tract
A composition of Agitprop Music for electromagnetic tape by
ILHAN MIMAROGLU

Featuring the singing and speaking voice of
TULY SAND
TRACT

A COMPOSITION OF AGITPROP MUSIC
FOR ELECTRONIC TAPE BY
ILHAN MIMAROGLU

FEATURING THE SINGING AND
SPEAKING VOICE OF
TULY SAND

With the Participation of the Pop Group
Topsy Turvy Moon
Auxiliary speaking voices: Ilhan Mimaroglu
and Erdem Buri
Text by Ilhan Mimaroglu, based on direct and
paraphrased quotations from Alexander
Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Mahir Cayan,
Nazim Hikmet, Jean Baptiste Clement,
Bertolt Brecht, Karl Marx, Eugene Pottier,
Mao Tse-tung.
Composed and realized in the studios of
American Center for Students and Artists,
Paris, France, and Columbia-Princeton
Electronic Music Center, New York, N.Y.
(1972-74).

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43 W. 61 St., NYC 10023
TRACT

STEREO

A Composition of Agitprop Music for Electro-Magnetic Tape

By Ilian Nissarolu

Featuring the singing and speaking voice of Tuly Sand

With the participation of the pop group Topsy Turvy Moon

And the auxiliary speaking voices of Erdes Buri and Ilian Nissarolu

Text by Ilian Nissarolu;

based on direct and paraphrased quotations from: Alexander Berkman, Bertolt Brecht, Jacobo Zabludovsky, Max Stirner, Peter Kropotkin, Mao Tse-Tung, Karl Marx, Eugène Pottier

The voices of Mânie Hikmet and fragment from Group 1's recording of L'Internationale, courtesy of La Chante à Monde, Paris, France.

Commissioned and realized in the studios of the American Center for Students and Artists, Paris, France, and Columbia-Princeton Music Center, New York, N.Y. (1974-75)

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Cover and insert art: fragment from a wall painting of a building occupied by the Puerto Rican squatters, on Amsterdam Avenue, between 111th and 112th Streets, New York, N.Y.

"For music is a non-suggesting art... How then can this mute evoke for man his destiny?" — Jean-Paul Sartre

Tract, defines the dictionary, is a distributed paper or pamphlet containing a declaration or appeal, especially one put out by a religious or political group. This definition corresponds quite well to what this piece of music is all about. It certainly is not a paper or pamphlet just as Schuman's Novelties are not short novels. On purely musical grounds, however, the literary allusions are made in the same manner. But, what is a purely musical ground? To pose the question in a specific way, to what extent does the spoken word (not to speak of the sung word) separate itself from the musical ground? The answer is plain and simple: it does not. Spoken word and sound are the very substance of music. As words, among other things they do in music, can signify too (a fact which is all too often forgotten), the literary reference of the title goes far beyond that of (to use our example again) Schumann's Novelties. Indeed, what could be the contents of a political pamphlet if the contents of this piece. To be sure, it is not put out by a group; it is out by myself as an individual, although what it says may very much agree with what certain groups say.

REASONS OF THE HEART

The text relies mostly on slogans and aphorisms. It consists of poetry and prose fragments either written by myself as direct or paraphrased quotations which are put together like a collection of graffiti, sequenced according to a definite political and musical purpose. The rhetoric of the piece is reflected in the way it is described: agitprop music (agit-prop = agitation and propaganda). Its appeal is designed predominantly as an appeal to rational. But its content is such that the reasons of the heart are not alien to reason. It is the dissatisfied rationality of its overly rational statements that makes it emotional. To provide one supporting argument for this I would say that one is more bound to a vouch for truth by emotion than by reason. But because the rationality of peaceable solutions has failed that appeal to violence has to be made. If we shift the general rationality from one premise to the other, the emotion becomes the rational, and vice versa.

A QUESTION OF STYLE

If it is prescribed that the style of a political piece of music should reflect the views of the related political movement on art, then the style to adoption ought to move to those prerequisites on the sympathies involved here being clearly New Left, but with strong anarchist tendencies. But is there a style in which there techniques and methods are endorsed by the said political movements? The prevalent, if vague and rather sentimental, inclination in such quarters is for a folk style. Tract has most certainly to do with the folk style and its association reaches the point of abrasion, because the folk style reflects the depressed economic conditions and common themes of life that are in and from these conditions are the ones created by the oppressive ruling classes. Adopting, therefore, a reflexive style whose essence is determined by poverty would amount at reducing the cultural objectives of revolution to a most modest scale and also at playing into the hands of the oppressors.

Tract eschews socialist realism too, except in a very broad sense. Visible works of art are not possible in socialist realism (so far there have not been many, but that does not prove much in terms of possibilities), it is only because socialist realism is readily associated with Soviet Russia and Stalinism to which Tract is antagonistic in no uncertain terms.

