

■(Chapter 4)

Kobayashi: Since Mr. Sakamoto is here in this hall with us, I would like to hear his music. My choice is “CHASM” and any other choice is fine, but, how about “CHASM”?

Sakamoto: OK, by all means.

Kobayashi: “CHASM” is music from the year 2004.

Sakamoto: Quite right.

Kobayashi: I think it is relatively a new piece. It runs for about four minutes let us listen to it and ponder a bit on what we talked about relationships of sound and space. We’ll have Mr. Sakamoto speak on how it was made afterwards.

(music)

Sakamoto: The root of this is a piano improvisation. It belongs to no file.

(piano)

Sakamoto: Could be called meditative.

Kobayashi: The first two reminded me of Chopin.

Sakamoto: Really? I do such ad-lib occasionally.

Kobayashi: How long do you do such impromptu?

Sakamoto: Fairly long. The long may exceed ten minutes, quite a variety. After all I do it for myself, meaning that if I find it boring I quit immediately. If my mood is switched on, I will forget time and could play for fifteen minutes. The feature of a piano is in the fading of the key that you just put your finger on, “pong.” We are all here in this hall. If you listen closely, we are surrounded by all sorts of background noise. A piano note will have the same volume as the background noise in the end. It melts in, disappears and

becomes invisible. Total performance includes this fading and it all starts with this “pong.” And you do it without thinking too much about it. As if by coincidence you put your finger on the key. It could be a complete accidental move but that depends. When this happens, memory of all the music you’ve listened to so far joins in. In such a case, one sound will trigger you to want to listen to and thus play a separate note. Such an uninterrupted flow comes to being. But, I do my utmost to suppress that desire. What I often do is endure this urge till the last moment that the lingering resonance of the note disappears. This is like a fisherman fishing and his catch. I input all the sounds that I played in the computer. Then like a fisherman, I will begin differentiating my catch. How shall I cook this? Is this fish worth cooking? If it is worth cooking, then how can it be cooked for it to be tasty? This is when trial and error begins. So what it’s going to be is bleary. And what I’m saying is fuzzy. Since with the piano, the hammer is beating the string, from this characteristic, the piano can be considered as one type of a percussion instrument. The feature of a note of a piano is clear cut, so piano is thought to be pointy. But then the resonance of a note is extensive. That is because what is hammered is a string and the vibration is long-lasting. If the initial part of that note is omitted, the sound emitted is that of a completely different musical instrument. So an attempt can be made to delete all the clear cut initial part. Remember I mentioned about melting into the background noise? What I am strongly attracted towards is the domain where it is still uncertain whether the melting into the background noise has taken place or not. There is a territory where it is hard to distinguish between noise and sound. I find this quite interesting. This is a territory which can’t be comprehended well and is a mixture and I irresponsibly call it a territory of musical sound and noise. This fascinates me. As I mentioned earlier, improvisations proceed on a straight line on the axis time. But once editing begins, it is liberalized from the restraints of time and can be handled freely. Time can be inverted and orders can be changed from front to back. One can delete a certain time zone or connect a time zone to another. I am free to do anything. In this musical piece, the first thing I did was to create a sequence by repeating such procedures. Basically it is simply a loop of about sixteen vibratos repeated several times. Yet you must have heard various funny noises. The truth is that after having made a sequence of my choice of flow, for substantial hour or two, looping was continued and ad-lib, I added varied effects. That is how an hour or so of a chaotic piece was created. Furthermore, I played around modifying this and that in accordance to my taste. I cut and paste for an hour or so if it need be done to make it the way I like it.

Kobayashi: This may come from my personal interest but listening to your talk reminds

me of the story of human genes. Somewhere in Bioscience at the University of Tokyo (UT) Kobamaba Campus, our genes are written at the very beginning by four letters. There is the Exon and the Intron which are written in by the same ATCG, some have meaning and others don't. These are encoded by Messenger RNA (mRNA) and this is transcribed to produce protein. This encoding transcription is done repeatedly and each time the Exon portion is deleted. So the meaningless part of the gene is cut off. This is again encoded to mRNA and it is then translated to produce protein. This is the central dogma. What you do here sounds similar to this.

Sakamoto: That may be so.

