

Remembering the 20th Century Committee Presents:

SLAVE PIANOS
A Schema & Historo-Materialist Pro-gnostic
by Mark von Schlegell

1. GREETINGS

This text schematizes for the contemporary Kulturnaut one early manifestation of the Kulturnautic impulse as it appeared in dusk of the 2nd Millennium, the mobile performance of the *Slave Pianos* collective as it agitated from New Cathaysia into »the International Art World« of the late 20th century.

A time-capsule placed in 5 hundred year limbo by the New Cathaysia Kulturocollective *Slave Pianos* in the year 2000 was finally exhumed in a pressure-sealed capsule on the Erasmus Orbital last Jannar. Upon the opening of this capsule, the materials put together in the books open before you came to light. This »book« mimics an authentic 21st Century artifact in every particular. The editors have gone so far as to include this schematic diagnosis of the *Slave Pianos* as if it were a fanciful work of speculofictive criticism written by a historical contemporary.

Even before the great decategorization of »the Humanities« of the 2030's, Kulturnautics, it is well known, was alive. By the end of the 20th century, in individual works of »writers«, »painters«, »sculptors«, »film-makers«, etc. etc., interdisciplinary action was offering a new »territory« in which to perpetuate the Americanisms of infinite

expansion, pioneering and manifest destiny on a world long worn down by such primitive trends. Even with such questionable aims, the resulting reversing of the discovery complex into kulturalnautic travel had already begun to yield the »purely secular bliss« of which Melton sung when she founded our discipline to crush the old Imperialism from the ranks of the women's division of the INLA. We hope that the publication before you will be an aid to your own such bliss as you prepare to ride with *Slave Pianos* into various prequels of Meltonic theory.

Though it would be many years, indeed, before kultur activists would take up the gun and solve so many of the petty problems initiating their alienation, it is noteworthy that the work of the ancients, so often conveniently dismissed by theorists, often makes direct comment on its own paradoxical impotence. Without the distortion of hindsight, many works of our misguided forbears invite the kulturalnaut into the troubled psyche of the industrial nations early in the 2nd Millennium of recorded history. We can thank the *Slave Pianos* collective for placing its time-capsule safely away from museum and collector culture to have survived the events of the 2020's intact. We can trace in their early Kultur nautic analysis a dimensional schematic of the impotent »avant-garde« of the 2nd millennium's turn.

2. GETTING ACQUAINTED

From the assorted scraps and odds and ends of the archives of Mike Stevenson and Damien Kesminas's *Slave Pianos*, we can glimpse an articulated hyper-historical self-

critique posed a half-century before the first appearance of the work rightly recognized as the origin of kulturnautics, Melton's Becker. The *Slave Pianos*, indeed, prove how clearly Melton marks what Niederhoffer calls »kultur's consciousness of its critical unconscious«. For despite the lucidity of their reflexive critique, Stevenson, Kasminas and comrades apparently continued a quixotic kulturnautic analysis of the particularly ambiguous and marginalized network of »art music« or »sound art« for 2 and a half decades of their lives. What they've left us stands as a near complete structural guide to the early avant-garde. We may take note here of Trotsky's words: In the invisible heart of the capitalist crystal the cracking, tendril- roots of revolution cannot be perceived in the moment, but only after the fact.

Slave Pianos will also be interesting to Kulturnauts investigating the geo-political transformation of the southern hemisphere in the 21st century; it should be noted that one of the collective's frequent confederates and collaborators was Giovanni Intra, who with Ann Shelton was to become Co-President of H. S. Cathaysia in the most heady days of the Joyous Turn.

3. ADDENDA

[Concluding these introductory remarks are 3 notes from other collectives included per order of joint-dictum 422210.3.]

Note A. »GLOBAL PSYCHOSIS«

Certain roots of Slave Pianos lie in the progressive agit-prop art of primitive socialism; others stretch down into the pit of global capitalism. It's generally understood that the »art world« of ancient modernity manifested its globalism unconsciously, going so far in its congresses (its various »annuals«, »biennales« and »art fairs«) to re-affirm representative national identities it might have easily had the courage to resist. Into such mythical globalism, the Slave Pianos Project cut its marginal swath with amusing sarcasm. Its alter-utopianism survived its paradox easily within the walls of a harsh irony of the sort to which viewers of the time were unaccustomed. Though the prophet Freud had already made it possible for consciousness to perceive its own illusion, it was a lucky chance that these Austra/New Zealanders optioned on a robot as an escape from the self-illusion still plaguing most cultural-production of the period. Certainly, though they directed their own attentions at fields of study styled »Humanities«, the Slave Pianos collective was most prescient in their forays into Robotic-engendered art, as if understanding the role robotics were to play in the future of the Humanities themselves.

