POLITICAL ACTIVISM THROUGH MUSIC FOR PIANO: A PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO INTERPRETING THE IDEOLOGY IN FREDERIC RZEWSKI'S (1938-2021) *NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS* (1979) AND CORNELIUS CARDEW'S (1936-1981) *THÄLMANN VARIATIONS* (1974)

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Michael Jorge Langer

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

Major Program:
Music

July 2022

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

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DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

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ABSTRACT

Political music is an emerging and relevant phenomenon. These works can pose challenges to performers in terms of understanding and interpreting their nuanced historical and political ideology. This dissertation is about the philosophical intersection of politics and works for solo piano. The primary works I examine are *Thälmann Variations* (1974) by English composer Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981) and *North American Ballads* (1979) by American composer Frederic Rzewski (1938-2021). I investigate the political ideology of each composer and connect it to their works. I explore the theoretical and philosophical implications of these works and offer my interpretive and programmatic recommendations to the performer.

Rzewski's *North American Ballads* (*Ballads* for short) are well known and have received generous scholarship; however, missing is a deeper philosophical examination, especially of the inclusion of improvisation. I have drawn together the best research while offering my interpretations and performance recommendations. There is little existing research on Cardew's *Thälmann Variations,* so I have provided an ideological and theoretical analysis.

I begin by establishing a foundation on the political music scholarship of Garratt, Mattern, and Rosenthal and Flacks as well as the philosophy of Foucault. I then draw on Rzewski's lectures and interviews to understand his ideology and apply it to my interpretation of his *Ballads*, building on the work of Hayashi, Paul, Zuraw, Cornett, Hershberger, and Hamm. This provides the framework for my interpretation and analysis of Cardew's *Variations*.

I argue that understanding the political underpinnings of the solo piano works of Rzewski and Cardew through the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures will help pianists understand each work's ideology while also allowing for better engagement with the repertoire. I additionally assert that these works act as objects of protest where the performer can embody

resistance. To understand the political underpinnings, performers need to be aware of the broader political and historical connections of each work and composer. To present the best performance which communicates the composer's intent, pianists will benefit from analysis of the music and philosophical examination of the ideology therein.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family for all their support and encouragement on this journey, especially my wife, Sarah, for the unfailing sympathetic ear, and my brother, Garhett, for providing a place to live during my dual life in two cities.

A great many thanks go to my teachers, advisors, and committee members at North Dakota State University. Thank you, Dr. Tyler Wottrich, for continually challenging me to think differently about music and performance, and for your guidance through my research. Thank you, Dr. Cassie Keogh, for your pedagogical training which has made me a much more effective teacher. I appreciate the guidance both you and Dr. Kyle Vanderburg have given me in forming this paper, especially my analysis of the *Thälmann Variations*. Thank you to my other committee members, Dr. Sigurd Johnson and Dr. Nicholas Bauroth, for your feedback and assistance in the writing process. Thank you, Dr. Annett Richter, for teaching me how to think and write like a scholar, and for your translations of the German documents that were so crucial to this research. I also could not have begun this research without graduate writing consultant Kristina Caton, who ignited my central thesis and was never afraid to prune my extreme verbosity.

Thanks also go to Dr. Corey Hamm for offering your time for an interview which has been so supportive to this document. Finally, many thanks to my colleagues and students at the University of Mary, who supported me throughout this journey. Achieving this milestone has truly been my *lumen vitae*.

DEDICATION

To my wife and dearest friend, Sarah, who has, without fail, offered all the love and support I could hope to ask for, who patiently listened to all the stories, successes, daydreaming, complaints, and whining, and whose steadfast encouragement kept me going through this journey with the inspiring words “just get it done!”

Familia supra omnia.

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CHAPTER 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFLUENCE OF MUSIC AND POLITICS

Come writers and critics who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide, the chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon for the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who that it's namin'
For the loser now will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'

Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside and it's ragin'
It'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls
Oh, the times they are a changin'

—Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, 1963

This dissertation is about the philosophical intersection of politics and works for solo piano. The primary works I examine are *Thälmann Variations* (1974) by English composer Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981) and *North American Ballads* (1979) by American composer Frederic Rzewski (1938-2021). I investigate the political ideology of each composer and connect it to their works. I explore the theoretical and philosophical implications of these works and offer my interpretive and programmatic recommendations to the performer.

Political music is an emerging and relevant phenomenon. In this current world where politics seems to touch every facet of life, new music with political messages provides a bounty of material for philosophical examination as well as compelling and timely repertoire for performers. There is an increasing number of political works for solo piano. These works pose challenges to performers in terms of understanding the nuanced historical and political ideology in which they are steeped. Additionally, risk is involved when performers take a political stand. My goal here is to first provide a framework for understanding political movements and how music supports those movements. I also hope to aid in the interpretation of these works. There is

little existing research on Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*. I have not found any theoretical analysis and so I have provided my own. Of the scant available research on the original songs Cardew used in the *Variations*, much is in German, and so I had it translated and include it here. Rzewski's *North American Ballads* are much more popular and have received generous scholarship; however, missing from that research is a deeper philosophical examination, especially of the inclusion of improvisation in the works. I have attempted to represent the best commentary of previous scholars while offering my own interpretations and performance recommendations.

Chapter 1 summarizes the history of political philosophies, social movements, protest, and how music has been a part of each. It introduces the topics, terms, people, and works used in the following chapters of this dissertation. It will identify and define major political terms, philosophies, and philosophers as well as political music terms and categories. It also discusses how pianists can engage with politics and political music.

Looking broadly, Chapters 2 through 5 cover two composers, Frederic Rzewski and Cornelius Cardew, their political ideology, and their political works of the 1970s. These are complex works based on protest songs from the 1930s. The composers' ideologies had a powerful influence on these works, and those ideologies need to be understood to perform the works convincingly. Additionally, the historical context of the works needs to be understood to successfully interpret them. I believe these works are worthy of study and performance. As I will show, they are effective in addressing social and political issues in present society.

Chapter 2 explores Frederic Rzewski's political ideology as well as his political works from the 1970s. Chapter 3 analyzes his *North American Ballads*. I cross-examine existing

scholarship with my own philosophical analysis and offer interpretive and programmatic recommendations to the performer.

Chapter 4 explores Cornelius Cardew's political ideology as well as his political works from the 1970s. Chapter 5 contains my own theoretical and philosophical analysis of his largest work for piano solo, *Thälmann Variations*. I offer my interpretive and programmatic recommendations to the performer.

In Chapter 6, I reflect on what my research reveals about the ideological interpretation of these works for pianists and audiences and I offer further pursuits of investigation into these works, composers, and topics.

I argue that understanding the political underpinnings of the solo piano works of Rzewski and Cardew through the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures will help pianists understand each work's ideology while also allowing for better engagement with this repertoire which targets a politically- and socially-aware audience and speaks to current political and social issues. I additionally assert that these works act as objects of protest and that the performer embodies resistance as well. To understand the political underpinnings, performers need to be aware of the broader political and historical connections of each work and composer. To present the best performance which communicates the composer's intent, pianists will benefit from analysis of the music and philosophical examination of the ideology therein. Performers must also be aware of the potential risks involved in presenting political ideas and must therefore be clear in their message.

In this chapter, many of the political terms, philosophies, philosophers, political music terms and categories I identify and define will come from James Garratt's *Music and Politics: A*

Critical Introduction (2019).[1] Supplemental commentary will come from Mark Mattern's *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action* (1998), and Rosenthal and Flacks' *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (2012).[2] To give context to the specific problems facing today's political pianist I have consulted Benjamin Hopkins' dissertation "The Political Pianist: Protest, Commissions, and Programming for the Twenty-First Century" (2020).[3]

The following chapters deal with multiple political eras, places, and figures of the twentieth century. Therefore, in this chapter I will provide a brief definition of politics and power. Next, I will define major political systems, political philosophers, and their philosophies, followed by the ways people oppose these systems through protest, resistance, and social movements. Since this document is primarily about how Cardew and Rzewski connect politics with their music, I survey the broader story of how music has been used in protest, resistance, and social movements, with a historical look at music's involvement through major eras of the twentieth century. The final topic is how pianists can engage with politics and the risks involved in doing so.

Political Terms

Politics are at the center of Cardew and Rzewski's works, so a definition of *politics* is needed first in order to understand its many facets and what it meant to the composers. The terms *political* and *politics* are problematic to begin with, with definitions on a wide spectrum.

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[1]James Garratt, *Music and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[2]Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Robert Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2012).

[3]Benjamin Hopkins, "Protest, Commissions, and Programming for the Twenty-First Century" (DMA diss., The University of British Columbia, 2020), accessed December 3, 2021, https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0395353?o=0.

Depending on one's frame of reference, *politics* might only refer to government and voting, or it might refer to every element of one's daily life. One might have a negative opinion of politics, thinking of the division and arguing it causes, or one might view it positively, thinking in noble terms of how obstacles have been overcome in history through social movements and how new legislation has been created to protect the rights of the under-privileged.

How much of life is political? The ancient Greeks viewed all life as political, using the word *politeia*, "which encompasses not only the organization and running of the state (*polis*) but public civic life in general."[4] Mattern defines how life can become political, saying "while all social life is potentially political, it is not inherently so. Social life becomes political through disagreement, debate, and conflict when unreflective, habitual reinforcement of communal identity and commitments is challenged."[5] Connecting with academia, Garratt points out how the definition of politics has expanded, saying that the "view of the political as inherent in all social relations chimes with the massively expanded conception of politics currently operative in arts and humanities disciplines (including musicology). Over the last half-century, the concept of the political has extended well beyond the state to encompass all aspects of life…"[6] In order to draw a clearer line between public and private life, there is another term: *civil society*. This can be used "to accommodate institutions and activities which are not part of the state apparatus yet are public in the broader sense. While civil society includes the spheres of religion and education, it also draws in political institutions that are not part of the state, such as trade unions and social change organizations."[7] This might be the best term to define the political worlds of the following chapters, as they deal with both trade unions and social change.

[4]Garratt, 6.
[5]Mattern, 4-5.
[6]Garratt, 10.
[7]Ibid., 6.

The music of Cardew and Rzewski deals with the political component of resistance. Resistance will be defined later, but first, why is it necessary? Resistance opposes those in power. How is power or control maintained by people, institutions, companies, and governments? Garratt and Mattern define three forms (Mattern calls them faces) of power: visible/domination, hidden/implied, and invisible/ideological. Visible power is exercised openly through institutions, structures, policies, and processes.[8] As domination, it involves an attempt by one or more individuals to control the behavior of others.[9] This is exhibited in how different classes, genders, races, and ethnicities control other groups in varying degrees and ways.[10]

Hidden or implied power works inconspicuously on the body and psyche through means of censorship or positive/negative association.[11] Garratt defines invisible power as "even more insidious, controlling how individuals view their place and role…[it] works at the level of values, beliefs and cultural practices, being internalized by the dominated and convincing them that there is no alternative to the status quo."[12] It takes the form of misinformation, propaganda, ideological control, or a history of oppression.[13] These are all various negative forms of power. Mattern calls the positive form *power as capacity* referring to "the skills and resources that enable critical choice and successful action by individuals or groups. Citizens in a democratic community must share a capacity for appropriate and responsible participation in public life."[14] In this democratic community "citizens require access to appropriate communicative arenas for participation in politics."[15]

[8]Garratt, 37-38.
[9]Mattern, 34-35.
[10]Ibid., 32-33.
[11]Garratt, 37-38; Mattern, 34-35.
[12]Garratt, 37-38.
[13]Mattern, 34-35.
[14]Ibid., 33.
[15]Ibid., 33.

The last type of power is *hegemony*, a type of power gained by being superior in strength, rather than through the direct use of force.[16] An example would be how the United States has historically been able to remain a superpower on the global stage not by using force but because of its superior fighting capacity. On a simpler level more related to these musical subjects is *cultural hegemony*. This is when "through cultural and intellectual work to win over hearts and minds, a particular group is able to secure discursive domination and thus the consent of the masses."[17] Garratt uses this to explain "the dominance of the ruling class, but also how the other classes can challenge it."[18] In the following chapters, this will be reflected in the stories of protest.

Political Philosophers and Philosophies

The following chapters delve into multiple political philosophies, principally communism and fascism as well as socialism, liberalism, and leftist viewpoints in Europe and America in the 1930s and 1970s. Therefore, familiarity is needed with the philosophies of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Hanns Eisler, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. Most significant is the philosophy of Michel Foucault which has the greatest bearing on the relationship of power and resistance, so I will go into greater detail on his contribution, as it provides an excellent lens through which to view the piano works of Cardew and Rzewski.

Marxism and Communism

Communism had a great impact on Cardew and Rzewski's music, so an understanding of this philosophy is needed to better understand their works. German philosophers Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895) developed the philosophy of Marxism in the

[16]Garratt, 38.
[17]Ibid., 39.
[18]Ibid., 39.

1840s, which led to the offshoots of socialism and communism. Marxism is not a single, cohesive doctrine, but an umbrella term. This theory "involved a materialist conception of history, a theory of class war, a belief in the ultimate destruction of capitalism and the formation of a classless society…or community based on common ownership of property and common labour with all sharing the common product."[19] Labor is the primary focus, as their belief was that "the capitalist mode of production exploits workers… It also alienates and dehumanizes them…"[20] Marxism is "an ideal of emancipation in which society is reorganized in order to enable individuals to realize their essential human capacities and powers. …the worker gains satisfaction from fulfilling labor and shared ownership over the product."[21] This ideal will be echoed in the writings of Eisler below, and all of the music surrounding Cardew and Rzewski in the following chapters.

Fascism

Cardew and his work oppose fascism, and so that political philosophy must be defined. The word *fascism* is derived from Benito Mussolini's (1883-1945) *fascisti* in Italy.[22] Fascism is difficult to define because "there is no consensus as to what Fascism was or is."[23] There are three features associated with fascism: the glorification of the state, the glorification of violence, and the glorification of the leader and leadership.[24] A leading expert on fascism, Stanley Payne describes it by what it opposes, saying it is "anti-Liberal, anti-Communist and anti-

[19]Susie Dent, ed., "Marxism," in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 19th ed., London, (Chambers Harrap, 2012-), accessed November 1, 2019, https://ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/brewerphrase/marxism/0?institutionId=1780.

[20]Garratt, 16-17.

[21]Ibid., 17.

[22]"'Fascism': The Word's Meaning and History," in *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed October 24, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/fascism-meaning-and-history.

[23]Richard Wyn Jones and Dafydd Jones, "Defining Fascism," in *The Fascist Party in Wales?: Plaid Cymru, Welsh Nationalism and the Accusation of Fascism*, 1st ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), 31, accessed June 10, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhgxh.7.

[24]Jones, "Defining Fascism," 35-36.

Conservative," and has "the desire to build an authoritarian state on entirely new foundations (rather than on traditional principles)."[25] Fascism has features of dictatorships and authoritarianism, but totalitarianism was the ultimate goal.[26] Forman compares communism to fascism, calling it the "arch foe" of fascism, but despite that, they are both totalitarian systems.[27] He sees fascism as a reaction to communism and defines both in terms of how they activate and control the working and middle classes.[28] He compares them, saying "Both call for worldwide struggle, but communism, being predemocratic and preindustrial, demands class war and the upward struggle of the worker. On the other hand, fascism, postdemocratic and postindustrial, must maintain its upper-class industrialists to support the racial war it intends to wage."[29] Viewing these competing ideologies in terms of class struggle helps to answer why people would support totalitarian rule. The groups most threatened by communism were "the lower-middle-class in close proximity to the communist workers, and the industrialists and landowners" and the military.[30] Therefore, communists as well as Jews became the enemy of fascists in Germany during the 1930s.

Nazism is a branch of fascism. The name is derived from a shortening and alteration from the German *Nationalsozialist* (national socialist).[31] It is defined as "the body of political and economic doctrines held and put into effect by the Nazis in Germany from 1933 to 1945 under Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) including the totalitarian principle of government, predominance of

[25]Ibid., 32.

[26]James D. Forman, *Fascism: The Meaning and Experience of Reactionary Revolution* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1974), 14; Jones, "Defining Fascism," 37.

[27]Forman, *Fascism*, 14.

[28]Ibid., 14-15.

[29] Ibid., 14-15.

[30] Ibid., 15-16.

[31]"Nazi," in *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed October 24, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Nazi.

especially Germanic groups assumed to be racially superior, and supremacy of the *führer*."[32] Garratt views fascism as "by far the most important political ideology to have emerged over the last century, and aspects of its influence continue to resonate within contemporary politics."[33] This lasting influence will be demonstrated through examination of Cardew's political life and music and consideration of what his music's message means today.

Hanns Eisler

Cardew and Rzewski were profoundly impacted by the political, social, and musical philosophy of German composer Hanns Eisler (1898-1962). Understanding his influence will benefit the interpretation of their works. Eisler was a major figure of twentieth-century music and politics. Cardew used one of Eisler's songs in his *Thälmann Variations* and Rzewski used one of Eisler's songs in his *36 Variations on* '*The People United Will Never Be Defeated!'* (1975) just four years before composing the *Ballads*.

Eisler studied with Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) and Anton Webern (1883-1945) in the early 1920s. In Berlin, he joined the German Communist Party in 1926. For the next decade he focused his time on writing and performing songs that supported the communist cause, which for him was primarily about labor.[34] Eisler's music was banned in 1933 when Hitler came to power and Eisler spent the next 15 years in exile in France, Russia, and the United States.[35] His music became dedicated to the overthrow of fascism. In 1942, he moved to the United States where he worked on film scores for Hollywood and European films. In the late 1940s, he faced

[32]"Nazism," in *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed October 24, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Nazism.

[33]Garratt, 179.

[34]Larry Weinstein, *Solidarity Song: the Hanns Eisler Story*, DVD, produced by Rhombus Media and ARTE/ZDF German Television Network (Oley, PA: Bullfrog Films, 1997).

[35]David Blake, "Eisler, Hanns," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2001-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.08667.

the Committee on Un-American Activities.[36] Despite a worldwide protest on his behalf organized by famous actors and composers, Eisler was expelled from the United States in 1948. He moved to Vienna and then Berlin in 1949.[37] There, he composed the anthem for East Germany.[38] His most fiercely anti-fascist work was also his largest in scale: *Deutsche Sinfonie*, op. 50 (1935-58), premiered in East Berlin in 1959.[39]

Eisler was equally known for his writings on the role of the composer in modern society. He believed music should serve the working class and "his goal was to use 'music as a weapon'" to fight for the labor movement.[40] In 1935, Eisler complained about institutions governing the art world, saying modern composers were "parasites entirely supported by wealthy patrons," more like a servant than an independent free-thinking artist.[41] He believed their art suffered since it could not reflect the everyday working man and support his struggles.[42] Eisler despised the wealthy class for holding all the power in determining the future of classical music.[43] As he saw it, they chose the composers and works that were performed, which, according to Eisler, did nothing to support the working class because the upper class did not care about the needs of the working class.[44] Eisler believed the working class should also determine what art is produced.[45] His beliefs were shared by many in the global music community and continued to

[36]Ibid.
[37]Ibid.
[38]Weinstein, *Solidarity Song*.
[39]Blake, "Eisler, Hanns."
[40]Rosenthal and Flacks, 8.
[41]Frederic Rzewski, "'We are the pupils of the working class': Hanns Eisler Today," article for The Daily World, New York, August, 1978, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 224.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid.
[45]Ibid., 226.

have an impact on composers even after his death, as is shown in the lives of Rzewski and Cardew.

Adorno and Marcuse

Mid-century left-wing politics and philosophy were shaped in large part by two contemporaries of Eisler: Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979). They both belonged to the Frankfurt School, a center for neo-Marxist social theory and philosophy that developed in Frankfurt, Germany in the 1930s.[46] Adorno conceived music's task as "to represent and critique the contradictions within society through its forms."[47] His view of the purpose of music mirrors that of Eisler's.

Marcuse believed that "if an individual group seeks liberation, their analysis or critique of society must come to terms with how things actually work at that moment in that society if any form of liberation is possible."[48] He saw the student revolts of the 1960s as a confirmation of his critical theory, believing "the need for social change includes class struggle but cannot be reduced to class struggle. …the form of art produced, and its revolutionary vision, may be determined by a multiplicity of oppressed/repressed subject positions."[49] The philosophies of Adorno and Marcuse had a profound impact on the way artists saw the purpose of their work in society, laying the groundwork for Cardew and Rzewski's generation of artists.

Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Power Structures

Cardew and Rzewski's works engage with historical movements of resistance. They also act as pieces of resistance and, in the case of Rzewski's *Ballads*, allow the performer to enact

[46]New World Encyclopedia contributors, "Frankfurt school," in *New World Encyclopedia*, accessed November 29, 2019, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Frankfurt_school&oldid=1004654.

[47]Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* (1949) cited in Garratt, 88.

[48]Arnold Farr, "Herbert Marcuse," Edward N. Zalta, ed., in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Standford University, 2021-, accessed November 9, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/marcuse/.

[49]Farr, "Herbert Marcuse."

their own resistance through improvisation. Since this idea is central to these works and my thesis, I will regularly engage with the philosophy of Michel Foucault (1926-1984). His philosophy of power structures provides the best lens through which to view the relationship of resistance to power. I will be invoking his philosophy throughout this document to provide a system of understanding protest music and the works of Cardew and Rzewski. Foucault was a French philosopher who was one of the strongest influences on the understanding of institutional power in the 1960s and 70s.[50] Foucault's philosophy of power structures differs a little from the three forms of power listed above by Garratt and Mattern. Where they described power in negative terms of abuse and repression, Foucault viewed power more in terms of a healthy balance of wills, similar to Mattern's *power as capacity*.

Foucault's first major work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), was a study of power dynamics in prisons and their relationship to society. He theorized that power is not only held at the top of an institution, but also requires the participation of each location or person throughout the entire structure.[51] This participation requires mutual respect within the structure, but resistance is necessary if participation becomes involuntary.[52] Viewing power as a system involving each individual, interwoven with all social relations, he said "it seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system…"[53] The idea of resistance "is crucial to Foucault's conception of what he termed 'relations of power', being embedded within them and a precondition for their existence. The idea that power and resistance are mutually dependent, suspended in a relation of

[50]Gary Gutting and Johanna Oksala, "Michel Foucault," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, (2018-), accessed November 5, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Foucault, writings 1972-77 quoted in Garratt, 55-56.

continual give and take…"[54] Foucault preferred to apply his conception to individual relationships more than between larger entities, such as citizens and government. He thought of how people balance power in their relationships and that resistance must necessarily be allowed in order to maintain power, otherwise a relationship would become abusive and dominating. Possessing power means allowing limited freedom to your subjects. Resistance is "a prerequisite for the exercise of power, an idea that limits power relationships to instances where both parties have some degree of freedom of action."[55] Power is just as fragile and unstable as resistance.[56]

Although Foucault's theory is designed for individual relationships, it can be applied here to see how resistance occurs in different structures, from employee vs. corporation to citizen vs. government. For example, when the following chapters look at union and war protest movements, I show how resistance is a natural part of a democracy. And I will explain how, in 1930s Germany, resistance was the last strength of a democratic society before fascism took over.

Ideology

This document primarily examines the *ideologies*, or summaries of the political and social beliefs, of Cardew and Rzewski and their works. Therefore, this complex term needs to be defined. Definitions vary depending on the philosopher. Karl Marx defined ideology in rather negative terms as "a lens transforming reality."[57] Similarly, Adorno saw ideology as a false consciousness, saying it was "the illusions needed to sustain the status quo."[58] French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) rejected Marx and Adorno's negative conception,

[54]Garratt, 56-57.
[55]Ibid., 57-58.
[56]Ibid., 58.
[57]Ibid., 95.
[58]Ibid., 97-98.

instead seeing ideology as "having an integral practical function within every society."[59] He defined it as "a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts)" which are the "unconscious assumptions, values and beliefs that trigger actions" that become "inseparable from their own selfhood."[60] Althusser also used the idea of an ISA, or 'ideological state apparatus', to represent institutions (for example, government, political parties, and mining/textile companies) which perpetuate ideology through ideological state apparatuses (such as schools, churches, trade unions, and cultural institutions).[61] These institutions are one way in which the ruling class holds onto state power.[62] In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how this institutional ideological struggle between state/citizen and corporation/employee played out in the music of Cardew and Rzewski. A final contemporary definition of ideology comes from Garratt, who says it functions in "everyday use as a synonym for a political worldview or set of principles," but he defines it as "a lens that imparts meaning to the past, brings present reality into focus, and projects a transformative vision of the future."[63] Garratt's definition may be the most helpful for understanding Cardew and Rzewski's music, seeing as how they engaged with the past and applied it to their present day, and how the music speaks to today and the future.

Liberalism

While communism had a great impact on Cardew and Rzewski, they also identified with less radical and more mainstream liberalism. It is important to define *liberalism* because there are many different perceptions of what *liberals* are or what *liberalism* is. Like *ideology*,

[59]Ibid., 101.
[60]Ibid., 102.
[61]Ibid., 102-3.
[62]Ibid.
[63]Ibid., 95.

liberalism is problematic to pin down because it has changed with each generation. Historically centrist, *liberalism* became in the twentieth century "a collective term for left-wing progressive and radical ideas."[64] Classical liberalism was replaced by social liberalism which gave the state a larger role in order to extend equal rights to groups previously denied them, sometimes employing forms of intervention (e.g. affirmative action/positive discrimination).[65] It is important to make the distinction that communism and liberalism, although both left-wing, are not the same. According to Garratt, "a communist, for instance, would place the economy firmly in the public realm, while for a liberal it lies predominantly in the private sphere."[66] These distinctions will be important going forward. Cardew was a member of the Communist Party, whereas Rzewski, while influenced by communism, was less radical in this regard, and made light of accusations that he was a Marxist.

Cardew and Rzewski were part of a new generation of liberalism in the 1960s. Defined by their era, liberals of the "Old Left" are those who came to political maturity in the 1930s and 1940s whereas the "New Left" came in the 1960s and 1970s.[67] The music of Cardew and Rzewski connect these two eras by glorifying the music and politics of the "Old Left" as part of the "New Left."

Liberalism has continued to evolve to the present day, and so the works of Cardew and Rzewski will be interpreted differently today than in their own time. It is important for performers to take account of the shifting identities and missions of each era of liberalism. An understanding of left-wing history enriches the discussion of the current performance of Cardew's and Rzewski's music.

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[64]Ibid., 7.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid., 6.
[67]Rosenthal and Flacks, 29.

Protest, Resistance, and Social Movements

Each of the piano works in the following chapters engage with ideas and music of protest, resistance, and social movements. I assert that these works are themselves acting as objects of resistance as well as the pianist who embodies resistance through performance. Next, I will define each of these terms—protest, resistance, and social movements—in purely political and social relationships before looking at how music acts as a tool of resistance.

Recall Foucault's philosophy of power structures, which defines the relationship of resistance to power. Because the terms *protest* and *resistance* are so similar it is important to define them both to find the distinctions. Garratt defines protest as "a public, collective display which challenges power holders to remedy an injustice or redress a grievance."[68] It offers "explicit statements of opposition to the political, economic or social status quo."[69] A problem with the general use of *resistance* is that it has become a generic term more or less interchangeable with protest.[70] The distinction comes in defining resistance as "micro actions rather than grand spectacles."[71] Resistance is effective when heavily coded and "more overt opposition would be dangerous or futile."[72] It involves a form of disengagement, for example, "not attending an event, not broadcasting the national anthem in celebrations imposed by the dictatorial government, [and] not 'being present' as ways of denial."[73] In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how the original songs of the 1930s used by Cardew and Rzewski are protest songs designed for a public protest movement. In turn, the music of Cardew and Rzewski is *about* that public protest more than it *is* protest. Their works are more heavily coded pieces of

[68]Garratt, 128.
[69]Dave Laing quoted in Garratt, 156-57.
[70]Garratt, 156-57.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Ibid.
[73]Marita Fornaro Bordolli quoted in Garratt, 156-57.

resistance. Since they are piano solos without lyrics, the listener must know the original songs and their history to know that they are about protest at all. My goal is to bridge that gap for the performer and audience.

Social movements are "historical moments when numbers of people ordinarily living their individual daily lives, come together to make history."[74] Those ordinary people can be categorized in two levels of engagement as "activists, who are consciously committed to political organizing as central to their everyday lives, and others who participate during the mass mobilizations that turn a cause into a movement."[75] Social movements require sacrifice and significant risk "since movements typically challenge established authority, rules, or conventions."[76] Rosenthal and Flacks identify the goals of social movements as to attract members, educate them, motivate them to pledge a kind of allegiance, contribute time and energy, mobilize them to engage, keep them as members, gain acceptance and support from nonmembers, and undercut or disarm opponents.[77] A movement is judged by whether or not it has won material gains for its members and whether it can win "recognition and acceptance for previously marginalized or scorned identities."[78] As I will explain in the next section, music can play a role in all of these goals. The crucial part of social movements is the *collective identity*, or the idea that a member believes *I will only get what I need if we all get what we need.*

Political Music Terms and Categories

With all the political and social terms defined, I now examine how music is used by social movements for political purposes. I first discuss how music exhibits its own power and

[74]Rosenthal and Flacks, 5.
[75]Ibid., 158.
[76]Ibid., 7.
[77]Ibid.
[78]Ibid.

politics. I then define the genres of *folk song*, *protest music*, and variants of protest music. Following that, I investigate the function of protest song and the many ways it serves movements, and finally, look at artist intent vs. audience reception. Looking ahead at the following chapters, these terms will be essential to understanding the source material used by Cardew and Rzewski. It will also help define their piano works.

How does music interact with politics? Garratt provides a broad definition which takes the stance that politics touches most of life. He asserts "the sphere of politics – and therefore also political music – naturally extends beyond government and party politics, encompassing social movements and public forms of artistic activism."[79] Mattern points out the ideological impact it can have, saying "music, like other cultural forms, has an impact on the identity of listeners and can distort people's perceptions of their interests."[80] Rosenthal and Flacks also connect society and ideology, stating social life inherently preserves power structures – including those in music.[81]

The songs that have been most successful in protest movements have been folk songs. This is also true for the songs used by Cardew and Rzewski. Rosenthal and Flacks define *folk song* as "songs produced and reproduced in the context of everyday life by people who don't live as musicians or artists, they are disseminated orally, and have no 'authored' version."[82] Songs whose authors are known can come to be folk songs when they are spread orally and adapted by people in diverse cultural settings.[83] This will also apply to a few songs in the following chapters.

[79]Garratt, 6.
[80]Mattern, 35.
[81]Rosenthal and Flacks, 18.
[82]Ibid., 11.
[83]Ibid.

What makes folk songs powerful in social movements? According to Rosenthal and Flacks, it is because they are easy to learn, can be acquired and reproduced at will by an ordinary person, are more readily stored in memory than in text, and they are uniquely portable.[84] Mattern explains music's power as a social phenomenon, observing the increased political capacity music offers by increasing participation in communal and public life, "especially for people who have historically been blocked from participation in more traditional and institutionalized political arenas."[85] Folk songs are memorable and easy to disseminate; therefore the message they carry is strengthened by the music.

What is political music, or, to put it another way, what makes music political? Garratt identifies three common positions on what is and is not political music.[86] The first draws a clear line between political and non-political, where political is treated as sub-artistic. The second also draws the same clear line but believes that autonomous art offers deeper political engagement. The third views all music as political. Recall the above discussion of what in life is and is not political; one's definition of the political nature of music depends on one's view of politics as broad or narrow. The following chapters will discuss music that is primarily designed to serve a political purpose—the original protest songs—and also music that serves both artistic and political purposes—Cardew and Rzewski's piano works.

What is protest music and how does it work? Rosenthal and Flacks define several aspects of its function, stating that "it identifies collective and structural arrangements—who has power? who does the work? who gets the payoff? who decides?—as the origin for much of what is usually felt to be one's personal situation."[87] Protest music identifies a problem and proposes a

[84]Ibid., 10.
[85]Mattern, 33.
[86]Garratt, 33.
[87]Rosenthal and Flacks, 20.

solution: it "states that existing arrangements are not natural, normal, or eternal, but the result of previous human decisions and arrangements, and thus susceptible to change, especially if those in a similar position band together to oppose those arrangements."[88] Protest music rallies people for a cause: it "helps achieve the task necessary for mobilizing such opposition, whether or not it helped spark the original ideas behind that opposition."[89] They add that "a piece of music may become political and not merely through its theme, but through the approach to that theme."[90] Examples of this will be seen below. Garratt identifies protest music's role not as independent, but as part of a movement, saying that "rather than changing the world by itself, protest music supports the broader work of social change movements."[91] In this way, protest music gains its power from social movements, but in turn, a movement can give power to a piece of music and make it political.

Protest music has several sub-genres, including *rebel song*, *fight song*, *anti-war song*, and *folk-protest song*, which "grew directly out of left-wing political activism, engaging explicitly with contentious topical events, figures and issues."[92] I will share specific examples of some of these in the history section below.

Music in Service of Social Movements

In the following chapters, I examine the original songs used by Cardew and Rzewski in their works and I assess how those songs were originally used to serve each of their movements. I also assess how Cardew and Rzewski designed their works to serve their own movements and how those works can continue to serve today's movements.

[88]Ibid.
[89]Ibid.
[90]Ibid.
[91]Garratt, 130.
[92]Ibid., 129.

How does protest music serve a social movement? Rosenthal and Flacks name five functions of protest music: education, conversion and recruitment, mobilization, serving the committed, and promoting solidarity. Protest songs educate when they point to some problem or discontent in society, usually in emotional terms.[93] They have messages that teach "things don't have to be this way. Join us and you can play a role in changing them."[94]

Conversion and recruitment happens when a song attempts to solicit and arouse outside support and sympathy for a social or political movement.[95] The musicians and music are "hoping to win us over to those ideas, to engender commitment…to become part of a movement."[96] They also describe how singing protest songs creates a safe space in an atmosphere without fear, providing "a way to try on ideas and identities… [singing] allows you to hear yourself saying those words, allows you to try out that idea and that identity."[97]

Mobilization happens when a song reinforces the value structure of individuals who are active supporters of the social movement or ideology through encapsulating a movement's core ideas and values.[98] Songs can "serve as the basis for the formation of a group, cutting across other divisions, creating 'a commonality of cultural experience' that can form the basis of new community. Your song links you to others who also see it as their song."[99]

Those members already committed to a movement are served by songs providing "encouragement to members of a movement" through "affirmation, reaffirmation, and sustenance to honor a commitment they've already made."[100] Encouragement is necessary,

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[93]R. Serge Denisoff, "Songs of Persuasion: A Sociological Analysis of Urban Propaganda Songs," *The Journal of American Folklore* 79, no. 314 (Oct.–Dec., 1966): 582, doi:10.2307/538223.
[94]Rosenthal and Flacks, 161.
[95]Denisoff, "Songs of Persuasion."
[96]Rosenthal and Flacks, 157.
[97]Ibid.
[98]Denisoff, "Songs of Persuasion."
[99]Rosenthal and Flacks, 162.
[100]Ibid., 123-25, 128.

because “to people faced with a hostile opponent with far greater power, the danger is real and the fear is great.”[101]

Songs promote solidarity when they “create and promote cohesion, solidarity, and high morale in an organization or movement supporting its world view, thereby fostering a collective identity.”[102] In many cases, movements need to draw together people with different values, backgrounds, races, and social standing. Songs foster solidarity when they “represent those shared beliefs that allow ‘disparate strangers’ to feel they are indeed a band of brothers and sisters, and reinforces those beliefs when much of the world is working to break them down.”[103] The act of singing together can also reinforce solidarity because “singing together serves as a model for working together… Harmonizing or a call-and-response structure emphasizes solidarity and interdependence.”[104] Unity is upheld when songs tie members to a shared tradition to create a collective memory, a “shared vision of the past, and thus (perhaps) a shared vision of the future.”[105] In this way, songs frequently celebrate martyrs of the movement and create a utopian vision of the future.[106] I will demonstrate in Chapter 5 how the celebration of martyrs was a primary function of the songs used by Cardew.

Political action can be taken through music in three forms. Mattern categorizes these forms as *confrontational*, *deliberative*, and *pragmatic*. Protest music is a type of confrontational action when its intent is “to oppose the exploitation and oppression exercised by dominant elites and members of dominant groups.”[107] Deliberative action is taken “when members of a

[101]Ibid., 128.
[102]Denisoff, “Songs of Persuasion.”
[103]Rosenthal and Flacks, 124.
[104]Ibid., 131.
[105]Ibid., 160.
[106]Ibid., 130.
[107]Mattern, 25-26.

community use musical practices to debate their identity and commitments."[108] This has the least relevance to this document's topic, but it could be applied to a community of composers who disagree about how their music should represent their values. Pragmatic action is "when members of one or more communities use music to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative efforts to address them…in mutually beneficial problem solving."[109] This connects to the protest song function of promoting solidarity. This action will be observed in the songs of the following chapters.

A song's meaning is often attributed to its lyrics, and therefore is defined by the lyricist's intent. In the case of protest songs, however, the songs often do not have a known lyricist, and either way, they frequently go on to have their own life where members of a movement can assign new meaning to a song. Rosenthal and Flacks argue for this differentiation in assigning meaning to songs, saying that lyrics are not that significant or the most important.[110] Their research has shown that "(1) most people don't know the lyrics of songs they say they know and love; (2) even when they do know the lyrics, most people have little conception of any meaning, either as intended by the artist or some alternative comprehensive interpretation of their own; and (3) by and large, most people don't care much about either lyrics or semantic meaning."[111] Since Rosenthal and Flacks consider the artist's intent and the song's meaning as separate they classify a song's life into three phases: transmission, reception, and context. Transmission is the artist's contribution, "including how the message is expressed lyrically and musically; how clearly the message is stated; what other clues and messages are provided in such contextual features as genre, dress, onstage comments, etc." Reception is "the audience's receptivity, including such

[108]Ibid., 28.
[109]Ibid., 30.
[110]Rosenthal and Flacks, 39, 44.
[111]Ibid., 44.

elements as expectations; their previous knowledge and interest in the topic, genre, and/or musician, etc." Context is "the processes and factors framing the interaction between [artist] and audience. Is there a [state] who controls what music may be heard? What are the conditions under which music is played? What social and political events background the performance? And so forth."[112] Identifying these phases will help to assign meaning to the protest songs in the subsequent chapters. I will examine the lyrics of each song and, when possible, discuss the lyricists' and composers' intentions, but I will also observe the extra or different meanings the songs took on from their various movements. In the music of Cardew and Rzewski, both views will be of interest, and as a result, deeper layers of meaning emerge in their compositions and in performance.

A Brief History of Political Music

Because the music of Cardew and Rzewski relies so heavily on the music and stories of the early twentieth century, I will provide a brief history of protest music. This will provide a context to understand the role of music in protest.

The term *protest music* likely conjures images of 1960s civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements. Less familiar is protest music of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. I will begin with activist songs of the pre-Civil War era, then the union protest movements during the first 40 years of the twentieth century, followed by the civil rights and Vietnam War protest movements. I trace the anti-establishment facet of the 1950s and 1960s avant-garde from which Cardew and Rzewski both emerged, and then connect it to the 1970s coinciding with Cardew and Rzewski's works. Finally, I connect historical protest music to the current day to place Cardew and Rzewski's works in context of the present day.

[112]Ibid., 27-28.

In his third *Ballad*, Rzewski used "Down By the Riverside" to represent the recent Vietnam War protest movement. Before the civil rights movement, this song was originally used to protest slavery. The existence of anti-slavery music in the United States dates back to the early nineteenth century during the pre-Civil War era. Many songs were designed to reinforce social reform with new lyrics set to familiar parlor songs and hymns. Many Northern activists supported the abolition of slavery by singing songs like "Get Off the Track!" (1844).[113] Numerous collections of abolitionist songs were published, such as *Songs of the Free and Hymns of Christian Freedom* (1836), *Freedom's Lyre: Or, Psalms, Hymns, and Sacred Songs for the Slave and His Friends* (1840), and *Anti-Slavery Melodies* (1843).[114]

The early twentieth century saw the mixture of leftist and communist ideas with music. Garratt connects the socialist tradition with music, saying "the idea of using art to convey political message, transform political consciousness and thus strengthen opposition to the existing order has been part of the socialist tradition since its emergence in the second quarter of the nineteenth century."[115] Much of protest song has its origins in the US labour movement of the 1910s and 20s.[116] One of the first union strikes to use protest music was in 1912 in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The strike was run by The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the Wobblies. They created a collective identity when they saw the need to "emphasize to workers from many different nationalities and backgrounds that their identity as workers was more important at that moment than the ethnic or national backgrounds that divided them. …[their] most potent weapon was often musicking…"[117] The best-known Wobbly song is

[113]Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 253-258.
[114]Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 37-42.
[115]Garratt, 84.
[116]Ibid., 129.
[117]Rosenthal and Flacks, 125.

"Solidarity Forever" but other popular titles include "The Commonwealth of Toil," "Casey Jones," and "The Preacher and the Slave."[118] Almost all the songs of the following chapters have their roots in this socialist labor movement.

Recall how Hanns Eisler in the 1930s combined communist idealism with music, calling for "a revolutionary art whose main character is militant and educative."[119] Eisler wrote many songs for Communist Party usage and to glorify communist martyrs, resulting in songs such as *Solidaritätslied* (c. 1930), *Das einheitsfrontlied* (1934), and *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*, (1930). The latter is included in Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*, the subject of Chapter 5. Eisler's contemporaries also produced anti-fascist songs that glorified communist martyrs, such as Paul Arma's (1905-1987) *Thälmann Lied* (1934) and Charles Koechlin's (1867-1950) *Libérons Thaelmann* (1934), both included in Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*.

