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ERIC SMIGEL

Observation and Memory: An Interview with Eric Richards

Though he is not yet widely known, American composer Eric Richards has been a continuous and highly respected presence in the avant-garde community since the 1970s, and his music has been gaining exposure in recent years.[1] Richards is part of a generation of composers who came of artistic age during the counterculture of the 1960s, when liberal experimentalism and interdisciplinary curiosity were pervasive in various arts. Like other New York artists, Richards took special note of recent developments in the downtown visual arts scene that had been garnering international attention. Abstract expressionism, with the dramatic spontaneity and bold physical presence of works by painters like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, was gradually being supplanted by the sensually vibrant and emotionally detached aesthetic of minimalism. The carefully measured reductionist techniques of artists like Frank Stella and Donald Judd produced works that focus on an essential quality of a limited collection of materials, creating an immediacy of effect that many artists of the period sought to capture in their own media. At the same time, figures such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns incorporated

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Composer Eric Richards was born in New York City in 1935, and he taught at the Mannes College of Music. His work has been recorded on the Turnabout, Koch, and New World Record labels, and many of his scores are available through Frog Peak Music. He has also written about music in several publications, including *ex tempore* and *Bernstein Remembered* (edited by Jane Fluegel).

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found objects and recognizable images into their multilayered paintings and combines, which inspired Richards and others to reevaluate the use of pre-existing melodies in their work.

Responsive to the physicality and immediacy evident in these different trends of modern painting, Richards cultivated a musical style that highlights the timbral qualities of acoustic instruments and voices as well as the physical context in which the sounds are produced. His mature works, which feature a small assortment of motives that gradually unfold in kaleidoscopic variations, suggest an affinity with principles of minimalism that emerged in the 1960s. While several minimalist elements in music—including repetition, cyclic patterns, and gradual processes—were greatly facilitated by the advent of magnetic tape technology, Richards has never written electronic music. However, the use of tape-recording techniques has been important to his compositional method. Much as a painter might sketch an object from different angles to gain familiarity with its visual features, so does Richards conceive of the tape recorder as a device to facilitate close and repeated listening of a sonic object that can be manipulated in a variety of ways. By overlapping several layers of activity, as well as altering the tape speed and direction, Richards reveals multiple dimensions of a recorded sample, which he carefully assesses, transcribes, and uses as raw material in his compositions. Through techniques of augmentation, diminution, repetition, variation, and transformation, Richards constructs homogeneous works that present constantly shifting perspectives of a rich soundscape—one that appears to be inhabited not only by physical sound, but also by one's memory of the sound.

Richards's inquisitiveness and his empirical examination of sound for its own sake is a distinguishing feature of composers who comprise the American "experimental" tradition, one with which Richards identifies. While certain experimental composers have gained a measure of fame, and made a significant impact on the history of American music, there are numerous other composers of this tradition whose life and works remain underrepresented. Typically, the experimental nature of their work results in a musical style that does not command widespread attention (James Tenney, for instance, often explained to the layperson that he was a composer of "unpopular music"). This is frequently coupled with the reclusive nature of several of the individuals themselves, who are deeply immersed in their own idiosyncratic work, and, as Richards remarks, carry dispositions that are rarely conducive to participating in fashionable trends in the arts:

> It is curious, many of the people whose music I like best—particularly Harley Gaber, Charlemagne Palestine, and Michael Byron—kind of dropped out for different reasons. That's a whole area of American music that I think is important, but that no one has written about or gone into—it wasn't part of "the scene," partly because

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> of the personalities of these different people. They were not what David Riesman [in *The Lonely Crowd*] would call "other-directed," they were all very inner-directed people who could not really be part of a scene.[2]

Richards fits the profile of an introspective artist, who places unflinching faith in his intuition, while largely disregarding mainstream movements. His favorite childhood book, for instance, is Munro Leaf's *Ferdinand the Bull*, which tells the story of a bull whom the composer counts as one of his heroes: oblivious to the machismo showmanship and public glory of bull fighting, Ferdinand displays natural ferocity when stung by a bee, but he prefers to sit alone in the shade of a tree and smell flowers—a solitary and reverent way of life adopted by Richards, who is more concerned with the observation of sounds than with self-promotion and musical politics.

The following text derives primarily from a set of personal interviews with the composer that took place in his Albuquerque home in March 2008; supplemental information includes excerpts from subsequent correspondences, as well as published and unpublished statements by the composer. Over the course of the conversation, which is chronologically arranged here in four general sections, Richards describes his formative experiences in music, both as a student and teacher, and discusses his unique compositional style. Also, being exceptionally well read, Richards speaks with nonchalant authority on a daunting array of subjects ranging from linguistics to musical theater to modern art and poetry—the numerous passions that inform his compositions.

Early Studies and Teaching: Oberlin and Mannes

Eric Richards was born in New York City in 1935, and as a teenager he studied piano privately with Hans Neumann at Mannes. After graduating from high school he attended the Oberlin Conservatory during the 1953–54 academic year, where he worked with visiting architect and visionary Buckminster Fuller on the construction of a geodesic dome. Although Richards studied composition with Joseph Wood at Oberlin, it was his experience with Fuller that would inspire him to conceive of music in spatial terms, or "as sound moving along lines of directed energy between points limning out specific geometrical shapes."[3] It was also at Oberlin that Richards was introduced to the poetry of Hart Crane and Ezra Pound, both of whom continue to stimulate his imagination.

Richards transferred from Oberlin to Mannes in 1954, where, in addition to his piano studies, he studied composition with Roy Travis and music theory with Felix Salzer, whose expertise in Schenkerian analysis would influence both the structural and notational aspects of Richards's later compositions. After tendonitis impaired his piano studies, he left Mannes and spent several years "drifting in and out from job to job,"

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one of which was in the Music Division of the New York Public Library.[4] In 1964 he returned to Mannes to complete his degree, and he studied composition with William Sydeman while teaching music theory both privately and to precollege students. After earning a bachelor of science degree in music theory in 1966, Richards taught at Mannes and enrolled in Gustave Reese's graduate courses in musicology at New York University, where he received a master of arts degree in musicology, and began composing in earnest. Many of his early works—including *Rocks: Gardens* (1971) for trumpet and piano, and *The Discourse of Insects* (1971) for solo percussion—were written specifically for students and colleagues he had befriended at Mannes, and he continues to maintain close contact with many of them. "Mannes was very important," Richards remarks, "since it introduced me to all these people, who have all been alienated from the scene in some way."[5]

ER: My first real formative musical experience was when I was about 14—I had a wonderful piano teacher, a Czech émigré whose name was Hans Neumann. He told me to stop playing music for a few weeks and just do a few very simple exercises that broke down everything into either finger motion, wrist motion, or forearm motion. It was like having a track coach or football coach, because I was able to see how different physical movements created different kinds of music or different elements of music. It was like gymnastics, and ever since then I've thought of music very clearly in those terms: different kinds of physical movements produce a different kind of sound, and it's very important to differentiate between the physical action and the subsequent sound. Imagining a different physical process creates a very transparent way of creating, performing, and listening to music. It's like what Bernard Berenson loved about Florentine art—its tactile element—and that's what I love about music.[6] It greatly affected the way I compose: there is always a physical motion producing a certain kind of sound. I can't think of a piece that I've written that is not, in a way, done this way.