The Academy

Note B. »THE GOLDEN CALF«

It's well known that many American slaves turned to the allegory of Exodus in order to preserve their psychic balance in the face of great adversity. Now through what can be considered a textbook example of Zitsko's early notion of artificial kulturnautics (20 years before Melton's Third Thesis) as the mechanical chiasmus of the historiography of Euro-American consciousness, we can see the Slave Pianos cult present to its

audience of taste-blinded sophisticates a glimpse of the Exodus Allegory from within the non-allegorical real of its menacing composition. Burdened by the marginalization-complexes of their profession, by their particular role within their professional world, and by their extra-Eurasian regions of origin, these artists can be identified with Zitsko's Exodus allegory's third point of view. Caught between the decadent slavery of Egypt and the rigid totemism of Mt. Sinai, these »artists« presented themselves as party of the crowd of Israelites — forever stymieing Moses's best laid plans, yet willing when the occasion (certain death, usually) demanded, to worship that which sustained them. Once more what Zitsko called the birth of realism can be seen occurring in the »unreal« itself. Again, under threatening conditions, the psyche was not only preserved from the self-concepts assaulting it, but history was re-imagined from within. So too science today promises free but cautious release from primitive enslavements as well as complete humiliation to the laws it condescends to write.

Astrophysics Collective

Note C. NEW CATHAYSIA and GONDWANALAND, a diagnosis

New Zealand's post-colonial history is itself a figura of the larger history of the post-colonial globe. That is to say while it was originally constructed to map the future, it illustrates a certain structural entity of the past at the expense of alternate histories. So original convicts and psychopaths who settled Van DeeMan's land managed, in several generations, to preserve (at least on the New Zealand archipelago) a modicum of decency in the wide immorality flowing through the 20th century Earth. No

nuclearotics, a ban on genocide, anti-cloning activism, of course, were all trends that led to New Zealand's crucial dominance of Australia during the Fall of the Nations. What is often forgotten, and will doubtless go un-pointed in the following schema is that the secret discovery of Gondwanaland and the Antarctic tunnel morphically resonated in the population at large. If today we come upon a group of late 20th-century Austra-Cathaysians, the Slave Pianos collective, who demonstrate rich intuitions of Meltonic Theory before the fact, we should use the moment to consider, indeed, what must be understood as the crucial impact of the discovery of Gondwanaland on Melton's Kulturonautics itself

Billy Wildthorne & Sally Thorpe

4. SCHEMA 1 (Example): GENERAL

Slave Pianos inhabits the mechanical dialectics of late humanism with a peculiar, perverse intensity. Polar modalities become centralities and vice/versa.

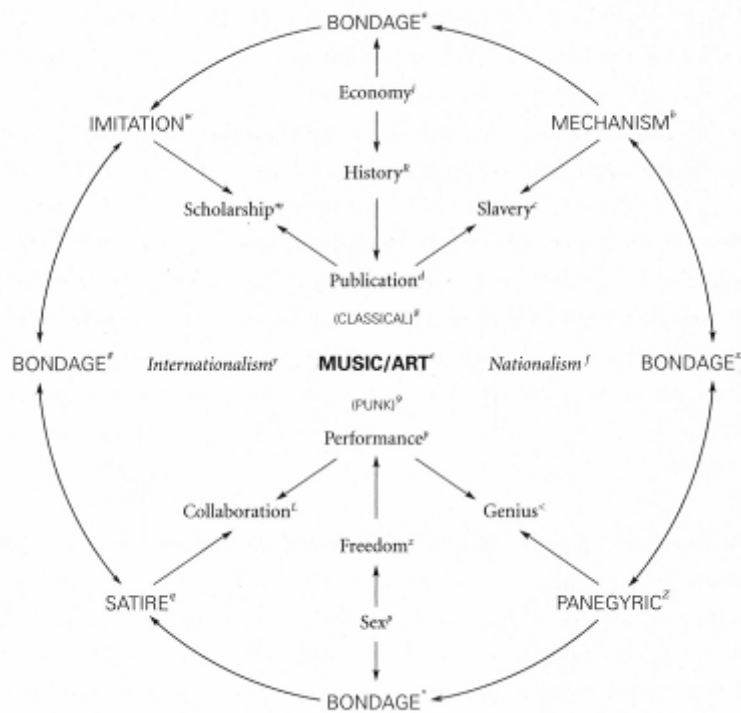
TRUTH	< <i>become(s)</i> >	LIES
History		Tradition
Performance		Object Art
Global Identity		Site Specification
Slavery		Freedom
Freedom		Slavery
Collective		Collaboration