Kobayashi: What Mr. Sakamoto is doing with sound is close to this production of protein by the work of genes that life depends on. Though, I don't know if similar inversions do occur. All the same, considerable numbers of mutual reactions between genes must take place. Listening to your story, somehow I get the impression that the musical space that Mr. Sakamoto is creating fits perfectly with the space of genes in my mind.

Sakamoto: There maybe similarities.

Kobayashi: Precisely. It is a fact that genes are information, too.

Sakamoto: Quite right.

Kobayashi: By handling information, cut and paste, end-products are created. This is poles apart from the world of self-expression. It is not merely singing from beginning to end. Simultaneously in making decisions on where to cut and where to use, intelligence as well as profound sensitivity must exist. Does it not?

Sakamoto: I agree. Where to cut and where to use or where to move for the sake of my interest is not based on logic. That is the sole...

Kobayashi: Root of everything?

Sakamoto: That's right.

■(Chapter5)

Kobayashi: Yes.

Sakamoto: This is where it all divides. Methodologies are the same. Anyone can do it.

Kobayashi: Many do can paste easily.

Sakamoto: So anyone can do it, if they try. But that is where originality makes the difference.

Kobayashi: Maybe that is what music is. As previously stated, classical music is an accumulation of layers on top of melodies. And with further blanketing by instructions, a song is fabricated. This being the bases, by mountainous amount of immeasurably confusing moves, a musical piece is completed. Whilst this understanding that layers are piled up, I constant feel the sense of layer structure the more I listen to Mr. Sakamoto's music. While there is simultaneous coexistence, I sense that what is happening on level A is not necessarily related to level B. I sense that perhaps events that are totally unrelated are taking place. On the other hand I also sense that it manages to structuralize a space that is designed with a particular single kind of uniformity. Going back to your comment, but by chance our space is not in fact a unilateral space based on western law of perspective. Space may well be constituted of infinite number of layers and that is what we are now confronting in the form of information.

Sakamoto: Are you talking about type of communication?

Kobayashi: By a type of communication, what do you mean?

Sakamoto: Like unity with the universe or whatever.

Kobayashi: Unity with the universe?

Sakamoto: I suppose not.

Kobayashi: You don't communicate?

Sakamoto: I am not the type that values communication here. It is all right if it happens.

Sakamoto: I am a bit unconvinced about that.

Kobayashi: So that is not your choice. You find that troublesome.

Sakamoto: As you say, layers of space. Now in architecture, basically things are determined by just one interpretation or meaning. Music is, maybe, also the same. But what appeals to me is the multiplicity of meanings. Western music can be shown on paper. That can be considered as single meaning with no alternative. So there is a single person that controls it all. This can be better understood with my former reference to the music of Bali. There is still some ambiguity but the aim is to avoid it. Then all of a sudden one composer appeared, who else but John Milton Cage Jr. from the USA. He introduced from out of the blue the concept of “chance,” which is the extreme version of ambiguity. Everyone was shocked. Most likely the root of Cage’s inspiration comes from the music of Bali and other non-European music. I am also attracted to such music. So by using the term multiplicity in meaning, if you desire some other words, it is existence without a key central nucleus.

Kobayashi: Can’t see the center?

Sakamoto: No. There is no center.

Kobayashi: Music in a wide sense of the term and in peculiar instances does include the music of Bali, despite the fact that there is existence of different views on that. I think western music seems to have created an exceptionally clear language. Western music can be considered as one kind of a language system. And it is western music that for the first time introduced a space or grounds to process sound in an orderly manner, as musical language. Voices, screams and sounds of all sorts were given a well organized grammar for it to work as a language. I think that is sensational. It took man several hundred thousand years to find means of travel other than to walk. To develop to the music of Bach and Wagner, the road must have been far from simple. In the world we live in, it is awesome that a musical language with such intellectual and clear cut means of motion, as man first used a horse to travel. I hold a colossal admiration for this evolution. In fact it is western music that genuinely improved the capabilities of this musical language to the point of it being able to express emotions with this language.

Yet there is this move to once again return to sound and to music that is not commanded by this grammar. At the same time, there is a start of a more fundamental domain that is completely different from, or has totally denied western music. And this domain may allow the participation of more varied people and also composing music by chance. Even the concept of composing a musical piece may no longer exist. In other words, the domain in which the various noises of the cities in which we live exist, as Mr. Sakamoto said earlier, may not be that different from the music we know of. In fact, they are somehow very closely related. From this I feel not a change of language but a dissolving or fusion of language.

