

Meditations 禪

The structure of this piece is determined by the manifestations of Yang 陽 and Yin 陰 in a simple I Ching divination.

A basic understanding of I Ching reading is necessary to perform this piece. Alfred Huang's book on the subject is one resource that outlines the procedure clearly and succinctly, while also providing an opportunity for more in-depth inquiry beyond the scope of this piece.

A single Hexagram reading will take place on the stage. During the reading, each line's Quality (Yang or Yin) and its Status (stable or moving) will be relayed to the instrumentalists via flag signals. For each line, Quality will determine the notes to be played, while Status will inform the affective aspect of performance. This approach is inspired by my complicated relationship and personal history with "Chinese" Music and "Chinese" Philosophy. In this and several other ways, *Other Futures* is different from John Cage's *Music of Changes*. A short run-down of the points of divergence may help to contextualize *Other Futures* as a work of Experimental American Art Music. Incidentally, it will also serve as a handy way to illustrate why *Other Bodies* is structured the way it is, and how it works as a ritualistic piece of music and performance art.

Cage conceived of I Ching readings as random occurrences. He used them in the development of his pieces to "make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and 'traditions' of the art." (Cage, *Silence*, 1961.)

Contrastingly, my philosophical background conceives of the physical world as a dynamic web of interconnected chains of cause and effect. In this context, the "random" occurrences in an I Ching reading are directly related to all the other events in direct temporal and physical proximity to the reader. Like the pattern of clouds above or the arrangement of leaves underfoot, the results of each I Ching reading are Characteristic of the situation in which the reading takes place. Whether conceived of as random events or as elements of an interconnected and all-encompassing pattern,

each I Ching reading is a circumscribed sample of what is happening in a specific place, at a specific time, to specific people.

This explains why the reading for *Other Futures* takes place on stage, and is integrated into the performance. Each line of the Hexagram embodies a moment where either Yang or Yin energy predominates in the performance area. These metaphysical "data" are relayed to the active instrumentalist, who uses it to choose between two versions of a musical phrase corresponding to each line number – a Yang version, or a Yin version. The reader also relays information about each line's Status, which indicates whether the predominating quality (Yang or Yin) is stable or in the process of changing. This parameter determines whether the notes of the current line's Yang or Yin phrase should be played in the Martial 武曲 or Civil 文曲 affective style. These styles have their origins in traditional Chinese repertoire and correspond to exciting and soothing interpretations, respectively. As such, the Martial style is associated with Yang energy, while the Civil style is associated with Yin. When a line's Status is stable, its phrase will be played in the associated style (Yang Phrase: Martial affect. Yin Phrase: Civil affect) and when a line's Status is moving, its phrase will be played in the opposite style (Yang phrase: Civil affect. Yin phrase, Martial affect).

The composition of the Yang and Yin versions of each musical phrase is informed by my understanding of Yang and Yin energy, founded on oral wisdom traditions in my family culture as well as from martial arts training (technique, philosophy and theory) which I underwent in my formative years. For each Line, the Yang and Yin versions are based on the same core melody. Yang versions involve denser textures, faster subdivisions and larger pitch ranges than their Yin counterparts, which make more use of silence and of harmony. **I have striven to make each version of each phrase embody its Quality to the greatest extent possible, so that the energetic data provided by the I Ching will be accurately reflected in the music.** Here again, I am at odds with Cage, whose compositional methods created a disconnect between the manifestations of Yang and Yin in his behind-the-scenes I Ching readings, and those in performances of the resulting sheet music.

Despite Cage's avowed intention of relinquishing executive control over his creative process, *Music of Changes* presents as a prescriptive score with highly specific directives embedded throughout. Ironically, interpretation of the piece (including its more impractical "random" moments) ironically requires the performer to be minutely versed in the "literature and 'traditions' of the [Eurocentric American intellectual music] art" which include rigorous attention to written detail. The Chinese musical styles with which I am familiar take a different approach, in which songs and pieces consist of an essential structure, whose subtleties, dynamics, articulations, etc. are determined by the performer. **In *Other Futures*, I have made a point of leaving as much room for interpretation as possible.** This is partly a function of the necessity of affective change as articulated above, but also reflects a deeply held belief that it is ultimately the composer's role to serve, not to be served by, the performer.

The melodic sensibility of *Other Futures* is informed and inspired by a deep vein of shared aesthetics between certain types of traditional Chinese repertoire and certain styles within the broad and culturally dominant Afro-American musical tradition. This connection is obscure to most American music scholars at the time of writing, but has been noted by Hafez Modirzadeh with respect to John Coltrane. It includes shared scales/tonalities, articulations/ornamentations, formal/structural conventions and interpretive paradigms. The core melody of *Other Futures* uses a form whose scale spacing, modal approach, iterative structure and pitch contours are found both in Chinese song-compositions of ancient provenance (General's Mandate 將軍令 High Mountain Flowing Water 高山流水) and in Afro-American song-compositions of the rural school (Going Away- Staple Singers. Last Fair Deal Going Down- Robert Johnson). **The melody is central to *Other Futures*, and serves as the listener's personal proxy and point of reference throughout the piece.** It is both constant and ephemeral – the music's focal point, but also the blank canvas on which the I Ching reading manifests its energetic texture. This represents my final and most important departure from the conventions of American Experimental Music. *Other Futures* is not really an aesthetic statement or a thought experiment. It is a neo-Taoist meditation on the nature of here and now. A single melody with 64 faces and infinite expressions. A bridge between the familiar and the unknowable. A song of you.