ES: What impressed you most about Buckminster Fuller?

ER: He was just magical—the idea of these lines of energy being pressed for maximum efficiency. I'm sure that affected my music very much, though it did not directly affect writing any music since I was doing hardly anything at the time—I had such difficulty writing. Just the image of these geometrical forms being compressed in such a way that they had the maximum amount of strength conjured up all kinds of wonderful lines of energy being pressed all over and energy moving along different lines to nodes—much of the kind of thing you get with Ezra Pound when he describes different nodes where energies converge.

ES: Did you physically assist Fuller?

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ER: Yes, we all did, but as soon as it was completed the whole thing completely collapsed, which I found totally charming. It showed that this was not architecture practiced for some functional purpose, but after all these days of working on it during the freezing winter it fell apart. I just loved that, because anytime I tried to build things as a kid, like those log cabin sets—which was a big thing during the New Deal era—and erector sets, I never could complete them. The log cabin always crumbled before I could put the roof on, and I could never figure out how to finish the erector thing. I think this is something that has continued throughout my life. As fascinated as I am with mechanics, I never had any real facility in technical things, and this is part of the reason why I probably never went into electronic music or computer music seriously, or why I never even built simple instruments. I tried to build musical instruments out of metal rods, or this or that, but anytime I started welding them, the constituent qualities that were so magical at first were completely lost. Imagining mechanics and wonderful machinery is much more fun for me and more practical than actually trying to build them, because I've never been able to succeed in doing that—it's just not my nature for whatever reason.

ES: Why did you leave Oberlin?

ER: I didn't do very well at Oberlin, so I went back to New York, where at least I felt at home as a teenager. I enrolled at Mannes, which was then just starting as a college, and I loved it. I loved Felix Salzer—we hit it off tremendously—and, of course, I could study with my old piano teacher.

ES: What encouraged you to begin composing?

ER: The dominant influence on me during all those years, especially when I was shifting from job to job, was the art world rather than the music world. I went to museums a lot, and occasionally read art books—Abrams art books were invaluable. More than anything else, my thinking was influenced by the painters from that era—people like Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. It meant a tremendous amount to me, going to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, or going to Yale, which had a wonderful collection at the time. That's when a lot of these works were coming to public notice for the first time—they had been shown in galleries, but this was the first time that they started to have large-scale exhibits or at least being acquired by major museums. Milton Avery was another wonderful artist who I admired very much. I wasn't that much into Philip Guston at the time—it looked too much like pink cotton candy—but he's been my favorite American artist for his later works. He's still the one artist who turns me on when I see his images of the Ku Klux Klan, the cigars, and the shoes.

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ES: Did the visual aspect of art lend itself to musical analogies?
ER: Well, more the processes behind the paintings. The idea of de Kooning overlapping one layer with another layer, smudging things out here—that was really the principle, the image I had of this: notes coming in and out, being vaguely heard or indistinct, musical overlapping. I'd very much like to get back to that sometime, but I don't know if I ever will. There's so much software that can do things like that now.

The Great Bass: Establishing the Fundamental

The year after he resigned from teaching music theory at Mannes in 1971, Richards composed a work for solo violin called *The Great Bass* (1972), which he considers to be the first major work in his own voice. It embodies many of the musical and extramusical principles that would continue to interest him for over thirty years. The work focuses on the relationship between a fundamental pitch and its harmonics, displaying the composer's penchant for examining the varying timbral properties of a closely related set of sonorities, and anticipating his long fascination with the rich overtones of bells. In the score, Richards indicates the proportion of the bow to be used for several of the notated figures. These specific instructions for bow distribution—the result of working closely with violinist Linda Cummiskey—reveal the composer's close attention to the correlation between the physical movements of a performer and the sound that is produced, a central facet of Richards's musical thinking since his early piano studies with Hans Neumann.[7] Finally, *The Great Bass* exhibits Richards's affinity for literature by incorporating directly into the score passages of Ezra Pound's translations of Confucian texts, which serve as literary analogies to musical concepts that are central to the work.[8] Naturally, the literary influence on Richards is most evident in his vocal works that carry texts. He composed three significant works for chorus during this period—*though under medium . . .* (1973–74, revised 1975), *wingsets* (1973), and *after sound, light and heat, memory, will and understanding* (1977)—the titles of which were taken from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.[9]

In addition to these basic compositional principles—exploration of a limited palette of timbres, mechanics as the basis for sound production, and structural analogies and processes derived from literature and art—Richards usually forges a close working relationship with the performer of his music, who is often a personal friend. This is as much social as practical: many of his works use unconventional systems of notation and demand a high level of dedication. "Plus," Richards admits, "it's fun working with one performer with their idiosyncrasies and enlarging that like a mirror with a microscope or a telescope until you start to get

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strange distortions that you would never have in a real time performance. Then you can make use of the gaps, the discrepancies, the exaggerations, the mistakes—that's where the fun is, really."[10]

Richards notes that several works that he composed around the same time as *The Great Bass* share essential features:

> All these pieces are about "processes." Each is conceived of as an essentially unique projection of a major ninth, an unfolding of an homogeneous continuum of sustained sounds (and directed silence) which is continually re-energized and differentiated into individual strata by the "composing out" of the resultant beats and combination tones which originate from adjacently-placed tones and overlapping rhythms. The energies of each of these pieces have been directed towards making explicit the different qualities of time, motion, and space implicit in the above acoustic phenomena.[11]

ES: What was the impetus for *The Great Bass*?

ER: I had a very good friend named Harley Gaber, who was at Mannes at the time.[12] He was dating a violinist named Linda Cummiskey, who taught at New Paltz, and a year or two later she was with a group at SUNY Buffalo with people like Joseph Kubera, Jan Williams, and Julius Eastman.[13] In spring of 1972 they were going to do a program at SUNY New Paltz of music influenced by the East, and somehow I got involved with writing a piece for it. Harley did two pieces [*Narrow Road to the Deep North* for solo vibraphone, and *October Piece* for piano and vibraphone], a famous radio announcer named Woody Leafer performed Cage's *4′33″*, and I think they did a performance of Terry Riley's *In C*. I also remember performing some Stockhausen text pieces [*Aus den sieben Tagen*] quite amateurishly at the piano with instrumentalists. It was at the height of the student protests against the war in Vietnam and there was an outdoor assemblage of outraged students protesting the war while we were up there performing, which only made the otherworldly, contemplative character of our program that much more powerful.

I remember my first attempt at doing something for Linda—it was based on fourths or something and I remember Harley saying, "Oh, no!" and Linda saying, "Oh, fourths, eww!" so that got me into seconds and ninths more. The first distinctive piece I wrote for her was *The Great Bass*. I owe so much to her—we went over every note together. She was commuting from New Paltz to New Haven to take private lessons at Yale from a wonderful teacher named Broadus Earle, who had a theory about the relation between specific physical movements and the specific sound produced and its overall function, sort of as one element in a larger syntax.[14] Linda was very involved with that at the time, so we really worked over that for weeks. I had written

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some pieces the year before—one for trumpet and piano for a friend of mine,[15] but *The Great Bass* was really the first thing exploring extreme upper harmonics of the violin with long spaces in between, and there was an Ezra Pound text underneath. That was the first piece that partially used the harmonic vocabulary that I would use later, that has been a part of me, but it was much more chromatic than anything I have done since then.