If anarchism is our ideological objective, then "freedom" is the key word. I have said elsewhere that "the eclectic approach provides the essential condition for creative freedom." That much, I think, would be sufficient to summarize the stylistic character of Tract. What remains to clarify is that "eclectic" does not signify the cut-and-dried approach as the current usage might suggest, but choosing the best from various systems, sources and styles — "best" meaning what is suitable for the purpose.

PERFORMED, BUT NOT PERFORMABLE

As any other electronic composition, Tract is made to be heard through a sound reproduction chain. It is made for recordings, for tape-music concerts, for broadcasts. What sets it apart from "conventional" electronic music is that it contains predominant elements of vocal and instrumental performance. It is not as a substitute to live performance, however, that the piece is heard on a recording. Indeed, it is not composed for repeatable performances or live performance, nor is it intended to substitute for any of the above. It is an electronic composition to be built subsequently in a studio equipped for electronic music. It follows that Tract is not a composition written for the female voice, but for Tuly Sand. Some good of course, for all the auxiliary performing forces.

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

In composing this piece, whose technical and procedural complexities must be apparent even at a first hearing, an entire range of elaborate studio techniques have been employed. I have not resorted to the sonic manipulations, however, to alter the sound of the performing elements whenever they were designed to appear as their true selves. I must emphasize this particularly for Tuly Sand, because on a few concert and broadcast performances of this piece I have been asked whether her voice had been electronically altered. This, of course, some of the sounds were electronic sounds. Tuly Sand, who started her career in Turkey as Tuiby German (her birth name) and pursued it in France, is yet practically unknown to larger audiences elsewhere as one of the most talented and versatile voice artists in the field. Aside from a few sequences where she performs more than one part by means of overdub techniques (and these must be very evident), her voice has not been electronically treated. The objective was, of course, to keep her exceptional compass, her impeccable sense of pitch, as well as her expressive range in their natural conditions.

The central character of the piece is not only a woman who passes through the various stages of gaining revolutionary consciousness, but, as the piece was written for Tuly Sand artist herself. In certain ways, if not in a systematic way, it is a fantasized summary of her career as a pop singer. This is particularly made evident in one of the longer sections of the piece (a subsection of Part I), one of hallucinatory, even nightmare-like character, in which a recording session is evoked. From the structural standpoint it is a recording within a recording — or, since we established a parallel with cinema, a film within a film. The whole of the piece consists of several layers of components: one of them originating from an actual recording session she had at the time I was working
on this piece; another is the composed re-enactment of a session; still another consists of fragments of earlier recordings; one more layer depicts the outside world as it pertains to her chosen field of activity; and yet another layer consists of a mosaic of the abstract and the concrete (synthesized and processed linear, meaning melodic, layers, including vocal ostinati) tying all the other components together to further define the shape. It is one in which an inability to collect experience and establish relationships is recognized. The primary element is survival in a hostile, oppressive, misleading and alienating economic and cultural environment. 

Just as each scene sequence ends, there is a sign of determination (where she says, in French, "I am ready; we are there") which is a retreat into a dreamy, quasi-religious meditation, in a state unesthetic to the pains of the outside world, until a voice calls her to come to her senses.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES

I began composing Tract in Paris, where I was spending a year on a Guggenheim Fellowship. It was the spring of 1972 when I was asked by Jorge Arriagada, director of American Center for Students and Artists' electronic music study (new closed), to write a piece for the Montparnasse Festival. For a long time I wanted to work with Tuly Sand and that was the occasion. It was a period of increasing repression and counterrevolutionary terror in Turkey. News of several revolutionary patriots murdered by the government forces was obvious which determined the content of the work in progress. I began to grow more and more abstractly and textually. The concept in which the work was to be premiered was the only few weeks away, and eventually the piece must be written and presented. Fortunately, I had composed and recorded all the material for Tuly Sand as well as the ancillary elements to enable myself to complete the piece upon my return to New York. In its finalized form, Tract received its premiere in a concert organized by the New York Turkish Student Association, at McMillin Theater, Columbia University, on April 26, 1974. The broadcast version was given a few months later over WBAI, New York.

PROGRAM MUSIC -- WITH A DIFFERENCE

Tract is, unmistakably, a piece of program music -- although one with a difference. While, in a conventional sense, a piece of program music is one that communicates its verbally explicable significance in the form of the notes, here the program notes are built right into the music -- indeed, they are an integral part of the music. In a sense, the whole piece is written down, explaining what the piece is all about, superfluous, as the work's meaning is meant to be clearly understood.

