable) shout-up? Perhaps. For even in 2025 the punk-ethos remains as an (if muted) oppositional voice. It's audience stocked by the indignant middle-aged, who carry themselves in rough working-men's togs, but keep themselves just out of spitting distance. Their residual anarchy tempered by nostalgia, and a justified cynical political apathy.

As a thought-experiment

Let us propose that the genesis of Punk-rock arose from some juvenile scallywaging. This scene is also resonant of my own (and, I suspect, many other emulative youngsters) early musical experience. In my teenage efforts at playing modern jazz there would be moments of frustration. The exigencies of playing a passable version of be-bop became so much effort. For relief, after rehearsing the band would often ‘mess about’. Sounding-off in a playful way, ignoring all the rules. This, surely, was my own personal breathless initiation into the brotherhood of free-jazz. Although I didn’t know it at the time.

Something similar, or in a parallel fashion, must have happened to musicians trying to find an identity beyond the second-hand left-overs of rock-star tribute. But as Adorno suggests such efforts only succeed in adopting a shadowy surrogate identity.

Free-improvising guitarist, Derek Bailey, found himself surfing these turbulent theoretical outflows. His proposed solution was to embed—or retrospectively qualify—his creativity within ‘a non-idiomatic’ frame-work. Bailey removed himself not only from formal musical practices; he placed his work beyond the stylistic references of jazz, and other informal musical practices that had arisen in the non-conformist spheres of agrarian and working-class musical expression, as well as abjuring other non-Western conventions. The (albeit minor) cultural result was paradoxical. For, like other influential cultural ‘outliers’ his

work spawned imitators. The cast of the shadow surrogate identity perniciously spreads exponentially. This may be the place to introduce another voice on this topic: Morton Feldman.

"...[T]he real tradition of twentieth-century America, a tradition evolving from the empiricism of Ives, Varese and Cage, has been passed over as 'iconoclastic' - another word for unprofessional. In music, when you do something new, something original, you're an amateur. You're imitators - these [orthodox musicians] are the professionals."¹

Adorno exhorts the artist to reject the rewards and commensurate onerous demands of capitalism, which demands reproduction to quench, assuage, and satisfy the paying customer, and thence make profit for the performance platform. It is this demand of replication which destroys art. It is capitalism's determination to extract value that forces creators to surrender their artistic identity. This capitulation erupts as the nervous-tic of self-plagiarism. Artist as a stuttering idiot relieved only by overweening (and temporary) acclaim, and/or the comforts of material bounty — a share of the loot.

As a young man I was attracted by the elevated energy, and hard-nosed elegance, I found in the work of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman et al. And, also later, the alleged 'empiricism' of Ives, Varese and

¹ From the 'Anxiety of Art', p 23 of 'Give my Regards to Eighth Street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman', Edited by B.H. Friedman, Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000.

Cage. I noted, with regret, how even these original minds (especially in the early days of formation) were classed pejoratively as 'pseuds' or 'amateurs'. Yet later coveted by the claws of capitalism conveniently after the demise of the unsettling biological presence of these original minds and actors.

How do we resist the sully of the creative thrust we perceive in the above and, more pertinently for the living creative artists, from having their identities shorn from their souls? Adorno surely believed that a creative human response is required to supersede capitalist culture. He therefore urges us (even if subliminally) to go beyond the mere negating of the negative socio-economic situation we are in.

Are you famous?

In the village in which I have lived for over fifty years I keep a fairly low profile. Villagers hear me practising. They know I have some kind of musical life. But they prefer not to know what I do. This suits me. However, on the rare occasion that any such enquiry arises, it is usually couched, tentatively, with reference to their own cultural bearings. For example, I was recently asked 'who is the most famous person I have played with?' Responding to this query was awkward. Should I reply with the names of musicians 'I' think are important (and deserving of 'fame')? Of course, the enquirer almost certainly won't know of whom I am talking, even if I mention Feldman's list of famous empiricists! So, I really can only answer the question by entering their hierarchy of popular music renown. And, here I fail them, because even though I have, on rare occasions, worked with musicians

who have achieved some popular notoriety, these—who I sense are more in the popular mode—are (if known) marginal in the general public's consciousness. It is better not to go there.