Sakamoto: Consider it before the advent of language or disassembling language, in any event, it is true I try to mindfully avoid it.

Kobayashi: I suppose so.

Sakamoto: Naturally, it is because “meaning” will emerge. The supreme authorities of renowned admirable European music do of course attempt to convey “meaning.”

Kobayashi: Quite right.

Sakamoto: Yes. There is a “meaning” or at least a form of emotion to convey. If you try to avoid that, how far will that take you? There must be music that does seek to become this form of music.

Kobayashi: Is that done in want of freedom? I am not saying this lightly. Here there is a desire to free oneself from systematic restraints that we face from various rules and grammars? Or is it the opening of a bit different hospitable space? What is your objective here?

Sakamoto: This is something that was often talked about during the post-modern times, but no matter what, the conclusion was that there is a psychological desire to express. My idea is to free the public from such typical blueprints of psychological expression. The question was that, that may not be the way it is. It was repeatedly debated in the 1980s but this belief in music expressing continued for ages. In fact by reading the musical scores of Bach, a famous composer of the past, there is faith in this blueprint and thus each note is a prayer. And since it is a prayer, this is a forceful message. Bach

most probably believed this and composed to express his own prayer or his internal emotions in order to send a prayer to God. Bach was composing to express to the outside world in a stunning aesthetic manner. “Ex” of the word “expression” is to go out and he must have believed in this blueprint of expressing internal emotions to the external world. To me that in itself is marked with “x”. That is why I recall about listening to a representative composer of Minimalism, Steve Reich.

(piano)

Sakamoto: This is the first part of Reich’s music, “Piano Phase.” Kind of long so, I skipped around. This goes on for over twenty minutes. Though this not my piece, it is in line with my work and each sequence is much shorter, “ta-te-ta-te-ta-ti-ta-ti-ta-ti-ti,” just a repetition of twelve sounds. I wonder how many hundreds of times he repeats this. Two pianists with two pianos play. And one starts to play slightly off timing. After a while, again the timing is slightly played off. You’ve heard only a sporadic version, but I trust you felt you heard a melody that was different from the first. “Ta-ti-ti-te-ri.” Give it more time, another different melody will appear. But Steve Reich did not compose this melody. It is just that the listener heard it that way. For example there is the melody by Beethoven that goes “so-so-mi.” (GGE) Of course you would hear it as “so-so-mi.” But in this case no one composed what you hear, “ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra.” It is just that the sound-figure of the first twelve sounds was looped and the timing was put off and yet melody like sound entered our ears. This is how it is done. So it could be similar to Japanese Noh play and music. This is very fascinating. This is music that is outside the music blueprint we talked of earlier but where music is used to express inner selves to the external world. This is indeed satisfying.

Kobayashi: Satisfying?

Sakamoto: I mean very good.

Kobayashi: While looping, every loop moves slightly off. Though it revolves like a circle it does not overlap. Not that I am a proponent of classical music or am I trying to debate your thought, but this is like the original form that is inherent in music. I find that in western music there is ABA that adopts the sonata form. After the first part there is unfolding part that follows to return to the original. Whenever music lifts off and takes off, it returns somewhere but that somewhere is slightly off the original spot. And

it is that that offers us pleasure, sense of security or something. We are aware that music returns to the same place but that there is a sense that it is not exactly so. In this line of thought, this is touching the bare and pure minimum or the essence of music.

Sakamoto: If the logic is extended to classical music that may be so.

Kobayashi: It would be if I pull your attention to this side.

Sakamoto: I can't say you are wrong in thinking that way. Coming from that, I like to say that humans have a disposition of being unable to endure a complete repetition. This is not mine but a piece composed by my friend recently.

(music)

Sakamoto: For eternity there is no change. It goes on and on. Humans tend to have an urge to change it. And that makes it interesting.

Kobayashi: That brings me back to "CHASM," where sound like a machine-out-of-order is inserted.

Sakamoto: There seems to be that desire.

Kobayashi: Does that come from a desire to liberate oneself from the flow?

Sakamoto: Maybe.

Kobayashi: Though a mere attempt, something does happen, as if to unchain oneself from something.

Sakamoto: I have a desire to be unchained.

Kobayashi: You do have this wish.