ES: What were your primary musical concerns while composing the piece?

ER: I think my concern, specifically, was how to create a long piece out of very few fragments together. I wanted to write a very long piece and somehow I thought that these fragments, with the text underneath, would allow the performer to look at the text and meditate upon the Confucian Analects with the Pound translations, and that would somehow create a situation where you could have anywhere from three seconds, five seconds, seven seconds of space before the next fragment, and you went up and down on the page in different ways. You could create and ten or fifteen minute piece in this way.

ES: What was the history behind *though under medium . . .* ?

ER: I started writing *though under medium . . .* during the winter of 1972–73, when I had a double shift at an apartment house in New York: I worked as a doorman during the dayshift, and then several days a week I worked an all-night shift as a porter. One morning after a double shift, I remember going home and trying to fall asleep, and the opening line of *though under medium . . .* ("How still the bells . . .") kept going over and over in my head like some kind of tape loop, and that was the origin of the piece.

Then, in the spring of 1973, Gregg Smith did a series with Robert Craft at Columbia—there were a few concerts called the Gregg Smith–Robert Craft Concerts at McMillan—and he included *Discourse of Insects* on the program. I wrote *The Discourse of Insects* for Michael Levinson, who was a percussion student at Mannes, and he had already performed it a few times by this point, so he already knew it backwards and forwards. Smith never had enough money for anything, because his group was actually unionized, and we were stranded in his rental car with percussion instruments after the performance. I think he didn't have enough money for the car or something, so we were stuck outside McMillan for like an hour trying to figure out what to do. During that time he said to me, "Why don't you do a piece for the Gregg Smith Singers?" This was interesting because the summer before I wandered into a record store and I picked up a used copy of one of Gregg Smith's Charles Ives recordings—it was the first Ives recording I owned.[16] I was just enchanted with that record, and here, maybe eight months later, I was stranded with this guy who asked me to do a piece for him.

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At the same time, I had an offer from Queens College CUNY, and it was almost a choice of spending a few months working on this piece, which would probably be recorded under a Ford Foundation grant, or taking this academic job. I went with the chance to spend time working on this piece that I started the previous winter! I wrote most of it that summer at a farm in North Liberty, Iowa, where Paul Schiavo and his wife at that time, Ada, lived, and I completed it in New York later that year. It was performed the next year and recorded a year or two later, at the same time that the Gregg Smith group did the famous recording of Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*.

In order for Smith to sign the contract with the Ford Foundation for the recording, the piece had to have a publisher. Smith knew this Italian émigré named Raoul Ronson, who had something called Seesaw Music. Smith called him up when he suddenly realized he had to have a publisher. So I met with Ronson a day or two later, and we had to change the text. I used a phrase from T. S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets*—"Quick, said the bird"—and we changed it to, "Quick, set the world," because he said I could be taken to copyright court, and the Eliot Estate is really savage, so I changed some of the text so it sounded almost identical.

ES: I understand that *though under medium . . .* was originally conceived as a wedding song.

ER: Yes, it started with something I had done earlier in the year—this is why Smith wanted me to do something for him. Barbara Lingelbach, for whom I had written *wingsets* and *after sound, light and heat,* was getting married to a fellow I had met at Oberlin, Marc Shapiro, the composer who had introduced me to Hart Crane and probably Pound as well. They wanted Gregg's wife, Rosalind Rees, to sing something at the wedding ceremony, and I remember going over to Gregg's house to discuss it—that was the first time I really dealt with him. We went over a little Emily Dickinson thing about the bells, and it was just something to do at the Quaker wedding ceremony.[17] They liked it so much, which is why Gregg asked me to write a choral piece.

For this expanded version, which uses twelve independent voices, I merged the Dickinson poem into a text by Hopkins—a famous sonnet on Henry Purcell that I first heard about from Carl Schachter. In the poem, Hopkins relates the thing itself as opposed to the species to which it belongs.[18] It's a whole idea that he had, who knows where he got it: Is the music of Purcell unique in itself? Is it perhaps the species itself that it belongs to? I think even before I set the Dickinson, I had tried to set the "Henry Purcell" poem, and I used the first few notes of "Dido's Lament" but with octave displacements. That's how I got the major ninth that begins the piece.

ES: How did you derive the rest of the pitches?

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ER: By imagining a succession of combination tones generated from that opening interval of a ninth for the first few pages of the piece, quite arbitrarily adding and subtracting successive pitches to create the atmosphere that I wanted. This procedure was entirely independent of any real acoustic phenomena occurring in real time: one doesn't actually hear real difference and summation tones as the piece "opens up"—it was a conceit about combination tones that had led me on this path. And I had huge fun deriving them from the same chapters on summation and difference tones that are contained in *On the Sensations of Tone,* the same Helmholtz book that Harry Partch carried in his backpack when he was jumping trains. It goes into combination tones pretty extraordinarily for someone in the 1860s.

I may have used some similar procedures in *wingsets,* but for the most part it was based on superimposed clusters of four tones each, which could also be transformed linearly into interesting hexachords. Barbara Lingelbach, who commissioned the piece for a performance by her New York Kantorei, said to me, "It's a twelve-tone piece, isn't it?" which really surprised me. She had managed to analyze the piece in a way that almost fell into that pattern.

Consent of Sound and Meaning: *Stretching, Compressing, and Observing Time*

While previous years saw Richards writing for solo instruments and choirs of voices, beginning with *Consent of Sound and Meaning* (1978–83) for ten double basses and seven trumpets, he frequently called for choirs of a single instrument (or for a solo acoustic instrument with a prerecorded tape).[19] In a sense, Richards extended principles of multiplicity, which he initially conceived for the voice, to instruments. As he remarks in a note to the choral work *though under medium . . .*: "If there is any kind of 'theory' underlying this music, then, I think it must be something close to that of Leonardo's physiology of vision wherein . . . 'everything fills the surrounding air with infinite images of itself.'"[20] The reference to Leonardo reflects the quasi-scientific approach to composition that Richards had adopted by the late 1970s: using a tape recorder, he would capture a sonic object (i.e., record a sound), alter the playback speed or direction, overlay multiple tracks, and carefully transcribe the results. Richards associates his fascination with techniques of manipulation, observation, and notation with the American tradition of experimental artists and also of naturalists, who possess

> an almost obsessive involvement with the subject—listening to it over and over again, piling up detail after detail in the writing of it, drawing—and perhaps even superimposing—view after view of a

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> single scene, until the mere appearances of the subject are transcended and something else, some new kind of truth and beauty—something we did not expect or even possibly imagine—is achieved.[21]

He also compares the shifting focus of different layers of musical time to the several layers of paint found in a work by Willem de Kooning, or the simultaneous perspectives one might experience while viewing a landscape. Richards translated this mode of perception into musical expression in *The Consent of Sound and Meaning*.[22]

The Consent of Sound and Meaning marks Richards's earliest involvement with the overlapping and elasticity of musical time, which continued to preoccupy him musically in the 1980s. For *ringrang* (1981), which he composed while working on *The Consent of Sound and Meaning*, Richards manipulated the mechanical speed of a music box as it was recorded, and then transcribed the tape for two pianos.[23] Similarly, *Conch Music* (1982–84) features multiphonic fragments played by an oboist, which were recorded and transcribed onto elastic material that the composer literally stretched before notating. Ever sensitive to the relationship between his music and pioneering work done in other disciplines, Richards compares *Conch Music* to the work of biologist D'Arcy Thompson, whose classic study *On Growth and Form* examines the formal development of species.[24]

ES: When did you start using tape recorders as a compositional tool?