A similar trend happened in the United States with The Composers' Collective, founded in 1932 by Charles Seeger (1886-1979), Henry Cowell (1897-1965), and Elie Siegmeister (1909-1991). Following the examples set by Soviet and European revolutionaries, one of the Collective's main objectives was "to teach composers to write revolutionary mass songs for workers to sing."[120] Seeger was the most inspired by communist doctrine, but not all of its members were communists.[121] The Collective commissioned one notable member, Aaron Copland (1900-1990), who wrote the song "Into the Streets May First!" (1935), a setting of Alfred Hayes's poem urging Americans to reclaim their country from the bourgeois.[122]

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[118]Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer, eds., *Songs of Work and Protest* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1972), 11.

[119]Hanns Eisler, *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, Manfred Grabs, ed., Marjorie Meyer, trans. (London: Kahn and Averill, 1978), 53.

[120]Monica Alice Hershberger, "Frederic Rzewski's 'North American Ballads': Looking Back to the Radical Politics of 1930s America" (Master's thesis, Michigan State University, 2011), 59-61.

[121]Ibid., 60-61.

[122]Ibid., 62.

The influence of communist doctrine was also felt in the folk music community. Many musicians, such as Woody Guthrie (1912-1967) and Pete Seeger (1919-2014), had more success reaching the common man than did classical composers like Copland. Guthrie played guitar and was part of the folk revival movement of the late 1930s.[123] A political radical, he wrote songs about the Great Depression, the dust bowl drought of 1935, union organization, and anti-fascism while also singing on picket lines, in marches, and at protest meetings.[124] His popular song "This Land is Your Land" (1940) ironically compares a country "made for you and me" with one that has "No Trespassing" signs and hungry people, implying the question "is this land really made for you and me?" Pete Seeger was the son of Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, both composers and members of the Composers' Collective. He was a songwriter, banjo player, and political activist seen as the patron saint of the 1950s and 1960s folk revival.[125] He was active in supporting the Civil Rights movement and devoted himself to opposing the Vietnam War.[126] In 1941, with Woody Guthrie and other musicians, he formed the Almanac Singers who sang songs about peace, war, politics, and anti-Nazi themes.[127] One of his best-known albums is *American Industrial Ballads* (1956). Each song on the album has connections to labor movements, such as "Casey Jones (The Union Scab)" and "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues."[128] The way Pete Seeger influenced Rzewski to use folk songs will be explored later, specifically the inclusion of "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" in his *North American Ballads*.

[123]Crawford, 613-14.

[124]Ibid.

[125]Anne Dhu McLucas, "Seeger, Pete(r) R," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2014-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630 .article.A2259314.

[126]McLucas

[127]Crawford, 617-18.

[128]Pete Seeger, *American Industrial Ballads*, originally issued as Smithsonian Folkway Recordings FH 5251, 1956, reissued as SFW40058 in 1992, compact disc, Liner notes by Irwin Silber, accessed July 31, 2021, https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/smithsonian_folkways/SFW40 058.pdf.

Cardew and Rzewski lived in an era where many folk, popular, jazz, and avant-garde musicians were producing music in protest or resistance to civil rights problems in the world. Cardew and Rzewski's works can be viewed as a natural output of that era's *zeitgeist*.

Cardew and Rzewski were part of the 1960s New Left which was inspired by the folk music of the Old Left. A folk music revival became one of "the main avenues for the transmission of the ideals of the Old Left to the New Left.[129] Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie had a tremendous influence on the new generation of musicians, passing on their musical and political beliefs. The popular song "If I Had a Hammer" (1949) by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays became a hit when the group Peter, Paul and Mary covered it in 1962. While the Old Left focused mostly on labor rights, the New Left focused on civil rights and anti-war themes during the Vietnam War. Singer Phil Ochs (1940-1976) was part of the new generation of protest song-writers "who neatly defined the genre in introducing his anti-war song "I Ain't Marching Anymore" (1964).[130] He wrote "Love Me, I'm a Liberal" (1965) in critique of what he perceived as hypocritical left-wing politicians. In support of civil rights, he wrote "Here's to the State of Mississippi" (1965), a satirical critique of segregation. Cardew and Rzewski's works can be viewed as a natural extension of this move to revive protest songs from the 1930s.

Fans of Bob Dylan (b. 1941) will know of his early idolization of Woody Guthrie as demonstrated in his style and lyrical content. Dylan's name often comes up in relation to protest music, but many of his songs are not designed for the picket line. Instead, they educate about civil rights issues, as in "The Death of Emmett Till" (1962), "Oxford Town" (1962), and "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1964), or describe the shifting social world, such as "A Hard

[129]Rosenthal and Flacks, 126.
[130]Garratt, 129.

Rain's A-Gonna Fall" (1962), "Blowin' in the Wind" (1962), and "The Times They Are a-Changin" (1963).

The civil rights movement was strengthened by both existing and new hymns and songs called *freedom songs.* According to Spencer, they divide into two basic categories:

> (1) *group participation songs*, often extemporaneously adapted from existing material by a group involved in civil rights activities, and (2) professionally composed *topical songs*, which comment on protest events from the sideline. Many freedom songs were adaptations from traditional spirituals and gospel songs. Typically these forms, especially gospel songs, were brought down to the mundane by textual modifications.[131]

The anthem of the civil rights movement was "We Shall Overcome."[132] Adopted by Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the movement in 1956, this hymn was a group participation song based on a mixture of two Baptist hymns of the early twentieth century.[133] Almost as popular was "Down by the Riverside," a southern plantation work-song. It was adapted for use by civil rights and anti-Vietnam War groups. Chapter 3 will explore how Rzewski used "Down by the Riverside" in his *North American Ballads*.

Protest songs went mainstream in the mid-1960s with numerous pop hits. Radical soul songs like Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come," James Brown's "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)," Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," and Aretha Franklin's "Respect" identified racial problems in society and proudly declared the humanity of black citizens.[134] Rock artists produced anti-Vietnam war songs like John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance" (1969), and "Happy Xmas (War is Over)" (1971), Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" (1969), Neil Young's "Ohio" (1970), and Edwin Starr's "War (What is it Good For?)" (1970), just to

[131]Spencer, 83.
[132]Ibid., 84.
[133]Ibid.
[134]Garratt, 129.

name a few. This generation's common spirit of political protest music helps to provide context for Cardew and Rzewski's choices to write political art music.

Today, the topic of protest music is entwined with the identity of 1960s protest music. This can cloud the understanding of protest music before and since that time, which can make it difficult to accurately assess the meaning of Cardew and Rzewski's works. As Garratt frames it, "protest song has come to be indelibly defined by the music of the 1960s, just as that decade continues to shape broader perceptions of social movements and their methods."[135] Garratt also warns of a "nostalgia-fueled" view of protest songs.[136] To paraphrase Garratt, since the late 1960s, protest song has been variously labeled as dying, dead, or reborn through new pop songs, although protest music can signify the health of pop music and activism.[137] The problem is that this results in "freezing what was a fluid genre into a narrow set of models, as well as projecting problematic expectations onto it."[138] The influence of nostalgia has been applied to Cardew and Rzewski's generation, who, during the Cold War, nostalgically looked back to the 1930s leftist politics and protest songs as a better time when music accomplished something.[139]

Cardew and Rzewski were educated in the postwar avant-garde music world of the late 1950s, and this had an influence on why they chose to create protest music in the 1970s. Protest also found an outlet in the mid-twentieth century avant-garde music community. Composers in Europe and North America sought new methods of expression such as serialism and aleatoric approaches which resisted tradition. The defiance of artistic convention can be viewed as resistance to the existing institution, and therefore a form of protest. A piece of music need not

[135]Ibid.
[136]Ibid., 143.
[137]Ibid.
[138]Ibid.
[139]Hershberger, 58-59.

include text to embody a message of resistance, although most of the songs discussed in later chapters do include text. As Rosenthal and Flacks explain, "composition without lyrics that calls into question conventional notions of melody or time may be political to the extent that it causes listeners to think again about the world around them that they usually take for granted."[140] The following chapters will discuss how Cardew and Rzewski's output in the 1950s and 1960s, much of which challenged institutional expectations, charted a natural path for political resistance to enter into their work.

There are numerous examples of avant-garde composers preceding Cardew and Rzewski who used their music to protest governments and civil rights. In the 1930s and 40s, European composers had faced horrible atrocities committed by fascist dictators. Italians Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-1975) and Luigi Nono (1924-1990) expressed their political and social concerns through their works. Among Dallapiccola's highest achievements are his anti-fascist *Canti di prigionia* (Songs of Imprisonment) (1938-41) for chorus, two pianos, two harps, and percussion, and his opera *Il prigioniero* (The Prisoner) (1944-48).[141] Nono was a passionate and outspoken communist in postwar years, and experimented with electronics, producing works for tape alone and live performance with tape.[142] His *La fabbrica illuminata* (The Illuminated Factory) (1964) for female voice and tape expressed resistance not only to capitalism but also to artistic institutions with its text describing poor working conditions accompanied by a recording

[140]Rosenthal and Flacks, 21.

[141]Virgilio Bernardoni and John C.G. Waterhouse, "Dallapiccola, Luigi," in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2001-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu .nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.07081.

[142]Gianmario Borio, "Nono, Luigiun," in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2013-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.20044.

of factory sounds. Nono's works of the late 1960s are "direct assaults on industrialized capitalism, imperialism and the still lingering shadow of fascism."[143]

Postmodernism

Many composers of Cardew and Rzewski's post-war generation turned away from their academic serialist training in the 1960s. One interpretation is that their resistance was a reaction to the failed hopes of the 1960s: the idealism of "peace and love" could not end the Vietnam War, which grinded on until 1975. Although many victories were won by the civil rights movement, there were obviously many more racial and economic hurdles to overcome. To this generation, Modernism was unable to communicate the issues of their times. The broad term for the aesthetic of this generation is *Postmodernism.* It is defined by Taruskin and Gibbs in *The Oxford History of Western Music* as

> an umbrella term that covers a group of interrelated intellectual, social, and artistic trends. In historical thought, postmodernism involves a radical questioning of previous belief systems and values, including the idea of historical progress that has exerted such a powerful influence on Western art music. In the arts, Postmodernism is reflected in an increasing influence of multiculturalism and the disillusion of traditional boundaries between high and low art as well as the prevalence of stylistic collage and pastiche.[144]

This tells us that this generation is defined by radical skepticism and relativism where their works exhibit a mixture of musical aesthetics without regard to any tradition. Rzewski and Cardew both rebelled against their academic training in Modernism and began to embrace both historical and new aesthetics previously unavailable them in total serialism. Postmodernism seeks to not be defined by labels, making it difficult to assign terminology. This difficulty is

[143]Garratt, 166.

[144]Richard Taruskin and Christopher Gibbs, "'Many Streams': Millenium's End," chap. 36 in *The Oxford History of Western Music: College Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1121.

observed when Taruskin suggests other terms to describe postmodernism: "post-ism," "after-everythingism," and the most negative, "it's-all-overism."[145]

One thing common to many postmodern works is the aesthetic of combining different compositional approaches through eclecticism, collage, and pastiche. This was an act of rebellion against Modernism, as Taruskin explains,

> To compose in an obsolete style as if it were not obsolete was to challenge the whole idea of stylistic obsolescence and of progress in history. And to challenge that idea was to call into question the necessity of the twentieth century's stylistic revolutions, one of the most sacred of all modernist dogmas.[146]

One way composers challenged the whole idea of progress was through eclecticism, the "juxtaposition of styles drawn from different historical eras and from different places around the world."[147] This could include inclusion of any material from the classical canon to modernism, rock, pop, jazz, experimental, or minimalism. Another way was through the technique of collage, "the simultaneous use of disparate musical elements, with no effort to unify them."[148] And a final way was through pastiche, an "imitation in the style of the past."[149] A list of representative composers and works of this aesthetic would include Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), *Mass* (1971); George Rochberg (1918-2005), String Quartet no. 3 (1972); and Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998), Symphony no. 1 (1972). In the following chapters, I will examine how Rzewski and Cardew use these approaches in their works through a synthesis of collage and pastiche.

Postmodernism had a powerful political vein that drove composers to make explicitly political artistic works.[150] In the 1960s, some composers felt compelled to protest the Vietnam

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[145]Ibid., 1106.
[146]Ibid., 1098.
[147]Ibid., 1095.
[148]Ibid., 1121.
[149]Ibid., 1095.
[150]Joseph Auner, "Histories Recollected and Remade," chap. 13 in *Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 261.

War through their art. One member of the aforementioned Composers' Collective, Elie Siegmeister, composed *The Face of War* for voice and piano (1966), a setting of poems by Langston Hughes (1901-1967) about the general horror of war.[151] Similar is Ned Rorem's (b. 1923) *War Scenes* for baritone and piano (1969) based on poems by Walt Whitman (1819-1892).[152] There is also George Crumb's (b. 1929) *Black Angels* for string quartet (1970), which Steinitz calls a "surreal allegory of the Vietnam War."[153] Bernstein's *Mass* blends orchestra with electronic instruments and rock passages in a quasi-theatrical antiwar message so explicit that president Richard Nixon was advised to stay away from the premiere at the Kennedy Center.[154] The third movement of Rzewski's *Ballads* (1979) is a setting of "Down by the Riverside" which served as an anthem for civil rights and Vietnam War protests. Americans were not alone in resisting the war in Vietnam. Canadian Barbara Pentland (1912-2000) wrote *Songs of Peace and Protest* for piano (1968) and *News* (1970) for piano and tape.[155] The English Cardew also wrote several piano works in support of communist Vietnam, addressed in Chapter 4.

Cardew and Rzewski had two contemporaries who also engaged in politics beyond war protest through their music: Louis Andriessen (1939-2021) and Christian Wolff (b. 1934). Andriessen is regarded as the most influential Dutch composer of his generation.[156] In 1968, he turned away from the avant-garde's rejection of the past with his work *Contra tempus*.[157] This

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[151]Ben Arnold, "War Music and the American Composer during the Vietnam Era," *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991): 332.

[152]Arnold, 331.

[153]Richard Steinitz, "Crumb, George (Henry)," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2013-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2249252.

[154]Auner, "Histories Recollected and Remade," 261.

[155]Betty Nygaard King, Kenneth Winters, and John Beckwith, "Barbara Pentland," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Canada, 2013-), accessed November 26, 2021, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/barbara-pentland-emc.

[156]Elmer Schönberger, "Andriessen family: (4) Louis Andriessen," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2001-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.47613.

[157]Schönberger.

began a period of political works beginning with *Reconstructie* (1969), a music-theatre morality based on the character of Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara. This was followed by wind ensemble arrangements of three communist union songs by Hanns Eisler in 1972, as well as two songs supporting communist Vietnam, *Thanh Hoa* (1972) and *Dat gebeurt in Vietnam* (1973). At this time, he developed a personal compositional style that reflected his political beliefs with the work *De staat* (1972-76) for large ensemble, which uses "homophony in the form of chords and unison melodies, not as a sign of impersonal collectivism but, on the contrary, as a structural expression of equality and collaboration."[158] He used this minimalist style to symbolize the ideals of the early twentieth-century labor movement in his *De volharding* (Perseverance) (1972) for trumpets, saxophones, trombones, and piano. He again represented labor unions in his *Worker's Union* (1975) for any loud-sounding instruments.

American composer Christian Wolff was a student of experimental composer John Cage (1912-1992) and associated with Cardew and Rzewski. From the early 1970s onwards Wolff's works reflected an interest in political subjects and attempted in his words "to stir up . . . a sense of the political conditions in which we live and of how these might be changed, in the direction of democratic socialism."[159] His *Accompaniments* (1972) for piano solo have the pianist, while playing, sing and recite a text about the Chinese Cultural Revolution. To demonstrate the mutual admiration between these political composers, Rzewski recorded *Accompaniments* in 2012.[160] Wolff's *Wobbly Music* (1975–78) for mixed chorus and variable instruments borrows three labor songs from the early twentieth-century union Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies), and

[158]Ibid.

[159]William Bland, "Wolff, Christian George," revised by David Patterson and Sabine Feisst, in *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2014-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib .ndsu.nodak.edu/ 10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2259415.

[160]Frederic Rzewski (piano), *Accompaniments*, Composers Recordings Inc. CRI SD 357, 1976, streaming audio, accessed November 16, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-HNWsbOX3Q& t=374s.

his piano solo *Bread and Roses* (1976–83) is based on women's protest songs from a 1912 Wobblies strike.[161]

Parallels can be drawn between all four of these composers in the subject matters of communism, Vietnam, and workers unions, especially in the setting of protest songs from the early twentieth century. The admiration for Eisler and his union songs is apparent in all but Wolff, with Andriessen's wind ensemble arrangements in 1972, Cardew's setting of *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* in his *Thälmann Variations* (1974), and Rzewski's inclusion of *Solidaritätslied* in his *36 Variations on* '*The People United Will Never Be Defeated!'* (1975). Compositional similarities can also be observed in the minimalist style of Andriessen's and Rzewski's music, which will later be explored in detail.

How do Cardew and Rzewski's works fit in to today's world of protest? First, the state of protest music today must be considered. In pop music it is most vibrant in R&B and hip-hop where artists identify with the Black Lives Matter movement. For example, Garratt cites Kendrick Lamar's song "Alright" (2015) which was "chanted defiantly by protesters in Ohio in 2015 following a confrontation with the police," which led many media commentators to call it "'the protest song of a generation', comparing it to Nina Simone's *Mississippi Goddamm'* and Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit* [resulting in] a new black national anthem to replace *Lift Every Voice and Sing* and *We Shall Overcome*."[162]

In art music today, protest has become commonplace, where themes frequently deal with racism, gender, immigration, war, and climate change. Politics are not only found in the music but are lived out on stage in representation and off stage in the daily lives of the performers and

[161]Bland, "Wolff."
[162]Garratt, 145.

composers. The next section is concerned with how performers can face today's political challenges.

The Political Pianist: Problems and Solutions

Performers of Cardew and Rzewski's works need to be aware of each work's political message and be prepared to accurately represent that message to an audience. If these works are to be included in a politically-themed program, the performer must know how to communicate the political messages and understand the risks and consequences if they choose to take a political stance. The following section will provide performers a context for interpreting political works, communicating political messages to an audience, and including the works of Cardew and Rzewski in political programs.

Today, everything can feel as though it is touched by politics. Words and actions are regularly judged by society as appropriate/inappropriate, supportive/critical of a certain group, on this side/that side of the argument. The idea of gender is being re-defined. Society is undergoing a major shift in what is deemed progressive or not. In the classical world, music of underrepresented composers (minority races and women) is being promoted, as are underrepresented performers. As I discuss below, new music has been emerging that deals directly with state politics and social movements. The music of Cardew and Rzewski is hardly alone in being political. If the modern pianist desires to perform these works, or promote any other political cause on stage, there are several factors to consider first.

The modern pianist faces new expectations and responsibilities, and new political repertoire. There are, however, risks involved in taking a political stance. I will summarize these expectations, options, and risks as outlined in Benjamin Hopkins' recent dissertation "Protest,

Commissions, and Programming for the Twenty-First Century" (2020).[163] He has presented a helpful framework for how pianists can engage with politics through protest, commissioning, and programming.

Our current musical world is dealing with both long-standing and new problems, reflecting society's battles for equality. One of the challenges that has impacted music most strongly is the issue of representation. As society has moved towards equality for women and minorities, classical musicians have felt the same need in programming and commissioning. There is a need for better representation in concerts, research, and education (music theory and history for example) and the expectation is now there for all musicians and teachers to reevaluate their materials. Hopkins describes the conservative nature of classical music in how it tends to maintain the past and traditions, saying it "can often feel inherently opposed to change."[164]

One might be tempted to believe that classical music is somehow outside of politics, or a refuge from it. Hopkins argues that classical music in not apolitical, saying it

> is not immune from political forces and pressures, and if the practitioners and creators of the art form do not speak about their values, classical music runs the risk of being co-opted and corrupted by bad faith actors. While athletes, chefs, business executives, country musicians, actors, pop stars, and reality television stars leverage their platform for political influence, classical musicians who remain silently apolitical render themselves uniquely and pointlessly powerless.[165]

Musicians might fear the consequences of taking a political stance. Remaining silent may appear as the safe route, but there is the belief that inaction instead upholds the status quo. Hopkins stresses the need to speak out, saying "the changes I am proposing feel inevitable rather than

[163]Benjamin Hopkins, "Protest, Commissions, and Programming for the Twenty-First Century" (DMA diss., The University of British Columbia, 2020), accessed December 3, 2021, https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0395353?o=0.

[164]Ibid., 105.

[165]Ibid., 8-9.

impossible, essential rather than radical."[166] His reasons for becoming radical likely reflect the feelings of many Americans:

> As an American citizen, the election of 2016 demoralized me. The events since then, and especially of the last year [2020], have radicalized me. …classical musicians have a right, even a responsibility, to voice their political opinions on any platform available. These proposals now seem, if anything, moderate. In the years to come, they must be taken further.[167]

Performers may, like Hopkins, feel radicalized about a certain issue, but is it their responsibility to speak out? They need to carefully consider the consequences of their actions.

How should pianists engage with politics? First, Hopkins believes that pianists can more easily be political because of their independence and since they "work mostly alone or in small groups, it is easier for them to make political choices and take unilateral political actions."[168] He believes that "classical pianists can and should engage in political speech and action," that it "is essential for pianists to consider the political implications of their work," arguing that "we are all implicated in our society's systemic inequities and injustices."[169] To address the risks of being political, he warns that "remaining apolitical does not guarantee safety."[170] He does not call for pianists to be constantly political but believes "there is a time and a place, and political speech and action should be carefully considered prior to any undertaking."[171]

Pianists need to be absolutely clear in their message if they want to be politically successful. The audience must understand what the performer is advocating for, and what action or remedy they propose.[172] Hopkins advises that

> the performer must clearly identify these messages, with contextual notes printed or spoken from the stage if necessary. Pianists must select repertoire carefully to ensure they

[166]Ibid., 105.
[167]Ibid.
[168]Ibid., 9.
[169]Ibid., iii, 9.
[170]Ibid., 35.
[171]Ibid.
[172]Ibid., 61.

> do not misrepresent the composer's intention or meaning. Political messages have often been erroneously attributed to some of the most iconic works in the piano literature.[173]

In the following chapters, I will recommend how performers can clearly represent the meanings with the works of Cardew and Rzewski, citing examples of professional pianists doing so.

Commissioning

Commissioning is one way that pianists can support better representation in available repertoire. Hopkins offers two models: ideological and representative. The ideological model is when "a pianist commissions works about a specific issue, by composers who support the same cause or agenda as the pianist."[174] His representative model is when "a pianist commissions a demographically representative group of composers to write pieces that may or may not have a specific political message."[175]

There are several examples of the ideological model in recent years. Pianist Sarah Cahill's 2009 project *A Sweeter Music* was in response to the Iraq War.[176] Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Cahill commissioned composers who were committed to pacifism. The project includes Rzewski's *Peace Dances.* In 2018, pianists Nicholas Phillips created the *#45 miniatures* project.[177] He commissioned composers to write short piano pieces in response to the election of President Donald Trump. Each work reflects topics such as expectations of the president's office, immigration, racism, and patriotism. In 2019, pianist Ann DuHamel created the project *Prayers*

[173]Ibid., 92.
[174]Ibid., 66.
[175]Ibid.
[176]Sarah Cahill, "Portfolio: A Sweeter Music – Sarah Cahill Piano," Sarah Cahill: pianist, accessed December 4, 2021, http://sarahcahill.com/portfolio/a-sweeter-music-%e2%80%a2-sarah-cahill-piano/.
[177]Nicholas Phillips, "*#45 miniatures project*," Nicholas Phillips: pianist, accessed December 4, 2021, https://www.nicholasphillips.net/45miniatures/.

for a Feverish Planet, asking composers to "somehow respond to climate change."[178] Recently completed, DuHamel anticipates performances in 2022.

For his dissertation, Hopkins commissioned two works and described the process. The first work addressed representation through commissioning a minority composer and addressed social rights through its subject matter. *My Dungeon Shook* (2020) by Joel Thompson (b. 1988) is a set of three preludes that are a musical protest of and personal reaction to the murders of black men Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd in 2020.[179] The second work addressed representation through commissioning a minority composer. This was *ravel's miroirs no. 3 but you're dissociating at your recital* (2020) for piano and pre-recorded audio by Peter Shin, who in 2020 was a Ph.D. composition student and is a second-generation Korean-U.S. American.[180]

Programming

Programming is a second way that pianists can support better representation in concerts. Performers must be clear to their audience. When a program contains political messages, Hopkins warns that "verifiable truth must be the foundation of political programming."[181] Ideological topics can include pacifism/anti-war, protesting states and state violence, tyrannical leaders, social movements, environmentalism, and representation.

I have listed several examples of pacifist works above, from the Vietnam War to the Iraq War. Cardew and Rzewski's pacifist elements will be discussed later in detail. A more recent pacifist work by Rzewski is *Stop the War! (Mile 61)* composed in 2003 at the onset of the Iraq War. Hopkins cites a few solo piano examples of works which protest states and state violence.

[178]Ann Duhamel, "Prayers for a Feverish Planet: Description of Project," Ann DuHamel: pianist, accessed December 4, 2021, https://annduhamel.com/prayers-description/.
[179]Hopkins, 69-70.
[180]Ibid., 75.
[181]Ibid., 94.

Leoš Janáček's (1854-1928) piano sonata *1. X. 1905* (1905) depicts the chaos and intensity of a worker protest on October 1 and 2 in 1905 in the Moravian town of Brno.[182] Gabriela Montero's (b. 1970) piano concerto *Ex Patria* (2011) was composed in honor of the 19,336 victims of homicide that year in Venezuela.[183] Fazil Say's (b. 1970) piano sonata *Gezi Park 2,* Op. 52 (2014) commemorates the death of a protestor at the hands of government forces during protests against the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan at Gezi Park in Istanbul in 2013.[184] The topic of tyrannical leaders is an offshoot of protesting the state. In 2018, pianist Igor Levit gave a recital in protest of President Donald Trump. The program featured works which all engage with themes of freedom or tyrannical leaders and included Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*[185] In the same year was Nicholas Phillips *#45 miniatures* project, mentioned above. Many of Cardew's works, especially *Thälmann Variations*, belong to this group of works protesting tyranny of the state.

The topic of social movements is found in many works. This is a primary concern found in Rzewski's works, such as *The People United, North American Ballads*, and *Songs of Insurrection* (2016). Tomeka Reid is a composer who has addressed the Black Lives Matter movement with her piano solo *Lamenting G.F., A.A., B.T., T.M.* (2020) which translates into pitches the initials of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade, four Black Americans killed in 2020, as well as the letters B, L, and M for Black Lives Matter.[186]

Another political topic is climate change. John Luther Adams writes many works reflecting the fragility of nature such as piano solos *Among Red Mountains* (2001) and *Nunataks*

[182]Ibid., 94-95.
[183]Ibid., 96.
[184]Ibid., 95-96.
[185]Ibid., 56.
[186]Ibid.

(Solitary Peaks) (2007).[187] Composer Whitney E. George began a project in 2014 called *Extinction Series* in which she composes short solo works for piano and other various instruments in memorial to extinct species. The series will continue indefinitely, as she says, to reflect "mankind's carelessly destructive tendencies."[188]

The act of representative programming can be political. A program can feature female and minority composers with or without ideological messages. The impact of the performance space and other forms of media should also be considered. For example, pianist Kathryn Woodard describes how her 2005 performance of Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* was enhanced by the murals of Diego Rivera in the Rivera Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts.[189] The 1932 paintings depict the working class and its struggles, paralleling the themes of the music. She believed it enhanced Rzewski's message and made a better experience for the audience.

Pianists have many causes they may feel strongly about, and many avenues to express concern. If they choose to speak out, whether from the stage or elsewhere, they need to carefully examine the ramifications and make sure their message is clear to their audience. The following chapters will observe how Cardew and Rzewski chose to handle these very decisions. I will also offer my suggestions for how to perform and program their works while effectively communicating their meanings to an audience.

[187]John Luther Adams, "Solo/Small Ensemble," John Luther Adams: composer, accessed December 4, 2021, http://johnlutheradams.net/solosmall-ensemble/.

[188]Whitney E. George, "Solo Works: Portfolio," Whitney E. George: composer/conductor, accessed December 4, 2021, https://www.whitneygeorge.com/solo-works.

[189]Kathryn Woodard, "The Pianist's Body at Work: Mediating Sound and Meaning in Frederic Rzewski's Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues," in *Sonic Mediations: Body, Sound, Technology*, edited by Carolyn Birdsall and Anthony Enns (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 137.

Conclusion

I began this chapter outlining the major political terms, philosophies, and philosophers of the twentieth century. That outline, along with historical examples of protest music, provides a framework for understanding how music is a powerful tool in protest movements. Finally, Hopkins provided a framework for how pianists can engage with political music today. With that background defined and clarified, it is possible to dive into the lives, ideologies, and piano works of Frederic Rzewski and Cornelius Cardew.

CHAPTER 2. FREDERIC RZEWSKI'S IDEOLOGY AND WORKS FROM THE 1960S AND 1970S

This chapter focuses on the personal ideology of Frederic Rzewski. I investigate the influences on his ideology and how that ideology manifests in his early works, particularly *North American Ballads* (1979), a complex work for solo piano based on American protest songs. Although Rzewski is generally regarded as a political composer, existing scholarship focuses almost exclusively on theoretical analysis.[190] However, a thorough investigation of how his ideology affects his compositional form has not yet been undertaken, and this is what I seek to do here. Using the philosophy of power structures developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault, I investigate the influences on Rzewski's ideology, including colleagues and social-political movements. Drawing on dissertations by Kim Hayashi (1995), Robert Christian Paul (1993), and Michael Zuraw (2003), as well as interviews, recordings, and publications by Rzewski, I examine his personal ideology and then connect it to his early compositions, specifically *North American Ballads,* investigating how and why this piece incorporates improvisation. Additionally, my own 2021 interview of Corey Hamm, a concert pianist and Rzewski expert, offers a fresh and personal perspective on the composer and his music.[191] I argue that understanding the political underpinnings of Rzewski's works for solo piano through

[190]Howard Pollack, "A New Age and a New Left: David Behrman and Frederic Rzewski," in *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliot Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 370-94; John Rockwell, "The Romantic Revival and the Dilemma of the Political Composer," in *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 84-95; Kim Hayashi, "The Keyboard Music of Frederic Anthony Rzewski with Special Emphasis on the 'North American Ballads'" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1995); Michael Zuraw, "From Ideology into Sound: Frederic Rzewski's 'North American Ballads' and Other Piano Music from the 1970s" (DMA diss., Rice University, 2003); Vanessa Cornett-Murtada, "Quotation, Revolution and American Culture: The Use of Folk Tunes and the Influence of Charles Ives in Frederic Rzewski's 'North American Ballads' for Solo Piano" (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2004); Hershberger; Robert Christian Paul, "Improvisation In Twentieth-century Solo Piano Repertoire, as Represented In Alvin Curran's *First Piano Piece* (1967) and Pieces Selected from *Squares* (1978) and *Four North American Ballads* (1978-1979), by Frederic Rzewski" (DMA diss., University of Miami, 1993), 110-113.

[191]Hamm, interview via Zoom by Michael Langer, February 1, 2021, Appendix B.

the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures will help pianists understand Rzewski's ideology and will thus allow for better engagement with an emerging and relevant repertoire that targets a politically- and socially-aware audience.

Rzewski had a reputation as a political composer. Books about twentieth-century music contain chapters on Rzewski with a focus on the political nature of his works. These include Howard Pollack's *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliot Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (1992) and John Rockwell's *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (1983).[192] In addition, several authors of dissertations and theses have written about Rzewski's music and have given varying degrees of attention to the political nature of his works, including Kim Hayashi (1995), Michael Zuraw (2003), Vanessa Cornett-Murtada (2004), and Monica Alice Hershberger (2011).[193] The general understanding appears to be that Rzewski was a politically-motivated composer and the topic is left there. In contrast, primary sources such as Rzewski's interviews, lectures, recordings, and publications reveal his politics and ideology as at the very core of his being, in turn governing his artistic and personal choices.

The Life of Frederic Rzewski

Frederic Rzewski (1938-2021) was an American composer and pianist who was born in Westfield, MA. He graduated from Harvard University in 1958 where he studied with Randall Thompson (1899-1984) and Walter Piston (1894-1976). At Harvard, he and his classmate Christian Wolff organized avant-garde concerts featuring the works of Stockhausen and John Cage.[194] Cage attended these concerts, and Rzewski developed a relationship with this leader of the avant-garde which would influence his own experimental improvisational work in the

[192]Pollack, 370-94; Rockwell, (1983), 84-95.
[193]Hayashi; Zuraw; Cornett; Hershberger.
[194]Frederic Rzewski, "Christian Wolff's Music," October 1997, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 434-36.

1960s.[195] He then went on to Princeton University to study with Roger Sessions (1896-1985) and Milton Babbitt (1916-2011), graduating in 1960. A Fulbright scholarship in 1960–61 allowed him to study with Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-1975) in Florence, Italy. Dallapiccola experienced both World Wars and a fascist regime in Italy, and as a result his works were a form of overt political protest, especially his later works during the time of Rzewski's studies.[196] Although Rzewski says little about his studies with Dallapiccola, it seems reasonable—in light of Rzewski's great respect for political composers—that some kind of impression was made on him by such an established composer who communicated political ideology through music.

Rzewski spent the 1960s performing and teaching primarily in Europe, where he took part in the premieres of serialist Karlheinz Stockhausen's (1928-2007) *Klavierstück X* (1962) and *Plus Minus* (1964) and taught at the Kölner Kurse für Neue Musik. During these years he also studied with modernist composer Elliott Carter (1908-2012) in Berlin.

In 1966 Rzewski co-founded the live electronic ensemble *Musica Elettronica Viva* (MEV) which was based in Rome and toured Europe and the United States (US) until 1971. Collective improvisation was the defining feature of the MEV, where scores were replaced with performance instructions in prose. Many of these performances expressed socialist political concerns. He described the era as progressive and reactionary, with culture and politics often confused.[197] He depicts himself during these years as "caught up in the furious energy of the student movement of the '60s in Europe."[198] On tour, he encountered working-class audiences.

[195]Frederic Rzewski, "'I am in the habit of trying to relate my work to the world around me' Conversation with Vivian Perlis," December 2, 1984, Oral History, American Music Series, Yale University, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 166-168.

[196]Bernardoni and Waterhouse, "Dallapiccola."

[197]Rzewski, "'I am in the habit,'" (1984), 184.

[198]Ken Terry, "Frederic Rzewski and the Improvising Avant Garde," interview in Downbeat, January 11, 1979, 21.

One such encounter had a significant impact on him. In 1969, he said he "witnessed over 100,000 metal workers from all over Italy marching through the city carrying bells and pipes and buckets and chains, cooking up an enormous racket," describing it as "one of the most amazing sounds I've ever heard."[199] His ideology about the power of unions may very well have begun at this moment as a result of seeing the mobilization of the Italian metal workers union. Many of Rzewski's subsequent works were based on union protest songs and are described in the next section.

In the 1970s, his creative work took another major shift when he began writing piano solo works which were unambiguously tonal and often displayed exceptional virtuosity. In these works, he often explored folk and popular melodies and his compositional structures typically featured a short theme followed by a large number of short variations, including climaxes of dramatic force.[200] I will discuss these works in more detail below.

In this decade, Rzewski engaged with other musicians in concerts that promoted social issues. One of his primary outlets was through the Musicians Active Collective, which held concerts in support of causes such as the Chilean People's Struggle, United Farm Workers, Attica Defense Committee, and promotion of May Day's union origin.[201] Rzewski believed that these concerts could develop political consciousness.[202]

In this era, Rzewski also associated with other political composers, including Cornelius Cardew and Christian Wolff. Cardew was known for performing American contemporary music,

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[199]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 21.

[200]Edward Murray, "Rzewski, Frederic (Anthony)," in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, 2001-. https://doiorg.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/978156159 2630.article.24218.

[201]Frederic Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Walter Zimmermann in *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver: A.R.C. Publications, 1976), 105, accessed September 28, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/7095446/Desert_Plants._Conversations_with_23 _American_Musicians.

[202]Frederic Rzewski, "Listening to the Sounds of the People: Some Recent Examples of Political Music in America," CBC broadcast, 1974, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 236.

especially by Cage and Wolff.[203] Rzewski admired Cardew, who was one of the few people Rzewski allowed to critique his music.[204] Rzewski said Cardew was "a real experimental composer … not afraid to make a big mistake."[205] He described Cardew's shift from improvised music to more structured music with a political message as "very successful indeed," and that Cardew was "really profoundly convinced by his whole thinking along these lines," and that Cardew had "quite a powerful mind."[206] They performed each other's music in the 1960s and 70s, and they performed in the same concert in Berlin during the time when Cardew was composing his *Thälmann Variations*.[207] In 2001, Rzewski recorded Cardew's *Thälmann Variations* and *We Sing for the Future* (1981), both for solo piano.[208] There are many parallels between the lives of Rzewski and Cardew, especially in the similar use of socialist ideology in their music. It is likely that these two composers influenced each other to compose political solo piano works.

After 1976, Rzewski divided his time between Rome and Liège, where he became professor of composition at the Conservatoire Royal in 1977 and made his home in Belgium. He was a visiting lecturer at many major American, Canadian, and European universities from the 1980s until his death in 2021.

Rzewski's Political Works from 1968 to 1979

The earliest of Rzewski's political works is *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1968) for a variable number of performers and instruments. It was a "proto-minimalist work which used

[203]John Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2001-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630 .article.04912.

[204]Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius," in *Grove Music Online.*

[205]Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Zimmermann (1976), 107.

[206]Ibid.

[207]John Tilbury, "Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981): A Life Unfinished," (Matching Tye, UK: Copula, 2008), 678-79.

[208]Frederic Rzewski (piano), *Cornelius Cardew: We Sign For The Future!*, New Albion Records NA116cd, 2001, streaming audio, accessed November 12, 2019, https://play.openmusiclibrary.org/albums/10965.

indeterminacy as a socialist critique of capitalist society."[209] Next was *Jefferson* (1970) for voice and piano, a setting of the preamble to the *Declaration of Independence*. *Jefferson* was composed immediately after the 1970 massacre at Kent State University. What appealed to Rzewski was the legitimacy of revolution implied in Jefferson's words: "Whenever any form of government becomes destructive… it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."[210]

Two companion pieces that achieved popular success were *Coming Together* (1971) and *Attica* (1972). These works were a critique of capitalist oppression using a minimalist texture and solid tonality.[211] These were Rzewski's response to a 1971 prisoner uprising at Attica Prison in New York State where inmates revolted due to overcrowding and systematic racism by guards. One guard died and state troopers stormed the prison, shooting and killing 39 people, including nine hostages.[212] The text of the pieces comes from an inmate's experience of the event. These pieces reflect Rzewski's emerging desire to communicate injustice in the world through his art. Personally, he wanted to challenge the power of his government which allowed the event to happen in the first place, and then get that message of injustice to his audience.[213]

The following year brought the cantata *Struggle Song* (1973) for solo baritone and mixed chorus, a minimalist work based on a text by abolitionist Frederic Douglas (1817-1895).[214] The next two years brought two sets of variations for piano solo. The first, *No Place to Go But Around* (1974), was based on music Rzewski wrote for a play with an anarchist perspective of

[209]Zuraw, 15.

[210]Vanessa Cornett, ""Which Side Are You On?:" Folk Tune Quotation and Protest in Western Art Music," *Music and Politics* 15, no. 1 (Winter, 2021), 5-6, https://doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0015.103.

[211]Zuraw, 15.

[212]Rebecca Kesby (producer), "Attica: The US Prison Rebellion That Ended in Carnage: BBC News," BBC News, posted September 28, 2016, accessed November 16, 2019, https://www.youtube .com/watch?v=kNzSV6AVpAQ.

[213]Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Zimmermann (1976), 104.

[214]Ibid.

social stratification and tension.[215] It quotes the pro-Communist anthem *Bandiera Rossa* (Red Flag).[216] The second variation set is *36 Variations on* '*The People United Will Never Be Defeated!'* (1975) for solo piano. It is among the largest and most performed and recorded of Rzewski's works. This imposing and highly virtuosic work is based on the pro-communist melody of the same name by Chilean musician Sergio Ortega (1938-2003), a leader of the Chilean Communist Left whose song became the anthem for the Chilean Popular Unity government and was eventually identified as a song of revolution around the world.[217] Recall that Rzewski's *The People United* also quotes Hanns Eisler's *Solidarity Song.*[218]

One of Rzewski's last political works from the 1970's came at about the same time as *North American Ballads*. This was *A Long Time Man* (1979) for piano and orchestra, consisting of 24 variations on the song *A Long Time Man*, a folk song sung by prison chain gangs in Texas.[219] It was first recorded in 1934, then resurfaced with folk singers in the 1960s.[220] The concerto represents Rzewski's sympathy for prisoners caught in a power dynamic. By using the prison song, he is drawing attention to the struggles of the prisoners, and through variations he places those struggles through a musical kaleidoscope, allowing his audience to consider the ideas from many perspectives. It can be revealing to look at Rzewski's works in light of Foucault's first major work on power structures, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), a study of power dynamics in prisons and their relationship to society. It is interesting that two of Rzewski's political works from the 1970s were about prisoners.

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[215]Zuraw, 44.

[216]Ibid., 45.

[217]David Miller, "Ortega, Sergio," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2001-). https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781 561592630 .article.51762.

[218]Zuraw, 58.

[219]Frederic Rzewski, "Program Notes: A Long Time Man," in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 468-470.

[220]Quentin Piergiorgio, ed., "It Makes a Long Time Man Feel Bad," Second Hand Songs, accessed November 17, 2019, https://secondhandsongs.com/performance/54770.

An understanding of Rzewski's beliefs on the power of music to convey socio-political ideology is an invaluable tool in the interpretation of his political works from the 1970s. The pianist must grapple with the meaning of each work and can then convey that meaning through the music. The following section will reveal Rzewski's views.

