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CD track list

1) Prologue

This thesis is dedicated to "le nouveau vague Americain" of progressive rock and avant-rock, represented first and foremost by the bands and artists that were associated with a L.A. music cooperative called COMA (the California Outside Music Association) and one group that originate from Denver, Colorado. These ensembles, namely Motor Totemist's Guild, 5UU's and U Totem (from the LA scene) and Thinking Plague (of Denver fame) form, through extensive interchanges of personnel and several common conceptual and musical traits, a kind of nexus, something like a pinnacle of the truly PROGRESSIVE rock music that emerged from the U.S. throughout the 80's and 90's and continue to do so into the 2000's.

My starting hypothesis is that the aforementioned bands and their music aspire to actively pursue and develop even further the ideals of the "classic" progressive rock of the 60's and 70's, represented by bands such as Yes, Genesis, Jethro Tull, Gentle Giant, Emerson, Lake & Palmer and King Crimson (just to mention six of the most famous and those most eagerly annotated in the annals of rock history), and even the most far-reaching and revolutionary ideas and visions of those bands from the 70's that lingered on the avant-garde fringes of progressive rock and even challenged the idea of "Rock" in general. These were artists such as Henry Cow, Art Bears (both out of Great Britain), Univers Zero (Belgium), Art Zoyd (France) and Stormy Six (Italy), all part of the now notorious RIO (Rock in Opposition)-movement.

In the following I will examine each of these four bands individual styles, their inherent relationships with one another and their complex, almost Freudian, affiliation with progressive rock, which involves (predominantly) empathies with, but also antipathies against, the progressive rock style. I will consider inherent similarities and crucial differences with regards to both musical and contextual issues, and my main means of achieving this initial aim will be a thorough analysis of a select composition by three of these groups, namely Thinking Plague ("Dead Silence"), U Totem ("Ginger Tea") and the 5UU's ("Well... Not Chickenshit").

“RIO” – categorical misuse

Music journalists and prog-rock fans have picked up on the link between the COMA/Denver exponents and the European revolutionaries of the 70’s mentioned above, and consequently coined the term “RIO-rock” or just “RIO” as a convenient genre label for the music that came out of and continues to emerge from the U.S. scene. This is, in my humble opinion, an all-too-coarse and, to a certain degree, even a downright fallacious categorization. The Rock in Opposition – movement had nothing to do with bands coming together trying to pursue a certain *style* of rock music. It was basically a kind of union of artists sharing the idea of constantly challenging the current boundaries of rock music at the time, as well as managing to play, distribute and communicate their music to their audiences outside the realms of the corporate music industry.

RIO was an important means of achieving this goal, and the organization’s primary functions was to provide a kind of distribution network for the bands’ recordings, and also ease the often painstaking process of booking concerts and tours in Europe. For example: Henry Cow would arrange concerts for Univers Zero in England, and Univers Zero returned the favour by setting up small tours for Henry Cow in Belgium. That’s basically how the network was organized.

The COMA movement was founded in 1983 to provide the same services for groups in a much smaller area, geographically speaking, namely Los Angeles, California. I will pursue these structural similarities to some length in a later chapter.

So, while some of the Rock in Opposition-bands certainly acted as early influences on the particular American progressive scene on which I’m focusing in this thesis, their stylistic differences and approaches greatly outnumber the similarities.

A “true” progressive

Returning to my initial line of argument, namely that the COMA bands and their Denver counterparts being some of the first true successors to the visionary artists of the “golden age”

of progressive and avant-garde rock, I have several reasons to put up for this maybe overly categorical statement. I will state them briefly at this point, and then return to this topic repeatedly in following pages.

First of all, the predominantly British wave of what was to be dubbed “neo-prog” bands in the early 80’s usually get the credit for resurrecting progressive rock after its demise in the late 70’s on the sacrificial altar of the Punk movement. This particular moment in the history of rock is treated to great lengths in a vast number of books, and I won’t dwell on this subject here.¹ The most important aspect for me is that the neo-prog artists, represented by the genre’s ubiquitous representatives Marillion and Pendragon, along with Pallas, IQ and Jadis, just to mention a few, went to great lengths trying to recreate the sounds, the stylistic traits and the poetic (as in hermetic, visionary and utopian) imagery in the lyrics of the 70s’ progressive rock artists in general, and of 70’s progressive pillar Genesis in particular. They focused on surface features of the genre, such as its characteristic *instruments* (including the mellotron, Minimoog etc.), *vocal stylings* (especially those of Peter Gabriel), *theatrics* and even *literal* references to archetypal chord progressions, riffs and rhythmic patterns, attempting to evoke some of the great music from the past. But ultimately, they ended up providing faint echoes from a time long gone, and of a period of experimentation and bold new musical synthesises now petrified into fixed and immovable musical genre labels. The most important initial aspect of progressive rock music was missing, namely the element of *progression*.

Taken at face value, this might seem like a hopelessly subjective, overly generalizing and even to some extents a downright *authoritarian* statement, but I assure that this will be further developed and elaborated later on.

Central to this present study is the COMA bands’ “stylistic *fusions*”,² and their *synthesising* of vastly different musical inspirations (in our postmodern era, it might even be fruitful to speak of *collages* of styles), which they integrated (and still integrates) with both advanced sound processing- and recording technology, and compositional principles and stylistic traits from the avant-garde(s) of Western classical music. Their music has in turns been labelled *avant-*

¹ See, for instance, Martin 1997, Stump 1997, Macan 1997 and Covach 2000.

² Moore 2001: 144, 177

rock, *avant-prog* and even “scored-rock”, due to the fact that the music often is conceived, communicated, rehearsed and performed by the means of musical notation.

Avant rock often resides precisely in this very intersection between “rock” and “classical/art” music, where the work methods (notation, scores) and compositional techniques (counterpoint, extensive thematic development, advanced non-tonal and non-modal harmonic structures, serialism and twelve-tone composition) of “art” music are channelled through a “rock” medium (i.e. the “standard” instruments of a rock band: drums, bass, guitar and keyboards), and the resulting works incorporate a particular ‘rock’ sensibility.

It would then seem that the textures and timbres of these bands more or less belong in the area of “popular” music, while the composing/songwriting have closer affinities to contemporary, even avant-garde, “classical” music. However, this account is considerably simplified, especially when considering that several COMA bands incorporate “orchestral” instruments side-by-side with their “electric” counterparts, not to mention the fact that the larger part of the musicians involved started their musical careers in bands that were inspired by Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and Cream as well as Yes, King Crimson, Genesis etc., and often draws heavily on these musical inspirations in the compositional process.

Still, this will have to suffice as an introductory characterization, because the important point for me to make is that the music of COMA is accentuating the tension between “popular” and “classical” styles, insofar as this distinction is still valid in our present time where traditional labels, genres and categories seems more and more played out. For the time being, I will take my chances. When developing a methodology for the investigation of the music of COMA, it therefore seems to me to be fruitful, or even unavoidable, to set up a terminology that encompasses both fields of musicology, namely the “traditional” and the “popular”.

There are basically three areas of study I intend to pursue: 1) avant rock (as exemplified by COMA and the aforementioned bands) as a *style* (or even *styles*) of music; 2) Texture – timbre – technology – production and 3) Selected aspects of music history, social theory, aesthetics, philosophy and sociology applied to the music of COMA in an attempt to discuss primarily the music’s *context* and *meaning*, and maybe even come to some conclusions regarding it’s inherent *spirit* and *sensibility* (which are key terms of Bill Martin, discussed later on) and, above all, its fundamental kinship to progressive rock.

As regards my first point, the analysis of musical style, I have chosen some key figures from both the “popular” and “classical” side of musicology whose insights and terminology I intend to apply as I plunge headlong into the study of COMA and avant rock.

Arnold Schonberg

I will start on the “classical” side of things, in the area that Allan Moore and Richard Middleton, respectively, describes as “conventional academic musicology”³ and “traditional musicology”.⁴ A classic study that to a great degree relates to the analysis of *form* and *style*, is Arnold Schoenberg’s *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (1970). and *Style and Idea* (1975). The first book is, as explicitly stated in Gerald Strang’s foreword, written as a textbook on composition, and, in this respect, it is equally applicable as a methodology for musical analysis, due to the extensive and detailed hierarchy of musical terms that Schoenberg sets up. *Style and Idea* is a collection of essays concerning an array of different subjects, including sections dedicated to modern music in general, analysis and evaluation of Schoenberg’s own works (where he often applies the very same terms that he presents in *Fundamentals...*) as well as two sections devoted to theory and composition, including his now classic essay “Composition with Twelve Tones”,⁵ in which he considers aspects of tonality, harmony, counterpoint and musical form.

Schoenberg was concerned with the idea of creating *unity* and *comprehensibility* in a piece of music by way of organizing the musical material into a musical *form*. The most important qualities of a comprehensible form are those of *logic and coherence*: “The presentation, development and interconnexion of ideas must be based on relationship. Ideas must be differentiated according to their importance and function”.

The book is divided into two sections. The first one dedicated to the *construction of themes*, a subject laid out by Schoenberg in a strictly hierarchical fashion, where he shows ways of combining the smallest of musical elements into larger *unities* and finally into full-fledged

³ Moore 2001: 5

⁴ Middleton 1990: 123

⁵ Schoenberg 1975: 214-249

melodies and then *themes*. In the second part, he proceeds up through the hierarchy and demonstrates how *primary* and *secondary*, *converging* and *contrasting* themes as well as *transitions* constitute complete musical *forms*, and dedicates the last section of the book to a run-through of some of the standard forms of classical music, both “small forms”: ABA, menuet, scherzo, theme and variations; and “larger forms”: rondo, sonata form. In fact, he sets up a *normative* model for composition and form, and, indirectly, for musical segmentation and analysis, by way of a *descriptive* grounding in works of the Western classical legacy (especially the piano sonatas of Beethoven, but also numerous examples from other composers).

Schoenberg utilizes several well-known terms from music theory that probably won't need any further explanation. Successively, he treats *phrases* of different *length* (closely associated with *metre* and *tempo*) consisting of *chord tones* and *non-chord tones* (as well as conventional formulas such as *neighbour tones*, *suspensions*, *ornamentations* etc.) that are rhythmically shaped, and the *phrase endings* are marked either as *melodic relief* or *rhythmical reduction*; *motives*, that get their shape and contour through the combining of *intervals* and *rhythm*, that, ideally, should “produce unity, relationship, coherence, logic, comprehensibility and fluency”,⁶ often through devices such as *repetition* (either *exact* or *modified*), whose resulting *monotony* can be countered and overcome by the principle of *variation*. This, in turn, can be the origin of new motives, related to the “basic” motive. Variation is possible both in the realms of *rhythm* and *intervallic* and *harmonic structure* (to which the melody is *adapted*), through changes in duration, accentuation, order of notes, addition, elision, expansion, reduction, inversion, harmonic substitution and transposition. Motives may then be combined, through *connexions*, into melodies, whose primary virtue according to Schoenberg is *balance*, which, in turn, is connected to *register* and *range*.

The next musical “building blocks” in Schoenbergs hierarchy are *sentences* and *periods*. They both revolve around a *tonic note* (first and foremost in music that, at least to some degree, can be described as “tonal”), and both have a definitive *ending*. A sentence involves exact or complementary repetition, while a period is divided into a *consequent* and an *antecedent*.

⁶ Schoenberg 1967: 8

Of particular interest is Schoenberg's treatment of the difficult process concerning the *development* of the musical material, of which there are several categories: a) Harmonic development, where he speaks of modulations, substitutions and the dichotomy of *centrifugal* (modulatory, mobile) and *centripetal* (stable, anchored) harmony; b) Rhythmic development, with regards to *irregular phrase lengths* and *elaborated syncopation* (Schoenberg claims, though, that the most effective variations are achieved by preserving as much of the original *rhythmic profile* as possible, as this will allow extensive changes in harmony and melody while still complying with the demands of unity and coherence) and c) Melodic development, through *sequences*, *quasi-sequential passages*, *insertions*, *extensions* and *omissions*. A most interesting term is coined by Schoenberg in this respect, namely **liquidation**, the gradual elimination of characteristic melodic traits for the benefit of the 'non-characteristic' or more 'obscure', so that one ends up with *melodic residues* that are liberated for further development and no longer subjected to the demands of continuity and repetition of the basic motive. Schoenberg speaks of 'the emancipation from motivic obligations'. All the aforementioned processes contribute, at one end of the scale, to *melodic growth*, *enlargement*, *extension* and *expansion*, and at the other, to *reduction*, *condensation*, *compression* and *intensification*.

At the top of Schoenberg's hierarchy so far reside *melodies* and *themes*. The **melody** aspires to cope with the unrest and conflict in music that unavoidably will arise when departing melodically from a starting point (the 'tonic'), and strives for balance by way of *delimitation*, explicit *division*, *continuity*, *repetition*, *symmetry* and careful *variation*. The **theme**, contrastingly, will deepen this sense of unrest, by utilizing *elaboration*, *development*, the use of *remotely related motive forms*, *vagrant harmonies* etc. The melodic/thematic material is then combined in two basic ways, either by way of "transitions", 'connectives', or through "juxtaposition",⁷ into complete musical **forms**, the traditional types of which he treats extensively in the second and third part of *Fundamentals*...

He also deals comprehensively with the categorizing of different types of *accompaniment* (chorale, figuration, periodic, complementary) as well as contrapuntal, semi-contrapuntal and quasi-contrapuntal treatment, and even *ostinato* (including *passacaglia*) and *obligato*. Finally,

⁷ Schoenberg 1975: 78

Schoenberg includes terminology for describing the *character* and *mood* invoked by compositional techniques, a terminology to which I will allude in later chapters.

In his *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, Schoenberg develops an extensive and, at the same time, easily applicable system for the *categorizing of musical parameters*, a system which to a great extent enables analytical precision and distinct articulation of the different elements that make up a piece of music. This, to me, is one of Schoenberg's greatest feats.

A most relevant point in connection with the music of COMA, is that he, through his theoretical works, proceeds to show the possibility of creating form, structure, unity and comprehensibility by way of the musical material, either on the level of tonality and traditional musical forms (*Fundamentals of Musical Composition*), harmony (*Structural Functions of Harmony*) or with the aid of twelve-tone technique and strict derivation of *rows* (*Composing with Twelve Tones*). This is certainly most applicable in the case of the COMA bands in particular, who all face the challenges of establishing unity and comprehensibility in a myriad of forms and approaches, coming from a musical foundation and attitude based on, for the temporary lack of a better word, a fundamental eclecticism.

So far we've been discussing mainly the achieving of unity in musical forms, and in the light of the previous account one might easily think that musical styles exist purely in the realm of the written notes, *the score*, totally independent of i.e. the *performance* and other, extra-musical, factors, more precisely the *context*. But insofar as COMA has just as much affinity with popular music, particularly 'rock', as with 'classical' music, it's important to realise that musical styles are constituted by a whole lot more than the way musical ideas, in the form of written notes on a piece of paper, are organized and assigned to different instruments.

Especially in the area of popular music, *texture* and *timbre* are just as important characteristics of a style, and these factors might even be further altered and developed through the technology of *sound processing* (effects, synthesizers, samples) and the *studio production*. These phenomena, among other things, are inextricably connected to the analysis of popular music in a comprehensive sense, and the British musicologist Allan Moore has spoken for the need of a "necessary reformulation"⁸ of conventional musicology for the latter's appliance, in a fruitful manner, to popular music.

⁸ Moore 2001: 9

Allan Moore

In his groundbreaking book *Rock: The Primary Text* (2001), Allan Moore's focus of attention is, precisely, the "primary text" of rock music, namely "the sounds themselves".⁹ His main consideration is musical *styles*, and the way in which these stand apart from *genres*, the latter being musical forms that occur across the realms of different styles (ballad, hymn etc.). According to Moore, styles can best be viewed as "a degree of consistency within musical tendencies and practices",¹⁰ furthermore "[a] description of the technical elements in the music [...] and information [...] about the various relationships among the composer, the music and it's audience".¹¹ Moore holds that styles are "historically constituted through practices, [that] in turn sets up stylistic conventions".¹² As previously mentioned, he adopts several key elements from more traditional musicology, but as long as he regards 'rock' and 'tonal concert music' different "*languages*"¹³ that each require their own analytical terminology, he "reinterpret[s] them in the light of the practices of rock",¹⁴ which in turn enables him to "develop an acceptable framework for considering rock's sounds [and] styles".¹⁵

Moore's *analytical reduction* of rock music consists of his attempt to identify and isolate the different 'layers' of the music, so that *differences* (a key notion of Moore's) may be demonstrated in each of the individual layers. His model "stratifies sound-sources into four [relatively discrete] layers":¹⁶ *Rhythmic layer*, *low register melody*, *high register melody* (the 'tune') and *harmonic filler*. He also identifies different instrumental *roles* and *functions* within these layers. Furthermore he discusses the recurrence of *patterns* ('riffs') and *sequences* (in a manner similar to that of Schoenberg). Typical instrumental roles, as Moore defines them, are: rhythmical - beat, accentuation or *stress*, 'standard rock beat', tempo setting and textural/timbral depth; low register, mainly the bass – root based, independent

⁹ Moore 2001: 1

¹⁰ Ibid: 1

¹¹ Ibid: 2

¹² Ibid: 13

¹³ Ibid: 12

¹⁴ Ibid: 6

¹⁵ Ibid: 16

¹⁶ Ibid: 33

melodic line, stressed beats); high register melody and harmonic filler, typically the guitar and keyboards (explicit and implicit harmony, riffs, solo break).

Moore also considers a set of layer-independent musical elements common to ‘rock music’: Rhythm and rhythmic organization, the voice, melody, form and harmony. For these musical areas, Moore defines, and even coins, terms that are readily applicable to rock music. They are all relevant to the music of COMA:

Rhythm: Moore sets up a small hierarchy where rhythm, resulting from a totality of all the instrumental forces, depends on a series of *stresses* that constitute *beats*. Groups of beats are grouped into *bars* to yield *metre*, and groups of bars are grouped to yield *hypermetre*. Two other terms are *elisions* and *extensions* (a term akin to Schoenberg; he also provides *insertions* and *omissions*), which as a stylistic norm often will occur at *formal divisions*.¹⁷

Voice: Moore enumerates a minimum of four factors that represent a kind of minimum to characterize a vocal style: *Register and range*, described as ‘high’, ‘medium’, ‘low’, ‘large’, ‘narrow’, and in a sense ‘falsetto’, ‘strained’, ‘laid-back’ etc; *Resonance*, thought of as “distance from what is often called a ‘colourless’ tone”,¹⁸ including aspects as vibrato, richness (whether the sound resonates in ‘the nasal cavity’ or the ‘chest’, and originates from the ‘throat’ or ‘diaphragm’); *Attitude to pitch*, “best considered against an abstract norm of tempered pitches”,¹⁹ including characteristics such as ‘flat’, ‘from below’, ‘sharp’, ‘from above’, ‘slipping’ and ‘sliding’ between pitches and the use of *melisma*; *Attitude to rhythm* concerns, similarly, the singer’s stance towards the ‘beat’, namely the use of syncopation, anticipation, delaying (‘behind the beat’) and subdivision, and also the rhythmic tension between ‘waywardness’ and ‘strictness’.

Melody: To Moore, “two elements are paramount [when discussing melody]”. The first is *contour*, “the shape traversed by a melody – such contours can be broadly *ascending*, *descending*, *pendulous*, *terraced* or *static* (my emphasis throughout)”. A “very prominent, indeed dominant, pattern [...] is the ‘downward sweep’”. The second is *focal pitches*. He also

¹⁷ Ibid: 41-43

¹⁸ Ibid: 46

¹⁹ Ibid: 46

identifies some main types of melody, being *chant*, *axial*, *oscillating* and *terrace*.²⁰ In this regard, one could also refer to Schoenberg, who dedicates a passage of his study to the characterization of *vocal* and *instrumental* melodies, and a more aesthetically oriented discussion on the difference between what he sees as the mainly reconciliatory nature of a *melody*, and the more developed and essentially unresting and agitating musical *theme*.

Formal structures: Moore differentiates between two main types of structures, namely *period structures* and *open-ended structures*. Period structures consist of three types, open/closed, open/open and closed/closed. He has adopted the term ‘period’ from Schoenberg, and the principles of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ are quite analogue to Schoenberg’s ‘dominant form’ and ‘tonic’ form of the antecedent and consequent, respectively.²¹ Open-ended structures consists of the repetition of patterns (i.e. riffs, harmonic progressions) that are “basic to the songs identity”.²² In addition, Moore takes into consideration the “conventional formal divisions found in rock: verse, refrain, chorus, bridge, introduction, payout and solo (break)”.²³ The formal structures are constituted by “immediate, deferred or lack of” *repetition* of these types of ‘sections’.²⁴

Harmony: Moore employs a *modal* (rather than *tonal*) system for the analysis of the harmonic patterns in rock music. *Progressions* are seen as derived from one or several of the seven *modes* rather than the major or minor scale, and chords that do not immediately transfer back to one particular mode are often results of *alteration* (suspensions, minor-to-minor or vice versa), though very rarely at root level. Furthermore, he groups different kinds of *harmonic sequences* or *patterns*, namely *stepwise* (up or down), by *thirds* (likewise) or by *fourths* (sharpwise or flatwise through the cycle of fifths), and even ‘cyclical’ and ‘oscillating’ sequences.

Altogether, this offers a truly adequate, and even extensive, set of tools (‘a musicology of rock’) for the characterization of stylistic features that abound in rock music’s individual songs, and Moore proceeds, in the chapter titled “A profusion of styles”, to systematically run through a host of rock’s constituted styles from the 70s and onwards, using this very

²⁰ Ibid: 49-51

²¹ Schoenberg 1967: 21

²² Moore 2001: 52

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

terminology. In addition, I would like to employ some additional terminology introduced by Moore in the course of his study.

Especially essential is his notion of a ‘sound-box’,²⁵ a basically three-dimensional, virtual textural space, changing with respect to real time. It contains the sound-sources as they are mutually structured. The *vertical* dimension represent the register and frequency spectrum, while the *horisontal* is provided by the construction of the stereo image, and finally one has the sense of musical ‘depth’, “the illusory sense that some sounds originate at a greater distance than others”,²⁶ that in turn gives “a sense of *foreground*, *middleground* and *background* (my emphasis)”.²⁷ The most important characteristics of the use of this textural space are “the types and degrees of *density* filling it (whether ‘thin strands’ or ‘blocks’), and the presence in this space of ‘holes’, that is, potential areas left unused”.²⁸ In addition, there’s the use of studio *effects* (reverb, delay/echo, distortion) that contribute to ‘filling up’ the texture and provide space, distance and atmosphere. And to describe “the origins of music’s constituent timbres” and “the class of gestures the music suggests”,²⁹ Moore makes use of a double dichotomy, *natural/synthesized* and *human/mechanical*.

To sum it up so far: Moore develops a body of coherent, and very useful, techniques for describing “the internal consistencies of practice”³⁰ that constitute a given *style* of rock music. He discusses stylistic *consciousness* and *competence* for both listeners and artists, and for the latter he describes three different ways of “referring” to styles: Through *performance* (in other words, the ‘forming’) of a style, and through the intertextually oriented techniques of *pastiche* and *parody*. These last two afford new layers of meaning to the competent listener, and at the same time signals the artist’s *attitude* towards the *ideas* (often presented through lyrics) in their own music.

A crucial difference between Schoenberg and Moore is that even if they both refer to the effects created by the music’s stylistic traits, the former considers mainly the effects on the musical *form* and on *the work* as a whole, and only rarely how they affect the listening

²⁵ Ibid: 121

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid: 156

³⁰ Ibid: 216

experience (through character, mood and the more psychological terms of expectations, tension/release etc.). Moore, on the other hand, continually alludes to the way stylistic traits influence the listening experience, and especially to the, musical and extra-musical, connotations that the music creates.

At the very end of his extended treatment of different styles, Moore sums up the question of the individual style's progression and development in the following remark: "[...] a style can only 'progress' to the point at which it has all the possible materials available for use. Thereafter, these elements can only be juggled with to produce new, different, but not 'better' styles. After this point, styles change, but do not develop".³¹

To me, though I'm still at a definitely pre-analytical level as regards the COMA bands and their music, this seems to be one of several good starting points for discussing the music of these artists, especially in the light of their stylistic 'fusions' and 'hybrid' approaches, which in turn involve questions of integration, development and unity.

Schoenberg and Moore's respective analytical apparatuses are, the way I see it, a good basis for starting out with the analysis of the particular brand of American avant rock that is my main focus in this present thesis. But after the completion of the *descriptive* phase of the analysis, one unavoidably has to cope with issues of the music's *context*.

Bill Martin

In these endeavours, I will extensively refer to the writings of Bill Martin, Professor Of Philosophy at DePaul University in Chicago, who is author of *Listening To The Future: The Time of Progressive Rock* (1997) and *Avant Rock: Experimental Music From The Beatles To Björk* (2002). The former book comprehensively surveys the progressive rock era from 1969 and all the way up to the style's initial "demise" in 1978, while the latter considers a much broader experimental trend both in rock music and other genres, and this second book-length

³¹ Ibid.: 216

study sort of becomes a successor to the first in the sense that many of the artists that receives treatment live and create in a “post-progressive” period or era.

I suspect that Prof. Martin would be, or indeed is, regarded as somewhat of a charlatan in musicological circles, especially due to his sometimes rather reckless treatment of established terminology and methodology. Personally, I have to admit that I find his approach to these particular styles of music very refreshing and indeed insightful. Especially appealing is his intellectual force and drive, and above all his undeniable *passion* for the subjects and the music itself. The fact that his explicit Marxist viewpoints, what Martin himself calls ‘a radical communitarism’ (of which a primary aim is “to achieve a global community of mutual flourishing”,³² are clearly defined and in some ways set off from those of i.e. Simon Frith, Dave Marsh and Cristopher Small, opens up for new and interesting perspectives. One of Martin’s central issues in this regard is that “there is a fundamental connection between thoughtfulness and care in art and an engagement with the possibilities of human flourishing”.³³ This is a part of what Martin calls progressive rock’s essentially *liberatory* and *utopian* stance.

One of Martin’s great merits is that he manages to see and place, more often than not in eloquently articulated chains of reasoning, the music in relation to a *context*, or a set of contexts, always giving the artists, albums and individual songs *significance* in the light of social, historical, philosophical, political and aesthetic terms. And what often makes his perspectives particularly interesting is that he accomplishes this from the viewpoint of a philosopher and social theorist, not a musicologist. So, as Martin states: [his] larger aim is to develop the philosophy and social theory of progressive rock”.³⁴

Martin introduces some key terms that I will invoke rather frequently in the following. First of all, he is primarily concerned with *musical ideas*, “from the more purely formal to those places where it is difficult to distinguish the music from “philosophy” (or “thought”, “theory” etc.)”.³⁵ To him, progressive rock and avant rock are both “very much *a music of ideas*”.³⁶ Furthermore, he claims that great art engages in creation of worlds, *poiesis*. This is clearly

³² Martin 1997: 9

³³ Ibid: 16

³⁴ Ibid: xiv

³⁵ Ibid: xiv

³⁶ Martin 2002: xiii

linked to one of the traits he holds as one of the most characteristic of progressive (and avant) rock, namely its “radically affirmative and utopian strivings”³⁷ that conjures the possibility of a different world, surely a both profound and “political” gesture. He holds *radical affirmation* up against *radical negativity*, which are inherent capacities in rock music, between which there is not necessarily a “dichotomy or opposition, but [rather] a productive, radical dialectic”.³⁸ Martin holds that Yes and the Sex Pistols, respectively, exemplify these two different stances in their ‘purest’ form. For this current presentation, I would, for instance, position the 5UU’s and Thinking Plague quite differently in this very dialectic. Radical affirmation and radical negativity is lined up, respectively, with a “Blakean” and “Brechtian” Marxism (Martin’s terms).

In his characterization of progressive and avant rock, Martin claims that “above all, rock music is two things: it is *synthetic*, and it is *generous*. Brought together, one could think of rock music as a *generous synthesis*. And furthermore, one can describe syntheses as being either “incomplete” or “complete”, or maybe something in between. This key notion of Martin’s is one that I will apply when discussing the COMA bands’ mixing of different styles, to the extent that, in the case of U Totem, particularly, it becomes somewhat of a full-blown “hybrid style”.

Finally, Martin includes in *Listening To The Future...* a tentative definition of progressive rock, which, in his own words, is “controversial not only in its formulation but, probably even more, its application”.³⁹ Nevertheless, it’s a useful starting point for discussion of stylistic traits and the music’s inherent ideas. To Martin, progressive rock as a style of music is “1) visionary and experimental; 2) it is played, at least in significant part, on instruments typically associated with rock music, by musicians who have a background in rock music, and with the history of rock music itself as background; 3) it is played, in significant part, by musicians who have consummate instrumental and compositional skills [another word for which is “virtuosity”. One could even talk about a kind of “collective” virtuosity]; 4) it is a phenomenon, in its “core”, of English culture; 5) relatedly, in significant part, it is expressive of romantic and prophetic aspects of that culture”).⁴⁰

³⁷ Martin 1997: 8

³⁸ Ibid: 258

³⁹ Ibid: 122

⁴⁰ Ibid: 121

Points 4) and 5), especially, are problematic in this context, due to the fact that I have chosen to investigate a particularly “American” type of avant-progressive rock, but as regards the last trait in this list, it could also (and for Martin, it does) concern a more ‘global’ form of romanticism *in general*. Points 1) – 3) could arguably be applied to many different styles of music, but what (according to Martin) in essence sets progressive and avant rock apart from other styles is the relative richness of *ideas*, its *ideology* (which is emancipatory and utopian in nature), its capability of *transcendence*, its *symphonic approach* to musical arrangements, its *conceptual density* and, above all, its *sensibility*, described by Martin as “prophetic”. All these topics will be explored in my treatment of these four bands and their music.

Finishing off this part, I just want to refer rather quickly to some lines (all with inherent dichotomies) that Martin draws through our recent history from the final years of the sixties and up to the present day. He identifies four different “movements”, or maybe “shifts”, that has unfolded through the last decades, namely from *sixties counterculture* to *postmodern capitalism*, from *modernity* to *postmodernity*, from *ideas* to *strategies* (when much of the current music-making is concerned) and, central to the case of progressive rock, from *linear progression and development* to *vertical ‘stacking’*. Somewhere in between these different extremities, in a postmodern era of fragmentation, atemporality, as well as an ahistorical and spatialized consciousness, avant rock resides.

2) California Outside Music Association *an abbreviated tale*

The story begins...

The *California Outside Music Association* (henceforth: COMA), described by a small L.A. newspaper as “a non-profit labour of love”,¹ was officially founded on March 3rd 1983, by the 20-year old music enthusiast Titus Levi out of Long Beach, California, and his “partner in crime”, Eric Potruch. These two gentlemen created a two-sided pamphlet with the *COMA Manifesto* on it, went to a Robert Fripp (original founding father of 70’s progressive rock group King Crimson) clinic/demonstration at the club Roxy in West Hollywood, and started spreading their message by handing out flyers to the audience.² Titus withholds that the original objective for the non-profit organization was that it would serve as “a way of packaging gigs”,³ that is, organizing and booking concerts that consisted of mainly California-based bands and artists that were “outside of the mainstream”, and whose musical philosophies and expressions correlated in some way or the other. According to James Grigsby of Motor Totemist’s guild, the purposes of COMA was basically threefold:

A. To organize concerts and festivals of unusual and creative music by California musicians. This activity was essential and continued through the early 90s.