ER: I began using tape at the most rudimentary level—I was not writing tape pieces in the sense that people speak of it—I was just recording stuff, and then basically listening to it over and over again, and then notating it, not always exactly, but using it as a take-off point for a piece, suddenly departing from all that at a certain point and letting the piece compose itself.

Shortly after *The Great Bass*, I asked Linda to play certain figurations similar to those in *The Great Bass*, and then I brought it down octave by octave, until they were very deep tones that almost sounded like double basses. I think I had a Revox A77, which had two speeds (7.5 and 15 IPS), and a cheap Toshiba (3.75 and 7.5 IPS), so you had to keep on going back and forth between the two of them, continually rerecording, until you got down to whatever you wanted. Then, with the help of Charlemagne Palestine, whom I had met when he was a student at Mannes, I created a massive tape loop that went all the way around the room. The bass part for *The Consent of Sound and Meaning* was created by literally transcribing the sounds on that tape loop for double basses. It was like taking five seconds of music and making a minute out of it, and just repeating it over and over again. I started to hear certain things and block out other things, and did a whole fifteen-minute piece out of it.

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ES: How did the tape loops relate to the different temporal cycles in *Consent*?

ER: When I said cut—when he [Charlemagne Palestine] was supposed to splice the tape—he came in a second or so too soon, just short of a minute, and this created a whole imbalance on the tape of things crossing over, which I love! They're like sutures between my saying something and him responding to cut the tape at that point. Each sequence of the loop that forms the genesis of the piece is just a hair short of a minute. That gave me the idea of using overlapping cycles of Mayan 260-day calendar, 360, 365, 584-day Venusian calendar, things just continually overlapping each other. Only at the very end does everything suddenly come together, much as all the Mayan cycles will when the world ends, which is supposed to be pretty soon, I think.

ES: How did the trumpet(s) become involved?

ER: That was another piece called *Fons et Origo* [for trumpet(s) and/or tape, (1976–77)], which didn't make a very good effect—it was boring for most people. I overlapped that with the double bass parts after ten minutes, and it's absolutely spectacular when the trumpets come in and rub against the pitches of the contrabass—I think it's the most interesting thing I've ever done in music, and it was entirely unintentional.[25]

ES: How did you conceive of *ringrang*?

ER: That came from a music box with the famous theme from *Swan Lake*, which I played at different speeds—winding the music box faster, and then slowing it down. I must have ended up with two different tapes or versions that I worked against each other, that were happening at different times. I'm not sure how that happened—it just sort of gradually happened—and then it developed into a specific technique that I used over and over again. While I eventually transcribed the tapes for two pianos, it was performed in that original taped form in Taos by a very dear friend of mine, Kathy Ray, who was an outstanding dancer. She may still have the tapes.

I wrote *ringrang* with Julius Eastman in mind. He had said, "Why don't you write something for me?" but when he saw it—it's kind of delicate and precise, with a very clear distinction between the different muscles that you're using for different tones—he didn't think it was up his alley. I don't know whatever happened after that, but it's never been done. I should have recorded the two-piano version with myself playing while I still had some chops, before the arthritis got too bad, but I never did.

ES: Did you modify the sounds on the tapes, or was it a straight transcription?

ER: I made tremendous alterations. I found a cheap hotel in Santa Cruz called the St. George, and I shut myself up there for a month or two and listened to those tapes over and over again. I made an endless

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scroll, which I probably have somewhere. Each line was notated on a scroll that could unroll from here to the end of the property—it was truly an insane endeavor. I just did that with letters [i.e., note names]. Then I went to the MacDowell Colony for two months, and I had access to a wonderful piano, so I actually tried to get the right voicing and the right pedaling from what was basically the score with letters that I had done in Santa Cruz.[26]

ES: How did you modify them?

ER: Just so it sounded good on a piano, and that it fit within the hands. I also added some other stuff that with certain tones—again, I was totally at a loss when it came to electronics, but I loved the idea—I also did this in the trumpet parts of *Consent of Sound and Meaning*—that is if you had certain kinds of filters, which people like David Behrman were using at the time, that when you hit certain pitches, suddenly other things would happen—it would set off chain reactions. That actually happens in the music, as if there were these different kinds of filters that were setting off other processes when, let's say, an octave would be reached or a unison. That's part of the process, except that it's written out rather than electronically done: whenever certain notes are hit, you would have rapidly repeating octaves like reverberations, which I indicate with cutout tabs. Included in the score are tabs that have to be inserted in the music at different places. They're arranged like a children's book: all the tabs are on two sheets, and you have to cut them out with scissors and insert them in the proper places.

My Memory of the Bells: *Time and Consciousness*

Over the last twenty years, Richards has continued to create what he calls "holographic entities" by working with the harmonic series and with overlapping temporal relationships. But he has moved from a transcription-based practice, which tends toward repetition, to one of greater variety and nuance: "Either my work ethic or feeling of discomfort with repeating identical material led me to quite industriously compose out completely different parts for the [complementary] material . . . [i.e., echoes and reverberations], but not that different that they would destroy the illusion of one pulsating whole with a single homogeneous texture."[27] For example, in *The Bells Themselves (and my memory of the bells)* (1997–98) for Tibetan tingsha and tape, Richards divides the sonority of the bells into two constituent parts—the attack and the reverberation—which he treats as separate entities that remain closely related: "the lower metallic sounds are 'the bells themselves,' the higher vibrations, 'my memory of the bells.'"[28] Also, in time's racing (but measured by what we do) (2000) for metal gyil(s), vibraphone(s), and crotale(s), Richards uses one instru-

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ment to enhance the reverberation or echo of the other, depending on such factors as temporal placement, articulation, and dynamics.