Rzewski's Political and Artistic Ideology

If performers want to understand Rzewski's music and how to interpret it, they need to understand his political and artistic ideology because that is what shaped his compositions. Having traced his education, associations, and works from the 1950s through the 70s, this section will look more closely at his personal convictions regarding politics and art. His ideology has its roots in the spirit of the post-war generation: resistance to traditional cultural and political institutions. His commitment to social justice was in part influenced by communism. In 1979, *Downbeat* writer Ken Terry labeled Rzewski "an avowed Marxist," but the ideological quality that stands out in Rzewski's own writings is a belief in class equality.[221] Through his music and in his public speaking he regularly challenged the elite classes' control of art. Rockwell referenced how Rzewski believed government should serve the lower classes, citing his admiration for the Italian Communist Party's electoral strategy which won over the lower-middle class through the use of culture.[222]

Indeed, the bulk of Rzewski's life's work has reflected how he views social issues. As he said in 2008, "I just feel that I can't write music that has nothing to do with what's happening in the world."[223] It is clear this was the case in the context of his political works and performances in the 70s. It is easy to question the ability of political artwork to make significant change in the

[221]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.
[222]Rockwell, (1983), 89.
[223]Sujin Kim, "Understanding Rzewski's *North American Ballads*: From the Composer to the Work," DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2009, 132.

world but it is difficult to quantify that change. Doing so is not the goal of this document, but Rzewski's answer to this question explains his ideology. He has not been immune to this critique and admitted the limitations of his art's ability to effect social change:[224]

> The important thing is to get past the notion that an individual can, with his own resources, make any significant progress on solving a problem which is social in nature. This is one of the biggest hurdles that artists have to overcome, the idea that art alone can solve problems that really need other forms of action. Art can help; it can be useful in solving human problems. It always has been and it always will be, but only as long as it recognizes its own limitations.[225]

Rzewski did not believe his music alone could make a significant social change in the world, just as much as he knew one person is unable to change the world, but he saw it as his duty to express his concern for problems in the world and convey that concern through his art.

Who was the audience for Rzewski's political works? He seems to have decided that 'preaching to the choir' was his best option, saying "if you're working in a political direction, you give up that idea. You don't want to talk to everybody. You don't want to talk to the capitalists and the bourgeoisie."[226] This has a parallel to Mattern's pragmatic form of political action, where "members of one or more communities use music to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative efforts to address them…in mutually beneficial problem solving."[227] Rzewski may have had strong personal ideology, but he did not see his music as confrontational. He wanted it to serve as a point of awareness and discourse amongst his community of social advocates.

Morality was at the core of Rzewski's ideology and motivated him to use political messages in his music. He asserted it was his duty to communicate a political message to his

[224]Rockwell, (1983), 93-4.
[225]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.
[226]Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Zimmermann (1976), 103.
[227]Mattern, 30.

audience.[228] He did not see himself as a political composer, stating "I am in the habit of trying to relate my work to the world around me," and saw his ideology in simple terms as trying to support the things that he believed in and not the things that he did not.[229] He did not think he had a politician's power, but he did think all citizens should stand up and make their voice heard through the power of collective unity. He asserted it was an artists' responsibility to relate their work to an overall political context.[230] His own shift from anarchistic music towards socio-political can be traced to 1968, when he wrote in his *Parma Manifesto* that the role of the artist was

> to be able to communicate the presence of danger to others. An artist is a person who lays claim to a heightened state of perception. He creates the *sense* of emergency in a state of tranquility, where there is no threat to individual survival … human sensitivities can be awakened to the presence of danger on the highest level.[231]

This shows that Rzewski had a strong ideology concerning the role of artists in society and that he felt strongly that it was the duty of all artists to communicate to their audience within a political realm.

Recall the discussion in Chapter 1 regarding German communist composer Hanns Eisler (1898-1962). It is not clear whether Rzewski knew Eisler personally, but Rzewski was certainly inspired by his ideology. Rzewski believed Eisler to be one of the best modern composers, precisely for his disdain of the wealthy ruling class. Rzewski admired that Eisler cared for the working class and fought for them. Like Eisler, Rzewski made the plea that people would not see

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[228]Rockwell, (1983), 94.

[229]Rzewski, "'I am in the habit,'" (1984), 184.

[230]Frederic Rzewski, "Music and Political Ideals," lecture given at the Univ. of Wisconsin, River Falls, April 1983, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 188-90.

[231]Frederic Rzewski, "Parma Manifesto: Creating out of Nothing," program notes for the Festival Internazionale del Teatro Universitario, Parma, March 23, 1968, first printed in *Source*, number 6, Davis, California, July 1969, 91, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 156.

artists as isolated in their art, but as part of a society.[232] Rzewski obviously admired, even idolized Eisler for being outspoken about problems he saw in the world and his desire to communicate his ideas through his music.

Rzewski had strong ideology about how powerful institutions determine art for society. As he saw it, the dominance of academic institutions—the ivory tower—and the elite upper class was a "deplorable situation of isolation and elitism with which contemporary music ha[d] been cursed throughout this century … and [was growing] steadily worse."[233] He felt that modern composers were either part of the problem or the solution. In an echo of Eisler, he called them either "a parasitic servant in the ivory tower" of academia with their work "doomed for the garbage," or listening to and in service of the people.[234] His desire was for composers to avoid institutional support, instead connecting with a variety of artists and classes. He had hope in a new generation of socially-conscious composers who were coming "out of the concert hall to the masses of people outside," especially those who, since the 1960s, were trying to figure out how to take political forms of action through their music.[235] For Rzewski, resistance to institutional powers meant all artists should stop participating in a system he saw as harming the free expression of art and society.

Rzewski identified with the political generation of the 1960s who tried to relate their music to political concerns. He believed art cannot be separated from a composer's life as part of a society.[236] Using Foucault's philosophy to understand this dynamic, all composers live within a power dynamic. No matter the place or time, all composers live in a system of power structure.

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[232]Rzewski, "Christian Wolff's Music," (1997), 228-30.

[233]Frederic Rzewski, "A Variety of Dialects: Some Political Currents in Modern Music," lecture text, August 1978, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 220.

[234]Rzewski, "Listening to the Sounds of the People," (1974), 238.

[235]Ibid.; Rzewski, "Music and Political Ideals," (1983), 196.

[236]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.

Their music is supported by some entity, whether an elite ruling class, a church, a university, or the public. Every composer participates in this system, whether by choice or not, and to varying degrees of resistance. Rzewski believed all composers throughout history are political by nature of existing in a political system.[237] He also believed that music is not an isolated subject free from the composer's political environment but that every composer writes music that reflects their political world, consciously or unconsciously. This was part of a more all-encompassing philosophy that saw music as a result of its environment and not independent of it.[238] For those who were more explicitly political in their art, he explained their reasons for being political as 1. there were/are forces beyond their control, 2. they found solidarity with struggle, 3. they have an abstract concern with morality (connecting their work to society), or 4. they have an inborn artistic taste for experimentation.[239] He advised caution, however, in balancing politics and art:

> Art and politics are not the same thing. There are points where they converge, and points where they diverge. One cannot easily be put into the service of the other without weakening it, depriving it of some of its inherent force as a vehicle of communication. The politics of the art world tends to be fairly irrelevant to politics in general. Whereas the kind of art which satisfies the political world is often pretty feeble as art. An effective combination of the two is nonetheless theoretically possible, perhaps because it is practically necessary: a condition that may exist only in certain moments of history.[240]

Here, Rzewski separated art from politics into each of their corresponding purposes. He believed art to be about communication which could be manipulated if politics gained too much control. To him, art had the power of expression and communication. He warned that politics could become too powerful if allowed to dominate art. He was always aware of power dynamics.

Rzewski believed music could be political even when lyrics were removed from a song. He believed that "realism in music does not require text. It *does* however require some kind of

[237]Rzewski, "A Variety of Dialects," (1978), 218.
[238]Rzewski, "Music and Political Ideals," (1983), 198-200.
[239]Rzewski, "A Variety of Dialects," (1978), 218.
[240]Rzewski, "Music and Political Ideals," (1983), 192.

consciousness of the active relationship between music and the rest of the world."[241] This parallels Rosenthal and Flacks' assertion that lyrics do not matter as much as the context in which a song functions within a protest movement.[242] Therefore, Rzewski's works are effective in communicating the political message without any text. The melodies carry their own political power and his aesthetic carries the action of the protest movements.

Improvisation as a Manifestation of Ideology

I argue that improvisation in Rzewski's works—in particular *North American Ballads*—is a manifestation of his political ideology. It functions as a tool to break down the classical hegemonic relationship between composer, performer, and audience by allowing the performer to create their own music within the composer's work. Understanding Rzewski's use of improvisation is central to interpreting his music.[243]

Rzewski first engaged with improvisation while touring in the group Musica Elletronica Viva, in which improvising was the defining feature. Musicians with jazz and classical training were often combined in these performances.[244] As early as 1963, his works used symbols for improvised *events*, eventually becoming completely improvised.[245] MEV represented artistic anarchy, meaning power structures were dismantled. The power of the composer was severely limited through the process of group improvisation. The group further challenged academic institutional power through public tours outside the academic world. Even the power of the performer was restricted when the members of MEV invited audience members to suggest

[241]Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Zimmermann (1976), 103, emphasis in original.
[242]Rosenthal and Flacks, 39, 44.
[243]Hayashi, 78; Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.
[244]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.
[245]Rzewski, "'I am in the habit,'" (1984), 176-78.

musical ideas or melodies before a performance.[246] Placing performers anywhere within the audience's space further blurred the lines between performers and audience members.[247]

Rzewski's education in serialism taught him that the audience is of no concern, that an artist should only create the art they want.[248] His group improvisation in the 1960s was his purest form of musical democracy, where the audience determined musical factors and there were no musical authorities. Feeling the limits of improvisation to communicate ideas, his aesthetic changed again in 1968 when he decided to write music about social ideas and thus needed a new musical language to accomplish this. For him, this meant returning to an older, more traditional language through a written score and tonality. Ever needing to break with tradition, he dismantled the composer's authority—in this case his own—by incorporating improvisation into his works. This allowed performers to challenge his power by inserting their own ideas into the greater patchwork of the score. The audience then witnessed this power resistance and therefore became part of the challenge. Democracy was retained through improvisation.

Rzewski was a highly skilled improvisor who explored the skill in experimental group improvisation, jazz, and classical genres. He believed that musicians should be experienced in improvisation and use it to express themselves. His performances, both live and studio recorded, frequently feature considerable amounts of improvisation. He was trained classically and did not enter the jazz world until 1964.[249] He began to gain experience improvising in jazz and classical contexts. He was accepted in both worlds by musicians and was seen as a sort of bridge between jazz and classical, running classes in New York where jazz and classical musicians would make

[246]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.
[247]Ibid.
[248]Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Zimmermann (1976), 103.
[249]Ibid., 21.

appearances. He was not, however, a jazz composer. Communication was essential to Rzewski and he believed jazz improvisation communicated ideas better than any other kind of music.[250]

These beliefs led him to incorporate improvisation into his works. He went so far as to improvise in standard classical works, not only at cadenzas, but in unusual places. In a mid-1970s performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 4 he added improvised passages as he played and improvised his own cadenza.[251] Rzewski believed that "improvisation is the soul of classical music" and noted that "Beethoven often improvised at his concerts" and further asserted that "in every great performance of classical music, there's a considerable amount of improvising." Another example of Rzewski's unexpected improvisation in Beethoven's music comes from 1991 when he performed op. 106, the *Hammerklavier* Sonata. In this performance and, in the face of tradition, he inserted his own cadenza within every single movement.[252] He did the same with Beethoven's equally famous Sonata op. 57 *Appassionata*.[253] In both cases, it is not just the insertion of improvisation, but the entire performance which is unique to Rzewski and goes against standard performance practice. This is something most artists would never consider doing, much less in public. It is this disregard for established rules that defines Rzewski. He challenged the power of the composer, who for hundreds of years had been treated like the ultimate authority, superior to the performer. Audiences go to concerts expecting to hear Beethoven and little of the performer. Rzewski argued that audiences in Beethoven's day would have heard the composer improvise, and therefore Rzewski was honoring the spirit of the music

[250]Rzewski, "Frederic Rzewski," interview by Zimmermann (1976), 106.

[251]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.

[252]Frederic Rzewski (piano), Rzewski plays Beethoven – Hammerklavier Sonata, recorded in 1991 in Switzerland, accessed October 13, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGyX5W9a_IE.

[253]Frederic Rzewski (piano), *Rzewski plays Beethoven – Appassionata Sonata*, recorded live in 2001, accessed November 16, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbsRVw5v3Yk.

by offering audiences this historically informed experience. In Rzewski's world, the performer is allowed to become the composer-creator.[254]

Improvisation is a skill that has mostly disappeared from classical piano training in favor of advanced technique and a large repertoire. In another critique of a power-structure, Rzewski placed fault in academic institutions for creating a musical culture in which he believed "improvisation was murdered and was replaced by a sort of slavery to the score."[255] It is my assertion that improvisation is at the core of Rzewski's musical ideal and is an ideologically-intwined element of his compositional process and expression. When present, improvisation is optional in Rzewski's scores in case the performer is not comfortable, and while such performances can still be effective the potential of the musical and ideological experience is sacrificed.[256] How is the performer to approach this skill? Zuraw suggests listening to Rzewski's recordings for improvisational inspiration, citing the "rich juxtaposition of styles and ideas that are surprising and inventive," and where "classical converges with the avant-garde."[257] While it is a natural inclination for musicians to honor the composer by improvising as he does, I argue that this goes against the very spirit of what he has created, that being a spirit of resistance to the power structure of the composer. When a pianist improvises in Rzewski's music, it is their opportunity to have their own voice heard. If the performer is going to challenge Rzewski's authority, they need to speak honestly with their own original ideas. Rzewski's recordings reveal his own resistance to the score through his improvisation; a political analogy would be a president who brakes the very laws they fought to pass.

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[254]Terry, interview of Rzewski (1979), 20.

[255]Frederic Rzewski, "Private or Collective?: The Foundations of a Future World Revolutionary Music," published in PIECES: An Anthology, ed Michael Byron, Vancouver: Aesthetic Research Center, 1974, in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 242.

[256]Zuraw, 49.

[257]Ibid., 50.

Improvisation in Rzewski's score demonstrates Foucault's philosophy of resistance to the power structures in that it is a resistance to the composer's authority. As Zuraw states, "improvisation blurs the boundaries between the composer, the piece, and the artist, making for a fluid amalgam of the three. …Performers of his music are not merely called upon to expound his ideals, they are expected to converse with the composer and participate in the debate of his politics"[258] Cornett expands the power breakdown to include the audience: "Rzewski relinquishes control, thereby liberating the performer. When the lyrics and meaning of the folk tune are understood by the audience, the listener is empowered as well."[259] This is further confirmed by pianist Corey Hamm. Regarding my assertion that improvisation equals resistance to the composer, Hamm said "I don't think I've ever heard anyone say that before. It makes perfect sense to me, actually, because he's very… it fits him. I think that your theory is a good one. It makes sense with his approach."[260] Therefore, I am confident that improvisation in Rzewski's music is the performer's opportunity to resist the composer's score to have their own voice heard and to invite the audience into a unique experience of resistance.

Conclusion

Once performers have investigated Rzewski's life, works, and ideology, they are prepared to dive into the *North American Ballads*. This large work for solo piano came after a decade of overtly political works, mostly for solo piano. His journey can be traced from serialism through experimentation, improvisation, minimalism, and then variation form. This journey involved collaborations with other musicians who also believed in social justice. His works can be interpreted as a manifestation of his belief that his music must speak about the way he viewed

[258]Ibid., 49.
[259]Cornett, 2021, 15.
[260]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.

the world. He fought traditional institutional structures in almost every aspect of his life: aesthetics, the role of artist in society, and the role of composer, performer, and audience. Improvisation is a defining feature of his compositional process and structure. In the following chapter, I will explain how improvisation functions in the *Ballads* and why it is important for pianists to incorporate it in performance.

CHAPTER 3. IDEOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATION IN RZEWSKI'S *NORTH AMERICAN BALLADS*

Rzewski's *North American Ballads* have received ample scholarship since the 1980s, mostly analytical, some historical, and to varying degrees, engaging with the work's political nature. My goal here is twofold. First, I seek to interpret Rzewski's ideology and how it manifests in this work. Second, I hope to inform pianists on how best to perform the *Ballads*. My process has been to sift through the wealth of existing analysis, draw it together with political scholarship, and then view it through the lens of Foucault's philosophy as well as the musical-political research of Rosenthal and Flacks and Mattern.

***North American Ballads*: Origins**

Rzewski's ideology is manifested through the use of protest songs and improvisation in *North American Ballads*. This work was the result of a commission from pianist Paul Jacobs (1930–1983) for his 1980 album featuring piano works by contemporary American composers, also including William Bolcom (b. 1938) and Aaron Copland.[261] There are four movements, each based on an American protest song related to pro-union activity or war protest: "Dreadful Memories," "Which Side Are You On?," "Down by the Riverside," and "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues."[262]

Rzewski's compositional inspiration came from several sources, including Pete Seeger (1919-2014), Christian Wolff (b. 1934), Charles Ives (1874-1954), and J. S. Bach (1685-1750). American folk-singer Seeger suggested to Rzewski that he should use traditional American

[261]Zuraw, 62-63; Paul Jacobs (piano), *Paul Jacobs Plays Blues, Ballads & Rags*, Nonesuch D-79006, 1980, vinyl.

[262]Hayashi, 36.

protest songs as the basis for his work.[263] Discussing his conception of *Ballads*, Rzewski said "These ballads are the kind of things I believe in. ...they are all based on traditional American work and protest songs."[264] Additional inspiration came from Christian Wolff, whose piano piece *Bread and Roses* (1976–83), mentioned in Chapter 1, served as a model for setting folk songs with political ideology in a solo piano work.[265]

Folk music and protest songs would have been a familiar form of artistic expression to Rzewski. He grew up hearing the socio-political protest songs of the American folk music revival which began in the 1930s and peaked in the 1950s and 1960s.[266] In the 1970s, when he began writing his political music using protest songs, the American public was familiar with folk music and the political meanings implied in their lyrics. Although protest songs in the 1930s were associated with communism due to many of the musicians' communist ties, my conclusion is that Rzewski did not use protest songs for their communist associations, but for their messages of social change and justice.[267] To Rzewski, there were

> certain universal archetypes in folk music which are found everywhere: some kind of 'human' form, perhaps related to the mother's voice or the rocking motion of her arms; and that these are perhaps recognized by specialized parts of the brain, like those specializing in recognition of human faces.[268]

Moreover, he explained what makes folk songs appropriate for composition:

> These tunes seem to have a special appeal to the human ear. You can change and distort them, subject them to all kinds of transformations without destroying them, unlike a

[263]Frederic Rzewski, "Program Notes: Ballads," in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Ger.: MusikTexte, 2007), 464-68.

[264]Ibid.

[265]Ronald Edwin Lewis, "The Solo Piano Music of Frederic Rzewski" (DMA diss., The University of Oklahoma, 1992), 66.

[266]Hayashi, 65.

[267]Ibid., 75. Hayashi argues that several songs of protest existed long before communism, and were therefore not necessarily tied to a political party.

[268]Rzewski, "Program Notes: Ballads," 464-68.

> twelve-tone row. They can act like a kind of tonal 'cement' in a musical composition, permitting wide-ranging improvisation without losing a sense of where 'home' is.[269]

Rzewski said that to appreciate *North American Ballads,* performers must study American folk music to understand why he used it in this work.[270] Hayashi concludes that Rzewski believed these songs "reflect the heart of a people and which, through their struggle and turmoil, represents an honest and distinctive aspect of America."[271] It was through protest songs that Rzewski expressed his concern for the struggles of the American working class. The performer needs to understand Rzewski's ideology to be able to appropriately program and effectively communicate its ideological meanings to an audience.[272]

The Protest Songs of *North American Ballads* Through the Lens of Rosenthal and Flacks, Mattern, and Foucault

Viewing the original protest songs of the *Ballads* through the lens of Rosenthal and Flacks' scholarship on protest music (see Chapter 1) can help provide an understanding for how these songs functioned as resistance and what power they carried. "Dreadful Memories," "Which Side Are You On?," and "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" were used by labor union protestors in the 1930s. Each functioned in conversion, recruitment, mobilization, serving the committed, and promoting solidarity. "Down by the Riverside" was used by Vietnam War protestors in the 1960s and 1970s. Its function was less about recruiting and more about serving the committed and promoting solidarity.

Of Mattern's three forms of political action, confrontational, deliberative, and pragmatic (see Chapter 1), these protest songs are both confrontational and pragmatic: a) confrontational, in

[269]Ibid.
[270]Hayashi, 53.
[271]Ibid., 78.
[272]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.

that they were used in public picket lines and marches to oppose dominant groups, and b) pragmatic, in that they were used to promote solidarity among their members.

Viewed through the lens of Foucault, the *Ballads* exhibit three general levels of institutional resistance. First, there is the historical genesis of the movement; specifically, there is an inspirational event for each original protest song. The next level of institutional resistance rests on Rzewski's use of the *Ballads* to both symbolize the historical protest moments and to empower the performer to engage in and create empathetic support for the historical as well as current protest movements. The last level focuses on the power of the performer to resist the hegemony of composer authority by way of inserting improvisation into performance. Rzewski's ideology about improvisation, as discussed in Chapter 2, is applied here to his *Ballads.* I argue that improvisation in these movements is a necessary piece of resistance that honors the composer's ideology.

***North American Ballads*: I. "Dreadful Memories"**

The first movement is based on the protest song "Dreadful Memories." The song functions at the first level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*. "Dreadful Memories," is itself a parody of the Protestant hymn "Precious Memories."[273] The new "Dreadful Memories" lyrics were written and set to the "Precious Memories" melody by folk singer and union activist Aunt Molly Jackson (1880-1960). Her lyrics, printed in Appendix A, share personal memories of a 1931 coal miners' strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, during which many children died from hunger and the cold.[274] Jackson performed it around the country

[273]David K. Dunaway, "Jackson, Aunt Molly [née Garland, Mary Magdalene]," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2014-). https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak .edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2262513.

[274]Aunt Molly Jackson, *The Songs and Stories of Aunt Molly Jackson*, Aunt Molly Jackson and John Greenway, Folkways Records FH 5457, 1961, vinyl, Liner notes by Aunt Molly Jackson and John Greenway, accessed June 2, 2021, https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/folkways/FW05457.pdf.

and recorded it for the Archive of American Folksong at the Library of Congress in 1939. The song, with its socialist ties, became associated with the greater 1930s labor movement.

Following Rosenthal and Flacks' delineation of protest song functions, "Dreadful Memories" converted and recruited union members by invoking sympathy through the heartbreaking description of babies dying due to the greed of the mining company, thus mobilizing and strengthening their resolve and solidarity among the union members and supporters. Viewed through Foucault's lens, the song was used to unite miners in resistance to their own company, making it an effective subject for Rzewski's ideological expression.

"Dreadful Memories" appealed to Rzewski through its historical value, musical simplicity, American identity, and political significance. In the 1970s, it came to represent the poor class's continual fight for rights against corporations.[275] Its musical simplicity makes it easily recognizable even when subjected to Rzewski's complex compositional methods. This ensures that the song's ideology remains intact throughout Rzewski's piano work. If the listener is always aware of the original song, they can remain aware of the miners' battle with the mining company. According to Hershberger, "by fully stating [the protest song] at the outset, Rzewski effectively declares he is honoring both [Jackson] and her struggle, and by memorializing her struggle, he quietly urges Americans to confront this sad reality."[276] The piano solo serves to amplify this struggle. This amplification is the second level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*, where the song's history and ideology are mixed with Rzewski's purposes.

Looking at the structure of the first movement, "Dreadful Memories" is a theme and variations with six variations in total.[277] Variation form was a favored structure for his works in

[275]Jackson, *The Songs and Stories*.
[276]Hershberger, 34-5, 37.
[277]Cornett, 2004, 44-5.

the 1970s, starting with *No Place To Go But Around* and *The People United*. For Rzewski and Cardew (see Chapter 5), variation form provided an opportunity to extend a short song into a larger creative work and probe the depths of political meaning through a prism of compositional techniques.[278] Rzewski's variations are largely defined by tempo and key changes as well as textural shifts.[279] He employs a large assortment of compositional devices, including simple techniques of repetition, stretto, melodic fragmentation, and more complex devices such as layered melodic fragments, obfuscation of the melody, use of dissonant intervals, polytonality, rhythmic complexity, and abrupt changes of key, meter, and texture.[280] Much of this is in an improvisational style and requires a formidable technique.[281]

These compositional techniques are used to create empathetic support for the historical mining protest symbolized in the song and is then, by extension, to current labor movements. There are three general areas of symbolism in the score. The first comprises the calm and unambiguously tonal sections symbolizing nostalgia, the parent's faith in a better life, and the innocence of the starving children.[282] Zuraw sees the use of counterpoint as symbolic of the "evolution of memory into reality" or "the complex psychology of memory."[283] A specific example of this is at the beginning of the movement where the protest song is introduced in a nostalgic, peaceful, and tonal setting, as shown in Figure 3.1.

[278]Using variation form and traditional tonality could be seen as a postmodern aesthetic and thus another act of resistance, which I will explore in more detail in the next chapter in my analysis of Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*.

[279]Ibid.

[280]Hayashi, 97-100; Cornett, 2004, 41.

[281]Ibid.

[282]Hershberger, 34-7; Hayashi, 100; Zuraw, 73.

[283]Zuraw, 85, 77.

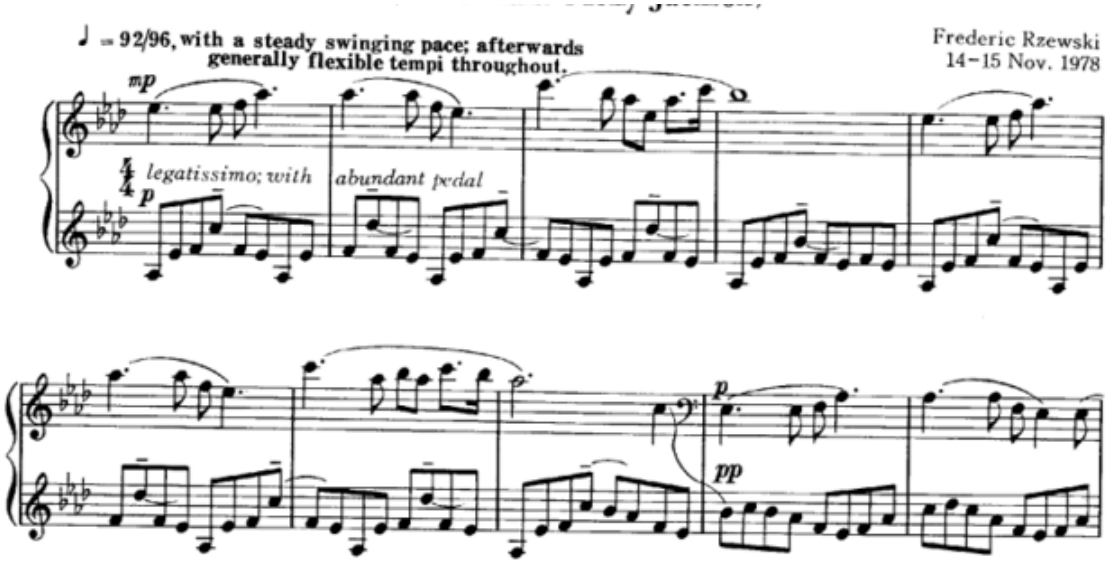

Figure 3.1. Rzewski, "Dreadful Memories" mm. 1-10.

The second general area of symbolism in the score is in passages that are harmonically unstable and have a denser texture. These sections symbolize the chaos, frustration, hopelessness, anger, and outrage of the parents.[284] Zuraw sums these elements up as representing the parents' feeling that "there is no foundation on which we may rely."[285] Hershberger identifies a quoted fragment of Stephen Foster's nostalgic "Swanee River" in m. 61 as "sounding like a muddled dream, a lost possibility of hope or comfort."[286] There is an accelerando in m. 68, followed by a crescendo from *f* to *ff* and a thickening of texture in mm. 71-76. Kim and Hayashi agree that this represents the anger, frustration, and confusion of the parents as they attempt to forget.[287] The movement's final measure is marked "fade to silence" on the last chord. Hayashi and Hershberger agree this fade invokes the image of Aunt Molly Jackson rocking dead babies in her arms, mortified beyond words.[288] Zuraw adds that it represents the corruption of

[284]Hayashi, 100; Hershberger, 35-6.
[285]Zuraw, 84-5, 77.
[286]Hershberger, 36.
[287]Hayashi, 100; Kim, 39.
[288]Hayashi, 100; Hershberger, 36.

innocence.[289] He also interprets the use of melodic contortion as a representation of the souring of the parents' sentiment. Contrast is a major feature of this work. Rzewski calls it his "war and peace" writing style, where sections alternate between intense activity and calm or playful characters.[290] This could be seen as a reflection of the inner turmoil of the parents as they battle the mining company while watching their children go hungry.

The third general area of symbolism in the score is in passages of contrasting motivic quotes and the banjo variation (mm. 35-40), which symbolize poverty's suffering, loneliness, and the painful burden of memory.[291] Zuraw connects Jackson's class comparison in the song's text with Rzewski's contrasting motivic quotes, saying "Her text dwells on the starvation of the miners' children, contrasting their deaths with the bejeweled wives of the coal companies operators" and later connects it with the piano solo, interpretating that the "conflict between classes is worked out symbolically in contrasting quotes of motives."[292]

Zuraw sees the banjo variation, shown in Figure 3.2, as a representation of the lower class, saying "Rzewski wishes to contrast these musical characters in a way that evokes the real-life victimization of the lower classes by capitalist industry."[293] Cornett and Kim see it more innocently as a "tongue-in-cheek treatment of the melody" or "an unexpected joke."[294] Perhaps Rzewski is using the humorous banjo style in a sardonic way to express the cynicism of Jackson's text.

[289]Zuraw, 85.
[290]Cornett, 2004, 44-5.
[291]Zuraw, 69, 82.
[292]Ibid.
[293]Ibid., 77.
[294]Cornett, 2004, 40; Kim, 35.

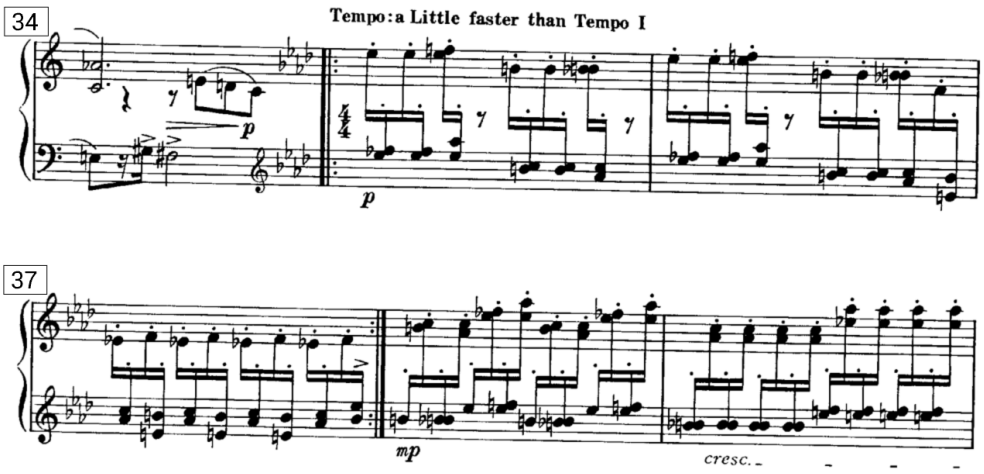

Figure 3.2. Rzewski, "Dreadful Memories" mm. 34-39.

Cornett connects this class conflict to Rzewski's communist ideology, saying

> He is a self-proclaimed Marxist, which would indicate that in essence he believes in the theory and practice of socialism, including the labor theory of value, dialectical materialism, and an eventual classless society. The composer's philosophy of a society where there exists no private property or class distinction is evident in three of the *North American Ballads*…where the fundamental political theme is the disproportion between the rich and poor, or those who "have" and those who "have not."[295]

This supports the interpretation of "Dreadful Memories" and indeed all of the *Ballads* as manifestations of the composer's ideology and as vehicles for his beliefs to be carried to the audience.

"Dreadful Memories": Performance Interpretation

This movement can best be performed once the pianist understands the ideology behind the work and how Rzewski expresses that ideology through the score. Kim offers several valuable interpretive suggestions for interpretation. One recommendation is that the performer convey the improvisatory nature of the score.[296] I agree that this freedom is found in much of Rzewski's music and in his attitude toward performing his own music as well as other

[295]Cornett, 2004, 35-6.
[296]Kim, 32.

composer's works. This means that while honoring Rzewski's score, the performer needs to play with freedom of tempo and rhythm in a spontaneous way. This attitude towards free interpretation is echoed by concert pianist Ralph van Raat:

> When working with Frederic Rzewski on the interpretation of his music, it has become even clearer that freedom of interpretation for the musician is of important concern to the composer. Many indications in the scores are trying to convey the spirit of his works, besides the actual notation of the music, which is precise but never limiting. His passion as a person corresponds with the passion in his music. It all follows logically from his strong ideologies in favour of the individual.[297]

Further evidence is found in my interview of pianist Corey Hamm, in which he revealed that Rzewski preferred Hamm's recording of *The People United* over other recordings that were faster and more polished.[298] Hamm added that, when the composer performs his own works, he will slow down during difficult sections, and does not complain about wrong notes in the performances of other pianists.[299] This demonstrates that performers can take license to make the *Ballads* their own, while taking care to honor the ideology.

Kim also has suggestions for specific passages. For example, the banjo section should be played very rhythmically, dry and crisp, like a banjo.[300] In the gentle opening and closing sections, the pianist should imagine a mother singing or even whispering a lullaby while rocking a baby who has just died.[301] She suggests using the soft pedal in mm. 77-85 and to be precise with rhythm in mm. 82-85.[302] For the last two bars (mm. 84-85), she suggests to hold the last chord until it fully disappears and to use a brush touch to depict the gloomy mood.[303] Kim asserts

[297]Ralph van Raat, piano, "'Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues' from Frederic Rzewski's *North American Ballads*,' Naxos Classical 8.559360, 2008, Compact Disc, Liner notes by van Ratt.
[298]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.
[299]Ibid.
[300]Kim, 35.
[301]Ibid., 32.
[302]Ibid., 39-40.
[303]Ibid., 40.

that the technically challenging section is the climax.[304] However, when she interviewed Rzewski in 2008, he argued "I don't particularly think about climaxes especially. There is no particular climax."[305] I have gathered from his colleagues that it is characteristically coy of him to dodge a question, but I believe his answer gives performers the freedom to let the music speak for itself without feeling the need to add traditional interpretive values.

I assert that Rzewski's "Dreadful Memories" reflects his ideology about the power of the collective and how people must unite to resist unfair power structures. It also acts as a conduit for his desire to communicate working-class struggles to his audience. His setting of a 1930s protest song in the 1970s reveals his belief in the universality of its message. Rzewski wants the audience to feel the loss and hopelessness of the mothers during the mining strike that has resulted in their babies' deaths. He hopes that allowing the audience to imagine their pain will lead to sympathizing with those women and by extension their fight against the mining unions.

The pianist's job is to communicate both levels of institutional resistance to the audience. When performed today, it could lead audiences to empathize with current struggles of any oppressed peoples. Viewed through the lens of Foucault, the protest song represents resistance within a corporate structure, while Rzewski's piano solo amplifies that resistance, therefore becoming a part of resistance against exploitation of employees by current corporate entities.

***North American Ballads*: II. "Which Side Are You On?"**

The second movement is based on the protest song "Which Side Are You On?", written in 1931 by Florence Reece (1900-1986), which functions at the first level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*. Reece lived in Kentucky during a coal miners' strike that resulted in a class war between mine owners and their hired deputies on one side and the

[304]Ibid., 38.
[305]Ibid., 99.

independent, free-wheeling Kentucky miners on the other.[306] Reece was a union organizer when she married a union leader. Her lyrics were inspired by an experience she had when coal company men came to her home looking for her husband, Sam. According to Reece,

> Sheriff J. H. Blair and his men came to our house in search of Sam. He was one of the union leaders. I was home alone with our seven children. They ransacked the whole house and then kept watch outside, waiting to shoot Sam down when he came back. But he didn't come back that night. Afterward I tore a sheet from a calendar on the wall and wrote the words to "Which Side Are You On?" to an old Baptist hymn "Lay the Lily Low."[307]

Like Jackson in "Dreadful Memories," Reece set her lyrics to an existing melody, making her song recognizable to the miners and easy to learn. Her words promote the union and demand that the listener take a side in the battle with the chorus that repeats the question "Which Side Are You On?" Cornett describes this song as "vigorous and angry" with the intent to recruit miners to unionize against wealthy company operators."[308] Cornett also points out its unusual focus on the division between the miners themselves.[309]

Viewed through Rosenthal and Flacks' functions of protest songs, "Which Side Are You On?" is very similar to "Dreadful Memories" in that it served to convert and recruit members to support the mining union, but instead of invoking sympathy, it paints a black and white image of good versus evil with a clear dividing line. The listener is faced with the choice of supporting the union or company "thugs." Once the song recruited members, it could then mobilize, strengthen resolve, and promote solidarity among the union and its supporters. Viewed through Foucault's lens, the song was used to unite miners in resistance to their own company, making it an effective subject for Rzewski's ideological expression.

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[306]Fowke and Glazer, as quoted in Cornett, 2021, 10.

[307]Henrietta Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines: A History in Song and Story by Women of Appalachia," *American Music* 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 209-224, https://www.jstor.org/ stable/3051817, 214-215.

[308]Cornett, 2004, 47.

[309]Cornett, 2021, 10.

To help provide greater historical and ideological context of mining union strikes, I highly recommend that performers watch the documentary film *Harlan County U.S.A.* (1976).[310] This film documents a violent mining strike in Harlan County in the early 1970s. There is no evidence that Rzewski drew direct inspiration from this film, but considering his political activism of the era, he likely knew of the story and would have sympathized with it. The film includes alternate lyrics to "Which Side Are You On?" and a performance of Florence Reece singing her song in 1972. One particularly powerful scene depicts a crowd of union-supporting women gathered on the picket line blocking the vehicles of the sheriff and scabs who are going to work in the mines in place of the striking union. The women start singing a song and they visibly appear to be resolved in their resistance to the sheriff and other men. It is a peaceful, but very tense. The sheriff eventually backs down and the scabs disperse. This scene powerfully displays one of Rosenthal and Flacks' functions of protest music: the inherent power of mass singing to create solidarity among members of a group. I believe the performer can benefit from seeing the act of protest singing, especially that which occurred within just a few years of the piano solo's composition.

Rzewski's solo piano setting of "Which Side Are You On?" amplifies Reece's battle against the mining company, just as he did in the first movement with "Dreadful Memories." This amplification is the second level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*, where the song's history and ideology are mixed with Rzewski's purposes.

The piano score of "Which Side Are You On?" is designed in two halves: the first is the composer's notation and the second is the performer's improvisation. These two halves also

[310]*Harlan County U.S.A.*, directed by Barbara Kopple (Cabin Creek Films, 1976, re-released by The Criterion Collection in 2006) DVD 1.78:1 HD.

represent the two sides of the debate in Reece's song: the company vs. the union.[311] This was a deliberate choice by the composer, as he explained

> The structure of the melody illustrates the words, "Which Side are You On?" So are you in this side? Or are you on that side? Are you supporting the minors? Or are you supporting the bosses? It's a question. So the idea is that you have to be the one side or the other. The music is intended to illustrate that simple idea. So it's divided into two parts. The first section is complex, the second section is simple. … What the music is telling is that the question is a complex question to answer.[312]

These two halves will be better understood in light of score analysis and discussion of the improvisation.

The score can be divided into seven variations, an improvisation equal in length to the previous variations, and a written finale. I will use Sujin Kim's label system for these sections with my own small adjustments in further description of the work, shown in Table 3.1.[313]

Table 3.1. Sections of "Which Side Are You On?"

Section	Measure	Characteristics
A	1-14	Rhythmical Confusion
B	15-25	Bi-tonal usage
C	26-33	Expressive antiphonal
D	34-50	Stretto and swing rhythm
E	51-60	Romantic improvisation
F	61-95	Stretto with trill and tremolo
G	96-130	Minimalistic passage
H	(130)	Improvisation equal in length to Sections A-G *The score includes an "addendum" which provides an optional six-measure transition back to the score.
I	131-138	Majestic full quotation

This movement features a multitude of compositional techniques and styles, most of which are found in the previous movement, "Dreadful Memories," with the addition of inverted

[311]Lewis, 74; Cornett, 2004, 69.
[312]Kim, 42.
[313]Ibid.

fragments and canonic variation.[314] The rhythmic nature of this movement is made even more complex through permutation, augmentation, and diminution.[315] Tonality is treated similarly with areas of stability alternating with complex polytonality. A wide variety of styles occur, including romantic and rhapsodic episodes, rock and jazz fusion, minimalism, and improvisation.[316]

This movement is interpreted by many as programmatic. Therefore, the manifestation of Rzewski's ideology in this movement is best understood one section at a time. Section A (mm. 1-14) is unusual because it begins with a variation instead of the theme. The primary feature of Section A is rhythmic confusion. The melody is fragmented and subjected to a complex web of layering, multiple meters, and polytonality. Most scholars interpret this section as symbolic of political conflict. Hayashi says it serves to confuse listeners, forcing them to take sides in the ideological battle.[317] Hershberger connects the constant change of key and registers to a chorus of angry picketers and the juxtaposed polytonal fragments to the ambivalence of people in the labor dispute.[318] Cornett equates the tonal conflict with political conflict, and imaginatively portrays the tangle of melodic fragments as "the cacophony of…a group of coal miners whistling the same tune, but each to himself in his own key and tempo."[319] The musical confusion could also depict the difficulty of unifying a crowd against the coal company. Performance of this section can be aided by clarity and precision in illuminating the melodic fragments.[320] However, it might be equally valuable to embrace the cacophony, thus allowing the audience to feel as though they are right there on the picket line amidst the shouting union members.