What this example discloses is a general unawareness of culture beyond the approved commodity modes and exemplars. Those who are embedded within capitalist success. And, of course, artists in every field are likely to be seduced by popular acclaim, and attendant financial benefits. In this general socio-economic settlement who can blame them? But, (note the market language) there is always a cost. Is there any way out of this minefield of public recognition—and into a meaningful cultural dialogue?

The above reminds me of a foray I did make onto one of the outer rings in the popular music constellation. Peter Kember (aka Sonic Boom) was invited by Pavement—one of the US 'indie' rock bands of the time—to put together a unit to accompany their early 1990s UK tour. Kember assembled 'EAR' (Experimental Audio Research) which he described as "... a loose affiliation of non-resident 'Sound Makers'". With Sonic Boom (Spectrum/Spacemen 3), Kevin Martin (God), Kevin Shields (My Bloody Valentine), Tom Prentice (God), and at times others e.g. Thomas Koner and Andy Mellowig. Yours truly was on board for the support band for the Pavement tour. Let us say: 'it was instructive'.

I played (if I remember correctly) in three of the tour concerts. Only on one of the concerts did EAR get a guarded hearing. Otherwise it was either complete

indifference (with EAR no more than background accompaniment, or cover, for audience in conversation-mode), or it was ridicule, registering a rumble of hostility.

One salient moment of illumination was observing Peter (Sonic Boom) fielding questions from his Spacemen 3 fans, who had come hoping (presumably) to hear their hero's latest Odyssey. They were, of course, disappointed, and somewhat nonplussed. This speaks of the inherent dangers of changing course ('style') mid-voyage.

What then is the function of fame in the cultural dimensions of a commodity-bound economy? For there is an inherent dilemma for an artist no matter the chosen medium.

Renaissance painters survived (in some cases prospered) by painting works that manifestly transcended the anticipated associative glory of commissioners.

Shostakovich composed within the threatening noose of Stalin's reckoning. Market forces are no less exigent, and have the capacity to camouflage. How else to value anything these days? And, the irony of our Punk counter-punching example, is that its negating shadow style ended up being famous, and profitable within the market.

Subterfuge, camouflage, or hidden in plain-sight

Adorno pummels us into a corner. For even within the most marginal of the counter-cultures there exists mini-markets. Largely unnoticed by mass media, international festivals of improvised music, in which aspirants yearn for inclusion. London's seven-nights-a-week Cafe OTO is similarly viewed. It is here, within a modishly narrow sub-cultural environment, that a cadre of slim-trouserred style czars feel

the lapels, and measure the sound-width. Maybe things change. Style-Wars. But imperceptibly. Only the most attentive observers note, and seek to join a newly configured fashionable (i.e. faux) 'avant-garde', which follows the most recent, but tiring, 'avant-garde'. Style is an agonising and mischievous tyrant if you are looking for fame and fortune.

For the foreseeable future there is only one game in town — capitalism. An egalitarian settlement is not on any horizon. Some might have been persuaded that a kind of intermediate social democratic settlement was possible. But let us examine this proposal: if, democracy depends upon equal voices, then the first hurdle is to achieve economic parity, or some kind of material equilibrium, to ensure comparable weight for each opinion. How is this to be achieved?

The digital loud-hailers of social media have a more pervasive voice-print than the scurrilous scandal-sheets of yester-year's popular rags. The snail-Mail now has a big booted brother spewing its particular take on truth. And the shock-jock algorithmists have discovered how to monetise controversy. This inflates, multiplies and sensationises scenarios. There is now an Orwellian-take on free-speech, which seems to be freer, and more available, to those who own the mediums (allegedly) serving the so-called marketplace of public discourse.

Socialism depends upon economic parity. So, democracy needs socialism. Meanwhile socialism can only be achieved through democratic deliberation. Both are required at the

same time. Can anyone really expect this miracle of timing and opportunity to arise easily.

So, back to the niggling conundrum of Adorno's assessment. The deleterious effects of opportunistically assuming a prevalent style, in order to succeed within a commodity complex. However, (as mentioned earlier) I am just a drummer, with no flair for market analysis, and no patience with the chore of marketing myself. A Trumpian failure—a loser. But, as a sceptical punter long ago noted (if reluctantly!), I can play the drums—if only (in his words) 'a bit'. And, also it was said (some time ago) that the most startling feature of my playing is its "stylelessness".² Obviously, there is no hope for me.