Richards has turned his attention in recent years toward the function of memory, a necessary component to the perception of time. In *My Great-Aunt Julia* (1993), for solo voice, Richards explores the relationship between memory and time by abstracting and radically transforming the storytelling features of a traditional ballad. Several of Richards's works of this period also engage the memory by including oblique references to pre-existing material: *Chicken Pull* (1989–92) is based on 1930s' blues recordings; *The Bells Themselves: Jonathan Edwards and the American Songbook* (1998–99) and *Time's Racing (but measured by what we do)* (2000) make passing references to songs from the repertoire of American musical theater; and *finalbells* (2002–4) contains fragments of Schubert melodies. While these references are deliberate, the material appears in such transformed guises that the result is completely devoid of sentimentality; in fact, Richards insists that the presence of such "quotations" (most of which remain unrecognizable) is almost superfluous to the essential sound and structure of the piece. Richards's use of pre-existing material encompasses a much broader source in *The Mouth of Night* (1995–96) for twelve breathers, which is a musical reconstruction of the linguistic evolution of Indo-European languages. Far transcending personal nostalgia, Richards's most recent works serve as a testament to his ongoing inquiry into the relationship between sensory experience and human existence, and, according to the composer, represent his "attempts to cut through time—and across history—to capture the wonder of the archaic beginnings of our culture and our consciousness."[29]

ES: You mentioned that you composed *My Great-Aunt Julia,* and other works, in a semiconscious state.

ER: I was falling asleep and was almost in a dream state, and I started the piece with very elemental fifths. I continued in the next few weeks just sort of improvising into a tape recorder—each day I would sing a new part into the machine—and I really didn't start composing consciously until I was at least about halfway through. Then I remember visiting some friends in Washington, D.C., and seeing an exhibit with some northwest coast art at the Smithsonian, at the Natural History Museum. I saw bird figures—these transformation masks—with flaps that opened up and you would see another figure inside. I suddenly thought I had to restart where I started in the middle as if it's another figure enclosed within this raven or something. That's the first conscious thing that I did: in the middle of the piece, I went back to the beginning. At the end, I was conscious of being a little ironic, almost in an Edward Gorey way—"whatever happened" and "she never spoke of it again"—all this also sort of like Gertrude Stein's mock Gothic

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mystery, *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*. That's really the only place where I did something with deliberate artifice in the last few lines.

I would say almost every piece I've written starts with some kind of a—it's not really a dream, but a state of falling asleep that people often talk about when you have an out-of-body experience. Most of the ideas for individual pieces have come while in that state, and then I just follow it if I'm ambitious enough. I'm sure there are times when I've been too lazy to try to remember what it was and didn't write a piece.

ES: In what ways have you incorporated references to popular music in some of your recent music?

ER: I started *The Bells Themselves: Jonathan Edwards and the American Songbook* with the particular chords and sounds on the piano I wanted, which had nothing to do with popular music or any particular tunes. Then I noticed that there was a certain profile within the chords that was common to many songs from the American Songbook, but it was just the inner voices of chords. I noticed, for example, that the contour—the actual pitches—fit perfectly within the Gershwin song "Our Love Is Here to Stay." That song was not even completed by Gershwin—it was played at parties, and it was notated by Oscar Levant and Vernon Duke after he died. I noticed—I had my ninth on the top, C to D over this B flat–C–G–E flat in the middle register—that the last song Jerome Kern wrote, "In Love in Vain," had the same profile. Two of Burton Lane's songs also fit that profile: "How Are Things in Glocca Morra" and "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever." There are many songs that fit that pattern. There were a lot of Rodgers and Hart songs, more than anything else. "Ol' Man River" fit that same profile. Also an early Jerome Kern song written with P. G. Wodehouse in the World War I era, "Bill," which later appeared in *Showboat*. Then at the very end I brought in, almost as stretto, the melodies of a number of songs, a page or two of the piece proper before the *pppp* ending. Since most of the melodies are pretty well camouflaged in inner voices, I identified or "tagged" them by placing the words that accompany them as textual underlay. It's almost impossible for the pianist to bring out anything. Besides, it would be foolish to do so. It's sort of like Schumann putting encoded names in his scores.[30] In fact, I think the piece would have been almost the same, even if I hadn't made a point of lining up some of these songs in different places, but it made it possible to do a little bit more interesting detail in the inner voices.

There are also a couple of improvised sections in *time's racing* that seemed sort of stale, so I had to figure out a way to make it a little bit fresher and give it something you wouldn't expect. I took something from *On the Town* and a few other tunes from the American Songbook. What I did was pick out the first note of that, and the first note of some

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other tune, and the first note of another, then I would go back to the second note of the first tune, and the second note of another song, and the second note of the third song, just to create a little bit of variety, which I don't seem to be able to do out of my own imagination. This way there was a little bit of something unexpected for those few brief measures. So, that's what those little improvised sections are: it was just a device to get out of the straightjacket I was stuck in at that moment and bring in something from the outside world. Since I had just done *The Bells Themselves*, it was an obvious thing to do, and I had a chance to use some songs that did not fit the profile of my chords in the three-piano piece.

Then, of course, in *Chicken Pull*, I used recordings of Sonny Boy Williamson, Big Joe Williams, and Robert Nighthawk. They were all recorded on Bluebird, the race division of RCA in Aurora, Illinois, in the late 1930s. Many of the introductions are virtually identical with slight variations, and I just lined them up: I recorded them on tape, played them backwards, and notated each one—I might still have a sketchbook including all these things. The actual sound, what I finally did with the seventy-two clarinets, came out totally different from the sound of those things on the tape.[31]

ES: How did quotations of Schubert find their way into *finalbells*?

ER: I had access to these wonderful cowbells that belonged to Alan Zimmerman. At first I recorded samples of him playing, then I experimented myself playing, and figured out certain pitches that I liked, combinations of things on different bells that weren't that far removed from the intervals that I had been using in my other pieces, but the intervals did not correspond to any kind of familiar tuning system at all, they were just what you got from these bells, and often had very little direct relation to what the fundamental of the bell would be. I figured, "Well, I'm probably going to be playing these fragments myself for my own fun." I didn't think of anything in relation to a concert piece, but I thought, how am I going to remember what bells to play to get the pitches I want, because I have to remember which part of the cowbell to rub to get the particular sound I want, the particular pitch, and the particular motion to get it, and everything else—there's no way I could be looking at any music. So I started to think, is there some mnemonic device to get the first few overtones I wanted from the bells? It turned out the pitches of the bells I had to rub to produce those overtones corresponded to a figure from "Der Doppelgänger" of Schubert—when a man sees his own double in German Romantic literature, it is a premonition of death. Then I picked out the notes of the song, just from the sheet music, and recorded Alan playing that. Then I made an entirely different version where you could take as much or as little time on each note that you wanted, and recorded a track of that. Then I figured I needed some new

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material, so again I went through the same process, and the succession of pitches of the bells that produced the harmonies I needed as the piece unfolded turned out to be very similar to yet other Schubert songs from his last published collection, *Schwanengesang*. There were one or two more pieces—Schubert's last song before he died is also one of the pieces—but by this time, I didn't care about finding the fundamentals that produced the harmonics I wanted, because my fixation with the last songs of Schubert had taken over. I think that last song—which is a very joyous song called "Die Taubenpost," about a pigeon carrying a message from a lover to his beloved—has little fragments in the piano part from his last piano sonatas, the A major and B flat. It was a very weird thing—it was probably the very last thing he ever composed. There was no connection—I did not pick that because of the pitches it produced—and that comes in just at the end to add more noise to the whole thing, to make it more massive and less precise, which adds a certain kind of intense quality as the piece progresses.[32]

ES: Could you discuss the linguistic background to your piece for twelve breathers, *The Mouth of Night*?