Such polarities offer points of motion for the kulturonaut, without certain resolution. Commentary is always elusive.

5. SCHEMA 2 (Example): SPECIFIC

Into such categorical generalities the Slave Piano project injects specifics, so that the kulturnaut may find inscribed into various concept-crystals, networks of individually opening constellations. The editors have elected to present an example of such a structure to celebrate their own encounter with the collective. Notes developing each abstraction marked will be easily found following.

First, a textual interruption will serve as demarking the volume of the four-dimensional grid in which the schema functions:



They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days -- Sorrow Songs --for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine. Then in after years when I came to Nashville I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of them rose for me morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past.

[W.E.B. DuBois, »The Sorrow Songs« (1903)]

6. KULTURNAUTIC STIMULI TO SCHEMA 2

The following notes delineate paths toward the interpenetration of the abstractions outlined in the schema above, per order of joint dictum 44588-K. The number preceding each note corresponds with the superscript following each of the chart's stations.

A. [Roots of the *Slave Piano* pre-occupation with BONDAGE draw on the colonial history of New Cathaysia]

trad. Folk song (19th cent.):

*In chains, Jim Jones, we're sending you
across to Botany Bay*



w. [IMITATION, it was said in the ancient days, is the sincerest form of flattery. *Slave Pianos* imitated the esthetic of admired schools. For instance, the constructivism of the early Soviet Republic.]

m [Much of the collective's production came in the form of SCHOLARSHIP, often perpetrated unseen and away from venues of presentation.]

Letter from Mike Stevenson to Charles LaBelle (1999):

Dear Charles,

Many thanks for reviewing Slave Pianos at China Art Objects. It is interesting that you discuss Eric Satie and his relevance (or otherwise) to Australian visual artists John Nixon and Marco Fusinato. Enclosed are copies of a newsletter that accompanied the activities of ANTI-MUSIC — a Melbourne-based visual artists music recording project. Founded in 1979 by John Nixon,

the project brought together artists such as Tony Clark, Peter Tyndall, Geary Wilson and Jenny Watson. They continued recording material until 1983. In all 60 issues of »Pneumatic Drill« were produced — and you can see Eric Satie features in several issues. Hope you find this of interest.

Kind regards, MS

j. [In a civilization still dominated by ECONOMY, the ancient collective understood that the prison is the Meltonian mask of the bank.]

*#. [As contemporary critics noticed, the *Slave Pianos* were intent on chiasmically reversing the BONDAGE of the musical performance itself.]*

*Charles LaBelle, *Frieze* (2000):*

*...the inescapable problem with *Slave Pianos* is that the convoluted process of >recomposing, arranging and translating< the source material ultimately consigns a lot of anarchistic noise to the prison-house of >music< and leaves formerly biting works toothless.*