[314]Paul, 100-03; Hayashi, 105-10, Zuraw, 88.
[315]Ibid.
[316]Ibid.
[317]Hayashi, 105-6.
[318]Hershberger, 38-9.
[319]Cornett, 2004, 60-1; Cornett, 2021, 13.
[320]Hayashi, 106.

Section B (mm. 15-25) features a bi-tonal setting of thematic fragments. The mood is more settled than the opening, but it is apparent that protester unity is still elusive. Hayashi believes the dissonance continues to "intensify the question of the text."[321]

Section C (mm. 26-33) features expressive antiphonal quotes of thematic fragments. This episode has been compared to the vocal and instrumental styles of Appalachia, especially the grace notes added to the melody in imitation of vocal scoops.[322] Zuraw links Rzewski's use of canon—which Zuraw reminds us literally means "law"—with the unification of the protesters.[323] He observes further order created by what he identifies as the first appearance of the complete theme.[324] Zuraw appears to be alone in this assertion, for Cornett explicitly says "...for Rzewski this is clearly not the full and final presentation of the song, which–in fact—does not occur until the end."[325] In agreement with Cornett, I will show later how the finale is the obvious unification, both musically and ideologically. Hershberger is critical of the score here, believing the espressivo character does not reflect the militancy of the original song. My interpretation is that the calm and tonally-stable sections provide the audience with moments for calmer reflection to consider each side of the argument and to imagine the hardships the coal miners suffered.

Section D (mm. 34-50) features layers of the theme in fragments in rhythmic diminution and augmentation, each in its own key. To use Cornett's symbolism, this could represent the miner's singing each in their own key and tempo, signifying that the protest movement is not yet

[321]Ibid.
[322]Hayashi, 108; Zuraw, 92.
[323]Zuraw, 92.
[324]Zuraw, 93.
[325]Cornett, 2004, 68.

unified. As the question "which side are you on?" echoes in their minds, each person grapples with whether they are on the side of the company or the miners.

Section E (mm. 51-60) has a somewhat Romantic improvisatory style reminiscent of Chopin's nocturnes.[326] It begins in one pitch center but by m. 58 slips down a whole step, stepping down by another again in the next measure. This section sounds very similar to Rzewski's recorded improvisation.[327] His recording could serve as an example of how to play this section.

Section F (mm. 61-95) is the wildest and most technically-difficult part of the work. Hayashi describes it as "madness and wild frenzy created with the hands thrashing about."[328] Zuraw interprets this section as representing escalated violence, with the trills of mm. 69-70 announcing a sense of alarm.[329] To that I add that the palm glissandos of m. 90 are a visceral physical embodiment of the violence to which a protest can lead. Overall, Section F makes great technical demands on performers, who must throw themselves from side to side as the music jumps from one extreme register to another as though they are torn between the two sides.

Section G (mm. 96-130) features a minimalistic repetition of a melodic fragment from "Which Side Are You On?", which gives the impression of a march finally brought into lockstep. Rzewski revealed that he used minimalism to create a hallucinatory state in the listener, saying "when people listen to repetitive sounds, such as the same words or sounds, they begin to hear things that are not actually being played or spoken. The process can create a sort of hallucination."[330] This section has elicited many ideological interpretations. Hayashi describes

[326]Paul, 100-03; Hayashi, 109-10.

[327]Frederic Rzewski, piano, *North American Ballads*: "Which Side Are You On?" Nonesuch Records, 2001, streaming audio, accessed June 24, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuJE_4RAhmU.

[328]Hayashi, 110.

[329]Zuraw, 94.

[330]Kim, 123-24.

the impact the music has on listeners as though they are "mesmerized into a stupor of relief and anticipation….forced to pay attention." What they are forced to listen to are "the struggles and confrontations as well as the relaxed quiet and the silent tensions of the chanting of a group of people who gain in strength and number."[331] Zuraw and Hershberger agree that in this usage minimalism symbolizes defiance, resistance, and the gathering strength and long endurance of the labor strike.[332] The chanting is suddenly interrupted in m. 127 by a unified exclamation of "Which side are you on?" in bombastic bitonal chords covering the full range of the keyboard. This provides the transition into the following optional improvisation section in m. 130.

Rzewski included the option to improvise between m. 130 and 131. I will refer to the optional improvisation as Section H and will save my ideological and performance argument for after the discussion of the score. If the performer chooses not to improvise, they immediately proceed to m. 131, Section I.

The Finale is Section I (mm. 131-138) and contains a majestic full quotation of "Which Side Are You On?" in powerful fortissimo octaves punctuated by octaves at the extreme ends of the keyboard. Most scholars agree that this section is the culmination of the dramatic power of "Which side are you on?" when it is finally chanted in a full force, militaristic setting.[333] The listener is forced to choose a side. This unification of the theme also connects to Rzewski's pro-labor stance and concern for social justice.[334]

Improvisation in "Which Side Are You On?"

I take three approaches to interpreting this movement's improvisation section. I first discuss the ideological significance of improvisation and Rzewski's negotiation of hegemony

[331]Hayashi, 113.
[332]Zuraw, 94-5; Hershberger, 40.
[333]Hayashi, 113; Zuraw, 88-9; Cornett, 2021, 15.
[334]Zuraw, 96; Hershberger, 41.

and resistance. Second, I discuss the approaches taken by various scholars to the improvisation. Third, I compare the improvisations of four professional recordings of this movement.

As established in Chapter 2, improvisation in Rzewski's works is a manifestation of his political ideology. It functions as a tool to break down the classical hegemonic relationship between composer, performer, and audience by allowing performers to create their own music within another composer's work. I assert that Rzewski's use of improvisation demonstrates Foucault's philosophy of resistance to the power structure because improvisation is, at its core, a resistance to the composer's authority. Both the performer and audience are liberated through this process. A simple analogy is the relationship between citizen and government in a democracy. The citizen has the freedom to speak out against the government, and the government is, in turn, shaped by that speech.

Indeed, Zuraw sees the "sudden radical change" of the score's first rule (shown below under Improvisation Performance Interpretation) as implying "unity sparked by revolution," where the performer is "symbolically working out the conflict" of the union protest.[335] The improvisation and notated score can also be seen as opposing sides of the conflict. As the composer said:

> It's a difficult question, 'which side are you on?' … Maybe the first part is complex, second part is simple. So you have this question of two things in both the written music and the improvised music. And also there is this difference between written music and improvised music. Are you on the side of the written music? Or are you on the side of the improvised music?[336]

In light of this conflict between improvisation and score, Cornett points out tensions between "structure or free forms, B minor or C mixolydian, classical counterpoint or jazz-inspired

[335]Zuraw, 96.
[336]Kim, 100.

minimalism, union rebel or company thug."[337] These dualities have also been called "rational and irrational, predictable and unpredictable."[338] Hershberger takes an even stronger position, arguing that improvisation is the embodiment of communism, saying it "depict[s] an assortment of Marxist images popular at the time. …improvisation represents the new, unshackled, communistic order. … symbolize[s] the struggle, revolt, or riot against the old order. Yet the final goal is greater unity, not struggle." I argue that improvisation allows performers to "speak" as empowered individuals against injustice.

Improvisation Performance Interpretation in "Which Side Are You On?"

However, empowerment to speak does not mean that all speech is appropriate or even always effective. Likewise, the invitation to improvise in "Which Side Are You On?" is not permission to symbolically or musically 'change the subject.' And, like the protest song it is based on, Rzewski's invitation is to a predetermined cause and a call to unity within that cause.

At Section H (between m. 130 and 131), the score somewhat ironically provides the following rules for the optional improvisation section:

> Optional free improvisation, subject to following conditions:
> 1. Improvisation should begin as a sudden radical change, with no "transition." That is, there should be no ambiguity about where the written music ends and where the improvisation begins. The manner in which this sense of a leap to a different kind of order is evoked is left to the interpreter. A few simple limitations, however, apply:
> 2. Begin by alluding in some way to the tonality of B minor -This may be brief. End with a rather long section in C-mixolydian (scale: C–D–E–F–G–A–B-flat–C).
> 3. Improvisation may use techniques employed in written music (polytonal transpositions of theme, etc.) or not; but in any case should represent a different "side" of the same form (many different tonalities in the first part, one tonality in the second).
> 4. Improvisation, if played, should last at least as long as the preceding written music.
> 5. If no improvisation is played, pass immediately to the finale.[339]

[337]Cornett, 2004, 61.
[338]Kim, 50.
[339]Frederic Rzewski, *Squares − North American Ballads*, Tokyo: Zen-On Music Co., 1982, 43.

Interpreting the performance of the improvisation is a complicated endeavor without a clear answer, just as speaking out against injustice may not always have a clear path forward. The above rules offer only a framework of what to play: 1. Begin with a radical change; 2. begin in B minor and end in C mixolydian; 3. you can choose to use the compositional methods of the score (polytonality, layering, minimalism, etc.) but even if this is not done, there must be two differing "sides" to the improvisation; 4. it must last as long as the preceding score (6 minutes on average). Beyond that, it is up to the performer to make all the decisions.

Several performers have offered suggestions on how to construct the improvisation. Robert Christian Paul did not make a recording, unfortunately, but he does detail his improvisation structure in his dissertation. He first relates it to an understanding of the score, where "an understanding of the context—in this case, the notation—is essential; it is unlikely that an improvisation that is oblivious to context would be successful."[340] There is great freedom with improvisation, but there is also a risk, as Paul warns: "the constraint of the external standard is removed, but the security is also lost. The improvisor must develop a confidence in his or her musical material analogous to that of the performer of the [original score], without consciously or unconsciously comparing the two."[341] Losing the security of the score can leave most pianists feeling lost, but as Paul exhorts, performers must develop confidence in what they create. Paul believes that rule no. 3 implies a three-part sectional form, which allows "contrast between tension and release being analogous to the antithetical positions suggested by the hymn text."[342] He lists a wide variety of stylistic methods to create his improvisation; and cites influences such as jazz, classical, and Indian music.[343] His improvisation also quotes other music, like hymns,

[340]Paul, 100.
[341]Ibid., 136-7.
[342]Ibid., 104.
[343]Ibid., 104-7.

Beethoven's ninth symphony, and Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*. While Paul has obviously thought long and deeply about the content of his improvisation, I question whether introducing outside themes with little or no connection to protest is in line with Rzewski's ideology. Again, performers are invited to join the dialogue about the mining protest. Introducing unrelated material is an attempt to change the subject, which does not help the labor movement.

The insecurity about improvisation brought up by Paul often prohibits pianists from publicly improvising. Rule no. 5 allows the option of not improvising and instead continuing to the Section I finale. Hayashi is one of those who chose not to improvise in performance, saying

> In order to carry out the instructions he provides effectively, one must not only be confident in the art of improvisation, but must also be extraordinarily proficient and adept at creating music with a sense of structure and form to correlate the improvisation to the rest of the music in the piece. It would be presumptuous of anyone who cannot meet these requirements to even attempt to do so.[344]

Hayashi holds a high standard for improvisation and assumes that Rzewski would have wanted only highly-skilled improvisers to attempt the improvisation. Several experts argue with this position: Cornett says that "Hayashi's opinion seems misguided, given the composer's inclination towards improvised music, and a philosophy of the dualism associated with the title of this piece", adding that "improvisation, regardless of the skill of the performer, is to answer the question, 'Which Side Are You On?'… the attempt to improvise is more important than an exhibition of the performer's improvisational skill."[345] After interviewing Rzewski, Kim concluded that "the attempt to improvise can be more important than the skill of the improvisation."[346] This was a result of the composer's statement, "I prefer it personally when people treat this text with freedom. And if they want to add something or change something,

[344]Hayashi, 113.
[345]Cornett, 2004, 63.
[346]Kim, 50.

that's fine with me as long as they have good ideas."[347] This last part— "as long as they have good ideas"—is the important element. I believe it is the power of ideas that motivates Rzewski and therefore what should motivate the performer, regardless of improvisational skill.

Moreover, parallels can be drawn from improvisation in Rzewski's other works. Corey Hamm, pianist and friend of Rzewski, has performed *The People United* about 80 times. He describes how he has approached the improvisation in that work:

> I have played it with no cadenza. I've also improvised my own cadenza. I've also written my own composed cadenza and [played] cadenzas written by other people. I don't really like a cadenza in that piece. It's a great idea, but there's something beautiful to me about the balance of the structure. But that's my own problem. I told Rzewski I wrote a cadenza and he got mad—was really mad—truly mad. Like "you must not do that!" He's fine if you don't improvise, but if you do it, it must be a true improvisation. It was totally against his principal. He didn't forbid me, but he told me "no!" I think that's relevant. If you're going to input your own idea, it has to be real.

Hamm's comments reveal just how passionately Rzewski thought about the purpose of improvisation. First, according to the composer, it is acceptable to not improvise; it does not destroy the integrity or message of the music to only play the notated score. Second, preconceiving the improvisation is certainly not allowed. Rzewski wants the performer and the audience to experience the moment. This is strongly rooted in his years of performing in improvisational groups (see Chapter 2). Last, Rzewski wants honesty in an improvisation: it should reveal the truth of the performer in that time and place. Hamm continues, detailing the elements he incorporated into this improvisation:

> I do try to take the themes. For *The People United*, they were figured out ahead of time, but not composed. I tried to do things that had not taken place earlier in the piece. I'm not a composer. I don't have that burning need to get my thoughts out. But I have ideas I pursue. When I improvise…I don't have a jazz background. I'm not good, but I have a basic understanding of jazz charts. When I do my improvisation, I was really aware of the types of sounds—like what Rzewski does—these rolled gliss. arms clusters that sound like a real 'YELP!' kind of sound. He's really good at that. For *The People United* I was aware of the tunes, how I would do them, and I had some sort of structure, and I tried to

[347]Ibid., 106.

> lead up to a type of climactic thing in the cadenza and then wind down to set up the return. … I tried to at least end my cadenza in a similar way that still segued nicely into the return of the theme.[348]

Hamm's improvisation in *The People United* used the work's themes and integrated rolled arm glissandos, one of Rzewski's favorite techniques. Hamm also planned a structure at the end that led to a climax and a "winding down" that led naturally to the return to the score. He further describes his improvisation's structure, saying he "tried to be aware of what it is between and should you have a complete contrast or not have a complete contrast—what are you going to do? Are you going to have a plan or reaction? It doesn't have to be a plan. It could be the opposite of it." He considers the music and symbolism before and after the improvisation but allows himself the freedom to choose what the contrast will be.

In the case of "Which Side Are You On?", Rzewski requests that the improvisation have a structure of two contrasting sections to represent the two sides, but Hamm's approach could certainly still apply: it is up to the performer what those "sides" look like. The score has an optional addendum that provides a transition between the improvisation and the notated Section I. All three improvisations in Table 3.3 used the addendum in some form or another.

While it is always valuable to listen to recordings of a work to discover how others perform it, I offer a word of caution: Rzewski would want an original improvisation that is an original creation. Zuraw recommends consulting the composer's recording legacy for a "wealth of ideas related to improvisation in his works."[349] However, while it is a natural inclination to honor the composer by improvising as he does, I argue that this goes against the very spirit of what Rzewski has created, being a spirit of resistance to the hegemony between composer and performer. When pianists improvise in Rzewski's music, it is their opportunity to have their

[348]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.
[349]Zuraw, 50.

voice heard. If they are going to challenge Rzewski's hegemonic authority, he wants them to speak honestly with their own original ideas.

To try to emulate Rzewski's improvisation (or anyone else's, for that matter) would be to try to honor them as an authority figure. I argue that improvisation empowers the performer to use their own voice and for the audience to hear directly from the performer. Whether or not it provides a satisfying musical experience is not the goal. The goal is that the performer attains equal footing with the composer and the audience becomes part of the experience of resistance.

Considering all of this, I have compiled Tables 3.2 and 3.3, which compare four recordings of "Which Side Are You On?"[350] This comparison is limited to the improvisations and total performance times of the work. I believe pianists can be inspired by ideas from these performers, but the most valuable take-away is how different they are, which demonstrates the inherent freedom to be original.

Table 3.2. Comparison of improvisation length in recordings of "Which Side Are You On?"

Performer	Paul Jacobs	Frederic Rzewski	Lisa Moore	Conrad Tao
Year	1980	2001	2003	2016
Performance time preceding the improvisation in minutes	N/A	7:30	7	7
Performance time of improvisation in minutes	N/A	6	4:30	7:30
Total performance time in minutes	6	14	12	15

[350]Paul Jacobs, piano, "Which Side Are You On?" on *Paul Jacobs Plays Blues, Ballads & Rags*, Nonesuch E2 79006, 252 804, 1980, reissued 1991, streaming audio, accessed June 24, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch ?v=gavxi9OTFoo. Original album: https://www.discogs.com/Paul-Jacobs-Plays-Blues-Ballads-Rags/master/893561; Rzewski, piano,*'Which Side Are You On?*' streaming audio; Lisa Moore, piano, *Four North American Ballads: No. 2. 'Which Side Are You On?'* Cantaloupe Music CA-21014, 2003, accessed June 30, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZtxH8 mOClA; Conrad Tao, piano, "Which Side Are You On? (after Florence Reece)" from Frederic Rzewski's *North American Ballads*, recorded July 27, 2016 at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, Dendrinos Chapel and Recital Hall, accessed June 30, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch v=euppwaLbByA.

Table 3.3. Comparison of improvisations in recordings of “Which Side Are You On?”

Composer	Description
Paul Jacobs, 1980	Does not improvise.
Frederic Rzewski, 2001	Uses quotes of the theme in variation form. Direct modulations. Establishes a tonal center. Driving rhythms. Arpeggio accompaniment. Contrasting intensity/reflection. Contrasting textures, sometimes thick, sometimes only one or two melodic lines. Reflective section with ostinato bass and fragments of the theme in different registers. Ends with his own written addendum: repeated fragment sort of calling off in the distance. Sudden abrupt loud chords create transition to written ending.
Lisa Moore, 2003	Uses quotes of the theme with thick chordal accompaniment. Meditative quality. Flowing ideas. Generous use of pedal. Goes outside tonality. Tremolos and trills. Transition back with notated addendum.
Conrad Tao, 2016	Begins with a single repeated note followed by repeated notes in various registers. Reflective mood. Quotes of the theme. Moves smoothly around unrelated keys. Some jazz harmony. New section: dry arpeggios woven around the theme. Drama and dynamics build with loud chords. Upper register repetition of a theme fragment. More reflective mood. Majestic entry of the theme in the tenor while repetition continues in upper register. Fades away then back in. Builds intensity. Even more majestic quotes of the theme. Upper register still repeating. Rapid alternating chords all over keyboard. Palm clusters moving down keyboard in a repeating pattern that transitions into a repetition of last five chords of the notated addendum.

“Which Side Are You On?”: Ideological Conclusion

This movement exhibits three levels of Foucault’s philosophy of resistance. At the first level is Reece’s original protest song, which reflects Rzewski’s ideology about the collective power of a united people resisting unfair power structures. At the second level is Rzewski’s notation, which amplifies the protest song’s universal message about the struggles of the working class while also demanding the audience to decide which side they choose. At the third level, the performer has the opportunity to resist Rzewski’s authority as composer through inserting improvisation into the score. This acts as resistance to the hegemony between composer, performer, and audience. As Cornett asserts, “in this piece of music, power is expressed as a

group phenomenon. The composition is mutually engaging when the interplay of composer, performer, and listener is established and in balance."[351]

North American Ballads: III. "Down by the Riverside"

The third movement is a setting of the song "Down by the Riverside," which functions at the first level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*. The protest song has a contrasting history compared to the other labor songs used in the *Ballads*. "Down by the Riverside" can be traced to Southern plantations as a work song and spiritual.[352] The lyrics, printed in Appendix A, were not meant literally but were likely biblical allusions with double meanings only known to the initiated.[353]

"Down by the Riverside" may have had its origin in slavery, but it took on new political significance during the Vietnam War era. The only song sung more often was "We Shall Overcome."[354] With its chorus repeating six times the phrase "I ain't gonna study war no more," the pacifist text appealed to war protestors and was used at demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, and nuclear protests.[355] The civil rights movement adopted it as well. For example, the Freedom Writers, an interracial group who sought the desegregation of interstate bus systems, sang a version called *Down on the Freedom Line*.[356] Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out against the war in Vietnam in 1968, declaring "There comes a time when one must take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells

[351]Cornett, 2021, 16.

[352]Hershberger, 43-4.

[353]Ibid. Hershberger cites heavily from the following: Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 61-62; Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1927), 480-481; Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 75.

[354]Hayashi, 117.

[355]Zuraw, 98; Cornett, 2004, 71.

[356]Zuraw, 98.

him it is right."[357] "Down by the Riverside" became a song which voiced the concerns of an entire movement.

Viewed through Rosenthal and Flacks' functions of protest songs, "Down by the Riverside" is unique among the songs of the *Ballads* in that its function is less about recruiting and more about serving the committed and promoting solidarity. Its message is not confrontational like the labor songs and points no fingers. In fact, it is quite the opposite, placing the singer in the first-person position of committing to ending their own violent actions. Viewed through Foucault's lens, the song was used to create solidarity among war protesters in resistance to their own government, making it an effective subject for Rzewski's ideological expression.

The trauma of the Vietnam War and the pacifist message of "Down by the Riverside" were a recent memory to Rzewski and his audience in 1979. He chose to set this song as a result of the Festival of Political Song held every two years in Berlin.[358] Each year a different country was featured, and in 1979 it was Vietnam. Rzewski selected "Down by the Riverside" because it could be seen as "a symbol of the peace movement at the time of the Vietnam War.[359]

Rzewski's solo piano setting of "Down by the Riverside" amplifies the Vietnam War protesters, just Rzewski did with the labor songs in the previous movements. This amplification is the second level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*, where the song's history and ideology are mixed with Rzewski's purposes. His piano solo setting can be seen as actively resisting the power of the government to engage in an unjust war and deny civil rights to its citizens.

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[357]Hershberger, 48-9; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution" (Passion Sunday Sermon, National Cathedral (Episcopal) in Washington, D.C., 31 March 1968) in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*., James Melville Washington, ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1986), 276-277.

[358]Lewis, 76.

[359]Rzewski, "Program Notes: Ballads," 464.

While Rzewski used union protest songs to resist corporate exploitation of the working class, he used the protest song "Down by the Riverside" to resist the power of the government. As Cornett states, "on a broader scale, the idea of a government leading its country into war despite the objections of millions of its people would certainly be consistent with Rzewski's social concern for the needs of the common people and their fight for social change, and the need to join together for a common cause."[360] Rzewski's audience in 1979 would have likely been able to recall war-protest marches and civil rights demonstrations in which "Down by the Riverside" was sung, and some may have even participated themselves.

Looking at the score, Rzewski's setting of "Down by the Riverside" is similar to previous movements in that it is a set of variations. I identify five variations, one transition section, two points for improvisation, and a codetta, shown in Table 3.4. Also, in the manner of previous movements, there are many different styles present, including gospel, counterpoint, and improvisation. There are several compositional connections to other movements. For example, as in "Dreadful Memories," the melody is set with a new accompaniment. One technique unique to this movement is stylistic allusion, or pastiche.[361] When the texture is not a gospel style, it is frequently layered with juxtaposed contrapuntal and polytonal fragments of the melody.

Table 3.4. "Down by the Riverside" sections

Section	Measure	Characteristics
A	1-18	Gospel Style Introduction
B	19-36	Contrapuntal Texture: *quasi una fantasia*
C	37-42	Peaceful Respite
D	43-62	Contrapuntal Texture and Climax
E	(62)	Optional Improvisation
F	63-66	Transition with quote of "Dreadful Memories"
G	67-82	Gospel Passacaglia
H	(83)	Optional Short Improvised Cadenza
I	83-90	Codetta

[360]Cornett, 2004, 73.
[361]Ibid., 86.

Kim identified only five sections, but I have expanded the divisions to include nine distinct regions and adapted the names for some of the sections.[362] As I did in "Which Side Are You On?", I label both improvisations as individual sections because they are integral threads in this piece's fabric.

Much like the second movement, the third has been interpreted by many as programmatic, where a story unfolds over the course of the work. Therefore, the manifestation of Rzewski's ideology in this movement is also best understood one section at a time. I label the first section of "Down by the Riverside" as Section A (mm. 1-18), "Gospel Style Introduction." The movement opens with a tender gospel-style left-hand accompaniment followed by three settings of the melody with increasing tonal harmony in D major, shown in Figure 3.3.

The opening tempo is marked "quarter note equals 80/88", but Rzewski corrected this in later interviews, saying that the tempo should be slower, at quarter note equals 60.[363] He confirmed this by taking the slower tempo in his 2001 recording.[364] Both tempi are used in other recordings: in Jacobs', the quarter note equals 74-84; Hamelin, 80; Moore, 82; and Jalbert, 65.[365] I believe that each tempo reveals a different character of the original song. One is reminded of earlier composers like Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev who revised earlier works; as a result, both versions take on their own unique meaning.

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[362]Kim, 52; Kim identifies (A) mm. 1-18 Gospel Style accompaniment (B) 19-36 Contrapuntal texture (C) 37-66 Climax and optional improvisation section (D) 67-82 Gospel-blues feeling (E) 83-90 Coda.

[363]Lewis, 77; Hayashi, 116; Kim, 52, 113.

[364]Frederic Rzewski, piano, *North American Ballads: Down by the Riverside*, streaming audio, Nonesuch Records, 2001, accessed July 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84G3H7lY1w.

[365]Paul Jacobs, piano, "Frederic Rzewski: Down By The Riverside (1979)," from *Paul Jacobs Plays Blues, Ballads & Rags*, recorded 1980, reissued 1991 as Nonesuch E2 79006, 252 804, streaming audio, accessed July 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P-LQzTVzL4&t=7s; Marc-André Hamelin, piano, "Frederic Rzewski - The People United Will Never Be Defeated & North American Ballads," recorded at Henry Wood Hall, London, United Kingdom, August, 1998, Hyperion CDA67077, streaming audio, accessed July 28, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMGzkgNg98Y; Lisa Moore, piano, *Four North American Ballads: No. 3. Down by the Riverside*, recorded 2003, Cantaloupe Music CA-21014, streaming audio, accessed July 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OwLy2s9dnM; David Jalbert, piano, *Rzewski: Down by the Riverside - David Jalbert*, recorded live in Montréal, 2018, accessed July 18, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE7sdiZe6UM.

There is a small ideological connection tying this movement to the previous. Figure 3.3 shows how certain notes are marked with tenutos in the opening bars that are revealed to be the beginning of the melody of "Which Side Are You On?" While not obvious to the listener, this shows the composer's intention to link these movements. More than a merely clever musical "easter egg," this can be seen as an ideological connection between movements. Perhaps Rzewski asks us: "Which side are you on? The government, or the young soldiers dying in Vietnam?"

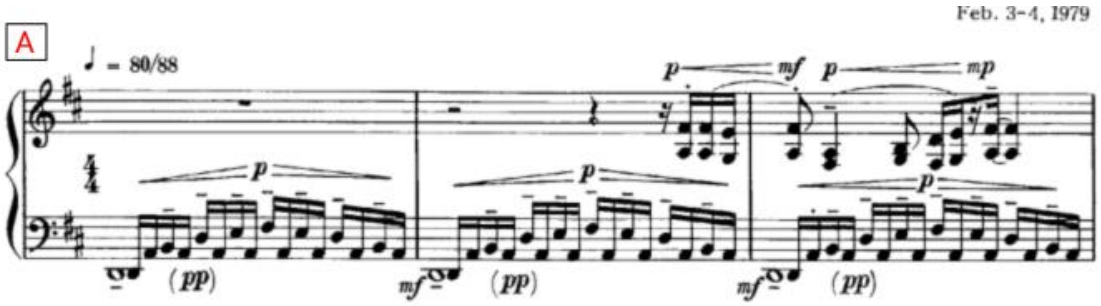

Figure 3.3. "Down by the Riverside" mm. 1-3.

This opening section is unique among the *Ballads* in that it communicates the original song's peaceful intent.[366] Cornett's analysis includes a side-by-side comparison of the original and Rzewski's setting, suggesting that his alteration of the melody through altered pitch and syncopation is a more realistic depiction of how the folk song is generally performed.[367] Cornett also points out that Rzewski's harmonic setting is simpler than the original.[368] Why does the composer make these choices? Perhaps he is attempting to create a feeling of authenticity for the listener, who could be led to imagine someone's peaceful plea for the end of war. Peace will not prevail, as this non-violent image will soon be torn apart in the following sections through many disjunct methods.

[366]Hayashi, 117-18.
[367]Cornett, 2004, 73.
[368]Ibid., 78.

Section B (mm. 19-36), shown in Figure 3.4, is defined by a sudden shift to a contrapuntal texture with overlain polytonal fragments of the melody in various rhythmic and harmonic alterations.[369] Section B has the heading *La stesso tempo, ma con rubato e flessibile; quasi una fantasia*.[370] The phrase *quasi una fantasia* indicates to perform flexibly, like a fantasy, which is the key to unlocking this section. Hayashi explains that "When one can take into consideration the flexibility in tempo, the playing reveals its direction, structure, and stature within the piece. The confines of the measures are no longer restrictive, and the music unravels itself within its own dimension."[371] Zuraw warns that "without the sense of improvisation that the composer demands, the music will sound clouded and overly complicated."[372] To help make sense of the score, Kim recommends that "the pianist should mark the melody line on the score" before playing.[373] I suggest consulting Zuraw's score for an example of doing so.[374]

[369]Hayashi, 118.
[370]Pianists will recognize the subtitle *quasi una fantasia* from Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata, Op. 27, No. 2.
[371]Hayashi, 118.
[372]Zuraw, 103.
[373]Kim, 54.
[374]Zuraw, 152.

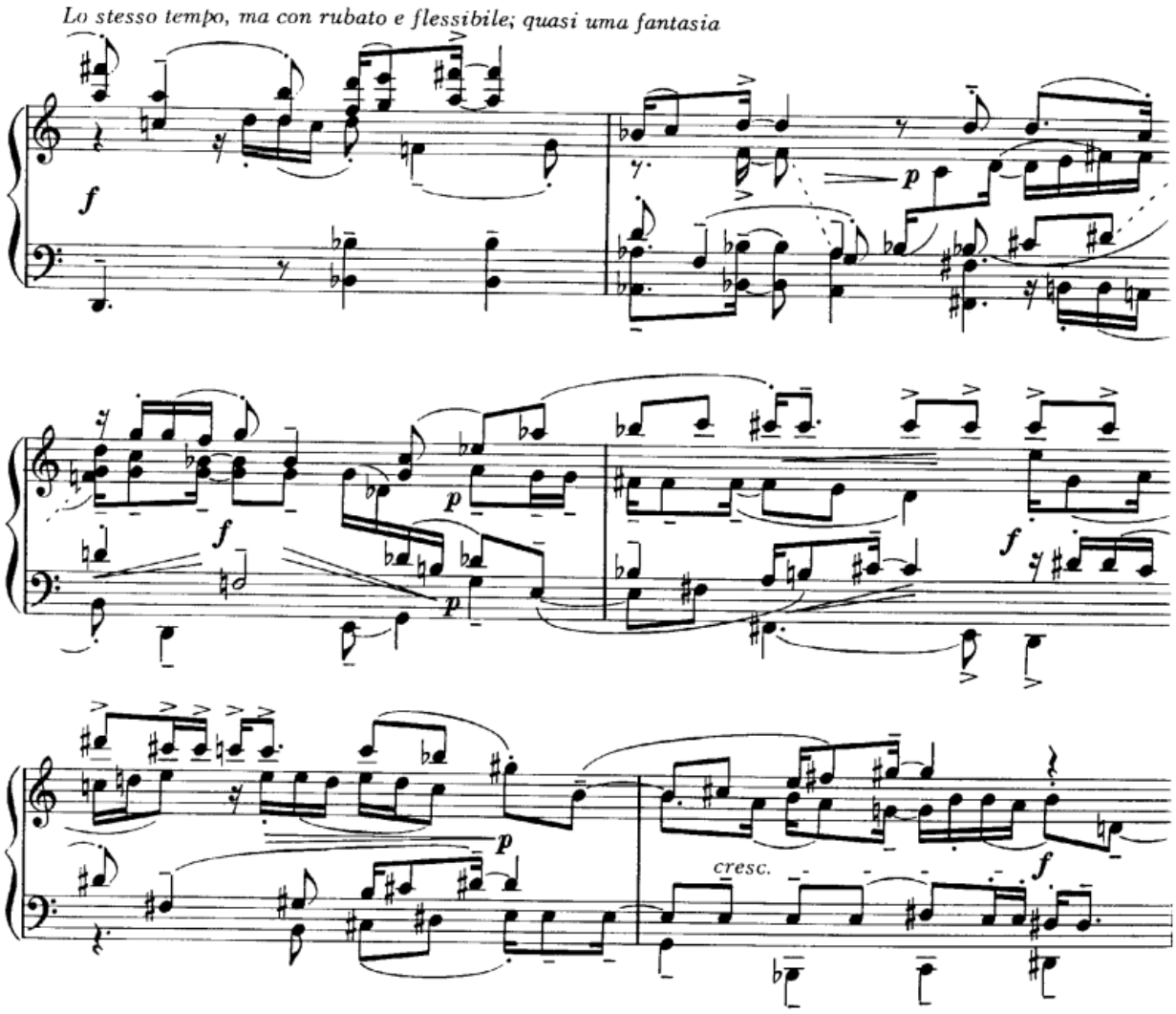

Figure 3.4. “Down by the Riverside” mm. 19-24.

The chaos of the contrapuntal texture of overlain polytonal melodic fragments in Section B can be seen as symbolic of the struggle of anti-Vietnam war protestors or the struggle for civil rights. One can imagine protestors unified peacefully in song in Section A, only to be scattered in the streets after police release attack dogs and smoke bombs.

Section C (mm. 37-42) provides six measures of peaceful respite from the chaos that surrounds it. Most of the musical material is made of layers of the melodic fragment “lay down

my sword and shield" and the rest is quasi-improvisational.[375] This could symbolize the regrouping of a scattered protest march or an internalization of the spirit of the movement. This spirit can be experienced by the listener if it is performed in a dreamy and tranquil manner.

The music's tranquility is destroyed in Section D (mm. 43-62) with a return to the disordered contrapuntal texture that reaches a climax in m. 57. Harmonically, dissonance builds through minor seconds or augmented unisons and tritones, creating an effect of uneasy tranquility.[376] Zuraw observes in mm. 48-58 the "violent conflict" of competing motives and how the "sweet harmony of the sixth is now transformed into militaristic and ponderous chordal structures" leading to "explosive clusters."[377] In the same measures, Hayashi observes a hasty and impulsive nature that highlights the extreme registral separation between the hands in dramatic and piercing dissonance.[378] As Figure 3.5 shows, when Rzewski reaches the limit of volume in m. 57 he uses palm clusters in the bass register to build greater intensity. This conjures the feelings of angry frustration Rzewski might have felt for the unjust war in Vietnam, or it could represent the anger of war protestors in general. This explosion of violence meets a sudden end with a breath mark in m. 59 followed by a *subito pp* and four measures of tranquility. This should be performed in a nostalgic inward fashion similar to Section C.

[375]Hayashi, 118.
[376]Ibid., 119.
[377]Zuraw, 104.
[378]Hayashi, 119.

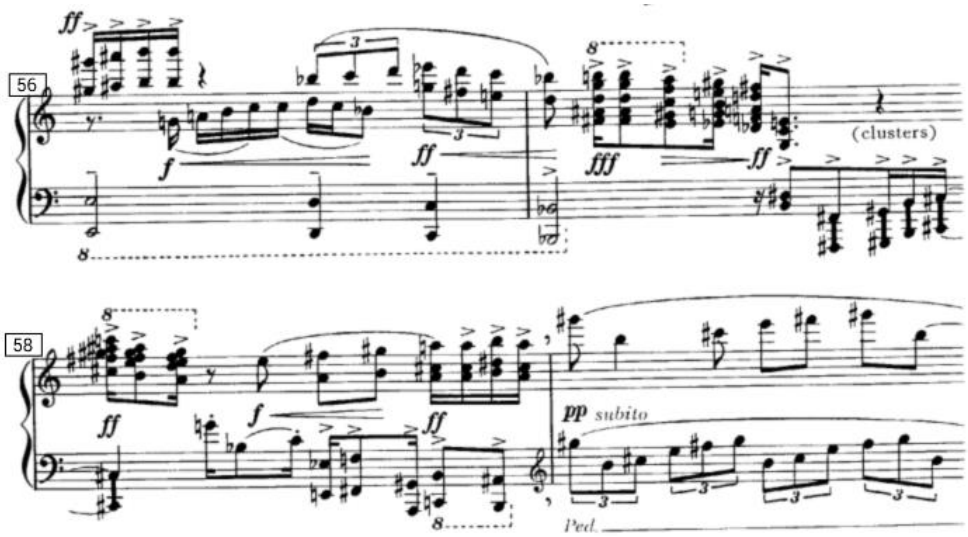

Figure 3.5. “Down by the Riverside” mm. 56-59.

The tranquility of Section D leads to an optional improvisation in m. 62 which I call Section E. In order to keep my three levels of Foucault’s resistance clear, I discuss the ideological and performance aspects of the improvisation after the score’s analysis. The improvisation returns to the chord in m. 62, leading into Section F (mm. 63-66). This short four-measure passage provides a transition from the improvisation into Section G and incorporates a quotation of the end portion of the “Dreadful Memories” melody. Cornett asserts that “the composer is undoubtedly hinting at the similarities between the first and the third movements.”[379] I believe these similarities also include the ideology of the *Ballads*. By invoking the listener’s memory of the suffering of the mining protesters in “Dreadful Memories” in the midst of Vietnam protest, Rzewski reminds listeners of the universality of protest movements. For the composer, protestors in the 1970s could be ideologically strengthened by the victories of historical protest movements. Furthermore, when the *Ballads* are performed today, they can reinforce modern resistance.

[379]Cornett, 2004, 81-2.

Section G (mm. 67-82), shown in Figure 3.6, can be called a gospel passacaglia, as it is firmly established in the key of D major in a gospel style and is structured in a repeating bass line and harmonic structure. The gospel style is achieved through syncopations of the melodic material and added grace-note slides. The texture is in four voices, like a chorale, although it begins with an omitted tenor line and in its place the bass is doubled in octaves. The tenor line has the full statement of the melody of "Down by the Riverside" when it enters on the repeat of Section G. Dynamically, this section grows from *ppp* to *fff* from the beginning of the first time to the end of the repeat. This section proves to have a powerful effect: Zuraw finds it "arresting," and Hayashi calls it "remarkable" and "ingenious."[380]

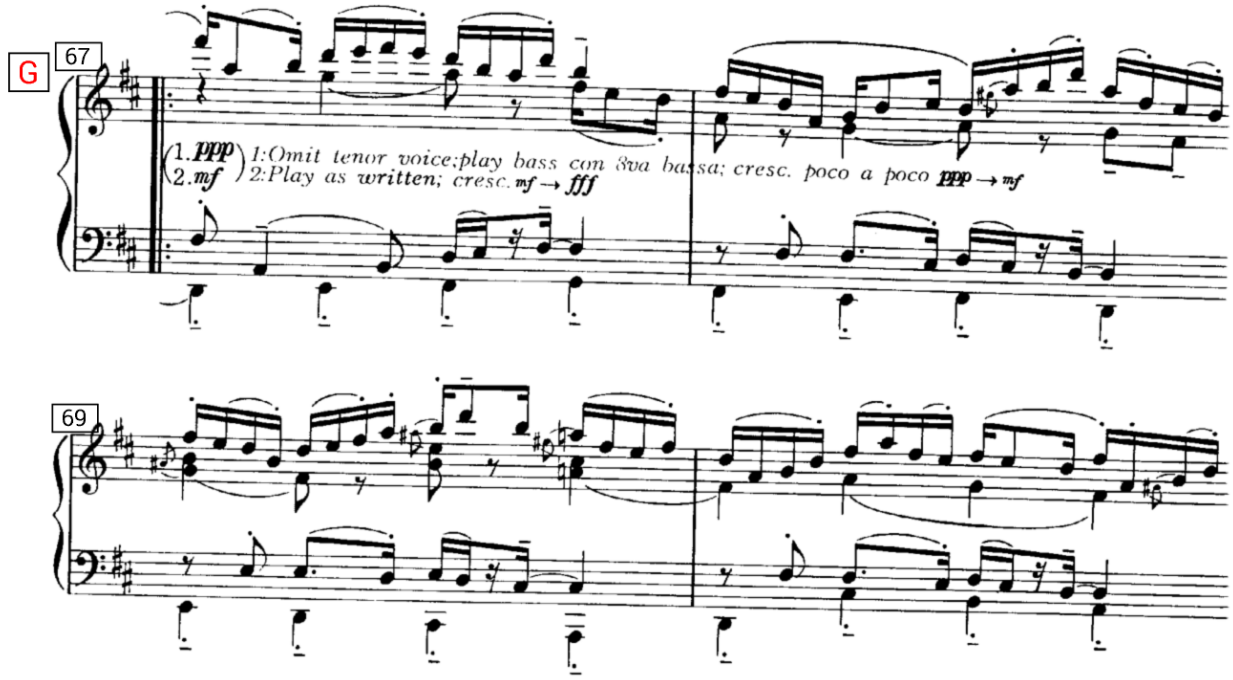

Figure 3.6. "Down by the Riverside" mm. 67-70.