ER: It goes a little bit into the origin of Indo-European languages that Saussure, the father of structuralism, postulated: that there were early Indo-European languages, before any of the ones that are known—before Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Persian—that had certain features that he deduced from the later languages. According to Saussure, there was an earlier language that had short vowels followed by laryngeal phonemes, similar to those still common to Semitic languages. Over time, the laryngeal sounds disappeared, merging with more open sonorities to form the long-stressed vowels associated with Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. It turned out that there actually was a language corresponding to Saussure's model: shortly after the turn of the century, Hittite was discovered, and scholars immediately determined from the endings that it was an Indo-European language.

The Mouth of Night is primarily about the counterpoint created by different kinds of inhalations and exhalations, which need vowels to support them, and with the linguistic tools I now had, I could incorporate for that purpose the short vowels of Hittite. As the piece develops, I gradually introduce the rough breathings of classical Greek, or the kind of glottal stops singers use before the vowels at the beginning of words to make their attacks sharper. Then, almost as virtuosic ornamentation, I have the singers conclude intakes of breath with successive "h" sounds, which also occur in Hittite. Finally, I not only bring in other vowel sounds that subsequently appeared as Indo-European languages evolved, but I also assemble a layer of text and symbols at the bottom of each page of the score containing the words

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from which I derived the vowel sounds, which are common to various languages—in addition to Indo-European words, I also include some Egyptian hieroglyphs and Hebrew letters. (Somehow during this process I also became particularly fascinated with Tocharian, one of the oldest Indo-European languages that probably died out by 800 A.D.) Anyway, these were words that I found interesting in terms of both the meaning and the sound. I wasn't drawing the words from any specific text—they were just isolated words from different languages that seemed somehow to be connected in a surrealistic way. I didn't go too deeply into what the connections might be.

ES: Your essay "Observation and Obsession: An American Way of Art" suggests that you feel part of an American tradition.

ER: Yes, but I'd be hard pressed to say what it is. Since I don't feel part of any group of any kind, that a label can be put on me, I guess I was trying to justify my existence as a composer someway in putting myself in some kind of historical tradition, which may not be the case, but I'm sure that was the psychological reason behind it. I'm an American, and part of all this—even if I don't feel like I fit in anywhere—is that maybe there were people in the past who tried to achieve the same kind of complexity in their work.

Appendix A
List of Works by Eric Richards

1969 *Five William Carlos Williams Songs,* for tenor or soprano, flute, English horn, and Bassoon; unpublished.
1969–70 *The Tyger,* for mixed chorus and orchestra; unpublished.
1970 Two Pieces for Piano, unpublished.
1970–71 *Lunar Oxenblood,* for mixed chamber ensemble; unpublished.
1971 *Rocks: Gardens,* for trumpet and piano; published by Lingua Press.
1971 *The Discourse of Insects,* for solo percussion; published by American Composers Alliance.
1971 Two Motets for Chorus, unpublished.
1971 *An Epithalamion,* for mezzo-soprano, violin, and cello; unpublished.
1972 *The Great Bass,* for solo violin; published by Lingua Press.
1972 *A Fanfare for Diebenkorn,* for three trumpets; unpublished.
1973 *The Two Thebes,* for oboe and electronics; unpublished.
1973 *wingsets,* for baritone solo, chorus, and instruments; published by Lingua Press.
1974 *A Whole Other Ball Game,* theatre piece for dancers, singers, and speaker; unpublished.
1975 *though under medium . . .,* for twelve-part a cappella chorus; published by Subito Music Corporation (orig. published by Seesaw Music).
1976–77 *Fons et origo,* for trumpet(s) and/or tape; unpublished.
1977 *after sound, light and heat, memory, will and understanding,* for chorus of women's voices and handbells; published by Frog Peak Music.
1978–83 *the consent of sound and meaning,* for ten double basses and seven trum-

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pets, or multi-tracked double bass and trumpet; published by Frog Peak Music.

1981 *ringrang,* for two pianos; published by Frog Peak Music.

1983 *A Mind of Winter,* for solo violin; unpublished.

1982–84 *Conch Music,* for oboe(s) in eleven parts; published by Frog Peak Music.

1985 *Lunin,* for tape with voices [incidental music]; unpublished.

1985 *A Lion Does Not Read Books,* for gamelan; published by the American Gamelan Institute.

1986 *Music for Cymbeline,* for six sopranos; unpublished.

1986 *Socrates: Theatre of Life,* for tape [incidental music]; unpublished.

1987 *Dracula: A Love Story,* for tape [incidental music]; unpublished.

1988 *the unraveling of the field,* for solo piano; published by Frog Peak Music.

1989 *In the Field of the Holy Apples,* for tape [incidental music]; unpublished.

1989–92 *Chicken Pull,* for seventy-two clarinets and four whistlers or clarinet and tape; published by Frog Peak Music.

1992 *An Old Actress in the Role of Dostoevsky's Wife,* for tape [incidental music]; unpublished.

1992 *fellow-strung,* for double a cappella mixed chorus and two alto and six soprano soloists; published by Frog Peak Music.

1993 *My Great-Aunt Julia,* for bass-baritone solo; published by Frog Peak Music.

1994–96 *Between a Rock . . .,* for rock band and solo lute; published by Frog Peak Music.

1995–96 *The Mouth of Night,* for twelve breathers; published by Frog Peak Music.

1997–98 *the bells themselves—and my memory of the bells,* for three Tibetan tingsha and tape; published by Frog Peak Music.

1998–99 *the bells themselves: Jonathan Edwards and the American Songbook,* for three pianos; published by Frog Peak Music.

2000 *time's racing (but measured by what we do),* for two metal gyils, two vibraphones, and two crotales, or for metal gyil, vibraphone, crotale, and tape; published by Frog Peak Music.

2001 *harte's bells,* for any solo voice and electronics; published by Frog Peak Music.

2002–4 *finalbells,* for sixteen suspended chromatic cowbells and tape; published by Frog Peak Music.

2007 *The Echoes of Light: Music for Rollins Chapel,* for flute, B-flat clarinet, marimba, and five voices (two sopranos, countertenor, tenor, and baritone); published by Frog Peak Music.

2008 *In the Pocket,* for two pianos; published by Frog Peak Music.

NOTES

This interview was the idea of Larry Polansky, who hosted Richards during his residency at Dartmouth College from February 25 to March 1, 2008, culminating in the premiere performance of *The Echoes of Light: Music for Rollins Chapel.* Polansky not only introduced me to Richards, but he also generously sent me a number of his scores published by Frog Peak Music, and provided an excellent critical reading of this document. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Michael Byron, who helped facilitate my meeting with

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Richards and made useful suggestions on the article. My largest gratitude, naturally, extends to Eric Richards: he was most hospitable during my visit to his home in Albuquerque; he provided me with books, scores, recordings, program notes, unpublished statements, newspaper clippings, and other ephemera; and he made helpful comments and corrected errors in an earlier draft—all of which proved invaluable to the formation of this article.

