

Pure Resonance

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AS the twentieth century draws to a close and the next millennium approaches, La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's work seems more significant than ever. The desire for transcendent experiences seems to be continuously expanding in postindustrial cultures, whether accessed through shamanism, virtual reality, New Age holism, hallucinogenic drugs, Eastern mysticism, cyberspace communications, raves, yoga, quantum physics, or mind machines. Young and Zazeela's work is at the core of the gesture toward transcendence in Western art and culture. Psychedelic philosopher Terence McKenna has termed this current phenomenon the Archaic Revival.

We are now living in a hyperdimensional collectivity, not only of earth and space but also of past and future, of conscious and unconscious. . . . The zeitgeist of hyperspace that is emerging, initially freighted with technology and cybernetics, requires that it be consciously tuned to an erotic ideal.¹

Young and Zazeela's work does precisely what McKenna describes here, tuning sound and light to find the perfect space where science and mysticism meet, a space in which time is transformed, where boundaries are dissolved, an ecstatic state of existence. Young's music utilizes advanced mathematics and psychoacoustics to create its effect, although these Western concepts of structure and measurement are infused with a deep understanding of Indian music and mysticism; both Young and Zazeela are virtuoso performers of the North Indian style of raga known as Kirana. Zazeela also works with scientifically based phenomena in her light environments; however, as in Young's work, the emphasis is finally always firmly placed on the *experience* rather than the theory. Despite the complexity of the systems, the ultimate end is the erotic ideal that McKenna describes, a state of ecstasy induced by pure resonance.

Over the past ten years I have organized and performed in over thirty concerts of Young's music in the U.S. and Europe.

Performing Young's music in Zazeela's environments creates a heightened state of being, a transformational experience in which the boundaries between performers and audience are obliterated. This sensation takes on a physical quality that is unique in my experience as a performer. During the performances of Young's extended long tone pieces such as *Composition 1960 #7*, *The Second Dream of The High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer*, *The First Blossom of Spring* from *The Four Dreams of China*, and *The High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer's Second Dream of The First Blossom of Spring* from *The Twelve Subsequent Dreams of China* I have frequently had a vision of the sound being produced as a large pool in the middle of the room, into which my own sound projects like a beam of light. This ecstatic sensation builds over the course of the work; the extended time durations of the individual notes and the overall performance are essential to its production. When the tuning is good it becomes impossible to tell where one's own sound stops and the other players' sounds begin, creating the sense of a group consciousness. The visual phenomenon is certainly enhanced, if not triggered, by playing the music in Zazeela's light environment. Unlike traditional theatrical or performance lighting, Zazeela uses her highly charged colored light to fill the entire space, further breaking down the boundary between performers and audience. McKenna describes a similar process of group mind in his accounts of singing rituals with ayahuasca shamans in the Amazon:

... psilocybin and ayahuasca—the aboriginal tryptamine-containing brew—both produce a telepathic experience and a shared state of mind. . . . The Logos is capable of going from a thing heard to a thing seen, without ever crossing through a discernible transition point. The thought that is heard becomes more and more intense until, finally, its intensity is such that, with no transition, one is now beholding it in three-dimensional, visual space.²

Young takes the melding of the performers' egos one step further in *The Melodic Versions of The Four Dreams of China* and *The Twelve Subsequent Dreams of China*. In addition to the sonic phenomena, the music unfolds as an improvisation with a three-leveled set of rules which makes it necessary for each performer to know exactly what every other performer is playing at all times. Each performer must also always be ready to adjust his or her melodic progression in order to avoid illegal combinations or progressions. This aspect of the performance of the piece could be thought of as a kind of telepathy between the musicians similar

to the shared state of mind McKenna describes. I have likened this way of organizing a composition to an idea of Joseph Beuys which he referred to as "Social Sculpture," a notion of art that has "an evolutionary-revolutionary power capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system."³ This unique way of controlling the interaction of a group of musicians can be thought of not only as a model for music making in general but also as a broader concept for societal organization. Individual and communal responsibilities are balanced in a way that produces an equilibrium which differs according to the personalities involved, but which always functions, enabling the musicians to give up any egocentric notions of performance practice.

The concept of resonance can be expressed on many different levels, from quantifiable tuning relationships to the more subjective study of metaphysics. The dissolution of boundary and the production of resultant tones, harmonics, or cosmic vibrations, are central to the phenomenon of resonance. The precise combination of carefully chosen elements presented in an extended time context results in the production of new phenomena which have an hallucinatory quality in that the listener/viewer perceives them even though they are not being generated firsthand in the form of the work. Resonance can also refer to the transcendence of specific dimensions in time; the evolutionary biologist Rupert Sheldrake uses the term "morphic resonance" to describe the "influence of previous structures of activity on subsequent structures of activity organized by morphic fields."⁴ In other words, it is possible to create resonances with other time frames, past, present, and future, to transcend the particular time in which one happens to be living. While Young and Zazeela's work emerged out of the late twentieth-century avant-garde, they are part of a continuum whose beginnings are truly ancient and not specific to Western culture. Norman O. Brown's description of the unconscious in his classic *Love's Body* relates to the higher level of resonance which Young and Zazeela have explored so deeply:

The unconscious is rather that immortal sea which brought us hither; intimations of which are given in moments of "oceanic feeling"; one sea of energy or instinct; embracing all mankind, without distinction of race, language, or culture; and embracing all the generations . . . past, present and future, in one phylogenetic heritage; in one mystical or symbolical body.⁵

Young and Zazeela have captured this "oceanic feeling" in a way that is universal and all-encompassing, fulfilling the role of art as

a source of a heightened state of consciousness that brings both performer and viewer/listener into a transcendent state of being. Their visionary work is a model for us all to take with us as we embark on our journey into the new millennium.

Notes

1. Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 76.
2. *Ibid.*, 99.
3. Joseph Beuys, "Interview with Kate Horsefield," in *Energy Plan for the Western Man*, ed. Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 75.
4. Ralph Abraham, Terence McKenna, and Rupert Sheldrake, *Dialogues at the Edge of the West* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bear & Co., 1992), 166.
5. Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), 88.

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