B. To *cross-promote* its artists' own concerts and recordings. COMA maintained an extensive database [...] and allowed its members to use its mailing list and postage discount. COMA released a compilation LP in 1985 [called *The Beginner’s Guide to COMA*] as a display of their ‘artist roster’, so to speak, and there were hopes for more albums. Regrettably, this never worked out.

¹ *Press-Telegram*, May 17 1987,

² See Appendix for copies of two different versions of the COMA Manifesto

³ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 4 2005

C. To act as a meeting-point for musicians (and poets, dancers, artists) who were seeking others with whom to collaborate. According to James Grigsby, “this, for me, was the most meaningful aspect.”⁴

In these respects, the COMA organization is similar to the European RIO-movement, which consisted of a number of avant-rock groups residing (more or less) on the political left wing, namely Henry Cow (England), Univers Zero (Belgium), Samla Mammas Manna (Sweden) Etron Fou Leloublan (France) and Stormy Six (Italy), and, later on, Art Zoyd, Art Bears and Aqsak Maboul. This organization or “collective” was formally founded on March 12, 1978 in the form of a concert at the New London Theatre, England.

In my personal opinion, a common musical-historical misinterpretation of both RIO and COMA was that these organizations were dedicated to promoting a particular musical *style*. On the contrary, according to Grigsby, “COMA was never about a particular musical style or approach or belief. It was pretty much open to anyone who considered themselves ‘outside of the mainstream’”.⁵ And to me Titus Levi adds: “I [didn’t] know anything about the RIO folks. Basically I was a naïve and eager 20 year old in 1983. I didn’t know any better”.⁶ He withholds that he had a much closer affiliation with several Californian organizations at the time, i.e. the *AACM* (Association for the Advancement of Creative Music), the *ICA* (Independent Composers Association) and the *Society for Jazz and World Music*. But, as a matter of fact, he emphasises in a longer statement that he:

“wasn’t so much inspired by these groups [directly]; in some ways I was making COMA from scratch. I didn’t know much about these sorts of groups. If I had, I might have tried affiliating myself with them or building more on their model. Instead I reinvented the wheel. Young and dumb I guess. [...] If I had known about the ICA in March 1983, COMA might have been an adjust office of that organization. However, even though the Independent Composers Association was separate, [...] it was immediately clear to me that we were on the same wavelength. They were more connected to concert music, electronic music (meaning more out of Stockhausen, Buchla and such), Cal Arts (the California Institute of the Arts, one of the big art schools in the area), UC San Diego and so on. But folks out of that area, like Kraig

⁴ E-mail from James Grigsby, November 29 2004.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 4 2005.

Grady, were becoming increasingly open to and influenced by free jazz, odd rock, and such. So the connection[s] sort of evolved organically”.⁷

Former initial COMA member, artist and musicologist Darrell Jónsson puts the origination of COMA in a somewhat different historical context than the oft misused RIO-connection:

“From my point of view, the first organization or intention for the sort of thing C.O.M.A. did, came from the 60's jazz world. Self-promotion, self-publishing, and so on was, from what I've been able to research in the U.S, mostly a Jazz invention [...]. Carla Bley and John Coltrane were players in this sort of organizations. Later on, punk picked up on the idea. C.O.M.A. was a post-punk thing, but I think many of us were well aware of the legacy of U.S. Jazz societies. I think Titus interviewed the Art Ensemble of Chicago at one point in time. During the 70 and 80's though my record collection was primarily composed of J.C.O.A. and Delmark music Coop releases. For some, there were several strong historical, philosophical and lifestyle threads, that were to various degrees expressed in C.O.M.A.”.⁸

An important influence on the development of COMA was the so-called Lost Music Network, based in Olympia, Washington. From 1979 to 1984, they published twenty-six issues, one for each letter of the alphabet, of the now legendary *OP* magazine (for which Darrell Jónsson was one of the writers). The editor's name was John Foster, and the publication was acknowledged for “its diverse scope and the role it played in providing publicity to do-it-yourself musicians in the midst of the cassette culture. [...] An emphasis of the magazine was ‘articles about music written by musicians’, and regular contributors included Peter Garland, Eugene Chadbourne, and Larry Polansky [in addition to Henry Cow guitarist and avantgarde icon Fred Frith]”.⁹ After the magazine's last issue, Foster arranged a conference up in Olympia, “offering the magazine's resources to parties interested in carrying on”.¹⁰ Titus adds to the story: “Darrell [Jónsson], Jim Norman and I decided to make a road trip up there. What a time. Anyway, a transplanted Bostonian in LA named Scott Becker picked up on the idea of the magazine and started publishing *OPTion*. I did in fact interview the late, great Lester Bowie for the "A" issue, along with doing short articles on Air and others. This really opened

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ E-mail from Darrell Jónsson, January 11 2005.

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Op_Magazine, accessed 3 July 2007 22:16.

¹⁰ Ibid.

COMA up to the move of the jazz/improvisational world even though, as Darrell notes, the group came out of a post-punk, and I would add, *prog rock*, matrix”.¹¹ In addition to OPtion, that remained in production until 1998, “attendant journalist David Ciaffardini went on to start another successor to OP, namely *Sound Choice*, which published until 1992”.¹²

COMA coming out...

COMA’s coming out-party was held at a local library auditorium in LA early in 1984. As Titus remember: “It was sparsely attended, but what the hell, it got things rolling and we were pretty excited about that aspect of it. We did have several members (maybe 15 or 20) by then, but it wasn’t anything huge. Just enough to mouth a concert, do some cross-promoting and the like”.¹³ It was at this very first COMA *event* (a key term that covered all of the organization’s activities) that Titus first met James Grigsby, co-founder and mastermind of Motor Totemist Guild. According to Titus, “James did play a pretty significant role once he did join. That old 8086 [computer of his] allowed us to keep up databases, put together mailings, and putting out *The Beginners Guide to COMA* in 1985, which was one of the more significant milestones for the organization. That wouldn’t have been possible without JG’s help, guidance, patience, and energy”.¹⁴

After its rather humble start, COMA rapidly grew in both forces and stature, and it’s time to take a more detailed look at the organization’s work. Titus: “My guess is that over 8 years (1983-1991) we must have put together over 50 programs”.¹⁵ By “programs”, he refers to concerts, events and happenings on a variety of venues, small and large, in Southern California in general, and in the Los Angeles area in particular. As Dave Kerman puts it: “The idea was to package gigs involving several COMA artists in such a way that they would perform *on a rotating cycle*”,¹⁶ which was one of COMA’s most important democratic principles.

¹¹ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 11 2005.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Op_Magazine, accessed 3 July 2007 22:16

¹³ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 4, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 10, 2005

¹⁶ Personal interview with Dave Kerman, Denver 28.03.2005

Demographical setting, booking and other challenges

What puts COMA in a somewhat unique position among other similar “collectives” both in the realms of jazz, rock and classical music, is first and foremost the geographical aspect. Titus actually undertook a monumental task when he first started putting the COMA wheels in motion. The Los Angeles area is enormously vast, and, demographically speaking, both the city itself and the population of Los Angeles are incredibly fragmented. Even up to the present day, advertising concerts and gigs in LA, especially when fringe artists and smaller venues are involved, is notoriously difficult. The Los Angeles Times, the city’s largest newspaper, prints almost no ads for cultural arrangements (except concerts at the LA Philharmonic and a few other big venues). Titus told me that there’s so much great music happening in LA all the time that people never gets the chance to experience, simply because they never get to know about the whens and the wheres.¹⁷

The process of *booking* concerts was (and is), similarly, another huge challenge. A third one is that musicians that are working in a similar musical realm neither get to hear about each other, meet up nor work together. COMA was founded as a way of overcoming all these obstacles. Titus’ and Eric Potruch’s plan was to create a wide-spanning network of musicians, dancers, writers, concert venues, sound technicians, lighting technicians, newspapers, radio stations and sponsors, and set up concerts and events that were cross-promoted through all the artists’ respective local networks. And, according to James Grigsby, their ambitions were largely fulfilled: “Yes, [at present] the land of hyperbole and artifice is host to an astonishingly varied underground music scene [...]. Now, all these [different] groups are in touch with each other, and people are talking about a progressive music scene!”¹⁸

An expanding festival

In 1988, COMA arranged its first Day of Music festival down in Long Beach as part of a collaboration with the *Society for Jazz and World Music*. Titus recalls:

¹⁷ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 4, 2005.

¹⁸ James Grigsby: “Underground Los Angeles” - essay

“The most fun we had doing COMA was putting together the Day of Music festivals. This event developed by accident really. From back in 84 I was tied in with some galleries in Long Beach that were all within walking distance. (Which is something of a rarity in LA and its suburbs). And to help promote the spaces (some of which had recently opened) we did a music fest with something like 20 performances spread out over two or three venues for a day. Great fun! [...]

Eventually, this became an annual event on Pine Avenue in Long Beach making use of several venues: System M, Mum's, and a couple of galleries on Third Street. We even had an impromptu jam in a hair salon next to System M featuring Karl Denson and Vinny Golia dueling on tenor saxes. More big fun!”¹⁹

In a Los Angeles Times article from 1989, written on the date of the second Day Of Music, Titus explains about the philosophy of the festival (and, in some ways, of COMA in general): “It’s an attempt to do something very non-LA – to *concentrate* rather than diverge. [...] Part of [our motivation] was showing the diversity of music programming available in in Los Angeles by concentrating it in one place”.²⁰

By it’s fourth year, in 1991, the festival had expanded significantly, with nearly 30 artists performing in five different venues.²¹ This event was sponsored by the Downtown Long Beach Association, “a professional organization that represented most of the businesses in downtown Long Beach, cultivating a more colorful and unified neighbourhood”²². This last quotation also reveals a whole lot about the spirit of COMA, namely the desire to unify the city of Los Angeles, to overcome the city’s inherent fragmentation and to connect its people, with all kinds of geographical and cultural backgrounds, through art in general and music in particular. According to Titus, when asked about his motivations for forming this kind of organization, he “began to realize that there was a lot more music out there, and it just grew on me until I said, ‘why don’t we see if we can get people to listen to it? Why don’t we see if we can get all these isolated people together and see if we can foster a little sense of community?’”²³

In a very similar vein, Darrell Jónsson recalls:

¹⁹ E-mail from Titus Levi January 10 2005

²⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, September 23 1989, part V p. 3).

²¹ See Appendix for the original cover of the festival programme.

²² *4th Day of Music* program leaflet

²³ *Los Angeles Times*, September 23 1989, part V p. 3

“[James] Grigsby organized an incredible event that stays vivid in my mind. It was a collaboration between his ensemble and a vietnamese tribal group. They did music and stunning dances, worked into a sympathetic framework Grigsby had constructed. For me this was an ideal of what C.O.M.A. could do. At that time South-East Asians were a somewhat persecuted minority in LA, so it took both some courage and no shortage of humanity on Grigsby's part to put this together. I remember people wandering into the show who were usually just suburbanites shopping. One old man walked in with a cane, and just gleamed. He must have been in his 70's, but suddenly looked 15 years younger. I imagine he was one of those old retired merchant marines who used to be integral of the old Long Beach downtown, the sort of character that had a wife in Long Beach and another family somewhere on the coast of South-East Asia. Anyhow, that Grigby event was visionary, and hit one of the nails (of what C.O.M.A was about) squarely on the head”.²⁴

COMA arranged their concerts at a host of different venues all over the LA area: System M, Mum's (Long Beach), Old Anti Club (Melrose), Lhasa Club (Hollywood), Music Machine (West LA) and others: “Beyond Baroque was one of a number of venues where COMA produced a series of shows. Mostly, it was (and is) a literary center. It's the home of West LA poetry”.²⁵ One of the central figures of the Beyond Baroque poetry scene was Emily Hay, flutist and singer of Motor Totemist Guild (and eventually U Totem). She and James Grigsby were introduced to each other through COMA. Later on, Dave Kerman of 5UU's and Grigsby met in a similar way. This is the networking principle of COMA in a nutshell. As Titus puts it:

“I really enjoyed the "matchmaking" aspect of running COMA. Of hearing someone like Ron George, who was playing this sort of "do it yourself gamelan" and matching him with Darrell. Or having Karl Denson spontaneously start jamming with Vinny Golia one afternoon. Yeah”.²⁶

Another COMA artifact of great importance to the organisation, was the semi-regular newsletters called “COMA Consciousness” that were distributed to all its members and potential members, and which contained numerous articles on music, interviews, record and concert reviews, editorials and announcements of upcoming performances.

²⁴ E-mail from Darrell Jónsson, January 11 2005.

²⁵ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 11, 2005

²⁶ E-mail from Titus Levi, January 11 2005.

A Beginner's Guide

However, the one COMA 'product' that most essentially puts the diversity of the COMA artists and the organization's very broad conception of the term "outside music" on display, was the compilation record that was released on the 6th of June in 1985, titled *A Beginner's Guide To COMA*. The album was put out on James Grigsby's Rotary Totem Records, and printed in 500++ copies. It consists of 10 tracks, and the artists involved are: Cartoon (originally from San Fransisco), Dogma Probe, The 5UU's, Elma Meyer, The Motor Totemist Guild, Newcross, Rhythm Plague, Mark Soden, Tao Mao and Underpeople.

Option magazine featured an almost raving review: "This compilation is really fantastic, if only for the sheer variety of music therein. I it all could be lumped under the dubious genre classification of "avant rock", but none of these bands sound at all alike [...]"²⁷ Even the much better known Keyboard Magazine described the album in more than favourable terms.

Alas, although there were plenty of plans in that direction, the organization never managed to release a follow-up to this sampler, and actually, roughly 12 years after the organization's inception, COMA undramatically but inevitably "fizzled out". Dave Kerman withholds that "as long as there were 10 bands in the organization, [with] all of them committed to an alliance that would help promote and distribute each others' recordings and concerts, it was perfect".²⁸ But eventually, "COMA became too big in scope. It became almost impossible to set up gigs for 50 bands and artists on a rotating cycle"²⁹. And therefore, "like anything else on an amateurish level trying to compete with consummate professionals (in this case the big Hollywood record labels), the organization faded away".³⁰

However, the democratic, 'communal', and, to put it in even stronger words, 'the radically communitarian' spirit of COMA lives on, and this is where I clearly see a connection to progressive rock's origin and ideology. The creation and subsequent work of the organization could indeed be regarded as a miniature version of the experimental milieu and 'general avant-garde' of the 1960's, a significant and maybe even unique period in history, or indeed

²⁷ Option magazine, Sept./Oct. 1985

²⁸ Interview with Dave Kerman, Ragazzi: http://www.ragazzi-music.de/interviews/kemandave_eng.html

²⁹ Personal interview with Dave Kerman, Denver 28.03.2005

³⁰ Interview with Dave Kerman, Ragazzi: http://www.ragazzi-music.de/interviews/kemandave_eng.html

“the last gasp of something we used to call history”.³¹ And the resurrection of some of the *energy* and openness of this period seen in the efforts of COMA is even more remarkable when considering the fact that the organization flourished despite residing in the literal shadows cast by the looming towers of the Hollywood film and record industry (probably one of the starkest symbols of Adorno’s ‘culture industry’), and furthermore, in a decade (the 80s) when cruel and bizarre political administrations represented by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were intensely dedicated to the negation and erasure of the Sixties’ spirit (the ‘political’ Sixties, that is, as the utopian, visionary and critical trace of this era stretched on into the middle seventies).

I would go so far as claiming that many of the musicians and artists that were involved in and later ‘came out of’ COMA maintained a near all-embracing attitude towards music of all genres and origins, and, furthermore, a penchant for experimentation with and synthesizing of all these impulses in a way that at least strives for and aspires to not only artistic integrity and unity, but indeed a true *validation* (as is definitely the case for Grigsby’s Indonesian concert) of all these different ‘musics’ rather than a mere *appropriation*. This is a trait that pervades, to a greater or lesser degree, the artistic oeuvre of all of my featured COMA-related bands, and which owes a great deal to the ideological legacy of the 60s and 70s in general, and of progressive rock in particular.

Outside music – avant rock

So what is “outside” music anyway? This key term of the COMA-organization, which occurs prominently in its very name, is in need of further analysis and clarification, as it resides at the very centre of COMA’s activities, and in several ways represents a starting point for my own lines of argument in the present text.

I will start by referring to James Grigsby’s take on the term, and then turn to John Covach and Bill Martin to gather some additional perspective on the “outside” phenomenon and its bearings on both the development and transformation of musical *styles*, as well as its

³¹ Martin 1997: 58

ubiquitous connections to mechanisms of ‘market’ and ‘the commercial’ within the manufacturing and distribution of products of the music industry.

In a short essay simply titled “What is outside music?”, which probably was part of an issue of “COMA Consciousness” (at least Titus has some vague recollections along those lines), Grigsby sets Outside Music off from Mainstream music, without making any qualitative judgements, by the degree of innovation in any given artist’s music: “As a single apple tree is unique and may bear fine fruit, so may a single disco artist be an original making high quality music. But, we can hardly call any of these innovative!”.³² As this example shows, Grigsby structures his essay around an analogy involving methods of music compared with processes of nature, and in the next paragraph he withholds:

“True innovation in nature can be achieved by means of a hybrid or a mutation. This situation can be likened to that of music that is outside, or exclusive of, Mainstream Music. The artists who work in the field of Outside Music, then, are distinguished by their ability to produce music that can not be easily classified. This can be achieved by a cross-breeding of various styles to create a hybrid that is neither one nor the other. This tampering with the major strains of established music is by far the most frequent method of Outside musicians, but it may not be a conscious method”.³³

This has resemblances to Bill Martin’s notion of rock music’s ongoing “dynamic interaction between margin and center” (the ‘Outside’ and ‘Mainstream’, respectively),³⁴ in which “the center can mean various things, ‘popular’, ‘mainstream’, closer to the root impulses of rock, and the like”.³⁵ Grigsby draws a bill on this phenomenon when he claims that the “innovations [of the Outsiders eventually] become the established forms that the Mainstream artist must continually try to infuse with vitality and substance”, and that a necessary requirement for the listeners’ appreciation of these innovations is a knowledge of the history and requirements of different styles of music. This way, “in an ideal world, the roles of the Mainstream and Outside would co-exist in a mutually beneficial relationship”.³⁶ However, in the *real* (consumer) world, value is often equated with *popularity*, which in turn is a function of recognisability, functionality and the formation of an identity (which, for rock music in

³² James Grigsby: “What is Outside Music?” - essay

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Martin 2001: XV

³⁵ Martin 2001: 184

³⁶ James Grigsby: “What is Outside Music?” - essay

particular, often involve tying up with a culture of adolescence), and subsequently it is generally the Mainstream that is “awarded with attention by the public media and capital by the established music business. The existence of alternatives is rarely acknowledged, much less sponsored”.³⁷ Avant rock, which forms the focus of this study, has to do with artists who have “resisted these [predominantly commercial] pressures, and who have, in a sense, attempted to imagine what music would be if such pressures didn’t exist”.³⁸

COMA, in its essence, was part of this “fringe that choose to oppose the process of assimilation into the mainstream”.³⁹ In a guerrilla-like fashion, the organization endeavoured to “use the commercial channels of communication to transmit a radical message: unusual and challenging music can be entertaining!”.⁴⁰ And for James Grigsby, this idea, which actually is a veritable credo for avant rock, was “the most encouraging thing [he had] heard from an arts organization”.⁴¹

1980’s “Ameriprogr”: creativity at the margins

Still, in the grand view of things, one must inevitably realize that avant rock, and particularly the tiny share of the field that is occupied by my small nexus of COMA-related bands, indeed remains a truly *marginalized* phenomenon in the music world. And maybe even more so in the early 80s, which saw the initial baby steps of the COMA organization, than in more recent times.

Musicology professor and progressive rock artist John Covach, when surveying the field of American progressive rock, recognizes the emergence of a progressive rock ‘revival’ in the 1990s, as well as the development of a ‘prog underground’, first and foremost propelled by the increasing popularity of the Internet. The underground movement prospered through online newsgroups, newsletters and fanzines, and this, in combination with founding of new and renewed efforts of existing mail-order houses and independent record labels, made it possible to “market independently produced CDs through the underground”, as well as getting

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Martin 2001: 185

³⁹ James Grigsby: ”Underground Los Angeles” - essay

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

a clearer sense of the history of American progressive rock by way of re-releases of records by hitherto obscure bands. The last roughly 15 years have also seen the appearance of a great number of U.S. festivals dedicated to progressive and avant rock, among which ProgFest (in Los Angeles) and NearFest (in New York) are two of the biggest.

So, while not even being close to the enormous commercial impact of several (predominantly British) progressive rock artists in the early to mid-70s, the last one-and-a-half decade has seen the reinstatement of Prog (the conscious employing of a capital 'P' in this context deliberately invokes the notion of a rigidly congealed genre or 'niche', which progressive rock, when considering the blatant fundamentalism displayed by many of its devotees, is on the verge of becoming) as a marginal, but still very much viable, commercial force in the music industry. Bands like Dream Theater, Spock's Beard, The Flower Kings and Transatlantic (another semi-incestuous circle of artists) all have huge followings, and release their records on fairly big (and even major) record labels. The same applies to even greater extent for 'neu'-prog acts such as Mars Volta and ... Trail Of Dead.

(An open question remains as to whether any of these bands are truly 'progressive' in the initial, Sixties' sense of the word. This remains a topic for the final chapter).

The early 80s, a period definitely pre-Internet and dominated by Cold War-rhetorics and the absurd overhanging threat of irretrievable nuclear destruction, was a different situation altogether. As the 70s drew to a close, progressive rock "was mostly out of the commercial mainstream" and "generally thought to be dead as a popular-music style".⁴² And at the very threshold of the 1980s, new wave, punk and disco had definitely become the most important stylistic forces, while progressive rock completely receded from the commercial market.

As a result of this, groups were now often "formed on a part-time basis, with musicians pursuing other careers by day. [...] In short, groups became more independent of the music industry; and if the industry was not much interested in their music, that meant bands did not need to be as much concerned about their music's commercial appeal as they might otherwise have been. This combination of factors led to more experimental and avant-garde tendencies in 1980s than had been the case for 1970s Ameriprogram".⁴³ So, while commercially successful

⁴² Covach 2000: 18

⁴³ Ibid: 31

American major label acts in the Seventies such as Kansas and Styx undoubtedly were deeply indebted to, even downright derivative of, the primary exponents of the British progressive rock scene (Yes, Genesis, King Crimson, ELP and Jethro Tull), the American progressive rock-related bands of the 1980s, while retaining these influences as well, continued even more “in the modernist direction explored earlier by avant-garde rockers like Soft Machine and Henry Cow”.⁴⁴ The music of COMA-bands should be viewed against this backdrop.

To provide a tentative conclusion of the previous discussion and lead the way for the next chapters, which will consider the music itself in more detail, I will try to make a preliminary differentiation between my COMA-related group of bands (as well as several artists with a similar outlook) and the remaining progressive rock scene in the U.S. For this, I will apply terms from John Covach, who distinguishes between ‘symphonic prog’ and ‘avant prog’ approaches, respectively. And although Bill Martin (rightly, in my opinion) opposes to a similar distinction made by Paul Stump regarding the progressive groups of the 70s (his corresponding labels are ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ progressive rock),⁴⁵ I nevertheless find them appropriate when trying to discern between the current ‘sub-trends’. Covach:

“There are thus two general but distinct types of Ameriprogressive groups in the 1990s: those that continue in the avant-progressive style developed in the 1980s (with roots [predominantly] in 1970s British avant-progressive); and those that return in some significant way to the style developed by Yes, Genesis and ELP in the 70s (often called ‘symphonic progressive’)”⁴⁶

In light of my line of argument above, the 90s’ progressive rock revival spawned a renewed interest in the ‘classic’ 70s progressive rock, and a lot of the bands that started out in this period definitely sort under the ‘symphonic progressive’ category. These bands (such as Spock’s Beard and the Flower Kings) make frequent literal references to the surface features (including the ‘sound’, and even particular types of melodies and riffs) of bands like Yes, Genesis, King Crimson and ELP, and, while they certainly have “a strong claim on authenticity” and surely displays a musical craftsmanship on the very same level as these artists, there still remains the issue of “the need for progressive rock to *progress* [...]”.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid: 32

⁴⁵ Stump 1997: 82

⁴⁶ Covach 2000: 40

⁴⁷ Martin 1997: 274

In my view, these ‘symphonic prog’ artists *reconnect*, in a most convincing fashion, with features of styles constituting progressive rock as a *genre*, while leaving out significant features of progressive rock as *ideology*. Often, their music can accurately be described as ‘progrock-pastiche’. Martin: “There’s much in [these band’s music] that simply takes one to another time, on a pleasant journey down memory lane, without doing anything that is especially new. They are very good at speaking a certain language, much as Lenny Kravitz is sometimes good at speaking the languages of Curtis Mayfield or Jimi Hendrix, or perhaps as Leonard Bernstein, in his three symphonies, recapitulated the classical discourse from Mozart to Stravinsky”.⁴⁸

Contrastingly, several bands that originate from 1980s Ameriprog (including, in my humble opinion, the 5UU’s, Motor Totemist’s Guild, U Totem and Thinking Plague), which also undoubtedly have affinities with 70s progressive rock, and by all means not exclusively with ‘avant-prog’ artists such as Henry Cow and Soft Machine, seem, in a number of ways, to reunite more fully with both the ideology, spirit and above all the *sensibility* of progressive rock. This, in particular, is due to their endeavouring to work out *new* syntheses, both inside and outside the specifically ‘Prog’ discourse, but always with the inherent traits of progressive rock ideology as backdrop – including an *epic* approach to composition, a fundamental aiming for *visionary transcendence* in and through the music, and a “spiritual autonomy of the musician-creator always close to Romantic ideology [...]”.⁴⁹

I will return to all of these issues, as well as others I see as distinctive of this particular brand of American avant rock, in the following. But for now, it seems appropriate to let Bill Martin conclude this chapter: “These are examples of groups that come out of progressive rock and still feature aspects of that music. But they are also just as contemporary as anything else out there, and in that sense they are carrying forward a truer sense of ‘progressive’ rock than what is found in most of the neo-prog (Martin’s equivalent to ‘symphonic prog’) groups”.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Martin 2001: 80

⁴⁹ Stump 1997: 111

⁵⁰ Martin 2001: 81

3) The Music

Ringin' In The New Progressive Era

And then it's time to face the music...

As already stated in the introduction, I've chosen to focus on the music of four representative American avant rock groups, namely Motor Totemist's Guild (henceforth MTG), 5UU's, U Totem and Thinking Plague.

MTG and the 5UU's were original COMA bands, both of them closely connected to this organization, while U Totem was a 'fusion' of these two groups, both stylistically speaking and in terms of band members and line-up. Thinking Plague is the 'outsider' in this particular context, originating out of Denver, Colorado instead of Southern California, but a short peak at all these groups' respective line-ups presents an outline of the personnel-wise and stylistic interchange involved:

Motor Totemist's Guild, ca. 1986:

James Grigsby – guitar, bass, composer
Emily Hay – flute, vocals
Lynn Johnston – woodwinds
Becky Heninger – cello
Eric Strauss – violin, keyboards
Dave Kerman – drums, percussion

5UU's, ca. 1994:

David Kerman – drums, guitar, composer
Sanjay Kumar – keyboards, composer
Bob Drake – bass, vocals, composer
Thomas DiMuzio – electric & computer generated sounds

U Totem, ca. 1991:

James Grigsby – bass, guitar
Emily Hay – flute, vocals
Eric Johnson-Tamai – bassoon
Sanjay Kumar – keyboards
David Kerman – drums, composer

Thinking Plague, ca. 1998:

Mike Johnson – guitar, composer
Shane Hotle - keyboards
Mark Harris - reeds
Bob Drake – bass, violin, vocals
Dave Willey – bass, accordion
Deborah Perry – vocals
David Kerman – drums

Rather than dividing these bands up into COMA groups and non-COMA groups, it seems much more fruitful to regard them as diverse exponents of “avant rock” and “avant pop” in their broadest terms, in such a way that the stylistic differences often outweighs the similarities, and where the common traits are those of *progressive sensibility* and *conceptual density and richness*. However, for the sake of simplicity, and to underline their basic affinity, I will from here on out refer to all these artists as ‘COMA-bands’.

For the analysis sections that follow, I have chosen to consider a few standout tracks from three of these groups' recorded output:

The 5UU's:	«Well, Not Chickenshit...» (from <i>Hunger's Teeth</i> , ReR, 1994) “Comeuppance” “Bought The Farm” “Hunter-Gatherer” “Absolutely, Absolute” (all from <i>Chrosis in Clay</i> , ReR 1997)
U Totem:	«Ginger Tea» (<i>Strange Attractors</i> , Cuneiform, 1994) «One Nail Draws Another» (<i>U Totem</i> , Cuneiform, 1990)
Thinking Plague:	«Dead Silence» (<i>In Extremis</i> , Cuneiform, 1998) «Lux Lucet» (<i>A History Of Madness</i> , Cuneiform, 2003)

As already stated in the introduction, all these bands, with the notable exception of the 5UU's, work with written *scores*, albeit in a “rock” context, that is, with standard rock instruments such as electric guitar, bass guitar and drums, with the addition of strings, reeds and extra percussion. By the kindness and courtesy of Mike Johnson and James Grigsby, I have been granted access to some of these scores, which opens up the possibility for conducting an analysis on both the level of the score (visual level) and the recorded sounds (aural level).

This corresponds to my initial aim of applying analytical tools from both Schoenberg and Moore, respectively.

My main objects for the analysis of these pieces will primarily be the following:

- 1) *Form and compositional structure*; how the communication of the composer's ideas to the musicians by the aid of music notation opens up for the application of complex formal schemes and the unfolding of an extended musical narrative, as often found in classical music, in a sonic realm that more or less belongs to the language of «rock».
- 2) *Harmony*; the extension of rock's harmonic vocabulary through the inclusion of harmonic procedures from classical or art music. Examples would be polytonality, quartal structures and clusters, and also more implicitly through extensive counterpoint and serial (especially twelve-tone) techniques.
- 3) *Rhythmical structures and metrical disposition*; the use of odd time signatures and assymmetrical metric groupings uncommon to, but by no means unheard of, in «rock» music. Put bluntly: how to make 17/16 «groove»...?
- 4) *Studio production as part of compositional process*; the «sculpturing» of recorded instruments and voices, effects processing and sampled as well as «found» sounds into a conceptual whole. Does the compositional work stop at the score level, meaning that the production is mostly a ‘decorative’ process (putting ‘icing-on-the-cake’), or are the elements of composition and production integrated at a higher conceptual level?