1. There is evidence over the last few years of a growing awareness of Richards and an enthusiastic interest in his music. In 2005 Lotus Music and Dance sponsored an evening of performances in New York featuring a retrospective of his works, which was reviewed by Kyle Gann; see Gann, "Disorient Express," *The Village Voice* (Feb. 15, 2005), http://villagevoice.com/2005–02–15/music/disorient-express). In 2007, New World Records produced an excellent CD recording titled *Eric Richards: the bells themselves* (cat. no. 80673) that includes several of the works discussed in this article, along with illuminating liner notes by Paul Paccione, and in 2008 Koch International Classics released a recording called *InsomniMania* (cat. no. 7674536), which features pianist Jenny Lin playing a number of works by American composers inspired to varying degrees by somnambulism, including Richards's *The Unraveling of the Field.*

2. Eric Richards, interview by author, recording transcription, Albuquerque, N.M., March 11–12, 2008 (hereafter Richards interview).

3. Richards, "Gallery Talk," written Feb. 7, 1999, and delivered by the composer at Adirondack Community College, Feb. 25, 1999, for the occasion of the opening of the exhibit *Intersecting Sound and Image: The Music Scores and Sketches of Eric Richards,* Visual Arts Gallery, Adirondack Community College (Feb. 25–March 25, 1999).

4. Richards interview.

5. Ibid.

6. Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) was an American art historian who specialized in the Renaissance.

7. During the interview, Richards emphasized the importance of noting the physical requirements necessary to produce the appropriate sound in one of his more recent works, *the bells themselves (and my memory of the bells)* (1997–98): "When I was working on the tingsha piece, I was totally involved in the physical movement—where I struck it, which muscles I was using, everything like that. It was very tactile, and I notated it all down very carefully. I worked on this piece so long, for two years: playing the tingsha myself and listening to the tapes over and over again. Going back to those early piano studies: finding and notating each motion, where I hit the bell and how I did it."

8. In an unpublished statement on *The Great Bass,* Richards writes: "*The Great Bass* takes its title from the following passages in Ezra Pound's *A Guide to Kulchur:*

"'Down below the lowest note synthesized by the ear and "heard," there are slower vibrations. The ratio between these frequencies and those written to be executed by the instruments is OBVIOUS in mathematics. The whole question of tempo, and of a main bass in all musical structure resides in the use of these frequencies.

"'Failing to hit the proper great bass, the deficient musician fumbles about off the great bass key as a poor singer fumbles about a little flat or a quarter tone too high.'

"I discovered the above passages while working on *The Great Bass,* and an analogy immediately suggested itself between the kind of elusive but underlying musical processes suggested in Pound's description and certain musical relationships that appeared to lay at the very basis of my violin piece. The musical materials that I was working with were generated by using acoustical phenomena such as overtones and combination tones—elements that have always seemed to me very close to the center of the musical impulse—in consistent compositional procedures, affecting every level of the work's structure."

9. "My choral pieces . . . have always been my personal laboratory for composing—perhaps in the way piano sonatas were for musicians of the Classic and Romantic era, or the way the guitar is for popular musicians today. This is not only because of the ease

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in moving live bodies without musical instruments and music stands in different spatial configurations (all of my choral work is spatial in conception) but also because of the way I can use concepts about sound that interest me that I have discovered in various texts ranging from Gnostic inscriptions and Catholic liturgy to texts by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and syncretic texts of my own—almost all dealing with light and heat, energy, movement, breath and sound." See Richards, "Gallery Talk."

10. Richards interview. The composer considers this type of performance commitment integral to his musical style, as he describes in an earlier interview with Beverly Ress: "There is something inherent in having an instrumentalist or singer start from scratch and have to work their way through a new system. You can somehow almost feel the work and the effort that's involved in trying something new, rather than just a pro reading a score in a rehearsal before a concert, which is something that happens so often in a contemporary music concert. My scoring is a way of involving the performer in a very intimate way over a long period of time. I think that one feels this kind of energy and learning process at the actual performance." See Beverly Ress, "The Cassette [*sic*] of Sound and Meaning: A Conversation with Eric Richards," Nov. 30, 1999, www.nomadnet.org/massage4/richards/index.html.

11. Richards, "Gallery Talk."

12. American composer Harley Gaber, whose notational practices strongly influenced Richards, also hand-copied the score of *The Great Bass*.

13. During this period, Cummiskey served as a Creative Associate at the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, an organization founded by Lukas Foss at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1964.

14. Linda Cummiskey met Broadus Earle in the summer of 1965 while participating in a string quartet program at Yale, and she began studying with him privately and occasionally in the early 1970s. According to Cummiskey, Earle taught each element of violin playing independently of each other: vibrato speed and width, bow placement, bow pressure, bow speed, shifting, body movement, even facial expressions and breathing were all treated as independent entities. Linda Cummiskey, telephone interview by author, Aug. 6, 2008.

15. *Rocks: Gardens* (1971) was written for trumpeter Frank Hosticka, whom Richards met at Mannes.

16. Charles Ives, *Charles Ives: Music for Chorus*, Gregg Smith, cond., The Gregg Smith Singers, the Ithaca College Concert Choir, the Texas Boys Choir of Fort Worth, and the Columbia Chamber Orchestra, Columbia MS 6921 (1966), LP.

17. This is the poem "How still the bells in steeples stand" by Emily Dickinson.

18. In a note preceding the poem "Henry Purcell," Hopkins writes: "The poet wishes well to the divine genius of Purcell and praises him that, whereas other musicians have given utterance to the moods of man's mind, he has, beyond that, uttered in notes the very make and species of man as created both in him and in all men generally." Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Selected Poetry*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 128.

19. These works include *ringrang* (1981) for two pianos, *Conch Music* (1982–84) for eleven oboes, *Chicken Pull* (1989–92) for seventy-two clarinets and four whistlers, *the bells themselves (and my memory of the bells)* (1997–98) for Tibetan tingsha and tape, *the bells themselves: Jonathan Edwards and the American Songbook* (1998–99) for three pianos, and *finalbells* (2002–4) for sixteen suspended cowbells.

20. Richards, unpublished composer's statement on *though under medium . . .*

21. Richards, "Observation and Obsession: An American Way of Art," *ex tempore* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1995), available at http://www.ex-tempore.org/RICHARDS.htm. In the same article, Richards compares his compositional approach to *Consent of Sound and Meaning* with the documentation procedures of naturalists: "Like my 19th-century naturalist models—from Audubon to Agassiz—I also had a subject to 'observe' with supposed 'scientific detach-

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ment' (though, of course, it was nothing of the kind whatsoever)—a two-note quotation from an ambulance siren that I had heard in New York (trumpets) and a tape loop I had made of violin fragments, recorded in a very high register, and then reversed and slowed down many times (the double basses). With the latter, I proceeded to listen over and over again to an almost inaudible mass of low, 'scratchy' sounds, until I could draw what meaning, what shapes, even what underlying patterns I could from the taped material—and, at will, construct my own composite landscape of layered double bass parts from the different strata of material."