I, however, yes, only by those who know the language. Tract's audience is necessarily limited by the chosen languages. Basically, it is a dadaist combination of the English and French. Musical considerations permitting, what is said in one language is occasionally repeated in the other language. I have used the French and its use is dictated by the fact that Nâzım Hikmet's poem lent itself much better in the original Turkish to the shaping of the final song's melodic line. These things have not been made public until now, the subject matter may remain undisclosed to audiences not understanding English and/or French (not to speak of the Turkish material) and which may come across by means of the abstract formal and emotional properties of music -- including, of course, word-music.

If, therefore, I have to do a certain amount of explaining now, I will do so, for the benefit of the English speaking audiences, it is to clarify the meaning of the cited French and Turkish sections of the piece.

IN OTHER WORDS

The first substantial sequence in French is the recitation of a few lines from a poem by Jean Baptiste Clément, a poet of the Paris Commune. This takes place about halfway through the piece. For gendarmes and informers, one can see no one on the roads but old people, and the fearful, ugly women and orphans. Follow a song on a Clément poem: People who die in poverty are soft like sheep; they are folded on this earth and buried like fossils and all this is singing and all this is dancing, to give one's self some hope.

Part II starts with a Latin text, but words that are very much part of both the English and the French at terminology -- the names of certain narcotics which are set to a mock sacred melody. The conception is obvious and needs no comment. In this sequence Tuly Sand, via dub, sings both voices of the "Antiphon." I was asked by several directors whether the low voice there was a male voice. It is not, and that alone should suffice to illustrate her vocal capabilities.

About one third of the way in Part II there is a section in French only, consistent of the words of the Internationale set to melodic fragments of the Clément poem. If these canaples insist on making heroes out of us ... set to the Star-Spangled Banner; They will know that we are for our generals ... to the Turkish national anthem; But if these crowds, these vultures, one fine morning should disappear ... to the anthem of the Soviet union; The state enchains and the law cheats ... to the German national anthem; Unforgetful of the sacrifice ... and neither God nor tribune ... to the Italian; after which the Internationale is sung in its original melody -- Nice, you wretched of the earth ...

A connecting section to the finale remains untranslated. The words are taken from a poem by Cidrâd, a Turkish poet, an idea of sentimental ... The words of the final song (poems by Nâzım Hikmet) are partly translated. Only this world, this pirate ship will sink ... is repeated in English and in Turkish. What is left untranslated can be said as and we will build a world like your face, my beloved; Free, cheerful, hope ... The reason I did not translate this part because I wanted to end the work on a note of equivocal pessimism -- or equivocal optimism, depending on what the listener likes will happen when this world, this pirate ship will sink.

A paratentetical note at this point on the journalistic aspect of Tract: references to specific events and persons of the time, which the composition was in progress should not, in the listener's mind, carry the importance of the actual events. Forces of darkness it is, as always, always as usual.

DEDICATION

I am not in the habit of dedicating my compositions. I was asked to dedicate this one to Nâzım Hikmet whom I regard as the greatest poet of the revolutionary struggles. He died in his Moscow exile, in 1937, after spending a good part of his life in prison. The piece could also be dedicated to women in whose names are evoked in the beginning by a series of associations. After all, this is a woman's piece. Also to the Turkish activists exiled by the government: Deniz Gezi, Nezir Haci, Turkay, Hikmet Inan (1965-1972), and their counterparts all over the world, in all courses of history, who met the same or a similar end. To Haci Almuky who was killed in a Turkish dungeon where she was imprisoned for harboring a revolutionary, in 1972, on her 26th summer. But I think a dedication to Nâzım Hikmet would cover them all. So, if a dedication means anything, I dedicate Tract in the name of all these people, living or dead, illustrious or unknown, who did or are doing much more than compose a piece of music.

Ilhan Mimaroğlu, born in Turkey (1926), where he was active primarily as a music critic, has been residing in New York since 1959. A recipient of Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships, he studied composition, electronic music, musicology, and English at Columbia University. His instrumental and vocal music includes Parody on Silliman for string quartet (1947), Prometopos for orchestra (1970), and Sentimental for piano (1957), Epicendive for voice and chamber ensemble (1961), September Moon for orchestra (1967), and Al Otta de Boheme for orchestra (1969). In the early sixties he was associated with Columbia Princeton Electronic Music Center where he composed the majority of his tape-music pieces which are commercially recorded, e.g. La Tombeeg d'Edgar Pog (1964), Intermozz (1964), Analogitia (1965), Visual Studies (1964-1965), Preludes (1967), Implacation (1969), Music for Jean Dupuyet's Coucou Bazaz (1973). As of 1972, he has been doing a series of programs on electronic music for the New York radio stations with the purpose of placing the arts in a political perspective. He displayed a growing political consciousness in his choice of subjects and relevant content in such works as Sing Me A Song of Songe (1971), Tract (1972-74) and to fill a surprise (1974), conveying messages of New Left persuasion.