The tracks I have chosen as objects of analysis are to me some of the most representative of the four bands' musical styles, and they inherit characteristics that seem important not only to the forming of these groups' individual styles (or *idiolects*, in Moore's terminology) but also to this more general style of «avant rock», which, as I will endeavour to show in the following, in many ways is a true extension of the language of 70s' progressive rock.

My goal for these analyses, then, is basically twofold:

1) To discern closely between each of the artists' stylistic particularities – what sets them apart from each other, what makes their musical contributions necessary for the enrichment of rock music repertoire and stylistic language, and

2) To use my findings on this more local level to support my main hypothesis that these four groups in particular, through the appliance of *virtuosic musical skills, linearity and linear development, generosity and synthesis, «hybridity» and destillation*, and finally *thematic unity*, are carrying forward the torch of 70's progressive rock's *utopianism, sensibility, conceptual density, radical affirmation and negation and transcendence*, but in an expanded, altered and definitely more «postmodern» musical realm.

And with this initial analytical frameset, we turn to the world of avant rock...

4) THINKING PLAGUE

«*Dead Silence*»

“Dead Silence” is the opening track of Thinking Plague's album *In Extremis*, which was released on Steve Feigenbaum's Cuneiform Records in 1998. Part of the reason for this particular choice is that it is the first song by Thinking Plague that I ever heard.

A large part of the song's appeal is for me the sheer richness of related musical ideas that are incorporated over a relatively modest time span of 4 minutes exactly. This particular trait, in addition to the song's dense contrapuntal textures, makes it comparable to the British 1970's progressive rock group Gentle Giant, who also excelled in constructing complex musical forms with track lengths much shorter than for instance their contemporaries Yes and Genesis. It should be added, however, that Thinking Plague surely are no strangers to longer works, with three of the tracks that comprise *In Extremis* clocking in at 8:03 (“This Weird Wind”), 13:43 (“Kingdom Come”) and 14:00 (“Les Etudes D’Organism”), respectively. What’s particular to all compositions on the album, regardless to their longevity, is the unfolding of what I perceive as an *epic vision*, a trait that is also characteristic of “Dead Silence”.

1) Form and melody

I will start out by drawing up a preliminary formal chart of “Dead Silence”, and then proceed to take a closer look at the song's most central themes and motives. In the following two sections I will make pretty extensive treatment of harmonic patterns and procedures, as well as some aspects of the song's rhythm and metre.

The basic form scheme for «Dead Silence» (see figure 3.1 below) is, after close scrutiny, quite clearer and more transparent than it appears at first listen.

«Dead Silence», formal chart

Bar no.	Lenght	Time	Form al name	Description	Key area	Instrumentation etc.
1 – 8	8 bars	0:00-0:08	A	Introduction	E	Percussive acoustic guitar, strings enter with ascending line in bar 5
9 - 24	16 bars	0:08-0:23	A2	1 st verse	E	Acoustic guitar, strings with ornamented pedal G, «split» vocals
25 - 40	16 bars	0:23-0:39	B	1 st interlude	E (free)	Soprano sax, electric guitar, piano, strings (pedal G)
41 – 48	8 bars	0:39-0:46	A'	Introduction reprise	E	Acoustic guitar, strings (pedal G)
49 – 64	16 bars	0:46-1:02	A2'	2 nd verse	E	Acoustic guitar, electric guitar, «split» vocals, piano, soprano sax
65 – 82	18 bars (16 + 2)	1:02-1:23	C	1 st bridge	E	Acoustic guitar, electric guitar, strings, piano, bass, clarinet, two-and three-part vocals,
83 – 98	16 bars	1:23-1:40	B'	2 nd interlude	E	Acoustic guitar, soprano sax, strings, sampled cellos
99 – 122	24 bars	1:40-2:13	C'	2 nd bridge	E	Acoustic guitar, electric guitar, strings, piano, bass, clarinet, two- and three-part vocals
123 – 137	15 bars	2:13-2:28	D	Transition	Open	Electric guitar, soprano sax, strings, flute, piano, bass
138 – 153	16 bars	2:28-2:44	E	Development section part I	Open	Electric guitar, accordion, flutes, bass
154 – 158	5 bars	2:44-2:49	F	Dev. section part II	Open	Electric guitar, strings, piano, bass
159 – 166	8 bars	2:49-2:58	G	Dev. section part III	A whole-tone	Acoustic guitar, electric guitar, sampled cello, bass, two-part vocals
167 – 182	16 bars	2:58-3:17	H	Dev. section part IV	C#	Electric guitar, flute, piano, bass
183 – 190	8 bars	3:17-3:26	G'	Dev. section part V	A whole-tone	Electric guitar, piano, bass
191 – 202	12 bars	3:26-3:39	H'	Dev. section part VI	C# (E)	Electric guitar, flute, piano, bass, sampled voice
203 – 220	18 bars	3:39-4:00	I	Ending	E	Electric guitar, organ, bass

This graph immediately reveals some interesting particularities of the song. First of all, up until the formal section D, “Dead Silence” resembles a standard rock song in its formal characteristics: 8-bar intro, followed by a 16-bar verse, 16-bar interlude, 8-bar intro recap and 16-bar verse. The bridge parts that follow have the formal role of choruses, but I've chosen to name them “bridges” because of their rather “unresolved”, or perhaps “inconclusive”, nature.

Then, after the transition at D, the remainder of the song up until the ending is akin to an extended developmental section, more in the style of the central part of Western classical music's oft-employed sonata form. Here new themes are introduced, and central motives from the first part are developed and often radically altered in a dense, contrapuntal texture.

Several important motives for “Dead Silence” occur as early as in the introduction, first verse and interlude. I have chosen to name them in small, italicized letters to separate them from the names of the song's formal sections:

a: ascending string line, bars 5-10:

b: descending diatonic 5ths (E dorian mode/E nat. minor) bars 9-12 of vocal line

c: soprano sax bars 25-27

d: electric guitar bars 31-32

e: alternately minor sixths and augmented 4ths, piano bars 28-32

f: bass riff bars 65-68

g: outlined arpeggio w/neighbour notes, clarinet & guitar bar 73

h: polytonal arpeggio idea, guitar & clarinet bar 75

i: guitar arpeggio w/neighbouring notes, partly derived from *g*.

Some of these motives are further developed into full-fledged *themes* (numbered):

Theme *1*: verse melody, bars 9 - 24

The second verse utilizes a «second ending», leading into the first bridge (b. 61-64)

Theme *2*: soprano sax theme, bars 25-40

Theme *3* (no directly corresponding motive above): bridge's vocal melody, bars 65 – 80

Theme *4*: piano left hand accompanying theme, bars 28 – 40

Theme *5*: guitar accompanying theme, bars 31 – 40

The song “proper”

Before moving on to consider how these themes and motives are elaborated and juxtaposed in the song's developmental section, let's take a look at the structure of the first part (up through the letter D in the formal chart):

A:

Bars 1-4: Acoustic guitar chord pattern (see below for analysis)

Bars 5-8: Ascending string line enters, utilizing two-octave synthetic scale.

A2:

Bars 9-24: Theme 1 (verse melody) enters, accompanied by acoustic guitar pattern and a slightly ornamented sustained G-note played by strings.

B:

Bar 25: Soprano sax enters with theme 2, accompanied by the strings' sustained G.

Bar 28: Piano enters with motive *e*, which is elaborated into theme 4.

Bar 31: Guitar plays motive *d*, which eventually develops into theme 5.

In bars 31 – 40, theme 4 and 5 works in a complementary rhythmical fashion, and played together they form a more or less constant eight-note obligato for theme 2 (soprano sax).

A':

Bar 41-48: Acoustic guitar pattern returns, with ornamented pedalled G in the strings.

A2':

Bar 49: Theme 1 returns, this time split up over three separate vocal tracks.

Bar 51: Guitar enters with second half of theme 5

From bar 53, the texture is considerably thickened. The second half of theme 2 (soprano sax), theme 4 (piano) and theme 5 (guitar) is played simultaneously with theme 1 (vocals), blurring out the harmony by creating 4-part counterpoint on top of the insistently repeating acoustic guitar pattern.

Bar 64: Transition into bridge - in essence the last bar of bridge's 4-bar periodic structure.

C:

Bar 65-72: Entrance of new acoustic guitar pattern, «trades» every second bar with piano 'hits'. Bass has motive *f*, and two-part vocals enter with theme 3.

Bar 73-79: Thickening of texture:

Guitar and clarinet adds motives *g* and *h*, played alternately.

Vocal melody doubles to eight notes and is three-part harmonized.

Bar 80-81: Small transition; guitar plays motive *i* twice, which is taken up and elaborated later in C'.

Bar 82 is «dead silent»...

B':

Bar 83-98: Soprano sax states theme 2.

Acoustic guitar pattern 1 returns, and sustained strings reinforce the guitar harmonies.

A new, seemingly unrelated string obligato is introduced, but it seems to me that the second part of this line derives from the wide intervallic skips (sixths and sevenths in abundance) of themes 4 and 5 (bass and guitar, respectively).

In bar 91, cellos enter with a monumental low-register obligato, the ascending contour of which greatly resembles motive *a*.

Bar 98 has the same transitional «pick-up» effect as bar 64 above.

C':

Bar 99-122: The second bridge is played with the same instrumentation as in C.

However, it's six bars longer due to the repetition twice of motive *h*, and a short development of motive *i*, which is «traded» for 5 bars in a transformed manner between electric guitar and piano.

D:

Bar 123-137: The small transitional part that leads into the developmental section basically consists of three main elements:

- 1) A small residue of the guitar's motive *g*, namely it's first beat, that together with a shimmering minor 2nd forms a jagged ostinato pattern.
- 2) The bass, continuing it's wide intervallic skips from the second verse, forms a complimentary rhythmical pattern with the piano, and is contrasted with

3) Searing chromatic lines and trills in the soprano sax.

In bar 135, the flute and soprano sax makes a short recap of theme 2, but they are soon cut of by a «falling-down-the-stairs»-type descending chromatic line, the character of which is strenghtened by an accelerando up to a tempo of 180 bpm, leading directly into **E** and the first part of the development section.

Development section

At 2:28 on the CD timer, there's a marked break in the flow of the song; from here on out, it would seem that the remainder of the song in some ways illustrate instrumentally the contents of the preceding lyrics. At least this will have to suffice as a starting hypothesis for the following analysis.

E:

Bar 138: The guitar and bass picks up the «wide interval» idea from themes 4 and 5, and starts out with an imitative figure utilizing the intervals of a minor and major seventh respectively (G#-F#, Ab-G).

Bar 142: The two accordion parts enter with a polytonal accompaniment figure and a restless melodic line that partly utilizes ideas from the clarinet's motive *g* (see bar 144). The guitar alternate between a minor and minor seventh skip, while the bass figure narrows down into a major second followed by a 4th, now forming a complimentary-rhythmical pattern with the guitar.

Bar 147: Two flutes take the lead with a simpler line, more in the line of the song's theme 3 (bridge's vocal melody) utilizing *mirror-writing*.

The guitar and bass falls together on a very similar line, almost like a riff, containing both the guitar's 7ths and the bass' 4ths.

Bar 151: The accordion takes over and elaborates on the contour of the flute line, while the second flute settles down into a 3-note chromatic pattern for controlled build-up of tension.

F:

Bar 154: Acts as a «break», with dovetailed interval skips between piano and guitar (a minor seventh, octave, major seventh and augmented fourth, respectively).

Bar 155: Guitar introduces another two-bar motive that I choose to label motive *j*.

The bass plays octaves ascending chromatically, while the strings has a sustained *c* which is taken up by the vocal's *d* in the next section. Both the bass' and the strings' «lead-in» contributes to a feeling of actual *modulation* of the key centre at formal division **G**.

G:

Bar 159: The guitar elaborates motive *j* into 4-bar accompanimental theme **6**.

- 166 The bass plays 4-bar riff in an 'A' tonality (more specifically, the 6th mode of C melodic minor scale), utilizing ascending chromatic line from **F** (in eight-notes).

The cello has a 4-bar obligato line, complementing vocal melody.

Vocals have long sustained notes, with second part adding chromatic, concerted line in last 4 bars.

H:

Bar 167: Finally, the song's first true «rock» part commences with 4-bar bass riff (2 + 2), 4 bars of piano guitar chordal pattern (2+2) and an insisting 1-bar guitar ostinato.

There are no clear resemblances to former motives or themes except for guitar's and bass' emphasis on major sixth and seventh intervals.

Bar 175: A distorted flute jumps in with a statement of the first half of theme 2 (soprano sax theme) played in *C#*, reinforcing the tonal centre of this section.

G':

Bar 183: On the recap of **G**, the guitar and bass plays their respective ostinato figures, but the sustained melody statements from the section's initial crop-up is replaced with a piano ostinato derived from the guitar's motive *g* (used in a similar way as in formal section **D**, including the soprano sax' trills), sustaining the «riffin'» character of the previous section.

H':

Bar 191: In this restatement of **H**, the contrapuntal activity is reduced while the sonic density is intensified.

The distorted electric guitar doubles bass ostinato.

Piano uses percussive voicings in low register to reinforce the 2-bar periods.

A sampled human voice takes out top line in guitar/bass riff as the dominating melodic part.

Most interestingly from a motivic point of view is the return of the strings' initial sustained g-note, in my interpretation clearly signalling that the song is nearing its conclusion.

Bar 195: Guitar enters with first 4 bars of theme 2, followed by a short ending utilizing the falling 5ths pattern found in the vocal's theme 1.

I:

Bar 203: For the ending, instrumentation is stripped down to a «power quartet» of organ, guitar, bass and drums. A 6-bar period is employed, played 3 times.

Distorted guitar and bass keeps their unison going, but this time just the ascending chromatic figure (leaving out the top line), spanning a minor third, that probably derives from the chromatic bass “pick-ups” at **F** and **G**.

The distorted organ plays a prolonged variation on the chordal pattern from **H** an octave higher.

Bar 209: (2nd 6-bar period) Guitar tacet, bass plays simplified 3-note figure.

Bar 215: (3rd 6-bar period) Bass tacet, organ finishes up and stops abruptly after third run-through.

2) Harmonic procedures and patterns

After a pretty extensive formal and motivic analysis of «Dead Silence», I will focus this briefer section on harmony around a number of key elements, in an effort to show how the

music of Mike Johnson and Thinking Plague in many ways extends the harmonic vocabulary of rock, and thereby opens rock music up to its possibilities by way of *imitation, assimilation and synthesis*.

The elements on which I will focus in this part are:

- 1) Non-functional chords and progressions
- 2) Polytonality: vertical structures and linear harmony
- 3) The establishment and reinforcement of recognizable *key centers* by the appliance of certain *focal* melodic lines and patterns.

1) Non-functional chords and progressions

Let's start by taking a look at the acoustic guitar pattern in the song's first eight bars, being so central to the structure of "Dead Silence". First of all, Johnson utilizes extensive muting with his upper right arm throughout. Above all, this gives the rhythmic pattern a *percussive* quality, and the top note (the note played on the guitar's first string) is muffled out almost completely.

As for the progression itself, it's a difficult one to analyze by conventional means. If one tries to decipher it by way of traditional chord symbols, it would turn out to be something like this:

Esus4	F#sus4	b5b9	Aadd4	Csus2	Esus4	b5b9	Aadd4	Gsus4
						F#sus4		

Which is a progression that truly defies traditional functional analysis. Two characteristics, though, are particularly interesting: The return of the Esus4 at every 4th bar anchors the pattern in a key centre that is definitely E, and the root movement of the three other chords by the interval of a minor third (F#-A-C) is actually an important structural device of the entire song.

The next step is to apply Alan Moore's modal system for the harmonic language of rock, to see if this would bring additional revelations:¹

E aeolian							
Isus4	11 II	#3 IV add4	VI sus2	Isus4	11 II	#3 IV add4	III sus4

First of all, one can see at a glance that all of the chords fit comfortably into an E aeolian pattern, with the humble exception of an altered third for the chord built on the fourth scale degree (actually a modal «loan» from the corresponding mode of E *dorian*). This serves to fortify the initial notion that the pattern's key centre is E, and that the tonal material for the construction of all these seemingly very complex chords (as well as for the verse's 16-bar melody) is to be found within the modes of E aeolian and E dorian, respectively.

But at the same time, Moore's system is seriously challenged, as it is primarily devised for the categorization of basically *triadic* sequences. So already when including chord symbol terminology such as “sus4”, “11” and “sus2”, one is at odds with the “regular” harmonic mechanisms inherent in rock music.

So then, one tentative conclusion is that one cannot easily call this particular progression “functional” in neither classical musicology's sense of the word nor according to Moore's theory of modal, predominantly *cyclic*, sequences.

Another, presumably more fruitful, strategy is to view these chords as springing out of the same *pool* of notes, in this case the E aeolian scale with the addition of the dorian mode's natural 6th. This is more in line with the methods of *serial* or *twelve-tone* harmony, and, more generally, with harmonic procedures utilized by twentieth-century classical composers, where the traditional cadential roles and internal structures of each particular chord in a progression (i.e.: V7, containing a tritone between the third and seventh, resolving to I by stepwise movement of the tritone into a major third or minor sixth) are downplayed, and where an important means of creating a *root* or *key centre* through a *sequence of chords* is to construct the chords out of notes from a certain *scale* (maybe even *scales*) or *series of notes*.

¹ Moore 2001: 52-57

Another example from “Dead Silence” might serve as illustration of another harmonic strategy, namely the harmonic sequence occurring through the interplay of guitar, piano and bass in bars 167-170 in the **H** part of the song (same sequence is repeated up through bar 182).

Once again with standard chord symbols, it would look something like this (chord by chord, with bass notes employed as chordal roots throughout):

Piano	C#add#9	Emadd ^{b9}		Dmaj7 ^{#5} /F	C#add#9	Emadd ^{b9}		Dmadd9
Guitar			Dmadd ^{b5}				B ^o /Eb	

And according to Moore:

	C# locrian							
Piano	II ^{#3} add ^{#9}	IIIadd ^{b9}		IImaj7 ^{#5} /#3	II ^{#3} add ^{#9}	IIIadd ^{b9}		II ^{b3} add ⁹
Guitar			II ^{b3} add ^{b5}				VII ^o /#II	

Which in this context hardly can make us any wiser, other than placing this section vaguely in a tonal area of C#.

But once again, seen in the context of twentieth-century harmonic practice, it can easily be interpreted as use of an *added-note* strategy. Major, minor and diminished triads are enriched with one dissonant scale tone, and, rather than constituting a directed linear progression in the traditional sense, are employed as *harmonic accents* built upon the top notes of the bass line.

The added notes used are:

C# major triad + b3/#2

E minor triad + b9

D minor triad + b5

F# major triad + b6 (with F in the bass – polytonal implications! See below)

B diminished triad + maj. 3rd

D minor triad + nat. 9

2) Polytonality: vertical structures and linear harmony

A particular harmonic device that is utilized frequently in Thinking Plague's music in general, and “Dead Silence” in particular, is the concept of *polychords* and *polytonality*, procedures originating from modern classical music and also found in big band literature, but rather seldom in the harmonic language of rock music. Mike Johnson calls it “his favourite compositional tool”,² and I have picked some examples from “Dead Silence” that may serve as illustrations:

A) Vertical structures

1) Bar 67 (C section), guitar

This is a “classic” polychord, with a minor triad on top of a major triad – F#m/C - forming a complex sound with several very dissonant intervals. It is repeated a great number of times through C and C'.

2) Bar 70 (C section), piano

A more rare specimen; an incomplete diminished triad (complete if one includes the vocal's melody note) on top of major triad: B⁰7/Eb. Repeated through both C and C'. And for the record; the second chord of the piano's 4-bar period in this section is an added-note structure rather than a polychord: Cadd4/E.

² Mike Johnson, personal interview, Denver 29.03.2005

3) Bar 125 & 126 (**D** section), piano

Major triad on top of quartal structure – A/aug. 4th+perf 4th – in bar 125, followed by a major triad interlocked with a minor triad – E + Cm – forming a polychordal *cluster*.

B) Linear harmony

This is the polytonal technique employed most frequently in “Dead Silence”: Two or more instrumental lines in different keys and/or with different tonal centers are played simultaneously, forming polychordal harmonic progressions in a *linear* way. Once again, some instructive examples:

1) Bar 75 (C section), full score

This is complex instance of polytonality. Instruments/voices are divided into pairs, each with their own tonal centre. This excerpt resides in the borderline area between vertical and linear harmony.

- Three-part quartal structures in **vocals** with g-e figure in **bass**: E dorian tonality
- Polychord in **acoustic guitar** and **strings**: F#m/C
- Polychordal arpeggios in **electric guitar** and **clarinet**: Eb/C

Observe the central root relationship of a minor third between the key areas: C-Eb-F#, while the vocals maintain E dorian.

2) Bar 83-97 (section **B'**), guitar + strings + soprano sax + cello

The soprano sax pretty much retains the same tonal centre as the acoustic guitar pattern (E dorian), with short deviations that emphasize the chord changes and suggest temporary shifts in tonality (bar 85: A; bar 86-87: Eb, or maybe C mixolydian-E lydian augmented; bar 93: A).

The string obligato resides in the tonal area of F# major (bars 83-90), then C major (91-95) and finally Db major (96-97).

The cellos play an ascending line from the E symmetrical diminished scale (1 – ½).

All these different tonal levels exert gravitational “pull” on the overall tonal area, constantly toying with and blurring the listener's sense of tonality, but the soprano sax, guitar and cellos ultimately wins over and places the section in the key centre of E.

3) Bars 135-144 (transition from D to E)

There's so much going on on different tonal levels in this passage that a few short instances will have to suffice as examples:

- The flute and soprano sax play **Eb aeolian** over **C#7#9** cluster chord and bass' pedalled **G** in bars 135 – 137.
- From bar 142 to 144, bass has an ostinato in **G**, guitar plays alternately minor and minor sevenths from **Ab**, and accordeon2 has polychordal arpeggio figure – **F/Ab**. Accordion melody resides somewhere between tonal centres of **Eb** and **Gb**.

3) *Focal melodic lines and patterns.*

So, the question ultimately becomes: With all these advanced formal and harmonic procedures, mainly appropriated from the world of classical and art music, going on in the music of Thinking Plague, what is it that still qualifies the music as *rock*? What puts the “rock” part in “avant rock”, so to speak? And furthermore; how is the immediacy, urgency and «catchiness» of rock music maintained in this admittedly very complex musical context? The way I see it, this is grounded in three main features:

- *The instrumentation:* A rhythm section consisting of drums, bass, keyboards (all woodwind and string parts with the exception of the soprano sax are performed with

synthesized sounds) will inevitably connote to the realm of some kind of *rock music*.

- A resort to common rock elements regarding song structure: verse, interlude and bridge (refrain?).
- The inclusion of *focal* lines and riffs that retain rock music's unquestionably hummable and “catchy” stance.

This last issue is the main theme of this section. There are certain melodic lines and patterns in “Dead Silence” that crop up repeatedly in the course of the song, and will act as *focal* points for the listener's perception of the music. They are:

1) Acoustic guitar pattern, bars 1-8

This ostinato or “vamp” figure has a regular periodic structure of 4 bars, and acts as a musical “anchor” in the entire first part of the song – whenever the, often complex, contrapuntal structures threaten to throw the listener off balance, this pattern will return and reinstall a sense of status quo. In the second interlude (**B'**), the pattern is played steadily alongside three different linear ideas, and remains a focal point around which to relate the dense contrapuntal texture.

2) Verse melody

This is a very strong example of a melody that despite its rhythmic twists and turns retains an intensely memorable character due to its familiar scale material (E dorian/E minor pentatonic), and the fairly constant interval structure involved (ascending and descending diatonic 5ths).

3) Soprano sax melody (introduced in **B** section)

This 16 bar theme (labeled by me as *theme 2* in the previous section) is the one true *leitmotif* of the song. It retains the syncopated nature of the verse melody, and even has some similarities with regard to interval structure (ascending 5th skips followed by stepwise, falling lines). It's basically divided into two parts, the second (last eight bars) being an arch contour

of four bars of ascending E dorian line (reminiscent of measure 4-8 in strings) and four bars descending, respectively. This particular theme is used as a *focal* melodic line throughout the entire song:

Bar no.	Part of theme used	Tonal center	Context
25 – 40 (B)	Entire theme	E (aeolian)	3-part counterpoint
57 – 64 (A2')	Last 8 bars	E (aeolian)	3-part counterp. behind vocals
83 – 98 (B')	Entire theme	E (aeolian)	2- and 3-part counterpoint
135 – 136 (D)	First 2 bars	Eb (aeolian)	Line over static polychord
175 – 178 (H)	First 4 bars	C# (aeolian)	Fortifies key centre in C# riff part
197 – 202 (H')	First 6 bars (alt. ending)	C (aeolian)	Polytonal use over C# riff

4) Bass/guitar riff (introduced in section **H**)

This rocking 4-bar riff is divided into 2+2 bars (ABAC), and serves as a primary structural device from the start of the **H** section and out. Although it's much more chromatically charged and “angularly” constructed than most standard rock guitar riffs, it has a lot in common with stock patterns from the realms of speed and thrash metal (e.g. Metallica: “Master of Puppets”), and it exploits the power of *repetition* to the extent that it becomes the counterpart of a pop and rock music “hook”.

Repetition and *motivic reuse and variation*, then, become important devices for contrasting the complex counterpoint found in abundance through “Dead Silence”.

I will repeatedly return to issues regarding these bands’ indebtedness to and close affinity with ‘popular’ and ‘rock’ styles in the remainder of this account. However, there is one connection to the more specifically ‘*progressive*’ rock-style, inherent in the stylistic idiolects of all these groups, but probably most of all in the music of Thinking Plague, that deserves some treatment here, before concluding the chapter with a few brief remarks on the production of *In Extremis*.

Musical temporality – “the time of music”

In his influential book, *Rock: The Primary Text*, Allan Moore refers to Jonathan Kramer’s theories of “twentieth-century music exploring different ‘temporalities’ from those of everyday reality” in his discussion of what listening mode would be the most appropriate for progressive rock. He adopts three of Kramer’s categories, namely ‘directed linearity’ (a directed motion from an initial point, along a clear path, to a final point – akin to functional harmony in its purest sense), ‘non-directed linearity’ (the sense of motion remains, but the target is ambiguous or vague – corresponding to the time sense of a great deal of conventional rock) and finally, the notion of ‘vertical time’ (where the music is ‘temporally undifferentiated’).³

As far as ‘non-directed linearity’ is concerned, the sense of a motion is ensured by *melody* (which consist of *lines* and *phrases*), *harmony* (through *progressions*, both cyclic and pendular, though the motion of both tend to be relatively *local*) and *rhythm* (motion is perceived from beat to beat and bar to bar). ‘Vertical time’, on the other hand, generally neither has phrases (according to Kramer, phrases and phrase endings are “the final remnant of linearity”), progression or goal direction, nor movement or contrasting rates of motion. The “result is a single present, stretched into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite ‘now’ [...]”.⁴

Moore’s interesting conclusion is that “progressive rock has some recourse to both directed and vertical times, expanding in both directions from the non-directed linearity of much other rock”.⁵ His chief example is King Crimson’s ‘Lark’s Tongues in Aspic, pt. 2’, that illustrates the notion of ‘directed linearity’ through a great sense of inner logic due to the voice-leading (which incorporates anticipations in the upper parts) of slowly moving harmonic progressions. Moore: “What differentiates this directed linearity from a non-directed linearity is either that ‘movement away’ has been made, or that ‘arrival’ is a long time in coming [...]”.⁶

His reference to the Crimson classic as an illustration of this principle is truly exemplary in its aptness. I will now offer another example that not only shows the COMA-bands’ basic

³ Moore 2001: 98

⁴ Ibid: 99

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid: 100

affinity with progressive rock, by way of this specific trait, but also serves to further deepening of the concept of a *linear development*.

The song “Lux Lucet”, found on Thinking Plague’s 2003-album *A History Of Madness*, is a telltale example of this resorting both to ‘directed’ and ‘vertical’ times from rock music’s basically non-directed temporality. The overall, albeit simplified, formal scheme of this song looks something like the following:

“Lux Lucet”

Intro	(0:00 – 0:50)	A B A B
Verse	(0:50 – 1:30)	A A’ B’
“Chorus”	(1:30 – 2:11)	C
Verse II	(2:11 – 2:59)	A A’ B’
Interlude	(2:59 – 3:59)	D E D E F D E G
Interlude II	(4:12 – 5:17)	G’
Bridge	(5:17 – 5:34)	H
Interlude III	(5:34 – 6:22)	G’’
Transition	(6:22 – 7:13)	I
Verse III	(7:13 – 8:10)	A’’ B’’
Ending	(8:10 – 9:36)	J (based on guitar figure of B)

In this song, the A sections, most typically, displays the typically ‘non-directed’ linearity of rock, with two alternating chord progressions (played by guitar and accordion, respectively) comprising 3 bars each. But there also a prevailing tendency that goes towards a ‘directed’ linearity in these sections, if they are considered on the level of the entire piece, due to the extensive altering and development of the parts of other instruments for each recurrence of A. This way, when the final verse enters at 7:13, the effect is undisputedly one of an ‘arrival’.

The formal section C, on the other hand, is definitely one of ‘non-directed’ linearity, with its 4-bar chord progression and a vocal line that is ornamentally ‘decorating’ rather than directed to a final point or ‘goal’.

The first interlude, on the contrary, is most certainly ‘directed’, in that the alternating parts are developed for each return, creating a belabored ‘movement away’ from the material of the preceding sections. In addition, the relative lengths of the recurrences as well as the frequency of the interchanges between them are constantly being altered. When the second interlude, already prefigured by the guitar, enters, it is perceived as a point of arrival.

The insistent 4-bar guitar pattern (with only vague harmonic implications) that runs through the entire second interlude (G’) is the first indicator of the song taking the turn towards a predominantly ‘vertical’ temporality. And this turn is completed with the arrival of the completely stationary pointillist texture at letter I, which comes at the heels of a more ‘directed’ version of the G section (most of all due to the steadily ascending bass line). The transitional part at I, then, corresponds with Kramer’s notion of a ‘single present’. This is even more the case for the ending, which basically consists of one and a half minute of repetitions of three different 1-bar patterns for electric guitar, two 1-bar patterns for piano – all of them written in a complimentary rhythmic fashion –, as well as sustained notes in the voice and bass. These parts slowly fade out, successively, until all that remains is the long-decayed delay feedbacks of a sustained guitar-G in each stereo channel. The evoking of a potentially infinite ‘now’...

Altogether, I regard these issues of musical temporality very relevant, though in no way conclusive by themselves, to my initial aim of establishing a link – and even a kind of stylistic kinship (a ‘bloodline’) – between the COMA-bands and progressive rock of the 1970’s. A further elaboration on the concepts of ‘linearity’ and ‘verticality’, as well as on the possibility of a progressive rock music in postmodern times, will be conducted in the final chapter.