When asked during the interview to identify other American composers who might share his propensity for observation, Richards responded: "The only person I can think of is somebody like Phill Niblock. I would say Harley Gaber, too, but I don't think he would have ever thought of it in that way. You do feel, when you listen to Phill Niblock's music, that those closely related sounds are being put under a microscope. That's definitely because of his use of tape. I think he was originally interested in film, so it was very easy for him to make that step—he used film and tape simultaneously. But I think that is experimental music in its truest sense: that he's using tools or devices to get inside sound, even though it's a totally different way of approaching it—in a way, it's music made by a filmmaker rather than by someone whose background is composition."

22. "I can almost trace the origin of my very particular excitement in composition to my own ways of looking at the Western landscape: on Greyhound bus trips along Route 80 going through Wyoming, I was utterly fascinated by the way buttes in the near distance, or trees or cattle in the middleground, would often shift—AT DIFFERENT RATES—in reference to a single, fixed landmark such as mountains in the far distance, or—at a very quick rate—to fence posts at the side of the highway. I was fascinated not only by these disparities—which were not dissimilar to those faced every day by the 19th-century surveyors, cartographers, and topologists—but by the way objects at different distances in the landscape could be indistinct and fuzzy at one moment and then come sharply into focus at another. Using different tempi for planes of differing clarity and opaqueness, I tried to create an analogous spatial differentiation of these differing visual levels of the landscape in a sustained work for 7 trumpets and 10 double basses, *The Consent of Sound and Meaning*." See Richards, "Observation and Obsession."

23. "*ringrang* . . . was similarly compounded out of technological and human imperfection. Here, my delight in the purely mechanical—moving cylindrical parts *per se*—interfaced perfectly with my obsession with overlapping cyclic patterns. The sound source was a music box of the familiar theme from *Swan Lake* that I operated manually, via a winding mechanism attached to the box, at all kinds of different tempi—including speed-ups and slow-downs—while recording all this on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. I then remixed the tape, dubbing on a new track of the identical material at half speed—and an octave lower. Finally, I broke down the material into different lines—often within a single piano part—by notating it in superimposition against grids of different tempi patterned in ratios of successive cardinal numbers (Piano 1—3:4:5; Piano 2—6:7:8)." See Richards, "Observation and Obsession."

24. "[With *Conch Music*] I first compared identical musical fragments—in this case, a brief succession of oboe multiphonics—at different tempi, using the variable speed mechanism of the tape recorder, and then notated them on rubber sheets—and stretched them out in different positions. The results were not at all dissimilar to the structural transformations one sees when D'Arcy Thompson distends, elongates, or compresses the coordinates of grids against which closely-related forms of plant and animal life have been drawn: one can see in both cases how organisms with an essential common form can develop in strikingly different ways from each other with respect to their ultimate shape." See Richards, "Observation and Obsession."

25. Richards separates the tape loops used in *The Consent of Sound and Meaning* into three

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distinct layers of activity, which he associates with overlapping calendar cycles: "Each of the three different levels have their own 'time' or tempo indicated by the Mayan glyphs at the beginnings of each system. These symbols are by no means purely decorative: they are stylized geometric forms of period glyphs taken from Mayan monuments and they are used here to indicate the different tempi that govern the three layers of double bass writing. These tempi overlap and interlock with the double bass section of the piece as the Mayan astronomy joined several different periods of time within a system resembling different-size gears interlocking in different cycles—a 260–day divinatory and sacred year interlocked with a 360– and 365–day year, as well as a 584–day Venusian year—to create all sorts of important junctures when the end of the different cycles coincide. This is the basic constructive principle underlying my piece: the intersection of strings and trumpets occurs at such a juncture, and certain details within the concluding trumpet section are set in motion as well by such conjunctions, much as details in Schenkerian analysis often coincide with—or mirror—the contours of the underlying structure. Thus, in *Consent*, as in no other piece of mine, does visual fancy interface with organic structure." See Richards, "Gallery Talk."

26. Richards was awarded a fellowship at the MacDowell Colony in 1978, 1980, and 1981.

27. Richards, "Gallery Talk."

28. Richards, "Artist's Statement," *Intersecting Sound and Image: The Music Scores and Sketches of Eric Richards*, exhibition catalog, Visual Arts Gallery, Adirondack Community College, Feb. 25–March 25, 1999.

29. Richards, "Gallery Talk."

30. In an email correspondence following the interview, Richards added the following remark to this topic: "The best—and maybe the only—thing I remember reading about the exact way that linguistic encoding within the music itself can influence the way we perceive that music was in an essay Charles Rosen wrote some years back on the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich that segued into Robert Schumann's use of literary devices and puzzles in his music as part of the Romantic ethos." See Charles Rosen, "What Did the Romantics Mean?" review of *Caspar David Friedrich, 1774–1840: Romantic Landscape Painting in Dresden*, by William Vaughan, Helmut Börsch-Supan, and Hans Joachim Neidhardt; and *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker, *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 1, 1973).

31. Richards describes *Chicken Pull* in unpublished program notes written for the Western Illinois New Music Festival, which took place March 28–31, 1993: "The piece's basic impulse comes from close listening (in *reverse* and at much slower speeds so that I could accurately notate them) to virtually identical 10- to 15-second blues introductions made in the Aurora, Illinois studios of the Bluebird (RCA Victor) recording label in the late 1930s by harmonica player and vocalist John Lee (Sonny Boy) Williamson, along with guitarists Big Joe Williams, Robert Nighthawk, Henry Townsend, and mandolinist Yank Rachel. When heard backwards, one ends up with material utterly different in every possible way from the original—with guitar, mandolin, bass, and vocal all fusing together to sound like one giant, alien harmonica—a distant relative indeed from the west Tennessee country blues harmonica that carries the principal instrumental line on these old recordings. Of course, layers of these very similar blues 'intros' are packed—and superimposed—upon each other, with the slight differences between them forming the basis of how I work out both the detail and overall structure of the piece."

32. In October 2004 THE LAND/an art site, Inc. of Mountainair, New Mexico, presented an environmental sculpture installation called "Death in Two Parts" that included a recording of *finalbells*. In an unpublished statement written for the occasion, Richards describes a more personal and spiritual element to the piece that corroborates his attraction to the idea of a *Doppelgänger* and the final works of Schubert: "When I first heard the sounds

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percussionist Alan Zimmerman produced by rubbing one of his three octaves of cowbells with a piece of rubber cut off from a superball, I knew that I had to 'pin' down these extraordinary harmonics. Yet as ephemeral and fleeting as were these delicate overtones, the memory of them completely haunted me and gradually became [such a] pervasive a part of my being [that] as I listened to them over and over again . . . I began to be convinced that they were real entities of some kind that had somehow become imprisoned in these metal forms and were literally 'crying' to be let out and be freed. I realize now that I was particularly emotionally susceptible to these kinds of thoughts at the time because so many of my friends and family were dying—or had died—but I still think, even as I am writing this now, that there is more to these pieces somehow than observing, recording—and piling up in different ways—specific harmonics from a set of cowbells. I feel somehow a *presence* of some kind that connects me with my recent dead, and that by my recognition and patterning of these presences that I've given them a chance to breathe a little bit more freely and enabled myself to communicate this experience to others."

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