

Is this new version a commission ?

Not at first. We had the idea for a new version of *wm* in 2009 and we started our investigations on that in early 2010. that led us to our friend Volker Straebel who works at the sound-department of the Technical University in Berlin and is a declared Cage expert. with him we were working on the idea to eventually realize a new tape version of *Williams Mix*, but that project failed because it was impossible to get funding for such an introverted plan. We then decided to make a digital version, which could have been made with less fundings, and eventually started the project. During that process we approached curators and received our commission quasi in retrospect.

Will it be recorded to disc ?

Yes, it's going to be released as a vinyl on Bill Kouligas label PAN.

Who is the owner of the score ?

Edition Peters, in New York. It's not easy to describe how difficult it was to have access to it.

How have you found the means to render the cutting angles and other precise indications pertinent to tape, on computer ?

More than a direct "rendering" what we did could be described as a "translation", and sometimes an integration. The score asks for different cutting angles for each tape fragment that compose the piece, and these angles could be ascending or descending, and sometimes are obtained with a double cut. On tape, the sonic result of a wider cutting angle is a longer fade-in (or fade-out) of the amplitude of the sound recorded in the tape fragment. On the other hand, the fact that the angle is ascending or descending, or made with a double cut, doesn't make any sonic difference: because of the way in which sound is recorded on tape the result is always an amplitude fade. We don't know if Cage was aware of the fact that this part of the indications of his score was actually sonically purposeless, but on our side we had to decide how to deal with these information. We decided to give a sonic *raison d'etre* to these parameters: instead of simply applying fade-ins and fade outs to the sound, we used low-pass and high-pass filters envelopes following the angles showed in the score.

What was way more complicated was the rendering of the editing technique that asks for recorded sounds not to spool horizontally, but on a given diagonal:



We experimented a lot - on tape - with this effect, which is widely used throughout all the composition and that in Cage's words is meant to "produce an alteration in all the characteristics of the recorded sound", trying to understand what exactly happens to the sound. The results were quite discouraging as nothing more than rumbling glitches - when not absolute silence - were obtained, no matter of what kind of sound was recorded on the tape fragment. A direct render of this on the computer is impossible (you can't flip sounds on protocols... and by the way, does space - one of the most abused words in the digital world - really exists outside of analogue reality?) and to "imitate" such poor results seemed not pertinent to the medium that we adopted. Hence, we decided to "translate" Cage's indications into something else, applying to these sounds percentages of harmonic rotation in proportion with the angles of the diagonals showed in the score. The sonic result is totally different from the original, but we think that our method still bears a certain conceptual closeness to Cage's idea.

Cage utilized the I Ching to organize the pieces of tape in the original version of the piece. What place have you accorded to chance in your version ?

Once we decided how to technically do the piece, there weren't many more decisions to take. I mean, we just prepared a folder with all the hundreds of soundfiles that the score requires, and then we just "followed the recipe". It's kind of strange, because you can work six hours on protocols without really knowing what you are doing, it doesn't really even feel like making music... and at the end of the day you listen back to the maybe 30 seconds you made and... well, it sounds like *Williams Mix*. Saying this I don't mean that nothing of us is present in the work, it's probably quite true the opposite: we made all the sounds, and our taste is definitely present in these discrete units. Moreover, because of the way in which sounds are categorized ("predictability" or "unpredictability" of certain parameters of the sounds) another layer of subjectivity - we could say of "unconscious decision" - is given: what for me is predictable is maybe totally unpredictable for you...

At the end, this piece is for us very much about a tension between predictability and unpredictability, constancy and variation, arbitrariness and chance, and our work is always oscillating between these opposites too.

The extract which I listened to on your site has a strange sense of closeness to the original work though the sounds are different. How do you explain this phenomenon ?

That was our first impression too, and it's quite strange when you think that our version is almost 10 times longer than the original. Probably this happens because the score, despite it's "openness", it's actually extremely specific. To explain this we could use an example: let's imagine a recording of a busy street in Manhattan, and one of a busy street in Palermo. These two recordings will be quite different from each other: the voices are different, the footsteps are faster in New York, in Palermo you mostly hear broken Vespas droning in the mid-high register which you won't hear in New York. Ambulances and police cars, omnipresent in both places, makes totally different sounds, and the overall reverberation of the skyscrapers city is completely different to the one of Palermo's historical centre and so on. Never the less we will categorize both of these recordings as "traffic": platonically, both the recordings share the same idea of "traffic".

Cage managed to produce an extremely strong and unique sonic "idea", hence a form, that remains absolutely transparent and clear despite its actual content.

Will your version be performed on eight separate speakers? How will you integrate the visuals ?

Yes, at least eight speakers, but to have 16 would actually be better. Depending on the venue the diffusion could be in surround sound or more frontal.

About the visuals: that's an hard question now, as Lillevan is still working on them. What we can say is that they are going to be rather sparse, and that he is working using a library of moving images in similar categories to the sound library. These will be treated and edited with film transitional techniques reproducing formal and functional aspects of the tape cutting and splicing methods present in Cage's score.

In the end, don't you think that you will do a more performative version than the original for tape, which in 1952 seemed to be a nose-thumbing at the music concrete of Schaeffer and was written in the same spirit as the Bruitism of Russolo ?

At an earlier stage we thought about including sounds that are produced on the spot and treated in real time with the effects required by the score, but we eventually dropped this idea, as the overall pace of the piece is really fast and it would be nearly impossible to perform the right sound in the right place... So it's going to be a completely acousmatic performance.

About Russolo, I wouldn't go too much on that direction: to my understanding Futurism was still very much attached to a completely "classical" vision of art: instead of worshipping the past they were worshipping the future... I think that their slogan "let's substitute the Nike of Samotrache with the Motor" tells a lot: they wanted an innovative content, but the mindframe was still "*passatist*". Russolo, probably one of the most cutting-edge futurists, wasn't totally rid of these problems: *L'Arte Dei Rumori* indulges a lot on the idea of substituting the old fashioned *beauty* of the orchestra with the avant-garde *beauty* of noises; the *Intonarumori* were conceived to be "pitched": Russolo was interested in their innovative timbre but he couldn't think completely outside chromatic scales etc etc. All this not to deny the importance of Russolo work, which i think is undeniable, but to point out that Cage perspective in Williams Mix is very different, as he doesn't feel the need to substitute music with noise because he only thinks *sound*, and his goal wasn't beauty or pleasure but maybe just trying to find a system to somehow imitate nature.

On the other hand the fact that Russolo categorizes noises in six families, and six are the sound families in Williams Mix is maybe not just a coincidence...