

# Connie Beckley

One way to work with the idea of conventions and my use of them would be to write an article in the form of columns, each column consisting of a set of sequential statements, unrelated except that they all deal with aspects of music. Theoretically, the reader would have the choice to conduct his or her reading by following the words straight across the page, or to skip to the next line after completing the words in the first line of the first column. I am assuming that most readers will do the latter, and if I want my writings to be perceived in the manner which I intended, I must observe this convention and not allow my thoughts to stray into the next column. However, by breaking this convention, I am also working with it. For when the reader realizes that his or her eyes are on the lower

right hand column without having read the words on the upper right hand column, he or she will be aware of the possibility of having skipped ahead of something else, thereby altering the order of things in the realm of time. Music, unlike painting, is an art form in which the time of its perception is controlled almost entirely by the artist, and in which the audience is subject to the artist's judgements concerning the use of that time. In any case, the artist's time becomes some form of imposition on the perceiver.

I once saw a magic show in which there was a levitation act. After a successful performance, the audience crowded onto the stage to see how the feat might have been accomplished. Their fascination for procedures and apparatus was somewhat amusing, especially when one considers that we send people to the moon with more complicated tricks than that. The real fascination for me lay in the very idea of levitation, an idea that most likely came into existence more from fantastic imagination than experimentation. Certainly flying to the moon did.

As a singer, I've had a similar fantasy about my voice, that of walking away from my song. In many of my works I try to create the image of music as something independent of the musician, sometimes using the aid of simple electronic equipment such as the conventional tape recorder or cassette. These may help me to release the music from certain physical limitations of the musician such as the length of a human breath or the ability of a singer to sing only one pitch at a time. In one piece, the voice of a singer is heard at 4 pitches simultaneously, simply because there are 3 cassette recorders playing the singer's recorded voice at different pitch levels, in addition to the live voice. Never do I electronically alter the naturally produced sound, and always, unlike the magic show, all aids are either visible or apparent.

When the various components of what we call music are considered separately, we, of course, find many in common with the visual arts—time, space, distance. It seems to me that the differences between music and a visual art form such as painting lie in the assembling and proportioning of components, *not* the presence or lack of them: space can become more or less passive; time, more or less controlled; distances, more angular or more omnidirectional. A little more of one component may give you music; a little more of another may give you a painting. Whereas in a baroque concerto, the visual presence of the musician seems incidental, in one of my works his or her visual presence may be imperative to the coherence of the music. In fact, none of my works to date can be exclusively audiorecorded. Ironically, the opposite has not been so. Some of my pieces are meant only to be seen.

It seems to me, then, that sound *can* be the manifestation of music, but not the essence of it; and in works that incorporate other musical components (such as time, space, or distance), apparently sound is not indispensable.

*Connie Beckley*