4) Production

“When [the final mixes for *In Extremis* came back [from Bob Drake], it sounded weird to me. Because, you know, I was accustomed to hearing all of these parts very clearly. And [then] Bob took the whole thing and *smashed* it. Made it sound like it was smashed up against the window, and that you’re looking at the smashed sound, you know. The drums

were all (*makes whooshing sounds*) – really compressed. And [there were] funny things, like the drums were all over here on this side and the bass guitar was over there, and... I told him, I said: Well, I like the Beatles, I like Yes... like *Yes Album* – Yes. You know, I listed up all the holy things that he and I both liked, and he said: OK, cool! And he took it from there. And he did a hump of weird-ass shit. And it sounded... I wasn't used to the sound that Bob was being developing, and he hadn't got it fully developed yet. He probably didn't achieve the sound that he has now until a couple of years ago [...]. One of the [intermittent] stages was where he was when he did *In Extremis*, which ended up [as something that] everybody really thought was a great production - everybody really liked the sound. And I had to get used to it, I had to learn how to hear it! And finally I did".⁷

Part of what made the producing of *In Extremis* quite challenging, is that it contains material that was recorded (in several different locations) and mixed over several years. "Kingdom Come", "This Weird Wind" and "Les Etudes D'Organism" were all finished between 1992 and 1994, while the remaining songs stem from 1996-98. So, for the final mixing and mastering, Bob Drake faced the difficult task of making it all sound like it belonged on the same record, which was an engagement he met brilliantly, pure and simple. According to Johnson, "[Bob's] mixing gave [the album] a surprising cohesiveness".⁸

Achieving this cohesiveness, I reckon, necessarily forced some decisions in the mixing process, and I suspect that what Johnson refers to as a 'smashing' of the overall sound first and foremost is caused by the appliance of vast amounts of *compression* (a sound processing effect that reduces the dynamic range of a signal), both in the stages of mixing and mastering, to sort of 'even out' the differences (which stem from variations with regards to recording conditions) concerning the *presence* of individual instruments in the sound-box (Allan Moore's term). Consequently, regarding the final mix of *In Extremis*, energy and excitement certainly prevail, though somewhat at the expense of transparency and discreteness.

As far as the "hump of weird-ass shit"-factor goes, this, to my mind, is due to a 'hybrid' approach to the mixing process (analogous to James Grigsby's hybrid approach to composition – treated in the next chapter), as well as a conscious disturbance and subsequent displacement of (music-historically grounded) standards regarding 'normative placement' and

⁷ Personal interview with Mike Johnson, Denver 29.03.2005

⁸ Interview with Mike Johnson in Giant Progweed online magazine:
<http://www.progweed.net/interviews/thinkingplague.html>

‘registral differentiation’ of the individual sound sources comprising the soundstage. These are issues that will be treated further when concerning the music of the 5UU’s, issues that I see as intrinsic to the subversive, ‘underground’ and experimental impulses of rock in general, and avant rock in particular. Examples of such disturbances in “Dead Silence” are:

- 1) The horizontal relocation of the drums from the far right to the center in the transition from the song ‘proper’ to the development section (the norm is, contrarily, for the instruments and voices to retain (relatively) fixed positions)
- 2) (Relatedly:) The symmetrical relocation (‘channel swapping’) of the guitar and soprano saxophone at the exact same location.
- 3) The ‘wandering’ bass guitar, moving from left via the center to the right in the course of the song.

These are all issues of stereo placement and ‘panning’, but there’s also

- 4) The ‘master muted’ moment of silence in bar 82, where all reverberating sounds are deliberately *cut off*, a thing that, by demands of convention, one shall not do.

The final word might as well go to the sublimely laconic Bob Drake himself (who, among other things, did a host of rap and hip-hop sessions – including albums for Ice Cube – during his stint in big LA studios), whose personal take on these matters seems like a fitting, temporary conclusion of this discussion:

“I know how to make standard ‘state of the art’ recordings and mixes just like all the other experienced engineers on the planet. I just don’t feel like doing that, I did enough of it already, and that direction isn’t my deep interest”.⁹

⁹ Interview with Bob Drake in *Perfect Sound Forever*: <http://www.furious.com/PERFECT/bobdrake.html>

5) Motor Totemist Guild & U Totem

The LA-based ensemble Motor Totemist Guild (MTG) was originally formed in 1980 by composer and multi-instrumentalist James Grigsby:

“I had been in San Francisco, in college at San Francisco State. I actually was hoping to live there, but I couldn’t find a job (laughs). So I came back to Southern California, and my immediate plan was to save up enough money to start my own home studio, which I did. At the time, for home studios the technology was 4-track reel-to-reel, and so I had two 4-track machines, bouncing back and forth tracks, and just started recording. I called it Motor Totemist Guild even though it really wasn’t a band. Actually, it really wasn’t a band until after I released the first album [...] Initially it was more a collaboration of musicians”.¹

Some of those musicians ended up forming a more permanent line-up of MTG after the release of their album *Infra Dig* in 1984, one which included LA woodwinds legend Lynn Johnston, cellist Becky Heninger, reeds and keyboard player Christine Clements, and (eventually) flutist and vocalist par excellence Emily Hay as well as Eric Johnson-Tamai on bassoon, an instrument so essential to the sound of both MTG and U Totem later on. 5UU’s drummer and mastermind David Kerman was already in the fold as a “strongly associated member” from the early MTG records.

MTG released three “official” albums in their first period, *Infra Dig* (1984), *Contact With Veils* (1986) and *Shapuno Zoo* (1988), as well as some more “unofficial” ones called *Klang*, which included the notorious “Barbie Variations”, and *A Luigi Futi* (1989).

The stylistic platform for MTG’s output was primarily the varied musical upbringing of the group’s leader and ideological guiding spirit, James Grigsby. He explains:

“Well, one of the ideas that I had with MTG and really the whole reason for that name of Rotary Totem, Motor Totemist, and so on... I thought of a totem pole, this Pacific NorthWest... you’ve seen these poles... it’s various symbols from their mythology, so you have a frog, or an eagle or various animals. But they’re all within the same object. And with that I wanted to evoke the idea of multiple styles fused together. And ‘Motor’ in it was the idea of... well, going from motor to

¹ Personal interview with James Grigsby, La Brea, California 26.03.2005

totem is like... it's the idea of electric and acoustic, coexisting. So that's why I had cello plus synthesizer. So I wanted to... From, really, the start, my idea was a **hybrid** of musics".²

He explained to me that when he studied music in college, there was a huge gap between the professors, who mostly were schooled in the strict styles of Schoenberg and Webern, and the new generation of minimalist composers, including Steve Reich, Terry Riley and Philip Glass, that were the people bringing art music forward at this point. Grigsby himself resisted both of these "camps", as they were striving for a purity of music. Grigsby: "You know, they were going: 'This is our philosophy of music, and we don't let anything else into this at all. We're going to remain pure and on this one path'. And that's not my personality".³

On the contrary, Grigsby grew up listening to rock'n'roll and jazz, and in the 1970's he even played in a Balinese gamelan group in San Francisco, an influence that is quite evident in especially MTG's music. So he asked himself how he could put all of these influences together, including BOTH the serialists and the minimalists, and make a hybrid of it. He elaborates this a bit further:

"And so I thought, well, my style is going to be "hybrid style". And the thing that makes it me is my personality, and the way that I put these things together. So I tried sometimes to put as many things as possible within one piece. [In] the first piece on the U Totem CD, "One Nail Draws Another" [...] I was trying to combine various styles, from Palestrina style counterpoint to rock – a sort of riff-style, [from] a song style to a twelve-note serial composition, from a Renaissance motet – vocal music – to Balinese gamelan rhythms, and put this all into one piece of music. So that's one of the pieces I felt that I was fairly successful at creating a hybrid [...]. And that's kind of been the way I've been looking at music all along, as a hybrid. To try and take all of these disparate elements and make something that sounds like it's unified. And sometimes I veer of that course, but that's my general course [laughs]"⁴

One of the students of American musicologist John Covach, Brandon Derfler, has written an extensive analysis on this piece, titled "U Totem's 'One Nail Draws Another' as Art Music", on which I will offer some brief remarks at the end of this chapter.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The band U Totem surfaced around 1989, when James Grigsby, Emily Hay and Eric Johnson from MTG, and David Kerman and Sanjay Kumar from the 5UU's decided to join their musical forces. Grigsby recalls that he first got to know Dave Kerman through COMA, and that the idea of U Totem came up after the two of them had worked hard for a while trying to get distribution for MTG's records in Europe:

“[Kerman] had corresponded with [Chis] Cutler (of Henry Cow and Recommended Records) over the years just as a fan, and I don't know how he developed a rapport with him, but he did (laughs). So he had this connection and sort of helped me into it, and this helped me to actually get my records out to Europe, because at that time they (Recommended Records) had a really nice network in Europe. They had distributors in France and Holland as well as in England, and even in Germany. So actually, through working out the recordings with Dave, we actually decided to collaborate musically, and that's really how U Totem came about”.⁵

The U Totem rock-chamber ensemble released their first, eponymously titled, album in 1990 on Cuneiform Records. This album contains compositions by Grigsby and Kerman, respectively, as well as collaborative efforts involving the entire group.

After the release of the first album, Kerman floated more and more over into the “new” 5UU's line-up, featuring Bob Drake, and Grigsby was left with all of the writing duties for U Totem's second album, which was put out on Cuneiform in 1994. This album features shorter songs, and interestingly has a booklet with a series of short noir-stories with an Eastern (particularly Japanese) tinge, all written by Grigsby, and linked together through common characters and a semi-red thread to form a complete novella spawning an entire fictional noir-universe. Grigsby adds more on the invocation of this fascinating album:

“In fact, that music went through a lot of changes. The original idea... originally I wrote the novella first. And I wasn't thinking of it as music. I wrote it because I wanted to write it, I don't know why [laughs]. When you write things, you just do them. And then I thought: I can make this into music. And originally I was going to transcribe everything, and make it almost like an opera.

My idea was to have the characters singing their parts and the narrator singing the part, and get something that could be done on stage almost as an opera. Well, logistically, that was just too hard to do. I HAD this band (U Totem), and so I figured, well... I started writing a couple of

⁵ Ibid.

pieces that way, but I ended up collapsing everything for ONE singer, so Emily is singing the narrator and all the characters, even though my original idea would have been to have different people do the different parts. It ended going in a different... as projects develop, they go in different directions.

And also, the feedback that I was getting from Steve at Cuneiform was... he didn't see it being possible for him to sell something that grandiose. And it would have taken me a lot longer, and he didn't want to wait several years [laughs]. And so it developed in a different way".⁶

One can clearly hear the residues of that original idea in the 46-minute course of the *Strange Attractors* album. The operatic concepts of aria and recitative are employed throughout, and there are even the ubiquitous atmospheric instrumental interludes interspersed between vocal tracks. The first song, "No Mo Ippon", can even be viewed as a kind of overture. Grigsby continues:

"And the other thing that I was trying to do in the pieces that DO use the literal text, was organizing the music around the rhythms of speech. So I would think... OK, I would recite the narrative, and try and capture the rhythm first, without thinking of notes or harmonies or melody at all. So I would just get tatah – tatah – tatatata – tatah, whatever the rhythm of speaking was. And then, once I had that, I had a continuity. So I had my whole structure based on just the words. And then I could create the harmony and melody and arrangement against that structure. So that's really how that came to be. And, again, it was going to be ALL that way, but it ended up going in different directions".⁷

I have chosen the track "Ginger Tea" from *Strange Attractors* as my object of analysis, because I regard this composition as pretty representative of the "hybrid", chamber-rock style of both of Grigsby's groups, but especially U Totem. My original first choice was the aforementioned "One Nail Draws Another", but I've decided to employ Defler's analysis as source material here, and just make some short comments on his excellent paper as a wrap-up of this chapter. The original score of "Ginger Tea" has generously been provided by Mr. James Grigsby himself.

⁶ Ibid.

“Ginger Tea” (*Strange Attractors*)

“Ginger Tea” clearly illustrates Grigsby’s main artistic project for this album, namely using the *rhythm of speech* as his central structural device. The lyrics for this song is a short story written in regular prose which employs virtually none of the traditional features of song lyrics, neither rhyme schemes nor regular strophic structures. So Grigsby takes the sentences one by one, assigns a natural speech rhythm to the syllables comprising them, and finally adds pitches to form a melody for singer Emily Hay.

The song employs no traditional formal divisions like verse, chorus, bridges etc. Its main structuring devices are the story told by the lyrics, as well as some brief motivic ideas that are introduced, transformed and juxtaposed continually throughout the song. I will consider these different motives in the next section.

An (admittedly quite elaborate) formal chart of «Ginger Tea» might look something like figure 4.1. I have consequently aligned the formal division points with paragraph shifts in the lyrics, which seems to me to be the chief formal structuring device of the piece. This often coincides quite well with the shifts in the main musical material employed in the different sections. The most troubling musical passage in this regard was bars 8-25 (letter B), which actually consists of three radically different sections:

- a passacaglia-like 12-tone row with octave-displaced melody fragments (typically pointillist writing) – bars 8-17
- rhythmical intensification through bursts of arpeggiated 32nd-notes – bars 18-21.
- Eb whole-tone thirds sequence in guitar and piano's LH juxtaposed with chromatic 4ths in piano RH over an Eb pedal in the bass & bassoon – bars 22-25

But considering the fact that the tempo is more or less the same through these 16 bars (it actually changes at 26, the first bar of section C), that the lyrics sung consist of the entire second half of the 1st paragraph, and, finally, that the passacaglia returns in developed form at the start of section C, it makes sense to lump them all together under the same sectional letter, namely B.

⁷ Ibid.

«Ginger Tea», formal chart

Bar no.	Lenght	Time	Formal name	Description	Key area	Instrumentation etc.
1 – 7	7 bars	0:00 – 0:26	A	Introduction	D / Ab	Vocals, bassoon, piano, guitar, bass, drums
8 – 25	18 bars	0:26 – 1:13	B	1 st paragraph	D+Eb WT	Major sevenths in abundance.
26 – 31	6 bars	1:13 – 1:35	C	2 nd paragraph	D / Ab	Tempo change – slower. Polyrhythm 3 vs. 4
32 – 45	14 bars	1:35 – 2:14	D	3 rd paragraph	D loc. (WT)	First appearance of “cluster signal”.
46 – 58	13 bars	2:15 – 2:37	E (D')	4 th paragraph	G (phryg.)	Cluster signal. Trills motive.
59 – 66	8 bars	2:37 – 2:52	Transition	Dialogue	G (phryg.)	Tempo gradually slower.
67 – 72	6 bars	2:52 – 3:20	F	5 th paragraph	Eb	Slower, contemplating. Release section.
73 – 78	6 bars	3:20 – 3:43	G	Dialogue	G?	Cluster signal. Isorhythmical patterns.
79 – 83	5 bars	3:43 – 4:01	H	6 th paragraph	C loc.	Rhythmic unison. Constant intervals.
84 – 93	10 bars	4:02 – 4:35	I	7 th paragraph	G (phryg.)	Isorhythmical patterns.
94 – 97	4 bars	4:35 – 4:51	Transition	Dialogue	G (phryg.)	Trills.
98 - 105	8 bars	4:51 – 5:27	J	8 th paragraph	C	Trills.
106 – 112	7 bars	5:27 – 5:56	K	Dialogue	Ab	Cluster harmony exclusively. Guitar adds feedback drone.

I've made some rather subjective decisions when it comes to the separation of sections marked by formal letters (A, B etc.) from shorter sections that I've chosen to name “transitions”. These latter ones always coincide with small snippets of dialogue.

I will now proceed to take a look at some of the central motivic ideas of “Ginger Tea”:

1) Motives and themes

“Ginger Tea” represents an entire textbook of transformational techniques favoured by 20th century composers. Grigsby utilizes transposition, imitation, prolongation, mirroring, juxtaposition and several other techniques to develop often very small motivic cells and rows. As far as the vocal part goes, the melody is of the “stream of consciousness”-type – not surprisingly, as it is structured rhythmically from syllables of normal speech and a very stylized type of “tonefall”. So it's exceedingly difficult to point out any particular recurring motives, simply because there are virtually none. But turning over to the rather involved, polyphonic accompaniment, one will find that the entire composition is conceived out of a collection of motivic cells. I've picked out a few to illustrate Grigsby's working methods:

a: 2 three-note cluster chords, c-f-gb and F³-Gb³-B³ (bars 1 & 2)

These two piano clusters form the most important kernel motive of the entire tune. They crop up already in the very first bar, and in the final section they form the entire harmonic foundation as they are hammered out repeatedly in a march-like fashion. Most often they occur at phrase endings and other important structural points. Upon closer inspection, they are actually mirrored clusters. Together they form an D13#9 chord or Ab13#9 chord, depending on the bass' root. This particular root relationship will be treated more elaborately in the section concerning harmony.

b: The “cluster signal” (bar 32)

Another key motive with direct formal implications is the “cluster signal” which first occurs as a brief prelude to the D section. It consists of two major second intervals a tritone apart. It also marks the transition to sections E, G and I, and, as a matter of fact, a pretty solid case could be made for restructuring the entire formal scheme according to the recurrences of this motivic cell. It then would look something like the following (agreeably rough) chart:

Section A: **Intro**

Sections B & C: **A**

Sections D & E (first appearance of cluster signal): **B** and **B'**.

Section F (release section - choral): **C**

Section G & H (new material superimposed on repeated cluster signal): **D**

Section I (transformed cluster signal utilizing the cluster chords *a*): **E**

Sections J & K: **Ending** (with material primarily derived from the *intro* and **B** sections)

This considerably simplifies the form: **Intro ABB'CDE Ending**

I will, though, continue to utilize my original chart, giving preference to the structuring power of the *lyrics*, in the remainder of this analysis.

c: The major seventh interval & “fake” twelve-tone row (bar 12-18)

The bass line starting out in section B, bar 12 makes excessive use of major seventh intervals, and the notes form what I would name a “fake” twelve-tone row, one consisting of all twelve tones, but where some are repeated before the completion of the row. The same row is utilized in the piano's left hand in section C, bars 26-27, this time in 16th-note values, and in bars 28-29, there's an ascending sequence exclusively made up of rising major 7th intervals.

d: Isorhythmical pattern, main motive in section D (bar 7)

This idea is introduced as a 6-note isorhythmical pattern in bars 7 and 39, and is transformed into a 7-note pattern with figurations in bars 41-44. Small “liquidated” residues occurs in bars 95-97.

e: Isorhythmical pattern, main motive in sections D & E (bars 34-37)

This pattern consists of 7 different notes and is inserted into the following rhythmic scheme: 16th + 32nd + 32nd + 16th + 16th + 32nd + 32nd + 16th + 16th etc. In this way, the notes will very rarely (in this particular case - never) occur twice on the same beat of the 6/16 subdivision. This invokes a fluctuating sense of restlessness. It is first introduced in bars 34-37 (D), occurs in bars 48-51 (E) and then in bars 63-64 as a transition to the release section F. In bars 65-66, melodic residues are employed in the flute part as a build-down into the quasi-choral starting out at bar 67. In the D and E sections, this motivic idea is accompanied by a rhythmically similar quasi-mirrored bass line in (arguably) D locrian that has polytonal implications for both motive *e* (which resides somewhere between D locrian and D whole tone) and motive *b* (the two maj. 2nd – clusters forming a F7b5 chord which has an undisputed whole-tone character).

f: Polytonal D locrian/Ab mixolydian arpeggio figure (bar 3)

Introduced in bar 3, this arpeggiated chord is central to the I section, and forms the transition from the choral part at F into section G. Interestingly, at letter I, the arpeggio is played simultaneously, through juxtaposition, in three different guises:

- in original form in the piano's right hand
- in tight imitation (altså tettføring – slå opp!) in piano's left hand
- in a slightly altered, prolonged eight-note version in bass and bassoon

This motive also exemplifies the primary harmonic relationship and tension in “Ginger Tea”, namely the interval of a tritone between the tonal levels of D and Ab.

g: Ascending whole- tone bass line (bar 7)

As illustrated by the motives that have been treated so far in this section, quite a few are introduced as early on as the first 8 bars (my initial A section). This also applies to the four-note ascending bass line first played by the bassoon in bar 7. It occurs again in bars 41-44 as foundation for motive *d*, and then in a liquidated, semi-tone pendular form (implying G phrygian) in bars 57-64. Bars 65-66 (the transition to the choral section) employ the original form one again. An extended derivation of this line is seen in the piano's left hand (bottom note) in bars 28-29.

h: “Trill” motive (bars 52-55)

Over a tension-building Gb-pedal introducing a new tonal area, this idea first crops up as a semitone trill between Db and D in the piano's left hand in bars 52-55, creating a time-stopping effect of suspended motion. It's then utilized as a device “supporting” the lyrical content as the temperature in the story rises gradually through section J. This time, the oscillation occurs between G and Ab and D and Eb, respectively, further emphasizing the importance of the minor second (which, inverted, becomes a major 7th) in the course of “Ginger Tea”.

i: Minor seventh idea – invariant dyads (bars 20-21)

Most evident in section H, played in a full rhythmic unison, the melody is harmonized below with constant minor 7ths. This idea first occurs in bars 20-21 (ascending arpeggio in piano).

2) Harmonic patterns and procedures

A) Cluster harmony (or inversions of quartal structures that involve min. 2nds)

This type of harmony, much more common in the musical realms of art music and jazz than in rock or “popular” forms, is encountered in abundance as “Ginger Tea” unfolds. The aforementioned clusters (or, more accurately, quartal inversions) named motive *a* in the section above are just one of several examples. Generally, they sort into three types:

- 1) Minor 2nd + perfect 4th or vice versa (bars 1-2) – inv. of 3-note quartal structure
- 2) Major 2nd + perfect 4th + minor 2nd (a combination of the two above, bar 10)
- 3) Perfect 4th + minor 2nd + Perfect 4th (bar 26)

B) Quartal harmony with added notes

This type of harmony represents an opening-up of the tautness and “bite” of minor second-laden cluster chords, and resides in the “grey” area between consonance and dissonance. An example is found in bar 5.

The same kind of structures is employed very effectively for contrast at letter F (67-71), the “release” section. A row of seven huge chords, all diatonic to the new key area of E flat major (but by no means acting “functionally” in the traditional sense of the word), are played twice, the second time utilizing rhythmic displacement. The more “airy” type of harmony in these bars, combined with the move from a busy polyphonic texture to choral-type homophonic writing, contribute to a feeling of relaxedness and calm, and also fits together well with the distanced, “observatory” lyrics in this part of the piece.

A brief example, not very representative of the overall harmonic world of “Ginger Tea”, but still interesting as an illustration of Grigsby's art music leanings and fancy for hidden quotations, is found in bars 82-83, where Wagnerian-type “vagrant” harmonies are employed, even the infamous Tristan-chord. These chords, as well, can be sorted under the tag of “quartal structures”.

The tension between the two kinds of harmony (cluster and quartal) is literally *played out* in section J (bars 98-105), where 3-note quartal structures and inversions and derivations of motive *d* harmonized in 4ths and quartal dyads (4ths and 5ths) are set out against semitone trills, the two motive *a*-clusters and ascending Ab major arpeggios neighboured a semitone below. Finally, at letter K, clusters (motive *a*) win over, and prevail exclusively up until the song's end.

3) Orchestration/instrumentation

In this section, I've decided to consider instrumentation and orchestration at the level of the *score*, as is the common approach in traditional musicology. Production, on the other hand, will be treated at the level of the *sound* itself, in this case the recorded version of “Ginger Tea” as found on the U Totem CD *Strange Attractors*.

Some discrepancies occur between the written and recorded parts, probably due to last-minute changes and decisions in the recording studio, but most of the time the differences are so slight that I won't dwell further into this aspect.

“Ginger Tea” is written for a line-up of vocals, flute, bassoon, piano/synthesizer, guitar, electric bass and drum kit/percussion, a cross between a rock group and a small chamber ensemble. Brandon Derfler, subsequently, describes U Totem as a “rock-chamber ensemble”.⁸ The piece is entirely through-composed, and the only “improvised” feature in the course of the song is an overdubbed guitar feedback drone which marks the start of the final section K.

Grigsby utilizes excessive doubling of parts throughout, so there are seldom more than three, and often two or even just one, different melodic and harmonic ideas going on

⁸ Brandon Derfler: “U Totem’s ‘One Nail Draws Another’ as Art Music”, pre-publication version

simultaneously. One interesting feature is that the vocal line is very often doubled, either melodically - at the unison or octave - by one of the tonal instruments, or rhythmically, by the drums. Often more than one instrument is employed for doubling, i.e. section C, where the vocal line is thickened by flute, bassoon and guitar.

The bass guitar is employed as a melody instrument throughout, playing mostly linear parts in much the same vein as the other instruments in the ensemble. The traditional “laying-down-the-bottom”-approach found in much rock and popular music is more or less absent, with a notable exception for the chugging riff that is fundamental to section K, the march-type ending of the song. Also interesting are the rumbling, low- to mid-register tritonal double-stops used first as a pedal point (the old D/Ab complex again...) in bars 26-31 (section C), and then as string bass-type percussive accents (as part of a C-F-B quartal structure) in section J, bars 99-105.

The same “orchestrational” approach is applied to the drum part (not notated in the score – Dave Kerman probably learned the song by ear at rehearsals). Kerman’s kit more often than not doubles one (or, sometimes, two) of the other parts (and by no means restricting himself to the bass part, as would probably be customary) in a rhythmic unison, and more seldom settles in to the typical rock “groove”. When this occurs, it's often employed in very short spans of musical time, often just one, two or four bars, contributing to the song's overall “start-stop” rhythmical profile. Examples of more groove-oriented drumming are found in bar 7 (underlying the isorhythmical pattern of motive *d*), bars 22-25, bars 39 and 41-44 (motive *d* once again), bars 61-62 (a particularly “prog-rock” type of riff), bar 96-97 (last gasp of motive *d*) and the entire section K. Except for these relatively few instances, the rest of the drum part is “scored” for a carefully selected percussion palette of kick drum, snare, toms, cymbals as well as hand percussion, bells, wood- and temple-blocks and triangle.

4) Production

Turning over to the question of what kind of *production values* are represented by the song, a first initial observation is that the general **sound** of “Ginger Tea” in its recorded guise is one of *transparency* and *intimacy*.

The acoustic instruments are exemplary recorded, and very little doubling and tripling of tracks is utilized. All parts are heard clearly and are evenly balanced, and the keyboard's MIDI patches are well integrated into the overall acoustic ensemble due to careful use of the mixer's equalizer. Still, the undoubtedly more “electronic” nature of the synthesized sounds contributes to a natural separation of the parts in the sonic space. The different parts' placing in the vertical axis of the sound-box (aka. stereo panning) is pretty much constant, and this invokes an impression of hearing the full band in the studio performing the piece “live”.

This feeling of intimacy, but also of presence and “upfrontness”, is reinforced further by the quite minimal use of reverb and other electronic effects. This all contributes to generating a kind of *chamber-rock* vibe, as the productional values clearly resemble those applied on recordings of chamber music ensembles from the realm of art music.

The limited number of musical voices and parts, combined with the restrained use of overdubs, makes it possible to fit all the instruments into the sound-box without making compromises with regards to volume or forcing excessive subtractive use of the equalizer, which will strip (especially acoustic) instruments of their natural richness of overtones. So the overall effect is one of tautness and “punchiness”. This, in my opinion, fits in well with the complex linear writing and the music's sense of *immediacy* and *urgency* due to the concise and firmly controlled motivic treatment, as well as the “hyppige” and “brå” shifts between sections fundamentally different in character. The music is never allowed to meander or wander along for anything but very brief periods of time. The intimate, tidy and well balanced production allows all the intricacies of the music to be perceived by the listener.

Very crudely, one could say that U Totem is more of a score-oriented, “writing” band than, for instance, the 5UU's (treated in the next chapter), who are generally more riff-oriented when it comes to the actual writing, but does just as much compositional work in the studio itself, carefully sculpturing the sonic space that Moore refers to as the “sound-box”.

5) “One Nail Draws Another” and “Ginger Tea”

In an insightful article titled “U Totem's *One Nail Draws Another* as Art Music”, John Covach' protégé Brandon Derfler makes a convincing case for considering and approaching

James Grigsby's music as part of the Western art music tradition rather than the rock tradition”, as it shares “a majority of the same procedural, formal, timbral and/or harmonic practices as those pieces which are part of this tradition”.⁹

His main piece of evidence in this regard is “One Nail Draws Another”, the opening track from U Totem's eponymous album released in 1990. This archetypal composition is probably THE primary example of Grigsby's highly “contaminated” (Bill Martin's expression) hybrid style, and Derfler conducts a thorough analysis of the song's formal, motivic and harmonic construction. His main findings can be summarized as follows:

I) Serial and diatonic organization

Derfler finds that a large part of the motives and themes in “One Nail Draws Another” stems from two basic *rows*. The first is a serial, 12-tone row with obvious similarities on both the hexachordal and trichordal levels (Figure 4.1). The second is a diatonic scale known as the 5th mode of the ascending melodic minor scale. Both the dodecaphonic and the diatonic row starts with the note F#, which thereby forms the central key area of the piece.

As development of his basic material is concerned, Grigsby utilizes both serial manipulatory techniques such as retrograde, row rotation, segmentation (into tetrachords, pentachords etc.), reordering of row members within smaller units (à la Schoenberg) and pitch subtraction (to divulge the serial row's relationship to the diatonic set) for the *dodecaphonic row*, and furthermore derivation of different subsets (a.o. the pentatonic scale, the half-diminished seventh chord and the whole-tone scale) from his *diatonic scale*.

II) Quotation

The two musical quotations most evidently present in “One Nail Draws Another” are the Blondie song “One Way or Another” (from the album *Parallel Lines*), the last refrain of which clearly resembles the chorus of Grigsby's composition, and the 15th-century *L'homme armé* popular tune. One staggering section in which this melody is employed is the three-

⁹ Ibid: 2

voice motet texture starting out at bar 80, where references to medieval and Renaissance music are found in abundance. This includes doubling of all three vocal parts by instruments, a single snare drum acting as a tambour and all the voices singing in different languages (Japanese, English and German) “to evoke the multilingual 13th-century motet”.¹⁰ Both tunes are fragmented and quoted extensively in the piece.