Section G has rich implications for ideological meaning. Zuraw connects it to Vietnam war protesters unified in song with religious undertones: "The effect is symbolic of a greater

[380]Zuraw, 106; Hayashi, 120-21.

unity that evokes the peace movement of the 60s. There is a sense of power in the growing dynamic that conjures up the spirit of *We Shall Overcome*, but in a much more spirited and grassroots manner. …it is also evocative of a coming together in the religious sense."[381]

Hershberger links the harmonic stability of Section G following the polytonality of previous sections with the power of the original song's protest message: "Here again, the listener understands that something about the tune is profound and unforgettable. Reasserted firmly back in D major, after pages of fragmentation and tonal instability, the tune and the memories associated with it, can not be silenced."[382]

Performers have several factors to consider in the interpretation of the gospel passacaglia. First, they must be very aware of the overarching gradual dynamic growth from *ppp* to *fff.* One could imagine a group of protesters almost inaudible as they march from a long distance gradually coming closer until they are immediately at hand in full force. The full emotional force of the experience of witnessing a unified anti-war movement should come through in the performance. The pianist should be familiar with gospel style music of the 1960s and 1970s to understand how to interpret the rhythms, grace notes, and inflection. The entrance of the tenor melody comes at the repeat of Section G at a *mf* dynamic. This must be treated as a special moment as the melody is brought out.

The score does not instruct to swing the sixteenths, but gospel frequently has this rhythm. Rzewski performed with swung sixteenths on his recording and commented on the performance nature of this section, saying, "For me it is not so easy to do. You have to be both precise and free of this at the same time I think. Because of the style suggested, gospel piano, it is both

[381]Zuraw, 106-7.
[382]Hershberger, 48.

precise and free."[383] As for other artist's recordings, Jacobs, Hamelin, and Moore do not swing the sixteenths.[384] One performer who imitates Rzewski is Jalbert who swings the sixteenth on both his 2006 and 2018 recordings.[385]

There is an optional cadenza inserted in m. 83, which I call Section H. This improvisation is also discussed below. Moving on, Section I (mm. 83-90) is a codetta which serves to destroy the overwhelming spirit of unity experienced in the gospel passacaglia. The music returns a final time to contrapuntal polytonal fragments in stretto. There is one remnant of the gospel style, as Lewis observes, in the accompanying left-hand tenths.[386] In the final three measures there are polytonal layers of melodic fragments over a sustained first-inversion D dominant-seven chord, all of which fades to a *ppp* dynamic. The final note sounds like the leading tone in the key of D, leaving the listener wondering what has happened to the protest movement which only a few moments ago was moving with great unified force. Zuraw offers a possible interpretation of the ideology, linking the score to the conflict of idealism and reality during war and feelings of futility in protesting:

> The movement ends on a note of social realism in which the ideal of peace or unity is dismantled to reflect the reality of war and tension. We are left with the grim thought that this struggle for unity is futile as the melody, the symbol of the social movement, is broken up at the end and left to waft away in the upper registers at the piano like smoke drifting off from an extinguished fire.[387]

One wonders what the composer's feelings were about the success of the Vietnam war protest movement. He might have been conveying a sense of hopelessness he felt during the war, or

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[383]Rzewski, piano, *Down by the Riverside*; Kim, 114.

[384]Paul Jacobs, *Down by the Riverside*, 1980, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P-LQzTVzL4&t=7s; Marc-André Hamelin, *North American Ballads*, 1998, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=bMGzkgNg98Y; Frederic Rzewski, *Down by the Riverside*, 2001, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=84G3H7_lY1w; Lisa Moore, *Down by the Riverside*, 2003, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 4OwLy2s9dnM.

[385]David Jalbert, *Rzewski: Ballads*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE7sdiZe6UM; David Jalbert, *Rzewski: Down by the Riverside*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE7sdiZe6UM.

[386]Lewis, 77.

[387]Zuraw, 108.

perhaps it represents the splintering of the movement into separate factions. Whatever Rzewski's feelings, the performer must connect to the score in a deeply personal way to achieve everything it has to offer.

Again, there is a symbolic working out of conflict. What is different here is the character of much of the original song and Rzewski's setting which is more tranquil and inward seeking. While "Which Side Are You On?" challenges the listener to choose a side, that challenge is not the engine driving this movement's program, but an element in the mix. In the Vietnam War era, citizens had to choose a side: protest or support. This can easily be applied to today's world, where the U.S. continues to be involved in other countries' affairs, leaving it to citizens to speak out against or accept the nation's course.

Improvisation in "Down by the Riverside"

As I did in the second movement, I take a few approaches to interpreting the improvisation section in this movement. The ideological significance of improvisation and Rzewski's negotiation of hegemony and resistance apply here as they did above. As before, I discuss the approaches taken by different scholars to the improvisation in this movement. Last, I compare the improvisations of four professional recordings of this movement.

As established in Chapter 2, improvisation in Rzewski's works is a manifestation of his political ideology. It functions as a tool to break down the classical hegemonic relationship between composer, performer, and audience by allowing the performer to create their own music within another composer's work. I assert that it demonstrates Foucault's philosophy of resistance to the power structure in that improvisation is a resistance to the composer's authority. Both the performer and audience are liberated through this process. This is the third level of Foucault's philosophy of resistance in the *Ballads*.

I refer to the first improvisation at m. 62 as Section E. Improvisation guidelines in the score offer much less structure than those in the previous movement, simply stating: "Optional improvisation: return to this chord. If improvisation is played, it should be about as long as the preceding written music." The only restrictions placed on the performer is that they begin and end with the chord in m. 62, an A-flat major triad over a D in the bass, and improvise for about four minutes (the performance time of the preceding material). Another difference from movement two is in the location of the improvisation, which is in the middle of the movement instead of just before the end. It is unclear why Rzewski chose to do this, but it certainly has an impact on the overall structure of the movement. In the case of "Which Side?" the performer can build to a sort of climax near the end and finish with the short notated and climactic full melody. This is not the case in "Down by the Riverside," where the general character of the movement is peaceful and reflective more than dissonant and chaotic. Looking at the structure of the score which surrounds the improvisation, there is a climax in m. 57 followed by a four-measure tranquil passage. The improvisation is followed by a long, tranquil gospel section. Therefore, the improvisation may not be a time for dramatic virtuosity, but an opportunity for personal reflection by the performer. Of course, it is entirely up to the performer.

For a guide to making improvisational choices, pianists can again turn to Paul's account of his choices. He observes a simplicity in the score's instructions which, for him, imply more freedom in vocabulary and material.[388] He does not see a need for a sectional structure as he did in "Which Side."[389] The eclecticism of the movement suggests an eclectic approach to the improvisation and he even uses a "more overt use of eclectic material, without resorting to actual

[388]Paul, 110-12.
[389]Ibid.

quotation."[390] Paul mostly uses a gospel style in his improvisation to match the vein of the original hymn—but with a twist—treating it in a Classical way with counterpoint. Other techniques employed are polytonality, percussive effects (clusters, staccato chords), lyrical passages, triadic upper structures with a non-harmonic bass note, and musical interruptions and digressions.[391]

As previously stated, to try to emulate Rzewski's improvisation (or anyone else's, for that matter), would be to try to honor them as an authority figure. I assert that the purpose of this improvisation is to resist the composer's power. However, it does no harm to be inspired by the variety of choices made by other artists, save only that one's improvisation be original and true to self.

Below, I have compiled Tables 3.5 and 3.6 which compare five recordings of "Down by the Riverside"[392] This comparison is limited to the improvisations and total performance times of the work. I found fewer recordings with improvisation, so unfortunately there are only examples from the composer and Lisa Moore.

Table 3.5. Comparison of improvisation length in "Down by the Riverside"

Performer	Paul Jacobs	Marc-André Hamelin	Frederic Rzewski	Lisa Moore	David Jalbert
Year	1980	1998	2001	2003	2006/2018
Performance time preceding the improvisation in minutes	N/A	N/A	4:30	3:30	N/A
Performance time of improvisation in minutes	N/A	N/A	2:30	2	N/A
Total performance time in minutes	6	6	10	9:30	6

[390]Ibid.

[391]Ibid., 111-12.

[392]Paul Jacobs, piano, "Down by the Riverside" from *Paul Jacobs Plays Blues, Ballads & Rags*, recorded 1980, reissued 1991 as Nonesuch E2 79006, 252 804, streaming audio, accessed July 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P-LQzTVzL4&t=7s; Marc-André Hamelin, piano, "Frederic Rzewski."; Rzewski, piano, *Down by the Riverside*, streaming audio; Moore, piano, *Four North American Ballads: No. 3.*; David Jalbert, piano, *Corigliano & Rzewski: Ballads & Fantasies*, Endeavour Classics, 2006, streaming audio, accessed July 18, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE7sdiZe6UM; Jalbert, piano, *Rzewski: Down by the Riverside*.

Table 3.6. Comparison of improvisational choices in “Down by the Riverside”

Performer	**Description**
Paul Jacobs, 1980	Jacobs does not include an improvisation.
Marc-André Hamelin, 1998	Hamelin does not include an improvisation.
Frederic Rzewski**,** 2001	Polytonal fragments of the theme in augmentation and diminution. Moments of tremolo or broken octaves used as accompaniment for fragments. Peaceful section that is mostly tonal with moments of polytonality. Frenetic energy section with massive sound. Pointillistic section reminiscent of Boulez serialism spanning the keyboard. Winds down to return to m. 62 chord.
Lisa Moore, 2003	Quotes several full statements of “Dreadful Memories” in a broad and reflective manner. Then switches to quoting “Riverside.”
David Jalbert, 2006/2018	Jalbert does not include an improvisation.

The second point in the score for improvisation is an optional cadenza which occurs in m. 83, which I call Section H. A footnote in the score says “a short, improvised cadenza may be played over this chord.”[393] In an homage to the Classical era, Rzewski connects this improvised cadenza to Beethoven’s use of fermatas to indicate that the performer should improvise a short cadenza.[394] In the Classical era, especially in concerti, composers frequently placed a fermata over a cadential 6/4 on which they would improvise, returning to that chord for a tutti orchestral cadence to tonic. Rzewski invokes this tradition by placing a cadenza on the penultimate chord, but instead of a Classical resolution, chaos ensues. The chord in m. 83 to be improvised over is an E major triad. To the listener, in context of the preceding tonal section in D major, this chord anticipates a cadence in D major. Whatever the performer chooses to do in this cadenza, resolution is fleeting, as the following measures return to polytonal fragmentation of the melody.

For inspiration in constructing the cadenza, Paul offers two possibilities. One could use the same material from the surrounding sections to create a formal transition from the tonal

[393]Rzewski, *North American Ballads*, Tokyo: Zen-On Music Co., 1982.
[394]Kim, 106.

section to the chromatic ending.[395] Alternatively, he suggests the pianist can just embellish the harmony of the E major triad or introduce the next harmony in the manner of a traditional Classical cadenza.[396] In the recordings listed above in Table 3.5, the performers who improvised in Section E also improvised a cadenza. The others did not improvise at either moment in the score. Jacobs, Hamelin, and Jalbert do not improvise a cadenza but continue directly into the codetta.[397] I would characterize Rzewski's cadenza, which lasts about 15 seconds, as a dissonant chromatic figure running up the keyboard acting as a total disruption of the tonal stability and rhythm of the passacaglia.[398] It flows seamlessly into the following chord in the score. Lisa Moore's cadenza lasts about 20 seconds and exhibits an ethereal quality.[399] In it, she weaves a quote of the tune "Down by the Riverside." These examples can serve as a starting point to performers as they create their own individual musical expressions.

"Down by the Riverside": Ideological Conclusion

"Down by the Riverside" proves to have unique qualities which set it apart from the other three *Ballads*, including different compositional techniques, the inclusion of two points for improvisation, and a pacifist ideology. At the same time, it communicates Rzewski's belief in protest movements and the need for resistance against power structures; in this case, the United States government. The presence of not only one but two moments for improvisation allow the performer to enter the composer's musical and ideological dialogue and fulfill Foucault's philosophy of resistance by leaving the authority of the score to communicate directly to the audience.

[395]Paul, 113.
[396]Ibid.
[397]Paul Jacobs, *Down by the Riverside*; Marc-André Hamelin, *North American Ballads*; David Jalbert, *Rzewski: Ballads*; David Jalbert, *Rzewski: Down by the Riverside*.
[398]Rzewski, *Down by the Riverside*.
[399]Lisa Moore, *Down by the Riverside*.

***North American Ballads*: IV. "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues"**

The fourth movement is a setting of the song "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues," which functions at the first level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads*. Similar to the mining union songs of the first two movements, this song has new lyrics set to a pre-existing melody. It began its life as the Tin Pan Alley song "The Alcoholic Blues", composed in 1919 by Albert Von Tilzer (1878-1958) with words by Edward Laska (1894–1959).[400] The original chorus reflects the Prohibition era and are printed in Appendix A. "The Alcoholic Blues" was recorded by several artists and became immediately popular.[401] In 1936, new lyrics were written and given the title "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" and are printed in Appendix A. The author of the new lyrics is unknown, but it was recorded by Bill Wolff in 1939 after a woman sang it for him during a summer course he was teaching at the Southern School for Workers in North Carolina.[402]

"Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" reflects the political climate of the 1930s in the American South. In 1929, the American Communist Party led textile strikes through the National Textile Workers Union, leading to the nation-wide General Textile Strike of 1934.[403] Communists were involved, but the United Textile Workers Union did not identify as

[400]Edward Laska, words, Albert Von Tilzer, music, *The Alcoholic Blues* (New York: Broadway Music Corporation, 1919. Von Tilzer composed music for many popular songs and is best known for his 1908 hit "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." SecondHandSongs, "Albert Von Tilzer," accessed August 9, 2021, https://secondhandsongs .com/artist/56918.

[401]Most notable was William "Billy" Murray (1877-1954), one of the most popular singers in the United States in 1919. Bill Murray (tenor), with Rosario Bourdon (conductor), *Alcoholic Blues*, Victor 18522, 1919, streaming audio, accessed August 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWlNXLCBfTA. Six recordings were released before 1936. SecondHandSongs, "The Alcoholic Blues," accessed August 9, 2021, https:// secondhandsongs.com/work/222787/versions; Pete Seeger, *American Industrial Ballads*, originally issued as Smithsonian Folkway Recordings FH 5251, 1956, reissued as SFW40058 in 1992, compact disc, Liner notes by Irwin Silber, accessed July 31, 2021, https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/smithsonian_folkways/SFW40 058.pdf.

[402]Fowke and Glazer, 74-5.

[403]Hershberger, 50-2.

communist, fearing attacks from both employers and communists.[404] It is likely that "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" was a product of the 1934 General Textile Strike.[405] Zuraw summarizes the text as describing "the greed of industry brass and seemingly relentless hours of performing the medial task of spooling cotton. The second and third verses imply that there was little rest for the millworkers. So little in fact, that there would be no time off, even for their own deaths."[406] The political significance of the lyrics and their ironic setting are further explained by Woodard:

> The lyrics are intended to provoke sympathy for the hardship of factory labour and promote solidarity among the workers. The worker subsequently describes this hardship in ironic terms… Such a contradictory stance is typical of Blues lyrics, where the cause of grief is presented with humor and irony as a means for tolerating difficult circumstances.[407]

"Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" was recorded at least twice before Rzewski set it in 1979. Pete Seeger recorded it in 1948 (released 1953) and The Hillmen recorded it in 1969.[408] Since Seeger was a friend of Rzewski, the 1948 recording is likely the one he knew.

Viewed through Rosenthal and Flacks' functions of protest songs, "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" is similar to "Dreadful Memories" and "Which Side Are You On?" in that it served to convert and recruit members to support a labor union. Like "Dreadful Memories", it is designed to invoke sympathy for the textile workers' terrible working conditions. Once the song recruited members, it could then mobilize, strengthen resolve, and promote solidarity among the union and its supporters. Viewed through Foucault's lens, the song was used to unite textile workers in resistance to their own company, making it an effective subject for Rzewski's ideological expression.

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[404]Ibid.
[405]Ibid.
[406]Zuraw, 108-9.
[407]Woodard, 127-28.
[408]SecondHandSongs, "The Alcoholic Blues."

Rzewski was inspired to compose this movement about textile mill unions by the movie *Norma Rae* (1979).[409] As Hayashi recounts from an interview, the composer said he

> was fascinated with what he calls the "brilliant" soundtrack from this movie. … One hears the constant turning of the machinery of a mill. Above this din were many of the conversations of the script. The important and crucial point for Rzewski was the fact that no matter how loud the machinery carried on, the conversation was always crystal clear.[410]

I highly recommend to everyone trying to understand this ballad that they watch *Norma Rae*. It shows the working conditions in an actual textile mill and the difficulties in fighting for unionization against corporate bosses. The visuals and audio help provide the pianist with the aural image Rzewski invokes with the score.

Rzewski's solo piano setting of "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" amplifies the textile worker's battle for better working conditions, just as he did in the first two movements. This amplification is the second level of Foucault's institutional resistance in the *Ballads,* where the song's history and ideology are mixed with Rzewski's purposes. His piano solo setting can be seen as actively resisting the power of corporations that attempt to exploit their employees.

Looking at the score, Rzewski employs a myriad of compositional devices in "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues." The most significant are the incorporation of forearm clusters, minimalism, fragmentation, and collage. This movement is similar to the second, "Which Side Are You On?", which begins with fragments of a melody which is not fully revealed until the end. Hershberger calls this process "cumulative."[411] Woodard connects this movement's collage aesthetic to postmodernism and adds ideological meaning by saying that the composer "conveys [the lyrics']

[409]Lewis, 79-80.
[410]Hayashi, 124.
[411]Hershberger, 52-3.

subtle meanings through compositional techniques, situating the pianist as the song's protagonist."[412]

Table 3.7 shows the sections of the fourth movement. As I did previously, I adapted Kim's table.[413] The only update I have made is to identify Section C (mm. 86-110) as a place in the score for optional improvisation, which I explain below.

Table 3.7. "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" sections

Section	Measure	Characteristics
A	1-34	Din of Machinery
B	35-85	Boogie-woogie ostinato (minimalism) under fragments of the tune
C	86-110	Sentimental blues/Optional Improv
D	111-135	Virtuosic melodic stretto
E	136-146	Boogie-woogie ostinato with the full *Winnsboro* tune
F	147-155	Diminishing machinery cluster

The score of "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" opens with the instruction to play *expressionless and machinelike*. The music begins with a *pp* half-step alternating ostinato F-G-flat. Cornett sees this as the first fragmented cell of the melody, citing the chromatic line of the chorus.[414] The half-step eventually leads to palm clusters and then forearm clusters. All scholars agree that the effect is to recreate the sound of textile mill machinery.[415] Rzewski explained how he believed the piano could appropriately convey the sound of machinery, saying that "the piano is, after all, a machine and therefore already lends itself to the depiction."[416] Hershberger interprets this section as conveying the idea of a "loss of humanity" through the mechanization of the performer's arms.[417] Woodward takes this concept further, connecting the mechanistic

[412]Woodard, 128.
[413]Kim, 60.
[414]Cornett, 2004, 100.
[415]Bell and Olmstead, 455; Hayashi, 124-25; Cornett, 94; Hershberger, 54; Lewis, 80-81; Zuraw, 114; Woodard, 131.
[416]Rzewski, interview in Hayashi, 124.
[417]Hershberger, 54.

performance with mimesis, Foucault's philosophy, and technology's power to shape humans. Woodward believes the pianist becomes or is reenacting the laborer in the textile mill, saying "The piece also brings the perspective of the 'work as flow' to the fore as the pianist divulges the results of hours of labour and embodies the role of 'worker' from the song's lyrics."[418] Looking through the lens of Foucault's essay "Technologies of the Self," Woodward suggests that Rzewski "situates the piano as a tool that has the capacity to transform the self" and is providing commentary "on the mechanical nature of the piano and a pianist's relationship to it."[419] Ideologically, the opening section's goal is to recreate the noise of textile mill machinery. The *Winnsboro* tune is the backbone of the noise, but this is not obvious to the audience. I believe Rzewski's goal is to create empathy in his audience towards the working class by helping them to imagine what it is like to work in a textile mill where it is almost impossible to speak over the deafening noise of the machinery. One could imagine the tune fragments as symbolic of protestors fighting to be heard by the uncaring company men. As Woodward suggests, the pianist can represent the mill-worker allowing the audience to not only hear the working environment, but to witness it as well.

Rzewski was not the first to try to recreate factory sounds in a musical work. Recall the history of political music in Chapter 1 regarding Luigi Nono's *La fabbrica illuminata* (1964). Nono's work combined recordings of factory sounds with live voice and text describing poor working conditions. While they share the same anti-capitalist ideology, Nono brings the factory and the worker to the audience more directly, whereas Rzewski abstracts the factory sounds and worker into the musical language and action. The message is the same, but the aesthetic is different.

[418]Woodard, 131.
[419]Ibid., 129-30.

The machinery of Section A continues into Section B (mm. 35-85), gradually turning into a sort of minimalist Boogie-woogie bass line. Rzewski explains his inspiration for this minimalist technique, connecting it to a teenage job he had in a large factory:

> machinery was going all the time. … When you are listening to repetitive sounds like that…you start hearing things that are not really there. That is the whole point of minimalism. …with these repetitions your brain starts to synthesize patterns. They are not really in the music, but they are happening in your brain."[420]

This reveals that Rzewski can, on some level, empathize with the textile workers. It is interesting how Rzewski took minimalism, which was so often strictly tonal and rarely dissonant (i.e. Glass and Reich), and created an aggressive and terrifying sound instead. This relentless dissonance bears a striking similarity to Andriessen's *Worker's Union* (1975).

Eventually, larger fragments of the *Winnsboro* tune are expansively set over this ostinato in mm. 51-58. The bass is unrelenting at *fff* under these fragments, which fade in and out at a dynamic range from *pp* to *f*, shown in Figure 3.7. Pianists are trained to bring out the melody in music, but that must be disregarded in this instance for a higher ideological and programmatic purpose. The score provides an explanatory note at m. 51: "Great care must be taken to keep the left hand at a constant (extremely loud) level, while maintaining at the same time the expressive variations in the intensity of the right-hand melody, which is, therefore, sometimes hardly to be heard." Lewis connects this to the film *Norma Rae*, where "Much of the dialogue takes place in the factory with the voices struggling to be heard above the noise of the machines. This is the idea that Rzewski wanted."[421] Cornett agrees, suggesting that "a listener can imagine the distant voices of the textile mill workers rising over the noise of the machinery." Rzewski's goal here is

[420]Rzewski, interview in Kim, 122.
[421]Lewis, 79-80.

to recreate the experience of the mill floor to help the audience imagine the worker's daily struggle. Pianist Hamm explains the performer's mission to properly express the ideology:

> People can't give that up – they want the melody to be heard. But you're not going to hear it. To me, that's the political message. If you don't do that – that's the political message. That's the people being overpowered by the man or machine. He's so clear – I admire him – about these things in general.[422]

If pianists consider Hamm's statement alongside Rzewski's ideology and programmatic goals, they can be prepared to let the quietest bits of the melodic fragments disappear. The goal is to transport the audience to that place where they are unable to hear all of the melody over the mechanical noise of the left hand.

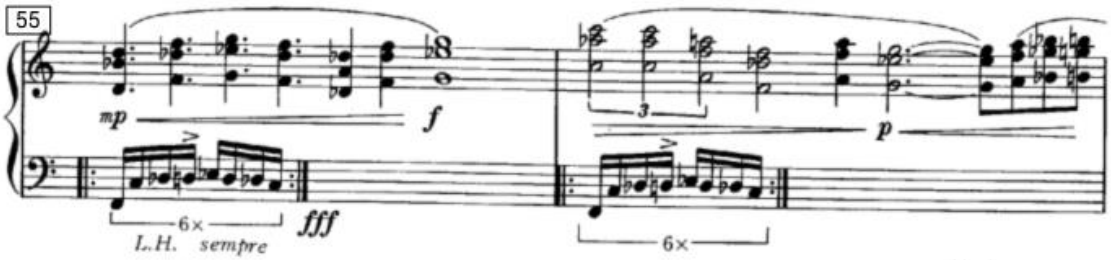

Figure 3.7. "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" mm. 55-56.

As this section builds to a climax, the pianist and the piano are pushed to their limits with parallel ninths at the outer extremes of the keyboard.[423] Hayashi describes the programmatic element as depicting the torment of the mill worker: "The purpose of the first part [of the movement] is to present the music as grim and grinding. It is unpleasant, and it gets worse. That is the intent. …until there is the explosion—no way out—to make the music sound like this, as one stuck to a factory job."[424] This explosion is followed by a metered fermata while the preceding clamor is allowed to ring. Rzewski explains how he performs this moment:

> "I usually do it strictly. One thing again, this depends on the instrument. … Larger instrument easily get that effect because the string is very long. … When the dampers

[422]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.
[423]Hayashi, 126; Cornett, 96-7.
[424]Hayashi, 126.

> come down, the string will fluff against the dampers and the sounds become louder to make a crescendo that way. And I like it a lot. It is tricky. It's not always easy to control it. It does not always happen."[425]

It might be tempting to revel in the pure chaotic noise leading up to m. 81, but as the composer insists, the time of reflection is proportional to the time spent in the chaos, and the performer can experiment with the way the dampers can create a crescendo of resonance. In this 'grand pause,' I propose that, ideologically, Rzewski is placing the listener inside the head of the mill worker, where the machinery resonates long after they've left the factory floor.

The following Section C (mm. 86-110) is of a completely different character to the machinery of the first two sections. It is a sentimental blues in which scholars disagree about the existence of melodic fragments and melodically-shaped material. Hayashi observes "melodic fragments of the protest tune, especially the pick-up of the chorus, "I got the blues"", while Cornett observes that "A full statement of the melody occurs in mm. 94-108."[426] To the contrary, Zuraw asserts that "The voices derive many features from the quoted theme, but not do not strictly adhere to their motivic roots."[427] Regardless of the exact quotation, this blues section is certainly inspired by *Winnsboro* in that it uses blues melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic language. For Woodward, this section "creates the effect of a cathartic spark of inspiration from the pianist after the intense mechanical drive of the opening."[428] Rzewski offered Hayashi some explanation of his intent through this sudden change in character: "There is the wistful idea of being in heaven, but everything is still the same as before: get what you can", to which Hayashi

[425]Rzewski, interview in Kim, 124-25.
[426] Hayashi, 127; Cornett, 97.
[427]Zuraw, 123.
[428]Woodard, 135.

summarizes: “It is not intended to be ironic, but rather a realistic presentation of the human condition.”[429]

Following the improvisatory blues section is Section D (mm. 111-135), characterized by exceptional virtuosity in melodic stretto. This is the first section to include a full quotation of the tune’s verse.[430] It is quickly usurped by polytonal fragments. This could be interpreted as the union finally overcoming an obstacle, but their temporary success is overwhelmed by even larger obstacles.

Section D contains a great amount of technical difficulty. Hayashi summarizes the purpose of the virtuosity as bringing the movement to a climax, calling this one of

> the most technically demanding sections of the entire ballad set… the performer is challenged to the maximum…The mental and physical requirements can be excruciating. However, this segment is crucial, for its magnitude, intensity, and forcefulness carry the power of the music to its heights in the piece, as well as to the climax of the set…

Again, the pianist is meant to embody the physical pain of the mill worker so that the audience might witness their struggle and be empathetic toward their plight. Rzewski describes how he achieves a powerful sound without pounding. He attributes his technical understanding to pianist David Tudor (1926-1996), whose way of playing was “to play very close to the piano keyboard and to get a very big sound by using arm weight” and to “[make] very few gestures that [are] not necessary.”[431] Rzewski continues: “I do not hit the instrument, but I sort of push away from it.”[432] This provides the performer with a model of how to accomplish the score’s extreme demands without overexertion or harsh tone. To continue through an ideological lens, I believe the technical demands symbolize the textile machine in the movement’s opening. Rzewski

[429]Hayashi, 127.
[430]Cornett, 97.
[431]Rzewski, interview in Kim, 127.
[432]Ibid.

makes the pianist go through great difficulties, perhaps representing the difficulties of the union. As Cornett suggested in earlier movements, the polytonal fragmentation in Section D could be an abstraction of protestors struggling to be heard on the picket line, drowned out by opposition. Or perhaps the protestors cannot agree upon tactics, and so it could represent in-fighting within the union.

In Section E (mm. 136-146), the boogie-woogie ostinato from section B returns with the complete *Winnsboro* tune. Van Raat and Woodward share programmatic interpretations of the way the previous section's chaos leads to the exposed tune. For Van Raat the melody represents the voice: "It is only after a dramatic gathering of sound and energy that finally the human voice breaks through and can be heard clearly."[433] Woodward goes a step further, saying this section is "a joyous culmination of the struggle that came before, which is the struggle to find the melody and to find one's voice—one might even say to find one's self as a pianist."[434] This transcendent concept of the pianist 'finding one's self' through the music could be extended to the audience. If they witness the pianist discovering their voice through the *Winnsboro* tune, perhaps they too can discover their voice to become activists in working-class struggles.

The final Section F (mm. 147-155) explodes with crashing forearm clusters that lead to palm clusters in the upper register, ending at the highest range of the keyboard. Rzewski reveals that the notation's spirit of the law matters more than the letter, saying that in the clusters,

> Notes are not important. … it does not mean that they have to be played precisely. … What is important here is the motion. It's not important whether you hit those particular notes or other notes. … You could write just clusters with no pitches. Maybe graphically making these cluster get smaller and smaller. In fact, perhaps that would be closer to the truth than writing these pitches… The only thing that is important there is the basic

[433]Van Raat, Ralph, piano, "'Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues' from Frederic Rzewski's *North American Ballads*,' Naxos Classical 8.559360, 2008, Compact Disc, Liner notes by van Ratt.

[434]Woodard, 135.

> motion of the whole bar. Of course, that could be done in many different ways. The pitches are the least important thing.[435]

Performers may take some solace in the knowledge that the exact notes are not important. This demonstrates again how Rzewski's ideology and programmatic goals are the governing factor in his work; therefore, performance interpretations must start from an ideological-conceptual point.

The final section contains two programmatic elements. One last fragment of the *Winnsboro* tune appears in m. 152 in the midst of palm clusters. The clusters then fade away to the top register, gradually losing notes and diminishing to no sound at all. Many scholars have drawn a comparison between these final bars and the final *Winnsboro* lyrics "So I can doff in the Promised Land."[436] This can serve as a reminder to the audience that the textile workers felt so chained to the mill that even death would not release them from their labor.

Improvisation in "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues"

In Table 3.7, I labeled Section C with an alternative description 'optional improv.' I assert that this entire section (mm. 86-110) can be replaced with an improvisation. My assertion is supported by a letter Rzewski wrote to Jacobs who gave the work its premiere: "this section could be replaced by an original improvisation."[437] I believe this is further supported by other factors, including Rzewski's ideology of resistance and attitude towards improvisation, the improvisatory nature of the section, and the existence of improvisation in the other movements and his previous works.

Most importantly, I assert that Rzewski has created these *Ballads* to represent institutional resistance, and therefore the performer honors the composer by resisting his

[435]Rzewski, interview in Kim, 130-31.
[436]Bell and Olmstead, 455; Zuraw 128; Cornett, 98; Woodard, 136.
[437]Frederic Rzewski, Rome, to Paul Jacobs, New York, 23 June 1979, transcript in the hand of Frederic Rzewski, archive collections, Lincoln Center library, New York City, quoted in Zuraw, 123-24.

authority through the insertion of their own musical and ideological commentary in this section. As I argue in the second and third movements, improvisation functions as a tool to break down the classical hegemonic relationship between composer, performer, and audience by allowing the performer to create their own music within another composer's work. Indeed, if one takes into consideration Rzewski's statements about improvisation in general and the importance of performers having good original ideas in the *Ballads* and his history of resisting institutional ideologies, it becomes not only a choice to improvise, but a necessity.

Therefore, the question is not whether there should be improvisation, but how a performer negotiates Rzewski's general call for improvisation. For those performers uneasy with the process, I suggest the following structure for their improvisation:

- Stick to a pitch center of B-flat.
- Play in a blues style.
- Follow Rzewski's approach: invoke the theme, begin calmly and gradually build the energy to a climax, and then transition to the mechanical ostinato of Section D (m. 111).
- Quote from the theme.
- Quote from other blues work songs or union songs.
- Performance time should last about the same as the written Section C.

This framework can provide a way for performers to honor the spirit of resistance in this movement. Ultimately, the pianist has great freedom to create a unique expression of their own ideology. They have the opportunity to enter into dialogue with the historic textile union, Rzewski's perspective, today's workers unions, and the audience.

"Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues": Ideological Conclusion

Within the fourth *Ballad* is the clangor of machines where the pianist takes the role of the machine operator. This allows the audience to witness and experience the laborer who struggles to find their voice, only to be destroyed in the end by the machine. Through this work, Rzewski paints a picture of the American working-class struggle. Some have drawn lines to the

composer's Marxist anti-capitalist beliefs. Groemer describes it as portraying "man's ability to survive in adverse conditions, the struggle of man versus machine, and the victory attainable by transformation rather than destruction," continuing that "Whether one holds Marxist, anarchist, or even capitalist views, this piece transmits a powerful message. But this message would not be so convincing were it not for the purely musical success of this work."[438] Zuraw also observes capitalism's negative depiction, saying "These startling contrasts symbolized the human element being taken by force and assimilated into the clangor of capitalist industry" and adding that "for the worker, there is no escape from the machinery of capitalist enterprise."[439] Zuraw interprets the movement's ending as a dream that turns out to be a sarcastic joke played on the workers.[440] This demonstrates that Rzewski successfully accomplished turning his ideological distaste for capitalism into an artistic work that communicates the deplorable textile mill working conditions to the audience.

Viewed through the lens of Foucault, this movement exhibits multiple levels of institutional resistance. The first level is in the historical textile mill union protest of the 1930s represented by the song. At this level, the union had to resist the power of the mill company, using "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" as a part of that resistance. On the second institutional level is Rzewski's depiction of that resistance through his piano solo. The work itself is a vehicle for Rzewski's resistance to corporate entities in the 1970s who would seek to exploit their workers—recall his inspiration from the film *Norma Rae* set in a 1979 textile mill union protest. A third level is the hegemonic relationship of pianist to composer. The pianist can choose to

[438]Groemer, 114.
[439]Zuraw, 130.
[440]Ibid., 132-33.

resist the score's authority by inserting their own improvisation into it, enabling their voice to be heard as they provide their own commentary on the labor movement.

***North American Ballads*: Ideological Connections Between Movements**

While each movement of the *Ballads* can stand independently both ideologically and in performance, there are compositional and symbolic threads that connect them as a unified whole. Several connections and differences emerge among the first three movements. These comparisons raise a few questions, not all of which can be answered. What should be made of quotations of previous movements within "Down by the Riverside"? Recall how Rzewski quotes movement two, "Which Side Are You On?", in the first measure of "Down by the Riverside" as well as briefly in mm. 26, 41-42, and 44-45. He also quotes movement one, "Dreadful Memories," in mm. 64-65. How does Rzewski see the connection between these movements? Is he asking the listener "Which side are you on? The government, or the young soldiers dying in Vietnam?" Is the war in Vietnam a "dreadful memory" for Rzewski and his audience? Does he see all protest movements as part of the same human spirit and a necessary part of democracy? What conclusions can be drawn? Perhaps the composer is attempting to help the listener connect the historical protest movements of mining, anti-war, and textile workers. Zuraw believes Rzewski is yearning for an unattainable idealism, saying, "throughout as in the preceding movements, there are also moments of idyllic beauty and sensuousness that represent a distant ideal from which contemporary society has been separated."[441] Hershberger sees it as a warning sign from the country's past treatment of the working class: "like "Dreadful Memories," "Down by the Riverside" is thoroughly haunted, unable to escape the mistakes of the past."[442] The

[441]Zuraw, 108.
[442]Hershberger, 49.

unifying ideological and compositional elements of the *Ballads* make them even more effective and powerful when performed as a complete set.

***North American Ballads*: Performance Considerations**

There are many performance considerations concerning the *Ballads*. To achieve the best possible interpretation, performers will want to reflect on the history surrounding the themes, their text, their meaning to the labor movements in the 1930s and 70s, and above all what they symbolized to Rzewski. It might best be programmed with the composer's other political works or political works of his contemporaries such as Cardew, Wolff, Nono, Dallapicolla, and Andriessen. It could also be appropriately fit into a program of postmodern works. If programmed with music of a non-political nature, care must be taken to place it with complimentary pieces and order the program appropriately so as to create a flow that honors the message of the *Ballads*. Audience makeup must also be considered. Regardless of the programming, listeners must be educated on the history of the *Ballads* to fully appreciate what it means. Without lyrics, the music retains little meaning to those who are unfamiliar with the original songs, but with explanation, an audience can appreciate the weight of the historical context.

A successful performance requires that the pianist understand the music and explain it to some degree to their audience, as pianist Corey Hamm questions: "Is it important for the musician to understand and present the sociological underpinning in the music the best they can? I think it is."[443] The performer has several options on the level of audience engagement. Rzewski frequently played recordings of the original protest songs before his performances of the *Ballads*, and sometimes led the audience in singing the songs.[444] Jacobs' performance of "Which Side Are

[443]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.
[444]Kim, 132-33.

You On?" begins with the recording of two stanzas of Reece singing the song.[445] In Conrad Tao's live performance of the same piece, he sits quietly at the piano while Reece's recording is played and then immediately begins performing. Pianist Corey Hamm also offers helpful examples. As he explained to me, before performing Rzewski's *The People United*, he provides a lecture, explaining the piece and playing examples of what to lister for.[446] He also plays a recording of a rally of people singing the original song the work is based on. I would recommend all of the above for the *Ballads*. The performer could briefly summarize the history of the 1930's American labor and anti-war movements as well as Rzewski's social views in the 70s. A portion of each of the four songs could be played at the piano, or better yet, recordings of the songs could be played. Examples of the variation procedures could also be performed. Time allowed for explanation of the work would depend on the rest of the program and the audience's previous knowledge. Some American audiences will be familiar with the history and places referenced in the *Ballads*, especially the Vietnam War era. American unions continue to protest unfair working conditions today, so audiences may be familiar with that dynamic. However, the performer cannot assume their audience is sympathetic to unions or pacifists, and so careful explanation is necessary prior to performance.

Conclusion

North American Ballads is an important work which communicates a rich political history through inventive compositional techniques. Its significance is found in its musical language and how effectively it speaks to social issues in America. It is lauded in scholarship.

[445]That is, the recording on YouTube. I have not listened to the original album to confirm it begins with the recording of Reece. Paul Jacobs, piano, "Which Side Are You On?" on *Paul Jacobs Plays Blues, Ballads & Rags*, Nonesuch E2 79006, 252 804, 1980, reissued 1991, streaming audio, accessed June 24, 2021, https://www .youtube.com/watch?v=gavxi9OTFoo. Original album: https://www.discogs.com/Paul-Jacobs-Plays-Blues-Ballads-Rags/master/893561.

[446]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.

Cornett praises the power of the music to express the struggle of the oppressed and underrepresented and how "the use of melodic quotation allows art music the opportunity to communicate strong philosophical and political gestures in an accessible yet distinctive voice."[447] Zuraw ties the work to current issues in the modern world, saying

> "Poverty, social conflict, violence, and inhuman working conditions are still perpetuated in this country through social imbalance, which favors the upper classes of American society. Rzewski employs nostalgia in the piano works as a symbol of what is lost in the haze of our American dreams. … These images resonate in the consciousness of the American people through the consistent perpetuation of racism and class inequality. … he also chronicles the scars of our nation through the more realistic tone of his modern counterpoint."[448]

Hershberger also observes in Rzewski's generation a nostalgia for an idealism they saw in the protest movements of the 1930s: "Perhaps Rzewski's *North American Ballads* look back to this notion, pleading for the understanding that passionate protest is not un-American but rather, quintessentially American."[449]

I believe *North American Ballads* is a modern masterwork that represents the tumultuous 1970s where so many institutional traditions were called into question artistically and socially. It embodies both systematic challenges through Rzewski's setting of political songs in a postmodern aesthetic. Performers will be most successful if they understand the political underpinnings of the work and view it as a piece of resistance on multiple levels.

[447]Cornett, 2021, 16.
[448]Zuraw, 130-32.
[449]Hershberger, 70.

CHAPTER 4. CORNELIUS CARDEW'S IDEOLOGY AND WORKS FROM THE 1970S

This chapter focuses on the personal ideology of English composer Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981) and how his ideology is manifested in his works for solo piano, with particular emphasis given to his most substantial work, *Thälmann Variations* (1974), in Chapter 5.[450] To date, there is little scholarship on political music for solo piano. Yet, in this current politically-charged world, new music with political messaging provides a bounty of material for study as well as compelling and timely repertoire for performers.

Cornelius Cardew is not a well-known composer and his political works of the 1970s suffer the same fate.[451] Pianists may be unfamiliar with the politics of this era and may not know how to engage with political subjects on stage. Understanding the political ideology behind Cardew's works opens avenues for performers and audiences to engage with them. *Thälmann Variations* is Cardew's largest political work. It was inspired by a complex historical-political movement and features a variety of compositional styles. Performers will be better able to perform this work after understanding how ideology and theoretical analysis intertwine in the score.

My primary source of biographical information was Tilbury's biography of Cardew, *Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981): A Life Unfinished* (2008).[452] Most of the available scores are Cardew's manuscripts, including *Thälmann Variations*.[453] I consulted a host of sources for historical information on the songs found in *Thälmann Variations*, many of which are online,

[450]Pronounced *tayl*-mahn. "Thälmann" can also be spelled "Thaelmann" and both are accepted German spellings. The "ae" in "Thaelmann" is the alternative to "ä" when umlauts are unavailable. This is the French spelling. Both spellings are found in this paper as I have tried to honor the sources.

[451]Timothy Taylor, "Moving in Decency: The Music and Radical Politics of Cornelius Cardew," *Music & Letters* 79, no. 4 (Nov., 1998): 573.

