



Curatorial > PROBES

With this section, RWM continues a line of programmes devoted to exploring the complex map of sound art from different points of view organised in curatorial series.

PROBES takes Marshall McLuhan's conceptual contrapositions as a starting point to analyse and expose the search for a new sonic language made urgent after the collapse of tonality in the twentieth century. The series looks at the many probes and experiments that were launched in the last century in search of new musical resources, and a new aesthetic; for ways to make music adequate to a world transformed by disorientating technologies.

Curated by Chris Cutler

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At the start of the seventies, Chris Cutler co-founded The Ottawa Music Company – a 22-piece Rock composer's orchestra – before joining British experimental group Henry Cow with whom he toured, recorded and worked in dance and theatre projects for the next eight years. Subsequently he co-founded a series of mixed national groups: Art Bears, News from Babel, Cassiber, The (ec) Nudes, The Science Group and p53 and was a permanent member of American bands Pere Ubu, Hail and The Wooden Birds. Outside a succession of special projects for stage, theatre, film and radio he still works regularly with Fred Frith, Zeena Parkins, Jon Rose, Tim Hodgkinson, David Thomas, Peter Blegvad, Daan Vandewalle, Ikue Mori, Lotte Anker, Stevan Tickmayer, Annie Gosfield and spectralists Iancu Dumitrescu and Ana Maria Avram. He is a permanent member of The Bad Boys (Cage, Stockhausen, Fluxus...), The Artaud Beats and The Artbears Songbook. Adjacent projects include commissioned works for radio, various live movie soundtracks, *Signe de Trois* for surround-sound projection, the daily year-long soundscape project Out of the Blue Radio (for Resonance FM) and p53 for Orchestra and Soloists.

He founded and runs the independent label ReR Megacorp and the art distribution service Gallery and Academic, is editor of the occasional sourcebook *Unfiled*, author of the book *File Under Popular* – and many articles and papers published in 16 languages. He was on faculty for a while at the Museum School in Boston and lectures irregularly on theoretical and music related topics worldwide. He has appeared on over 160 recordings.  
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# PROBES #5.2

## Auxiliaries

The PROBES Auxiliaries collect materials related to each episode that try to give a broader – and more immediate – impression of the field. They are a scan, not a deep listening vehicle; an indication of what further investigation might uncover and, for that reason, most are edited snapshots of longer pieces. We have tried to light the corners as well as the central arena, and to not privilege so-called serious over so-called popular genres. This fifth auxiliary investigates further ways of piano preparations: will the torture never end?

### 01. Playlist

#### 01 Programme icon

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

#### 02 John Cage talks. From the documentary *Four American Composers* by Peter Greenaway (excerpt), 1983

Cage told this story many times, with minor variations, all featuring the famous pie plate.

#### 03 Sophia Dussek, 'Le Petit Tambour' (excerpt), 1828

Sophia Dussek was born in Edinburgh in 1775. This piece for piano with Janissary stop was played by Marco Cardiano.

#### 04 Vervan Weston, 'Tesselations' (excerpts), 2003

A structured improvisation based on 52 closely linked pentatonic scales played on the restored Luthéal in the Museum of Musical Instruments in Brussels. Vervan is one of the few people given access to this historic instrument. I have selected several sections in which the sonorities, and more importantly the shift in sonorities, are most evident.

#### 05 Matteo Ramon Arevalos, 'After After' (excerpt), 2012

Taken from a live performance of this 'visual music' composition for grand piano and live projection. The piano is prepared with mosaic tiles and the accompanying video projection (by collaborating artist: Maria Chiara Zenzani) follows in real time the vagaries of the initial tile design as it is first decomposed and then edged back toward coherence through the efforts of the pianist who, constrained by a five note score, attempts – by making strategic playing choices – to reconfigure an approximation of the original design.

#### 06 Johann Sebastian Bach, 'Fugue in C minor' (excerpt). From *The Well Tempered Clavier, Book 1*, unattributed source or date, but recent

Assembled from notes sampled from an untuned, thumbtacked piano.

#### 07 Eric Riemann, 'Forgetting Belief' (excerpts), 2010

For a prepared Fender Rhodes electric piano. The preparations include the application of small pieces of quartz on the tops of the resonators, small washers on the tuning forks, muting the forks with felt, rubber, hands; scraping with rocks, coral, marbles, metal, strings, paper, wood, pencils, and a shoehorn. There is also a set of bowable rods installed and different parts of the instrument are bowed.