III) Form

By constructing his vast musical fabric from these relatively few, carefully selected snippets of musical material, systematically exploring and exploiting their inherent characteristics and potential for alteration and juxtaposition, Grigsby displays a “formal organization [that] is tightly controlled and organically conceived”.¹¹

Derfler, very convincingly, proceeds to show that the overall form of the piece could be considered being “a combination of sonata form (complete with introduction and coda) and arch form”.¹² Thus, the large formal divisions looks like this:

Introduction - twelve tone row, diatonic transition, <i>L'homme armé</i> .	1 – 30
A - verse, chorus (“One Nail” theme - 'A')	31 – 50
B - unison theme 'B' (free atonal) juxtaposed with serial row. Isorhythmic sequence and canon.	51 – 79
C - motet over <i>L'homme armé</i> (theme 'C') Restatement of 'A' theme - “One Nail...”	80 - 126
Development – mainly developing 'A' and 'C' themes	127 - 148

¹⁰ Ibid: 13

¹¹ Ibid: 14

¹² Ibid

C' -	motet over <i>L'homme armé</i> (w/imitation)	149 - 172
B' -	'B' theme & phase-shifted row; aleatoric section	173 - 184
A' -	verse, chorus ('A' theme)	185 - 191
Coda -	rhythmical contraction and lengthening of basic row augmentation of theme 'B' final transformation (through rests) of 12-tone row into diatonic scale	192 - 246

Derfler states that “after noting all the compositional complexities in Grigsby's score [...] that stem from Western European art music practices [...], one is hard pressed to pronounce unambiguously that this music stems from the rock tradition”. With this point I agree, up to a certain point. He withholds that 'One Nail Draws Another' seems “best classified as art music with a considerable rock influence”.¹³ He names these influences as being most apparent in the *instrumentation* (rock 'power trio' with keyboards and 'classical' instruments), the style of *drumming*, occasional rock clichés and “*licks*”, the *studio and recording environment* used as a compositional tool and timbral modifier, and finally the *marketing* of the group and its music.

Though I tend to go along with Derfler as far as these specific “rock” traits go, my own personal view is that the rock and popular music influences creep even further into the music of U Totem, all the way into the levels of this particular score and even the general musical *style*. I would like to name three additional examples to illustrate this:

First of all, the verse part of “One Nail Draws Another” evokes obvious connotations to one of the most popular of song forms, namely the *musical* and its *show tune*, with it's “overveierende” diatonic melody and deliberate invoking of harmonic clichés such as the aeolian IV⁶ - I^{#3} cadence, the extremely “utbredt” use of the diminished 7th chord as a passing chord (for instance, in the pendular progression Em7 - E^o7 – Em7 (bar 35)), the augmented 5th of a major 7th chord resolving to a natural 5th (bar 39-40), not to mention the pedalled bass line descending stepwise every fourth bar, starting at bar 31: F#, E, D, C#.

¹³ Ibid: 17

This also applies to the chorus (“One nail – draws another...”) as well (bars 47-49). Diatonic melody line outlining the notes of a F# major triad, sung over a phrygian VII – VI^{#5} – (I – I^{#3} – II) – VI – II harmonic progression, involving both the ubiquitous harmonic twist of Em – F# and the (by composers of musicals, especially) beloved **m7^{b5}**, which also could be interpreted as a **m⁶** (with a different root) chord. In the key of F# major, these translate into G#m7^{b5} and Bm⁶, respectively).

Another, the third, example is found in bars 51-60, namely the theme labeled 'B' by Derfler. He describes it as “a curious, free atonal passage in shifting meters, played forte and in unison by the entire ensemble. It strikes one as sounding quite similar to some of Frank Zappa's unison ensemble passages”.¹⁴

To me, this is nothing but an archetypal *progressive rock riff*, such as could be found in the music of i.e. Gentle Giant, played, as it is here, over a steady drum groove that emphasizes regular quavers. Fringe fusion artists that stylistically reside close to progressive rock, such as Chick Corea's Return To Forever, also employ these kinds of unison, riff-type passages excessively, especially on their *Romantic Warrior* album. The defining features are (as Derfler rightly points out) constantly shifting meters, large intervallic skips, rhythmic displacements through anticipations and delays, all delivered with great energy and a “rocking” spirit!

Such progressive rock - type *riffs* occur several times in “Ginger Tea” as well, most notably in bars 61-62, a hectic riff in the 5/16 meter so fancied by the 70's progressive rock exponents, and in bars 76-78 – a Gentle Giant'ish isorhythmical pattern (9/16 over 4/4) outlining Ab7b5 and D7b5 chords, respectively.

John Covach, musicology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (originally Brandon Derfler's teacher) evokes the notion of “what he sees as a musical “middleground”, or a *stylistically balanced meeting-point* between the two traditions”¹⁵:

It would seem that 90s prog musicians and art-music composers may be approaching a certain musical middle ground from opposite ends [...]. *There are, of course, fundamental distinctions to make between contemporary progressive rock and crossover* [music from ‘classical’ composers that borrow from rock], and it is important that one doesn't

¹⁴ Ibid: 15

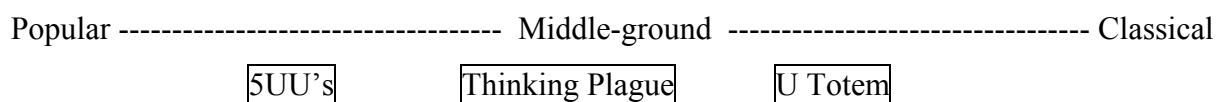
¹⁵ Ibid: 5

approach [contemporary American composer Steve] Mackey’s ‘Physical Property’ as if it were rock music, or approach [American 90s’ progressive rock band] Echolyn’s ‘Letters’ as if it were art music; each would suffer under such an aesthetic interpretation. But still, within the larger question of the relationship between popular and art music in American culture, it is tempting to wonder whether there really could be a music that would not need to be qualified as either pop or classical and yet be meaningful in some aesthetic sense. If such stylistic distinctions were ever erased for future listeners (or at least found by them to be irrelevant), *perhaps progressive rock would also lose its stylistic distinctiveness in the bargain.*

It may well be that in order for prog or crossover music to be interesting, each must blur that line in the listener’s understanding that may be thought to separate popular and art music in American culture – to challenge the stylistic division in a way that causes one to hold more than one repertory in the ear as music-stylistic points of reference. It seems then that *progressive rock may be at its best when it celebrates the tension between rock and classical music without ever really resolving it.*”¹⁶

The way I see it, Covach aims straight for the matter here, in the final paragraphs of his article on the evolution of American progressive rock. I’ve emphasized some sentences that I consider being of vital importance to the present discussion.

First of all, the notion of a musical middle-ground, with the strictly theoretical ‘pure’ forms of popular music and classical music placed on the extreme left and right, respectively, of a horizontal axis, would be a convenient way to ‘place’ each of my featured COMA-bands in a stylistic relationship with one another:



Due to what I see as a particular “unity” and even “completeness” in Thinking Plague’s synthesis of popular (rock) and classical styles, for me, they are the group coming closest to residing in such a musical middle-ground. The 5UU’s (treated in the next chapter) have far more explicit leanings towards popular styles, at least in the surface features of their particular

idiolect, while U Totem's (primarily Grigsby's) music invokes such a great number of techniques and compositional "complexities that stem from Western European art music practices"¹⁷ that they belong somewhat closer to the other end of this scale.

But this is generally too simple a categorization, because I still cling firmly to my original claim that all three of these groups have an inherent connection to progressive *rock*, which means that in my view, U Totem, though deeply indebted to the legacy of 20th century art music, is certainly not a crossover artist (although it may seem that way according to the illustration above), but rather an avant-chamber-rock – band. And this is precisely where Covach's *fundamental distinctions between contemporary progressive rock and crossover* come into play.

The primary question is: What can be named as such distinctions? Or, to rephrase the question in the voice of Bill Martin - "how do we know that some experimental rock music is indeed 'rock' music?" His answer is basically twofold: "There is the lineage, you might say, that the musicians have participated in – they 'come out of' a background in rock music". Which by all means is significant, but as Martin admits, "this doesn't mean very much in a period when anyone can come from any background and play any kind of music".

So he goes on to suggest that "the other identifying feature might be the presence of *instruments typically associated with rock music*: electric guitars and bass guitars, trap drums (which are typical of jazz as well, of course) and electric and electronic keyboards. But this is no more than a kind of indicator; surely a genre of music should not be identified merely by the sorts of instruments used to play it".¹⁸

This, of course, leaves us with a veritable status quo. Having the history of rock music as a "backdrop", as well maintaining the presence of rock music instruments (especially - I would say - the drum kit) in the music are indicators, to be sure, of the music at least *relating* to "rock", but if one should stop there, it would seem to seal the case up for Derfler. So, to pursue this even a bit further, could it be possible to find elements of rock music (especially progressive rock) influence that are *intrinsic* to the music itself, regardless of what instruments that are employed to perform it?

¹⁶ Covach 2000: 54

¹⁷ Derfler: "U Totem...": 17

¹⁸ Martin 1997: 99

I would like to think so, and I've already endeavored to find such evidence in the music of Thinking Plague. Maybe a couple more consultations with Martin can reveal some additional insights. In his latest book on the topic of avant rock, he grapples with these issues once more:

“What is ‘rock’? [...] Rock, at its very roots, is a derivative and synthetic form of music [...] [As] an always-already “contaminated” form of music, rock calls into question the whole idea of genre - for surely every kind of music has its roots in something else. [...] One might attempt a simple substitution. Instead, why not ask, Does it *rock*? If the music ‘rocks’, then you have answered the question, at least by an openness to examples, of what the music is in its basic form. Of course, this is too simple, and yet [...] I want to hold on to it”.¹⁹

After this preliminary exercise, the plot eventually starts to thicken:

“[If] one were a young artist with avant-garde inclinations [in these postmodern times], one might just as likely and just as validly work out these inclinations on the basis of rock music as on the European classical tradition or the jazz tradition. Indeed, for all that the canons of jazz and classical music still may be extended in creative ways, there are also significant ways in which these canons can be stifling. Rock music, on the other hand, tends to admit all comers [...]”²⁰

And:

“In rock music, [an] extreme stretching of song form, sometimes to the breaking point, was first evident in the music of the psychedelic groups [and] many of the progressive rock groups [...] And yet, [...] even in the most far-flung examples of the music, [there continues to be] a recognizable recognition to song or dance. This is very obvious in the case of an artist such as Björk, where a singular vocal instrument meets Stockhausen on the way to the disco. What seems to be behind such combinations – which are undoubtedly ‘postmodern’ – is a dynamic of the avant-garde that exists in rock music but not in jazz or European classical music. Avant rock resists and plays off the *mainstream* of rock music, but it might not have the sort of *antagonism* toward the mainstream that one often sees in jazz and classical avant-gardes”²¹

This seems to be a more fruitful approach. The “anti-antagonism” of rock music, or, in other words, a “dialectic between margin and center”, is part of what Martin refers to as “the ‘rock

¹⁹ Martin 2002: 180

²⁰ Ibid: 187

²¹ Ibid: 188

sensibility’ about making music”. Due to the fact that he deals with “some figures who, though they have spent considerable time and effort on the borderlands of rock, clearly cross into other territories as well”. Often, these territories are new and previously undefined, and there is an open debate with regards to their mutual placing on the musical map and drawing-up of lines and borders, but “in some sense [Martin claims] these territories for rock; the reason is the sensibility with which these new explorations have been undertaken”. But, as he seems satisfied with concluding, “definitions here, ultimately, are a matter of what Wittgenstein called ‘family resemblance’”.²²

Which means that by naming numerous examples of artists to whose works this ‘rock sensibility’ is intrinsic, one becomes at least implicitly aware of the nature of this very sensibility. To Martin, both Glenn Branca (the writer of electric guitar symphonies who was part of New York’s ‘No Wave’ art rock scene), John Zorn, Bill Laswell, the Kronos Quartet, Evelyn Glennie (a classical percussionist) and Sonic Youth, though all deeply immersed in and indebted to other musical styles, traditions and avant-gardes, are still, first and foremost, expressing this kind of sensibility in their music.

This, intuitively, seems essentially right (or at least *essential*), as far as I am concerned. The integral parts of the rock music language – such as its generous synthesis, its dynamic interaction between margin and center, its subversive energy and its capability of “reconstituting the other traditions (including their respective ‘mainstreams’) in such a way that we can have Beethoven and Bernstein and Berio - because rock is open to all of it” – are all constituent parts of this sensibility, as is the so-called ‘Springsteen principle’, where ‘the core of the work [...] is still *songwriting craft*, albeit overlaid with far out, difficult, complex textures and rhythms [...]”.²³ For the COMA-bands, one might indeed also employ ‘composerly *handicraft*’ as an essential trait – more on this in the last chapter.

So, to conclude this section, one could say that due to the very ‘generousness’ of Grigsby’s *hybrid* approach (as illustrated in the analysis of two of his pieces), as well as the music’s inherent capabilities of reconstituting and even reconnecting with a myriad of other musical styles and traditions (including their respective mainstreams), at least for me his music exhibits a sensibility that is true to that of ‘rock’. And furthermore, as his compositional oeuvre indeed shows no lack of *epic vision and approach to composition* (both on the levels

²² Ibid: 111

of the individual tune and that of the complete album), nor of a *romantic utopianism*, I would claim, that his music carries forward a specifically '*progressive rock*' - sensibility.

²³ Ibid: 170

6) Dave Kerman / The 5UU's

Drummer, percussionist, guitarist and composer extraordinaire David Kerman occupies a unique position in this tale of American avant-progressive rock, being a key figure in all the bands that are treated herein. For instance, Kerman plays a central role on all of the following albums:

Contact with Veils (Motor Totemist Guild)

Shapuno Zoo (Motor Totemist Guild)

U Totem (U Totem)

Strange Attractors (U Totem)

In Extremis (Thinking Plague)

He is something of a nomad both literary speaking and in the musical sense of the word. From his outset as part of the COMA organization in LA, he has moved back and forth between Denver, France (Bob Drake's studio located at Chris Cutler's farm) and Tel Aviv, Israel (playing in the band Ahvak and working in the studio of Udi Koomran). In 2002, he relocated to Denver from Tel Aviv, and now runs the American branch of Chris Cutler's Recommended Records, called ReR-USA.

In addition, he has participated on records by the Dutch avant-rock group Blast, and occupies the drum chair of the Belgian band Présent, lead by guitarist Roger Trigaux, founding member of the original Rock in Opposition (RIO) – group Univers Zero.

If one could name Mike Johnson «the Aristocrat» and James Grigsby «the Academic» in this particular pool of bands and people, Dave Kerman truly deserves being called «the Anthropological Entrepreneur» (!), at least according to the description of his work found in this excerpt from All Music Guide's featured biography:

“5uu's, under Kerman's wing and determination, [played] strong and radically for over two decades. The lineup of the band changed somewhat over the years, but always consisted of reputable avant-rock players. Starting with rock & roll and fusion that melted into a form of *guerilla-rock*, Kerman pushed his musical talents to new limits and moved on into the outer fringes of progressive rock. His talents expanded from drums into guitar, keyboards, songwriting, composing,

arranging, and producing” (as well as *label management and distribution...*).¹

Besides contributing to all the aforementioned musical projects, Kerman has also managed keeping his «own» band together through all these turbulent years of geographical shifts. This band is called the 5UU's, and their recorded output roughly divides into three phases:

1) *The initial period (1986 – 1991)*

Bel Marduk & Tiamat (1986)

Elements (1988)

These albums were both recorded while Kerman was still living in LA. Interestingly, the album *Elements* features contributions from the entire line-up of Motor Totemist Guild, and thereby forms the nucleus of U Totem three years before this band's first album.

2) *The «mature» period (1991 – 1997)*

Hunger's Teeth (1994)

Chrisis In Clay (1997)

Kerman's first stint with Thinking Plague, resulting in the recording of the critically acclaimed *In This Life* in 1991, brought him together with bass player, singer and producer Bob Drake. These two gentlemen immediately developed a rapport, and the seed for a second version of 5UU's was sown, including Kerman, Drake and original 5UU's keyboardist Sanjay Kumar.

Their first album, *Hunger's Teeth*, was recorded in Denver, and featured electronic «noise» exponent Thomas DiMuzio as guest artist. This record represented a big artistic leap for the 5UU's in several ways. Bob Drake's contributions on the production side of things gave the band a «huge» and instantly recognizable sound, which, much in the same way as King Crimson's album *Red* had done twenty years earlier, really stretched the boundaries of what a «rock power trio» could achieve sonically. The tightness of performances resides at the brink of the sensational, and the compositions retain the «scored» quality of those of Thinking Plague, Motor Totemist Guild and U

¹ <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=11:0jfexqw5ld0e>

Totem, although the 5UU's of this period very seldom wrote down any of their intricate arrangements. Drake's vocal stylings, often compared to Jon Anderson of Yes, although I often fail to see the instant similarities, are nothing but truly impressive, executing difficult melodies with grace and power. His virtuosic bass lines and monstrous Rickenbacker sound is a signature part of the 5UU's approach, as is Kerman's simultaneously slammin' and sophisticated take on the traditional rock drummer's role and Kumar's angular keyboard parts and assorted selection of rather «astringent» sounds and patches.

The band embarked on a mid-sized European tour in 1995 as a four-piece unit, bringing along Thinking Plague's Mike Johnson, who had been assigned the not-terribly-easy task of grappling with Kerman's idiosyncratic guitar parts, originally often conceived on guitars which were set up with virtually «non-existent» tunings. On this tour the band tried out some of the material intended for their second recording, *Chrosis in Clay*.

Bought the farm in France...

For this album, Kerman and Drake relocated to Chris Cutler's farm in France, which was turned into a studio and dubbed Studio Midi-Pyrénées, and has remained Bob Drake's permanent place of residence to the present day. Armed with one - and later, two - 16-track ADAT machines, a host of stringed instruments and keyboards, a very small collection of obscure outboard effects and a veritable arsenal of percussion, not to mention boundless creativity and complete artistic freedom, they created what is arguably their finest, most coherent effort.

The realm of the recording studio was meticulously explored; for instance, tracks were recorded in different rooms and locations of the farm (outside, large halls, small wood-panelled rooms, lofts etc.), and the natural ambience and character of each recording location was used in combination with electronic effects to add variety to the sound image. I will treat these issues more thoroughly under «Production» below.

The music was composed and arranged by Kerman and Drake, and Sanjay Kumar was flown over from the US to record the keyboard parts. The record was favourably received, and the British modern music magazine *The Wire* included it on the list of top avant rock albums of 1997. But after the release of the album, this version of the 5UU's fell apart. Dave Kerman kept himself busy

recording drum tracks for Thinking Plague's *In Extremis*, and Bob Drake started pursuing a solo career, which so far has spawned six albums, as well as dedicating a lot of time to recording, mixing and mastering other artists' albums.

Bill Martin offers a telling description of the mid-period 5UU's in his book *Avant Rock: Experimental music from the Beatles to Björk*: «The 5UU's must be especially annoying to writers who would prefer to have nothing good to say about progressive rock, since they quite clearly draw from a whole range of progressive groups (that themselves would prefer to be mutually exclusive), from Yes to King Crimson [...]. The 5UU's are also very much in the Henry Cow school of whimsy and fragmentation, sometimes also with the biting quality that characterized the Cow's Brechtianism. This side of the 5UU's music opens them to other marginal, experimental trends in rock music since the progressive era».²

3) *The «solo» period*

Regarding Purgatories (1999)

Abandonship (2001)

The two most recent 5UU's albums are essentially Dave Kerman solo projects, as is indicated by the artist name «Dave Kerman/The 5UU's». They differ from the two mid-period offerings by exploring more extended structures than the basically «song form» approach utilized on *Hunger's...* and *Chrosis...* Especially *Abandonship* (which was recorded in Tel Aviv) employs computer technology extensively, and displays Kerman's fascination for and experimentation with collage-like forms, electro-acoustic sounds and musique concrète. Both albums feature numerous guest artists, including singer Deborah Perry of Thinking Plague.

As very little of the music of 5UU's exists in any kind of notational or scored form, my analytical approach in this section will differ quite a bit from the one employed in the two preceding chapters. Instead of focusing on just one song, I've decided to conduct a full *transcription* of one of their album tracks, and also refer to (mainly through formal charts) several shorter examples from a handful of other songs. Allowing my own personal preferences to come through quite strongly in this case, all the selections are lifted from their two mid-period albums.

My main analytical object will be the quintessential 5UU's anthem «Well... Not Chickenshit» (the

² Martin 2002: 80

opening track of *Hunger's Teeth*). For this song I will conduct a complete formal and harmonic analysis. To prove a very important point about the 5UU's' systematic exploration of traditional *song structures* and the previously mentioned technique of *musical intertextuality*, this section will also feature transcribed examples and brief comparative analyses on «Comeuppance», «Bought The Farm», «Hunter-Gatherer» and «Absolutely, Absolute» (all from *Chrosis in Clay*).

“Well... Not Chickenshit” (to be sure...)

I start out, once again, with a formal chart, this time excluding bar numbers, but incorporating naming of subsections (themes) in a hierarchical relationship to the main formal divisions:

Time	Section name	Theme	Key area	Description
0:00 – 0:32	Intro	Pt. I (0:00-0:24)	Var. - Ab	”Weaving” keyb. lines, stop-time bass
		Pt. II (0:24-0:32)	Var. - B	
0:32 – 1:17	A (Verse)	'A'	F-F#-B	Busy bass line, keys and vox in unison
1:17 – 1:51	B («Chorus»)	'B1' (1:17-1:30)	B phryg.	Vocal
		'B2' (1:30-1:51)	B phryg.	Instrumental
1:51 – 2:07	Transition I	'C1'	A	“Spanish Phrygian” cadence
2:07 – 4:11	C (Interlude)	'C2' (2:07-2:26)	D	Unison riff part
		'D' (2:27-2:40)	F#	Call-and-response part
		'C3' (2:41-3:18)	D	Riff part w/guitar solo
		'C4' (3:18-3:56)	D	Riff w/polytonal choral
		'D' (3:56-4:11)	F#	Call-and-response part
4:11 – 4:46	B'	'B1' (4:11-4:25)	B phryg.	Instrumental
		'B2' (4:25-4:46)	B phryg.	Vocal
4:46 – 4:53	Transition II	'C1' (4:46-4:53)	A	“Spanish” cadence
4:53 – 6:07	C' (Interlude II)	'C5' (4:53-5:12)	D	Unison riff part, low key w/perc.
		'C6' (5:12-5:49)	D	Riff part w/choral – thinner texture
		'C7' and 'E' (5:49-6:07)	D (min.)	Riff part w/new vocal theme
6:07 – 6:39	Coda (Outro)	'F'		Brief, «symphonic» ending

First of all, one general observation about the music of (especially mid-period) 5UU's, is that they, to a much greater degree than Thinking Plague and MTG/U Totem, work out of more traditional «rock» (and popular music) *song structures*. While Mike Johnson's and James Grigsby's music often take the shape of «character pieces», differing considerably from each other with regards to duration, compositional approaches and formal schemes (and often with a certain «film music»

quality, which especially holds true for Thinking Plague), the compositions written by Kerman and Drake for the 5UU's are more consistently of the «song» type, showcasing an seemingly infinite number of both radical and more subtle variations on standard forms.

The type of structure most frequently employed seems to be the quasi-symmetrical or arch-shaped double ternary (ABACBA) form with a «big» C – section and coda, akin to a simplified classical sonata form, but just as reminiscent of the «rock» song with its oft-employed scheme of intro-verse-chorus-verse-bridge-chorus-outro. *Well... Not Chickenshit* falls structurally in the vicinity of this song form, as does *Comeuppance*, *Bought The Farm*, *Hunter-Gatherer* and *Absolutely, Absolute*, as well as several other titles.

1) Motives and themes / harmony

In very much the same vein as James Grigsby's "Ginger Tea", the vocal themes of "Well... Not Chickenshit" are often free flowing, "stream of consciousness"-type lines which seems to be structured by the *lyrics* and not the other way around. Recurring motives, patterns and "hooks", then, are encountered much more often in the accompanimental parts.

Intro (bars 1 – 14):

This also remains true for the intro (bars 1-14), which has what amounts to be a partly composed, partly improvised (although, as the copy of Kerman's original handwritten score in the Appendix clearly shows, it's actually through-composed) roller-coaster keyboard line in shifting meters, played over a steady drum groove and atmospheric noise "kulisser", creating a very dense texture. The keyboard line is highly chromatic, and tonal centers are vague and constantly shifting, but reinforced periodically by bass guitar "hits" on foundational notes. A rough tonal plan for the introduction could be something like the following:

Bar 1	C# mixolydian
Bars 2-3	G# (mixolydian, bluesy)
Bars 4-5	C# minor
Bar 6	C minor
Bar 7	Chromatic transition to D minor

Bar 8-9	D minor
Bars 10-11	D major (lydian)
End of bar 11	G# minor (harmonic)
Bars 12-13	C# minor (dorian)
Bar 14	B lydian (semi-cadential)

In my formal chart, I split the intro up into two parts, divided by the unison, cadentially concluding G# harmonic minor line in the last part of bar 11. The tonal center is briefly restored to the initial home area of G#, and the intro subsequently ends on the relative major key of B.

Verse:

The verse (theme ‘A’) starts out with a deviation of the intro’s ascending Dmaj13-arpeggio (which can also be considered a G#m7b5 chord) in bars 10-11. It undisputably starts out in the key of F, with a mixture of the whole-tone scale and the phrygian mode. The melody is set out over an extremely busy one-bar bass-riff in F, which over the course of the verse’s first 9 bars forms several different polytonal relationships with the vocal theme.

One technique that is extensively used to create unity and coherence in this tonally wavering, chromatically shifting theme is *sequencing*, often of very small 3- and 4-note motives. Below, I have picked out some telling examples:

Bar no.	Description	Tonality
16	Descending minor thirds	F (phrygian)
17-18	Asc. min 3 rd + Desc. min 2 nd + Desc. maj 3 rd	B (phrygian)
22-23	Pentatonic 3-note cell	B (minor)
25-26	Rhythmical sequence (triplets)	B
31 + 34	Ascending 5ths	B

In bars 31-35, the bluesy connotations of the preceding section’s bass line is taken all the way “out”, by incorporating a quote of the infamous ”Guitar boogie”-riff, set in a ¾ meter and played

over a considerably shortened 12-bar blues progression. Here, the tonality is finally settled in the key of B major (but still with bitonal shifts between major and minor in the vocal line), and the part ends with a cadential line harmonized in sixths, suggesting the dominant level of F# major...

“Chorus” (theme ‘B’):

... which makes for a smooth transition to the delayed resolution to B minor in bar 39. Using Moore, the underlying harmonic progression of this theme can be analyzed as follows:

B phrygian

:C#sus ^{b9}	Hm ^{b6add9}	C7 ^{#11}	Am ⁶	C ^{add#11}	Hm ^{b6add9} :	F ^{add#11}	Em ⁷⁽⁶⁾	A...
#IIsus	Im	Iib7	VIIIm	II	Im	bV	Ivm	VII#3

The C#sus^{b9} and Fadd#11 chords can easily be interpreted as *modal interchange* or “borrowed” chords from the related mode of B aeolian and B locrian, respectively. But just as was the case with Thinking Plague, the progression could also lend itself to an interpretation involving 20th century harmonic *added-note* structures. The tonal level basically remains B minor, and chromatic alterations of the 2nd and 6th (C#/C and G#/G, respectively), as well as *tritone substitutions* (C for F#), create subtle harmonic disturbance to this otherwise rather functional progression.

Two outstanding traits of this particular section are first and foremost the abrupt change of *mood and tempo* (or, more precisely, *feel*) and the *instantly memorable*, almost *hummable*, character of the vocal/violin melody, especially when contrasted with the melodic restlessness characterizing the previous part. This is due to at least two significant factors:

- A well-balanced melodic contour involving a combination of stepwise, descending (often chromatic) movement and ascending skips (perfect/diminished 5ths)
- The continued use of sequencing of very small, motivic cells (see, for instance, the recurring 5th interval in mm. 45-46 and the brief one-bar violin line in 51-52).

Observe that in this first rendition of theme ‘B’, the vocal version is followed by an instrumental one, while at the recap of this section at 4:11, it’s the other way around. So the ‘B’ themes are actually placed in a completely symmetrical fashion on each side of the central C - section.

Transition (“C1”):

The transition brings in another element, namely a repeated “Spanish” cadence of Bb⁶ – A with a one-bar keyboard “hook” line based on the Spanish Phrygian scale with an added b3 (A - Bb – [C] - C# - D - E - F - G). This line is eventually developed into a two-bar version, where the second bar consists of a chromatic descent from F# to D#, the augmented fourth of A, creating tension and expectance of resolution...

Interlude (Section C):

And the resolution comes, in the form of a relentlessly driving, highly syncopated bass- and piano-riff in shifting meters, namely 17/16 – 17/16 – 18/16 – 17/16. This is the 5UU’s version of what Alan Moore would name an archetypal *open-ended* riff-structure so characteristic of several rock music styles, and what’s truly impressive about this particular part is that the band, through careful use of metrical *subdivision* (which is marked out in my transcription of the song) sort of rubs the edges off these pretty odd time signatures and – to put it somewhat bluntly – makes them “groove” in such a way that one is hard pressed to consider them “difficult” or “tricky” at all.

This 4-bar riff is clearly derived from the preceding transitional section – the pick-up (G-D skip of a fourth) is placed on the second quaver of the 17/16-bar, and the aforementioned Spanish Phrygian- and chromatic lines, respectively, occur in every other bar, similar to the transitional section. Every bar opens with a chromatic descending figure, D-C#-C, anchoring this part in a tonal center of D, which means that the harmonic progression from the last bar of the *transition* (‘C1’) into the first bar of the *interlude* (‘C2’) forms a completely functional resolution from A to D (dominant – tonic).

After a short call-and-response part (labelled ‘D’ in the formal chart) in the distantly related, through a *chromatic third relationship*, key of F# (consisting of a bass/guitar/piano – riff alternating with chromatic polytonal keyboard lines melodically coupled with maj. 2nds and 3rds), the band returns to the C2-riff and successively treats it in two radically different ways:

Guitar solo (“C3”):

At 2:41, James Grigsby (who is a featured guest musician on the album) plunges headlong into what seems to me to be a mocking-but-good-hearted parody on the typically over-the-top thrash metal guitar solo. Choosing sheer psychosis and hyperactive rhythmical density (most of it generated by rubbing the guitar against a mic stand) over melody and harmonic outline, Grigsby goes directly for the throat, and plays into the pulsating energy generated by the band’s performance. This is one of the very few examples of instrumental, improvised breaks in a 5UU’s song, and in the context of this tune, this relatively short “solo spot” is utilized for maximum, devastating effect.

“Choral” section (“C4”):

One of the songs truly magic moments is the transition from the guitar solo part, by the way of this most ubiquitous of rock guitar gimmicks, the long whammy-bar “dive”, into the written choral-like section at 3:18. At this point, the guitar (finally) joins in on the C2-riff (it has been kept in tight reins up until this point), once again to great effect and a testimony of the band’s arranging skills, and the musical foreground is taken over by a (mostly) 3-part choral doubled in unison by the organ and piano. This section is a most telling illustration of what Kerman calls his “three-finger approach”, about which I had an enlightening conversation with the two gentlemen Kerman and Johnson at a restaurant called the Mercury in Denver, Colorado in March 2005:

Dave Kerman: If I wrote a three-part chord (*visually illustrates with three fingers and a virtual keyboard*)... you know, this is how I play. Three fingers, you know, chords. My chordings are never more than three fingers. He (*Sanjay Kumar*) would add the other two [*if they were needed*]. You know, he’d figure out where they were supposed to go.

Mike Johnson: But [*Regarding*] *Purgatories*, that’s all you, except for the stuff that Chuck did...

D.K: And if you look at it, there’s not so much harmonic work to it. It’s like one-note kind of stuff. There’s not so much chordal... well, sometimes...