[452]John Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981): A Life Unfinished* (Matching Tye, UK: Copula, 2008), 722.

[453]Cornelius Cardew, *Thälmann Variations: For Solo Piano* (London: Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1989).

especially in the form of recordings on YouTube. A significant amount of historical context and theoretical analysis came from Langenbruch's article "Medium Kampflied: Kulturtransfer im Pariser Exil am Beispiel der Kampflieder von Paul Arma" (2012) and book *Topographien musikalischen Handelns im Pariser Exil: Eine Histoire croisée des Exils deutschsprachiger Musikerinnen und Musiker in Paris 1933-1939* (2014), as well as Moore's article "Socialist Realism and the Music of the French Popular Front" (2008).[454] Historical context on German Communist Labor-Party leader and martyr Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944) was found in Lemmons' article "'Germany's Eternal Son:' The Genesis of the Ernst Thälmann Myth 1930-1950" (2009) and LaPorte's article "'Legends have a tenacious life': Ernst Thälmann, the First World War and memory in the GDR" (2019).[455] I interpret *Thälmann Variations* as a work of resistance through the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures. Additional support in interpreting ideology and political power comes from sources already discussed in Chapter 1: Mattern (1998), Rosenthal and Flacks (2012), and Garratt (2019).[456] My approach to theoretical-ideological analysis is supported by the existing scholarship on Rzewski's *North American Ballads* discussed in the previous chapter.

[454]Anna Langenbruch, "Medium Kampflied: Kulturtransfer im Pariser Exil am Beispiel der Kampflieder von Paul Arma," *Lied und populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture* 57 (2012), accessed September 30, 2021, https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/docview/1432700363/86317F4E97C84D2CPQ/1?accountid=6766; Anna Langenbruch, *Topographien musikalischen Handelns im Pariser Exil: Eine Histoire croisée des Exils deutschsprachiger Musikerinnen und Musiker in Paris 1933-1939* (Hildesheim, DE: Georg Olms Verlag, 2014); Christopher Moore, "Socialist Realism and the Music of the French Popular Front," *The Journal of Musicology* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2008). Translations of Langenbruch's sources were kindly provided by Annette Richter, Ph.D. by email on October 21, 2021 and will hereon be used in this chapter.

[455]Russel Lemmons, "'Germany's Eternal Son:' The Genesis of the Ernst Thälmann Myth 1930-1950," *German Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (May 2009), https://www.jstor.org/stable/40574804; Norman LaPorte, "'Legends have a tenacious life': Ernst Thälmann, the First World War and memory in the GDR," *Twentieth Century Communism* 17, no. 17 (Sept. 2019), Accessed October 22, 2020, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A626122249/GPS?u=ndacad_58105ztrn&sid=GPS&xid=674eaf12.

[456]Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Robert Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2012); James Garratt, *Music and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

I argue that understanding the political underpinnings of Cardew's works for solo piano through the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures will help pianists understand Cardew's ideology and will thus allow better engagement with an emerging and relevant repertoire that targets a politically- and socially-aware audience.

The Life of Cornelius Cardew

Cornelius Cardew was an English composer and pianist trained at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He began his career in the avant-garde; his early works were inspired by John Cage (1912-1992) and Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007), the latter of whom Cardew studied and worked with. In the 1960s, Cardew was involved with experimental group improvisation and performed with the ensemble AMM and, later, the Scratch Orchestra.[457] It was with the Scratch Orchestra in 1969 that he became inspired by Marxist ideology through the theoretical works of Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976) and the Chinese Revolution.[458] He began to renounce his earlier indeterminate works and eventually wrote the book of essays *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (1974).[459] These essays reveal his search for a meaningful artistic voice, where he invokes Marx saying "It is not enough to understand the world, the point is to change it, so we should say to artists, it is not enough to decorate the world, the point is to influence it."[460]

This marked his move to not only compose more conventional works exhibiting tonality, but also works that served a socialist political movement. He became politically active in socialist and anti-imperialist movements in England, Germany, Ireland, and Canada during the 1970s, gave lectures at universities and politically-themed concerts and wrote songs for socialist

[457]John Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001-), accessed November 10, 2020, https://doiorg.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.04912. AMM is not an acronym. The name came about rather arbitrarily.

[458]Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius," in *Grove Music Online.*

[459]Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius," in *Grove Music Online.*

[460]Edwin Prévost, ed., *Cornelius Cardew: A reader* (Harlow, United Kingdom: Copula, 2006),167.

organizations.[461] His public demonstrations against fascism and racism eventually led to his imprisonment.[462] I will examine his works for piano solo composed during these years in the context of his political activities and then through the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures as an extension of his ideology. Finally, I suggest how performers can engage with these works.

Cornelius Cardew's Ideology

Foucault's philosophy of power structures was one of the strongest influences on the understanding of power in the 1960s and 1970s.[463] Therefore, it is the lens through which I will illuminate Cardew's ideology. His generation came of age in the 1960s, the era of the counterculture movement, a time when many traditional political and civil institutions were questioned and challenged. Tilbury's biography reveals that Cardew resisted much of his own training, society's norms of artistic expression, and the social injustice he witnessed in the world.[464] Applying Foucault's philosophy reveals Cardew's ideology and musical compositions as a constant challenge to an artist's participation in established institutional power structures.

Cardew was a socially-conscious composer and his goal was to convey political awareness to his middle-class audience through his works for piano solo. On July 11, 1973, he wrote the following in his personal journal about the composer's difficult role in trying to communicate a revolutionary message to a bourgeois audience:

> Music backs up, supports the social conscience of its audience… When we try and write revolutionary music for the usual audience we're faced with the insurmountable problem of giving it a form that backs up the (bourgeois) class consciousness of the audience. If we succeed then the revolutionary content is turned around to serve the bourgeois audience in its ideas and cultural milieu. If we fail, then the revolutionary content remains but does not touch the audience – you get the negative reaction either on the grounds that

[461]Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius," in *Grove Music Online.*
[462]Ibid.
[463]Gutting and Oksala, "Michel Foucault."
[464]Tilbury, "Cardew, Cornelius" in *Grove Music Online.*

> it's bad music, or on the grounds that it is an attack on the audience. There *cannot* be any career as a revolutionary artist.[465]

This statement reveals three pillars of Cardew's ideology. First, that he believed that his music should serve revolutionary ideals. Second, that he was aware of the different ways his music could speak to his audience. Third, that he believed that his success as a composer (as opposed to his success as a revolutionary) depended on avoiding insulting his audience, and to instead relate to their sensibilities and values. In other words, this statement reveals that Cardew knew there was a political line that, if crossed, would alienate him from his audience, thereby depriving him of his ability to motivate people to join his socialist cause. Four years after this journal entry, in 1977, Cardew spoke to an audience at a concert at the Air Gallery in London. He called on many of his fellow composers to support the socialist revolution (the struggle for liberation), saying that if they failed to support the liberation struggle, they were supporting imperialism.[466] He believed that "by turning a blind eye" to the class struggle they were condoning evil.[467] He was adamant that there was no middle course. Fellow Scratch Orchestra member, Psi Ellison, said that "while many composers regenerate from a musical place, Cardew's resource was life itself."[468] It is important that Cardew's music is approached from the perspective of his political life and the temptation is avoided to view his artistic output as isolated objects.

Biographer John Tilbury worked and performed with Cardew for many years and therefore offers a personal portrait of Cardew. He provides a snapshot of Cardew's convictions during his political years and the resulting works for solo piano he composed in the following passage.

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[465]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981)*, 722.

[466]Ibid., 847; from Cardew's speech as paraphrased by Tilbury.

[467]Ibid.

[468]Ibid., 725; quoted in Kathryn Gleasman Pisaro, "Music from Scratch: Cornelius Cardew, Experimental Music and the Scratch Orchestra in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, US, 2001).

> This is the utopia in pursuit of which Cardew was willing to sacrifice not only his own life, but also the lives of his family and comrades. Small wonder that few could follow him. To follow was to trudge the streets of the most deprived parts of London, to suffer abuse on street corners, to be threatened with violence on doorsteps, to be constantly in danger and at risk, to spend hours in libraries studying the 'human condition,' to be on call for the revolution 24 hours a day, to be accountable to the [English Communist] Party, to be remorselessly critical of oneself and of one's own actions and their consequences for the revolutionary cause, and to be intoxicated with the idea of a new world, a new planet.[469]

Each of Cardew's works were created during a time of intense political activism and existed as an expression of his ideology. One might wonder why a composer who spent decades working in the avant-garde would suddenly abandon that aesthetic for traditional musical language. Tilbury explains how Cardew's compositional method was determined by his politics, saying that

> In the seventies Cardew's musical priorities demanded not only more traditionally-based compositional methods; more importantly, they presupposed another context, in which music, and all other human activities, found expression and meaning. But he allowed this context to overrule the intrinsic demands of content; he was heedless of the 'reality principle' – in this case, of the imperatives of the composer's craft. Thus, the exigencies of a politically revolutionary agenda created distortive emphases which were woven into the fabric of his politics – a heedless continuum of political rectitude: no deviations, no surprises, but a granite-like ineluctability driven by the logic of historical materialism.[470]

Tilbury's summary of how Cardew's ideology determined the content of his compositions will become the basis for my argument that Cardew was first and foremost a political activist, and that his compositions are merely an arm of his activism.

Tilbury goes on to quote Cardew, who said "We should see all our work in the context of the overall strategy of the Party. Not subjectively to put one's own problems first and attach exaggerated importance to them."[471] His conviction to make all his creative output serve Communist Party ideology resulted in politically-themed works that need to be understood in

[469]Ibid., 686.
[470]Ibid., 929.
[471]Ibid., from a handwritten note, likely in 1973.

their historical context. Six years later, Cardew confirmed his commitment to this ideal saying "We have to be Party people. Partyism is an art."[472] This demonstrates that in order to understand Cardew's music his politics must first be studied. Collectively, Cardew's own words and his fellow musicians express that for Cardew, his compositions were merely a vehicle for his life experience and could be cast in any form necessary to transmit his experience to his audience. His works for solo piano can be viewed as an extension of his political life. This explains why Cardew wrote political music. It allowed him a creative outlet to express his feelings about the injustice he saw in the world.

Cornelius Cardew's Political Works for Piano

During the 1970s, Cardew's ideology was shaped by communist and socialist philosophy which he conveyed through his compositions. I will focus on the series of works for solo piano which emerged from this period, but it is worth noting that these works were written alongside other from different genres. He also wrote many songs (some of which he arranged for piano solo), a handful of sonatas and shorter works for piano with either violin, woodwinds or percussion, and even a late piano duo titled *Boolavogue* (1981).

Cardew's first group of political piano solos was his *Piano Album 1973*, a collection of ten short pieces all reflecting a range of socialist movements from anti-imperialism in Ireland to Chinese communism.[473] This collection reveals that Cardew was influenced by the communist philosophy of Mao Tse-tung, chairman of the Communist Party of China. Of the ten pieces in *Piano Album 1973*, four are based on Chinese communist songs and two pieces are transcriptions of Cardew's original songs.[474] The first, *Soon (there will be a high tide of Revolution in our*

[472]Ibid., from handwritten notes dated November 18, 1979.
[473]Cornelius Cardew, *Piano Album 1973: For Solo Piano* (London: Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1991).
[474]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 713.

Country), is based on his 1971 setting of Mao Tse-tung's 1930 essay *A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire*.[475] The second, *Long Live Chairman Mao!*, was inspired by a poem lauding the Chairman.[476] The Chinese Revolution sparked Cardew's creativity to write many of these pieces. In a declaration of his admiration for Mao Tse-tung's accomplishments in China, Cardew wrote that "The People's Republic of China is the most advanced socialist country in the world."[477] Cardew was inspired by how Mao Tse-tung regarded literature and art as necessary to the well-being of the people because, although life alone is beautiful, "life reflected in art is more intense and even closer to the universal truth than everyday life."[478] Although Cardew later refuted Mao Tse-tung, he still saw art as being transformed by revolution, and even rendered superfluous by it.[479] *Piano Album 1973* is primarily a political expression; it does not represent individualism or subjectivism. Cardew's political intention led to each piece expressing a socialist ideal.

Piano Album 1973 was soon followed by the *Piano Album 1974*, a collection of four short pieces addressing communist movements in Germany and China.[480] These two piano albums were Cardew's first experimentation with political piano music. Many of the works are simply solo arrangements of folk music or his own original songs.

These piano albums likely helped prepare him to take on something on a larger scale, for 1974 also brought his most ambitious work, *Thälmann Variations*. In this piece he combined three German communist labor movement songs as the basis for his variations. The following

[475]Mao Tse-Tung, *A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire,* Marxists Internet Archive, 1930, accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_6.htm.

[476]Cardew, *Piano Album 1973,* program notes.

[477]Ibid. Mao Tse Tung established the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1931 and was part of founding the People's Republic of China in 1949. He served as chairman of the Republic until 1959 and continued as chairman of the Communist Party until his death in 1976. "Mao Tse Tung (1893–1976)," in Encyclopedia of Marxism: Glossary of People, accessed December 13, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/glossary/ people/m/a.htm#mao-tse-tung.

[478]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 725. (quotation of Mao Tse-tung)

[479]Ibid.

[480]Cardew, *Piano Album 1974*.

chapter provides a detailed history and analysis of this work, and so I will move on to his next piano solo.

Cardew's *Vietnam Sonata* (1976) celebrates communist Vietnam's victory in May 1975. This work is not as well-known as the large works which flank it.[481] This sonata contains Cardew's original songs, including *Law of History*, a song that celebrates how a small country can revolt against a large country, and *Revolution is the Main Trend in the World Today* (which also appears in *Piano Album 1974*).[482] The middle movement of this sonata features quotations of folk music from Vietnam, Albania, and Germany, all of which support the socialist cause.[483]

Cardew's last work for solo piano, *We Sing for the Future* (1980), based on an original song of the same name, is another large ideological work which lasts about 18 minutes in performance. It reflects the final years of his life before he was killed in a hit-and-run accident in 1981.[484] For Cardew, these years were a time of zealous public demonstrations in Canada and England. *We Sing for the Future* served as another conduit for his activism. In 1979, he went on a tour in Canada with the Communist Canadian Cultural Workers' Committee as part of his involvement with England's PCA (Progressive Cultural Association).[485] On this tour, Cardew wrote several propaganda songs for the CCWC, including *We Sing for the Future*. His songs, along with those of other composers, appeared in an anthology, also called *We Sing for the Future*, published in 1980 by the CCWC.[486] Cardew was imprisoned in 1980 for six weeks for his participation in demonstrations in England in 1978 and 1979 against the National Front, a

[481]This is my own conclusion. There is no available official score, only an original manuscript with a watermark downloadable as a pdf, and I have not been able to find a recording.

[482]Cardew, *Piano Album 1974*, 11.

[483]Cornelius Cardew, *Vietnam Sonata: Thälmann Variations* (London: Experimental Catalogue, 1976), program notes.

[484]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 960.

[485]The Progressive Cultural Association was an organization within the CPE-ML (Communist Party of England-Marxist Leninist), founded in 1976.

[486]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 918-22.

racist Nazi organization.[487] During his prison sentence, he gave music lessons, played organ, and sketched the solo piano arrangement of *We Sing for the Future*.[488]

Conclusion

It is evident that Cardew was highly ideological and felt an intense commitment to communicate his ideology through his music. Beginning in 1969 with the influence of Marxism and the student protest movement, politics became his primary concern. He became increasingly involved in social activism in the 1970s.

Each of Cardew's works for solo piano represent his life experience as a socialist crusader and function as vehicles to convey his ideology to his audience. His objective was to motivate his audience to support his various socio-political movements. Foucault's philosophy of power structures can help show that Cardew intended for these piano solos to be a tool to fight from within fascist and imperial institutions all over the globe. Armed with this knowledge, pianists can be enabled to appropriately interpret, program, and execute these works. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how Cardew's ideology is manifested in his largest work, *Thälmann Variations*.

[487]Ibid., 959.
[488]Ibid., 918-22.

CHAPTER 5. IDEOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATION IN CARDEW'S *THÄLMANN VARIATIONS*

***Thälmann Variations*: Historical Background**

Cardew's *Thälmann Variations* is his most substantial work for solo piano. The 29-page score can last as long as 25 minutes in performance. Scholars agree on its quality. Tilbury argues it is Cardew's "finest" work, and fellow British composer and devoted communist Alan Bush (1900-1995) stated he "thought it was full of invention, with a range of expression and variety of effect which was most impressive."[489] Hopkins cites *Thälmann Variations* alongside Rzewski's works in a list of suggested repertoire related to social movements.[490]

Cardew composed *Thälmann Variations* while he lived in Berlin intermittently in 1973 and 1974, and although he did not indicate there was a connection, there is enough evidence to suggest that living in Berlin and associating with local German communists is likely what exposed him to the mythology of Ernst Thälmann. In January 1973, Cardew took a position as artist in residence in Berlin as part of the Künstlerprogramm of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).[491] He worked there for most of 1973 and left in January of 1974, about seven months before completing the *Variations.*[492] His private journal reveals the extent of his political commitment during these years and how he believed his art should serve this agenda. In May 1973, he jotted these notes:

> What are the themes that any artist worth his salt has to tackle today? Fascism. War. Revolution. Socialism. Are there other themes? Yes - human relationships, the family, work, science. But in the present circumstances these are subsidiary and should be linked to the four main themes. How should these themes be treated? Positively - so that the artist can actually take up his real role as an instrument of enlightenment and progress, as

[489]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 719, 731-32; Bush's quote comes from a personal letter to Cardew dated 1976, which Tilbury quotes in a footnote.

[490]Hopkins, 102.

[491]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 658.

[492]Ibid.

> a factor for uniting the ordinary working people to take up their destiny and exert themselves for the forward march of humanity. Go into the themes in more detail. Underlying all of them is the crisis, the class struggle. Democracy. Peace. The working class. The social order. Military in art. Sensitivity in art. Breath in art. Scientificness [sic] in art. Partisanship in art. Truth and Objectivity in art.[493]

These ideas and questions expose the bedrock of Cardew's ideology that led to the *Variations* (as well as all Cardew's future output). He was searching for meaning and relevance in his music, and "fascism, war, revolution, and socialism" were his priorities. Communist Party ideology reinforced his conception that everything he did in his life needed to support the cause of "uniting the ordinary working people to take up their destiny and exert themselves for the forward march of humanity." Communism exalts "the working class," and therefore Cardew felt his life also needed to exalt it. By extension, his music can be understood in the same terms as more than an artistic statement and as something which simultaneously elevates the working class and fights fascism. For East Germany in 1973, Ernst Thälmann represented all these ideals, and was therefore the perfect subject for Cardew to amplify through his next solo piano work.

To appreciate why Thälmann (pictured in Figure 5.1) was still so highly revered in Germany in the 1970s requires an understanding of the history of communism in Germany leading up to WWII. Scholar Russel Lemmons states that

> Thälmann was chairman of the KPD [German Communist Party] in the final years of the Weimar Republic. A staunch opponent of National Socialism, Thälmann came to stand for the KPD's struggle against fascism. Imprisoned during the Third Reich, he was idolized by Communist International propaganda as representative of all those suffering under the Nazi yoke. Murdered in Buchenwald [concentration camp] in 1944, Thälmann assumed a critical role in the legitimizing narrative of the postwar East German communist party and state.[494]

[493]Ibid., 669-70.

[494]Russel Lemmons, "'Germany's Eternal Son:' The Genesis of the Ernst Thälmann Myth, 1930-1950," *German Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (May 2009): 343, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40574804.

Figure 5.1. Image of Ernst Thälmann speaking at a rally in Berlin, 1930. Lebendiges Museum Online, German Historical Museum.

Thälmann's imprisonment in 1933 and his 1944 martyrdom under fascist rule led to German communists idolizing him for decades to come. This is further supported by Norman LaPorte who says that in an early biography, Thälmann's "memory was used to personify a true 'son of the people', who had been born into a socialist family and whose political experience alongside ordinary workers in Hamburg's docks had forged his class consciousness."[495] Many songs were composed about Thälmann following his imprisonment for use at Communist Party rallies in Germany and then all over Europe and Russia as communists fled Germany in exile.

[495]Norman LaPorte, "'Legends have a tenacious life': Ernst Thälmann, the First World War and memory in the GDR," *Twentieth Century Communism* 17, no. 17 (Sept. 2019): 10, Accessed October 22, 2020, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A626122249/GPS?u=ndacad_58105ztrn&sid=GPS&xid=674eaf12.

Cardew uses three of the songs from that anti-fascist labor movement in his *Thälmann Variations*.

Another factor contributing to the Thälmann mythology was that, following World War II, the Soviet government justified their occupation of Germany by glorifying Thälmann.[496] His mythology was manifested in vast artistic output, including films, novels, plays, poetry, cantatas, paintings, and memorials.[497] Cardew's choice of Ernst Thälmann as the subject for his *Variations* makes sense in light of this ideologically-infused creative vein pulsing in East Germany.

Why would an English composer create a work with such intense anti-fascist themes in Germany in 1974? One possible answer is the prevailing spirit of left-wing protest that thrived in West Germany during the late 1960's and into the 1970s. The most extreme example of this was the Red Army Faction (RAF), also known as Baader-Meinhof, a militant, far-left, anti-imperialist, and anti-fascist organization active from 1967 to 1998.[498] The RAF enacted bombings and murdered state officials while its leaders became icons.[499] Some members of the public were sympathetic to the RAF, secretly harboring members across West Germany.[500] In the midst of this public sympathy came the West German publication of *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum* (1974) by Heinrich Böll.[501] A veiled autobiography, it tells the fictional story of a woman questioned by the police for harboring a RAF member and as a result has her life destroyed by the press.[502] The book was made into a movie the following year in West Germany,

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[496]Lemmons, "'Germany's Eternal Son:', 350-51.

[497]Ibid.

[498]Joanne Wright, *Terrorist Propaganda: The Red Army Faction and the Provisional IRA, 1968-86* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 26-27.

[499]Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the RAF* trans. by Anthea Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xvi-xix.

[500]Ibid.

[501]Heinrich Böll, *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum: or: How Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead* Leila Vennewitz, trans. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

[502]*The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta (Ciné International, 1975) released by Criterion Collection, 2003, DVD.

demonstrating a general sympathy for the RAF and free speech.[503] So much of Cardew's his anti-imperialist and anti-fascist rhetoric of this era matches that of these left-wing extremists. The violent protest dominating West Germany in the early 1970s could help to explain why an English composer would create a work in Berlin that promotes anti-fascism and communism.

***Thälmann Variations*: The Themes**

Thälmann Variations is divided into three main sections. In the first, Cardew works with three different songs written in the 1930s by different composers and lyricists, each with a common theme: the exaltation of Ernst Thälmann and the German communist labor movement which Thälmann led. The second section comprises three slow variations, and the third features lively march variations.

The three themes in the *Variations* are 1.) *Thälmannlied*, op. 33 (1934) by Paul Arma (1905-1987) with text by Erich Weinert (1890-1953), 2.) *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*, op. 28, no. 3, (1930) by Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) with text by Erich Weinert, and 3.) *Libérons Thaelmann*, op. 138 (1934) with both music and text by Charles Koechlin (1867-1950). I will discuss these songs before a thorough examination of *Thälmann Variations* because they need to be understood independently for what they meant to Cardew historically, musically, and ideologically.

The first and primary theme Cardew uses in *Thälmann Variations* is *Thälmannlied,* op. 33, composed in 1934 by Paul Arma with text by Erich Weinert (shown in Figure 5.2). Arma was a French composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist of Hungarian birth. After time studying in Budapest with Bartók, he settled in Berlin in 1931.[504] The advent of the Nazi regime in 1933

[503]Ibid.

[504]Vera Lampert, "Arma, Paul [Weisshaus, Imre]," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.01260.

forced him to move to Paris, where he collected French folksongs and resistance songs.[505] He also wrote many of his own anti-fascist fight songs.[506]

Arma composed *Thälmannlied* while in exile in Paris and it "became a symbol for the fight against fascism in 1930s Paris" and "contributed to the introduction of the communist spirit in France."[507] In political gatherings, the song served two purposes: as entertainment to provide "a contrast to the political speech by way of change in medium" and also "the opportunity to involve the audience by singing."[508]

Erich Weinert was a German communist poet who specialized in satire and was an outspoken agitator.[509] He fled the Nazi regime to the U.S.S.R. where he wrote the words to *Thälmannlied*. Weinert portrays Thälmann as the idealized socialist German in *Thälmannlied* which describes a battle in which Thälmann led the fight against the Nazis, and that, despite his imprisonment, the world will rise up to liberate him.[510] The chorus militantly proclaims, "For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!"

This last phrase, "Raise your fist!", is of great significance to the story of Thälmann and in *Thälmann Variations*. A raised fist is the symbol used by the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (Alliance of Red Front-Fighters, or RFB) led by Thälmann before his imprisonment.[511] Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 illustrate the importance of the fist as a symbol of the labor movement.

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[505]Lampert, "Arma, Paul."

[506]Robin Arma, "Paul Arma: Fight Songs," accessed March 17, 2022, http://www.robinarma.com/crbst_66.html.

[507]Langenbruch, *Topographien*, 287; Langenbruch, *Medium Kampflied*, 151.

[508]Langenbruch, *Medium Kampflied*, 150-151.

[509]Theodore Huebener, *The Literature of East Germany* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1970), 34-36.

[510]Ibid.

[511]Friedbert Mühldorfer, "Roter Frontkämpferbund, 1924-1929," in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*, April 6, 2007, accessed November 27, 2020, https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Roter_Frontkämpferbund,_1924-1929.

Figure 5.2. Image of members of the Red Front Fighters' League with fists raised, Germany, around 1928. Lebendiges Museum Online, German Historical Museum.

Figure 5.3. Image of the tip of a flag of the Red Front Fighters' League. Lebendiges Museum Online, German Historical Museum.

It helps to be familiar with what happens musically in *Thälmannlied* before discussing how Cardew uses it in *Thälmann Variations*. I have not been able to obtain a score for *Thälmannlied*, so I created my own in Figure 5.4. My transcription comes from a 1936 recording

of the German singer Ernst Busch.[512] The song is written in the key of G major in a march style with simple instrumentation of solo voice, piano, brass, and saxophone. It is 12 measures long and set to four verses which can be found in full in German and English in Appendix A. It is characterized by a singable melody over simple harmony. This design is intentional, as it needed to be easily learned and sung at Labor Party meetings and in public protests. It is written in a folksong style; as Langenbruch illustrates, it closely resembles the traditional song *Auld Lang Syne* melodically and rhythmically.[513] Langenbruch draws a connection, saying "if we consider that Arma studied with Bela Bartók and later worked as collector and editor of international folksong, it is not surprising that his *Thälmann song* can be viewed to belong to his protest songs that use folksong-like melodies and a ballad-like sound to convey political content."[514] Langenbruch also describes how effectively the final melodic shape of *Thälmannlied* translates the gesture of a raised fist into music and "gives the song a motion in progress."[515] This symbolic musical gesture will prove to be of great importance to Cardew as my analysis of *Thälmann Variations* will show.

[512]Ernst Busch (vocals), *Das Thälmann-Lied*, recorded 1936, accessed September 12, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ZxYtHwYi0.

[513]Langenbruch, *Topographien*, 288.

[514]Ibid.

[515]Langenbruch, *Medium Kampflied*, 151.

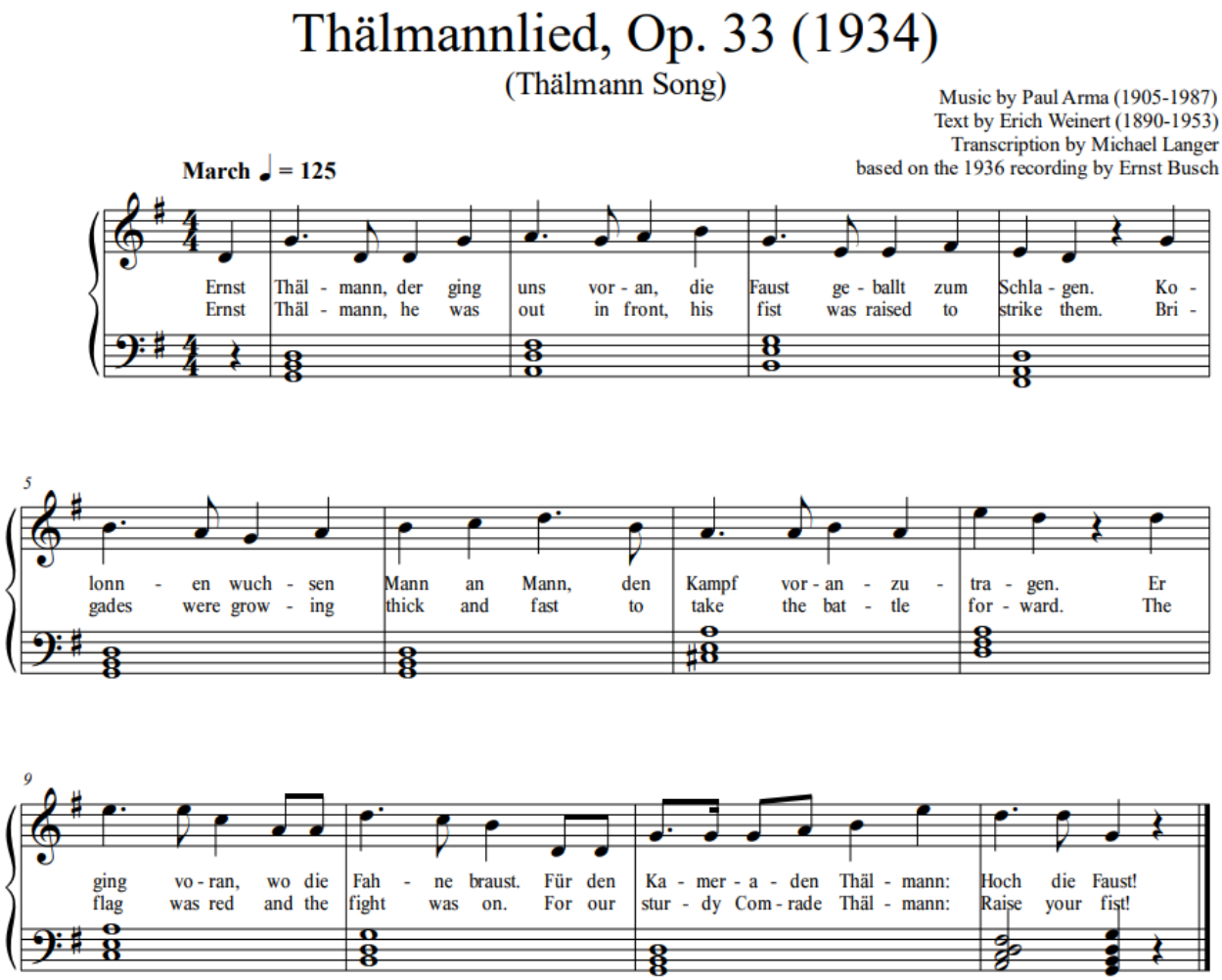

Figure 5.4. *Thälmannlied*, Op. 33 (1934) by Paul Arma and Erich Weinert.

The second theme Cardew uses in *Thälmann Variations* is *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* (The Secret March), op. 28, no. 3, composed in 1930 by Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) with text by Erich Weinert (seen in Figure 5.5). Eisler's life and political ideology are outlined in Chapter 1. He wrote *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* in Berlin three years before the Nazis came to power, resulting in his exile to France. Weinert's complete German text and an English translation can be found in Appendix A. To summarize, the lyrics are a rally cry to German working-class coal miners

and steel workers to rise up and take arms against fascist armies.[516] The chorus triumphantly proclaims how the "socialist world republic will rise from the ruins of old society!" Unlike the other two songs in Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*, Eisler's *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* makes no mention of Thälmann, who, in 1930, was the leader of the labor movement but would not be imprisoned for another three years. It does, however, share the same theme of rallying the working class to battle fascism.

I helps to be familiar with what happens musically in *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* before discussing how Cardew uses it in *Thälmann Variations*. Figure 5.5 shows the melody and lyrics from *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*. It is written in the key of B-flat minor in 6/8 meter and marked *Lebhaft bewegt* (lively and agitated). The refrain is set in 2/4 and is performed at a slower tempo.[517] This is the longest and most musically complex of the three songs in *Thälmann Variations* with two verses and a refrain, both 34 measures long. The harmony is highly chromatic with many half-diminished chords, augmented fifths, and chromatic passing tones. Ernst Busch's 1960 recording with piano is at a brisk dotted-quarter = 170, reminiscent of Schubert's *Erlkönig* (1815).[518] Eisler's setting in a minor key, his use of chromaticism, and a weak tonal center help to reflect the sense of anxiety and dramatic urgency in Weinert's text. The music rises to a further sense of urgency in the refrain, where the melody sits in the higher range, further amplifying the increased sense of urgency in the violent lyrics which call workers of the

[516]Margaret R. Jackson, "Workers, Unite!: The Political Songs of Hanns Eisler, 1926-1932," (DMA treatise, Florida State University, 2003), 39, https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:182074/datastream/PDF/view.

[517]Ernst Busch, "Der heimliche Aufmarsch (The Secret Deployment)," on *Ernst Busch, 1960: Live in Berlin*, Berlin Cabaret 0014692BCB, Jan. 2010, streaming audio, accessed July 5, 2022, https://ndsu-naxosmusiclibrary-com.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/catalogue/item.asp?cid=0014692BCB; "Hanns Eisler - Der heimliche Aufmarsch - Ernst Busch Chor," scene from *Solidarity Song: The Hanns Eisler Story* (Rhombus Media and ARTE/ZDF-German Television Network, 1996), accessed June 5, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8S0I0J_fXLo.

[518]Busch, "Der heimliche Aufmarsch."

world to arm themselves with guns to annihilate the fascists. There may be an intentional invocation of the *Dies Irae* melody in the refrain. Figure 5.6 shows the melody in mm. 35-38 which closely resembles the first two phrases of the *Dies Irae*, shown in Figure 5.7. Measure 35 of *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* follows the same shape as the first phrase of the *Dies Irae*, which is repeated as the main motive of the refrain.

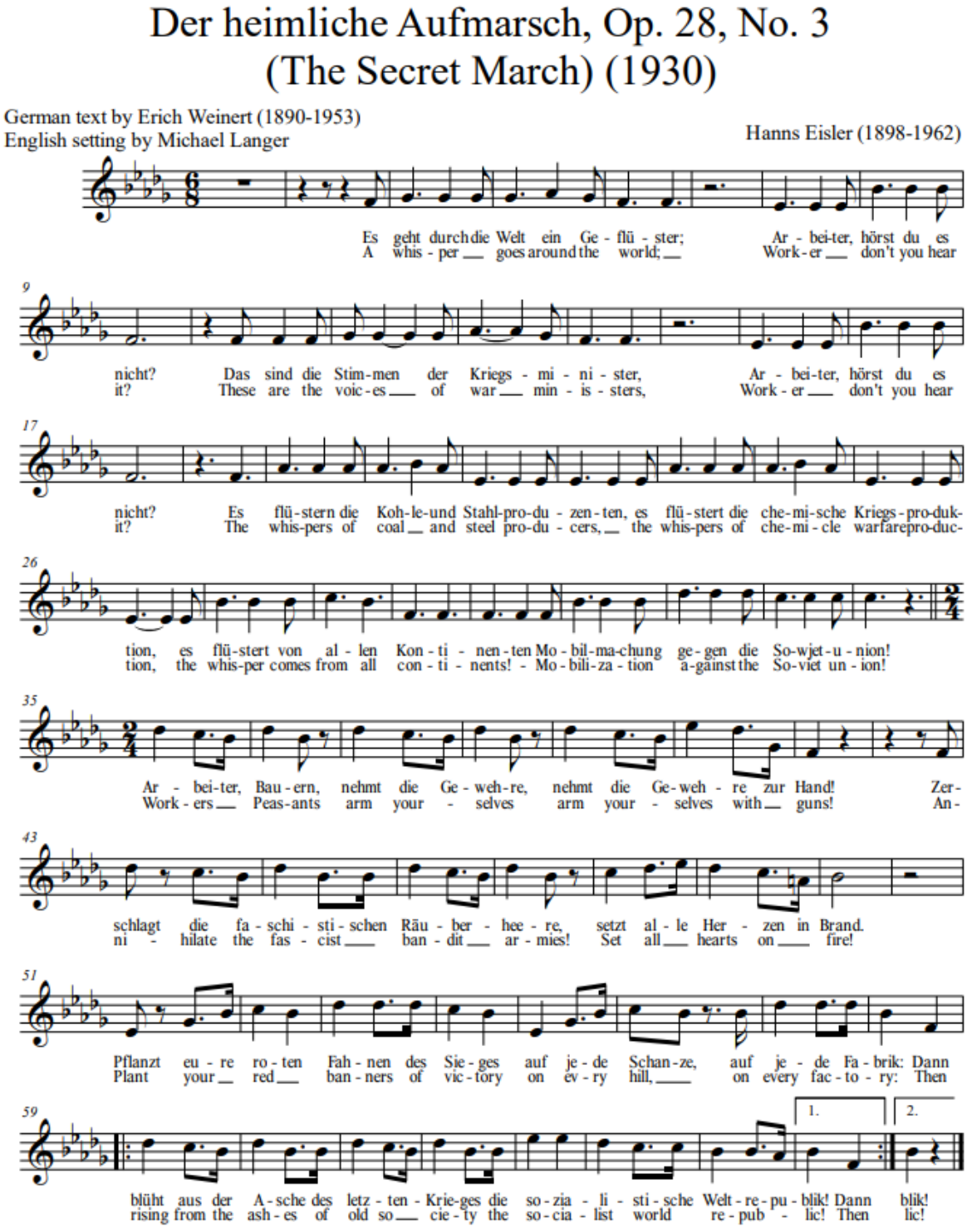

Figure 5.5. Melody of *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* (The Secret March), op. 28, no. 3 by Hanns Eisler and text by Erich Weinert.[519]

[519]Based on Hanns Eisler, *Ausgewählte Lieder V: Lieder, Balladen, Chansons für Gesang und Klavier* (Leipzig, Germany: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), 12-15. English translation from Song Lyrics, "Hanns

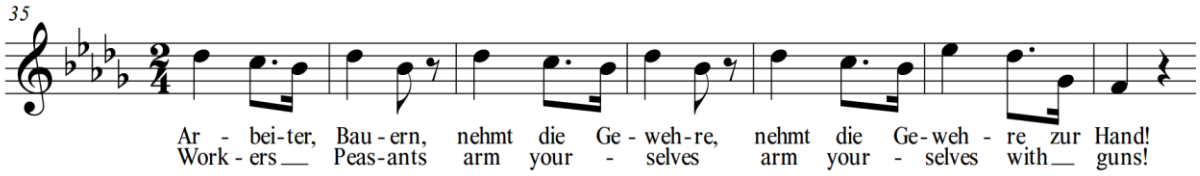

Figure 5.6. *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* mm. 35-41.

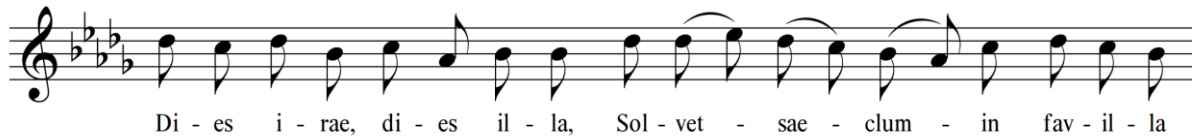

Figure 5.7. First two phrases of *Dies Irae*.

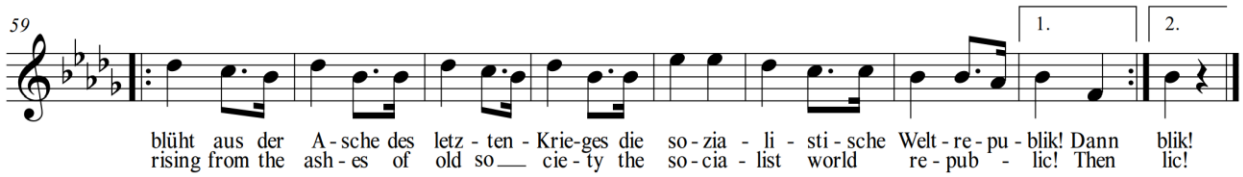

Figure 5.8. *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* mm. 59-66.

Additionally, Figure 5.8 shows how the phrase shape in mm. 63-66 is similar to the second phrase of the *Dies Irae.* Eisler's invocation of the *Dies Irae* reflects Weinert's text which calls workers of the world to take up arms to "annihilate the fascist bandit armies!" and portrays an old world destroyed and "rising from the ashes of old society." These words pass judgement on the established order and call for its destruction, reflecting the way the *Dies Irae* describes the final judgement which will dissolve the world in ashes.

The third theme Cardew uses in *Thälmann Variations* is *Libérons Thaelmann* (Free Thaelmann), op. 138, composed in 1934 by Charles Koechlin. Koechlin was a French composer, teacher and musicologist who studied with Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire where he developed an interest in modal music and folksong and later became a central figure in French political

Eisler: Der Heimliche Aufmarsch Lyrics," accessed October 23, 2020, http://www .songlyrics.com/hanns-eisler/der-heimliche-aufmarsch-lyrics/.

artistic culture, associating with Debussy, Ravel, and Milhaud.[520] Although never an official party member, he was sympathetic to communist ideals in the 1930s, which is reflected in his 'music for the people' and his work for the musical committee of the Association France–URSS.[521] In 1934, Koechlin was commissioned to write a song to protest Thälmann's imprisonment by the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, or AEAR), a group responsible for bringing Soviet socialist realism to the consciousness of France's artistic elite and which engaged in artistic projects with manifest left-wing political themes.[522] Koechlin produced *Libérons Thaelmann*, which he described as a "fiercely revolutionary" song.[523] The text expresses a theme of international proletarian solidarity, calling the working class to unite against fascism. It also places the communist leader Thälmann at the center, reflecting the socialist realist tendencies of the AEAR. Like the directive to "raise you fist!" in *Thälmannlied*, *Libérons Thaelmann* includes the words "Soldiers have their fists outstretched." My research has not resulted in a complete score, so I have relied on those reprinted in Langenbruch and Moore.[524] Figure 5.9 shows my score based mainly on Moore's with added lyrics from Langenbruch. Only verses 3 and 4 have been available and are included below.