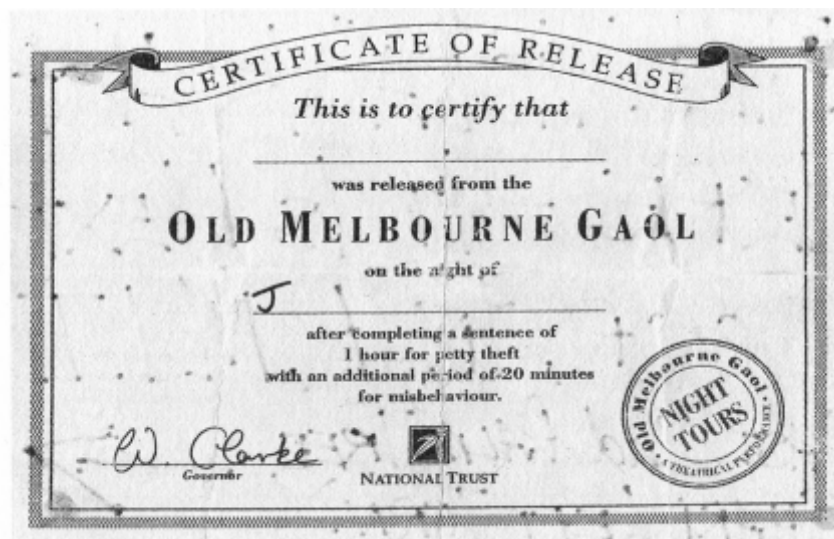
Y [Contemporaries were also caused by the collective to note the paradoxical INTERNATIONALISM of the »art world.«]

Julian Holcroft, »Slave Pianos« (1999):

*As a piece of agit-prop theatre, *Slave Pianos* was in some ways a critique of the serious business of reputation building and artistic*

exchange that characterizes major enterprises like the Biennial and other such >international< events

"BILL VIOLA" IS NOT
HERE - IT IS NEXT
DOOR, IN R.M.I.T.
(PAST 2nd PALM TREE,
SHARP LEFT TURN.) →



x. [At every edge of their kultunautic journey *Slave Pianas* encountered BONDAGE.]

Sebastian Small, »Slave to the Music« (1999):

If art really is one of the freest of arenas, why is it that artists who position themselves at the furthest extremes of art practice are so often dry, control-fixated and obsessional?

R. [Despite its various displays of »postmodern« *Angst*, the collective stands in tradition of marginalized expression constituting an alternative HISTORY oriented towards New Cathaysian anomalies.]

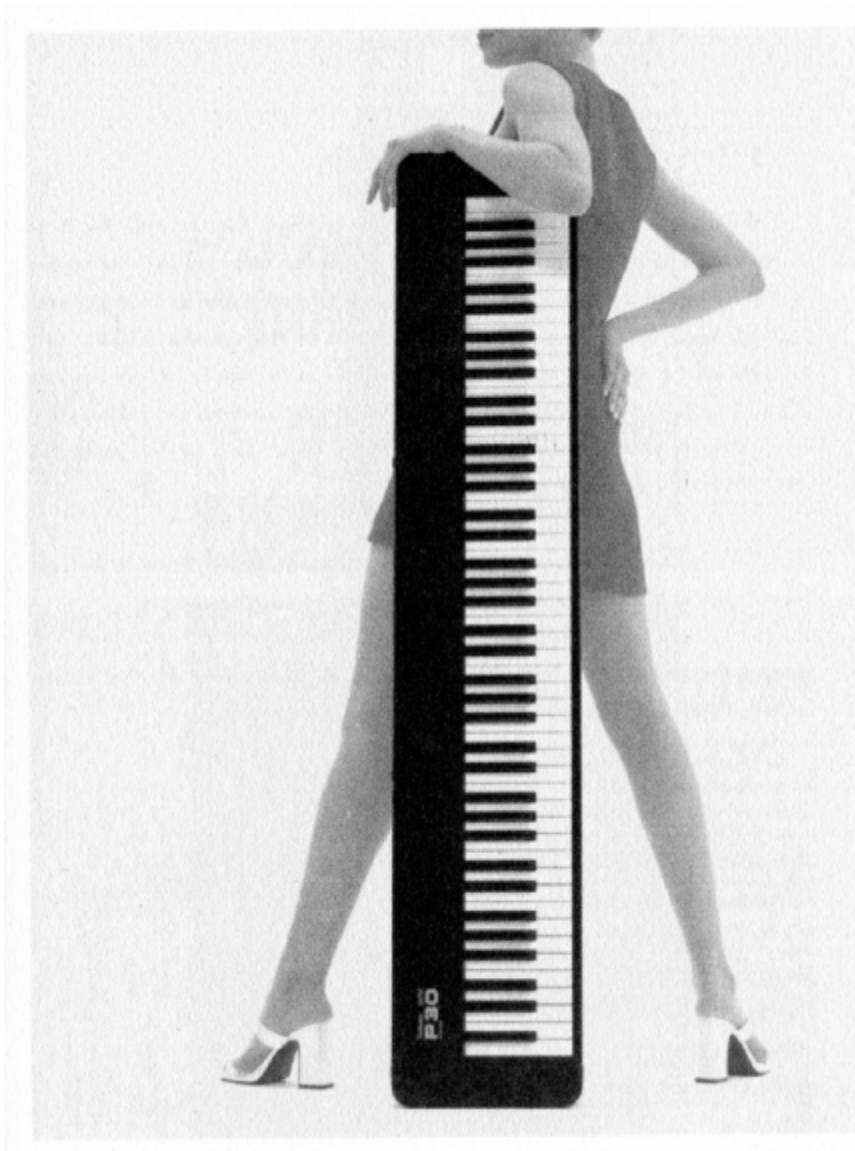
trad. Folk Song (19th Cent.):