M.J: Yeah, there’s some in there...

D.K: Yeah, yeah, sometimes, but it’s never usually more than three notes in any chord.

M.J: That’s all I ever need!

Jarle: That’s probably where the... you have this, I don’t know if I should call it signature parts, because it’s not like you use it all the time, but you have these ostinatos going on in the bass and the drums, and you add this sort of triadic harmony on top, with major and minor chords just moving along, and... (*as is done in “Well... Not Chickenshit”*).

D.K: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's kind of where I...

Jarle: Maybe that stems from that three-finger approach.

D.K: Yeah, it's exactly where it comes from.

M.J: Those chords come from his twisted mind. And then the melody comes in, and it's like (*sings typical 5UU's angular melody*)

(*laughter*).

D.K: You know, a lot of those keyboard chords came from guitar, just the last three strings on the guitar.

Jarle: Ah, and then you transferred them over to the keyboard.

M.J: I've done it that way too. It's like, how many notes do I need from this guitar chord for the keyboard part.

D.K: Exactly right.

Jarle: But that's actually... when WE work, in my band (*Panzerpappa*), I just tell the keyboard player: OK, do some 5UU's-stuff on top of this!

D.K: (*laughs*). Do some 5... Do some sick shit by the 5UU's...

Jarle: Do what Dave would do!

M.J: Just take your hand like this, and (*sings wildly irregular and atonal accents*).

(*laughter all around*)

Jarle: No, you keep the ostinato going, just a few bars of bass and drums, and then you add these chords that modulate freely.

M.J: It's polytonality.

Jarle: Yeah, it is!

(*personal interview with Dave Kerman & Mike Johnson, March 26th 2005*)

This particular passage from the extensive interview that took place in the course of a most pleasant night out in Denver three years ago – all the friendly, mocking banter aside – actually illustrates quite well how Kerman approaches composition in general, and harmony in particular. The keywords are *3-finger/3-note approach* and *polytonality*.

5UU's treats the rock *riff* or *ostinato* (such as the one at letter 'C2' in "Well... Not Chickenshit") in much the same way as composers of Western classical music employs the *pedal bass*, that is, as a tonal anchor or foundation for polytonal harmonic excursions. This is exactly what goes on between 3:18 and 3:56 in "Well..." (at letter 'C4'). Kerman adds a melody line (the top voice) over the

steady 4-bar ostinato, which more or less can be related to the main tonal area of D, and then harmonizes this line with 3-part voicings that suggest several other tonalities and exert gravitational pull towards other harmonic realms.

A brief analysis of the first eight bars of ‘C4’ may serve as an illustration:

Chord no.	Melody note	Harmonic analysis	Relation to main tonal area (D)
1	D	D6 (Bm7)	I
2	F	C#	VII (C#/D)
3	Ab	Dsus#4 (quartal)	I
4	D	Bb	bVI (Bb/D)
5	C#	C#sus#4 (quartal)	VII (incompl. Bb13#9)
6	B	G13 (quartal)	IV (really Dm6/9)
7	G#	C#m	VIIIm (C#m/D)
8	D	Dsus (quartal)	I
9	C	Csus#4 (quartal)	bVII (really D7add4)
10	C#	C#dim7	VII (C#dim7/D)
11	C	C#maj7 (no 3 rd)	VII (compound chord)
12	D	Dsus (quartal)	I
13	F#	A13 (quartal)	V7 (compound chord)
14	G	Dsus (quartal)	I
15	A	Asus#4 (quartal)	V (really Daddb9)
16	C	Gm11	IVm (really Dm7#5)
17	E	Dadd9	I
18	F#	F#add9	#III

As is obvious from this figure, a lot of these chords are hard to label with conventional chord symbols, as they are often functionally incomplete and “empty” quartal structures constructed from perfect and augmented 4ths, and occurring in both 1st (m11) and 2nd (the sus#4’s) inversions. The important point to make is that the quartal chords, being mildly dissonant in nature, are employed, through a mixture of parallel and contrary motion in the voice-leading, as “dominants” in relation to the pure major and minor triads, temporary establishing other key areas that alternately threaten and reinforce the dominating position of the main tonal realm of D:

D6 – C#

G13 (or Dm6/9) – C#m

Asus#4 – Gm(11) – Dadd9

I guess that Kerman to a great degree flies on ears and instinct when writing sections such as this one, but it seems that the compositional choices, at the deepest level, are grounded in an intuitive understanding of fundamental harmonic mechanisms or even “laws”, because there are clearly *progressions* unfolding here, with obvious care for direction and destination of the *root movement*.

The tension that is built up through this first long ‘C’-section, culminating in the harmonically restless and dense choral part discussed above, is finally released through a recap of the ‘D’ theme, with the entire band coming together on the unison bass riff in the key of F#.

The functional resolution from F# to B minor is employed again in the return to the ‘B’ theme, which at this point connotes even stronger to a calm-after-the-storm – moodiness, with its lone violin melody on top of open-fifth accordion-chords. The band enters, and vocals take over at 4:25, continuing all the way through the 3-bar F - Em - “tag” that ends this theme.

Second interlude (C’) and ending (‘E’ & ‘F’)

After a recap of the “Spanish” transition, the ‘C2’-riff enters for a second interlude, this time in a radically different setting of palm-muted bass guitar in high register. For this version of the interlude (marked C’), the same formal plan of successive solo-choral settings is employed, but the guitar solo is replaced by a brief, sparse improvisational percussion feature, and the choral section is rearranged for a chamber-like trio of piano (doubled by glockenspiel), vibraphone and mildly distorted electric guitar. The texture is considerably thinned out, and the mood remains ominously low-key all up until the brief, symphonic ending.

Following the reorchestrated choral section is a somewhat melancholic vocal melody, in parts reminiscent of a folk tune, which is doubled by keyboards and sung over the still-rolling ‘C2’-riff. The tonality has now finally settled in D minor, with only brief hints of whole-tone and phrygian modalities. Special notice should be made of the overtly obvious cadential phrase (A7b9 – Dm) in bar 6. Finally, the song ends with a brief coda that repeats the last four bars of the verse (‘A’).

2) Form

In this section, I intend to draw on source examples from several other 5UU's songs, all from the album *Chrosis in Clay*, to be able to make a short comparative analysis of the band's approach to *formal structure*, and their use of established popular *song forms*. First I will draw up some simplified formal charts:

Comeuppance

Time	Section name	Theme	Description
0:00 – 0:55	A	A1 (0:00 – 0:42)	Vocal theme – very busy polyrhythmic accompaniment
		A2 (0:42 – 0:55)	Instrumental tag
0:55 – 2:01	B	Trans. (0:55 – 1:04)	Half-time feel
		B1 (1:04 – 2:01)	Organ + keyboard duet
2:01 – 2:47	A'	Trans. (2:01 – 2:09)	Reminiscences of accompanimental “hits” at A
		A1' (2:09 – 2:47)	Full reindition of vocal A1-theme by keyboards
2:47 – 3:01	C	Trans.	“Build” section – ends in big vocal chord
3:01 – 3:29	A''	A2	More developed version of instrumental tag A2
3:29 – 3:41	Ending	A1	Simplified “riff” version of accompaniment at A

Bought The Farm

Time	Section name	Theme	Description
0:00 – 0:30	A	A1 - VerseI (0:00 - 0:07)	“Avant-country” w/guitar chicken-picking and 2-beat drums
		A2 - Instr. (0:07 - 0:15)	
		A3 - VerseII (0:15 - 0:23)	
		A4 - Instr. (0:23 - 0:30)	
0:30 – 1:01	B	B1 - ChorusI (0:30 - 0:38)	Aggressive rock part in 5/4
		B2 - Instr. (0:38 - 0:45)	Same idea, add Gentle Giant-type guitar line
		B3 - ChorusII (0:45 - 0:53)	
		B4 - Instr. (0:53 – 1:01)	
1:01 – 1:19	Trans.	Bridge	Massive multiple-part vocal cadence à la Yes
1:19 – 2:17	C	C1 (1:18 – 1:24)	9/4 bass ostinato established
		C2 (1:24 – 2:16)	Call-and response duet electric guitar/vibraphone
2:17 – 2:56	D	D	Ominous, whispering, sampled cut-up vocals, theme fragments
2:56 – 3:30	E	E1 (2:56 – 3:04)	Short sung interlude, processed vocals
		E2 (3:04 – 3:30)	7/4 keyboard ostinato with mellotron-like sustained line
3:30 - 4:01	A'	A5 (3:30 – 3:42)	Windling keyboard line over “rock” version of A1 accomp.
		A6 (3:42 – 4:01)	Instrumental reindition of verse theme
4:01 – 4:15	Ending		

Hunter - Gatherer

Time	Section name	Theme	Description
0:00 – 0:32	Intro		Keyboard melody, “rock guitar” chords
0:32 – 1:25	A	A1 - Verse I (0:32 – 1:14) A2 – Instr. (1:14 – 1:25)	Vocal Flanged guitar solo
1:25 – 1:47	B	B1	Gentle Giant-type additive-meter riff
1:47 – 2:02	Intro ½ reprise		
2:02 – 2:32	A’	A3 – Verse II	Developed and altered verse melody
2:32 – 3:13	B’	B1 (2:32 – 2:53) B2 (2:53 – 3:13)	Guitar melody added, fragments of verse
3:13 – 3:20	Ending		Keyboard melody

Absolutely, Absolute

Time	Section name	Theme	Description
0:00 – 0:28	Intro	Based on theme C	Shifting meters, steady beat, busy melody
0:28 – 0:40	A	Verse	Bottom “drops” out, “mode mixture”-melody
0:40 – 0:54	B	Bridge	4/4, pretty standard “rock” chord progression
0:54 – 1:08	C	Chorus (refrain)	Intro’s chord progression, clustered harm. vox
1:08 – 1:20	A’	Verse II	
1:20 – 1:34	B’	Bridge II	
1:34 – 1:48	C’	Chorus (refrain) II	
1:48 – 1:59	Transition		
1:59 – 2:23	D	Interlude (based on A)	“Spanish-country” guitar
2:23 – 2:36	A’’	Verse III	More contrapuntal activity behind vocals
2:36 – 2:49	B’’’	Bridge III	Bottom fully restored
2:49 – 3:03	C’’’	Chorus (refrain) III	Dense texture, high-pitched ‘chest’ vocals
3:03 – 3:40	Outro (intro reprise)	Based on theme C	

Referring once more to the All Music Guide biography on Kerman, a telling description is that “for several years, Kerman investigated the compositional and musical theory concepts of progressive rock, wanting to explore how far and which way it could go, always being open to the more radical influences”.³

Of all four COMA-related groups discussed herein, the 5UU’s is probably the one group that best exemplifies Bill Martin’s notion of a “*reconnection*” with and, subsequently, a true “*extension*” of the language of progressive rock (More on these issues in the final chapter). And the two main areas

³ All Music Guide

in which the 5UU's contributes most significantly to this kind of extension are, in my view, the realms of *formal organization* ("song" structure) and *timbral exploration*.

A precarious song foundationalism...

Martin: "[The] newer possibilities that were becoming progressive rock pushed song form to its limits, sometimes fracturing the form altogether. For most groups, something like a song remained foundational [...], however, the relation to a song, especially in the sense of 'popular song', became tenuous [...]"⁴

As far as Motor Totemist Guild U Totem and Thinking Plague are concerned, they, too, generally hold on to a general idea of a "song" as a compositional foundation of their works. Still, it is specifically in the music of the 5UU's that one will encounter the most thorough explorations of, subtle variations on, and radical extensions of the song form, while, at the end of the day, their compositions as they are presented still falls at least remotely in the vicinity of a popular music "song" structure.

When discussing the song "Absolutely, Absolute" on the 5UU's website, Kerman makes a few telling comments on its origins:

Again, I was looking to fuse opposites here, so by choosing the compositional METHOD of the Carpenters and the complex SPIRIT of what I considered to be their opposite, Art Bears, I set out to make a new kind of pop song; not to dabble around in the middle-ground between the two, but to fuse them into some sort of musical Frankenstein. This [song], to me, is an uncomfortable listening experience, where every commercial Hit Parade cliché is offered (verse, chorus, verse, chorus, break, bridge, verse, chorus), but [it] is flogged by a furthered sense of musical direction and messed-up timing-scheme [...]⁵

Agreed, 'Absolutely, Absolute' is probably the most extreme example of the, often well-disguised, "song foundationalism" which to a great degree permeate the music of the 5UU's in their mid-period. With a fairly sweeping generalization one could say that the underlying *form* of their compositions often can be reduced to what amounts to a fairly simple "popular song structure", but

⁴ Martin 1997: 84

⁵ Dave Kerman's comments on 'Absolutely, Absolute', under "Hindsight & Samples" on the 5UU's website:

that it works quite the opposite way with regards to the *content* (e.g. melodies, harmonies, rhythms, timbres, lyrics).

And, concerning their formal structures, there is, as I've already mentioned, a tremendous amount of *variation* to be found. A brief comparison of my four formal charts above could indeed be instructive:

- **“Comeuppance”** has no ‘chorus’ in the traditional sense, but rather exploits the use of both a *vocal* and an *instrumental* rendition of the verse (the same technique that was discussed above regarding “Well... Not Chickenshit”).

Furthermore, in the absence of a ‘chorus’, the “central” instrumental section follows immediately on the heels of the first verse.

At the recap of the verse, it's played instrumentally by what sounds like a “slide-guitar synth”.

The last part of the song start off with a “build” section (based on new material, but with same rhythmical grounding as the intro) which culminates in two huge, Yes-like, vocal chords, and then leads into a more developed version of the short instrumental ‘tag’ that succeeded the first verse.

As one can see, most of the different ‘sections’ that one expects to encounter in a popular song are all in place, but the *order*, relative *emphasis* (with regards to duration and number of *recurrences*, especially) and hierarchical *significance* of these various structural points (to use Moore's description) have been displaced and disturbed when compared to the ‘traditional’ norm (an ambiguous term, to be sure...).

- Similarly, **“Bought The Farm”** employs similar vocal vs. instrumental interchanges in the verse section, this time employing the instrumental version as a sort of echo (or even a kind of ‘refrain’) of the sung verse.

The ‘B’ part, which resembles two ‘choruses’ in the standard meaning of the term, utilizes a similar ‘concerting’ of vocal and instrumental versions, but this section, significantly, never reoccurs in the remainder of the song.

The ‘central’ (interlude) section, which follows another Yes'ish vocal cadenza, is much longer than was the case for “Comeuppance”. It consists, really, of three subsections (‘C’, ‘D’ and ‘E’) that differ quite considerably from another with regards to *mood* and *texture*, and the only recurring motive from earlier in the song is a faint echo of fragments of the verse theme (‘A1’) during the

<http://web.archive.org/web/20040609125747/www.5uus.com/index.htm>

ominous D-section.

'E', then, becomes a kind of release after the tension of the claustrophobic atmosphere that soaks through the previous part. But, at the same time, it's has the effect of a 'build-up' to the final verse, for the achievement of which the band utilizes a 'minimalist'-type of musically repeated synth-line (akin to a *loop*) contrasted with a sustained, slow-moving mellotron.

When the verse returns in an expanded instrumental rendition, the accompaniment has changed into a 'rocking' version of the initial 'avant-RIO-country'-affair (Kerman: "Kind of like a cowboy hat with a sickle and hammer on the brim". Once again that generous synthesis at work...). The winding little keyboard-'tag' that precedes the final verse returns as a brief coda, and concludes the song in a surprisingly abrupt fashion.

Just as seen in the above discussion of "Comeuppance", the traditional "INNBYRDES" significance of the various sections comprising the main structural points in the song is, once again, considerably altered. One other important characteristic is the extensive amount of variation employed both in the *orchestration* and the *accompaniment* whenever there are recurrences of thematic material involved.

- Turning over to "**Hunter-Gatherer**", one is immediately struck with the deceptive simplicity of the form as presented by my chart. But once again, there is great subtlety in how Kerman and Drake apply small deviations, alterations and extensions of this otherwise basic *binary* ABAB-form (with the addition of an intro and outro).

The intro of the song is repeated in considerably shortened form as an interlude. This clearly divides the song into two quite similar sections (AB + AB), and gives an overall *quasi-symmetrical* shape to the song's structure. The musical material employed in the intro is pretty much unrelated to the motives/themes in the other parts of the song, but the *metrical pattern* is somewhat similar to the section B.

Turning to the first verse ('A1'), the accompaniment is a polyrhythmic, open-ended structure involving the bass and drums and a repeated keyboard-riff, over which a two-part vocal line evolves. The same backing is employed underneath the following guitar 'tag'.

The B-section that follows is built around a guitar/bass-riff which evokes the British progressive rock band Gentle Giant, especially in its use of so-called *additive rhythms*, or, as Moore calls it, a *transgression* of the regular beat (an example would be Giant's "Advent of Panurge" or "Knots", both from their 1973-album *Octopus*).

Regarding the subsequent recaps of both A and B after the interlude, they both employ interesting variations. The second verse ('A3') has a significantly altered and developed verse melody, while the return of the riff-part ('B2') eventually adds a guitar melody that incorporate fragments of the verse section A. So, in a way, there is a *linear development* unfolding inside relatively rigid formal structures ("RAMMER?")

Once again, this is an example of a tune that has no 'chorus' in the regular sense, but still undoubtedly conforms to the idea of a "song".

- Finally, let's consider "**Absolutely, Absolute**", which already has been discussed at some length. Once again one encounters the kind of *economic reuse* of material from section to section which 5UU's employ to achieve *unity* and *coherence* in their compositions.

The vocal sections could formally be divided into three different parts, akin to a verse, bridge and chorus, respectively. Due to the fact that these individual sections are very short, a case could be made for considering them as just one big 'verse', but the obvious change of beat in the transition from A to B, and the almost *overtly cadential* harmonies leading into the C-section leaves no doubt in my mind as to the placing of structural division points in the formal chart.

The intro and outro both utilize the odd-meter, power-chordal riff of the section C, and adds a keyboard melody on top that in a way connotes to the quote from John Coltrane's "India" that The Byrds employed in the intro of their 60's LSD-anthem "Eight Miles High" (And this association is probably not THAT far out, considering the fact that Dave Kerman holds David Crosby in the highest regard).

Another example of motivic recurrence is the use of a "Spanish-country"-tinged elaboration of the verse's guitar/keyboard-figure for the brief interlude at D.

The outro is a near-exact repetition of the intro, which is another example of toying with popular song structures, in that this maneuver evokes the oft-employed "*bookends*" principle.

There's one more comment I would like to add regarding "Absolutely, Absolute", one which leads us over into this chapter's final brief remarks on the 5UU's explorations of *timbre* and the studio (which includes the mixing desk and effects processing, but just as much the choices regarding *recording locations* and *microphone placements*) as both a *compositional tool* in its own right, as well as the primary means of what I would refer to as *sonic sculpturing*.

3) Production, or: Aural alchemy - timbre as organism

An ingenious, as well as bold, device that Bob Drake has used in the mixing of this song, is allowing the ‘bottom’ of the sound-box (Moore’s layer of “low register melody”⁶) to ‘drop out’ right after the intro. It is then reinstated for the ‘C1’ section (first chorus), but then taken out once more for the second verse, this time returning a bit earlier, namely in the second half of ‘B2’ (in the form of a bass synth drone).

Then, when the third verse comes in after the interlude, the bottom is fully restored from its very outset, and this, taken together with Drake’s staggering bass-fill in the transition from ‘B3’ to ‘C3’, the accompanimental parts being much more *present* in the aural image and Drake notching the chorus melody up an octave (still produced with a powerful ‘chest’ tone in spite of the relatively high register) contributes to making this the song’s truly climactic moment.

Kerman offers some fascinating, and revealing, ‘trivia’ on the recording of *Chrisis in Clay*:

“[The] studio part of [Cutler’s farm in France] was fairly bare bones. We had one ADAT machine (though a second one came from America not much later), a Russian-made Elektronika mixing desk (clean sounding as it was well-maintained), a slew of microphones (including Ringo Starr’s bass drum mic purchased at a clearing sale at Abbey Road) and hardly any effects units. This situation, while not dire by any means, dictated that much of the atmosphere of the recordings needed to be created by the many rooms and barns of the farmhouse itself. For instance, if we wanted a big, boomy drum track, instead of adding a lot of reverb in the mix later, we would record the drums in a large, two-storey manger where cows used to be penned. A smallish guitar sound may have been recorded in a closet. A “dead” bass sound may have been achieved by placing the amp in a vegetable storage room with mud flooring. All in all, the point is that we were experimenting with the sounds of modern digital recording in an organic way”.⁷

Though I will treat these issues more fully in the final chapter, as a distinguishing feature of the 5UU’s when compared to the other COMA-related bands, I will still wrap off this section with a few rather subjective remarks.

Kerman’s description, “experimenting with the sounds of modern digital recording in an organic way”, actually sums up my own personal listening experience remarkably well. ‘Organic’ and, furthermore, the sound-image perceived as an *organism* in itself, are important keywords here.

⁶ Moore 2001: 33

Allan Moore speaks of sounds unfolding in a “virtual textural space, envisaged as an empty cube of finite dimensions, changing with respect to real time” – namely, the three-dimensional “sound-box”, with all the sound sources unfolding according to a *vertical* (register) and *horizontal* (stereo panning) placement (location), as well as with some sense of musical ‘depth’ (volume, ‘presence’, giving the impression of textural foreground, middleground and background).⁸ Moore holds that the “most important features of the use of this space are the types and degrees of *density* filling it (whether thin strands or ‘blocks’, and the presence in this space of ‘holes’, that is, potential areas left unused”.⁹ Through his studies of a vast array of stylistic practices in the history of rock music, Moore has identified several norms regarding both *registral differentiation* of the different sound sources and their *normative placement* within the sound-box.

What’s particular for the 5UU’s is that they (in much the same way as a host of other avant rock artists, so this is by no means a distinguishing feature by itself) very often break with these norms. When considering the great number of simultaneous parts in different instruments going on in the music, one is struck by a realization that the main emphasis is not at all on registral (or horizontal) stratification to provide for all individual ‘voices’ being heard clearly. This seems to be a source of some frustration for Mike Johnson:

“[The] sound of [*Chrisis in Clay*] was... there were so many parts and so much information crowded into such a small space, all done with ADATs. *Something* suffers in the final master of that, I think, although I think it’s a great record. [...] You see, I had a problem with it, but that’s also because I had to learn how to hear it. I heard it as a live band and as rough tracks, you know. I heard the rough tracks before they had an album. And when I heard it come out, it was like there was twice as much stuff on these tracks as there had been. It was like, ‘Wow, I can’t hear that thing that I liked!’ (*laughter*). So I was biased, you know”.¹⁰

Quite contrary to the always opiniated Mr. Johnson, I think this says a lot about the 5UU’s timbral contributions to progressive and avant rock’s stylistic language, in that the various parts and lines are subsumed to the larger whole, what I refer to as the sonic sculpture. I would actually go so far as to try and ‘transcend’ Moore’s in some ways rather mechanical model of various degrees of density and textural holes being (mere) potential for retrieval, at least when concerning the music of the 5UU’s. For me, a more apt analogy would be one that aligns their soundworld with a sort of living,

⁷ 5UU’s website: <http://web.archive.org/web/20040609125747/www.5uus.com/index.htm>

⁸ Moore 2001: 121

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Personal interview with Dave Kerman & Mike Johnson, Denver, March 29th 2005

breathing organism (some might even say a monstrous beast of some sort...).

This way, the appearances and subsequent filling-out of textural holes due to some physical principle of potential and its realization, could rather be thought of as a alternating *contraction and expansion* and *deflation and inflation* of the aural image (regarding shifts in density and textural depth, and even movement of sounds within the stereo space unfolding in time), once again akin to a living organism – pulsating, breathing, moving.

The song “Darkened Doors” (from *Chrosis in Clay*), especially, seems to illustrate this concept quite well. It starts out with a pastiche on a medieval *gigue* (which, it seems, is equal parts joyous and ominous) for the intimate setting of piano and drums only. This soon gives way to a tranquil section with soft, processed Gentle Giant-like ‘head’-tone vocals declaiming a wistful melody, accompanied by lush synthesizer-chords and sparse percussion. The ‘chamber’-like atmosphere still prevails, but there is a marked swelling-up of the sound-image.

After the return of the *gigue*-part (this time with an added counterpoint line), the beast “rears it’s ugly head”, so to speak, and pulsating bass and drums take over. From this point and up to the very end of the song, what unfolds is a continuous contraction and expansion of the sound-image as organic entity. The general degree of density is (at times almost unbearably) high, but still there’s a constant organic evolution of the sonic sculpture, in many ways remotely akin to Japanese noise artists such as Merzbow and Yukiko.

To conclude this somewhat lofty discussion, and thereby this entire chapter, let’s hear Dave Kerman’s own amusing comments on the inception of the song:

“‘Darkened Doors’ is a venture making opposite lyrical aesthetics into counterpoint. One characteristic is pretty, while the other is ugly. The outcome was more what I was after with “Sons and Daughters”, so it’s good this all worked out the way it did. Another opposing of characteristics here is calm vs. tempestuous. I was banging a big tree trunk against a large aluminum barn door when some English friends arrived at the farm for their peaceful summer vacation. The house had been converted into the studio, each room being filled with musical stuff and most of the socializing and cooking needed to be done out in the garage. Our guests, while not altogether certain we were insane, surely realized their summer was going to be no dog and pony show [...]”¹¹

¹¹ 5UU’s website: <http://web.archive.org/web/20040609125747/www.5uus.com/index.htm>

7) Epilogue

Finally, it's time to reconnect with the opening paragraphs of my first chapter, and consider the music of COMA and its related bands in relation to the 1970's progressive rock movement. This I will attempt to do both in terms of musical characteristics and in a broader, more philosophically oriented context. My main inspirations for this final chapter are musicologist Allan Moore, philosopher and social theorist Bill Martin and, chief authority of US progressive rock, John Covach.

Progressive rock - a definition

Towards the end of a very long discussion about the theory of progressive rock in his book *Listening To The Future: The Time of Progressive Rock*, philosopher/social theorist and musician Bill Martin offers a tentative definition of progressive rock as a *style* of music, including five specific traits:

- 1) It is visionary and experimental
- 2) It is played, at least in significant parts, on *instruments* typically associated with rock music, by musicians who have a *background* in rock music, and with the *history* of rock music itself as background
- 3) It is played, in significant part, by musicians who have consummate instrumental and compositional skills
- 4) It is a phenomenon, in its "core", of English culture
- 5) In significant part, it is expressive of romantic and prophetic aspects of that culture¹

When working his way towards this definition, Martin names and discusses several other important traits of progressive rock as *ideology* that are relevant here. I will discuss these issues, as well as the five main paragraphs of his definition, in turn, and place them in the context of American progressive rock in general and the COMA bands in particular.

¹ Martin 1997: 121

1) Visionary experimentalism

As Martin puts it: “Above all, rock music is two things: it is *synthetic*, and it is *generous*”². Rock was synthetic in its origins, and it is generous by way of being “ever open, ever growing and ever willing to engage in experiments with redefinition”³. To Martin, this “generous synthesis”, a trait so fundamental to rock music, shows that there has always been a progressive trend in this music.

He also makes a distinction between the “underground” and the “pop” element of rock music, both of them often found in one and the same song, and this dichotomy is something that can be traced back to the early exponents of rock’n’roll, such as Little Richard (e.g. “Tutti-Frutti”), Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. Progressive rock “represented a concentration and heightening of all the trends in rock music that were set against the merely “pop” sensibility: the underground and developmental aspects, the complete album approach, generosity and synthesis”⁴.

One of the key elements of the “developmental” aspect is what Martin calls “stretching-out” (which suggests longer works, but has just as much to do with stretching beyond established style boundaries), and he identifies two radically different ways of stretching out musically, either through 1) extended *composition* (pushing song form to its limits, incorporating several different composed parts akin to Western classical music) or 2) extended *improvisation* (akin to free form jazz).

While the first approach is the one most often employed within the progressive rock style, a combination is regularly encountered, and they both usually take a *linear*, as opposed to *vertical*, form. According to Martin, “there is a developmental logic to progressive rock works”⁵. Another important characteristic is what has been labelled *conceptual density*, a trait generally embraced by fans and slandered by critics of the style. In a purely musical sense, this term signifies motivic and thematic richness, an expanded harmonic vocabulary, extensive use of counterpoint and an “advanced attitude to time signatures” (MOORE, SJEKK SITAT), techniques often lifted from the realms of classical music and jazz,

² Ibid: 21

³ Ibid: 22

⁴ Ibid: 42

⁵ Ibid: 91

specifically. Quite contrary to the rock critic consensus of dismissing this as “art music seriousness” and “pretentiousness”, Martin has a quite different take on it: “What greater sophistication and complexity do bring to rock music is a greater range of possibilities”⁶.

Progressive sensibility: Radical affirmation and negation

In addition to the aforementioned specifically musical characteristics, Martin also brings to the table several philosophical and ideological terms that are just as useful when trying to characterize the *sensibility* of progressive rock, and how this very same sensibility (as opposed to mere surface features) is carried on in the music of several bands across the Atlantic 15-20 years after progressive rock’s heyday:

Closely connected to the allegedly visionary approach taken by progressive rock artists is a dialectic set up by Martin between *radical affirmation* and *radical negation*, categories he has borrowed from Theodore W. Adorno.

Radical affirmation is connected to libratory and *utopian* strivings, and “the felt experience that society does not have to be based on exploitation and domination, [but] that something else is indeed possible”⁷. Music that expresses a radical affirmation “offers (or perhaps ‘conjures’, in a truly magical way) the possibility of a different world. When this is done with intensity and vision and skill, as it is in the best of progressive rock music, the gesture is a profound one, a radical affirmation of human possibility”⁸. Seen in this way, radical affirmation lines up with Aristotle's thoughts on the *human project*, namely the “bringing about of *eudaimonia* – flourishing – which involves an intertwining of the good person, the good life and the good society”⁹, and also with *poiesis*, the creation of worlds (through great art, including music). Martin Heidegger called it “world disclosure”, while Nelson Goodman refers to it as “ways of worldmaking”.

⁶ Ibid: 73

⁷ Ibid: 8

⁸ Ibid: 11

⁹ Ibid: 7

Radical negation, on the other hand, is linked to the idea of social transformation through critique, protest and revolutionary grounded “assault[s] on the existing system”¹⁰, including capitalist phenomena such as music-as-commodity and Adorno's “culture industry”. The emphasis is on “intensifying the sense of alienation in an alienating world”¹¹, a strategy of defamiliarization (a la Brecht).