> Verse 3
> Listen in Shanghai, listen in New York, prepare for battle.
> Dockers and coolies, marching tirelessly
> Red Front! Thaelmann!
>
> Verse 4
> Listen in Paris, listen in Provence, unite in action.
> Miners, Peasant Workers, Soldiers have their fists outstretched.

[520]Robert Orledge, "Koechlin, Charles (Louis Eugène)," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, 2001-, https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15248; Moore, "Socialist Realism," 489-92.

[521]Orledge, "Koechlin."

[522]Moore, "Socialist Realism," 489, 475-77.

[523]Ibid. 489.

[524]Langenbruch, *Topographien*, 291; Moore, "Socialist Realism," 491.

Red Front! Thaelmann![525]

Much like *Thälmannlied, Libérons Thaelmann* functioned in two ways at political rallies: both as entertainment and as a vehicle for audience participation.[526] It became hugely popular in Paris. Langenbruch quotes a 1935 Paris newspaper article that described how *Libérons Thaelmann* was sung by a choir along with other French and Russian workers' songs and that "the song had to be repeated again and again, and the entire hall rose from their seats and joined in on the song, Libérez Thälmann! Befreit Thälmann!—a grandiose conclusion to this opening rally."[527] At a later outdoor rally it was "sung enthusiastically by the tens of thousands."[528] Moore cites the left-wing music critic Pierre Kaldor, who in 1938 at the height of the Popular Front "grant[ed] *Libérons Thaelmann* seminal status, claiming that it set the standard for modern, revolutionary music in France."[529] The incredible success of *Libérons Thaelmann* as a musical-political expression explains why it appealed to Cardew.

It helps to be familiar with what happens musically in *Libérons Thaelmann* (shown in Figure 5.9) before discussing how Cardew uses it in *Thälmann Variations*. The harmony is modal and is not functional. The melody and harmony gradually rise in a stepwise planing motion throughout the ten-measure phrase. The harmony is mostly built with fourths and fifths, often in parallel movement. The modal and parallel harmony gives this song an impressionist quality. This was not only an artistic choice, but just as Arma chose to make *Thälmannlied* sound like a traditional folksong, Koechlin chose to use modality because of social and political concerns, believing that "modal music, thanks to its intrinsic ties to folksong, constituted a

[525]Langenbruch, *Topographien*, 291; Moore, "Socialist Realism," 491, my own translation of the original French lyrics. Dockers are shipyard workers. Coolies are south-Asian low-wage laborers, now considered a derogatory term.

[526]Ibid., 290, 292.

[527]Ibid., 291.

[528]Ibid.

[529]Moore, "Socialist Realism," 492.

shared musical heritage that could facilitate a musical and political rapprochement between modern composers and the masses."[530]

Many musical elements reveal that Koechlin designed *Libérons Thaelmann* with a political function for communal gatherings of amateur singers.[531] A unique element in *Libérons Thaelmann* is the dramatic placement of the shouted text "Rot Front!" (Red front!) at the musical climax of the song. This phrase—"Rot Front!"—was the shortened name of the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (Alliance of Red Front-Fighters, or RFB) led by Thälmann before his imprisonment.[532] Langenbruch concludes that "its move towards the melodic and textual climax 'Thaelmann!' expresses something forceful and immediate that is reinforced by the previous inserted spoken stanza:" Furthermore, Langenbruch identifies the design for amateur political singers in the "extremely short stanzas and the chanted rhythm [which] seem to have been inspired by the speech song then commonly heard in musical performances at political events."[533] While *Libérons Thaelmann* does have a simple melody and repetitive rhythm, and it was certainly popular in its day, it also has a somewhat modern impressionist sound which sets it apart from the other two songs in Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*. Like *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*, the modern style makes *Libérons Thaelmann* sound more of its time than a folksong would. This quality carries over into Cardew's *Thälmann Variations*.

[530]Moore, "Socialist Realism," 490.
[531]Ibid.
[532]Mühldorfer, "Roter Frontkämpferbund."
[533]Langenbruch, *Topographien*, 288.

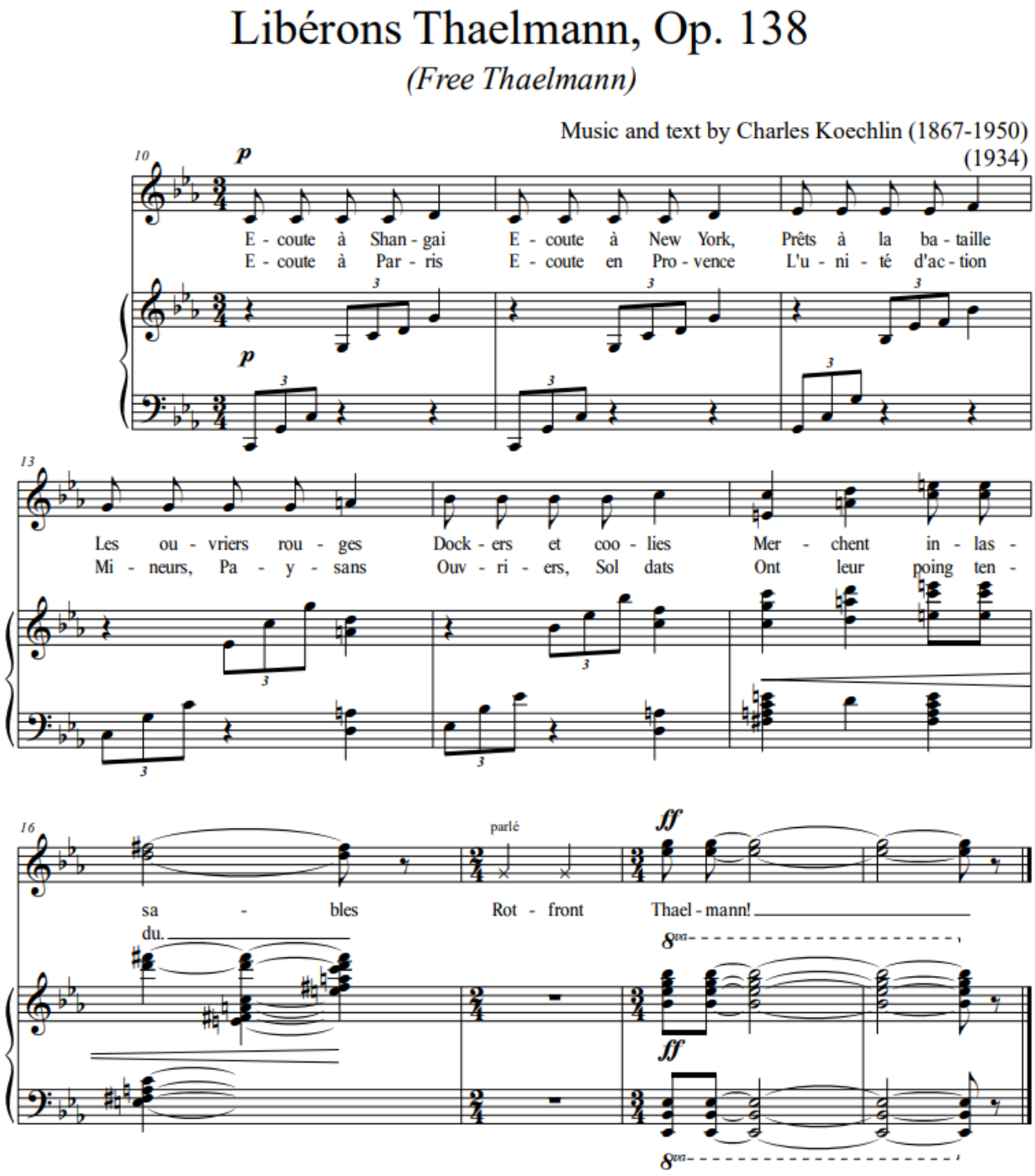

Figure 5.9. *Libérons Thaelmann,* op. 138 by Charles Koechlin.

How did these three songs—*Thälmannlied*, *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*, and *Libérons Thaelmann*—function in the anti-fascist labor movement and how did they exhibit political power? Recall from Chapter 1 Rosenthal and Flacks' definitions of how protest music serves a

social movement. These three songs served several political functions: conversion and recruitment in a safe space, mobilization, serving the committed, and promoting solidarity. Also recall from Chapter 1 Mattern's three forms of political action through music. These three songs are pragmatic because members of a community—the Communist Labor Party—used the songs in meetings and rallies to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative efforts to address them.

Foucault's philosophy of power structures can be used as a lens to better understand how these three songs were part of a resistance movement in the 1930s and why Cardew deemed them still suitable in the 1970s for resisting fascism. Foucault asserted that power is held by all members of an institution, and resistance is necessary if participation becomes involuntary.[534] Therefore, resistance was necessary as fascism became increasingly powerful in Germany, threatening the goals of the German Communist Labor Party, represented by Thälmann. These three songs were a part of the labor movement's resistance as they fought from within the institution of their own government. As the power of the Nazi party grew in 1933 it outlawed all resistance, and therefore the resistance came from other countries, especially France. At this point, the Foucault conception of an institution achieved a global level where citizens of other countries had to resist advancing fascism before it could dominate the entire globe. As for the songs composed in France, they functioned as a part of this global resistance, calling the world's working class to rise up against the advancing threat. These three songs functioned in the anti-fascist labor movement, exhibited political power, and acted as resistance in the 1930s. Therefore, Cardew deemed them still suitable in the 1970s for resisting fascism through his *Thälmann Variations*.

[534]Gutting and Oksala, "Michel Foucault."

***Thälmann Variations*: Analysis**

For the sake of clarity, I will first explain my terminology and shorthand in discussing Cardew's *Thälmann Variations* (from here on shortened to *Variations*). The work is divided into what Cardew simply labels as three *sections*. The score is divided into sections by double bar lines and each section can stand alone as a complete entity. I will refer to each of the *sections* as *parts* because I use the term *section* to refer to each variation instead of Cardew's usage as a division of the entire work. Cardew did not include measure numbers in the score, and so I have assigned my own numbering system where each part begins at measure 1. I also shorten the song titles as follows: *Aufmarsch = Der heimliche Aufmarsch*; *Libérons = Libérons Thaelmann*; and *Thälmannlied* as is.

Cardew's choice to use tonality and traditional forms in his music of the 1970s can be seen as a part of postmodernism and therefore a form of resistance. This is especially true in his *Variations*. Variation form was avoided by the total serialists and experimentalists—the world of Cardew's training in the 1950s and 60s.[535] For Cardew, the act of using variation form was against the principles he learned studying with Stockhausen. To be clear, variation form had not gone away in the twentieth century. Early modernists like Schoenberg, Copland, Carter (1908-2012), and Stravinsky (1882-1971) wrote variations from the 1920s to the 60s. Cardew's contemporaries wrote variations as well, such as Kagel's (1931-2008) *Variationen ohne Fuge* for orchestra (1972), Tippett's (1905-1998) Piano Sonata no. 3 (1973), and Rochberg's *Partita-Variations* (1976). The act of writing variations was not unique, but it was an act of resistance to abandon his training in serialism to use what the Darmstadt school would have deemed outdated. As my analysis will demonstrate, Cardew, like many other postmodernists, had an 'anything

[535]Elaine Sisman, "Variations," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2001-), https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29050.

goes' attitude towards the music in *Variations*. Everything from Baroque to modern techniques are included.

It is difficult to label the type of variations in Cardew's *Variations*. There are elements of "melodic-outline variations" where the melody is obvious and often embellished and there are elements of "formal-outline variations" where only the theme's form and phrase structure remain, and then there are additionally elements of "fantasy" or "free variations" where thematic motives are developed and there is a programmatic feature.[536] Cardew's *Variations* are truly a hybridization of all three types.

There are other unique components to the structure of *Variations*. In a set of variations, typically a single theme is developed, but Cardew includes three themes, already discussed above. They are, however, not treated to equal amounts of variation. *Aufmarsch* and *Libérons* only appear in part 1, meanwhile *Thälmannlied* takes up twice as much time and is the only theme developed in parts 2 and 3 (see Table 3.1 for a visual overview of the entire work). Also unusual is that *Thälmannlied* goes through many variations before it is presented unaltered. Often, the theme returns in a relatively original form at the end of the variation cycle, but Cardew fragments it in the final variation. One could argue that Cardew's "theme" is in fact extra-musical. The overwhelming "theme" that ties *Variations* together is the history and ideology of the 1930s labor movement and 1970s anti-fascism. The work can be seen as treating that ideology to the variation process and so the result is that *Variations* is a synthesis of music, politics, and ideology combined and reinterpreted through the prism of Cardew's voice.

Cardew provides brief program notes in the score which help to explain his intentions and the work's structure. Regarding part 1, he writes that "the *Variations* celebrate the proletarian

[536]Sisman, "Variations."

hero Ernst Thälmann" and references Thälmann's 1933 imprisonment and 1944 murder by the Nazis in the Buchenwald concentration camp.[537] This makes it clear that Cardew viewed Thälmann as a communist and anti-fascist martyr and that this work serves as a monument to the labor movement as well as a vehicle to express his ideology to his audience. He continues,

> "The theme of the variations is the *Thälmann Song*, written in 1934. But I think the tune is an old one, hence the pastoral opening. The whole first section is loosely historical: the pastoral passages at the beginning are interrupted by a militant workers' march which leads to Hanns Eisler's tune *Rumors of War*, symbolizing the vitality that Thälmann infused into the German workers' movement. Then Charles Koechlin's *Libérons Thaelmann* is used to describe the cataclysm that overtook the German workers in 1933."[538]

This reveals that he designed the first part with a programmatic historical "theme" where *Thälmannlied* represents the idealism of the communist labor movement, *Aufmarsch* represents Thälmann's vitality, and *Libérons* represents the destructive forces of the Nazi party. Cardew never identifies Arma as the composer of *Thälmannlied* and the program notes imply that he believed the tune—"an old one"—to be a traditional folksong.[539]

Cardew's notes for part 2 state it is "three slow variations: songs of sadness, warmth and dignity commemorating the countless men and women who have given their lives in the fight against fascism."[540] This demonstrates he is not only composing in honor of Thälmann or even the broader labor movement, but for all people who have stood up against fascism. Cardew's concern is the entire anti-fascist movement that he believed Thälmann embodied.

Cardew's notes refer to part 3 as a "complex 'march of events' dedicated to the present struggle of the German communists against the re-emergence of fascism."[541] This suggests that

[537]Cardew, *Thälmann Variations*, program notes.
[538]Ibid.
[539]It would appear that Arma's folksong design was effective in convincing Cardew of its timelessness.
[540]Cardew, *Thälmann Variations*, program notes.
[541]Ibid.

Cardew was not only writing about Thälmann or a historical event, but also about what he believed was a current fight against fascism in Germany. Thälmann and the events surrounding him spoke to Cardew's current world affairs in the mid-1970s. In his diary in 1974, Cardew wrote that "such full-blooded treatment of the [Thälmann] theme brought 'bolshevisation to the Party,'" and of the final section he wrote that it represented "continuing Thälmann's work."[542] Altogether, Cardew's diary and program notes make clear his intention for *Variations* to express his ideology through music.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of *Variations*. Each part, variation section, and measure number are listed corresponding to the prevailing pitch center, meter, and theme of that variation, as well as a description of significant events and characteristics.

[542]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 722.

Table 5.1. Analysis overview of *Thälmann Variations*

Section	Measure	Pitch Center	Meter	Theme	Description/Characteristics
1A	1-36	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Pastoral mood, melodic rhythm and harmony altered
1B	37-48	Gm	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Harmonic variation, tune not present, rhythmic unison line in alternating hands, wedge shape
1C	49-76	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	2-part invention texture, driving rhythm, tune imbedded but not obvious
1D	77-100	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Embellished melody, lyrical with increasingly subdivided rhythmic figures, Chopin-esque, glissandi
1E	101-115	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Energetic, first appearance of unaltered original tune in unison doubled octaves, repeated "fist!" motive
1F	115-127	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	2-voice texture, tune imbedded, martellato, energetic
1G	127-141	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Double octaves, embellished tune, triumphant spirit
1H	142-223	Bbm	6/8	*Aufmarsch*	March feel, quiet, anxious driving rhythm, tune intact, harmony slightly altered
1I	224-297	Bbm	6/8	*Aufmarsch*	Anxious driving rhythm continues, tune intact, harmony significantly altered, triumphant ending
1J	298-313	Cm	3/4	*Libérons*	Quiet driving rhythm, tune intact, harmony slightly altered
1K	314-338	Cm	3/4 (2/4)	*Libérons*	Louder driving rhythm, tune intact and doubled in octaves, harmony slightly altered
1L	339-357	Cm	3/4 (2/4)	*Libérons*	Crescendo from very quiet to loud, metric augmentation, harmony slightly altered, fallboard slams
1M	358-384	Cm	3/4	*Libérons*	Trills, tune harmonized with non-functional harmony, tune in canon, repeats of final phrase
2A	1-33	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	3-voice triads in steady eighths, calm and quiet mood, complete tune is broken into 3 parts, tune rhythm slightly altered
2B	34-73	Ab	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Tune in middle voice over simple bass line and offbeat chordal accompaniment, tune intact, soft, warm, dreamy
2C	74-95	A	9/8	Thälmannlied	Reflective, funereal, imbedded diminution of tune,
3A	1-34	G	4/4, 3/4, 9/8	*Thälmannlied*	Lively and resolute, steady eighth driving rhythm, tune imbedded, repeat of "fist!" motive,
3B	35-64	A	12/8	traces of all three?	Galloping rhythm, no tunes recognizable, but motivic traces of each tune present, rising lines
3C	65-76	A	39/4	*Thälmannlied*	Galloping rhythm augments, tune in diminution imbedded into texture, "fist" motive is augmented
3D	77-100	Eb	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Reflective mood, bell chimes lead to 2-voice texture, tune fragmented and transposed, tune rhythm is intact
3E	101-131	G	4/4	*Thälmannlied*	Coda, broad tempo,"fist!" motive repeated at various intervals, complete tune in octaves accompanied by ascending octave scales, interrupted by tune fragments. Triumphant ending

There are a wide variety of variation procedures in the *Variations*. Table 5.2 provides a list of the variation procedures Cardew employs in *Variations*. The procedures are grouped by melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic character, further broken down into sub-types with corresponding locations in the score. There are several unique phenomena which are listed last. This is not meant to be exhaustive, and of course there are hybrid variations which combine different procedures.

***Thälmann Variations*: Ideology**

Variations is a work about historical political ideology and is specifically a representation of Cardew's ideology. I have already explained Cardew's personal ideology, the history, ideology, and music of the 1930's German communist labor movement, and the anti-fascism that existed in Germany in the 1970s. Now, in an effort to help explain *Variations* to performers, I will demonstrate how I observe the way ideology manifests in the work and how to interpret the music to honor Cardew's intentions and create the most successful performance.

Above, I illuminated the ideology of the three songs included in *Variations*. To recap, the lyrics of each song call the working class to rise up against fascism, often using violent battle imagery. *Thälmannlied* and *Libérons* specifically praise Thälmann as a victorious leader. All three also functioned as a form of resistance to fascist forces in the 1930s. One might question how much power these songs have in a purely instrumental form, as Cardew has set them in his *Variations*. Recall Chapter 1 where I outlined Rosenthal and Flacks's three phases of a protest song's life: transmission, reception, and context. The transmission phase was the inherent intention in the composer's music and lyrics which I described above. The reception phase was when the people singing the songs were a communist working-class audience already opposed to fascist rule. The context phase was an environment of increasing fascist totalitarian rule, either approaching war or in wartime. In the context phase, members of a movement can assign new meaning to a song. In fact, Rosenthal and Flacks assert that lyrics are not that significant or the most important element of a song.[543] Therefore, despite the absence of lyrics, the melodies of these three songs take on the ideological weight of not only the lyrics, but also the anti-fascist labor movement.

[543]Rosenthal and Flacks, 39, 44.

Table 5.2. Variation procedures in *Thälmann Variations*

Variation Procedure	Sub-type	Section where it happens
Melodic Variations	Embellishment	1D, mm. 77-92 1G, mm. 130-131
	Imbedding in texture	1C, mm. 61-76 1F, mm. 115-127 2C, mm. 74-95 3C, mm. 65-76
	Repetition	1L, mm. 339-346
	Fragmentation	2A, mm. 1-33 3D, mm. 83-95 3E, mm. 101-131
	Retrograde of fragments	2C, mm. 83, 91, 93
	Interrupt tune	2A, mm. 17-21
	Tune unaccompanied in unison	1E, mm. 101-112 1G, mm. 127-129
	Canon	1M, mm. 369-374
	Motivic development of ^5-1 “raise your fist!”	1E, mm. 112-115 3A, mm. 12-15, 30-34 3C, mm. 65-76 3E, mm. 101-131
	keep rhythm of the tune but alter pitches	1A, mm. 1-35
	octave doubling	1G, mm. 127-141 1K, mm. 314-338 3E, mm. 101-131
Rhythmic Variations	Altering duration of individual notes	1A, mm. 1-35
	Augmentation	3C, mm. 65-76
	Diminution	2C, mm. 74-77 3A, mm. 18-30 3C, mm. 65-76
	Use only rhythm of the tune	3D, mm. 83-95 3E, mm. 101-108
Harmonic Variations	Slight alterations: added diatonic notes, inversions, embellishments	1A, mm. 1-35 1I, m. 297 1J, mm. 298-313
	Significant alterations: brand new harmony	1B, mm. 37-48 1H, mm. 190-46 1I, mm. 224-248, 266-269 1M, mm. 358-384
	Harmony alone without obvious tune or imbedding	1C, mm. 49-60
Other Phenomena	Glissandos	1D, mm. 97-98
	Altered dynamics	1H, mm. 142-173 1J, mm. 298-313
	Fallboard slams	1L, mm. 350, 354
	Text Painting	1H, mm. 142-173
	Shifting pitch centers	1M, m. 384
	Rising motives – pitch scheme and scales	Part 2 (entire part) 3B, mm. 35-64

Recall Cardew's ideology in the early 1970s: his communist beliefs led him to compose works which spoke to the common people and served a higher political purpose. That higher purpose was an idyllic classless society in which the working class controls the means of production. This was intensified by a cultural phenomenon in West Germany of militant anti-fascism. There is also the influence of postmodernism which likely motivated him to question his belief in serialism and experimentalism and to turn toward tonality and traditional structural models to convey his message. To Cardew, the public could not be served by modernism from an ivory tower. He could only change the world through a language it understood. His *Variations* are his effort to make a change in society and present his own interpretation of 1930s German communist ideology.

There are countless examples of ideological phenomena in the *Variations* score and even more ways to interpret them. I offer here my own interpretations of how the music symbolizes ideological meaning insofar as it is helpful to performance practice and therefore will limit my discussion to the most significant phenomena. I have modeled my interpretation of Cardew's score on the scholarship on Rzewski's *North American Ballads* outlined in the previous chapter.

I observe three ways in which Cardew communicates ideology in his *Variations*. They are 1.) glorification of the 1930s German communist anti-fascist labor movement, 2.) a call to action, and 3.) a personal ideological interpretation of the 1930s labor movement and its application to 1970s Germany. I provide specific musical examples of each below.

Cardew glorifies the labor movement in several ways: through pastoral settings (e.g. 1A, mm. 1-36 and all of Part 2), driving rhythm and fast tempi (e.g. 1B, mm. 37-48 and 1C mm. 49-76), strengthening a tune through octaves to create a strong, triumphant spirit (e.g. 1G, mm. 127-141 and 1K, mm. 314-338), repetition of fragments (e.g. 1L, mm. 339-346), altering harmony

(1M, m. 358-384), and fallboard slams (1L, m. 350 and 354). Pastoral settings glorify of the labor movement by placing a theme in a calm, non-confrontational musical character, as if to say "there is no need to fight anymore. The battle is won." This symbolizes Cardew's idealism of the movement's ideology. I will illuminate two processes below—altering harmony and fallboard slams—and how Cardew uses them to glorify the labor movement.

On example of Cardew's glorification of the labor movement is in variation 1H, mm. 190-93 (and again in 1I, mm. 266-269), shown in Figure 5.10, where he alters the original harmony of *Aufmarsch*, shown in in Figure 5.11. He changes harmonic course by setting the melody within staccato sforzando G-flat major chords instead of the original B-flat minor. The G-flat major harmony lends a more triumphant feeling, as though looking back at a battle already won, instead of the original song's coming battle.

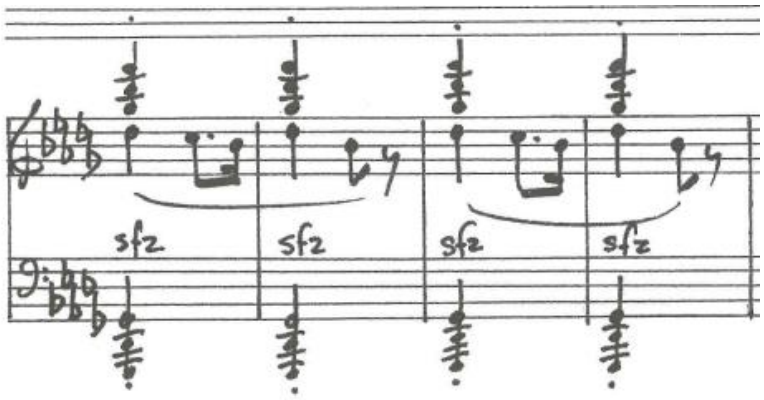

Figure 5.10. *Thälmann Variations* section 1H, mm. 190-93.

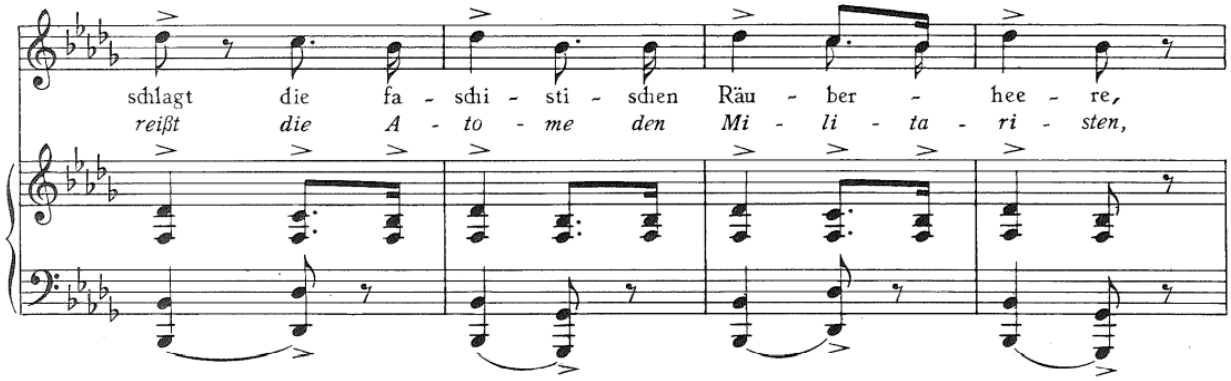

Figure 5.11. *Der heimliche Aufmarsch* mm. 43-46.

Slamming the fallboard is a unique extra-musical component not found anywhere else in the work. As Figure 5.12 shows, the instruction to "slam keyboard lid" for two beats appears in section 1L (m. 350 and 354), a variation on *Libérons*. This is at the point where the original score has the shouted words "Rot Front!" (Red Front!), shown in Figure 5.13. Cardew abstracts the shouted words "Rot Front!" into an explosive percussive sound through the double-slamming of the piano's fallboard, thereby punctuating the driving music with violence both in sound and the performer's action. In so doing, Cardew conveys the violent demands of the people that would have sung Koechlin's song at rallies in the 1930s and communicates his demand for action against fascism in his present day. Cardew said this song "describes the cataclysm that overtook the German workers in 1933."[544] He is simultaneously telling a historical story and using this story and its music to rally activism in his own times. Regarding the performance interpretation of the keyboard slams, the slamming of the fallboard should communicate the militancy of crowds demanding Thälmann's release from prison as well as Cardew's insistence that his audience join his fight against fascism.[545] There is great difficulty in slamming the fallboard so rapidly twice in a row and keeping it in time with the music. The only recordings I have found are both by Rzewski. In his live performance (2009) he pounds his left fist on the fallboard instead of slamming it.[546] This is highly effective and is much easier than slamming the fallboard back and certainly faster than slamming down. Best of all, it displays a literal "outstretched fist"

[544]Cardew, *Thälmann Variations*, program notes.

[545]One might even justify shouting out "Rot Front!" while slamming the fallboard. While there is no evidence to justify a vocalization, I find it in keeping with Cardew's character and the spirit of the work.

[546]Frederic Rzewski, "Play for Today - Cornelius Cardew: The Final Decade," performance of *Thälmann Variations* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, November 21, 2009, accessed June 7, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqTaikz426o.

from the song's lyrics and the symbol of the Red Front. Rzewski's association with Cardew make it likely that his interpretation is in keeping with Cardew's intention.[547]

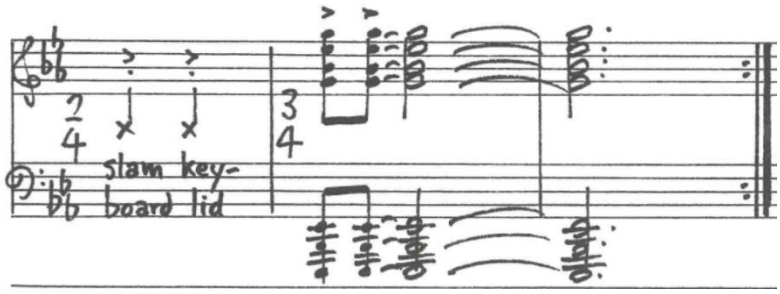

Figure 5.12. *Thälmann Variations* section 1L, m. 350-52.

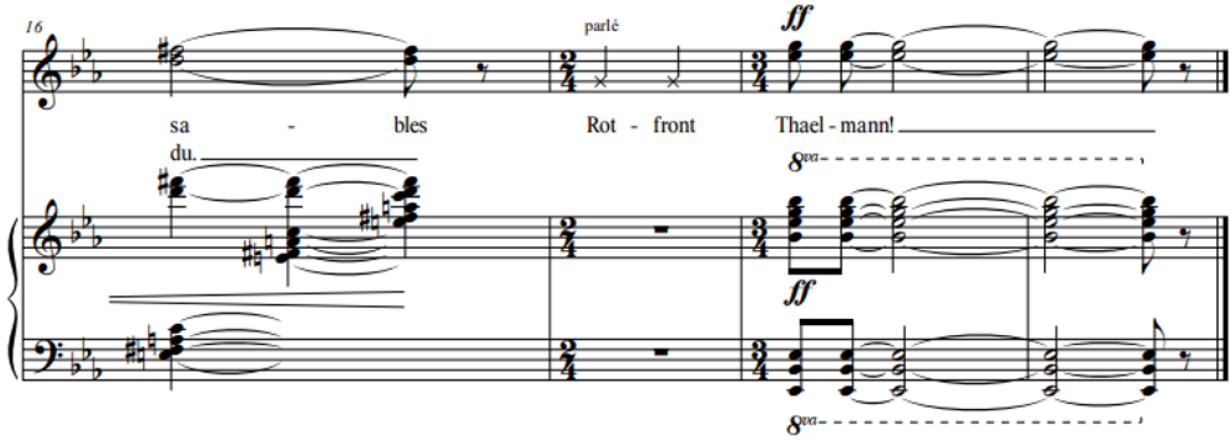

Figure 5.13. *Libérons Thaelmann* mm. 16-19.

Cardew calls the audience to action in two ways. One way is through rhythmic and metric diminution and augmentation (e.g. 3A mm. 18-30 and 3C, mm. 65-76). The other way is through emphasis of the "raise your fist!" motive: a descending 5-1 scale degrees. This is a powerful allusion to final measure of *Thälmannlied* is set to the words "Raise your fist!" and the symbolic raised fist of Thälmann's Red Front Party (shown in Figures 5.1, 5.3, and 5.4). By repeating this fragment, Cardew is reinforcing the statement's power, while the fragment's transposition through related and unrelated pitch centers could symbolize each global location of anti-fascism

[547]Further investigation into Cardew's performances is needed. Tilbury lists two recordings of Cardew performing the *Variations* (Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 1052) but I have not been able to obtain them. They appear to only be available on LP.

in the 1930s. This motive is found throughout the work, such as in 1E (mm. 112-115), 3A (mm. 12-15, 30-34), 3C, (mm. 65-76), and 3E, mm. (101-131). It is most often a descending ^5-1 but frequently occurs inverted, such as in the last example.

One fascinating variation, section 3C (m. 65), shown in Figure 5.14, combines the imbedding, diminution, and augmentation of *Thälmannlied* along with the "raise your fist!" motive. It is set in the peculiar meter of 39/4, a significnat augmentation of the previous meter of 12/8. Meanwhile, the imbedded melody is set in diminution where each original measure becomes one dotted-half-note beat. The diminution is interrupted by the "raise your fist!" motive which is expanded into two beats—necessitating the extra thirteenth beat at the end. The performer should play each measure of this variation as one long phrase with the musical peak on the "raise your first!" motive on beat 12.

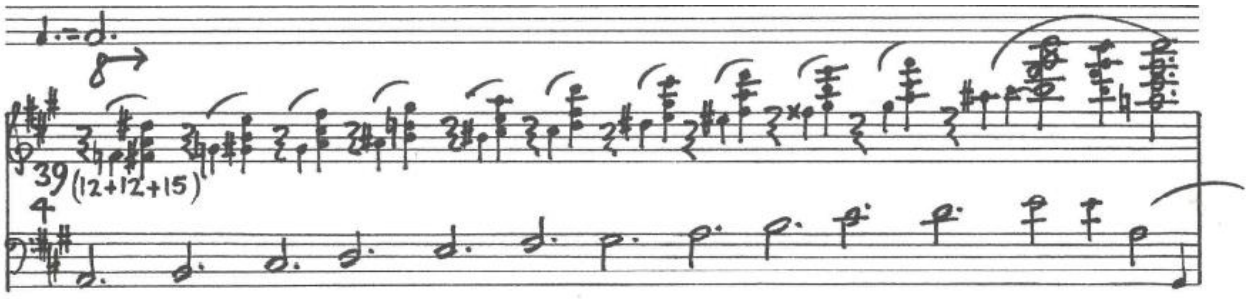

Figure 5.14. *Thälmann Variations* section 3C, m. 65.

The ways in which Cardew communicates his personal ideological perspective are through obscuring the theme, altering harmony, imbedding and ornamenting melody, altering dynamics, fragmentation, using rising motives, and removing the theme altogether. Though most variation works begin with the theme in its original form—Rzewski's *The People United* for example—Cardew imposes his perspective on the *Thälmannlied* and the labor movement by beginning with four sets of variations before presenting the song in its original unadorned form. The first variation opens nostalgically, pining for a time when people stood up to fascism, as if to

say to the audience "here is the ideal, let us return to it." The following variations are full of energy and occasionally obscure the melody before the music suddenly arrives at the source of Cardew's inspiration in section 1E (m. 101). Here, the original *Thälmannlied* finally appears invoking a crowd marching down the street singing this song in unaccompanied unison.

One place Cardew communicates his personal ideological perspective through altering the harmony is in section 1I (mm. 224-257), a variation on *Aufmarsch*, shown in Figure 5.15. In this repeat of the *Aufmarsch* verse, Cardew leaves the melody untouched, but harmonizes the melody differently, alternating pedal points between the dissonant, out-of-place B-double-flat, and more consonant sounding A-flat. Then, in mm. 242-249, the harmony shifts down to a pedal G-flat before returning to something more akin to the original with a B-flat pedal. The effect of this new wandering harmonization under the original melody is to cast a stark new lens on the *Aufmarsch* melody's character. It sounds strange and new, constantly pointing in different directions, uncertain in its journey. It could be symbolic to Cardew of how *Aufmarsch* could take on a different meaning to each person singing it.

One more noteworthy harmonic alteration that reveals Cardew's personal ideology is section 1I (m. 297), at the end of his *Aufmarsch* variations. He replaces the original final B-flat minor chord with a Picardy third, as if he is reflecting on the labor movement and sees it as a triumphant success instead of *Aufmarsch*'s image of imminent doom.

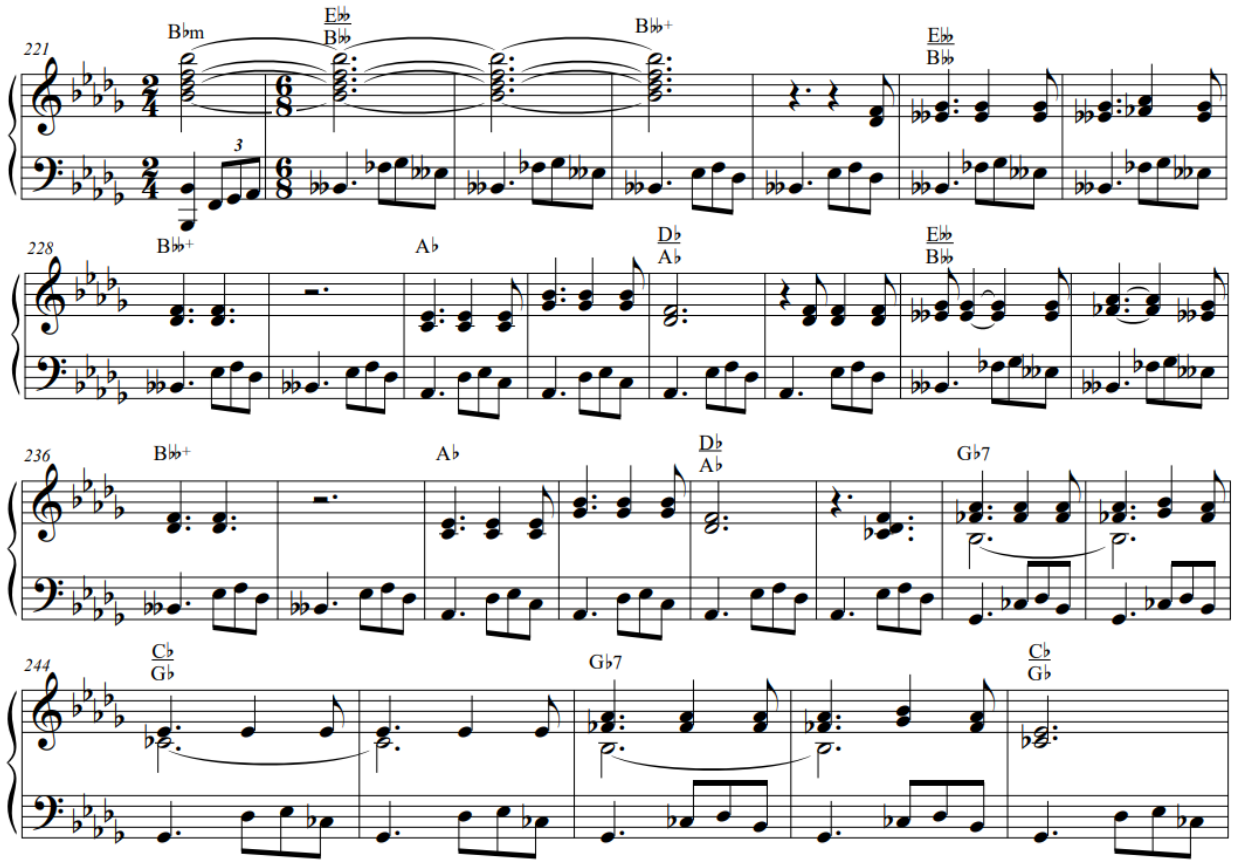

Figure 5.15. *Thälmann Variations* section 1I, mm. 221-248.

Cardew's process of imbedding and ornamenting the melody makes it harder if not impossible to recognize the melody, but by turning it into more flexible harmonic and rhythmic material, he expands its purpose to become the makeup of a larger form. In so doing, he reflects the spirit of communism in which Thälmann's vitality—the imbedded melody—is taken on by the people in the labor movement—the complete texture. For example, in section 2C (mm. 74-95), Cardew reduces and compresses each measure of *Thälmannlied* into one beat symbolizing the spirit of Thälmann as the bond that connects all those who fight fascism, past or present. In the same variation, the way in which each new reiteration of the *Thälmannlied* centers on tonalities related to A major symbolizes each part of the historical movement—Thälmann, his

contemporaries, those that came after, Cardew and his contemporaries—all part of the historical fabric of those willing to give their lives to fight fascism.

Cardew communicates his personal ideological perspective through altering dynamics from the original songs. For example, in section 1H (mm. 149-173), *Aufmarsch* is introduced in a *pp* dynamic instead of the original *ff*. Where the original *Aufmarsch* commands your attention immediately, Cardew's setting is subdued. It gives the impression of Cardew telling the story *about* the labor movement rather than transporting listeners directly *into* the battle. It is a step removed from the action. Regarding performance interpretation, pianists should be careful to observe the *pp* dynamic which is effective in portraying the original text's whispers of war spreading around the world.