*I'd rather have joined that pirate ship
than gone to Botany Bay
With the gales blowing round us
and the winds ablowing gale*

*I'd rather have drowned in misery
than gone to New South Wales
They've got no time for mischief
there they say*

*Remember that, says they.
For they'll flog the potion out of you
Down there in Botany Bay*

P. [We can easily see in retrospect, through the agitation of *Slave Pianos*, the misguided and convoluted attitudes towards SEX that still plagued civilization at the turn of the 2nd millennium.]



b. [At the core of the agitation resided precient
foreknowledge of the poetry of MECHANISM.]

Electronic Mail from Robbie Rhoades, Etiwanda CA. to
Mike Stevenson c/o Darren Knight (Sat. 14 Nov. 1998
00:58:21 —0800)

...I have a process which will generate the theme »snakebites« from the MIDifile. It requires that the velocities of MIDI performance be altered to only two levels. The velocity values are arbitrary; I use val=72 for the lower (accompaniment) level, and val=80 for the accented theme. Can you make a separate MIDI file for the performance(s) like this? Although the theme accents surely are not required, for many styles of music it helps the pianist greatly. The worst performance is when the roll is played at constant (usually loud) insensitivity on an electric piano. What boredom! That's why I like my old foot-pumped Aeolian Pianola so much — it's quite expressive.

c. [SLAVERY and the liberation movement it necessitates was an allegory located in the high! low struggles within the musical categorization complex of ancient modernity.]

d. [In their quixotic efforts at document creation, *Slave Pianos* perceived the relation between PUBLICATION and the prison-house of written language.]

Emily Dickinson (P709):

*Publication — is the Auction
Of the mind of Man —
Poverty — be justifying
For so foul a thing
Possibly — but We — would rather
From Our Garret go
White — Unto the White Creator -
Than invest — Our Snow — [P709]*



e. [MUSIC was already being perceived at this time as an architecture of power relations.]

Report by anonymous spectator (ca. 1653), apparently transcribed by Norman M. Klein for a study on special effects (2003) lost in the data tsunami of 2016:

While the music began, his eyes rose toward the balconies on the stage, toward the Worthies and their over-stuffed harlots, as carefully lit as the orchestra. The wings alongside the stage slid into place. Onstage the palace disappeared, replaced by a ship running aground while hitting a sea monster. But above all of this, as if they were spitting down on him was the spectacle of the Worthies, so he spat back at the only moment when he was allowed to vent his anger. The seamonster glowed in a flume of shaved silver. The music rose. The Worthies floated comfortably in their seats