#### 08 Ferrante & Teicher, 'Someone to Watch Over Me', 1956

#### 09 Magda Mayas, live performance (excerpt)

Prepared piano and prepared clavinet. The piano is prepared with fishing line, bamboo skewers, metal and stone balls, rosin, a fork, slate and metal plates. Some strings are plucked and partially taped; magnets, mallets and rubber balls are also used. On the clavinet, metal coins, plectra, magnets, rubber and wood



[Magda Mayas' prepared piano before a performance]

are used, as well as slate, pencils, marbles and a small music box. Raised in Münster, resident in Berlin, Mayas has a jazz/post jazz background, and studied with Misha Mengelberg and Georg Graewe.

**10 John Cage, 'Concerto for Prepared Piano' (excerpt), 1950-51**

Written in three movements for prepared piano and chamber orchestra, this was a pivotal work in Cage's shift from composition to the use of chance procedures. The movements traced the shift – in the first the piano is still freely composed but by the third, the entire composition is the product of impersonal, automated decisions.

**11 Russ Conway, 'The Third Man' theme (excerpt), 1958**

**12 Piano and paper. Unknown Source, date, provenance or purpose**

But a fascinating sound...

**13 George Crumb, 'Morning Music (Genesis II) (Cancer)'. From *Makrokosmos Volume II*, 1972**

In the 'Makrokosmos' series, Crumb explored many extended techniques, which we will come to, and a few preparations. Here it's the classic sheet of paper again.

**14 Alain Savouret, 'Valse Molle' (excerpt), 1973**

Savouret studied with Elsa Barraine, Olivier Messiaen and Marcel Beaufils and was associated with Schaeffer's Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in Paris, which was itself the creation of French National Radio. He worked with instrumental as well as electroacoustic techniques. In this early work he mixes both, with the addition of a prepared piano.

**15 Josef Anton Riedl, 'Douce Amère' (excerpt), 1972**

For Violin, Guitar, Zither and prepared Piano. The German composer Josef Anton Riedl (b. 1929) specialises in music for percussion, multimedia and sound poetry. One of the pioneers of both concrete and electronic music, he worked in the early fifties both with GRM in Paris, and the NWDR electronic studio in Köln. He was also the director of the Siemens Studio for electronic music until its closure in 1966.

**16 & 17 Hauschka, 'Mount Hood', 2010, and 'FIM', 2005**

With a background in the late ninties in rock and hip-hop (God's Favourite Dog) Volker Bertelmann switched course to concentrate on piano preparation, not unlike Ferrante & Teicher, as an instrument with which to confect a kind of popular music, renaming himself Hauschka in appropriate pop style. Preparations include ping pong balls, leather, aluminium foil and a miscellany of weighted objects strategically positioned with gaffer tape. He seems first to create an instrument – a sound set – and then composes or improvises following its aesthetic logic. In 'Mount Hood' a large number of ping pong balls are used as preparation.

**18 György Kurtág, 'In Memoriam Lajos Hernádi', 2003**

Played on what Kurtág calls a supersordino (hypermute) upright piano. To achieve this effect, the middle muting pedal is permanently depressed, and the reverberant, muted, sound that results is then gently amplified.

**19 Magda Mayas, 'Shards' (excerpt), 2008**

**20 Programme icon**

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

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## 02. Notes

**On length and edits.**

The purpose of these programmes is to give some practical impression of the probes we discuss. This necessitates for the most part extracting short stretches of music from longer wholes, which, of course, compromises the integrity and



disrupts the context inherent in the original works. I have also, on occasion, edited different sections of a longer work together, better to illustrate the points under discussion. So the examples played in the programmes should not be confused with the works themselves. Wherever the word 'excerpt' appears after a title in the programme transcript, this indicates that what follows is an illustration, not a composition as it was conceived or intended. If something catches your ear, please do go back to the source.

**Notification**

If you want to be notified when a new probe goes up, please mail [remegacorp@dial.pipex.com](mailto:remegacorp@dial.pipex.com) with subject: Probe Me.

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### 03. Credits

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake.

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### 04. Acknowledgments

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### 05. Copyright note

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