The “YesPistols” dialectic

Martin names this the “YesPistols”-dialectic, placing the British progressive rock group Yes and the notorious punk band Sex Pistols, respectively, at either end of the affirmative/negative scale. For our specific purpose here, it should probably be renamed the “YesCow”-dialectic, replacing the Pistols with Canterbury legends Henry Cow and the entire *enterprise* launched by the emergence and later demise of this great ensemble, including acts such as the Art Bears, News From Babel, Aksak Maboul and more recent efforts such as The Science Group, not to mention an array of different solo efforts from each of the former Cow members, of which Chris Cutler and Fred Frith probably are the best known. Martin: “Henry Cow were one of the few progressive rock groups that excelled at radical negativity, as opposed to the more affirmative stance that characterized most of these [progressive rock] groups”¹². And:

“A few other[s] have followed this path of radical negation, including, at times, King Crimson, and even Emerson, Lake and Palmer. This is clearly the minority path, though it may also be, paradoxially, the more secure one in that it can be easier in some circumstances to rail against the existing state of things than try to imagine a different world. The other path, radical affirmation, is less secure in that there is a danger, in such an attempt at imagination, at merely giving *solace* within the terms of the world as it is; there is also the danger of just being downright goofy or merely sentimental [...]”¹³

In short, radical affirmation can “slide over into pure otherworldliness and escapism”, while radical negativity can “slide over into cynicism”¹⁴. But, as Martin withholds, “all of the

¹⁰ Ibid: 29

¹¹ Ibid: 120

¹² Ibid: 116

¹³ Ibid: 120

¹⁴ Ibid: 116

various forms of these [two] approaches were (and *are*) expressive of a radical, *prophetic* sensibility”¹⁵. More on this last issue later on.

When making the historical jump from the early 70's primarily British progressive rock scene and up to the mid-80's to the early 00's American avant rock outings from my selection of COMA-related bands, it is precisely this issue that represents one of the most important shifts in ideology, namely a tipping of the scales from progressive rock springing out of a basically affirmative stance (“One thing that can be said about Yes is that there is not a trace of cynicism in their music”¹⁶) to avant rock more inclined to partake in a spirit of radical negation. Martin sees a significant connection here with society's political move from the Sixties' counterculture – spawned by a widespread and global social upheaval - with its idealistic, visionary and revolutionary values of collective transformation and a ‘general avant garde’, to the Eighties' and Nineties' *postmodern capitalism*, which for the music industry would include phenomena such as taste publics, cynically calculated niche marketing and strategies of recuperation and cooptation.

Henry Cow: the radical predecessor

The Henry Cow example above is not at all chosen arbitrarily. For both Thinking Plague and the 5UU's, especially, the influence from this revolutionary enterprise has been both crucial and far-reaching, all the way down to the Cow's contemporary and complex chamber-rock – style, their instrumentation (electric and acoustic instruments coexisting), their carving-out of an “underground” market for their music (under the slogan of Rock In Opposition), the somewhat twisted Brechtian-Romantic tone of their lyrics and the fundamental notion that “radical politics had to have a radical language”.¹⁷

Thinking Plague and 5UU's carries this spirit onwards, incorporating both bleak Blakean imagery and Schopenhauerian insights. As Martin has emphasized: “Throughout the time of progressive rock, [Henry Cow] were among the groups most closely connected to a larger musical avant-garde, and they maintained this connection both in the later years of the group

¹⁵ Ibid: 121

¹⁶ Ibid: 6

¹⁷ Stump: 225, quoting Robert Wyatt

and in the post-Henry Cow projects that individual members would undertake. Interestingly, they were arguably the group least connected to the more romantic aspects of progressive rock.”¹⁸

But, as he withholds, “the influence of English romantic poetry – and the “sensitivity of this poetry” – [on progressive rock in general], is present even in the work of Henry Cow.”¹⁹

Similarly, there are also clear examples of the COMA bands taking a more romantic, utopian and radically affirmative stance.

James Grigsby’s collaboration with Cambodian musicians in LA, for instance, is a stellar example of a celebration of the human spirit and the vision of a global community of mutual flourishing. Another example is his aforementioned multilingual motet section from “One Nail Draws Another”, which brings together the English, German and Japanese languages, respectively, and which becomes something of a ‘communitarian hymn’ in miniature.

Yet another, in many ways more complex, instance, is Thinking Plague’s “concept” album from 2003, *A History of Madness*, which in parts is based upon the history of the Cathars, a Christian sect in medieval France that were exterminated in the so-called “Albigensian Crusade” in the 13th century. This record actually represents the affirmation/negation – dialectic very well.

According to Mike Johnson, he “actually wanted to somehow combine and express ideas concerning both the insane history of humanity - with all its inhumanity - and the personal experience of insanity, or mental illness, which I believe is extremely relevant to this ‘post modern’ world of ours”²⁰. This, of course, indicates a radically negative stance, as does the lyrics of “Dead Silence”, which have already been discussed in brief.

But in another paragraph from the same interview, Johnson recounts that “Regarding [the song] ‘Consolamentum’, I also wanted to evoke an incredible harrowing and *heroic* act, one that happened many times among the Cathars when besieged at Montsegur and elsewhere”. Even when defeat was certain, many people trapped in the fortress voluntarily chose to accept the Consolamentum, which was the ritual by which a regular believer became a “perfected”

¹⁸ Martin 1997: 245

¹⁹ Martin 1997: 113

²⁰ <http://www.progressiveears.com/library/johnson.asp?bhcp=1>, published 2004.

one (French: “parfait”). This would ensure their immolation on the pyre, which by no means was an unavoidable fate: “The rest of the captured might be whipped, imprisoned, fined or even sent home. So it was not necessary to face the flames. My protagonist in the song has made that choice, and is contemplating her escape from this evil world into the next.”²¹.

Double-edged as this may be; for me it still represents a sort of transcendence of the misery of this world, the yearning for redemption and the hope for another world, a different and fundamentally better one.

An astringent aesthetic

Still, the most downtrodden path for bands residing in this specific part of the current avant rock scene is the one of radical negation. An important signifier is what can be described as a general compositional and sonic *astringency* in these bands’ music. When, for instance, the influence of groups like Yes pops up in the course of some of the COMA artists’ songs (two telling examples are Thinking Plague’s “The Third Wind” (*In Extremis*) and the 5UU’s song “Bought The Farm” from *Chrosis in Clay*, the tone and atmosphere is often generally darker than is the case with Yes, and the melody lines and chords are harsher and more dissonant. Still, the music is not necessarily more *complex*.

The oft-cited classical music influences of all these bands, like Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Bartok, to mention some of the most important, are basically the same for both Yes and Thinking Plague, but TP (as well as the other COMA related artists) has also accumulated, assimilated and *synthesized* their share of the roughly 20-30 years of music history that have occurred and been developed in between, which include several styles that represent an even heavier emphasis on atonality, fragmentation, randomness and noise.

And, as I’ve already mentioned, Mike Johnson and his Denver cohorts sprung out of a radically different sociological and political climate than the 70’s progressive rock artists. The *utopian* strivings of Yes and similar artists in the early 70’s, inspired by the tremendous optimism of the 60’s counterculture, has shifted into nearly *dystopian* visions of the

²¹ *Ibid.*

“disintegration of one's psychic and emotional being caused by living in this society of superficial commercialism, phony icons and self-destructive hypocrisy”²², as well as “a good solid overlay of alienation toward modern western materialist society”²³.

2) *Rock instrumentation, -background and -history*

“In some sense, as the compositional boundaries between experimental rock and the more general avant-garde began to blur, the presence of certain instruments is what distinguished the former as still a kind of rock music”²⁴

Through the preceding chapters, I've consciously and insistently tried to sustain and probably even reinforce the COMA bands' fundamental affinity with the stylistic history of *popular* music in general, and *rock music* in particular, which for me remains a defining feature of the music of these artists. I've even endeavoured to find evidence of a rock music *kernel* in the basic construction of melodic lines, riffs and chord progressions to be able to counter the notion that “certain works of experimental rock, if they were to be scored for instruments more typically associated with European classical music, would not necessarily be recognizable as rock music [but rather as ‘contemporary music’]”.²⁵

Instrumental roles: shifts and expansions

Still, it's an undeniable fact that the presence of rock music *instruments* is an important indicator of rock music *influence*. That said, one of the distinguishing traits of the progressive rock groups', as well as all of the previously treated COMA bands', approach to composing and arranging music, is the displacement of the standard instrumental *roles* of these instruments.

Bill Martin uses the bass guitar (which happens to be his own instrument of choice) as his primary example. He states: “The expanded role of the bass guitar brought about a

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Martin 1997: 98

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 99

transformation in the music. [...] The innovations in the music can be seen in microcosm in the innovations of the bass lines”²⁶. Martin especially highlights the “melodic drive [and] contrapuntal contributions of [Paul] McCartney and [John] Entwistle, [which] encouraged a new level of *synergy* that flowered in the playing of Chris Squire (Yes), John Wetton (King Crimson), Glenn Cornick (Jethro Tull), Hugh Hopper (Soft Machine) and the other major bass guitarists of progressive rock”, a synergy that continues to bloom in the playing of Bob Drake (Thinking Plague, 5UU’s) and Dave Willey (Thinking Plague). Martin then goes on with a greatly significant generalization:

“The greater role for the bass in this music is symbolic of the way that, in the development of the underground and visionary trends that emerged in the late sixties, groups took a more “symphonic” approach to musical arrangement. In other words, the part for each instrument was carefully crafted as a contribution to a larger whole, and compositions emphasized the possibilities of diverse timbres. Instruments that had been “last” became, if not “first”, then at least equal players in the band. [And] the music was [...] qualitatively enriched because of this”²⁷

Rock band as (chamber) orchestra – redefining instrumental roles

The “rock band - cum - orchestra” – approach that Martin describes in the previous paragraph, was indeed very much taken up and developed by all four of the COMA bands that I have been discussing. Several examples from my previous analyses may serve as illustrations:

U Totem: The “orchestrated“ parts for drum kit and bass, especially, as well as the conscious, chamber music-like explorations of different timbres, often including electric sounds set up against acoustic ones (synthesized piano with flute, electric bass with bassoon) doubling the different parts in “Ginger Tea”.

Thinking Plague: The lead guitar’s primarily *ornamental* role in “Dead Silence”, with fanfare-like flurries of 16th-notes almost reminiscent of the piccolo flute’s role in a marching band.

²⁶ Ibid: 48

²⁷ Ibid.

This trait is found throughout the entire Thinking Plague catalogue, especially in songs like “Love” (*In This Life*) and on most of the compositions from their most recent album, *A History of Madness*. I actually see it as an inherent and important part of the guitar style of Mike Johnson, as evidenced by his significant contributions in a similar vein to the Science Group’s latest album *Spoors* (a group consisting of Johnson, Bob Drake, Stevan Tinkmayer and Chris Cutler).

One should also, as was the case for U Totem, take note of the *timbral juxtapositions* of acoustic/natural and electric/synthetic sound sources in “Dead Silence”, where, for instance, heavily processed electric guitar is set up against the clarinet (bars 71-78), and soprano saxophone (bars 121-132), respectively, and how the synthesizer’s string patch is “morphed” into a warm-sounding accordion-line at the beginning of the development section (bar 140 and onwards).

The 5UU’s: Dave Kerman’s and Bob Drake’s approach to arranging is probably the most straightforward one when compared with the other bands, in that it comes out of a primarily “rock” tradition. Especially in their “mature” period, the instrumentation and orchestration remains basically true to that of the “expanded power trio”, with drums, bass, guitar and keyboards assuming somewhat traditional roles.

But one can also find significant extensions of rock’s stylistic language, especially in Bob Drake’s post-Chris Squire – type weaving and slithery melodic bass lines, more often than not residing at the very front of the sound-box. The guitar and keyboards, too, are frequently engaged in a *contrapuntal* relationship (often with an obvious influence from progressive rock’s uncrowned kings of contrapuntal technique, Gentle Giant) of equal importance and significance, rather than being placed in the traditional hierarchical layers of one instrument providing *melody* and the other *harmonic filler*, respectively.

Timbral exploration

And furthermore, when it comes to experiments with *timbre* and different instrumental combinations, the 5UU’s approach is, by comparison, probably the most radical and “cutting-edge” of them all. This is seen most startlingly when trying to apply the acoustic/natural -

electric/synthetic – continuum previously set up for considering the music of Thinking Plague and U Totem. With the exception of the 1988-album *Elements*, which features the entire line-up of Motor Totemist Guild (and not to forget the two choral sections of “Well... Not Chickenshit”, of which the first applies a massive synthesizer doubling of organ and piano while the other is an “acoustic” stripped-down version utilizing electric guitar, vibraphone, piano and glockenspiel), most of their output employ minimal use of traditional, acoustic instruments (with notable exception for the drum kit and vast array of percussion instruments).

So for consideration of the 5UU’s music, one should probably employ another scale for the characterization of different sound sources, namely one running from the more or less *organic/natural* on one side to the *constructed/processed* on the other. The left side of this axis is the residence of the electric guitar, organ, Bob Drake’s bass guitar and vocals and Dave Kerman’s drum kit and acoustic percussion, while on the right side one encounters an industrial mass of sharp-edged keyboard patches (including piano), electronic percussion, Thomas DeMuzio’s digitally constructed and manipulated noise bursts and last, but by no means least, Bob Drake’s incessant processing and *resculpturing* of an enormous array of sound sources, both organic and constructed ones, to such an extent that the signal processing and, even more importantly, the mixing console become probably the most essential instrument for the shaping of the final result. This applies to the 5UU’s to a much greater degree than the other bands discussed herein.

A notable exception is Thinking Plague’s most recent album, where, in much the same way as for the 5UU’s, the composition process has continued to evolve all the way into the mixing studio, and where the close and conscious interweaving of the various levels – the notated score, the instrumental performances and the subsequent mixing and sonic shaping – arguably contributes to making *A History...* the most fully integrated and profound artistic statement in the entire Thinking Plague catalogue (one almost mind-numbing example is the digitally generated “trembling” of the sound image which occurs in the middle of the song “The Underground Stream”. Agreed, this sounds rather “gimmicky” when described in words, but seen in perspective of the musical context in which it occurs, it actually has a downright startling effect).

For U Totem, it's generally more a question of the mixing process not "standing in the way" of all the different instrumental parts of the musical fabric "coming through". This is an approach that fits extremely well with the fact that of these four different groups, U Totem (as well as the later incarnation of Motor Totemist Guild) is probably the most academic, "composerly bent" and "score" oriented. In his "Manifestos of Motor Totemism", Grigsby offers some telling comments that might serve as an appropriate wrap-off of this section of instrumental *roles* and *timbres*, as well as the orchestral and "symphonic" use of the rock-chamber ensemble:

The orchestra exists in order to preserve the music of the past (primarily the 19th century) [...]. The situation is clear: the orchestra is simply not available to the modern composer (unless, as Frank Zappa has proven, one can buy it) [...]. The structure of the modern orchestra can be seen as an analogue of any governing body. The levels of beaurocracy [sic] are so firmly grounded as to mitigate against any qualitative change. Is it any wonder that today's composer finds the small, decentralized chamber ensemble a more suitable form of expression? [...].

And he concludes:

Therefore, I'm again brought to the same conclusion: that the use of *hybrid* (my emphasis) means and forms of communication is preferable to an approach that searches (I think in vain) for a pure musical statement [...]. The important thing is not to lose sight of the *communal spirit* of music-making.²⁸

This opens up for a couple of very interesting discussions which will be conducted in the next section:

First, is it possible to draw from Grigsby's comments that the music he writes is of such a character that it just as well could, perhaps in his mind originally *should*, be played by an orchestra (or at least a chamber orchestra in the classical vein), and that he, out of necessity (economically and otherwise) has to settle with the rock – chamber ensemble as a sort of second choice? Brandon Derfler seems to reach a conclusion along those lines when

²⁸ J. Grigsby: "Manifestos of Motor Totemism"; previously available from <http://pweb.netcom.com/~takatek/luigi01.html>, accessed by Brandon Derfler 21 March 2001

discussing U Totem's music. I, for my part, do not. But indeed, it opens up some interesting perspectives on the motivations for the "symphonic" rock band approach.

Second, there is the dichotomy of the "*group*", which brings with it the principles of group composition and the "communal spirit of music-making", set against the "*strong personality composer*", where the musicians become a mere vehicle for realizing parts that are meticulously scored out for them in advance. The bands that I am discussing here all take a somewhat different stance in this matter, and this will be explored further. This point, according to Martin, also holds great historic significance in the realm of progressive rock, and he identifies a gradual shift from the group orientation of the Sixties and Seventies to the more and more dominating role of a "key personality" and "single convener" in more recent avant rock ensembles.²⁹

In both of these cases, considering the level of conceptual ambition in this music, and the strong demands on the musicians by way of the musical material, a prerequisite of actually "pulling it off", to use a rather mundane but still appropriate expression, is virtuosic musical skills.

3) *Virtuosity: instrumental and compositional skills*

"Progressive rock is visionary and experimental music played by virtuosos on instruments associated with rock music' [...]. The distinctive term here is 'virtuosos' [...]. In rock music, the definition of virtuoso has tended to come down to purely quantifiable elements, especially *speed*. This is to be rejected for a number of reasons [...]. I think I have found some ways around these [definitional] problems [...]. What is the difference between a really good musician and a virtuoso? The criterion I propose is this: a virtuoso is a musician for whom difficulty is not an issue [...]. Another way of coming at this is to define the musical virtuoso as someone with not only consummate instrumental or vocal or compositional skill, but also as someone with a very large musical vocabulary. [...] Please remember [that] it is the combination of musical virtuosity with a visionary and experimental approach that is essential.³⁰

²⁹ Martin 1997: 262

³⁰ Ibid: 100-101

Among the vast amount of hostile antagonism and criticism that have been aimed at progressive rock artists ever since their heyday, two of the watchwords encountered most frequently are probably “pretentiousness” and “(empty) virtuosity”. Instead of going into a value-laden and outright defensive sermon on behalf of the entire progressive rock style at this point, I just want to make clear that when compared to other artists from other, often related, styles of music which also have been met with accusations along these very same lines (examples could be Cream, Jimi Hendrix, and the whole league of guitar-heroes like Yngwie Malmsteen, Eddie Van Halen and Joe Satriani), “progressive rock’s ideal [was that] of a *collective* virtuosity”³¹. This musical ability itself is “aimed at creating an opening for transcendence”³², and the “emphasis [is] on the idea that the performers serve as mediums for the transmission of the music”.³³

This very much remains the ideal for more current avant rock artists as well, including the COMA bands discussed herein. In my personal interview with Dave Kerman and Mike Johnson three years ago in Denver, Johnson (always the somewhat cynical one in these matters – bless his heart!) expressed a decidedly more pragmatic view on both my notion of a “scene” or “collective” consisting of these different bands, and the topic of virtuosity and musical skills:

Mike: It’s not about a group of friends who sort of trade members, it’s about guys trying to find people who can play this music! (*laughs*).

Jarle: Yes!

Mike: You know. Who can and who will?

Dave: You’ll find a lot of people who *can*, but they’re not stupid enough to work so much for no money, you know, so you’ve got to do it because you like the music.

Mike: And that cuts this field way down, you know.

Dave: Honestly, there are, like you’re talking about, even some people who wanted to but COULDN’T do it. You know, like your keyboard player thing [*Refers to Johnson’s torments when trying to locate a capable keyboard player for the live version of Thinking Plague in 1999*]. It takes somebody who’s got a certain amount of musical upbringing in our sort of way to understand this kind of music.

³¹ Macan 1997: 67

³² Martin 1997: 136

³³ Macan 1997: 67

Mike: Yeah, a certain kind of sensibility.

Dave: Yeah, exactly right.

Mike: And a real desire to play music that does an awful lot of changing.

Dave: Yeah.

Mike: You know. And if you can't be comfortable in that, you'll never be able to relax with this kind of music, and you'll always be like reading, or something...³⁴

It's undeniably very interesting that Kerman and Johnson brings up the term "sensibility" in this context. Although this is primarily a topic for discussion towards the end of the current chapter, for now it may serve to further elaborate the subject of virtuosity in progressive and avant rock.

Having an abundance of mere "chops" or "skills" on a particular instrument is, according to Johnson, simply not enough; the particular kind of virtuosity that is demanded in this context is a *collective* one, and requires a certain *sensibility* for music that is in some ways *hyper-eclectic* (and therefore demands a large vocabulary and familiarity with a great number of musical styles) and constantly *changing, developing* and *evolving* in a primarily *linear* fashion.

An eclectic virtuosity

The way I see it, admittedly very much inspired by Bill Martin's insights in these matters, it's a veritable fact that ALL rock music, and especially avant rock that is recorded and performed in our postmodern, or even *post-postmodern* era, is to a lesser or greater degree eclectic, synthetic, derivative and generally 'contaminated' in its very essence. According to Chris Cutler: "Because we were rock musicians there was no academy and there were no rules: we could lift anything from anywhere we wanted"³⁵.

³⁴ Mike Johnson & Dave Kerman, personal interview Denver 29.03.2005

³⁵ Martin 1997: 86, quoting *The Wire*'s 1997-interview with Chris Cutler.

However, one of the features that sets my small nexus of COMA-related bands apart from many other current avant rock trends, is that they in many ways resurrect the good ol' modernist notions of *linearity* and *narrative*, in ways much more akin to the literary *novel* rather than those quintessential postmodern art forms of *video* and *film*.

Thus, at this point in *my* narrative, it probably suffices to say that the performing of a kind of rock music that is hybrid in nature, formally experimental and linearly developmental requires, at least, a *different* kind of virtuosity than playing rock involving primarily cyclical chord progressions, regular metres and popular music song structures.

Technique and “anti-technique”

In his book *Avant Rock: Experimental music from the Beatles to Björk* (2002), Bill Martin structures large parts of his impressive and engaging historical survey of the dynamics of the avant-rock field in the post-sixties period by way of two central dichotomies: that between *improvisation* and *composition*, as well as the one most relevant in this context, avant-garde art's (including the *rock* avant-garde) central “tension between an *emphasis on “technique”* and a certain *refusal of technique”*.³⁶ Martin quotes a characteristic piece of true Brooklyn-wisdom from Lou Reed to illustrate this point: “In the late 1960's and early 1970's [...], there were those who were trying to become much better musicians, or much better players of their instruments at any rate, and those who were trying to forget what little they already knew”.

And Martin elaborates further: “The presumption in the latter case was that technical skill was getting in the way of, or replacing, *significance*”.³⁷ One could also talk about a replacing of “transcendence”, in the Cagean sense. But transcendence *through*, not despite, technique is also by all means possible, as witnessed in the cases of John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor or Jimi Hendrix – all champions on their respective instruments, where “music, as a spiritual-material force, seems to simply express itself through [their] playing, and yet this could not happen except in the case of someone so supremely prepared”.³⁸

³⁶ Martin 2002: 3

³⁷ Ibid: 4

³⁸ Ibid.

Martin's larger point, which is extremely relevant when trying to distinguish the progressive rock – oriented COMA nexus from other directions that progressive and avant rock is taking, is the following: “[...] we saw the Beatles on the one [“technique”] side, or, perhaps even more to the point, Cream, Hendrix and the progressive rock groups, and [then] the Velvet Underground, [...] Patti Smith and punk on the other. Although these trends look like contrary paths for making rock music, what is perhaps even more significant, if one takes the larger view, is the way the dichotomy itself structured the trends [and still] *continues* to structure the ways that rock musicians approach experimentation”.³⁹

One could then compare the COMA artists to a band such as Sonic Youth, one of the most legendary and celebrated bands in the field of avant rock, whose “real lineage goes back through punk to the Velvet Underground [who, incidentally, included the eloquent Mr. Reed in their line-up]”, and in whose music “we will see much more emphasis on the refusal of technique and on improvisation, though there [undoubtedly] is technique to what they do [...]”. Seen in this perspective, there is no doubt that all of the COMA bands belongs on the “compositional” and “technical side” of these respective dichotomies.

But what's common to both the Youth and the Plague, is that they both strive “toward epic and even profound *vision*”⁴⁰, as well as a kind of *transcendence*. Which, in the case of Sonic Youth, is sought for with a “Velvet Underground-like orientation through noise and the refusal of technique”⁴¹ (at least in the traditional meaning of the word), randomizing procedures and a rare, punk-meets-art – combination of carelessness (or really: taking care with *contingency*) and integrity.

The COMA bands, on the other hand, “transcend technique [by] drawing on a basic characteristic of all rock music, [namely] synthesizing diverse elements from all parts of the musical world. [...] [A]ssimilation, synthesis and imitation are integral parts of the [very] *language* of rock”.⁴² The 5UU's, for example, incorporate ‘Eastern’ influences, predominantly Klezmer and Arabic styles, fuse them with progressive rock idiosyncrasies in the vein of Yes and Gentle Giant and rock's sheer energy represented by Led Zeppelin and the Punk Movement, and all while at the same time retaining an obvious connection to the

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid: 120

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid: 5

most recent and ‘cutting-edge’ developments in the fields of electro-acoustic music and musique concrete. Thinking Plague is generally more ‘Western’ oriented in their style, mixing the contrapuntal leanings of Shostakovich with the polytonal harmonic constructions of American composer William Schuman, and incorporating these in systematic explorations and further developments of the ‘art-song’ concepts of Henry Cow and the Art Bears. And U Totem, true progenitors of the ‘hybrid’ style, take on the daunting task of not only mixing, but also *integrating*, elements like Schoenbergian ‘sprechgesang’, the dodecaphonic techniques of Webern, Balinese Gamelan music, Stan Kenton-style big-band jazz, show tunes (from Broadway to Brecht) and 15th century polyphony.

Regardless of which of the two approaches ((dedication to/refusal of technique) that are employed, it seems like it all boils down to letting the music itself “come through”. And in the light of the previous comments on individual versus collective virtuosity, it seems somewhat appropriate to focus in on virtuosity with regards to *composition* and the initiation of the music itself, because it seems that a third usable dichotomy could be the one between individual composition and group composition.

“The group’s the thing” vs. the strong personality

”A simple question: what is going on with groups? I have already referred to the saying in rock music, ‘the group’s the thing.’ Even with groups that have strong leaders, or even what might be called ‘principal composers’, there is a group dynamic that contributes to the uniqueness of rock music as a musical form. [...] Even the examples that deviate somewhat from a more fully egalitarian situation [Martin holds up the strange case of Robert Fripp and King Crimson], where every band member contributes equally to such things as composition, strength of musical voice, and say-so in the direction of the band, still confirm the basic ideal of rock music as a group production”

And:

“There are still plenty of rock groups, of course, both experimental and otherwise, but the group dynamic that were characteristic of bands in the period from about 1960 to 1980 or so seem to be in a state of transition. Taking experimental rock separately (though the same issues arise in rock more generally), there is a tendency either for individuals to work on their own, or for groups to be transitory and not last very

long. [Artists like] Björk and Jim O'Rourke [are] emblematic of this shift".⁴³

The development of "group orientation" in each of my featured bands seems in many ways to converge with Martin's analysis. Thinking Plague, 5UU's and Motor Totemist Guild all started out as true "groups", and although all three had a "principal" composer (Mike Johnson, Dave Kerman and James Grigsby, respectively), there were (as far as I know) a true group dynamic and "band democracy" in play. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill musicology professor John Covach, one of the leading authorities on progressive rock in the U.S., invokes the idea of a "composer's collective":

"[An] interesting instance of a 'composer's collective' is an interrelated group of Ameriprogressive bands: the Los Angeles-based Motor Totemist Guild and 5uu's, and the Denver-based Thinking Plague. [...] As a result of participating in one another's projects, these musicians have in effect formed a kind of composer's cooperative in which who has written a particular piece can often determine the name of the group playing it (though there are several other musicians involved in the groups' recordings as well). The music of all four groups continues in the avant-progressive style pioneered by Soft Machine and Henry Cow [...]."⁴⁴

Personally, I find myself having a fairly deep disagreement with Mr. Covach over this matter. The way I see it, there are merely two bands in this larger pool to which the description 'collective' may be applied in the way Covach defines the word, namely U Totem and 5uu's, and the only true intersection point, so to speak, between the two, is Dave Kerman. James Grigsby seems to confirm this: "I was trying to start recording for the second U Totem album, and at the same time, Dave was recording with Bob [Drake]. So I would say: "Dave, we need some more material!" (*laughs*), and he would answer: "Well, I've done material that's not right for U Totem". So on the second U Totem record, I ended up writing all the material, because Dave's material was going to the collaborations with Bob".⁴⁵

Rather, I tend to regard these groups as four separate entities unified by common personnel, a definitely converging artistic outlook and ideology, and (for three of them, at least) their connection to the COMA organization. Each of them has a primary composer who is the main

⁴³ Ibid: 224-225

⁴⁴ Covach 2000: 30

⁴⁵ Personal interview with James Grigsby, La Brea, California 26.03.2005

driving force, while the other members provide crucial artistic input. Mike Johnson offers a fascinating description of Bob Drake's role as a "musical midwife" for both Thinking Plague and others:

JH: Although you may have always written most of Thinking Plague's music, I suspect Bob served as your sounding board as it came together - and that's also important.

MJ: All true, especially before he went to LA in 1989 - so the first 3 records were very much the result of a collective synergy, mostly between me and him, and frankly in those days, often more naïve and inexperienced, but still tapping into something... I think it's important for me to emphasize - yet again - that Thinking Plague was originally most definitely the joint creation of Bob Drake and myself. We had played in various bands prior to Thinking Plague, and we were best friends, I'd say. We had a certain chemistry, a process, that primarily started with songs that I wrote, including most of the parts for all the instruments.

But when Bob and I worked on these songs, he quickly developed ideas about how it should sound, a drum part, bass sounds, maybe some alterations to parts, some creation of parts I'd left undone, and an approach to recording and producing. He often started working on a song by laying down drums and bass tracks without me being there. As I say, he quickly understood what I was after, and often went past that into something he envisioned. Quite often his vision brought out the necessary element to capture the idea. I trusted him completely.

But, he was not really a writer of music in those days - for no other reason than he hadn't yet decided to really do that. He didn't until he was in LA well after our 3rd record, *In This Life*, was released. The ability was always there. But he'd sort of dedicated the decade of the 80s to facilitating the work of other composers - myself, Susanne Lewis, Bruce Odland, a very creative friend called Lin Esser, and numerous others. What he did for us all was invaluable.⁴⁶

The formation of U Totem in 1989 seems to signal some kind of shift. In this band the concepts of "group composition" and "individual composition" seemed to coexist for some time in a relationship of relative equality. Grigsby has some illuminating comments on the division of writing duties in this band that go right into the core of the group/individual dynamic:

Dave [Kerman] works very collaboratively. He had this really odd way of working, because he comes from, initially, a rhythmic structure. And usually an impossibly complicated rhythmic structure [*laughs*]. But he

⁴⁶ <http://www.progressiveears.com/library/johnson.asp?bhcp=1>, published 2004.

doesn't necessarily have an idea for harmony, so he would ask me: Can you write something for the flute and bassoon, some sort of counterpoint that would fit into this rhythmic scheme. So I could do that. And then he would say to the keyboard player: Can you come up with something that would fit? And we would each bring something into his structure. But it's his structure, it is his lyrics, and he determines the eventual shape of it. But he likes to bring in other people's ideas. I'm approaching more from a traditional composer's point of view, where I'm writing for the people, but it's generally my ideas and my vision – from start to finish".⁴⁷

For their most recent albums, however, all of these bands have become more akin to the case of Robert Fripp and King Crimson, in which a group is assembled when there's music to be played, and where the music is conceived more or less fully by a single individual:

- The 1998-album by Motor Totemist Guild, *City of Mirrors*, performed by a "big band" version of the group, features compositions exclusively written by Grigsby (just like the second U Totem album, *Strange Attractors*). The same goes for their/his "imaginary soundtrack" *All-America City* (1999), in which the idea was providing a small group with graphic scores and different kinds of verbal instructions – akin to the "randomizing procedures" discussed above.