But, if 'style is a surrogate identity' (as Adorno asserts) then stylelessness may be a start: a super-sessional embarkation point.

Obviously, human creativity is subject to enquiry, exploration, and some kind of consolidation. Our empiricism surely must be dependant upon, and consequently reflect, some kind of supportive socio-political settlement—even if only in a prenatal stage. How then do we examine, approach, and subsequently appropriate, a post-Adorno ex-surrogate identity?

At the time of writing, there has existed, for the past twenty-five years, a small regular (weekly) ever-shape-shifting community of musicians, and sound artists, engaged in the

² "His free drumming flows superbly making perfect use of his formidable technique, but his most startling feature is his stylelessness. It's as though there has never been an Elvin Jones or a Max Roach." — review of a set with saxophonist Lou Gare. — Melody Maker (27.03.1975)

examination, and the practice of, what might so-easily be called ‘a non-stylistic’ mode of musical endeavour. This workshop, began a programme which potentially meets the criteria that would (could) be an acceptable discipline which does not follow the stylistic morés of conventional cultural expectations, or the commodity culture. The treadmill of *tonic sol fa*, and the nervous tic of the metronome only arise (if at all) as parody. Thus, this particular musical practice, and its attendant latent (ever-generative) philosophy, remains aware of history.

Of course, in these hyper-market moments of our time, this initiative—which has provided new insights and new soundscapes—is both fragile, and exposed to possible distorting exploitation. Such a practice could so easily become a means of creating innovative stylistic manifestations pliable for profit. This is a risk. For there is no sure way to insulate, protect, or maintain the creative socio-dynamics of this essentially collective endeavour from being captured, and imprisoned, by some entrepreneur. Indeed, given our political climate, this process, and its products, would be considered to be ‘up for grabs’.

Changing platforms. Extra-artistic activity

Empiricism and progressive arts have often lent vocal and audio resonance in oppositional politics. The utopian dream stirs most stridently in those who sense that their driving motivations ought to find fertile assent in the wider community. Art, beyond the exultation of the senses, food for the soul and exercise for the mind, becomes art as social prophesy. Well-meaning agitprop art, at its worst,

parodies, fulfils, confirms Adorno's warnings about 'style as a surrogate identity'.

Inevitably, rather than being inspirational, art in politics must serve the political imperative. The muse must become a spur for political action. As such, art is diminished, and risks losing its identity. Artist as a political foot-soldier. Heroic sublimation on behalf of the political cause. Performatively, such an act is almost an artwork. Except that the creative well-spring is sucked-dry. All that remains is the nobility of class-consciousness. But, maybe it suffices. The options being a return to obscurity within commodity-culture, and the futility of acknowledging a surrogate identity.

I suggest that, within our present socio-economic culture, we accept—as a given—that the value of most art is calculated by how well it is financially rewarded. This reward calculus, of course, is mediated through the market process. Given this scenario, why are there those who ignore the profit model? It is not that they are already financially stable enough to be free-wheeling dilettantes. It is because the practice itself offers creative, intellectual and emotional, satisfaction. And, (perhaps surprisingly for some) inspiration for those who pay attention. Some audiences seek out, and applaud, those on this road to nowhere.

Free improvisation, of the type I have been involved with all my adult life, and have referred to above, has experienced a topsy-turvy response. Although never perceived as part of the mainstream cultural narrative, it was treated with some (if reserved) respect during its early formative days (mid-

1960s). Protagonists like John Stevens, Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, and some of my own close associates, were treated with some seriousness, and even (albeit modest!) largess via (the then) Arts Council of Great Britain. Some practitioners were also admitted to its hallowed halls to participate in policy. Both Evan Parker and myself (at different times) served on the now defunct ‘New Music Sub-committee’ of ACGB. Those times, and those avenues of cultural-economic connectivity, have gone. It was the publication of an Arts Council review—ironically or cynically—entitled ‘The Glory of the Garden’ that formally signalled what had been coming.³

The albeit slow (and maybe reluctant) move towards a more democratic and progressive support for the arts was replaced by a charter for entrepreneurialism. It did not take long for some savvy arts-administrator-wag to identify, and rename, the said document as ‘The Seed-Catalogue’.