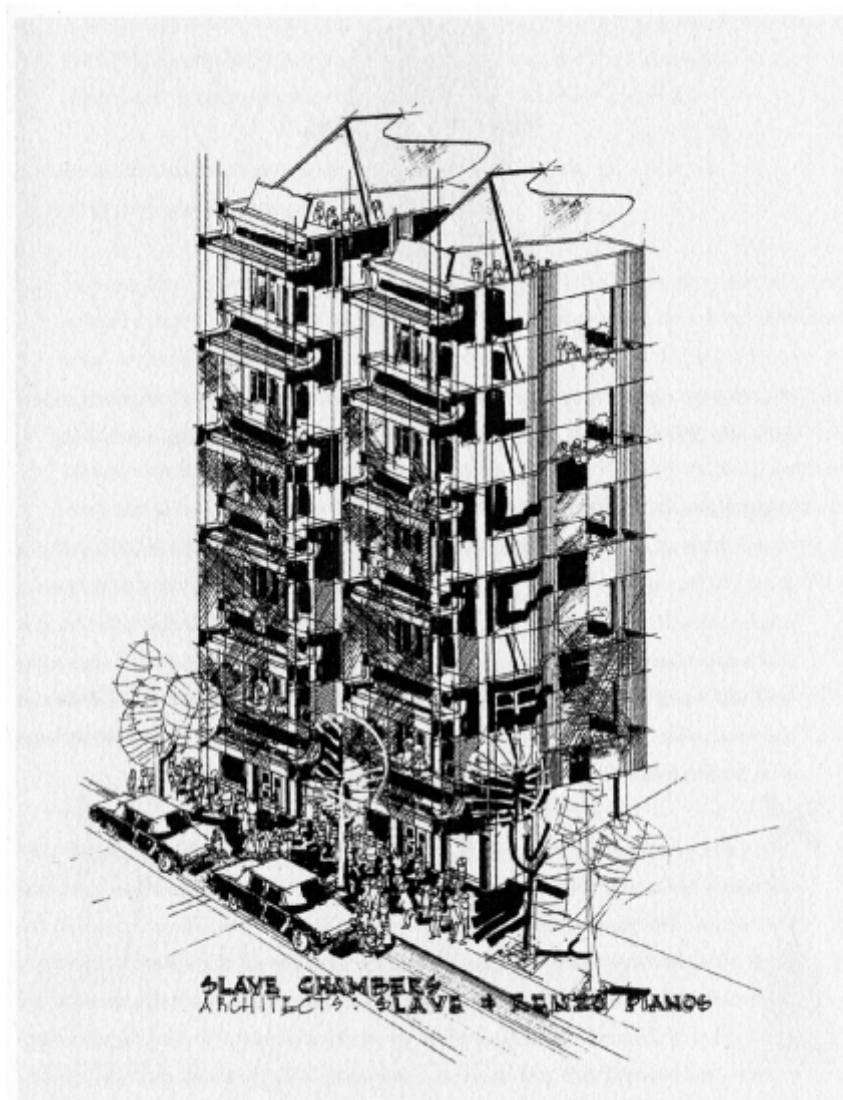
f [Though their Austra-New Zealand perspective occasioned a critique of a pseudo- internationalism that excluded them, *Slave Pianos* in fact drew on a kind of anti-NATIONALISM for inspiration.]

Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (2000):

...nationalism and modernity are not necessarily mutually exclusive discourses; on the contrary, in Europe and the American Colonies, and in more recently colonized regions, modernity has been driven by nationalisms. Nationalism is not simply a Romantic discourse, but one that draws on Enlightenment ideas of Progress, liberation, co-operation and equality. To see nationalism as exclusively atavistic, radicalist, nostalgic and militant is fatally to misunderstand the situation of countries [...] that still sit on the boundaries of tradition and modernity [...] such a narrow view of nationalism is the product of a shallow cosmopolitanism, a limited modernity [...] not only does nationalism look to the past, but also to the future. Not only is it a Romantic reaction to the pains and confusions of

modernity, but it is a strategy, in both culture and politics, of giving back to the individual subject or to a community, a sense of hope and coherence in the face of the shattering, fragmenting experience of modernity

8. [The architecture of CLASSICAL music was easily perceived as the fancy dress of global capitalism.]





9. [PUNK rock appears to have been a musical expression inspired by a burgeoning internationale called »Fluxus« with which this German seems to have been associated.]

Joseph Beuys (b. Krefeld, Germany 1921, d. 1989)

Joseph Beuys maintained a close association with Fluxus but was never actually a Fluxus artist. He took part in various Fluxus activities before developing his own performances which stressed fixed actions on his own body in contrast to the collective activities that Maciunas promoted. Through performance Beuys began to expand sculptural ideas using noise and sound as artistic materials. His music moved between the extremes of silence and noise and, when called for, could also manifest itself as pop music. In his piano pieces Beuys often used techniques and devices to restrain or mute the instrument.

