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## JIM TENNEY AND SPACE TRAVEL (EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION)

LARRY POLANSKY

OUR PLANET HAS run out of ideas, and out of room. For perhaps the first time in the history of our species, the frightening possibility exists that we will cease to explore outward, to extend our physical and geographic frontiers—while deliberately turning our attention to the maintenance of the meager resources on this planet. We are now making deeper and deeper investigations of the expansion of the human mind, but without a corresponding expansion of our physical environment. Humanity must proceed in both directions at all times, to maintain the balance between the potentials of the organism and the potentials of the environment.

Of course the mind needs exploring. Continual discovery regarding our perception, modes of consciousness, cognitive organization, and mental capabilities is an evolutionary process both necessary and exciting. Each day we learn more about the possibilities and potentials of the electrochemical system known as the human brain. Work in cybernetic, cognitive, and perceptual modelling offers new ways of considering our creative, communicative, and developmental behavior, and suggests radical ways in which we might deliberately evolve that behavior into a future in which we might enjoy a spiritual and intellectual habitat previously thought to be the exclusive province of mystics. Science, technology, spirituality, and art become less distinct with each new discovery about the nature of matter, with each new work by people like Alvin Lucier, David Rosenboom, or James Tenney, with each new piece of intelligent software or hardware, with each new discovery about neural pathways in the brain, and with each new datum of extraterrestrial information. With the dissolution of these boundaries emerges a new type of human.

Trotsky (himself a mathematician) suggested that the goal of any political system should be to allow mankind to devote its energies to pure art and science, and that the maintenance of each person's physical well-being and economic security was a rather primitive step in our history (albeit one we have far from reached). It then becomes the role of artists and scientists, perhaps, to simply "maintain" a certain amount of intellectual progress until the world is ready to start utilizing it, like the legendary Hassidic "tzaddikim" who caretake a thread of "righteousness" until the Messianic age arrives.

Many of the composers represented in this volume have helped humanity reach its terrestrial limits. Composers like Lou Harrison have helped create a truly planetary music. Artists like Alvin Lucier and Stan Brakhage have shown us

the impossibility of distinguishing between human and natural creation, and as such have permanently changed our perception of the physical world. Pierce, Tenney, Hiller, Ames, Rosenboom, and others have looked inward, investigating the nature, limits, and possibilities of human perception and cognition. They too have changed forever the role of art, by making the act of creation less concerned with invention than with discovery. They have opened doors to the human mind.

Yet the mind is not the last, nor the only frontier remaining. It should not be explored by default, simply because there is nowhere else to go. We must leave the planet, and soon. The scope of discovery, the sheer quantity of newness that lies ahead of us is, to be almost ridiculously understated, unparalleled in human history. Along with the physical and scientific wonders beyond the earth's atmosphere lies an equally rich inspirational and ideological source for art and the advancement of the human consciousness. It's not that we simply need more room to live—we need more room to think. It's not simply what we can learn about "things" by going into space—but what we can learn about ourselves. When the first human inhabits another planet, there will be a revolution in art and ideas unlike any we have ever seen, and probably unlike any we will see again until another dimension of equal magnitude (time? physicality?) is breached.

As a young composer, I hope to live long enough to see and be part of this revolution. But the way things seem at the moment, this is far from certain. For older generations of composers, it is even less likely that this essential and cathartic destiny of man will be reached in their lifetime. I don't mean to sound morbid—just sad. We have moved too slowly—turned our attention to the details of the mundane, the terrestrial. We possess the technology, the means, and in many cases, the willingness to go (I would much rather be a Martian composer than an Oakland one), but have chosen to squander those resources destroying life, and in a relatively recent aberration, constructing atmospheric defense systems to ensure that no one can leave!

In a sense the substantial artistic progress made in the last thirty or forty years will be wasted if we do not move on to the next step. In much the same way that many in the generation after Schönberg were content to fill in details, to be self-referential, and to ignore the deep generative ideas of serialism (the primitives of form, morphogenesis, and the need for radicalization of art), the ideas of Tenney, Hiller, Rosenboom, and Xenakis are beginning to be trivialized, made into elaborate clichés, and, worst of all, left unchanged.

James Tenney, as a composer and theorist, has given us a body of work that erases many of the boundaries that functioned to retard our intellectual and spiritual evolution. He has looked at the mind, he has looked at sound, and he has refused to compromise his feeling that music must change mankind, must evolve the species into a slightly higher order of being.

Tenney's work is often focussed on human perception itself, and suggests what composer John Bischoff might call "advanced listening techniques." It's

not so much that Tenney wants to tell you something, as it is that, like Cage, he is interested in providing a tool to help you evolve. In other instances, Tenney's musical models are subtly cosmological. Like Fuller's geometries, which strongly suggest drastic improvements for the existing blueprints for society and the human mind, several of Tenney's compositions give us formal "holarchies" which offer, in a way that only sound can, new possibilities for modes of personal and societal functioning.

To continue this work, we must seek out the next frontiers, and I believe we are in large part ignoring the obvious. Whereas Tenney's inspirations have often come from hitherto unknown aspects of human formal perception, the next generation's must come from a greatly expanded knowledge of the universe. Where Lou Harrison teaches us about "northwest Asia" (Europe), we must teach the next generation about a small rock slightly to the left of Andromeda Ra 23h 37m 10sd 43 4'.