The Arts Council of Great Britain can now be perceived as part of the liberal-progressive views that informed the 1942 (William) Beveridge Report, and what is known as the Butler Education Act of 1944. These were the foundational elements of Britain’s post Second-World-War welfare settlement. It is no accident that another progressive liberal had a hand in state intervention within the arts. Namely, John Maynard Keynes.⁴ Given Keynes’ influence upon the

³ The title of the document in question was surely a nod towards the Rudyard Kipling poem. This probably reflected the nostalgic, and inherently conservative, and thence anti-progressive, sentiments of the report’s author.

⁴ Arising out of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in 1940, The Arts Council of Great Britain emerged. Its first chairman was John Maynard Keynes.

new economic order of the time (Bretton-Woods 1944 Conference) his arts intervention seems something of a hobby-project, most likely born out of a war-time morale-boosting series of lunchtime concerts featuring pianist Myra Hess. These recitals were held at The National Gallery, in London's Trafalgar Square. They started shortly after the war began and continued throughout The Blitz.

Of course, this state intervention with the arts had a strong upper-middle-class-intellectual bias. Keynes was notably part of what we now historically refer to as The Bloomsbury Group. Initially, there was no obvious intention to embrace the aesthetics of the more 'informal arts'. And, it took until the mid-1960s before the first Arts Council award for a jazz project emerged. A tentative step, which inevitably focused upon the composing and orchestrating talents of British double-bassist and band-leader Graham Collier. It took the ACGB a little while longer before they dipped a tentative toe into the swirling waters of freer kinds of musical improvisation.

Perhaps it would be better to say that the presence (c.post 2000 CE) of what we might call 'an aesthetic of improvisation' has faded. It had, of course, never really been flavour of the month. Although the force of its argument—advocated by its early protagonists and their supporters—was difficult to ignore.⁵

Readers may have noted that exactly at the time the British Welfare State was being formulated—with its cultural add-

⁵ One such non-musician was Victor Schonfield.

on, The Arts Council of Great Britain—Theodor Adorno was publishing the essay which prompted my belated response: ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’. So, did the Welfare State protect British Art from the depredations, and consequent cultural detriment, of an ensuing rampant capitalist deployment? It may have delayed things.

Of course, The Arts Council of Great Britain—despite, perhaps its own inflated self-perception—was a fragile spar on which to rest the nation’s culture. Other social and economic forces offered a more concrete and dynamic, if unanticipated, cultural outcomes. By the 1980s, reactionary railing against the ‘permissive society’: a cocky youthful cohort binging on the pill and hallucinogenics, disrespecting authority, relegating established religion to maharishi-margins, and (fatally for civil authoritarianism) with spare cash in their pockets and purses. The reaction can be characterised by reducing it to view the effect of two harridans—Mary Whitehouse and Margaret Thatcher. They led the charge. The main pillars of welfare, in the sights of this strident opposition to the counter-culture, with almost comic certainty, led to the imposition of the law-of-unintended-consequences. The (un)Hinge(d) and Bracket (Thatcher/Whitehouse) analysis convinced itself that disobedient, dissaffected, lazy and sexually flagrant youth was the outcome of welfarism.⁶ In particular, Thatcher’s mob bayed for the removal/reduction of unemployment benefit, and the closure of the Institutes of Indolence they saw in the free-of-charge third-tier of educational options,

⁶ Mary Whitehouse was a conservative activist. Her traditional moral convictions brought her into direct conflict with advocates of the sexual revolution, feminism, children's rights, and LGBT rights etc.

namely: Schools of Art. The blue-rinse brigade attacked one of Britain's most successful (if unintended) 'blue-sky' R&D projects, and, arguably the basis of its most successful post-Second-World-War export stream. Namely: British Rock n' Roll. Sold (coals to Newcastle) to the thirsting U.S. mass-market. The Beatles, The Stones, David Bowie through to Elton John and others, including Queen, all reigned supreme. Injecting funds into the UK balance of payments, creating technological spin-offs to amplify the stadium experience, and develop the new recording/video cash streams. In the process, a new breed of working-class tax-exiles were giving HMRC the run-around. Pop-capitalism had arrived. And, Jimi Hendrix (among others) came to Britain to find out how it was done. From a money-grubbing Tory perspective, what was there not to like? Had they not noticed? Britain was a winning commodity music imperialist. Vindictiveness (or was it jealousy of the new freedom youth enjoyed) is rarely a rational option. So, just as freer life-style options were closed, other attacks on working-class aspirations followed. Privatisations—of every-day necessary services—to satisfy the insatiable City financiers. The Poll Tax leading to riots. No wonder a Punk movement emerged.