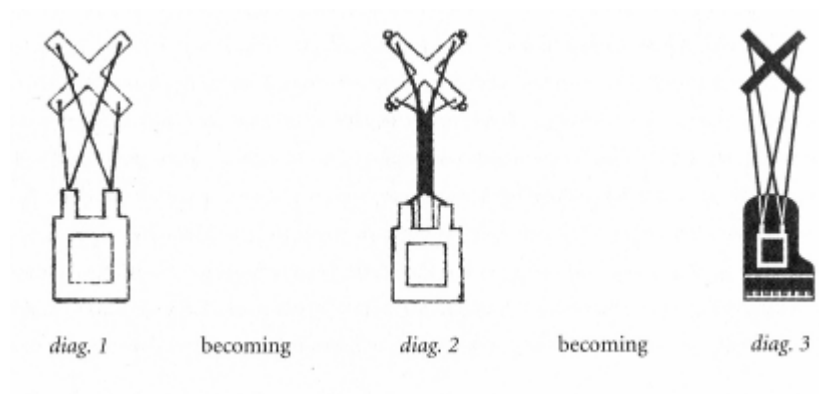
L. [From the perspective of Stevenson's oeuvre, *Slave Pianos* deals with the complicated sentiment of longing for an avant-garde purity which has been tarnished by critical acumen and historical hindsight. But, by COLLABORATION with Kesminas et. al., the former has also been able to indulge in the showiest elements of his paranoid persona. Conversely, by sidling up to such as

Stevenson, Kesminas has drawn attention to the anxiety that lies beneath the surface of his art-world animosity. Working together, they express their intensely tortured love/hate relationship with the avant-garde as a phenomenon apart from individual failings.]

o. [Due to the ironies of its relative position, *Slave Pianos* left possible discourses on FREEDOM unvoiced. Nevertheless, by its long and historied dialectical relation to Slavery, the discourse on freedom is unseparable from such a project.]

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845):

In moments of agony, I envied my fellow slaves their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trumpet of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.



q. [SATIRE was a mode invented by colonial populations to thwart the centralism of the Imperial discourse.]

>. [GENIUS, as Melton argues, is the will made self-perceivable by means of techno-robotics. The late 20th-century's development of recording machinery propelled a number of important figures into safe marginalization.]

Joe Meek Introduces Meek Music (1961):

With stereophonic playback equipment quite often one can sit through a whole symphony or a whole excerpt from a show and get very little impression of stereophonic sound. I've tried.., and had to do it rather carefully. To give the impression of space, of things moving in front of you. To have a picture of parts of the moon. So I composed different tunes that for me, different parts of the moon would have in common

z. [Slave Pianos was not above fulfilling the hyper-ancient role of the artist as kultur's PANEGYRIC conscience, celebrating figures too often ignored for the benefit of men and women of the future like us.]

Mike Kelley (b. 1954, Wayne, Michigan, US) cultivated his musical interests during the early 1970's while enrolled at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. During this time he became aware of Fluxus and the musical experimentation of West Coast composers Harry Partch, New York Minimalist LaMonte Young, the noise music of Karlheinz Stockhausen, the free jazz of Sun Ra and the Chicago Art Ensemble. In Detroit he co-founded the band >Destroy All Monsters< at a time when rock bands like >The Stooges< and the MC5< were redefining performance parameters, exploring links with free jazz, radical politics and rock and roll counter-culture as a site for social experimentation. Kelley initially approached these concerns through non-traditional instrumentation, predominantly vacuum cleaners and squeeze toys. The band blended experimental techniques — particularly noise — with pop, a result of Kelley's interest in rock and roll, particularly the outrageous and ironic proto-punk bands formed in the Detroit area.

*. [Our ability today to appreciate what the *Slave Pianos* collective intended by the use of the BONDAGE allegory and its dependent esthetic is limited. This image, for instance, though somewhat frightening, it is true, remains to us a complete mystery.]



6. END

By order of Joint Dictum 22, the editors close this schema with a toss of the I Ching.



[The editors have proposed Mark von Schlegell (1967-2714) as the author of this text. Von Schlegell, eventually an unknown librarian, at this time wrote a number of obscure kultur reviews during a brief spell of depression at the turn of the centuries, including a brief but savage review of the Slave Piano stop-over in Los Angeles in 2000. As it's been discovered that von Schlegell attempted the production of speculative fiction in the 2010s, it would have been possible for him to have written this text were it not in fact real.]