Sakamoto: I do like repetition. Nevertheless, after constant continuation, as if turning the dial of a radio, I get the desire to insert some noise and play around. But I do notice that at clubs that play music, people listen to such repetition that goes on scarcely

unchanged. Then they go into a trance? For example, in a building space if you glare at a wall which is totally undecorated, you'd imagine designs of various kinds that do not really exist. That is also the same. Humans can't bear such identical uniformity. I feel some similarity here. In any event it is fascinating to go back to a state of zero ground or zilch.

■(Chapter6)

Kobayashi: Of course I am not in a position to summarize Mr. Sakamoto's lecture.

Sakamoto: There is no reason to summarize at all.

Kobayashi: Though there is no need to summarize, I do like to speak a bit after having listened to Mr. Sakamoto's CDs for a month or so. How about "hospitable space." If a poet were to name it, is it not like an "affectionate hollowness?" By "affectionate," I sense an extremely hospitable and non-aggressive multi-layer space where various intrusions are tolerated and accepted in this multi-dimensional space. And there is no message. Moreover, the way in which this space is created is like stabbing with knife-like-sharpness the very core of our age. A little while ago there was talk about genes, but no one, even Bach or Mozart knew about genes fifty years ago.

Sakamoto: That's right.

Kobayashi: Maybe it is for the first time only after entering this age that we realized that not only our vital activities but our sense of awareness and expressivity are just simple creation of "cha-cha-chatu-cha" or so movement in the cellular level. There is space that is adaptive to that age and that becomes evident depending on the age. I can't but feel that here, though it's appearance may be the same, coming out of the minute slippages, a swell like undulation surges that results in offering a pleasant sensation is born.

Sakamoto: That could be. What we see as man's evolution is in fact error in duplication, copying. In music there are those that wait for errors to occur. This is not done out of will or intention but is arranged so that errors take place on their own. In that case, errors are fascinating. The gist of joy is buried under such grounds.

Kobayashi: Noise, accidental incidences, risks and such were considered as negative

elements and avoided in standard classical music in the past. But here they are themselves captured as creative elements.

Sakamoto: That's right.

Kobayashi: In the past, such sound that went "pu-chi-pu-chi-pu-chi" would be absolutely out of the question and thrown away immediately.

Sakamoto: In fact if it was a job done in wall painting, it would have to be done again for a finer look. Another metaphor would be photographic prints. That was how it was up until now.

Kobayashi: It is because such accidents occur at such places in such a manner in a musical piece that an opposite result of creating a space for accidents to occur comes to being in the minds of the listeners. Since it is accidental and not a man-made space, it is perplexing to man's perception. Oops! It's a malfunction! But simultaneously, that hollowness that suddenly springs up in front of you is one space that can be tolerated because it is not man-made. Here exists an exceedingly sophisticated aesthetic principle. How is it if I encapsulate it like this way, professor?

Sakamoto: I must remind you that I see no point in summarizing.

Kobayashi: Not intended as a summary.

Sakamoto: But looking for similarities, I find it in the space at tea ceremonies. It does not take a completed form. Like the use of a branch of a bare tree which happens to lie nearby.

Kobayashi: Is that what you had in mind?

Sakamoto: Isn't that it? Grab a branch of a bare tree and present it in a vase as an ornament. If all present compliment it as desirable. It turns out to be quite good.

Kobayashi: Yes?

Sakamoto: Here, human contriver and "me-ism" like self-expressions are minimized.

The scheme is to enter a world of expression-less expression. Some may refer that as being contriving. But, no matter what I can't but sense intimacy to this. There is totally no need to summarize. But it's time isn't it? This is class.

Kobayashi: Yes. May I?

Sakamoto: Shall we listen to the audience?

Kobayashi: By all means. Since this is class work, I would like to limit the question to students only. Would anyone like to use this opportunity to ask Mr. Sakamoto, a question? Don't come up with a dumb question! I would be embarrassed. Anyone? The person over there. Do you need a microphone? Or can you just speak out loud. Please go ahead.

Questioner: One expression is to sing with a guitar. To me the only image I have of singing is to sing songs on musical textbooks of the Ministry of Education and Science which already has the verses prepared. So what is singing with a guitar to you? Furthermore, your use of looping the word "animal" to compose a song, such a form of expression is to me hard to understand. So finally, please explain to me what singing means to you, Mr. Sakamoto.