Experimental?

For, in what has become back-ground chatter, I hear (in media and arts-admin-speak) regular and approving references to 'experimentalism'. This soubriquet has become (at least for a while) an attractive linguistic attachment to proposed future programmes. There is,

though, precious little empiricism in much of the ensuing output. ‘Experimentalism’ is more of a kite-mark than a cultural signifier.

Meanwhile, and despite its displacement from what is deemed worthy of the imprimatur of cultural product, there is sufficient joyful noise going on. Enough, and regular enough, to be found by those questing souls who seek something other than what the platforms of capitalist taste prefer us to sample, and pay dearly for.

Something, of the kind of thing I have carefully only alluded to above, stirs in some musicians. They perversely abjure formal and marketed musical product. I resist outlining what I think the objectives, the founding moments, and the specific practices of a ‘styleless’, or a ‘non-idiomatic’, music might be. This is because it works best in each individual’s making, and—most potently—within a sympathetic, non-determining, and a non-judgemental collective environment.

The improvising impetus arises from what it does not have. We improvisers have no repertoire. And, to avoid mindless repetition, and the encrustation of ‘style’, we need to renew our relationship with our materials, the environment, and co-players, on each creative occasion.

★★

A now long-departed Chairman of the British Musicians’ Union once described the existence of provincial orchestral players, as living in ‘genteel poverty’. I suspect ‘the genteel’ has ceased to assuage the poverty. Now only the most disciplined (and ‘entrepreneurial-minded’) of orchestral

musicians has a reasonable economic professional life. Other actors, in the ever-swaying mood of vogue, must find a way to survive—needing all the tools of self-promotion and marketing that music conservatories now find necessary to instil in their ‘customer’ students.

During part of the mid-to-late history of AMM we had a spell when renowned cellist Rohan de Saram made some concerts with us. There might have been more music-making with him if the schedule of his participation in the Arditti Quartet had not been so demanding. I would not presume to judge the value of this quartet, which for much of its existence lent its skill and credentials to realising experimental works, often from aspirant composers at high-brow music festivals. Knowing Rohan, he would have given his utmost care, attention and respect to the compositions to which they had agreed give life. What I can report upon is Irvine Arditti’s response to his knowledge of Rohan’s forays with AMM. I was not party to what the said conversation encompassed. Rohan did tell me, however, that Irvine ventured an interpretation of our cloaked acronym (i.e. ‘AMM’) — as “‘Ain’t Much Money”. Need I say more?

Beyond Style

It would seem that ‘beyond’ style—in the ‘normal’ socio-economic circumstances of our capitalist culture—is to be marooned on an aesthetic atoll amid a sea of an uncomprehending indifference: orphaned from a common culture which has removed itself from commonality, and which commands all social participants to embrace an aspirational competition for parental attention: but, willingly

accepts self-exile into a gulag, in which the inmates keep themselves safe from the depredations of capitalism's thought-police—those customer-custodians of good taste, and so-called social well-being, i.e conformity. They who have, in effect, captured culture most easily from its 'good-intentioned social-welfare champions' who enshrined their endeavours in State-funded arts councils and the like.

To be without 'style'—in the Adorno sense which is a corrupted, or unconscious, adherence to marketable fashion—is to cut the chains of custom and conformity. Thus, insulating the natural self-preserving integrity of enquiry, within a framework of collegiate endeavour. A class-solidarity that, paradoxically, is open to all. All the while protesting: I am not that. I am not cornered by idiom. I exist beyond—and in spite of—any insidious inducements. I am not responding to the diktats of the prevailing culture, not trying to outpace others professionally, even as I seek to be more aware, and ever-more competent, in whatever life practice I am engaged. Cardew: "We are searching for sounds". And, finding the meanings that can be attached to them. If there has to be purpose in life, that purpose is to discover the purpose of life.

Edwin Prévost—Matching Tye, February, 2025