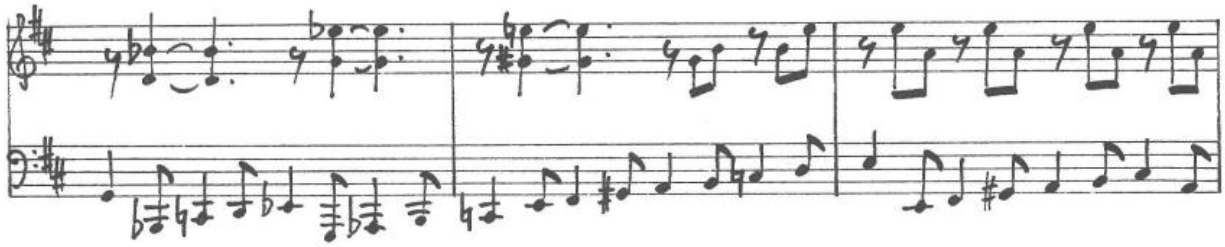

Figure 5.16. *Thälmann Variations* section 3B, mm. 36-38.

Cardew communicates his personal ideological perspective in variations without any recognizable material from the original songs. This is most evident in section 3B, (mm. 35-64) shown in Figure 5.16. Void of anything familiar, this section is purely Cardew's artistic creation. In doing so, Cardew sacrifices the political power of the songs, but gains creative expression, which is the maximum outpouring of his political activism. It is possible this is his attempt to weave musical elements of each song into one musical fabric. This variation is in a galloping 12/8 meter; is Cardew channeling the 6/8 meter of *Aufmarsch*? The melodic motive of scale degrees 5-6-7-8 could be based on the *Thälmannlied* opening pitches D-G (text: "Ernst Thäl-") or possibly an inversion of the closing "raise your fist!" motive on D-G. There are also repeated

descending fifths on pitches E-A in m. 38. A possible invocation of *Libérons* could be seen in the rising stepwise motion occurring throughout the variation. This variation could be interpreted as Cardew's way of bringing the entire anti-fascist movement together in unity. Up to this point in the *Variations*, the tunes have been separated. Perhaps here he sees them as part of a whole anti-fascist movement, embracing the past and present. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as the way in which an individual—represented by a song—loses their identity to take on the identity of the group—represented by the complete texture. Recall Rosenthal and Flacks' functions of protest music from Chapter 1 where conversion and recruitment require a safe space to try on ideas and identities. The swirl of activity in this variation could be a symbol of that safe space where laborers of past and present come together to become something more powerful in the fight against fascism.

***Thälmann Variations*: Cardew's Performances**

Cardew's performances of the *Thälmann Variations* reveal his ideology and provide more insight into his character and therefore illuminate the *Variations*. The *Variations* contain a great deal of virtuosic material, which could be viewed as part of an elitist bourgeois tradition and antithetical to communist ideals. Cardew answered this accusation at a lecture at Portsmouth Polytechnic in 1976, where he faced criticism for featuring an elitist technique in the work.[548] His audience felt this ostentatious display was in opposition to the spirit of Thälmann's people—the simple working class. Cardew's indignant response was that "virtuosity served the revolutionary content of the music."[549] What does his position reveal? What is the purpose of virtuosity in any musical context? It can simply be a display of skill, which is unlikely to have a place in Cardew's world of direct intent. In the context of the *Variations*, perhaps virtuosity can

[548]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 973.
[549]Ibid.

operate as the tool to express an extra-musical idea. Cardew elevates and strengthens the message of the original songs which on their own are limited to their individual history and ideology. Through virtuosic passagework and abstraction, Cardew ties together the history and ideology of the 1930s labor movement with his current 1970s society and projects it through his personal ideology and artistic aspirations.

Cardew was clear about the message of his *Variations*. In 1977, he performed the *Variations* at the Air Gallery in London.[550] Speaking to the audience about the work, he declared unequivocally his opposition to the idea that the audience can have their own opinions about an artwork, saying "when I play this music I'm saying to you what actually is the case. This music is about Thälmann…and around the issue of Thälmann, how he fought against the fascists…and nobody is going to tell me any different."[551] Cardew's biographer, Tilbury, approves of Cardew's demand that his audience listen on his terms. Tilbury describes Cardew's relationship as an artist to his audience as "coercive and exclusive."[552] Cardew believed that, in writing the *Variations*, he was supporting the same anti-fascist cause in the same manner as Thälmann. To Cardew, this work embodied not only Thälmann and the communist anti-fascist labor movement of the 1930s, but also Cardew's 1970s communist anti-fascist cause.

***Thälmann Variations*: Performance Considerations**

Can Cardew's *Variations* successfully stand alone as an artistic product? I believe it can do so based on its artistic merit. However, an audience (however small) that is familiar with the communist themes would bring their own political understanding to the work. To the uninitiated, it can be appreciated as an artistic product, a historical account, and as a piece of political

[550]Ibid.
[551]Ibid.
[552]Ibid.

activism. As evidenced by his performances above, Cardew would have desired all three, but his greatest concern was motivating his audience to take political action.

There are many performance aspects to consider for the *Variations*. To achieve the best possible interpretation, performers will want to reflect on the history surrounding the themes, their text, their meaning to German communists in the 1930s and 70s, and above all what they symbolized to Cardew. The *Variations* should be approached and executed with an earnest conviction coupled with veneration for the anti-fascist and pro-labor movements which Thälmann represented. It might best be programmed with Cardew's other political works, or political works of his contemporaries such as Rzewski, Wolff, Nono, Dallapicolla, and Andriessen. It could appropriately fit into a program of works by other communist composers, or a program of postmodern works. If it were programmed with music of a non-political nature, care must be taken to place it with complimentary pieces and to order them appropriately in a way that creates a flow that honors the message of the *Variations*.

Regardless of the programming, listeners must be educated on the history of the work to appreciate what it means. Without lyrics, the music retains little meaning to those who are unfamiliar with the original songs, but with explanation, an audience could appreciate the weight of the historical context. One must also consider the potential political views of the audience. A strongly conservative audience has the potential to immediately reject the thought of appreciating music written by a communist celebrating communism. I am optimistic that when presented with a framework for Cardew's life and the compositional circumstances of the *Variations*, even the most zealously conservative listener could value the way in which a composer chooses to stand up for something they believe in and then accomplishes that activism through their art. Foucault is helpful here, in that his philosophy demonstrates that resistance to any institution must come

from within its structure. This applies to anyone who is unsatisfied with the world around them—left and right wing alike. It demonstrates that change will only come when people stop supporting an institution and begin to resist it. Meaning can also be found in the way Cardew draws on the German communist music of the 1930s to speak to the world of the 1970s. Many struggles in life are common to all people, and I believe most would agree that the past can help to understand the present. These qualities—conviction, activism, appreciation of history—have universal artistic merit and can be invaluable when engaging an audience.

The performer has several options on the level of audience engagement. Pianist Corey Hamm offers helpful examples. As he explained in Chapter 3, before performing Rzewski's *The People United*, he provides a lecture, explaining the piece and playing examples of what to listen for.[553] He also plays a recording of a rally of people singing the original song the work is based on. I would recommend all the above for Cardew's *Variations*. The performer could briefly summarize the history of Thälmann's labor movement and Cardew's view of fascism in the 1970s. A portion of each of the three songs could be played at the piano; or, better yet, recordings of the songs could be played.[554] Examples of the variation procedures could also be performed. Time allotted for explanation of the work would depend on the rest of the program and the previous knowledge the audience brings.

Cardew's *Variations* are not limited in their anti-fascist rhetoric to the world of the 1970s. The work continues to speak to issues of the modern world, and therefore audiences, because fascism unfortunately still exists today in the form of neo-Nazism, white nationalism,

[553]Hamm, interview, 2021, Appendix B.

[554]Unfortunately, a recording of *Libérons Thaelmann* does not seem to exist, as I have been unable to find one.

and antisemitism.[555] For example, in 2012 in my home state of North Dakota, neo-Nazi Craig Cobb attempted a take-over of the small town of Leith, ND.[556] As I conducted my research for this document between 2020 and 2022, I observed more examples, some of which again hit close to home. In December, 2020, at the height of the Blacks Lives Matter movement, my school, North Dakota State University, fought white supremacists on SnapChat who threatened black students and the university president with violence.[557] In that same month, in Boise, ID, another city I have lived in, a statue of Anne Frank was defaced with swastikas.[558] And, finally, neo-Nazis and white supremacists were among the protestors at the insurrection at the US capitol on January 6, 2021.[559] While it cannot be known if Cardew would have seen any connection between these events and his *Variations*, it may be useful to performers and audiences if the work's meaning is expanded beyond twentieth-century German anti-fascism and its ideological theme of resistance to evil forces is applied to today. This could help the *Variations* to be interpreted in a more universal humanistic language instead of something stuck in its own ideological and historical prison. It depends on if the work is interpreted as lauding communist ideals or as more humanistically fighting the suppression of fascism in all its forms.

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[555]Southern Poverty Law Center, "Hate Map," 2021, accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map?ideology=neo-nazi; CBS News, "2019 saw most anti-Semitic incidents in US in 40 years, tally finds," May 12, 2020, accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/2019-saw-most-anti-semitic-incidents-in-us-in-40-years-tally-finds/.

[556]Southern Poverty Law Center, "Craig Cobb," accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/craig-cobb.

[557]Baily Hurley, "Threatening email sent to NDSU President for involvement in Black Lives Matter protests," Valley News Live, Fargo, ND, published online December 9, 2020, accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.valleynewslive.com/2020/12/09/threatening-email-sent-to-ndsu-president-for-involvement-in-black-lives-matter-protests/.

[558]Dustin Jones, "Idaho Anne Frank Memorial Defaced With Nazi Propaganda," Northwest Public Broadcasting, NPR News, published online December 10, 2020, accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.nwpb.org/2020/12/10/idaho-anne-frank-memorial-defaced-with-nazi-propaganda/.

[559]Jorge Fitz-Gibbon, "Neo-Nazis among protesters who stormed US Capitol," New York Post, published January 6, 2021, accessed June 8, 2022, https://nypost.com/2021/01/06/neo-nazis-among-protesters-who-stormed-us-capitol/; Hatewatch Staff, "The Year in Antigovernment Extremism Part 3: Opposing the Election Results," Southern Poverty Law Center, published online February 8, 2021, accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/08/year-antigovernment-extremism-part-3.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, Cardew expressed his ideology through his works for solo piano in the 1970s and with greatest success in his *Thälmann Variations*. The militant nature of the melodies and lyrics of all three of Cardew's themes—*Thälmann Lied*, *Der heimliche Aufmarsch*, and *Libérons Thaelmann*—reflect the life and struggles of Ernst Thälmann in 1930s Germany. They also reflect the lives and ideologies of the composers and lyricists of the original songs: Paul Arma, Hanns Eisler, Charles Koechlin, and Erich Weinert. Most importantly, they reflect Cardew's character, life, and ideology. His combining of these three songs in his *Variations* was meant as a rally cry to Cardew's audience. By subjecting these themes to the variation process, he amplified their character and symbolism and thus conveyed his ideology through a spectrum of variation techniques. Furthermore, the *Variations* reflect his ideology in the 1970s: the supremacy of communism and the fight against what he believed was a resurfacing tide of fascism.

The politics of *Thälmann Variations* are complicated and may deter performers from engaging with this work. I argue that if the time is taken for careful study and consideration of political ramifications, this work can be a rewarding artistic experience for performer and audience alike. There are many lessons to be learned from this work regarding history, political activism, and artistic expression, and it is a veritable feast for pianists in search of political music.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

As this document has shown, Frederic Rzewski's *North American Ballads* and Cornelius Cardew's *Thälmann Variations* are works which exhibit a wealth of compositional styles and political ideology. They both draw on the past musically and politically while also speaking to the present. They represent postmodern qualities in aesthetic and attitude toward social justice.

I have demonstrated that understanding the political underpinnings of the solo piano works of Rzewski and Cardew through the lens of Foucault's philosophy of power structures helps pianists understand each work's ideology while also allowing for better engagement with this repertoire. I have also established that these works act as objects of protest and that the performer embodies resistance as well. To help performers understand the political underpinnings I have investigated the broader political and historical connections of each work and composer. Pianists will hopefully benefit from my analysis and philosophical examination of the ideology in these works, which should assist in producing the presentation that best communicates the composer's intent. I have cautioned the potential risks involved in presenting political ideas so that performers are able to be clear in their message.

My hope is that my work will provide a way to understand and perform political works through the application of philosophy and history. I believe this can contribute to the various dialogues on political music, postmodernism, American and European music history, theoretical analysis, and solo piano performance practice. I expressly hope to add to the discussion of improvisation in classical music the view that improvisation can be interpreted as resistance to the composer. Specifically, I hope this complements the ongoing research on Rzewski and Cardew.

There are many avenues of further research regarding Rzewski's *Ballads* and Cardew's *Variations*, as well as their greater oeuvre and other tangents. It would be worthwhile to perform further analysis of different performers' improvisations in other Rzewski's works to cast a light on the performance practice as it relates to the act of resistance. The topic of improvisation as a form of resistance could be studied as it applies in other musical works, especially if they are not overtly political.

There are many holes in the scholarship of Cardew's *Variations*. Scores need to be obtained and made available for Arma's *Thälmannlied* and Koechlin's *Libérons Thaelmann*, and a recording of *Libérons Thaelmann* must be found or created. Most of Cardew's scores exist only in his manuscripts, so the creation of engraved copies of *Thälmann Variations* and other works would be beneficial. Cardew's live performance of *Thälmann Variations* is only available on LP. It needs to be converted to digital and made widely available. His studio recording (in an English library) should also be made available in the United States as well as online. Many of his works have yet to be recorded by the composer or anyone else.[560] Pianists should make professional recordings of his works, especially his other large work, *Vietnam Sonata*.

It could be fruitful to study both composers' entire oeuvre in search of ideological connections with consideration of how each one worked with power structures in their other works. Foucault's philosophy of power structures can be a helpful lens in this study as it applies to other political composers. Mattern's concept of "deliberative action" could be applied to a community of composers who disagree about how their music should represent their values. One could compare the works of Cardew and Rzewski and include other political composers.

[560]Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew*, 1052.

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APPENDIX A: SONG LYRICS

"Dreadful Memories"

Set to the tune of "Precious Memories." Lyrics written in 1931 by Aunt Molly Jackson (1880-1960).

Dreadful memories! How they linger,
How they pain my precious soul!
Little children, sick and hungry,
Sick and hungry, weak and cold.

Little children, cold and hungry,
Without any food at all to eat;
They had no clothes to put on their bodies,
They had no shoes to put on their feet.

CHORUS:
Dreadful memories! How they linger,
How they fill my heart with pain;
Oh, how hard I've tried to forget them,
But I find it all in vain.

I can't forget them, little babies,
With golden hair as soft as silk;
Slowly dying from starvation,
They parents could not give them milk.

I can't forget them coal miners' children
That starved to death for want of milk;
While the coal operators and their wives and their children
Were all dressed in jewels and silk.

Dreadful memories! How they haunt me
As the lonely moments fly;
Oh, how them little babies suffered!
I saw them starve to death and die.[561]

[561]Aunt Molly Jackson, *The Songs and Stories.*

“Which Side Are You On?”

Set to the tune of “Lay the Lily Low.” Lyrics written in 1931 by Florence Reece (1900-1986).

Come all of you good workers,
Good news to you I’ll tell
Of how the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.

Chorus
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

My daddy was a miner,
And I’m a miner’s son
And I’ll stick with the union
Till every battle’s won.

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there;
You’ll either be a union man,
Or a thug for J. H. Blair

Oh workers, can you stand it?
Oh tell me how you can,
Will you be a lousy scab,
Or will you be a man?

Don’t scab for the bosses,
Don’t listen to their lies.
Us poor folks haven’t got a chance
Unless we organize.[562]

[562]Hayashi, 104, quoted from Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 55, which in turn quoted from Alan Lomax, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), 176. A scab is a non-union employee hired by a company to replace the striking union members.

“Down by the Riverside”

Traditional American work song-spiritual.

1. I’m gonna lay down my sword and shield,
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside,
Down by the riverside,
I’m gonna lay down my sword and shield,
Down by the riverside,
I’m gonna study war no more.

CHORUS
I ain’t gonna study war no more,
I ain’t gonna study war no more,
I ain’t gonna study war no more,
I ain’t gonna study war no more,
I ain’t gonna study war no more,
I ain’t gonna study war no more.

2 I’m gonna talk with the Prince of Peace
3. I’m gonna shake hands with every man, etc.
4. I’m gonna walk with my brothers in peace, etc.
5. I’m gonna make love, make love not war, etc.
6. I’m gonna put on my freedom robe, etc.[563]

[563]Fowke and Glaser, 85-88.

“Alcoholic Blues”

Composed in 1919 by Albert Von Tilzer (1878-1958) with words by Edward Laska (1894–1959).

I’ve got the blues, I’ve got the blues
I’ve got the alcoholic blues
No more beer, my heart to cheer
Goodbye whiskey, you used to make me frisky
So long highball, so long gin
Oh, tell me when you comin’ back agin?[564]

“Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues”

New lyrics set to the tune of “Alcoholic Blues” in 1936. Author unknown.

1. Ol’ man seargent sittin’ at the desk
The damn ol’ fool won't give us no rest
He’d take the nickels off a dead man’s eyes
To buy a Coca-Cola an’ a eskimo pie

[chorus]
I got the Blues, I got the Blues,
I got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues.
Lordy, Lordy, spoolin’s hard.
You know and I know, I don’t have to tell,
Work for Tom Watson, got to work like hell.

2. When I die don’t bury me at all
Just hang me up on the spoolroom wall.
Place a knotter in my hand
So I can keep on spoolin’ in the Promised Land.

3. When I die, don’t bury me deep,
Bury me down on Six Hundred Street;
Place a bobbin in each hand
So I can doff in the Promised Land.[565]

[564]Laska and Von Tilzer, *The Alcoholic Blues.*

[565]Fowke and Glazer, 74-5. A spool is a reel for winding yam; a knotter is a little gadget used for tying the ends of the yam together; to doff is to remove filled bobbins from spinning frames in the mill, a doffer is a worker who takes filled bobbins from the spinning frames. Rzewski’s program notes in *Nonsequiturs* have minor discrepancies in text, and he does not include verse three.

***Thälmannlied*, Op. 33 (1934)**

Music by Paul Arma (1905-1987), text by Erich Weinert (1890-1953)

English translation as it appears in Cardew's score of *Thälmann Variations*[566]

Ernst Thälmann, der ging uns voran,
die Faust geballt zum Schlagen.
Kolonnen wuchsen Mann an Mann,
den Kampf voranzutragen.
Er ging voran, wo die Fahne braust.
Für den Kameraden Thälmann: Hoch die Faust!

Ernst Thälmann was out in front
His fist was raised to strike them.
Brigades were growing thick and fast
To take the battle forward.
The flag was red and the fight was on
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

Er fiel den Schindern in die Hand.
Sie kauften falsche Zeugen.
Er hält der Qual und Folter stand;
die konnten ihn nicht beugen,
trotz Mord und Tod, der im Kerker haust!
Für den Kameraden Thälmann: Hoch die Faust!

The Nazis got him in their hands
They bought some rotten traitors.
But Thälmann would not bend before
The tortures they inflicted.
In prison too his banner flies
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

Es schallt Alarm: Das Mordgericht
will ihm den Kopf abschlagen.
Doch wenn die Welt zum Sturm aufbricht,
dann werden sie's nicht wagen.
Reißt weg das Beil, das schon niedersaust!
Für den Kameraden Thälmann: Hoch die Faust!

Sound the alarm! The phoney court
Has sentenced him to perish.
But when the people of the world
Rise up to liberation
We'll snatch the axe that falls on him.
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

Dimitroff haben wir befreit,
weil wir die Welt entflammten.
Drum wieder in die Ohren schreit
den Henkern, den verdammten.
Die Welt ist wach, die Empörung braust:
Für den Kameraden Thälmann: Hoch die Faust![567]

Dimitroff was in just the spot;568
The traitors thought they had him.
But news was spread at lightning speed
And world opinion freed him.
The world awakes! Indignation flames!
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

[566]Cornelius Cardew, *Thälmann Variations: For Solo Piano*, program notes from 1974, (London: Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 1989), 30.

[567]The Song of Thælmann (1934) - Ernst Busch: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century in Songs, Accessed September 12, 2021, https://sites.google.com/site/ernstbush/pesni-i-ih-istoria-mp3-file-1/spisok/pesna-o-telmane-1934-pesna-narodnogo-fronta-1937. 1934 Quotation from the text from the record recorded by Ernst Busch for "Gramoplasttrest," Moscow, 1936.

[568]Presumably, Georgi Dimitrov (1882-1949), a world-renowned Bulgarian Communist who, in 1933, went on trial in Leipzig for anti-Fascist activities. "Dimitrov, Georgi Mikhailovich," in *Encyclopedia of Marxism:*

The following is a more literal English translation of *Thälmannlied*:[569]

Ernst Thälmann was leading us
His fist was raised to strike them.
Brigades were growing thick and fast
To take the battle forward.
He went ahead where the flag was moving
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

The Nazis got him in their hands
They bought some rotten witnesses
But Thälmann would not bend before
The tortures they inflicted.
Despite murder and death in the prison
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

The alarm sounds! The phoney court
wants to decapitate him
But when the people of the world
Rise up to liberation
We'll snatch away the axe that is already falling on him.
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

Dimitroff was liberated by us
because we set the world on fire.
Therefore we scream into the ears
of the murderers, the damned ones.
The world awakes! Indignation flames!
For our sturdy Comrade Thälmann: Raise your fist!

Glossary of People, Accessed November 24, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/d/i.htm#dimitrov-georgi.

[569]translation by Annette Richter, Ph.D., October 19, 2021.

Der heimliche Aufmarsch **(The secret march) Op. 28, No. 3, (1930)**

Music by Hanns Eisler (1898-1962). Text by Erich Weinert (1890-1953)

Es geht durch die Welt ein Geflüster; Arbeiter, hörst du es nicht? Das sind die Stimmen der Kriegsminister, Arbeiter, hörst du es nicht? Es flüstern die Kohleund Stahlproduzenten, es flüstert die chemische Kriegsproduktion, es flüstert von allen Kontinenten Mobilmachung gegen die Sowjetunion!	A whisper goes around the world Worker, don't you hear it? These are the voices of war ministers! Worker, don't you hear it? Coal and steel producers are whispering! Chemical warfare production whispers too! The whisper comes from all continents! Mobilization against the Soviet Union!
Arbeiter, Bauern, nehmt die Gewehre, nehmt die Gewehre zur Hand! Zerschlagt die faschistischen Räuberheere, setzt alle Herzen in Brand. Pflanzt eure roten Fahnen des Sieges auf jede Schanze, auf jede Fabrik: Dann blüht aus der Asche des letzten Krieges die sozialistische Weltrepublik! Dann blüht aus der Asche des letzten Krieges die sozialistische Weltrepublik!	Workers! Peasants! Arm yourselves! Arm yourselves with guns! Annihilate the fascist bandit armies! Set all hearts on fire! Plant your red banners of labour on every ramp, on factories! Rising from the ruins of old society The Socialist World Republic! Rising from the ruins of old society The Socialist World Republic!
Arbeiter, horch, sieziehen ins Feld und schrei'n "Für Nation und Rasse!" Das ist der Krieg der Herrscher der Welt gegen die Arbeiterklasse; denn der Angriff gegen die Sowjetunion ist der Stoß ins Herz der Revolution und der Krieg, der jetzt vor der Türe steht, ist der Krieg gegen dich, Prolet!	Workers hear, they gather to battle And shout "for nation and race!" This is the war of world leaders Against the working class! Because the assault against the Soviet Union Is a strike in the heart of the revolution! And the war, which sweeps through countries now, Is the war against you, proletarian![570]
Arbeiter, Bauern, schlagt den Faschisten Dolch und Gewehr aus der Hand! Entreißt die Atome den Militaristen, eh' alle Länder in Brand. Pflanzt eure roten Banner der Arbeit Auf jeden Akker, Auf jede Fabrik: Dann steigt aus den Trümmern der alten Gesellschaft die sozialistische Weltrepublik!	Workers, peasants, beat the fascists Arm yourselves with dagger and rifle! Snatch the atoms from the militarists before all countries are on fire. Plant your red banners of labour on every field, on every factory: Then rising from the ruins of the old society the socialist world republic![571]

[570]Song Lyrics, "Hanns Eisler: Der Heimliche Aufmarsch Lyrics," accessed October 23, 2020, http://www.songlyrics.com/hanns-eisler/der-heimliche-aufmarsch-lyrics/.

[571]My own translation of the second refrain.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW WITH COREY HAMM

Interview with Corey Hamm (CM) by Michael Langer (ML) conducted February 1, 2021.

ML: At the core of my thesis is the question "What does it take to perform these pieces?" There's the political aspect of the composers but I also want to make sense of the performance interpretation aspect. I think you're the perfect person to talk to about that because you have had to grapple with that very question.

CH: I've spoken to [Rzewski] and asked which is more important – the music or the politics? I feel like I can answer that quite confidently – that it's the music. In fact, he is very hesitant to talk about the political inspiration or sociological inspiration…. He was never really willing to talk about that with any of the political pieces. He has said "the music matters…that counts, not the politics." And yet he feels strongly about the state of the world. Obviously, he's inspired by problems in the world. He never really wanted to talk about those things. I actually asked him about that stuff myself, and I only asked so far because he didn't want to talk about those things. He'd be happy to talk about the music and stuff. But he did say "it's the music that counts." I think he didn't like people to downplay the music.

What I love about his pieces is how he's able to take the problem and represent it in a very audible way, for example in *The People United* the structure of six groups of six. Five represents the fingers and fingers together represent the fist of revolution. And each variation represents a different person or group of people but they're all joined together fully in the final variation (36). It's an audible representation of the title and the movement he aspires to. I think that's fantastic.

With “Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues” the machine and the racism it represents is terrifying and the tune representing the people – and who wins at the end? We don’t know. The black and white clusters are another audible representation of the thing.

But he is a very politically and socially aware person. And there’s just too many titles in all of his works that are so clearly political and socially aware. I think he would prefer socially aware to the word political. I can’t go much further than that.

You asked me if I’ve played any political pieces besides Rzewski’s works. I’ve played lots of Rzewski’s works like *The People United, North American Ballads,* but never *De Profundis*. I’ve played all those for piano pieces although they’re not all political. I’ve played *Squares* which are not fully political, but *Hyenas* is inspired by politics. I’ve played *Bring Them Home* the two pianos and percussion version, *Johnny Comes Marching for a Soldier*, and a set of variations based on a Yiddish folk song that’s all about a father lamenting that he has to leave home before his son wakes up in the morning to go to work, like to the coal mines. He comes home after his son is already in bed so he never gets to see his son because he’s in the coal mines. So, it’s a social statement that’s a beautiful piece and a wonderful piece.

As far as other composers I have played the Janacek Sonata which is politically inspired. I’ve taught some others. One of my students played the *Sunflower Sutra* [by Jerome Kitzke], one of the pieces written for Tony de Mare, a piece for speaking pianist. But *Sunflowe*r is a great piece. I forgot the name of the

composer. Brett Dean, the Australian composer, or is he Kiwi? He wrote a tiny piece for piano that I've taught.

ML: With that list of pieces in mind, at the heart of my thesis is that the performer should be aware of what these pieces mean, what they mean to the composer, and what the composer is trying to say to the audience. Would you agree with that when you perform something like *The People United* or anything like that do you think the audience needs to know what it's about to fully appreciate it?

CM: I think it really helps. Certainly *The People United*—I mean, musically, the structure. Like I said, I'm amazed at the coordination of the musical and social structure of the piece. I always give some little lecture or speech or whatever before I perform *The People United*. Usually I will start—and a lot of people do this—with a recording of the South American rally with 100,000 people chanting and singing the piece with the original band, I'm sure you've heard that. I have that recording and I have that played it's about four minutes long well the audience is seated before I walk out onstage, I'll have that playing for the audience because it's quite gripping, because it's a huge number of people chanting. It's really amazing. Then I talk about the piece and in that sense the political context—it sets you up for this epic vibe. Then I'll explain the piece—it depends on what the presenter wants. Sometimes the presenter wants a long 20- to 30-minute explanation. And other times they want a short 10-minute explanation, but I think that's very important. It shows the audience what to listen for. I'll actually play little examples and show them signposts along the way, like the opening variation one which is octave transposition all over the place, so that

comes back in variation 6 and it also comes back in variations 31 and 36. So those are signposts. There are a bunch of other things that talk about and show them how it works a bit. That's musical but it's so well connected to the political element that I think it helps with all that. And that recording with a huge group of people is somehow clarifies things politically as well. So, I like to do that. "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues": same thing. I talk about that too. You don't have to say that much. It's not that complicated. A little bit: this is the machine; this is the people; black and white; who wins? Maybe a little more than that but basically that and people love that piece as you know.

ML: I have a theory and I'd like to run it past you. It's about his use of improvisation. As I was working on this, I came to the conclusion that when he… Improvisation is important to Rzewski. I read about his performances and concerts. He'll perform Beethoven and he'll insert improvisation where you normally wouldn't have it. He's a big believer in improvisation. And then in his music, where he puts an improvised section. So now the performer gets to step in to take the place of the composer—and Rzewski is all about resisting the power structures—and so when you as the performer get to be the composer—for a moment you're actually breaking down the whole power structure as composer. The classical idea that we put Beethoven on a pedestal: it's all about Beethoven, it's not about us. Rzewski creates this world where you get to have a voice. So, it's a social thing. What do you think? Does that theory hold weight?

CH: I think so. I don't think I've ever heard anyone say that before. It makes perfect sense to me, actually, because he's very… it fits him. You've heard his Beethoven

recordings. They're fascinating. I love them. I would never try that but that doesn't mean people shouldn't. When he does it, I sort of don't mind. It's okay with me and we all know that Beethoven was a fantastic improviser, apparently. We've heard that he would muck around with his own pieces sometimes. We know as a great improviser. It may be true that he did some improvisation. We don't know to what extent but little variations within his own pieces, but who knows? I think that your theory is a good one. It makes sense even his approach. I've heard Rzewski play *The People United* a few times live. I also know he doesn't like to fret. He'll be at the bar enjoying a drink before a performance and suddenly realize he needs to get there. And then he'll take very difficult sections very slowly and it's still a powerful performance.

He also doesn't like perfection. I'm thankful that he likes my recording a lot. There are many perfect recordings out there that are more accurate and faster than mine, but he doesn't like them. I'm not trying to bolster myself. He does love others. Though they are more polished than me or him he doesn't like that. It's not negative but he wants reality: real people playing real stuff.

ML: It sounds like ideas are what matter to him.

CH: I've played *The People United* about 80 times. I have played it with no cadenza. I've also improvised my own cadenza. I've also written my own composed cadenza and cadenzas written by other people. I don't really like a cadenza in that piece. It's a great idea, but there's something beautiful to me about the balance of the structure. But that's my own problem. I told Rzewski I wrote a cadenza and he got mad – was really mad – truly mad. Like "you must not do that!" He's fine if

you don't improvise, but if you do it it must be a true improvisation. It was totally against his principal. He didn't forbid me, but he told me "no!" I think that's relevant. If you're going to input your own idea, it has to be real.

ML: You could draw a comparison to a political rally. It's not always prewritten speeches. They just react. We saw that at the US capital last month. There wasn't much of a plan.

CH: Not scripted. He doesn't want scripted. There was an interesting thing when we did this festival in NY. There were many pianists. Ursula Oppens and Jerrry Lowenthal performed. Lovers of Rzewski. When they asked me I thought – oh cool. We could have 6 pianists play *The People United*. The organizers thought it was a great idea. Like a gift to Rzewski. Rzewski forbade it. He refused to come if they did that. He said it was too disjunct. It was a sound reason and I was surprised. So, I just played it. I think that was the composer. It wasn't the political activist. "My piece is my piece." That's what we did – we didn't want to make him mad.

You asked: is it important for the musician to understand and present the sociological underpinning in the music the best they can? I think it is. It's easy to play *The People United* or "Winnsboro" with specific titles but harder with generic titles that don't connect to politics. I often hear people play "Winnsboro"—the driving section with *fff* where the melody is under all those layers.

ML: Doesn't he say in the score that the melody should be inaudible because it represents the workers being drowned out by the company machines?

CH: Absolutely. Of course you're right. But people can't give that up – they want the melody to be heard. But you're not going to hear it. To me, that's the political message. If you don't do that – that's the political message. That's the people being overpowered by the man or machine. He's so clear – I admire him – about these things in general.

And then sometimes the sounds he asks for – scrapes or vocalizations or smashing boxes – like *Bring Them Home* – sometimes they're representative or nonsense sounds. It can be useful to feel like those things have intention.

About improvisation: beyond *The People United* cadenza. Many pieces have brief improvisation moments. It's obviously very important to him. He experiments with it compositionally. It's a tool he inserts. There are plenty that are not optional.

ML: I think all the moments in the *Ballads* are optional. To me they all feel organic. I've watched recordings. He's structured it in a way that makes sense. I have a jazz background, so improv doesn't scare me as much as it might others. I'm looking forward to performing a couple. What goes through your mind when you improvise in these pieces? Do you try to quote themes or bring them back, or incorporate other melodies?

CH: I do try to take the themes. For *the People United* – they were figured out ahead of time, but not composed. I tried to do things that had not taken place earlier in the piece. I'm not a composer. I don't have that burning need to get my thoughts out. But I have ideas I pursue. When I improvise – I don't have a jazz background. I'm not good, but I have a basic understanding of jazz charts. When I

do my improvisation, I was really aware of the types of sounds – like what Rzewski does – these rolled gliss arms clusters that sound like a real "YELP!" kind of sound. He's really good at that. They may come from his time with Stockhausen and the ***Klavierstück***. You should definitely listen to his recording of the ***Klavierstück X***.

I wanted to use those types of sounds, too. I suppose that's cheating, but… I did my own thing with them.

For *The People United* I was aware of the tunes, how I would do them, and I had some sort of structure, and I tried to lead up to a type of climactic thing in the cadenza and then wind down to set up the return. I never wanted to sacrifice… I told you about my hesitation about the cadenza in *The People United* because of what it does to the structure and the flow for me. So, I tried to at least end my cadenza in a similar way that still segued nicely into the return of the theme. I used to do lots of it free improv when I was younger. I had some musical groups where we would make sure that every concert we would do 10 minute improv or something like that. Just free, not on a tune. I like that. So, I'm not scared of that. But I'm not totally comfortable at that either. I've done it, I suppose, a fair amount, so *The People United,* some tunes. For *Hyaenas*, it wasn't the tunes. It was just sounds and dramatic energy and gestures—doing something—building to something—setting up something when the written music returns. What's the one with the ostinato?

ML: "Which Side Are You On?" It has those cells in the middle.

CH: Yeah, that thing. So, I was aware how the improv related to that. Not that I did that, but trying to be aware of what it is between, and should you have a complete contrast or not have a complete contrast—what are you going to do? Are you going to have a plan or reaction? It doesn't have to be a plan. It could be the opposite of it.

You know *The Road*? Rzewski's giant piece that's about 8 hours long.

ML: I've heard of it, but I haven't listened to it.

CH: I think it's literally 8 hours long. It's not meant to be a single piece. A friend of mine organized a performance of it all in a row but Rzewski thought that was the most ridiculous thing. Of course, my friend loved to do that type of thing for the grandeur of Rzewski. I haven't performed it and I'd like to explore it more because Rzewski says there's plenty of good pieces in *The Road,* but people don't play it because they're parts of the whole but they're extractable and they're built to be taken apart. He's sad that people don't pursue it and don't realize it. There's a lot of improv in that piece and there's a lot of exploration.

ML: Is it also social political?

CH: I would say it is at least to a degree. It's social political. For instance, one of the pieces—it's called *The Road* and he separates them into miles there's mile 1. There's about 60 miles in the piece. Within, the miles are separated but I'm not sure what the pieces within them are named. One of them is named *Traveling with Children* so it's a social thing. I don't know that it's the deepest meaning. I don't know if that's part of the piece. It's just called that. I think there is some political subject. There might be something that sparks your interest. A number of those

pieces have speaking in them. They're not solely piano but they have speaking and improv. So, I think it's a whole mixture of stuff.

One thing that was interesting to me: I organized a Rzewski festival in Vancouver in 2008 which was his 70th birthday. So, he came over for it. He played three concerts. I played *The People United.* We have a faculty new-music group. We played a bunch of stuff, including *Coming Together.* Students gave a concert. I was scared he'd be mean to my students but he wasn't. He has a little bit of a reputation for telling it like it is. If someone doesn't do a good job, he'd tell them they didn't do a good job. I didn't want my students to go through that but they did well and he was also nice so to them so it was okay.

ML: *Coming Together*—I love that piece! I like minimalism in general. I love the Attica prison story. That might be his first or second political work after he went through his improvisation stuff in the 60s.

CH: Absolutely, I agree with you. I love it too. I remember playing that for him. We had a chance to have rehearsal with him. It's variable instrumentation. I was playing just the baseline and he came over to me and said "You know you can do a lot more. You can play it in different octaves. You can do a lot with it. Play those notes, but you don't have to be in that shape all the time." There's quite a bit of freedom that I didn't realize. I needed him to tell me that. I did my best for the actual concert the next day but that was good to know.

Also, you know his *Soundpool*? It's a great thing but I think it's a single sheet. It's Rzewski's thoughts on improvisation and how to be an improviser. It's a philosophical thing. It was published in some magazine back in the 70s.

He says things of great wisdom about improvisation like “if somebody is playing something that you don’t like it then join them and do that too.”

ML: I think I know what you’re talking about. It’s his manifesto on improvisation from the 1960s when he was traveling with the MEV around Europe and the US. And that’s the rules of the group. It was published in the Avant Garde magazine *Source*.

CH: Good. I love that. It’s fantastic. Do you know his book *Non Sequiturs*?

ML: Yes. I’ve used that a lot to get a sense of how he views politics and how music should communicate politics.

CH: That’s a very useful book. The other thing I would say: he wrote many pieces for variable instrumentation like *13 studies for instruments* written in 1977. The structure of those is very improvisational. Sometimes it’s quite improvisational and sometimes you improvise with the material he gives you. The title isn’t political but the way he deals with the players in a sort of democratic or Communistic way is fascinating and wonderful. They’re great pieces. I’ve taught them a lot and played them a lot with my new music group at UBC. They all come with an explanation of what you’re supposed to do with the piece. Reading those could inform some of your thoughts. That’s a lot of stuff. Please ask me whatever you care to ask me.

ML: I think you’ve answered the bulk of it. You haven’t mentioned Cornelius Cardew. Is the *Thälmann Variations* familiar to you?

CH: I had a student play it. I’ve never played it myself. A student played it about 10 years ago. And I have Rzewski’s recording of it. I’m fascinated with that. It

wasn't a doctoral student. I enjoyed it very much. Is that going to be on your lecture recital too?

ML: Yes. I started my research with Rzewski and that led to Cardew since they were close. There isn't much research on Cardew. He didn't write a lot of piano works. He wasn't as accomplished as Rzewski. I've done a lot of research into the *Thälmann Variations* to understand it's history and structure, and Cardew's political ideology. I feel like I have something new to say about that piece.

CH: Fantastic.

ML: There's a lot of dissertations on Rzewski. He's a big name. It's interesting to compare the two. There's a lot of similarities. I've found that Rzewski is more a composer than a political activist. Cardew seems to first and foremost a political activist who happens to be a composer. His contribution is to write music that supports the communist and anti-fascist cause.

CH: I was running a festival in Vancouver and Rzewski came. It was my privilege to drive him around and entertain him. It was fun. After everything was over, he had a day off. He said, "I want you to take me to where all the homeless people are in Vancouver." I'm sad to say but Vancouver, like San Francisco, has a large amount of homeless people. It's tragic and a shame. Of course, I took him. He was appalled. That was interesting to me. How often do your guests want to see the worst part of the city? I admired him because he wanted to see the reality of the city. That's the kind of guy he is.

ML: That reveals a lot about his character. And it makes sense because so many of his pieces are about the little trodden on by the government or corporations.

CH: He also wanted to see a gallery of aboriginal, first-nations art. I took him to what I thought was a great gallery of very good art, but it was the polished high-priced type of stuff. He only spent 15 minutes and wasn't impressed. He asked to see the real stuff and I didn't know where to go. But I looked it up and found a good place and he was more satisfied. He saw real people working on it right there. That was really neat. He's the type of person where you might meet him, and he'll say "Nice to meet you. What are your thoughts on abortion?"

ML: That's his style?

CH: Well, he might not be that abrupt, but it's not far off. He wants to have a real conversation about something controversial and know what you think. If you try to avoid it, he will not like that. It's a beautiful thing but a shocking thing too.

ML: I think that's refreshing.

CH: If you have a real dialogue about something like capital punishment, he's fine. You don't have to agree with him, he just wants to talk, but if you avoid it, he won't like it.

APPENDIX C: LETTER FROM FREDERIC RZEWSKI

Email to Frederic Rzewski from Michael Langer, February 2, 2021.

Mr. Rzewski,

I am a DMA student working on my dissertation and I would be very interested in talking to you about your compositions, particularly *North American Ballads*. My research focuses on how music can communicate socio-political ideas. This will culminate in a lecture-recital that will include some of the *Ballads.* I have also researched Cornelius Cardew's *Thälmann Variations* and find it fascinating. I would especially like to hear your reflections on Cardew's life and this work and would be interested to hear your thoughts on your recording of the Variations. I spoke with Corey Hamm yesterday and he recommended that I reach out to you. I would truly appreciate speaking with you if you have the time. There's no rush, so we can meet at your convenience, over Zoom or a phone conversation.

Thank you,

Michael Langer

Email response form Frederic Rzewski to Michael Langer, February 2, 2021.

Re: request for a personal interview

I can't talk about these pieces. They are from 1979 and I can't stand them any more. Here is something more recent for you to look at:

[attached pdf of his new work, *Six Movements*][572]

[572]This is included mostly for humorous purposes to demonstrate both that composers can tire of their own work and also the great success of the *Ballads*. He passed away a few months later and I will always regret not trying to engage with him on a different topic.