Sakamoto: Used terminologies can be different from one person to another. No problem with that. There is nothing wrong with your understanding. How shall I put it? The first basic definition of a song is a line of sounds that own some passion and that proceed on a time axis. That means that the singing need not be done by the voice of a human. It can be anything. It can be this or that. I once heard of a person who gave homework to his students to compose melodies with odor, compose melodies with aroma or smell. Maybe it is alright to think that is a song too. Thinking with such extensive definition and broad understanding may be feasible.

Kobayashi: The question was not posed to me so I don't need to reply.

Sakamoto: No you don't.

Kobayashi: Though not being asked and it is rather odd that I respond, if I were to answer, I'd add the following. In one way or other it is song that transports feelings. If

one focus only on the sound, we realize that that is not merely a lineup of sounds and that there is power in the sounds and that songs do play the role of transporting one's emotions. As Bach called on God, it is the same pious mind that people sing in choirs in wish to convey some feeling. That is so of a lover's confession of love. Likewise, it is song that conveys one's feelings by making use of the air of tension that exists between sounds. Without this, it is no longer a song.

Sakamoto: Well put.

Kobayashi: After listening to Mr. Sakamoto's comments, what impressed me was that you respond extremely sensitively to a sound. After the piano strings "pong," you'd listen on for a while and continue to listen till that sound disappears into the world of noise. This is not a song. What is being pursued is not a song. On the contrary it is the opposite of a song. Definitely passion exists. But you are not concerned about how one's feelings reach the audience and how they respond to that. In your case, a sound "pong" that is played out of the blue, a sound one may not have necessarily played at all is attentively observed with great enthusiasm. No one else in ordinary situation will care for that. In ordinary case, emotion is injected in the air of tension created by sounds but Mr. Sakamoto is completely uninterested in that. Sound just merely disappear.

Sakamoto: As a physical phenomena?

Kobayashi: As a physical phenomena. You don't display your feelings by taking a ride on the music but simply watch it cautiously.

Sakamoto: I am a listener!

Kobayashi: Yes, you are a listener. In all probability Ryuichi Sakamoto is gifted with an unearthly ability to listen. Will that do as a summary?

Sakamoto: Well summarized.

Kobayashi: I've managed to summarize for the second time. Coming to the end, this being a precious occasion, does Mr. Sakamoto has anything to say to the young people here? Please go ahead.

Sakamoto: What can I say! At around your age, I was infatuated with listening attentively with my ears. Call it, “open the ears.” This is also something I read in a book. Allow me to explain. In order to go to high school and university, I rode the commuter train every morning. Trains make a sound effect that sound in Japanese like “gata-gata, gatan-gatan.” Its expression is a unit of one “gatan.” But if you open your ears and listen carefully, there are several tens of sounds that are articulated. The squeaking sound of the train, glassy sound that the window makes, sound of the wheels abrading the track; these sounds are constantly altering. A gust of wind will change it too. So with more concentration, you can hear voluminous amount of sounds, even the breath of the gentleman sitting next to you. The sound of clothes rubbing as one comes in contact with another passenger, as well as the sound of newspaper and magazines adding to some tens of variety of sounds. Whenever I was bored of being crammed in a fully packed train, I made it a rule to “open my ears.” The same can be said of eyes as well. I claim that the opening of sensory organs is crucial. Won’t you try it? You may encounter an enthralling discovery.

Kobayashi: I would like to end with a question typical of a journalist. Please tell us what you intend to do as regards your work?

Sakamoto: I already have a lot on my plate; a wide selection. Recently Dr. Kobayashi visited my installation art. I plan to take it to somewhere in Europe. Other than that there is “CHASM” that Dr. Kobayashi commented that he liked. It’s been a while since I made that piece and it is about time that I composed my solo which I have never done. So there is an abundance of stuff.

Kobayashi: So it is true to say that “CHASM” is the single masterpiece that represents the working area of Mr. Sakamoto.

Sakamoto: I’m not sure of that but it’s been already three years since “CHASM.” Things have changed extensively. I acquired at the recent installation art a new space like a field.

I see the difficulty in capturing such a notion of space in a single CD. I’d admit that it must be outrageously nearly incredible. Though with no promise of success, that notion of space hit me hard and was a refreshing surprise. I can’t help but want to play with it a bit more.

Kobayashi: So that is what you will be doing. You will “open your ears” to this space.
With this closing I’d like to thank Mr. Sakamoto.

Sakamoto: Thank you.