- The two 5UU's albums that have come out after *Chrisis in Clay, Regarding Purgatories* (1999) and *Abandonship* (2001), are basically Dave Kerman solo projects, with guest musicians such as Deborah Perry (Thinking Plague) participating on individual songs.

- Finally, while Thinking Plague's *In Extremis* (1998) features both older group compositions ("This Weird Wind", "L'Etudes D'Organism" and "Kingdom Come", all recorded as early as 1992) and more recent tunes penned by Mike Johnson only, for their most recent effort (*A History Of Madness* (2003)) ALL the music was written by Johnson in the notation program Finale, and then the finished parts were handed out to the musicians for individual practicing. Then the songs were subsequently multi-tracked (instrument by instrument) in the studio. So there's a question here whether one could speak of Thinking Plague as still being a "group" in the original, "rock" sense of the word, even though the album features most of the musicians that participated on *In Extremis* (with the significant exceptions of Bob Drake and Dave

⁴⁷ Personal interview with James Grigsby, La Brea, California 26.03.2005

Kerman). Mike Johnson himself goes as far as stating that “the particular orchestration and attitude of the music on *A History of Madness* are, I would say, about 95% a result of how it was written, and then recorded. The performers, for the most part, played the parts that were written for them. Of course, whenever a person plays an instrument the sound they make is very much a product of their facility, fingers, breath, expression, intensity, etc. But on this record, they were really given some pretty precise parts to play”.⁴⁸

My inherent feeling is that the “individual composer” approach in many ways facilitates the creation of large-scale, *linear constructions*, as well as the sustaining of a singular, coherent artistic *vision*. This is, of course, closely related with the use of *notated scores*. Chris Cutler elaborates this particular relationship further:

“Much of [Henry Cow’s] music had to be written down because it was compositionally complex. Normally someone comes along with a guitar and keyboard, plays the chords, sings along, and everybody starts to help arrange it, Composing is different – you organize your musical forces in a highly complex way moving from one disposition to another so that the players can’t simply be left to work out their own parts. When you’re composing harmonies vertically or contrapuntally, it’s best to write it out”.⁴⁹

But, as Cutler maintains:

“Henry Cow was very much a collective enterprise, so even if a composer brought a fully-scored piece to the group we’d feel free, as a group, to change individual parts, chop sections out, or say, ‘We need something else in here’, and then develop it. It was a very productive way to work, extending the power of scores”.⁵⁰

This extends Martin’s idea of the ‘group composition’ in rock even further, fusing this particular ‘collective’ dynamic with the classical (indeed, Romantic) notion of a ‘single convener’.

⁴⁸ <http://www.progressiveears.com/library/johnson.asp?bhcp=1>, published 2004.

⁴⁹ Stump 1997: 142

⁵⁰ Ibid

One crucial difference between my COMA-bands and Henry Cow in this respect is that while Henry Cow was a full-time, though not in any means a lucrative, occupation for all its members (according to Cutler, they “were living absolutely 160 per cent [for the band] and examining most things most of the time”),⁵¹ the situation for their more recent American ‘counterparts’ is a quite different one. These issues were discussed at length in chapter 2, where I maintained that these bands were, and have become even more so, *part-time* activities for the people involved, of which follows that they generally have less of an opportunity for engaging themselves fully in the time-consuming process of group composition.

An important exception is U Totem, who essentially practised every night of every week in their most active period, and this is reflected in that their particular synergy as a group is akin to that of Henry Cow, often incorporating a collective transformation of compositions written by the respective individuals. This was very much the case, to a greater or lesser degree, for the early incarnations of all these bands, but pecuniary obligations, as well as geographical and logistical challenges (involving band members living in different cities, countries and even continents) have (almost by *necessity*) led to a gradual “shedding-away” from their initial group orientation. This leads Bill Martin to inquire rather urgently about the state of the very “idea of the *group* (and group composition) [...] Has the countercultural notion of collectivity been eclipsed in this time of normalized fragmentation?”.⁵² At least for this rather marginalized field in the popular music domain, it may seem that Martin hits the mark in his assertion that “we seem to live in a time where it may be that such [episodic] projects are the best that can be achieved”.⁵³ A time where the Sixties’ emerging notion of a *general* and *popular* avant-garde (which involved a hitherto unsurpassed openness for experimentation displayed by both artists, listeners and record companies) seems very far away indeed.

4 & 5) British romantic and prophetic aspects

I’ve decided to group the final pair of Martin’s defining characteristics of progressive rock under one heading, both due to their close relationship and also because his fourth trait in

⁵¹ Stump 1997: 224

⁵² Martin 1997: 304

⁵³ Ibid: 269

particular, which concerns the immanent “Britishness” of the style, is generally difficult to trace in the music of the bands that I’ve treated in this text. Not surprisingly, one could say, with all of them residing on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean, but the picture is not quite that simple, and one of the reasons is the predominantly British influence on the first wave of American progressive rock groups. John Covach offers a brief historic outline of the history of progressive rock music-making in the US:

“While the important and high-profile progressive rock – groups of the 1970s were British, progressive-rock bands sprang up elsewhere as well [...]. There were a number of groups playing progressive rock in the US during the 1970s, and one can find American groups playing an important role in the style even in its earliest stages of development [...]. While British progressive rock can be seen to develop directly out of British psychedelia, American progressive rock in the 1970s is primarily a reaction to British prog, and [...] not a development of American psychedelia. American progressive rockers for the most part imitated the principal British progressive-rock groups. But since some of the British groups were influenced in part by American psychedelic bands [and most certainly by 60s hippie counterculture!], the influence of American psychedelia on Ameriproprog ends up tracing a circuitous route through the British Isles”.⁵⁴

So while there certainly was a British influence on American progressive rock in the 1970’s, it was generally restricted to surface features of an already established style, as well as the ‘return’ to the US of inherent countercultural values of this style that originally were part of the originally *American* psychedelia-influenced hippie-movement. Only mere traces of what could be described as an “Englishness” ever made it back to the US during this extensive round-trip!

The particular “British-isms” that Bill Martin and Edward Macan holds up as being essential the progressive rock style are the influence of the *Anglican church* - in ways of employment of instruments such as the Hammond organ and mellotron, a ‘choir-boy’ vocal style involving multi-part harmonies and the notion of ‘progressive rock as liturgy’ -, as well as the underlying currents of English prophetic Romanticism. Of these, it’s this last trait that I see as most relevant when trying to forge a link with 80s’ and 90s’ American avant rock.

⁵⁴ Covach 2000: 15-22

To put it in fairly short terms, English romanticism and pastoralism was vital to the initial formation of the progressive rock style, as was the influence of the northern European radical reformations and religious hermeticism. There are significant reasons to extend this notion to include the influence of ‘Romanticism’ more in general, of which primary examples from the art world are those of late 19th century romantic music, as well as the poetry of William Blake and Raymond Williams (which, significantly, stretches on into the works of American poets such as Allen Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac).

Key elements of the ‘philosophical’ side of romanticism are “a complex, hermetic sense of connection”,⁵⁵ an ethical and political universalism, a visionary utopianism and a “radical, *prophetic* sensibility [...] The Biblical prophets, those old Israelites, were best known for railing against the deep flaws of their own society. And yet they were also utopians, prophesying deliverance and redemption”.⁵⁶ Which is an exact characterization of the stances of radical negation and radical affirmation.

Yet another side of Romanticism is its “eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth century attempts of substituting art for religion”,⁵⁷ and this is where we really start to see the first glimpses of a connection to my COMA-related groups residing on the other side of the Atlantic: “Such attempts are not only a part of romantic ideologies going back to Blake, Wordsworth, Hölderlin, Schiller, or Beethoven, but also form an important part of *modernist* art, as with Kafka and Joyce. The aim is to express a beauty that transcends the misery of this world, or that is a utopian prefiguration of a redeemed world”.⁵⁸ Paul Stump elaborates further on progressive rock’s connection to modernism:

“On the one hand, the music of most Progressive bands (e.g. of Yes), can be described first and foremost in terms of a *modernist* project. That is, dignifying continual progress, rationality, discipline; artistically, it deals in universals, in truth, justice and beauty. The hostility its cognoscenti showed towards forms such as Punk and Disco, whose essentially metropolitan aspect seemed to embody the dehumanizing, disposable nature of late capitalism is a case in point. In the face of these phenomena, Progressive pitched 1960s revolutionary romanticism [as is best exemplified by Henry Cow]”.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Martin 1997: 109

⁵⁶ Ibid: 121

⁵⁷ Ibid: 136

⁵⁸ Ibid: 137

⁵⁹ Stump 1997: 350 - 351

An essential part of this ‘modernist project’ (as well as of avant-garde art in general) is the fundamental concept that “*ideas* play an important role in the music, and the quality of the music depends in a significant way, on the quality of the ideas involved”.⁶⁰

So then, having considered all these different influences, it’s finally time as well as ample occasion for me to sum this up by stating a brief ‘methodology’ for my canonized circle of COMA-bands, Thinking Plague, Motor Totemist Guild, U Totem and the 5UU’s, namely that they ideologically and artistically reside in a complex intersection point of *romanticism*, by way of visionary utopianism (through either an affirmative or negative stance), a prophetic sensibility and a general sense of connectedness (through the generous synthesis); *modernism*, which involves the grappling with fragmentation through linear development and narrative progress; and, finally, a kind of *radical communitarianism*, which was most apparent in the work of left wing artists such as Henry Cow in the 1970s.

All these factors, as well as all the specific musical traits discussed throughout this presentation, leads me to claim that these exponents of American avant-rock both reconnects with and significantly extends the style and language of 1970s progressive rock. In many ways, the true artistic feat of these bands is the reinstatement of notions of romanticism and modernism in a post-modern era.

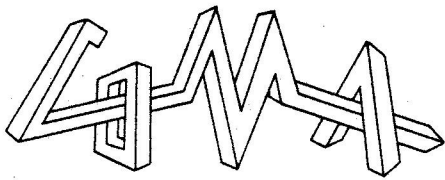
⁶⁰ Martin 1997: 119

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APPENDIX

1. COMA-manifesto I
2. COMA-manifesto II
3. "Dead Silence" (Mike Johnson) – original score
4. "Ginger Tea" (James Grigsby) – original score
5. "Well... Not Chickenshit" (David Kerman) – transcription



California Outside Music Association
5153 Hanbury Street
Long Beach, CA 90808

Outside (out sid') adj. 1) a description meaning not within. (e.g., the music was outside of the mainstream.) 2) Artistic expression supported by COMA (i.e., progressive/avant-garde new wave, rock, jazz, classical, free jazz, ethnic, performance art, modern dance, modern ballet, photography, video art, expressionism, surrealism, poetry, modern theatre, etc.)

I. What is COMA?

COMA is a non-profit organization coordinating the artistic endeavors of performers, producers, promoters and audiences of "outside" music/art. Currently, COMA's primary function is booking and promoting its members' performances/exhibits at clubs, concert halls, college campuses, galleries, and wherever performances and/or exhibits can be sanctioned. Future plans include a bi-monthly magazine, detailing the organization's activities, and a referral service designed to help members contact extra artists and gain preferred access to recording studios and engineers for studio projects, with producers already available. COMA's final goal is to educate the public, making them aware of what we have to offer - a valid and viable alternative to mainstream music, through optimum exposure and publicity.

II. A Business Objective: Selling Art Without Selling Out

COMA realizes that the music/art industry is reluctant to sign and promote artists whose music and concepts confuse and/or challenge the unadventurous consumer. We also know that the music/art business is highly competitive, causing "success" to be extremely difficult for any artist to attain. The "outsider" is especially hard-put because he/she must decide whether to compromise his/her art or to remain unknown. COMA believes that neither case is necessary. By combining the strength of numbers and dedication of the artists, COMA will make the artist and their unique ability known. In return, COMA does not ask him/her to compromise artistic integrity. By organizing in this fashion, COMA will overcome the competition - competition that unfortunately pits one "outsider" against another.

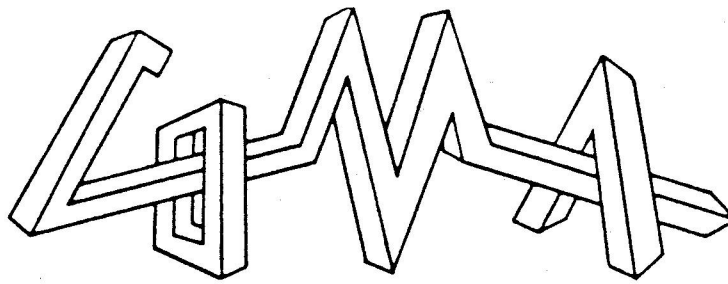
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California Outside Music Association

outside (out sid') adj. -- 1) a description meaning not within. (e.g. the music was outside of the mainstream.) 2) Music supported by COMA; (e.g. Free Jazz, Avant-Rock, Electronic Music, Modern Classical, etc.)

What is COMA?

The California Outside Music Association is a non-profit, membership organization founded in March 1983. The organization's purpose is to further "outside," that is, non-mainstream music. Our goal is to make the public aware of the existence and importance of outside music.

History

In March of 1983, COMA began to promote itself. Since July of the same year, we have produced over twenty concerts and many radio programs. In June '85, COMA (in association with Rotary Totem Records) released the first of a series of LP's featuring music by our members.

What does COMA do?

In addition to the functions mentioned above, COMA operates a free of charge musicians referral service that allows musicians to contact other musicians, artists, and technicians. Artists and technicians may also use the service to contact musicians. The album mentioned above is our most ambitious project to date. However, we have already undertaken a more ambitious project: production and distribution of an interview/music program for nationwide broadcast.

Why COMA?

COMA believes that most outside music is thoughtful, well-crafted, imaginative and important music. It encourages the listener to become involved and exercise his/her aesthetic sensibility. It is music which recognizes traditions and attempts to create new ones. Again and again members of COMA have noted that many individuals enjoy outside music when exposed to it. With more exposure, outside music and its proponents will receive the attention that they deserve.

Why Non-Profit?

COMA is non-profit organization for many reasons. Most importantly we can put aesthetics before the bottom line. As many of us know, profits and aesthetics do not often mix.

5153 Hanbury Street Long Beach, CA 90808 (213) 420-COMA

**DOWNTOWN
SEPTEMBER 28, 1991
LONG BEACH,**
The California Outside Music Association (COMA)
and System M are pleased to present the 4th annual

**day
[of]
Music**

**Birdland West
Mum's Ristorante
System M Caffé Gallery
Walker Building
Williams/Lamb Gallery**

**27 Bands
Noon to Midnight
Five Bucks**

**Sponsored by the
Downtown Long Beach
Association.**

M
SYSTEM
Caffé Gallery

c•ma
california **OUTSIDE** music association

DEAD SILENCE

"C" Score

by Mike Johnson

164

Voice 1

Acoustic - steel string

Guitar 2

mf

(Strummed while muted with upper arm) Pan=R

Kybd. 3

V 1

G 2

K 1

Sampled Strings

p

mf

K 2

Sampled Strings

pp

mp

V 1

lost my pow - er of speech to - day,

V 2

mf tore it a - way,

V 3

G 2

mf (as)..a

K 1

pp

K 2

p

11

V 1 *And*

V 2 ...a snake its tail.

V 3 fly, trapped, leaves its wing be - hind,

G 2

K 2

15

V 1 I have walked in - to the trap that crav - ing truth must spring.

V 2 *And*

G 2

K 2

19

V 2 flesh now ren - ders that which mind can - not con - tain.

G 2

K 2

23

Sop.Sx. *mf*

K 2

Pno *mf*

27

Sop.Sx.

G 1 *mp* Slap Echo

K 2

Pno

31

Sop.Sx.

G 1

Pno

35

Sop.Sx.

G 1

K 2

Pno

Pno

p

mf

39

Sop.Sx.

G 1

G 2

K 2

Pno

mf

p

43

V 1

G 2

K 2

The

47

V 1 wall be - tween the world and me

V 2 ...and

V 3 ..has fa - ded out,

G 2

51 2

V 1 The

V 2 hells of my own dream - ing have..

V 3

G 2 torn through my doubt.

Pno 51 2 *mf*

55

V 1

ve - ry air is nau - seous The

V 3

and the wa - ter turned to puss.

Sop.Sx.

G 2

Pno

Pno

Bs

mf

mf

59

V 1
fo - rests feed le - vi_a - thans...

V 2
...whose wastes feed us.

Sop.Sx.

G 2

Pno

Pno

Bs

f

p

63

V 1

If there's no beau - ty, then close your eyes...

V 2

If there's no beau - ty,

G 2

p

Smooth Strings

K 1

p

Pno

Pno

Bs

f

p

67

V 1 If there's no jus - tice, just swal - low lies...

V 2 If there's no jus - stice,

G 2

K 1

Pno

Bs

> f *p*

71

V 1 (and) feed your children to the fur-nace

V 2 (and) feed your child-ren to the fur-nace

V 3 (and) feed your child-ren to the fur-nace

Cl. *mp*

G 1 *mp* Dist.+ Warbly Chorus

G 2

K 1

Pno

Pno

Bs *> f* *p*

75

V 1
Breathe the poi-son in si - lence

V 2
Breathe the poi-son in si - lence

V 3
Breathe the poi-son

Cl.
Breathe the poi-son

G 1
Slap Echo
Dist.+ Warbly Chorus
Clean

G 2

K 1

Pno

Bs
> f

79 Slower (mm158)

Sop.Sx. *mp*

G 1

G 2

K 1 Slower (mm158) Strings *pp*

K 2 Strings *mp*

Pno Slower (mm158) *ff*

Bs Slower (mm158)

83

Sop.Sx.

G 2

K 1

K 2

87

Sop.Sx.

G 2

K 1

K 2

K 3

Sampled cellos

mf

gradual accel

91

Sop.Sx.

G 2

K 1

K 2

K 3

gradual accel

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 87 to 90, and the second system covers measures 91 to 94. The instruments are Soprano Saxophone (Sop.Sx.), G2 (Guitar 2), K1 (Keyboard 1), K2 (Keyboard 2), K3 (Keyboard 3), and Sampled cellos. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Soprano Saxophone part has melodic lines with some rests. The G2 part features a rhythmic accompaniment of chords. The K1 part has a simple melodic line. The K2 part provides harmonic support with chords. The K3 part has a bass line. The Sampled cellos part is marked 'mf' and includes a 'gradual accel' instruction. The second system continues the same parts, with the Soprano Saxophone part starting at measure 91 and the other parts continuing from the previous system.

a tempo (mm166)

95
V 1
I hear no fur - or.

95
V 2
I hear no fur - or.

95
Sop.Sx.

95
G 2
a tempo (mm166)
p

95
K 1
mp
a tempo (mm166)
p

95
K 2
mf

95
K 3
f

95
Pno
a tempo (mm166)
mf

95
Bs
a tempo (mm166)
p *f*

99

V 1

Are none ap - palled? Or are my vi - sions..

V 2

Or are my vi - sions..

G 2

K 1

Pno

Pno

Bs

p *f*

103

V 1
just mad - ness, all? Will the win - ter

V 2
Will the win - ter

V 3
Will the win - ter

Cl.
mp

G 1
Slap Echo

G 2

K 1

Pno

Pno

Bs
p *f*

107

V 1
kill the sum - mer? (and) will the spring

V 2
kill the sum - mer? (and) will the spring

V 3
kill the sum - mer? (and) will the spring

Cl.
107

G 1
107
Dist.+ Warbly Chorus
Slap Echo

G 2
107

K 1
107

Pno
107

Pno
107

Bs
107
p *f*

111

V 1
be si - lent?

V 2
be si - lent?

Cl.
111

G 1
Dist.+ Warbly Chorus
111

G 2
111

K 1
111

Bs
111

115

Cl.
115

G 1
Clean
f *p*
115

G 2
115

K 1
115

Pno
115

Bs
ff *f*
115

119 1/4=156

V 1

Sop.Sx. 1/4=156

G 1 1/4=156
mf Slight Overdrive
f

G 2

K 1 1/4=156

Pno 1/4=156
8va

Pno 1/4=156
f

Bs 1/4=156
f

123

Sop.Sx.

G 1 Pull-off

Pno *mf*

Pno *mf*

Bs

135 $\frac{1}{4}=180$

Sop.Sx. *f* *mp*

G 1 $\frac{1}{4}=180$
Clean *mp*

K 1 *f* *mf*

K 3

Pno $\frac{1}{4}=180$
f

Bs $\frac{1}{4}=180$
f *mp*

139

G 1

Acc1 *mf*

Acc2 *mp*

Bs

Detailed description: This page of a musical score covers measures 135 to 139. It features seven staves: Sopran Saxophone (Sop.Sx.), Guitar 1 (G 1), Keyboard 1 (K 1), Keyboard 3 (K 3), Piano (Pno), Bass (Bs), and Accordion (Acc1, Acc2, Bs). The score is in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 1/4 = 180. The Sopran Saxophone part begins at measure 135 with a triplet of eighth notes marked *f*, followed by a melodic line that transitions to *mp*. The Guitar 1 part is marked 'Clean' and *mp*. The Keyboard 1 part also starts with a triplet of eighth notes marked *f*, then moves to *mf*. The Piano part has a *f* dynamic. The Bass part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, starting with *f* and then *mp*. The Accordion parts (Acc1, Acc2, and a second Bass line) begin at measure 139 with various rhythmic and melodic patterns, with dynamics of *mf* and *mp*.

143

FL.

mp

143

FL.

mp

143

G 1

143

Acc1

143

Bs

147

FL.

147

FL.

147

G 1

147

Acc1

mp

147

Bs

151

FL.

FL.

G 1

Acc1

K 1

Pno

Bs

f

mf

mp

ff

Horn/strings

Distort.

slight accel

slight accel

slight accel

3

155 $\frac{1}{4}=192$

V 1 *mf* Ahhhh...

V 2

G 1 $\frac{1}{4}=192$ Pull-off

G 2 Acoustic - steel string *mf* Pull-off

K 1 $\frac{1}{4}=192$ *f*

K 2 Sampled Cello *p*

Bs $\frac{1}{4}=192$ *mf* OFF-Dist.

159

V 1

V 2

V 3

G 1

G 2

K 2

Bs

mf Ahhhh...

163

V 1

V 3

G 1

G 2

K 2

Pno

Pno

Bs

167

G 1

G 2

Pno

Pno

Bs

mf Electric Dist.+ Heavy Flange

f

f

f

5

171 Flute-like *mp*

Musical score for measures 171-174. The score is for a woodwind ensemble and piano. The instruments are Flute (Fl.), Clarinet 1 (G 1), Clarinet 2 (G 2), Piano (Pno), and Bassoon (Bs). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The flute part is marked 'Flute-like' and 'mp'. The piano part consists of two staves. The bassoon part has a melodic line.

175

Musical score for measures 175-178. The score is for a woodwind ensemble and piano. The instruments are Flute (Fl.), Clarinet 1 (G 1), Clarinet 2 (G 2), Piano (Pno), and Bassoon (Bs). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The flute part has a melodic line. The piano part consists of two staves. The bassoon part has a melodic line.

187

Fl. *Distort. (in mix)*

G 1 *Fuzz*
mf

K 1 *Sampled Voice*
f

Pno *sfz*

Pno *sfz*

Bs *f*

191

Fl.

G 1

G 2

K 1 *mp*

Pno *sfz*

Pno *sfz*

Bs

195

FL.

G 1

G 2

K 1

Pno

Pno

Bs

Clean

mf

f

sfz

sfz

199

Fl.

G 1

G 2

K 1

Pno

Pno

Bs

199

Organ

mf

sfz

sfz

mf

203

G 1

K 1

Bs

203

207

K 1

Bs

mp

211
K 1

211
Bs

Detailed description: This system contains two staves. The top staff is labeled 'K 1' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Bs'. Both staves start with a measure number '211'. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It contains four measures of music, primarily consisting of chords and some eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It contains four measures of music, featuring a melodic line with eighth notes and rests.

215
K 1

Detailed description: This system contains a single staff labeled 'K 1'. It starts with a measure number '215'. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It contains four measures of music, primarily consisting of chords and some eighth-note patterns.

Ginger Tea

voice

1 A hot cup of gin - ger tea and a few drags of

bassoon

1

piano

1

guitar

1

bass

1

1

v. 3 ree - fer could ea - si - ly take me back.

b.

3

p.

3

g.

(Sub) - - - - -

3

B

3

v. 5 Ha zy sun - light scat - tered through the build - ings and the palms. The

p.

5

v. 7 tem - pere - ture was ri - sing on my Nine - teen Thir - ty Six stuc - co bal - co - ny.

f.

b.

p.

g.

B.

v. 8 The day the year was all up to me.

b.

p.

g.

B.

v. 13 A block a - way June was stop - ping traf - fic.

b.

v. 17 Her awk-ward gait

b. 17

p. 17

g. 17

B. 17

v. 19 (she did - n't wear those shoes yes - ter - day) sug - ges - ted

f. 19

b. 19

p. 19

g. 19

B. 168

v. 21 vul-ner-a - bil - i - ty, a sharp con-trast to eyes that shot straight

f.

b.

p.

g.

B.

21

v. 24 for the base of the brain.

b.

p.

g.

a.

24

169

slower

v. 26 She had the same eyes yes - ter - day.

f. 26 slower

b. 26 slower

p. 26 slower

g. 26 slower

B. 26 slower

26

v. 28 De - spite her cool mus - lin blouse and blue jeans

f. 28

b. 28

p. 28

g. 28

B. 28

v. 38 I nod - ded, set my cup down, took a last deep drag,

f. 38

b. 38

p. 38

g. 38

B. 38

v. 41 brushed back strands of fa - ded hair

f. 41

b. 41

p. 41

g. 41

B. 41

v. 42 in vain il - lu - sions of the past, and

f. 42

b. 42

p. 42

g. 42

B. 42

v. 44 skipped down - stairs.

f. 44

b. 44

p. 44

v. 47 "Hi. You look love - ly."

b. 47

p. 47

g. 47

B. 47

v. 51 "What's your name?"

b. 51

p. 51

g. 51

B. 51

v. 53 She raced past me up the stairs,

p. 53

v. 55 half - way glanc - ing back to an - swer.

b. 55

p. 55

g. 55

B. 55

v. 58 "Hel - lo June. My name is E - dison."

b. 58

p. 58

g. 58

B. 58

b. 61 slower

p. 175 61 slower

65 *very slow* "You play all these?" *a tempo* I nod - ded, sur - veyed the room,

v. *very slow* *a tempo*

f. *very slow* *a tempo*

b. *very slow* *a tempo*

p. *very slow* *a tempo*

g. *very slow* *a tempo*

B. *very slow* *a tempo*

68 lit - tered with ra - di - os, vi - o - lins and ar - cane re - cord - ing e -

v. *3* *3* *3*

f. *3* *3* *3*

b. *3* *3* *3*

p. *3* *3* *3*

g. *3* *3* *3*

v. 70 quip - ment. I bit my lip, hop - ing her

f. 70

b. 70

p. 70

g. 70

B. 70

v. 72 friends weren't thieves.

b. 72

p. 72

g. 72

B. 177 72

74

v. 3

"That's a beau - ti - ful neck - lace."

b. 74

p. 74

g. 74

B. 74

p. 76

g. 76

B. 76

v. 78

I was - n't ly - ing. She wore the most el - e - gant In - di - an sil - ver

p. 78

g. 78

B. 78

80 jew - el - ry which, set a - gainst her cof - fee com - plex - ion and braid - ed hair,

81 gave an im - pres - sion of cas - u - al op - u - lence. She

83 would-n't stay long in this part of town. "A la - dy gave it to me.

slower

v. 86 She takes care of me. So what do you want to do?"

f. 86

p. 86

B. 86

a tempo

v. 88 a tempo "Let's just sit here and make out for a while."

b. 88 a tempo

p. 88 a tempo

g. 88 a tempo

B. 88 a tempo

v. 89 She smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

b. 89

p. 89

90 It's not cus - to - ma - ry to kiss hook - ers, but she did - n't seem to know that. I could

90

90

90

90

90

92 guess her back - ground but not her di - rec - tion. I kissed her like she was a col - lege girl.

92

92

92

92

92

94 "So how much do you want to spend, old man?"

94

94

94

94

94

b. 96

p. 96 96

B.

96

b. 97

p. 97 97

B.

97

v. 98

f. 98 98

b. 98

p. 182 98

100

v. new trick were rid - ing up - town in a

f. 100

b. 100

p. 100

g. 100

B. 100

101

v. sil - ver sports car. To - mor - row she'd be back with me in blue jeans.

f. 101

b. 101

p. 101

g. 101

B. 101

101

183

p. 101

105

v. "Can I look to June?" "Are you one of her friends?"

f.

b.

p.

g.

B.

105

107

v. "Not really." "The

f.

b.

p.

g.

B.

107

184

107

108 bitch skipped out, ripped me off for two - hun - dred dol - lar, not to men - tion the

109 last two months rent. You see her, tell her An - dy C is look - in' for her."

111 "I doubt I'll see her a - gain."

Well... Not Chickenshit

♩ = 112

Introduction

David Kerman
Transcription: Jarle G. Storløkken

Keyboard

Bass Guitar

Kbd.

Bass

Kbd.

Bass

E. Gtr.

Voice

A

Kbd.

Bass

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

18

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

21

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

24

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

26

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

29

29

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

E. Gtr.



33

33

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

E. Gtr.



B

38

38

Voice

Kbd.



42

42

Voice

Vln.

Kbd.

Bass

46

Vln.

Kbd.

Bass



51

Transition

Vln.

Kbd.

Kbd.

Bass



57

Kbd.

Kbd.

Bass



61

C

Kbd.

Kbd.

Bass

2nd time: 8va

64

Kbd. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 



67

Kbd. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 



69

Kbd. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 

Guitar solo enters 2nd time

72 x4

E. Org. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 

75

E. Org. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 

78

E. Org. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 

81

E. Org. 

Kbd. 

Bass 

E. Gtr. 

Just top voice transcribed - chords difficult to sort out

84

E. Org.

Kbd.

Bass

E. Gtr.

88

E. Org.

Kbd.

Bass

E. Gtr.

91

Bass

95

Bass

98

Bass

Pno.

E. Gtr.

Vib.

101

Bass

Pno.

E. Gtr.

Vib.



104

Bass

Pno.

E. Gtr.

Vib.

unison bend



107

Bass

Pno.

E. Gtr.

Vib.

110

Bass

Pno.

E. Gtr.

Vib.



'E' Theme

113

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

Pno.

E. Gtr.

Vib.



116

Voice

Kbd.

Bass

119

Voice

Kbd.

Bass



122

Voice

Kbd.

F etc.